Chapter 14: Globalization, Migration, and Economic Inequalities

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Learning Objectives

- Understand the emergence of globalization, including the socioeconomic and political-ecological effects of globalization
- Explain the differences between economic and geographic Global Souths and Global Norths
- Know the ways in which development and global Western capitalism create instabilities that incentivize people to pursue migration or lead to displacement and the creation of refugee communities
- Understand the various theoretical models used by researchers to explain people's motivation for migration, including the differences between forced and voluntary forms of migration
- Differentiate between the ways people might demonstrate agency for migration (making decisions to migrate) and the ways that larger structural forces influence the patterning of global migration (such as the demand for exploitable labor in certain types of jobs)

Emergent and Formed Globalization

As the twentieth century came to a close, the idea of globalization captured people's imaginations, and the term quickly rose to prominence without a clear definition of or agreement on the parameters of globalization. Different people, groups, organizations, businesses, and governments regularly used the term to describe the goods and bads of a wider global economic system. Politicians point to (regular or irregular) migration as a reason for unemployment among its citizenries. Business leaders note that to stay competitive in the market, layoffs will occur and production will move overseas. Western human rights organizations point to the growing levels of poverty and exclusion in 'developing' countries, while simultaneously build relationships with non-governmental organizations in those places to advance concepts of universal rights, gender equity, fair trade, or freedom of association. Public health officials point to the global trading of sugar and its widespread infiltration into all kinds of food, resulting in diabetes and lost limbs and death that some in the medical profession simply describe as normal (Moran-Thomas 2019). Despite one's interpretation of globalization and its consequences, these examples demonstrate the intensification of interaction among people and countries around the world.

One could argue that throughout human history we have developed relations with other people near and far (everything from the emergence of the first state-level societies to the expansion of the Roman Empire, or the spice trades that linked Asia, North Africa, and Europe to the rise of colonialism).

Anthropologists who attempted to explain the contours of a given society or culture recognized that people's connection with other cultures undoubtedly shaped their own over time. Many early Boasian anthropologists and archaeologists (e.g., Alfred Krober, Margaret Mead, Ralph Linton, Clark Wissler) recognized the importance of **diffusionism**, or how cultures were formed through their internal dynamics as well as by the spread of cultural features from other societies. The outcome is a mixture of internal and external events that create a particular constellation of a culture at any given point in time, but one that is also malleable and subject to change. However, even as various social scientists point to historical analogs and interconnections that bound people together over time, as noted below most agree that the formation of globalization today is distinctly different than in the past.

Connections between Globalization and Development

At its most basic, **globalization** focuses on the ways in which people's lives are shaped by the proliferation of complex, interdependent connections as seen in the movement of capital, natural resources, information, culture, and people across national borders. These processes have seen a dramatic expansion following World War II. In the aftermath of the war, the global order was reconfigured by the United States and its European allies. On the one hand, infrastructure created during and following the Second World War—notably communication technologies and air and sea transportation systems—allowed for a dramatic expansion of the number and diversity of people that could travel to or connect with far off places. On the other hand, as colonial powers began their retrenchment in the face of protests and uprisings among those demanding sovereignty and dignity in the emerging world system (e.g., India, Cambodia, Tunisia, and Loas), Western powers sought new ways to retain degrees of influence over previously colonialized areas. As newly independent nations sought to expand their markets, generate economic growth, and improve living standards for their peoples, Western governments and global financial institutions such as the World Bank provided technocratic and institutional support through the framework of development. First and foremost, **development** seeks to improve people's quality of life, expand regional and local employment opportunities through the sustainable use of environmental resources, and positively impact other areas of social, political, economic, or ecological life.

While the above definition reflects modern sensitivities and aspirations, most early development guidance sought to create wealth and economic prosperity by aligning 'undeveloped' or newly independent nations with Western political, economic, and legal systems. By minimizing the differences in how business could be conducted in the United States and, for example, in Ghana or the Philippines, the hope was that capital and infrastructural investments would move between countries with little friction. The end result would be improved wealth and prosperity for all. A central method used among early development practitioners was **Modernization Theory**, or the idea that investments in infrastructure, technology, and institutional capacity could create greater wealth, improved living standards, and facilitate the transition from a traditional, simple society to a modern, complex one.

Though the idea of reducing poverty and improving living conditions early on was laudable, the ways in which development were implemented often disregarded national sovereignty, undermined important sociopolitical institutions, weakened domestic economies, negatively impacted cultural systems, and other undesirable effects.

However, as noted by Rosling (2018), it is important to consider the improvements made in many countries around the world and not be overly pessimistic about global or local conditions. The psychological phenomena of biased exposure and biased memory could be variables here, influencing our view of the world as being worse off compared to the past. For example, whereas **biased exposure** sees people pay more attention to negative news coverage and information, **biased memory** sees people holding on to positive information about the past for longer periods of time compared to negative information or experiences (Mastroianni 2023). As these two elements combine (for example, seeing news coverage on the moral decline of our newest generation of children and fondly remembering how it was when you were a kid, despite all the trials and tribulations you suffered growing up), they can create an unshakable feeling that the world is simply getting worse. Undoubtedly, many of the quantifiable targets set by policy makers on poverty reduction, gender and racial equity, economic growth, and infrastructural improvements have fallen short at national and global scales. However, despite the shortcomings and imperfections in our world, we are, as a whole, better off. "In fact, the vast majority of the world's population lives somewhere in the middle of the income scale. Perhaps they're not what we think of as middle class, but they are not living in extreme poverty.... Step-by-step, year-by-year, the world is improving. Not on every single measure every single year, but as a rule" (ibid: 13).

Of course, while we have made progress in disease eradication, nutritional standards, educational access, and the like (see for example the World Bank's [World Development Indicators]), the world continues to face real challenges and a globalized development must respond differently than in the past. Drawing on classic works such as Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom*, anthropologists increasingly argue that we must focus on ensuring people's *capabilities* for obtaining an improved life (and noting the way that poverties diminish one's possible futures—it is hard to think and strategize about the future, directing money and energy into an uncertain outcome when one is struggling to make ends meet in the present). Should development and globalization meet their objectives of improving people's lives, reducing poverties, increasing socioeconomic equity, and ensuring people's abilities to find well-being and build a good life, we must think about globalization and development differently (see also Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2010). "This requires placing matters of dignity, fairness, happiness, freedom, moral well-being, rights, and entitlements at the center of not only an economic and political enterprise, but an ethical and humanistic one" (Gullette 2019: 303). Globalization and development must be assessed by their impacts on *people's* capabilities, freedoms, and choices, not simply the *average* for a given country or society.

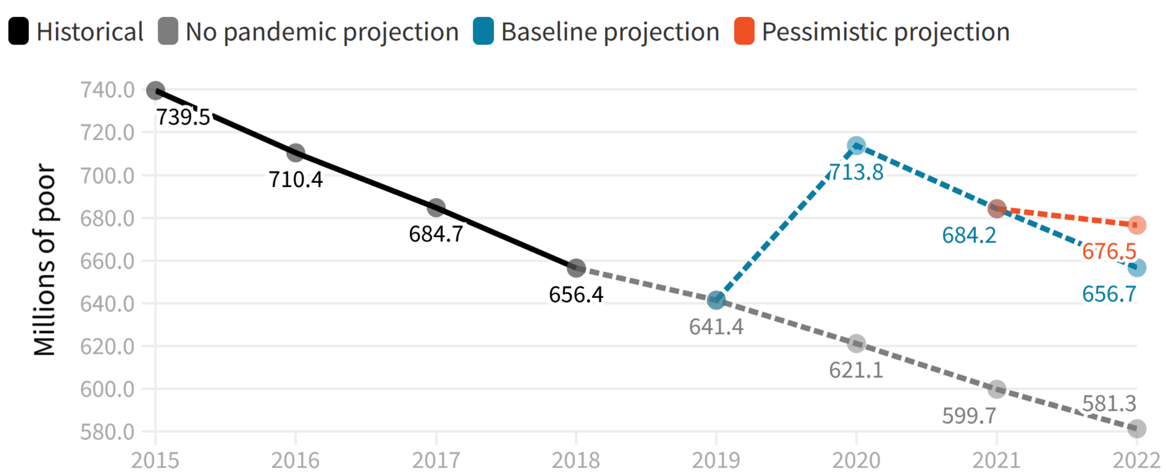
Globalization, Capitalism, and the Global South

One of the larger critiques leveled against the current configuration of globalization (and global development) is the distribution of wealth and power (ecological degradation is considered below and in the chapter *Environmental Anthropology*). The rapid expansion of communication and transportation technologies following World War II helped usher in the period of late capitalist development and **flexible accumulation** (Harvey 2005), or a system whereby companies utilize communication and transportation networks to move production overseas in search of cheaper labor and laxed regulations in their effort to accumulate greater capital and profits. This means that corporations may move their production to 'developing' countries or what might be referred to as the Global South. Though some use the term Global South as a less value-laden way of referencing 'developing' or 'undeveloped' countries (those terms can be read pejoratively, which is why one might also see 'newly industrialized countries' or 'lower-middle-income countries'), the idea of the Global South is more complex.

When read within the late capitalist framework, scholars focus on the crises, injustices, inequities, and exploitation created within capitalism. The focus squarely sits on understanding the damage created through capitalist expansion and its **externalities** (the negative effects of capitalism—such as pollution, CO_2 emissions, or species extinction—that society pays for in different ways, but not the company directly producing the harm). This also includes how labor is exploited within capitalism to create greater profits for shareholders and the elite within a society. In this regard, the idea of a **Global South** can be deterritorialized. It is not tied to *geography*—a particular country that one might think of 'developing' or part of the Global South. Rather, the Global South in this context is *economic* and considers how laborers are subjugated by capitalist production. For example, even within a wealthy, affluent nation (**Global North** countries such as the United States or Denmark), workers can be exploited by capitalism and exist in subaltern positions (collecting little pay, experiencing union-busting pressures, receiving diminished healthcare coverage, being employed on a contract basis, and so on). Likewise, even in countries geographically viewed as 'undeveloped' or part of the Global South (such as Mozambique or Vietnam), one can also see economic Global Norths with the rise of the super affluent and *nouveau riche* within these 'poorer' countries. Therefore, the idea of 'global' recognizes the ways that workers around the world might experience marginalization or exclusion under contemporary capitalism, which in the end can lead to more precarious ways of living for a great many people.

Logically, one might question whether global poverty rates are declining or increasing. As with most issues explored by anthropologists, the answer is complicated. The past several decades have seen notable declines in extreme poverty (those living on less than $2.15 per day). Since 1990, when approximately two billion people lived in poverty, that number declined to 648 million by 2019. Of course, using the *International Poverty Line* of $2.15 per day creates a low living standard and would prove challenging for most people to obtain a healthy diet or ensure access to other necessities such as medical care or education. As such, the metrics we use to measure poverty need careful interrogation. Additionally, global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian-Ukraine war's impact on food and energy have created politico-economic situations that have forced more than 70 million more people into conditions of extreme poverty (World Bank 2022). For example, given the uneven recovery following the pandemic (data show that the world's poorest experienced twice the financial loss compared to the world's affluent), it is unlikely that extreme poverty will be ended by 2030 (see figure 1). Additionally, the global poverty landscape has shifted under such pressures of flexible accumulation, pandemics, and national wars. Whereas Asian countries constituted the majority of the world's poor 30 years ago, today sub-Saharan Africa and other conflict-affected states have seen notable concentrations of and upward trajectory in poverty (e.g., Syrian conflicts have led to displacement and swift economic downturns and Nigeria is expected to move from being home to 80 million poor people to 107 million by 2030). This demonstrates that while there have been improvements in countries around the world, deeply entrenched complications remain that create an uneven globalization for many.

Figure 1: *Nowcast projections of extreme poverty for the global population, 2015-2022* (Source: https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty).



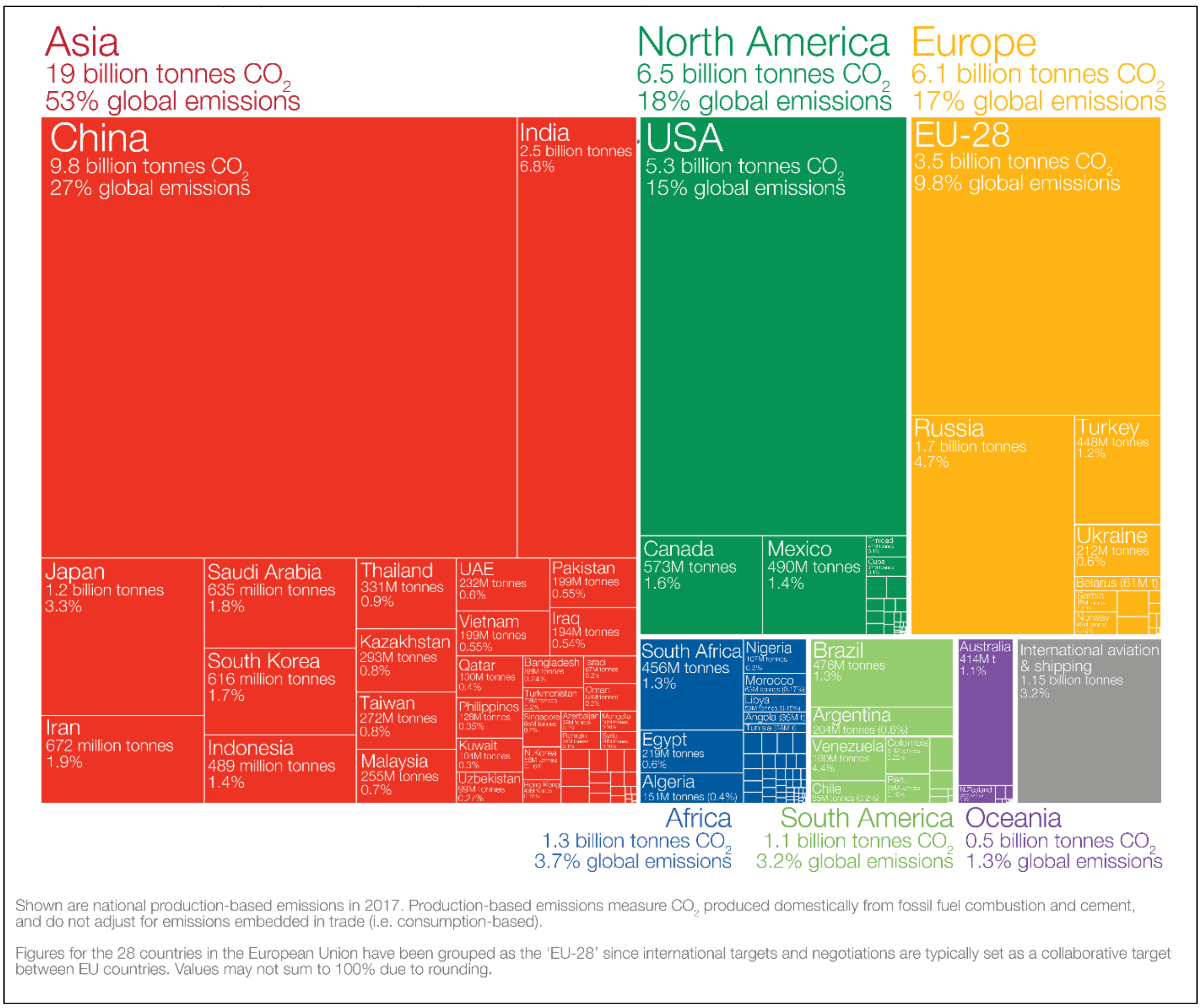
Source: Lakner et al (2022) (updated), Poverty & Inequality Platform (PIP), Macro and Poverty Outlook.
Note: Extreme poverty is measured as the number of people living on less than $1.90 per day. 2018 is the last year with official global poverty estimates. 'No pandemic projection' utilizes Global Economic Prospects growth forecasts from before the COVID-19 pandemic. Baseline and pessimistic projections utilize growth forecasts from April 2022 Macro and Poverty Outlooks. Baseline scenario distributes the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation, and the conflict in Ukraine equally to all households. Pessimistic scenario includes the disproportionate impact of rising food prices on the bottom 40% compared to the top 60% over the baseline scenario. Official poverty estimates are available for East Asia & Pacific, Europe & Central Asia, Latin America & Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, and rest of the world for up to 2019, and for Middle East & North Africa up to 2018. Official South Asia estimates are only available up to 2014. Regions are categorized using PIP definition.

Environmental Effects of Globalization and Capital Accumulation

Perhaps one of the easiest ways to see globalization at work is the ways in which environmental resources, ecological systems, or environmental catastrophes ignore nation-state boundaries, moving beyond and escaping the confines of a given region. Examples could be the relatively prosaic, though still detrimental, ways that plastics are carried by rivers and oceans around the world. Or we might consider the magnitude 9.0 earthquake and tsunami that hit the Tōhoku (northeastern) region of Japan in 2011, eventually devastating the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant. As three of the six cooling towers collapsed, hydrogen explosions distributed radioactive debris throughout the world and required mass evacuations in the region. In this instance, rightful concern focused on the spread of nuclear fallout. But as Ryo Morimoto details in his ethnographic account, the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster were experienced differently by residents, many of whom desired to return to live in their now irradiated homes. According to Morimoto, "one tsunami survivor … hesitantly shared that 'while I feel lucky to have survived the tsunami unlike some people, sometimes I cannot be confident that I am in a better state because of the nuclear accident afterward. I never thought being lucky is bad luck'" (Morimoto 2023: 5; see also Wellock 2021). Or as Mark Juergensmeyer notes, a spectacular forest fire in Indonesia "created a cloud of haze that lasted for months and covered much of the Indian Ocean and extended all the way to Africa. The haze combined with smoke to create smog that smothered urban areas, reduced air traffic and endangered the health of those forced to breathe it" (ibid 2010: 336). While the economic effects were most acutely felt in Malaysia and Singapore, the world suffered as 2.5 gigatons of CO_2 entered the atmosphere. Similar patterns hold true for pollution created through urbanization and industrialization. National boundaries mean very little as water and wind carry debris and the fallout of human activities across nation-states, while simultaneously dramatically altering the lives of those near and far.

As a result, sustainable forms of development, cleaner and safer energies, more equitable distributions of societal risk and benefit, and reduced greenhouse gases (or GHGs) have been promoted within international climate change conferences (see Sachs 2015). While progress has been made along certain metrics, unfortunately most of the externalities associated with global capital accumulation continue to haunt us. For example, pollution and emissions have continued an upward trajectory, with a notable increase following the COVID-19 pandemic rebound. Economic sectors that produce some of the largest emissions of GHGs include electricity production, transportation, and industry (others are housing and agriculture). The largest emitters of GHGs, ranked higher to lower, include China, the United States, India, Russia, and Japan (see Figure 3). However, while China emits nearly double the CO_2 produced by the United States, this is largely attributed to their standing as the world's largest producer of goods and products consumed globally and the amount of coal burned to power its manufacturing sector. That is, US emissions have declined partly because production of consumable products (televisions, computers, furniture, and so forth) have been outsourced to China, thereby displacing the negative externalities of US consumption. Some politicians and researchers have argued that due to China's heavy reliance on coal powered energy plants, moving the production of goods and commodities back to the United States may reduce global GHGs due to the use of cleaner energies and increased labor productivity. This action would provide the ancillary benefit of strengthening the resilience of critical US supply chains through the domestic production and processing of precious metals and minerals, semiconductors, or medical supplies. Of course, as noted by Wiedman, et al. (2020), should labor productivity and efficiencies rise in US or global production, then higher output of goods and greater consumption would be required to sustain employment for industrial workers. In short, there is no perfect solution, and each solution introduces other complications to consider.

Figure 2: *Treemap visualization showing the annual CO_2 emissions by country and region, aggregated based on data as of 2017* (source: https://ourworldindata.org/co2-emissions).



Such is the complicated relationship between globalization, consumption, and ecological harm. Relationships between a given set of variables or the harms produced might be ignored or overlooked as urbanization and economic growth are prioritized. For example, as seen in the works of Elizabeth Roberts

(2017) or Elana Resnik (2021), the accumulation regimes and urbanization patterning characteristic of developmental targets of increased consumption and improved living standards introduce a variety of health risks. For these authors, the anthropological focus becomes *how* people manage their lives and labor in conditions of global ecological harm. Roberts analyzes the risks introduced through urbanization and global industrialization in Mexico's working-class neighborhood of *Colonia Periférico*, where dams, cement factories, and other foreign and domestic industries introduce toxicity into the area and into the bodies of residents. Similarly, Resnick considers how the accumulation of waste and trash in Bulgaria—largely through the consumptive behaviors of middle- and upper-class domestic residents and international actors—leads to working-class laborers managing other people's trash. Processing and disposing of the **anthropogenic accumulation** (the waste produced at local and planetary scales through human activities) place workers at risk. In both cases, byproducts of production or other people's refuse become enlivened and situated in the world and in particular bodies.

While not exhaustive, other notable ways globalization contributes to ecological degradation include 1) destroying habitat, 2) facilitating the spread of invasive species through urbanization, travel, or road construction, 3) expanding monocrop and cash-crop production, which often leads to habitat loss and species endangerment, 4) establishing or expanding mining operations for precious minerals and metals, and 5) overexploiting food stocks such as fish or meat, which can lead to oceanic pollution and deforestation for cattle operations, respectively. Please revisit the chapter *Environmental Anthropology* for more information on anthropogenic climate change and environmental degradation. Likewise, please see this chapter's additional resources for more information.

An Anthropological Approach to Globalization

When considering globalization from an anthropological perspective, a fundamental interest in the discipline is to consider the ways our lives become entangled with others in global contexts. In effect, how do we live with other people, nonhumans, and institutions in supportive and, at times, conflicting ways? How do we make sense of the complicated comingling of people, societies, economies, and environments across national borders?

Reflect on your day. How might the things you did connect with other people, places, or resources? For example, consider where your shoes are made, where the food is grown that you had for breakfast or lunch, where your television is assembled (and its component parts sourced and processed), where the oil was extracted from the earth to create any plastics you might have interacted with... or how numerous US companies that create goods central to your life (e.g., cellphones, computers, clothes, furniture, medicine) often relocate to other countries to financially benefit from cheaper labor, unregulated markets, or reduced environmental regulations (and by doing so place other people in other countries at risk). Such a list could quickly spiral out of control as you think through all the different ways your life is connected and made possible through such global systems.

Anthropologists generally consider such relatedness through our entanglements in a variety of transnational processes (e.g., migration, neoliberal expansion, resource extraction, urbanization) and how people attempt to survive and thrive in worlds built, dismantled, and refashioned by global institutions, capitalists, and various actors. Given that many of the events and actions that shape our lives are not experienced at a global level, some scholars have argued that **transnationalism** is a more apt term since it focuses on the actions or relationships that cross national boundaries but do not affect the world (e.g., Khagram and Levitt 2008; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995). Examples could include family that has immigrated abroad but still builds relationships with those in their origin country, an indigenous rights organization in Brazil building networks with similar rights movements in Nicaragua in an effort to learn new social movement strategies and bring attention to their cause, or an American tourist that travels abroad, falls in love, and continues to nurture that relationship via FaceTime once they have returned home.

Anthropologists' careful attention to how such events are experienced by people ensures that we do not lose sight of the smallness of things as they unfold within larger global contexts. Ultimately, anthropological attention to globalization demonstrates how our world and way of living in it are made through relations with others.

Migration and Aspirations

As covered here and explored in the chapter on *Power and Sociopolitical Organization*, nation-states' modern capitalist economies have reduced the number of people living in poverty and expanded the middle-class in various countries around the world. Yet, governments and multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank have not achieved many of their targets on ending poverty, hunger, or other types of suffering. Experiences of deprivation, diminished capabilities, and subjugation to capitalism complicate many lives, both in affluent and low- to middle-income countries. Processes such as flexible accumulation, the rise of neoliberalism, or unsustainable forms of development coalesce to create economic Global Souths around the world. As I have noted elsewhere (Gullette 2021), one often hears the common refrain ‘life is hard’, whether this is in English, in the Spanish expression *la vida es dura*, or in the Thai declaration *chiwit lumbaak, chiwit lumken*. Impoverishment and destitution can be a fact of life and different cultures’ colloquialisms attempt to capture the daily challenges of making ends meet, choosing livelihood strategies when one has little discretionary income or financial cushion, or managing the recurring and rhythmic downturns in national and global economies.

Despite such hardships and the unfulfilled promises of development and globalization, people continue to struggle and seek ways to obtain a better life, for themselves and their families. One economic strategizing behavior regularly deployed is migration. Should one’s current sociopolitical, economic, or ecological environment provide insufficient resources to make a decent living, then migrating to another place or country may be an option. Migration can allow someone to escape the stress or insufficiencies of their current location and relocate elsewhere with, ideally, more favorable conditions. In such situations, we can broadly (and imperfectly) think of migration as either voluntary or forced. **Voluntary migration** unfolds in situations where one has agency and free will in deciding to migrate, usually as a mitigative strategy to handle undesirable situations that affect them (e.g., high unemployment, political instability, environmental degradation, or family reunification). **Forced migration** occurs when individuals have no choice about moving. This can include those identified as displacees and refugees (discussed further below) or those experiencing displacement due to natural disasters, persecution under wartime conditions, human trafficking, or other events that limit or remove people's choice or timing in their movement. The question that dominates political economic and socioecological debates surrounding migration is: *when is migration voluntary and when is it forced*? Fundamentally, this deals with the relationship between **structure** and **agency** (that is, the broader societal forces that may facilitate or limit one's possible options and the freely made individual decisions to engage in a particular action, respectively). In a situation where a country has high unemployment or narco-related gang activity, if someone emigrates from that area and attempts to enter another country for a better life and a more secure sociopolitical environment, is that voluntary or forced? Did they make the decision to migrate or was that decision effectively made for them at a structural level? If someone is experiencing increased flooding and risk to their property and self because of urbanization, dam development, or more intense and frequent typhoons, is their decision to immigrate underpinned by structure or agency, or a mixture? How do policy makers disentangle the complex relationship between variables that forms someone's motivation to migrate elsewhere, often at great risk? As demonstrated below in our discussion of refugee classification, determining how we classify such movement extends beyond semantics. How we define and label these processes has implications for their legal standing and protections offered under international law.

Building from our discussions above on the externalities produced through globalization and the sociopolitical and economic uncertainties associated with flexible accumulation, scholars have noted how such processes can introduce rapid-onset effects such as hyperinflation, unemployment, poor working conditions, environmental damage, or various economic upheavals (e.g., how a rapid inflow of robust foreign capital and businesses can undermine or displace domestic industries) (see for example Delgado Wise and Veltmeyer 2016; Juergensmeyer 2014; McGill 2016; Rapley 2004). Disruptions and instabilities created through global capital penetration can lead to new emigration networks as people respond to the altered politico-economic landscapes within their communities and take advantage of modern transportation systems that can facilitate their traveling over great distances (in short, this is known as the **globalization theory of migration**). While international migration can emerge due to the differences in living standards between Global North and Global South countries (e.g., improved socioeconomic and infrastructural differences in the United States compared to El Salvador), researchers commonly note that emigrant flows emerge in response to the *domestic* situation and institutional constraints in the country of origin (or where emigrants leave from). If policy makers seek to curb international migration, then greater efforts should be placed on improving socioeconomic, political, and governance conditions within sending countries. As it stands, given the processes of dispossession and political economic upheavals associated with globalization and development—along with possible corruption or ineffective governance in one's country of origin—migration is a logical and adaptive response to those circumstances (see figure 3).

Figure 3: *Rural-urban migration is a common strategy used by many families in Thailand, where they respond to destabilization in domestic economies caused by the International Monetary Fund's interventions. Additionally, poor investment by the Thai government in rural provinces incentivizes families to migrate to dense urban centers such as Bangkok to find work in both 'high' and 'low' labor markets.*

Photograph by:
Gregory Gullette, 2019

Theories on Migration and Socioeconomic and Political Effects

Given that about two to three percent of the world's population has consistently engaged in international migration over time, what prompts some to leave and most others to stay? Certainly, there are substantial risks associated with **irregular migration**, or when someone migrates to another country outside the regulatory norms of that destination country (*sans papiers*, or without papers). Sadly, a cursory reading of the news exposes us to a variety of stories about migrants drowning at sea, suffocating in the back of a moving van or semi-trailer, dying of dehydration or exposure as they made their way through dangerous ungoverned terrains, or being assaulted or trafficked by gangs that control territories along national borders. Decisions to migrate are not taken lightly. Researchers use various theoretical models to explain the motivations of migrants, as well as the structural forces that facilitate or constrain their decisions and actions. The diversity of migration studies prevents us from considering all theoretical models and the granular elements of each. Of course, the selected theories here demonstrate that the decision-making process is never simple and usually pulls from community-wide and intimate, familial experiences with migration.

One of the earliest and longest lasting theories on migration is **neoclassical migration theory** (also referred to as neoclassical economics in the migration literature), which at a basic level views the migration decision-making process as one of an individual's cost-benefit calculations when deciding where and when one should migrate. According to neoclassical migration theory, at an individual level the goal is to maximize one's income by migrating to another location or country. Essentially, where can someone be most productive and capitalize on their skills and knowledge? At a broader level (such as between national economies or countries), neoclassical theory is useful to analyze how governments that seek to curb migration into their country attempt to raise the costs or risks associated with irregular migration. As demonstrated in the ethnographic vignette on the *Prevention through Deterrence* program (see below), governments may militarize borders, build walls, or funnel migrants through dangerous terrains. By doing so, the costs of hiring a smuggler (e.g., a *pollero* or coyote) to get across the border without detection surge and the risks to one's life and safety escalate. In effect, the goal is to increase the financial and personal costs associated with irregular migration so those outweigh any perceived benefit of immigrating.

A common analytical element within neoclassical migration theory (though it can be present in other theories as well) is the **'push-pull' model**. Here researchers identify the different sociocultural, economic, political, or environmental factors that 'pushes' someone to leave their community or country (i.e., what things incentivize someone to leave) and what 'pulls' them to go somewhere else (i.e., when picking a new destination, what attracts someone to go to a particular place or country over others). As you might imagine, both push and pull factors can be active in one's decision to immigrate elsewhere. Someone might face political persecution, high unemployment, environmental deterioration, or high population densities that could incentivize (or push) them to leave home. Simultaneously, another region or country might hold the promise of a better life because of improved political conditions, labor standards, jobs and wages, or housing and land availability.

Of course, a selectivity issue emerges in these different theories and approaches. In an attempt to understand why some migrate and others do not, scholars have used **human capital theory**, which argues that migration allows someone to capitalize on and increase the productivity of their skills and knowledge. Since people vary in terms of their class, education, gender, age, skill sets, physical abilities, and so on, there will be differences in what one might expect to gain from migration (not to mention what risks they might face through irregular migration). What types of jobs will be available for them in a new destination society? Will they experience underemployment? Will they need to travel greater distances to capitalize on specialized labor skills (compared to lower-skilled workers who can generally find work nearby)? And importantly, is someone's decision-making process based on complete and accurate understandings of the destination society's labor market conditions? What we generally see is that migration is characterized by unknowns, imperfect information, and limited access to certain resources. For example, will a poorer person migrating to the United States be able to borrow money from banks to start a business? Will she face discrimination when applying for jobs? Will he know the intricate rules and regulations on applying for visas and work permits? Will they be exploited by an unscrupulous manager?

The process of how someone integrates into (global) labor markets is complex and cannot be reduced solely to macro sociopolitical, economic, or environmental forces (*things* that make someone react to those conditions and emigrate from an area). A charge leveled against such functionalist or structuralist theories is that considerations on agency may be ignored. For example, why would someone immigrate to a given country even though they know experiences of exploitation or marginalization face them? What motivates someone to enter into labor markets where they may perform dangerous, dirty, or demeaning work? Why migrate in the face of dangerous crossings?

Two theories in particular attempt to recognize the influential force of larger structural forces as well as individual agency within migration patterning: *dual labor market theory* and *new economics of labor migration*. Whereas neoclassical migration theory locates decisions to migrate largely at an individual level, **new economics of labor migration** posits that migration is a family decision, usually rooted in understandings that local labor markets are unstable and imperfect (e.g., limited access to credit or high unemployment) and families should spread economic risk by diversifying the geographic location of one's work and the types of work that constitute household income. For example, among agrarian families I have worked with in Thailand's Isaan region, many will send daughters or sons to work in factories or service industries in domestic urban centers (or *mueang* districts) or even abroad. Families not only diversify the sources of income received, but they reduce financial hardships should agricultural production experience droughts, floods, fires, pests, or other risks to a seasonal harvest since those other incomes are gained independently from agriculture.

Lastly, **dual labor market theory** demonstrates how modern capitalist economies create a demand-side focus for lower-skilled workers and why some migrants take lower-valued positions that native residents in wealthy countries may reject. Essentially, it is argued that modern capitalism creates a bifurcated labor market. On one hand, a portion of the labor market is characterized by jobs that are secure, high paying, safe, and held in high regard. Native residents and those with more dominant positions in society actively compete for such employment (i.e., major ethnic or racial groups, particular genders, immigrants with regular status or papers, religious majorities, among others). On the other hand, a shortage exists of workers willing to take jobs typified by low pay, precarity, hazardous working conditions, contract labor, or lower cultural valuations. As such, workers that may lack advanced education, formal migrant status, or have other markers of lower societal position (such as subordinate racial, ethnic, or gendered identities) take such positions due to lack of choice and due to employers often actively recruiting (irregular) immigrants to fill positions that native residents may shun.

Forced Displacement and Refugee Resettlement

The above discussions reflect a general view of the migration process as voluntary, with varying degrees of structure and agency at play. As noted, a special category exists for those experiencing forced migration or displacement. This can include people fleeing violence, war, or oppression. As noted by the *1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, a **refugee** is someone who, "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themself] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of [their] former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (UNHCR 2023). Whereas the 1951 Convention largely focused on protecting European refugees created during and after the Second World War, the 1967 Protocol removed any geographic or temporal qualifiers, thereby expanding the Convention to help protect anyone fleeing war, conflict, or persecution. Within the UN Refugee Convention, people have a fundamental right to cross international borders in their efforts to gain protection.

It should be noted that while some scholars and activists use the term ‘environmental refugee’ to reference people experiencing displacement due to ecological collapse or natural disasters (and therefore are unable to return home), broad international recognition of this designation does not currently exist. Similarly, governments may attempt to limit the number of people they designate as refugees through a narrow reading of conditions contained in the 1951 convention. People that have applied for refugee status and await the legal proceedings and adjudication processes to reach a decision on their case are known as **asylum seekers**. Governments may attempt to limit the number of people granted refugee status. Once that classification is granted by a signatory country, refugees have legal protections under international humanitarian law and must be kept safe and protected (click here for the current list of signatories on the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol). A cornerstone of the UN Refugee Convention is the principle of **non-refoulement**, where a refugee should not be returned to their origin country where they may continue to face threats to their freedoms or life. Other rights afforded include the rights to housing, education, non-discrimination, freedom of religion, freedom of movement within that country, among others. Given the wide protections offered to refugees, governments carefully weigh who deserves refugee protection. In that process, states may decide that individuals seeking asylum do not meet refugee requirements and more generally reflect the conditions of being a **forced migrant** (those who must leave their homes due to changes brought on by globalization and development, such as building dams or factories) or should be classified as an **internally displaced person** (those who have been forced to flee their homes due to violence, conflict, or natural- or human-made disasters, but have not crossed an international border). Undoubtedly, the process of governments determining which terminology to apply to a person, or a group of people, reflects domestic political concerns, international power struggles, and even the sociopolitical and economic capabilities of a given country’s ability to house and support those seeking protection.

An Ethical Understanding of Globalization, Development, and Migration

As seen in our discussion, globalization and development may create sociopolitical, economic, or ecological instabilities in different countries (or economic Global Souths and the externalities of globalization). Migration, whether forced or voluntary, becomes a common strategizing behavior that people use to mitigate some negative effects. Of course, given global migration patterns, countries have shown animus directed toward immigrant and refugee communities. For example, politicians may point to the economic competition created among lower-skilled domestic workers and newly arrived migrants.

Expanding immigrant communities and poorly regulated hiring practices can displace working-class US residents and create downward pressures on labor, resulting in employment uncertainty and diminished earnings for already vulnerable groups (Borjas 2016). So, who benefits from migration? Undoubtedly, immigrants and refugees gain much from the process—not in every case and many suffer through their movement or displacement. But enough greatly benefit by relocating, accessing new markets, reuniting with loved ones, or enjoying freedoms denied in their home country. These successes help deepen aspirational ideas for others who might also want an opportunity for a better life, despite the hardships associated with (irregular) migration or displacement. Additionally, receiving societies generally benefit from migration. Though labor competition and wage depression can occur within certain economic sectors and among native residents, as a whole migration positively impacts receiving countries (for example, Sanderson [2016] shows that national incomes increased by 5 percent in advanced Western economies due to migration).

Despite the benefits enjoyed from international migration within receiving societies such as the United States, France, or Great Britain, we see a mainstreaming and rise in anti-immigrant sentiment. This is partly driven by populist economic concerns as well as public frustrations on governments' inability to control borders and establish legal and humane pathways that migrants and refugees can access. Government ineptitude that incentivizes irregular migration (placing people's lives at risk) blends with public frustration to create intolerant and exploitative sociopolitical and economic environments for migrants and refugees, thereby complicating their full participation in the destination society. Immigrants and refugees may find themselves in vulnerable situations, experiencing abuse, mistreatment, or other violations they may not report to authorities (particularly if fear of deportation exists). While imperfect and incomplete, one policy approach to reduce vulnerability—for both domestic working-class residents and newly arrived immigrants—is to expand the policies that allow for regular forms of cross-border population movement. This will not only enable receiving countries to gain from immigrants' economic productivity, but also reduce the exploitation irregular migrants may receive in the labor market, which will concurrently diminish the wage depression experienced by native working-class residents. The regularization of immigration and population mobility can work to improve all people's sense of security, value, and positive contributions they make to society.

Ethnographic Vignette: *State Power, Dangerous Terrains, and Immigrant Rights*

As noted above, governments can implement various strategies to curb irregular migration: build walls, militarize borders, or penalize domestic businesses that (knowingly) hire irregular migrants. However, governments may also purposefully funnel migrants through difficult to navigate desert landscapes, thereby raising the risks associated with migration outside formal channels. While nation-states have legitimate authority to manage their borders, it is questionable as to whether such policies of directing irregular migrants into dangerous terrains is a humane use of that power. In this extended excerpt taken from Jason De León's (2015) work, we see how such policies have unfolded over several decades between Mexico and the United States.

> "*This book is about the violence and death that border crossers face on a daily basis as they attempt to enter the United States without authorization by walking across the vast Sonoran Desert of Arizona. If you live in the United States, you already know about many of the people…They pick your fruit, detail your cars, and process your meat. They toil in occupations that US citizens can't or won't do. Keep in mind, though, that not everyone who crosses the desert is a first-timer. In the Obama era of mass deportations, close to 2 million people were removed from the country through fiscal year 2013. Many of these deportees are now running scared across Arizona's Mars-like landscape to reunite with family members or simply return to the only place they have ever called home. My argument is quite simple. The terrible things that this mass of migrating people experience* en route *are neither random nor senseless, but rather part of a strategic federal plan that has rarely been publicly illuminated and exposed for what it is: a killing machine that simultaneously uses and hides behind the viciousness of the Sonoran Desert. The Border Patrol disguises the impact of its current enforcement policy by mobilizing a combination of sterilized discourse, redirected blame, and 'natural' environmental processes that erase evidence of what happens in the most remote parts of southern Arizona…*
>
> *Those who live and die in the desert have names, faces, and families. They also have complicated life histories that reflect an intimate relationship with transnational migration and global economic inequality. We just rarely ever get to see them up close as they make these terrifying journeys or hear them describe this process in their own words. In what follows, I bring into focus the logic and human cost of the US border enforcement monster known as '****Prevention Through Deterrence****,' a strategy that largely relies on rugged and desolate terrain to impede the flow of people from the south…*
>
> *…The things that happen to the undocumented migrants who experience the strong pull of the US economy and the simultaneous blunt force trauma of its immigration enforcement practices can be generally characterized as a form of structural violence. It is violence that is indirect (i.e., the result of federal policy). No one individual is responsible for it. Moreover, it often occurs out of site, many portray it as 'natural' and it can easily be denied by state actors and erased by the desert environment…*
>
> *… [The policies of Prevention Through Deterrence] expose noncitizens to a state-crafted geopolitical terrain designed to deter their movement through suffering and death. The perception that the lives of border crossers are insignificant is reflected in both their treatment by federal immigration enforcement agencies and in the pervasive anti-immigrant discourse… Contributing to this dehumanization is the fact that the Sonoran Desert is remote, sparsely populated, and largely out of the American public's view. This space can be policed in ways that would be deemed violent, cruel, or irrational in most other contexts. Just imagine how people would react if the*

corpses of undocumented Latinos were left to rot on the ninth hole of the local golf course or if their sun-bleached skulls were piled up in the parking lot of the neighborhood McDonald's…

In July 1993, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) promoted Mexican American Border Patrol agent Silvestre Reyes to chief of the El Paso Sector. Reyes was brought in during a moment of crisis when a series of law¬ suits and claims of human rights violations had been brought against the Border Patrol in the region. Two of the major grievances lodged against the agency were that legal Latino residents were subjected to unfair racial profiling and harassment, and that the consistent pursuit of undocumented border crossers through neighborhoods was a dangerous and abusive practice… In response to these complaints, Reyes came up with a radical new enforcement strategy that would fundamentally change how the border was policed… Operation Blockade*…*

The logic behind Operation Blockade was straightforward. Placing heightened security in and around the downtown urban port of entry in El Paso would force undocumented migrants to attempt crossings in more rural areas that were easier for law enforcement to monitor. Although this initial strategy in El Paso had neither been officially sanctioned nor fully evaluated by INS, it immediately garnered media and political attention and was soon adopted as a part of a new federal project. Less than a year after Operation Blockade, INS published its Strategic Plan, which essentially repackaged what Reyes had done informally into a national program: 'The Border Patrol will improve control of the border by implementing a strategy of 'prevention through deterrence.' The Border Patrol will achieve the goals of its strategy by bringing a decisive number of enforcement resources to bear in each major entry corridor. The Border Patrol will increase the number of agents on the line and make effective use of technology, raising the risk of apprehension high enough to be an effective deterrent.' One of the primary components that structured the new PTD strategy was the recognition that remote areas along the border (e.g., the Sonoran Desert) are difficult to traverse on foot and hence can be effectively used by law enforcement…

The acknowledgment that the desert, as well as the other extreme environments cross-cut by the border, could strategically be used to deter migrants from illegal entry on a large scale was not, however, formally laid out in policy documents until the start of the official PTD era, after 1993. The initial Strategic Plan memorandum was among the first to refer to environmental conditions as a potential resource for securing the geopolitical boundary: 'The border environment is diverse. Mountains, deserts, lakes, rivers and valleys form natural barriers to passage. Temperatures ranging from sub-zero along the northern border to the searing heat of the southern border effect [sic] illegal entry traffic as well as enforcement efforts. Illegal entrants crossing through remote, uninhabited expanses of land and sea along the border can find themselves in mortal danger' …

In 1994, it was predicted that PTD would push the migrant experience beyond simple apprehension and deportation… the federal government clearly appreciated that people could be funneled over 'hostile terrain' where law enforcement had 'tactical advantage.' Twenty years *later, the common Border Patrol discourse focuses on blaming the smugglers who 'endanger migrants in the desert.' This shift in federal tone that now deflects culpability away from policy and toward the environment and coyotes is summed up well in an article in the Arizona Daily Star in which a Border Patrol agent reflects on the discovery of several migrant bodies: 'The Sonoran Desert is extremely vast and remote with very few water sources.... [I]t is important to realize illegal immigrants are being victimized and lied to by smugglers who lead them through treacherous terrain and expose them to extreme conditions.'… The federal government's refusal to acknowledge any responsibility for this death toll, coupled with the blaming of coyotes for taking people through high-risk areas, overlooks the fact that the 'significant growth in use of coyotes has been the predictable, direct result of the enhanced border-enforcement strategy.'*

The increase in migrant traffic through Arizona and the rise in crossing fatalities indicate that security practices have effectively and systematically funneled people toward violent terrain and made the process more deadly. In no uncertain terms, Prevention Through Deterrence relies on the desert to 'deter' people from attempting to cross…" (De León 2015: 1-37).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has considered the various entanglements created between development and globalization, including specific considerations on the formations of economic (and geographic) Global Souths. Due to the socioeconomic and political-ecological effects of globalization and development, migration can be a commonly deployed strategy among families seeking to mitigate the negative externalities created under contemporary global capitalism. Of course, policy makers and researchers confront challenges when determining whether migration is forced or voluntary or whether a given person or group of people should be classified as refugees and receive protections offered under international humanitarian law. As noted, disentangling the complex motivations for migration and resettlement proves challenging. Despite substantial research in the field, the degree to which structure or agency is at play in someone's migration decision-making process can remain unclear. Of course, greater efforts should be made to regularize and expand formal migration and resettlement options, which would reduce people's needs to enter into irregular migration and its associated dangers. Additionally, this would improve newly settled peoples' abilities to integrate into the destination society and improve working conditions and wages for all residents (native and resettled).

Key Terms

Agency

Anthropogenic accumulation

Globalization

Globalization theory of migration

Asylum seekers
Biased exposure
Biased memory
Development
Diffusionism
Dual labor market theory
Externalities
Flexible accumulation
Forced migrant
Forced migration
Global North
Global South
Internally displaced person
Irregular migration
Modernization theory
Neoclassical migration theory
New economics of labor migration
Non-refoulement
Prevention Through Deterrence
Push-pull model
Refugee
Structure
Transnationalism
Voluntary migration

Comprehension Questions

1. In what ways did development contribute to the formation of globalization?
2. What are some of the main positive and negative effects of development and globalization?
3. How can an advanced economy such as the United States also have economic Global Souths within its borders?
4. What are the differences between forced and voluntary forms of migration and resettlement?
5. In what ways are refugees and internally displaced persons similar to immigrants? How are they different?

Critical Thinking and Engagement Questions

1. Why has globalization led to more pronounced experiences of poverty?
2. How has globalization notably shaped your life and your experiences?
3. Given the way our consumption in the US can have negative environmental effects in other countries (such as climate change or displaced externalities), what changes can you make in your behavior to positively contribute to global environmental conditions?
4. Of the theories discussed on migration (forced or voluntary), which do you view as more accurate in portraying issues within domestic or international migration?
5. Given the challenges associated with irregular migration, what workable solutions do you see to deal with the dangers and risks associated with such movement (both within sending and receiving societies)?

Resource Links

The global economy's expansion over the past several decades has shown that, despite the emergence of populist nationalism in more recent times, the interconnections between nations, capital interests, groups, and people have generally widened and deepened. This chapter has attempted to cover the more pressing issues in global studies. However, as with anything as expansive and diverse as globalization and migration, it is impossible to cover every topic. Please use the resources below to explore in greater depth the issues covered here (or learn about other topics that were excluded).

- The Brookings Institution's site for Global Development
- The World Bank's Open Data for Global Poverty
- The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals
- The United Nations Hight Commissioner for Refugees
- The United Nations Human Rights Office for Slavery and Trafficking
- The International Labour Organization
- Our World in Data: Migration
- Our World in Data: Trade and Globalization

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