Environment and Planning A 2010, volume 42, pages 1852 – 1867

doi:10.1068/a42364

Local and green, global and fair: the ethical foodscape and the politics of care

Kevin Morgan
School of City and Regional Planning, Cardiff University, Room 2.66, Glamorgan Building, Cardiff CF10 3WA, Wales
Received 9 September 2009; in revised form 15 December 2009; published online 28 June 2010

Abstract. The core values of the ethical foodscape—ecological integrity and social justice—can assume very different political forms unless they are fashioned into a coherent and progressive narrative of sustainability. This paper explores the politics of sustainability through the prism of three major issues. First, the *carbon-labelling* controversy is used to highlight the potential conflict between green campaigners (who extol the benefits of local food) and social justice campaigners (who support fairly traded food from afar). Second, *school-food reform* is used to demonstrate that local *and* global food, far from being mutually exclusive options, can both be part of the constitution of a sustainable food system if global food is framed in cosmopolitan terms. Third, the paper engages with the *politics of care* literature to explore a question that underlies the above issues, namely, how and why we care for others. It is argued that ethical consumerism, a key part of a progressive narrative of care, is not sufficient to counter the challenge of climate change—the greatest threat to ecological integrity *and* social justice.

1 Introduction

Food is one of the most important prisms for exploring world poverty and sustainable development, arguably the two greatest challenges facing the global community in the 21st century (Stern, 2009). Despite claims to the contrary, particularly from neoliberals who believe it is just another industry, the agrifood sector has a unique status. Quite apart from its umbilical link with nature, the exceptionalism of the agrifood sector lies principally in the fact that we ingest its products. Food is vital to human health and well-being in a way that the products of other industries are not, and this remains the quintessential reason why we attach such profound significance to it. Because of its unique role in human reproduction, shaping our physical and cognitive development, food is the ultimate index of our capacity to care for ourselves and for others, be they our 'nearest and dearest' or 'distant strangers'.

Human life is 'nasty, brutish, and short' without access to food, and political elites know that their grip on power is tenuous whenever hunger stalks the land. This is the principal reason why agriculture has enjoyed a privileged position throughout human history. It is also the reason why it was deemed to be a special case by the vast majority of governments in the 20th century, even in the US, which manages to combine an ideological commitment to free trade with one of the highest farm-subsidy systems in the world (Morgan et al, 2006).

If food is critical to human development from a physiological standpoint, it is also a significant vehicle for cultural identity and economic development, especially in developing countries, where agriculture remains the dominant activity for the poorest of the poor. Indeed, the most important achievement of the World Food Summit in 2008—a hastily convened meeting in Rome to discuss the price explosion of staple foods—was the international donor community suddenly rediscovering the significance of agriculture, having neglected it for a generation in the framing of development programmes for the global South (World Bank, 2007).

The developed countries of the global North have been undergoing major changes of their own with respect to food and agriculture. Until recently, two political narratives of food vied for the attention of politicians and consumers—the *conventional* agrifood narrative, which has dominated mainstream politics since the 1930s, and the *alternative* agrifood narrative which emerged in response to what were perceived to be the noxious effects of conventional agriculture on human health and the environment (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 2000; Lang and Heasman, 2004; Maye et al, 2007; Potter, 1998; Whatmore and Thorne, 1997).

Although the alternative food narrative embraces a wide array of product values—ethical, organic, local, and fair trade, for example—it used to be defined by what it was not rather than by what it was. In other words, it was defined in opposition to the conventional narrative, which was indelibly associated with an intensive, industrialised, and productivist agrifood system that extolled quantity over quality, price over provenance (Marsden, 2004; Morgan et al, 2006). But these alternative products also have something more positive in common: by espousing certain values-in-action, they each contribute to, and form part of, what we might loosely call *the ethical foodscape*, which enshrines values associated with ecological integrity and social justice, the two key features of a *sustainable* agrifood system.

Recently, however, this alternative food narrative has itself come under pressure: externally from the conventional sector, where some mainstream products claim to offer a more cost-effective combination of price and provenance; and, internally, from tensions within the ethical foodscape. The most significant of these tensions surfaced in response to the news that Tesco, the largest supermarket in the UK, had decided to introduce carbon labels on all its products. This move was just one part of a whole series of moves on the part of supermarkets, backed by environmental groups, to relocalise the global food system in the name of sustainability. The Tesco decision triggered a polarised reaction around the world. As I will show in the next section, environmentalists in developed countries were delighted with the news, while African farmers were left 'confused and concerned' by the thought that they might be penalised by a green campaign against their air-freighted produce. This carbon-labelling episode raises compelling questions about the ethical foodscape and its contribution to sustainable development. For example, to what extent is there a trade-off between the multiple values on offer in the ethical foodscape? Furthermore, what and who do we care about most and, equally important, why do we care at all?

To explore these questions in more depth, this paper is organised as follows. In section 2 I examine some of the values of the ethical foodscape and focus on the carbon-labelling dispute, which threatened to drive a wedge between green proponents of 'local' food and pro-poor advocates of 'fair-trade' food. In section 3 I explore public food strategies that have sought to overcome these tensions by integrating the values of 'local and green' and 'global and fair' into hybrid and cosmopolitan food systems, underlining the point that *sustainable* food chains are not synonymous with local food chains. In section 4 I explore the implications of the above analysis for the political geography of care: *how* and *why* we care for others are some of the most important questions that societies can ask themselves in the era of climate change, which is a *social justice* issue as well as an ecological issue because the countries least responsible for the problem are the most vulnerable to its effects.

2 The ethical foodscape: local and green, global and fair

Invariably treated as a homogenous entity, part of the 'alternative food sector', the ethical foodscape actually consists of a wide spectrum of products, each of which espouses a set of values that claims to make a positive contribution to one or more of the following causes: human health, the environment, the local economy, poor primary producers in the global South, animal welfare, and biodiversity. Of all these ethical labels, perhaps the strongest claims have been made for local, organic, and fair-trade products, all of which loom large in the new moral economy of food (Morgan et al, 2006). Because of the tensions that recently emerged around these ethical labels, and the narratives on which they are based, it is useful to distinguish between the *local and green* narrative (which includes the organic label as the deepest shade of green) and the *global and fair* narrative (which includes the Fairtrade label as well as the wider fair-trade lobby which campaigns for pro-poor development policies in the global South). Since the concept of sustainable development embraces multiple values—economic and social as well as environmental—it is difficult if not impossible to give parity of esteem to them all, especially on a food label.

2.1 The local and green narrative

Sustainability, for many green activists, is just another name for localisation. The stylised reasoning tends to run as follows: the more local the food chain, the greener it is; the greener it is, the more sustainable it is; and green trade implies local trade. In more formal terms, the principal arguments that have been advanced for the 'local and green' (L&G) narrative are threefold: (i) that local food systems are the most ecologically sustainable, not least because they have lower food miles; (ii) that locally sourced food retains more of its nutrients and is therefore better for human health; and (iii) that local food systems provide not merely economic gains for the community, but also foster social capital by helping to reconnect consumers with producers (Born and Purcell, 2006).

Like 'sustainability', the notion of 'local food' is notoriously difficult to define with precision, fuelling a never-ending debate about 'how local is local'? Research conducted for IGD, the big food retailers' association in the UK, found that a majority of consumers surveyed expected 'local food' to come either from their county or to be produced within thirty miles of where they buy it. A disconcerting finding, at least for those who equate 'local food' with 'alternative food', was that a third of consumers see supermarkets, the acme of the conventional sector, as the place where they would expect to buy local food, well before farmers' markets and farm shops. Although price, taste, and sell-by date are the top three considerations, a majority of consumers expressed a strong preference for more seasonality because "seasonal foods give them better quality or better taste at a certain time of year" (IGD, 2003, page 1; 2005).

Growing consumer preferences for local food, coupled with a burgeoning public awareness of climate change, persuaded UK supermarkets that the time was ripe for them to become *greener* grocers, downplaying the fact that the real aim was to develop their environmental credentials as a competitive weapon in the battle for market share. Although small supermarkets like the Co-op and Waitrose had done much more on the ethical trading front, though with much less fanfare, other retailers were the first to play the carbon card.

Marks & Spencer was the first to go public on the carbon front. In early 2007 it announced its Plan A (so-called because it said there was no Plan B), the primary aim of which was to render the company carbon neutral by 2012. Among other things, this involved cutting airfreighted food from overseas and buying more locally produced food (Marks & Spencer, 2007). Not to be outdone, Tesco sought to go one step further,

saying it would introduce carbon labels for each of its 70 000 products and try to reduce its airfreight to less than 1% of its products (Leahy, 2007). As part of their new low-carbon strategies, both companies announced plans to introduce environmentally friendly labels—saying 'flown' and 'by air'—to alert consumers to the airfreighted status of goods. What added further weight to the campaign against airfreighted produce was the news that the Soil Association (SA), the UK's premier organic-certification body, was launching a consultation exercise to determine if it should introduce a partial or complete ban on such produce for the sake of more locally produced organic food (SA, 2007).

As we will see, these moves provoked a furious response from the international development lobby in and beyond the UK, which claimed that the spurious concept of food miles was being invoked to hurt poor farmers in the developing world. Other critics argued that the 'green turn' on the part of the supermarkets amounted to an 'ethical hijack' in which big agrifood companies were seeking to appropriate such valuable terms as 'local' and 'seasonal' by "applying them to products and practices that we believe do not deserve such ethical or environmental credentials" (Sustain, 2008, page 1).

Notwithstanding the potential benefits of local food systems, recent critics have also mounted a theoretical critique by highlighting the dangers of 'the local trap', which refers to the tendency of food activists and researchers to assume that the local scale is inherently associated with positive attributes. For example:

> "The local is assumed to be desirable; it is preferred a priori to larger scales. What is desired varies and can include ecological sustainability, social justice, democracy, better nutrition, and food security, freshness, and quality" (Born and Purcell, 2006, page 195).

Nothing better illustrates the dangers of the local trap than the concept of food miles, which has captured the public imagination despite the lack of any scientific rigour. The fact that food miles are popularly understood to be a measure of the carbon footprint of a product illustrates the shortcomings of food miles as a concept. Product lifecycles, rather than food miles, are the only sound basis for carbon labelling, leaving scientists to conclude that "food miles don't go the distance" (Edwards-Jones, 2006, page 1; see also Edwards-Jones et al, 2008). In addition to these environmental criticisms, the local food lobby has also had to contend with sceptical geographers, who argue that the socially benign attributes of local food have to be demonstrated rather than assumed (D Goodman, 2004; Hinrichs, 2003; Morgan et al, 2006).

If the benign attributes of local food are being contested, so too are the alleged benefits of organic food—which prides itself on being the greenest of the green food labels. The strongest claims for organic food have traditionally come from the UK, where the SA is the key player. A certifier as well as a campaigner for organic food and farming, the SA makes five claims on behalf of the organic label: (a) it is better for the planet because it is less energy intensive; (b) it is better for human health and well-being because no food has higher levels of minerals and vitamins; (c) it is kinder to animals; (d) it is better for wildlife; and (e) it is GM free (SA, 2009). Of all these claims, the health dividend has met with the greatest scepticism. The UK's Food Standards Agency (FSA), for example, has never accepted this claim; indeed, in its most recent statement, based on an independent review of the evidence from the past fifty years, the FSA said the review showed "that there are no important differences in the nutrition content of organic food when compared with conventionally produced food" (FSA, 2009, page 1).

Aside from its health claims, the SA is also trying to position the organic label in the forefront of the campaign against climate change. Claiming to be the most climate-friendly food label was not an easy claim to make when nearly a third of all organic food sold in the UK is imported from overseas. The globalisation of the organic label was thought to have compromised its environmentally friendly image, just as 'conventionalisation' had done with respect to its labour-friendly image in the US (Guthman, 2004). It was to protect the ethical integrity of the organic brand that the SA launched its consultation on airfreight in May 2007, a process that concluded by changing the organisation's standards to ensure that organic produce can *only* be airfreighted if it met the SA's own Ethical Trade or the Fairtrade Foundation's standard (SA, 2008).

The airfreight consultation proved to be far more controversial than the SA ever imagined. In an effort to placate *ecologically* conscious consumers who were concerned about food miles, it had alienated the international development community which was concerned about the *social* implications for poor producers. Some SA members may wonder whether the damage to its public image was worth the effort, especially when the vast bulk of organic food imports arrives by sea, with airfreight accounting for as little as 1% of organic food imports (SA, 2008).

2.2 The global and fair narrative

For the international development community, sustainability is globalisation with a human face. A fairer and more sustainable food chain means Northern markets are genuinely open to producers from the global South. Fair trade thus implies more global trade. If the environmental dimension of sustainable development is foregrounded in the L&G narrative, the social and economic dimensions are accentuated here.

From a global and fair (G&F) perspective, one of the striking features about the sustainable development debate in the rich countries of the global North is the assumption, particularly rife on the left, that globalisation is a largely negative phenomenon. But many poor countries in the global South tend to see it differently, especially in Africa, the poorest continent in the world economy. For example, one of the objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, which was adopted by African states in 2001, is "to halt the marginalization of Africa in the globalization process and enhance its full and beneficial integration into the global economy" (Morgan et al, 2007, page 10). What we have here, then, is a desire for more, not less, involvement in the globalisation process, so long as this is beneficial integration. Although it is invariably reduced to and conflated with neoliberalism, globalisation can actually assume positive or negative forms. To the extent that it assumes a pro-poor stance on trade, development, and climate change, for example, globalisation can be a positive force for change, a point that is often forgotten in left-of-centre circles in the North. Establishing a pro-poor stance, however, is no easy matter, as evidenced by the lack of progress with the Doha trade round, the Millennium Development goals, and the Kyoto protocol on climate change (Morgan et al, 2006).

Fair-trade schemes are among the best examples of globalisation with a human face, animated as they are by a desire to right the wrongs of world-trade rules that are far removed from being fair, level, or pro-poor. Arguably, there would be no need for a Fairtrade label if we had a fair-trade system because the label was partly designed to compensate for the inequities of the system. Creating a fairer world-trade system was ostensibly one of the aims of the Doha Development Round, so-called because it was meant to signal that pro-poor issues would be given prominence in a new multilateral trade agreement. The fact that the Doha round has failed to reach agreement speaks volumes for the World Trade Organization's failure to translate its rhetoric

into reality. Although the Doha round stalled for many reasons, the most important factor was the failure to agree on agricultural reform. For developing countries, the key issue is the refusal of the developed countries to reform their farm-support systems. The systematic unfairness of the system lies in the fact that the rich countries of the North spend over US $1 billion a day supporting their agricultural producers—six times what they give in foreign aid—the net effect of which is higher output at home, fewer imports, and the dumping of vast surpluses on world markets which undercut poor primary producers. In short, "success in world agriculture depends less on comparative advantage than on comparative access to subsidies—and poor countries lose every time" (Watkins, 2003, page 18).

In the absence of a fairer trade system, fair-trade schemes strive to fill the vacuum. The value of Fairtrade sales in the UK reached nearly £500 million in 2007, among which bananas, coffee, and tea were the main products, and the Fairtrade Foundation launched an ambitious scaling-up strategy in 2008 to increase sales fourfold by 2012. In less than fifteen years, Fairtrade has become one of the UK's social change success stories, though it impacts on a tiny minority of developing-country producers. According to the Foundation, it has forged "a unique alliance for change between millions of producers in poor countries and consumers in rich countries. It has provided a living model of trade that works through the conventional market—and yet challenges its unfair rules" (Fairtrade Foundation, 2008, page 11; M K Goodman, 2004). Although more impact assessments need to be conducted, a recent study found that fair-trade affiliation had positive effects on poor producers, especially as regards living conditions and family nutrition (Becchetti and Costantino, 2008).

Far from being a purely materialistic arrangement, the alliance between poor country producers and rich country consumers signals the growth of a "transnational moral economy" in which morally charged links are "forged *semiotically* through the discursive and visual narratives that saturate these foods with politicized and ethical *meanings* intended for extensive reading by consumers" (M K Goodman, 2004, page 893, original emphasis). Indeed, the growth of fair trade as a 'transnational moral economy' is perhaps the most palpable expression of a new ethic of care for 'distant strangers', though some green campaigners were never comfortable with this emphasis on international trade, the implication being that fair trade and green trade were somehow mutually exclusive.

Fair-trade bodies like Twin had been aware of the dangers of what they saw as "green parochialism" for some time, warning of "the potentially damaging and simplistic debates regarding sourcing locally versus the promotion of trade from poorer countries" (Twin, 2007, page 10). However, Twin's worst fears were realised when the BBC presented the carbon-labelling dispute in the following terms:

> "A recent bold statement by UK supermarket Tesco ushering in 'carbon friendly' measures—such as restricting the imports of air freighted goods by half and the introduction of 'carbon counting' labelling—has had environmentalists dancing in the fresh produce aisles, but has left African horticulturalists confused and concerned" (BBC, 2007).

Researchers at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), an independent research institute which specialises in sustainable development issues, did more than anyone to clarify the carbon-labelling dispute. Their basic contention was that the food-miles concept is blind to the social and economic benefits of trade in food, especially food from developing countries. A wide range of fresh fruit and vegetables (FFV) is imported into the UK from sub-Saharan African countries and this airfreighted trade was estimated to account for less than 0.1% of the UK's total carbon emissions. On the credit side, this airfreighted trade bestowed considerable social

and economic benefits on poor rural communities in Africa, amounting to some £200 million a year. When dependents and service providers are factored in, the IIED research found that 1 to 1.5 million people's livelihoods depend in part on this FFV supply chain. Although there are outstanding issues to be resolved—like the enormous quantities of water that the UK is 'importing' as a result of this trade—the IIED concluded by saying that there is no need for local food campaigns in developed countries "to work against the interests of developing countries" because, when the degree of harm is put into the context of Africa's modest demands on "ecological space", the benefits trump the costs (MacGregor and Vorley, 2006, page 2; see also Garside et al, 2007).[1]

In criticising the food-miles concept from a social and economic perspective, and positing the concept of 'fair miles' instead, the IIED researchers offered a judicious analysis of the issues at the heart of the carbon-labelling dispute, highlighting the potential for a progressive political alliance between the local/green and global/fair lobbies. The most important conceptual step for such an alliance to prosper is for both lobbies to recognise that sustainable food systems, far from being wholly local or global, can be more hybrid and cosmopolitan than either side may have imagined up to now. A more capacious understanding of sustainability is needed here, drawing on multiple values rather than a single value set, which is precisely what public food reformers have been trying to explore in the prosaic world of school-food reform.

3 Neither local nor global: the rise of sustainable food systems?

One of the key points from the foregoing analysis is that sustainability is not necessarily synonymous with localisation when it comes to the design of sustainable food systems. On the contrary, a sustainable food system can in principle be derived from a combination of locally produced and globally sourced foodstuffs, giving sustainability a hybrid and cosmopolitan spatial character. A practical illustration of this point comes from the recent reform of the school-food service, a service that is widely deemed to be a litmus test of a society's commitment to sustainable development because it caters for the nutritional well-being of young and vulnerable children. A new wave of school-food reform is underway in developed and developing countries, where it aims to redress different permutations of obesity and hunger. Food planners hope and believe that the school-food chain could, by drawing on a hybrid mixture of local and global ingredients, become a vehicle for sustainable development. In this section I examine school-food reform both in developing and in developed countries to highlight the cosmopolitan character of the process in each case.

Where it exists, the school-food service in developing countries has been highly dependent on the work of school-feeding projects run by international aid agencies. The largest of these is the UN's World Food Programme (WFP), which provides free school food as an incentive for children of poor families to go to school. In 2006, for example, WFP school-food programmes reached more than 20 million children in seventy-one countries, and such provisioning is especially important for gender equality because, as one of its posters declares, "a girl in school is a girl with a future". Although it is now facing unprecedented challenges because of high food prices, the WFP has been one of the greatest humanitarian success stories of the past forty years, a life-enhancing example of global solidarity to relieve local hunger and distress.

Apart from its emergency relief operations, WFP has been actively involved in launching the Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) programme, which signals a radically new era in school feeding in developing countries. The radical nature of the

[1] Agrifood exports from developing countries can be contentious, however, especially where the country in question is exporting food when its domestic population is malnourished.

programme lies in the fact that it aims to produce a triple dividend: in addition to the health and educational dividends associated with conventional feeding programmes, the HGSF programme also aims to deliver a *development* dividend by using locally produced food instead of food imported from abroad. Although WFP would prefer donors to switch from food aid to cash aid, so it can purchase locally in the countries in which it operates, the US has been wedded to the idea of food aid because it is sourced from American agribusinesses.

Although its architects saw HGSF as a 'quick win' on the road to the Millennium Development Goals—because it addressed the multiple goals of hunger, education, gender equality, and development at the same—the programme is proving to be neither quick nor easy. In short, the architects seriously underestimated the challenge of this new model of school feeding because it entails so much more than school food. To be successful, the HGSF programme needs to fashion robust and transparent governance structures to provide a framework for collective action. It has to create dedicated financial resources to enable the initiative to survive the vicissitudes of the electoral cycle. And it will have to deploy the power of purchase to calibrate supply and demand. In all these actions, it will have to keep corruption at bay within the state, and outside the state it will have enlist the support of civil society and the private sector. Far from being just about school food, then, the HGSF programme embodies the entire drama of development in microcosm and this is why it requires more *local* commitment from developing country governments and more *global* support from the international donor community (Morgan and Sonnino, 2008; Morgan et al, 2007).

Belatedly, the international donor community is beginning to see the need for new and more innovative global–local partnerships in developing countries if initiatives like the HGSF programme are to stand any chance of success. As we will see in the next section, developed countries have both a *moral* and an *ecological* obligation to do more to help developing countries to create local markets at home (through programmes like the HGSF programme) *and* allow access to global markets (through reforming their highly subsidised farm-support systems). The rise of the HGSF programme demonstrates that interest in local and sustainable food systems is not confined to the developed countries of the global North.

In the developed world one of the pioneers of school-food reform is the City of Rome, which introduced the first stage of its 'quality revolution' as early as 2001. Originally justified on social justice grounds, to make good-quality food available to all children regardless of income, the process of school-food reform in Rome has progressively been informed by the notion of sustainability, which features *global* as well as local ingredients. To ensure that Fairtrade products are part of the school-meals system, the Roman tender rewards suppliers with points for offering such products. Similarly, to ensure that locally sourced products are offered, the tender sets a high premium on 'guaranteed freshness' in its specifications (Sonnino, 2009). As well as local produce and increasingly local *organic* produce, children are treated to Fairtrade bananas from Ecuador and chocolate bars from the Dominican Republic, underlining local and global nature of the school-food system (Morgan and Sonnino, 2008).

Highly imaginative food-education programmes addressed to children are designed to complement the innovative tenders for local suppliers. For example, the Cultura che Nutre (culture that feeds) programme helps children to appreciate the benefits of seasonality and territoriality—concepts that are used to illustrate the cultural links between products and places, which is especially important in Italy because it has more geographically certified food products than any other country in the European Union (Morgan and Sonnino, 2008).

Although Rome is way ahead of London with respect to school-food reform, London has also launched an ambitious strategy for healthy and sustainable food in the city, one of the pillars of which is school food. Reflecting its status as a world city, with greater ethnic diversity than perhaps any other city in the world, the strategy says that the need "to have access to culturally appropriate food means that there may be limits to the extent to which 'local' food can meet London's needs" (Mayor of London, 2006, page 30).

The key point to establish is that, like Rome, the political authorities in London do not uncritically equate sustainability with localisation. Local food is being promoted, certainly, but *not* to the exclusion of all other considerations, one of which is the global cultural connectivity of London's world-in-a-city population. With more than 100 languages spoken in boroughs like Greenwich, for example, the main emphases of school-food reform are on nutritional quality first and geographical provenance second. Given the international flavour of school meals in ethnically diverse boroughs like Greenwich, it is not so much local food that predominates as a *cosmopolitan* localism; that is to say, domestically produced ingredients in national dishes from all over the world, complemented with Fairtrade fruit and chocolate (Morgan and Sonnino, 2008).

The cases of Rome and London are instructive because they illustrate that a politics of place is possible in which local and global obligations are not juxtaposed as mutually exclusive alternatives. Through the prosaic example of school-food reform, we can see how public bodies are trying to discharge their obligations to people and places near and far by using the power of purchase to promote locally produced *and* globally sourced products.

4 The politics of care: from ethical consumers to ecological citizens

As the carbon-labelling dispute demonstrated, a crude reading of the L&G and G&F narratives creates the misleading impression that they make mutually exclusive claims on our allegiances, when in actual fact we care about the values enshrined in *both* narratives because together they constitute what we take to be 'sustainable food systems'. If such systems are to become the norm rather than the exception, however, there needs to be a more robust political commitment to sustainable models of development in and beyond the agrifood sector, especially in developing countries, where *climate change* threatens to wreak havoc, spawning the greatest of all social injustices—where those who have done least to cause the problem of global warming are the ones to be worst affected (UNDP, 2007). The implication here is that, while many causes have a moral claim on our allegiances, they are not equally compelling causes; for example, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the people who face the most grinding poverty and hunger "ought to have first call on human solidarity" (UNDP, 2007, page 6).

If the poorest countries are to receive the level of support envisaged by the UNDP, such support will need to be far more substantial than the modest forms of solidarity embodied in ethical consumerism—the private purchasing power that sustains the products of the ethical foodscape and which signals the private expression of care on the part of the concerned consumer. Indeed, nothing less than a new politics of care will have to be fashioned because, in the perennial debates about how to solve world hunger, the missing factor is the lack of political will rather than a lack of resources (FAO, 2006). A new politics of care has two defining features: (1) it defines care first and foremost as a function of the *public sphere* rather than the private sphere; and (2) it applies the ethic of care *globally* as well as locally, challenging the traditional identification of care with the proximity principle of 'nearest and dearest'. To explore the new politics of care, in this final section I move beyond the *ethical consumer* to the

more capacious and multidimensional realm of the *ecological citizen*, and seek to explain how and why we care for/about others.

No one has done more to rescue the concept of care from its private ghetto than Joan Tronto, the feminist theorist, who has made a compelling case for a new *political* ethic of care. In her pioneering book, *Moral Boundaries*, Tronto (1994) shows that the gendering of care in the private sphere was quietly but effectively accomplished by 18th-century moral philosophers as part of a larger project that identified 'sentiments' with women and 'reason' with men. Although some feminists cleave to the notion that care is essentially a private matter, naturally associated with the personal realm and with women's values in particular, Tronto argues that this 'woman's morality' perspective has had two unfortunate effects—it has emasculated women and has delayed the development of a public ethic of care. To overcome these problems, she contends, "we need to stop talking about 'women's morality' and start talking instead about a care ethic that includes the values traditionally associated with women" (page 3). Rethinking the politics of care in this way "requires that we think about care in its broadest possible *public* framework" (page 178, original emphasis). This in turn requires that we think about the needs of all humans, not just those who are sufficiently powerful to make their needs felt. It requires a renewed commitment to democratic processes, like including care-receivers in shaping the processes of care. "And it requires, on the most profound level, that we rethink questions of autonomy and otherness, what it means to be a self-sufficient actor" (page 172).

Tronto argues that the most profound question facing us today is the question of *otherness*, how to get along with 'others' who are not like 'us'. Through the prism of care, however, Tronto fully appreciates that 'others' can be spatially near but socially far—that is to say, they are not necessarily 'distant others' in the simple geographical sense of the term. As she reminds us, "the disdain of 'others' who do caring (women, slaves, servants) has been virulent in our culture. This dismissal is inextricably bound up with an attempt to deny the importance of care" (page 174). However, when she tries to distil her argument into a universal moral principle, by proclaiming that "one should care for those around one or in one's society" (page 178), this conclusion looks highly particularist and wholly inconsistent with the spirit of inclusivity that animates the rest of the book. Aside from this shortcoming, Tronto offers a powerful argument as to why the concept of care should be treated more seriously in political theory and practice and why, in particular, it should be seen as a legitimate responsibility of the public sphere and not confined to the private sphere, an argument that has sparked a lively debate about the politics of care (Held, 2005; Massey, 2007; Smith, 1998).

Current debates about care—why we care and how far we should care—have revived an interest in the Scottish moral philosophers, many of whom were deeply exercised by the changing relationship between *distance* and *sentiment* as capitalist commerce created a larger, more impersonal world of human transactions. For David Hume (1711 – 76), the problem of growing social and spatial distance was so great that a distance-decay effect was deemed to be inevitable because, to his mind, human beings would naturally harbour less sympathy for people from afar than for people in close proximity. Dismissing the idea that we are motivated by a general 'love of mankind', Hume nevertheless accepted that human beings do have a natural sympathy for the plight of others, but only when it occurs in close proximity, "when brought near to us, and represented in lively colours" (Hume, 1978, page 481).

This interplay between distance and sentiment was developed further, and in a more sophisticated way, by Adam Smith (1723 – 90). Although Smith is widely known as one of the founding fathers of modern economics, the thinker who made the idea of 'self-interest' socially respectable, he is less well known but no less important as a

moral philosopher, the thinker who showed that human beings can be other-regarding creatures who cannot be reduced to desiccated and self-referential calculating machines. Nothing better illustrates this other-regarding aspect of Smith's moral philosophy than the opening passage of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which begins with a justly famous passage about the natural wellspring of human sympathy:

> "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it" (Smith, 1976, page 9).

While he acknowledged that human sympathy was subject to a distance-decay effect, Smith sought to resolve the dilemma, and the wider problem of moral conduct in an increasingly impersonal world, by resorting to the universal moral principles of *self-command* and *self-interest*. Self-command, for Smith, was buttressed "by the sense of propriety, by regard to the sentiments of the supposed impartial spectator" (1976, page 263). The embodiment of reason, principle, and conscience, the 'impartial spectator' was deemed to be the regulator of our moral conduct, our better selves as it were, the means through which we put ourselves in the shoes of others. Self-interest, on the other hand, was one way of dealing with the problem of moral conduct in the impersonal commercial world. That is to say, Smith hoped and believed that a more calculated form of virtue—namely self-interest—would help to regulate conduct between people who had no direct or personal knowledge of each other on account of spatial distance—like new trading partners at different ends of the globe, for example.

Drawing on Smith's theory of moral sentiments, we can begin to answer the question of *why* we care for others. We have a capacity to care for others, according to Smith, because *this is what being human means*. This indissoluble bond of common humanity needs to be affirmed anew in every generation, especially when it has been obscured for so long by what David Smith calls "the postmodern nightmare of a world in which there is nothing but diversity" (2000, page 137). Support for this view comes from Margaret Archer, the social theorist, who argues that other-regarding action is crucially significant to the constitution of our identities as human beings because "we are who we are because of what we care about: in delineating our ultimate concerns and accommodating our subordinate ones, we also define ourselves" (2000, page 10).[(2)]

The fact that care may vary with distance, and that family and friends take precedence over others near and far, does not invalidate the basic argument; it may simply reflect the limits of our capacity to care *for* others, which entails action, as opposed to our less-bounded capacity to care *about* people and things, which can be merely cerebral. Being explicit about our ethical values is one of the prerequisites for a more robust debate about the theory and practice of care, a debate that may be easier to achieve following the 'normative turn' in the social sciences (Sayer, 2010).

But moral sentiments provide only part of the answer as to *why* we care for others. Another compelling moral basis for caring can be gleaned from the concept of 'ecological citizenship' (Dobson, 2004). Drawing on the foundational concept of the ecological footprint—the amount of natural resources that we use to maintain our consumption patterns—Andrew Dobson argues that the obligations of ecological citizenship are owed asymmetrically, in part because they express a nonreciprocal form

[(2)] Although we have a *capacity* to care for others, the extent of this capacity is highly variable as to who is included. This divergence between capacity and reality suggests that Adam Smith's argument works best as a normative rather than an explanatory principle, otherwise we cannot explain why we tolerate world hunger, for example. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for helping me to clarify this point.

of responsibility. That is to say, "those who occupy ecological space in such a way as to compromise or foreclose the ability of others in present and future generations to pursue options important to them, owe obligations of ecological citizenship" (page 13). As to why they should care about the uneven or inequitable use of ecological space, Dobson's ecological citizens care because "they want to do justice" (page 15).

Dobson's ecological citizens have been likened to 'ecological angels' because of their selfless concern for future generations and for strangers in other parts of the world. One critic has argued that "Dobson's notion of ecological citizenship demands too much, especially in the absence of any discussion of the balance to be struck between legitimate 'self-interest' and concern for others" (Barry, 2002, pages 145 – 146).

Despite its shortcomings, the concept of ecological citizenship has merit because it underlines our obligations to others, near and far, who have made fewer demands on ecological space—like the African farmers we encountered earlier who rely on airfreight to export their fruit and vegetables. But ecological citizenship can accommodate legitimate self-interest too. Putting it bluntly, citizens of developed countries are simply acting in their own (enlightened) self-interest when they care about and for distant strangers in the developing world. For example, the emissions from deforestation in the Amazon, or from coal-fired power stations in China, are *global*, not local, problems; consequently, developed countries have every reason to become more active ecological citizens in these cases by, for example, paying poor countries to maintain standing forests and helping to develop clean coal technologies like carbon capture and storage. Such *other-regarding* behaviour is also *self-interested* behaviour because, without a new agreement on 'common but differentiated' action to contain climate change, global warming will undo us all (UNDP, 2007).

Whatever its motivation, then, ecological citizenship furnishes another answer to the question as to why we care. We care for others because *this is what being sustainable means in an ecologically interdependent world*. The fact that some ecological citizens may be motivated less by disinterested notions of social justice and more by enlightened self-interest neither diminishes nor invalidates the basic argument. Most important of all, as we have seen, ecological citizenship has the potential to transcend the conventional binary of *self versus other* because both are exposed, albeit unequally, to the noxious effects of climate change, the most formidable collective-action challenge in the world (Stern, 2009).

Although ethical consumption constitutes a laudable consumer reaction to the problem of unsustainable development, the source of global warming, it can only ever be a small part of the answer (Seyfang, 2006). Of far more significance is the mobilisation of political power at national and international levels in support of sustainable models of development both in developed and in developing countries. A new politics of care will help to expedite this process, especially if care is acknowledged as a public discourse for citizens and not merely as a private discourse for consumers, because ethical consumerism, although an important component of sustainable development, can never be a surrogate for the actions of ecological citizens working in tandem with green states at home and abroad to mainstream sustainable development. In their different ways, Smith's theory of *moral sentiments* and Dobson's concept of *ecological citizenship* help us to understand better the ethical and political reasons as to why we should take an active interest in the plight of others in an ever more interdependent world, where the rivalries of *self versus other* are more apparent than real. Far from being a hopelessly idealistic political project, a new politics of care can be discerned wherever and whenever development is addressed as if sustainability *really* mattered. Public food provisioning provides the quintessential litmus test of this new politics of care because, as we saw earlier, food is unlike any other sector as far as human development is concerned.

Another practical expression of this new politics of care comes from an unlikely quarter—the American Planning Association (APA). In its new strategy for community and regional food planning, the APA recognises that planners around the world had dealt with all the essentials of life—like air, water, and shelter—with the conspicuous exception of food (APA, 2007). To compensate for this extraordinary oversight, it has developed an exemplary strategy for sustainable food systems in which localisation is championed at home *and* abroad—that is to say *globally* local not parochially local. To this end, the US federal government is urged to support pro-poor forms of globalisation "in ways that sustainably increase local capacity for food security and food self-reliance" (APA, 2007, paragraph 7e). Charting a new vision for community food planning, the APA strategy is a testament to what can be envisioned when sustainability is treated seriously and when local/global and green/fair are framed in complementary rather than competitive terms.

The APA strategy is also notable in another respect because, far from confining itself to *why* we should care, it highlights *how* to express our care in a sustainable fashion. In calling for 'pro-poor forms of globalisation' to promote the local capacity for food self-reliance in developing countries, the APA comes close to mirroring the demands of Via Campesina, the transnational social movement of peasants which champions the concept of *food sovereignty*. The sixty-year-old failure to honour the Right to Food, first enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, persuaded new social movements like Via Campesina to recast this human right so that it is no longer about the right to food per se, but about the right to feed oneself—the difference between food security and food sovereignty (Desmarais, 2007; Windfuhr and Jonsen, 2005). Food sovereignty, according to Via Campesina, is "the right of each nation to maintain and develop their own capacity to produce foods that are crucial to national and community security, respecting cultural diversity and diversity of production methods" (Via Campesina, 1996, page 6).

Significantly, the Via Campesina vision of sustainable food and farming is animated by the same principles of social justice and ecological integrity that inform the APA vision, a salutary reminder that the L&G narrative, though it tends to be exclusively associated with the developed countries of the North, is equally relevant to the developing countries of the South. The contexts may be different, but the challenge is the same: namely, to mobilise enough political support to get these principles of social justice and ecological integrity embodied in emerging global governance regimes—particularly the unfinished Doha agreement on world trade and the Kyoto2 protocol for regulating greenhouse-gas emissions—to ensure that trade and development rules are as pro-poor and sustainable as possible.

Ecological alliances do not evolve of themselves. On the contrary, they have to be consciously fashioned, and sustained, through constant political deliberation within and between states and within and between civil society groups at local, national, and international levels. Such complex alliances normally take inordinate amounts of time to forge, but *time* is precisely what is lacking in the politics of climate change—the issue which trumps all other issues in terms of its implications for social justice and ecological integrity. For this reason, the UNDP assessment of climate change began by invoking the famous words of Martin Luther King:

> "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. We are faced now with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now ... . In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late" (UNDP, 2007, page 1).

In terms of the politics of care, the UNDP argues that no issue merits more urgent attention today than the fight against climate change because, by threatening the very

basis of life itself, it challenges us "to think about what it means to live as part of an ecologically interdependent human community" (2007, page 2). Although ethical consumerism clearly has an important role to play in responding to this challenge in and beyond the food chain, the private purchasing power of concerned consumers will never be enough to counter the formidable corporate and political forces that fuel *unsustainable* development. Until these forces are contested and contained, through the efforts of ethical consumers *and* ecological citizens working in concert, one can only hope that these belated efforts will not be 'too late'.

5 Conclusions

In this paper I have argued that the values associated with the ethical foodscape can take divergent forms unless they are fashioned into a coherent and progressive narrative of sustainable development. The argument was pursued through the prism of three issues. First, the carbon-labelling controversy was used to highlight the potential conflict between green campaigners (who favour locally produced food) and social justice campaigners (who favour fairly traded food). Second, school-food reform was used to demonstrate that locally produced and fairly traded food, far from being mutually exclusive options, can both be part of a sustainable food system when the latter is framed in cosmopolitan terms. Third, these issues issues raise compelling questions about the politics of care. Drawing on moral philosophy and ecological theory, the argument was made that ethical consumerism, though it embodies a private ethic of care, is not sufficient to counter the looming threat of climate change, which requires a new *public* ethic of care if the international community is to meet the greatest threat to ecological integrity and social justice in the world today.

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank Mike Goodman, Lewis Holloway, Damian Maye, Andrew Sayer, Roberta Sonnino, and Bill Vorley for discussing one or more of the issues in this paper. I am also grateful for the insightful comments of three anonymous referees. Earlier drafts of the paper were presented at two conferences: the ESRC Conference on Local Food and Rural Development: Does it Work Here and Overseas? at St Asaph, Wales, 13 March 2007, and the Imagining Sustainable Food Systems Conference, at Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada, 6 – 8 May 2008. Finally, I must thank the ESRC and the UN's World Food Programme for sponsoring the two research projects on which this paper draws.

References

APA, 2007, "Policy guide on community and regional food planning", 11 May, American Planning Association, Chicago, IL

Archer M, 2000 *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)

Barry J, 2002, "Vulnerability and virtue: democracy, dependency and ecological stewardship", in *Democracy and the Claims of Nature* Eds B Minteer, B Taylor (Rowman and Littlefield) pp 133 – 152

BBC, 2007, "African trade fears carbon footprint backlash", 21 February, http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6383687.stm

Beccheti L, Costantino M, 2008, "The effects of Fair Trade on affiliated producers: an impact analysis on Kenyan farmers" *World Development* **36** 823 – 842

Born B, Purcell M, 2006, "Avoiding the local trap: scale and food systems in planning research" *Journal of Planning Education and Research* **26** 195 – 207

Desmarais, 2007 *La Via Campesina: Globalization and the Power of Peasants* (Pluto Press, London)

Dobson A, 2004, "Ecological citizenship", paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Portland, Oregon, 11 March; copy available from the author

Edwards-Jones G, 2006, "Food miles don't go the distance BBC Green Room", http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/4807026.stm

Edwards-Jones G, et al, 2008, "Testing the assertion that 'local food is best': the challenges of an evidence-based approach" *Trends in Food Science and Technology* **19** 265 – 274

Fairtrade Foundation, 2008, "Tipping the balance: the Fairtrade Foundation's vision for transforming trade, 2008 – 2012", The Fairtrade Foundation, London
FAO, 2006 *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* (Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome)
FSA, 2009, "Agency emphasises validity of organic review", 7 August, Food Standards Agency, London
Garside B, MacGregor J, Varley B, 2007, "Miles better? How 'fair miles' stack up in the sustainable supermarket", International Institute for Environment and Development, London
Goodman D, 2004, "Rural Europe redux? Reflections on alternative agro-food networks and paradigm change" *Sociologia Ruralis* **44** 3 – 16
Goodman M K, 2004, "Reading fair trade: political ecological imaginary and moral economy of fair trade foods" *Political Geography* **23** 891 – 915
Guthman J, 2004 *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA)
Held V, 2005 *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford University Press, Oxford)
Hinrichs C, 2003, "The practice and politics of food system localization" *Journal of Rural Studies* **19** 33 – 45
Hume D, 1978 *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford University Press, Oxford)
IGD, 2003 *Local Food Comes From Our County, Says Consumers* IGD, London
IGD, 2005 *Patriotism Alone Will Not Sell British Food, Says New Research* IGD, London
Ilbery B, Kneafsey M, 2000, "Registering regional speciality food and drink products in the UK: the case of PDOs and PGIs" *Area* **32** 317 – 325
Lang T, Heasman M, 2004 *Food Wars: The Global Battle for Minds, Mouths and Markets* (Earthscan, London)
Leahy T, 2007, "Green grocer? Tesco, carbon and the consumer", speech to Forum for the Future, London, 18 January; copy available from Forum for the Future
MacGregor J, Vorley B, 2006, "Fair miles? The concept of 'food miles' through a sustainable development lens", International Institute for Environment and Development, London
Marks & Spencer, 2007, "M&S launches Plan A", Marks & Spencer, London
Marsden T, 2004, "Theorising food quality: some key issues in understanding its competitive production and regulation", in *Qualities of Food* Eds M Harvey, M McMeekin, A Warde (Manchester University Press, Manchester) pp 129 – 155
Massey D, 2007 *World City* (Polity Press, Cambridge)
Maye D, Holloway L, Kneafsey M (Eds), 2007 *Alternative Food Geographies: Representation and Practice* (Elsevier, Oxford)
Mayor of London, 2006, "Healthy and sustainable food for London: the Mayor's food strategy", May, Mayor of London, City Hall, London
Morgan K, Sonnino R, 2008 *The School Food Revolution: Public Food and the Challenge of Sustainable Development* (Earthscan, London)
Morgan K, Marsden T, Murdoch J, 2006 *Worlds of Food: Place, Power and Provenance in the Food Chain* (Oxford University Press, Oxford)
Morgan K, Bastia T, Kanemasu Y, 2007 *Home Grown: The New Era of School Feeding* World Food Programme, Rome
Potter C, 1998 *Against the Grain: Agri-environmental Reform in the US and the EU* (CABI, Wallingford, Oxon)
Sayer A, 2010 *Why Things Matter: Social Science, Normativity and Values* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)
Seyfang G, 2006, "Ecological citizenship and sustainable consumption: examining local organic food networks" *Journal of Rural Studies* **22** 383 – 395
Smith A, 1976 *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford University Press, New York)
Smith D, 1998, "How far should we care? On the spatial scope of beneficence" *Progress in Human Geography* **22** 15 – 38
Smith D, 2000 *Moral Geographies: Ethics in a World of Difference* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh)
SA, Soil Association, Bristol BS1 3NX
2007, "Should the Soil Association tackle the environmental impact of air freight in its organic standards?", May
2008, "Ensuring limited organic air freight is fair and ethical", Press Release, 6 March
2009, "Five reasons to choose organic", May
Sonnino R, 2009, "Quality food, public procurement, and sustainable development: the school meal revolution in Rome" *Environment and Planning A* **41** 425 – 440

Stern N, 2009 *The Global Deal* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)
Sustain, 2008 *Ethical Hijack: Why the Terms 'Local', 'Seasonal' and 'Farmers' Market' should be Defended from Abuse by the Food Industry* Sustain, London
Tronto J, 1994 *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (Routledge, New York)
Twin, 2007, "Twin and Twin Trading annual report 2006/2007", Twin and Twin Trading Ltd, London EC2A 3LT
UNDP, 2007 *Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World* United Nations Development Programme, United Nations, New York
Via Campesina, 1996 *Food Sovereignty: A Future Without Hunger* Via Campesina, Rome
Watkins K, 2003, "Reducing poverty starts with fairer farm trade" *Financial Times* 2 June
Whatmore S, Thorne L, 1997, "Nourishing networks: alternative geographies of food", in *Globalising Food* Eds D Goodman, M Watts (Routledge, London) pp 287 – 304
Windfuhr M, Jonsen J, 2005 *Food Sovereignty: Towards Democracy in Localized Food Systems* (FIAN-International, Heidelberg)
World Bank, 2007 *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development* (World Bank, Washington, DC)