

GUEST EDITORIAL

# Place Geography and the Ethics of Care: Introductory Remarks on the Geographies of Ethics, Responsibility and Care

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**ABSTRACT** *In a recent review article, Jeff Popke (2006, p. 510) calls for a 'more direct engagement with theories of ethics and responsibility' on the part of human geographers, and for a reinscription of the social as a site of ethics and responsibility. This requires that we also continue to develop ways of thinking through our responsibilities toward unseen others—both unseen neighbours and distant others—and to cultivate a renewed sense of social interconnectedness. Popke suggests that a feminist-inspired ethic of care might be instrumental in developing this expanded, relational and collective vision of the social, which is particularly prescient given the contemporary economic downturn throughout the globe. Thus, as the 'moral turn' in geography continues to evolve, this special issue seeks to bring together geographers working within feminist or feminist-inspired frameworks, and with a shared interest in the changing geographies of ethics, responsibility and care. The collection of papers has its origins in conference sessions on Care-full Geographies, organised by the Guest Editors at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in 2007. In this editorial we seek to position the papers within broader debates about care, responsibility and ethics that have emerged in geography and the wider social sciences in recent years, and to highlight the key issues that have framed these debates.*

## Geographies of Care/Caring

Geographical debates about ethical and political responsibility have produced a rich understanding of the relationships between space and spatiality, on the one hand, and notions of care and caring on the other. Much of this work on geographies of caring has been concerned with distance, or the ethics arising out of a sense of responsibility towards those with whom we have caring relationships and toward different and distant others. Feminist geographies, in particular, have sought to investigate the complex spatialities of caring, bringing the social spaces of care, and particularly of care work, under renewed scrutiny. In large part, feminist geographers have been concerned with 'care ethics' (Popke, 2006, p. 506), wherein caring is not so much an activity as a way of relating to others (Held, 2006; Smith, 2005; Staeheli & Brown, 2003). This work also challenges the notion of care, emotion and

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welfare being restricted to the space of the private. McKie *et al.* (2002), for example, explore the blurring of the boundary between formal and informal care, illustrating the ways in which informal caring feelings and activities reflect the experiences of people in families and relationships, employment, organisations and institutions, and are subject to a range of policies both directly and indirectly related to acts of care. The reduction of care to the private realm reserved for women, as something below politics, has been challenged by feminist geographers inspired particularly by the work of feminist political theorists who posit care as the key to social accountability and responsible citizenship (see, for example, Tronto, 1993).

In advanced economies the question of who cares (specifically for children, the elderly and other dependents) has a burgeoning resonance given the return of women to the workplace, changing patterns of family formation and geographical location, and an ageing population (Parry *et al.*, 2005). The shortage of people to undertake care work becomes critical and highlights an increasingly complex array of care options: paid and unpaid, public and private, formal and informal, regulated and unregulated. Where the state is reluctant to provide for care, the burden often devolves to families, the more affluent of whom may respond by 'buying in' care. These changes not only impact on individuals or households, but also have global consequences, as the world's poor fill in the care deficit (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003). Thus, these new geographies of care also have implications for understandings of work, as care practices cross boundaries between different domains of what is constructed as 'labour' (cf. Castree *et al.*, 2004). Unpaid private care work is increasingly commodified and borne by transnational female migrants (see, for example, Cravey, 2005), whilst care previously supplied by the state is increasingly shifted to the family. Kim England's paper exemplifies these trends and the issues that emerge from them through a case study of the (re)placement of caring into the home in Canada. She explores debates about the care crisis and the profound effects this is having on the relationship between states, markets and households, the parameters of citizenship, and the responsibilities of both the collective and the individual. Her paper examines proposed 'solutions' to this crisis, and reflects on how the spaces of responsibilities and care are shaped by the ways in which relational geographies of actually existing neoliberalisms are played out on the ground. Similarly, in her paper Rosie Cox picks up on this theme of the practices of care, but from the angle of both care work and instances of 'care' in food networks, to explore both their practical and theoretical problems and possibilities. Indeed, if we expand on what it is we mean by 'labour' in the geographies of care/caring, then both the care 'work' of shopping and animal husbandry, as explored by Mara Miele and Adrian Evans here, and the 'hands on dirt' approach of permaculturalists that Maria de la Bellacasa discusses in her paper take on even more salience as ethical/moral practice. Thus, across the set of papers gathered in this themed section, care work and the work of caring constructs the 'care worker' through sets of different practices, engagements and spaces.

### **Relational Geographies of Care and Responsibility**

While feminist geographers have highlighted the political-economy of care in the context of neoliberalism, theoretical and conceptual debates about the ethics of care and responsibility and their complex spatialities have emerged within

geography's so-called 'moral turn'. In particular, questions about caring at a distance have revolved around the possibilities of extending an ethos of concern for those most proximate to those spatially removed (Corbridge, 1993, 1994, 1998; Silk, 1998; Smith, 1998, 2000, 2002; see also Lee & Smith, 2004). Geographies and ethics of connectivity and collective responsibility have been explored in most detail in research on ethical consumption, wherein increased knowledge of the plight of distant workers has effected a turn towards ethically-sourced or fairly-traded products. As Barnett *et al.* (2005, pp. 24–25; Barnett 2005; see also Barnett & Land, 2007) point out, however, models of moral agency in consumption that foreground the relationship between geography, knowledge and responsibility have tended to be problematic. This is because they focus on the responsibilities of individuals rather than how individuals can become collective actors, and they underplay a range of other considerations (in addition to knowledge of distant others) that play a role in shaping people's dispositions towards others. Thus debates about ethics in geography have been accused of turning attention away from the political since they focus on individual rather than collective action. As Braidotti (2006, p. 119) argues, theories that rely on a liberal vision of the subject as moral agent cannot answer the questions of why people *should* care, how we get others *to* care, and what do we do with people who simply *do not* care. Nor do they acknowledge issues of power that emerge in asking these questions.

In contrast, Barnett *et al.* (2005, p. 43) propose a model of responsibility in which individual ethical decisions are connected to broader mobilisations, and in which 'individualised ethical responsibility is transformed into a practice of collective, political responsibility' (cf. Cook *et al.*, 2007; Goodman, 2008). This has resonances with the recent focus by feminist geographers on notions of 'care-scapes' and care ethics. McKie *et al.* (2002), for example, use the conceptual framework of caringscapes to explore the ways in which informal interdependencies across the lifecourse, at different spatial scales, can be enacted through a variety of forms of communication, including expressive embodiment. Geographers have also begun to explore spaces in which a feminist ethic of care connects morality, responsibility and social justice (see the special edition of *Environment and Planning A* 35, 2003), and in which social relations produced through emotion and emotional connections are also understood as sites of power (Lawson, 2007).

Models of collective responsibility are also based on relational understandings of space and place. The ways in which geographies of responsibility meld with the ethics of care through these relational understandings is perhaps most clearly articulated by Doreen Massey (2004). Massey outlines a politics of connectivity, based on the mutual constitution of distant places, through which we may feel a sense of responsibility for places to which we are not directly connected. Again, responsibility is not at an individual level, but at the collective level. For example, as Young (2003) argues, we are not individually responsible for poor working wages and conditions in the sweatshops serving global markets, but as participants in the global economy and consumers of the products made under these conditions, we bear collective political responsibility. Scale is clearly significant since moral and ethical issues operate differently, and sometimes in contradiction, at different spatial scales; Whatmore (1997) hints at this with her discussions of a 'relational ethic'. For example, the moral imperative to provide for one's family may work against

a wider ethic of care invoked by global inequities that would involve subsuming the interests of one's household to those of distant strangers (Miller, 2001). In response, Massey develops a relational understanding of ethics and responsibility that is able to bridge these different scales, arguing that the global should be approached through the local so that a sense of connectivity and responsibility across distance can be fostered. Drawing on these insights, Jackson *et al.* (2009, p. 20; emphasis in original) argue that, 'Thinking relationally about the *connections between scales* might offer an alternative to conventional thinking about the politics of space and place'. It also appeals directly to thinking about care as an activity, and as a kind of universal, arising out of a sense of responsibility toward others, in which responsibility is 'located not in the abstract universals of justice, but rather in the recognition of our intersubjective being' (Popke, 2006, p. 507).

This notion of intersubjectivity also points towards a further dilemma for ethics of care, which is highlighted by Miele and Evans and Puig de la Bellacasa in this issue, specifically that of how to develop an ethic of care towards non-human others (see also Lorimer, 2007). Again, we can think of this both in terms of care in the abstract and care as performed through consumer choices and behaviour. The complexities of caring are clearly apparent when considering the ethical choices that inform the buying and consuming of food. There are issues around caring for one's own health, or caring for others (for example, children or dependents). Sometimes these would complement caring for animal welfare, but not always. Caring for a family on a limited budget might mean exercising choices that do not include consideration of animal welfare; caring for one's health might mean consuming meat in the case of poor health arising from deficiencies. There are possibilities, however, as Miele and Evans demonstrate, for using relational approaches and notions of intersubjectivities between human and non-humans in order to develop a broader ethic of care around animal welfare. In a similar vein, Puig de la Bellacasa brings the ethics of the permaculture movement—which aim to create sustainable human habitats by following 'natural' patterns—into dialogue with other discussions regarding bios and naturecultures, or the interdependence of all forms of life. She argues for an approach to the ethical as an everyday *doing* that connects the personal to the collective, decentres the human, and does not ground ethical obligation in moral norms, but in concrete relationalities in the making. These papers thus begin to move beyond the liberal definition of the individual and to account for the construction of desiring subjects of an alternative, more 'caring' kind:

Interconnectedness and the argument that 'we' are all in *this* together, are best served by a nomadic, non-unitary vision of the subject which has dissolved the boundaries of the bourgeois individualism and redefined itself as a collective, multi-layered yet singular entity. (Braidotti, 2006, p. 119)

Viewed from this perspective, as Puig de la Bellacasa suggests, the ethics of sustainability are compatible with the ethics of care. This is also richly suggestive of a neo-materialist discursive ethics, rather than a neo-universalist model, based on non-unitary subjectivity and on multiple forms of accountability. More specifically,

Kneafsey *et al.* (2008) found these kinds of ethics, subjectivities and accountabilities broadly circulating in and constitutive of the five alternative food networks they explored for their *Reconnecting Consumers, Producers and Food: Exploring Alternatives* volume. For them, the consumers in these networks were found to be:

... knowledgeable, thoughtful and caring on many levels. They are far from the model of the alienated, economic rationaliser searching out cheap, convenient food and knowing little of the implications. Rather they are rational on their own terms, participating in practices that have an emotional, or moral, logic as well as an economic one. 'Reconnection' with the production of their food has had wide ranging implications for most of these consumers. Involvement in these schemes went beyond relationships with individuals and, for some participants, encompassed much broader notions of community, education and support for a way of life they believed in. Participation in the 'alternative' food sector allowed for and encouraged practices that embraced caring at many levels.

And, as they conclude about the wider implications and, indeed, politics of this ethics of care in reconnection,

[p]articipation in 'alternative' food schemes might not save the world, at least not in the short term, but it might help to build the knowledge, and positive relationships that create the capacity for change... [and support] all those who want to build more equitable, more sustainable, and more closely connected relationships between consumers and the producers of their food.

### **Problematising Care as Care Work and Ethical Consumption**

As we have argued here, much of the debate within geography about the ethics of care and responsibility has focused on either care work or on ethical consumption. Thus feminist geographical approaches have tended to focus on care work in the context of neoliberalism. Kim England's paper in this issue builds on these debates through an analysis of the relationship between care and responsibility and the move within neoliberalism from state-provided care to familial and individual responsibility, hidden beneath the moniker of 'care-giving'. Others have sought to marry ethical concerns with collective politics through exploring patterns of 'alternative' consumption. For example, and drawing on similar concerns, Barnett *et al.* (2005; see also Harrison *et al.*, 2005; Littler, 2009) use ethical consumption in order to demonstrate that individual shopping choices are also connected to broader political movements aimed at bringing about social change. However, there are several complications and, indeed, contradictions within both approaches, some of which are addressed specifically in the set of papers here, but which are also addressed in the wider literature (e.g. Cox, 2006; Goodman, 2010).

While caring has been recast in significant ways as an economic relationship, it is thus also a political relationship since care work is both shaped by policy shifts (as Kim England demonstrates) and bound up with relationships of power.

At a global scale it reveals inequities within global political economies as well as between individuals. As an engagement between individuals, it is very often a relationship of power in which both carer and cared-for can exercise power over the other. As Rosie Cox illustrates in this issue through the example of domestic carers, this relationship is not always benign. As she puts it in her paper, while '[c]aring for others can be a source of pleasure and fulfilment, and if often very precious, it is also undervalued, denied, a source of degradation and exploitation'; it is fundamentally a practice located within global scale hierarchies of gender, class and ethnicity. Care can thus very much be a problematic 'performance' for those who need it, who give it and for those who arrange care for others.

Global inequities in relationships of power also mean that there are still 'ethical' risks associated with political movements based in ethical consumption and caring at a distance. Ethical and fair trade rely on discourses of 'self' and 'other'—the 'haves' (Northern consumers) and the 'have nots' (Southern producers). On the one hand, critics claim that by buying ethical products affluent Northern consumers are able to 'immerse themselves in a foreign world of fantasy, where workers are content and the earth is clean' (Dolan, 2005, p. 369; see also Freidberg, 2003). On the other hand, the South is imagined as steeped in backwardness, corruption and economic chaos, and in dire need of salvation by Northern benevolence. The 'Third World' worker is reconstituted as an object of Northern consumers' duty and obligation. Thus, desire for ethical action in the North is not always triggered by a sense of commonality, affinity or solidarity but by images of downtrodden—and now terribly 'sexed up' (e.g. Varul, 2008)—Southern workers that reinforce a sense of cultural difference (Lyon, 2006). Progressive initiatives that can make a tangible difference in the South still fortify centuries-old self/other distinctions by reminding consumers in the North of their post-colonial and angst-ridden ethical obligations to the poverty-riddled South. They are also shaped by Northern definitions of what is 'fair' and 'ethical' while often excluding 'local' understandings of social organisation and ethics (McEwan, 2009). There is thus still potential for further unpacking by geographers of the wider ethics of 'ethical' and 'fair' consumption patterns and the political economies of who is included and who is left out on both the production and consumption ends of ethical consumption networks (Goodman, 2010).

Of course, the idea that consumption is an appropriate medium through which to express political practices and, now, 'citizenship' (e.g. Barnett *et al.*, 2010; Clarke, 2008; Johnston, 2008) is open to question. In particular, it is rarely recognised that acting civilly through (ethical) consumption is a particularly 'private' form of citizenship that one has to pay for the right to experience and that the connections of citizen-consumer are not all that new—albeit in specifically 'imperial' forms (e.g. Domash, 2006; Trentmann, 2007). Thus, the scope of political activism can be very much limited to those who have the resources, knowledge and status to exercise their consumption choice (Dolan, 2005, p. 383; Guthman, 2003); indeed, for some, an 'ethical' choice may be how best to feed a family on a limited budget (Howard & Willmott, 2001, p. 3). Thus, the ability to pursue an ethical agenda is conditioned by a range of social factors (race, ethnicity, class, gender, and so on); in the care work of ethical consumption, geographical and political economic context still very much matter, with, as several critics argue, 'market triumphalism' at the heart of many of the ethical values expressed in contemporary consumption-scapes

(Appadurai, 1997; Goodman, 2004; Littler, 2009). Furthermore, there are some very important questions about whether global inequalities and moral injustices *can even be* rectified through the market (Blowfield, 1999), or whether this simply works towards a 'kinder, gentler' (Dolan, 2005, p. 383) 'counter-hegemonic' (Evans, 2000) globalisation. As Popke's recent review (2006; see also Popke, 2003, 2009) highlights, the 'moral geographies of caringscapes' and those of caring-at-a-distance in the 'consumption-scape' are clearly just as socially-constructed and -constituted as they are (often) economically inscribed.

Furthermore, it is important not to construct consumption-scapes as the new and singular places and spaces of ethics, responsibility and care. In particular, privileging consumption and the continuing 'label-ization' of its politics as *the* key ethical arena can lead to a neglect of other important modes of ethical action, such as political protest (e.g. Guthman, 2007). As Miele and Evans argue in this issue, the consumption of food gives rise to a host of different ethical questions, as well as spaces of ethical action. In the case of foods of animal origin, aesthetic and ethical considerations are often tacitly interwoven, yet their relationship is seldom questioned. The disassociation of food from animal bodies raises ethical issues since this divorces consumption practices from animal welfare. Thus, Miele and Evans demonstrate the need for greater engagement with the complexities and contradictions of locating the ethics of animal foods within the everyday logics and the morality of mundane practices of shopping, preparing a meal and eating.

Rosie Cox's paper also points to the fact that care works differently with respect to food versus labour/caring work. It might be argued, for example, that care in food is easier to 'see' and 'appreciate' given that it is transmitted not only through the relations of care set up by the alternative food networks ('seeing' the cow, farmer, and landscape that the food is coming from), but it is tied to something very material and embodied in this food, which then is incorporated (in multiple senses) into one's consuming body. Thus the materialities of care in action, as very often embedded in 'alternative' foods (e.g. Kneafsey *et al.*, 2008), are easy to see and thus easier to appreciate. In contrast, caring labour is often harder to 'see' and is perhaps more intangible; it is less material and more difficult (for some) to appreciate, and thus easier to denigrate, ignore and undervalue. It is perhaps easier to appreciate the care going into food on grounds of taste, healthiness, quality, animal welfare and so on, as opposed to the more invisible care relations of someone hired to take care of children.

At their most broad, the papers in this special issue highlight the fact that care is fundamentally geographical in its production, development, reception and, now, consumption. It is about 'feeling' as much as 'doing', it is about 'doing to' as much as 'feelings from' and the authors here point to how entangled and complicated these issues and instances of the multiple practices and expressions of care can be. Care connects diverse communities, such as feminists, environmentalists, pacifists, anti-racists, and it is best understood as a search for an *ethos*, rather than a universal ethics. As Braidotti (2006) argues, care is bound up with a postmodern humanism that emphasises the interdependence of self and others (including non-human others), acknowledges contingency and values responsibility. Understanding care and its relationalities is about exploring its complex connections to responsibility, ethics and feelings, its political and cultural economies and materialities, and the

ways in which it is lived as lacking for many and/or abundant for others. And, in an increasingly unsettled and continually unequal world, it is the politics of care that matter, and matter in crucial and critical ways for many. By building on these complexities of care and, specifically, its politicised spatialities, the papers in this themed section work to push us to think about the ways of considering, building and enacting more *carefull* spaces, places and worlds.

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