(Re)Locating Known Histories of Science to the South: The Case of Hybrid Seeds in Mexico

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What new meanings of global networks and knowledge distribution emerge if we examine wheat, a transplant to the Americas, as a twentieth-century development project export from Mexico? Can wheat seeds be used to challenge existing narratives that explain flows of technical aid, scientific knowledge, and, eventually, food aid? This paper posits that our current understanding of food aid is marred because it uses a flawed understanding of where hybrid wheat seeds were developed. This misunderstanding originates in simplistic misconstructions of scientific production traced along imperial lines. International agricultural aid projects were rooted not in the arrival of the Rockefeller Foundation to Mexico in the 1940s but rather in earlier national projects. I will illustrate how the often-overlooked exchange of ideas between Mexican and Indian scientists about hybrid wheat can yield surprising interpretations about flows of knowledge and technological innovation.

I am interested in the history of science, knowledge production, circulation of knowledge, history of medicine, and public health. Specifically, my research focuses on the intersection of science and culture, public health, scientific and medical exchange in the Global South, and modern Latin America.