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Tactical Ethics: how the discourses of Fairtrade and Black Economic Empowerment change and interact in wine networks from South Africa to the UK

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Abstract

This paper explores the spaces and power relations of ethical foodscapes. Ethics can offer a commodity a valuable unique selling point in a competitive marketplace but managing the changeable and multiple motivations for stakeholder participation throughout the commodity chain in order to utilise this opportunity is a complex negotiation. Through exploring the spaces and relations within three South African-UK ethical wine networks, the discursive tactics used to sustain these are uncovered. The discourses of Fairtrade, Black Economic Empowerment and organics are highly adaptive, interacting with each other in such a way as to always be contextually appealing. This 'tactical mutability' is combined with 'scales of knowing', which, this paper argues, are essential for network durability. 'Scales of knowing' refers to the recognition by stakeholders of the potential for different articulations of a discourse within the network, which combines with 'tactical mutability' to allow for a scalar, contextual and 'knowing' (im)mutability to ensure the discourse's continued appeal. However, even when one discourse is the 'lead' it always folds within its linkages to other ethical discourses at work, suggesting that ethical practice is mutually supportive discursively. This means that at the producer end ethical interactions may offer more capacity to enact genuine transformation than the solo operations of a discourse.

1 Introduction

In 2003, the first Fairtrade wine grape producers in the world were certified in the politically sensitive and complex terrain of South Africa. Various described as a consumer choice movement, a challenge to neoliberalism and a market-driven commercial model (Linton et al., 2004; Nicholls and Opal, 2005) certified Fairtrade has become a globally recognised phenomenon (Raynolds and Murray, 2007).¹ While not beyond critique (Barrientos et al., 2007; Moore, 2004), Fairtrade has the laudable aim to provide sustainable, democratic and transparent trade connections between producers and consumers, to enable the former to improve their lives and environments (FTF, 2005). While this establishes an overarching, global discourse of ‘fairness’, on the ground the practices, conceptualisations and material impacts – all the elements that this paper considers to constitute a discourse – are contextually adapted.

Political and ethical factors have arguably become more explicit in contemporary consumers’ decision making (Hilton, 2004), with the recognition that ‘...everyday choices and acts by individuals play an important role for the future of political, social, and economic life. In short, every person is part of global responsibility-taking’ (Micheletti, 2003: 2). However, the ethical/political consumer is not oblivious to price or quality, and what counts as ‘ethical’ or ‘political’ is neither simple nor uncontested with multiple motivations and conceptualisations establishing an extremely complex space. Consumers too are fluid and versatile subjects, with priorities dependent on time and context (Sassatelli, 2006). Being ‘ethical’ can offer a commodity an important unique selling point (USP) within a competitive marketplace and so appealing to shifting consumer preferences is essential. However, how the information, knowledge and network resources are deployed in order to ‘articulate *consumption* and *the consumer* through a register of ‘ethics’ and ‘responsibility’ (Clarke et al., 2007: 246) does not necessarily also encourage participation from retailers, producers and all those involved in moving a commodity from production space to market. Therefore, how an ethical commodity portrays itself must change to ensure the consistent and sustainable enrolment of all stakeholders. Knowing the discursive tactics necessary to sustain both production and consumption is therefore critical to an ethical, and arguably any, brand’s survival. By exploring the contextual discursive adaptability within ‘ethical’ wine networks this paper acts to respond to Goodman et al’s (2010) call for more engagement with the issues of power within contemporary ethical foodscapes. This paper also explores some of the spatial impacts brought by the mainstreaming ‘expansion and contraction’ (ibid: 1793) of alternative food systems by considering how the mobility and mutability of ethical discourses is both scalar and strategic in meeting and sustaining market and/or network requirements. In this way it contributes to the ongoing debates regarding the politics of scale, recognising that scales are ‘always becoming, always subject to change, and everywhere implicated in the ongoing

¹ Following common convention in the literature, ‘Fair Trade’ refers to the movement as a whole, whilst ‘Fairtrade’ signifies the section certified by Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO).

formulation of life' (Herod, 2011: 255) and that how they are constructed and interact shapes the production of knowledge and power relations.

This paper draws on fieldwork conducted in the UK and the Western Cape in 2008² to explore this discursive adaptability by considering the flows of certified Fairtrade and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) through wine networks between South Africa and the UK, which is the main destination of bottled South African wine (Ponte, 2009; winetimes.co.za, 2012). Post-apartheid South Africa offers a unique and contested space in which the social ethics espoused by Fairtrade and BEE are highly relevant and the wine industry, with its prosperity and continuing record of exploitation (McEwan and Bek, 2009b) presents a useful arena in which to consider their application. The research methodology aimed to explore how the discourses of Fairtrade and BEE were conceptualised, practised and 'materialised' throughout their commodity networks and so a multi-sited approach was taken to more effectively 'follow' these (Marcus, 1998), centred around the four wine brands of Fairhills, M'hudi, Reyneke and Tukulu. Following the selection of these case studies, the discourse of organics emerged as an additional ethical layer for Reyneke and Tukulu. While the research focus remained on the original interest in Fairtrade and BEE, organics has been included in this paper as it adds depth to the analysis of the spaces, power relations and interactions of multiple ethical codes.

Fifty four semi-structured interviews were conducted in South Africa, of which eight were NGOs related to the wine industry, eighteen were farmworkers, eight were farm owners and twenty were other stakeholders in the wine brands. UK-based interviews were conducted with three supermarket wine buyers, one supermarket wine marketing manager, three wine importers, one online ethical wine retailer, one head of CSR, two representatives of the Fairtrade Foundation and six store managers/in-store wine specialists. Industry reports and marketing materials were also analysed.

The paper is organised in four sections. The first outlines the conceptual framework that grounds the paper's understanding of how Fairtrade and BEE interact and their intra-network mutability. The second places BEE and Fairtrade in the context of South Africa and its wine industry. The third section provides some empirical context by considering the three wine brands of Fairhills, Tukulu and Reyneke before the fourth section discusses the multiplicity, mutability and scalar nature of ethical discourses that emerges through the concept of 'scales of knowing'. This is grounded in an active and unstable, Foucauldian-inspired understanding of discourse, which contains a recognition of the potential for different articulations throughout the network; this is used to ensure continuing appeal to the different stakeholders and scales of operation of the network.

² Research was conducted between March and June, supported by a departmental grant from the School of Geography, Archaeology and Earth Resources, University of Exeter.

2 Conceptualising Discursive Interactions

A network-based approach 'assists in bringing greater understanding to the realities of daily business practices' (Bek et al., 2007: 304) and has provided valuable insights into the operations of the South African wine industry (See Ponte, 2009; Ponte and Ewert, 2009). It therefore offers a useful framework to explore the articulations and interactions of Fairtrade and BEE as the wine these discourses are attached to move from South Africa to the UK. My approach draws on both Latour's actor network theory (ANT) and Marcus's 'following' to open up the 'politics, poetics and economics of connection' (Cook, 2006: 656) between the 'situated people, artefacts, codes, and living things' (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997: 288) that link ethical wine production and consumption spaces in particular and social networks. ANT's non-human agency and idea of an 'immutable mobile' help to ground my conceptualisation of network operations and durability but, following Allen's (2003) concerns over how power is conceptualised in ANT, I draw on 'following', which takes a less structured approach that makes space for context and the unexpected, and recognises that power relations are always central and multiple (Freidberg, 2001).³

Considering the interactions between BEE and Fairtrade reminds us to not 'consider "things in isolation", as "things in themselves"' (Lefebvre in Merrifield, 2000: 172), but to recognise the presence of a spatial relationality that extends through the wine commodity networks. The continual flows of mobile actants between nodes is essential because every point of departure leads somewhere different; there is no pre-made network and it thus needs to be continually retraced in order to maintain the associations (Latour, 2005). Under ANT, network durability is provided by an 'immutable mobile'; however, this notion of 'immutability' raises some concerns. The material properties of objects, including the functional space they occupy within the network, are immutable and their flows provide the network with shape but, if we understand the world discursively, meaning is also a key component in ensuring stability and durability of the network.⁴ Latour incorporated changes in meaning in his recognition that 'objects, by the very nature of their connections with humans, quickly shift from being mediators to intermediaries...' (Latour, 2005: 79) and I understand this as including the potential to shift back again, from being intermediaries to mediators.⁵ This capability to shift between the two roles is critical in enrolling stakeholders throughout the network because it allows adaptation to the shifting context and motivations for involvement. Context is clearly significant to network operations and although hinted at by Latour, it remains under-theorised in his discussion (Allen, 2003). I suggest that a more nuanced conceptualisation of mutability that

³ Thrift (2000: 5) in *The Dictionary of Human Geography* notes that 'immutable mobiles' – devices, types of people, animals, money, and so on...can be transported from one location to another without changing form – which allow those networks to become *durable*'.

⁴ For example, while a wine bottle can change shape, it remains functionally a wine bottle; however, how the new shape is understood and the new meanings attached to it can affect how the network operates e.g. whether it appeals to a premium, entry-level or novelty market.

⁵ Intermediaries transport meaning or force without transformation while mediators modify, transform, distort and translate the meaning or elements that they carry through their engagement with the object (Latour, 2005).

incorporates context and power relations provides a better tool for understanding the role of an object within a network.

In the case of ethical wine networks, the material nature of the wine bottle and its contents remains immutable as does the macro-scale ethical discourse structuring the network and identifying it as, for example, Fairtrade. However, at the local scale, the ethical discourse works to maintain the network by adapting its message to appeal to the changing context. This presents a more scalar understanding with the ethical commodity network being held in shape by a macro-level immutable ideal but dependent for its sustainability on the micro-level adaptations that make this ideal relevant and credible on the ground. As Marcus (1998: 90) acknowledges following a network uncovers the innate presence of dynamism and surprise; ‘movement and tracing within different settings of a complex cultural phenomenon gives an initial, baseline conceptual identity that turns out to be contingent and malleable as one traces it’. I now move on to contextually ground these ethical wine networks in their initial production setting of South Africa.

3 Contextualising Transformation in the Wine Industry

Despite South Africa’s democratic transition in 1994 and continuing process of national reconciliation, the marginalisation of the historically excluded black majority remains highly visible (Alexander, 2006; Gray, 2006). The ANC government recognised that this was resulting in sub-potential economic growth and unless action was taken ‘the stability and prosperity of the economy in the future may be undermined to the detriment of all South Africans, irrespective of race’ (RSA, 2004). Efforts to address these structural inequalities centred around BEE, which, under Mbeki’s presidency, focused on consolidating the ‘black bourgeoisie’ who were considered to be critical to the establishment of a more prosperous and equitable future (Iheduru, 2004); ‘a racial problem is therefore conceptualised as having a class solution’ (ibid: 2). This black capitalist class is an important factor in maintaining political stability, which rests on a delicate compromise of white power, corporations and mass black poverty (Iheduru, 2004, 2008). However, this focus led to concerns over the wider application of BEE, which contributed to the *Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act 2004* that aimed to promote effective economic participation by the black population, increase employment and ensure more equitable income distribution. The Act was supplemented by *Generic Codes of Good Practice*, which provided standards and a framework for implementation; certain sectors have developed specific charters allowing them to address more industry specific issues, such as the *Wine Industry Transformation Charter (2007)*.⁶ BEE has been operationalised

⁶ The Wine Industry Transformation Charter was formulated and approved by a representative range of industry stakeholders. It deviates from the Generic Codes of Good Practice in encouraging even exempted businesses, those earning under R5 million per annum, to participate and takes the characteristics of the industry into account by addressing land reform, rural development and poverty alleviation.

on a scorecard comprising of seven elements: ownership, management control, employment equity, skills development, preferential procurement, enterprise development and socio-economic development.

Although it currently lacks regulatory enforcement even within those industries with Charters, BEE has become a critical element of investment decisions although this is often driven by strategic interest calculations and ‘fateful compromise’ between the state and market (Iheduru, 2008). The motivations underlying participation in BEE vary considerably (Alessandri et al., 2011) and it remains open to criticism regarding ‘blackwashing’, the creation of ‘Black Diamonds’, assessment of compliance and corruption (Iheduru, 2004).⁷ Despite this, Iheduru (2004, 2008) argues that BEE has had positive political, economic and social impacts as a multiracial middle class has become a reality within South Africa.

However, in the wine industry critics have argued that BEE has established a conservative context (McEwan and Bek, 2009a) centred around ‘a managerial exercise through the WineBEE Charter and its codes’ (Du Toit et al., 2008: 28). This shifts the nature of debates from the political to the technical, to a discourse of amelioration rather than transformation that distracts attention from the continuing, unequal underlying power relations (ibid). Du Toit et al (2008: 7) comment that ‘the industry had long been a byword for white power and black exploitation, notorious for its grim working conditions, poor wages, degrading institutions like the *tot* system, and authoritarian, racist white farmers’ and transformation still lags far behind other sectors.⁸ Although post-apartheid legislation has given farmworkers unprecedented social security and labour rights, the impact on their lives has been ambiguous. Increased international competition and domestic legislative pressures have contributed to a restructuring of the wine industry, with trends towards casualisation, externalisation and contractualism (Ewert and Du Toit, 2005).⁹ Combined with the increasing downward pressure on prices by retailers (Bek et al., 2007), this has meant investment in transformation tends to be limited and ‘groundbreaking initiatives are required to tackle long-entrenched socio-economic, political and cultural legacies’ (McEwan and Bek, 2009a: 725).

Although BEE only became central to the transformation discourse within the wine industry in 2003 (Du Toit et al., 2008), a number of grassroots initiatives engaged with similar ethics of upliftment prior to this. It is worth noting that around 80% of wine farms are exempt from the provisions of the WineBEE Charter due to their small turnover (SAWIC, 2007) and although the Charter encourages participation, in a financially pressurised industry the majority feel they lack the capacity to be involved (McEwan and Bek, 2009b). However, the political pressure on farmers is increasing, with the government aiming for 30% of the industry to be black-owned by 2014 (FTF, 2010). Therefore, more are likely to try and replicate the first wave of ‘empowerment’ projects that occurred in the mid-1990s, which were largely instigated by progressive and inspired farmers who considered empowerment a matter of conscience and political vision

⁷ The term ‘black diamond’ refers to the black middle classes in South Africa.

⁸ The *tot* system was a system in which farm workers were part-paid in alcohol.

⁹ ‘Casualisation, externalisation and contractualism’ refers to a neoliberal restructuring of agriculture with moves towards more casual and contract labour in an effort to reduce the employment ‘burden’ on the farm in terms of, for example, holiday pay and sick leave.

(Ewert et al., 2006). These were mainly 'share equity schemes', joint ventures between white farmers and their workers, usually based around 'land and brand' projects (Moseley, 2008).¹⁰

Thandi was one of these pioneers and has grown significantly since its inception in 1996, and Fairtrade accreditation in 2003. It started when the farmer Paul Clüver decided to support the workers of Lebanon, his local community, who were facing the loss of their livelihoods and homes because the South African Forestry Company Limited (SAFCOL) had decided to cease activities in the area. He combined 'self-interest with worker empowerment and the interest of the new state [in economic redistribution]' (Ewert et al., 2006: 26) by initiating a partnership with the workers from Lebanon, his own farm, SAFCOL and an NGO that established the Thandi brand. This overcame the usual constraints of skills, capital and land on new entrants to the wine industry by combining a sound business plan with existing technical and market knowledges.

Despite its commercial success and genuine drive to skills-based empowerment Thandi, and projects like it, have faced criticism due to their highly uncertain nature, with success dependent on a complex array of factors, including, amongst others, the political will of the potential stakeholders, the existence of financial support and the positive reaction of markets (Ewert et al., 2006; Moseley, 2008). Often these projects only give workers indirect ownership and for workers to enjoy the benefits of the trust they must remain employees; also, the generally small scale of the projects limits the number of workers able to acquire management skills and housing tenure – a charged issue in South Africa – often remains insecure (Du Toit et al., 2008; Moseley, 2008).

Although a 'paternalistic, authoritarian and racialised labour regime' persists in the South African wine industry (McEwan and Bek, 2009b: 256), a growing range of alternative and progressive initiatives have been established to try and address the transformation challenge. Although Bek et al. (2007) acknowledge that there is a long way to go before transformation in terms of equality of opportunity is embedded within the wine industry's everyday spaces, these endeavours highlight the potential that exists. Social codes, whether emerging locally, such as WIETA, or around an international scheme, such as Fairtrade, while perhaps limited in their impact on national and global power relations, can bring significant benefits to workers' daily lives (McEwan and Bek, 2009a). While this paper recognises that environmental codes such as the Biodiversity in Wine Initiative (BWI) are contributing to the ethical terrain of the industry and the discourse of organics is discussed in sections 4.1 and 4.2, the focus remains on 'social codes' such as BEE and Fairtrade because these are directly concerned with transformation.

In the early 2000s, FLO-International was approached by a group of South African wine producers who wanted to facilitate international market access for their brand (Barrientos and Dolan, 2006). The external and stringent auditing system of Fairtrade was particularly attractive to the wine industry, which was still

¹⁰ 'Land and brand' refers to projects in which farmworkers are supported in both the acquisition of land and the establishment of a wine brand.

adapting to its re-entrance into the global market. Ethical standards offered a way to gain political credibility and market position (Moseley, 2008) with external audits protecting genuine participants within the still white-dominated industry (Kruger and Du Toit, 2006). FLO-International was keen to support change in the new South Africa (Lamb, 2008) and therefore introduced certification standards for South African wine grapes in October 2003 (FLO, 2006).

McEwan and Bek (2009b: 260) comment that 'the South African wine industry has played a pioneering role in fair-trade wines' and wine has become one of the most important Fairtrade products in South Africa (FLSA, 2012). Although at the time of the empirical research, a WIETA executive commented that:

The South African consumer is completely uneducated in terms of ethics...Ethics? Not at all...Price and I guess brand to some extent but price plays a very dominant role (Interview, 13/03/08).

The domestic market has since started to change with efforts taken to raise awareness of Fairtrade amongst the South African public (FLSA, 2011) with wine playing a central role in the growing domestic Fairtrade market. FLSA (2012) states that out of the ZAR 18.4m spent on Fairtrade products in South Africa in 2010, 50% was on South African Fairtrade wine. Ethics are therefore increasingly acting as a domestic as well as an international promotional tool, which is likely to encourage greater participation in ethical practices – whether Fairtrade or BEE – because, as Bek et al. (2007: 310) note 'for any new initiatives to progress it is crucial that they are able to connect with a market'.

It is worth remembering that the conventional face of South African wine grape production has a wide-ranging spectrum of compliance from commitment to BEE principles to continuing labour abuses in the form of unsuitable housing, illegal evictions, exposure to chemicals, low pay and restricted unionization (Smith, 2011). My research focused on 'ethical' wines and, as such, this restricts what I can say regarding practices in conventional vineyards, which constitute the vast majority of producers. Therefore, I focus on the motivations in those networks where ethical standards *are* chosen but even within this innovative sample, and indeed between the different spaces within each network, there were clear changes in the power relations, motivations and implementation of the ethical discourses.

3.1 Fairtrade and BEE Interactions

Although Fairtrade has been criticised for not addressing broad-based socio-economic change, depoliticising transformation and prohibitive costs (McEwan and Bek, 2009b; Moseley, 2008), the Fairtrade Foundation (2010) argues that it has had positive social, economic, environmental and empowering impacts on both South African workers and smallholders. In particular, Fairtrade standards have adapted to the specific South African context, with an unprecedented, and to date unrepeated, national level negotiation of 'fairness'. South African agriculture remains dominated by white owner-farmers and plantation style farms, and without explicitly including BEE in its conceptualisation of 'fairness' in this space,

Fairtrade would have ended up 'legitimising the racial and material legacy of slavery, colonialism and Apartheid' (Kruger and Du Toit, 2006: 203) because it would have supported the unequal structural conditions resulting from these.

Fairtrade offers a way through some of the critiques faced by BEE as it makes the latter more stringent, tying it into existing auditing pathways, and broad-based in its enactment of empowerment. The certification criteria for Fairtrade in South Africa focus on the four BEE dimensions that support FLO-International's core mission to benefit small farmers and workers: ownership (specifically worker ownership), management control, employment equity and skills development (FTF, 2010). FLO-Cert, the body that certifies and monitors Fairtrade standards, requires all producers to present a self-assessment with documentary proof and achieve full compliance within three years; in addition, no exemptions are granted (FLO-Cert, 2008). In these spaces, there is an ongoing dialogue between the discourses of Fairtrade and BEE, which works to their mutual benefit; BEE becomes more accountable through the presence of an auditing mechanism and Fairtrade is grounded within the South African context, ensuring its sensitivity, relevance and effectiveness. However, these are very niche operations meaning that these augmented discourses have a highly limited reach. Wines of South Africa listed 3596 primary wine producers in 2010 (WOSA, 2010) but there were only 16 certified Fairtrade wine grape producers (FLSA, 2012), 35 empowerment projects and 30 black owned brands (WOSA, 2009). Why then do these discourses operate and interact in these particular spaces?

My overall research focused on following the wines from South Africa to the UK and therefore all the brands I explored were export focused. While the beneficial USP of ethics in a dynamic, crowded and competitive global marketplace at one time gave export-oriented producers more value from participation (Bek et al., 2007), the rising domestic interest in ethical commodities is increasing the appeal to producers focused on the home market in South Africa. However, I suggest that this is embryonic compared to the volumes and capital available on the international market and that an export-focus remains important, particularly in raising the capital necessary to initiate and maintain transformation projects. Bearing this in mind, with a €3.4bn global market in 2009 (FLO-International, 2011), being certified Fairtrade can connect a producer to an established and lucrative niche market. Combined with the guaranteed price floor and social premium, Fairtrade offers clear market-based incentives for involvement and support for implementing empowerment projects. In contrast, BEE has only a limited international market presence and so export-oriented BEE wines have to rely more on premium material quality to command the necessary price points to ensure business and project sustainability.

As with the pioneering empowerment projects, a central individual or group remains a critical factor in the emergence and development of both these discourses (Bek et al., 2007; Ewert et al., 2006). The limited market and state incentives to participate in BEE and the capital and time intensive Fairtrade certification requires a driving force in the shape of a facilitator. The latter plays a key role in determining the structure

and style of the project undertaken, which is strongly shaped by whether they were motivated by transformative policies, altruism or the potential of a new market (Moseley, 2008). As will be seen in section 4, Reyneke enacted a more philosophic/philanthropic articulation of BEE in contrast to Tukulú's more corporate and commercial strategy.

How Fairtrade and BEE are understood within South Africa offers a useful grounding for the following discussion of how the discourses change through their networks and provides an insight into their contextual adaptability. The interviewees tended to position BEE and Fairtrade as separate entities. While BEE does exist independently, it was not recognised that in South African Fairtrade production spaces the two discourses are inseparable. This artificial separation appeared to be informed by a notion of utility, which grounded BEE's capacity to enact transformation within the domestic sphere and Fairtrade's strategic value internationally.

The general consensus amongst those interviewed was that BEE was more relevant domestically, being targeted on specifically South African requirements although there was a definite place for Fairtrade. Those arguing for the latter's greater importance focused on its role as a global commercial strategy, able to generate sales through connecting to an internationally recognised market. This highlighted the often tactical rather than ideological focus of those utilising Fairtrade. For example there was little mention of the enhanced capacity for BEE that the premiums of Fairtrade would enable. In a personal communication Joachim Ewert, Professor of Sociology at the University of Stellenbosch, considered Fairtrade as too small in South Africa to have much impact, especially in the highly fragmented wine industry with its multiple varieties and brands (Abbott, 2010). He argued that national legislation, which is relatively strict, has greater capacity to impact on labour conditions. This view was echoed by Johan van Rooyen of the South African Wine Industry Council (SAWIC) who considered that it was more important to achieve a broad-based platform, which could serve as a foundation for other discourses such as Fairtrade, which remains very limited in scope.

The discourses of BEE and Fairtrade interact in South Africa in complex and contextual entanglements and, given their differing international recognition, the nature of these interactions also changes as the wine moves in and between different network spaces. This highlights an interesting and tactical mutability because fundamentally all the wines need to gain market share and so adapt their utilization of BEE and Fairtrade accordingly. Drawing on the three examples of Fairhills, Reyneke and Tukulú (Figure 1), this paper now moves on to consider this dynamism, exploring the changing faces of Fairtrade and BEE as the discourses fluctuate in power as they move through their commodity networks. Fairhills is a Fairtrade co-operative cellar that was certified in 2005 and supplies the Co-operative UK own label Fairtrade South African wine as well as trading under the Fairhills brand. Reyneke is a small, family-run, organic/biodynamic wine farm that initiated its housing-based empowerment project in the mid-1990s. Tukulú too could be considered an 'empowerment pioneer' in the wine industry; it was established in 1998 by Stellenbosch

Farmers Winery, which merged with Distillers in 2000 to form Distell, in partnership with a community trust and a group of black businessmen. This variety of operating structures reflects that of the South African wine industry in general and offers a broad grounding to try to unravel the complexity of different forms of ethical engagement.

FIGURE 1

4 Multiple, Mobile and Mutable: ethical discourses in action

At the time of the fieldwork, Fairhills was the only brand studied in which both BEE and Fairtrade were active and considering how BEE was conceptualised and practised in this space provides a more empirical grounding to the discussion in section 3.1. Fairhills was initiated explicitly as a Fairtrade project by the UK Co-operative group and the South African wine sourcing company Origin Wine, which highlights the continuing international influences and export orientation involved in Fairtrade certification. How BEE and Fairtrade interact in Fairhills demonstrates the possibilities of this collaboration between nationally and internationally oriented discourses. For the Fairhills project manager, as suggested above, Fairtrade was the more powerful discourse in this space because it shaped the way in which BEE was articulated, ensuring that the latter was engaged, operational and credible:

...black empowerment as expressed by Fairtrade and by South African national legislation is [sic] two totally different concepts. In South Africa, black empowerment is by ensuring that your business is co-owned by black people or black citizens and basically it's so easy to comply with national legislation...with regards to Fairtrade...the black empowerment, yes, you can follow a very similar concept to that but how we actually address it is by way of...a collaborated project whereby all the beneficiaries are benefiting...our first step towards black empowerment or empowerment, not black empowerment, is more for us based on empowerment, empowering the lesser fortunate, being the employees on the farms... (Interview, 23/05/2008)

This dominance was also related to the levels of paperwork, capital and effort required to operationalise Fairtrade. Despite this, the interaction was co-constitutive because BEE permeated all aspects of South African Fairtrade, ensuring a very practical and continual communication between the two discourses. As the quote above signals, Fairhills tried to enact a broader form of empowerment than the economic articulation of BEE and how it was practised included more social elements. Following Fairtrade guidelines, Fairhills responded to the ownership, management, employment equity and skills development elements of BEE. The Fairhills Association, consisting of the farmworkers, owns 25% of the 'Fairhills' brand name, the democratically elected Joint Body has spent the Fairtrade social premium on a craft co-operative and coffee shop, and key project workers such as the Fairhills Administrator, Craft Co-operative Marketing Manager and Crèche Co-ordinator have all been 'skilled' out of the farmworker body. These contribute to ensuring a sustainable and supportive transfer of knowledge and management control (for more details see Herman, 2010). However, Fairhills also aims to address the social exclusion consequences of apartheid

– deeply engrained and racialised subject positions, a lack of skills and education amongst the black majority, social fractures and low self-esteem – which are highly structural and embedded. The social premium has therefore also been used to fund community sports days and a community centre to foster a sense of inclusion and togetherness amongst the farmworkers who had previously had limited inter-farm interaction. Day-care centres, school buses, youth, sports and women’s clubs and an adult education programme are all essential elements that endeavour to bolster gender equality and education. In addition, a psychologist has been employed to provide support in terms of building self-esteem, addressing substance abuse issues and enhance coping strategies amongst the farmworkers. The future goals of Fairhills reflect this broader sense of empowerment, including both economic and social elements, as they include the aim to eventually own three production facilities, retirement housing and a health centre.

In Fairhills, Fairtrade provides the mechanism through which this broader conceptualisation of empowerment is practised as it connects to a global market with capital premiums and external auditing as well as to a more extensive ethical ideology than that espoused in BEE. Nonetheless, BEE remains a central motivation as it offers a route for Fairtrade to adopt contextually relevant practices and address the historical and contemporary sensitivities of South Africa. The combination of this historically grounded imperative of equality with the ways in which the ‘mechanism’ and ‘motivation’ roles have been mobilised highlights the way in which BEE and Fairtrade have become indispensable to their sustainable and sensitive operation within Fairhills. However, as noted in section 2, networks are not pre-made and the spatial relationality that exists between the different nodes means that context is critical in determining network operations. While Fairhills, Reyneke and Tukulu are all ‘ethical’ wine networks, the different context in which each operates affects how the discourses are articulated. As Fairhills demonstrated, multiple ethical discourses can operate in one space but again the context shapes the nature of this interaction. Considering the multiple ethical layers deployed by Tukulu starts to unpack the idea of ‘scales of knowing’, which I argue is critical for network durability.

4.1 Tukulu and ‘Scales of Knowing’

Tukulu combines multiple social and environmental codes in one brand. It is certified organic, a BWI member, WIETA accredited, 2006 winner of a Farm Health Award, certified Fairtrade in 2009 and ‘one of South Africa’s foremost empowerment labels’ (Tukulu, 2009). This highlights the proliferation of ethical discourses and increasing producer confusion over which is the most appropriate to the market as there is limited synergy between the various codes. While this has led to overlap, increasing the economic and time burden on the average producer, Tukulu’s connections to its ‘big brother’ Distell (Interview, 10/04/2008) reduces this potential constraint, allowing it to take full advantage of the various market opportunities that the different ethics offer.

Tukulu's empowerment credentials rest on an ownership partnership between Distell, a community trust for the farmworkers settlement and a consortium of BEE investors, which was established prior to BEE legislation. It is felt within Distell that this gives Tukulu a legitimacy, credibility and uniqueness amongst other empowerment strategies within the wine industry. Tukulu was established with the aim that by 2018, the brand would be completely black-owned with skills being transferred sustainably during this 20 year period. However, it now looks unlikely that Distell will disinvest because of Tukulu's market success, and the BEE investors have had significant difficulties in changing the power relations within the brand and gaining control over decision-making. While they understand BEE as about skills transfer as well as ownership, Distell appears more inclined to claim BEE credentials based on a nominal transfer of control only. Throughout the interviews with the Distell stakeholders in Tukulu, adherence to the multiple ethics appeared to be guided more by an economic or political rationale rather than a moral 'conscience', with both Fairtrade and organic being positioned as critical to establishing a bigger share of the international wine market. However, they were explicitly positioned as not overlapping as the Marketing CEO recognised that 'they mean different things to different people' (Interview, 03/04/2008) and it was seen as not necessarily 'wise' to have a wine certified under both codes. I suggest that this was considered unnecessary with the separation of 'organic' and 'Fairtrade' within the Tukulu stable giving the brand broad market appeal without the expense of multiple codes for each wine.

At the time of the research there was more emphasis within Tukulu on organic branding. It was recognised by the Marketing Manager that to 'share a voice within the media you've got to do something different, so like the organic range, so we had something to tell them' (Interview, 03/04/2008). In 2008, Tukulu had 90ha that was full organic with a further 76ha in conversion. However, only 13.87ha are now marketed as organic with Fairtrade taking a more prominent role (Tukulu, 2012). Fairtrade certification was considered to be of particular utility in accessing the notoriously competitive UK market because, as the Marketing CEO noted, it offered an almost 'sub-category' opportunity (Interview, 03/04/2008), referring to a marketable and recognisable niche within the multiple brands, varieties and price points of the UK wine market. Distell's BEE Group Manager commented that 'the retailers in the UK are, that's the first question they ask, so it makes business sense to do so, to get a Fairtrade accreditation because it's a license to trade, particularly in markets such as the UK' (Interview, 07/04/2008). At the time it was considered to have little relevance to the domestic market, although as mentioned in section 3 this is now changing, and so Fairtrade was seen as an international imperative and not something to be pushed in the domestic market. Equally, the lack of ethical awareness amongst South African consumers and negative publicity around BEE acting as a 'front' meant that Tukulu's BEE credentials were only a limited selling point. As with organics, it was seen as something to share with the media but as the Marketing Manager commented 'we mention it in our brochure but...the perception is that BEE is...just about giving it to people and being a front so we don't push it in the local market' (Interview, 03/04/2008). However, Distell's Head of Farming Operations recognised the potential this could offer in a growing black consumer market:

There will be a group of people...in South Africa also more sympathetic if you help disadvantaged people especially if you go into the black market and they know that you are doing something behind the scenes to uplift their people also (Interview, 02/04/2008)

While Fairtrade was seen as particularly beneficial in the overseas markets, BEE again had only a limited purchase as it was seen as something confined to South Africa. The Marketing CEO did note that this was used by WOSA at the London Wine Show in 2007 – perhaps in connection to its ‘diversity is our nature’ campaign – where Tukulu was one of the contributors to an explicitly BEE wine stall; however, in general he went on to state that ‘we never really overemphasize or push the empowerment thing as why you must buy the wine’ (Interview, 03/04/2008) preferring to rely on quality as a more sustainable consumer motivator.

Tukulu’s market driven approach to ethics begins to draw out the concept of ‘scales of knowing’, which this paper contends is critical to understanding network durability. This refers to the awareness amongst stakeholders of the potential for different articulations of a discourse. Within Tukulu Fairtrade and, albeit to an increasingly lesser extent, organics were positioned as international-level discourses, while BEE was seen as a way to maintain credibility in national level political and media circles but of limited market relevance. Unlike in Fairhills, the various discourses were deployed relatively independently with minimal interaction within the production space, which, I suggest, is due to the highly corporate motivation underlying their presence. However, the market opportunities that they offer are largely based on their ethical nature, which points to an ever-present recognition of the other articulations that, for example, Fairtrade may have. I suggest that how Fairtrade is understood is always looking to a ‘counterweight’, producer to consumer and vice versa, to ensure continuing participation, recognising that motivations are different to the various network stakeholders.

The benefits Fairtrade offers to Tukulu within the UK are based on the increasing public recognition of the Fairtrade mark, which reached 70% in 2008 (FTF, 2009). Amongst UK consumers, it is widely considered as a worthwhile reason to purchase, as the Business Development Manager at the Fairtrade Foundation commented ‘It’s a good thing to do for people... when it comes to the consumer message, its clear, really they get it...’ (Interview, 25/09/2008).

Although Fairtrade wine’s market share in the UK only stands at 1% it has the benefit of being part of an international movement, able to draw upon the existing widespread awareness amongst consumers. This gives it a stronger market base in the UK than BEE and the often entry-level price-point appeals to the price-conscious consumer. All store managers interviewed felt that demand for Fairtrade has crossed product categories and the increase in certified commodities has supported consumers who want to make it a lifestyle choice.¹¹ Price and quality remain key and many brands including Fairhills have moved away

¹¹ Supermarket managers and in-store ‘experts’ in and around Exeter and Bath were interviewed face-to-face, by telephone or over email.

from the traditional Fairtrade model of a willing consumer paying a price premium. Entry-level pricing has been used to mainstream Fairtrade in the highly fragmented UK wine market, which demonstrates the contextual adaptability of the discourse as Fairtrade evolves to appeal to and enrol a changing and changeable mass of consumers. Although dogged by persistent perceptions of low quality (Interview, 04/02/08), all Fairtrade wines enter the market after being benchmarked against their price-point competitors through tastings and all the wine buyers and importers interviewed consider Fairtrade wines to offer value for money.

Tukulu's utilisation and varying promotion of its multiple ethics highlights the awareness of stakeholders that a discourse can be understood differently throughout the network. In fact, the micro-scale producer understandings of Fairtrade, for example, were always 'knowing' and looking towards the other conceptualisations that ensured its market relevance. This weaves in to the concept of 'tactical mutability', which is explored through a consideration of the changing power of the discourses of BEE and organics in Reyneke.

4.2 Reyneke and Tactical Mutability

Reyneke's production is consciously ethical, being shaped by the philosophical leanings of its owner-farmer, Johan Reyneke. He is explicit about being inspired by Arne Naess's 'deep ecology' and Amartya Sen's 'capability to choose' to operationalize organic/biodynamic and empowerment practices. Johan initiated an empowerment scheme in the mid-1990s that, following consultation with the farmworkers, centred on off-farm house ownership and skills; this was to give the workers a stake in the business, getting them 'to work for themselves as well and not just for a wage at the end of the week...to work for their futures...' (Interview, 04/04/2008). It was intended that this project would be supported by the sales of the 'Cornerstone' wine, so called because Johan recognised that the farmworkers were the cornerstone of his business. However, the small nature of Reyneke's operations meant that in reality this was supported by sales of all the wines.

Reyneke is not certified Fairtrade, despite qualifying, because at present all the wine produced is being sold and, given the capital and time intensive nature of organic certification, there is no capacity to maintain Fairtrade accreditation too. As Johan explained:

...for us to register for Fairtrade would be more administrative work, more costs and if we are already selling all the wines we make and growing faster than we could wish for, why do it? The only reason I could think to do it would be to make sure that you farm in an ethical way but according to our discussions with the people from Fairtrade we do qualify so we've covered that base as well, the only thing we haven't done is pay the money and done the admin... (Interview, 04/04/2008)

Despite a lack of social certification and certain issues regarding the sustainability of this scheme and degree of empowerment, social and environmental discourses infiltrate all the everyday spaces and practices on the farm but this changes through the commodity network. For many years, Reyneke was not certified organic or biodynamic as Johan 'didn't want to emotionally blackmail anyone into buying my wine' so he focused on 'the quality for the consumer and the organics and empowerment for myself' (Interview, 04/04/2008). However, in 2006 Johan entered into a partnership with Vinimark, formerly Reyneke's domestic distributor, who initiated the organic certification. Vinimark has re-branded Reyneke to better connect with the 'environmental ethics' market, by foregrounding the organic message as can be seen in the current packaging (Figure 2), which is simpler and more 'earthy' than the previous label (Figure 3) and meets organic criteria in the inks and glues used (Interview 04/04/08; Interview 08/04/08).

FIGURE 2

This relationship has made the Reyneke brand more market oriented, which has drawn on Vinimark's professional expertise to establish a more nuanced and targeted product identity. Reyneke's original labelling featured a Neolithic stone hand axe (Figure 3), several of which had been found on the farm, which Johan felt offered an historical connection. However, the label contained no explanation as to the presence of the hand axe and it conveyed neither the wines organic and biodynamic production nor its empowerment principles. Vinimark identified the organic nature of the wine as the central message because of its attraction to overseas markets such as the UK and growing domestic appeal. The hand axe was confusing and irrelevant to the primary communication, as Vinimark's Marketing and Export Director noted:

...I am a biodynamic producer, I produce my grapes in a certain way to deliver a certain results both to the wine and the property I live on...has nothing to do with hand axes so it becomes quite a cluttered bit of communication where you're trying to tell the biodynamic wine story but your label has a hand axe on the front so there wasn't continuity between how he was trying to position himself to the market versus all these stories he was wanting to tell. (Interview, 08/04/2008)

FIGURE 3

The 'Cornerstone' name offered consumers' a more direct connection to Reyneke's empowerment strategy but as Vinimark's Marketing Director commented 'it's a lovely idea, fits perfectly with his [Johan's] philosophy and is really just a generous way of working with people; it's a nice story to have, it's not the front brand name of a product' (Interview, 08/04/2008). While the 'Cornerstone' name has survived the re-branding there is no longer any mention of the empowerment project either on the wine bottles or on

the Reyneke website. Despite this, the continuing presence of 'Cornerstone' hints towards the multiple ethics present in Reyneke although the interaction here is different to that between Fairtrade and BEE in Fairhills. As mentioned in section 4.1, environmental and social ethics 'speak' to different consumers and their different production space foci mean that they cannot be so easily integrated. However, they do still collaborate as by adding multiple dimensions to Reyneke's story the overall credibility of the brand is enhanced. While organics is used as the lead discourse in consumer promotions, working to connect to an existent USP in the UK wine market (Halstead and Davies, 2008), retaining 'hints' towards other 'stories' was a critical element of the promotional strategy. Maintaining multiple layers of visible and invisible information appealed to more enquiring consumers, drawing them actively into Reyneke's story in an attempt to develop brand loyalty. As Vinimark's Marketing Director explained:

...because otherwise brands become boring. They need to be continuous little stories in the way this is, so if people want to get involved in the brand it's more than just a drinking experience in terms of putting something in their glass and pouring it down your throat (Interview, 08/04/2008)

This demonstrates the ongoing dialogue between BEE and organics even within the consumer space in which BEE is otherwise invisible, although they are less indispensable to each other's operation than Fairtrade and BEE are in Fairhills. In Reyneke's vineyard, the discourses are both active and visible, working in parallel with little overlap in their scope. At the consumer end, their scope interlinks as both are working towards enhancing and maintaining market share; while the brand is orientated around organics, the BEE element is present as an additional tactical layer to augment credibility and intrigue the more active consumers.

Considering this interaction between BEE and organics highlights the strategic nature of ethical discourses, with the overall durability of the Reyneke network dependent on the micro-level adaptations in its discursive operations. While the organic message may appeal more to consumers, the brand sustainability also depends on ensuring worker participation, particularly as the political pressure for transformation grows. In the final section, I draw out these ideas of 'tactical mutability' and 'scales of knowing' to consider their implications for ethical commodity discourses.

5 Re-Conceptualising Discursive Interactions

The empirical discussion highlights the dynamism of discourses, with their contextual adaptability centred on their tactical mutability, which is grounded in 'scales of knowing'. This connects to my Foucauldian understanding of discourse, which is active, precarious and unstable, emerging through social interactions (Wetherell et al., 2001). The external world that structures these is open to contestation and fluctuation being an historical and power-laden formation, and power and discourse have a co-constitutive

relationship. Power is highly significant in shaping discourses, while the latter are central in circulating power relations through the whole social body (Hall, 2001). This relationship means that discourses are never neutral and have an important role in creating communities; for this it is therefore necessary for particular articulations of the discourses to become stabilised. For example, Fairtrade's meaning becomes partially fixed when it is attached to wine because of the standardisation required to disseminate a coherent message to consumers through advertising, labelling and educational initiatives. However, as demonstrated in Fairhills, Reyneke and Tukulu, a discourse always contains the capacity for modification (Torfing, 1999; Wetherell, 2001) with the constant drive to appeal ensuring a perpetual state of mutability. How a discourse is articulated to negotiate this balance between necessary stability and change is ultimately strategic with inter-discursive interactions and visibility changing through the networks in a tactical effort to retain and enrol stakeholders.

All three wine networks discussed demonstrated a certain 'knowing' recognition of what appealed at other nodes in their network. However, even when one discourse was being emphasized, such as organics in Reyneke or Fairtrade in Fairhills at the consumer end, this was not monolithic but instead wrapped within its linkages to the other ethical discourses at play both within and outside of its network. I therefore suggest that ethical practice is generally mutually supportive discursively so within 'organic' are strands of consumer empowerment and ecological 'fairness', while Fairtrade contains both consumer and producer empowerment as well as an understanding that it is enacting more sustainable trade connections. The 'lead' discourse contains space for multiple, often locally grounded understandings that connect to other ethical imperatives but is ultimately promoted due to its market appeal.

How the discourses interacted and were utilised by Reyneke and Tukulu contrasts with the more substantive collaboration between BEE and Fairtrade in Fairhills, which was based on political and ethical rather than market imperatives. Together with the different styles in which BEE was implemented across the three brands, this positions context as a critical factor in shaping and structuring a discourse's articulations. I suggest that the concept of an 'immutable mobile' deemed as critical within ANT to the durability of a network actually consists of at least two elements. In this instance, the wine bottle and wine acted as an intermediary, which does not 'transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or elements [it is] supposed to carry' (Latour, 2005: 39), while context was the critical mediator, which gave the ethics attached to the bottle their necessary dynamism and adaptability. For example, to Tukulu's marketing team Fairtrade was an international sales opportunity while to workers it represented improvements in standards of living and changed relationships with management and to consumers it remained a way to support producers in the developing world; so, context is important in shaping how the discourse is understood and articulated. It is this combination of mutability of meaning and immutability of the material object that ensures the sustainability of a network. Mutability emerges as a relational concept, being dependent on circumstance, and this relationality contains the capacity for both fixity and change in terms of the partial stabilisation but simultaneous instability of meaning at each network node and the

combination of a macro-scale static discourse with micro-scale transformations. This relational and scalar mutability contributes to critiques of network theories, particularly actor network theory (Allen, 2003; Whittle and Spicer, 2008) and ongoing academic debates regarding the politics of scale that conceptualise it as 'actively constructed and produced' (Macleod and Goodwin, 1999: 711). As such, scale emerges as a social construct that acts back on political and social practices by shaping how they are understood and what is positioned as possible, and therefore is central to the formation and praxis of discourses and structures of governance (Cox, 1998; Edwards et al., 2001; Herod, 2011; Jessop, 2001; Jones et al., 2004; Lebel et al., 2005).

6 Conclusions

From my perspective as a British ethical consumer, the complexity of the ethical terrain in South Africa was unexpected. The interactions at the ground level of Fairtrade with BEE, which was a previous unknown to me, jarred with the transparency purported to be central to certified Fairtrade. This connects to continuing debates amongst academics and practitioners regarding the capacity for commodity defetishisation but, as Kleine (2010: 126) asks, 'how fair is fair enough?' She raises this question in relation to consumer knowledges, which remain a source of contention, but maintaining these fetishising multiple layers of meaning may contribute to the success of a brand. Stories are critical to this and they must be carefully managed, appealing to the more actively engaged consumer while not bombarding others with excess information.

Ethical discourses emerged as tactical, 'knowing' and highly dependent on context with their network sustainability dependent on a relational (im)mutability of meaning. This established a relatively open space in which even when one discourse appeared hegemonic, others were always folded within it. This created the capacity for a multiple and mutually supportive space of ethical praxis, particularly at the producer end where a standardised and singular ethical position was less essential than that facing consumers. How the ethics interacted further demonstrated their contingency and dependence on the space and individuals involved for their structure; while in Reyneke and Tukululu, the ethical discourses operated relatively independently even within the vineyards, in Fairhills they were entangled into an inseparable collaboration. Although this represents only a tiny fraction of operations within the South African wine industry, I consider that this Fairtrade/BEE nexus offers a genuine opportunity to enact sustainable transformation. The broader conceptualisation of empowerment combined with the capital consequent of the Fairtrade market structure (guaranteed minimum price plus social premium) offers participants more opportunities to overcome the continuing structural constraints that impact on their everyday lives.

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Captions

Figure 1 Location of Case Study Wine Farms, Western Cape, South Africa

Figure 2 Re-Branded Reyneke Wine Label. *Source:* Reyneke (2011)

Figure 3 Original Reyneke Wine Label. *Source:* Reyneke (2011)