Week 6 Reading Response
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HSS 404 039

Pathologies of Power – Health Human Rights, and the new war on the poor
Forward, Introduction (1-25), Chapter One (29-50)

The forward discusses how Paul Farmers work is impactful by describing how Farmer goes about explaining the concept of structural power. The most memorable part of the forward was the brief story about Acéphie, a tragic life driven by the structural inequalities of society. Acéphie's story gives a strong foundational understanding of the term "structural power" by giving us a direct example on its influence.

Once again structural violence is seen though the experiences of someone's life. We learn about the story of Julia, one of Farmers friends. Julia had lost so much due to the conditions in Guatemala and Mexico. It's not only Julia but other people within the region, the refugees who had to leave their homes, Julia's family who have been separated for years. An interesting point Farmer brings up is the idea of a change in mentality. He states that it's not the people on the ground who need a change in mentality rather the people in power. It can be argued that both parties need a change in perspective, but when the people in power don't fully understand the structural deficiencies their polices create, more unnecessary violence is born from it

Farmer mentions how human rights are normally a topic defined by lawyers and juridical, it is not common to see the perspective of a physician or an anthropologist. This idea was intriguing to me as it was not a thought that had come to mind. Many social inequalities are that of a lack of healthcare, limited access to treatment for common maladies. It is physicians like Farmer who are within these communities who have first-hand experience on how these illnesses can be prevented if not for the social structures in place. Anthropologists literally study human nature and culture, they too would have a strong idea of what issues are a result of the state of being and that of negligence and indifference.

Another interesting point mentioned in the introduction was that of the lack of action when it came to economic and social rights. These rights are often ignored if it means actually providing goods, be it medicine, food, or money, but at the same time if the cost is going to war so be it. Most of the Cold War was a war on an economic system that betrayed what was working for people in power. Many countries reached out to western powers for help, but when declined they shifted to their other option, communism, and after that the same western powers who refused to send help in terms of goods, send bullets. At the start of introduction, a work by Eduardo Galeano titled "The Nobodies" is quoted. As Galeano described, the difference of people who matter and those who don't is framing, all rights are defined by framing.

Farmer starts his study on structural violence with the people of Haiti. These people have been subject to all forms of violence and injustices. The unstable political atmosphere allows for rampant poverty and unchecked illness. The leading cause of death in adults was TB and AIDS, while in children it was diarrhea, measles, and tetanus. All of these illnesses are considered trivial in this day with the use of modern medicine. It is a tragedy that a whole nation suffers from such preventable illnesses due to a lack of support from the systems that are in place. Farmer now walks us through in depth examples of structural violence through the stories of real people, one of which was mentioned earlier in the forward, Acéphie. In using these stories, the reality of structural violence comes across very effectively. Farmer is able to target the empathy of the reader to get the definition of structural violence across. Each of the stories highlight the preventable nature of the tragedies and how the current structure in place is to blame. When so much of the world can benefit from an abundance of modern technology and advancements, it's a shame that there are people who can't, not due to their personal actions but due to the environment they are in.