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# Humanitarian Aid in Question: The Case of Rice Imports to Haiti

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**HUMANITARIAN AID IN QUESTION:  
THE CASE OF RICE IMPORTS TO HAITI**

**By**

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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**WORK CITED**

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## INTRODUCTION: RICE AID IN HAITI

The face of hunger took the world stage in April 2008 when Haitians converged in Port-au-Prince to protest the rising cost of food. Essential staples, including rice, have escalated up by 50 percent in the previous year. Haitians, many of whom live on \$2 a day, joined protestors across the globe in response to a worldwide increase in food prices. In the southern city of Les Cayes, clashes between civilians and the Haitian United Nations forces, Minustah, left four dead. The thousands of protesters that marched to Port-au-Prince's National Palace did so peacefully, though vocally (The Associated Press). While rooted in many factors, the intense and widespread hunger in Haiti has worsened in the past three decades due to increased rice exports from the U.S. A staple in the Haitian diet, rice has provided a livelihood for many farmers for decades. However, with the advent of U.S. rice imports, many Haitian rice farmers lost their jobs; their rice could not compete with the heavily subsidized rice from Arkansas or Miami. How has such humanitarian aid shifted rural dynamics, particularly in regards to gender, labor and land ownership? Furthermore, how has this instance in Haiti revealed wealthy nations' contradicted commitment to human rights?

The issue of rice in Haiti intrigued me from a theoretical perspective. That is, I wanted to understand the social dynamics of the global food market. Why does

Haiti continue to be the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere when it receives a great deal of aid? I wanted to know why Haiti receives tons of rice imports from USAID when rice constitutes a staple in the Haitian diet. Why would a country import a staple grown on its own land? It appeared to me to be illogical. This led me to question the potential role rice aid, and by extension humanitarian aid, has played in preventing Haiti from succeeding it in the global market in large part due to an unstable central government. Furthermore, why has poverty remained at a critical level when copious pounds of rice have been delivered to Haiti? Such a question prompted me to wonder about the consequences of this ineffective humanitarian aid on the woman in rural Haiti whose land provided a means of subsistence but also of income. This drove me to question the broader social implications of humanitarian aid.

The effects of U.S. rice imports to Haiti have been disastrous, falling the hardest on the poor, peasant woman. Ever since the Woodrow Wilson's invasion of Haiti and restructuring of the constitution, the West, primarily embodied by the United States, has continued to dominate Haitian politics and in turn has largely contributed to its fractured structure today. Largely infertile soil, remnants of the

French occupation, complicates farming as does primitive farming tools<sup>1</sup>. However, instead of providing modern, more efficient farming machinery, international donor agencies choose to fund corrupt governments and export goods from their own country. In the case of rice, the U.S. provided rice when there was no urgent need of rice, a political move that ended up financially benefiting the U.S.

Unsurprisingly, at face value, humanitarian aid seems to represent the benevolence of global powers that seek to selflessly give back to countries not as well off. Each component of the term, *humanitarian* and *aid*, lead the uninformed bystander to logically support such an endeavor. The problem, however, is that such an understanding of humanitarian aid is over-simplistic and paradoxical the majority of the time. As the ancient Chinese aphorism says, "give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime," (Danielson). This brings me to the question of why food aid, and humanitarian aid on a larger scale, has failed to elicit positive change in Haiti when countries and organizations have donated billions of dollars toward reconstruction.

My thesis deals with four key terms in the modern-day world economy:

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<sup>1</sup> The "West" represents the nations from which the dominant capitalist ideology originated. The West has benefitted by exploiting those who have not embraced, at least successfully, the capitalist framework of their political economy.

neoliberalism, neoimperialism, human rights, and humanitarian aid. David Harvey defines neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2). Arising from three distinct regions, China, the U.S., and England, neoliberalism emerged in the global political scene in the late 1970s, early 1980s. Since then, the global economy has adopted neoliberal policies of deregulation and privatization that reinforce a distrust of government intervention, a distrust that is embodied in Haiti by the thousands of NGOs. Financial success within the global market now instinctually motivates individuals and institutions alike while functioning to further enhance the class structure. Though seemingly allowing anyone to succeed by protecting them from uninformed and biased state intervention, the principles of neoliberalism only cater to a select portion of society who already possesses the means and access necessary for achievement in the global market. In no way do rural Haitians fall under this elite category, making them instantly exploitable by those who do constitute the privileged, neoliberal minority. Using David Harvey’s analysis of neoliberalism as a lens, I argue that rice imports are indicative of a neoliberal global framework that



compensates for its lack of ethics with ingenious methods of material and human exploitation. In the case of Haiti, this has led to a disenfranchised rural population that no longer has autonomy over their own labor.

Slavoj Zizek's "Against Human Rights" contends that the West depoliticizes humanitarian intervention. Yet, how can humanitarian intervention not be political when its basis of existence relies upon the notion of universal human rights? Zizek posits that human rights comprise a category created and exploited by powerful countries to maintain the liberal capitalist world order. Zizek dismantles Europe's process of modernization that continuously involves getting rid of old ideals that in turn arrive at "developing" countries. Wanting to modernize in order to keep up with the global economic order, the countries receiving dismissed methods of progress follow suit often in the form of genocide to cleanse the country, so to speak, of that which is keeping it back from success in the global order. Zizek reminds the reader that "...the two great ethnic crimes imputed to the Turks in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—the Armenian genocide and the persecution of the Kurds—were not committed by traditionalist Muslim political forces, but by the military modernizers who sought to cut Turkey loose from its old-world ballast and turn it into a European nation-state," (116). Referencing Hegel's concept of "reflexive

determination,” Zizek explains how humanitarian intervention functions to come to grips with modernization (116). In other words, when providing humanitarian aid to a country that is involved in genocide, Europe’s remaining guilt is absolved because they are now doing their part to prevent genocide. This ripple-like effect of modernization relies upon globalization and therefore continues to occur. Another point crucial to my thesis is Zizek’s notion of “anti-political politics,” (126). “Not only is violence the necessary supplement of power, but power itself is always-already at the root of every apparently ‘non-political’ relationship of violence... The task of critical analysis is to discern the hidden political process that sustains all these ‘non’ or ‘pre’-political relationships. In human society, the political is the encompassing structuring principle, so that every neutralization of some partial content as ‘non-political’ is a political gesture *par excellence*,” (125). Not realizing the political nature of humanitarian aid can lead to real problems not being dealt with correctly. For example, after the earthquake, though aid was flowing in by the millions of dollars, where did this money go? Even today, virtually no one knows (*Assistance Mortelle*). Globalization has created an environment in which the West continuously responds to the problems they were vital in introducing.

Jacques Rancière asserts that human rights experienced a rebirth in the

1970s to 1980s. Incidentally, the same time neoliberalism emerged in the global stage. The end of the Cold War did not bring about the utopia theorists like Marx had predicted. Instead, the “Inhuman,” surfaced next to the rethinking of good and evil, two concepts heavily laden with ideology as well as polarizing (297).

Rights of Man turned out to be the rights of the rightless... the rights of the victims, the rights of those who were unable to enact any rights or even any claim in their name, so that eventually their rights had to be upheld by others, at the cost of shattering the edifice of International Rights, in the name of a new right to ‘humanitarian interference’ –which ultimately boiled down to the right to invasion (Rancière 297-298).

The “Rights of Man” evolved into the Human Rights now associated with the ethical basis for humanitarian intervention, which works to mask the politics that prompted such an intervention. Rancière contends that human rights arise from radical political praxis. In this way he gives credit to the political subject that recognizes the inequality in their rights and therefore fights for them. It is through this process that the state recognizes people’s rights that they once denied. The problem with humanitarian intervention is that powerful countries have donated, so to speak, the ambiguous term of human rights that continues to fail in preventing

“evil.” Each time a genocide happens or a natural disaster, global powers will intervene to return human rights that had, in a sense, been “returned to the sender,” the global power who must in turn reenact them for those that cannot enact them by themselves (308). Like Žižek, Rancière calls for an ontological reassessment of human rights and to whom they pertain.

The instance of rice aid in Haiti definitively demands a reevaluation of humanitarian aid in today's world. In this thesis, I will outline the effects of rice aid on Haitian society and theoretically analyze humanitarian aid's presence in “developing” countries.<sup>2</sup> In addition to ruining many Haitian farmers' livelihoods, rice imports have aggravated Haiti's economic situation and national stability, the consequences of which have fallen primarily on the poor woman. I focus on the effects on the peasant woman in this thesis. Food insecurity remains a crisis. Throughout my thesis, I draw from the texts of scholars Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Rancière, and Noam Chomsky, in order to attempt at understanding what is really going on here. Such theorists illuminate the historical and theoretical analysis of

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<sup>2</sup> I am cognizant that the term “developing” country derives from a systematically repressive and dominant ideology. I use it only to signify the global hegemonic structure that continues to exploit countries, like Haiti, and lock them into a fragile state of severe poverty and dependence.

humanitarian aid and the concept of human rights that said-aid seeks to protect.

The purpose of my thesis is to shed new light on the business of humanitarian aid, using rice in Haiti as a case study of sorts. I seek to uncover the role international donor institutions have played in reinforcing the fragile state in Haiti as a result of rice aid, arguing that humanitarian aid has done more to prevent than to inspire sustainable progress in Haiti especially in rural Haiti that continually gets hit the hardest during economic crises such as the one brought on by humanitarian aid in the form of rice.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Humanitarian aid includes food aid.

## CHAPTER 2: A BRIEF POLITICAL HISTORY OF HAITI: A TALE OF OCCUPATION

Rice aid provides one instance in a long list of exploitative practices throughout Haiti's existence as an independent nation. In fact, to even call Haiti independent seems like a half-truth. Just under 25 years ago, the first democratically elected president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, returned to Haiti from exile. Simultaneously, exports from the U.S. to Haiti skyrocketed despite Haiti's near self-sufficiency in domestically cultivated rice. Rice farmers soon experienced the repercussions of this political and economic move as cheap, heavily subsidized rice flowed in from Arkansas and Miami. Though the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti soon became the fourth largest importer of American rice, after Japan, Mexico, and Canada. Haitian-produced rice now only accounts for 20-30% of in-country rice consumption (Gauthier 1, Lindsay 23).

However, before Haiti was an infertile, impoverished nation, it was a lush, prosperous island. In fact, when Europeans first conquered the island over 500 years ago, they described the island as a "virtual paradise: opulent, peaceful, densely populated, rich in resources," almost the opposite of how one would depict present-day Haiti (Farmer 17). In December 1492, Christopher Columbus established the

first European settlement in the New World on the northern strip of the island Columbus named Hispaniola. The natives of this northern section, *Ayiti*, “high country” in Arawak, welcomed Columbus and his men with open arms, only to be met with disease, slavery, and categorical massacre (53). Though portrayed by Columbus himself as “lovable, tractable, peaceable, gentle, decorous Indians,” the original population of Haiti perished at a staggeringly quick rate. A people of eight million at the close of the 15th century, their size dropped to 50,000 in 1510 and to almost zero in the late 17th century when the French seized the colony from the Spanish (54). The transformation of Haiti started with the purge of the indigenous population.

“Haiti’s agony began with the success of the plantation colony, it was the richest in the hemisphere” (Stoll 7). As Stephen Stoll elucidates in his article, “Towards a Second Haitian Revolution,” Haiti’s historic plight began with the French’s successful launch of a plantation economy in Haiti. The western third of Hispaniola, the French colony of Saint Dominigue, cultivated coffee, sugar, and cotton utilizing slaves from West Africa. In 1791, however, this institution collapsed at the hands of the very people it enslaved. Inspired by Enlightenment ideals, the slaves victoriously fought back against their colonial masters, killing most of them,

and defended themselves against British and French military forces (Stoll 7). In 1804, Haiti formally became an independent nation; independence, however, would only last for a relatively short period of time. The triumph of the slaves instilled a deep-seeded animosity towards Haiti not only in the European elite, but in their American counterparts as well.

Both France and America proved to retain a profound grudge against Haiti. In France, the embitterment came from the former plantation owners who received no compensation for their stolen property. As late as 20 years after the Haitian Revolution, the French monarch, Charles X, still aggressively urged the President, Jean-Pierre Boyer, to demand reparations from Haiti. In 1825, his wish came true; President Boyer ordered that Haiti pay 150 million francs in reparations. This stripped any hope of future independence from Haiti. The recently established agrarian society could not withstand another invasion; she was still too weak. Therefore, Haiti agreed to pay the inordinate sum, a coerced decision that forced Haiti to borrow from French, German, and American banks (Farmer 66-67). From that point on, Haiti has remained in debt, a fragile condition that has perpetuated her poverty as well.

After France reestablished her control over Haiti by creating a relationship



that mirrored peonage, America followed suit. In 1776 after declaring independence from Britain, America allied with French forces to crush the slave rebellion in Haiti. When their efforts emerged as futile, America refused to recognize Haitian independence until 1862, when Haiti presented an answer to, interestingly enough, the “Negro Question.” At that time, America was up in arms as to what to do with this newly freed population. The majority actually believed that these African Americans could not survive in America without slavery – they would die. Therefore, logic led the government to resolve upon deportation. Lincoln saw the “Black country” as a perfect location to ship freed slaves in order to absolve America of “blot or mixture,” as Thomas Jefferson colorfully remarked (Farmer 18). Thus marked the beginning of international power diplomacy sticking their hands in Haiti.

Woodrow Wilson incited the first official U.S. invasion of Haiti, marking the beginning of a long-standing U.S. occupation of Haiti whose ramifications are still very apparent. In 1914, one year before the U.S. invasion, President Wilson sent marines to Haiti to transfer \$500,000 from the Haitian National Bank to reserves “for safe-keeping” in New York (Buschschluter 1). The assassination of the Haitian president motivated President Wilson’s 1915 invasion of Haiti to protect U.S.

corporate assets. In addition, rising German influence worried President Wilson who wanted to maintain full U.S. control of the region. This objective prompted him to deploy U.S. troops to Haiti that remained there until President Franklin Roosevelt withdrew them in 1934 as part of his “Good Neighbor Policy” (Buschschluter 1). These troops only brought violence and horror to Haiti and left her reliant on the U.S.

In 1944, as WWII was in its last stages, European powers convened to found the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This fund would provide immediate, short-term financial aid to enable countries that won the war to continue foreign trade. Simultaneously, the World Bank materialized to fund the rebuilding of Europe. However beneficial these institutions would prove to be, their interests only represented those of world powers. At the time, these superpowers boasted large empires that included all nations now considered developing countries. Therefore, no developing countries participated in the crafting of the IMF or the World Bank because no such countries existed (Life and Debt). As a result, these international monetary boards grant aid in the form of Structural Adjustment Loans that function to reproduce a neocolonial relationship between them and the developing countries they are supposedly helping.

The primary source of Haitian poverty and key to its elimination is the land, “in its ruined countryside” (Stoll 7). Before the U.S. occupation of Haiti, which was spearheaded by Woodrow Wilson, Haiti had established her own constitution that consisted of many land reforms. These included prohibiting any white person from owning land and redistributing plantation properties for small farms. With these provision grounds, as they were called, former slaves could put to use techniques of self-sufficient farming planters had taught them. Though required to keep production costs low, self-sufficiency in agriculture allowed Haiti to survive after cutting ties with European powers. Already experts at managing the volcanic soils and ample rainfall, the free Haitians masterfully cultivated cassava, dasheen, breadfruit, yams, and rice, just like they had done previously as slaves (Stoll 7). Expanding their local market to include plantains, bananas, and coffee, Haitian farmers proficiently fed their country.

For developing countries, accepting aid from the IMF results in a vicious cycle of dependency. These powerful institutions regard recession and depression in poor countries as evidence of the countries’ inability to govern themselves and control extravagant government spending (Gros 975). In February of 1980, the World Bank started instituting Structural Adjustment Loans (SALs), also known as

Structural Adjustment Plans (SAPs). Under the pretext of fear incited by the 1979 oil scare, the World Bank contended that SAPs would prevent countries importing oil from being hurt by rising oil prices and therefore being unable to devote as much money to development (975). In reality, these SAPs can be viewed as a Trojan horse; though providing immediate finances, these loans work to reinforce the World Bank and IMF's control over developing countries as these countries amass huge debt and therefore must come back for more, so to speak.

Since 1986, Haitians have adopted the term "l'insécurité" to portray the intermittent spikes of political turbulence, crime, and economic collapse as the government attempts to consolidate democracy while in a state of massive debt. This process has significantly debilitated labor, general income levels, gender relations, and overall nutrition among Haitians, while contributing to an increase in technological and environmental hazards particularly precarious for a fragile nation such as Haiti (James). Foreign aid is largely responsible for Haiti's political, social and economical unrest, as much of it comes from neoliberal institutions that seek to expand the global market, with its inherent fluctuations and periodic crises, instead of stabilizing a developing country.

Since the 1980s, the U.S. has colluded with the IMF and World Bank to enact

neoliberal policies in Haiti (Gros 975). In the early 1980s, Haiti began receiving pressure from international institutions like the IMF and World Bank to liberalize their economy (Devienne 16). The immense sway of these institutions became especially apparent in Haiti in 1994 when President Aristide returned from exile. After the first ousting of the president, the U.S. struck a deal with the Haitian politician. They would bring him back into power if her promised to institute a few economic policies, one of these being the virtual destruction of foreign tariffs. Tariffs on U.S. goods dropped to 3% and almost instantaneously imports skyrocketed into Haiti (Lindsay 23). President Préval, Aristide's successor, recognized the need to repair Haitian agriculture; self-sufficient farming could once again feed the country. He collaborated, so to speak, with the IMF to establish an economic plan that would boast higher investment in agriculture. Yet, massive debt to the IMF, World Bank, and other international institutions stifled the desired outcome of this legislation. 3.5% of the budget was allotted to agriculture, only a fraction of the amount dedicated to repaying debt. This debt prevents any significant economic growth and prevents Haiti from achieving independence.

In 1986 Haitian agriculture shifted dramatically at the influx of rice imports. Agriculture has historically been the primary source of employment and revenue for

Haiti, employing roughly 70% of workers and accounting for 26% of GDP in 2008 (*Le Secteur Agricole en Haïti* 1, Devienne 16). The principal crops produced are coffee, cacao, sugar cane, rice, sorghum, sisal, legumes, and corn. Those that dominate exports, however, are coffee, sugar cane, cacao, sisal, and fruits, especially mango. Ten national “Départements” of food production constitute Haiti’s agricultural sector. They encapsulate every geographical region, the north, the northwest, the south, the east, etc. One of these departments is the ancient Artibonite Valley that is devoted to rice production. Rewarded the nickname “le Grenier d’Haïti,” or the breadbasket of Haiti, this Valley allowed Haiti to be sovereign – it provided a central source of nourishment to keep the country self-sufficient (*Le Secteur Agricole en Haïti*). The Artibonite Valley spans across 45,000 hectares, 28,000 of which are devoted to rice irrigation and cultivation. 75% of Haitian rice originates here, around 67,500 tons. The Artibonite Valley is also the largest national producer of onions, shallots, garlic, and eggplant. After rice imports skyrocketed, however, domestic rice cultivation deteriorated significantly, naturally followed by a serious slump in rural employment and GDP.

Haitian-grown rice now accounts for merely 20% of national rice consumption, making Haiti extremely vulnerable to global price fluctuations. Rice

imports actually come from 20 countries, of which the U.S. supplies the most (70-80%) (*Le Secteur Agricole en Haiti* 1). 30,000 metric tons of rice is imported into Haiti monthly, an annual expenditure of around \$270 million. This continues while local production decreases and prices increase. A bag of rice doubled in cost from January to June 2008, though remained slightly cheaper than local rice due to heavy U.S. subsidies (Gauthier 2). A bag of rice worth 750 gourdes in winter rose to more than 1150 gourdes in the summer (from 20 to more than 30 dollars) (*Le Secteur Agricole en Haiti* 1). In April 2008, after the beginning of the farming season in March, the government decided to subsidize the price of imported rice by 9%. Though providing a temporal solution for urban dwellers, this subsidy does little for long-term poverty in Haiti, which originates in Haiti's lack of agricultural self-sustainability. Haitian farmers continue to use antiquated and inefficient machinery they cannot afford to replace while a great deal of arable land is dedicated to bio-fuel crops, both contributing to food shortages and higher prices as a result of increased demand. Fertilizer proves to be too expensive to buy so farmers cannot properly replenish their soil after each harvest, which can lead to poor future harvests (Gauthier 2). This problem subsists because Haitian farmers barely gross enough profit to feed themselves let alone invest in modern machinery as well as

fertilizer. Therefore, Haitian farmers seem to be at an impasse while the general public continues to starve (Devienne 16, Le Secteur Agricole 1).

The advent of rice imports marked a drastic fall in the annual income of Haitian rice farmers. In 2008, a rice farmer had to spend over half of their earnings on rice. Rising food prices have caused immense impoverishment all across Haiti where 80% of Haitians currently live in poverty (Devienne 16). This has led to the “Clorox” hunger phenomenon. This hunger is defined by a sensation that resembles that of swallowing bleach or battery acid (Lindsay 23, Stoll 10). Many Haitians have taken to eating mud biscuits, which consist of a bit of oil, some salt, and mud.

Though devoid of significant nutrition, these biscuits manage to fill up the stomachs of many Haitians, of whom six out of ten “cannot count on even one square meal a day” (Gauthier 2). The mud biscuit phenomenon emerged notably as a result of two variables. Firstly, the stark climb in rice prices rendered the staple overwhelmingly unaffordable. Secondly, in November and December of 2008, two intense storms hit Haiti and ruined the harvests of countless farmers (Etwareea 1). This shift to using earth not just for farming but also for immediate satiation demonstrates a shocking level of poverty that humanitarian aid has not yet remedied.

Haitians who live in rice bowl of Haiti, the Artibonite Valley, represent the



most impoverished and starving (NPR). Though handling rice everyday, they cannot eat what they can sell. Rice cultivating families now struggle to feed themselves, not to mention send their children to school. Consequently, rural Haiti has experienced a drop in the amount of children attending school, for which the government provides no aid. Those who are fortunate enough to attend school are perpetually hungry because school has no money to provide lunches. An annual school fee generally adds up to around \$45, but the majority of families pay nothing (NPR). This drop in education after Structural Adjustment Loans and other forms of international intervention is not unique to Haiti, however. In Jamaica, these loans have prohibited the government from funding education and agricultural development, weakening the country even more (Life and Debt). The negative effect on school attendance must not be overlooked when assessing the effects of foreign aid.

Though aid continues to flow to Haiti, it is distributed unequally, rural areas frequently receiving nothing. “U.S. food aid—bound by requirements that U.S. assistance earmarked for food be based on the “donation” of U.S.-produced food delivered by U.S. shipping companies—is either given out to the poor (as direct food assistance) or sold by NGOs to support their overhead and operating costs (a

process known as monetization),” (Partners in Health 1). Therefore, though aid can help those in need, it can also just as easily function to further corporate goals, doing little to actually solidify Haiti in the world market. A great deal of aid undermines Haiti’s agricultural sector, the backbone of the country. This ensures Haiti’s future reliance on the donor country or institution that can then expand their industry. In 1982, the U.S. virtually started the attack on rural Haiti through the extermination of Haitian Creole pigs. Under the Reagan administration, the U.S. found a strain of swine flu in these pigs that presented an extreme risk of infection to Haitian farmers. Though the illness existed, the solution of killing all Creole pigs seemed to be rather extreme, as these extremely well adapted pigs played a crucial role for 85% of rural households. Two years after the local pigs were exterminated, the U.S. began to ship pigs from Iowa to Haiti. Haitian peasants are estimated to have lost up to \$600 million, which was followed by a 30% decrease in enrollment in rural schools. The Creole pigs also constituted a high source of protein for peasants, but with the new pigs, that tasted worse and whose breeding necessitated more attention and resources, consumption of protein plummeted. To top it all off, the peasant economy crumbled as a result of further soil degradation (Aristide 12-15). Of course, as Gauthier indicates, donors like the U.S., who make hundreds of millions

off of exports to Haiti, do not want Haiti to actually become self-sufficient (2). That would jeopardize a major source of business. In 2007, Haiti imported approximately \$112 million of rice from the U.S. In 2008 that number rose to \$270 million (Gauthier 2). A fundamental problem emerges if the institutions upon whom Haiti continues to rely for aid do not actually have Haiti's interests in mind.

More recently, Haiti has experienced widespread riots protesting a consistent lack of access to food and demanding the expulsion of U.S. goods from Haiti. At Aristide's return to power, the IMF and World Bank said importing rice would actually benefit the poor because the newly-unemployed peasants could move to the city and sell their labor to "American assembly plants to make textiles and electronics for export" (Lindsay 23). Yet, this has deepened Haitian dependency and heightened her vulnerability to price fluctuations in the global market. 4.5 million Haitians continue to scrape by on less than a dollar a day (Lindsay 22). Initially, rice imports were banned in Haiti and considered part of the black market. They incited attacks from angry peasants and as a result, the government stationed soldiers in Artibonite Valley to monitor these uprisings (Lindsay 23). Yet the riots continue and have magnified in their intensity. In Les Cayes, for example, in early April 2008, protesters of rising food prices clashed with "peacekeepers" and

knocked down the walls of a UN military base. Often ending violently, these riots have led to a heightened public vigilance of efforts to further destabilize the government by drug traffickers or opponents of René Préval, Haiti's president until May 2011. External institutions can largely be blamed for the loss of economic and political authority necessary to control these riots, allowing for a deeper sense of instability in Haiti (Gros 975).

The key to Haiti's recovery lies in a recommitment to agriculture. The neoliberal forces that have advocated for Haiti's complete immersion in the global market have in actuality worked to reify Haiti's deeply rooted dependence on such forces. Self-sufficient farming must reemerge as the primary method of farming and a pragmatic livelihood.

### CHAPTER 3: A HISTORY OF HUMANITARIAN AID AND ITS ROLE IN

#### HAITI

Humanitarian has evolved as a practice ever since it was first realized after World War II. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the adjective “humanitarian” as “concerned with humanity as a whole; *spec.* seeking to promote human welfare as a primary or pre-eminent good; acting, or disposed to act, on this basis rather than for pragmatic or strategic reasons (chiefly *depreciative* in early use, with the implication of excessive sentimentality),” (“Humanitarian”). In 1944, as WWII was in its last stages, the department of foreign aid within the government began with founding of found the International Monetary Fund (IMF). European powers convened to establish a fund that would provide immediate, short-term financial aid to enable countries that won the war to continue foreign trade. Simultaneously, the World Bank materialized to fund the rebuilding of Europe. However beneficial these institutions would prove to be, their interests only represented those of world economic powers. At the time, the concept of “developing countries” did not yet exist; therefore, no developing country participated in the crafting of the IMF or the World Bank (Life and Debt). As a result, these international monetary boards that grant aid in the form of financial loans serve to reproduce a global neoimperialistic

hierarchy.

After WWII, the United Nations convened to establish the Charter, followed soon after by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The end of WWII also marked a shift in global politics in which the United States emerged as “sovereign.” With this supreme status, “American Exceptionalism” came to define U.S. foreign policy (Chomsky). International law existed, but the United States deemed themselves exempt from its jurisdiction.

USAID emerged after WWII and remains a prominent player in global humanitarian aid politics. The government agency’s origins lie in the optimistic and rather idealistic belief that the U.S. could resolve the world’s problems abroad as well as at home. George Marshall’s 1947 Harvard commencement speech marked the birth, so to speak, of “international development assistance” (Schuller 139). Established by the Kennedy administration in 1961 at the height of the Cold War, USAID molded out of a fear of communism. President Kennedy placed the new “humanitarian aid” agency under the auspices of the State Department. Controversial from its beginning, the new humanitarian agency differed from the Marshall Plan before it. Bipartisan support for the organization relied upon the argument that it was a sagacious investment, one that Representative Udall of

Arizona at the time described as “a program that sets out to combat the forces of extreme poverty and political oppression which are the best possible breeding ground for Communism” (140). Therefore, the Kennedy administration launched USAID under the pretext of protecting vulnerable people from themselves.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War in 1989 jeopardized the legitimacy of humanitarian international development and therefore the very foundations of USAID (Schuller 143). The Bush Sr. administration, however, resolved to keep humanitarian intervention as part of U.S. foreign policy, which elicited the preservation of U.S.’s immense military force under revised grounds. The United States should be able to protect themselves from “technologically advanced third world countries and maintain the power to intervene in the Middle East,” a potential threat. At the time, there was no international “right” to humanitarian intervention, a formality the U.S. disregarded by declaring that

In a world full of perceived potential threats, the risk to global order and the norm of non-intervention on which it continues to be based is simply too great for the legality of unilateral preventive action as distinct from collectively endorsed action from the security council for it to be accepted allowing one to act would allow all.

The U.N. world summit later endorsed the right to humanitarian intervention despite the objections from perpetual victims of U.S. dominance. Humanitarian intervention now provided the grounds for the stronger global powers, mainly the U.S., to invade countries under the pretext of protecting human rights. USAID, the figurehead of humanitarian intervention, adopted a new ideology. The agency now sought to advance the “U.S. national interest,” an extremely vague and changeable political imperative (146). Haiti’s political and social volatility largely stems from inconsistent USAID policies and funding as a result of fiercely partisan politics in Washington.

Though still hiding under a guise of honesty and selflessness, USAID continues to be political. However, as Schuller notes, the “grafting of foreign policy objectives onto aid programs lends foreign aid a political character, making it a space for contests over how the national interest is defined” (Schuller 141). Zizek would agree, arguing that humanitarian aid is guided by ideology.

It often transpires that the donor country dictates what the receiving country needs without consulting them. In the case of rice, the U.S. decided that Haiti needed food in the form of rice, a political choice that would benefit the U.S., more specifically Arkansas rice farmers, in the long term while only increasing



Haitian debt. This is very similar to how the IMF maintains control over the countries they lend money to. The IMF always stipulates how the money shall or shall not be used. This is not aid and ends up belittling the receiving country, reinforcing a neocolonial structure. The “savages” aren’t fit to run their own country so we will do it for them, and because they’re so dumb, we will get rich off of their raw materials or just make them dependant on us so we stay rich and get richer.

For developing countries, accepting aid from the IMF results in a vicious cycle of dependency. These powerful institutions regard recession and depression in poor countries as evidence of the countries’ inability to govern themselves and control extravagant government spending (Gros 975). In February of 1980, the World Bank started instituting Structural Adjustment Loans (SALs), also known as Structural Adjustment Plans (SAPs). Under the pretext of fear incited by the 1979 oil scare, the World Bank contended that SALs would prevent countries importing oil from being hurt by rising oil prices and therefore being unable to devote as much money to development (975). In reality, these SALs can be viewed as a Trojan horse; though providing immediate finances, these loans work to reinforce the World Banks and IMF’s control over developing countries as these countries amass

huge debt and therefore must come back for more, so to speak.

SAPs have consistently failed, not just in Haiti. This is in large part due to the time gap in between the securing of the loan and its repayment. The repayment on the loan is generally within three to five years; so often times, the governmental administration that received the loan is not the same one to repay it. “Through structural adjustment lending the banks simply require that certain policies be implemented as a condition for budget support in hard currency. No one is responsible for producing any proof that the policies implemented have produced returns necessary to repay the loan... The funds lent as structural adjustment programs become ‘pork barrel’ spending because they are not tied to concrete objectives,” (10-11). For this reason, the money often disappears, commandeered by corrupt agencies seeking to further privatize Haiti, in the process coincidentally fostering the IMF and World Bank’s neoliberal sentiments.

A 1988 report found in the USAID archives, the Hamilton-Gilman Report, revealed, “the public has very little concept of the aid programs as an instrument of foreign policy used to advance U.S. interests,” (Schuller 146). This illustrates Slavoj Zizek’s claim that humanitarian aid relies upon the neoimperialistic notion of human rights that bear the façade of working for human good instead of political

power.

Among the family of international development groups, USAID allocates the most grant aid. For example, in 2004, USAID provided more than \$23 billion in FY while the European Commission gave around \$9 billion (Schuller 138). It seems ironic to note USAID's location in the Ronald Regan Building, a strikingly modern edifice and "reflection of neoliberal ethos of privatization and erosion of public space," (139). The juxtaposition of the global political economic market and a supposedly depoliticized agency seems to be suspicious.

## CHAPTER 4: THE GENERAL EFFECTS OF RICE AID ON RURAL HAITIAN

### SOCIETY

Since the 1980s when the Reagan administration uncovered a swine fever epidemic among Haitian hogs, the United States has taken to exporting pigs' ears to Haiti. The undesirable body part, devoid of much fatty flesh, serves as a constant reminder to Haitians of the United States' deception and brutal interference in Haiti. In her article, "Women, Sabotaj, and Underground Food Economies in Haiti," Myron Beasley exposes the popular animosity surrounding food aid that often functions to boost the donor country or institution's morale while falling short of adequately aiding the receiving countries. She speaks to Aimee, a woman street-food vendor on a corner in Port-au-Prince, selling items from a box. Examining the box and its contents, Beasley is intrigued by some delicious-looking fried bits she cannot identify. "They are pig ears," Aimee responds. "This is what the U.S. sends to us because you don't eat them there... You know how we feel about your pig!' she says with disgust in her eyes," (Beasley 33).

The story of pigs' ears illustrates the notion of the wealthy giving what they no longer want to the poor. This can also be applied to human rights. Rancière's theory of unwanted rights sent to developing countries fits in perfectly here. Those

receiving the pigs' ears or human rights most often do not want them and eventually push them away. It is a vicious cycle, however, because the wealthy countries will come in as if it is their duty to reinstall these prescribed "human rights" when really they are only acting to secure their global authority once again. This concept helps explicate how the economic structure relating to food imposed by the IMF and World Bank does not work in the Caribbean and has led to many problems.

Aristide's political ethos during his first interrupted presidency embodied a contradiction: on one hand Aristide represented the first politician that could vocalize the needs and wants of the Haitian poor majority. As a Father, Aristide fervently supported the liberation theology, especially its "option for the poor" doctrine, which inspired him to advocate for a more democratically just Haiti in which poor Haitians could participate. "On the other hand, those same theological views of politics led him to see himself as a prophetic, charismatic leader who has a direct, symbiotic relationship with the "prophetic" people and who could interpret their needs, interests, and aspirations without mediating organization such as political parties with clearly defined rules of governance and accountability between leaders and their constituents," (Dupuy xiv). Dupuy challenges Aristide's commitment to his promises of his election campaigns, a commitment made

difficult, however, by the global financial institutions.

Since the 1980s, the U.S. has colluded with the IMF and World Bank to enact neoliberal policies in Haiti (Gros 975). In the early 1980s, Haiti began receiving pressure from international institutions like the IMF and World Bank to liberalize their economy (Devienne 16). After the coup removing Baby Doc from power, former President George H.W. Bush only added to Haiti's fragility by backing faulty economic sanctions that generated mass migration to the cities, strengthened the wealthy Haitians' power in involving Haiti in the international drug trade, and provoked a mass exodus from Haiti to the United States in the image of racialized "boat people," (Schuller 157). During the election in which Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected, the Bush Sr. administration spent \$12 million of public dollars to support U.S.'s choice candidate, Marc Bazin. The World Bank finds no fault in the use of public funds for foreign elections, asserting that a win could prove to be immensely useful for gaining access to the foreign government. If the funded candidate loses, however, public funds have been squandered (Schuller 157). The sway of these financial institutions, spearheaded by the U.S., became especially apparent in Haiti under the Clinton administration.

In 1994 President Aristide's returned from exile at the hands of the U.S.

military. Before resuming his role as president, however, Aristide had to make an extremely difficult decision. The military junta that controlled Haiti between Aristide's first ousting and his return committed mass murder due to their own paramilitary organization. Wanting to stop the killing of tens of thousands of his supporters, Aristide resolved to accept the stipulations outlined by the U.S. in exchange for bringing him back to power (Schuller 158). Among these policies was the virtual destruction of foreign tariffs. Tariffs on U.S. goods dropped to 3% and almost instantaneously imports skyrocketed into Haiti, precipitating the slump in the Haitian rice market (Lindsay 23).

President Préval, Aristide's successor, recognized the need to repair Haitian agriculture; self-sufficient farming could once again feed the country. He collaborated, so to speak, with the IMF to establish an economic plan that would boast higher investment in agriculture. Yet, massive debt to the IMF, World Bank, and other international institutions stifled the desired outcome of this legislation. 3.5% of the budget was allotted to agriculture, only a fraction of the amount dedicated to repaying debt. This debt prevents any significant economic growth and prevents Haiti from achieving actual independence.

Food security, Mamadou Baro argues, is crucial in the establishment of a

stable, thriving nation. An illusive term, food security precipitates self-sufficiency and thus autonomy. He classifies food security as concerning the economy, the environment, and the quest for democratic government. "Food insecurity prevents people from being economically active citizens because they lack the simple physical energy needed to contribute fully to their own livelihood... the lack of food leads to the over-exploitation of marginal land, the misuse of water supplies, the exhaustion of soils, and deforestation... the pursuit of democracy is hampered when basic human needs are not met," (Baro 20). As long as rice remains out of Haitians' control, these three factors will deteriorate.

Over the past three decades, the international institutions responsible for taking over "reconstruction" of developing countries have used the same techniques, none of which have proven successful, that is, successful in the sense of making the developing country more self-reliant. These methods consist of two recurring objectives that do more to reinforce Haiti's reliance on external support than to render her a stronger nation. The first targets Haitian labor and seeks to transform it into the cheapest within the Caribbean so the price of exports, overwhelmingly to the U.S., remains low. The second is more complex and has worked to destroy Haitian agriculture. In the 1980s, Haiti produced upwards of



80% of her food; in 2011 that figure dropped to 42% (Goodman). Under Former President Clinton, rice, a staple in the Haitian diet, went from being entirely domestically produced to nearly all imported, primarily from heavily subsidized farms in Arkansas.

The international community continues to act with their interests in mind, failing to consult the Haitian government and propagating a paternalistic relationship with Haiti. Now considered the “Republic of NGOs,” Haiti lacks a strong central government necessary to establish some sort of sustainable infrastructure (Goodman). After the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship, international donor institutions funded the creation of NGOs that would meet the needs of the people that the Haitian government had perpetually failed to meet. Yet, in reality, NGOs have prevented any significant nationwide progress from occurring due to the hundreds of groups that boast some sort of authority. In addition, many NGOs receive funding from international donor agencies, so they are, in that sense, more powerful than the central government currently is (Goodman, Schuller). Dupuy concedes that the Haitian government historically has fallen short of providing for the poor majority, but emphasizes that funding NGOs rather than working with the Haitian government itself only magnifies this problem. He attributes the current

condition of Haiti in which the “basic needs and basic rights” of the poor majority remain unanswered to the international community as well as Haitian elites (Dupuy 1997).

The international community has a history of working with the Haitian elites rather than the Haitian government, which three decades ago, was composed of and crafted for the Haitian elite. Now those that can flee have fled and the international community has continued to provide “aid,” which has hurt rather than helped Haiti as a state and the poor majority as a neglected population.

THE EFFECT ON THE “POTO MITAN” OF HAITI, THE WOMEN:

Poor women and children are those primarily affected by economic downturn. With rising poverty, income gaps continue to widen while gendered labor undergoes a shift (Correia 35). In 1999, Haiti’s total population equaled around eight million, about two-thirds of which lived in rural regions (39). The World Bank, in their assessment of gender in the Caribbean, reports that of developing countries, Haiti has one of the highest Economically Active Population rates (EAP) in which 62% of women work. They also note that rural Haiti is plagued with a “stagnant under-productive agricultural sector, [a] lack of basic infrastructure and services, ... extensive environmental degradation, ...fuel shortages and a lack of piped water,” but omit to mention their shortcomings that influenced this disaster (39). They do indicate, however, that household duties primarily carried out by women are more arduous because of these structural inefficiencies (36). The burden placed on women to fulfill tasks in and out of the household has increased in the last 30 years, in large part due to internal and international migration aggravated by the interruption in the Haitian rice market.

One of the sources of increased pressure on women derives from migration.

Women and men tend to demonstrate different migrating patterns. For both sexes,

however, migration follows potential employment. Women often migrate internally to the city to pursue domestic work or factory jobs in “export-processing zones” while men tend to migrate internationally for seasonal jobs (Correia 39). This has led to an increase in woman-run households heavily reliant upon remittances sent back from their husbands or other male family members (Sassen 2). Between 1990 and 1997 approximately 200,000 Haitians (about four % of the total population) migrated to the U.S. Women migrants receive much worse treatment and overall fewer rights than their male counterparts, notably in the Dominican Republic where the majority of migrants head. The National Coalition for Haitian Rights published that, in the Dominican Republic, women are not “legally permitted to work on sugar can plantations and are not eligible to receive housing, health care and other social services, and are often subjected to sexual violence” (Correia 39). New migration behavior has influenced the rural society and household leadership.

Though the effects of food insecurity largely fall on the woman, they also destroy the environment, as explained by Mamadou Baro earlier. In the absence of men, women must strive even harder to support their families. Without rice to sell at city markets, women have increasingly resorted to selling wood, charcoal, and labor in the Dominican Republic or overseas. The two former sources of income

emerge out of the hope to make a profit in an era of constant energy shortages (Correia 53). Charcoal is cheaper than oil whose price forever climbs making the demand for charcoal ever steeper. As many men leave to attempt to earn remittances to send back to their families, women do what they can to make money. The problem, however, is that the constant collection of charcoal and wood leads to environmental degradation which results in poorer farming land and fewer sustainable options for already poor farmers to rely upon for their future livelihood.

The inability of the land to hold up against natural disasters causes many families to be displaced, among them many previously women-led households. As rural migration grows to cities, overpopulation transpires allowing a natural disaster to be ever more disastrous. In the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, approximately 230,000 Haitians were killed, 300,000 injured, and 1.5 million displaced (*Assistance Mortelle*). Women generally represent the population labeled as the “vulnerable group” that needs “special help,” yet their central role in rebuilding communities is often overlooked by aid organizations (Palmer 236).

In rural Haiti, households form in response to economic and social conditions. They are fluid, often changing seasonally. Most unions are not ones recognized under the law so they can easily break and form (Correia 40). Multiple

types of unions between men and women exist, but “cohabitation” is the most common. In this union, women generally remain in the house while men earn an income and enjoy greater authority in the relationship (Correia 36). As noted in Gender in the Caribbean, there has been an influx of men who have migrated either to the Dominican Republic or overseas to attempt at earning more money to send back to their homes in the form of remittances. When this happens, women improvise to compensate for a loss in consistent income. The incidence of American rice imports to Haiti has contributed to a similar situation where rural women have been forced to carry a greater burden to provide for themselves and their children. Women disproportionately bear the brunt of their households’ workloads. They “are entirely responsible for the household economy, organizing the family, raising children, working in the fields and gardens; and that 90 per cent are involved in some sort of commercial enterprise, and spend most of the day at the market which they reach on foot or by donkey” (N’Zengou-Tayo 124).

Fertility is higher in rural areas, but on average not by too much (42).

Though virtually every Haitian mother (96%) breastfeeds their child, the need to generate income impels them to cease doing so, often after less than three months.

The introduction of other liquids and solid foods renders an infant markedly more

prone to infectious diseases and death (41-2). In addition, the health care received by rural Haitian women falls short of their needs. In order to survive, pregnant women often work up until they go into labor, which frequently leads to nutritional anemia (N'Zengou-Tayo 121). These examinations shed light on health effects on women in grave poverty who must care for their children while heading the household at the same time.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Women's Rights (Ministère à la Conditions Féminine et aux Droits de la Femme) is the main body in Haitian government that arbitrates the political status of women. However, due to the "weakness of government agencies," international institutions like UNICEF, USAID, and UNDP have interfered to try and remedy the inequalities women still face. They have "played a key role in further addressing gender issues in Haiti" (37). Despite their efforts, women have had very little political representation, only accounting for four percent of local authorities and deputies between 1997 and 1999 (38). In addition to international institutions, private and NGO sectors play a large role in the distribution of health, education and other areas that the public sector cannot afford to address (37). They often target rural Haiti that primarily abides by customary rules rather Civil/Statute Law (38). Though increasingly bearing the

burden of earning a living, women have not enjoyed a proportional rise in political representation.

As women struggle to sell rice, the prospect of sending their children to school diminishes significantly, especially for the young peasant girls. "When resources are scarce, girls have less chance of getting an education," (Palmer 237).

As school has become less of a priority in rural Haiti, girls at around the ages of 8 or 9 are expected to start their household apprenticeships. This consists of helping with their younger siblings, fetching water, assisting in cooking and marketing. For boys, age 10 marks the point when they will start helping their fathers in the fields.

A widespread lack of school attendance in rural Haiti primarily derives from the unaffordable school fees, largely a consequence of failed SAPs. Furthermore, children are needed in the house and fields to help out, making attending school practically unviable. Caring for younger children or collecting water make a substantial difference for parents (N'Zengou-Tayo 120).

Presently, young peasant girls are sent by their families to bigger cities to work as domestic servants. When they are young they work lower middle class families gradually progressing, as they grow older, to upper middle class families.

Though planned, these jobs are considered temporary, useful only for accruing



enough capital to launch an enterprise (Correia 127). Violence against women is a regular threat facing domestic workers, and a means of repression used by the state against women across classes” (N’Zengou-Tayo 118). However, women’s organizations have gained a great deal more of acknowledgement in the years since Baby Doc’s dictatorship crumbled. This has precipitated a greater focus on gender inequality in Haiti, especially within the realm of education and labor (119).

Historically, rural women have been extremely politically active. During the time of military rule after the fall of the Duvalier regime, rural women repeatedly attempted to organize themselves. A community of women radically started their own garden that they farmed on and harvested from themselves (125). However, with the severe and persistent lack of infrastructure, water, and farmable land, women have been unable to maintain a livelihood off of the land on their own. Consequently, many women have migrated to the city where they can work domestically or in garment factories for international corporations. These women often come to the city with little to no money and multiple children, a critical situation that often leads women to prostitute themselves. City migrants rarely find job security; that is to say, their newly established livelihoods are very fragile. Any unpredictable event, such as illness or political revolts in addition to a lack of

professional experience can end a woman's career. Though the life of a peasant woman may seem rather grim, there have been efforts made to aid women in overcoming "economic and historical invisibility," such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Enfofanm, Kayfanm, as well as numerous grassroots women's rights groups (126).

## CH. 5: A CALLING FOR A RE-POLITICIZATION OF HUMANITARIAN AID: A

### CONCLUSION:

As I was doing this research, I became ever more skeptical of U.S. foreign policy and humanitarian aid in general. One of the central problems with humanitarian intervention, however, is the implication that the donor country is past persecuting or ignoring their citizens. Yet, in the case of the U.S., this is blatantly not true. Hurricane Katrina brought to light the inability of the U.S. to help its own citizens. Furthermore, as humanitarian aid remained depoliticized in the global schema, at home in the States, domestic humanitarian aid quickly became political, as the people who desperately needed aid and weren't receiving it were predominantly people of color.

"The realization of the right to food" is a complicated phrase (Partners in Health 3). Humans require sustenance to survive; that is to say, humans need to eat and drink water to survive. Yet, if this were a true "right," so to speak, wouldn't everyone have access to it? Haitians right to food has been ignored, but so has that of many Americans. Nevertheless, institutions invoke the notion of human rights when talking about a country that doesn't have 'rights' like U.S. citizens do. Human rights appear again and again as the rights that we should afford the needy because

we already possess them.

The purpose of my thesis is not to offer a solution to hunger or political instability in Haiti, but to promote a rethinking of the concept of humanitarian intervention/aid. Slavoj Zizek deeply influenced me after I read his “Against Human Rights” which connected the theoretical dots in my mind. Just as Zizek demands the recognition of the ideology implicit in the notion of human rights and by extension humanitarian aid, I hope to emphasize that shift in thinking by showing the consequences of a specific case of humanitarian aid that was carried out by officials either ignorant or consciously greedy officials. A subscription to universalism is inherent in the idea of human rights that dictates that humans outside of politics are merely animals with rudimentary needs, desires, and, of course, rights. Rancière argues this not to be the case and I completely agree. If politics are removed from the discourse surrounding humanitarian intervention and human rights, then the poor will remain the poor as long as the rich desire.



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