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LIBS 201-001 *Violence*

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**Social Justice Abroad: Shifting the Movements to Global Application and Incorporation into American Foreign Policy**

Over the past several years, social justice and its related themes and causes have become dominant forces in America’s political and cultural conversations. They manifest themselves in our ongoing dialogue about excessive uses of police force and the large-scale violence that oppresses people of color as a result, they manifest themselves in the controversy surrounding Planned Parenthood (be it legitimate or not) and the right of a woman to terminate a pregnancy, and the frequent discussions of income inequality and the need to alleviate poverty in the United States. These topics are all critically important to the goal of achieving a more just and equitable country, and they are all key foundations of what is traditionally considered the larger social justice movement in America, but so often the dialogue and conversations of social justice Americans have is confined so tightly to a purely Americanized perspective that most mentions of social justice abroad are virtually unheard of. There is a much wider world beyond America’s borders, a world with twenty times as many people inhabiting it as the United States alone. The lives of people all over the planet are just as prone to injustice as Americans are, if not more so, and it is a failure of the American people to not incorporate more global language into the lexicon of social justice.

If the citizens of the United States are to become more inclusive of global issues in talking about social justice, as they absolutely should, a functional and explicit understanding of exactly what the problems the rest of the world faces become necessitated. Just as issues of social justice in the United States are diverse and numerous, struggles for social justice abroad are largely plentiful and far-reaching in other different states or other parts of the world. For example, a legitimate problem in many countries in Europe is the emergence of hyper-conservative attitudes and right-wing political parties in the face of changing ethnic identity and social or cultural norms. Brian Beary, an acclaimed international journalist writing for the CQ Researcher, states that “In addition to economic stagnation and high joblessness rates, immigration from poorer to richer countries has led to social tensions, made worse by a new influx of refugees fleeing Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, after decades of dormancy, anti-Semitism appears to be on the rise again”. It appears that the current sluggish economic climate in many European states, fueled by relentless austerity policies by their respective governments, have triggered a sense of bleak frustration and hopelessness which in turned has allowed right-wing parties across the continent to market their authoritarian policies as a remedy to the social ills befalling Europe. The platform of many of these parties usually have central themes of extremely conservative social customs, overwhelming glorification of the military, and above all, rampant xenophobia. The new government of Poland, which emerged after the eastern european country’s national election in October, is a prime example of such a sharp shift to the right. Law and Justice, or Prawo i Sprawiedliwość in Polish, is the dominant party in Poland having captured a plurality of the country’s votes in the last election. Amongst its platform components include adherence to traditional Roman Catholic values (i.e. refutations of LGBT equally and access to contraceptive care) and a strict refusal to allow Muslim refugees into the country, even in light of the ongoing civil war in Syria and the struggle against ISIL. Poland is not alone in its rise of right-wing political parties. Countries including Austria, Greece, Denmark, and Sweden have seen their ultra-conservative parties makes gains in either public approval or legislative seats. While conservatism is not in of itself a cause for alarm, sharp shifts to the authoritarian right are, especially in a continent with such a dark history of authoritarian leaders using fear to inspire violence and oppression.

The potential American response to the issues of far-right governments are tricky and complex. On one hand, the United States has been around long enough to remember the rise of similar governments in the past, and what horrors can emerge when their rhetoric and actions are not kept in check. On the other hand, many of these political parties come to power largely due to resentment of American influence in some way. The American geopolitical hegemony is seen by many right-wing leaders as chauvinistic, and belittling to the authority and autonomy of European states. For example, Viktor Orban, the Prime Minister of Hungary, attacked the United States for its “liberal values of corruption, sex, and violence”, while simultaneously complementing governments of Russia and China as example role models for the function of a state. Orban has also been critical of the relationship the United States has had with the European Union (EU) and Russia, sharing a belief with many in Europe’s resurgent right that America uses the former as a vehicle for its own policies against the latter, often at the expense of the individual autonomy of the European states in the EU.

What needs to be done by American elected officials is a series of geographically and politically relevant incentives or ultimatums to various states to maintain simple outlines and standards of decent behavior in regards to social welfare. For example, if  the government of a country in eastern europe who is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), continues to advance policies that would be oppressive towards immigrants or minorities in general, the United States can offer increased or decreased military infrastructure in the country as leverage to secure basic civil rights in those countries. Those would be felt especially hard on states like Poland and Hungary, who talk a big game of bolstering their national defenses, but are still heavily dependent on the United States and NATO to cover a significant part of their defenses. According to membership policy, a state participating in NATO must spend at least two percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense. As of 2012, only five countries meet or exceed that requirement: founding members The United States, The United Kingdom, and France, as well as the smaller and economically cash-strapped balkan countries of Albania and Greece. A reduction in military installations (or more drastic yet, a complete cut-off) could have the potential to keep ideologically rightward states from sliding into full and legitimate totalitarianism or fascism, as it would highlight their dependence on a military relationship with the United States and put pressure on them to keep basic standards of civil rights and justices. Military alliances aside, simple economic aid or economic incentive could also be used as the diplomatic carrot as opposed to the stick that scaling back on defense would represent. As mentioned earlier, economic worry in the face of the Great Recession caused many European governments to abandon Keynesian-style economic development in favor of austerity-driven budget cuts, which proved disastrous to the employment rate of many countries across Europe. France, for example, has an unemployment rate close to ten percent. That, along with fallout from the recent ISIL-conducted attacks on Paris earlier in November have produced a considerably high and dangerous level of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment across the country that jeopardizes goals of social justice in France as well as ignites fears in the hearts of France’s already established Muslim community. The United States could consider committing a portion of its defense budget, which likely has room to be allocated as it consumes sixty percent of discretionary spending and is likely to increase given the budget deal President Obama made with congressional republicans in mid-October, and use it to reward allied states with economic stimulus in exchange for not succumbing to xenophobic or reactionary pressures. Through a variety of policy initiatives, the United States can defeat the surge of reactionary, right-wing politics in Europe and help establish a coherent and comprehensive theme of social justice in the region.

While the emergence of right-wing political groups in Europe is definitely problematic and warrants special consideration, the threats that they pose to social justice are by and large very abstract, as of now at least. A much more tangible and legitimate threat to social justice abroad is the oppression and marginalization of women and girls in north Africa and western and southern Asia.  While many of the states in Europe, Oceania, and the Americas have taken significant action over the past half century to advance women’s rights (or at the very least spread awareness of the issues that diminish women’s equality), many of the economically diminished countries of Africa and Asia have yet to make such progress. Currently, over fifteen million girls marry under the age of eighteen in various parts of the world (often under arranged marriages), and eight times as many girls do not even attend institutions of primary education. To make things worse off, drastic and atrocious acts of violence are constantly committed against women and girls in the aforementioned regions of the world. The Islamic State of Syria and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS), the globally denounced terror organization, has made something of a business of kidnapping women and girls in the territories that they administer and either selling them as sex slaves or taking them hostage for use as sex slaves. Iraq’s Yazidi population has been a target of ISIS that has been met with particular violence and hostility from the terror organization. According to a CNN article from October, The Yezidis, a cultural group native to Iraq, have religious beliefs that claim the earth was created by a single God who entrusted stewardship of the earth to a peacock angel, has been explicitly targeted by ISIS, who believes that the religious beliefs of the Yazidis are tantamount to idolatry or devil worship. The same report also states that ISIS forced pregnant Yazidi women to undergo abortions and later sold them into sex slavery or traded them for weapons and supplies. Another group that has conducted unspeakable acts of violence against women is Boko Haram in Nigeria. Boko Haram made headlines last year when its kidnapping of 276 Nigerian schoolgirls prompted the #bringbackourgirls campaign on Facebook and Twitter. Unfortunately, this act of violence is disturbingly common for the terror outfit. In Nigeria’s northern territories, Boko Haram has committed acts of terror and violence that include the kidnapping and rape of more than five hundred girls, the pillaging and destruction of villages, and innumerable suicide attacks inside the country. Not only are the actions of these groups abhorrent, but without addressing them first and foremost, women in Iraq, Syria, and Nigeria are forced to almost exclusively think about their most basic survival instead of means to better themselves through education, individuality, or other forms of empowerment. It is a sad and unconscionable existence that few who grew up in the west can even decipher or understand.

To begin to understand how to confront the issues of women’s oppression in developing countries, it is best to divide the larger issue into two categories: Find solutions to the *marginalization* of women in various countries, and find solutions to the *outright violence* against women in various countries. These are two very different diagnoses to two very different problems, and as such, they warrant very different remedies in order to be effective. The solution to the marginalization of women in developing states is for the government of the United States to subsidize and assist non-profit organizations and advocacy groups working abroad in order to help foster the empowerment of women in foreign countries. Research shows that when women in developing countries receive substantial education, the country’s economy begins to grow considerably, likely as the result of its educated labor force almost doubling with the new academic grounds gained for women. These groups have been shown to get results, as when their lobbying efforts helped raised the southeast African nation of Malawi’s marriage age from fifteen to eighteen. As for the issue of terrorist groups committing acts of violence against women in developing nations, the solution becomes much more difficult to obtain. Obviously, goodwill, interest groups, and the Peace Corps can’t disarm or dismantle terrorist organizations, especially ones like ISIS with some governing power and territorial claims. Furthermore, the potential to apply military force is an option, but full-on assaults costs military lives and inevitably result is massive civilian casualties, which by all definitions runs counter to the ideals and purposes of social justice. This is a problem that unfortunately has to be measured in utilitarian benefits, where there is no clear way to obtain a solution without blood, but the solution that results in the lesser loss of life should be the one that is sought out. First of all, despite the wave of Republican governors crying foul, the United States should expedite its vetting process for refugees, which would directly remove people in crisis, women and their children in particular, away from the violence overseas. It should be noted that the lengthy vetting process is a completely inefficient and unheard of way for terrorists to enter American borders, and that the men responsible for the tragedy in Paris in November were natural-born French citizens, so concerns of radicals or terrorists entering the United States as refugees is an irrational phobia. As far as facing the issue of terrorism in various places in the world, the United States needs to rally, train, and assist regional powers to remove the terrorist organizations from their respective areas. It’s not a clean solution by any stretch of the imagination, but it’s the only option available. Granted, the United States should also learn from its previous experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan and turn focus away from bombings are strikes, but containment, so that the groups are unable to claim more territory and endanger more women and minorities.

Needless to say, there are more issues that have not been covered in this essay, but what’s been described are perhaps the biggest dangers and threats to social justice across the globe. It is unfair to diminish the goals of social justice movements in the United States, but with the exception of the Black Lives Matter and anti-transgender violence movements, not many movements in the United States face as much severe danger as many people overseas do. It is very appropriate to demand social change in America, in fact, it is *required* as a merit of basic patriotism to be concerned about the needs of your fellow countrymen and women, but at its core, the social justice movement is about humanism. Social justice knows no borders and it sees all lives as having equal merit while understanding that some lives face undue and unequal oppression from institutional forces. It is up to the American people to simultaneously fight for social justice both at home and overseas.

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