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PRIVATE TROUBLES AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Developing a Sociological Imagination

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, students should be able to do the following:

- 1.1 Compare personal and social problems, societal and global problems
- 1.2 Discuss how the political, economic, and cultural features of a society comprise its social location in the world and influence both individual and societal vulnerability to global problems
- 1.3 Illustrate global goals for improving people's life chances and progress made toward those goals
- 1.4 Identify theoretical frameworks for the analysis of global problems
- 1.5 Describe the major features of the global economy, global governance, and global culture

Finding Solutions: Tarun Bharat Sangh (Young India Organization) Building From the Grassroots

Because the problems that we face are interrelated, so are the solutions. Affecting change in one problem may trigger a cascade of improvements. This is what the villagers in the Rajasthan area of India discovered. Facing overwhelming problems, such as poverty, water scarcity, hunger, forest degradation, pollution from mining, and little education and health care, the villagers of Rajasthan partnered with Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS). Energized and empowered, they overcame the odds. It started with water management but accomplished much more.

Rajasthan is harsh territory in northwest India—arid and semi-arid lands, mountains, and desert. Like the rest of India, it is extremely vulnerable to climate change. Its temperatures range from 0°C (32°F) to 49°C (120°F). Nearly all the water that arrives in the monsoon runs off the land or evaporates. The people are poor. Although Rajasthan is about 10 percent of India's land area, it has only 1 percent of India's water. Its forests are dying. As in many water-scarce communities, women and girls sacrifice education and employment opportunities to spend hours every day fetching water.

That was then, about 30 years ago. Today, although the climate is no friendlier, people's lives are much better. The key to the success in Rajasthan is the local community's involvement in and control of every phase of development. Spearheading a grassroots effort rather than coming in and taking over, TBS energized the local communities to

restore traditional water and resource management. In 1987, TBS helped villagers construct a small *johad*, a traditional water management technique that directs rainwater underground to prevent evaporation and runoff. Seeing the success of this small demonstration, a johad craze overtook the region, with remarkable results. The water table began to rise after decades of depletion. Rivulets began to run year-round. Enriched, forests and scrub in the area came alive and prevented even more runoff.

Empowered by the recognition of their traditional knowledge and skills, the villagers have taken charge of water management and much more. The wells and aquifers are replenished. This has revitalized agriculture for both crops and livestock. Agricultural production for subsistence improved, and villages generate income from milk products made possible by the increase in biomass for livestock fodder. One of the major foci of TBS is the empowerment of women and girls. They no longer spend up to 18 hours a day hauling once scarce water, fodder, and fuel wood. Relieved of much of this hardship, girls are more often in school and women assume important roles in their communities in resource management, health, and education. They revived traditional knowledge of herbs and healing and provide health care for the community. Primary schools are established throughout the area. TBS provides extensive training for the community teachers and infrastructure. Alternative educational centers for women provide training and platforms for self-help and discussions on topics such as girl education, child marriage, child labor, and rights and responsibilities.

The keys to success in Rajasthan are community inclusion and building on cultural traditions and values. Rather than taking over and excluding local people from development efforts, TBS worked at the grassroots level, promoting and nurturing village councils. It recognized the dignity of and value in traditional knowledge and practices. TBS supplies some funding and support, but villagers direct all aspects of the processes. They make the decisions through village councils and provide the labor. At the village level, the council, Gram Sabha, has representatives from all households. The council meets twice monthly, and all households must attend the meetings. There is no formal leader or hierarchy, and decisions are consensual.

At the regional level, The Avari Sansad (River Avari Parliament) meets twice a year, with representatives from 72 of the river basin villages. It is participatory, egalitarian, and decentralized, following Gandhian ethos. Parliament determines the best practices for water management and enforces the rules. Violations are handled in the community where they occurred through dialog and deliberation. Parliament decides which crops are recommended and which are forbidden, which industries are allowed and where, whether or not boreholes may be drilled in the catchment area, grazing rights and limits, and other considerations that bear on protecting the natural resources and thus the health of the communities. Every decision is made with concern for long-term sustainability.

Empowered, the villagers learned to fight to protect their interests. Recognizing the importance of fish to the ecosystem, the communities fought off the government's efforts to allow a contractor to exploit the fish that had returned to the river. The people resisted, even though most are vegetarian, and won. They saw that mining was degrading their forests, disturbing the delicate balance in their mountains, threatening the animals therein, and affecting their natural water system. Despite violence by pro-mining elements, they fought the mining operations. They succeeded in having 470 mines closed by an order of the Supreme Court of India.

Over the course of 30 years, they restored the Avari River and its tributaries. Little of the monsoon rain is wasted. There are now more than 10,000 rain harvesting structures in the region. The entire region is revitalized, and people have life chances that seemed impossible just a short time ago. TBS has won national and global awards for its work. It is a model nongovernmental organization.

Source: Adapted from Tarun Bharat Sangh [n.d.]. See the website for more information: <http://tarunbharatsangh.in>

IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES, IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

—Charles Dickens (1859), *A Tale of Two Cities*

In 1859, Dickens thusly described the Paris and London of 1775, full of contradiction as the Enlightenment demands for the freedom and dignity of humankind challenged the heavy weight of tradition and monarchy. In its contradictions, the mid-1800s was equally stark. Each was a period overflowing with possibility and potential to provide a good life for everyone. Yet each was a period in which much, if not most, of humankind was buffeted by forces beyond people's individual control—forces of which Dickens himself had been a victim, forces that pushed many into the abyss of despair. Each of these periods inspired great literature, philosophy, social theory, and scientific thought as reformers sought to combat forces that overpowered people, stripping them of their dignity and opportunity for a good life. This was the consistent theme across Dickens's work: how the personal and often tragic problems of individuals stem from the social and political forces over which they have no control.

The twenty-first century is a similar era; it could be the best of times. Like the 1850s, there is sufficient productive capacity in the world to give everyone a good life, a life of comfort. There is sufficient knowledge of how to do it sustainably in ways that will preserve our environment and resources. This is the promise of our era.

Yet our world is full of contradictions. Vicious wars and violent conflicts still plague much of the world, killing hundreds of thousands and sending millions of people into life-threatening journeys to find refuge. Poverty and hunger still stalk many countries. People suffer violence, including violent death, because of their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation. People reject environmental science. Many do not want to acknowledge fact, putting their trust in the fictions spewed daily but presented as reality. Xenophobia and prejudices are growing in many countries. Within societies, inequality is increasing. Where there could be plenty, we find despair.

There is still promise. We have made progress. Violent conflict has lessened since the mid-1990s. Interstate war had virtually disappeared until the invasion of Ukraine. Extreme poverty was more than halved from 1990 to 2019. Fewer children die from preventable illnesses or water-borne ailments. Many more people have access to education and health care.

We can do better. In today's world, no people should be victims of tragic social problems any more than they should have been in Dickens's time.

PRIVATE TROUBLES, PUBLIC ISSUES

It is hard to imagine a place so devoid of opportunity, where people have so little to lose that they would walk thousands of miles to escape it. That is the story, though, of the *lost boys* of Sudan. Their story is a modern legend. It is incredible. It illustrates how personal and private troubles may be caused by social forces.

Victims of Circumstance: The Lost Boys

Sudan in the 1980s was a toxic mix of warfare, food insecurity, destruction, and death. Sudan was always an uneasy place; its borders, drawn by the British in 1947, merged an Arabic Muslim north with a Christian and animist south. During Sudan's transition to independence, it was clear that the peoples of the south would have little power, being ruled by the government in Khartoum. Even before its official independence at the close of 1955, southern troops rebelled. Civil wars and violent conflict followed. Arms poured into the country. In 1982, full-fledged civil war broke out, again. Civilians were slaughtered. Both sides committed atrocities.

To escape the violence and warfare, 20,000 boys, many as young as 5 or 6 years, left their villages in southern Sudan (South Sudan was not independent until 2011). In large groups, they walked over a thousand miles to Ethiopia, but war there forced them to walk again, again through war zones, this time to refugee camps in Kakuma, Kenya. Dehydration, exhaustion, drowning in rivers, war, and wild animals had claimed thousands, nearly half of them, along the way. When they finally reached camp, they were given food and medication. Some learned English, some other languages. Some were eventually reunited with their families, but most were not. In the early 2000s, about 3,600 were settled in the United States and thousands more were settled in other countries. By then they were adults, but they did not know snow, let alone electric light switches, butter, flush toilets, or even calendars. They excelled in their new homes, many graduating from colleges, many starting businesses. Some have returned to their hometowns to help the new generation of lost boys as the wars in Sudan and South Sudan continue (International Rescue Committee 2014).

There is no mistaking that these boys are victims. In their cases, it is easy to see the role of social factors. In other cases, with other problems, the social factors may be more difficult to discern. But if you look, you will find them.

To begin studying global social problems, we first need to distinguish personal or private problems from public or social problems. How do you recognize social problems? Here is an analogy that I use in my classes:

Imagine that you are working as an admissions clerk in the emergency room (ER) of a hospital. Among your duties is recording information concerning what brings people to the ER: what is wrong with them and how they got sick or were injured. It is obvious that each person coming into the ER has a problem.

You notice that many people are injured in car accidents at a particular intersection of highways, let's say the intersections of U.S. Routes 119 and 22. The ER physicians fix most of these people. They mend their broken bones and repair their injured organs.

Are they really solving the problems? Yes, but also no. Yes, they have solved many of the individual problems of the people admitted to the ER. But there is a larger problem, a social problem. What needs to be done?

Students quickly see that someone needs to repair the intersection. Maybe bushes have overgrown and are obstructing the view of oncoming traffic. Perhaps the merge lane is too short. Maybe there are potholes. It should be obvious that something is wrong with the structure of the intersection. People will always have problems. However, when a large number of people suffer from the same problem, it is likely to be a social or public problem. The root cause is in the structure of the social group—whether a community, a society, or the world—just as the root cause of the accidents was the structure of the highway.

Another important point: Not everyone who goes through the intersection has an accident. Consider what makes some people more vulnerable than others. In the case of the accidents, there are a variety of possibilities. People who don't travel through that intersection are not vulnerable. Maybe people with old cars that cannot accelerate as quickly or reliably are more likely to have an accident. Perhaps people who are older cannot twist their necks far enough to see around the overgrown bushes. You can probably think of more factors that would make a person more likely than others to be vulnerable at that intersection. This doesn't mean that the accidents are personal problems. The vulnerable people would not have been vulnerable had the intersection not been faulty.

That is how we understand social problems. Many individuals suffer the consequences, but the source of the problem is in the social order—local, national, or global. The problems people share are larger than their own vulnerabilities, mishaps, or mistakes. Contradictions and dysfunctions in global systems can wreak havoc in individual lives that otherwise may not have been problematic.

Modern global problems affect young and old, rich and poor. No one escapes vulnerability to problems such as environmental pollution and terrorism. However, the people who bear the most severe victimizations are not randomly distributed. People are not equally vulnerable to global social problems. Some people and categories of people have liabilities not of their own making that aggravate their individual vulnerability. Their liabilities depend on their social location. The location could be geographical such as the country or neighborhood in which they live. It could be their age, gender, race, ethnicity, social class, or one of many other factors. However, being poor—a poor country or a poor person in a wealthy country—and being marginalized because of race, religion, ethnicity, or gender are among the most significant factors determining vulnerability. A sociological imagination helps one see the social dimensions of problems in the global system, the contributing factors, and thus the potential solutions.

PHOTOS 1.1 AND 1.2 ■ Personal Versus Social Problems

If only a small number of people in a community are homeless, it may well be due to their individual personal problems. However, the presence of homeless encampments is symptomatic that homelessness is a social problem. What factors might make one society or another more vulnerable to homelessness? What makes one person more vulnerable than others?



"Looking for Something?" by Adam James. Public domain (Photo 1.1). Cory Doctorow/CC BY-SA 2.0 (Photo 1.2).

As with the faulty intersection, describing the scope of global problems and determining the most vulnerable comprise the first steps in confronting them. Explaining the vulnerability of people in the operation of global systems is the second step. This helps us identify the sources of the problems and find viable solutions. Throughout this process, it is essential to remember that the individuals most vulnerable are akin to the “canary in the coal mine.” They suffer the consequences first and usually the most severely, and the rest of us will probably suffer from them later or perhaps more subtly.

What are some of the social problems that people face in your country? Can you identify some of the factors that make some people more vulnerable than others?

An Example: Suicide

Suicide is one of the problems that we think of as most idiosyncratic, that is, most subject to individual rather than social factors. It is true that most people who commit suicide have some type of personal problem; perhaps they are often depressed or unhappy. Many may have experienced a personal misfortune. But most people who are unhappy, are depressed, or have problems, even severe ones, do not commit suicide. Emile Durkheim studied suicide in 1897 to demonstrate that variation in suicide rates is a social phenomenon; rates of suicide vary with social structural variations. Rapid social change leaves people feeling anomic, without clear guidelines for life. Too few and/or weak bonds among people in society drains life of meaning, and too great an importance placed on the group in relation to the individual can make individuals' lives seem inconsequential—as if it doesn't matter whether they live or die. All three of these social factors—rapid social change, lack of bonds, and diminution of the individual—cause spikes in suicide rates. Each of these social structural conditions is a mechanism whereby life loses meaning.

Durkheim noted that economic recessions increased suicidal tendencies. The financial crisis that began at the end of 2008 is a modern case in point. One study found that at least 10,000 suicides occurred in North America and Europe as a result of the recession. Whereas suicide in Europe had been decreasing in the years leading up to the recession, suicide reversed course and began an upward climb when the recession hit. It rose 6.5 percent by 2009 and remained elevated through 2011. In the United States, suicide had already been trending upward, but with the recession the rise accelerated 4.8 percent over the prerecession rate. Suicide in Canada increased 4.5 percent. In contrast, industrialized countries that escaped the recession did not experience an increase in suicide (Reeves, McKee, and Stuckler 2014). That is not the whole story or even the most important part.

The increase in suicides was not inevitable. If the social structure, like the intersection on the highway, was repaired or was not faulty to begin with, the suicide spikes could have been prevented (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). In a related study of 20 European Union countries, researchers found that greater investments in labor market programs and high levels of social capital (social trust) were significant in reducing suicides related to job loss. These social structural factors were effective, whereas suicides “were not significantly mitigated by higher rates of antidepressant prescription, unemployment cash benefits or the total per capita investment in social protections” (Reeves et al. 2015).¹

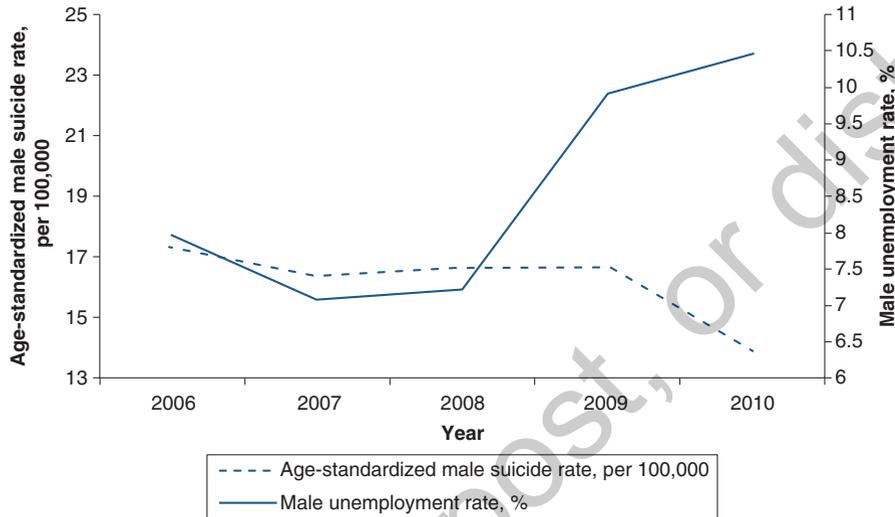
The authors noted that the suicides were not necessarily among people who became unemployed. Suicides may also occur due to increased economic anxiety. Rapid social change that leaves people with uncertainty, particularly in the context of a weak social fabric, makes people vulnerable. Strong fabrics protect them.

A CLOSER LOOK

THE MITIGATING EFFECTS OF SOCIAL EXPENDITURES ON SUICIDE

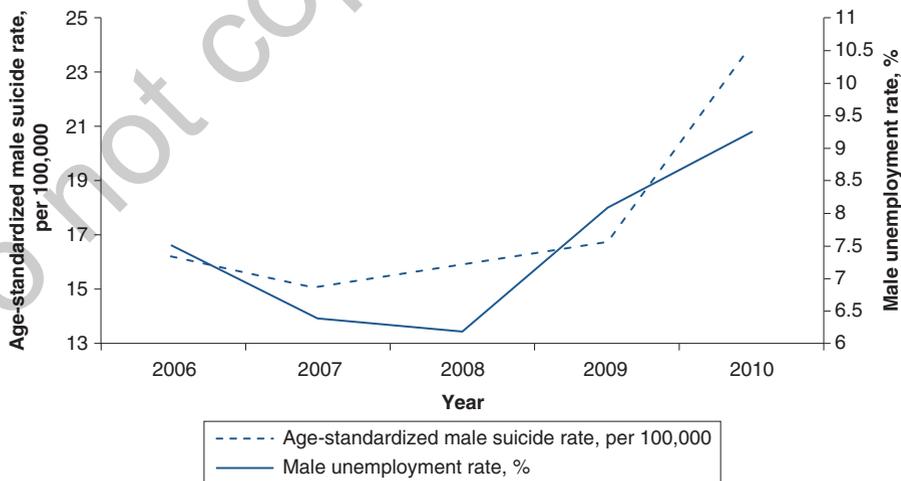
Social spending on labor market programs prevented the spike in suicides experienced in countries that did not mitigate the effects of unemployment.

FIGURE 1.1 ■ High Spending (>US\$ 135 per person, per annum) on Active Labor Market Programs



Source: Reeves, Aaron, Martin McKee, and David Stuckler. 2014. "Economic Suicides in the Great Recession in Europe and North America." *British Journal of Psychiatry* 205(3):246–247. Reproduced with permission.

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Low Spending (<US\$ 135 per person, per annum) on Active Labor Market Programs



Source: Reeves et al. 2015. Reproduced with permission.

VULNERABILITY TO GLOBAL PROBLEMS

Global Vulnerability

Many challenges confront the modern world. We face a world of uncertainty. Whether in disease control, finance, the environment, or violent conflict, we increasingly face risks that defy rationality because we cannot calculate their consequences; they are unknown (Beck 1992). Consider the range of unanswerable questions posed by actions of our own human making. Here are but a few:

- How long will our water resources last if we continue to draw down freshwater resources? Can we replenish them in time?
- What do we do with the nuclear waste we are accumulating? Is there a way in which to dispose of it safely?
- Can we prevent terrorism?
- What do we do if antibiotics stop working against deadly infections?
- Is it safe to combine animal and human DNA to grow human organs in animals?
- Do genetically modified (GM) foods pose health risks or not?
- How high will the world's population grow? Can we slow growth? Should we?

Ironically, most of these are of our own making. They are manufactured risks (Giddens 2003).

- The ferocity and frequency of extreme weather events both are increasing, yet we continue to manufacture greenhouse gases.
- We have bountiful renewable and clean energy sources but are choking on the pollution from the combustion of fossil fuels.
- Natural disasters and ecosystem deterioration drive millions more people from their homes than does violent conflict.
- Violent conflict and persecution still threaten the world long after most of the world has recognized the importance and dignity of all humankind yet has failed to treat many with dignity.
- Tens of thousands of people starve to death every day. This is not because we cannot produce enough food. As a world, we throw away enough food to feed everyone who is hungry. (Waste and Resources Action Programme [WRAP] 2015)

These challenges and risks are synergistic, intensifying the effects of each other. Global agriculture produces more than enough food to feed the world. The economic value of food waste is hundreds of billions of dollars per year and increasing. Growing the food that is wasted and decay of food waste emit greenhouse gases that add billions of dollars more to economic loss. Greenhouse gases cause global warming, which in turn contributes to hunger and violent conflict as once arable lands no longer support agriculture. Each of these contributes to waves of migration, which can destabilize surrounding countries and feed waves of resentment, discrimination, and persecution.

Because the threats to human security are interrelated, we live in a chronic state of *systemic risk*. Systemic risk is the risk of “breakdowns in an entire system, as opposed to breakdowns in individual parts and components” (World Economic Forum [WEF] 2014). Systemic risks are characterized by the following:

- Modest tipping points combining indirectly to produce large failures
- Risk sharing or contagion as one loss triggers a chain of others
- “Hysteresis,” or systems being unable to recover equilibrium after a shock. (WEF 2014:12)

While the synergy of interrelated risks and threat of systemic risk may appear daunting, it can also be cause for optimism. Synergy works both ways. Improvements in one challenge area can affect improvement in others. Mitigating climate change, for example, can lessen drought, affecting food security and decreasing violent conflict.

Individual Vulnerability

As you know, not everyone is equally vulnerable to global risks. Much depends on one’s life chances. Very generally, your life chances are the opportunities and resources that you have to meet your needs and achieve your goals. Life chances depend heavily on a person’s social location. The country in which you live is one social location. A child born in a Western European country has a much better chance to survive infancy and childhood than one born in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, or poverty pockets of the United States. The chances to obtain adequate food, clothing, and shelter; achieve your potential in physical, intellectual, and emotional development; get a good education; or have a job also vary by social class, gender, race, religion, and ethnicity. These are also social locations. Social location increases or decreases people’s vulnerabilities to the risks of the world. This is one way in which, as Mills (1959) said, it is impossible to understand the history of the individual without understanding the history of the society or, for our purposes, the globe.

Locating Countries in the Global System

There are many labels commonly used to describe a country’s position in the global system and the relationships among them. The assumption is that countries within any one category have a relatively common set of characteristics. They may be economic, political, or cultural depending on the specific labels and the context in which they are used. These labels are so often used that it is important to understand what they mean and some of the finer distinctions among them.

Developed and Developing

One delineation that social scientists use is *developed* as opposed to *developing*. The classification is simplistic, but it is conventional shorthand to group countries that are similar in the characteristics important in determining people’s life chances. One of these characteristics is wealth. Developed societies are generally wealthier, and poorer societies are generally still developing.

The World Bank (n.d.) classifies countries into income categories according to their gross national income (GNI) per capita.² For the fiscal year 2021, the World Bank classifications³ report uses the following classifications and thresholds:

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Low-income economies | \$1,045 or less |
| Lower middle-income economies | \$1,046–\$4,095 |
| Upper middle-income economies | \$4,096–\$12,695 |
| High-income economies | \$12,695 or more |

Source: Hamadeh, Nada, Catherine van Rompaey, and Eric Metreau. 2022. "New World Bank Country Classifications by Income Level: 2021–2022." Washington, DC: World Bank World Bank Blogs. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/new-world-bank-country-classifications-income-level-2022-2023>.

The World Bank reports hundreds of development indicators relating to a country's economy, government, education, health care, and more. The income or wealth (total assets minus debt) of a country is related to life chances but is not sufficient to capture the complexity of life chances. Some countries do better at providing life chances than countries that have higher incomes.

To provide a measure better suited to gauging the actual life chances of people within a country, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) calculates the Human Development Index (HDI) to classify countries according to their level of development, defining development as enlarging human choices. The UNDP conceptualizes enlarging human choices as a function of two primary dimensions: factors that directly enhance human capabilities and factors that create conditions for human development. Each of these has several components.

Factors that directly enhance human capabilities are a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. Factors that create conditions for human development are participation in political and community life, environmental stability, human security and rights, and equality and social justice (UNDP 2015). Each of these expands the *human capital* of a society and makes it possible for individuals to achieve their potential.

The HDI attempts to capture the opportunities that people in the society have. It incorporates GNI per capita, life expectancy as an indicator of health, mean years of schooling, and expected years of schooling. Countries are given scores from 0 to 1. The closer to 1, the higher the level of human development; the more opportunities and choices people have, and the better their life chances are. Countries are classified as very high, high, medium, and low development. The HDI is not a perfect or complete measure but is a useful tool.

The Human Development Report provides alternative HDI measures adjusted to reflect how inequality and gender affect the HDI. The Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) considers the impact of three measures of inequality on each country's overall human development score. There is no society in which all people have absolutely equal life chances; however, some come close. In societies with very high levels of inequality, some people are much more privileged than others; some are so deprived as to have little to no choices in life. The Gender Inequality Index modifies the HDI by contrasting women's and men's scores on several important measures: health, labor market participation, and participation in government. As with the inequality-adjusted score, there is no society in which women are equal to men; in some societies, women have little or no control over their own lives.

East and West, North and South, and More

There are many other terms used to distinguish among systems of societies. For the most part, the definitions are not analytically precise. They refer to very general characteristics such as East (or the Orient) and West (or the Occident). In this case, the reference is primarily to civilizational

or, broadly speaking, cultural characteristics. These may appear stereotypical. Aspects of the civilizational differences deemed important are an orientation to group welfare taking priority as opposed to individual welfare, respect for and the place of elders in the society, formality and informality of social relations, dimensions of time, reverence for the natural world, and religious differences. Sometimes this delineation is used to refer to up and coming powers (the Asian *Tigers* and China) as opposed to older and declining powers (Europe and the United States) and often just “West” or “the West” to signify Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. In these cases, it is referring more or less to the traditionally wealthier societies.

North and *South* are descriptors that refer to northern and southern regions of the globe. However, the implicit meanings of the terms are that the North is richer and dominant and the South is poorer and exploited. *First World*, *Second World*, and *Third World* are terms that have fallen out of favor, although they appear in older, particularly Cold War, literature about international relations. They infer political and economic characteristics. First World refers to capitalist industrial societies, on the one hand, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance countries, on the other. Second World refers to the Warsaw Pact countries and the USSR—the less developed Eastern bloc. Third World countries refer mostly to non-aligned nations. In some contexts, the Third World and First World are used synonymously with South and North, respectively.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is another category you will encounter. It formed by a United Nations Convention in 1960, and is an inter-governmental organization of the richest countries of the world. The organization fosters cooperation to promote one another’s and global economic growth while maintaining financial stability. Originating with 20 members, it had 38 as of 2022. Several of the more recent members are emerging economies such as Mexico, Chile, Estonia, and Slovenia; Colombia and Costa Rica joined in 2020 and 2021, respectively. Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia, Peru, and Romania are the next in line for accession.

Throughout this book as well as in social science literature generally, any of these terms may be used. Each has assumptions that the societies being referenced share important features in the context of the discussion. With respect to global problems, the labels are relevant as shorthand for referring to a cluster of countries with inference to the types and severity of problems they experience and the basic characteristics of their governments and economies.

USING A SOCIAL SCIENCE LENS

The social world is complex. Each social science views it from a somewhat different perspective, illuminating a different facet. Each social science employs a variety of strategies and perspectives. Each contributes something to our understanding. That is to say that within the social sciences, there are multiple lenses through which we view social life. Each lens brings a different aspect of social life into focus. While some people think of them as competing, it is more useful to see them as complementary. Each of the perspectives is a tool that helps us exercise a part of our sociological imaginations.

Shaping the Modern World

Taking our cue from Mills (1959), if we want to understand the global problems that plague individuals today, it is necessary to understand some of the history that has shaped the global systems, the societies within it, and people’s lives within them.

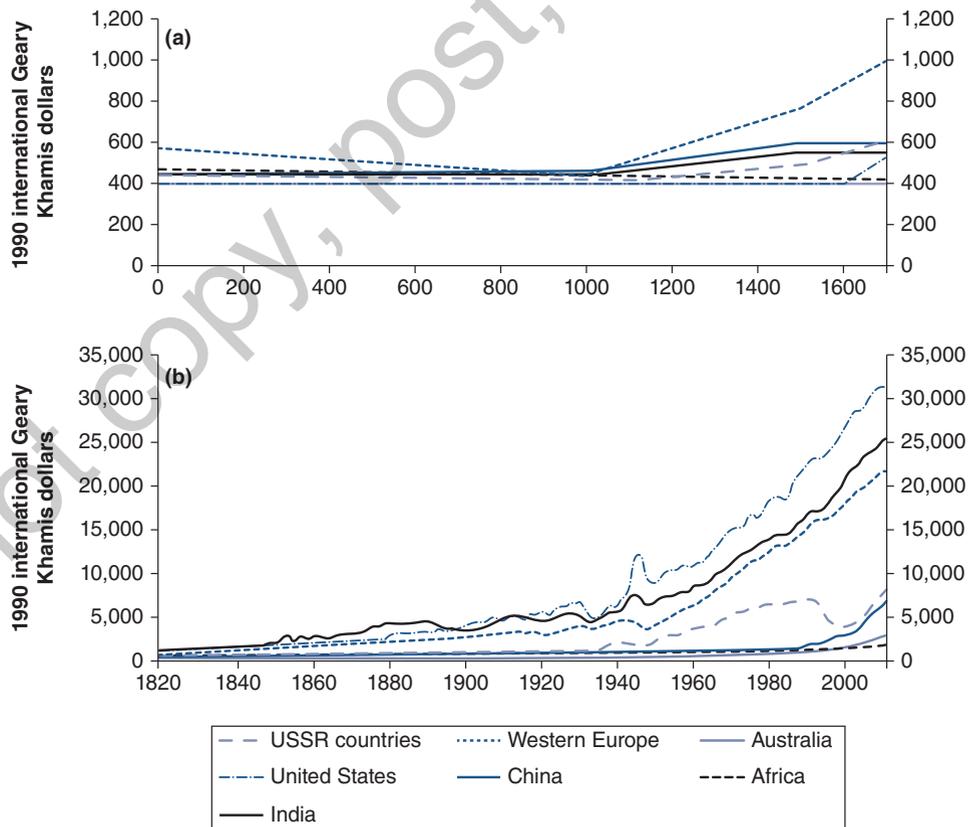
The Great Divergence

There is not a clear beginning to what we think of as the modern era. A useful starting point is what Samuel Huntington called “the great divergence”—the period when some societies surged ahead of others in development. Although some social scientists date the beginning of the divergence in the 1600s, when the European countries gained dominance in trade and began outpacing societies of the East in wealth and power, others posit it nearly 200 years later, at the time of the Industrial Revolution. In the fifteenth century, European societies accumulated wealth through trade surpassing the Middle East, India, and China, which had enjoyed the highest standard of living in the world until then. Still, until the mid-nineteenth century, there was relative equality among societies (but great inequality within societies). Societies were agricultural, and there was little opportunity for people outside of the landed nobility and trading companies to accumulate wealth.

In the mid-nineteenth century, with the Industrial Revolution and the colonization of Africa and Asia, the fortunes of Europe and North America advanced rapidly, separating them from the rest of the world, which remained poor. During the periods of trade expansion, followed by the Industrial Revolution and colonization, Europe created a vast overseas empire that lasted 500 years from the fifteenth century to the latter part of the twentieth century (Figure 1.3) (Landes 1999, Maddison 2010).

FIGURE 1.3 ■ Europe’s Surge Ahead

Beginning in the fifteenth century, European development began to advance ahead of Asia. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, with the Industrial Revolution and colonialism, it surged far ahead. Few countries have yet to catch up.



Source: The Australian Government the Treasury. *Economic Roundup Issue 3:71*. The Treasury available at https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-03/Roundup_Issue3_2012.pdf under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia [CC BY 3.0 Australia]. Full terms at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/>

Social scientists vary in the importance they place on one factor or another in the rise of European and later North American wealth and power over the rest of the world. It is unlikely that one factor or set of factors can account for the divergence. The West benefitted from good fortune with respect to geography, climate, topography, and resources that facilitated development. Reforms in social structure and culture such as modern democratic institutions, including balance of powers among government branches, laws to protect property and mechanisms for their enforcement, free education, electricity, and access to markets and financial institutions, as well as the embrace of science and pragmatic use of inventions, contributed to their growth. Many of these factors were not as favorable or lacking in other societies.

We may now be on the brink of a great convergence testing new models of development rather than following the models of the West. Following World War II, the Asian Tigers—Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, and Hong Kong—emerged with a roar and quickly caught up to developed societies. Succeeding them in the 1990s, the Asian “Cubs”—Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines—arose with growth rates that doubled their incomes. Although some may now be faltering, the “BRICS”—shorthand for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—exercise significant power on the global stage representing the rise of the global South and challenging the political and economic hegemony of Western powers. Even some of the poorest countries have made progress. In the twenty-first century, growth in developing societies has outpaced that in developed societies. Ethiopia, for example, experienced double-digit growth. Tanzania doubled its gross domestic product (GDP). Rwanda’s GDP growth averaged 8 percent a year.

GLASS HALF EMPTY OR HALF FULL?

THE ACHIEVEMENTS: THE UN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Although we often talk about global problems in the abstract, it is individuals who suffer the very real consequences of global problems. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) gave visibility to global efforts spearheaded by the United Nations (UN) to improve the lives of the poorest and most deprived people in the world. The goals were established in 2000, and the target date for attaining them was 2015. Comparing the severity of the problems is one indicator of the extent of global problems and a measure of the progress we have made in conquering them.

The primary focus of the goals was poverty reduction, although they cast a wide net encompassing many related factors. The 2015 Millennium Development Report (UNDP 2015) details significant progress toward reducing poverty and improving education, health, sanitation, living conditions, water and sewage, and gender equity; demonstrating that significant progress can be had with coordinated global effort.

The Eight Goals and Progress Achieved

- To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger: Extreme poverty was reduced from 47 percent in 1990 to 14 percent in 2015.
- To achieve universal primary education: The number of primary school children out of school decreased from 100 million in 2000 to 57 million in 2015.
- To promote gender equality and empower women: The ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary school in southern Asia increased from 74 girls to 103 boys in 1990 to 1:1 in 2015.
- To reduce child mortality: Global number of deaths of children under 5 years old was reduced from 12.7 million annually in 1990 to 6 million in 2015.
- Global measles vaccine coverage: Measles vaccine coverage increased from 73 percent in 2000 to 84 percent in 2013.

- To improve maternal health: Global maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births) decreased from 380 in 1990 to 210 in 2013.
- To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases: Global anti-retroviral therapy treatments increased from .8 million in 2003 to 13.6 million in 2014.
- To ensure environmental sustainability: Access to piped drinking water increased from 2.3 billion in 1990 to 4.2 billion in 2015.
- To develop a global partnership for development official development assistance: Funds directed to development aid increased from US\$ 81 billion in 2000 to 135 billion in 2013.

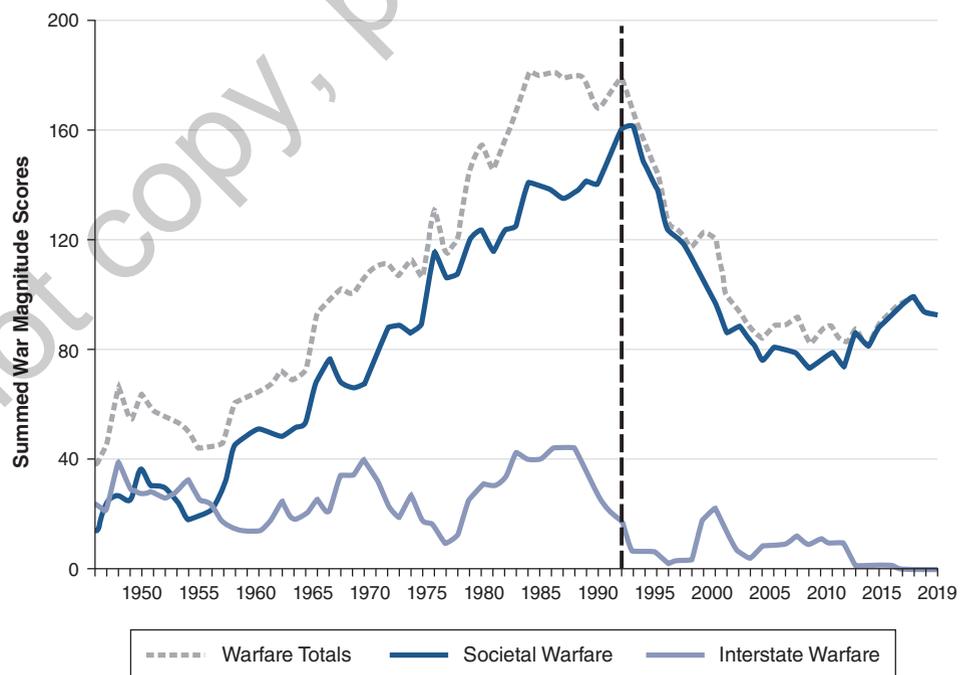
Source: From Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart, by Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, © 2015 United Nations. Reprinted with the permission of the United Nations.

Human development is much improved over 20 years ago. But improvement is not consistent year after year. As with most indicators, there tend to be ups and downs within overall upward trends. From the close of the Millennium Goal timeframe in 2015 to 2019, much progress was achieved. However, COVID left hardly any measure of progress unscathed. For the first time ever, overall human development declined 2 years in a row and 5 years were lost.

Violent conflict certainly remains a serious problem, but the level of violent conflict is much lower than at its peak in 1991. War among groups within countries has dominated conflict since the mid-1950s (Figure 1.4). Much of this was fueled by intra-societal struggles for dominance after independence and the Cold War. War between two countries had all but disappeared from

FIGURE 1.4 ■ Global Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2019

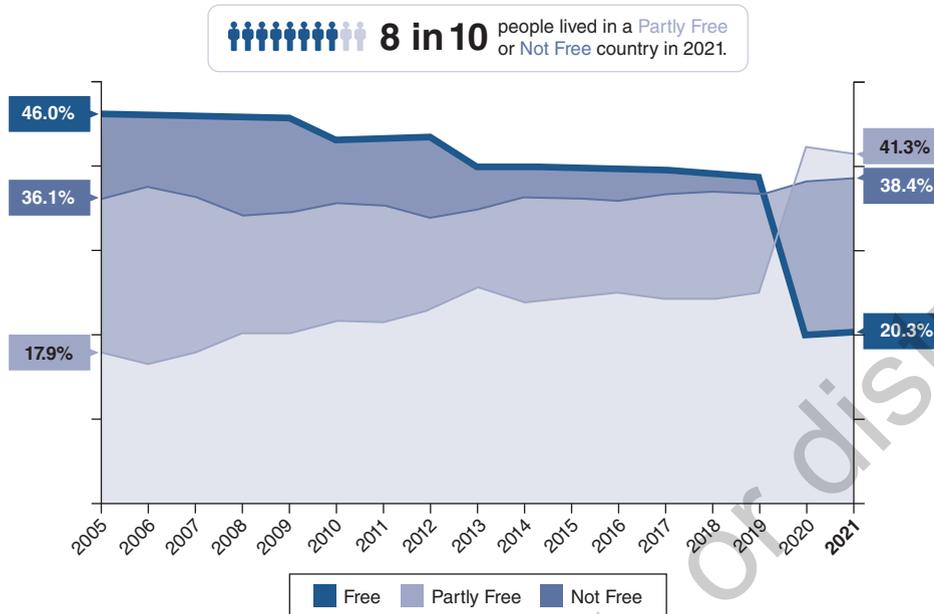
Few interstate wars have been fought since World War II. Most have been intrastate wars (within states).



Source: Center for Systemic Peace. 2020. "Major Episodes of Political Violence 1946–2019." <http://www.systemicpeace.org/warlist/warlist.htm>. Reproduced with permission.

FIGURE 1.5 ■ Percentage of People Living in a Free Society

The percentage of people living in a country rated free has declined by over half since 2005.



Source: Repucci, Sarah, and Amy Slipowitz. 2021. "Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy Under Siege." P. 4. Reproduced with permission.

the global map, until the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Since about 2010, there has been a bump up in violence. The overall trend, however, is toward greater peace.

Despite the successes, serious global problems persist. The supply of freedom declined steadily for 16 years, from 2005 to 2021, even in established democracies. Authoritarian rule is on the rise, but the long-term trend is improvement (Figure 1.5). People have more freedoms than before and during the Cold War period. More countries rate as free and more people live in freedom than at almost any other time, except 2005, in human history. However, the continued decline in freedom is near global, but is approaching Cold War lows.

Progress is uneven; some regions surpassed goals, while others had little progress. As development goals approach completion, the remaining cases become the hardest to solve. For example, with respect to Millennium Goals, developing regions reduced their rate of extreme poverty by 69 percent; sub-Saharan Africa reduced its rate by only 28 percent (UNDP 2015). Globally, child mortality declined 53 percent; however, Oceania achieved only a 31 percent reduction (UNDP 2015). Aside from regional differences, achievement varies by gender, by the wealth of countries, and across urban and rural areas within countries.

The Challenges Ahead: The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

As the MDGs approached their final years, the UN adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),⁴ which took effect in 2015. The target for their completion is 2030. With 17 major goals and a range of targets within each goal, the SDGs are more ambitious than the MDGs. In tackling a broader set of issues, they acknowledge the interdependence of problems and the globe as a single system.

The SDGs apply to all countries, not just the least developed countries. Each goal stresses that every nation needs to improve. The first goal is to end poverty *everywhere*; thus, the goal of ending poverty includes indicators for both rich and poor countries. Each goal stresses *sustainability*, acknowledging that development in the past has wreaked havoc on the environment. Life chances of much of the global population must improve, but if it is not done with concern for environmental health, we will not be able to maintain the gains and everyone will be worse off than before (please go to <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>).

The SDGs pay more attention to the contributions of indigenous communities and traditional knowledge while emphasizing the importance of integrating science into policy making and assessment. Too often, countries do not have the infrastructure or acumen to implement science-based policy. In such cases, developing countries must rely on foreign technologies and investment. On the other hand, developed societies are just beginning to acknowledge the importance of indigenous knowledge.

The goals are ambitious; many countries, international intergovernmental organizations, and civil society groups acknowledge their urgency. No country can achieve the goals on its own. Achieving them requires the coordinated action among civil society and corporations as well as countries and intergovernmental groups globally.

PERSPECTIVES FOR STUDYING PROBLEMS

The social world is complex. There are many lenses, many social sciences, through which to view social life. Each social science—sociology, political science, economics, psychology, or anthropology—employs a variety of strategies and perspectives that together make a more complete picture. Within sociology are several perspectives from which sociologists view the social world. Although many sociologists contributed to one or more of these perspectives, their basic premises and frameworks originated from the works of the classical sociologists, primarily Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber.

Conflict Theory and the Forces of Production

Based in the work of Karl Marx, conflict theorists center their analyses on competition for and differences in power. Marx's focus was economic history—historical materialism—or how power in a society derives from a person's relationship to productive processes. As productive forces change, power shifts from one group to new groups as social structure changes.

From feudal to capitalist societies, power gradually shifted from the aristocracy who controlled land to the bourgeoisie who controlled industrial activity. Transitions occur, Marx argued, because each era contains the seeds of its demise. The aristocrats of feudalism were impossible without the peasants on whom they relied. But as the aristocracy adopted new methods of production, enclosed land, and grew cash crops, serfs and peasants were forced into the cities—ultimately becoming the workers of industrial capitalist enterprises. The bourgeoisie were impossible without the proletariat, the workers who performed the labor of production. Ultimately, as industrialization progressed along the never-ending quest to satisfy newer needs, Marx believed that professionals such as doctors, lawyers, merchants, and artisans would become absorbed into the working class until there were only two classes, the bourgeoisie and the workers. Workers would become increasingly exploited and alienated.

Because Marx saw survival as the most elemental societal function, those who controlled the forces of production controlled all other parts of the social system as well. Conflict theory

focuses on how the bourgeoisie come to control the institutions of society and use them to their advantage. Thus, education prepares people for the jobs needed by the economy and helps perpetuate inequality within class structure. Laws and policies are written to benefit the elite classes. Marx called religion the opiate of the oppressed. Religion keeps us duped—if not happy. For example, if you believe that the poor will be rewarded for all eternity and the rich and corrupt will be damned, or that the rich deserve their wealth because they have worked hard for it, you are not likely to rebel against the status quo.

Secular culture supports the power structure as well. Horatio Alger's nineteenth-century stories featured rags to riches plots of how poor boys of sterling character worked hard and rose to wealth. Called the *Horatio Alger myth*, it remains a prominent theme in the United States. The belief that anyone who is willing to work hard can make it in the United States feeds antagonism toward welfare and other anti-poverty programs. Rugged individualism is a variation; people who have amassed a fortune, such as a Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, made their money on their own. These cultural ideals ignore the goods a society provides without which people could not have created their fortunes: the governmental structure of laws that protect their businesses; the roads, railways, ports, and airports their goods travel on and through; the public educational systems that educated their workers; their workers who work overtime and on holidays; the tax breaks, and the government-funded research that brought them to the point where they could make their enterprises a reality.

Who Benefits?

The irony of capitalism is that industrialization released so much productive power that everyone could have a good life. But instead, many all over the world remain in poverty and misery. Marx foresaw that capitalism would create a global economy. Multinational corporations, with the cooperation of elite classes in the poorer nations, developed an international bourgeoisie, a transnational capitalist class that extracts value from both workers and their countries and transforms them into their profit. Little accrues to the workers who create value. Not only the economies but also the political systems of many countries, rich and poor, continue to be controlled by, or at least serve the interests of, capital.

The conflict theory key to understanding the forces behind the essential problems of the world is *who benefits?* Whether it is understanding the relationships among societies or the individuals within societies, those at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy suffer the most. Low achievement within educational institutions, the lowest wage jobs, lack of access to medical treatment, vulnerability to crime and violence—asking who benefits reveals the underlying power structure. Someone usually benefits from another's misfortune.

Contemporary conflict and critical theorists (a type of conflict theory) expand their analysis of conflict to include conflicts in values—such as those fueling the culture wars within and among civilizations—and other sources of domination based on gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, and other fault lines within societies. Conflict theorists operate within the tradition of critical theorists in that they seek not just to explain but also to transform the social order for the emancipation of humankind.

Structural Functionalism: Problems of Order Within and Among Systems

Structural functionalists view societies as living organisms. Organisms are composed of systems and structures, each of which has a set of functions. Human bodies, for example, have a skeletal system, a muscular system, a nervous system, and so on. Each system has a particular function that relates it to the other systems, and together they function to keep the organism alive.

Viewing society as an organism focuses attention on structurally different systems such as the economic system, the political system, and the educational system, each of which has a different function but is related to and depends on the others. Together, they keep the society functioning.

The Importance of Solidarity

This perspective grew out of the work of the classical sociologist Emile Durkheim. The central intellectual problem of the fledgling science of sociology as Durkheim saw it was the problem of order. How was order possible in societies that stressed liberty and individual freedom? The answer for Durkheim was that people needed to feel connected to the social community; after all, people were social and did not exist except in a social group. With individualism and individual liberty, what would keep people from merely acting on their own selfish interest?⁵ There needed to be some sort of moral code to connect them to the larger social order, to be the basis of solidarity. Collective values and beliefs were extremely important. Without them, society would be nothing but the war of all against all.

In *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim (1893/1964) illustrated how the increasing division of labor in modern society—the differentiation of institutional systems—changed the nature of people’s relationships and feelings of solidarity. In traditional societies, there was little diversity; people lived similar lifestyles in agricultural villages and towns. They had a shared set of collective values and beliefs that served as the basis of their solidarity. These values and beliefs prescribed very specific codes and guidelines for living. Consider, for example, the prescriptive nature of Amish life or Sharia law in which everything from clothing to recreation is prescribed. Durkheim called this *mechanical solidarity*.

However, in modern societies, the division of labor necessitates people developing different occupations and thus different lifestyles and outlooks. As millions of people migrated to the cities to work, live, and recreate together, an entirely different basis for social order emerged. Durkheim called this *organic solidarity*—organic as in living organisms, held together by differences and thus interdependencies—rather than similarity.

A prescriptive basis of solidarity was impossible. A much more generalized set of values and normative regulations was necessary. In Western societies, people rally around the general values of freedom, equality, and privacy. Periodically however, what they mean in practice is vigorously debated.

Social order is more difficult in the context of organic solidarity than in that of mechanical solidarity. People were freed by the political revolutions and division of labor to be individuals but also made more vulnerable to anomie due to the relative lack of prescriptive guidelines and to egoism due to the lack of strong attachments found in traditional society.⁶ This affects the frequency and severity of social problems. In both the global order and many societies, there is insufficient solidarity, either in terms of feeling that one belongs and thus bears some responsibility for common well-being or in terms of insufficient consensus on governance and how problems should be resolved.

When the social system operates well, everyone in the society, or the globe, acquires the resources necessary to fulfill their life chances. In traditional societies, economies may have failed to provide what people needed to survive because of insufficient knowledge or technology. People lived shorter lives. In today’s world, there is enough knowledge and productive power to provide adequately for everyone in the world. Yet tens of thousands of people die from hunger daily, and violent conflict, international crime, shortfalls in health and education, and myriad other problems threaten people’s life chances.

Function and Dysfunction

Structural functionalism prompts us to find the problems of order, the dysfunctions, within and among societal and global systems that give rise to these problems. For example, if people are starving, the economy is failing them—not providing them with the needs of survival. Is it because their wages are too low for them to buy healthy food? Do they have access to healthy food? Has environmental degradation or violent conflict resulted in food shortages in their country? Have local farmers been put out of business by agribusiness? Is it each of these to some degree?

The contributions that a system makes to stability are its functions. Dysfunctions lead to instability. Functions and dysfunction may be manifest (intended and recognized) or latent (unexpected or unknown to many). Public housing projects, for example, were intended to be stable and secure housing for the poor; in many parts of the world, they replaced viable neighborhoods and became hotbeds of crime. The *green revolution* was intended to solve world hunger, but in many countries it destroyed farmland and put small farmers out of business. Each of these programs, however well intended, had serious unanticipated dysfunctions.

Function and dysfunction are not value judgments. Many things could lead to stability that many people would deem wrong or immoral. In addition, what is functional for the individual or segment of a social order might not be functional for the whole. For example, choosing to have or not have children is not judged as good or bad for most people. In developing societies, however, it may be functional for an individual family to have many children. Children may contribute to the economic health of the family. Where child mortality is high, families may have more children, recognizing that some may die young. Children may care for parents in their old age and so on. However, for societies that are growing too quickly, more children are dysfunctional for the society. Similarly, in developed societies, many families are having one child or no children. This is functional for the family; however, it is dysfunctional for the society experiencing zero or negative population growth.

Symbolic Interactionism: “If People Believe Something Is Real, It Is Real in Its Consequences”

Conflict and structural functionalist perspectives focus on social systems. Max Weber maintained that to understand social action, it was necessary to understand not only the social structure in which it occurred (as the perspective of the conflict theorist and structural functionalist) but also the meaning of action to the acting individual. According to Weber (1922/1978), social scientists had a much more difficult task than natural scientists. Social scientists need to do the empirical work that natural scientists need to do—collect data, find reliable patterns, and track down correlates and causes—and then some; they also needed to interpret what they found.

The objects of the natural world do not act on the basis of meanings. Two hydrogen atoms are not motivated to unite with oxygen to form water. They do not think about it. It does not need to be interpreted or empathized with to be understood. Not so in the social world. People act on the basis of the meanings that they attach to things, ideas, people, relationships, and so on. Weber stressed the importance of understanding people’s actions. The social scientist needed to develop the quantitative skills of the natural scientist and also needed to develop *verstehen*, the ability to empathize and interpret what an action or belief means to the person acting.

One of Weber’s (1905/1976) most influential books, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, demonstrated the importance of *verstehen* in understanding why capitalism developed in England and Germany, not in Catholic countries and not in the East. As

discussed earlier in this chapter, the divergence in development did not depend on England or Germany's superior technology; for most of history, the technology of the East was superior. Nor was it an accident of fate. According to Weber, the culture of Protestantism, in particular Calvinism, propelled Protestant England into industrialization and the creation of wealth more quickly than either the Catholic countries of Europe or the Islamic and Buddhist countries of the East. The beliefs and values of Calvinism provided the motivations that shaped people's actions, including how they would use technology and wealth, giving rise to capitalism.

Calvinists believed that they were predestined to heaven or hell. Success in business became a sign that they were favored by God and destined for salvation thus motivation for people to work hard. (Our admiration of the wealthy and disdain for the poor is a remnant of this.) Calvinism forbade luxuriating in food, wine, perfumes, and silks as French and Italian Catholics were wont to do with the fruits of their labor. Calvinists put their profit back into their business. (Investment and reinvestment remain pillars of the capitalist enterprise.) The duty to work, demonstrating one's piety, had consequences in nature as well. Nature was the object of people's work. Thus, a stone or a tree, for example, did not serve God by being in the natural state but needed to be transformed, by work, into hammers, roads, cathedrals, or something else to service God. Transforming natural resources through work still serves as justification to view the environment only as a tool in the pursuit of progress.

Weber also stressed that economic class was not the only source of power in social interactions. Prestige and political office could also carry power because people ascribe meaning to them. In contemporary society, there is a lot of talk about *branding*. People associate characteristics relevant to quality, trustworthiness, and so on to brands. The association may be deserved or might not. Nevertheless, the *brand* is only as valuable as the meaning that people attach to it.

Not fully recognizing the importance of *verstehen* has hampered aid efforts in the developing world and development in poorer areas of rich societies. For example, some feminist movements did not recognize the importance of family roles in traditional societies. It was not until they understood this that they could work meaningfully with the women they were trying to "help." Many people do not understand the importance of wearing a burka to some Muslim women who appreciate the freedom from people's eyes, particularly men's eyes. People have criticized the poor for having a *present time* orientation. It was not until ethnographers went into poor communities that they understood that the poor have a very clear understanding of the uncertainty of their futures. If the only thing certain is the present, then making the most of the present is a viable strategy. Understanding why farmers in developing countries might not want to use genetically modified seed when it is *free*, why a woman in a poor country might not want birth control, why there are strenuous objections to developing sacred lands of indigenous peoples, in short, understanding any human action, requires that we use *verstehen*.

Like Marx and Durkheim, Weber did not believe that contemporary social structures necessarily (or even often) worked for the benefit of all humankind. Using *verstehen*, he realized that as more and more of life became bureaucratized, people would feel increasingly trapped. His detailed analysis of bureaucracy led him to call it an "iron cage" in which people were imprisoning themselves. Marx, Durkheim, and Weber each probed the social order using multiple lenses to understand and solve the challenges, problems, misery, and social problems emergent at the time of the Industrial Revolution. Using these lenses in concert with one another helps us understand the complexity of contemporary global problems.

UNDERSTANDING THE GLOBAL ORDER

About 2,000 years ago, the Stoics recognized that the political, racial, ethnic, class, and all the labels that people use to divide people into *us and them* are artificial. The divisions are socially constructed and not part of the natural world. More than 150 years ago, Durkheim (1893/1964) predicted that societies were becoming so differentiated and people so diverse that at some point all we would have in common with others was our common humanity. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed that every person had rights as members of humanity and that political, ethnic, racial, and gender distinctions had no bearing on these rights.

Increasingly, people recognize this in their own lives. According to the World Values Survey (n.d.), 72.1 percent of people in 60 countries agree or strongly agree that they see themselves as a world citizen. Exactly what each person means by this is not certain. At a minimum, if we see ourselves as a citizen of a place, such as a country, we must recognize that we are a member and, as such, we have rights and responsibilities. Most people, then, must think that they are part of the world as a whole and as such have both rights and responsibilities.

Global social problems arise from the globe as a social system. By seeing themselves as citizens of the world, individuals recognize that they are enmeshed in global systems in the same ways that they are in societal systems. A number of specific theories based in the conflict, structural functionalist, and symbolic interactionist perspectives can help us understand the globe as a system, inform the study of global problems, and discover the means to grant people's rights and fulfill our responsibilities as world citizens.

Theories of the Global Economy

The global economy is what most people associate with globalization and the world system. Constant improvements in the speed and cost of transportation and communication have globalized every aspect of the economy. There are not many places or people that are not tied one way or another to the global economy.

Goods and services are produced from resources and components that come from all parts of the world and are distributed to all parts of the world. Production and consumption of goods occurs within a global framework. We are used to the idea that the products that are part of our daily lives may travel around the world before they reach us.

Every step of the production and distribution process adds value to the original raw material, increasing the price and providing jobs. The materials for one product, such as a mobile phone or computer or even the shirt on your back, may come from several countries. Perhaps the cotton in your shirt was grown in the United States or India. That is one cost, and the number of jobs depends on how it was grown and harvested. The cotton may be spun into thread in Indonesia, knit or woven into cloth somewhere else, dyed and sewed into a T-shirt in Colombia or Bangladesh according to the specifications of a designer in the United States, and then shipped around the world to retail and wholesale outlets. You might pick the shirt off the shelf at your local store or order it online from a merchant across the globe. Each step adds to the cost—value added—and provides jobs (Rivoli 2009).

Many of the raw materials needed for products come from the poorest societies. The precious metals needed for electronics come from some of the poorest countries in resource-rich Africa. Some are mined by children; unprotected by basic labor laws, they are regularly exposed to toxins that limit their life chances and work for pennies a day. Although their work is very valuable, little value is added to the cost of the product despite their life-threatening labor. The raw materials are manufactured into components and assembled into products in somewhat richer

countries, perhaps China or Mexico. Most are delivered to the richer countries where they ultimately end up in the waste stream and are shipped back to poor countries for reuse or disposal, where the toxic materials have a second chance to pollute.

Few jobs are immune from being moved across country or across the world. Nearly everyone is in the global labor market looking for a job that will pay enough to live comfortably. Both manufacturing and service jobs are mobile. There is a global market for nearly any good or service that does not require hands-on labor such as plumbing or auto repair. The high-level service job market is not exempt; electronic communication facilitates the delivery of services from one side of the world to the other. Every service from reading x-rays, to accounting and engineering, to surgery (through robotics) that does not require hands-on labor can be done off-site or out of the country. Ironically, primary industry jobs are not mobile but can be replaced by technology as happened in agriculture and mining in developed societies.

The world of investment and finance is borderless. Economic activity can be directed from anywhere in the world. The command centers of global corporations and the banks through which you do business need not be near to where stocks are bought and sold, checks are deposited or withdrawn, mortgages are applied for, or insurance is purchased. A recent advertisement for a global bank boasted that “in a changing world, you can unlock many markets with a single key.” The bank has more than 180,000 employees in 70 countries claiming “local knowledge” and “worldwide expertise” (BNP Paribas 2017).

The globalization of capitalism refers to the evolution of capitalism from the early trading companies to a system of ownership, production, and control that incorporates nearly every country into global enterprises and markets. The globalization of capitalism also refers to the transition as formerly socialist-oriented societies transformed their state-controlled economies to free markets, privatizing industries and liberalizing trade. Many societies now have a mixed economy, differing in their balance of free market and state ownership and state planning or control. For example, China, calls itself *market socialism* or *socialism with a Chinese twist*. In 1978, China abandoned its solidly socialist system, private enterprises were allowed, and some people became quite wealthy, others advanced into the middle class, although a large poverty class still remains. The Chinese state still owns many of its largest businesses—from agriculture, to banks, to oil, to manufacturing—and much of the economic planning is done by the state. In much of Europe, mixed economies combine private enterprise and substantially free markets with strong social welfare programs. Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Ireland (and Canada) are among the most free economies in the world. However, because each has an extensive social welfare system supported by taxation, they are called social democracies. The United States is mixed, with the largest share of enterprises privately owned, a smaller welfare program, and less regulation. Only North Korea and Cuba remain as socialist economies.

The benefits of the global economy are not shared equally among societies or the people within them. Where a country is located on the value-added chain—the level to which it has developed—determines how wealthy it can become. Each step along the supply chain adds value. Primary industry, the extraction of resources, is lowest on the value chain. Secondary industry, manufacturing, adds value to raw materials, provides better jobs, and increases the wealth of a society. A society that provides high-level services and tertiary industry, such as design, engineering, and financial services, adds *the most* value and can grow very wealthy. Where a country is located and where specific people are located within the country determine many of their life chances.

Inspired by Marxist analysis, world systems analysis and global systems analysis focus on economic relations and the expansion of capitalism at the global level as the source of inequality among countries.

World Systems Perspective

Rather than focusing on the division of labor within societies, world systems analysis⁷ focuses on international power and the division of labor among societies. Its fundamental tenet is that a society's position in the global economy is more important to individual life chances than people's position in their society. Inspired by Marxist analysis, it focuses on the expansion of capitalism across countries and domination of a few countries over many.

The power relations among countries are undeniably a potent force in shaping the internal dynamics of countries' economies. Conflict, competition, and exploitation characterize international relations as some countries maneuver themselves into dominant positions analogous to a global bourgeoisie, controlling the global economy, and other countries fall into subordinate positions, a global proletariat, supplying raw materials and low-level manufacturing and service.

According to the world systems perspective, global capitalism evolved in stages for hundreds of years. In the sixteenth century, Europeans began their global exploration and conquest. As they controlled and colonized more territory, they took raw materials from one country, used them to manufacture or buy goods in other countries, and sold them in a global market, including to the countries from which the raw materials came.

Thus, Europe began to establish increasingly complex commodity chains that eventually stretched across the globe. By about 1900, global capitalism was well established. The most developed societies controlled the markets and trade. They are the core of the economic system. Portugal, the Netherlands, Britain, and (since World War II) the United States have each had a turn in dominating the global economy.

The Periphery. The global commodity chain begins at the periphery. The periphery contains the poorest and politically and economically weakest societies. They are the least well integrated into the global system. A large portion of the labor force of these economies is employed in primary industries, such as agriculture, mining, forestry, and fishery, in which much of the work is insecure and pays very little. Their secondary, or manufacturing, sector is typically composed of labor-intensive low-level technology products such as clothing and textiles. Similarly, their service sector tends to be concentrated in lower level services, often tourism, and contributes much less value to their gross national product than service industries in higher-income countries.

Because these countries have less technological capital such as machinery, factories, and robotics needed for advanced productive capacities, every economic sector is much more labor intensive than in more developed societies. For example, in the United States, cotton is a technologically managed crop. One large farm can produce 13,000 bales of cotton in a year with only 13 employees and 26 machines. One machine, a cotton picker, costs about \$600,000. This is not in the budget of a farmer in Pakistan, another major cotton-growing country, where nearly all the picking is done by hand.

Who benefits from the peripheral societies' lowly position? Peripheral societies tend to have little negotiating power in the global political arena and have difficulty in generating fair trade deals, arrangements with multinational corporations, or terms with international financial institutions. Powerful governments and multinational corporations can manipulate prices and wages, at times in collusion with political elites in the peripheral societies. For centuries, their resources and labor have been exploited by wealthier nations. For example, as a condition of joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), developing countries needed to accept patented seeds and the partner fertilizers and pesticides that were created in tandem with them. Multinational manufacturers enter the countries for cheap labor, tax breaks, and weak environmental laws. All

these extract value from the country and force it to absorb part of the cost of production. Are these arrangements functional or dysfunctional, and for whom?

The peripheral societies have the lowest human development scores and greatest concentration of the poor. Finding solutions may be difficult, but it is not impossible. With greater economic diversification and political and technological development, they can rise from the periphery. Determining and establishing the conditions under which participating in global value chains enhances rather than stifles development is essential to providing a quality life in these societies.

The Semi-Periphery. Semi-peripheral societies are a step up on the commodity chain from the periphery. This is a very diverse level. Some societies at this level moved up from the periphery, and others fell from the core. As the middle level, they have a mix of core and periphery characteristics. Primary industries play a smaller role in their economies than in the peripheral societies. They are industrializing, but most industrialized later than the core countries, so their industrial sectors tend not to be cutting edge or highest value added but rather mid-range. They may manufacture automobiles and electronics but tend not to compete in the core countries. During economic downturns, their economies may benefit at the expense of the core by providing cheaper exports to other semi-peripheral countries and to peripheral countries.

Their institutional forms, government, education, health care, political parties, and so on are relatively more developed than the periphery but less developed than the core. Most of these societies gained independence during the nineteenth century and were able to take advantage of the migration of manufacturing from the North and West to the South. Brazil and many of the South American countries are in this group. Many Eastern and poorer European countries and rising Asian countries, such as China and India, are in the semi-periphery. Semi-peripheral societies, such as India and especially China are doing, may grow powerful and strong enough to challenge or move into the core, as did the United States.

The Core. These are the richest and most powerful countries. Controlling the highest levels of technology secures their place in the highest value-added sectors of the economy. In the age of imperialism it was shipping, in the industrial era it was high-level manufacturing, and in the service economy of today it is the design and marketing of high-tech products, information services, and finance. In the core society manufacturing sectors, one would find cutting-edge industries such as bioengineering, new materials science, and robotics. Like the United States, these societies may have very profitable and large agricultural sectors, but despite their size these comprise a small portion of their GDP. They have the economic and political clout to negotiate favorably with other countries and steer international organizations on such things as trade and finance. Aid and loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund historically were directed toward the interests of core societies, particularly during the Cold War. Capital extracted from lower levels accumulates in the core societies. North American and Western European societies, along with Japan and Australia, comprise the bulk of the core. This domination began with industrialization and was enforced through colonialism, the Cold War, and neocolonialism.

World systems perspective is a very useful descriptive for the status of societies around the world and the relationships among them. They cannot explain all underdevelopment. How, for instance, did the Asian Tigers escape the periphery? What about the new Asian Cubs? How was their escape from the periphery accomplished in spite of colonial histories?

Global Systems Theory

Like the world systems perspective, global systems theory (GST) (Sklair 1999) focuses on the spread of global capitalism. But rather than put states at the center of analysis, it focuses on economic classes spanning the globe. Following Marx, GST identifies classes primarily through their relationship to the means of production. According to GST, the transnational capitalist class (TCC) is the dominant force in the global economy. Nationality of members of the TCC is immaterial in this theory. Their control of the economy comes through the activity of transnational corporations in business, their influence in politics, and ownership of the media.

The TCC exerts control of global economic, political, and cultural systems. Unlike the origins of capitalism wherein the most important political, economic, and cultural processes occurred within countries, GST argues that they now occur without regard to national borders, not within or even among countries. The transnational capitalist class is composed of four *fractions*: the leaders of the largest transnational corporations (the corporate fraction), the biggest media and merchant outlets (the consumerist fraction), politicians and bureaucrats (the state fraction), and the technocrats (the technical fraction). Together, they control the spread of the processes of production, from the extraction of raw materials to the delivery to consumers all over the world. Together, these fractions serve to advance the interests of capitalism, from the policy and law that regulate capitalist enterprises to the spread of consumerist culture through the mass media. Global cities are the *command centers* of capitalism, the hubs where corporate, media, and financial headquarters locate.

Just as the transnational capitalist class is spread across the world, so are the transnational labor movements, transnational social movements, civil society organizations, and transnational lower and middle classes. People's interests coincide with their transnational class more than with fellow nationals of another class. Whereas the transnational capitalist class is well organized and powerful, labor across the world is weak. There is no transnational union to represent labor and no effective transnational laws or treaties to protect workers. Even within developed societies, labor has lost much of the influence and capacity to argue for workers' rights that it once had.

Both world systems and global systems theorists predict that we are nearing the end of the capitalist era as we know it. World systems theorists maintain that a challenge to the existing core could come from semi-peripheral societies that are growing, such as China, Russia, and Brazil, or from a coalition of regional societies.

Or the threat to capitalism could come from within the nature of capitalism itself. Capitalism is less appealing if a high level of profits cannot be maintained. Environmental laws may force companies to clean up their environmental mess or not degrade environments to begin with. Labor may demand better working conditions and wages. Indigenous groups are claiming more rights to their resources—such as the Native American protests over the Dakota pipeline. All these would cut into profits by making producers pay more of the cost of production. At the same time, the state, generally supportive of capitalism, is losing legitimacy. The continuing demise of the middle and working classes and concentration of wealth are making it harder for states to maintain order. Together, these forces may bring an end to global capitalism.

As the information society matures, will new productive forces displace capitalism? The information economy relies on a more creative workforce than an industrial economy. With outsourcing and contracting, will everyone become an independent contractor?

Global systems theorists predict that as human rights ideology advances, it will diffuse from political and cultural spheres to the economic sphere. Because capitalism is exploitative, human rights pose a serious threat.

What comes after capitalism—perhaps a more authoritative regime with greater concentration of economic and political power or something better for all humankind—remains to be seen.

Global Culture

There are two ways in which to look at global culture. One is to consider cultural diversity—how cultures of the world vary—to appreciate each for what it offers to enrich people’s experience of the world and understand the world from another person’s point of view. Cultural diversity enriches our experiences within the world and within societies. People have moved foods, clothing, music, and their values and lifestyles through trade, migration, and travel for millennia. Cities are hubs for these interactions. Nearly every city in the world offers a taste of the diversity of global cultures. Ironically, as cities become more diverse internally, they become more alike across cultures in their diversity.

If you aren’t near a city, you can experience the world through modern communication. You can visit the Seven Wonders of the World online, watch news and entertainment from other countries, order products (even food), find recipes, and experience nearly any aspect of any culture. We all can become cosmopolitan and appreciate the beauty and value within other cultures.

Along with people and products, ways of thinking about the world, ideas, and values travel. Some are embedded within the products. Hip hop is a global phenomenon. Although the lyrics may vary, the style and “attitude” of male, and increasingly female, adolescent angst is embodied in the clothes, facial expressions, dance, and rhythms of the voice and music.⁸ The near-global popularity of blue jeans signifies more than comfort. The independence and rebellion of youth, identification with the West, being modern, and the desire for equality (even though this may be a perverse charade in the case of expensive designer jeans, particularly those manufactured with rips, marks of wear, paint splatters, and already dirty) are woven into every pair, ironically now often made in the developing world (Crothers 2012).

Ideas spread globally through education, nongovernmental organizations, and intergovernmental organizations as well as through ordinary people in their travels. These diffuse different ways of looking at the world. We all look at the world from different perspectives depending on the context. At home deciding how to celebrate a holiday, we look to tradition. When we’re studying for an exam, we use experience and consider what worked or didn’t work the last time. When a child is born, many people look to religion for a christening, even if they do not regularly practice. If we are deciding the best way in which to cure a disease or run a business, we turn to rationalization.

Rationalization is one of the most important components of global culture. It grew out of Enlightenment thought and has diffused globally. Rationalization is a way of thinking grounded in reason rather than in tradition, common sense, or religion. Through science, rationality helps us create reliable and valid knowledge about the world and find the best ways in which to do things. On the other hand, there has been an increasingly strong backlash against scientific or technocratic knowledge in areas such as climate change and vaccinations. This is also a global phenomenon.

In addition to being a way of gaining knowledge, rationalization is a way of organizing the world. It emphasizes calculability—that everything can in some way be measured and arranged for the purpose of efficiency and predictability. It is a tool for organizing social life. Global trends in institutional arrangements, whether governmental, educational, hospital, military, manufacturing, or business enterprises, use rational, primarily bureaucratic, models. But as Weber lamented, bureaucracy might have appeared rational and functional but was highly dysfunctional. Bureaucracies were, in Weber’s terms, “iron cages” that were alienating, reducing people to cogs in the bureaucratic machine.

Human rights is another of the most important elements of global culture. The UN adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Representatives of all regions of the world formed the drafting committee. Although the declaration does not have the force of law, two treaties that followed, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights of Indigenous People, do have the force of law. All three documents influenced every national constitution written or revised after it. Some rights, such as freedom of expression, of speech, and of belief, appear in nearly all (more than 90 percent) national constitutions. Although there may be disagreement about exactly how each right applies in a particular circumstance, this is no different from the diversity within any national culture. Regional conventions and covenants such as the Helsinki Accords adopted in 1975, the Arab Charter on Human Rights adopted in 1994, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted in 1998, also recognize the universality of human rights. The UN Conventions, regional charters, and national constitutions that enshrine human rights have the force of law. They lay a normative groundwork for citizens in their relations to societies and the world's responsibility to people regardless of the country in which they reside.

Appadurai's Global "Scapes": A Theory of Global Culture

How culture diffuses around the world is the subject of Arjun Appadurai's five global "scapes." Appadurai (1996) used scapes to capture the nature of global cultural flows. A landscape is not static. It is constantly changing as water, wind, people, and animals flow or tread through it. Each of these creates paths in the landscape. Valleys are dug out by water, and dunes might be built by wind. People and animals create pathways and build habitats, dams, and roads that change the landscape. The landscape changes the flows as well. A river needs to bend around rocks or hills. The pathways of people and animals adjust to the terrain. Last, a landscape looks different from different vantage points and to the different people viewing it.

So too with global culture. The increased volume and ease of communication, which can be instantaneous from one side of the world to the other, and transportation, which can move masses of people from one side of the world to the other in a matter of hours, produced massive flows of information globally. Because people are on both the sending and receiving ends, the flows of information are shaped by and subsequently shape people's images of the world. As with the symbolic interactionists, the flows create a socially constructed reality shared globally but unique to every individual.

Appadurai identified five distinct but related flows that circulate culture globally:

- Ethnoscapes capture the flow of people for migration, for recreational travel, on business, to give assistance as part of a nongovernmental or governmental organization, and for any other reason. As people move about, their alliances, relationships, and communities morph and shift. They carry ideas and images with them, transmit them to others, and receive ideas and images from others. The communication among them is not perfect any more than any communication is; thus, we learn and in part invent the images and ideas of others that we both send and receive.
- Mediascapes are produced by mass and social media. They influence how people view other people in their own country as well as in other countries—how they understand the situation of others.
- Ideoscapes are the images of ideologies. They move within political domains and reach out to people through political parties, governmental and educational agencies, protest groups, and civil society organizations.

- Technoscapes are the flows of technology, high and low tech, mechanical and informational. This flow is important to determining the occupational structures of high- and low-wage jobs within countries, the movements of money (e.g., cell phones have become important in conducting business in developing countries), and the tools available to people for communication, education, and so on.
- Financescapes are the flow of currency and stock markets and of investment into and out of countries. These affect everything from the value of currency to the cost of goods. The financial crisis of 2008 demonstrated the interconnected nature of financial systems. Contagion spread globally in days, to some places within hours, shutting down banks and businesses.

Each of us develops our impressions, attitudes, and beliefs about the world and the people in it based on these flows. They have far-reaching consequences. Consider the situation of refugees. How you think of refugees may be influenced by knowing or working directly with refugees or perhaps pictures in the newspaper and accounts of their situations. Maybe you discuss the issues with your family, with friends, or in a class. Different accounts present us with different images and interpretations. Whether you decide that refugees are a threat or deserving of refuge, or whether you see them as a drain on the economy or a benefit, depends on how you assimilate these flows and convey them to others and is shaped by your own predispositions and prior knowledge and beliefs.

Global Governance: Who Gets What, When, and How

Complex social systems need a set of processes for regulation and coordination, enforcement, settling disputes, and deciding how resources will be distributed or used. These are the functions that we usually ascribe to governments. There is no global government. Instead, there is a relatively uncoordinated and often unaccountable multifaceted system of governance. Layers of governance are composed of individuals, states, intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, corporations, and civil society groups, each of which has a role, often unofficial, in determining “who gets what, when, and how,” the defining function of politics according to Lasswell’s (1960) famously titled book.

International Governmental Organizations. International organizations have several mechanisms to shape global norms. Their charters or constitutions lay out a set of principles—such as for human rights, fair trade, and/or environmental sustainability, among others—that members promise to uphold. To join most international organizations, countries must meet membership criteria. Membership criteria are a way of getting compliance to international or regional norms. Some, such as the European Union, might require a certain type of economic system, in this case a free market. Others require relationship commitments such as NATO’s commitment to mutual defense—an attack on one member is an attack on all members. Members could be suspended or expelled for not maintaining the conditions of membership.

International organizations have authority to make and enforce policy and law within the boundaries determined by their member countries. Organizations that provide loans might require recipient countries to make structural adjustments to their economies to acquire a loan. The UN, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the WTO, among others, legislate through treaties and conventions and have the authority to enforce them through some form of sanctions ranging from being *called out* in a report to diplomatic meetings, ending diplomatic relations, being excluded from international events, and economic sanctions. Military sanctions are generally reserved for humanitarian interventions.

These organizations shape global systems. Whether these organizations operate for the common good or in the interests of the most powerful members is a source of contention.

Civil Society Organizations. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are nonfamilial, nonstate, and noneconomic organizations that people voluntarily join to pursue their common interests. Their common interest could be with anything from a Parent Teacher Association at a local school to the International Red Cross. For the purpose of discussing global problems, the CSOs of most interest are those working domestically or internationally to effect solutions to people's problems.

CSOs have a decided impact on governance through their work. The decisions they make distribute resources and have direct impact on people's lives. They sit on expert panels and boards and influence governmental and corporate decision making and activities. The UN Integrated Civil Society Organizations System has entries for more than 24,000 organizations. The entries provide information on the region in which they work, the type of organization, and the issues on which they work. They address a range of issues such as economic and social development, peace, sustainability, conflict resolution, democracy development, and gender issues. Most engage in all aspects of advocacy for their issue from educating the public and policymakers, lobbying for policy changes, to delivering services *on the ground* where they are needed.

Nongovernmental organization is a similar term that applies primarily to aid agencies. It is a type of civil society organization. Politicians or business owners may very well be members of CSOs, but not in their capacity as representatives of a government or their business.

Multinational Corporations. Any corporation that has facilities or offices, or even a mailing address, in more than one country is a multinational. These corporations can be very powerful and exert tremendous influence not only in the countries where they operate but also globally. Just in deciding that they will open a new facility, they influence policy within nations. Countries may compete for investment, sacrificing environmental quality, tax revenue, or their own development for investment money.

Corporate executives sit on global decision-making bodies as experts, influencing global regulations and policies. They lobby within nations and global bodies, currying favor and promising rewards for the countries or bodies that act in accord with their demands. Because their responsibility is to make profit for their shareholders, they act in their interests rather than in the common interest. Increasingly, however, some corporations are recognizing that social responsibility may actually make a positive impact on their bottom line.

Global Governance and Global Problems

Each of these actors in global governance—intergovernmental organizations, international civil society groups, and multinational corporations, along with states—operates independently as well as in concert. Even when each believes that it is operating for the greater good, their goals may be in conflict. Environmental organizations work for cleaner production of goods and energy. Workers' groups may fear that this will result in job loss.

Within international governmental organizations, countries often have their own interests in mind rather than the overall good. In most of these organizations, countries with greater economic power have a greater voice in deciding courses of action. Multinational corporations are accountable to stockholders and use their ethic to make profit as a rationale for moving to low-wage countries, avoiding taxes and strict environmental laws. International governmental organizations are accountable only to their funders. Even with good intentions, they may end up distorting local needs in pursuit of more global goals or neglecting needy groups in favor of ones with more popular causes.

There is no overarching body that can enforce cooperation among these groups or the pursuit of common goals. Global governance thus becomes a global competition for power and influence, with each group pursuing its own ends and accountable to its own stakeholders.

The Global Community: Global Civil Society

Our neighborhoods, our cities, our country, the world—these are the physical communities that we inhabit. Our clubs and organizations, our friendship groups, the places where we volunteer—these are the social communities that we inhabit. We build these communities through interaction.

A strong social community makes a country strong. When we belong to clubs and organizations or have friends and networks of acquaintances, we build ties to one another and throughout our communities. Some ties may become very strong such as with our closest friends or an organization with which we volunteer and to which we feel deeply committed. Other ties are weaker, perhaps only a face or name recognition, but both types are important. These strong and weak ties are the basis of civil society. The more robust and plentiful the ties, the more social capital (Putnam 2000) in a neighborhood, a city, a society, or the world.

Capital is a thing of value that can be put to use to obtain a goal. For example, *human capital* is the total of resources inherent in the population of a community—the level of education and the overall health and well-being of the people. The *higher* the human capital, the better equipped a community is to achieve its goals. *Economic capital* is the financial resources. A person's *social capital* is the value of the person's ties to others. People with a lot of social capital have many others on whom they can rely. They have people who they can call on for help, support, a favor, or advice. Some of these may be close friends, while others may be members of the same organization or people who know people they know. Social capital is a resource.

The global civil society is all the formal and informal connections that people make throughout the world through travel, migration, education, and volunteer work. As travel and communication among people of different countries increase—think of how many students travel abroad every year—the global social fabric becomes more tightly woven with extensive networks of bonds connecting diverse people all over the world. The long-debated *six degrees of separation* thesis—that everyone in the United States is connected to everyone else by, on average, a chain of six people—seems to now hold at the global level.⁹

The connections people make the world over increase the social capital of the world. Especially important is *bridging capital*. Bridging capital is capital that is built among people who are different from one another. Bridging capital *bridges* the fault lines among people—nationality, ethnicity, race, and social class—whether in a town, a country, or the world. Without bridging capital, it would be difficult for people to understand their common interests and goals. It would be difficult for people to understand one another's perspectives. Bonding capital is the capital built up among people who are alike in characteristics such as age, race, and social class. Both bonding capital and bridging capital are important; both build trust. As a community, large or small, a good measure of social capital means that people can work together to achieve common goals for the common good. It has collective efficacy.

A significant body of research on social capital has accumulated since the 1990s that confirms its importance. The OECD established a social capital project to look at the variety of ways in which social capital has been used in the social scientific literature. It found four distinct uses among the variety of definitions in the literature. Two apply to individuals: personal relationships and social network support. Two apply to collectives: civic engagement/trust and cooperative norms (Scrivens and Smith 2013). In studying global problems, social capital of the collective is most important, whether at the level of the community, society, or the world.

World Society Theory

World society theory (Meyer et al. 1997) is the counterpoint to global systems theory. Whereas global systems theory centers analysis on the global economy as the driver of global relations, world society theory argues that the global economy, global culture, and globalization generally grow out of the relationships among people—the global civil society—that exist outside of the formal operations of the economy or states.

The ideas that give shape to economies as they develop, to governmental bureaucracies, and to educational institutions emerge from the networks of people sharing ideas. As people adopt particular ideas and models, these spread and many will become part of global culture.

Ideas about human nature, the nature of knowledge, rationalization, and science, the nature of individualism, state sovereignty, human rights, the rule of law, the importance of environmentalism, and many more spread through civil society through the activity of intellectuals, people traveling for pleasure, the advice of experts, educational exchanges, and civil society groups—in general, through people interacting with others.

The ideas become a set of templates available to actors—whether individuals, organizations, governments, or corporations—the world over from which they can borrow. They serve as blueprints for the *good state*, a *sound educational system*, economic and political *freedoms*, the good *global citizen*, and so on. As the templates become more clearly defined, they crystalize and inform those in decision-making positions.

In other words, global culture develops through interactions in global society. Global culture, rather than the economy, shapes global life and subsequently the internal dynamics of societies as they adopt and conform to global models. The models available in the global culture inform the structures of economic and political systems, of education and governments, of non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations.

This is not to say that there are not competing global models. Clearly, there are. World Wars I and II, the Cold War, and as is evident today, the culture clashes within and among societies were and are clashes among competing global models.

SUMMARY

The study of global problems is complex. When studying social problems within a society, recognizing the social factors that give rise to problems and the factors that make particular individuals more vulnerable to them can be difficult. Studying global problems adds another level of analysis—identifying the global forces that give rise to global problems and the factors that make particular societies and the individuals within them more vulnerable to them.

Teasing out these forces and determining the impact of each requires understanding how the global systems that operate on societies evolved and how their momentum is likely to shape the future. If the forecast for the future appears good, knowing how it is developing can help ensure it. If the forecast is not good, understanding how it developed can help change the forecast.

Global culture has developed in such a way that the mandate for a good society is one that fulfills the potential life chances of all its members. A good world has the same mandate. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has become the centerpiece of global culture. Human rights are everyone's rights as a member of global society. Upholding everyone's human rights is everyone's responsibility as a member of global society.

Throughout the course of this book, a select sample of global problems is analyzed. Each analysis begins with an examination of the data and identification of patterns in the data. Considering alternative explanations—guided by theories that suggest forces to examine—for

societies' and individuals' vulnerabilities is the second phase. Finally, some of the people working in the field through civil society organizations, governmental organizations, or intergovernmental organizations to help solve these problems are spotlighted.

Not all global problems selected, or even every aspect of the global problems selected, can be covered completely. However, by studying some, working through the analysis, considering the questions, and doing related analyses, you will develop skills to examine and evaluate problems on your own—problems that plague the world now and ones that are likely to arise.

DISCUSSION

1. What is the difference between a personal problem and a social problem? What indicators would you look for to determine whether an issue is a personal or social problem?
2. What are the problems that confront your community? Can you identify social factors at work? Are there any individual-level variables that make particular people more vulnerable than others?
3. Consider one of the problems confronting your community. Compare the approaches to the problem that would be taken by a conflict theorist, a structural functionalist, and a symbolic interactionist.
4. Do wealthy nations have a responsibility to help poorer nations raise their standard of living? Why or why not? Are there ways in which helping another nation, say Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, helps the *helper* nations? Can you think of other examples?
5. Rank the sustainable development goals from highest to lowest in order of the priority you think they should have. What criteria did you use in deciding? In a small group, divide a fictive budget among the goals. What percentage of your budget would you allot to each of the goals? Explain your priorities.

ON YOUR OWN

1. Assess your global competence. The PISA international assessments administers a survey to students, administrators, and teachers. Complete the survey and rate yourself. What grade would you give yourself? What are your strong points, and where are your weaknesses? What can you do to improve your scores?
 - Assess yourself again at the end of the term. Did you improve your competence?
 - You can find the survey here: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/PISA-2018-Global-Competence-Questionnaire.pdf>
 - If the link is old, search for PISA Global Competence Questionnaire.
2. Investigate the relationship between colonization and human development and/or societal wealth. Randomly select 10 countries from each of the Human Development Index categories from least to highest development countries. Using the Central Intelligence Agency *World Factbook*, find out whether or not a country was colonized and its date of independence. (Do not count countries that separated from another country as a former colony.) Does there appear to be a relationship between colonization and development?
 - Which of these would you consider *successful* societies? Why or why not? As the term progresses, you may discover more reasons why some former colonies remain weak states and others are thriving.

3. There are many country and global databases and maps of social factors such as poverty/wealth rates, unemployment, educational attainment, teen pregnancy, and homicide by state. Choose a selection of the databases and/or maps. Describe the patterns related to severity that you observe. Compare and contrast the maps, noting which have similar patterns. Summarize your observations. How do you explain similarities in the data or maps?
4. Compare the maps of country scores on the Cato Institute index of economic freedom with scores on the Freedom House index of political freedom. If you have access to Excel, SPSS, or another statistical program, find the correlation between these scores. Is there a significant relationship?

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