# Freidberg Article Critical Analysis

Cleaning up down South: Supermarkets, ethical trade, and African horticulture is an article written by Freidberg and published in the social and cultural geography journal to stress on the significance of maintaining a sustainable environment (Freidberg, 2003). Freidberg is a professor of Geography at Dartmouth College and holds a Ph.D. from UC Berkeley University. According to the author, ethical standards have become fetishized in the modern society where organisations rarely comply with rules and regulations. Freidberg argues that supermarkets in the United Kingdom have lacked compliance with the set standards. In this case, the supermarkets do not care about the rules from a moral perspective but instead adhere to comply with the standards due to fear of bad press and negative brand reputation. Additionally, such organizations fear to lose their esteemed customers as well as excellent marketing chances. The critical analysis concentrates on the impact of this on the supply chain in the African continent with particular focus on Zambia’s horticultural industry.

According to the author, the transparent appearance and instances where full disclosure is exhibited have translated itself into what modern supermarket stores in the UK look like and consequently into the vegetable packaging in the horticultural industry. In this case, ethical standards have turned into a tool that is being utilized by supermarkets to wade off negative publicity, which is another way that products are marketed to the consumers and differentiated from those of competitors in the industry. Mistrust in the government has granted supermarkets the chance to portray themselves as emergent and more efficient gatekeepers of food supply and food security as quoted in Freidberg (2003) by Marsden and Wrigley (1996), and Marsden, Flynn, and Harrison (2003). However, it is imperative to note that more power comes with more responsibility which means that such supermarkets must be ready to pay the price for any duties assumed. The authority that supermarkets exercise and the ethical standards such as EUREP-GAP and ETI provides a convenient and more structured way to control the supply chain. Nevertheless, these codes of conduct do not concern themselves with the people paying for the compliance and nearly all supermarkets are not willing to do so.

Additionally, lack of adherence to standards combined with the geographical distance and cultural differences contributes to the homogenization of the supply chain in Africa as Freidberg (2003) points out. The significant suppliers of vegetables are mainly large farms run by the white people. The author goes ahead and refers to them as “Benign dictators” as they have the capacity to supply vast amounts of vegetables and are culturally similar to the supermarket buyers in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the author compares the ethical standards mission portrayed to a neo-colonial civilization mission where people are continuously exploited with little considerations. Therefore, cleaning the south will remain to be a difficult task as long as the companies run by the whites continue to dominate. Apart from the current improvements in infrastructure, preceding efforts mainly focused on making the African continent more hygiene with a close focus being in the soap industry. An example is the introduction of Timothy Burke’s lifebuoy men and lux women in 1996. In this case, the white people wanted to acquire cheap labour from the Africans although they had to ensure that it was clear labour. Based on Freidberg’s claim on neo-colonialism and radicalisation, moral standards are being emphasised such through vocational training.

As the contemporary ethical standards become more burdensome, additional human resources are required to ensure adherence to the compliance laws and regulations. According to the author, the white expatriates are traditionally more expensive, which consequently leads to the quest for cheap labour. In this case, the vocational training crowded by local black population become the ideal solution to the provision of low-cost workforce. Even though more black Zambians are occupying the middle-level management jobs, the racial difference is observed when it comes to the export business. Dramatic liberalizations experienced in the 1980s has led to a significant change in the consumer markets in Zambia, a situation worsened by the growing competition in the region. Zambia has been forced to re-orient towards the oversee consumers particularly in the agro-industry. The most apparent export industry remains to be that of horticulture which has experienced a constant annual growth rate of 20 percent. Initially, the horticultural business was mainly experimental as it dealt with cheaper commodities such as avocados and melons. The dynamic and slightly sluggish economy, therefore, falls short of the level of competition exhibited by companies in overseas countries.

Lack of proper ethical standards, poor quality, and lack of safety measures are some of the major issues being experienced in Zambia and other countries in Africa. Additionally, there is high demand for technicians and bookkeepers to reduce the costly expatriate staff being outsourced to help in stabilizing the dwindling horticultural industry. The launch of crucial horticultural vocational programmes in the continent has improved on-farm training to ensure high quality and ethical conformance. In this case, research institutes use a huge amount of resources to establish the most efficient packaging that demonstrates compliance (Freidberg, 2001). The superiority of the UK supermarkets and companies has reduced the strictness of ethical standards. Such organizations violate sanitary rules because they collude with officials and gain favours in return. The restrictions on child labour make it difficult for parents to send their children to school. Additionally, teenage children living with AIDs and orphans find it difficult to cope with life as they cannot find employment.

Green, ethical trade in the region and particularly in Zambia has become a major obstacle that cannot be overcome. Black Zambian smallholders have a hard time finding standard chemical storage facilities, regular medical check-ups, and lack of enough capital to for the approved costs. Chain supermarkets such as Waitrose failed to join the ETI because of the numerous differences with the ILO (International Labour Organization) although it does have its ethical guidelines that ensure compliance. For the small enterprises, it is difficult to establish standardised rules which comply with international bodies. Therefore, the concern over the monopoly nature of supermarkets may end up becoming a significant problem if it is not addressed in time. From a personal point of view, the article accurately analyses the ongoing ethical compliance crisis across the globe. In case the issue is not solved using the appropriate means, chaos and conflicts with international bodies may arise and lead to a significant economic breakdown. Companies should adhere to set ethical standards to ensure uniform growth and development across the globe which is increasingly becoming complicated.

## References

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