



The Centre For Business Relationships,
Accountability, Sustainability and Society

WORKING PAPER SERIES No. 50

**Local and Green Vs Global and Fair:
The New Geopolitics of Care**



Kevin Morgan



Local and Green Vs Global and Fair: The New Geopolitics of Care

Kevin Morgan

Abstract

Tesco's decision to introduce carbon labels on its products was met with two radically different reactions. Green campaigners were delighted, not least because it signalled a more sustainable approach to product labelling based on "food miles". In contrast, the international development lobby was angry, because it believed that "fair miles" are a better measure of sustainability than "food miles". Through the prism of this contentious issue, the paper argues that the rivalry between local/green and global/fair is more apparent than real, and it concludes by arguing that a new geopolitics of care needs to embrace both dimensions if it wants to fashion sustainable food systems.

About the BRASS Centre

The ESRC Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society (BRASS) was the first ESRC Centre in Wales. It was established in 2001 with a £3.1 million grant, and has very recently received its second phase funding of £4.8 million which will take it up to 2011. The Centre is a joint venture between the University's Schools of Business, City & Regional Planning and Law. It brings together the three Schools' existing research expertise on issues of sustainability, business ethics, company law, corporate reporting and business communication.

The Centre started work in October 2001 under the leadership of Professor Ken Peattie of the Business School, Professor Terry Marsden of the Department of City and Regional Planning and Professor Bob Lee of the Law School. The Centre exists to understand and promote the vital issues of sustainability, accountability and social responsibility, through research into key business relationships.

Published by

The Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability & Society
(BRASS)
Cardiff University
55 Park Place
Cardiff CF10 3AT
United Kingdom
<http://www.brass.cf.ac.uk>

© BRASS Centre 2008

ISBNs 978-1-906644-12-3 (print)
978-1-906644-13-0 (web)



Table of Contents

Introduction

1. Political Narratives of Food: The *Local and Green* Narrative

2. Political Narratives of Food: The *Global and Fair* Narrative

3. Neither Local nor Global: The Rise of *Sustainable* School Food Systems?

4. Local/Global, Green/Fair: Fashioning a New Geopolitics of Care

Acknowledgements

References

Introduction

Food is arguably the most important prism for exploring current political debates about world poverty, sustainable development and the geopolitics of care, all of which are ultimately part and parcel of the same global debate about getting ahead together. Despite claims to the contrary, particularly from neo-liberals who believe it is just another industry, the agri-food sector has a unique status. Quite apart from its umbilical link with nature, the exceptionalism of the agri-food sector lies principally in the fact that we ingest its products. Food is therefore vital to human health and well being in a way that the products of other industries are not, and this remains the quintessential reason as to 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 our 'distant others'.

Human life is 'nasty, brutish and short' without access to food, and political elites know they have a tenuous grip on power when 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 twentieth 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 economic development, especially in developing countries, where agriculture remains the dominant economic activity for the poorest of the poor. Perhaps the most notable achievement of the World Food Summit in 2008 - a hastily convened meeting to discuss the commodity price explosion - was that the international aid community suddenly rediscovered the significance of agriculture, having neglected it for the best part of a generation in favour of more 'modern' sectors of the economy.

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* agri-food narrative which has dominated mainstream politics since the 1930s and the

alternative agri-food narrative which emerged in response to what it perceived to be the noxious effects of the former on human health and the environment (Potter, 1998; Lang and Heasman, 2004; Maye et al, 2007). Although the alternative food narrative embraced a number of different variants - organic, local, certified, fairtrade etc - it was to some extent defined by what it was not rather than by what it was. In other words, it was defined in opposition to the conventional narrative, that was indelibly associated with an intensive, industrialised and productivist agri-food system which extolled quantity over quality, price over provenance (Morgan et al, 2006; Marsden, 2004).

Recently, though, this alternative agri-food narrative has begun to fracture, revealing potentially debilitating 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. But the Tesco move was just one part of a whole series of moves on the part of supermarkets, and certain environmental NGOs, to re-localise the global food system in the name of sustainability. The Tesco decision triggered a polarised reaction around the world. As we will see, environmentalists in developed countries were reported to be 'dancing in the fresh produce aisles', while African farmers were left 'confused and concerned' by the thought that they might be penalised by a green campaign against climate change, a problem in which they were the least culpable. This carbon labelling episode raises larger questions about the political compatibility and moral compass of alternative food narratives. To explore these tensions in more depth, the article is organised as follows:

- Section two examines some of the key arguments of the *Local and Green* narrative that has become fashionable in developed countries;
- Section three explores the scope and limits of the *Global and Fair* narrative on which small farmers in developing countries have pinned their hopes;
- Section four maintains that a progressive politics needs to eschew the above polarisation and, drawing on empirical studies of the school

food service in Europe and Africa, it argues that sustainable food systems are a hybrid mix of local and global food;

- Section five assesses the wider implications of the above analysis for current debates about how and why we care, an issue where political geography and moral philosophy converge in a new geopolitics of care.

1. Political Narratives of Food: The *Local and Green* Narrative

What is a sustainable food chain? The answer depends on the food narrative to which one subscribes. Each of the above food narratives - the conventional/productivist, the local/green and the global/fair - would answer the question in a different way. In the local and green (L&G) narrative the reasoning usually runs along the following lines. Sustainability is another name for localization. The more local the food chain, the greener it is; the greener it is, the more sustainable it is. Green trade implies more local trade. This is obviously a very stylised summary of a whole series of specific arguments that make up the multi-dimensional L&G narrative. The specific arguments are too numerous to mention here, but the principal arguments 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 re-connect consumers with producers (*Born and Purcell, 2006*). Figure 1 provides a more comprehensive overview of the arguments that are enrolled into the L&G narrative.

Figure 1: Ten Reasons to Buy Local Food

1. Locally grown food tastes better.

Food grown in your own community was probably picked within the past day or two. It's crisp, sweet and loaded with flavor. Produce flown or trucked in from California, Florida, Chile or Holland is, quite understandably, much older. Several studies have shown that the average distance food travels from farm to plate is 1,500 miles. In a week-long (or more) delay from harvest to dinner table, sugars turn to starches, plant cells shrink, and produce loses its vitality.

2. Local produce is better for you.

A recent study showed that fresh produce loses nutrients quickly. Food that is frozen or canned soon after harvest is actually more nutritious than some "fresh" produce that has been on the truck or supermarket shelf for a week. Locally grown food, purchased soon after harvest, retains its nutrients.

3. Local food preserves genetic diversity.

In the modern industrial agricultural system, varieties are chosen for their ability to ripen simultaneously and withstand harvesting equipment: for a tough skin that can survive packing and shipping; and for an ability to have a long shelf life in the store. Only a handful of hybrid varieties of each fruit and vegetable meet those rigorous demands, so there is little genetic diversity in the plants grown. Local farms, in contrast, grow a huge number of varieties to provide a long season of harvest, an array of eye-catching colors, and the best flavors. Many varieties are heirlooms, passed down from generation to generation, because they taste good. These old varieties contain a genetic material from hundreds or even thousands of years of human selection; they may someday provide the genes needed to create varieties that will thrive in a changing climate.

4. Local food is GMO-free.

Although biotechnology companies have been trying to commercialize genetically modified fruits and vegetables, they are currently licensing them only to large factory-style farms. Local farmers don't have access to genetically modified seed, and most of them wouldn't use it even if they could. A June 2001 survey by ABC News showed that 93% of Americans want labels on genetically modified food - most so that they can avoid it. If you are opposed to eating bioengineered food, you can rest assured that locally grown produce was bred the old-fashioned way, as nature intended.

5. Local food supports local farm families.

With fewer than 1 million Americans now claiming farming as their primary occupation, farmers are a vanishing breed. And no wonder - commodity prices are at historic lows, often below the cost of production. The farmer now gets less than 10 cents of the retail food dollar. Local farmers who sell direct to consumers cut out the middleman and get full retail price for their food - which means farm families can afford to stay on the farm, doing the work they love.

6. Local food builds community.

When you buy direct from the farmers, you are re-establishing a time-honored connection between the eater and the grower. Knowing the farmers gives you insight into the seasons, the weather, and the miracle of raising food. In many cases, it gives you access to a farm where your children and grandchildren can go to learn about nature and agriculture. Relationships built on understanding and trust can thrive.

7. Local food preserves open space.

As the value of direct-marketed fruits and vegetables increases, selling farmland for development becomes less likely. You have probably enjoyed driving out into the country and appreciated the lush fields of crops, the meadows full of wildflowers, the picturesque red barns. That landscape will survive only as long as farms are financially viable. When you buy locally grown food, you are doing something proactive about preserving the agricultural landscape.

8. Local food keeps your taxes in check.

Farms contribute more in taxes than they require in services, whereas suburban development costs more than it generates in taxes, according to several studies. On average, for every \$1 in revenue raised by residential development, governments must spend \$1.17 on services, thus requiring higher taxes of all taxpayers. For each dollar of revenue raised by farm, forest, or open space, governments spend 34 cents on services.

9. Local food supports a clean environment and benefits wildlife.

A well-managed family farm is a place where the resources of fertile soil and clean water are valued. Good stewards of the land grow cover crops to prevent erosion and replace nutrients used by their crops. Cover crops also capture carbon emissions and help combat global warming. According to some estimates, farmers who practice conservation tillage could sequester 12-14% of the carbon emitted by vehicles and industry. In addition, the habitat of a farm - the patchwork of fields, meadows, woods, ponds and buildings - is the perfect environment for many beloved species of wildlife, including bluebirds, killdeer, herons, bats, and rabbits.

10. Local food is about the future.

By supporting local farmers today, you can help ensure that there will be farms in your community tomorrow, and that future generations will have access to nourishing, flavorful, and abundant food.

Source: Centre for Sustainable Environments, in Born and Purcell (2006)

These arguments for buying local will resonate differently in different food cultures. Local and regional food has a strong pedigree in some countries, particularly in Italy, France and Spain for example, while countries like the UK and the US have been described as 'placeless foodscapes' on account of their industrialised systems and their standardised fare (*Ilbery and Kneafsey, 2000; Morgan et al, 2006*). However, food cultures are not set in aspic and even the UK and the US are witnessing a growing demand for local and regional food.

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 30 miles of where they live or buy it. A disconcerting finding, at least for those who equate 'local food' with 'alternative food', is that 33% of consumers see supermarkets, the acme of the conventional sector, as the place where they would expect to buy local food, followed by farmers' markets and farm shops. There were also some very significant variations within the UK: Scottish and Welsh consumers are much more likely to identify with their home nations, while English consumers tend to identify with the regions of England. 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; IGD, 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, underplaying the fact that the basic aim was to develop their environmental credentials as a competitive weapon in the battle for market share. Although small supermarkets like the Coop and Waitrose had done much more on the ethical trading front, though with less fanfare, other retailers were the first to play the carbon card:

- Marks and 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, which involved cutting airfreighted food and buying more locally produced food (*Marks and 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 their airfreighted status. What added further weight to the campaign against airfreighted produce was the news that the Soil Association, 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 (*Soil Association, 2007*).

As we will see in the following section, these moves provoked a furious response from the international development lobby in 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 food 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*).

Notwithstanding the potential benefits of local food systems, recent critics have spoken of 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 certain 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: 195).

To illustrate the dangers of the local trap, let us examine two of the key arguments of the L&G narrative - the notion of food miles and the presumed health benefits of local

food. The notion of food miles has captured the public imagination more than any other aspect of sustainable development. However, if its main strength is its popular resonance, its main weakness is its lack of scientific rigour. The fact that it is 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; Edwards-Jones et al, 2008*).

The healthful image of local food was badly tarnished by the E.coli crisis in Wales in 2006, which infected 150 people and led to the death of a five year old child. The source of the disease was traced to a *local* meat supplier to the school meals service, a supplier who had been the subject of countless complaints from consumers and caterers. The most shocking aspect of the crisis - apart from the death of a child of course - was the abject failure of the regulatory system at every stage of the process, particularly the environmental health inspections that proved to be woefully inadequate, and the procurement contracts that were awarded to a local supplier simply because he made 'the lowest cost offer'. No less shocking, but certainly more bizarre, was the fact that this unhygienic meat supplier actually featured in the Welsh Assembly Government's "good practice" guide to local food promotion (*Alford, 2008*). How do we explain the fact that an unscrupulous meat trader secures public contracts to serve meat to school children when he has a known record of poor hygiene? The answer is threefold: (i) the supplier traded on its image as a 'local' food vendor when localisation was moving up the political agenda (ii) the regulatory authorities failed in their inspection duties and (iii) low cost could masquerade as best value because the catering culture was a 'cheap food' culture (*Morgan and Sonnino, 2008*). These local details assume a global relevance because it is difficult to imagine a better illustration of the local trap than the tragic consequences of this E.coli crisis.

Local food systems may have the *potential* to deliver multiple benefits, but these positive outcomes cannot be assumed to exist simply because they stem from a supposedly benign local sphere. On the contrary, the outcomes have to be monitored and regulated to ensure that the ethical claims of firms that trade on the L&G narrative are valid.

2. Political Narratives of Food: The *Global and Fair* Narrative

What constitutes a sustainable food chain in the Global & Fair (G&F) narrative? Here we have a different answer, and the stylised version tends to run along the following lines. Sustainability is globalization with a human face. A fairer food chain means northern markets are genuinely open to producers from the global south. Fair trade implies more global trade. If the environmental dimension of sustainable development is foregrounded in the L&G narrative, here the social and economic dimensions tend to be accentuated.

From a 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 globalization is a wholly negative phenomenon. But many poor countries in the global south see it somewhat differently, especially in Africa, the poorest continent in the world economy. For example, one of the primary 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). What we have here, then, is a desire for *more* not less involvement in the globalization process, so long as this is beneficial integration of course. Although it is invariably reduced to and conflated with neo-liberalism, globalization can actually take positive or negative forms. To the extent that it adopts a *pro-poor* stance on trade, development and climate change, for example, globalization 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, evidenced by the lack of progress with the Doha trade round, the Millennium Development Goals and the Kyoto protocol on climate change.

Fair trade schemes are among the best examples of globalization 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 former was partly designed to compensate for the problems of the latter. 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 to developing countries that their interests would be paramount in the making of a new multilateral trade agreement. The fact that the Doha round has failed to reach an agreement speaks volumes for the WTO's failure to translate its rhetoric into reality. Of all the reasons why the Doha round failed to reach a successful conclusion, the most important factor was the failure to secure agreement 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 was succinctly summarised by a senior Oxfam official:


'The problem is this: each year rich countries spend over \$1 billion a day supporting their agricultural producers - six times what they give in foreign aid. The EU and the US account for almost two-thirds of total spending. The subsidy fest translates into rocketing levels of output, fewer imports and the dumping of vast surpluses on world markets. Farmers in developing countries undercut them in local and global markets, while high import barriers shut them out of rich country markets. Northern governments like to lecture on the merits of open markets. But success in world agriculture depends less on comparative advantage than on comparative access to subsidies - and poor countries lose every time' (Watkins, 2003).


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 major product categories, 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*). Although the impact literature is surprisingly scarce, 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*).

Fair trade organisations like Twin had been aware of the dangers of 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, 2007:10*). As we know, this issue forced itself onto the political agenda when the UK supermarkets publicly embraced carbon labelling in 2007. The BBC coverage of the issue, shown in Figure 2, captured the polarised reaction to the news in Europe and Africa.

Last Updated: Wednesday, 21 February 2007, 21:24 GMT

 E-mail this to a friend

 Printable version

African trade fears carbon footprint backlash

By Victoria Averill

Nairobi, Kenya

"What is global warming?", asks Samuel Mauthike, a small scale vegetable farmer in Kirinyaga, Kenya's central province, as he crouches down compressing the moist soil around his green bean plants.



How green are Kenya's exports?

"Is it something caused by us in Africa?"

Mr Mauthike, 32, like so many of the two million Kenyans who rely on the western world to import their flowers, fruit and vegetables for their livelihoods, has never heard of a carbon footprint either.

He points to the simple gravitational water irrigation system that flows through his smallholding, admitting he has never been in a plane, rarely travels by bus and uses nothing but his hands to grow, fertilise and harvest his top quality green beans, which then appear on a supermarket shelf in Europe.

Yet he and his fellow Kenyan farmers, whose lifelong carbon emissions are negligible compared with their counterparts in the West, are fast becoming the victims of a green campaign that could threaten their livelihoods.

Crippling

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 horticulturists confused and concerned.

Researchers at the IIED, an independent, nonprofit research institute working in the field of sustainable development, did more than anyone to clarify the issues in the carbon labelling debate, laying the basis for a sound and progressive politics of green *and* fair. In a series of articles, published before and after the green epiphany of UK supermarkets, the IIED researchers developed a robust critique of the 'food miles' concept (*MacGregor and Vorley, 2006; Garside et al, 2007*). Their basic contention is that, as a concept, food miles 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 to the UK from sub-Saharan African countries, so much so that UK consumers spend more than £1 million at retail every day on these items. This airfreighted trade is estimated to account for less than 0.1% of the UK's total carbon emissions, which is trivial compared with the UK's domestically generated food miles. On the credit side, this airfreighted trade bestows 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 suggests that 1 to 1.5 million people's livelihoods depend in part on this FFV supply chain. While there are outstanding issues that need to be resolved - like the enormous quantities of African water that the UK is 'importing' as a result of this trade - the IIED researchers conclude by saying that there is no inherent necessity for local food campaigns in developed countries 'to work against the interests of developing countries'. But to ensure a positive outcome for both sides of the equation, they argue that a more robust analytical framework needs to be put in place, so that: (i) the degree of harm is put into the context of Africa's current use of 'ecological space' (ii) the degree of harm is quantified and compared to that of other food choices and (iii) the degree of development gain is quantified, to demonstrate whether this trade really benefits those living in poverty (*Garside et al, 2007*).

The last point is especially important when discussing the prospects for the poorest of the poor, especially in Africa, which is often portrayed as the continent that globalization forgot. Better market access, however, will do nothing of itself to help small developing country food producers to meet the exacting technical standards of developed country markets. This highlights the need to align trade policy with development policy, instead of over-selling trade liberalization as a recipe for poverty reduction. Contrary to neo-liberal claims about the benign effects of liberalization and

globalization, a sober assessment of the evidence suggests that 'integration with the world economy is an outcome, not a prerequisite, of a successful growth strategy' (Rodrik, 2001). This argument resonates with more recent work on the social dynamics of economic marginalisation in Africa, which discovered that persistent poverty is associated not simply with disconnection *from*, but also with 'adverse incorporation' *in* the world economy (du Toit, 2008).

One of the implications of the above critique is that the G&F narrative tends to conflate development with trade, implying that the latter is the only route to the former for poor countries. The notion of 'fairness' in the G&F narrative therefore needs to be framed more broadly to embrace development in the broadest sense of the term - but here the record of the global north is no more flattering than it is on the trade front. If the rich countries of the north have been unwilling to adopt a pro-poor stance in the Doha trade round, they have also signally failed to honour their commitments on the wider development front. The fate of the Millennium Development Goals commitment is a case in point. Under the auspices of the UN, the international community committed itself to eight development goals in 2000, the first of which was to halve hunger by 2015, widely regarded as the 'gateway' to all the other goals. However, the international community made disappointing progress even before the current world food crisis made the goal even more difficult to achieve. Far from being an anomaly, however, the north has consistently failed to honour its pledges on world hunger ever since the UN issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. No human right has been more universally proclaimed, or more consistently violated, than the Right to Food (George, 1984).

The 60 year old failure to honour the Right to Food persuaded new social movements to recast this human right, so that it is no longer about the right to food, but the right to feed oneself, the difference between *food security* and *food sovereignty* (Desmarais, 2007; Windfuhr and J. Jonsen, 2005; Saragih, 2008). According to Via Campesina, the transnational social movement of peasants that champions the concept, food sovereignty is 'the right of each nation to maintain and develop their own capacity to produce foods that are crucial to national and community food security, respecting cultural diversity and diversity of production methods' (Via Campesina, 1996). Though it is not anti-trade, the food sovereignty conception asserts

that food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and **only** secondarily an item of trade, a profoundly disturbing idea from a WTO perspective. While the international agri-business lobby can support food security, which it claims can be delivered through free trade, it is deeply opposed to food sovereignty, principally because it reduces commercial opportunities in the developing world. This is where we find the real rivalry between political food narratives: the neo-liberal narrative of food security through free trade versus the Via Campesina narrative of food sovereignty are worlds apart, whereas the rivalry between the L&G and G&F narratives is more apparent than real.

The Via Campesina vision for sustainable food and farming helps us to see the shortcomings of treating the L&G and G&F narratives as mutually exclusive narratives. Equally important, it also illustrates that the L&G narrative is as relevant to the developing countries of the south as it is to developed countries of the north. As we will see in the following section, if the developing world is to reduce chronic hunger, it will have to address local domestic markets as well as global export markets. Furthermore, if it is to mitigate the noxious effects of climate change, it will have to develop food and farming systems that are genuinely sustainable. Developing countries will require more and better international assistance to meet the twin challenges of poverty reduction and sustainable development. This is nowhere more urgent than in sub-Saharan Africa, the chief locus of world hunger, where many international aid projects have been vitiated by donor paternalism, which reflects a failure to recognise Africans as agents of their own future (*Morgan et al, 2007*).

3. Neither Local nor Global: The Rise of *Sustainable* School Food Systems?

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, the double burden of malnutrition. The main purpose of this short section is simply to highlight how the school food chain could, by drawing on a hybrid mixture of local and global ingredients, become a vehicle for sustainable development. Where it exists, the school food system 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 71 countries, and such provisioning is especially important for gender equality because, as one of its most powerful posters says, "a girl in school is a girl with a future". Although it is now facing unprecedented challenges, due to the food commodity price explosion, WFP needs to be much better resourced because it has been one of the world's greatest humanitarian success stories for the past 40 years.¹

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 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 aid 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 agri-businesses.

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 under-estimated the challenge of this new model of school feeding, which is not just about school food. To be successful, the HGSF programme will need to fashion robust and transparent governance structures to provide a framework for collective action. It will have to create, and sustain, dedicated financial resources to enable the initiative to survive the vicissitudes of the electoral cycle. 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 to enlist the support of civil society and the private sector. Far from being just about school food, then, the HGSF

¹ This section draws on Morgan et al (2007), Morgan and Sonnino (2008) and Sonnino (2008)

programme embodies the entire drama of development in microcosm, analogous to 'the world in a grain of sand' as the poet, William Blake, so memorably put it.

The WFP aims to make itself redundant in school feeding by persuading the host government to assume responsibility for the programme after it has been established. In the very poorest countries, however, it is likely to maintain a semi-permanent role, providing advice and technical support on the demand side (especially in public procurement) and the supply side (by helping small farmers to form producer associations). These food chain innovations are desperately needed because international aid to agriculture fell steeply over the past 20 years, the victim of a fashionable belief in World Bank circles that agriculture was not a suitable vehicle for 'modernisation'. The current world food crisis helped the Bank to re-discover the value of agriculture, forcing its president, Robert Zoellick, to issue a '10-point proposal to tackle the global food crisis' (Zoellick, 2008).

Belatedly, the international 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 following 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* to gain access to global markets (through reforming their highly subsidised farm support systems).

School food reform is also playing a leading part in the sustainable development debates in the developed countries of the north. Although there are many public bodies in Europe and North America that equate sustainability with localization, the leading reformers have developed a much more sophisticated understanding of what constitutes a 'sustainable school food system'. One of the pioneers of school food reform in Europe 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 included, the 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.

Although Rome is way ahead of London in the school food stakes, the latter 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, 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, 2006:30*). The key point to establish is that, like Rome, the political authorities in London do not uncritically equate sustainability with localization. Local food is being promoted, of course, 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. 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, where the citizens and consumers of tomorrow are being schooled today, we see how public bodies are trying to discharge their obligations to people and places near and far.

4. Local/Global, Green/Fair: Fashioning a New Geopolitics of Care

Although the *Local & Green* and *Global & Fair* narratives can be construed as rival political narratives, a construction that could trigger a debilitating zero-sum politics, such rivalry is neither necessary nor desirable. It is certainly nothing like the truly implacable rivalry between the neo-liberal and food sovereignty narratives, which is genuinely antagonistic, mutually exclusive and politically irreconcilable. Far from being such implacable rivals, the L&G and the G&F narratives need to be understood as complementary narratives, each of which is important to the constitution of a *sustainable food system*. Because such systems do not emerge of themselves, they have to be fashioned through a new politics of care, a politics that has two defining features: (i) it defines care first and foremost as a function of the *public sphere* rather than the private sphere, where it has been ghettoised for centuries as a woman's responsibility and (ii) 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. In explicating a new politics of care, this final section also tries to identify the moral bases of care so as to answer the simple but fundamentally important question - why exactly do 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. In her pioneering book, *Moral Boundaries*, Tronto 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 emasculated women and 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' (*Tronto, 1994:3*). Rethinking the politics of care in this way 'requires that we think about care in its broadest possible *public* framework'. 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...' (*Tronto, 1994:172*).

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 is able to appreciate that 'others' are near, though far from dear - that is to say, they are not necessarily 'distant others'. 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' (*Tronto, 1994: 174*). However, when she tries to distil her argument into a universalist moral principle, by proclaiming that 'one should care for those around one or in one's society' (*Tronto, 1994:178*), this conclusion looks highly

particularist and wholly inconsistent with the spirit of inclusivity than animates the rest of the book.

Current debates about care - why we care and how far we should care - have revived an interest in the Scottish Enlightenment 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 (1711-1776), 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: 481).

This interplay between distance and sentiment was developed further, and in a more sophisticated way, by Adam Smith (1723-1790). Smith opens his magnum opus on moral philosophy, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 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: 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* (Smith, 1976; see also Tronto, 1994). Self-command, for Smith, was buttressed 'by the sense of propriety, by regard to the sentiments of the supposed impartial spectator' (Smith, 1976: 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 wider problem of moral conduct in an impersonal 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.

Although Smith is widely known as one of the founding fathers of modern economics, the thinker who made 'self-interest' socially respectable, he is less well known but no less important as a moral philosopher, the thinker who showed that human beings are other-regarding creatures that cannot be reduced to desiccated self-referential calculating machines. Drawing on Smith's theory of moral sentiments, we can begin to answer the question posed earlier by saying that we care for others because *this is what being human means*. This indissoluble common bond needs to be affirmed anew in every generation, especially when it has been obscured for so long by 'the postmodern nightmare of a world in which there is nothing but diversity' (Smith, 2000:137). The fact that care may vary with distance, where family and friends take precedence over others near and far, does not invalidate the basic argument, and 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.

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, an amount that varies within and between countries - Dobson argues that the obligations of ecological citizenship are owed asymmetrically, in part because they express a non-reciprocal form 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' (Dobson, 2004: 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' (Dobson, 2004: 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: 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 air-freight to export their fruit and vegetables to the UK. 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 others 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.

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 a connected and inter-dependent world*. The fact that some ecological citizens may be motivated less by disinterested notions of justice and more by enlightened self-interest neither diminishes nor invalidates the basic argument. Most important of all, ecological citizenship has the potential to transcend the conventional binary of self v other because both are equally implicated in the challenge of climate change, the most formidable collective action problem in the world today (*Stern, 2006*).

A new geopolitics of care will need to be fashioned if the world is to adapt to and mitigate this life-threatening challenge. In their different ways, Smith's theory of *moral sentiments* and Dobson's concept of *ecological citizenship* help us to better understand the ethical and political reasons as to why we should take an active interest in the plight of others in an ever more inter-dependent world, where the rivalries of

self v other, local v global and green v fair are more apparent than real. Far from being a hopelessly idealistic political project, a new geopolitics of care can be discerned wherever development is addressed as if sustainability really mattered. Food provisioning provides the quintessential litmus test of this new politics because, as we saw earlier, food is unlike any other sector.

One of the most encouraging examples of this new geopolitics of care comes from an unlikely quarter - the American Planning Association. In its new strategy for community and regional food planning, the APA recognised 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 localization is championed at home *and* abroad - that is to say *globally* local not parochially local, because the US authorities are urged to support pro-poor forms of globalization 'in ways that sustainably increase local capacity for food security and food self-reliance' (APA, 2007). Charting a new vision for community food planning, the APA strategy is a testament to what can be achieved when sustainability is treated seriously and when local/global and green/fair are framed in complementary rather than competitive terms. Fashioning sustainable food planning strategies along these lines does more than anything to make hope practical for communities large and small, giving practical expression to a new geopolitics of care.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Andrew Sayer, Roberta Sonnino and Bill Vorley for discussing one or more of the issues in this paper. Earlier drafts of this paper were presented to two conferences: the RELU *Conference on Local Food and Rural Development: Does it Work Here and Overseas?* St Asaph, 13 March 2007, and the *Imagining Sustainable Food Systems Conference*, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada, 6-8 May 2008. I would like to thank participants at both events for their sympathetic critiques. Finally, I must thank the ESRC and the UN's World Food Programme for sponsoring the two research projects on which this article draws.

References

Alford, A (2008) Butcher appeared in WAG pamphlet promoting best food producers, *Western Mail*, 29 February

American Planning Association (2007) *Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning*, 11 May, APA

Barry, J (2002) Vulnerability and Virtue: Democracy, Dependency and Ecological Stewardship, in B. Minter and B. Taylor (eds) *Democracy and the Claims of Nature*, Rowman and Littlefield, New York

Becchetti, L and Costantino, M (2008) The Effects of Fair Trade on Affiliated Producers: An Impact Analysis on Kenyan Farmers, *World Development*, Volume 36 No. 5, pp. 823-842

Born, B and Purcell, M (2006) Avoiding the Local Trap: Scale and Food Systems in Planning Research, *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 26, pp.195-207

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

Dobson, A (2004) *Ecological Citizenship*, Paper to the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Portland, Oregon, 11 March

Du Toit, A (2008) Living on the margins: the social dynamics of economic marginalisation, *Development Southern Africa*, 25:2, pp. 135-150

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 & Technology*, 19, pp.265-274

Fairtrade Foundation (2008) *Tipping the Balance: The Fairtrade Foundation's Vision for Transforming Trade 2008-2012*, The Fairtrade Foundation, London

George, S (1984) The Right to Food and the Politics of Hunger, in *Ill-Fares the Land: Essays on Food, Hunger and Power*, Penguin, London, pp.221-261

Garside, B et al (2007) *Miles Better? How 'fair miles' stack up in the sustainable supermarket*, International Institute for Environment and Development, London

Hume, D (1978) *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Ilbery, B and Kneafsey, M (2000) Registering Regional Speciality Food and Drink Products in the UK: The Case of PDOs and PGIs, *Area* 32 (3), pp.317-25

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

Lang, T and 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

Marks and Spencer (2007) *M&S Launches Plan A*, Marks and Spencer, London

MacGregor, J and Vorley, B (2006) *Fair Miles? The concept of 'food miles' through a sustainable development lens*, International Institute for Environment and Development, London

Marsden, T (2004) Theorising Food Quality: Some Key Issues in Understanding its Competitive Production and Regulation, in Harvey, M et al (eds) *Qualities of Food*, Manchester University Press, Manchester

- Maye, D et al (eds) (2007) *Alternative Food Geographies*, Elsevier,
- Mayor of London (2006) *Healthy and Sustainable Food for London: The Mayor's Food Strategy*, May
- Morgan, K et al (2006) *Worlds of Food: Place, Power and Provenance in the Food Chain*, Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Morgan, K et al (2007) *Home Grown: The New Era of School Feeding*, World Food Programme, Rome
- Morgan, K and Sonnino, R (2008) *The School Food Revolution: Public Food and the Challenge of Sustainable Development*, Earthscan, London
- Potter, C (1998) *Against the Grain: Agri-environmental Reform in the US and the EU* (CABI, Wallingford)
- Rodrik, D (2001) *The Global Governance of Trade: As If Development Really Mattered*, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University
- Saragih, H (2008) *Food sovereignty to answer world food and energy crisis*, Via Campesina Speech to Swissaid, Berne 29 May
- Smith, A (1976) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, Oxford University Press, New York
- Smith, D (2000) *Moral Geographies: Ethics in a World of Difference*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh
- Soil Association (2007) *Should the Soil Association tackle the environmental impact of air freight in its organic standards?* May

Sonnino, R (2008) Quality Food, Public Procurement, and Sustainable Development: The School Meal Revolution in Rome, *Environment and Planning A*, Volume 40 (in press)

Stern, N (2006) *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review*, 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: The alliance for better food and farming, 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*, London

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

Windfuhr, M and Jonsen, J (2005) *Food Sovereignty: Towards Democracy in Localized Food Systems*, FIAN-International

Zoellick, R (2008) A 10-point proposal to tackle the global food crisis, *Financial Times*, 30 May