**Teaching the 2004 coup in Haiti from a French perspective: an Insight into global Neo-Imperial Culture and Practices.**

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Examining the 2004 coup in Haiti opens a window onto one of the most heated ideological debates in understanding current geo-politics and neo-imperialism. Teaching the political history of Haiti is particularly stimulating because of its implications in understanding the contemporary world order. Teaching of this material is approached usefully through Critical Discourse Analysis because this allows students to draw their own conclusions from primary material both in French and in English. The understanding of discourse as a social practice also helps breaching the history of ideas and concepts such as neo-imperialism and the impact such an ideology continues to have in Haiti and in many other countries experiencing similar challenges.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the first democratically-elected president of Haiti, after winning the election for a second time in 2001, was forcibly removed from power in 2004 by French, US and Canadian Special Forces in the presence of US Ambassador Luis Moreno and escorted to a plane towards Central African Republic. Drawing on Peter Hallward’s book *Damning the Floods* and Hallward’s debate with Lyonel Trouillot, Slavoj Žižek argues that the for/against Jean Bertrand-Aristide discussion among the left dissociates the “partisan[s] of radical emancipation’ from the partisans of ‘globalisation with a human face” (Žižek, “Democracy versus the people”). Žižek argues that “Peter Hallward's outstanding book is not just about Haiti, but about what it means to be a "leftist" today.” However, understanding the impact of the 2004 coup in Haiti also entails recognizing the political, social and human repercussions of the neoliberal agenda imposed by Western powers such as France, Canada and the United States and critically assessing the true nature of the current world order.

This chapter offers pedagogical suggestions for students to assess critically French involvement in the military intervention that overthrew Aristide in light of the ideological debate among scholars who have written on the topic and the discursive analysis of the portrayal of Aristide’s government in the press. It pays particular attention to discursive justifications offered by French intellectuals and newspapers that legitimized the intervention. The collusion of the political sphere with the liberal press and intellectuals is at the center of this analysis. Indeed, most of the articles published on Aristide after 2001 originated in *Le Monde* and *Libération*. Furthermore, in the month preceding the intervention (January 2004), French intellectual and former advisor to President François Mitterrand, Regis Debray, published a widely circulated report on France and Haiti.

This teaching unit should be divided into three sessions. A first session dealing with Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s two mandates and the history of the three coups and their impact on Haitian society; a second session analyzing the historical debate surrounding the nature of the 2004 coup and a final session dealing with press coverage and the power of language. The three main teaching/research questions addressed here are: 1. Did the press campaign led by the two publications and echoed in Debray’s report pave the way for a Franco-American-Canadian military and diplomatic intervention? 2. What were the discursive techniques used to legitimize military intervention and the removal of Aristide, who had been democratically elected in 1991 and again in 2000? Ruth Wodack Martin Reisigl’s Discourse Historical Approach is pertinent here in identifying and classifying such techniques (Wodack and Reisigl, 2009, 87). 3. What were the impacts of the military intervention?

JEAN-BERTRAND ARISTIDE’S TWO MANDATES: A HISTORY OF INTERVENTIONISM

In order to contextualize the 2004 coup in Haiti, it is essential to understand that it was not the first attempt to get rid of Aristide’s government. It is also important to note that Haiti’s debt under Aristide was the trigger and pretext for French involvement against the Aristide government from 2003 onwards. Dividing the class into four groups helps in addressing four essential questions: 1. The history of interventionism and ongoing colonization in Haiti[[1]](#endnote-1); 2. The social and political climate that witnessed the rise of Aristide as a popular leader; 3. The similarities and differences between the two coups against Aristide’s government in 1991; 4. The reasons behind the US and European economic embargo launched against Haiti after Aristide’s second election.

A priest who was strongly influenced by Liberation Theology, Aristide, the leader of the Lavalas Party, was elected with 67 % of the popular vote in 1991 on the basis of a radical social program of re-building of the Haitian state and public sector. [[2]](#endnote-2) However, Haiti was in the midst of a severe economic depression. The dictatorships of François Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, lasted almost 30 years and opened up the country to American economic domination; ten years of successive military juntas led mostly by General Henri Namphy finalized the process of the liberalizing the economy (also known as the *Plan Meriken*, or American Plan). USAID Development strategy reports helped open Haitian markets by advocating grain imports, cutting and eventually eliminating export taxes and pushing the development of the assembly industry which had begun under Jean-Claude Duvalier (USAID 1984 24). This was imposed via directives like the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) led by the World Bank and the IMF and signed by General Namphy. This plan resulted in the pauperization of the population, the rise of food prices dictated by low export taxes and the increase of urbanization: “Haiti’s neoliberal agricultural policies had drastic consequences for the country’s farmers. Whereas in the 1970s Haiti imported about 19% of its food needs, it now imports 51%. (…) Eighty percent of all the rice consumed in Haiti is now imported.” (Dupuy 2007) This desperate economic situation worsened with the ‘Washington Consensus’ that pushed neoliberal reform even further (Klein 2007). It is worth showing extracts from *Poto Mitan* in class to discuss the worsening of working conditions in factories between the mid 1970s and the mid 1980s.

The 1991 election of Aristide threatened to disrupt the neoliberal agenda. When Aristide assumed office there existed an external debt of $939.003.000, inherited from the Duvalier and Namphy regimes.[[3]](#endnote-3) After agreeing to a second Structural Adjustment Program concomitant to grants and loan money, which was needed to keep the economy afloat, opposition to Aristide grew very quickly (Mc Gowan 1997). Indeed, this new SAP imposed very strict measures on the public sector that were in total contradiction with Aristide’s political agenda: redundancies, reduction of import taxes, elimination of custom tariffs, suspension of licensing requirements for sugar and rice imports. (10) Exploiting popular dissent, the political opposition planned a first coup in January 1991. This unleashed an incredibly strong popular response when thousands of people – mostly from the poorer areas like *Cité Soleil* – charged into the streets of Port-of-Prince and surrounded the presidential palace to protect the president (Hallward 38-39). Learning from this episode, the military organized a second coup in September. The army contained *Cité Soleil* by shooting on sight anyone attempting to reach the city center. At least 300 people were killed in the first night (Hallward 40). Aristide was then placed under arrest and deported to Venezuela. Raoul Cédras, head of the army, who was also on the CIA payroll (Rossier 2005), established a military junta that lasted three years, until Aristide’s return was organized by the administration of U.S. President Bill Clinton in 1994 ‘Operation Restore Democracy’.

The junta was brutal and violent and established a reign of terror in Haiti. Almost five thousand Lavalas supporters were killed while many Haitians were forced to flee the country. The army reestablished the old paramilitary structures that Aristide had abolished (Chomsky 1993 211); the *Chefs Seksyon* and ex-*macoutes* and created the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti (FRAPH), the death squads led by Emmanuel Constant and Louis-Jodel Chamblain who had worked for the *Macoutes* (Sprague 2012). The international community publicly condemned the coup and organized a trade and economic embargo. The embargo was broken by the administration of U.S. President George H. W. Bush, which then granted exception to 800 U.S. companies (Chomsky 1994). The Clinton administration increased trade with the military junta while the embargo had hugely detrimental consequences for the population and unemployment rose. The unprecedented brutality of the regime led to a record number of forced exiles who began landing on the shores of Florida. On arrival they were denied political asylum and were detained in Guantanamo Bay before deportation back to Haiti. The refugee crisis and the negative coverage of the Cédras regime eventually pushed the Clinton administration to overthrow the junta and to allow Aristide to return to power (Girard 2002 70-85).

Aristide’s return came with a stringent condition which were fiercely imposed by the Clinton government. This was in the form of another Structural Adjustment Program called ‘Emergency Economic Recovery Program’ (EERP) led by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, the IMF and USAID.[[4]](#endnote-4) The terms of the contract were very clear: Aristide had to comply with the EERP plan that would redirect the economy towards the private sector. This plan involved privatization of state-owned companies, redundancies of most civil servants, a radical reduction in government regulation, a push towards an export-led economy and cuts to salaries.[[5]](#endnote-5) These measures were pushed forward by the René Préval administration (1996-2000). 1995-1997 was a crucial period for the *Organisation Politique Lavalas* (OPL), which split into the factions OPL and Fanmi Lavalas, led by Aristide. The tensions and disagreements were mainly linked to class issues: OPL represented bourgeois civil society while FL was a popular movement which supported Aristide’s social program. FL won the legislative elections in May 2000 and Aristide was re-elected in November 2000. Aristide won 92% of the votes and 60% voter turnout. The same year, and despite the ratification of IDB loans, the funds were withheld and the World Bank suspended all its grants to Haiti.[[6]](#endnote-6) The US embargo, followed by the EU, was explained by an electoral fraud during the May 2000 elections in which Aristide had not even been elected. The impact of the embargo on the Haitian society was extreme, as the government budget was reduced to $300 million by 2003 and Haiti’s GDP fell from $4 billion in 1999 to $2.9 Billion. The nature of the embargo and the aid blockage is key to understanding the most brazen aspects of the neoliberal agenda.

In April 2003, at a speech during a bi-centennial commemoration of Haitian revolutionary Toussaint Louverture’s death, Aristide reminded France of its colonial past and asked for the retribution of the 90 million gold Francs that Haiti paid France in return for its independence. Because of the exorbitant interest rates applied to this infamous debt, Aristide made a case for retribution ($21.7 billion) to be paid back. Following Aristide’s demand, in October 2003, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin put together an ‘independent committee of reflection and propositions on the Franco-Haitian relationship’and appointed two representatives: Régis Debray and Véronique Albanel. The commission’s report was published in January 2004 and Aristide was demoted the following month.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL DEBATE

The historiography is particularly revealing in understanding the 2004 coup. Chris Bongie, Noam Chomsky, Michael Deibert, Alex Dupuy, Robert Fanon, Paul Farmer, Philippe Girard, Peter Hallward, Nick Nesbitt, Randall Robinson, Lyonnel Trouillot and Christophe Wargny are among the most significant scholars who have contributed to the historiographical debate. The debate highlights the fact that the historian’s neutrality is a myth and often highly ideological. It also reveals what was at stake with the coup in Haiti and situates what happened at the core of a series of neo-imperial and military practices.

Two main sides of this debate confront their interpretation of coup as legitimate or illegitimate depending on their understanding of and agreement or not with Aristide’s political agenda. Students’ presentations on the arguments used by both sides are a very productive way of addressing this historiographical debate. The students should be able to present the scholars’ work, summarize each perspective and the sources used to support the arguments. In order to prepare this session it is essential for the students to visualize the level of violence disclosed during this coup. Both documentaries directed by Kevin Pina and Nicolas Rossier are excellent sources because of their use of footage shot during the coup. They are perhaps the most influential journalists who have engaged with the coup and its aftermath. The human cost of the coup is a necessary realization in order to further contextualize the historiographical debates.

Michael Deibert’s book *Notes from the Last Testament* takes the format of a file made up by theseries of lawsuits against Aristide and Lavalas. However, since the book’s publication all its evidence has been proven erroneous and all charges against Aristide have been dropped. Alex Dupuy’s book *The Prophet and Power*elaborates a much more subtle critique of Aristide’s administration. Aristide’s social program was inevitably going to alienate the dominant class, he argues, and Aristide’s unwillingness to compromise pushed him to resort to the repression of political dissent of the elites. The repression of dissent and the fear of yet another coup are, according to Dupuy, the two principal reasons why Aristide relied on the armed group, *Chimère*, as a paramilitary force. This perspective shared by Robert Fanon in his 2007 book, *The Roots of Haitian Despotism* and Christophe Wargny who laments the gradual corruption of the regime in *Haïti n'existe pas: deux cents ans de solitude*.

Peter Hallward’s *Damning the Flood* and Justin Podur’s *Haiti’s New Dictatorship*, Paul Farmer in ‘Who removed Aristide? Paul Farmer reports from Haiti’ and Noam Chomsky in ‘U.S.-Haiti’ share similar arguments. They argue that the Aristide government was weakened and destabilized by a combination of factors because he was trying to establish a popular democracy. These included economic pressure from the embargo, a national and international media campaign of vilification, paramilitary violence and cooption of civil society organizations. None of these authors deny the fact that corruption also existed under Aristide, but note that the scale was different and it was not institutionalized to the same extent as under the military juntas or the Duvaliers.

Lyonel Trouillot attacks Peter Hallward’s *Daming the flood* in an article ‘Hallward, or The Hidden Face of Racism’ and openly launches an ideological attack on the author (Trouillot 2009 128-136). Accusing Hallward of corruption, of being Aristide’s ghost writer and of racism because he claimed ‘the right to name the other’s reality in the other’s stead’, (132) he concludes by calling Hallward a “fanatic.” In an newspaper article published by *L’humanité* in March 2004, Trouillot reasserts that the overthrow of Aristide was orchestrated by the population (Trouillot 2004). Trouillot tries very hard to legitimize the demotion of Aristide as a popular act and never acknowledges the actions taken by the G184 against the Aristide government and its links with the *Collectif NON* led by Trouillot, a group of artists and intellectuals who in December 2003 took a public stance against Aristide and began denouncing the violence and abuse. Hallward responds to Trouillot’s attack in his article “Lyonel Trouillot, or the fictions of formal democracy” and in turn underscores his class affiliation by reaffirming the popular support enjoyed by Aristide even months after the coup and despite risking being killed. Hallward, who rejects the authoritarian and corrupt nature of Aritisde’s regime as being a construct to discredit and thwart popular democracy, admits that these gangs were responsible for some of the political violence under Aristide. However, both Sprague and Hallward draw a comparison between the number of murders committed by FL between 2000 and 2004 (around 30) and the murders of Lavalas supporters during the military junta from 1991 to 1994 and the killings of between 30,000 and 50,000 people during the Duvalier dictatorships (1957-1986) (Sprague 29). It is important to note that the international community did not at any point suggest overthrowing either of the Duvaliers. One should also recall that that instead, the French government hosted Jean-Claude Duvalier during his exile in France for twenty-five years. It should also be noted that according to a study published by the Center of Human Rights at University of Miami School of Law, around 4,000 people were killed after they were accused of being Lavalas supporters (Griffin 2004).

Chris Bongie discusses the Trouillot and Hallward debate and concludes by reaffirming the ever-present American friendship towards Haiti, particularly in the face of the tragedy of the January 2010 earthquake: ‘How can one speak of enemies, when the self-styled ‘Friends of Haiti’ – the U.S. government and its military first among them – are so visibly engaged in benign acts of ‘reconstruction and stabilization’ (…)’. Peter Hallward and Naomi Klein, on the other hand, implore the public and the international community to stay vigilant and to protect ‘human rights’ at all costs. Both Nesbitt’s and Hallward’s arguments are reinforced by a detailed narration of the coup from a close personal friend of Aristide: Randall Robinson, author of *An Unbroken Agony*. Randall Robinson’s version of the facts is used in the form of an interview for Nicolas Rossier and Kevin Pina’s documentaries on the coup. The comparison of these texts with visual sources is extremely important and powerful because images of the coup allow the students to feel closer to the brutality of the coup and its aftermath.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE FRENCH MEDIA CAMPAIGN

A brief introduction to the methodology used to analyze the press is important to remind the students that the Discourse Historical Approach outlined by Ruth Wodack is useful here as a methodological approach for two reasons: 1. “Discourse always involves power and ideologies […] and no interaction exists where power relations do not prevail” (Wodack 1999); and 2. “Discourse […] is always historical, that is, it is connected (synchronically and diachronically) with other communicative events which are happening at the same time or which have happened before” (Wodack & Ludwig 199912).

The students should research the context in which Aristide’s demand of retribution was made and link it to the results of the work done by the focus group on the embargo. They should also research the background of the main actors: Dominique de Villepin, Régis Debray, Véronique Albanel and the G184.

In October 2003, as a result of Aristide’s demand for retribution, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin commissioned Régis Debray and Véronique Albanel to write a report on the Franco-Haitian relationship. The report was published by the prestigious conservative publishing house, Les éditions de la Table Ronde. The two French newspapers used here are *Le Monde* and *Libération* because of their liberal reputation and their tradition of intellectual resistance with figures like Hubert Beuve Mery and Serge July. These voices of authority are reinforced by Régis Debray, a former student of Louis Althusser (ENS). Debray was professor of Philosophy at the University of Havana in the 1960s and developed a close relationship with Che Guevara during his time in Bolivia. By 1981 he was an adviser to the government of President Mitterrand. Until his report on Haiti his reputation was of left-wing intellectual *à la française*. Véronique Albanel is the sister of then Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin and was also part of the administrative council of the NGO, *Association Fraternité Universelle* *en Haïti* (AFU) whose partners are Bouygues and Air France. The intellectual kudos of these newspapers and the intellectual figure of Régis Debray are symbolic and they are firmly rooted in French national identity*.*

Once this context is established the students should be put in groups to identify the different discursive techniques following the critical discourse analysis approach. According to Ruth Wodak’s ‘argumentation theory’, topoï correspond to ‘[…] conclusion rules which connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion, the claim [...].’ This methodology allows for the reader to identify what constitutes a topos in the texts studied. The topos of threat is particularly interesting because it provokes an emotional reaction: ‘if there are specific dangers and threats, one should do something against them.’ (Wodak & Meyers 2001 74). The students can screen both newspapers online and list the different topoï they can identify.

From April to December the general discursive structures disclosed in all the articles published on Aristide (76 in *Le Monde* and 50 in *Libération*)[[7]](#endnote-7)and Debray’s report are very similar and develop three general topoï to portray the ongoing situation in Haiti: the topos of fear that is developed around the political chaos in Haiti; the topos of fraud with the theme of the aid money poured into the country despite ongoing level of poverty; and the topos of urgency and emergency with Aristide portrayed as the new tyrant, and that will eventually necessitate military intervention. These are the main topoï identified as examples of discourse analysis but this list is not exhaustive and this section should be the object of a discussion with the class.

The first topos introduced is the topos of fear, political and social chaos. In Denis Tillinac’s Preface to Debray’s text, Haiti is introduced as a Francophone country whose population deserves France’s clemency (7). A condescending recognition of the importance of Haitian culture is immediately followed by a infantilization of the population. ‘This beautiful country’, Tillinac laments, ‘tyrannizes itself constantly.’ The juxtaposition of opposing and contrasting ideas represents the figure of speech called anti-thesis. This rhetorical tool is constantly used to remind the reader that the richest colony in the world became one of the poorest following independence. This figure of speech is reinforced and thematically developed in the Debray’s first chapter. The use of metaphorical language centers on the Apocalypse. He uses words like ‘chaos’, ‘anarchy’ and verbs that reinforce the decline from the colony’s golden age like ‘to deepen into’, ‘to continue to sink into’. The vocabulary and semantics paint a picture of wretchedness: terms like ‘tragic history’, ‘corruption’, ‘social misery’ are reinforced by the use of numerous superlatives and data and statistics. Life expectancy is on average 52 years for women and 48 for men; unemployment is about 70%. Some 85% of Haitians live on less than $1 US per day. Yet the structure of the argument always places responsibility for Haiti’s situation firmly in the hands of the population:

May our Haitian friends assume their part in the responsibility in the incredible descent that in two centuries took Haiti from being “the pearl of the Antilles”, the richest colony in the world, which provided a third of France’s import commerce – the Kuwait of the time of Voltaire – to a level equivalent to the Sahel and with similar conditions.

Debray uses an optative mood that is conveyed almost like a prayer. He ends his introduction on Haiti’s chaotic situation by blaming the population for not ‘even’ being self-sufficient ‘any longer’ in terms of food production. Debray omits to explain the disastrous impact that the U.S. export-led economy had on the food industry as off 1981when the Clinton administration forced Haiti to drop tariffs on imported, subsidized U.S. rice. The policy destroyed Haitian rice farming and jeopardized Haiti’s ability to be self-sufficient. Even Bill Clinton, when he became UN envoy to Haiti, apologized before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee for this disastrous policy.[[8]](#endnote-8)

The second main topos is the topos of fraud, usually linked to the aid money. Another similarity between Debray and the liberal press, but in much of the scholarship, is the issue of the debt and humanitarian aid.‘Haïti’, he writes, ‘is one of several extreme cases: it has received billions in foreign assistance, yet persists as one of the poorest and worst governed countries in the world.’ Debray reminds us that between 1994 and 1999 European aid was 487 million Euros, a fifth of which was provided by the French government (30). But Debray fails to explain that in 1994 after Aristide’s return most of the aid money came via the Structural Adjustment Program: the Emergency Economic Recovery Program (EERP). It was imposed as a condition of his return to the country by the International Development Bank, IMF, the World Bank and USAID (as noted above, SAPs included the privatization of a series of state-owned companies, flour and cement mills, the ports and airports, banks, electricity and telecommunications services and cutting the jobs of the majority of civil servants).

According to Debray, since the return of Aristide in 2001 the international community has poured about 2 billion Euros into the country, 200 million of which came from France (25). And yet, Haiti’s situation did not improve. As for the 2001-2004 period, Debray also omits to explain the difference between bilateral and multilateral aid. No bilateral aid was versed to the Haitian government between 2000 and 2004 from the U.S., Canada or the EU. According to economist Jeffrey Saxe and U.S. Representative Maxime Waters, in April 2001 6 loans were approved by the IMF, Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, but these loans were blocked. Nonetheless, the Aristide government still had to service the interests on the debt to the international institutions and they drained the government of the foreign external reserves to pay for loans it had never received. As a result, the exchange rate collapsed, inflation rose and the economy collapsed. However, for Debray and the French liberal, only Aristide is to be held responsible. Two reasons are invoked repeatedly: 1. Aristide’s refusal to implement the (EERP) after 1995; 2. the senatorial elections of November 2000 that were declared fraudulent, although Aristide was not yet in post. Debray goes into more detail of what he calls ‘what sort of debt?’ when discussing reparations and argues that it is used as diversion from real issues with his presidency.

The other principal topos linked to the first two topoi is that of urgency and implies that Aristide is a threat to democracy in Haiti. The attack on Aristide is an attack on a certain form of popular democracy. The real resentment here calls into question the notion of popular democracy itself. The process that brought Aristide into power twice with 67% in 1991 and 92% 2000 of the electorate was rigorously monitored by the international community and is virtually unheard of in the West, where low voter turnout and political disengagement characterize most general elections. Yet Debray refers to this as ‘a populist shortcut’ (36). Debray calls Aristide’s regime an ‘anarcho-autoritarian mess’ (34) and claims that the ‘Restore Democracy’ operation led by Clinton in 1994 to bring Aristide back into power to have failed. After Debray and Aubanel’s visit to Haiti in December to put pressure on Aristide to force him to resign, the discursive structure intensifies and the demonization is pushed to the extreme in articles published in *Le Monde* and *Libération*. Consider these examples, which were typical of French media coverage: ‘the Slum’s prophet’ (*Le Monde*); ‘from the slums to the luxurious villa’ (*Le Monde*); ‘From theprophet to the dictator’(*Le Monde*); ‘The defrocked priest’ (*Le Monde*); ‘Aristide has become a Bokassa’ (*Libération)*;‘He dilapidated everything (*Libération*); ‘Fear has changed sides like with Duvalier’ (*Le Monde*)*.* The religious references are used as metonymies of Aristide’s illegitimate power. Aristide increasingly is not referred to by his name but by what he represents: ‘the ex-priest’, ‘the Voodoo dictator’, ‘the Voodoo priest that brings death’, ‘le dictator vaudou mortifère’ (this sensationalist language is particularly prominent in *Libération)*. Another exercise that can be led by the students is to compare French with American press coverage and to discuss the use of similar or different topoï. Peter Hallward disscusses a few of these articles but the students can find more; students can even compare the main stream American press coverage of Aristide’s government with an ethnic press often viewed as alternative (Spencer 2012).

Once some of these discursive constructions are identified it is crucial to discuss the performative nature of these press reports in order to understand the role the press and the intellectuals played to justify the military intervention. With the publication of Debray’s report in January 2004, the intervention is clearly announced as well as the absurdity of the debt repayment. The closing paragraph of the Preface reaffirms the objectivity of the report which seeks to justify decisions already taken and to make sure that they are acted upon quickly: ‘May this report – as detailed as it is objective - incite our authorities to hasten the implementation of the decisions just taken.’ This conveys to the reader the clear idea that the intervention has already been decided and reinforces the sense of urgency before the reader has had the chance to read the report. Again, the use of the optative mood reinforces the almost religious-like language of a prayer.Around the same time, *Le Monde* affirms that, ‘Aristide’s departure is imminent.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Constant reference to the humanitarian crisis is reinforced by several interviews and quotations from the opposition, the use of UN reports as well as the lobbying of NGOs that have a clear interest in not allowing the Haitian government to rebuild its public sector as Aristide had proposed. The combination of the presence of a ‘tyrant’ and the reports on demonstrations and the active presence of the rebel army in the north of the country are the three main arguments used to outline the ‘humanitarian crisis’ which in turn legitimized intervention. Mediatic and intellectual production before the 2004 coup in Haiti thus provides an insightful example of this dialectical relationship as outlined by Wodack and Reisigl in their discussion and definition of discourse as social practice and highlights how it in turn impacts political decision-making.

CONCLUSION: THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

As a conclusion to the session it can be an interesting exercise to ask students to label some of the quotes found in the articles studied with George Orwell’s critique of political language. The 2004 coup narrated by the French and American press becomes the perfect example of George Orwell’s slogan from 1984, ‘war is peace’. The neo*-*Duvalierist, Guy Philippe(who led several coup attempts against Aristide) and leader of the February coup was armed by the U.S., trained by the U.S. forces in Manta, Ecuador, is described by *Le Monde* as ‘a chance for peace’.[[10]](#endnote-10) Raoul Cédras, who took power after the first coup in 1991 and imposed a brutal military dictatorship is similarly quoted unchallenged in *Le Monde*: ‘We will free Haiti from Aristide’s slavery’.[[11]](#endnote-11)

In the two weeks that followed ‘the humanitarian intervention’, 600 corpses were found in *Cité du Soleil*. After the coup, Boniface Alexandre was sworn into office and Gérard Latortue was flown in from Miami to take the head of the new government and a committee of seven men chosen by the U.S., Canadian and French authorities were put in place to help him govern. It is important to discuss how the class views this ‘democratic’ process. In March, April, and May and until his return to Haiti in 2011, hundreds of popular demonstrations demanding the return of Aristide took place in Haiti and were severely repressed by the police forces backed by the UN MINUSTAH forces. *Cité du Soleil* was cut off from the rest of Haiti, hospitals were shut down and endured severe repression. Most former members of Lavalas are dead, in jail or in exile.

In the same exercise, it is important for the class to identify all the main actors behind this coup and not just the foreign forces, but also the corporate forces: the G184. The group that is referred to as the ‘democratic opposition’, the G184, which Debray calls ‘the national consciousness (neither nationalist nor *noiriste*) ready to assume its rights and civic duties’ is frequently described in both newspapers as ‘the democratic platform’, ‘the democratic opposition’,  **‘**the pacifist option’, ‘the Haitian opposition’, ‘pacifist and legal’. In fact, the G184 is a conglomerate of the richest families in Haiti, the biggest corporations and a few elite ‘intellectuals’. The leader of the G184, André Apaid is the CEO of Alpha Industries— which is the biggest sweatshop operator in Haiti, with about fifteen garment-assembly plants, where workers sew clothing for Canadian and U.S. firms Gildan Activewear, Disney, and Walmart. It is perhaps not surprising that Apaid was so fervently opposed Aristide’s increase to the minimum wage. After the coup he once again managed to keep the minimum wage down. Professionals and businesses declared that Apaid is ‘the real government in Haiti’ (Griffin 2004). Keeping these quotes in mind in relation to the extracts of *Poto Mitan* studied in class, Orwell’s ‘freedom is slavery’ seems particularly relevant.

Finally, since the summer of 2004, the *Comité des Avocats pour le Respect des Libertés Individuelles* CARLI has denounced massacres, political killings, arbitrary/political arrests, and the withholding of due process under the Latortue government. CARLI has also denounced the active return of the army to power, and killings by former soldiers. As a result of their recent work, members of its staff have received death threats, mostly from former soldiers and members of FRAPH, the paramilitary organization that terrorized Haiti during the 1991-1994 military junta. CARICOM has asked the UN repeatedly to investigate the 2004 coup but to no avail. Neither *Le Monde* and *Libération* nor Debray explain the crisis in Haiti. A final discussion on the role of the liberal media and their affiliation to the ideology of corporate and military power and Western imperialism is crucial to conclude with the last of Orwell’s concepts: ‘ignorance is strength**’.** This type of transmediatic discourse, represented by the collusion between the political elite, the media and the corporate world, has become a dominant practice since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Chomsky and Herman analyse this kind of media representation in the United States in their ‘propaganda model’. They identify several filters which shape the news and which construct and/or reinforce the dominant discourse (Chomsky and Herman 1988 2). Chris Hedges also argues that an orchestrated manipulation of the readership serves only elite interests. François Robinet, in his recent work on the media coverage of wars in Francophone Africa, argues for the emergence of common transmediatic techniques as well as the elaboration of a dominant discourse to cover these conflicts. Within the Francophone context, Haiti is hardly an isolated case. Between 1961 and 2016 successive French governments intervened 44 times in the African continent and interventionism is clearly an inherent aspect of expansion. This form of transnational political-economic hegemony, at the core of military interventions, dictates the relationships between states within the present global economy and has brutal implications on the populations of the former colonies, as can be seen in the 2004 coup. What happened in Haiti during the coup can be seen as a ‘modus operandi’ that has since been used in other former colonies.

1. NOTES

   Ask students in this first group to compare the histories of the coups with the American occupation (1915-1934). The DLOC: Digital Library of the Caribbean at FIU (<http://dloc.com/> ) and the website “Haiti: Island Luminous” (<http://islandluminous.fiu.edu/>) will provide excellent sources for research. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ask the students to brainstorm on the symbolic meaning of this name. It means ‘landslide’ as in ‘avalanche’ in order to refer to the broad-based popular support to Aristide’s social agenda. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.DOD.DECT.CD?locations=HT> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Dupuy, ‘Dupuy, Alex. “Globalization, World Bank and the Haitian Economy”. Contemporary Caribbean Culture and Societies in A Global Context. Ed. Knight, Franklin and Teresita Martinez-Vergne. Kingston: UWI Press. 2005. 45 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. United Nations, ‘Emergency Economic Recovery Programme’ *International report* 1.A1, 1995. <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43a/050.html> (Accessed 10 June 2015) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Beeton, Dan, ‘What the world bank and the IDB owe Haiti’ *ZNet*, August 2, 2006.

   <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/what-the-world-bank-and-idb-owe-haiti-by-dan-beeton/> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. ***Le Monde***

   * April 2003: 1 article (retribution 21.7$)
   * Mai 2003: 1 article
   * June 2003: 2 articles
   * September 2003: 1 article (death of Amiot Metayer)
   * October 2003: 5 articles
   * November 2003: 1 article
   * December 2003: 5 articles
   * January 2004: 12 articles
   * February 2004: 48 articles

   ***Libération***

   * April- October 2003: 0 article
   * October 2003: 2 articles
   * November 2003: 1 article
   * December 2003: 10 articles
   * January 2004: 6 articles
   * February 2004: 33 articles

   [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. # ‘Bill Clinton’s Heavy Hand on Haiti’s Vulnerable Agricultural Economy: The American

   # Rice Scandal’.

   # <http://www.coha.org/haiti-research-file-neoliberalism%E2%80%99s-heavy-hand-on-haiti%E2%80%99s-vulnerable-agricultural-economy-the-american-rice-scandal/>

   (Accessed 10 June 2015) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. ‘Le départ d’Aristide ne devrait pas tarder’, *Le Monde*, (18-12-03) [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. ‘Une chance pour la paix’, *Le Monde*, (27-02-04) [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. ‘Nous libérerons Haïti de l’esclavage d’Aristide’, *Le Monde,* (25-02-04)

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    <http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDAAM917.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-11)