

INSIGHTS TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF
FAIR TRADE FROM AN ALL-FEMALE
COFFEE COOPERATIVE

by

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A thesis presented to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts
with a Major in Sociology
December 2013

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Harris, my thesis chair, for her continued support and guidance throughout the thesis process. Additionally, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. McKinney and Dr. Price who have been open and available to me throughout this academic endeavor. I would like to thank the faculty and staff within the Department of Sociology at Texas State University for their ongoing support and friendship. I must thank my fellow graduate students who always inspire me to put my best work forward. I would like to thank my husband, Dominic and my two sons, Timothy and Christian, for their unwavering love, support and tolerance. I would like to thank my parents, Colleen and Richard Russell for their sustained interest in my educational pursuits. I would like to thank my two brothers, Rich and Bob and their families for their continued interest and support. I would like to thank Barbara and Joseph DuVarney for all of their kind words of inspiration. I must thank Luna Chandna for her direct encouragement throughout the research and writing process. I would like to thank all of my family, friends and neighbors who continue to support me in my educational journey. I would also like to thank the female cooperative members, travel delegation members and the delegation guide-translator for their thought provoking questions and their willingness to share openly and honestly. Finally, I must thank Fairly Roasted Coffee and Cooperativa Femenina, without which this opportunity would not have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vii
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	9
Ideals of Fair Trade	9
Critiques and Benefits	13
Issues of Gender Equity	15
Background on International Coffee Trade	22
III. METHODS	26
Case Study	26
Qualitative Field Methods	27
Benefits of a Qualitative Approach	29
Theories Considered: Lens and Framework	30
Data Analysis	34
IV. FINDINGS	37
The Cooperative Structure	38
Cooperativa Femenina, Literacy and Land Ownership	38
Cooperative Membership	43
Education	44
Empowerment and Protection	46
Female Solidarity	50
Day-to-Day Business	51
Cooperative Members and Businesswomen	54
Potential Limitations to Producers' Participation	55
Concerns for the Future	56
Experiences with Fair Trade	59

Family and Community Development.....	64
A Space of Their Own	64
An All-Female Cooperative Structure	66
Educating Daughters.....	67
Changing Relationships	68
Events That Highlight Individual and Collective Agency	71
Collective Representation	71
The Secondary Level Cooperative.....	73
V. CONCLUSION.....	76
Case Study Limitations.....	79
Future Studies	80
APPENDIX A: PROPOSED INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	82
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORMS	83
REFERENCES	85

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Log of Participants and Their Self-identified Positions Within the Cooperative	28

ABSTRACT

To date, social scientists, international aid organizations, and fair trade organizations have conducted extensive research concerning the experiences of fair trade producers. However, there is relatively little research available regarding producers' experiences in all-female, fair trade cooperatives. This project focuses specifically on Nicaraguan female coffee producers who are members of an all-female, fair trade cooperative associated with the Nicaraguan NGO, Cooperativa Femenina. The purpose of this project is to learn more about the producers' experiences with the Fair Trade network and with their cooperatives, especially with regards to democratic participation, producer empowerment and equity of opportunity within the organizational structure. Data was collected over a one-week period by means of interviews via an English-Spanish translator. The results of the qualitative analysis of this data revealed a positive association between the producers' social empowerment and their active participation in their cooperatives. Furthermore, the cooperative's supportive, gender-centered organizational framework provided a safe environment for the women to challenge patriarchal social norms related to decision-making and leadership. A better understanding of female agricultural producers' fair trade and cooperative experiences may enhance the efficiency and overall success of development efforts that aim to improve the quality of life of poor, rural women.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Fair Trade movement has been a response to the inequality promulgated by the global capitalist economy (Barratt Brown 1993; Bowes 2010; Fridell 2004). The division in global economic equality follows the same North South trajectory as European colonialism and neo-liberal globalization; generally speaking, Northern economies exploit Southern nations for cheap primary materials and labor (Barratt Brown 1993; Bowes 2010; Fridell 2004; Jaggar 2001).

Following WWI and WWII, Alternative Trade Organizations (ATO's) were established to support refugees of war with basic goods and modest income (Barratt Brown 1993; Bowes 2010). However, the first two world wars drew Western nations' funds back home, leaving many of the world's colonized nations with incomplete infrastructures and limited markets for exports (Barratt Brown 1993; Bowes 2010). Subsequent primary product price fluctuations worsened the global South's economic position even further due to the onset of economic recession, newly manufactured substitutes for primary products and primary producers' use of new technologies that ultimately expanded product capacity for markets that were already saturated (Fridell 2004). During the decade that followed WWII, Alternative Trade Organizations (ATO) could be found in every first world nation (Barratt Brown 1993). ATO's implemented direct trading relationships with poor, primary producers in the South in an attempt to elevate Southern producers' economic standings (Barratt Brown 1993; Bowes 2010; Fridell 2004; VanderHoff Boersma). Many of these ATO's built storefronts and created mail order catalogs to expand product sales with largely volunteer-based staff (Barratt

Brown 1993; Bowes 2010). During the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, the alternative trade model would become integral to the solidarity movement, whereby progressive Northern organizations sought to buy and sell products from producers in countries that were excluded from mainstream trading channels for political reasons (Renard 2003).

Optimally, these alternative organizations attempted to link market mechanisms to the fulfillment of human needs, specifically the needs of poor primary producers living in the global South (VanderHoff Boersma 2009).

In 1988, fair trade coffee producers from Mexico sought to certify and label their organic coffee to allow them entrance into the mainstream market; these producers were part of a coffee cooperative in Mexico known as the Union de Comunidades Indigenas de la Region del Istmo (UICIRI) that were led by a fellow coffee producer, Fr. VanderHoff Boersma (Barratt Brown 1993; Bowes 2010; Fridell 2004; VanderHoff Boersma 2009). VanderHoff Boersma (2009) claimed that a labeled fair trade product held the potential to re-embed the social costs of production by certifying the social principles of effectiveness, ecological sustainability, and social sustainability. Yet, Goodman (2004) suggested that Fair Trade was simply "fairer trade" that had attempted to fill the void left by Northern civil society's aid fatigue. According to Goodman (2004:892), the focus of this fairer trade was to better Southern commodity producers by "raising the niceness of capitalist development."

However, Reynolds (2007) points out that by the end of the twentieth century consumers had become increasingly concerned with the safety of industrial agro-food systems, which provided an opening in the market for certified food products.

Additionally, Adams and Raisborough (2008:1170) suggest that the moral economy had

also become a salient issue for consumers during this same timeframe and they defined this moral economy as “the refraction of economic exchange through moral norms and sentiments.”

Furthermore, Adams and Raisborough (2008:1170) state that the processes of globalization instigated a growing “reflexive recognition of the unscrupulousness of free trade as contributing to the basis of one’s own daily privilege.” Today, certified and labeled Fairtrade products depend on ethical consumers who are willing to support distant producers through consumption practices at additional costs. These ethical consumers are sometimes referred to as LOHAS or Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability shoppers (Adams and Raisborough 2008; Raynolds 2007).

While the Fairtrade label allowed for a greater volume of Fair Trade products to enter the global marketplace, the label also certified the products’ quality, thereby objectifying what was once fair in fair trade (Renard 2003). Accordingly, the framework for labeled fair trade must now be situated within the institutionalized norms of the global economy (Raynolds 2007). Additionally, it is possible that the quality and product standardizations now required for labeled Fairtrade products may alter the power relations between Fair Trade Organizations and Southern producers (Raynolds 2007; Renard 2003). The reason for this is that such social constructs require the establishment of rules and consequences rather than what was once simply the collective acknowledgement of the participating actors (Raynolds 2007; Renard 2003).

VanderHoff Boersma (2009) suggests that Northern Fair Trade auditing organizations’ underutilize Southern producers’ knowledge and experience which inevitably maintains the appearance of a paternalistic relationship upheld for the

betterment of poor producers. Moreover, Gendron, Bisailon and Otero Rance (2008) question the continued production of marketable Northern Fair Trade products at the expense of local food crops or various Southern commodities. Gendron et al. (2008) suggest that the current arrangement simply reemphasizes the dominant North South trade position. For fair trade to be democratic in this regard, it must be premised on local commercial flows and increased separation from a dependence on exportation and its inherent global fluctuations (Gendron et al. 2008).

However, the soft paternalism that continues to direct the mechanisms of Fair Trade also appears to encourage Southern producers to ultimately direct their own trade, as the examples of Kuapa Kokoo, Divine Chocolate and Liberation Nut Company show. Each of these Fair Trade producer cooperatives now exports directly and independently (Bowes 2010). Nonetheless, Fair Trade must allow for proportional representation of Southern producers within Northern Fair Trade organizations to adequately define what is fair within fair trade exchanges. Yet, the impetus for greater technical and capital expertise as well as the need for increased expedience will likely supersede greater democratic participation due to the continued increase in global fair trade sales levels (Raynolds 2007).

The Fair Trade movement has experienced the majority of its growth during the past fifteen years as it decidedly entered the mainstream global market through the use of the Fairtrade label. The decision to move beyond the alternative storefront and church bazaar has had consequences for the Fair Trade movement, where competing visions attempt to define whether fair trade is a development aid program or an actual alternative to the capitalist market economy (Barratt Brown 1993; Bowes 2010; Fridell 2004).

The quantitative data for certified and labeled Fairtrade products over the past 15 years undoubtedly indicates an increase in both total Fair Trade sales and the number of overall participant producer groups. Fairtrade certified sales grew by 27 percent between the years 2009 and 2010 and total sales reached 7 billion dollars in 2009 (Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International 2012). Additionally, the number of participant producer groups increased from 827 to 905 between the years 2009 and 2010 and the total number of Fair Trade producers at the end of this period had reached a record 1.2 million (Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International 2012).

The qualitative fair trade research to date suggests, however, relatively mixed outcomes for individual fair trade producers (Gonzalez Manchon and MacLeod 2010; Hutchens 2010; Kasente 2012; Lyon 2008). One recurring theme within the fair trade literature is that female producers earn the same fair trade income as men but without the same access to democratic participation (Gonzalez Manchon and Macleod 2010; Hutchens 2010; Kasente 2012; Lyon 2008). Although gender equality is a prominent tenet of the Fair Trade Movement, Fair Trade Organizations have not yet created clearly defined steps for achieving equitable access to opportunities within the required cooperative structure (Lyon 2008). The Fair Trade tenet of empowerment suffers from a similar fate; without proper organizational definition or direction, female cooperative members are often relegated to the gendered roles of the place of production (Hutchens 2010, Kasente 2012). For example, Lyon (2008) notes that there were no female producers in management or lead organizational positions in the Guatemalan fair trade cooperative that was researched and, moreover, only seven of the 116 members were women.

There is little research in the fair trade literature regarding the unique social positioning of the group of fair trade producers I will be visiting. First, each of the six fair trade member cooperatives associated with the NGO Cooperativa Femenina, is exclusively female. Second, these women farm coffee, a cash crop, which according to the literature is primarily a male-dominated venture. Third, as with many female agricultural producers in the South, these women live within a rural, traditional society in Nicaragua and their new roles as landowners, coffee farmers and decision makers are far outside the gendered norms (Lyon 2008).

I suspect that by using the qualitative methods of field research I will be able to provide an ample description, interpretation and explanation of the experiences of this group of fair trade producers through informal individual and group interviews, as well as through participant observation (DeWalt and Dewalt 2002). Informal interviews attempt to use a series of semi-improvised questions adapted to the interviewee(s) perspective to gain extended responses from participants (Instructional Assessment Resources 2007). Additionally, using the guidance provided by other fair trade researchers, it is my intention to contribute to the literature related to all-female cooperative structures in rural, male-dominated societies (Gonzalez Machon and MacLeod 2010). I would like to know whether or not this organizational structure, the all-female cooperative, may allow for fuller democratic participation and organizational advancements unlike what has been reported for mixed-gender cooperatives (Kasente 2012; Lyon 2008). I am also interested in whether fair trade female producers' experiences are emancipatory or exploitive since additional duties that arise from agricultural production often add to the demanding roles

already placed upon traditional women in rural communities (Fitzgerald 2012: Steinkopf Rice 2008).

Ultimately, I would like to know whether the discourse found within the Fair Trade network represents Fair Trade practice (Fitzgerald 2012). In other words, have the Fair Trade tenets of democratic participation, gender equality and producer empowerment been successfully realized by the members of these fair trade producer cooperatives? These are questions of outcome, which Fair Trade implies is one of the central differences between their market orientation and that of the free market economy (Fitzgerald 2012).

Due to the dearth of research related to female fair trade agricultural producers and the all-female cooperative structure, associated qualitative research regarding the individual and collective experiences of these women in these unique positions seems overdue. The goal of this research project is to identify potential solutions to Fair Trade problems related to democratic participation, empowerment and gender equality for female producers through a case study of members of an all-female fair trade coffee cooperative. The following is a list of research questions I aim to answer.

- What are these women's experiences of Fair Trade?
- What are these women's experiences working within an all-female cooperative?
- How have these women's experiences as Nicaraguan fair trade coffee producers and cooperative members altered their level of agency?
- How has the role of fair trade producer affected these women's standings within their immediate family units and/or communities?

- Have these women gained skills and knowledge through their participation in Fair Trade that they feel was of particular benefit?

CHAPTER II

Literature review

Ideals of Fair Trade

Fair Trade was an outgrowth of the Alternative Trade movement established during the twentieth century. According to Barratt Brown (1993), Alternative Trade Organizations sought to change the dynamics of charity endeavors from collecting and distributing money to establishing alternative marketplaces for Southern producers' products. Initially, these products were mostly handicrafts, sold to Northern consumers through specialty shops and mail order (Barratt Brown 1993). However, over the past 15 years, fair trade has moved into the mainstream market through Fair Trade product certification and agricultural products, which now represent the largest percentage of global Fair Trade sales annually.

Today, there appear to be two strands of Fair Trade represented within the Fair Trade network. One strand of Fair Trade Organizations, referred to by Bowes (2010) as 'reformers', seem to be primarily focused on global poverty reduction while the other strand, labeled 'transformers', remains dedicated to the transformation of the global economy through an emphasis on changing the nature of the current consumer-producer relationship (Jaffee 2012; VanderHoff Boersma 2009). Yet, most Fair Trade Organizations appear to have agreed to the following Fair Trade principles, as summarized by the Fair Trade Federation (2012):

1. Create opportunities for economically and socially marginalized producers
2. Develop transparent and accountable relationships
3. Build capacity

4. Promote fair trade
5. Pay promptly and fairly
6. Support safe and empowering working conditions
7. Ensure the rights of children
8. Cultivate environmental stewardship
9. Respect cultural identity

The Fair Trade community also offered this definition of fair trade in 2001:

“Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers – especially in the South. Fair Trade Organizations, backed by consumers, are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade. Fair Trade products are produced and traded in accordance with these principles - wherever possible verified by credible, independent assurance systems” (World Fair Trade Organization 2012).

Bowes (2010) refers to non-auditing Fairtrade Organizations as transformers.

Transformers assert that certified Fair Trade audits reduce the important expression of solidarity between Northern Fair Trade Organizations and Southern producers, and that the additional fees related to audits reduce producers’ profits (Bowes 2010; Fitzgerald 2012). Perhaps just as importantly, transformers are concerned that the political identity of the Fair Trade movement, which had once resolved to be an alternative to the free market economy, will be delegitimized by Fairtrade’s entrance into mainstream retail spaces (Bowes 2010; Fitzgerald 2012).

Fair trade reformers on the other hand, appear to focus their efforts on providing access to the Fair Trade network for the greatest number of producers through audits and certification labels (Bowes 2010). The decision to move fair trade products into the

mainstream economy was made in an effort to reach a greater number of consumers, which has brought with it the potential to positively affect a greater number of Southern producers (Bowes 2010).

Smallholders and other producers who wish to belong to the Fair Trade network must establish themselves under a cooperative structure and then institute democratic organizational processes, transparent administrative methods and agree to comply with anti-discriminatory regulations as defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO) (Bowes 2010:6; FLO 2012 VanderHoff Boersma 2009). Smallholders are agricultural producers who farm between three and ten hectares (1 hectare=2.47 acres) and utilize family members as their primary labor (FLO 2012). Plantations are newcomers to the Fair Trade network and are required to provide safe working conditions and provisions for collective bargaining while agreeing not to hire employees under the age of 16 years old, while also abiding by the same rules outlined for smallholders (Bowes 2010; FLO 2012). The admission of plantations into the Fair Trade network has been yet another source of contention between reformers and transformers, since smallholders have historically been the focus of the Alternative Trade movement's efforts due to their often, unfavorable position at the bottom of the value chain (Barratt Brown 1993; Bowes 2010).

In addition, all fair trade producers must adhere to environmental stipulations, such as the minimal use of pesticides (some of which are strictly banned), the prohibited use of genetically modified seeds and the refrainment from planting in virgin forest areas (Bowes 2010; FLO 2011). Producers are independently audited for certification and once certified, are audited annually thereafter (Bowes 2010; FLO 2011). Currently, producer cooperatives with fewer than 50 producers pay a first-time certification fee of

approximately \$2500, and an ongoing renewal charge of \$1500 annually; whereas, cooperatives with more than 50 producers pay higher fees (Mohan 2010). Fair trade wholesalers who supply retail establishments also pay a licensing fee and the fee structure is product dependent (Mohan 2010).

Producers must comply with Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International (FLO) certification criteria in order to access the Fair Trade network and its' associated benefits. Producers are guaranteed a predetermined Fairtrade minimum price for their products and should the market price be higher at the point of contract, producers are entitled to the higher price of the two (Bowes 2010; FLO 2011; VanderHoff Boersma 2009). Fair Trade buyers also pay an additional Fairtrade premium to producers' cooperatives for community development, which is on average 5 percent of the selling price (Bowes 2010; FLO 2011; World Fair Trade Organization 2012). In addition, Fair Trade buyers provide producers with pre-financing credit for up to 60 percent of the contracted product value, and are encouraged to enter into contracts greater than one year (Bowes 2010; FLO 2011; VanderHoff Boersma 2009; World Fair Trade Organization 2012).

FLO uses third-party audits and certification processes to enable primarily agricultural products to be sold within mainstream retail settings around the globe, which has increased consumer fair trade awareness, overall sales and producer participation (Barratt Brown 1993; Bowes 2010; FLO 2012). FLO is an umbrella organization that represents 21 national Fair Trade labeling bodies. FLO sets the majority of minimum product pricing and associated premiums as well as select services apportioned to global fair trade producer groups (Bowes 2010). The Fairtrade labeling model must regularly be

adjusted to a variety of local, political and economic circumstances, as well as to a variety of local producer and worker organizations (Raynolds 2007). Therefore, FLO has established two separate entities, FLO e.V., which establishes Fairtrade product standards and provides support to producers and FLO cert., which audits and monitors the Fairtrade certification process (FLO 2011; Raynolds 2007). Additionally, it is important to note that the creation of the Fairtrade labeling process has made fair trade accessible to transnational corporations for the creation of ethical product lines, which fair trade transformers likewise oppose (Bowes 2010; VanderHoff Boersma 2009).

Critiques and Benefits

VanderHoff Boersma (2009) questions the democratic foundations of the Fair Trade labeling organizational structure where all but one of the current Fair Trade decision-making organizations are located in the Northern hemisphere while Fair Trade producer cooperatives continue to be located mainly in the Southern hemisphere (Bowes 2010). Additionally, VanderHoff Boersma (2009:59) states that the inability of Northern organizational actors to “listen and respect the views of Southern partners...leads them to focus on symptoms rather than the real problems.” Perhaps it is this inability to focus on real problems that has led to the array of mixed outcomes for Southern fair trade producers, as is reported in the literature (Hutchens 2010; Kasente 2012; Lyon 2008).

Fair Trade Organizations’ marketing efforts imply that Southern fair trade producers receive better compensation than their mainstream counterparts through the Fairtrade minimum price mechanism (Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International 2011). However, research shows that fair trade producers’ wages are not always

significantly different from conventional producers, if at all (Ruben and Fort 2011). As Gavin Fridell (2007) states, it is not simply the ethical consumer's purchases that determine economic outcomes for producers but also world market prices, transportation costs and additional fee structures, which are dependent on both product type and place of production.

Further criticisms arise when researchers report that producers are excluded from specific roles within the Fair Trade value chain and are more likely to be constrained to their producer role alone (Beji-Becheur, Diaz Pedregal, and Ozcaglar-Toulouse 2008). Additionally, when multinationals are involved in the Fair Trade network, producers report a schism between the fairness of Fair Trade and the expediency and efficiency required to serve these large-scale markets (Beji-Becheur, Diaz Pedregal, and Ozcaglar-Toulouse 2008).

Lyon's (2008) research reveals gender equity issues within Guatemalan cooperatives where women were rarely included in the voting processes or in decision-making roles. Moreover, Lyon (2008) specifically recalls that one Guatemalan fair trade coffee cooperative had only a single male manager and an all-male board of directors with willing female cooperative members left waiting in the wings. In contrast, female fair trade handicraft producers in Bangladesh report that their cooperative has provided them with opportunities to learn new skills, expand their mobility and to procure medical services (Le Mare 2012). In addition, the female jute and terracotta producers are provided with literacy classes through their fair trade cooperative and "encouraged to read production sheets, handle money, [and] have bank accounts" (Le Mare 2012:102-103).

The market for fair trade goods has experienced extreme growth due to the certification and labeling of Fairtrade agricultural products, which often are co-certified organic and thus whose quality is often touted as superior to conventionally grown products (Steinkopf Rice 2010). From 2006 to 2007, the Fair Trade market increased by 47 percent while specific agricultural products, such as bananas and sugar, increased their market share by 72 percent and coffee continued its own unabated growth at 19 percent annually (Steinkopf Rice 2010). However, the recent labeling initiative has produced a surge in the market share of Fairtrade certified agricultural products, which now represents approximately 70 percent of total Fair Trade sales and supersedes the once popular fair trade handicrafts whose complicated production procedures prevent certification (Greig 2006; Steinkopf Rice 2010). This Fair Trade trend may have negative consequences for female fair trade producers who account for 80 percent of the total Fair Trade handicraft production (Greig 2006; Steinkopf Rice 2010). Fair trade handicraft producers carry the additional burden of translating greater productivity into an increase in income since buyers' prices have not kept pace with the high costs of raw materials (Jones, Smith and Wills 2012).

Issues of Gender Equity

According to Copelton (2007), to facilitate women's empowerment, women must be afforded access to resources that can be used to shape their lives, particularly, economic resources. The International Labor Organization (ILO) (2011) reports that women living in rural areas of developing nations fare the worst with regards to economic participation. Moreover, to address issues of gender equity, attention must also

be given to legal reform, social safety nets, child-care programs, education, as well as access to information and labor markets (ILO 2011).

Lyon (2008) states that growing numbers of international non-governmental donors are funding certification-based poverty solutions, which makes the task of assuring that the Fair Trade process is indeed gender equitable, critical. Kasente (2012) insists that issues of gender equity must be deliberately integrated into Fair Trade organizational practices for female producers to realize their full potential. More specifically, Kasente (2012) cites the need for Fair Trade Organizations to address discrimination in the certification process, which tends to be male-dominated.

Kasente's (2012) gender equity research took place among Ugandan fair trade coffee producers who had successfully attained their Fair Trade membership amid the country's burgeoning 1.321 million coffee farmers. Fair Trade Organizations have historically targeted these smallholders for agricultural products since these producers are thought to be the most vulnerable in the mainstream market due to a variety of production issues, such as the inability to secure credit and lengthy commodity chains that often leave the individual producer with payments that do not cover the costs of production. Smallholders that work less than five hectares (1 hectare = 2.47 acres) of land provide 70 percent of the world's coffee beans (Utting-Chamorro 2005).

However, smallholders most often depend upon family members for agricultural production, which means when "gender roles and power relations are overlooked, life can actually become more challenging for women" (Kasente 2012:113). One of the female Ugandan coffee producers stated, "we neither participate in coffee marketing nor do we get meaningful proceeds from sale of coffee" (Kasente 2012:117). Additionally, these

female producers asserted that coffee was a man's crop (Kasente 2012). Moreover, Ugandan women were rumored to steal and sell coffee to meet domestic needs, which was thought to lead to domestic violence in some households (Kasente 2012). Yet when Kasente (2012:119) asked about this alleged thievery, the fair trade female producers' responded by asking, "how can a woman steal from herself?"

Furthermore, although it is estimated that women grow 70 percent of the food in the Southern hemisphere, cash crops such as coffee and cocoa production remain unequally in the domain of men, even within the Fair Trade market (Steinkopf Rice 2010). These additional imbalances within the Fair Trade network weaken the vaguely defined gender equity and empowerment components for female agricultural producers and remain unaddressed by Fair Trade decision-making bodies (Kasente 2012; Lyon 2008).

Fair Trade Organizations claim that fair trade practices empower poor female producers by providing them with equal access to the Fair Trade network. Yet, many women throughout the globe do not choose to work of their own accord nor make decisions about how earned incomes are to be used, instead men often make these decisions for them (Le Mare 2012). Since cultural norms can cloud an accurate interpretation of empowerment, it is essential to clearly understand how the acquisition of new skills and new knowledge through fair trade practices position women within their families and communities (Le Mare 2012).

In Bangladesh, female empowerment was defined by the female producers as the ability to make active decisions, which was due in part to the cultural pattern of deference to men's decision making within the home, work space and public arena (Le Mare 2012).

The female fair trade handicraft producers interviewed by Le Mare (2012) felt that their voices were now heard and that they were newly able to make decisions about how to use their income, such as, to buy land, educate their children or purchase basic domestic goods.

Le Mare (2012) suggested that the change of status for the female handicraft producers appeared to be directly associated with their fair trade cooperative earnings. However, it appeared that the women also benefitted from expanded mobility necessitated by fair trade duties and through their participation in collective activities (Le Mare 2012). In other words, it appears that the social relationships that stemmed from these women's participation in their cooperative, as well as the way in which production was organized, was equally essential to the empowerment process (Jones et al. 2012; Le Mare 2012).

Greig's (2012) research explores the impact that gender relations might have on the potential development and export of a Fair Trade shea butter from Burkina Faso. Shea butter production is essentially a female, cooperative activity, which makes it a perfect fit for the Fair Trade framework (Greig 2012). Yet, in Burkina Faso, the husband is positioned as the decision maker, which requires his wife to request permission to attend to tasks outside of the maintenance of family life (Greig 2012). Furthermore, women are often prevented from participating in the formal economy due to the traditional expectations of gender roles within the greater Burkinabé society (Greig 2012). Rural Burkinabé women must schedule their use of time between shea butter production, agricultural duties, domestic responsibilities and other economic activities of the family, which often necessitates that shea nut collection take place at odd times of the day when a

woman's work is not required elsewhere (Greig 2012). Greig's (2012) impact assessment ultimately highlights the struggle to clearly discern potential fair trade producer outcomes in particular places of production, especially outcomes for female fair trade producers.

Lyon (2008) emphasizes that FLO provides no explicit direction for fair trade cooperatives to specifically address issues of gender equity. Lyon (2008) further notes that female producers' only official role during the time the researcher spent with one Guatemalan fair trade coffee cooperative was to serve a meal while the male board members were meeting. Furthermore, the seven Guatemalan female producers from Lyon's (2008) research felt that their input was limited to the cooperative's other economic enterprises, a coffee tour and weaving project which were in alignment with gendered expectations (Lyon 2008). Although Fair Trade practices require all producer cooperatives to follow the ILO conventions prohibiting discrimination, the research clearly verifies the limitations of application of this convention due to issues that arise in the place of fair trade production (Lyon 2008). Apparently, without specific consideration for gender roles and power relations, female fair trade producers can find themselves disadvantaged by traditional patriarchal constructs (Lyon 2008). As the feminization of poverty continues to be the focus of global development, it seems unfortunate that Fair Trade Organizations have not taken a leading role in assuring gender equity and empowerment for female producers (Steinkopf Rice 2009).

Moreover, the cooperative structure often defines democratic participation as one vote per property owning family, which in traditional rural cultures can result in the male head of household being privileged to this single vote (Lyon 2008). Additionally, both Utting-Chamorro's (2012) and Lyon's (2008) research both note a skewed ratio of men to

women, in favor of men, within the mixed-gender fair trade cooperatives. Lyon (2008) implies that female cooperative members might simply be a local, procedural necessity since cooperatives can be required to have a minimum number of producers to be legitimate.

Yet Jones et al. (2012) note that the collective organization required for Fair Trade membership has the potential to play a political role in advocating for the interest of all members who are linked through networks, alliances, and federated structures. Additionally, the Fair Trade network is most often utilized for economic empowerment and may provide marginalized producers with access to new resources and opportunities (Jones et al. 2012). The additional income Southern female producers derive from fair trade can allow for economic diversification as well as the potential for savings (Jones et al. 2012). Diversification is especially important for consistent incomes to be sustained since the Fair Trade market is often negatively affected by the whims of the global free market and agricultural yields are additionally dependent on other factors outside of the control of any single producer (Jones et al. 2012; Valkila 2009). Moreover, Jones et al. (2012) state that a key benefit of female Fair Trade membership is the ability to share ideas and experiences, and to learn from one another. Working together, female producers can actively solve problems and institute solutions, which can make their cooperatives more attractive to Northern buyers (Jones et al. 2012; Steinkopf Rice 2010).

Hutchens, (2010:460) however, maintains that Fair Trade Organizations tend to view the Fair Trade movement itself as “inherently empowering... that its benefits flow equally to men and women.” Hutchens’ (2010) fair trade research suggests that female fair trade producers’ limited participation was accepted as a feature of traditional

cultures. One of Hutchens' (2010:460) interviewees from World Fair Trade Organization-Asia (WFTO-Asia) stated, "there is a place for gender equity in Fair Trade...but we can only do so much...women's position-is a cultural issue, isn't it?" Hutchens (2010) suggests that statements such as these imply that some Fair Trade representatives view gender inequity as a static variable within cultures rather than a dynamic variable entrenched in institutional structures and individuals' daily interactions.

Hutchens (2010) and Lyon (2008) also suggest that Fair Trade Organizations must take a more formal approach towards assuring gender equity, perhaps by reframing the issue of gender as a structural and human rights based concern rather than simply ascribing inequity to an issue of culture. Lyon (2008) advocates for a participatory certification process whereby the certifiers themselves actively promote the democratic participation of all cooperative members as a first step towards correcting problems associated with gender equity. However, Hutchens (2010:464) suggests that Fair Trade Organizations are increasingly hesitant to take any formal action that might be misconstrued as "intervening in traditional cultures in a colonialist style of transporting ideas and values from the North to the South."

Like many Southern female agricultural producers, women in Nicaragua struggle with the balance between duties in the fields and everyday domestic responsibilities further complicated by lack of access to water, education, health services, proper sanitation and reliable road systems (Gonzalez Manchón and MacLeod 2010; Steinkopf Rice 2010). According to Gonzalez Manchón and MacLeod (2010), female-only cooperatives are rare and women generally are under-represented at all levels of farmers' organizations. Opportunely, in 1998, Oxfam Canada provided the National Federation of

Agricultural Cooperatives and Agribusiness (FENACCOOP), a mixed-gender cooperative located in Nicaragua, with a gender-mainstreaming framework (Gonzalez Manchón and MacLeod 2010). In 2006, when the FENACCOOP membership included a mere 28 percent women and only a single woman board member, a gender audit was performed and a Gender Action Plan developed (Gonzalez Manchón and MacLeod 2010). The audit and action plan were found to increase the members' awareness of gender issues through the use of workshops and meetings, therefore these efforts have resulted in positive gains for the female cooperative members (Gonzalez Manchón and MacLeod 2010). As a seemingly direct consequence, the female cooperative members are now active participants in all of the cooperative's projects and receive additional targeted technical training when necessary (Gonzalez Manchón and MacLeod 2010). Eventually, the cooperative also began a social messaging campaign within their communities to address violence against women and to provide greater awareness about the importance of women's reproductive health (Gonzalez Manchón and MacLeod 2010).

Background on International Coffee Trade

In 1989, the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) collapsed; the ICA was a compilation of international agreements which set both coffee production and consumption quotas while simultaneously governing quality standards for the industry between the years 1962 to 1989 (Bacon 2005). The ICA's demise along with growing market liberalization spurred global coffee production which led to higher inventories in consumer countries, at a time of lower demand and with an increased market concentration within the roasting and trading segments of the commodity chain (Bacon 2005). Pressure placed on developing countries by The World Bank during the late

1990's contributed to the rise of coffee production for export, especially in Vietnam and thus the burgeoning global supply; Vietnam is now the second largest coffee exporting nation in the world (Fridell 2004).

Subsequent withdrawal by national agricultural ministries from previous roles of coordinating in-country coffee production, commercialization and quality control has reduced governments' negotiating power within markets (Bacon 2005). Ultimately, changes to the structure of the global coffee commodity chain led to a severe decline in income for smallholder coffee producers and exacted untold social and environmental damage globally (Bacon 2005; Jaffee 2012). Following the suspension of the ICA, worldwide green coffee bean prices fell from U.S. \$1.30/lb. to less than \$.60/lb. overnight, while production costs remained at approximately U.S. \$1.10/lb. (Thomson 1995 as cited in Low and Davenport 2005). The rationalization of the global coffee market continues to have severe consequences for poor smallholders whose incomes are consistently in peril due to market factors beyond their control (VanderHoff Boersma 2009).

Fairtrade's minimum pricing system and long-term contract provisions have allowed many poor coffee families in Nicaragua and elsewhere to secure adequate nutrition, education and healthcare (Ruben and Fort 2012; Utting-Chamorro 2005). However, Fair Trade coffee in particular is experiencing an economic ceiling of sorts due to the fact that Fair Trade coffee accounts for only 1 percent of total worldwide coffee sales (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 2009). On a positive note, Ruben and Fort (2012) report that Fair Trade's presence in a region can often generate greater market interest and set a fair price floor for other agricultural products.

The importance of the alternative market through which Southern producers can sell their coffee crops cannot be overemphasized. Fair trade proposes a new form of rural development that attempts to link the local with the global through trade (Utting-Chamorro 2005). In order to sell the entirety of an annual coffee crop, fair trade producers often utilize both alternative and commercial markets (Bacon 2005). In Bacon's (2005) research, the coffee producers interviewed sold 60 percent of their crop through commercial market channels and the other 40 percent within the alternative market for an average sale price of just \$.58/lb.; this amount was half of that year's Fairtrade minimum price, \$1.09/lb. Today, Fair Trade is just one of many coffee certification programs available to coffee producers. Organic, environmentally sensitive and social third-party certifications now make up 10 percent of the global coffee market (Tellman, Gray and Bacon 2011).

According to Jaffee (2012), social movement organizations have increasingly shifted their focus away from the state and towards transnational corporations. In 2001, Starbucks began purchasing from alternative coffee markets after they received public criticism due to labor rights violations on Central American coffee plantations (Jaffee 2012). The ability for transnational corporations to purchase Fairtrade products has changed the nature of the Fair Trade movement (Jaffee 2012). The same year Starbucks began its' foray into the Fair Trade market Nestlé also became a fair trade coffee buyer to the chagrin of many fair trade activists, especially 'transformers' (Jaffee 2012). Nestlé, which is one of five transnational corporations that control 69 percent of instant and roasted coffee markets, had premised its Fair Trade agreement with a pledge to consistently increase its' annual fair trade coffee volume (Fitzgerald 2012; Jaffee 2012).

But even so, as of 2008, Nestlé's annual fair trade purchases remained at just .0025 percent of its total coffee volume (Fitzgerald 2012; Jaffee 2012).

The recent decision to allow transnational corporations to participate in the Fair Trade network at less than the previously determined 5 percent minimum drew significant criticism and cries of fair washing by many fair trade loyalists (Jaffee 2012). Fair washing is a term used to describe the process through which transnational corporations are thought to participate in the Fair Trade market to either help with a poor market image or to simply gain a share of the ethical consumer market (Renard 2000). In 2010, the Fairtrade Foundation's deputy director publicly announced that the 5 percent minimum purchase agreements were not legally enforceable (Jaffee 2012).

CHAPTER III

Methods

Case Study

My research project was based on the experiences of female fair trade coffee producers organized under Cooperativa Femenina, an NGO located in Nicaragua. In 1996, Cooperativa Femenina was established to aid rural female producers in northern Nicaragua. According to Fridell (2004), during the 1980's and 1990's many new NGO's were created to fill the social welfare and development role that the state once occupied. Over the past 12 years, Cooperativa Femenina has helped to organize 250 female producers from six different producer communities into six member cooperatives. The women living in this rural region often lack access to basic education and health care services and their daily lives are made more difficult by the absence of proper sanitation, inadequate road systems and lack of regular access to electricity and water. Yet, these cooperative members' experiences were central to understanding fair trade outcomes for female agricultural producers living in rural areas of developing countries.

Just four years ago, the six member cooperatives began a long-term market relationship with Fairly Roasted Coffee, a roaster and distributor located in the United States, along with two other international fair trade coffee roasters/distributors. Fairly Roasted Coffee organizes fair trade travel trips annually for Northern consumers to visit with their fair trade cooperative business partners in the South and to allow fair trade producers to travel to the United States as well. This case study was based on the opportunity to travel with a Fairly Roasted Coffee organized travel delegation to Nicaragua for eight days in January of 2013.

Qualitative Field Methods

The goal of this research was to know more about the female coffee producers experiences within the Fair Trade network and their cooperative. Therefore informal individual and group interviews, as well as participant observations were the ideal methods of research, rather than surveys or other research designs. All recorded interviews took place within the female producers' communities or at Cooperativa Femenina's offices. Although the ethnographic techniques of field research allow for emergent questions, a few of the questions I asked were, how did you come to be involved in the women's coffee cooperative? What is good about working in this cooperative? What has the Fairtrade premium been used for in your community?

According to Esterberg (2002), through observation and participation methods researchers attempt to understand how the research participants view social life. The January 2013 Fairly Roasted Coffee travel delegation was designed to allow travel participants to learn more about all aspects of Fair Trade coffee production. The travelers were in a position to learn about the impact of Fair Trade and the associated cooperative structure directly from the female coffee producers themselves, the NGO staff and the Fair Trade organizational associates in a variety of settings. Additionally, travel participants learned a great deal about coffee production and international coffee markets. The Fairly Roasted Coffee travel guide provided all translation services during my research travels.

I selected my purposive sample on the basis of the female producers' knowledge about the topic as well as the availability and willingness of the individual participants to be interviewed. My case study participants consisted of various members from the six

female producer cooperatives and employees from Cooperativa Femenina and Fairly Roasted Coffee. The following chart lists participants under their assigned pseudonyms. The names appear chronologically as they appear in the transcripts, except for Fairly Roasted Coffee and Cooperativa Femenina staff that were present in more than one community throughout the week and therefore appeared multiple times in the transcripts. The North America Fair Trade Roaster and Nicaraguan Cooperative featured in this thesis were also assigned the pseudonyms, Fairly Roasted Coffee and Cooperativa Femenina.

Table 1. Log of Participants and Their Self-identified Positions Within the Cooperative

Number	Name	Position	Number	Name	Position
1	Francesca	Board	18	Luisa	Committee
2	Marita	Board	19	Beatriz	Member
3	Abella	Manager	20	Anita	Member
4	Sarah	Committee	21	Matilda	Project
5	Nita	Committee	22	Consuela	Member
6	Maribel	Committee	23	Josephina	Member
7	Rosario	Board	24	Dolores	Committee
8	Abella	Manager	25	Marcela	Board
9	Natalia	Board	26	Imelda	Project
10	Estela	Board	27	Maresol	Committee
11	Gabriela	Board	28	Nita	Committee
12	Lucinda	Committee	29	Abella	Manager
13	Luz	Board	30	Pascuala	Board
14	Camila	Board	31	Aina	Co-op Fem staff
15	Rebeca	Board	32	Elena	Fairly Roasted staff
16	Marcella	Committee	33	Alita	Co-op Fem founder
17	Cande	Board			

According to Esterberg (2002), in qualitative research, data analysis is a process of making meaning. During my eight days of travel I utilized a logbook to record lists of interviewees, notable participant observations and the particulars of the group interviews.

In addition, I used the logbook to guide my interview questions and to reflect on potential sociological themes and connections. Moreover, I audiotaped each individual and group interview then personally transcribed all of the recorded audio and written field notes. I used both open and focused coding to identify common research themes among the participants and six different producer communities (Esterberg 2002).

The opportunity to be immersed in an all-female fair trade coffee cooperative and community was an opportunity to research a group not well represented in the fair trade literature. Although researchers have explored issues of gender within fair trade, few have had the opportunity to research an all-female group of agricultural cash crop producers. Additionally, this case study seemed especially ripe for using a sociological imagination to better understand how the structures of fair trade have influenced these women's lives and potentially the lives of others in their communities. Understanding how these women have negotiated fair trade in rural Nicaragua would add to the existing fair trade literature and perhaps provide greater details that could inform both development and Fair Trade organizations about the various experiences of Southern female agricultural producers and the inner workings of an all-female agricultural cooperative.

Benefits of a Qualitative Approach

The potential gap in the fair trade literature that I will attempt to address is suggested in Steinkopf Rice's (2010) recommendations for future research. The researcher states the need to examine "the impacts of fair trade from the unique perspective of women through a qualitative methodology" (2010:49). Steinkopf Rice (2010:49) specifically identifies standpoint theory as a potential lens for this research

while stating, “[standpoint theory] may provide insights into the complex relationship between fair trade and women in LDC’s [Least Developed Countries], whether fair trade from the perspective of these women is exploitative or emancipatory and the conditions leading to each outcome.”

Lyon (2008) states that future fair trade research should determine whether it is necessary for female coffee producers to be paired with female industry mentors for support and instruction, due to the inconsistent ways in which mixed-gender cooperatives incorporate female producers. Moreover, Lyon (2008:266) states, “research is needed to assess the impact of these women only cooperatives on participants’ livelihoods and well-being,” whereas “some female coffee producers prefer to operate in a public domain of decision making that is entirely separate from that of men” (Yasmin 2005 as cited in Lyon 2008:266).

Theories Considered: Lens and Framework

According to Rolin (2009:218), standpoint theory can prompt the researcher to view “relations of power as a distinctive kind of obstacle to the production of scientific knowledge.” The power Rolin (2009) refers to is that of choice, where one individual or group can be limited potentially by the decisions of another individual or group. Even more, standpoint theory served as a lens for observing and understanding the life experiences of these female agricultural producers, which made it was important for the researcher to be aware of inherent power imbalances and to make an effort to empower underprivileged participants while collecting data (Rolin 2009). Some of the methods employed in this effort were to practice active listening, to allow participants to expand

the dialogue outside of the boundaries of the interview questions, and to repeat back what the interviewee had stated to assure that the information was correctly understood.

Although the tenets of Fair Trade clearly state that the movement is one of equality and empowerment, as with all relations of power it was important to recognize that this setting was most likely to contain individuals or groups in unequal positions and with conflicting interests (Rolin 2009). Rolin (2009) suggests that in these types of settings it is important to be aware of the forces of shame, embarrassment and other uncomfortable emotions that might make data collection difficult and suggests that researchers might integrate questions about both the individual and the collective to elucidate instances where problems of a single producer are often issues of the collective as well.

Dorothy Smith (1992:89) described the process of developing a standpoint theory this way, “I thought we could have a sociology responding to people’s lack of knowledge of how our everyday worlds are hooked into and shaped by social relations, organizations and power beyond the scope of direct experience.” This apt recognition that the social experience is more than the sum of its individual parts is what sociological research can bring to the study of fair trade. To research female coffee producers is not simply to research the associated agricultural methods or necessary environmental conditions for production, nor the singular aspects of transporting, marketing or distributing the coffee. From a sociological perspective, it is as essential to consider the place of production, its geographical and cultural history, the social organization of production and coffee’s place in the vast global marketplace today.

Globalization theory is an appropriate lens through which to begin to understand the position of the certified Fair Trade product market within the global economy. Production and commercialization of the global agro-food system is increasingly left in the hands of expanding transnational corporations as the process of capitalist competition continues to intensify (Renard 2000). This competition has forced transnational corporations to be sensitive to consumers' wariness with regards to food safety, nutritional content and environmental degradation (Renard 2000), thus increased participation in ethical sourcing certification attempts to assuage consumers' demands. Many of these consumer concerns have come on the heels of growing government deregulation and active trade liberalization (Renard 2000).

Furthermore, the increased concentration of economic power wielded by fewer transnational corporations seems to disadvantage poor Southern producers who compete for agricultural contracts among a myriad of global suppliers from harvest to harvest. Emergent transnational dexterity is evident within the coffee industry, where the top five corporations control an estimated 69 percent of coffee production (Bacon 2005). The equally large-scale roasters and distributors that supply these corporations must utilize multinational dealers that are positioned to supply the volume and variety of coffee required for particular brand signature blends (Renard 2000).

Additionally, Fridell (2004) states that neoliberal globalization has influenced radical adjustments to government policies, which have affected development projects once based on nation state intervention and global market regulation to the direct detriment of poor producers. For agricultural producers in Nicaragua this has meant the removal of government agricultural and cooperative subsidies and supports as well as a

restriction of credit (Horton 2013). Therefore, in an ever-greater trend towards global voluntarist development, Fair Trade finds itself one of many social movements now competing for the same ethical consumer. To this end, consumers' inability to clearly distinguish between the large variety of certified consumer products offered in the mainstream retail market has forced Fair Trade to increase its use of consumer research, marketing strategies and quality control (Fridell 2004).

Development theory is also an informative lens through which to consider the experiences of female agricultural producers living in the South and their interactions with Northern Fair Trade Organizations. Development theorists suggest that Southern production for Northern markets is based on previous patterns of colonization. Historically, Southern primary agricultural producers were required to grow commodity crops for their colonizers' consumption and profit. Today, however, Southern commodity producers continue to trade along a similar North South route necessitated by the framework of agro-export, and also in part to satisfy global development organizations' debt repayment conditions (Fridell 2004).

The growing feminization of agriculture appears to be at the epicenter of colonization and globalization for female fair trade producers. Many women who reside in the southern hemisphere have taken on greater agricultural responsibilities due to the migration of men to urban areas for better paying employment, without appropriate access to credit or the ability to participate in rural organizations that continue to exude a male bias (Lyon, Aranda Bezaury and Mutersbaugh 2010). These female producers must meet these additional duties while dealing with issues of poor infrastructure, such as

limited access to water, insufficient transportation and inadequate road systems (Gonzalez Manchón and Macleod 2010), which are often remnants of decolonization.

Data Analysis

Data collection methods for this research paper included informal interviews with individuals and groups, as well as participant observations in order to get a sense of the groups' cohesion on a variety of topics and to better understand the level of information sharing among producers and cooperatives. By using a variety of methods, comparisons could be made within and between sites, events, and in a variety of contexts. A diverse group of cooperative members participated in these interviews. For example, some of the interviewees were founding members over the age of thirty-five, while others were new members in their late teens and early twenties. Similarly, the participants occupied a variety of positions within the cooperative organizational structure, whereas some members held board positions, others were members of cooperative committees and leads on projects, and still others identified themselves simply as cooperative members. Notably, all of the female producers interviewed identified themselves as residents of the six communities prior to their involvement with *Cooperativa Femenina* and Fair Trade.

Each group interview followed a previously scheduled cooperative meeting that had been arranged for the benefit of the Fair Trade travelers and their travel itinerary and therefore, the participants were those members who were available to attend on the selected day and time. Inevitably, since there were numerous participants and topics to cover, and time was limited in each community, not all of the women who were present in the meetings were able to participate to the same extent. Individual interviews took place according to the availability of the producers and accompanying translator in any

given community during non-scheduled timeframes throughout the week. A copy of the interview guide used during the individual interviews can be found in Appendix A.

According to my log, during my travel time I came in direct contact and conversation with 68 female cooperative members as well as five staff members from Cooperativa Femenina, one staff member from Fairly Roasted Coffee. The women who appear in the findings section have been assigned pseudonyms for the express purpose of maintaining participant confidentiality. The researcher transcribed both field notes and recorded interviews, resulting in approximately 60 pages of data. The data were then taken through four cycles of process coding, resulting in four primary themes. Ultimately, 33 participants were interviewed and recorded for the purposes of this research project. The producers were willing participants who wanted to share their life experiences, and many of them expressed that they wanted the story of their journey as *cooperativistas* to be told. This project contributes to fulfilling that wish and the women repeatedly expressed their gratitude for this support.

Through the creation of a word document that contained all 60 pages of transcribed data, I utilized the comment function to open code each line of data. In an effort to narrow my focus, I then took the most recurrent codes and went back through the data in an effort to more clearly induce the themes represented by the overall data. During the focused coding process I additionally color coded quotes that were representative of each of the recurrent codes. I then created a separate word processing document in which to make analytic memos about how the codes related to one another. Once I had some understanding of how the coded data tied together, I created a final word document where I cut and pasted quotes from both interviews and field notes into identified typologies.

The four major themes were identified as: struggle, access to opportunity and support, new roles and concerns for the future.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

From an economic perspective, these female fair trade producers are the epitome of fair trade success, as they currently sell 100 percent of their annual coffee production to international Fair Trade buyers. There appear to be many reasons for their success, which include the quality of the Arabica coffee that they farm, their organic certification and their unique marketing position as an all-female fair trade coffee-producer cooperative. Additionally, perhaps as Jones et al. (2012) suggest, when women producers work together they are able to more actively solve problems and institute solutions, which can make their cooperatives more attractive to Northern buyers.

The four major themes that emerged from my analysis were: struggle, access to opportunity and support, new roles and concerns for the future. *Struggle* is the word that the female cooperative members themselves used to describe the challenges that ultimately led them to organize, as well as to describe both new and ongoing stumbling blocks that they face in their communities. *Access to opportunity and support* represents the many personal and professional opportunities made available to the female producers in their own communities through their association with the NGO, Cooperativa Femenina. The women embody their *new roles* as fair trade producers and cooperative members via the unrestricted sharing of their homes, communities, personal histories and their collective journey as *cooperativistas*. Additionally, the new roles that these producers perform as members of their all-female cooperatives have brought new purpose for them, which inspires their individual and collective hope for their futures. However, the women also face substantial *concerns for the future* due to the fragile

position that they continue to occupy as agricultural producers in an increasingly global economy.

The Cooperative Structure

Cooperativa Femenina, Literacy and Land Ownership. Cooperativa Femenina, a Nicaraguan NGO, was founded in 1996 for the exclusive purpose of empowering rural women living in the agricultural regions of the country through ideological, economic, political, and organizational means and methods. Several of the original cooperative members who were interviewed first came to know Co-op Femenina through community literacy programs and access to farmland provisioned by the NGO between the years 1996 to 2001.

Several of the cooperative members interviewed shared that they had heard rumors that the co-founders of the newly organized NGO were visiting women in these rural communities in an attempt to better understand their needs. The co-founders of Cooperativa Femenina were both educated women who were born and raised locally in this area of the country. One of the members clearly articulated what she was thinking when she decided to attend one of Co-op Femenina's newly organized literacy programs in a neighboring community twelve years ago. Camila stated:

...and so during that time, I thought about how much violence and how much abuse I have had to deal with in my life, and there were some other women in [a neighboring community] who were getting organized and meeting and holding workshops, and some of them were education workshops and I didn't know how to read or write, and so I would go two days a week. I signed up for the education program; and I would travel walking two hours each way; and I would go twice a

week.

Camila's experience was not unusual; many members acknowledged that they too were once illiterate and had initially attended a literacy program organized by Cooperativa Femenina before becoming cooperative members. During an individual interview, Camila shared more candidly about her experience as a newly literate woman. "Learning how to read is like going to another country that you never knew before. Someone would give me directions and tell me where this sign is and tell me to turn left and I would have no idea. But now I know," she said. From the week's discussions, it appeared that the literacy program united many of the female producers from various communities through common goals and shared successes, and created a sense of trust between many of the female producers and Cooperativa Femenina. In addition, as Camila's quote suggests, literacy has increased these women's mobility and therefore the mobility of their families as well.

Although Nicaraguan women can now legally own land, they described the process of acquiring land as difficult. According to a report from 2010, 65 percent of Nicaraguan women do not own the land that they work (FEMUPROCAN 2013). When Elena, the Fairly Roasted Coffee liaison was asked about Nicaraguan female producers' ability to legally purchase land, she answered, "They could purchase land, but it would be challenging because of the politics and legal procedures." As agricultural producers, access to land is a necessity for economic empowerment. At the beginning of one of the co-op member meetings, Marcela had shared, "So it is important to tell you a little about our history...all of the land in this area was owned by two people, two wealthy land owners and after the revolution the land was left in the hands of the co-op but the land

was left to the men who worked the land. So the men owned the land and we didn't have any land of our own." When asked to expand on this topic, Camila, a founding cooperative member, added:

Well in the beginning women didn't have land. They rented their land and they were renting the land and very productive and once the men saw this, that they were very productive and that they were successful, they would take their land away and their product as well. So whether they were planting beans or potatoes or tomatoes the women had to rush to harvest as much as they could because their land was being slowly taken away from them. So that is when we got in touch with Cooperativa Femenina and they started to purchase their first plots of land. And so Cooperativa Femenina bought farms in each of the different communities and the last place that they purchased land was down over that hill.

Cooperativa Femenina initially purchased 47 *manzanas* (1 *manzana* = 1.7 acre) of coffee farmland in 2001 to provide female producers with a secure place to farm. When the cooperative members were asked about the first women to work this land, Marcela explained, "When we first got organized, we also had an issue where we were lacking land and we didn't have as much right to access the land. So from then we organized a collective with six women." Camila had emphasized, "That land could not be taken away from us because that land was Cooperativa Femenina's and we trusted them that they would not take the land away." This statement reflects a broader sentiment in the community that was expressed several times throughout the week; the members view the staff members of Co-op Femenina as partners and mentors in their development, as opposed to authority figures. Mancini Billson and Fluehr-Lobban (2006:389) suggest,

“To secure positive social change for female well-being, significant women’s organizations must exist that are well-organized, expertly led, powerful and firmly entrenched.” It is quite apparent that Cooperativa Femenina has been instrumental in the social and economic development of the all-female cooperative.

Elena has worked in these communities for the past three years and she provided additional background information about the first female producers’ collective that was first organized under Cooperativa Femenina in 2001. Elena explained, “A little bit of background, the land was worked by the collective initially because at first it was a collective before the cooperative. And so the collective was working the land and they were trying to work it collectively and it doesn’t really work here.” Camila was quick to add, “When you are working on something with a lot of people you have less ownership of it, and you don’t feel like its yours. And you might put less effort in and so if it is your own and you thought it depends on you, you feel that sense of pride and you are going to put everything into it.” As Cooperativa Femenina has done repeatedly, they worked directly with the members to determine the best course of action. This mentality is closely aligned with the conclusions Oxaal and Baden (1997) assert. Their research suggests, “For participation to promote empowerment it needs to be more than a process of consultation over decisions already made elsewhere” (Oxaal and Baden 1997:11). In the next step of the land distribution process, the decision was made to divide the land so that members could work independently under a cooperative structure rather than collectively. The producers seemed to realize early on that they were able to effect change in their own lives by voicing their concerns and collaborating directly with Co-op Femenina.

Today, the six member cooperatives collectively have 250 members who farm 191.9 *manzanas* of land. Legal access to land is still of paramount importance for these female producers, as it has allowed them to experience an increase in agency. Agency is defined as the ability of an individual or group to make effective choices and to then transform choices into outcomes (The World Bank Group 2012). During one group interview, two members stated that they keep their coffee production separate from their husbands so that the income from the harvest comes directly to them and then they can decide how to use it. The majority of the members present at this meeting signified through nods and general consent that they too worked their own coffee fields separately from their husbands' land. Francesca had stated at one point, "We exercise our rights as women to do what we want." Despite these positive changes in the producers' social and economic development, their days still begin before sunrise with domestic chores and end after long hours spent attending to their fields and cooperative responsibilities. However, it does not appear that these female producers consider their additional roles to be exploitive but rather emancipatory.

For these female coffee producers, legal access to land was a first step towards increased economic empowerment. With Co-op Femenina's support, the access to land also became a catalyst to organize under the member cooperative structure. As the cooperative membership grows, the members' collective agency allows them to address additional individual, household, and institutional barriers that may obstruct their continued progress. Although access to land and literacy were once obstacles to the producers' individual and collective empowerment, they eventually became catalysts for change.

Cooperative Membership. The members explained that democratic participation is a condition of membership, and that attendance at business meetings and assemblies is required. Elena conveyed the following during a meeting with board members from each of the six cooperatives' "So they will meet here [Cooperativa Femenina's offices] once a month with the board and then they will meet once a month with the boards of the [other six] cooperatives and then they will share the information with all members." One of the founding members, Natalia, added, "So we do three big assembly meetings per year with [all of] the members." Regularly scheduled meetings support the cooperatives' attempt to facilitate democratic proceedings, transparency and information sharing.

The members suggested that mandatory attendance might be a reason why more women from their communities opt not to join the all-female cooperatives. Rebeca explained, "So they might not want to attend our meetings and they might be a little bit rude or have kind of a bad attitude. They might not want to attend the assemblies and they might not want to change their attitudes. In the end it's up to them. If they don't want to do what is required, we don't want them here." Francesca had shared that cooperative membership was denied to no woman, "...but they must have the willingness to overcome, attend training, empower themselves. The training is 40 hours over one week. It is intensive. They must attend study circles, solicit members, work hard, *struggle.*" Elena also suggested that the cooperative social share fee of 250 *cordobas* (\$25 U.S.) might also prevent other female producers in the communities from joining the cooperatives. When asked if that was a large sum of money, Elena acknowledged that it was. It appeared that the members had established criteria for membership that they felt would attract the most dedicated female producers. Likewise, it is important to note that

these data suggest that the first female producers to organize in each of the six cooperatives sought help from Cooperativa Femenina independently and directly. This self-motivated behavior may be a contributing factor to the cooperatives' current success.

Education. The female producers spoke at length about the lack of educational opportunities afforded to women in this remote region of the country. The women identified two central barriers to their educational participation. Firstly, gender discrimination within the public school system and within their families has been pervasive. Secondly, agricultural families living in this region continue to lack the funds to purchase items for school. Francesca had shared, "You do need supplies, shoes, transportation to attend free public school. Poor families don't have these things." Francesca went on to explain, "There is discrimination against females within the education system. School access has been a problem for rural women. Sons went to school but many children stayed home to help farm; they went uneducated. When the girls try to return to school much later, they cannot join the younger classrooms as older children; it is too late for them."

Although the bright blue and white public primary schools can now be found within walking distance of many of these rural communities, secondary schools are often located an hour or more away. During an individual interview with Camila, she emphatically asserted, "...for the government it is not important that I have my education because it is easier for them to cheat us if I am not educated." Camila's oldest daughter has been attending university on Saturdays in a nearby city and Camila lamented, "...it is hard to send kids to university. The costs are really hard. We pay 300 *cordobas* (\$15 U.S.) for transportation...you have to put a lot of work into it." Camila is a single mother, which is

not unusual in these agricultural communities. Therefore, it is essential that Camila's daughter be available during the week to help her mother with the business of coffee production prior to attending her college courses on the weekend. Although it is an apparent financial struggle for Camila to support her daughter's education, it is also evident that these new educational opportunities provide an immense source of pride and hope for family members and other cooperative members who also lend their financial support.

Fortunately for the producers, each of the six member cooperatives have now formed education committees that work directly with Cooperativa Femenina and the Ministry of Education to support a community-based learning initiative for members. The Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development suggests that education level is one of the best predictors of well-being and a route to better community functioning (cited in Mancini Billson and Fluehr-Lobban 2012). Marcela said that her cooperative "first started out with primary education and now we started secondary education and there is a group of women who will be starting high school this next year." During an individual interview with Camila she shared, "Yes and so once I got into it I was motivating for the other women in our community. I continued studying until I reached the third level and I want to continue studying so that I can finish high school. And now I am another kind of woman, a woman with principles. I am not the same as when I started." The opportunity that the members have to access education not only strengthens each individual but the cooperative community as a whole. The literature suggests that trust and participation increase when all members of a community are able to increase their individual education level and as trust and participation increase, individual well-

being is thought to increase as well (Mancini Billson and Fluehr-Lobban 2012; Steinkopf Rice 2010).

Camila had openly shared during an individual interview that she had recently completed her 6th grade studies and that she hoped to eventually complete high school. When she was told by one of the fair trade travelers that her presentation skills seemed to surpass that of a high school graduate, she responded by saying that education is just one part of any given individual's potential. Surprisingly, many of the female producers told of a time not that long ago when they hid their faces when they spoke due to a lack of self-confidence, but today they readily recite the history of their cooperatives and the intimate details of their own personal journeys without hesitation to Fair Trade travelers who are essentially complete strangers. A newly found confidence was evident in the way that many of the female producers spoke and carried themselves throughout the week. Rather than simply a symptom of their economic success, it appeared that these producer's social skill sets have developed from their active participation within the cooperative organizational structure and the many roles that must be fulfilled for the cooperative to remain successful.

Empowerment and Protection. The members shared that through their participation in gender equality and reproductive health workshops that were organized in association with Cooperativa Femenina, they have had the opportunity to learn to better value themselves as women. At the first meeting, Abella, a cooperative member, had prepared a PowerPoint presentation that Elena translated; one of the slides had a list of goals for the cooperative members and one of those goals was to broaden gender equity beyond the government's or church's portrayal of women. In addition to the gender awareness

training, the cooperative members once had access to a mobile health clinic that was funded by an international aid organization, which provided them with comprehensive female care. Consuela explained, "... when we had the mobile clinic here it came along with workshops on gender and sexual reproductive health and so it wasn't just nursing and exams it was more information and more understanding." Further on in the group interview, Consuela seemed to capture what this new knowledge meant for many of the women present when she said:

...all of the workshops we have received about gender equality and all of the awareness we have received about our lives has been a great learning for us. All of the workshops on health and sexual reproduction rights, about what a gift our bodies are and how to take care of ourselves and then love ourselves. We have been able to leave behind the myths that our culture has for its women, passed through our dads or grandfathers, that were put upon us, that left us feel ashamed about ourselves as women, about our bodies. And we don't feel that way anymore.

Unfortunately, the international aid organization withdrew its funding for the mobile clinic three years ago, citing that it was a duplication of services already provided by the state's free health care system. Although the country's Ministry of Health does send an intern to perform wellness checks periodically, the closest public health clinic is approximately two hours walk away. Luisa described their struggles with health care this way: "Most of the women have to walk more than two hours to the closest clinic and one woman traveled three times that distance and there wasn't anyone at the clinic so we took money out of our cooperative to get her to proper care." The members lament the loss of

the intimate care provided to themselves and their daughters by the staff of the mobile health care clinic but they also remain steadfast in their resolve to locate another source of funding that would allow them to restart the service.

Additionally, the members' daughters are encouraged to attend the women-centered community workshops. Abella shared "As a youth I participated in the sexual health and reproduction workshops and so all of this education has helped me personally and professionally—going through all of the different workshops and now I am participating in a process which is called the formation of the integral leadership." Although Abella can still be found working in her mother's coffee fields, as a single woman and soon to be college graduate, she is well aware of the opportunities that she has gained from this all-female cooperative over the past 11 years. While touring one of the cooperative communities affected by a recent landslide, Abella took a moment to thank several of the founding cooperative members who were present that day for their dedication. She warmly shared, "We, the members, the daughters, are thankful for all you have struggled through so that we could be bearers of that fruit." In fact, many of the daughters of the original cooperative members shared that they have gained the knowledge and support they needed to direct their own futures. While some of the daughters have attended college, others now work their own coffee fields as members of the cooperative.

Moreover, the gender equality workshops tackled the issue of domestic violence, which continues to affect not only these female producers but also Nicaraguan women more generally. The women expressed both anger and a sense of vulnerability when they described the *machismo* culture that they felt was responsible for the abuse that Nicaraguan women continue to suffer. The literature suggests that the *machismo* culture

places an overemphasis on the socio-sexual reputation of men who attempt to prove their manhood by acting in physically risky ways (Stanford University: “Machismo Sexual Identity”). Francesca conveyed, “Many of us were raped but were unaware that this was wrong, that there existed laws against this.” The women from her community candidly acknowledged during this group interview that perpetrators were not always strangers, but often were their own husbands and family members. During one of the group interviews where domestic violence was being discussed, Abella stated, “We started out learning to read and write, to improve our health and deal with issues of violence.” The producers’ opportunities to gain basic skills for living, such as reading, writing and a better understanding of good self-care through their cooperatives appeared to prepare these women to explore more complex concepts such as gender equality, empowerment and democratic participation. Consuela had conveyed, “And all of these years have been a struggle to get more freedom and much more knowledge and understanding.” Additionally, by acting together, these women now have a better chance to overcome the constraints of any single individual, and their collective voice of struggle is more apt to contribute to changes to the law, public policies and services, institutions and social norms (Oxaal and Baden 1997).

Furthermore, the cooperatives appear to be strengthened through the ongoing opportunity that all members have to gain the skills and knowledge that allows them to participate more fully. Regardless of what position a producer held in her co-op or the amount of time she had spent as a member, each woman had the opportunity to speak at the group level and most appeared to possess a shared knowledge of the cooperative’s business activities.

Female Solidarity. During an overnight stay in one of the cooperative communities, the members provided dinner and entertainment for the travel group. Four of the members' teenage daughters performed an emotionally laden skit that conveyed the difficulties associated with the lives of these female fair trade coffee producers but also emphasized the supportive climate they have come to experience as *cooperavistas*. The skit dealt with issues of domestic violence and the members' dedication to support the victims of violence within their communities. The teens also depicted the vulnerability experienced by one cooperative member who made the decision to migrate to the city to work in the growing export-processing zone. The following is a direct excerpt from my field notes about the skit the teens performed that evening.

One of the member's teenage daughters conveyed the loneliness she expected to experience living in the city among people she did not know and the disappointment she felt about the low pay she was earning despite her long hours of work. Eventually the girl decided to return to her home and her fellow cooperative members. Her counterparts, although sympathetic to her bad experience, were stern with her as well. They told her that they would expect to see her first thing the next morning, back in the coffee fields, since it was now harvest time.

The skit further conveyed the importance that these members now place on the female solidarity that has been established within their cooperatives. Earlier in the week, Francesca had asserted, "As women we are lawbreakers of this culture, the culture of our fathers and grandfathers. They cannot take this away from us." Many other members from the six cooperative communities expressed similar sentiments over the course of the week, which suggested that this was in part a result of the women's cooperative

experiences.

Day-to-Day Business. The cooperative members have countless opportunities to learn and use personal, professional and technical skill sets during their daily cooperative activities. According to the literature, such opportunities allow women to develop their capabilities and confidence to aspire to positions and influence across the whole value chain, and such opportunities reportedly are all but absent in many of the mixed-gender cooperatives that appear in the fair trade research (Gonzalez Manchón and MacLeod 2010; Kasente 2012; Lyon 2008). In these agricultural cooperatives it is essential that the female producers receive ongoing training specific to organic farming, despite their awareness that organic farming may lower crop yields; all of the crops farmed by the members are organic. While touring a central site shared by all six of the member cooperatives, six of the producers stopped to demonstrate their recent bokashi composting training while carefully explaining the method and the potential downfalls, step-by-step. Abella, who was also at this central site this day, noted, “We have adopted a concept and a practice of agricultural practices in harmony with the environment and that has been essential for us in empowering us as women because we can’t empower ourselves if we are not respectful of nature as well.” It was apparent from similar comments made by other members throughout the week that the female producers’ strong environmental stance preceded their involvement in the Fair Trade network and seemed to be part of the cooperatives’ group discourse. The producers’ environmental discourse may be directly connected to the eco-feminist movement or to environmental feminism more generally, both of which attempt to connect the domination of women to the exploitation of the natural environment (Lorentzen and Eaton 2002).

The cooperatives' central site serves as a location for the plant nursery, hibiscus production, coffee roasting, composting area, the newly installed coffee-cupping lab, and additional production activities associated with the local market. Carmen was on-site during the tour and explained that she was responsible for roasting this year's secondary grade coffee crop for the local market. The cooperative's coffee roaster was not electric, rather, it was a large metal drum that was turned over a well-heated, wood fed fire for an hour at a time to produce the best flavor coffee for the local market; the smoke from the roaster quickly filled the small room where it was housed. For the sake of comparison, Elena stated that the cooperatives' Fair Trade buyer, Fairly Roasted Coffee, owned an electric roaster that took only a short eight to twelve minutes to roast a similar amount of coffee. Carmen went on to demonstrate how she would intermittently grind and package previously roasted beans for the local market in an adjacent room while the green coffee beans were roasting. The ability of the co-op members to perform many of these economic activities themselves allows them to retain a greater percentage of profit from sales. Carmen reported that the members were fortunate to have a demand for their local coffee that surpassed their current supply. In addition, Carmen stated that the members prep and package their hibiscus tea and jam at this location, as well as other products that the members sell to the local market. By fulfilling these additional steps, the co-op members are able to keep a greater percentage of the sale price for each product sold.

During this visit to the central site, 80,000 coffee transplants and the companion castor transplants which are used for shading the coffee plants in the fields, were housed underneath a light-filtering tarp secured to a metal frame above. The producers stated that the nursery now held enough transplants to be able to plant 20 *manzanas*. Water was

supplied to the transplants and the adjacent hibiscus field through a drip irrigation system that was connected to the property's well. The producers present this day conveyed through both words and actions that a shared procedural knowledge of all activities that take place here, at the central site, was absolutely necessary for each cooperative to participate and benefit.

During the tour of the community parcel, Rebeca spoke about another new cooperative project, which will provide the members with additional income and supplement their current personal farming efforts:

So another way that the women here have been empowered is through the reproductive package of animals. Umm—it started with ten women who received the initial whole package: ten hens, one rooster, a cow, a female pig and the materials necessary for the coop and pigpen. And so we started out with ten women, then we grew to thirty women and now with this [housing] project twenty more women will benefit. So fifty-one will now have received an animal package.

The producers are also provided with the necessary training for adequately tending to these animals prior to transfer. As a result of this diversification project, 30 producers now have 30-dozen eggs to sell weekly at the organic farmer's market in a nearby city. According to the literature, through greater market participation women become agents of their own change, which has a positive effect on their competency and personal autonomy and this appeared to be the case for these active co-op members (Mancini Billson and Fluehr-Lobban 2012).

Cooperative Members and Businesswomen. Furthermore, the producers are able to refine their skills related to conducting business within international and local markets as cooperative members. At the most basic level, the female producers must develop skill sets related to time management, clarity of communication, bookkeeping and money management to negotiate their own production and that of the co-op. Project and committee work requires that the women also cultivate negotiation and mediation skill sets associated with meeting predetermined goals as a group in a timely manner. To this end, the producers have access to communication and mediation workshops offered by the young, female psychologist employed by Co-op Femenina. The psychologist is also available to counsel the women on an individual basis. Over the course of the week I met many members who served on an assortment of cooperative committees that dealt with topics such as production, education, credit, solidarity, sustainable development, women workers and sexual reproductive health. These opportunities allow the women to take on greater roles within the group, which strengthens their own personal skills sets while simultaneously serving the collective. Many of the members stated their names, committee membership and told a little about their current work within the committees during the introductions that took place at the beginning of each group meeting. It was evident that for many of the women present that their committee participation provided an additional source of pride and knowledge beyond their general co-op membership.

Furthermore, at each cooperative meeting it was evident that the members followed procedural protocols. The producers, staff, and visitors would gather in the members' community buildings to be seated in a large circle. The members would introduce themselves and state their positions within the cooperative and then would ask everyone

in attendance to tell introduce themselves. An attendance clipboard was passed around the room at the beginning for all to sign-in. The following is an example of this procedural organization. Rosario started this particular cooperative meeting by saying:

I am the president of my cooperative and it is called Sun Shines Upon Us and once we organized the Cooperative Central, I am the president here. These are our installations here, our structures that make up our cooperative. So we are going to present ourselves, introduce ourselves. First the administrative board of the cooperative and then hopefully you will introduce yourselves as well.

The women conducted themselves professionally; after each question was asked, the female producers would look from one to another until the woman who felt most assured of an answer spoke. The members' ability to learn and routinely practice basic professional courtesies with one another in a safe environment appeared to give them the confidence necessary to share comfortably in open meetings with outsiders present. The seriousness and thoroughness with which the members conduct these meetings in each community attests to the new purpose the women have found in their roles as cooperative members and hosts to curious outsiders and business professionals alike.

Potential Limitations to Producers' Participation. The process by which to fill elected positions for each of the cooperatives became unclear after several group interviews. When asked to clarify the process, Marita said, "Positions don't change much, unless they are not performing or opt to leave." Yet during another group interview, one member suggested that lead positions would automatically transfer from mother to daughter, when the situation allowed. However, it was evident that specialized training, such as leadership training, was based on a system of meritocracy. The leadership

program and coffee-cupping training sessions were each being attended by five young women who were identified as either the daughters of founding members or daughters of members who were identified as exemplary contributors to the cooperative effort.

Concerns for the Future. Although the cooperatives' economic endeavors have enabled these fair trade producers to gain a more stable financial position than they have had in the past, climate change in this region has the potential to derail the cooperative's future fair trade plans. The coffee field that one cooperative member, Carmen, farmed with her mother is located more than a 30 minute walk from her home over increasingly deteriorating dirt roads, which eventually turn into little more than a walking path. As soon as we arrived at the field it was evident that *roya*, also known as coffee rust, had affected her plants. Carmen pointed out the stark differences between the healthy and unhealthy plants. There were few leaves on the affected coffee plants, and many of the coffee cherries appeared burnt and dried out rather than the bright, healthy red that signifies that the cherries are ripe and ready to be harvested. *Roya* is a fungus that attacks coffee plants, in particular the Arabica coffee plant, and has recently taken a hold in these cooperative members' fields over the past year. In fact, the majority of the members stated that they had harvested between 30 and 60 percent less coffee this year than last year due to the effects of the fungus. We were told that *roya* depends on drought conditions followed by heavy rains and strong winds to take hold and Elena commented while we were touring this particular coffee field that these conditions came together perfectly in this area in 2012. Unfortunately, should global climate change intensify in the coming decades, the frequency of extreme conditions, such as those experienced this year, is likely to increase to the detriment of all agricultural producers in the region.

However, these female producers also face another complication, as their coffee fields were planted 30 to 50 years ago by the original landowners. As this time period is close to the average coffee plant lifespan, the producers will likely have to face a replanting period soon. The producers cannot know for certain when the coffee plants will stop producing, but the *roya* fungus may be an indicator. As coffee plants age they become increasingly susceptible to the fungus. As of February 2013 the women anticipated that they would need to cut down the coffee plants affected by the fungus at the start of the rainy season and begin a replanting effort. Even if this action stems the fungus, coffee transplants take three to four years to produce coffee cherries; in other words, the producers will have little or no crop in these areas for several years to come. Not only will the women need technical direction to address the agricultural side of this newly detected threat, but they will also need to put much more energy into their local economic endeavors in an attempt to compensate for this serious turn of events.

One of the cooperative members, Imelda, attempted to put this event into context when she shared:

This year we are very worried about the *roya* because our production is not enough and we are worried about next year because we will probably need to cut down our trees. So we have struggled a lot, but the struggle continues and never ends in order to move ahead but we are happy to have our buyers and happy to have a little bit more stable price but there won't be more.

The members often referred to the difficulties they continue to face as struggles to be overcome, not alone, but in concert with Cooperativa Femenina, Fairly Roasted Coffee and other support organizations. When Imelda stated, "there won't be more," she refers to

the extra money that is used to fund annual educational scholarships provided to members' daughters. Camila had made a reference to this situation earlier in the week. "We are a little bit worried this year because of the coffee fungus and how it could affect our income in hard times. That is how we use our resources, to put our kids through school. But we're going to fight," she said.

Although the women are concerned about the education funds, there are potentially greater consequences for any of the individual producers who are financially independent of the others. In the cooperative structure, each woman's income is dependent on her alone; there are no social safety nets if her income is 60 percent less this coming year. However, Elena felt that their Fair Trade buyers would attempt to offset some of the producers' losses this year through an increase in their per pound pricing offer. She told the group present during one meeting, "I just wanted to share also that as a follow-up from the meeting we had a couple of weeks ago, we had with the buyers, they were very impacted and very emotional, and they are talking about the possibilities of what we could do to help them and deal with the *roya*." Elena stated that the Fair Trade buyers plan to offer the female producers the same rate of purchase for their crops this year as last year, despite the fact that this year's per pound coffee price had dropped by more than \$1.00 (U.S.). The female producers refer to their Fair Trade buyers as generous supporters. The term 'support' was also part of the group's discourse and the members often shared their gratitude for the support that they had received as well as their desire to continue to receive that support.

Experiences with Fair Trade

The cooperatives were first able to access the Fair Trade network just four years ago. Imelda shared, “In the beginning we didn’t have a buyer to buy our coffee and now we’ve been working for about four years with Fairly Roasted Coffee, which has offered to sell our coffee, and we don’t sell to *coyotes* and receive a better price.” Imelda was referring to the middlemen, or *coyotes*, that frequent these communities during the harvest and attempt to buy coffee producers’ crops at reduced prices to then sell to international buyers. During the eight years leading up to their entrance into the Fair Trade network, the female producers worked with Cooperativa Femenina to organize under a cooperative structure and to secure their organic and Fair Trade certifications. Before their entrance into the Fair Trade network, the cooperatives made a collective decision to stay true to their values by choosing their buyers selectively and excluding transnational corporations. One of the members, Abella, attempted to clarify their stance when she stated, “In our experience of empowerment, also we have linked values that are related to the solidarity economy, that go against exploitative relationships with human beings.” The cooperative members appeared to have a basic understanding of the differences between the mainstream and Fair Trade markets, especially when it came to the treatment of labor.

The female producers have sold 100 percent of their first-grade quality coffee to three international Fair Trade roaster-distributors, with whom they hold long-term contracts, for the past four years. The literature suggests that many fair trade coffee cooperatives worldwide are only able to sell a portion of their annual fair trade coffee harvest through the Fair Trade network (Ruben and Fort 2011). To give the travelers

some idea of how much coffee the six cooperatives produce, Abella stated, “So we started exporting 500 *quintales* or 50,000 pounds of organic coffee on the Fair Trade market, but we have been increasing our volumes and sales and so last year we exported 650 *quintales* of green coffee beans to the United States and Denmark.”

One of the primary benefits of Fair Trade access for these female coffee producers has been the extension of credit prior to the start of each growing season. Access to credit is critical for these female producers because it is very difficult for rural producers to obtain credit in Nicaragua. Likewise, the pre-credit extension financially maintains these women and their households throughout the 32-week long growing season. It is estimated that Nicaraguan women receive only 11 percent of the credit released in rural areas of Nicaragua (FEMUPROCAN 2004). In the past, many of the women said that they would run out of money during harvest time. At times when the producers did not have the funds to support themselves and their families through the harvest, selling to *coyotes* became an essential measure. Cande, who is the president of her cooperative, described the process of selling to *coyotes* this way, “We would receive a very low price and sometimes they would steal from us. When they would weigh the coffee to price they would say it was less than it really was and they just would treat us horrible.” Luisa had shared during an individual interview, “In some ways, this has helped us to wake up a little bit and realize what we deserve and how we were being cheated before.” The level of accountability provided by the members’ fair trade buyers has also added to their new self-worth as Luisa’s statement suggests and has led them to consider a better future for themselves and their communities as well.

The travel delegation visited the female coffee producers during the harvest season

and one of the members, Imelda, proudly stated, “So now we have people coming in and we tell them [cooperative members] they need to be prepared. So now people will come in with cash into our fields and things and will try to cheat us. So now that we have become women who are more prepared and well-educated they are not going to be able to cheat us.” Luisa went on to tell about an incident she had recently witnessed between *coyotes* and a few of her fellow *cooperativistas*. She shared, “So one time I saw in another community that the women were leaving with a whole truck load of coffee, with the cooperative, and they were going to go process it and a *coyote* stopped them along the way and offered to buy it all from them on the spot and they said, **no** –we are not going to do that, and they continued on and went on to sell their coffee.” With greater business knowledge and sufficient credit, the women are now able to identify and avoid these deceptive business practices. As a result, they have also developed a new sense of confidence and economic independence.

This year, the cooperatives had used the entirety of their pre-season credit provided to them by their Fair Trade buyers before the end of the harvest. As this was a critical concern, a representative from Fairly Roasted Coffee traveled to Nicaragua to meet with the producers to better understand their financial needs. The representative successfully managed to secure them an additional loan with a progressive lending institution to complete the crop collection. Elena, the travel delegation’s translator and Fairly Roasted Coffee representative, reassured the producers present during this group interview that the credit would be available to them soon. The credit was not interest free; the last loan was taken out at 6 percent interest, but Elena felt certain that the Fairtrade premium this year would more than cover the interest amount for each of the cooperatives. Cande, a

member of the newest member cooperative that was founded just three years ago, described her feelings about selling in the Fair Trade network this way:

We feel really lucky and really proud to see all that we have managed and all that we have achieved in the past three years, because we started out with nothing and we have done a lot in three years, organizing our cooperative and selling our coffee with a Fair Trade mark on it. There is a sense of pride to sell our coffee with a Fair Trade mark on it because we no longer have to sell to *coyotes* or middlemen.

The all-female cooperatives' coffee buyers actively negotiate pricing with the female producers annually. For the past three years the co-ops have received coffee pricing that was almost twice the Fairtrade minimum. The female producers are aware of the superior financial position they find themselves in with their Fair Trade buyers as was noted when Beatriz commented, "We are also very happy that we receive a much higher price for our coffee than even other cooperatives or even other coffee growers." In addition, these Fair Trade buyers willingly access additional credit for the producers when the need arises, and they orchestrate travel opportunities that allow for personal exchanges between the producers and fair trade consumers.

Fairly Roasted Coffee arranged a trip for one young cooperative member, Abella, to come to the United States to speak to college students about her life as a coffee producer and cooperative member. During her time in the United States, Abella was able to see first hand how the cooperatives' coffee was received, processed and marketed. Additionally, she had the opportunity to visit with fair trade consumers. Abella described her visit this way:

It was just a really, really incredible experience for me. I was just really moved by all of it. To see how, where our coffee ends up and how it is sold in big supermarkets and to see the faces of the women on those bags of coffee so far away and to think that people far away actually support us and support everything that is behind that coffee and it made me feel so, so proud of all of us and of all that we have been through and all that we have struggled with to get where we are and it was just a very incredibly moving experience.

The opportunities that the members have had to expand the ideas they have of themselves and their cooperative ventures, through a variety of global interactions both inside and outside of their communities, validates their struggle to improve their situations.

Similarly, the female producers in each community expressed gratitude that international travelers had taken time to visit them to learn more about their communities and cooperatives. At the end of one of the group interviews, Nita shared:

I just want to say that I know it is not everybody that comes to see our work here and I know that it is a great sacrifice for all of you and for you I know it is not just about buying or drinking our coffee but I know it takes a lot for you to come here to see our conditions and to see the sacrifice that it takes to send you our coffee as we sacrifice to get you a good cup of coffee we know that you are sacrificing to come here as well and we are very appreciative of that.

Pascuala added, “I just wanted to thank you for coming, for being here. It helps us to feel like we are not alone and we always enjoy having visitors here but thank you for taking the effort.” It was apparent that many of the female cooperative members interpreted the fair trade travelers’ visit as yet another sign of outside support and solidarity.

Family and Community Development

A Space of Their Own. Community buildings have been erected in each of the six cooperative communities for the exclusive use of the members, and the women spoke about this space often. The members of each of the six member cooperatives decide for themselves how to best utilize this space. At first sight, the brick structures outfitted with cement floors and metal roofs seem unimpressive. However, when the members described the ways in which they have utilized the fairly new community buildings, the importance of this space to these women became obvious. Abella had shared:

Co-op Femenina continues to do workshops in the communities so they travel to the communities and work with the youth or work with the adults. And one advantage that Cooperativa Femenina has is that they built community houses, which is just like this building, which allows them to do workshops, training, health services, study circles, cooperative meetings, host visitors, all different kinds of things. So they will go and use that space and come out to the communities.

As we walked up the narrow path to the cooperative's community building with Camila, she shared, "We have also fought to have this building, this structure, so we can carry out our activities... before we would simply have to meet in a hallway in my house and this building was built two to three years ago." The women inform us that the community buildings once provided an intimate space for the mobile health clinic workers to conduct health exams. Rebeca had shared, "What this building would be used for was for pap exams for the women and pre-cancer screenings and things like that. Umm –it was around the same time that they found three of the women had cancer and they managed to treat them in time and now they are okay, three of them that are here in the meeting

today.”

At other times, when it was necessary to hire workers from outside of the community for building projects or harvest purposes, the members were able to offer the space as temporary living quarters. Rebeca had shared, “We used to not have a place to meet either and this is what each of the communities of Cooperativa Femenina have now as a meeting place, kind of a branch office. It housed the workers who were working on the [housing] project which reduced the costs for the workers who could simply stay here but the room is mostly used for meetings like these or the mobile health clinic.” The community buildings have also been used to house the fair trade travel delegations, which provide the host community with additional income.

However, according to the members, one of the most important uses for the six community buildings is the ability to offer shelter to victims of domestic violence and their children. According to several of the women’s estimates, up to 120 women from the community have been assisted by cooperatives’ defense committees. While the producers shared about a reduction in the number of domestic abuse victims that they have themselves witnessed over the years, Luisa shared, “Not to say that violence does not still exist, but we have reduced it dramatically because the women have somewhere to go. So we are working on decreasing it everyday a little bit more. It’s a very broad topic for us as women but we are continuing to fight and we continue to work together.” It is clear from the on-going dialogue amongst the producers throughout the week that the community buildings also provide the members with a place to “withdraw temporarily from the male-dominated mainstream to reflect on identity goals and strategies for change” (Mancini Billson and Fluehr-Lobban 2006:383).

An All-Female Cooperative Structure. When the female producers were asked about possible opportunities that the men in their communities had to participate in the activities of the cooperative, the members definitively stated that there were no opportunities for men to participate; men were not even invited to observe their meetings. Two members shared during this dialogue that their husbands belonged to mixed-gender cooperatives in nearby communities. Their responses were not severe but moderately defensive, as if all that they had worked towards was in need of protection. Josephina, a co-op member, stated, "...in the mixed co-ops, there are only five or ten women from the community here or the one where [her husband] is a member." Consuela added, "There, there are only men on the committees so it is better for us to be part of this co-op where we have more say." Another criticism of the mixed-gender cooperatives was that they only met on an annual basis unless something unforeseen needed to be addressed. Abella added, "We have formed friendships and relationships within the cooperatives and visited with other mixed cooperatives where we can witness just how much we have achieved as women in comparison. They lack gender ideology and empowerment elements." Francesca confidently assured the visitors, "We don't let Cooperativa Femenina tell us what to do. We are not top down unlike other aid in this area." The members present emphatically conveyed their agreement with her statement. Fair trade research suggests that female producers are often unable to capitalize on the benefits offered by mixed-gender cooperatives, and these women appeared to learn this first-hand from their visits to other co-ops in the area. For this reason, they passionately and unanimously support the all-female cooperative structure that is now in place.

Educating Daughters. The cooperative members are particularly dedicated to their daughters' educational pursuits. Abella explained, "...through the education program, daughters of the members of the co-ops receive scholarships to continue studying." The scholarships are a source of pride for the members and are mentioned with great regularity. Since the first education committee was established in 2004, Cooperativa Femenina and the female producers have awarded 40 young women scholarships to attend university, and another 15 scholarships were awarded to daughters who pursued technical certification programs; the members say some of the young women have trained to become welders and carpenters. According to Abella, "Ten young girls are [currently] receiving scholarships. Some are attending secondary and some are starting their degree." The members were asked what their hopes were for their daughters who were attending university. Clara answered:

Some of our hopes is that they will come home and help our own community. Some of our daughters are studying psychology and some people think that psychological support is just for crazy people but it's not just for crazy people. It's –it's for people who are depressed or need support. For instance, now with this coffee crisis people feel like they are going through some amount of trauma because they are not going to receive as much income but nobody knows what we are going to do about that. But we need people like Co-op Femenina to help educate and support them so they can move forward. Not just getting them to hospitals or medical but with that same support in dealing with their fear. And also there are some daughters studying agriculture, getting technical degrees and we also need these people to serve as agricultural technicians to come and help us with support and production.

Whether or not the members' daughters will in fact come back to their communities to work remains to be seen, but the hope that their educational attainment instills in this cooperative is evident.

It is a prevailing belief amongst the cooperative members that the newfound opportunity to provide education for their children is one of their greatest achievements. However, producers from each cooperative expressed a serious concern that this opportunity may be slipping away due to the devastating effects *roya* has had on their coffee crops. At the same time, they are hopeful that they will continue to receive the ongoing support that they need from their consumers as well as from outside organizations to keep these opportunities alive.

Changing Relationships. Francesca openly shared about the changes in her own family since taking advantage of the community-based training and workshops, "We have learned to communicate. I have 12 children, once we would hit our children but no more." Further on in the discussion Francesca added, "It has been a beautiful experience and with our sons as well. They would once not wash a plate or serve in the kitchen but now we know that that is not right, they must participate fully as well." Noticeably, this was one of the few times during the interviews that sons were mentioned. Several of the other women shared that their ability to discuss issues with their spouses has improved and therefore, their day-to-day lives have improved as a result. Francesca, who appeared to be in her late fifties or early sixties, chuckled as she spoke about the changes that have taken place in her own marriage. Francesca said her husband now respects her right to rest or nap, she does not have to be constantly going *and neither does he*. It appeared that

this newfound leisure was a way that Francesca could actively resist gendered norms (Shaw 2001).

However, Camila shared that the men in the members' cooperative communities once derogatorily referred to the female producers as "street women" due to the members' efforts to collectively organize. Francesca also stated that the female producers had endured 10 years of fighting what she described as the men's rebellion. Both of these women attributed this behavior to the men's strong desire to dominate, or the *machismo* culture. Eventually, the cooperative members decided to implement defense committees in their communities, which was highly unpopular. Francesca explained, "When we went out into the community, they were angry." Imelda explained the work of the defense committees:

I'm going to talk a little about defending the rights of women. We are going to talk about the fight against violence. We know that many of the women have suffered violence and so we have organized these kind of defense committees, a network on the community level in order to support them. So if we realize that a woman has been suffered violence or domestic abuse we visit them and support them and help them if they decide to denounce the crime or report it with the police department or women's office.

According to Mancini Billson and Fluehr-Lobben (2006:384), "Social change in economic, political, and educational institutions depends in part on the ability to change unbalanced, male-dominated gender regimes in family and intimate relations." The support that the members are now able to provide to each other and to the other women in

their communities who have suffered domestic violence has been an important first step in challenging the entrenched *machismo* culture.

The members shared that when the defense committees were first organized, it was not uncommon that the cooperative members would have to pay for the police officer's gasoline to get them to respond to their calls. Recollections such as these highlighted the difficulties that the co-op members had in their own communities when they first sought protection under the law for themselves and other women. Camila shared a bit about being a member of her community's defense committee, "...it is not very easy and don't think that it doesn't still scare me. We have communication with the police and if we call them and tell them something is going on [they will come]. My mom would say you are facing things that are really dangerous and defending the women that are victims of domestic abuse and it was a dangerous task." Camila's mother passed away several years ago but she felt certain that her mother was proud of all that she had been able to accomplish as a *cooperativista*.

Repeatedly, the female producers described, in a variety of ways, a new respect that they felt the men in their communities were beginning to have for them. Francesca asserted that the positive changes in women's health had led to men's concern for their well-being. Abella had shared that men's new found respect for women could be seen in their agreement to use birth control. Abella is one of the younger co-op members, single and in her early twenties. Several of the members stated that birth rates had dropped in their cooperative communities over the past 12 years and that one or two children was the new norm. Francesca also shared, "As the women changed, the men were forced to change. The women became examples of strength in their communities." The women

identified a strong association between the changes in their relationships and the new knowledge that the cooperative has afforded them. It appeared that the cooperative members' ability to consistently generate income and effect positive change has not only improved their confidence and self-esteem but their status within their households and communities as well.

Events That Highlight Individual and Collective Agency

Collective Representation. The new roles that the female coffee producers now embody as cooperative members, entrepreneurs, and community advocates have increased their visibility not only in their own communities but in the greater province as well. During the week spent in the producer communities, the all-female cooperative members hosted a home-dedication ceremony for one of their cooperative communities that had lost 71 homes in 2011 to landslides. Local officials, newspaper journalists and more than 100 community members came together for the event. The local government had financed and constructed twenty-four new homes for the landslide victims while Co-op Femenina managed to secure funding to build an additional twenty homes. Several other organizations financed the building of yet another seven homes, bringing 51 new homes to this community. The all-female cooperatives' development committee also played an active role in the design and budget allocation for the homes financed through Co-op Femenina. The cooperative members from this community who had lost homes were all fortunate to have received new homes after spending the last two years homeless.

Although the day was celebratory, the co-op members also had concerns that they wanted their local representative to convey to the new mayor during the event. The

community's local representative would speak about this community's lack of access to clean water and electricity. In addition, the representative spoke about poor sanitation conditions that the members feared would negatively affect the greater community. The co-op members who had received new homes funded by Cooperativa Femenina had received training specific to their new composting latrines and with this new knowledge came concerns about issues of sanitation. The women hoped that the representative's words would be well received by the new mayor and that similar solutions would eventually be implemented for the entire community.

Many of the members took the opportunity provided to them at the end of the celebration to express themselves publicly. A few co-op members recited poems they had written. Other members took time to reflect about the work that had taken place in the community and spoke of this day as a resurrection, while they expressed their immense gratitude to all that had contributed to the outcome. During the event, Camila stated:

A lot of this came from being organized and receiving support and feeling we are not alone. It is important to know that someone is there when you are going through such difficult times. This time was incredibly difficult for us, it is not easy to have to leave your home, leave your nest. But knowing that it was in a risk area we know we have to do that, to find somewhere else to live but we have felt supported because of the organizations that we are connected with.

As a founding member and past president of the all-female cooperative in this community, Camila sat with the other honored guests during the celebration. The police chief and new mayor, both of whom are women, attended the day's event along with both of Cooperativa Femenina's co-founders. The day's events highlighted the female

producers' new roles within their community as hosts, honored guests, political activists and empowered women who readily lent their voices to the home dedication ceremony.

The Secondary Level Cooperative. In 2012, the six member cooperatives voted to use 50 percent of their Fairtrade premium to execute the legal processes related to establishing a secondary level cooperative. The secondary level cooperative structure legally joined the six member cooperatives under a single cooperative structure. According to the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization (2009), secondary level co-ops attempt to serve the various community producers through economies of scale, some examples may include, shared banking or accounting services, transportation costs and marketing efforts (Cracknell 1996). At the first group interview that week, Abella shared the following information related to the newly formed secondary cooperative:

So the members of these six cooperatives, we have recently organized a secondary level cooperative and from there we are able to strengthen our own economic development and from their our entrepreneurial development from the perspective of a solidarity economy and in search of our own autonomy and at the same time, activists in the Nicaraguan feminist movement. So it's been an effort on behalf of the co-ops to develop the [secondary level co-op]. It has all been based on assembly meetings; so with the entire co-op in each of the communities, they decided that they wanted to develop this type of secondary co-op and decided that this was a good idea. And then from there six delegates were chosen from each co-op that now represent the assembly of the secondary level co-op.

Abella went on to explain what the legal transfer would mean from Cooperativa Femenina's standpoint, "And so we have talked about we are in the process of transferring a lot of this work, agricultural production from Co-op Femenina to the secondary level co-op. And so a lot of these things were assumed beforehand by Cooperativa Femenina, certification, commercialization, the Fair Trade and organic certification, roasted coffee, this whole installation was Cooperativa Femenina's and now it is being turned over to the secondary co-ops and also the credit fund." In other words, Cooperativa Femenina will legally transfer ownership of the credit fund and other cooperative assets to the secondary level cooperative. According to the fair trade literature and many Fair Trade organizations' discourse, greater producer autonomy is what fair trade aspires to ultimately accomplish. However, Co-op Femenina will continue to play an active role in these women's futures, at both the community and cooperative level.

In addition, funding has been secured by the secondary cooperative, with Cooperativa Femenina's assistance, for an operating budget that will cover business expenses for the next two to three years. Elena explained:

And so with the help of Co-op Femenina, they were able to formulate a project [financial] that was recently approved –that's a really big project –for use over the next two to three years so that they can get on their feet. And so after that they will be able to hire two more people and Abella's salary will come out of that. She is kind of the manager and then they will hire a technician working specifically with coffee in the field and then someone to administer the credit and they won't be on their own for a while. It will continue to be a process of accompaniment [with

Cooperativa Femenina] until they are on their own.

Inevitably, Elena implied, more will be required from each and every cooperative member as Cooperativa Femenina steps aside and the group increasingly directs its own interests. Elena stated, “Right now I think there are a lot of challenges and I think a lot of people are worried too about taking the next step and I think because you have to provide more out of your own pocket to make the co-op happen. And so it is important to think about that long-term and to think about what that could provide for us in the future and how the co-ops can be more sustainable on their own. And by putting a little bit in now, hopefully, they will be able to get more back later with technical assistance, other information, other technologies or infrastructure.” According to the members, when Cooperativa Femenina assisted the first female producers to form the first member cooperative in 2001, they could have only imagined that one day the membership would grow large enough to form a secondary level cooperative. In May of 2012— more than a decade later— the member cooperatives convened and decided to make that vision a reality.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Oxaal and Baden (1997:24) suggested, "...unless empowerment is clearly defined and the strategies or processes whereby it is to be translated from policy to practice specified, empowerment becomes a vague goal or meaningless buzzword." Similarly, several fair trade researchers have also suggested that in order for female producers to benefit from the fruits of Fair Trade's principal tenets— democratic participation, producer empowerment and equity of opportunity— strategies must be clearly defined and translated from policy to practice to be realized (Gonzalez Manchon and MacLeod 2010, Hutchens 2010, Kasente 2012, Lyon 2008, Oxaal and Baden 1997, Steinkopf Rice 2008). When the female fair trade producers became cooperative members more than a decade ago, they gained new opportunities. Although it is apparent that many of the opportunities that have been extended to the female producers over this period of time have been part of Cooperativa Femenina's overall strategy of empowerment, which emphasizes democratic participation and equality of opportunity, it is reasonable to conclude that some of those opportunities were a result of the producers' primary initiatives. Nevertheless, it appears that these initiatives would not have had the same level of success without Cooperativa Femenina's willingness to listen and collaborate with the producers.

Although the Fair Trade network contributes to these female coffee producers' economic empowerment, the primary influences of their social empowerment at this time are the all-female cooperative members and the staff of Co-op Femenina. The literature describes social empowerment as a process of developing confidence and autonomy that

enables individuals and groups to act on their own to achieve self-defined goals, and this matches my research observations (Bacon 2010, University of Birmingham 2013). In other words, the safe and supportive environment of the all-female cooperative encourages these producers to both learn and strengthen new personal and professional skill sets, which further empowers their active participation to their own benefit and the benefit of their cooperatives, families and communities.

After reviewing the full content of the transcripts, it is apparent that there are lingering effects related to dependency from Nicaragua's colonial era. Although Spain is no longer a controlling power here, the people still look to Spain specifically and the West more generally for development aid and humanitarian support. However, there are reasons beyond the remnants of colonialization that leave farmers in this region dependent on international support. Nicaragua's tumultuous political history has some bearing on the insufficient access to public and infrastructure services, but neoliberal reforms are also at work under the direction of the World Bank, as Nicaragua remains the second poorest nation in the region. Nicaragua's rural poor are among those most affected by reforms that have restricted agricultural credit and removed supports and subsidies (Horton 2013). The female producers have no social protections in place as fair trade coffee farmers. Therefore, the producers' reliance on outside organizations appears essential as their economic pursuits increase in an attempt to improve their livelihoods. According to the literature, social protection and social welfare services are now described as fundamental for fighting poverty and promoting economic growth (Brunori and O'Reilly 2010).

Dependency theory most aptly frames the producers' discourse related to their need for continued organizational support. The women's reliance on Cooperativa Femenina for guidance and funding is evident but several times during the week the producers referred to the need to locate a new donor to restart services once provided by the mobile health clinic. On other occasions, producers would make more generalized statements about their hope that organizations continue to choose to support them. Yet, the women seem to speak of outside support as a mechanism towards greater self-sufficiency rather than long-term dependency. Indeed the female producers' latest decision to establish a secondary level cooperative, as well as Cooperativa Femenina's assuredness to legally transfer current cooperative assets, speaks to this assertion.

Furthermore, the actions of both Cooperativa Femenina and Fairly Roasted Coffee also suggest that the female producers are in need of both organizations on-going support to become independent, successful women. However, both organizations have deliberately worked towards equitable exchanges with the female producers, despite the apparent power imbalances, in an explicit effort to empower. Oxaal and Baden emphasize that empowerment can take different forms: the *power* an individual has *to* make decisions, the *power* to work *with* others towards a common goal and finally the *power* that individuals recognize *within* themselves through greater confidence that allows them to take actions to influence change (1997:1). Many of the female producers individually and collectively exhibited various stages of each of these three forms of empowerment through their words and actions, which may suggest that the support the producers have received has successfully increased their level of empowerment.

To date, most fair trade cooperative research has focused on mixed-gender

agricultural cooperatives, perhaps this is because they are more common and typically have larger memberships. Consequently, few researchers have documented the organization of all-female fair trade agricultural cooperatives or evaluated the consequences of this structure. In contrast, this study provides a first-person, personal account of members' experiences within their all-female fair trade cooperatives. Furthermore, the conclusions of this research suggest that all-female cooperatives may foster stronger community relationships among members than their mixed-gender counterparts. In turn, this community environment supports individuals' personal advancement. It is this member-cooperative relationship that facilitates democratic participation, empowerment and greater financial opportunity.

Case Study Limitations

While this case study attempts to fill a gap in the research related to female fair trade producers by exploring the concepts of democratic participation, producer empowerment and gender equity in the all-female cooperative structure, the use of interviews along with participant observation limits generalizations to other populations. Although co-op members from six different coffee-producing communities in Nicaragua have provided the data gathered for this case study, the participants were all associated with the same NGO, Cooperativa Femenina. As a result, the data may or may not reflect the views of other female fair trade coffee producers in Nicaragua or other global locations. An attempt was made to reduce this bias by interviewing producers of different ages, varying years of cooperative membership and women who were serving in a variety of positions within the cooperative structure. Additionally, it was equally beneficial to this case study to have access to Elena, the Fairly Roasted Coffee liaison, throughout the

eight days of travel for her insider-outsider perspective.

Another potential limitation for this case study may be social desirability bias. Social desirability bias occurs when participants attempt to give answers that they think the interviewer wants to hear. The participants were made aware that the case study was meant to explore the producers' experiences within their member cooperatives and with Fair Trade, more generally. Additionally, the guide-translator was an employee of Fairly Roasted Coffee and although she has worked closely with the female producers and Cooperativa Femenina in a variety of capacities over the past three years, it is possible that her presence might have also elicited social desirability bias. In an attempt to minimize the potential for social desirability bias, daily individual and/or group interviews were conducted to allow interview questions to emerge from the ongoing dialogue throughout the eight days. However, participants rarely discussed negative experiences related to their cooperatives or the Fair Trade network, which may signify an attempt to put forward only their positive experiences.

Future Studies

There is a need for additional qualitative research specific to female fair trade agricultural producers to better understand the affects cooperative organizational structures have on individual cooperative member outcomes. Although the all-female cooperative structure has produced positive outcomes for many of these members, the organization and requirements of the cooperative may have substantial bearing on this result as well. Some questions to consider for future research are: Do social empowerment activities such as gender equality training, literacy and further formal educational opportunities increase female members' participation in mixed-gender

cooperatives? Do mixed-gender fair trade cooperatives provide similar opportunities for social empowerment as all-female cooperatives? Answers to these questions might reveal potential solutions to the inequity of opportunity reported by female members of Fair Trade mixed-gender cooperatives in the literature.

Additionally, this case study could be expanded to assess the level of opportunity and participation for these female co-op members as they transition from the member cooperative structure to the secondary level cooperative structure. Moreover, qualitative research could be employed to better understand potential barriers for female producers in the six cooperative communities that opt not to become members of the all-female cooperatives. Finally, a household-level social development survey could be developed and implemented to better understand the cooperative membership body.

APPENDIX A

PROPOSED INTERVIEW GUIDE

1.
 - Have you always lived in this location or did you move here to work for the cooperative?
 - How did you become involved in the women's coffee cooperative?
2.
 - What is your job?
 - Who do you report to?
 - How well do you work with this person?
 - Do you feel that they are fair?
3.
 - What is good about working with this cooperative?
 - Could it be better? In what ways?
 - Is this work the best work for you in this area of the country?
4.
 - Are there any challenges for you to work as part of the cooperative?
 - Are there problems or issues that go unsolved in the cooperative?
 - Who helps you to try and resolve them?
5.
 - How does this work affect the rest of your life, at home or in the community?
 - Can you tell me an example of how this work has affected your life for the worse or the better?
 - Is there something else you would like to do for work other than this?
7.
 - What has the fair trade premium been used for in your community?
 - Have you had a vote in what the fair trade premium has been used for in your community?
 - Do you know what countries your fair trade coffee is sold to and why?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Justice vs. Poverty Reduction: The life of a female fair trade producer.-IRB Number:
2012R538

- IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCHER

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

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You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Kelley A. Russell-DuVarney, who is a master's degree student from the Sociology Department at Texas State University. Mrs. Russell-DuVarney is conducting this research for her master's thesis. Dr. Deborah Harris is her faculty sponsor for this project.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a member of one of the five coffee cooperatives structured under Cooperativa Femenina or a fair trade associate/professional. If you choose to participate, I will ask you questions about your role as a fair trade coffee producer, community member or fair trade professional.

- PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of the female fair trade producer. I hope to use what I learn from the study to contribute to the fair trade literature. I will provide an executive summary upon completion to the Fairly Roasted Coffee liaison and Cooperativa Femenina directors.

- PROCEDURES

If you decide to participate, you will take part in an informal interview, focus group or participant observation. The informal interview and focus group discussions will be audio-tape-recorded. If you decide to take part in the interview, you are free to

stop the interview at any time. You can withdraw from the study without prejudice or jeopardy, from the cooperative or myself. You do not have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. If you have any questions, please ask me.

- CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain strictly confidential. Audio files will be kept on an encrypted memory stick and code numbers will be assigned so your name will never be attached to the audio files. Only I, the interviewer will hear your interviews on the digital recorder or audio files until the study is complete. After twelve months, I will erase the recordings of all interviews. When I describe the information obtained, an alias or false name will be used in place of your true name or identity, as well as the name of your particular cooperative. I will not transcribe any identifying information.

You will be offered a copy of this consent form to keep. If you have questions in the future, please feel free to contact me directly. With questions or concerns about your rights or this research, you may also contact the Institutional Review Board chairperson at Texas State, Dr. Jon Lasser (512-245-3413, lasser@txstate.edu) or the Office of Sponsored Projects administrator, Ms. Becky Northcut (512-245-2102). You may also contact my supervising professor, Dr. Deborah Harris (dh57@txstate.edu, 512-512-245-4547).

- PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this study. Your verbal agreement/signature means that you have understood the information provided and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time after agreeing to participate should you choose to do so and all information collected will be erased.

- POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

I expect that any risks, discomforts or inconveniences will be minor and I believe that they are not likely to occur at all. If discomforts do occur, you may discontinue your participation. Should you find it necessary to seek additional support as a result of this research, you should contact the Cooperativa Femenina directors (phone numbers were provided to the participants):

Participant/Witness

Signature/Date

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