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Globally useful conceptions of Alternative Food Networks in the developing south: the case of Johannesburg's urban food supply system

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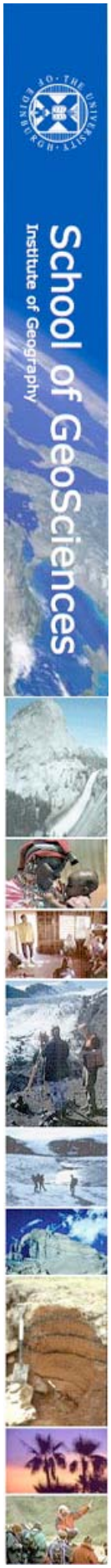

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Introduction

Literature on alternative food networks (AFN) has hitherto included multifaceted foci such as short food supply chains (Ilbery and Maye 2005; Renting *et al* 2003), local food supply systems (Winter 2003; Hinrichs 2000), and local supply chain sourcing (Ilbery and Maye 2006). Other literature has focused on the quality turn in food supply (Weatherell *et al* 2003; Goodman and DuPuis, 2002) culturally embedded food systems (Hinrichs 2000), direct farm retail (Renting *et al* 2003; Weatherell *et al* 2003; Brown 2001), community supported agriculture (Allen *et al* 2003); 'good food box' schemes (Sage 2003), specialty (Ilbery and Maye 2005; Ilbery and Kneafsy 1999) and hybrid food networks that include both alternative and conventional elements (Ilbery and Maye 2006; Ilbery and Maye 2005).

AFN have been presented either as a new evolution of agro-food systems emerging as a response to crisis-ridden conventional agribusiness, as a "popular mobilisation against US cultural and corporate food imperialism" (Whatmore *et al* 2003: 389), or a transitionary move toward some kind of alternative or post-productivist era (Ilbery and Bower 1998). AFN have been characterised by a different phase of trade relations, sourcing practices or era of production and consumption as compared to globalised agrifood processes (Goodman and DuPuis 2002) exhibiting defining characteristics that

are succinctly reflected in Ilbery and Maye (2005). These characteristics include food that is “fresh”, “diverse”, “organic”, “slow” and/or “quality” (Ilbery and Maye 2005: 824), and networks or supply systems that are “small-scale”, “short”, “traditional” “local”, environmentally “sustainable” and “embedded” (*Ibid.*). The common factor is that all these characteristics are oppositional to characteristics of conventional food supply systems that are “processed”, “mass (large-scale) production”, “long food supply chains”, formal retailing – “hypermarkets” and “disembedded” (*Ibid.)*.

Existing literature acknowledges that the emerging research on AFN has widely centred on northern, predominantly European and North American, contexts (Hughes 2005; Ilbery and Maye 2005; Watts *et al* 2005; Goodman 2004; Whatmore *et al* 2003). It is thus not surprising (and arguably necessary) that AFN evident in the north are markedly different from AFN in a developing world context. At a broader conceptual level there is the emergence of alternative discourses (Ilbery and Holloway 1997) which is both driven by and fundamentally linked to spatial policy developments (Watts *et al* 2005), including agricultural policy. The emergence of AFN in the European experience is situated within ideas about food safety, and within rigorous quality and safety regulations developed as a result of policy and institutional change within a transitional European economy (Ilbery and Holloway 1997; Evans *et al* 2002; Goodman and DuPuis 2002; Goodman 2004). The European-wide paradigm shift in quality consumption (Goodman and DuPuis 2002) has been facilitated by alternative transitions within the 1999 CAP reforms (Goodman 2004). Naturally, agricultural transformation linked to these, as in the post-1992 reforms – like any policy response – “[is] necessarily embedded in recent historical, political, economic

and cultural contexts which, while enabling or encouraging certain types of (in)activity, proscribe or constrain others" (Ilbery and Holloway 1997: 185). In the case of AFN this means that policy reforms, driven by institutional structures (albeit signalled by 'on the ground' experience) create and enable the conditions necessary for AFN to emerge and exist (Campbell and Coombes 1999). It follows that respective national, regional or institutional priorities will determine the nature of food networks, amongst other things, and that a particular articulation of AFN will emerge from its contextual space, be it institutional, regional, political or cultural.

The emergence of AFN in North America is directly attributed to oppositional social movements within activist circles (Goodman 2004). The emergence of AFN, and its concomitant literature gained impetus primarily from "[its] oppositional status and [the] socio-political transformative potential of alternative agro food networks" (Goodman 2004: 4). The North American move to embrace and encourage AFN is as a result of a strong commitment to social justice movements (Allen *et al* 2003) and increasing antagonism toward the hegemony of the productivist complex (Grey 2000a; Grey 2000b). AFN is conceptualised as a quasi-revolutionary movement which "returns insistently on the central question of [the] capacity [of AFN] to wrest control from corporate agribusiness and create a domestic, sustainable and egalitarian food system" (Goodman 2004: 4).

Furthermore, for those adhering to it, a North America articulation of AFN or 'alternative agrifood initiatives' represents a lifestyle statement that for instance reflects an avant-

garde, socially reflexive transition 'for the young, yuppie type who do it because it's fashionable and the right[1] thing to do'. Allen *et al* accurately question whether AFI are "significantly *oppositional* or primarily *alternative*" (original emphasis), and whether there is a potentially transformative process of consumption choice suggested by the rising popularity of alternative food initiatives (2003: 61/2). The premium paid for local, organic, environmentally sustainable and ethically sourced food is set up as the price to pay for having a social conscience and opposing a global regime that is wrought with opacity, and which contributes to exploitation and environmental degradation. These initiatives can arguably be perceived as being embedded within either a socially reflexive frame of reference or an elitist one. Irrespective, it is clear that particular articulations of AFN emerge from differing contexts, even though the observable characteristics may be similar.

European and North American 'contextualisations' of AFN have emerged predominantly from policy agendas concerning food quality and an effort to *re*-value rural (and economically declining) space, and also from an activist impetus linking economic justice and food safety. I argue in this paper that even though AFN in the south are oppositional to conventional food supply systems[2], they are fundamentally different from AFN in the north. AFN in the south is defined in this paper as the entire food supply system that, in part or fully, contests or opposes the dominance of conventional food networks within urban areas of the developing south. I show that AFN in the south have emerged as a

[1] (Read left/oppositional)
[2] A conventional food network is defined in this paper as the food supply system that is linked to large-scale, productivist agriculture and supermarket retail, and the highly industrialised supply chain associated with industrialised, large-scale production and consumption.

response to the inability of communities to access conventional food supply systems, and should not be understood primarily as a marker of remnant informal food systems. These AFN represent a grassroots endeavour for culturally diverse communities to consume culturally-specific food, and for poorer communities to make use of accessible food networks within the emergent context of supermarket dominance. While I argue that AFN should be understood contextually, the larger point is that 'contextually based' AFN in the south have globally useful significance to an emergent alternative agrofood theory which has the potential to become universalised beyond the south.

A conception of AFN in the south offers a timely contribution to the emergent theoretical construction on emergent AFN literature by arguing that issues that are perceived to have greater significance in a developing world context are in fact integral to the formation of an inclusive worldwide knowledge base of AFN. The significance of extending the theory on *Alternative Food Geographies* also suggests a correlation with critical research. Emergent literatures are too often implicated in exclusionary academic practises (Hughes 2005; Berg 2004; Yeung and Lin 2003), which exclude knowledge that emerges from non-UK or US contexts (Paasi 2005) and, more particularly, from the developing south. Theory – which often becomes universalised within academic space (Yeung and Lin 2003) in general – needs to include empirical evidence from arena other than the dominant European and North American contexts (Berg 2004). It also needs to "incorporate a 'theorizing back' from South to North" (Hughes 2005: 502), to be found estimable. Researchers both within and outside the south have recognised boundaries to the advancement of theory concerning issues affecting a 'southern'/developing world

category such as poverty or cultural diversity (Berg 2004; Milbourne 2004; Braun 2003; Minco 2003; Vaiou 2003; Yeung and Lin 2003).

To bring this argument back to the emergent theory on *Alternative Food Geographies*, the discursive space suggests that there may be "a dearth of space and time among the 'disenfranchised' for democratic participation and imagining alternatives" (Samers 2005: 882), which in this context plays out as the exclusion of globally useful south-based agrifood debates in agrifood research. The focus of south-based agrifood debates is not the celebration of (alternative) consumption (Goss 2004), but rather issues of food poverty and insecurity, and the potential of agricultural development for alleviation (Coen Flynn 2005; Allen 2004; Allen *et al* 2003; Wrigley 2002). Since they are perceived as having more to do with survival rather than consumption, these arguments have hitherto been ignored by those contributing to the emergent AFN literature.

Even though Goodman and DuPuis propose a research agenda of alternative geographies of food "beyond the production-consumption debate" (Goodman and DuPuis 2002: 5), these debates have failed to transcend the celebration of alternative consumption evident in much of the northern literature (Goss 2004). It is for this reason that within the literature on alternative geographies of food issues that are typically classified as 'developing world issues' (such as poverty, food security and cultural diversity) do not occupy dominant space within the nascent northern consumption-framed AFN literature. This paper thus argues that, beyond the consumption debate, emergent themes in a study on AFN in the south have relevance to agrofood studies in an era of urban poverty and

cultural diversity in the south *and* the north. Alternative food networks articulated in the south do not simply offer a developing world *perspective* on AFN, but should challenge a hitherto northern and exclusionary conception of AFN and propose a globally usefully conception of alternative geographies of food.

Methodology

This study is based on research undertaken between March 2004 and September 2005. The broader focus of the research is part of an ongoing investigation around urban food supply systems in the developing south. The study consisted of ethnographies of a small sample of farms, and over forty semi-structured, in-depth interviews with agricultural practitioners, vendors and a number of random consumers in the Johannesburg area, in the Gauteng Province, South Africa (Figure 1). The Lenasia area of study, in the south west of Johannesburg, is a formally racialised Indian township community which now is more diverse, and is also home to a growing informal settlement population. A number of interviews with farmers in the in the south of Johannesburg, and more affluent northern areas of Johannesburg were also undertaken, as well as interviews with relevant stakeholders in the Department of Social Development, and the agricultural community. During a brief visit to France, Germany and England, a number of ethnographic observations and short interviews were undertaken at farmers' markets and allotment gardens.

Figure 1

Figure 1: The Johannesburg Region in the Gauteng Province

This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section describes and contextualises AFN in the south, the second reflects on the emergent themes AFN in south highlight, and the third argues that a 'south' conception of AFN has implications for northern AFN theory. The conclusion reflects on the point that a potentially universalised AFN theory needs to go beyond geographically and socially exclusive arguments by presenting a case in 'defence' of why AFN in the south should be considered alternative at all.

An empirical and contextual description of AFN in the South

Johannesburg's alternative food supply system appears to be marked by stark contrasts with Lenasia's peri-urban farms juxtaposing large supermarket complexes. Young families walk alongside the busy freeway and carry their fresh food purchases – anything from leafy vegetables to squawking chickens – to where they live (Figures 2 and 3). While there is a supermarket complex, within close driving distance to where people live, that sells fresh vegetables and pre-packed chickens at a fraction of the price of live chickens, the formal retail supply system is generally inaccessible for those without private transport. Scores of fruit and vegetable vendors in Lenasia's main trading area make fresh produce more accessible to the majority of the community. This produce is either sourced from surrounding farms or from the Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market. Other foodstuff is sold directly by farmers at car boot sales, in makeshift market stalls, or from head-balanced buckets (Figure 4). Women sit in front of large metal drums, *braai* (barbeque) chicken feet, heads and giblets (Figure 5), and sell them as snacks in the main shopping area. A person can nearby buy half a boiled sheep's head (still in the skull) to eat with a spoon during a break from shopping.

Figure 2: Traditional African Vegetable

Figure 3: The road-side sale of live farm chickens

Figure 4 (left below) : Traditional nuts sourced directly from a farm.

Figure 5: Cultural chicken snacks

Other food distribution systems, which are local and against the logic of conventional retail, include the sale of *maas* (cultured sour milk) from local small producers and un-sliced quarter loaves of bread that are sold to schoolchildren during breaks. Alternative food supply systems for poor people are particularly noteworthy; surrounding farms sell poultry and beef off-cuts to residents in the township who re-sell them, while others times give away the offal, head, skin and feet of their slaughtered livestock to the poorer residents at no cost. Informalised alternative food supply systems that cater to poorer members of the community are preferred by poorer people even though the food may not always be cheaper or safer. Face-to-face interaction of producers and consumers are typical, and relationships of trust are increasingly the *modus operandi* of small peri-urban producers to gain access to speciality markets, even in formal retailing structures. The farms that facilitate direct sale are legitimate landholdings and the enterprise conducted is regulated[3]. The following four sections explain the food provisioning system in the south: direct farm retail, local-cultural food provisioning networks, cultural and religious food networks and food supply chains for the urban poor.

Direct farm retail

More than twenty-five of the farms that fringe the peri-urban region have begun over the past decade to engage in direct sale to the local community, both in formal residential areas and in informal settlements. Neither the cultural food supply system nor food

[3] This is in reference to the notion that African food supply systems should be classified as part of the informal economy. The classification of the economic systems as informal is based on whether or not they are economically regulated (Rogerson and Preston-Whyte 1991).

networks catering for the urban poor have *intentionally* developed as a community food-security specific or culturally-specific food networks although they can now be perceived as one. The community market relationships rely heavily on local knowledge of religious regulation, or ceremonial expertise. As one producer/retailer put it: "when I sell to the Indians I leave the giblets in a little packet with the Cornish [rock chicken] and I keep the feet separately" (Interview, 05/2005). Again, these networks are not part of the informal economy although the end sale does sometimes not occur at a formal store. The owner of one of the largest formal farm enterprises, which has four home-outlet stores said: "just because we don't sell to Spar [a local supermarket] doesn't mean we're a fly-by-night joint" (Interview, 03/2004). A larger percentage of local food supply systems are hybrid and make cultural food more accessible to urban communities.

Local-Cultural Food Provisioning Networks

In areas of Johannesburg, cultural modes of production and regulation, which intercept formal more conventional retail networks, are familiar and are increasingly becoming the norm. One farmer/retailer explains "the customers want to know that I am Halaal[4] certified. The other HACCP[5] one is already met" (Interview, 04/2005). Another informant added: "it's safe, it's cheap and people can get what they want. Checkers [a discount supermarket] is cheap but it's not Halaal" so "people trust my food" (Interview, 04/2005).

[4] Halaal is a religious certification ensuring that food products do not come into contact with any forbidden substance under strict religious sanction (The Muslim Food Board).
[5] Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (a standardised international food regulatory certification framework)

The success of the cultural food network, in particular from the production side, lies in the community relationships it makes use of. Some farmers cite the fact that they can speak the language of the consumer is an added bonus, which helps to build cultural trust. Home deliveries, drive-through vendors, telephone orders, and outlet stalls outside mosques, radio stations, and banks, all function as a unique community 'service'. While hardly any of the small farms have formal marketing, the advertisements of one large poultry farm in community newspapers under the slogan "we only sell what we slaughter" (Interview, 09/2005) highlight the importance of consumer trust that is linked to religious Halaal certification.

Many of the farmers in this area do not have the capacity to enter the formal market, but there is a considerable percentage of farmers who are relatively well-off, and whose businesses are thriving and growing, despite the lack of government support. These farms thus present a fundamentally different conception of typical smallholder agriculture in the south that engages in subsistence agriculture or informal trade. These farms potentially have access to formal retail supply chains because of the quantity and quality of their output, but choose not to engage in formal chains. As one farmer explains: "I can sell to Spar, but I have enough people who buy from me and I don't even advertise. Someone tells someone else and that's how the word gets around" (Interview, 04/2004). The dominant motivation for direct farm retail is the customers' perception that farmers provide a service to members of the community who would otherwise have no other channel to purchase some of the cultural foodstuff and ceremonial livestock they offer. One consumer said "it's so convenient, and even if it wasn't, you can't get stuff like this in the shops. It stays fresher for longer and we know it's good and healthy. Plus it's

cheaper. I wish I could buy all my fruit and vegetable here" (Interview, 08/2005). Traditional food networks are not only strongly visible and accessible because of consumer food choice; another driving factor is religious sanctioned foodstuff under the Islamic Halaal regulation.

Cultural and Religious Food Networks

Cultural or religious food networks that are specifically located in Indian and Black townships facilitate cultural hubs in the racially diverse south of Johannesburg. These cultural zones have emerged 'from below', and are not always voluntary. They have developed as an alternative method of cultural survival, and they have formed on the basis of local knowledge (cf. Sage's 2003 defensive localism). Culturally driven AFN in the south suggests a 'necessary' and niche opportunity, which caters to enclaves of cultural groupings. As one dairy farmer put it: "we sell the real thing [cultured sour-milk]…we can say 'this is stuff you grew up with'" (Interview, 07/2004).

Since cultural supply systems continue to exist in a post-apartheid era, it is clear that cultural patterns of consumption are persistent, and go beyond local AFN debates. Ex/non-residents of Black and Indian townships commute to these 'speciality' localities for culturally-specific food items. Indian vegetables, Halaal poultry and products, and livestock, used in traditional African and/or Islamic ceremonies and festivals, are increasing produced by peri-urban farms in the area. With the alternative of travelling up to 600-1000 kilometres for cultural-religious food, the peri-urban fringe of many black townships is fast becoming the core of alternative food provisioning.

The religious Halaal regulation governing the production of chicken and poultry products is a fascinating element of cultural food networks that intercepts 'conventional' regulatory frameworks. Communities in the developing world, which are increasingly under the jurisdiction of Islamic food regulation, do not purchase Halaal products predominantly because they want healthier lifestyles, although one farm-retailer does suggest that the Halaal certification is so stringent that it meets all of the international quality controls anyway. The 'choice' of exclusively buying Halaal is a religious imperative. The process of production is heavily regulated by 'The Muslim Food Board' and governs the growth, storage and processing of all meat products. In Lenasia and its surrounding areas, the largest market for these products is the Indian Islamic community. The cultural enclave of Johannesburg now functions as the only place where some cultural/religious food networks are available. As an aside, since most food enterprises – retail, wholesale and restaurants – are owned and managed by members of the Islamic population in Lenasia and other majority-Muslim communities, the Halaal marker can now be seen as an alternative regulatory standard within African cities. While Halaal provisioning practices have been in place for as long as the Islamic religion has existed, that it is now facilitated by formal regulatory frameworks is a recent occurrence much like the French AOC regulation. The final type of food provisioning network in the south facilitates accessible food supply for the urban poor.

AFN for the Urban Poor

AFN for the urban poor is a highly significant aspect of food supply in the south, even though cultural food supply systems are dominant. While supermarkets provide cheaper and more accessible food, the urban poor (mainly from informal settlements and low-income areas) do not have refrigeration facilities to store fresh food and meat products nor do they own private vehicles with which to transport large quantities of foodstuff. While the urban poor have to access some non-food items in supermarkets, most food products are procured from surrounding farms that are within walking distance and where they can purchase an unplucked live chicken that is unavailable in any formal retail outlet. While this chicken may be close to double the price of a pre-packed frozen supermarket chicken, every part of the chicken is consumed by these populations. These chickens are mainly purchased by women from informal settlements, in and around the farm area, who will carry one back home by foot, then pluck, singe the hairs and cook every part of the animal, including the head, feet and beak with the exception of rectal bags.

Poultry AFN are different to free-range/quality/organic AFN as portrayed in a European context. Firstly, the kind of product that communities purchase from urban and peri-urban farms are not available in a conventional food supply system and, secondly, although consumers pay more for more supposedly more accessible food they sometimes get an inferior quality product. Pre-packed chicken in a supermarket is cleaner and at times almost half the price of a live chicken, but cultural modes of consumption and accessibility, in this sense, takes precedence over conventional food networks that according to an agro-industrial logic offers safer, cheaper food. The poultry network only

briefly illustrates the point that within a multifaceted developing world context, alternative modes of food provisioning play an important role for both poorer and culturally diverse communities who may not have access to formal retail outlets, or who require speciality foodstuff that are not available in large supermarkets.

No local government, farmer unions, or formal marketing bodies support these enterprises through such initiatives as farmers' markets. A farm may hold an open day where there are pony rides for kids and *braai*s for the family, using foodstuff from the farm. With these exceptions, however, the success of the network depends solely on enterprise innovation and the demand for cultural food. This, together with cultural customer familiarity and communal ties, promotes a 'by us, for us' ethos. One farmer succinctly sums it up: "it's our own product for our people" (Interview, 07/2004).

Food supply systems in the south cater for culturally diverse urban communities whose food requirements are not available in supermarkets. Alternative food networks (AFN) in this context *is* enterprise/business-driven, but are also increasingly based on cultural preservation articulated though market relations of trust forged through personal marketing strategies, the ability to speak the language of the consumer, the possibility of making other products according to customer demand, and the initiative on the part of farmers to set up car-boot farm stores or makeshift stalls outside primary schools where parents frequent. As discussed, the most notable AFN is the culturally-specific Halaal and traditional food networks for urban residents.

The point of this largely descriptive section is that the kind of food supply systems represented in a city of the south cannot be classified as either informal or traditionally remnant. These alternative supply chains occur in a context of increased access to conventionally available (supermarket) food, and yet, through direct farm sale, are geared to meet the consumption needs of the urban poor and culturally diverse that are not met by conventional food supply systems. Much like culturally-specific and 'traditionally remnant' food consumption practises in the north, which are now facilitated by AFN, alternative and hybrid food supply systems in the south have become dominant in the food provisioning choices of south-based consumers.

Unlike food supply systems represented in the literature around AFN, however, in the alternative food supply systems in the developing world context there is no romanticised return to the local, and no quest of the idyllic countryside lifestyle. Although there are consumers who are concerned with greenness, fresh-from-the-earth produce, highly regulated quality measures, and who do want to make a socio-political statement by what and where they obtain food, for poorer consumers these are not always the primary motivations. Thus, while these food networks may be perceived as informal or remnant, they represent an alternative consumption space for the urban poor and culturally diverse communities in the south.

The next section presents a brief review of the literature regarding the increasing dominance of supermarket retail in the south as the conventional food supply context to which food supply systems in the south present a valid alternative. Even though consumers' access to cheaper retailed (supermarket) food is increasingly greater given

the proximity and proliferation of supermarkets, the real access poorer people in urban areas could enjoy is counteracted by rising inflation and stagnant (if not decreasing) real incomes, higher public transportation costs and lack of refrigeration counteract. In *this* context AFN in the south have emerged both as a result of the unavailability of certain cultural food stuff in supermarkets and as an alternative means of food provisioning for poorer people.

AFN in the context of increasing formal retail

Food supply systems in the south may in the past have been characterised entirely by informal networks or subsistence, but from the above description it may appear that these food supply systems are survivalist or are merely contemporary reflections of traditional food consumption. More recent research, however, helps to build the argument that these direct, cultural and accessible food supply systems occur in a context of increased accessibility of formally retailed foodstuff in developing world cities. Over the past four decades formal retail networks, and supermarkets in particular, have become more dominant in food provisioning. Research on Southern Africa (Weatherspoon and Reardon 2003), Latin America; Brazil (Farina 2002), Chile (Faiguenbaum *et al* 2002) and Argentina agrees that decentralised supermarkets, not only reaching the mass-market, replace traditional stores which are directed toward poorer members of communities (Farina 2002) as the "nature of the domestic market changes in general with development" (Weatherspoon and Reardon 2003: 8). While food supply purely within a myopic sense of informal trade is still evident, informalised food outlets linked to formal

farm sale cater for the ‘poor consumer segment’ and culturally diverse communities (Rogerson 2003).

Furthermore, it is argued that those developing world countries, where agro-industrial activity is on the increase, exhibit the growth that is necessary for their further economic development (Reardon and Barrett 2000). Nevertheless, within the specific contexts mentioned above, there is a reactionary politic not in opposition to retail-led hegemony, agro-industrialisation or institutionally supported anti-globalisation food networks, as in northern cases of AFN. AFN in the developing world are fundamentally survivalist in nature (Rosset 1998).

Consumption or survival? Cultural and Accessible Food Supply Systems

In the context of the dominance of formal, supermarket-driven food networks, AFN emerge as a food provisioning mechanism that supply culturally diverse communities and poor people with accessible, culturally-specific food. More generally, AFN in the south is linked to urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) and has become a strategic alternative income generating enterprise for some, as well as a coping/survivalist mechanism (Rogerson 2003; Porter *et al* 2004; Coen Flynn 2005). These particular contexts enable, and explain the existence of AFN linked to local, direct, relational, fresh produce, organic and culturally specialist supply chains which occur in response to inadequate conventional supermarket food supply. When it comes to the speciality cultural foodstuff like Indian vegetable, dairy products, religiously-sanctioned foodstuff and ceremonial livestock, the food networks are noteworthy, not because they perceived as being

informally available, but because they are unavailable through other conventional retailing systems.

AFN in the South

AFN in the south have not emerged primarily from a top-down policy proviso, neither are they predominantly driven by NGOs in search of economic justice. They emerge as a grassroots development imperative which includes survivalist enterprise, accessible food networks for the urban poor and cultural food networks for diverse communities. While AFN in the south exhibit certain elements similarly articulated in the north, the driving factors for these different AFN are contextual, and have emerged from fundamentally different politico-economic spaces. AFN in the south exhibit short food supply chains, quality, slow food, local/speciality produce, cultural speciality food and direct farm sale. The economic context within the agrofood complex in South Africa is not lagging, however, but is in a dynamic phase of growth (Mather 2005). The distinction of "advanced economies" (Renting *et al* 2003: 394) in reference to the context from which AFN emerge, suggests that other (less 'advanced') contexts do not have the same driving factors. In the Johannesburg case, the driving factors include inadequate provisioning of supermarkets for traditional, religiously sanctioned foodstuff, and accessible food stuff for the urban poor.

AFN in the South exhibit two dominant characteristics: cultural food networks and food networks for the poor. The local context includes culturally diverse communities, a large percentage of whom are Islamic, and poorer communities who do not have access to

supermarkets. It has been suggested, in light of the empirical description, that these food networks be classified as being part of a more established research tradition on African food systems (cf. Guyer 1987) that examines either *informal* food networks, or they should be framed within a literature on the broader informal economy. It is clear that all kinds of consumption that make use of informal networks in the developing south continue to occur. However, the AFN in the south cannot be equated with informal food networks entirely, even though they may exhibit 'informal' characteristics such as catering for the poor or bypassing formal retail structures. Formal retailing structures do exist, and the fact that these AFN are not simply remnant from some pre-conventional era suggests that they cannot be classified as merely being part of survivalist informal economic enterprise. For much the same reason as AFN in the north are not considered as part of the informal economy despite the fact that they too make use of car boot sales (Crewe and Gregson 1998; Fisher 1999), marginalised consumption spaces (Crew and Gregson 1998), less technological production or word-of-mouth marketing, or are based on remnant cultural food needs, food networks in the south occupy an alternative space. They do so because they occur (and have recently emerged) within a context of the dominance and increased 'access' of conventional food networks. They are reactionary to inadequate supermarket food provisioning, and the alternative food networks materialise as a result of the demand for cultural food that was previously home-grown or unavailable.

Samers (2005) argues that the myopia of classing certain systems as either informal or formal, is linked to the imaginaries associated with what the term 'informal' conjures up;

in Africa, for example, poor, illicit, ethnic, exotic and/or chaotic street trade. Daniels (2004: 507) is critical of the notion that economies "graduat[e] from the informal to the formal economy" as reflection of their social progress. To suggest that food supply systems are informal based on their context, is problematic. Whatmore *et al* argue that AFN in Europe are "[f]ar from disappearing … [and are] diverse and dynamic food networks that had been cast as remnant or marginal in the shadow of productivism have strengthened and proliferated" (2003: 389). It is strange to note that what is considered 'alternative' in a developed world context, is often classed as being part of the 'informal economy' in a developing world context – with both having similar characteristics. The premise of a recent work by Coen Flynn is reflective of a conception of African food supply as still occupying a pre-modern, non-industrialised space that asks "[w]ithout grocery stores, supermarkets, food delivery services, or convenience stores, how do people acquire food in Africa?" (Coen Flynn 2005: 1).

On the contrary, in a liberalised and deregulated developing world context, an increased dominance of formal retailing marked by the increase in large retail supermarkets is evident. While current debates suggest the increase in formal retail, and others argue the persistence of informal (pre-formal) retailing in the developing world (cf. Samers 2005), there is evidence of an emerging countermovement of AFN in the developing world; speciality food networks, cultural food supply chains and direct selling of food grown on urban and peri-urban farms in the vicinity as a response to inadequate supermarket supply.

Within an increasingly culturally diverse milieu that is particularly pervasive in developing world cities, alternative types of food provisioning and consumption behaviours that contest the conventional, formal, and retail-led food supply system are necessary for survival. Porter *et al* argue that "in urban areas [in the developing world] there is a diverse range of consumption behaviours shaped by ethnicity, household structure and poverty" (Porter *et al* 2004: 31). In comparison to AFN emerging from the north these AFN do not necessarily represent lifestyle alternatives to conventional food systems, which are arguably elitist and geographically exclusionary. Issues of culturally diverse and accessible food for the urban poor, which have fallen out of view in northern literature, are crucial to an understanding of useful AFN in the developing world. I suggest the term 'useful AFN' because, in a southern context, AFN has the potential to challenge and extend a theoretical politico-economic construct that will not only inform agrifood debates and policy but, as I later argue further, will also be of actual value to poorer and culturally diverse people by addressing their access to food. Theory which includes food systems of the poor in the north, however, has to some extent been advanced by northern researchers.

Food insecurity in the North

Where poorer United Kingdom residents do not have access to transport or to supermarkets, a few theorists have seen the importance in addressing "issues such as how low-income families living two bus rides from a grocery store get access to fresh fruit and vegetable" (Wrigley 2002: 2032). As is evident in a developed country where access to retailed food is assumed to be higher, certain members of the community are

marginalised. Facilitating AFN that cater for the urban poor in developed countries may prove not only to be a necessary policy interest in regards to quality control, but also a growing social solution to food poverty and concerns of cultural food marginalisation. Wrigley (2002) argues that decreasing access to food for poorer part of the United Kigdom population and this type of social exclusion, is becoming increasingly important to policy makers. In North America it is argued that "without access to supermarkets, which offer a wide variety of foods at lower prices, poor and minority communities may not have equal access to the variety of healthy food choices available to non-minority and wealthy communities" (Morland *et al* 2001: 23). Although there is a need for a policy focus on access to food for poorer communities, in the north this kind of research does not emanate predominantly from agro-food studies but hails from concerns around welfare and national longitudinal nutritional studies (Cummins and Macintyre 2002; Morland *et al* 2001). The increase in concerned consumerism is not argued in relation to supporting survivalist economies, but buying local (Weatherell *et al* 2003).

If increasing poverty and access to food is indeed such a hugely urgent future policy agenda (Pearson *et al* 2005; Cummings and Macintyre 2002), it is increasingly necessary for alternative food studies to engage with these issues in agrifood debates (and also surprising that it has not done so already). Food networks for the urban poor and for marginalized and/or multicultural communities have evaded the perception of contemporary research agendas within agrofood studies. The poor are regular features in literature around both food security, and poverty alleviation (Coen Flynn 2005; D'Haese and Van Huylenbroeck 2005). The failure to include poor and culturally diverse

communities in a 'broader' theory on alternative agrofood systems, however, with the exception of Wrigley (2002), Allen *et al* (2003) and Allen (2004), implicitly excludes a crucial segment of society. A powerful argument in relation to this is made by Rigg and Ritchie (2002) who assert that the reason "why post-productivist rural scholarship on the developing world has yet to make much of a mark *is* because it is out of step with [other] realities in the poor world" (Rigg and Ritchie 2002: 360, original emphasis).

A Globally Useful AFN conception: Implications for AFN theory

A developing world perspective on AFN is useful to countries in the north since rural and urban poverty is an increasing trend across the globe. A developing world articulation of AFN includes survivalist strategies, poverty alleviation and community development initiatives, and does not merely fulfil the hankering for the rural idyllic, nor the often elitist quest for conscience-quenching food. Like promoting economically declining regions in Europe and North America, AFN in these contexts have the potential to reflect broader agricultural transformation in respect to food security. More recent alternative food initiatives (Allen *et al* 2003) in the some parts of North America recognise the need to cater for the urban poor – particularly low income Black and Hispanic groups – and tackle issues of empowerment and education; homeless peoples' gardens, school garden projects and skills-based training (Allen *et al* 2003). In New Jersey, for example, youth empowerment projects include using urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) as a tool to teach responsibility, financial independence and to increase food security of at risk youth (Hamm and Baron 1999), while in Paris, farmers' markets function as an accessible source of fresh produce and often fish. In Sandwell, in the United Kingdom, food banks

accumulated through urban agriculture are used to provide for poorer people, and allotment gardens in the urban and peri-urban areas of the country could arguably facilitate culturally driven types of AFN by catering for large and growing migrant communities. The potential is far greater than just community-*supported* agriculture (Grey 2000a; Hinrichs 2000), which is a formal project-based initiative supported by USDA, and other farmer organisations (Wilkinson 2001).

There is the possibility of making use of contextual drivers of AFN to further the kind of AFN that would benefit the urban poor or culturally diverse communities. Using the European AFN paradigm that is based on policy-driven agricultural transformation, and through understanding the North America impetus for reflective social AFN as the "critical impulse of social resistance in everyday life" (Harvey 1996 cited in Allen *et al* 2003: 62), AFN could be a transformative tool with which to guide agricultural policy, social development, poverty alleviation, and cultural modes of provisioning. More importantly, since AFN may also be understood as a value-based reaction (Grey 2000a), AFN has the potential to be more than just a theoretical construct.

It is significant that developing world conception of AFN is not necessarily only valid within a developing world context. AFN in the south illustrate that while it is crucial to examine the geographic, socio-economic and institutional contexts from where particular types of AFN emerge, issues like cultural food networks and accessible, alternative food provisioning for poorer populations are increasingly applicable to other contexts. In this sense, it is vital within North American and European conceptions (and markets) to

broaden the paradigm of AFN to include UPA, food networks that cater for the urban poor, and cultural modes of provisioning. Of course, evidence of larger multicultural communities and increasing poverty in other communities in the north is now visible more than ever before. For example, the German Ministry of Social Development is proactively involved with the holistic integration of their Turkish communities (Halm and Sauer 2004), and the large Indian, Polish, Caribbean populations in the United Kingdom (amongst other ethnic groups) have increasingly popular cultural food supply systems in various urban area. Again, the allotment garden offers potential for cultural food supplies to migrant communities. The point is that AFN must by contextually relevant to diverse communities. Certainly, holistic research into AFN – that by definition is not conventional and *cannot* therefore assume a conventional customer – must include these marginalized communities. (Unless, of course, the conception of AFN has a neatly-packaged market in mind)

Conclusion: Beyond geographically and socially exclusive AFN

Were I to sketch the profile of the imaginary customer envisaged by a fictitious AFN 'practitioner' – as suggested by AFN literature based in the north – she may look something like this: White, upper-middle class, with a sophisticated sensibility, middle to late-middle age, professional, academic, with access to transport and credit. She frequents farm stores and chique produce markets to buy organic, fresh, fairly-traded foodstuff which is "not only good to eat, but good to think" (Lockie and Halpin 2005: 284) since it is healthy, good for the environment, *and* donates eighty pence/cents to start a school in the rural area in the developing world from which the produce comes. She

drives a huge SUV a longer distance to the next rural village where specialty foodstuff is locally produced. She takes pleasure in consuming the rural countryside and returns home to fine wine and prepares her ethically traded, local, safe and high quality organic food.

The more conventional customer, whose class precludes her from being a consumer of alternative food, would then have to be one of two types of people. The first is a person who lives from hand-to-mouth, and makes use of informal food networks because there are no other available sources of food. Of course she is not perceived as consuming at all, merely surviving. The second type of consumer is a lower-middle class, public transport-using person, who wields a large shopping cart through an overcrowded discount supermarket looking for store brand goods in bulk. She stops for lunch, with her tirade of children, at McDonalds, and returns home fat, unhealthy and swarming with untraceable bacteria and hungry children.

AFN catering to people fitting the first profile, and a conception of AFN engendering this class of consumer, does not only exclude two-thirds of the world's population, but overlooks the presence of socio-economic classes who do not meet the profile of the kind of AFN consumer suggested in the literature. Surely this kind of notion cannot be considered the forerunner of conceptually mapping alternative geographies of food, without it also being implicated as a geographically and socially exclusive, *elitist* geography of food. Similarly, one of the vanguards of northern AFN, the Slow Food Movement, is critiqued as being "[a] movement [that] encourages careful, 'reflexive', spare-no-expense food production both on the farm and in the kitchen – a social and

political ideal that … has now become a statement of elite class structure" (Friedburg 2003: 5)

In a rather scathing account, Goss (2004) argues that agrofood systems and research which have an established exclusive market in mind, is symptomatic of the celebration of a consumption culture. He shows how the celebration of consumption within northern agrifood studies set the paradigm for all other kinds of contemporary research (Goss 2004). Of course, taking advantage of the 'festivity' is not possible for most of the planet, making the celebration, like the preferred AFN profile, one to which the large majority of the world's population has no access.

Since emergent literature on AFN was hitherto based within European and North American contexts, it is natural that the theory is 'Euro/Americocentric', and reflects issues perceived to be relevant in the north. However, this paper has argued that a contextual focus that includes AFN perspectives from the south – food systems for the poor and for culturally diverse communities – are progressively more relevant in a developed world context of racial diversity and urban poverty. A south-based articulation of AFN is equally oppositional to the conventional food system but includes AFN for poor and culturally diverse people, for reasons not altogether different to Euramerican contexts; accessibility and cultural food provisioning. While evidence of high quality, local, organic networks does exist, dominant indicators of AFN emerge from grassroots, survivalist enterprise that link production and consumption so that these networks cater for the urban poor and culturally diverse communities. Allen (2004) similarly argues that

alternative food networks play an important role in the ability of poorer members of the community to access safe food. Within global agrifood studies and the literature on AFN emerging from the north, arguments of this nature, highlighted most evidently in southern contexts, have not yet been adequately engaged with.

Korf and Oughton (2005) argue that developing world methodologies and theory can benefit transforming and emerging conceptions of the European country-side. If this does not occur, the growing body of agrifood knowledge may obscure diverse social realties in contexts where a more inclusive theory of alternative agrofood geographies would be useful in serving real social agendas (not just in knowledge production). While critical researchers may be reflexive about this danger, an emergent theoretical paradigm on *Alternative Food Geographies* developed by researchers primarily from the north has the potential to become universalised. Without a broadening of the parameters which define the theory, it also has the potential to become an exclusive, elitist academic discussion. As such, a south-based conception of AFN has a much greater global usefulness beyond the (albeit important) critical-geography contention that research from the south should 'theorise-back' to the north.

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