



# Gender in the World Food Economy: Inequitable Transformation of Haiti's Food Economy

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Over the past five decades, agricultural trade liberalization and integration into the global food system have undermined gender equality, women's empowerment, and food security in Haiti. International actors who design agricultural policies are aware of gendered contributions to Haitian food security, yet ignore this knowledge to privilege an ideological belief that trade liberalization and structural adjustment programs will advance gender equality. I argue that agriculture and food policies must treat gender roles and responsibilities as constitutive to the solution by recognizing their critical contribution to the structure of Haitian agrarian society and accordingly food security. I advance this claim by analyzing scholarly literature, institutional documents, and interviews with interlocutors ( $n = 292$ ) from rural, peri-urban, and urban settings across Haiti to document how: 1) dominant narratives support an ideological belief that trade liberalization will advance gender equality; 2) integration of Haiti's local food economy into the world food economy demands the reorientation of gendered labour; 3) women must participate in a system that while purporting to improve food security, ultimately diminishes their nutrition and social, economic and political wellbeing. This research documents that policies designed to globalize Haiti's food economy on the premise of improving food security actually force women to abandon agricultural production and intensify their labour in less lucrative distribution and consumption roles of imported goods. This analysis documents that the transition ultimately reifies gender inequalities, heighten food insecurity, and contributes to feminist food scholarship.

**Keywords:** world food economy, gender, peasants, food security, Haiti, migration, small farmers

## INTRODUCTION

While the world food economy is widely credited for providing affordable food, it is also increasingly criticized for delivering price spikes and food insecurity to countries of the Global South (Clapp, 2012); Haiti is no exception. Haiti's current reliance on global food imports has contracted the historically rooted peasant<sup>1</sup> economy of food and is fundamentally responsible for chronic rural poverty and food insecurity (Dupuy, 1989; Mintz, 1989; Fatton, 2002; Mintz, 2010; Dubois, 2012;

<sup>1</sup>Peyizan and paysan(ne) are widely used in Kreyòl and French to refer to rural food producers in Haiti. Interviewees refer to themselves as peyizan in an effort to re-valourize the term with urban dwellers. Although some English speakers find the term pejorative, the term peyizan is used in this English manuscript to build support for the interviewees' wishes.

Cohen, 2013; USAID, 2016). Yet, although diminished, agriculture remains central to the Haitian economy; once responsible for 40 percent of Haiti's GDP in the 1990s, today it contributes only 25 percent (FEWS Network, 2018). National production supplies just 43 percent of Haiti's food needs, 51 percent is met by food imports and 6 percent by food aid, leaving the population vulnerable to global price spikes; by comparison, in 1981 food imports represented only 18 percent of the Haitian diet (MARNDR, 2010; Julie et al., 2017).

Astonishingly, despite this decline in consumption of local production, 60 percent of the Haitian population still participate in farming (Cohen, 2013). Contributing to this effort are women, who historically are the backbone of the production-distribution-consumption triad of the local food economy and hence food security. During the 1970s and 1980s, Haiti's food economy began its integration into the world food economy and intense pressure was placed on women to participate. The integration was presented as the solution to food insecurity; however, the approach privileged a global production and efficiency view, acknowledging the nuances and contribution of Haitian women's roles and responsibilities, and then ignoring the disruption foreign food policies would inflict (World Bank, 1998; USAID, 2016; World Bank, 2020). The continual outcome of the transition of women's roles and responsibilities is having profound effects on women and family's wellbeing, health, and nutrition, and women's ability to live outside of the law's restrictive categories of property and personhood where women build their economic and political power. Furthermore, because the world food economy remains production and profit-driven, there seems to be little concerted effort from the international community to readjust these damaging policies to improve the situation.

The majority of the political economy literature on Haiti's food security either misses the social considerations of the Haitian peasantry or treats them as a single social unit while missing the various gendered experiences of women. For instance, scholars critique the dominant narratives from international entities (i.e., WB, IMF, UN, IDB, USAID), and Haiti's national actors (i.e., the elite business and political class), that support Haiti's insertion into the world food economy and results in a food system that propagates structural poverty for peasants (Dupuy, 1989; Mintz, 1989; Trouillot, 1995; Fatton, 2002; Hallward, 2007; Mazzeo, 2009; Mintz, 2010; Dupuy, 2012; Lundahl, 2015; Vansteenkiste, 2018). However, in doing so they miss that the associated outcomes are not merely economic or political problems in which women are marginalized, but a social problem centered in gender relations. Other literature speaks of the Haitian female in their gendered role of *poto mitan*—the center post of family relations and commerce activities (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998; Edmond et al., 2007; Renée and Schuller, 2009; Vansteenkiste, 2017; Moore, 2020), but fail to attribute the historical successes of local food security to the same gendered role and responsibility; a necessary step to understand the impact of integration into the world food economy. The 1994 RFSA team found female-headed households more vulnerable than male-headed ones, yet in times of scarcity social networks ensured vulnerable people—children under age of five, pregnant

and lactating women, the elderly and chronically ill—were given priority in feeding, marking the critical importance of social relations in maintaining food security (Baro et al., 1994:23; Baro, 2002).

This paper contributes to feminist food scholarship and addresses these scholarly gaps by documenting how: 1) dominant narratives support an ideological belief that trade liberalization will advance gender equality; 2) integration of Haiti's local and gendered food economy into the world food economy demands the reorientation of the *poto mitan* (gendered labour), and; 3) Haitian women must participate in a system that purports to improve their food security yet ultimately diminishes their income, nutrition, health, social, economic and political wellbeing. I will achieve this aim by 1) reviewing the political and economic narratives that support the integration of the local and global food economies, yet misses a discussion of gendered social considerations; 2) documenting the use of gendered labour to assist the transformation of the local food economy; and 3) examining the profound effects on women's roles and responsibilities and their ability to make economic contributions to the household and community.

Findings reveal that the transformation of Haiti's food systems and associated outcomes are not merely economic or political problems in which women are marginalized, but a social problem centered in gender relations. The transformation disrupts an agro-ecological system intertwined with meaningful social networks at the expense of women's well-being. Necessary to this understanding is Moore's (2020) attention to the importance of feminized political geography encapsulated in the *lakou* (homestead), *eritaj* (ancestral land), market, and bodies of women. Building on her argument that societal and national patriarchal political projects circumvent women's economic and political power built in the *lakou/eritaj/market* nexus, I document how this struggle is intensified by the patriarchal structure of the world food economy.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Haiti has a long history of class divisions, which works to diminish any reasonable social contract between the state and civil society. Specifically, the smaller ruling political and business bourgeoisie instrumentalize state machinery to meet their own needs. These needs differ dramatically from the majority of small peasant farmers and urban poor. In this process, the Haitian elite encourage importation to prop up their business ventures, which reorient women's labour away from producing-distributing-consuming for local food security to distributing-consuming cheap imports to the demise of local food sovereignty. The result is a predatory state that extracts surplus labour and the wellbeing of civil society to ultimately further impoverish the rural and urban poor.

## Origins of the Gendered Local Food Economy

During colonial rule, slaves planted the genesis of today's local food economy in food gardens on small plots of land along the

margins of plantations, which led to marketing produce and capital accumulation, marking the beginning of the peasant class and economy (Murray, 1977; Mintz, 1985; Trouillot, 1990, 48–49, 54; Carney, 2008). Since food and protections allotted to slaves were not provided as stated in Louis XIV's 1685 Code Noir (James, 1963)<sup>2</sup>, the plots were a means of survival. Plantation owners tolerated gardens since the activity subsidized the cost of plantation production by feeding the labour (Fick, 1990; Weis, 2007, 32). One of the burdens carried by female slaves was the reproduction of the slave class via food production and childbirth (James, 1963).

Political exclusion was entrenched through language as all government business was conducted in French, the official language of Haiti, until Creole was added in 1987, making Haiti a bilingual country. Until then, the official language designation excluded Creole-speaking peasants from participating in the governance of their country or understanding any decisions made on their behalf. In a further act of exclusion, legislation passed in 1825 marked rural peasants as second-class citizens, followed by a 1945 ruling whereby the term “*Paysan*” was required to appear on birth certificates until revoked in 1988 (N'Zengou-Tayo, 1998, 119). The law impacted which school peasants were allowed to attend and, ultimately, which jobs they could secure. It served as a clear marker of *mounn andeyò*, literally, “people outside,” and demarcated the spatial boundaries between the extractive urban elite class and the peasants from whom they extracted cheap labour. Women understand that Haiti's macho and classed society constructs them as *klas defacorize*—marginalized class, a socio-economic position that is an outcome of Haiti's historical political economy (N'Zengou-Tayo, 1998; Bell, 2001).

In Haiti's patriarchal society, women were considered family dependents—sisters, mothers, wives—voiceless apolitical innocents; women did not gain suffrage until 1950 (Charles, 1995a). In their gendered roles, women are sole owners and solely responsible for selling the garden harvest to contribute to the local food economy and household economics (Mintz, 1971; Lowenthal, 1987; Schwartz, 2015). These activities revolve around the *lakou*. Schwartz (2015:2) notes women have a high degree of control over the *lakou*, food harvesting, processing, and local redistribution and marketing, marking the *lakou* as “the single most important and often only means of social and material security.” It is both a symbolic and material space where extended kinship-based exchange constitutes social reproduction (Merilus, 2015; Moore, 2020). It is the place where women are solely responsible for household income and expenditures (Schwartz, 2015). Yet despite the autonomy earned, the *lakou* and *eritaj* remain patriarchal structures, which women may or may not inherit from their fathers and more

often gain access through sexual relations (Charles, 1995b; Moore, 2020).

Conjugal unions called *plasaj* (common-law marriages) constitute 85 percent of peasant unions and oblige women to center their activities around the *lakou* and local markets, while also providing them access to men's land. Rigid gender roles limit time for political participation, formal employment opportunities, and movement, making access to land for market gardens an important resource for women. Within the conjugal framework, a woman cultivates a field on the man's land. Men's lands are often small and geographically separated. Division for distribution through inheritance is responsible for the size of the small parcels of often less than 1.5ha. Men purchase subsequent small parcels of land throughout their lives and will participate in sharecropping and to a lesser extent rent or sharecrop land. Often the man helps with heavy labour (e.g., land preparation, weeding), but when he is absent, children will help, as will neighbours and relatives in a *konbit* (mixed gender team) system of sharing labour and harvests (Lowenthal, 1987). Alternatively, landless labour of the community may be hired. The arrangement gives women autonomy to pursue market activities to generate income for the household. Further, this mutually supportive, reciprocal arrangement is at the heart of the local food economy and food sovereignty. This shared labour and women's roles in local food production make possible men's export-oriented production and participation in the world food economy.

By the turn of the 20th century, peasants had built a relatively self-sufficient local food economy independent of any world food economy (Mintz, 1989, 262). Haiti remained self-sufficient until the mid-1980s (McGuigan, 2006; Schwartz, 2008; Gros, 2010; Mintz, 2010; Dupuy, 2012) and exported surplus commodities such as coffee, rice<sup>3</sup> (Gros, 2010), and sugar (FAOSTAT, 2017) to the global market. The nation also developed state grain storage as insurance during shortages (Gros, 2010, 978). All this local development relied on women's labour to produce, distribute, and establish consumption patterns of the local food economy, which hinged on participation in patriarchal conjugal relationships described earlier.

In the Haitian pluricultural system, many diverse crops are rotated and intercropped through small plots allowing farmers to manage the risk of crop losses while harvesting most of the year (Baro, 2002; Fuller-Wimbush and Fils-Aimé, 2014). Pluriculturalism is an integrated system that provides multiple agro-economic, environmental, and socio-cultural functions (Baro, 2002; Jean-Denis et al., 2014), and guarantees investments close to the *lakou* allowing for the management of plants and fertility through kitchen and small farm animal waste. Increased resource and crop diversification, intercropping, and rotation associated with pluriculturalism is directly linked to the protection of soil and accumulation of biomass (Hutchinson et al., 2007; Baro, 2002).

<sup>2</sup>Code Noir was a legal framework established to protect slaves from the brutal treatment inflicted by white planters (Schuller 2016), it also dictated that slaves were property to be divided between inheritors and required slaves to be baptized and practice Catholicism (Fick 1990).

<sup>3</sup>Haiti was self-sufficient in rice production until 1987 (Gros 2010: 980).

## The World Food Economy—An Agricultural Exchange Regime

The period prior to the 1974 World Food Conference hosted by the FAO can be described as the alignment of Western industrial agriculture with neoliberal ideology. It is important to note that while the FAO has historically upheld supply-centric models of food security, and promoted trade liberalization within the agricultural sector, the organization itself has undergone many shifts and transitions since 2005, and is currently positioned within a wider field of international forces that often promote alternative ideas of governance (Gustafson and Markie, 2009). However, the period prior to this change is important for the consideration of Haiti's case.

The FAO is a UN international governance structure, established in 1945 to deal with post-war concerns of production, distribution, consumption, and trade in an integrated fashion, with basic human dignity, economic development, and national and global security underpinning its work (Gustafson and Markie, 2009). The FAO's efforts to create a World Food Board to establish food reserves, redistribute world supplies, and stabilize prices, was met with national protectionism, leaving only international industrial and agricultural development and trade, and commodity policy, the main alternatives for advancement (FAO, 1946; Gustafson and Markie, 2009). Within these policies is a glaring omission of the roles of responsibilities of women in food systems. In the 1970s, cereal prices tripled, fertilizer prices quadrupled, and a food crisis ensued. The FAO prepared for the 1974 World Food conference to deal with the crisis. One outcome was the first internationally agreed-upon food security definition:

Availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices (Devereux and Maxwell, 2005, 15).

The 1974 definition of food security, influenced by earlier moves to industrialize food production (Clapp, 2012, 6), a less-than-completely-successful green revolution, the establishment of the US Food for Peace Program in 1954 to distribute US over-production, and then the World Food Programme in 1961, led to the conception of "food security" in terms of supply. This helped to cement the idea that industrial agriculture was the best development goal.

The objective of the conference was to ensure that no short-term food shortage would occur despite forecasted population growth (FAO, 1974, viii). The FAO's contribution, "The State of Food and Agriculture 1974," focused on three pillars to inform world food issues: production, trade, and regional analysis. This narrow path of analysis led the conversation toward privileging industrial agriculture and economic growth, with data on increased global trade utilized as a measurement of success. The FAO looked to regional analysis as opposed to individual country data, precluding the differing agroecological practices, which are more suited to

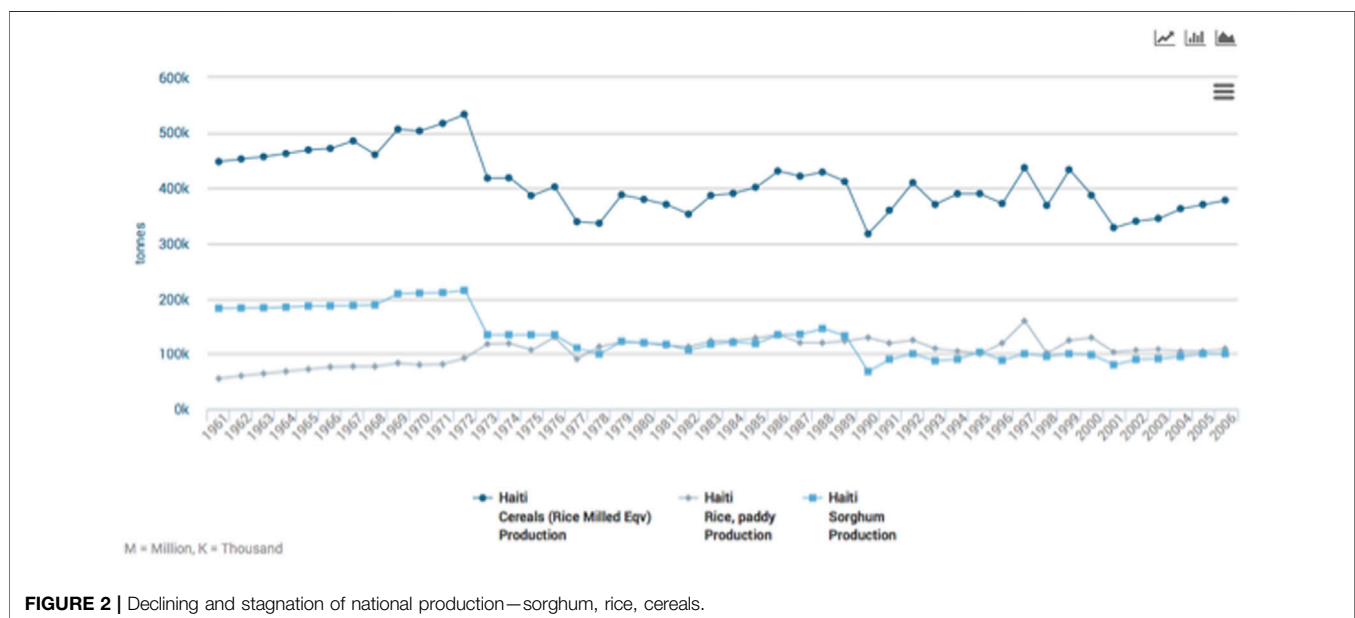
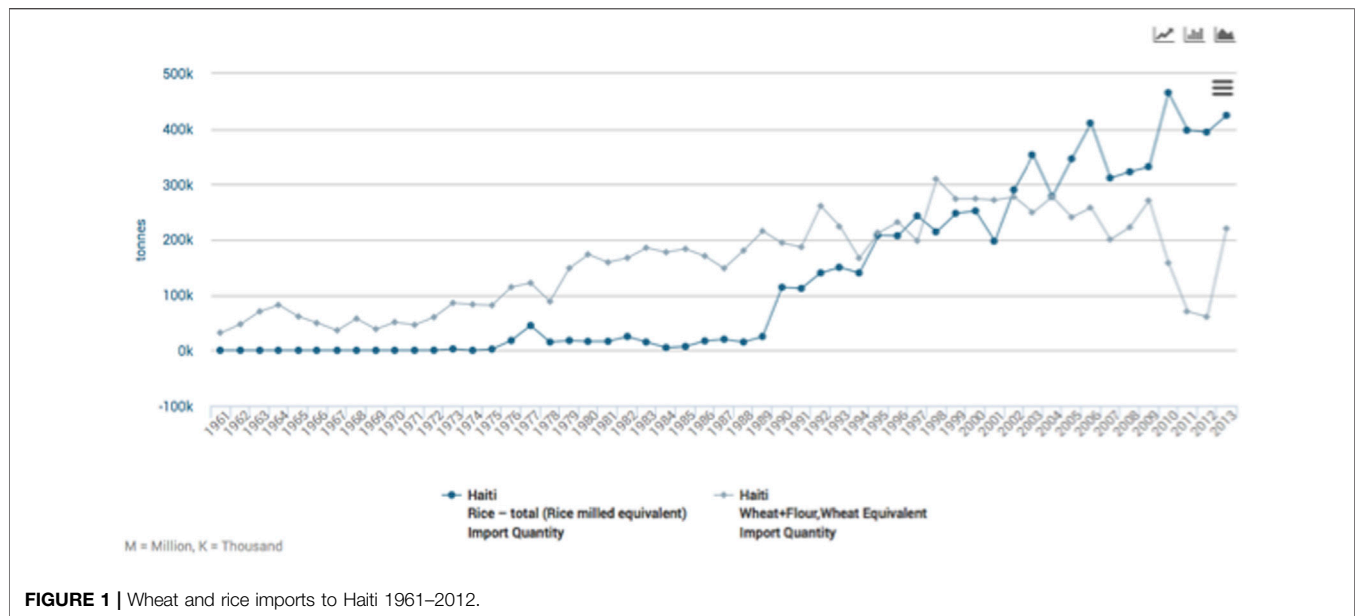
fit the socio-economic variations of individual countries, and the gender, class, and race differences experienced by Haitian producers. The same policy was applied across the global south via the *middle space*, which included USAID with programming largely informed by the FAO. Together, the events minimized other ways of thinking about food, making it difficult to consider the benefits of social stability and the roles of women in small-scale, peasant food production.

During the 1980s, the FAO's vision of increased trade to grow the world food economy found support from the WB and IMF through the imposition of a series of policies under the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). At SAPs core was a neoliberal ideology promoting currency devaluation, enhanced trade liberalization, increased foreign direct investment, and the restructuring of Haiti's local governance system, aiming to capitalize on Haiti's comparative advantage of cheap labour and tropical exports. (McGowan, 1997; Weis, 2007; Gros, 2010).<sup>4</sup> Until this time the state-controlled food prices through administrative injunctions and state reserves which were dispersed to meet food shortages (Gros, 2010). Just as the FOA had, SAPs worked against local food sovereignty by promoting the production of export crops over staples for domestic use and weakened the state's ability to control its economy and protect its local producers (Gros, 2010). With SAPs pressure to reduce social programs and extension services, the rural infrastructure deteriorated - including roads, production facilities, and a lack of competitive technology. With heightening unequal trade liberalization rules, foreign imported food rose to account for 60 percent of all food consumed in Haiti and 80 percent of all rice (Wilcock and Jean-Pierre, 2012; Cohen, 2013; IFAD, 2013 Dupuy, 2014). Rice imports disrupted consumption patterns of other locally grown crops, such as beans, grains, roots, and tubers. Exporting crops specifically impacted women, since their main income stream relied on marketing garden crops. They moved from primary producers in the local food economy to primary consumers and distributors of imports. Overall, trade liberalization has been a failure for Haiti by most measures. Per capita GDP fell from US\$632 in 1980 to US\$332 in 2003; this mirrors the declining contribution of agriculture to Haiti's GDP—from 32.9 percent in 1996 to 27.1 percent in 2002 (Gardella, 2006). Meanwhile, the value of imports increased from US\$354,158 in 1980 to US\$1,188,000 in 2003 and US\$3,700,000 in 2013 (FAOSTAT, 2017). These statistics demonstrate changing import competition that impacted women's agricultural production and livelihoods.

Instead of increasing agricultural support and improving peasant functioning to meet the growing population's needs, the structure deepened existing extractive tendencies of the *middle space* and

<sup>4</sup>SAPs following the Washington consensus prescriptions also applied, to many countries in the global south, fiscal discipline, concentration of public expenditure on public goods, tax reform, market-determined interest rates, competitive exchange rates, privatization of state-owned enterprises, and legal guarantee for property rights (Gros 2010).

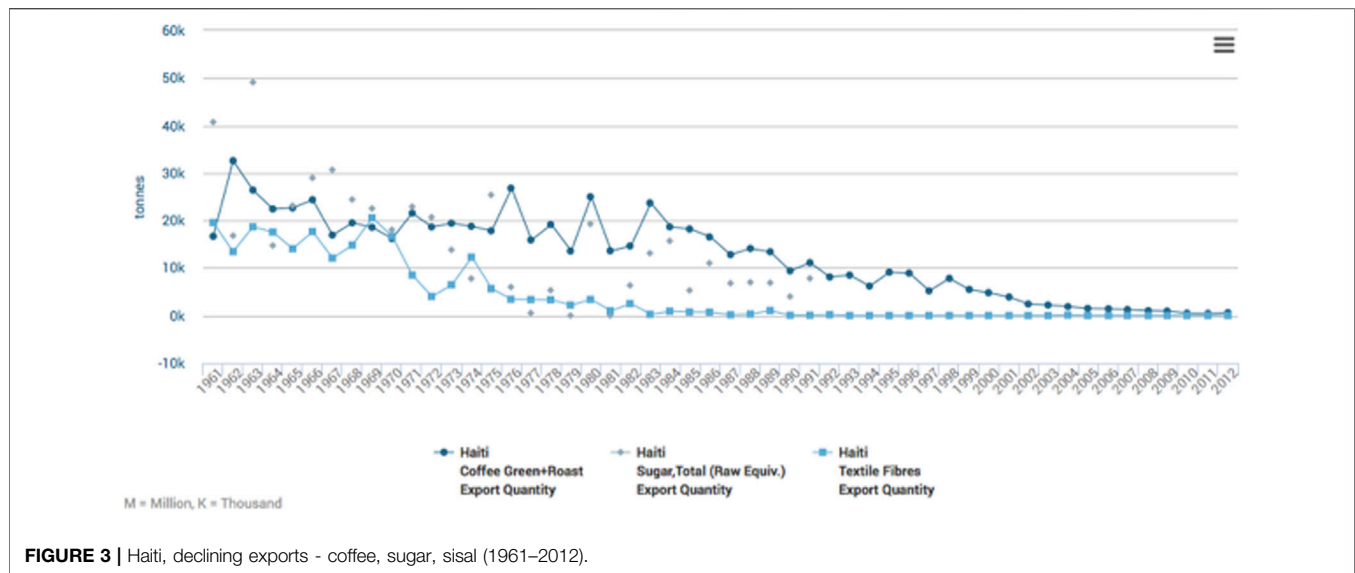




Haiti’s intermediary class to refocus business activities on food imports which dominate local market opportunities. National production for food security retracted through the installation of policies that placed peasant farmers in direct competition with cheap, subsidized, imported foods (Gros, 2010; Cohen, 2013) (see **Figures 1, 2**), negatively impacting women’s ability to generate enough income for the household through traditional agricultural activities. Simultaneously coffee, sugar, and textile exports (see **Figure 3**) declined, impacting men’s ability to contribute to household income requirements. Together, events spurred the agrarian rural-urban migration patterns.

### Developing a Feminist Theoretical Framework

Transnational feminism and gender and development literature provide the lens for this analysis. A transnational feminist lens helps explain how inequality experienced by Haitian women is grounded in the intersectionality of historically-developed class, race, and gender roles particular to Haiti (Charles, 1990; Charles, 1995a; N’zengou-Tayo, 1998; Bel, 2001; Charles, 2010; Schulle, 2015) and more broadly to community focused societies in the Global South (Nagar and Swarr, 2010). Furthermore, transnational feminists argue that if we fail to consider power



**FIGURE 3** | Haiti, declining exports - coffee, sugar, sisal (1961–2012).

relations intersected by race, class, and gender, then we fail to understand subjectivity as derived from a collective consciousness (Mohanty et al., 1991; Wekker, 2006; Smith, 2008; Nagar and Swarr, 2010; Nightingale, 2011; Salem, 2014).

It is difficult to reconcile intersectional discrimination because it is mediated by political dynamics that are both internal and external to communities (Sylvain, 2011). When power is located externally, it often obscures intersectionalities and assumes that people are homogeneous. Disrupting this process is important to ensure that peoples' heterogeneous needs and choices are met (Cornwall, 2003). Internally, social norms dictate people's roles and responsibilities making it difficult for women to access resources and positions of power to serve women's needs. Therefore, what we first must understand is the process: how does power create social exclusions and inequalities? Many global institutions working on food security purport to include the participation of women without the consideration of the type of participation or accounting for the social structures that shape gendered lives (Carella and Ackerly, 2017), thereby failing to meet the concerns of transnational feminists. While others, such as USAID (2017) and the World Bank (2020), acknowledge gendered roles, they fail to acknowledge the damage caused by the neo-liberal trade regimes they advance.

Gender and development literature focuses on the masculinized and gender-blind nature of development policy at local, national, and international levels. It draws attention to how development excludes women's knowledge and experience, yet simultaneously relies on their labour to privilege men's activities (Moser, 1993; Schroeder, 1999; Cornwall et al., 2004; Li, 2007; Rai and Waylen, 2008; Ransom and Bain, 2011; Neumann, 2013; Enloe, 2014; Powell, 2017; Sweetman and Ezpeleta, 2017; Bastia and Piper, 2019; Pearson and Sweetman, 2019). For instance, agricultural development policies miss the roles and functions of women and privilege the male experience (Ransom and Bain, 2011).

Central to the marginalization of women is the treatment of power. I examine how dominant narratives of causes and

solutions to food insecurity are maintained, even in the face of evidence that Haiti is disadvantaged by its inclusion in the world food economy. The problem is complex, since power from the international level is neither homogenous nor comes from one governing source with a singular intention or will; power comes from a range of actors and sources (Li, 2007). Clapp (2012) identifies this as the *middle space*, where actors called "intermediaries" work to control and influence how the world food economy operates. It is in the *middle space* where norms, practices, and rules take form and shape powerful social relations. These relations reach across geographical space, with the help of the Haitian ruling class, to reproduce and adapt existing class, race, and gender hierarchies to meet the goal of integrating Haiti's local food economy; in so doing, they have profound social and material effects on women's lives. The agendas of international actors who focus on resources extraction manipulate naturalized gendered roles and the multiple meanings of women's work to harness women's labour (Enloe, 2014). In Haiti, women's labour in the local food economy is naturalized through its categorization of informal, subsistence, or household and used as a free service to maintain the health and wellbeing of a cheap labour force to produce export goods for the global market. Women's multiple roles and labour are manipulated to uphold a system that dialectically serves to marginalize them. I argue that to improve food security, local gendered roles and responsibilities must be recognized and treated as constitutive to the solution while attending to the improvement of local food sovereignty.

In this analysis, I bring together the concerns of transnational and gender and development scholars to document what is absent from scholarly literature, which is evidence of the further marginalization of Haitian women's lives as an outcome of the integration of Haiti's local food economy into the world food economy. I achieve this by building on the lessons from these feminist scholars combined with the experiences of poor rural, peri-urban and urban women to guide an interrogation into the intersection of shifts in food systems with gendered roles in

agrarian life, to demonstrate that the world food economy relies on women's labour to meet its own ends and ultimately heighten gender and social inequality and food insecurity.

## Methods and Methodology

I document the transition of the food system using the feminist lenses outlined above to review institutional documents and data retrieved from the FAO, USAID, World Bank, and Government of Haiti, as well as scholarly literature, and field observations, and data collected between 2010 and 2017. Focus groups, as well as structured and semi-structured interviews, provide insight into perceptions of changing diets, access to and availability of food, livelihoods, and household wellbeing. In total 293 respondents from the following three groups were interviewed: 1) Haitian peasants ( $n = 57$  men;  $n = 92$  women) locate in rural and peri-urban areas in the Commune of Limonade, in the North Department, who were interviewed to understand their changing experience and struggles with food production, distribution, consumption, and access to land; 2) poor rural-urban migrants in urban Cap Haitien, the North Department ( $n = 30$ ) were contacted through a non-governmental nutrition centre, and interviewed about their reasons for migration, struggles with food security and malnourishment of their children in urban centres; 3) women marketers distributing food ( $n = 113$ ) were interviewed in five different urban markets: Marche Kwa de Bosal, Kwa Bouke, Mache Salomon, and Mache Tèt Bèf in Port-au-Prince in the West Department, and Mache Cluny in Cap Haitien, in the North Department, to understand their experiences selling imported and local food, and consuming food. Data were analyzed for opinions regarding food security and changing food regimes. I considered in detail the classed, raced, and gendered position of women, who are considered the *poto mitan*.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As garden production became less competitive in local markets, Haitian women began to leave the *lakou* and migrate to urban centers for work and to find better schools to prepare their children for a non-agricultural future inscribed with higher status.

Statements by Haitian women verify these changes in their day-to-day production and consumption patterns.

Rice is no longer a special Sunday meal, it is eaten every day because we can buy cheap Miami rice. It replaces locally grown rice, rootstocks, millet, pitimi, and sorghum (Interview, Limonade, January 2014).

Lam veritab made good flour and cakes, but now cheap imported wheat flour is used (Interview, Cap Haitien, March 2014).

Spaghetti with hotdogs is a traditional Haitian breakfast (Interview, Port-au-Prince, May 2013).

Integration into the world food economy works at cross-purposes with Haitian women as it removes women from the

income-generating potential of the production triad used to feed rural households and stabilize food sovereignty. The aftereffect of this loss is greater participation in the less lucrative distribution and consumption vectors and profound effects on women's ability to make economic contributions to the household and food security for the community. This inability to generate enough income and food for rural households and communities leads to increased migration<sup>5</sup> to urban centers in search of employment. As women migrate with their children (N'zengou-Tayo, 1998, 126) they lose further control over their means of subsistence used to provide for the household. They descended onto the lowest rung of social status as underemployed trinket sellers and urban slum dwellers, increasingly vulnerable to political unrest, and illness (N'zengou-Tayo, 1998, 126; Charles, 1995b, 149). In this precarious situation, women at times turn to sex as a means to earn money. Interviewees concur that sex is a frequent demand to secure employment at NGOs and Haitian businesses. Expert interlocutors validated this and their own participation in the practice (Interview, Cap Haitien, March 2014). Further, field observations and scholars document the sex trade and violence women experienced by MINUSTAH (UN) peacekeepers and UNIPOL officers (Kolbe, 2015).

As women migrate from the rural *lakou* they leave behind strong social networks that keep male violence in check (Schwartz, 2015), and community support networks that provide moral economies of care - namely reduce the risks and vulnerabilities associated with food shortages and health crises (Vansteenkiste, 2017). Further, the social economy and extended family that act as a trade, credit, labour sharing, and safety network are also left behind. Migrants often arrive in the city minus a social network of support, leaving them extremely vulnerable and dependent on humanitarian assistance. An urban interlocutor revealed: "I share less and I hide my own food shortages from my neighbours. They don't need to know my business." As the local food economy declines, traditions of mutual solidarity are lost, leading to the demise of social stability. When disassembling moral economies of care, social instability increases, and women are at greater risk of violence, food insecurity, and associated poor health.

## Adapting the Feminized Locally Oriented Food Economy

Haiti's local food economy operates largely under the control of women. It is a gendered domain that places women as the main owners of the production harvests and guardians of the local food economy as women oversee the production-distribution-consumption triad of local food products. Integration into the world food economy works at cross-purposes with Haitian women as it removes women from the income-generating

<sup>5</sup>I argue rural-urban migration increased as income opportunities decreased. However, migration patterns are motivated by multiple factors including access to secondary school, relatives in the urban, etc. Scholars argue for and against access to land causing migration (Lundahl 2011 *versus*; Gardella 2006; Sletten and Egset 2004).

potential of the production triad used to feed rural households and ensure food sovereignty. The aftereffect of this loss is greater participation in the less lucrative distribution and consumption vectors and profound effects on women's ability to make economic contributions to the household and food security for the community. This inability to generate enough income and food for rural households and communities leads to increased migration<sup>6</sup> to urban centers in search of employment. As scholars note, "gender roles and a households' organization of labour along gender lines influences who migrate, where to, and for how long" (Bastia and Piper, 2019).

Today, still, the majority of rural peasant women are tied to the home. Women are central to household economics, community food security, and social stability, relying on gardens, marketing food products, charcoal, artisan crafts, and raising animals. Men contribute heavy labour, care for large animals, and money from informal employment and selling export crops (Schwartz et al., 2015). The act of participating in food production, distribution and consumption, and sharing, is a moral marker that establishes personhood and membership into a social unit (Kivland 2012). Household food is not only the immediate household, which is fluid and dynamic in membership in and of itself; rather it extends to neighbours and relatives in a tradition of *sharing plates*. Households are linked through sharing food and agricultural labour, creating a larger unit of interdependence. As observed during fieldwork, a household shares food in accordance with the importance of the person—the more critical one is to the woman's network and survival, the larger the plate of cooked food one receives. Therefore, the household in Haiti is not a single production unit but a social network of neighbours and kin designed to reduce vulnerability through production and trade (Schwartz et al., 2015). These smaller units are situated within regional and national production and trade circuits. This larger local distribution system mitigates a lack of appropriate food storage by taking advantage of the variety of micro-climates with differing seasonal harvests to trade (Schwartz et al., 2015). The seasons also encourage a system of seed sharing (Murray and Alvarez, 1975).

Madan Sara are responsible for up to 90 percent of the local trade in Haiti (FTF, 2016), making them essential. These women travel to remote mountain areas, buying and selling food goods, sharing political, agricultural, and health information, and extending credit. One Madan Sara interviewee explained "I rent a large truck with two other Madan Sara and we travel up to the mountain where we trade food, news, and credit with cultivators." Where possible, the women rent trucks to travel large distances, and operate or supply food depots in a lucrative, intricate, regional and interregional distribution system that is necessary for Haiti's food security. In total, the local system is a feminized space characterized by a class hierarchy of street

vendors; small and large market vendors; small boutiques; local, regional, or national Madan Sara; and Madan Sara depot owners (wholesale and retail). Elite Haitian males, participate in the top rung of this hierarchy within the wholesale export-import sector, and own warehouses and depots, strengthening their historical position as gatekeepers between the world food economy and the local food economy by increasing importation of food.

Despite of the important role Madan Sara play, they are under pressure to reorient to the advantage of foreign producers as food distributors of imports. With decreasing prices for agricultural exports and removal of import tariffs during SAPs, the Haitian business elite expanded their activities to capitalize on lucrative import opportunities in the new food economy. Imports include staple grains—rice, beans, lentils—and also highly processed foods: wheat flour, hotdogs, spaghetti, Coca-Cola and Tampico (processed artificial juice), cornflakes, crackers, sweet drinks, processed snack foods, candy, evaporated milk, tomato paste, and vegetables and legumes from the Dominican Republic. Also imported are foods rejected by American consumers (e.g., chicken feet) and Dominican consumers (e.g., broken rice).<sup>7</sup> As businessmen increase food importation, Madan Sara are forced to participate in the distribution of cheaper imports to meet consumer demands and to neglect the distribution of local production. The Madan Sara, like elite Haitian males, take advantage of the new tariffs and global food system and leave behind smaller producers in their rural circuits to add distribution of imported goods from the Caribbean and the neighbouring Dominican Republic.<sup>8</sup>

As globalization changes the local food economy, the transition relies on the adaptation of consumption patterns. Cheaply-priced imports encourage changing preferences, as do the lack of clean water, fuel, storage, or labour for preparation.

Interviewees reported the following changes to consumption patterns.

We used to feed our babies alaroot, a wild food. It is not recultivated and people are eating it less. This knowledge is lost between generations and young people use imports. Alaroot is good for the soil. Even as late as 1998, we could find women selling it in the streets in Cap-Haitien (Interview, Cap Haitien, March 2014).

We used to eat tchaka more often. It is made with corn; we break the corn to take off the shell and mix it with beans and meat, sometimes pumpkin. It is delicious and has lots of nutrients. If you eat it at nine in the morning you won't need anything else until six at night. It's less popular now because it takes a lot of time to cook and

<sup>6</sup>I argue rural-urban migration increased as income opportunities decreased. However, migration patterns are motivated by multiple factors including access to secondary school, relatives in the urban, etc. Scholars argue for and against access to land causing migration (Lundahl 2011 *versus*; Gardella 2006; Sletten and Egset 2004).

<sup>7</sup>Some food products are misrepresented in Haitian markets such as Corn Soy Blend sold as Corn (USAID 2013). Milk products are edible oils and Haitians are generally unaware of the difference.

<sup>8</sup>In the 1970s there arose an international Madan Sara who would travel to other countries within the Caribbean to bring back material items for sale (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998).



charcoal is expensive. And, we need to get to the market to work. It is African food and we leave some on the ground for the ancestors – the Lwa (Interview, Limonade, September 2013).

As the local food economy changes, so do socio-cultural consumption patterns. One urban interviewee reported feeding her children sweet pop and bread for dinner when she could afford nothing else. Changing consumption patterns are not considered healthy by many Haitians. Women interviewees from Cap-Haitien reported:

We work in the garden to make Haiti strong. Our food is fresh; the imports make us sick (Interview, Cap Haitien, May 2013).

Imported foods are not the same as our food. I prefer food that is grown in Haiti. It has more vitamins, is organic, fresher, and tastes sweet (Interview, Cap Haitien, October 2013).

We need to put our heads together and solve this problem. The land is sick and we are sick (Interview, Cap Haitien, October 2013).

Generally, interviewees expressed an understanding that the current hardships are directly tied to the changing local food economy caused by imports. As explained by a male agronomist:

When we make changes we don't improve. We start back at zero because we replace our ideas with American ideas and don't take the time to critique them. We are losing a lot of knowledge with this system of replacing knowledge instead of transferring knowledge (Interview, Limonade, May 2013).

The traditional Haitian diet is largely plant-based, consisting of yams, manioc, sorghum, sweet potato, millet, maize, and eggs, and with less poultry, pork, goat, and beef. Cultural nuances that are left unrecorded by FAO data include the addition of *moringa* leaves for strength, and *alaroot* flour for making baby formula, to suggest two of many. Jean-Baptiste (1994), offers a deeper look at the ethnobotany of green leafy vegetables used for food and medicine in Haiti and gives evidence to suggest that the Haitian diet is more complex than Western measurements of consumption may capture. The changes to local diets concerns women, as one older woman explained:

When our children were sick we would just go to the garden and get the medicine. Now we have no garden and no knowledge. The food in the market is less fresh; it has to be transported for hours, plus harvest time, plus sitting in the market. And medicine plants need to be fresh for the best potency (Interview, Cap Haitien, October 2013).

Incomplete data collection has led to misunderstanding and underrating healthy eating practices by local actors.

Today, changing consumption patterns reflect changing identities and economic power, as well as changing trade policies.<sup>9</sup> Trade policies make it possible for Haitians to enjoy their favorite Sunday meal, rice, and fried meat, every day of the week, displacing traditional consumption patterns. An interviewee commented on the outcome of this structural change.

After our parents are finished working in agriculture who is going to replace them? We are victims of acculturation. City dwellers think they live in New York or Boston; their mentality changes with movies. We have young parents and they have nothing in their minds to help themselves. They go to the market early to earn money and they don't know how to garden or teach their kids to garden—everyone is poorer. We have many single-parent families, this is common now, and it makes it difficult for society to improve (Interview, Cap Haitien, February 2014).

Despite knowing that the food system is failing, Haitian consumers are trapped, trying to stretch meager earnings further; they have no choice but to buy cheap imports. As rice fills families' stomachs, so do sugary beverages (Stevens, 1998), displacing traditional fresh fruit juice. Healthy consumption patterns, and linkages between structural food insecurity and poor health, are often lost in the discussion of production, which focuses on efficiency and yields.

Adaptations to export-agriculture, to meet the demands of the world food economy, further marginalize women in their role as *poto mitan*. Although men provide the heavy labour to cultivate gardens, their participation after that is often directed to coffee or cocoa production for export. Men's export crops, since the 1940s, have been under the jurisdiction of state-selected rural and urban elite families who control both imports and exports (Charles, 1995b). As exports declined in the 1970s with the associated debt crisis recession (see **Figure 3**), men migrated in search of work<sup>10</sup>, sometimes to sugar plantations in the Dominican Republic, or further. This left women without male labour for cultivation. It also resulted in less income, greater hardship, and the weakening of the production unit. During an interview, one urban woman migrant lamented: "My husband went to the Dominican Republic; I have waited 5 years for him to return." As the global market shifts and wanes, the female-dominated local food market is assumed to always serve its reproductive and subsistence roles, despite the pressures put upon it, such as the retraction of male support.

<sup>9</sup>The concept of "the peasant in need" is engrained in the American consciousness. Post-earthquake, American farmers donated rice to Haiti as part of relief efforts, stating: "The U.S. rice industry has long enjoyed a trade relationship with Haiti that is very meaningful to us." USA Rice Chairman Jamie Warshaw said, "We would like to demonstrate our concern for their suffering by donating rice, which is a staple in the Haitian diet" (Western Farm Press 2010).

<sup>10</sup>Between 1961 and 2010 total migration to all countries increased from 51,997 persons/year to 150,000 persons/year (World Bank 2017), representing economic and politically motivated movements.

Today, many women sell imported food products.<sup>11</sup> Many have abandoned their own production and migrated to urban centers in order to get by in a marginalized political economy of food. Some Haitians are very aware of this problem and unhappy with it, reporting: “The imported foods are bad for the country. Those foods prevent Haiti from being a country that can produce for itself,” and “We feel ashamed when Haiti imports foods. Eating other foods is not good because we don’t encourage the local production.” Although aware of the issue, and motivated to change the local food economy to improve their circumstances, some suggest that they are unable to do so because of their lack of financial power and political voice.

Meanwhile, powerful transnational corporations push for greater trade flexibility to sell and source within and between nations, strengthening their linkages and power globally. In essence, moving regulations out of the reach of governments and citizens, and shifting sovereignty from national governments to the world food economy regime (132; McMichael, 2000; Weis, 2007; Clapp, 2012). In Haiti, international corporate actors of the *middle space* make alliances with Haitian elite intermediaries to alter their activities from exporting small scale coffee, and cocoa, that yielded poor profits in the world food economy, to becoming profitable food importers. As in other global south contexts (see Powell, 2017; Sweetman and Ezpeleta, 2017; Bastia and Piper, 2019; Pearson and Sweetman, 2019), local citizens are excluded from decision-making processes regarding the use of land resources to benefit their social and economic systems. These intermediaries shifted the local food economy to align with their economic interests, heightening inequality, food insecurity, and existing class tensions.

## CONCLUSION

This paper narrates the historical transformation of the Haitian food economy through a gendered lens, to demonstrate how gender roles are instrumentalized to heighten food insecurity in a structure paradoxically designed and purposed to alleviate hunger. Central to the narrative are actors in the middle space who organize power relations to demand women’s participation for the functioning of the neoliberal food regime, demonstrating that the gendered development- food security nexus needs meaningful attention. For Haitian women, hard-won social and material security and autonomy gained within the patriarchal *lakou* and *eritaj* system are lost as women’s source of production—the local garden—is replaced by offshore agriculture, and the value of their activities—income for the household and community food security—is captured as profits in a global value chain leaving heightened food insecurity and dismantled social networks.

<sup>11</sup>Flour is duty-free when imported on market day at Ouanaminthe (border town with DR). Officially tariffs are 3.5 percent on wheat flour and 4 percent on bulgur and hard wheat. The number of wheat flour importers is more than twenty. There are three main importers for rice, two for vegetable oil, and one for wheat grain. Palm oil is imported from Malaysia through the USA (USAID 2013). The World Bank (2015) suggests the concentrated nature of importers is leading to higher prices.

Intermediary actors purposefully ignore the demands placed on women and their traditional critical role as *poto mitan* of the local food economy, removing women from the production side of the equation, yet counting on them to fulfill the responsibilities assigned to them as women in their distribution and consumption roles. By doing so, the world food economy relies on unequal gender relations and ultimately intensifies the patriarchy and gender inequities embedded in the local context to meet its own ends. Without offering meaningful support mechanisms or allowing participation in the new food economy, the arrangement asks women to uphold: 1) food distribution and consumption; and 2) a socio-economic system that sustains community wellbeing marked by food security and social stability, but removes the income generation of the production side of women’s production-distribution-consumption triad. Haitian women and men have become consumers and distributors for the world food economy; their participation dialectically undermines their production system, food sovereignty, and wellbeing. The outcome is loss of income and autonomy, food insecurity, social instability, migration, poor livelihood choices, poorer health, and greater dependence on a global food system that is causing their woes. Therefore, women’s roles and contributions to gendered food and social production must be analytically visible and accounted for to ensure equitable integration with the world food economy. This case study allows us to see the material impact of powerful social relations between female and male peasants, their local food economy, and international actors shaping an inequitable world food economy.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusion of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by University of Guelph 13MR031. The patients/participants provided their verbal or written informed consent to participate in this study.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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