

Global Hierarchy of Disruptive Food Aid

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While it seems counterintuitive, the global hierarchy of international food aid plays into both racial and class hierarchies. One normally associates the word "aid" with philanthropy and altruism when in reality, international food aid is a lasting impact of colonialist economies. The origins of food aid are often credited to U.S. President Harry Truman, who stated in his 1949 Inaugural Address, "[we must make] the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial processes available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas...Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas" (Patel 97). This speech was considered a founding document for the concept of "development" in neoliberal internationalism demonstrating how the foundational values of the process of development were not humanitarianism, but security policy. Food aid programs were born not of America's superior charity but of "part of a policy mindset that linked international trade, military power, and redistribution" (Patel 98). Therefore, the foundation of food aid is built out of America's racial and class hegemonic discourses.

Post-war recovery and innovation led to American farmers producing at excess and determined to continue growing for their economic benefit. To prevent the value of domestic goods from dropping, the United States

needed a way to rid itself of excess products. The July 10, 1954 signing of the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act, Public Law 480-- also known as Food for Peace--addressed domestic surpluses. This act solved two problems at once: solving the global poverty that threatened U.S. national security and selling U.S. surpluses to developing nations in the Global South for a discounted price. Such a policy depended on the idea that "the hungry might be rendered less troubled, more grateful, and in a twist, more dependent if provided with cheap food" (Patel 98). A policy built on political and economic manipulation, the artificially deflated goods ruined the market values of goods in developing countries, functionally destroying local agricultural systems. Native farmers could not keep up, leading to a dependence on the country providing its aid. Food aid was never about humanitarianism; it was "a strategic tool in the negotiating kits of rich and poor countries alike" (Patel 101).

The United States has frequently benefited from the hegemonic discourses relating to colonialism in food. One such example is the relationship between U. S. food aid and Haiti's local agricultural systems. First, a little background of the unique positionality of Haitians food economy.

Between 1791 and 1804, enslaved Haitians overthrew their French colonial rule gaining their independence in the process. However, a free state composed primarily of former slaves was seen as a security risk by global hegemony. Global powers worked to economically strangle the country, with France violently demanding "reparations" for the amount of

money it “lost” due to the Haitian Revolution. The consequences were devastating, perpetuated by hegemonic discourses of racial and imperialist powers. Post-colonial Haiti has been a pawn in many rich countries’ political agendas. Recently, the United States’s donation of food aid allows it to look generous and humanitarian whilst simultaneously using said aid to control the Haitian political agenda. This economic system mimics closed-loop trade systems utilized by colonies and is often viewed by scholars as a form of neo-colonialism. Historically, colonizing states demanded coercive revenue-extraction measures. These included both natural resources and the forced native purchasing of colonial goods (Parker). This cycle is now flipped to require dependency on American food aid. U.S. food aid combined with the IMF’s loan’s condition of lowered state-led tariffs led to an economic crash in 1987 of self-sufficient regional agricultural systems. Without a stable agricultural system, Haiti was forced into economic and political dependency on U.S. neo-colonialist economic structures reinforcing both the political and economic instability of Haiti, harming citizens and destroying local jobs in agriculture. It is evident that the hierarchies of colonialism are alive and well in America’s food aid distribution system. The racial, colonialist hegemonic ideologies have been perpetuated through political and economic coercion by America.

Other than reducing U.S. political intervention in the Global South, directing action and counter-hegemonic discourses towards supervised monetary funding to re-invest into local systems of agriculture. Only by investing in Haitian, sustainably engineered agricultural programs will the

United States colonialist impacts of food aid be diminished.

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