Ethnic minority people are amongst the poorest in Western societies, often as a result of high unemployment.

Older people

Many people who may have been reasonably well paid during their working lives experience a sharp reduction in income (and status) when they retire, especially if they did not, or could not afford to, invest in a private pension while working. The ageing of the population is putting increasing strain on state pension provision. As life expectancy increases, so too does the number of older people in the population. Between 1961 and 2005, the proportion of people in the UK aged 65 and over more than doubled, to make up 16 per cent of the total population. At the age of 65, men can now expect to live, on average, to 81.6 years and women to 84.4 years, the highest ever levels (Palmer et al. 2007).

In recent years, several studies have shown that poverty amongst pensioners has been reducing since 1997. Based on the HBAI measure of 'households below 60 per cent of average income', individual pensioners in poverty decreased from 29.1 per cent (2.9 million) in 1997–8 to 17 per cent (1.8 million) in 2005–6 (Brewer et al. 2007). The number of pensioners on a low income does tend to increase with age, though there are divisions within pensioner groups. For example, those with additional private pension provision are less likely to experience poverty and there is a clear gender dimension to this: only 30 per cent of women have an additional private pension, compared to more than 70 per cent of men (Wicks 2004). In recent decades, older

Global life expectancy is discussed in more detail in chapter 8, 'The Life-Course'.

women and those from ethnic minorities are more likely to experience poverty than other pensioner groups.

Explaining poverty

Explanations of poverty can be grouped under two main headings: theories that see poor individuals as responsible for their own poverty, and theories that view poverty as produced and reproduced by structural forces in society. These competing approaches are sometimes described as 'blame the victim' and 'blame the system' theories, respectively. We will briefly examine each in turn.

There is a long history of attitudes that hold the poor as responsible for their own disadvantaged positions. Early efforts to address the effects of poverty, such as the poorhouses of the nineteenth century, were grounded in a belief that poverty was the result of an inadequacy or pathology of individuals. The poor were seen as those who were unable – because of a lack of skills, moral or physical weakness, absence of motivation, or below average ability – to succeed in society. Social standing was taken as a reflection of a person's talent and effort; those who deserved to succeed did so, while others less capable were doomed to fail. The existence of 'winners' and 'losers' was regarded as a fact of life.

As we see in our discussion of the rise of the welfare state below, accounts of poverty that explain it as primarily an individual failing lost popularity during the mid-twentieth century. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, they then enjoyed a renaissance, as the political emphasis on entrepreneurship and individual ambition rewarded those who 'succeeded' in society, and held those who did not responsible for the circumstances in which they found themselves. Often, explanations for poverty were sought in the lifestyles of poor people, along with the attitudes and outlooks they supposedly espoused. One influential version of this thesis was put forward by the American sociologist Charles Murray. Murray (1984) argues that there is an underclass of individual who must take personal responsibility for their poverty. This group forms part of a dependency culture. By this term, Murray refers to poor people who rely on government welfare provision rather than entering the labour market. He argues that the growth of the welfare state has created a subculture that undermines personal ambition and the capacity for self-help. Rather than looking to the future and striving to achieve a better life, the welfare dependent are content to accept handouts. Welfare, Murray argues, has eroded people's incentive to work. He makes a contrast between those individuals who must take personal responsibility for their poverty and those who are poor through 'no fault of their own' – such as widows, orphans or people who are disabled, for example.

» **Murray's work is examined in more detail in chapter 11, 'Stratification and Social Class'.**

Murray's views may resonate among sections of the British population. Many people regard the poor as responsible for their own problems and are suspicious of those who live on 'government hand-outs'. Yet these views are out of line with the reality of poverty for many people. As we have seen, the very oldest and youngest people are often the poorest in society, and are not in a position to work. Many people receiving financial help from the government, such as those receiving tax credits in the UK, are actually in work but not earning enough to bring them over the poverty threshold. Of the remainder, the majority are children under the age of 14, those aged 65 and over, and the ill or disabled. In spite of popular views about the high level of welfare cheating, fewer than 1 per cent of welfare applications involve fraudulent claims – much lower than is the case for income tax returns, where it is estimated that more than 10 per cent of tax is lost through misreporting or evasion.

The second approach to explaining poverty emphasizes larger social processes

The continuing decline of manufacturing industries in the 1970s and '80s eliminated many well-paid jobs, restructuring the urban economy and thus leading to increases in poverty levels.

which produce conditions of poverty that are difficult for individuals to overcome. According to such a view, structural forces within society – factors like class, gender, ethnicity, occupational position, educational attainment and so forth – shape the way in which resources are distributed. Writers who advocate structural explanations for poverty argue that the lack of ambition among the poor, which is often taken for the 'dependency culture', is in fact a *consequence* of their constrained situations, not a *cause* of it.

An early exponent of this type of argument was R. H. Tawney (1964 [1931]), who saw poverty as an aspect of social inequality. For Tawney, social inequality led to extremes of both wealth and poverty and both were dehumanizing. Extreme poverty limited life to mere subsistence, while extreme wealth led to a pampering of the rich. Both were reprehensible, but the key to tackling poverty was therefore to reduce structural social inequality, not simply to blame individuals for their situation (Hickson 2004). Reducing poverty is not simply a matter of changing individual outlooks, but requires policy measures aimed at distributing income and resources more equally throughout society. Childcare subsidies, a minimum hourly wage and guaranteed income levels for families are examples of policy measures that have sought to redress persistent social inequalities.

Two research studies from the mid-1990s reached similar conclusions on the reasons for contemporary poverty levels, and both use what we can call an 'economic restructuring' hypothesis. In America, sociologist William Julius Wilson put forward one important version in his book *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (1996), and in Britain, Will Hutton's *The State We're In* (1995), described the emergence of a 'thirty, thirty, forty' society (see below)

Wilson argued that persistent urban poverty stems primarily from the

structural transformation of the inner-city economy. The decline of manufacturing industries, the 'suburbanization' of employment and the rise of a low-wage service sector dramatically reduced the number of jobs available to those immediately leaving education that pay wages sufficient to support a family. The high rate of joblessness resulting from economic shifts has led to a shrinking pool of 'marriageable' men – those financially able to support a family. Thus, marriage has become less attractive to poor women, the number of children born out of wedlock has increased and female-headed families have proliferated. New generations of children are born into poverty, and the vicious cycle is perpetuated. Wilson argues that black Americans suffer disproportionately because of past discrimination and because they are concentrated in locations and occupations particularly affected by economic restructuring. He argued that these economic changes were accompanied by an increase in the spatial concentration of poverty within black neighbourhoods in the USA.

In Will Hutton's analysis of the UK, similar processes of economic restructuring during the 1970s and '80s created new divides within the population. Around 30 per cent were *disadvantaged*. That is, they were either out of work (but seeking employment), in irregular part-time and short-term jobs, or 'economically inactive' for other reasons, such as those we discussed above in relation to single parents. The disadvantaged groups live in poverty on the margins of society. Another 30 per cent, the *marginalized insecure*, had jobs and regular work, but because of economic restructuring, which weakened the trade unions and led to many more fixed-term contracts, their income levels were low and the jobs were relatively insecure. This group includes many women in generally poorly paid, part-time jobs (McGivney 2000). Finally, around 40 per cent – the privileged – are in full-time employment or are self-employed. The majority of this group are not rich, but their employment is more secure and their income tends to be higher; compared to the other two groups, therefore, they are relatively advantaged. Like Wilson in the USA, Hutton suggests that it is much harder for those in the disadvantaged and marginalized insecure groups to hold a marriage together, as parenting becomes more stressful and people have to work long hours in several jobs to earn a living wage. Hutton concludes that economic restructuring and the loss of industrial workplaces and well-paid jobs has served to produce a more divided society and perceptions that 'nothing can be done' to redress the issue of poverty.

For both Wilson and Hutton, poverty cannot be explained by reference to individual motivations and personal attitudes. Instead, poverty levels have to be explained with reference to structural changes in society and these do not happen in isolation from developments within the global economy.

Evaluation

Both explanations of poverty, as outlined above, have enjoyed broad support, and variations of each view are consistently encountered in public debates about poverty. Critics of the culture of poverty view accuse its advocates of 'individualizing' poverty and blaming the poor for circumstances largely beyond their control. They see the poor as victims, not as freeloaders who are abusing the system. Yet we should be cautious about accepting uncritically the arguments of those who see the causes of poverty as lying exclusively in the structure of society itself. Such an approach implies that the poor simply passively accept the difficult situations in which they find themselves. This is far from the truth, as we shall see below.

Poverty and social mobility

Most research into poverty in the past has focused on people's entry into poverty and has measured aggregate levels of poverty year by year. Less attention has traditionally been paid to the 'life-cycle' of poverty –

people's trajectories out of (and often back into) poverty over time.

A widely held view of poverty is that it is a permanent condition. Yet being poor does not necessarily mean being mired in poverty. A substantial proportion of people in poverty at any one time have either enjoyed superior conditions of life previously or can be expected to climb out of poverty at some time in the future. Recent research has revealed a significant amount of mobility into and out of poverty: a surprising number of people are successful in escaping poverty, and at the same time a larger number than previously realized live in poverty at some point during their lives.

Statistical findings from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) in the decade of the 1990s, showed that just over half of the individuals who were in the bottom fifth (quintile) by income in 1991 were in the same category in 1996. This does not necessarily mean that these people remained consistently in the same position over the five-year period, however. While some of them may have done so, others are likely to have risen out of the bottom quintile and returned to it again during that time. In fact, the BHPS longitudinal panel study, which tracks 16,000 individuals across 9,000 households over a long period, has shown significant social mobility. For example, it shows that relatively large proportions of children experience poverty, but most for quite short periods. However, many families that move out of poverty also have a higher risk of re-entering the category later, during periods of economic change. These findings have led to a new understanding of the quite fluid patterns of poverty, which have also been found in other developed societies (Leisering and Leibfried 1999).

Using data from the UK's New Earnings Survey Panel Dataset and other sources, Abigail McKnight (2000) analysed trends in *earnings* mobility in Britain between 1977 and 1997. By tracking groups of low-paid workers, McKnight found a significant amount of persistence in low pay. Her survey showed that around a fifth of employees in the lowest earnings quartile (quarter) are still there six years later. She also found that people who are unemployed, who are amongst the poorest group in Britain, are most likely to gain employment in the lowest-paid sections when they do find work; and that low-paid employees are more likely to go on to experience unemployment than are higher-paid employees.

Scholars have stressed that we should interpret such findings carefully, as they can easily be used by those who wish to scale back on welfare provisions or avoid categorizing poverty as a political and social issue altogether. John Hills (1998) at the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion has cautioned against accepting a 'lottery model' view of income determination. By this he means that we should be sceptical of arguments which present poverty as a 'one-off' outcome that is experienced by people more or less randomly as they move through the income hierarchy. This view suggests that the inequalities between the wealthy and poor in society are not terribly critical; everyone has a chance of being a winner or a loser at some point, so the idea of poverty is no longer a cause for serious concern. Some unlucky individuals may end up having low incomes for several years in a row, the argument goes, but, essentially, low income is a random phenomenon.

As Hills points out, the BHPS does reveal a fair amount of short-range mobility on the part of those living in poverty. For example, among individuals in the poorest decile (tenth), 46 per cent were still there the following year. This suggests that more than half of those in the lowest decile managed to escape from poverty. Yet a closer look shows that 67 per cent of the individuals remain within the bottom two deciles; only one-third progress further than this. Among the bottom fifth of the population by income, 65 per cent were still in the same position a year later; meanwhile, 85 per cent remained in the bottom two-fifths. Such findings suggest that about one-third of low income

is 'transient' in nature, while the other two-thirds are not. According to Hills, it is misleading to think that over time the population gradually 'mingles' throughout the income deciles. Rather, many of those who move out of poverty do not advance far, and eventually drift back in again; the 'escape rates' for those who remain at the bottom for more than a year get progressively lower.

While climbing out of poverty is surely fraught with challenges and obstacles, research findings indicate that movement into and out of poverty is more fluid than is often thought. Poverty is not simply the result of social forces acting on a passive population. Even individuals in severely disadvantaged positions can seize on opportunities to better their positions; the power of human agency to bring about change should not be underestimated. Social policy can play an important role in maximizing the action potential of disadvantaged individuals and communities. In our discussion of welfare later in this chapter, we will draw attention to policy measures designed to relieve poverty by strengthening the labour market, education and training opportunities, and social cohesion.

» Social mobility is discussed more fully in chapter 11, 'Stratification and Social Class', and chapter 19, 'Education'.

Social exclusion

What is social exclusion?

The idea of social exclusion has been used by politicians in various ways to frame their own social welfare policies. Because of this, the concept has become rather diluted over recent years and its meaning less clear. However, the notion was first introduced by sociologists to refer to new sources of inequality and the concept continues to inform much applied social research, which aims to understand and tackle disadvantage and inequality. Social exclusion refers to ways in which individuals may become cut off from full involvement in the wider society. For instance, people who live in a dilapidated housing estate, with poor schools and few employment opportunities in the area, may effectively be denied the opportunities for self-betterment that most people in society have. The concept of social exclusion implies its opposite – *social inclusion* – and attempts to foster inclusion of marginalized groups have now become part of the agenda of modern politics, though *how* this is done differs across societies (Lister 2004).

Social exclusion raises the question of personal responsibility. After all, the word 'exclusion' implies that someone or something is being left out. Certainly, there are instances in which individuals are excluded as a result of decisions that lie outside their own control. Banks might refuse to grant a current account or a credit card to individuals living in a certain postcode area; insurance companies might reject an application for a policy on the basis of an applicant's personal history and background; an employee made redundant later in life may be refused further jobs on the basis of his or her age.

But social exclusion is not only the result of people being excluded; it can also result from people excluding themselves from aspects of mainstream society. Individuals can choose to drop out of education, to turn down a job opportunity and become economically inactive, or to abstain from voting in political elections. In considering the phenomenon of social exclusion, we must once again be conscious of the interaction between human agency and responsibility, on the one hand, and the role of social forces in shaping people's circumstances on the other.

A useful way of thinking about social exclusion is to differentiate between 'weak' and 'strong' versions of the concept (Veit-Wilson 1998). Weak versions of social exclusion see the central issue simply as one of trying to ensure the inclusion of those who are currently socially excluded. Strong versions also seek social inclusion, but, in addition, try to tackle some of the processes

through which relatively powerful social groups 'can exercise their capacity to exclude' (Macrae et al. 2003: 90). This is a significant distinction as the version adopted by governments will shape their policies towards social exclusion. For example, in debates on rising levels of school exclusions for bad behaviour, a weak approach would focus on how individual children can be brought back into the mainstream education system, while a strong approach would also look at potential problems of the education system itself and the role of powerful groups within it that have the capacity to exclude.

Social exclusion, then, is a broader concept than poverty, though it does encompass it. It focuses attention on a broad range of factors that prevent individuals or groups from having the same opportunities that are open to the majority of the population. Ruth Lister (2004) concludes that the broad concept of social exclusion is a useful one for social scientists, provided that it is not seen as an alternative to the concept of poverty, which, she contends, remains central to our understanding of inequality and disadvantage.

The 2000 PSE survey distinguished four dimensions to social exclusion: poverty or exclusion from *adequate income* or resources (which we have discussed above), *labour market* exclusion, *service* exclusion and exclusion from *social relations* (Gordon et al. 2000). Next, we look at these last three elements in relation to evidence from the UK, although the patterns identified here are, to varying degrees, repeated in other industrialized countries.

Labour market exclusion

For the individual, work is important not just because it provides an adequate income, but also because involvement in the labour market is an important arena for social interaction. Thus, labour market exclusion can lead to the other forms of social exclusion – poverty, service exclusion and exclusion from social relations. Consequently, increasing the number of people in paid work has been seen by politicians who are concerned about the issue as an important way to reduce social exclusion.

To be in a 'jobless household', however, should not necessarily be associated with unemployment. The 2000 PSE survey found that 43 per cent of adults (50 per cent of women and 37 per cent of men) are not in paid work. By far the largest group of those who are not active in the labour market are retired (24 per cent of all adults). Other groups who are inactive in the labour market include people involved in domestic and caring activities, those unable to work, perhaps because of disability, and students. Overall, we should be cautious about claiming that labour market inactivity is a sign of social exclusion in itself, because of the high proportion of the population that this involves, but we can say that exclusion from the labour market significantly increases the risk of social exclusion.

Service exclusion

An important aspect of social exclusion is lack of access to basic services, whether these are in the home (such as power and water supplies) or outside it (for example, access to transport, shops or financial services). Service exclusion can involve individual exclusion (when an individual cannot use a service because he or she cannot afford to do so) or collective exclusion (when a service is unavailable to the community). The PSE survey found that almost a quarter of people are excluded from two or more basic services and only just over 50 per cent of people had access to the full range of publicly and privately provided services. Table 12.6 shows the levels of collective and individual exclusion from each of the various services.

Exclusion from social relations

There are many ways in which people can be excluded from social relations. First, this type of exclusion can mean that individuals are unable to participate in common social

Table 12.6 Public and private services used by respondents (%)

	Collective exclusion		Individual exclusion		
	Use: adequate	Use: inadequate	Don't use: unavailable or unsuitable	Don't use: can't afford	Don't use: don't want or not relevant
Public services					
Libraries	55	6	3	0	36
Public sports facilities	39	7	5	1	48
Museums and galleries	29	4	13	1	52
Evening classes	17	2	5	3	73
A public or community village hall	31	3	9	0	56
A hospital with accident/ emergency unit	75	13	2	0	10
Doctor	92	6	0	0	2
Dentist	83	5	1	0	11
Optician	78	3	1	1	17
Post office	93	4	0	0	2
Private services					
Places of worship	30	1	2	0	66
Bus services	38	15	6	0	41
Train or tube station	37	10	10	1	41
Petrol stations	75	2	2	1	21
Chemist	93	3	1	0	3
Corner shop	73	7	8	0	12
Medium/large supermarket	92	4	2	0	2
Banks or building societies	87	7	1	0	4
Pub	53	4	2	2	37
Cinema or theatre	45	6	10	5	33

Source: From Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain by David Gordon et al. published in 2000 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Reproduced by permission of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

activities, such as visiting friends and family, celebrating special occasions, spending time on hobbies, having friends round for a meal and taking holidays. Second, people are excluded from social relations if they are isolated from friends and family – the PSE survey (2000) found that 2 per cent of people had no contact with either a family member or a friend outside their own house even a few times a year. A third aspect of exclusion from social relations involves a lack of practical and emotional support in times of need – someone to help with heavy jobs around the house or in the garden or to talk to when depressed or to get advice from about important life changes. Fourth, people are excluded from social relations through a lack of *civic engagement*. Civic engagement includes voting, getting involved in local or national politics, writing

a letter to a newspaper or campaigning on an issue one feels strongly about. Lastly, some people are excluded from social relations because they are confined to their home, perhaps due to disability, caring responsibilities or because they feel unsafe on the streets.

Examples of social exclusion

Sociologists have conducted research into the different ways that individuals and communities experience exclusion. Investigations have focused on topics as diverse as housing, education, the labour market, crime, young people and the elderly. We shall now look briefly at three examples of exclusion that have attracted attention in Britain, as well as in other industrialized societies.

Housing and neighbourhoods

The nature of social exclusion can be seen clearly within the housing sector. While many people in industrialized societies live in comfortable, spacious housing, others reside in dwellings that are overcrowded, inadequately heated or structurally unsound. When entering the housing market, individuals are able to secure housing on the basis of their existing and projected resources. Thus, a dual-earning childless couple will have a greater chance of obtaining a mortgage for a home in an attractive area. In countries where people tend to buy rather than rent their home, in recent decades house prices have risen considerably faster than inflation, ensuring that owner-occupiers realize large profits on their property, while those not already on the housing ladder find it increasingly difficult to buy a first home. By contrast, households whose adults are unemployed or in low-paying jobs may be restricted to less desirable options in the rented or public housing sector.

Stratification within the housing market occurs at both the household and the community level. Just as disadvantaged individuals are excluded from desirable housing options, so whole communities can be excluded from opportunities and activities that are norms for the rest of society. Exclusion can take on a spatial dimension: neighbourhoods vary greatly in terms of safety, environmental conditions and the availability of services and public facilities. For example, low-demand neighbourhoods tend to have fewer basic services such as banks, food shops and post offices than do more desirable areas. Community spaces such as parks, sports grounds and libraries may also be limited. Yet people living in disadvantaged places are often dependent on what few facilities are available. Unlike residents of more affluent areas, they may not have access to transport (or funds) which would allow them to shop and use services elsewhere.

In deprived communities, it can be difficult for people to overcome exclusion and to take steps to engage more fully in society. Social networks may be weak; this reduces the circulation of information about jobs, political activities and community events. High unemployment and low-income levels place strains on family life; crime and juvenile delinquency undermine the overall quality of life in the neighbourhood. Low-demand housing areas often experience high household turnover rates as many residents seek to move on to more desirable housing, while new, disadvantaged entrants to the housing market continue to arrive.

Rural areas

Although much attention is paid to social exclusion in urban settings, people living in rural regions can also experience exclusion. Some social workers and caregivers see that the challenges of exclusion in the countryside are as large, if not larger, than those in cities. In small villages and sparsely populated areas, access to goods, services and facilities is not as extensive as in more settled areas. In most industrial societies, proximity to basic services such as doctors,

Run-down housing estates can be sites of intense social exclusion, where many factors combine to prevent full social participation.

schools and government services is considered a necessity for leading an active, full and healthy life. But rural residents often have limited access to such services and are dependent on the facilities available within their local community.

Access to transport is one of the biggest factors affecting rural exclusion. If a household owns or has access to a car, it is easier to remain integrated in society. For example, family members can consider taking jobs in other towns, periodic shopping trips can be arranged to areas that have a larger selection of shops, visits to friends or family in other areas can be organized more readily, and young people can be fetched home from parties. People who do not have access to their own transport, however, are dependent on public transport, and in country areas such services are limited in scope. Some villages might be serviced by a bus only a few times a day or week, with reduced schedules on weekends and holidays, and nothing at all later in the evening.

Homelessness

Homelessness is one of the most extreme forms of exclusion. People lacking a permanent residence may be shut out of many of the everyday activities that others take for granted, such as going to work, keeping a bank account, entertaining friends and even getting letters in the post.

Most homeless people are in some form of temporary accommodation, although there are still many who sleep rough on the street. Some homeless people deliberately choose to roam the streets, sleeping rough, free from the constraints of property and possessions. But the large majority have no such wish at all; they have been pushed over

Homelessness is one of the most complicated and often extreme forms of social exclusion.

the edge into homelessness by factors beyond their control. Once they find themselves without a permanent dwelling, their lives sometimes deteriorate into a spiral of hardship and deprivation.

Who sleeps on the streets in Britain? The answer is very complicated. For example, from the 1960s onwards, people with mental health problems and learning difficulties were discharged from institutions as a result of changes in healthcare policy. Before that, these people would have spent years in what used to be called long-stay psychiatric or mental sub-normality hospitals. This process of deinstitutionalization was prompted by several factors. One was the desire of the government to save money – the cost of residential care in mental health institutions is high. Another, more praiseworthy motive was the belief on the part of leaders of the psychiatric profession that long-term hospitalization often did more harm than good. Anyone who could be cared for on an outpatient basis therefore should be. The results have not borne out the hopes of those who saw deinstitutionalization as a positive step. Some hospitals discharged people who had nowhere to go and who perhaps had not lived in the outside world for years. Often, little concrete provision for proper outpatient care was in fact made (Social Exclusion Unit 1998a).

Surveys consistently show that about a quarter of people who sleep rough have spent time in mental health institutions, or have had a diagnosis of mental illness. Hence changes in relevant healthcare policy are likely to have a disproportionate effect on the incidence of homelessness. Most people who are homeless, however, have not suffered mental health problems; nor are they alcoholics or regular consumers of illegal drugs. They are people

who find themselves on the streets because they have experienced personal disasters, often several at a time. Becoming homeless is rarely the outcome of a direct 'cause–effect' sequence. A number of misfortunes may occur in quick succession, resulting in a powerful downward spiral. A woman may get divorced, for instance, and at the same time lose not only her home but also her job. A young person may have trouble at home and make for the big city without any means of support. Research has indicated that those who are most vulnerable to homelessness are people from lower working-class backgrounds who have no specific job skills and very low incomes. Long-term joblessness is a major indicator. Family and relationship breakdowns also appear to be key influences.

Although the vast majority of people who are homeless manage to sleep in shelters or receive temporary accommodation, those who find themselves sleeping rough are often in danger. Research by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) into homelessness and street crime in London, Glasgow and Swansea provides the first indication of the extent of victimization suffered by homeless people on the streets. The British Crime Survey, the leading statistical indicator of crime in Britain, does not include homeless people among its respondents. In *Unsafe Streets* (1999), the IPPR revealed that four out of five rough sleepers have been the victims of crime at least once. Almost half of them have been assaulted, yet only one-fifth chose to report the crimes to the police. The picture that emerges is one of homeless people who are victims of high levels of violence on the streets, but who are also excluded from the systems of legal and police protection that might possibly offer some assistance.

Although making homelessness a top priority has been universally praised, there is little consensus on how to get people off the streets into permanent housing and to lead more stable lives. Advocates for homeless people agree that a more long-term approach – including counselling, mediation services, job training and befriending schemes – is needed. Yet, in the meantime, many charity groups are loath to suspend short-term measures such as delivering soup, sleeping bags and warm clothing to homeless people on the streets. The issue is a controversial one. In trying to shift attention towards the need for permanent solutions, the government's 'homelessness tsar' Louise Casey remarked that 'well-meaning people are spending money servicing the problem on the streets and keeping it there' (quoted in Gillan 1999). Many housing action groups agree. Yet charity and outreach groups such as the Salvation Army take a different approach: as long as there are people living on the streets, they will continue to go to them and offer what assistance they can.

Even though it is not the whole answer, most sociologists who have studied the issue agree that the provision of more adequate forms of housing is of key importance in tackling the multiple problems faced by homeless people, whether the housing is directly sponsored by the government or not. As Christopher Jencks concluded in *The Homeless* (1994): 'Regardless of why people are on the streets, giving them a place to live that offers a modicum of privacy and stability is usually the most important thing we can do to improve their lives. Without stable housing, nothing else is likely to work.'

Others disagree, stressing that homelessness is only 20 per cent about 'bricks and mortar' and 80 per cent about social work and outreach to counter the effects of family breakdown, violence and abuse, drug and alcohol addictions and depression. Mike, a homeless man in his late 50s, concurs: 'I think that for most people the situation is much more complicated than it seems. Often the problem is about their own belief in themselves, their self-worth. A lot of people on the street have low self-esteem. They do not believe they can do anything better' (quoted in Bamforth 1999).

Crime and social exclusion

Some sociologists have argued that in many industrialized societies, there are strong links between crime and social exclusion. There is a trend in modern societies, they argue, away from inclusive goals (based on citizenship rights) and towards arrangements that accept and even promote the exclusion of some citizens (Young 1998, 1999). Crime rates may be reflecting the fact that a growing number of people do not feel valued by – or feel they have an investment in – the societies in which they live.

The American sociologist, Elliott Currie, investigated the connections between social exclusion and crime in the United States, particularly among young people. Currie (1998) argues that in American society, young people are increasingly growing up on their own without the guidance and support they need from the adult population. Faced by the seductive lure of the market and consumer goods, young people are also confronted by diminishing opportunities in the labour market to sustain a livelihood. In fact, the economic restructuring identified by Hutton and Wilson above has led to feelings of a profound sense of relative deprivation amongst young people, and a willingness to turn to illegitimate means of sustaining a desired lifestyle. The standards of economic status and consumption that are promoted within society cannot be met through legitimate means by the socially excluded population. According to Currie, who echoes Merton's earlier ideas about 'strain' (see chapter 21, 'Crime and Deviance'), one of the most troublesome dimensions to this connection between social exclusion and crime is that legitimate channels for change are bypassed in favour of illegal ones. Crime is favoured over alternative means (Currie 1998).

In a more recent ethnographic study of a deprived community in the North of England, Robert McAuley (2006) investigated the links between social exclusion and crime amongst young people. McAuley argues that the dominant explanation for persistent youth crime is that some communities are 'intolerant of work'; that is, many arguments suggest that a growing underclass – or the experience of social exclusion – gives rise to poor communities in which many people are turning to crime to get what they want. However, most of the young people McAuley spoke to still valued work, but felt abandoned by the rest of society and 'victimized' both at school and when applying for jobs, because of the stigma attached to the place in which they lived. McAuley argues that, as Britain's industrial base contracted, service industries provided the main work, and Britain, like many other developed societies, became a consumer society. In fact, says McAuley, it is consumer societies rather than the urban poor that have devalued work, because consumerism promotes the acquisition of material goods rather than a work ethic.

Britain's consumer society defines itself in opposition to the poor estates, whose young people are labelled anti-social and susceptible to crime. These labels follow young people into school and the labour market, thus helping to produce the cheap source of labour on which consumerism depends. Ironically, consumer culture then also uses images of urban gangs and gangsters to sell its global commodities. What McAuley's research points to are some of the consequences for young people growing up in

THINKING CRITICALLY

What are the main differences between social exclusion at the 'bottom' and at the 'top' of society? What could or should governments do to deal with the problems created by elite forms of social exclusion? Should governments concentrate on tackling social exclusion at the bottom rather than the top of society?

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

12.1 Social exclusion at the top?

The examples of exclusion that we have considered thus far all concern individuals or groups who, for whatever reason, are unable to participate fully in institutions and activities used by the majority of the population. Yet not all cases of exclusion occur among those who are disadvantaged at the bottom of society. In recent years, new dynamics of 'social exclusion at the top' have been emerging. By this, it is meant that a minority of individuals at the very top of society can 'opt out' of participation in mainstream institutions by merit of their affluence, influence and connections.

Such elite exclusion at the top of society can take a number of forms. The wealthy might retreat fully from the realm of public education and healthcare services, preferring to pay for private services and attention. Affluent residential communities are increasingly closed off from the rest of society – the so-called 'gated communities' located behind tall walls and security checkpoints. Tax payments and financial obligations can be drastically reduced through careful management and the help of private financial planners. Particularly in the United States, active political participation among the elite is often replaced by large donations to political candidates who are seen to represent their interests. In a number of ways, the very wealthy are able to escape from their social and financial responsibilities into a closed, private realm largely separate from the rest of society. Just as social exclusion at the 'bottom' undermines social solidarity and cohesion, exclusion at the 'top' is similarly detrimental to an integrated society.

Elite social exclusion can physically separate the rich from the rest of society

deprived communities of that 'thirty, thirty, forty' society described by Will Hutton (1995), described above. But for McAuley, it is not just a period of economic restructuring, but the affluent consumer society itself which effectively 'socially excludes' the poor.

The welfare state

In most industrialized societies, poverty and social exclusion at the bottom are alleviated to some degree by the welfare state. Why is it that welfare states have developed in most industrialized countries? How can we explain the variations in the welfare models favoured by different states? The face of welfare is different from country to country, yet industrial societies have on the whole devoted a large share of their resources to addressing public needs.

Theories of the welfare state

Most industrialized and industrializing countries in the world today are welfare states. By this, it is meant that the state plays a central role in the provision of welfare, which it does through a system that offers services and benefits that meet people's basic needs for things such as healthcare, education, housing and income. An important role of the welfare state involves managing the risks faced by people over the course of their lives: sickness, disability, job loss and old age. The services provided by the welfare state and the levels of spending on it vary from country to country. Some have highly developed welfare systems and devote a large proportion of the national budget to them. In Sweden, for example, tax revenues in 2005 represented 51.1 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), in Belgium, 45.4 per cent and in Austria, 49.7 per cent. By comparison, other industrialized nations take far less in tax. In the UK, tax revenues are 37.2 per cent of GDP, in Germany, 34.7 per cent and in the USA, just 26.8 per cent (OECD 2006). In this chapter, we have focused on the role of the welfare state in alleviating poverty. However, the role of the welfare state in providing these services and benefits is discussed throughout the book. Chapter 8 looks at the welfare state and the provision of services and benefits for older people, chapter 10 looks at the welfare state and the provision of healthcare and chapter 19 looks at the role of the welfare state in providing education.

Many theories have been advanced to explain the evolution of the welfare state. Marxists have seen welfare as necessary for sustaining a capitalist system, while functionalist theorists held that welfare systems helped to integrate society in an orderly way under the conditions of advanced industrialization. While these and other views have enjoyed support over the years, the writings of the British sociologist T. H. Marshall (1893–1981) and Danish sociologist Gøsta Esping-Andersen have perhaps been the most influential contributions to theories of the welfare state. Marshall's influential arguments are outlined in 'Classic Studies 12.2', and you should look at this before moving on to later arguments about welfare and citizenship.

Gøsta Esping-Andersen: three worlds of welfare

Gøsta Esping-Andersen's *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) brings a comparative perspective to the earlier theories of the welfare state. In doing this, Esping-Andersen can be seen to have taken seriously the criticism levelled at Marshall's general evolutionary perspective, namely that different national societies followed different paths towards citizenship rights and, accordingly, created different 'welfare regimes'. In this important work, Esping-Andersen compares Western welfare systems and presents a three-part typology of their welfare regimes.

In constructing this typology, Esping-Andersen evaluated the level of welfare decommodification – a term which simply means the degree to which welfare services are free from the market. In a system with high decommodification, welfare is provided publicly and is not in any way linked to one's income or economic resources. In a commodified system, welfare services are treated more like commodities – that is, they are sold on the market like any other good or service. By

Classic Studies 12.2 T. H. Marshall and the evolution of citizenship in Britain

The research problem

You may have been described as a 'citizen' of a particular country, implying a certain 'belonging' to it. But when did the idea of 'citizenship' emerge and how did it develop? What exactly *is* citizenship anyway, and what rights and responsibilities does it confer on citizens? How is citizenship related to the state's provision of welfare? One important theorist who tackled these questions is Thomas Humphrey Marshall, whose ideas have been very influential in shaping debates on welfare and citizenship rights. Writing from the late 1940s, Marshall saw citizenship as emerging alongside industrialization as a fundamental feature of modern society.

Marshall's explanation

Taking an historical approach, Marshall (1973) traced what he described as the 'evolution' of citizenship in Britain (specifically England) and identified three key stages, each one expanding the meaning of 'citizenship'. The eighteenth century, according to Marshall, was the time when *civil rights* were obtained. These included important personal liberties such as freedom of speech, thought and religion, the right to own property, and the right to fair legal treatment. Building on these rights, in the nineteenth century, *political rights* were gained. These included the right to vote, to hold office and to participate in the political process. The third set of rights – *social rights* – were obtained in the twentieth century. These include the right of citizens to economic and social security through education, healthcare, housing, pensions and other services, all of which became enshrined in the welfare state. The incorporation of social rights into the notion of citizenship meant that everyone was entitled to live a full and active life and had a right to a reasonable income, regardless of their position in society. In this respect, the rights associated with social citizenship greatly advanced the ideal of equality for all, and Marshall's account is often described as an optimistic one, seeing a growing range of rights for all citizens.

Critical points

One immediate problem with Marshall's explanation is that it is based on a single case-study – Britain – and critics have shown that his evolutionary approach cannot be applied to other national cases such as Sweden, France or Germany (Turner 1990). Marshall's 'evolutionary' explanation is also not entirely clear. Is it really just a description of *how* citizenship actually developed in Britain, rather than a causal explanation of *why* it did so? Critics argue that Marshall tends to *assume* the progressive development of types of rights but does not explain the links between them or how, say, civil rights lead inevitably to political and then to social rights.

In more recent times, critics have argued that the awareness of globalization makes Marshall's theory– which is based on the influence of the nation-state – rather outdated, as it seems to assume that citizenship develops from the internal dynamics of national societies. Today, however, sociologists are much more sensitive to the relationships and influences between and across the world's societies. Finally – as we will see later in the chapter – Marshall's evolutionism is severely challenged by the crisis of 'welfarism' from the 1970s and the attempt to 'roll back' levels of welfare provision in many developed societies, a development which does not appear to fit his historical thesis.

Contemporary significance

Marshall's views influenced debates about the nature of citizenship and, in recent years, informed political questions and academic research on social inclusion and exclusion. His central idea that rights and responsibilities are tightly intertwined with the notion of citizenship is enjoying renewed popularity in discussions about how to promote an 'active citizenship'. And although his explanation is certainly too state-centred to be entirely satisfactory in a globalizing age, the notion of an evolving expansion of citizenship rights and responsibilities continues to inform our understanding of what citizenship is. For

example, a relatively new type of citizenship now seems to be emerging – environmental or ecological – based on the rights and responsibilities of people towards the natural environment (Smith 1998; Dobson and Bell 2006). Hence, despite its flaws, Marshall's general approach may have a little more life left yet.

The concept of environmental citizenship is discussed in more detail in chapter 5, 'The Environment'.

comparing policies on pensions, unemployment and income support among countries, Esping-Andersen identified the following three types of welfare regime:

1 *Social democratic* Social democratic welfare regimes are highly decommodified. Welfare services are subsidized by the state and available to all citizens (universal benefits). Most Scandinavian states such as Sweden and Norway are examples of social democratic welfare regimes.
2 *Conservative-corporatist* In conservative-corporatist states, such as France and Germany, welfare services may be highly decommodified, but they are not necessarily universal. The amount of benefits to which a citizen is entitled depends on their position in society. This type of welfare regime may not be aimed at eliminating inequalities, but at maintaining social stability, strong families and loyalty to the state.
3 *Liberal* The United States is the best example of a liberal welfare regime. Welfare is highly commodified and sold through the market. Means-tested benefits are available to the very needy, but become highly stigmatized. This is because the majority of the population is expected to purchase its own welfare through the market.

The United Kingdom does not fall cleanly into any of these three 'ideal types'. Formerly, it was closer to a social democratic model, but welfare reforms since the 1970s have brought it much closer to a liberal welfare regime with higher levels of commodification, which seem set to continue. This shift from one model to another makes the UK an interesting case study.

The welfare state in the UK

One of the main differences between welfare models is the availability of benefits to the population. In systems that provide universal benefits, welfare is a right to be enjoyed equally by all, regardless of economic status. An example of this in the UK is the provision of child benefit, which goes to the parents or guardians of children under the age of 16 regardless of their income or savings. Welfare systems predicated on universal benefits are designed to ensure that all citizens' basic welfare needs are met on an ongoing basis. The Swedish system has a higher proportion of universal benefits than that of the UK, which depends more on means-tested benefits. 'Means-testing' refers to an administrative process by which the state assesses the actual income (or resources) of an applicant for welfare against its standardized rate, and, if there is a shortfall, makes up the difference as a social security benefit, or provides the service. Examples of means-tested benefits in the UK are income support, housing benefit and working tax credit. Examples of means-tested services are those provided by local authority social services departments as part of packages of care for older people who are living in care homes or in other accommodation within the community.

This distinction between universal and means-tested benefits is expressed at a policy level in two contrasting approaches to

welfare. Supporters of an institutional view of welfare argue that access to welfare services should be provided as a right for everyone. Those taking a residualist view argue that welfare should only be available to members of society who truly need help and are unable to meet their own welfare needs.

The debate between those who support an institutional view of welfare and those who support a residualist view is often presented as a dispute about taxation. Welfare services have to be funded through tax. Advocates of the 'safety-net welfare state' approach stress that only the most in need – to be demonstrated through means-testing – should be the recipients of welfare benefits. Supporters of a residual view of welfare see the welfare state as expensive, ineffective and too bureaucratic. On the other hand, some feel that tax levels should be high, because the welfare state needs to be well funded. They argue that the welfare state must be maintained and even expanded in order that the harsh polarizing effects of the market are limited, even though this means a large tax burden. They claim that it is the responsibility of any civilized state to provide for and protect its citizens.

This difference of opinion over institutional and residual welfare models is at the heart of current debates over welfare reform. In all industrialized countries, the future of the welfare state is under intense examination. As the face of society changes – through globalization, migration, changes in the family and work, and other fundamental shifts – the nature of welfare must also change. We will briefly trace the history of the welfare state in Britain and recent attempts to reform it.

The formation of the British welfare state

The welfare state in Britain was created during the twentieth century, yet its roots stretch back to the Poor Laws of 1601 and the dissolution of the monasteries. The monasteries had provided for the poor; without this provision, abject poverty and a near complete absence of care for the sick resulted, which led to the creation of the Poor Laws. With the development of industrial capitalism and the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society, traditional forms of informal support within families and communities began to break down. In order to maintain social order and reduce the new inequalities brought about by capitalism, it was necessary to offer assistance to those members of society who found themselves on the periphery of the market economy. This resulted in 1834 in the Poor Law Amendment Act. Under this Act, workhouses were built, offering a lower standard of living than anything available outside. The idea was that the living conditions in the poorhouses would make people do all they could to avoid poverty. With time, as part of the process of nation-building, the state came to play a more central role in administering to the needy. Legislation which established the national administration of education and public health in the late 1800s was a precursor of the more extensive programmes which would come into being in the twentieth century.

The welfare state expanded further under the pre-First World War Liberal government, which introduced, amongst other policies, pensions, health and unemployment insurance. The years following the Second World War witnessed a further powerful drive for the reform and expansion of the welfare system. Rather than concentrating solely on the destitute and ill, the focus of welfare was broadened to include all members of society. The war had been an intense and traumatic experience for the entire nation – rich and poor. It produced a sense of solidarity and the realization that misfortune and tragedy were not restricted to the disadvantaged alone.

This shift from a selective to a universalist vision of welfare was encapsulated in the Beveridge Report of 1942, often regarded as the blueprint for the modern welfare state. The Beveridge Report was aimed at eradicating the five great evils: Want, Disease,

Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. A series of legislative measures under the post-war Labour government began to translate this vision into concrete action. Several main acts lay at the core of the new universalist welfare state. The wartime National government had already introduced the Education Act in 1944, which tackled lack of schooling, while the 1946 National Health Act was concerned with improving the quality of health among the population. 'Want' was addressed through the 1946 National Insurance Act, which set up a scheme to protect against loss of earnings due to unemployment, ill health, retirement or widowhood. The 1948 National Assistance Act provided means-tested support for those who were not covered under the National Insurance Act, and finally abolished the old Poor Laws. Other legislation addressed the needs of families (1945 Family Allowances Act) and the demand for improved housing conditions (1946 New Towns Act).

The British welfare state came into being under a set of specific conditions and alongside certain prevailing notions about the nature of society. The premises on which the welfare state was built were threefold. First, it equated work with paid labour and was grounded in a belief in the possibility of full employment. The ultimate goal was a society in which paid work played a central role for most people, but where welfare would meet the needs of those who were located outside the market economy through the mischance of unemployment or disability. Connected to this, the vision for the welfare state was predicated on a patriarchal conception of families – the male breadwinner was to support the family, while his wife tended to the home. Welfare programmes were designed around this traditional family model, with a second tier of services aimed at those families in which a male breadwinner was absent.

Second, the welfare state was seen as promoting national solidarity. It would integrate the nation by involving the entire population in a common set of services. Welfare was a way of strengthening the connection between the state and the population. Third, the welfare state was concerned with managing risks that occurred as a natural part of the life-course. In this sense, welfare was viewed as a type of insurance that could be employed against the potential troubles of an unpredictable future. Unemployment, illness and other misfortunes in the country's social and economic life could be managed through the welfare state.

These principles underpinned the enormous expansion of the welfare state in the three decades following the war. As the manufacturing economy grew, the welfare state represented a successful class 'bargain' that met the needs of the working class as well as those of the economic elite who depended on a healthy, high-performing workforce. But by the 1970s the splintering of political opinion into institutional and residualist welfare camps became increasingly pronounced. In the 1990s both the left and the right acknowledged that the Beveridge vision for welfare was outmoded and in need of significant reform.

Reforming the welfare state: the 1980s

The political consensus on welfare broke down in the 1980s when the administrations of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the USA attempted to 'roll back' the welfare state. Several main criticisms were at the heart of attempts to reduce welfare. The first concerned mounting financial costs. General economic recession, growing unemployment and the emergence of enormous welfare bureaucracies meant that expenditure continued to increase steadily – and at a rate greater than that of overall economic expansion. A debate over welfare spending ensued, with advocates of a 'roll-back' pointing to the ballooning financial pressure on the welfare system. Policy-makers emphasized the potentially overwhelming impact of the 'demographic time bomb' on the welfare system: the number of people dependent

on welfare services was growing as the population aged, yet the number of young people of working age paying into the system was declining. This signalled a potential financial crisis.

The 'greying' of the global population is discussed in chapter 8, 'The Life-Course'.

A second line of criticism was related to the notion of *welfare dependency*. Critics of existing welfare institutions argued that people become dependent on the very programmes that are supposed to allow them to forge an independent and meaningful life. They become not just materially dependent, but psychologically dependent on the arrival of the welfare payment. Instead of taking an active attitude towards their lives, they tend to adopt a resigned and passive one, looking to the welfare system to support them.

The UK Conservative government implemented a number of welfare reforms that began to shift responsibility for public welfare away from the state and towards the private sector, the voluntary sector and local communities. Services, which were formerly provided by the state at highly subsidized rates, were privatized or made subject to more stringent means-testing. One example of this can be seen in the privatization of council housing in the 1980s. The 1980 Housing Act allowed rents for council housing to be raised significantly, laying the groundwork for a large-scale sell-off of council housing stock. This move towards residualism in housing provision was particularly harmful to those located just above the means-tested eligibility line for housing benefit, as they could no longer get access to public housing, but could ill-afford to rent accommodation at market rates. Critics argue that the privatization of council housing contributed significantly to the growth of homelessness in the 1980s and 1990s.

Another attempt to reduce welfare expenditure and increase its efficiency came through the introduction of market principles in the provision of public services. The Conservative government argued that injecting a degree of competition into welfare services such as healthcare and education would provide the public with greater choice and ensure high-quality service. Consumers could, in effect, 'vote with their feet' by choosing among schools or healthcare providers. Institutions providing substandard services would be obliged to improve or be forced to close down, just like a business. This is because funding for an institution would be based on the number of students, or patients, who chose to use its services. Critics charged that 'internal markets' within public services would lead to lower-quality services and a stratified system of service provision, rather than protecting the value of equal service for all citizens.

To what extent did the Conservative governments of the 1980s succeed in rolling back the welfare state? In *Dismantling the Welfare State?* (1994), Christopher Pierson compared the process of welfare 'retrenchment' in Britain and the USA and concluded that welfare states emerged from the Conservative era relatively intact. Although both administrations came into office with the express intent of slashing welfare expenditure, Pierson argued that the obstacles to rolling back welfare were ultimately more than either government could overcome. The reason for this lies in the way in which social policy had unfolded over time: since its inception, the welfare state and its institutions had given rise to specific constituencies – such as trade unions and voluntary agencies like the Child Poverty Action Group – which actively defended benefits against political efforts to reduce them.

Pierson saw the welfare state as under severe strain, but rejected the notion that it was 'in crisis'. Social spending stayed fairly constant and all the core components of the welfare state remained in place. While not denying the great rise in inequalities as a result of welfare reform in the 1980s, he

points out that social policy on the whole was not reformed to the extent that industrial relations or regulatory policy were.

The theory underlying the policies of Margaret Thatcher's and successive Conservative administrations (1979–97) was that cutting tax rates for individuals and corporations would generate high levels of economic growth, the fruits of which would then 'trickle down' to the poor. Similar policies were implemented in the USA. But the evidence does not support the 'trickle-down' thesis. Such an economic policy may generate an acceleration of economic development, but it also tends to expand the differentials between the poor and the wealthy and increase the numbers living in poverty.

THINKING CRITICALLY

From your reading so far, does a comprehensive welfare state system tend to create a dependency culture? With reference to Esping-Andersen's (1990) three types of welfare regime (discussed above), which countries would you expect to have the highest levels of welfare dependency? What evidence is there that these societies have been damaged by state welfare?

Reforming the welfare state: 1997–2008

Welfare reform was a top priority for the Labour government, which came to office in the UK in 1997. Agreeing in some respects with Conservative critics of welfare (and thus breaking with traditional left politics), Labour argued that new welfare policies were needed to cope with poverty and inequality as well as to improve health and education. It saw the welfare state as often part of the problem, creating dependencies and offering a 'hand-out' instead of a 'hand-up'. Instead, Labour wanted to tackle the roots of poverty, arguing that it was pursuing a Third Way, beyond the politics of the 'old' left and that of the Thatcher government's 'new' right. In doing so – initially at least – Labour drew on some of my own ideas (Giddens 1994, 1998), aimed at modernizing the politics of the left for a global age. These included: the strengthening of civil society; decentralization of power away from the nation-state, which should embrace cultural diversity in all of its policies; a focus on social exclusion rather than inequality; and use of the private sector to add a dynamic element into public service provision to create a 'social investment state'.

Initially rejecting the policies of the old left as outdated in an era of individualism, consumerism and globalization, Labour looked to create a 'new left' political position and programme. For example, the party argued that one of the main difficulties with the welfare system was that the conditions under which it had been created no longer existed: it had happened at a time of full employment when many families could rely on men to work and bring in a 'family wage'. However, changes in family structures had, by the 1990s, rendered such a patriarchal view of the male breadwinner inapplicable. An enormous number of women had entered the workforce and the growth of lone-parent households placed new demands on the welfare state. There has also been a distinct shift in the types of risk that the welfare state needs to contend with. For instance, the welfare state had proved to be an inadequate tool for dealing with the harmful consequences of environmental pollution or lifestyle choices such as smoking.

From the outset, Labour focused on a type of 'positive welfare', involving a new 'welfare contract' between the state and citizens based on both rights *and* responsibilities. It saw the role of the state as helping people into work and thereby a stable income, not just supporting them financially through periods of unemployment. At the same time, it expected citizens to take responsibility for trying to change their own

circumstances, rather than waiting for welfare hand-outs.

Employment became one of the cornerstones of Labour's social policy, as it was believed that getting people into work was one of the main steps in reducing poverty. Among the most significant welfare reforms introduced under Labour were so-called 'welfare-to-work' programmes (see 'Using your sociological imagination 12.2').

Women are now much more equal in economic, social and cultural terms than in previous generations and the entry of large numbers of women into higher education and the labour market has meant a growing divide between 'work-rich' households, characterized by dual earners, and 'work-poor' households, in which no one is active in the labour market. Women's earnings have become more integral to household income than they were in earlier times and the impact of their earnings can carry enormous weight. Indeed, the success of dual-earner households, particularly those without children, is one of the most important factors in the shifting pattern of income distribution. The differences between two-earner, one-earner and no-earner households are becoming increasingly apparent.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Is it realistic to expect welfare-to-work programmes to succeed in helping *all* social groups to get employment? Is everyone able to work? Why do you think these programmes fail to help the long-term unemployed to find work? List the obstacles facing those who have been unemployed for more than a year, when they are looking for a job. What can governments do to help remove these obstacles?

As well as the welfare-to-work programmes discussed above, Labour has also used welfare measures to raise the income of those in low-paid jobs. A minimum wage was introduced in 1999 and a commitment was made to reduce child poverty by 25 per cent by 2004–5 and to abolish child poverty by 2020. Recent assessments show that the government has had some success in its aim, with child poverty falling by 600,000 by 2006. However, it has also been noted that even if the ten-year target of halving child poverty by 2010 is met, levels will still be higher than in 1979 when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister (Flaherty et al. 2004). In 2006, government figures on Households Below Average Income (HBAI) showed that in spite of optimistic forecasts by many commentators, Labour had failed to achieve its interim target of reducing child poverty by 25 per cent between 1998/9 and 2004/5. Projections based on current policies suggest that far more radical measures will be needed than those in place at the moment if child poverty is to be further reduced in a large-scale way.

Even critics accept that some of Labour's welfare policies have had some successes: helping many young people into work, raising levels of funding for public services and helping people like Lisa (featured at the start of this chapter) get into work. However, Labour's approach to welfare has been more harshly judged. The attempt to make welfare benefits dependent on a commitment actively to seek work or attend interviews has been described as a 'creeping conditionality', which erodes the principle of a citizen's 'entitlement' (Dwyer 2004). Labour's work-focused programmes (and others in some European countries) have been promoted through the language of 'social inclusion', as we saw above. However, it is not clear how exclusion relates to underlying problems of social *inequality*, which, historically, have formed the basis of Labour's policy programmes when in government.

In *The Inclusive Society*, Ruth Levitas (2005) studied three main discourses, or ways of discussing and framing welfare policy, used by Labour since 1997. First,

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

12.2 Evaluating welfare-to-work programmes

Since 1997, the Labour government has put forward a number of policies and targets to move people from welfare into work. 'New Deal' programmes have been set up for certain groups such as the disabled, the long-term unemployed, young people and those aged over 50.

Similar programmes have existed for some time in the United States, and there has been some opportunity to study their implications. Daniel Friedlander and Gary Burtless (1994) studied four different US government-initiated programmes designed to encourage welfare recipients to find paid work. The programmes were roughly similar: they provided financial benefits for welfare recipients who actively searched for jobs, as well as guidance in job-hunting techniques and opportunities for education and training. The target populations were mainly single-parent heads of households who were recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the largest cash welfare programme in the country. Friedlander and Burtless found that the programmes did achieve results. People involved in them were able either to enter employment or to start working sooner than others who did not participate. In all four programmes, the earnings produced were several times greater than the net cost of the programme. They were least effective, however, in helping those who needed them the most – those who had been out of work for a lengthy period, the long-term unemployed.

Although welfare-to-work programmes have succeeded in reducing American welfare claims by approximately 40 per cent, some statistics suggest that the outcomes are not wholly positive. In the USA, approximately 20 per cent of those who cease to receive welfare do not work and have no source of independent income; nearly one-third who do get jobs return to claim welfare again within a year. Between a third and a half of welfare leavers who are in work find that their incomes are less than their previous benefit levels.

In Wisconsin, the US state which was one of the first to introduce welfare-to-work programmes, two-thirds of welfare leavers live below the poverty line (Evans 2000). Pointing to such findings, critics argue that the apparent success of welfare-to-work initiatives in reducing the absolute number of welfare cases conceals some troublesome patterns in the actual experiences of those who lose their welfare.

Others question the effectiveness of local empowerment 'zones' for combating social exclusion. They argue that poverty and deprivation are not concentrated in those designated areas alone, yet the programmes are targeted as if all the poor live together. In the UK, the findings of the government's own Social Exclusion Unit back this claim: in 1997, when Labour came to power, two-thirds of all unemployed people lived in areas outside the 44 most deprived boroughs of the country. Localized initiatives, sceptics point out, cannot replace a nation-wide anti-poverty strategy, because too many people fall outside the boundaries of the designated empowerment zones.

Labour adopted a *redistributionist* discourse, which viewed social exclusion as a *consequence*, not a cause of poverty and social inequalities. Second, she identified a *moral* discourse on the underclass (as we saw in the discussion of Charles Murray earlier in the chapter). This discourse tends to blame those who are socially excluded, seeing them as responsible for their own situation and, sometimes, as a separate social group with specific characteristics. Third, Levitas notes a *social integrationist* discourse that ties social exclusion and inclusion firmly to employment, encouraging labour market participation as a solution to social exclusion.

The main issue for Levitas is that Labour discourse and policy has drifted away from the Labour Party's historically dominant, redistributionist approach to welfare. On this account, Labour's welfare policy has become little different from that of the previous Conservative approach with its

The drug-taking antics of celebrities are often a source of entertainment in the media, while the negative aspects of addiction are associated with the poor and socially excluded.

focus on making those at the bottom of society's hierarchy responsible for their own position and for getting out of it. The problem is that this has separated social exclusion from social inequality and concentrates on the divide between the excluded and the included rather than that between rich and poor, allowing the rich successfully to evade their own responsibilities to the wider society. Susan MacGregor, for example, argues that Labour has, in practice, dealt mainly with the unacceptable behaviour of the poor – separating out the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving' unemployed and the genuine 'asylum seeker' from the 'economic migrant' and so on. She argues that, 'This concentrates on the bad behaviours among the poor, ignoring the drug taking, infidelities, frauds and deceptions and other human frailties found among the rich, the better off and the not-quite-poor' (2003: 72).

Finally, despite opposing the Conservatives' privatization of railways and other public sector enterprises while in opposition, Labour has not reversed any of them (with the partial exception of Railtrack, which owns tracks but not the trains themselves). Indeed, in government, Labour has relied heavily on market mechanisms, particularly in the partnerships between public and private sectors, in order to raise the level of investment in public services such as the National Health Service without having to resort to raising tax rates.

Poverty and welfare in a changing world

Changes in the occupational structure and the global economy have contributed to the trend towards inequality in Britain, the United States and elsewhere. A decline in the manual workforce had an important effect both on patterns of income distribution and on unemployment. It is often the case that workers in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs have found it difficult to re-enter a rapidly changing labour market where educational qualifications and technological competence are in increasing demand. Although there has been a marked expansion of opportunities in the service sector, much of this has been for positions that are low-paid and with little prospect for advancement.

In the twenty-first century, welfare debates are not simply about material prosperity, but about the overall well-being of the population. Social policy is concerned with promoting social cohesion, fostering networks of interdependence and maximizing people's abilities to help themselves. Rights and responsibilities are taking on new importance – not only for those at the bottom attempting to move off welfare and into work, but also for those at the top whose wealth should not entitle them to evade civic, social and tax obligations. Critics say Labour should have done more to tackle spiralling inequalities at the top. This issue is not as distant from attempts to reduce poverty as it may seem at first sight. For if the rich paid higher levels of taxation, not only would they be living up to their social responsibilities, but that extra money could be used to help the poor – for example, to make more impact on reducing child poverty than the government has so far been able to achieve. In academic and political debates as well as policy-making, issues surrounding social exclusion and inclusion, poverty and wealth creation and material provision and well-being look likely to be the key dilemmas for the next few decades.

Summary points

1. There have been two ways of understanding poverty. Absolute poverty refers to a lack of basic resources needed to maintain health and bodily functioning; relative poverty involves assessing the gaps between the living conditions of some groups and those enjoyed by the majority of a population.
2. Many countries have an official measurement of poverty: a poverty line. This is a level below which people are said to live in poverty. Subjective measurements of poverty are based on people's own understandings of what is needed for an acceptable standard of living.
3. Poverty remains widespread in the wealthy countries. In the 1980s and '90s Britain had one of the worst poverty records in the developed world. Inequalities between the rich and poor widened dramatically as a result of government policies, the transformation of the occupational structure and large-scale unemployment. The poor comprise a diverse group, but individuals who are disadvantaged or discriminated against in other aspects of life have an increased risk of being poor.
4. Two main approaches have been taken to explain poverty. The 'culture of poverty' and 'dependency culture' arguments claim that the poor are responsible for their own situation. The second approach argues that poverty results from larger social processes, which are both reinforced and influenced by the actions of individuals.
5. Social exclusion refers to processes by which individuals may become cut off from full involvement in the wider society. Social exclusion is a wider term than poverty, and includes a lack of resources and income and exclusion from the labour market, services and social relations. Homelessness is one of the most extreme forms of social exclusion. Homeless people lacking a permanent residence may be shut out of many everyday activities which most people take for granted.

CHAPTER 13

Global Inequality

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CHAPTER 13

Global Inequality

Bill Gates numbers amongst the world's wealthiest individuals. He is trustee of one of the largest charitable foundations in the world, but his personal wealth still means he is richer than about two-thirds of countries.

The past 30 years have seen the creation of more billionaires than ever before in history (a billionaire is defined as someone with wealth of *at least* a thousand million US$). At the start of the twenty-first century there were some 573 billionaires worldwide – 308 in the United States, 114 in Europe, 88 in Asia, 32 in Latin America, 15 in Canada, 13 in the Middle East, and 3 in Australia (Forbes 2000). Their combined assets in mid-2000 were estimated at US$1.1 trillion – greater than the total gross national products of 87 countries representing more than a third of the global world population (calculated from World Bank 2000–1).

In May 2008, Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft Corporation, was finally displaced as the world's wealthiest individual after holding that status for

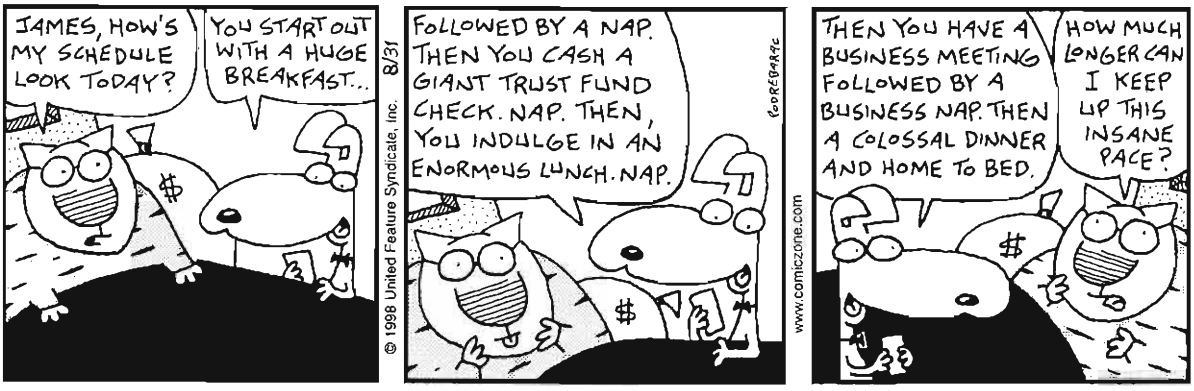
13 consecutive years. Warren Buffett, an American investor and businessman, was heralded as the world's richest person, with a net personal worth of US$62 billion, primarily based on his stock holding in Berkshire Hathaway, a US-based insurance conglomerate (see table 13.1). Gates's fortune, some US$58 billion, is based largely on ownership of Microsoft's stock and he seems to personify the entrepreneurial spirit: a computer nerd turned capitalist, whose software provides the operating system for the vast majority of personal computers worldwide. During the late 1990s, Gates had a net worth of around US$100 billion, but after reaching this peak, the value of Microsoft's stock began to decline, leaving his personal fortune greatly reduced. Nevertheless, he remains one of the wealthiest individuals in the world and his personal fortune dwarfs that of other well-known entrepreneurs like Richard Branson (Virgin Group) and Roman Abramovich (Russian oil industry).

Among the world's top forty richest individuals and families in 2007 were 16 from North America, 13 from Europe, 5 from the Middle East, 3 from Hong Kong, 2 from India and 1 from Mexico (*Sunday Times* 2007). If Bill Gates typifies the Western, high-tech entrepreneur, then Hong Kong's Li Ka-shing – number 11 on the 2008 list – is the hero in a rags-to-riches story that characterizes the success of many Asian businessmen. Li began his career by making plastic flowers, but by 2007 his US$26.5

Table 13.1 Twenty richest individuals and families in the world, 2008

Rank	Name	Citizenship	Age	Net Worth ($bil)	Residence
1	Warren Buffett	United States	77	62.0	United States
2	Carlos Slim Helu & family	Mexico	68	60.0	Mexico
3	William Gates III	United States	52	58.0	United States
4	Lakshmi Mittal	India	57	45.0	United Kingdom
5	Mukesh Ambani	India	50	43.0	India
6	Anil Ambani	India	48	42.0	India
7	Ingvar Kamprad & family	Sweden	81	31.0	Switzerland
8	KP Singh	India	76	30.0	India
9	Oleg Deripaska	Russia	40	28.0	Russia
10	Karl Albrecht	Germany	88	27.0	Germany
11	Li Ka-shing	Hong Kong	79	26.5	Hong Kong
12	Sheldon Adelson	United States	74	26.0	United States
13	Bernard Arnault	France	59	25.5	France
14	Lawrence Ellison	United States	63	25.0	United States
15	Roman Abramovich	Russia	41	23.5	Russia
16	Theo Albrecht	Germany	85	23.0	Germany
17	Liliane Bettencourt	France	85	22.9	France
18	Alexei Mordashov	Russia	42	21.2	Russia
19	Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Alsaud	Saudi Arabia	51	21.0	Saudi Arabia
20	Mikhail Fridman	Russia	43	20.8	Russia

Source: *Forbes Magazine*, 'The World's Billionaires', 3 May 2008



billion in personal wealth derived from a wide range of real estate and other investments throughout Asia, including family ownership of STAR TV, a television-transmission satellite whose broadcasts reach half the world.

How have a few individuals and families been able to accumulate such enormous wealth? One reason is that globalization – the increased economic, political, social and cultural interconnectedness of the world – has produced many more opportunities in many more parts of the world, which have enabled some people vastly to increase their wealth.

In the UK, the sixth Duke of Westminster, Major-General Gerald Cavendish Grosvenor, represents an older, aristocratic form of wealth acquisition and transmission down through families. But fewer people today are rich because of such inherited wealth. The sixth Duke's fortune of some £7 billion – largely consisting of property in fashionable areas of London – does not even make him the richest person in the UK. That title belongs to Indian-born steel magnate, Lakshmi Mittal, whose £27.7 billion makes him the richest person in the UK and fourth richest in the world. A glance at the list of the wealthiest people around the world shows that most of them could describe their riches as 'new entrepreneurial wealth', rapidly made during the course of a single individual's life.

Bill Gates and Lakshmi Mittal exemplify this new entrepreneurial wealth. Both of these multi-billionaires were born into relatively modest backgrounds in their respective countries before gaining fantastic economic success. Both men benefited from globalization: Gates through his involvement with some of the new information and communication technologies that drive globalization and Mittal by driving forward the international expansion of his family's India-based steel-making business.

» At this point you may want to refer to chapter 4, 'Globalization and the Changing World', to refresh your understanding of 'globalization'.

Yet the benefits of globalization have been uneven, and are by no means enjoyed by all. Consider, for example, Wirat Tasago, a 24-year-old garment worker in Bangkok, Thailand. Tasago – along with more than a million other Thai garment workers, most of whom are women – labours from 8 a.m. until about 11 p.m. six days a week, earning little more than the equivalent of £2 pounds an hour (Dahlburg 1995). Billions of workers such as Tasago are being drawn into the global labour force, many working in oppressive conditions that would be unacceptable, if not unimaginable, under employment laws, such as the minimum wage, which are taken for granted in the developed world. And these are the fortunate ones: although many countries, such as those in Eastern Europe, have found engagement in the global economy socially and economically difficult, especially

Millions of workers across the world are employed in 'sweatshops', working long hours for little financial reward. Has globalization been beneficial for these workers?

initially, the populations of those societies that have remained outside the world economy, such as North Korea, have typically fared far worse.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Should we celebrate the existence of 573 individual billionaires? Why might some people object to such a concentration of wealth in the hands of a very small number of people? If the desperately poor living and working standards of people like Tasago (above) could be effectively improved, would the fact that there are 573 billionaires in the world then be irrelevant?

Social inequality is one of the issues on which the discipline of sociology was founded, though the focus of the classical sociologists was on inequalities of class, status and power *within* the industrial societies. This generally meant studying the internal processes which produced inequality, disadvantage and exclusion. For example, in chapter 12 we examined poverty, social exclusion and welfare, noting large differences of income, wealth, work chances and quality of life, mainly *within* the industrialized countries. In chapter 11 we looked at types of social stratification, class-based inequality and social status distinctions and why these hierarchical social divisions continue to shape life chances today. Then

in chapter 22 we will turn our attention to inequalities of power and explore the spread of democracy across the world with a tendency to reduce very steep power gradients as people gain new political rights.

However, these same crucial issues of class, status and power exist on an even larger scale in the world as a whole. Just as we can speak of the rich and poor, high and low status or powerful and powerless *within a single country*, so we can talk about these inequalities and their causes *within the global system as a whole.* In this chapter, we look at global inequality, primarily in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (see chapter 4 for globalization in a longer time-scale). We begin with a brief discussion of what is understood by the term 'global inequality', and how definitions of the term change the way we think about it. We examine what differences in economic standards of living mean for people throughout the world. We then turn to the newly industrializing countries of the world to understand which countries are improving their fortunes and why. This will lead us to a discussion of theories that attempt to explain why global inequality exists and what can be done about it. We conclude this section by speculating on the future of economic inequality in a global world. From an examination of global inequality, we then move to an account of global population growth, a trend occurring at its greatest pace in some of the poorest countries of the world. The central issue here is how population growth impacts on the prospects for improved life chances and equality across the world.

Economic inequality is a major source of the world's problems with poverty, hunger and health, and for that reason it forms the central focus of this chapter. However, as we noted above, there are also major inequalities of social status and global inequalities of power both within and between nation-states. The latter remains an important source of many entrenched conflicts, some of which are discussed in chapter 23, 'Nations, War and Terrorism'. This chapter will also refer to these forms of inequality where necessary, but for a broader discussion, readers should consult the relevant chapters identified above.

Global economic inequality

Global economic inequality refers primarily to the systematic differences in wealth, incomes and working conditions that exist *between* countries. But there are, of course, many differences *within* countries: even the wealthiest countries today have growing numbers of poor people, while less wealthy nations are producing many of the world's super-rich. Sociology's challenge is not merely to identify such differences, but to explain *why* they occur – and *how* they might be overcome.

One way to classify countries in terms of global inequality is to compare their economic productivity. One important measure of economic productivity is gross domestic product (GDP). A country's GDP is made up of all the goods and services on record as being produced by a country's economy in a particular year. Income earned abroad by individuals or corporations is not included in GDP. An important alternative measure is gross national income (GNI). (GNI was formerly referred to as gross national product or GNP.) Unlike GDP, GNI includes income earned by individuals or corporations outside the country. Measures of economic activity, such as GDP or GNI, are often given per person; this allows us to compare the wealth of an average inhabitant of a country. Also, in order to compare different countries, we need to use a common currency, and most international institutions, such as the World Bank, use the US dollar. We will use both the US dollar and, on occasion, the UK pound.

The World Bank is an international lending organization that provides loans for development projects in poorer countries. It

uses per person GNI to classify countries as high-income, upper-middle-income, lower-middle-income or low-income. This system of classification will help us to understand more easily why there are such vast differences in living standards between countries, though, for the sake of simplicity, we will usually merge the upper-middle and lower middle categories.

The World Bank (2003) divides 132 countries, containing nearly 6 billion people, into the three economic classes. There are 74 other economies in the world, encompassing about 178 million people, for whom the World Bank does not provide data, either because it is lacking or because the economies have fewer than 1.5 million people. While 40 per cent of the world's population live in low-income countries, only 15 per cent live in high-income countries. Bear in mind that this classification is based on *average income* for each country, it therefore masks income inequality within each country. Such differences can be significant, although we do not focus on them in this chapter.

For example, the World Bank classifies India as a low-income country, since its per-person GNI in 1999 was just $450. Yet despite widespread poverty, India also boasts a large and growing middle class. China, on the other hand, was reclassified in 1999 from low- to middle-income, since its GNI per capita in that year was $780 (the World Bank's lower limit for a middle-income country is $756). Yet even though its average income now confers middle-income status on China, it nonetheless has hundreds of millions of people living in poverty.

Comparing countries on the basis of income alone, however, may be misleading, since GNI includes only goods and services that are produced for cash sale. Many people in low-income countries are farmers or herders who produce for their own families or for barter, involving non-cash transactions. The value of their crops and animals is not taken into account in the statistics. Further, economic output is not a country's whole story. Countries possess unique and widely differing languages and traditions. Poor countries are no less rich in history and culture than their wealthier neighbours, even though the lives of their people may be much harsher. Social and cultural assets such as social solidarity, strong cultural traditions or systems of familial and community assistance do not lend themselves to statistical measurement with quite the same ease as monetary transactions.

Many environmental campaigners have argued that GDP and GNI are particularly blunt measures of quantity that tell us nothing about the quality of life. Even those economic activities that damage the natural environment and human lives the most are simply counted as part of a country's total output and, thus, are seen to contribute to economic well-being. From the perspective of long-term environmental sustainability, this method is completely irrational. If we took account of some of the social and cultural aspects of life noted above, we may arrive at a radically different view of the apparent 'benefits' of continual increases in GDP/GNI.

Even if we do compare countries solely on the basis of economic statistics, the ones we choose for our comparisons are likely to make a difference to our conclusions. For example, if we choose to study global inequality by comparing levels of household consumption (of, say, food, medicine or other products) rather than GNI, we might reach a different conclusion on global inequality. We could also choose to take into account other factors. A comparison of the GNI of several countries is all very well, but it does not take into account how much things *actually* cost in a country. For example, if two countries have a more or less equal GNI, but in the first, an average family meal costs just pennies, whereas in the second it costs several pounds, then we might conclude that it is misleading to argue that the countries are equally wealthy – after all, in the first

country one gets considerably more for one's money. Instead, the researcher might choose to compare *purchasing power parities* (PPP) that eliminate the difference in prices between two countries. *The Economist* magazine uses a famous measure of PPP with its light-hearted 'Big Mac Index', which compares the cost of the hamburger – made with identical ingredients – in different countries. In this chapter we concentrate on comparisons of GNI between countries, but it is important to be aware of the other measures commonly used.

THINKING CRITICALLY

How useful do you find the World Bank's ranking of low-, middle- and high-income countries? Which aspects of life within different countries does the 'average income' measure help us to understand? Which aspects of life is this method likely to miss? How else could we compare the living conditions of countries with such different cultures, social structures and economic standards of living? Why might such comparisons be useful to policy-makers?

High-income countries

The *high-income countries* are generally those that were first to industrialize, starting with the UK some 250 years ago, spreading to Europe, the United States and Canada. It was only some 30 years ago that Japan joined the ranks of such high-income, industrialized nations, while Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan moved into this category only in the 1980s and 1990s. The reasons for the success of these Asian latecomers are much debated by sociologists and economists and we will look at these debates later in the chapter.

High-income countries account for only 15 per cent of the world's population (roughly 891 million people) – yet they lay claim to 79 per cent of the world's annual output of wealth (World Bank 2000–1). High-income countries offer decent housing, adequate food, safe water supplies and other comforts unknown in many other parts of the world. Although these countries often have large numbers of poor people, most of their inhabitants enjoy a standard of living unimaginable for the majority of the world's people.

Middle-income countries

The *middle-income countries* are primarily found in East and Southeast Asia, the oil-rich countries of the Middle East and North Africa, the Americas (Mexico, Central America, Cuba and other countries in the Caribbean, and South America) and the once-Communist republics that formerly made up the Soviet Union and its East European allies. Most of these countries began to industrialize relatively late in the twentieth century and are therefore not yet as industrially developed (or wealthy) as the high-income countries. The countries that once comprised the Soviet Union, on the other hand, are highly industrialized, although their living standards have been eroded since the collapse of communism and the shift towards capitalist economics. In Russia itself, for example, the wages of ordinary people dropped by nearly a third between 1998 and 1999, while retirement pensions dropped by almost half: millions of people, many of them elderly, suddenly found themselves destitute (CIA 2000).

In 1999, middle-income countries included 45 per cent of the world's population (2.7 billion people) but accounted for just 18 per cent of the annual wealth produced. Although many people in these countries are substantially better off than their neighbours in low-income countries, most do not enjoy the high standard of living of the high-income countries. The ranks of the world's middle-income countries expanded between 1999 and 2000, according to the World Bank's system of classification, when China – with 1.3 billion people (22 per cent of the world's population) – was

reclassified from low- to middle-income because of its rapid economic growth. This reclassification is somewhat misleading, however. China's average per person income of $1,100 per year in 2003 is quite close to the cut-off for low-income countries (at $766), and a large majority of its population are in fact within the low-income category by World Bank standards.

Low-income countries

Finally, the *low-income countries* include much of eastern, western and sub-Saharan Africa; Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia and some other East Asian countries; India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan in South Asia; East and Central European countries such as Georgia and Ukraine; and Haiti and Nicaragua in the western hemisphere. These countries mostly have agricultural economies and only recently began to industrialize.

In 1999, the low-income countries included 40 per cent of the world's population (2.4 billion people) yet produced only 3 per cent of the world's annual output of wealth. What is more, this inequality is increasing. Fertility is much higher in low-income countries than elsewhere, as large families provide additional farm labour or otherwise contribute to family income. In wealthy industrial societies, where children are more likely to be in school than on the farm, the economic benefit of large families declines, and so people tend to have fewer children. Because of this, the populations of low-income countries (with the principal exception of India) are growing more than three times as fast as those of high-income countries (World Bank 2003). In many low-income countries, people struggle with poverty, malnutrition and even starvation. Most people live in rural areas, although this is rapidly changing. Hundreds of millions of people are moving to huge, densely populated cities, where they live either in dilapidated housing or on the open streets.

See chapter 6, 'Cities and Urban Life', for a wider discussion of urbanization.

Is global economic inequality increasing?

The question of whether global inequality is increasing or diminishing has polarized opinion in recent years. Anti-globalization activists argue that globalization generates more inequality, while defenders argue that it is proving to be a great levelling force between the world's rich and poor. The first dramatic changes in global inequality occurred more than two centuries ago with the Industrial Revolution, as Europe and then other regions underwent rapid economic expansion, leaving the rest of the world far behind in terms of wealth and material goods.

Those who see that global inequality is expanding argue that in the past few decades globalization has exacerbated the trend towards inequality that began with industrialization. Globalization's critics cite statistics of the kind used in the UN Human Development Report 2007/08, which noted that the 40 per cent of the human population living on less than US$2 a day account for just 5 per cent of global income, but the wealthiest 20 per cent account for three-quarters of global income. In particular, sub-Saharan Africa will account for a full one-third of world poverty by 2015, up from one-fifth in 1990 (UNDP 2007a: 25). At the global level as well as within many countries, inequality is increasing along with globalization.

By contrast, others have pointed out that over the past few decades the overall standard of living in the world as a whole has actually risen. Many indicators measuring the living standards of the world's poorest people show improvements. Illiteracy is reduced, infant death rates and malnutrition are falling, people are living longer, and global poverty – commonly defined as the number of people living on less than one US dollar a day – has reduced (see table 13.2 below).

However, there are substantial differences between countries. Many of these gains have been in the high- and middle-income countries, while living standards in many of the poorest countries have declined. Indeed, although the 1990s was a time of economic boom for the world's richest country, the United States, the UN Human Development Report (2003) found that more than 50 countries, located mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, suffered falling living standards during the decade as a result of famine, the global AIDS epidemic, conflicts and failed national economic policies. Atkinson (2003) reminds us that increasing inequality cannot be explained entirely by general reference to rapid globalization, as national taxation and other economic policies continue to play an important role. For example, in Scandinavian countries like Sweden, where the welfare state operates in a redistributive way, global trends towards the widening of social inequality have been more effectively prevented than in other countries, such as the UK, which have adopted a more right-of-centre approach to welfare reform.

» See chapter 12, 'Poverty, Social Exclusion and Welfare', for a discussion of welfare state regimes.

As the above dispute shows, the way we chose to measure global inequality makes a big difference to the conclusions that we reach on the issue. The economist, Stanley Fischer, compared two ways of looking at global income inequality: the first simply compares income inequality between countries; the second takes into account the number of people living in those countries as well. The first way of looking at global inequality is shown in the top chart of figure 13.1. This shows the average income of a selection of poor and rich countries between 1980 and 2000, with each country represented on the graph by a uniform dot. The figure shows that during this period the average income of the poorest nations grew much more slowly than the average income of the world's richest nations. Hence, the trend (shown by the black line) shows inequality increasing as the economies of the richer countries on the right of the graph grow more quickly than those of the poorer countries (on the left). If the poorest countries had grown faster than the richest, the black trends line would slope down from left to right. The gap between the richest and the poorest of the world's countries therefore appears to be growing.

The bottom chart, which takes into account the population size of the countries, presents a rather different view on global inequality. The same chart is shown here, but this time the dots that represent each country have been drawn in proportion to the size of the number of people living in that country. What is particularly noticeable about this graph is that two of the world's biggest countries – India and China, which between them account for well over one-third of the world's population – have increased the sizes of their economies considerably since 1980. Because of the size of these two countries, a population-weighted line of best fit drawn through the second chart would slope downwards, implying that global inequality is falling, as, on average, the populations of the poorest countries catch up.

Once we take account of the fact that China and India have performed so well economically since 1980, and especially since 1990, together with the fact that these two countries account for such a big share of the world's poorest people, global poverty appears to be relatively stable. Those countries that have done best economically in the period since 1980 – like India, China and Vietnam, for example – also tend to be those countries that have integrated most successfully into the global economy. The enormous inequality still found within those countries that have grown economically in recent decades means that some critics have asked at what price integration into the global economy comes.

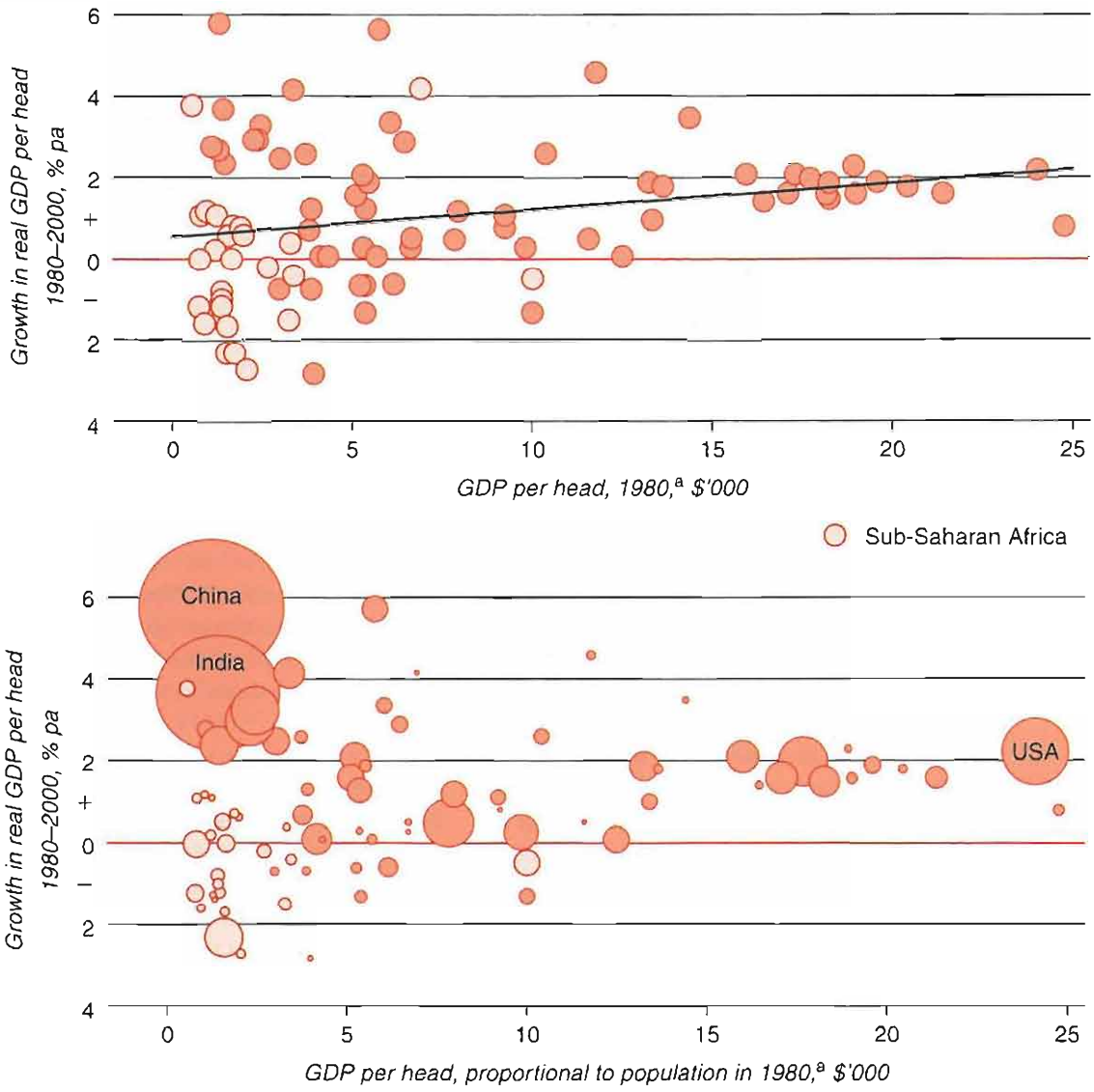


Figure 13.1 Two ways of looking at global income inequality
[a]1996 prices

Source: *The Economist*, 11 March 2004 © The Economist Newspaper Limited, London

Unequal life chances

An enormous gulf in living standards separates most people in rich countries from their counterparts in poor ones. Wealth and poverty make life different in a host of ways. For instance, about one-third of the world's poor are undernourished, and almost all are illiterate, lacking access to basic primary school education. While most of the world is still rural, within a decade there are likely to be more poor people in urban than in rural areas.

Urbanization in developing countries is discussed in more detail in chapter 6, 'Cities and Urban Life'.

Many of the global poor come from tribes or racial and ethnic groups that differ from the dominant groups of their countries and

Table 13.2 Global quality of life measures show an improving picture, 1990–2005

Quality of life indicator	1990–1	2004–5
World		
Enrolment in primary education per 100 children of primary age (%)	82.5	88.8
Literacy rate of 15–24 year olds (%)	83.5	87.4
Mortality rate for under-5s per 1,000 live births	95	76
Infant mortality rate (children under 1) per 1,000 live births	65	52
Births attended by skilled health personnel (%)	47	59
Population using an improved drinking water source (%)	78	83
Developing regions only (%)		
Population living below US$1 a day	31.6	19.2
Poverty gap ratio[1]	9.3	5.4
Prevalence of underweight children under 5 years of age	33.0	27.0
Urban population living in slums	46.5	36.5

[1] The *poverty gap ratio* = average percentage shortfall of poor individuals' incomes below the poverty line. This measure assesses the depth of poverty rather than just the percentage of a population whose income falls below the poverty line.

Source: Data taken from United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals Report*, 2007

their poverty is, at least in part, the result of discrimination. Here we focus on differences between high- and low-income countries in terms of health, starvation and famine, and education and literacy.

Health

People in high-income countries are far healthier than their counterparts in low-income countries. Low-income countries generally suffer from inadequate health facilities, and when they do have hospitals or clinics, these seldom serve the poorest people. People living in low-income countries also lack proper sanitation, drink polluted water and run a much greater risk of contracting infectious diseases. They are more likely to suffer malnourishment, starvation and famine. These factors all contribute to physical weakness and poor health, making people in low-income countries susceptible to illness and disease. There is growing evidence that high rates of HIV/AIDS infection found in many African countries are due, in part, to the weakened health of impoverished people (Stillwagon 2001).

Because of poor health conditions, people in low-income countries are more likely to die in infancy and less likely to live to old age than people in high-income countries. Infants are 11 times more likely to die at birth in low-income countries than they are in high-income countries, and – if they survive birth – they are likely to live on average 18 years fewer. Children often die of illnesses that are readily treated in wealthier countries, such as measles or diarrhoea. In the mid-1990s in some parts of the world, such as sub-Saharan Africa, a child was statistically more likely to die before the age of 5 than to enter secondary school (World Bank 1996). Still, conditions have improved in low- and middle-income countries since then. For example, between 1990/1 and 2004/5 the global infant mortality rate dropped from 65 (per 1,000 live births) to 52 alongside an increase in the proportion of

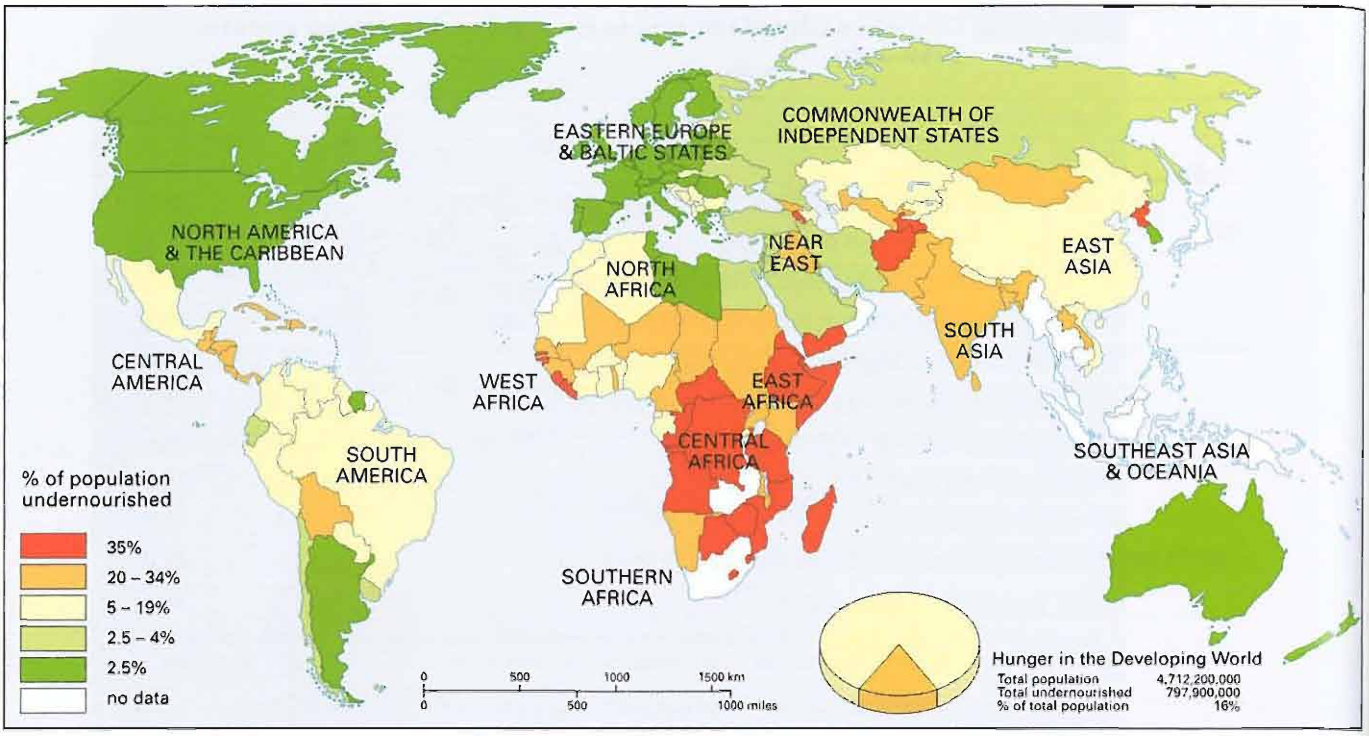


Figure 13.2 Undernourishment – a global problem, unevenly distributed

Source: World Food Programme, 29 June 2007. © 2007, World Food Programme.

births attended by medical personnel from 47 to 59 per cent. A range of other measures also showed marked improvement (see table 13.2)

During the past three decades, many improvements have occurred in most of the middle-income countries of the world and in some of the low-income countries as well. Throughout the world, infant mortality has been cut in half, and average life expectancy has increased by ten years or more. The wider availability of modern medical technology, improved sanitation and rising incomes account for most of these changes.

Hunger, malnutrition and famine

Hunger, malnutrition and famine are major global sources of poor health; they are not new problems, but long-standing issues. What seems to be new is the extent of hunger and undernourishment – the fact that so many people in the world today appear to be on the brink of starvation (see figure 13.2). The United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP 2001) estimated that 830 million people go hungry every day, 95 per cent of them in developing countries. The UN defines 'hunger' as a diet of 1,800 or fewer calories per day – an amount insufficient to provide adults with the nutrients required for active, healthy lives. According to the World Food Programme study, 200 million of the world's hungry are children under the age of 5, who are underweight because they lack adequate food. Every year hunger kills an estimated 12 million children. As one 10-year-old child from the west African country of Gabon told researchers from the World Bank:

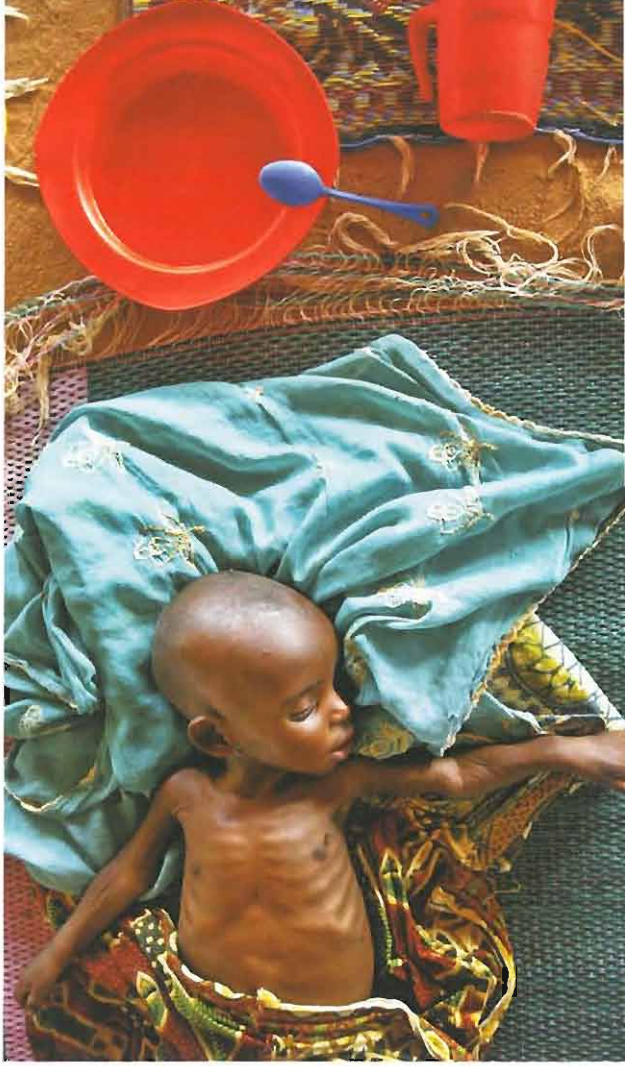
> When I leave for school in the mornings I don't have any breakfast. At noon there is no lunch, in the evening I get a little

> supper, and that is not enough. So when I see another child eating, I watch him, and if he doesn't give me something I think I'm going to die of hunger. (Narayan 1999)

Yet more than three-quarters of all malnourished children under the age of 5 in the world's low- and middle-income countries live in countries that actually produce a food surplus (Lappe 1998). It has been estimated that the amount the population of the United States spends on pet food each year ($13 billion) would eradicate much of the world's human hunger (Bread for the World Institute 2005).

Famine and hunger are the result of a combination of natural and social forces. Drought alone affects an estimated 100 million people in the world today. In countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Tajikistan, the combination of drought and internal warfare has devastated food production, resulting in starvation and death for millions of people. In Latin America and the Caribbean at the start of the twenty-first century, 53 million people (11 per cent of the population) were malnourished, along with 180 million (33 per cent) in sub-Saharan Africa and 525 million (17 per cent) in Asia (UNWFP 2001).

The spread and persistence of HIV/AIDS has also contributed to the problem of food shortages and hunger, killing many working-age adults. A study by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Association (FAO) has predicted that HIV/AIDS-caused deaths in the ten African countries most afflicted by the epidemic will reduce the labour force by 26 per cent by the year 2020. Of the estimated 26 million people worldwide infected with HIV, 95 per cent live in developing countries. According to the FAO, the epidemic can be devastating to nutrition, food security and agricultural production, affecting 'the entire society's ability to maintain and reproduce itself' (UNFAO 2001).



Every year, hunger, resulting from both natural and social causes, kills about 12 million children.

The countries affected by famine and starvation are, for the most part, too poor to pay for new technologies that would increase their food production. Nor can they afford to purchase sufficient food imports from elsewhere in the world. At the same time, paradoxically, as world hunger grows, food production continues to increase. Between 1965 and 1999, for example, world production of grain doubled. Even allowing for the substantial world population increase over this period, the global production of grain per person was 15 per cent higher in 1999 than it was 34 years earlier. This growth, however, is not evenly distributed around the world. In

Global Society 13.1 What does the world eat? What should the world eat?

In 2000, photojournalist Peter Menzel and journalist Faith D'Alusio set out to record what a culturally diverse range of families across the world ate in one week. Their 2005 book *Hungry Planet: What the World Eats* was the result. They visited 30 families in 24 countries looking at food purchases, costs and recipes, and photographing families with their typical weekly food items. Two examples from their book are reproduced here:

Republic of Chad: The Aboubakar family of Breidjing Camp
Food expenditure for one week: 685 CFA francs, or $1.23
Favourite foods: soup with fresh sheep meat

USA: The Revis family of North Carolina
Food expenditure for one week: $341.98
Favourite foods: spaghetti, potatoes, sesame chicken

much of Africa, for example, food production per person declined in recent years. Surplus food produced in high-income countries such as the United States is seldom affordable to the countries that need it most.

THINKING CRITICALLY

From the evidence and photographs shown in 'Global Society 13.1', compare the two family diets on the basis of cost, quantity of food, diversity of food items and fresh versus pre-packaged items. Is it possible to say which diet is healthier or which is more damaging to the natural environment? Explain as fully as possible the reasons for your answers. In what ways do these two diets reflect and illustrate global inequalities embedded within the world's food production systems? What might be the main effects on the natural environment, on human health and on other species if the current global human population of 6.6 billion were all to adopt the USA diet?

Education, literacy and child labour

Education and literacy are important routes to economic development. Here, again, lower-income countries are disadvantaged, since they can seldom afford high-quality public education systems. As a consequence, children in high-income countries are much more likely to get schooling than are children in low-income countries, and adults in high-income countries are much more likely to be able to read and write (see figure 13.3). While virtually all secondary school-aged males and females are still in full-time education in high-income countries, in 1997 only 71 per cent were in middle-income countries and only 51 per cent in low-income countries. In low-income countries, 30 per cent of male adults and almost half of female adults are unable to read and write. One reason for these differences is a sizeable gap in public expenditures on education: high-income countries spend a much larger percentage of their gross domestic product on education than do low-income countries (World Bank 2001).

Education is important for several reasons. First, it contributes to economic growth, since people with advanced schooling provide the skilled work necessary for high-wage industries. Second, education offers the only hope of escaping from the cycle of harsh working conditions and poverty, since poorly educated people are condemned to low-wage, unskilled jobs. Finally, educated people are less likely to have large numbers of children, thus slowing the global population explosion that contributes to global poverty.

A further important reason for the relatively low levels of children in primary education in low-income countries is children's involvement in work at the expense of their education. Children are often forced to work because of a combination of family poverty, lack of education provision and traditional indifference to the plight of those who are poor or who belong to ethnic minorities (UNICEF 2000a). Child labour has been legally eliminated in the high-income countries, but still exists in many parts of the world today. According to the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) more than 218 million boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 14 are working in developing countries, about one out of every four children in the world. Of these, 126 million are estimated to be working in hazardous conditions (ILO 2004). Child labour is found throughout the developing world, with the highest incidence of children's work in sub-Saharan Africa and the largest number of child workers found in the Asia-Pacific region.

Two-thirds of working children (132 million) labour in agriculture, with the rest in manufacturing, wholesale and retail

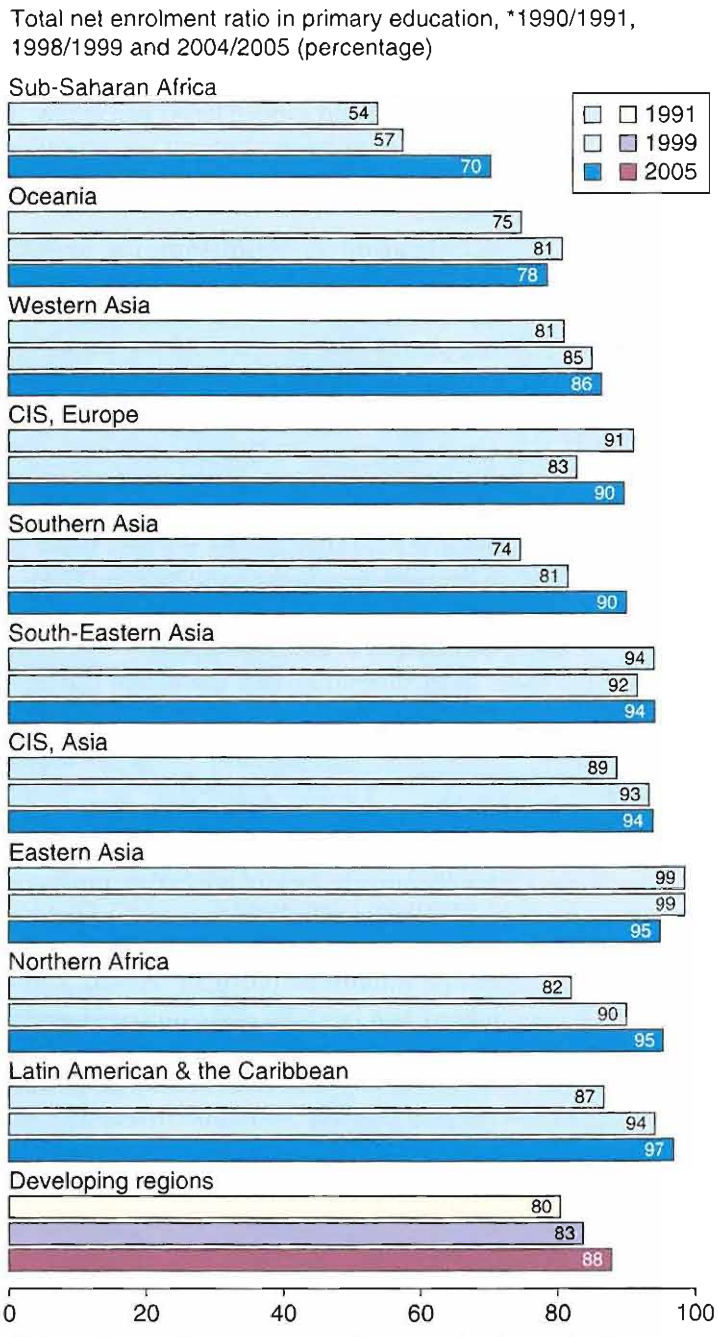


Figure 13.3 Global inequality in educational enrolment, 1991–2005

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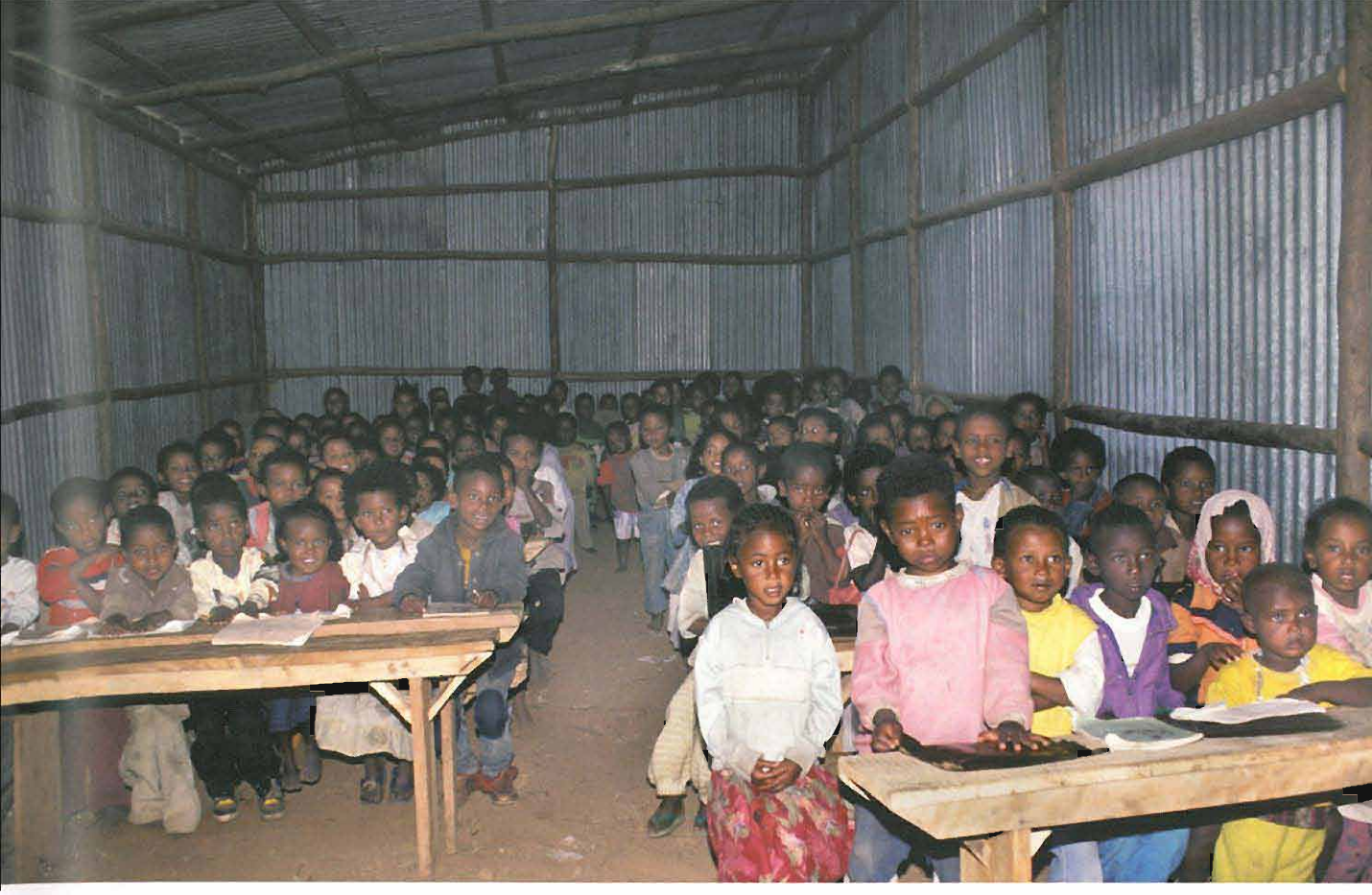


Education plays a crucial role in countries' economic development, but low-income nations' schools are often underfunded.

trade, restaurants and hotels and a variety of services, including working as servants in wealthy households (ILO 2007). At best, these children work for long hours with little pay and are therefore unable to go to school and develop the skills that might eventually enable them to escape their lives of poverty. However, simply enforcing an immediate ban on all child labour, even if it were possible, might be counter-productive. Child labour is a better alternative to child prostitution or chronic under-nourishment, for example. The challenge is not just to end child labour, but also to move children from work into education, and to ensure that they are properly provided for during their school years.

One form of child labour that is close to slavery is 'bonded labour'. In this system, children as young as 8 or 9 are pledged by their parents to factory-owners in exchange for small loans. These children are paid so little that they never manage to reduce the debt, condemning them to a lifetime of bondage. One case of bonded labour that attracted international attention was that of Iqbal Masih, a Pakistani child who, at the age of 4, was sold into slavery by his father in order to borrow 600 rupees (roughly US$16) for the wedding of his first-born son. For six years, Iqbal spent most of his time chained to a carpet-weaving loom, tying tiny knots for hours on end. After fleeing the factory at the age of 10, he began speaking to labour organizations and schools about his experience. Iqbal paid a bitter price for his outspokenness: when he was 13, while riding his bicycle in his home-town, he was gunned down by agents believed to be working for the carpet industry (Bobak 1996).

Global Society 13.2 Child labour in agriculture

An ILO Report published for their World Day Against Child Labour, on 12 June 2007, focused on child labour in agricultural work settings, where the majority of child labourers work. Much agricultural child labour is not seen as formal employment but simply as 'helping the family', which tends to render it invisible to policy-makers.

The following section is from the ILO Report (2007) and it gives an indication of the risks children face in agricultural child labour.

Seventy per cent of working children are in agriculture – more than 132 million girls and boys aged 5–14 years old. The vast majority of the world's child labourers are not toiling in factories and sweatshops or working as domestics or street vendors in urban areas; they are working on farms and plantations, often from sun up to sun down, planting and harvesting crops, spraying pesticides, and tending livestock on rural farms and plantations. These children play an important role in crop and livestock production, helping supply some of the food and drink we consume, and the fibres and raw materials we use to make other products. Examples include cocoa/chocolate, coffee, tea, sugar, fruits and vegetables, along with other agricultural products like tobacco and cotton.

A large, though uncertain, number of the 132 million girls and boys carry out 'hazardous child labour', which is work that can threaten their lives, limbs, health, and general well-being. Irrespective of age, agriculture – along with construction and

mining – is one of the three most dangerous sectors in which to work in terms of work-related fatalities, non-fatal accidents and occupational disease. Child labourers are susceptible to all the hazards and risks faced by adult workers when placed in the same situation. They are at even greater risk from these dangers because their bodies are still growing and their minds and personalities still developing, and they lack work experience. So the effects of poor to non-existent safety and health protection can often be more devastating and lasting for them. Also, a feature of agriculture that sets it apart from most other forms of child labour is that the children usually live on the farms or plantations where they work. This exposes them to additional risks.

Bangladesh is a primarily rural country and for many children working to help grow, harvest, transport or sell farm products is a normal, everyday role from the earliest days of childhood. They are regularly exposed to farm machinery and tools that often result in devastating injuries. About 50 children a day are injured by machines, and three of them are injured so severely that they become permanently disabled.

In Zimbabwe, the wheels of a tractor which had been standing overnight had become bogged down in the mud. The following morning, a 12-year-old boy started the tractor, revved up the engine to free the wheels, trying to move in a forward direction (when the safe procedure would have been to try to reverse out). The wheels remained stuck, that is, resisted movement, and the tractor reared up on its front wheels and overturned backwards, fatally crushing the boy beneath it.

In 2000, an 11-year-old girl, illegally employed on a farm in Ceres, Western Cape, South Africa, fell off a tractor, resulting in the amputation of her left leg.

In 1990, a 15-year-old migrant farm worker in the USA was fatally electrocuted when a 30-foot section of aluminium irrigation pipe he was moving came into contact with an overhead power line. Two other child labourers with him sustained serious electrical burns to their hands and feet.

Source: ILO 2007

Abolishing exploitative child labour will require countries around the world to enact strong laws against the practice and be willing to enforce them. International organizations, such as the UNILO, have outlined a set of standards for such laws to follow. In June 1999, the UNILO adopted Convention 182, calling for the abolition of the 'Worst Forms of Child Labour'. These are defined as including:

- all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography, or for pornographic performances;
- the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; and
- work that, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children. (ILO 1999)

Countries must also provide free public education and require that children attend school full time (UNICEF 2000). But part of the responsibility for solving the problem also lies with the global corporations that manufacture goods using child labour, trade unions that organize the workforce, agricultural cooperatives whose values are opposed to child labour and, ultimately, the consumers who buy the goods.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Were you surprised at the extent of child labour described above? Should *all* child labour right around the world be banned? What consequences – positive and negative – would be likely to follow from such a ban? Can you think of any forms of 'child labour' which are still seen as acceptable in the high-income countries? What makes the latter appear to be more acceptable than those discussed above?

Can poor countries become rich?

By the mid-1970s, a number of low-income countries in East Asia were undergoing a process of industrialization that appeared to threaten the global economic dominance of the United States and Europe (Amsden 1989; also see chapter 4 for a discussion of these developments). This process began with Japan in the 1950s, but quickly extended to the newly industrializing countries (NICs), that is, the rapidly growing economies of the world, particularly in East Asia but also in Latin America. The East Asian NICs included Hong Kong in the 1960s and Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore in the 1970s and 1980s. Other Asian countries began to follow in the 1980s and the early 1990s, most notably China, but also Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. Today, most are middle-income, and some – such as Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore – have moved up to the high-income category.

Figure 13.4 compares the average economic growth rates of the low-, middle- and high-income countries of the world. Economists have tended to assume that the developing countries, en bloc, would experience higher average rates of economic growth than the developed, high-income ones, as their development starts to catch up. However, until quite recently this was often not the case and only a few developing countries managed to out-perform the average growth rate of the developed economies.

This has changed since the mid-1990s, though, as the *average* growth rates of low- and middle-income countries have been higher than those in the developed world. Indeed, 13 countries have now been reclassified by the World Bank as 'developed economies' as their economic growth rates have propelled them into the ranks of the relatively wealthy countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahrain, Greece, Guam, Isle of Man, Republic of Korea, Malta, New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, Saudi Arabia, San Marino and Slovenia (World Bank 2007b). These are all places that were considered to be poor just two generations ago. By 1999, the GDP per person in Singapore was virtually the same as that in the United States, while China, the world's most populous country, has one of the most rapidly growing economies on the planet. At an average annual growth rate of 10 per cent between 1980 and 1999, the Chinese economy doubled in size.

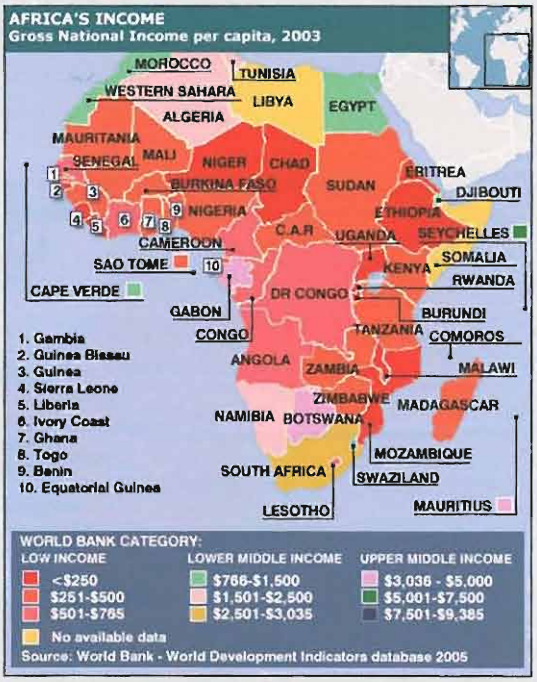
Comparing countries on the basis of their average income level continues to show a wide divergence, particularly between the developed and developing countries. Comparing the incomes of rich and poor people *within* a single country shows that, over recent years, some countries have experienced widening income inequality (USA, UK, Brazil), while others have remained fairly stable (France, Canada). However, measuring global inequality at the *individual* level, regardless of country of residence, shows that since 1970, 'the average global citizen has become richer' and global income distribution has become more equal (Loungani 2003; see figure 13.4). However, this conclusion is heavily influenced by the rapid growth of a small number of large countries, including China, India and Vietnam. Leaving these aside, the 13 countries recategorized by the World Bank as 'developed economies' represent a small minority of all developing countries,

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

13.1 Solutions to global inequality?

Poverty

Most of sub-Saharan Africa is in the World Bank's lowest income category of less than US$765 gross national income (GNI) per person per year. Ethiopia and Burundi are the worst off with just US$90 GNI per person. Even middle-income countries like Gabon and Botswana have sizeable sections of the population living in poverty. North Africa generally fares better than sub-Saharan Africa. Here, the economies are more stable, trade and tourism are relatively high and AIDS is less prevalent. Development campaigners continue to urge the G8 to reform the rules on debt, aid and trade to help lift more African nations out of poverty.

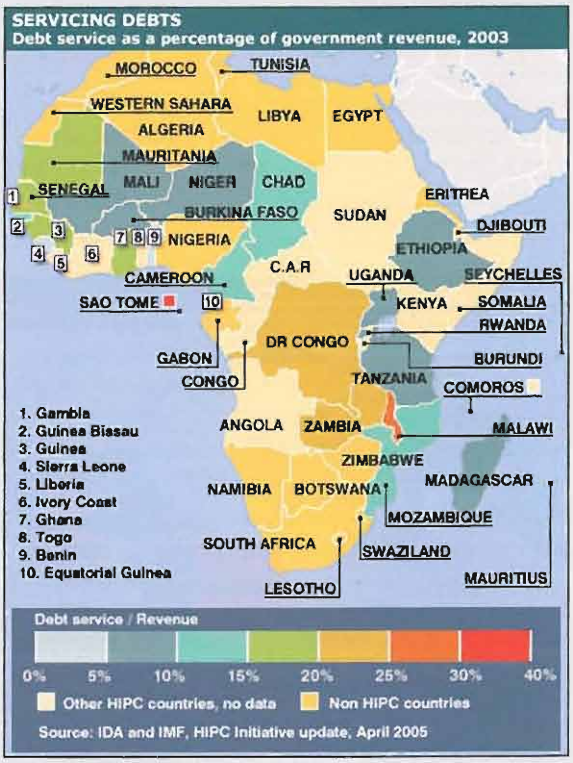


Source:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/africa/05/africa_ economy/html/poverty.stm
© bbc.co.uk/news

Debt

The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative (HIPC) was set up in 1996 to reduce the debt of the poorest countries. Poor countries are eligible for the scheme if they face unsustainable debt that cannot be reduced by traditional methods. They also have to agree to follow certain policies of good governance as defined by the World Bank and the IMF. Once these are established, the country is at 'decision point' and the amount of debt relief is established. Critics of the scheme say the parameters are too strict and more countries should be eligible for HIPC debt relief.

This map shows how much 'decision point' HIPC countries spend on repaying debts and interest. Under a new plan drawn up by the G8 finance ministers, 14 African HIPC countries will have their debts totally written off.

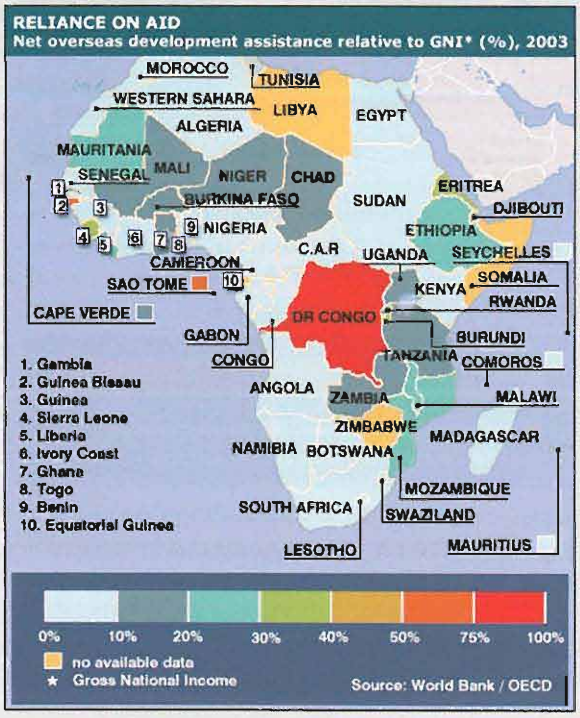


Source:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/africa/05/africa_economy/html/debt.stm © bbc.co.uk/news

Aid

Africa receives about a third of the total aid given by governments around the world, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Most aid has conditions attached, meaning that governments must implement certain policies to receive the aid or must spend the money on goods and services from the donor country. The World Bank, which is reviewing its conditionality policies, argues that aid is far more effective, and less vulnerable to corruption, when coupled with improved governance. There was a sharp drop in rich countries' relative spending on aid in the late 1990s.

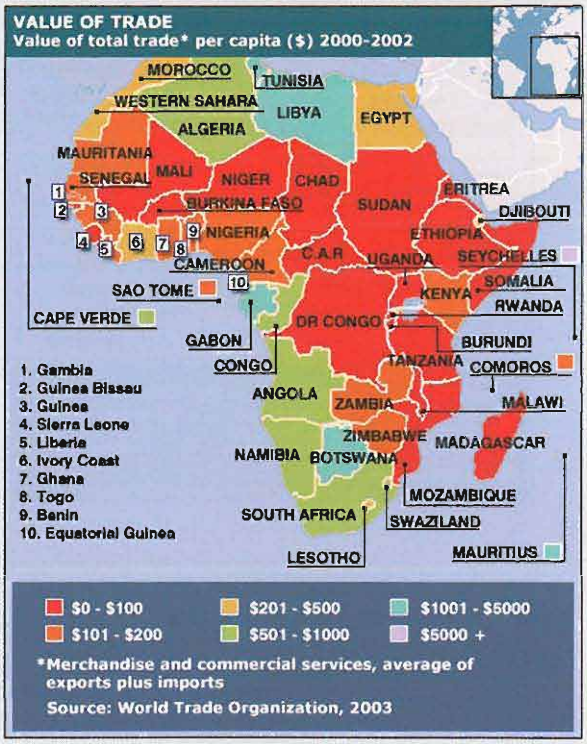
In 2005, the 'Make Poverty History' campaign sought to persuade the G8 to raise an extra US$50 billion more in aid per year and to enforce earlier pledges for developed countries to give 0.70 per cent of their annual GDP in aid. The campaign claims success in gaining 'international acceptance of the principle of 100 per cent multilateral debt cancellation; an undertaking at the G8 summit that developing countries have the right to decide, plan and sequence their economic policies to fit with their own development strategies and international support for (as close as possible) universal access to treatment for HIV and AIDS for all who need it by 2010' (www.makepovertyhistory.org/theyearof/).



Source:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/africa/05/africa_economy/html/aid.stm © bbc.co.uk/news

Trade

Africa is rich in natural resources such as minerals, timber and oil, but trade with the rest of the world is often difficult. Factors include poor infrastructure, government instability, corruption and the impact of AIDS on the population of working age. Poorer countries and agencies such as Oxfam also argue that international trade rules are unfair and favour the developed world. They say rich countries 'dump' subsidized products on developing nations by undercutting local producers. And they accuse the World Trade Organization (WTO) of forcing developing nations to open their markets to the rest of the world but failing to lower rich countries' tariff barriers in return. The WTO responds that low-income countries receive special treatment, including exemption from some regulations that apply to richer nations.



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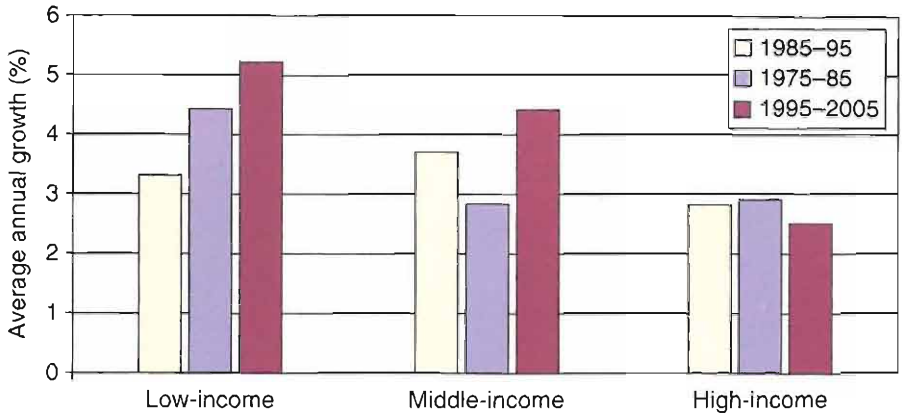


Figure 13.4 Average economic growth in the low-, middle- and high-income countries, 1975–2005

Source: World Bank 2007b

Table 13.3 Cross-country, within-country and global inequalities

Concept of income inequality	Cross-country inequality	Within-country inequality	Global inequality
What it measures	Inequality of *average* incomes across countries	Differences between incomes of the rich and the poor within a country	Differences between incomes of the rich and the poor, ignoring the country to which they belong
What the evidence shows	Divergence	Increasing inequality in many countries (for example, Brazil, China, United States), but low and stable levels in many others (for example, Canada, France, Japan)	Convergence

Source: Loungani 2003

whose combined population totals only around 2 per cent of the global population. Clearly, economic growth rates remain very unevenly distributed. The share of global output over the decade 1995–2005 did not improve for most developing regions, with the notable exception of East Asia and the Pacific (see figure 13.5), which increased its share by some 6 per cent in the period.

The economic expansion in East Asia in particular has not been without its costs. These have included the sometimes violent repression of labour and civil rights, terrible factory conditions, the exploitation of an increasingly female workforce, the exploitation of immigrant workers from impoverished neighbouring countries and widespread environmental degradation. Nonetheless, thanks to the sacrifices of past generations of workers, large numbers of people in these countries are now prospering.

How do social scientists account for the rapid economic growth in the East Asian NICs? The answer to this question may hold some crucial lessons for those low-income countries elsewhere that hope to follow in the steps of the NICs. Although the NICs' success is partly due to historically unique

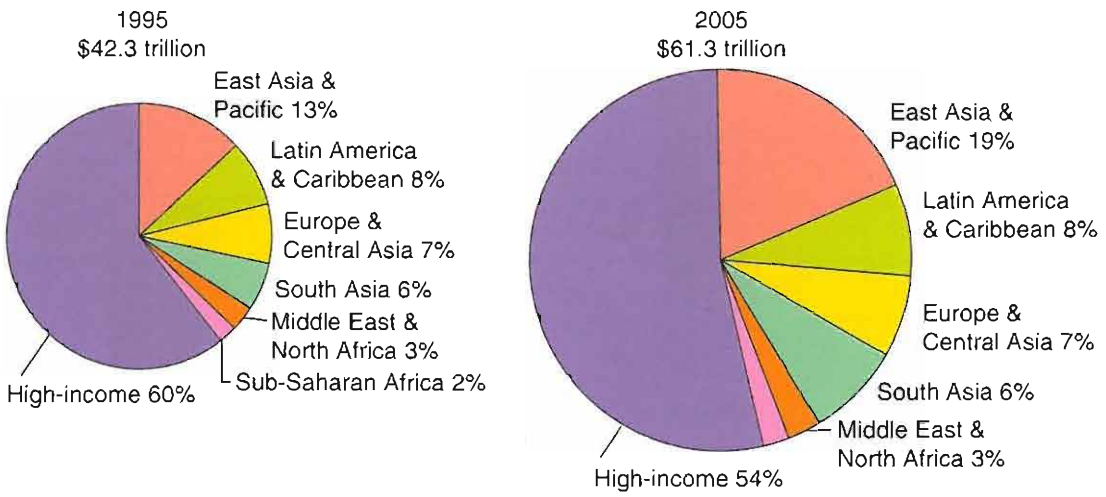


Figure 13.5 Share of global output by region, 1995 and 2005

Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2007. © 2007 by World Bank. Reproduced with permission of World Bank in the format Textbook via Copyright Clearance Center.

factors, it is also the result of factors that could lead to a rethinking about the causes of global inequality. To understand the rapid development of this region, we need to view these countries both historically and within the context of the world economic system today.

The economic success of the East Asian NICs, particularly from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, can be attributed to a combination of factors. Some of these are historical, including those that stem from world political and economic shifts. Some are cultural. Still others have to do with the ways these countries have pursued economic growth. Some of the factors that aided their success are as follows:

1 Historically, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore were once part of colonial situations that, while imposing many hardships, also helped to pave the way for economic growth. Taiwan and Korea were tied to the Japanese Empire; Hong Kong and Singapore were former British colonies. Japan eliminated large landowners who opposed industrialization, and both Britain and Japan encouraged industrial development, constructed roads and other transportation systems, and built relatively efficient governmental bureaucracies in these particular colonies. Britain also actively developed both Hong Kong and Singapore as trading centres (Gold 1986; Cumings 1987). Elsewhere in the world – for example, in Latin America and Africa – countries that are today poor did not fare so well in their dealings with richer, more powerful nations.

2 The East Asian region benefited from a long period of world economic growth. Between the 1950s and the mid-1970s, the growing economies of Europe and the United States provided a substantial market for the clothing, footwear and electronics that were increasingly being made in East Asia, creating a 'window of opportunity' for economic development. Furthermore, periodic economic slowdowns in the United States and Europe forced businesses to cut their labour costs and spurred the relocation of factories to low-wage East Asian countries (Henderson and Appelbaum 1992). One World Bank study (1995)

From a Weberian perspective, traditions of respect and submission to authority embedded in Japanese culture can be used to explain the country's economic development.

found that between 1970 and 1990, wage increases averaged 3 per cent yearly in developing countries where economic growth was led by exports to wealthier countries, while wages failed to increase elsewhere in the developing world.

3 Economic growth in this region took off at the high point of the Cold War, when the United States and its allies, in erecting a defence against communist China, provided generous economic and military aid. Direct aid and loans fuelled investment in such new technologies as transistors, semiconductors and other electronics, contributing to the development of local industries. Military assistance frequently favoured strong (often military) governments that were willing to use repression to keep labour costs low (Mirza 1986; Cumings 1987, 1997; Castells 1992).

4 Some sociologists argue that the economic success of Japan and the East Asian NICs is due in part to their cultural traditions, in particular, their shared Confucian philosophy (Berger 1986). A century ago, Max Weber (1976 [1904–5]) argued that the Protestant belief in thrift, frugality and hard work partly explained the rise of capitalism in Western Europe. His argument has been applied to Asian economic history. Confucianism, it is argued, inculcates respect for one's elders and superiors, education, hard work and proven accomplishments as the key to advancement, as well as a willingness to sacrifice today to earn a

greater reward tomorrow. As a result of these values, the Weberian argument goes, Asian workers and managers are highly loyal to their companies, submissive to authority, hardworking and success-oriented. Workers and capitalists alike are said to be frugal. Instead of living lavishly, they are likely to reinvest their wealth in further economic growth.

This explanation has some merit, but it overlooks the fact that businesses are not always revered and respected in Asia. During the late 1950s, pitched battles occurred between workers and capitalists in Japan – as they did in South Korea in the late 1980s. Students and workers throughout the East Asian NICs have opposed business and governmental policies they felt to be unfair, often at the risk of imprisonment and sometimes even their lives (Deyo 1989; Ho 1990). Furthermore, such central Confucian cultural values as thrift appear to be on the decline in Japan and the NICs, as young people – raised in the booming prosperity of recent years – increasingly value conspicuous consumption over austerity and investment.

5 Many of the East Asian governments followed strong policies that favoured economic growth. Their governments played active roles in keeping labour costs low, encouraged economic development through tax breaks and other economic policies and offered free public education. We shall discuss the role of East Asian government policies later in this chapter.

Whether the growth of these economies will continue is unclear. In 1997–8, a combination of poor investment decisions, corruption and world economic conditions brought these countries' economic expansion to an abrupt halt. Their stock markets collapsed, their currencies fell and the entire global economy was threatened. The experience of Hong Kong was typical: after 37 years of continuous growth, the economy stalled and its stock market – the Hang Seng Index – lost more than half its value. It remains to be seen whether the 'Asian meltdown', as the newspapers called it in early 1998, will have a long-term effect on the region or is merely a blip in its recent growth. Once their current economic problems are solved, many economists argue, the newly industrializing Asian economies will resume their growth, although perhaps not at the meteoric rates of the past. For example, by 2004 economists noted that Hong Kong's economy was again growing and the property market was rising.

Theories of development

What causes global inequality and how can it be overcome? *Can* it ever be overcome? In this section, we shall examine different types of theory that have been advanced over the years to explain development: market-oriented theories, dependency and world systems theories and state-centred theories. These theories have strengths and weaknesses. One shortcoming of all of them is that they frequently give short shrift to the role of women in economic development. By putting them together, however, we should be able to answer a key question facing the 85 per cent of the world's population living outside high-income countries: how can they move up in the world economy?

Market-oriented theories

The most influential theories of global inequality advanced by British and American economists and sociologists 40 years ago were **market-oriented theories**. These assume that the best possible economic consequences will result if individuals are free – uninhibited by any form of governmental constraint – to make their own economic decisions. Unrestricted capitalism, if it is allowed to develop fully, is said to be the avenue to economic growth. Government bureaucracy should not dictate which goods to produce, what prices to charge or how much workers

Classic Studies 13.1 Walt Rostow and the stages of economic growth

The research problem

Why have some countries and regions experienced rapid economic development, while others continue to struggle? Is the problem of underdevelopment essentially an internal one (rooted within particular countries), or is it the consequence of external forces? What can we learn about the process of development from the already developed societies? The answers given by Walt Rostow (1916–2003), an economic adviser to former US President John F. Kennedy who became an influential economic theorist, helped to shape US foreign policy towards Latin America during the 1960s.

Rostow's explanation

Rostow's explanation is a market-oriented approach, which came to be described as modernization theory. **Modernization theory** says that low-income societies *can* develop economically, but only if they give up their traditional ways and adopt modern economic institutions, technologies and cultural values, which emphasize savings and productive investment. According to Rostow (1961), the traditional cultural values and social institutions of low-income countries impede their economic effectiveness. For example, he argued that many people in low-income countries lack a strong work ethic; they would rather consume today than invest for the future. Large families are also seen as partly responsible for 'economic backwardness', since a breadwinner with many mouths to feed can hardly be expected to save money for investment purposes.

But for Rostow and other modernization theorists, the problems in low-income countries run much deeper. The *cultures* of such countries tend to support 'fatalism' – a value system that views hardship and suffering as an unavoidable part of normal life. Acceptance of one's lot in life thus discourages people from working hard and being thrifty in order to overcome their fate. On this view, then, a country's economic underdevelopment is due largely to the cultural failings of the people themselves. Such failings are reinforced by government policies that set wages and control prices, generally interfering in the operation of the economy. So how can low-income countries break out of their poverty? Rostow saw economic growth as moving through several stages, which he likened to the journey of an aeroplane (see figure 13.6):

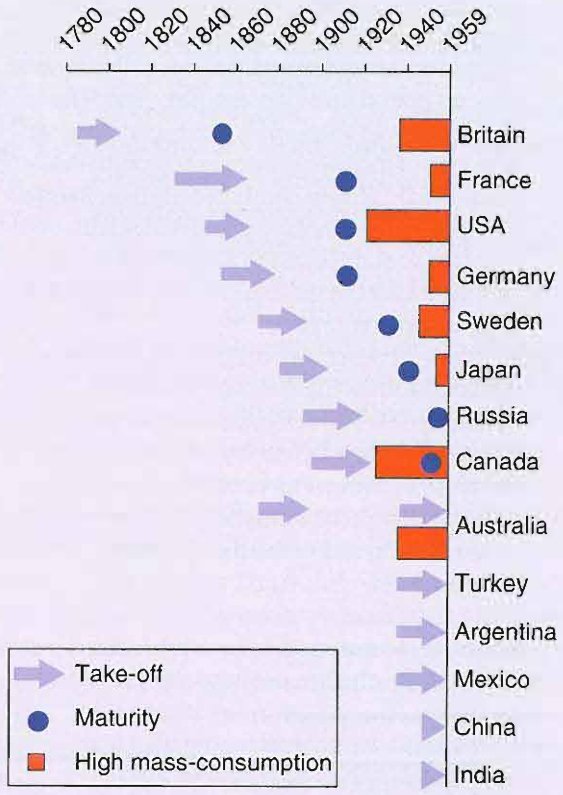


Figure 13.6 Rostow's stages of economic growth for selected countries, 1750–1959

Source: www.agocg.ac.uk/reports/visual/casestud/southall/trajecto.htm

1 *The traditional stage.* This is the stage just described, characterized by low rates of savings, the (supposed) lack of a strong work ethic and the 'fatalistic' value system. We could say that this aeroplane is stuck on the runway.
2 *Take-off to economic growth.* The traditional stage, *can* give way to a second one: economic take-off. This occurs when poor countries begin to jettison their traditional values and institutions, and people start to save and invest money for the future. The role

of wealthy countries is to facilitate and support this take-off. They can do this by financing birth control programmes or providing low-cost loans for electrification, road and airport construction, and starting new industries.

3 *Drive to technological maturity*. According to Rostow, with the help of money and advice from high-income countries, the aeroplane of economic growth would taxi down the runway, pick up speed and become airborne. The country would then approach technological maturity. In the aeronautical metaphor, the plane would slowly climb to cruising altitude, improving its technology, reinvesting its recently acquired wealth in new industries and adopting the institutions and values of the high-income countries.

4 *High mass consumption*. Finally, the country would reach the phase of high mass consumption. Now people are able to enjoy the fruits of their labour by achieving a high standard of living. The aeroplane (country) cruises along on automatic pilot, having entered the ranks of the high-income countries.

Rostow's ideas remain influential. Indeed, neoliberalism, which is perhaps the prevailing view among economists today, is rooted in Rostow's ideas. Neoliberals argue that free-market forces, achieved by minimizing governmental restrictions on business, provide the only route to economic growth, holding that global free trade will enable all the countries of the world to prosper. Eliminating governmental regulation is seen as necessary for economic growth to occur. Neoliberal economists therefore call for an end to restrictions on trade and often challenge minimum wage and other labour laws, as well as environmental restrictions on business.

Critical points

Supporters of modernization theory point to the success of the newly industrializing economies of East Asia as proof that development really is open to all. However, it can be objected that (as we saw above) the reasons for this success is partly accidental, involving Cold War political expediency and the historical legacy of colonialism. Such a conjunction of conditions is unlikely to apply to other low-income countries in the post-Cold War world. Indeed, even in the twenty-first century, many low-income countries, in spite of external assistance, have not passed through Rostow's stages and remain very far from becoming economically developed. A further criticism is that Rostow saw high-income countries playing a key role in helping low-income ones to grow. But this fails to take proper account of the long-term consequences of colonialism, which benefited the militarily powerful European societies at the expense of those in Asia and Latin America, thus dealing the latter's economic development a devastating early blow. Finally, by pointing to 'fatalistic' cultural values as a causal factor in underdevelopment, Rostow can be seen as ethnocentric, holding up Western values, ideals and models of 'progress' as superior. As chapter 5, 'The Environment', shows, the Western pursuit of untrammelled economic growth has, perhaps irrevocably, damaged the global natural environment, leading some to question whether this kind of 'progress' can be sustainable over the long term.

Contemporary significance

Rostow's theory of 'evolutionary' stages towards self-sustaining economic growth has suffered in the light of continued global poverty, hunger and underdevelopment, leading many to abandon it altogether. Certainly any notion of *inevitable* progress through the Rostovian stages finds little support almost half a century later as his 'non-communist manifesto' has probably attracted as much opposition and criticism as Marx and Engels's (1848) original communist version. But as we have already seen in this chapter, recent *global* indicators do present a more positive picture of an improving situation for many, though by no means all, populations in the low- and middle-income countries of the world. This may show that economic development is not exclusive to the high-income societies and that, as Rostow argued, the process of modernization remains a possibility for all in an era of rapid globalization and the intensification of international trade.

should be paid. According to market-oriented theorists, governmental direction of the economies of low-income countries results in blockages to economic development. In this view, local governments should get out of the way of development (Rostow 1961; Warren 1980; Ranis 1996).

THINKING CRITICALLY

Karl Marx said that the industrialized countries showed an image of their own future to the less developed countries. What are the main differences between Marx's version of modernization theory and that of Walt Rostow? Whose version, if any, is best supported by the historical evidence to date?

Dependency and world systems theories

During the 1960s, a number of theorists questioned market-oriented theories of global inequality such as modernization theory. Many of these critics were sociologists and economists from the low-income countries of Latin America and Africa, who drew on Marxist ideas to reject the idea that their countries' economic underdevelopment was due to their own cultural or institutional faults. Instead, they build on the theories of Karl Marx, who argued that world capitalism would create a class of countries manipulated by more powerful countries, just as capitalism within countries leads to the exploitation of workers. The dependency theorists, as they are called, argue that the poverty of low-income countries stems from their exploitation by wealthy countries and the multinational corporations that are based in wealthy countries. In their view, global capitalism locked their countries into a downward spiral of exploitation and poverty.

According to dependency theories, this exploitation began with colonialism, a political-economic system under which powerful countries established, for their own profit, rule over weaker peoples or countries. Powerful nations have colonized other countries usually to procure the raw materials needed for their factories and to control markets for the products manufactured in those factories. Under colonial rule, for example, the petroleum, copper, iron and food products required by industrial economies are extracted from low-income countries by businesses based in high-income countries. Although colonialism typically involved European countries establishing colonies in North and South America, Africa and Asia, some Asian countries (such as Japan) had colonies as well.

Even though colonialism ended throughout most of the world after the Second World War, the exploitation did not: transnational corporations continued to reap enormous profits from their branches in low-income countries. According to dependency theory, these global companies, often with the support of the powerful banks and governments of rich countries, established factories in poor countries, using cheap labour and raw materials to maximize production costs without governmental interference. In turn, the low prices set for labour and raw materials prevented poor countries from accumulating the profit necessary to industrialize themselves. Local businesses that might compete with foreign corporations were prevented from doing so. In this view, poor countries are forced to borrow from rich countries, thus increasing their economic dependency.

Low-income countries are thus seen not as underdeveloped, but rather as *misdeveloped* (Frank 1966; Emmanuel 1972). With the exception of a handful of local politicians and businesspeople who serve the interests of the foreign corporations, people fall into poverty. Peasants are forced to choose between starvation and working at near-starvation wages on foreign-controlled plantations and in foreign-controlled mines and factories. Since dependency theorists argue that such exploitation has kept their

Transnational corporations have often been accused of exploiting the poorest and reaping the financial rewards. Some argue this means that dependency culture, whereby the economic growth of poorer nations is held back by developed countries, did not die with colonialism.

countries from achieving economic growth, they typically call for revolutionary changes that would push foreign corporations out of their countries altogether (Frank 1969).

While market-oriented theorists usually ignore political and military power, dependency theorists regard the exercise of power as central to enforcing unequal economic relationships. According to this theory, whenever local leaders question such unequal arrangements, their voices are quickly suppressed. Unionization is usually outlawed, and labour organizers are jailed and sometimes killed. When people elect a government opposing these policies, that government is likely to be overthrown by the country's military, often backed by the armed forces of the industrialized countries themselves. Dependency theorists point to many examples: the role of the CIA in overthrowing the Marxist governments of Guatemala in 1954 and Chile in 1973 and in undermining support for the leftist government in Nicaragua in the 1980s. In the view of dependency theory, global economic inequality is thus backed up by military force: economic elites in poor countries, backed by their counterparts in wealthy ones, use police and military power to keep the local population under control.

Brazilian sociologist, Enrique Fernando Cardoso, once a prominent dependency theorist, argued more than 25 years ago that some degree of dependent development was nonetheless possible – that under certain circumstances, poor countries can still develop economically, although only in

ways shaped by their reliance on the wealthier countries (Cardoso and Faletto 1979). In particular, the governments of these countries could play a key role in steering a course between dependency and development (Evans 1979). As President of Brazil from 1995 to 2003, Cardoso changed his thinking, calling for greater integration of Brazil into the global economy.

During the last quarter of a century, sociologists have increasingly seen the world as a single (although often conflict-ridden) economic system. Although dependency theories hold that individual countries are economically tied to one another, **world-systems theory**, which is strongly influenced by dependency theory, argues that the world capitalist economic system is not merely a collection of independent countries engaged in diplomatic and economic relations with one another, but must instead be understood as a single unit. The world-systems approach is most closely identified with the work of Immanuel Wallerstein and his colleagues (Wallerstein 1974, 1990 and elsewhere).

» In chapter 4, 'Globalization and the Changing World', see 'Classic Studies 4.1' for a discussion of Wallerstein's pioneering role in world-systems theory.

Wallerstein showed that capitalism has long existed as a global economic system, beginning with the extension of markets and trade in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The world system is seen as comprising four overlapping elements (Chase-Dunn 1989):

- a world market for goods and labour;
- the division of the population into different economic classes, particularly capitalists and workers;

- an international system of formal and informal political relations among the most powerful countries, whose competition with one another helps shape the world economy; and
- the carving up of the world into three unequal economic zones, with the wealthier zones exploiting the poorer ones.

World-systems theorists term these three economic zones 'core', 'periphery' and 'semi-periphery'. All countries in the world system are said to fall into one of the three categories. Core countries are the most advanced industrial countries, taking the lion's share of profits in the world economic system. These include Japan, the United States and the countries of Western Europe. Peripheral countries comprise low-income, largely agricultural countries that are often manipulated by core countries for their own economic advantage. Examples of peripheral countries are found throughout Africa and to a lesser extent in Latin America and Asia. Natural resources, such as agricultural products, minerals and other raw materials, flow from periphery to core – as do the profits. The core, in turn, sells finished goods to the periphery, also at a profit. World-systems theorists argue that core countries have made themselves wealthy with this unequal trade, while at the same time limiting the economic development of peripheral countries. Finally, the semi-peripheral countries occupy an intermediate position: these are semi-industrialized, middle-income countries that extract profits from the more peripheral countries and in turn yield profits to the core countries. Examples of semi-peripheral countries include Mexico in North America; Brazil, Argentina and Chile in South America; and the newly industrializing economies of East Asia. The semi-periphery, though to some degree controlled by the core, is thus also able to exploit the periphery. Moreover, the greater economic success of the semi-periphery holds out to the periphery the promise of similar development.

Although the world system tends to change very slowly, once-powerful countries eventually lose their economic power and others then take their place. For example, some five centuries ago the Italian city-states of Venice and Genoa dominated the world capitalist economy. First the Dutch, then the British and currently the United States superseded them. Today, in the view of some world-systems theorists, American dominance is giving way to a more 'multipolar' world where economic power will be shared between the United States, Europe and Asia (Arrighi 1994).

State-centred theories

Some of the most recent explanations of successful economic development emphasize the role of state policy in promoting growth. Differing sharply from market-oriented theories, state-centred theories argue that appropriate government policies do not interfere with economic development but rather can play a key role in bringing it about. A large body of research now suggests that in some regions of the world, such as East Asia, successful economic development has been state-led. Even the World Bank, long a strong proponent of free-market theories of development, has changed its thinking about the role of the state. In its 1997 report *The State in a Changing World*, the World Bank concluded that without an effective state, 'sustainable development, both economic and social, is impossible'.

Strong governments contributed in various ways to economic growth in the East Asian NICs during the 1980s and 1990s (Appelbaum and Henderson 1992; Amsden et al. 1994; World Bank 1997):

1 *East Asian governments have sometimes aggressively acted to ensure political stability, while keeping labour costs low.* This has been accomplished by acts of repression, such as outlawing trade unions, banning strikes, jailing labour leaders and, in general, silencing the voices of workers. The governments of

Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore in particular have engaged in such practices.

2 *East Asian governments have frequently sought to steer economic development in desired directions.* For example, state agencies have often provided cheap loans and tax breaks to businesses that invest in industries favoured by the government. Sometimes this strategy has backfired, resulting in bad loans held by the government (one of the causes of the region's economic problems during the late 1990s). Some governments have prevented businesses from investing their profits in other countries, forcing them to invest in economic growth at home. Sometimes governments have owned and therefore controlled key industries. For example, the Japanese government has owned railways, the steel industry and banks; the South Korean government has owned banks; and the government of Singapore has owned airlines and the armaments and ship-repair industries.

3 *East Asian governments have often been heavily involved in social programmes such as low-cost housing and universal education.* The world's largest public housing systems (outside socialist or formerly socialist countries) have been in Hong Kong and Singapore, where government subsidies keep rents extremely low. As a result, workers do not require high wages to pay for their housing, so they can compete more easily with American and European workers in the emerging global labour market. In Singapore, which has an extremely strong central government, well-funded public education and training help to provide workers with the skills they need to compete effectively in the emerging global labour market. The Singaporean government also requires businesses and individual citizen alike to save a large percentage of their income for investment in future growth.

Evaluating theories of development

Each type of theory discussed above has both strengths and weaknesses. But together, they enable us to understand better the causes and cures for global inequality.

Market-oriented theories recommend the adoption of modern capitalist institutions to promote economic development, as the recent example of East Asia attests. They further argue that countries can develop economically only if they open their borders to trade, and they can cite evidence in support of this argument. But market-oriented theories also fail to take into account the various economic ties between poor countries and wealthy ones – ties that can impede economic growth under some conditions and enhance it under others. They tend to blame low-income countries themselves for their poverty rather than looking to the influence of outside factors, such as the business operations of more powerful nations. Market-oriented theories also ignore the ways government can work with the private sector to spur economic development. Finally, they fail to explain why some countries manage to take off economically while others remain grounded in poverty and underdevelopment.

Dependency theories address the market-oriented theories' neglect in considering poor countries' ties with wealthy countries by focusing on how wealthy nations have economically exploited poor ones. However, although dependency theories help to account for much of the economic backwardness in Latin America and Africa, they are unable to explain the occasional success story among such low-income countries as Brazil, Argentina and Mexico or the rapidly expanding economies of East Asia. In fact, some countries, once in the low-income category, have risen economically even in the presence of multinational corporations.

Even some former colonies, such as Hong Kong and Singapore, both once dependent on Great Britain, count among the success stories. World-systems theory sought to overcome the shortcomings of dependency theories by analysing the world economy as a whole. Rather than beginning with individual countries, world-systems theorists look at the complex global web of political and economic relationships that influence development and inequality in poor and rich nations alike.

State-centred theories stress the governmental role in fostering economic growth. They thus offer a useful alternative to both the prevailing market-oriented theories, with their emphasis on states as economic hindrances, and dependency theories, which view states as allies of global business elites in exploiting poor countries. When combined with the other theories – particularly world-systems theory – state-centred theories can explain the radical changes now transforming the world economy.

International organizations and global inequality

There are a number of international organizations whose work impacts on global poverty. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank – together known as the Bretton Woods Institutions (named after the place they were set up: Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA) – were established during the Second World War. They are based in Washington, DC, and their membership is made up of governments from across the world. The IMF is an organization of 184 countries. The main work of the IMF is in maintaining stability in the international financial system – most noticeably when it is called in to sort out a large debt crisis, for example as happened in Argentina from 2001 to 2003. It also works with governments across the world to improve their economic management, but it is precisely that advice which is often criticized as causing some of the problems that poorer countries face (Stiglitz 2002).

The IMF's Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) are essentially sets of conditions aimed at helping countries to balance their economies. These conditions are imposed on governments, primarily in the developing world, in return for new loans or to enable them to make repayments on older loans from commercial banks or from the World Bank. However, although SAPs were meant to target the needs of the specific country, in practice they have focused on the same 'solutions', including privatization programmes, reductions in social welfare spending and free market reforms. Critics argue that in too many cases, structural adjustment has had negative rather than positive effects on developing countries. Some have even suggested leaving the IMF and setting up an alternative bank, specifically for the developing countries of the Southern hemisphere (see 'Global Society 13.3'). Since 1999, the IMF and World Bank have tried to counter such criticisms by requiring loan recipients to produce Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) outlining country-wide plans to reduce poverty. They hope that this will connect the IMF and World Bank's financial assistance to the Millennium Development Goal of halving 1990 poverty levels by 2015.

The World Bank Group's mission is to fight poverty and improve the living standards of people in the developing world. It is a development bank, which provides loans, policy advice, technical assistance and knowledge-sharing services to low- and middle-income countries to reduce poverty. The World Bank is made up of a number of accounts providing relatively cheap finance – mainly loans – for its member governments. Recently, the Bank has also started giving grants to governments for specific programmes. It also provides technical expertise alongside its loans and grants. Both the World Bank and the IMF have been accused of promoting market-driven

Global Society 13.3 Why South America wants a new bank

Leaders of several South American nations have signed a founding document to create a new body, the Bank of the South, as an alternative to multilateral credit organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

The idea was first put forward by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in December 2006 as part of his battle against the influence of the US and the international financial institutions, which he has described as 'tools of Washington'. Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela have all joined the initiative. Chile and Peru decided to remain on the sidelines, while Colombia, which had expressed interest, has put its decision on hold following recent disagreements between Colombian President Alvaro Uribe and Mr Chavez.

According to Venezuelan finance minister Rodrigo Cabezas, the creation of a new organization is 'a demonstration that times have changed'. The Bank of the South, known as Banco del Sur in Spanish and Banco do Sul in Portuguese, he explains, will be funded and run by South American countries themselves.

Analysts believe the Bank of the South initiative reflects the increased unpopularity of the IMF and the World Bank among many South American countries. Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, also sees it as one of many signs of a new independence from institutions such as the IMF and its 'unwanted austerity measures'. 'At the beginning of this decade, scepticism in Latin America was sealed when Argentina disregarded IMF advice by defaulting on its debt and then experienced robust economic recovery', Mr Weisbrot said.

Luis Maldonado, a presidential representative to the government body that helps regulate Ecuador's banking sector, argues that 'Latin America has been impoverished and harassed long enough that we have no other choice [but to] start the Bank of the South'. Venezuela has gone so far as to threaten to leave the IMF – although it has not set any date for such a move. 'If the IMF does not abandon its record of implementing tough policies with regards to emerging countries and being totally benevolent to developed countries, as it was in the last US mortgage crisis, it will struggle to regain its credibility', said Mr Cabezas. Pulling out of the IMF would amount to a technical default on Venezuela's bonds and would raise the cost of future borrowing in global markets.

Other members of the Bank of the South share many of Venezuela's concerns about the IMF, but have made clear that they do not intend to leave it or other international institutions. Gustavo Guzman, Bolivia's ambassador to Washington, explained to the BBC that the bank would provide a much-needed 'alternative source' of funds. He points out that it has been difficult for Bolivia to get loans from the IMF and international markets since the government's recent moves to renationalise its oil and natural gas industry.

Colombian finance minister Oscar Ivan Zuluaga said at a meeting in New York that the Banco del Sur was seen as an effort to integrate the countries of South America and 'nothing more than that'.

Mixed reactions

The Bank of the South proposition has been greeted with caution by most analysts, although they agree that having more options for countries seeking funding is not a bad idea. Michael Shifter, Latin American expert at the Washington-based Inter-American Dialogue, said that while it was 'tempting to dismiss the Banco del Sur because of the political agenda behind it', he would advise sceptics to wait and see. 'Chavez's political agenda is undeniable, but so is the money he has at his disposal right now', he said. 'Over the longer run, the initiative will have real problems because of politicisation, but in the meantime it would be a mistake to underestimate its possibilities.'

Mr Shifter also feels the timing is fortunate. 'Banco del Sur is taking off precisely when traditional multilateral institutions like the Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank are struggling to redefine their missions and adapt to new circumstances', he said. 'Everything is in flux, so anything can happen.'

Source: Adapted from Lourdes Heredia, BBC News, 10 December 2007 © bbc.co.uk/news

reforms to the detriment of poor countries and people, and both have made an effort in recent years to concentrate more on the elimination of poverty.

One example of the new approach taken by the World Bank and IMF in recent years has been an initiative known as HIPC – Heavily Indebted Poor Countries – to grant debt relief to many of the poorest countries (see 'Using your sociological imagination 13.1' above). Some countries had taken on so many loans over a number of decades, which had attracted so much interest, that they could not afford to pay them back. If they were to pay them back in full, it would probably have wiped out the resources that the countries' governments had available for education, health and other basic services. The HIPC initiative was launched in 1996 to give those countries sufficient relief – funded by governments of rich countries – that they could deal with their debt burden as well as tackle poverty. A key element of the initiative was the requirement for all countries involved to produce and implement a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. By 2007, 29 countries had taken part in the HIPC process.

The United Nations, perhaps the best known of the international organizations, includes a series of funds and programmes, which work across the world to tackle the causes and effects of poverty. Examples include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Children's Fund, both based in New York, the World Food Programme in Rome and the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva. All have country offices across the world. Each aims to tackle different aspects of poverty. UNICEF's work is focused on girls' education, protection of children and immunization, as well as provision of clean water and sanitation. UNDP works with governments in poor countries to improve governance, including the rule of law, justice, state provision of basic services and tackling corruption. Add perhaps another ten UN organizations in any one country and there is likely to be a complicated mix of organizations covering a number of interrelated issues. One key concern is the spread of HIV and its effects on economic, health, institutional capacity, family and social spheres. At least four UN organizations are therefore involved in tackling this problem. UN organizations generally suffer from low levels of core funding compared to their Bretton Woods cousins. Some, like the WHO, are also involved in setting international standards and undertaking research.

One member of the UN family that has regularly been in the news headlines in recent years is the World Trade Organization (WTO). Based in Geneva, it regulates international trade through negotiations between its 149 member governments and provides a mechanism for resolving trade disputes. The WTO has been the focus for a wave of anti-globalization and anti-capitalist demonstrations since its creation in 1995, replacing the previous General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which had operated since 1948. The protests have involved a varied range of political activists and social movements which view the WTO, along with the World Bank and the IMF, as managing the world economy in the interests of the already wealthy and powerful countries against the interests of the global poor.

» **Chapter 22, 'Politics, Government and Social Movements', discusses the anti-globalization movement in more detail.**

The round of WTO negotiations launched in Doha in Qatar in 2001 is referred to by some as a 'development round'. There is a widespread view that the current international trading system is not fair to poorer countries and is constraining their economic development. A prime aim of these negotiations is to rectify this through, for example, improved access for these countries' goods and services to others' markets. However, the lack of real progress in negotiations led to the Doha Round being suspended on 27 July 2006. In particular, no

agreement could be reached on reducing the huge subsidies which farmers in the USA, Europe and Japan receive, or the restrictive import tariffs imposed by emerging economies including China, Brazil and India. Without some movement on these two issues, developing countries continue to be disadvantaged and denied access to 'fair trade' in international markets (see 'Global Society 13.4').

THINKING CRITICALLY

Look at the evidence presented in 'Global society 13.4' on world trade. How do the four theoretical perspectives we introduced above fare in the light of this evidence? For instance, does it illustrate Rostow's *stages of economic growth*? Can *dependency theory* explain the persistence of such unequal trading relations? Is there evidence here of the threefold typology outlined in Wallerstein's economic *world-system theory*? What explanatory power do *state-centred theories* have in relation to international trade and its obvious inequities? What would the WTO need to do in order to give poorer, developing countries more opportunities to trade across the world and improve their share of world trade? How likely do you think it is that the WTO will achieve this?

All the organizations described above are said to be multilateral, as they involve many, indeed the majority of, countries. So-called bilateral donors are also involved in the reduction of global poverty. In the UK, the government's Department for International Development (DfID), works with specific poor countries to meet the Millennium Development Goals. These goals were set out by the international community in the late 1990s. They include a series of targets, of which two of the most important are halving, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than US$1 a day and ensuring that, by 2015, all children will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Several of these targets are unlikely to be met. In the UK, the work of DfID includes the provision of grants and expertise in the country, as well as policy and advocacy at the international level to remove some of the structural barriers to the reduction of poverty (for example debt, trade rules and exploitation of resources).

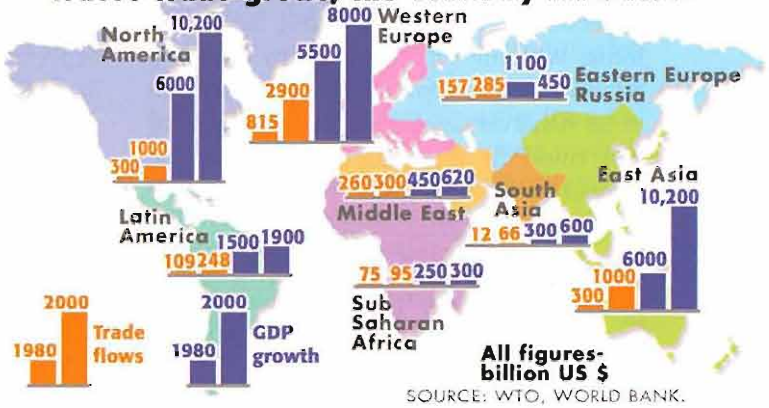
Global economic inequality in a changing world

Today the social and economic forces leading to a single global capitalist economy appear to be irresistible. The principal challenge to this outcome – socialism/communism – ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The largest remaining socialist country in the world today, the People's Republic of China, is rapidly adopting many capitalist economic institutions and is the fastest-growing economy in the world. It is too soon to tell how far the future leaders of China will move down the capitalist road. Will they eventually adopt a complete market-oriented economy or some combination of state controls and capitalist institutions? Most China experts agree on one thing: when China, with its 1.3 billion people, fully enters the global capitalist system, its impact will be felt around the world. China has an enormous workforce, much of which is well trained and educated and now receives extremely low wages – sometimes less than one-twentieth of what workers earn in comparable jobs in the developed countries. Such a workforce will be extremely competitive in a global economy and will force wages down from Los Angeles to London.

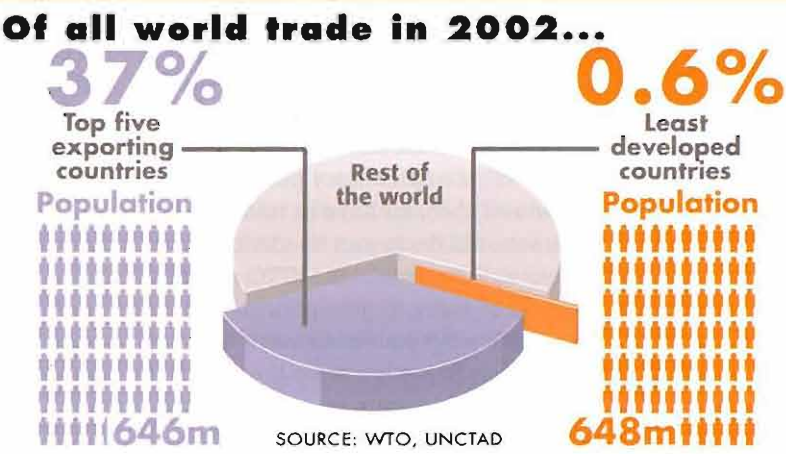
What does rapid globalization mean for the future of global inequality? No sociologist knows for certain, but many possible scenarios exist. In one, our world might be dominated by large, global corporations with workers competing against each other for a living wage. Such a scenario might

Global Society 13.4 World trade, globalization and the persistence of global inequality, 1950–2002

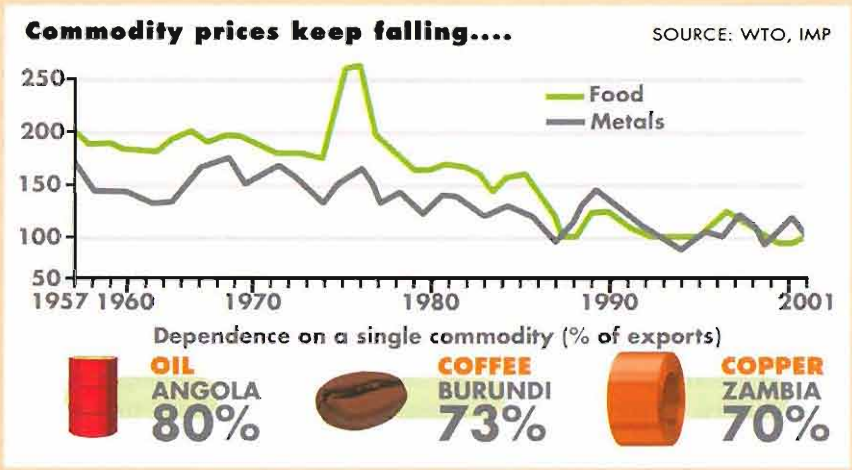
The growth in world trade has been unevenly spread. Some developing countries – often in Asia – have increased growth by producing more manufactured goods. But others – often in Africa – have fallen further behind.



The world's poorest countries – the 49 least developed countries – have not shared in the growth of world trade. The 646 million people in the top exporting countries – the US, Germany, Japan, France and UK – have 100 times more trade than their poor counterparts.



Huge agricultural subsidies by Western countries to their small farm populations far outweigh the aid given to developing countries. The rich countries have repeatedly pledged to reduce the size of their farm supports. So far the amount of such subsidies has changed little in 20 years, while the amount of aid has declined.



Many poor countries depend on a single primary export like wood, coffee, copper or cotton. But prices for such commodities have been declining. Prices of manufactured goods have, in contrast, risen in relative terms.

Source: BBC News Online, 15 August 2007, 'Trade and the poor: will globalization save or destroy the world?': http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/business/2004/world_trade/default.stm#

China is the fastest-growing economy in the world. Despite its communist foundations, the gap between rich and poor is large and arguably widening.

predict falling wages for large numbers of people in today's high-income countries and rising wages for more in low-income countries. There might be a general levelling out of average income around the world, although at a level much lower than that currently enjoyed in the industrialized nations. In this scenario, the polarization between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' within countries would grow, as the whole world would be increasingly divided into those who benefit from the global economy and those who do not. Such a polarization could fuel conflict between ethnic groups, and even nations, as those suffering from economic globalization would blame others for their plight (Hirst and Thompson 1992; Wagar 1992).

On the other hand, a global economy could mean greater opportunity for everyone, as the benefits of modern technology stimulate worldwide economic growth. According to this more optimistic scenario, the more successful East Asian NICs, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore, are a sign of things to come. Other NICs such as Malaysia and Thailand will soon follow, along with China, Indonesia, Vietnam and other Asian countries. India, the world's second most populous country, already boasts a middle class of some 200 million people, about a quarter of its total population (although roughly the same number live in poverty) (Kulkarni 1993).

A countervailing trend, however, is the technology gap that divides rich and poor countries, which today appears to be widening, making it even more difficult for poor countries to catch up. The global technology gap is a result of the disparity in wealth between nations, but it also reinforces those disparities, widening the gap between rich and poor countries. Poor countries cannot easily afford modern technology – yet, in the absence of it, they face major barriers in overcoming poverty. They are caught in a vicious downward spiral from which it is proving difficult to escape.

Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University in New York, and a prominent adviser to many East European and developing countries, claims that the world is divided into three classes: technology innovators, technology adopters and the technologically disconnected (Sachs 2000).

Technology innovators are those regions that provide nearly all of the world's technological inventions; they account for no more than 15 per cent of the world's population. Technology adopters are those regions that are able to adopt technologies invented elsewhere, applying them to production and consumption; they account for 50 per cent of the world's population. Finally, the technologically disconnected are those regions that neither innovate nor adopt technologies developed elsewhere; they account for 35 per cent of the world's population. Note that Sachs speaks of regions rather than countries. In today's increasingly borderless world, technology use does not always respect national frontiers. For example, Sachs notes that technologically disconnected regions include 'southern Mexico and pockets of tropical Central America; the Andean countries; most of tropical Brazil; tropical sub-Saharan Africa; most of the former Soviet Union aside from the areas nearest to European and Asian markets; landlocked parts of Asia such as the Ganges valley states of India; landlocked Laos and Cambodia; and the deep-interior states of China' (Sachs 2000). These are impoverished regions that lack access to markets or major ocean trading routes. They are caught in what Sachs terms a 'poverty trap', plagued by 'tropical infectious disease, low agricultural productivity and environmental degradation – all requiring technological solutions beyond their means' (ibid.).

Innovation requires a critical mass of ideas and technology to become self-sustaining. 'Silicon Valley', near San Francisco in the United States, provides one example of how technological innovation tends to be concentrated in regions rich in

universities and high-tech firms. Silicon Valley grew up around Stanford University and other educational and research institutions located south of San Francisco. Poor countries are ill-equipped to develop such high-tech regions. Sachs calculates that 48 tropical or partly tropical countries, whose combined population totalled 750 million, accounted for only 47 of the 51,000 patents granted in the USA to foreign inventors in 1997. Most poor countries lack even a science adviser to their government. Moreover, these countries are too poor to import computers, mobile phones, fax machines, computerized factory machinery or other kinds of high technology. Nor can they afford to license technology from the foreign companies that hold the patents.

What can be done to overcome the technological abyss that divides rich and poor countries? Sachs calls on wealthy, high-technology countries to provide much greater financial and technical assistance to poor countries than they now do. For example, lethal infectious diseases such as malaria, measles and diarrhoea claim million of lives each year in poor countries. The modern medical technology necessary to eradicate these illnesses would cost only US$10 billion a year – less than US$15 from every person who lives in a high-income country, if the cost were shared equally.

Sachs urges the governments of wealthy countries, along with international lending institutions, to provide loans and grants for scientific and technological development. He notes that very little money is available to support research and development in poor countries. The World Bank, a major source of funding for development projects in poor countries, spends only US$60 million a year supporting tropical, agricultural or health research and development. By way of comparison, Merck, the giant pharmaceutical corporation, spends 35 times that much (US$2.1 billion) for research and development for its own products. Even universities in wealthy nations could play a role, establishing overseas research and training institutes that would foster collaborative research projects. From computers and the Internet to biotechnology, the 'wealth of nations' increasingly depends on modern information technology. As long as major regions of the world remain technologically disconnected, it seems unlikely that global poverty will be eradicated.

In the most optimistic view, the republics of the former Soviet Union, as well as the formerly socialist countries of Eastern Europe, will eventually advance into the ranks of the high-income countries. Economic growth will spread to Latin America, Africa and the rest of the world. Because capitalism requires that workers be mobile, the remaining caste societies around the world will be replaced by class-based societies. These societies will experience enhanced opportunities for upward mobility.

What is the future of global inequality? It is difficult to be entirely optimistic. Global economic growth has slowed, and many of the once promising economies of Asia now seem to be in trouble. The Russian economy, in its move from socialism to capitalism, has encountered many problems, leaving many Russians poorer than before. It remains to be seen whether the countries of the world will learn from one another and work together to create better lives for their peoples. What is certain is that the past quarter of a century has witnessed a global economic transformation of unprecedented magnitude. The effects of this transformation in the next 25 years will leave few lives on the planet untouched.

If global inequality is one of the most important problems facing people today, then a related issue is the dramatic increase in world population. Global poverty and population growth are tied together today, for it is in some of the world's poorest countries that population growth is greatest, and it is to a discussion of this phenomenon that we now turn.

World population growth and global inequality

It is estimated that the Earth's six-billionth inhabitant was born on 12 October 1999. The world's population is booming – it has more than doubled since 1960. An American expert on population studies, Paul Ehrlich, calculated in the 1960s that if the rate of population growth at that time were to continue, 900 years from now (not a long period in world history as a whole) there would be 60,000,000,000,000,000 (60 quadrillion) people on the face of the earth. There would be 100 people for every square yard of the Earth's surface, including both land and water.

The physicist, J. H. Fremlin, worked out that housing such a population would require a continuous 2,000-storey building covering the entire planet. Even in such a stupendous structure there would only be three or four yards of floor space per person (Fremlin 1964).

Such a picture, of course, is nothing more than nightmarish fiction designed to drive home how cataclysmic the consequences of continued population growth would be. The real issue is what will happen over the next 30 or 40 years. Partly because governments and other agencies heeded the warnings of Ehrlich and others, by introducing population control programmes, there are grounds for supposing that world population growth is beginning to trail off (see figure 13.7). Estimates calculated in the 1960s of the likely world population by the year 2000 turned out to be inaccurate. The World Bank estimated the world population to be just over 6 billion in 2000, compared to some earlier estimates of more than 8 billion. Nevertheless, considering that a century ago there were only 1.5 billion people in the world, this still represents growth of staggering proportions. Can this scale of human population be adequately fed and housed, or will large sections of it be condemned to a life of poverty? What would the spread of current Western lifestyles to the world's population mean for the global environment? Can the planetary ecosystem cope with the pollution and waste of global consumerism? These questions are made more urgent when we realize that the factors underlying population growth are by no means entirely predictable. The population in 40 years' time could be even higher than current forecasts suggest.

Population analysis: demography

The study of population is referred to as demography. The term was invented about a century and a half ago, at a time when nations were beginning to keep official statistics on the nature and distribution of their populations. Demography is concerned with measuring the size of populations and explaining their rise or decline. Population patterns are governed by three factors: births, deaths and migrations. Demography is customarily treated as a branch of sociology, because the factors that influence the level of births and deaths in a given group or society, as well as migrations of population, are largely social and cultural.

Demographic work tends to be statistical. All the developed nations today gather and analyse basic statistics on their populations by carrying out censuses (systematic surveys designed to find out about the whole population of a given country). Rigorous as the modes of data collection now are, even in these nations demographic statistics are not wholly accurate. In the United Kingdom, there has been a population Census every ten years since 1801. The Census aims to be as accurate as possible, but for various reasons some people might not be registered in the official population statistics – for example illegal immigrants, homeless people, transients and others who for one reason or another avoided registration. In many developing countries, particularly those with recent high rates of population growth, demographic statistics are much more unreliable.

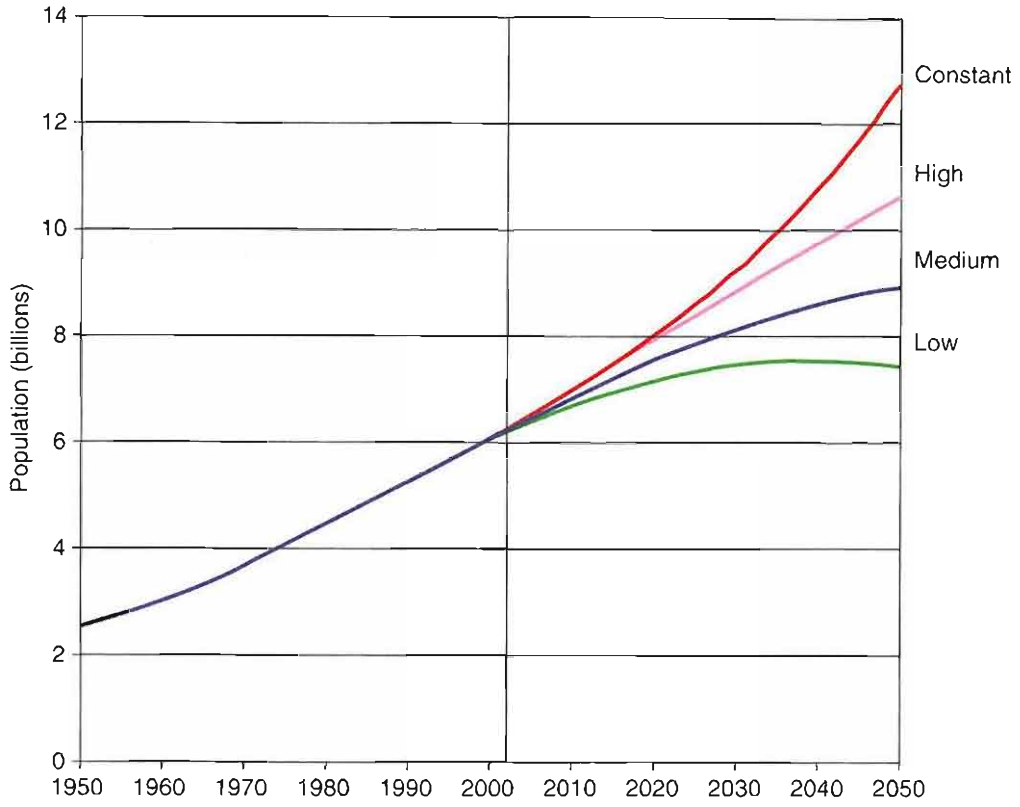


Figure 13.7 Estimated and projected population of the world by projection variant, 1950–2050

Source: UN 2003a

Dynamics of population change

Rates of population growth or decline are measured by subtracting the number of deaths per 1,000 from the number of births per 1,000 – this is usually calculated annually. Some European countries have negative growth rates – in other words, their populations are declining. Virtually all the industrialized countries have growth rates of less than 0.5 per cent. Rates of population growth were high in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but have since levelled off. Many developing countries today have rates of between 2 and 3 per cent. These may not seem very different from the rates of the industrialized countries, but in fact, the consequences are enormous.

The reason for this is that growth in population is exponential. There is an ancient Persian myth that helps to illustrate exponential growth. A courtier asked a ruler to reward him for his services by giving him twice as many grains of rice for each service than he had given him the time before, starting with a single grain on the first square of a chess board. Believing that he was onto a good thing, the king commanded grain to be brought up from his storehouse. By the 21st square, the storehouse was empty; the 40th square required ten billion grains of rice (Meadows et al. 1972). In other words, starting with one item and doubling it, doubling the result, and so on, rapidly leads to huge figures – 1:2:4:8:16:32:64:128, and so on. In seven operations, the figure has grown by 128 times. Exactly the same principle applies to population growth. We can measure this effect by means of the doubling time, the period of time it takes for the

Global Society 13.5 Demography – the key concepts

Among the basic concepts used by demographers, the most important are crude birth rates, fertility, fecundity and crude death rates. **Crude birth rates** are expressed as the number of live births per year per 1,000 of the population. They are called 'crude' rates because of their very general character. They do not, for example, tell us what proportion of a population is male or female, or what the age distribution of a population is (the relative proportions of young and old people in the population). Where statistics are collected that relate birth or death rates to such categories, demographers speak of 'specific' rather than 'crude' rates. For instance, an age-specific birth rate might specify the number of births per 1,000 women in different age groups.

If we wish to understand population patterns in any detail, the information provided by specific birth rates is normally necessary. Crude birth rates, however, are useful for making overall comparisons between different groups, societies and regions. Thus, in 2006 the crude birth rate in Australia was 12.4 (per year, per 1,000 population), in Nicaragua 24.9, in Mozambique 39.5 and, highest of all, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo it was 49.6 (UN ESA 2006). The industrialized countries tend to have low rates, while in many other parts of the world, crude birth rates are much higher (figure 13.8).

Birth rates are an expression of the fertility of women. **Fertility** refers to how many live-born children the average woman has. A fertility rate is usually calculated as the average number of births per 1,000 women of childbearing age. Fertility is distinguished from **fecundity**, which means the potential number of children women are biologically capable of bearing. It is physically possible for a normal woman to bear a child every year during the period when she is capable of conception. There are variations in fecundity according to the age at which women reach puberty and menopause, both of which differ among countries as well as among individuals. While there may be families in which a woman bears 20 or more children, fertility rates in practice are always much lower than fecundity rates, because social and cultural factors limit breeding.

Crude death rates (also called 'mortality rates') are calculated in the same way as birth rates – the number of deaths per thousand of population per year. Again, there are major variations among countries, but death rates in many societies in the developing world are falling to levels comparable to those in developed nations. The death rate in the United Kingdom in 2002 was 10 per 1,000. In India it was 9 per 1,000; in Ethiopia it was 18 per 1,000. A few countries have much higher death rates. In Sierra Leone, for example, the death rate is 30 per

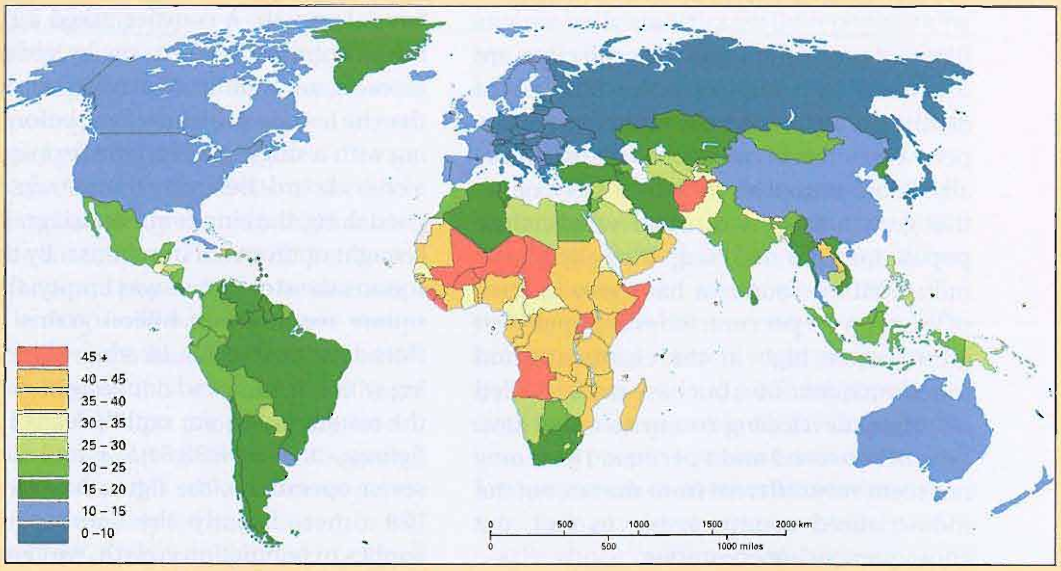


Figure 13.8 Global crude birth rates

Source: Based on *CIA Factbook* 2007

1,000. Like crude birth rates, crude death rates only provide a very general index of **mortality** (the number of deaths in a population). Specific death rates give more precise information. A particularly important specific death rate is the **infant mortality rate**: the number of babies per 1,000 births in any year who die before reaching their first birthday. One of the key factors underlying the population explosion has been reductions in infant mortality rates.

Declining rates of infant mortality are the most important influence on increasing **life expectancy** – that is, the number of years the average person can expect to live. In 2007, life expectancy at birth for women born in the UK was 81.3 years, compared with 76.23 years for men (CIA 2007). This contrasts with 49 and 45 years respectively at the turn of the twentieth century. This does not mean, however, that most people born in 1901 died when they were in their 40s. When there is a high infant mortality rate, as there is in many developing nations, the average life expectancy – which is a statistical average – is brought down. Illness, nutrition and the influence of natural disasters are other factors that influence life expectancy. Life expectancy has to be distinguished from **life span**, which is the maximum number of years that an individual could live. While life expectancy has increased in most societies in the world, life span has remained unaltered. Only a small proportion of people live to be 100 or more.

population to double. A population growth of 1 per cent will produce a doubling of numbers in 70 years. At 2 per cent growth, a population will double in 35 years, while at 3 per cent it will double in just 23 years. It took the whole of human history until 1850 for the global population to reach 1 billion. But during the next 80 years, by 1930, it had doubled to 2 billion. By 1975 – in just 45 years – the population had doubled again to 4 billion and in 2007, it stood at 6.6 billion.

Malthusianism

In pre-modern societies, birth rates were very high by the standards of the industrialized world today. Nonetheless, population growth remained low until the eighteenth century because there was a rough overall balance between births and deaths. The general trend of numbers was upward, and there were sometimes periods of more marked population increase, but these were followed by increases in death rates. In medieval Europe, for example, when harvests were bad, marriages tended to be postponed and the number of conceptions fell, while deaths increased. These complementary trends reduced the number of mouths to be fed. No pre-industrial society was able to escape from this self-regulating rhythm (Wrigley 1968).

During the period of the rise of industrialism, many looked forward to a new age in which scarcity would be a phenomenon of the past. The development of modern industry, it was widely supposed, would create a new era of abundance. In his celebrated *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1976 [1798]), Thomas Malthus criticized these ideas and initiated a debate about the connection between population and food resources that continues to this day. At the time he wrote, the population in Europe was growing rapidly. Malthus pointed out that while population increase is exponential, food supply depends on fixed resources that can be expanded only by developing new land for cultivation. Population growth therefore tends to outstrip the means of support available. The inevitable outcome is famine, which, combined with the influence of war and plagues, acts as a natural limit to population increase. Malthus predicted that human beings would always live in circumstances of misery and starvation, unless they practised what he called 'moral restraint'. His cure for excessive population growth was for people strictly to limit their frequency of sexual intercourse. The use of contraception he proclaimed to be a 'vice'.

For a while, **Malthusianism** was ignored, since the population development of the

Western countries followed a quite different pattern from that which he had anticipated – as we shall see below. Rates of population growth trailed off in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, in the 1930s there were major worries about population decline in many industrialized countries, including the United Kingdom. The upsurge in world population growth in the twentieth century has again lent some credence to Malthus's views, although few support them in their original version. Population expansion in developing countries seems to be outstripping the resources that those countries can generate to feed their citizens.

The demographic transition

Demographers often refer to the changes in the ratio of births to deaths in the industrialized countries from the nineteenth century onward as the demographic transition. This thesis was first outlined by Warren S. Thompson, who described a three-stage process in which one type of population stability would be eventually replaced by another, as a society reached an advanced level of economic development (Thompson 1929).

The prospects for twenty-first-century equality

Fertility remains high in developing world societies partly because traditional attitudes to family size have been maintained. Having large numbers of children is often still regarded as desirable, providing a source of labour on family-run farms. Some religions are either opposed to birth control or affirm the desirability of having many children. Contraception is opposed by Islamic leaders in several countries and by the Catholic Church, whose influence is especially marked in South and Central America. The motivation to reduce fertility has not always been forthcoming even from political authorities. In 1974, contraceptives were banned in Argentina as part of a programme to double the population of the country as fast as possible; this was seen as a means of developing its economic and military strength.

Yet a decline in fertility levels has at last occurred in some large developing countries. An example is China, which currently has a population of about 1.3 billion people – almost a quarter of the world's population as a whole. The Chinese government established one of the most extensive programmes of population control that any country has undertaken, with the object of stabilizing the country's numbers at close to their current level. Incentives were instituted (such as better housing and free healthcare and education) to promote single-child families, while families with more than one child face special hardships (wages are cut for those who have a third child). In some cases the Chinese government's policy has had horrific unintended consequences. A traditional preference for boys, and a belief that males will look after their parents in their old age, whereas females, once married, 'belong to' someone else, has led to some newborn girls being killed by their families in preference to facing the penalties of having a second child. However, there is evidence that China's antenatal policies, however harsh they may appear, have had a substantial impact on limiting the country's population growth.

China's programme demands a degree of centralized government control that is either unacceptable or unavailable in most other developing countries. In India, for instance, many schemes for promoting family planning and the use of contraceptives have been tried, but with only relatively small success. In 1988 India had a population of 789 million. By 2000, its population just topped a billion. And even if its population growth rate does diminish, by 2050 India will be the most populous country in the world, with more than 1.5 billion people.

It is claimed that the demographic changes that will occur over the next 100

Classic Studies 13.2 Demographic transition theory

The research problem

As societies industrialized from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, their populations increased rapidly. But a century or so later, population growth had slowed, and in the twenty-first century, many developed societies are barely replacing their population. Why did this happen? Is there a pattern to such a long-term transformation and, if so, is it likely to be repeated across other industrializing countries? What will happen to the size of the global human population in the future? Warren S. Thompson (1887–1973), an American demographer, was the first to identify a pattern to such developments and his work was developed by later demographers who linked demographic trends to industrialization.

The Demographic Transition Model

Thompson (1929) recognized that although changes to birth and death rates shape population growth and size, there are important *transitions* in a society's birth and death rates, which have a profound impact on their overall population. Later demographers refined and developed his ideas into a model, usually referred to as the *Demographic Transition Model* (DTM), which identifies a series of stages through which societies pass as they go through industrial development (you may wish to refer to the model illustrated in figure 13.9 as you read the next section).

Stage One refers to the conditions characterizing most traditional societies, in which both birth and death rates are high and the infant mortality rate is especially large. Population grows little, if at all, as the high number of births is more or less balanced by the level of deaths. This stage was operative for most of human history as epidemics, disease and natural disasters such as floods and drought kept down human numbers. In *Stage Two*, which began in most of Europe and the United States in the early part of the nineteenth century – with wide regional variations – the death rate fell but fertility remained high. The consequence was a marked phase of long-term population growth. Improvements in food quality and higher crop yields, safe water supplies for drinking and washing, more efficient sewerage and waste disposal; all of these produced a fall in the death

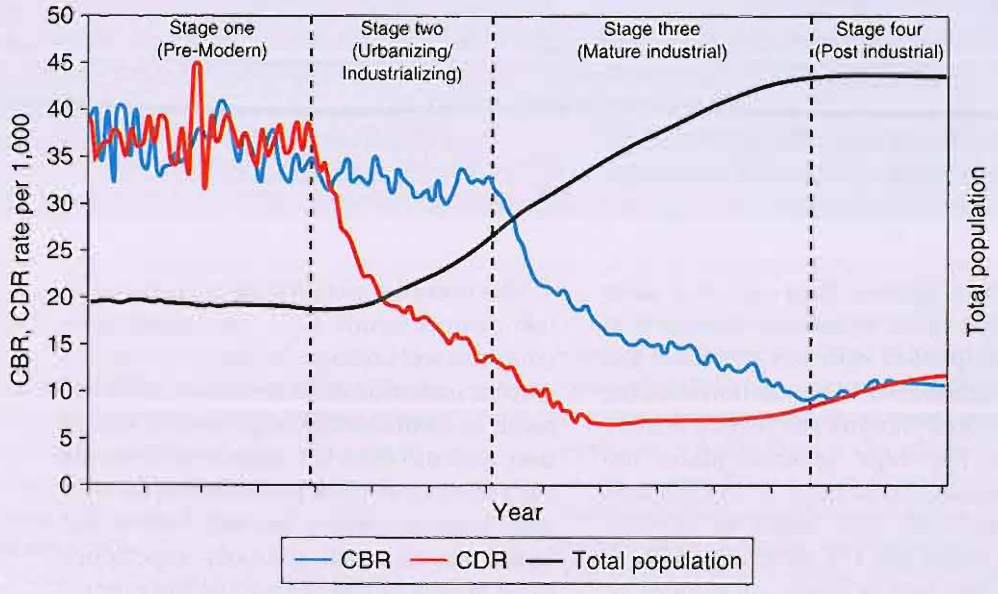


Figure 13.9 The Demographic Transition Model

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image: Stage5.jpg

rate and subsequent rise in population. In *Stage Three* the birth rate also fell, to a level such that the population gradually became fairly stable, though obviously, at a much higher absolute level than in Stage One. Several possible reasons have been put forward for this change, including increasing literacy levels (particularly amongst women) leading to the challenging of traditional ideas regarding women's primary role as childbearers; compulsory education which removed children from the workforce; and urbanization, which removed the need (in rural areas) for large families to work on the land.

Somewhat later, improved contraceptive technologies also played a major part in enabling people to control their fertility. Some demographers identify a *Stage Four*, in which populations stabilize, thus completing the demographic transition. However, some countries, including Greece, Italy and Japan, have recently been reproducing below replacement levels and we might speculate about a stage in which population levels in the advanced industrial societies may decline. However, so far this stage remains a theoretical possibility rather than reality.

Critical points

Although it is generally accepted that the sequence accurately describes a major transformation in the demographic character of modern societies, there are some considerable differences amongst the industrialized countries. When the model is applied to developing countries, critics have pointed out that the emergence of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s has been a major factor in slowing or even halting some countries' progress as death rates and infant mortality rates have risen rather than fallen. Sub-Saharan Africa has suffered most as a result of the spread of HIV/AIDS (see chapter 10, 'Health, Illness and Disability').

The DTM has been widely seen as an anti-Malthusian thesis. It suggests that rather than exponential growth leading to mass hunger and widespread famine, human populations are likely to settle into comfortable stability. One objection to the optimism embedded in this view is that the spread of Western-style consumerism to even the existing population would seriously damage the global ecosystem, and on present population forecasts, things can only get worse. Some environmentalists argue we should not be so sanguine about high absolute human numbers but should be aiming for a managed *reduction* in the global population.

Contemporary significance

The DTM has been perhaps the most influential perspective on long-term population trends ever devised and it continues to inform research in the field of demography. Demographers do not agree about how the sequence of change predicted by the model should be interpreted though, nor how long Stage Three is likely to last. Nevertheless, the great virtue of the model is that it encourages us to take a long-term view of human development in a global perspective and provides a point from which to start doing so.

years will be greater than any that have taken place in all of human history. It is difficult to predict with any precision the rate at which the world population will rise, but the United Nations has several fertility scenarios. The 'high' scenario places the world's population at more than 25 billion people by 2150. The 'medium' fertility scenario, which the UN deems most likely, assumes that fertility levels will stabilize at just over two children per woman, resulting in a world population of 11.8 billion people by 2150.

This overall population increase conceals two distinct trends. First, most developing countries will undergo the process of demographic transition described above. This will result in a substantial surge in the population, as death rates fall. India and China are each likely to see their populations reach 1.5 billion people. Areas in Asia, Africa and Latin America will similarly experience rapid growth before the population eventually stabilizes.

The second trend concerns the developed countries that have already undergone

demographic transition. These societies will experience very slight population growth, if any at all. Instead, a process of ageing will occur in which the number of young people will decline in absolute terms and the older segment of the population will increase markedly. This will have widespread economic and social implications for developed countries: as the dependency ratio increases, pressure will mount on health and social services. Yet, as their numbers grow, older people will also have more political weight and may be able to push for higher expenditures on programmes and services of importance to them.

Ageing of the global population is discussed in chapter 8, 'The Life-Course'.

What will be the consequences of these demographic changes for global inequality? Some observers see the makings of widespread social upheaval – particularly in the developing countries undergoing demographic transition. Changes in the economy and labour markets may prompt widespread internal migration as people in rural areas search for work. The rapid growth of cities is likely to lead to environmental damage, new public health risks, overloaded infrastructures, rising crime and impoverished squatter settlements.

Famine and food shortages are another serious concern. As we saw in our discussion of global inequality, there are around 830 million people in the world suffering from hunger or under-nourishment. As the population rises, levels of food output will need to rise accordingly to avoid widespread scarcity. Yet it is difficult to see how this can happen; many of the world's poorest areas are particularly affected by water shortages, shrinking farmland and soil degradation – processes that reduce, rather than enhance, agricultural productivity. It is almost certain that food production will not occur at a level to ensure self-sufficiency. Large amounts of food and grain will need to be imported from areas where there are surpluses. According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), by 2010 industrialized countries will be producing 1,614 pounds of grain per person, compared to only 507 pounds per head in the developing world.

Technological advances in agriculture and industry are unpredictable, so no one can be sure how large a population the world might eventually be able to support. Yet even at current population levels, global resources may already be well below those required to create living standards in the less developed world comparable to those of the industrialized countries.

Summary points

1. The countries of the world can be stratified according to their per-person gross national income. Currently, 40 per cent of the world's population live in low-income countries, compared with only 16 per cent in high-income countries.
2. An estimated 1.3 billion people in the world, or nearly one in four people, live in poverty today, an increase since the early 1980s. Many are the victims of discrimination based on race, ethnicity or tribal affiliation.
3. In general, people in high-income countries enjoy a far higher standard of living than their counterparts in low-income countries. They are likely to have more food to eat, less likely to starve or suffer from malnutrition and likely to live longer. They are far more likely to be literate and educated and therefore have higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs. Additionally, they are less likely to have large families, and their children are much less likely to die in infancy of malnutrition or childhood diseases.
4. *Market-oriented theories* of global inequality,

such as modernization theory, claim that cultural and institutional barriers to development explain the poverty of low-income societies. In this view, to eliminate poverty, fatalistic attitudes must be overcome, government meddling in economic affairs ended and a high rate of savings and investment encouraged. *Dependency theories* claim that global poverty is the result of the exploitation of poor countries by wealthy ones. Even though the economic fate of poor countries is ultimately determined by wealthy ones, some development is possible within dependent capitalistic relations. *World-systems theory* argues that the capitalist world system as a whole must be understood if we hope to make sense of global inequality. It focuses on relationships of the core, peripheral and semi-peripheral countries and on long-term trends in the global economy. *State-centred theories* emphasize the role that governments can play in fostering economic development. These theories draw on the experience of the rapidly growing East Asian newly industrializing economies as an example.

5. Population growth is one of the most significant global problems currently faced by humanity. Malthusianism is the idea, first advanced by Thomas Malthus two centuries ago, that population growth tends to outstrip the resources available to support it. Unless people limited their frequency of sexual intercourse, he argued, excessive population growth would ensure a future of misery and starvation.
6. The study of population growth – demography – is primarily statistical, but demographers are also concerned with trying to explain why population patterns take the form they do. The most important concepts in population analysis are birth rates, death rates, fertility and fecundity.
7. Changes in population patterns are usually analysed in terms of stages within the demographic transition. Prior to industrialization, both birth and death rates were high. During the beginning of industrialization, there was population growth, because death rates were reduced while birth rates took longer to decline. Finally, a new equilibrium was reached with low birth rates balancing low death rates.
8. World population is projected to grow to more than 10 billion people by 2150. Most of this growth will occur in the developing world, where countries will undergo a demographic transition and experience rapid growth before the population stabilizes. In the developed world, population will grow only slightly. Instead, a process of ageing will occur and the number of young people will decline in absolute terms. These population trends will have far-reaching implications for labour markets, welfare systems, food and water supplies and the natural environment.

Further reading

Given the wide-ranging subject matter of this chapter, a word of caution is in order. None of the reading for this chapter can legitimately be labelled 'introductory' and all of it makes intellectual demands of the reader. This should be a worthwhile challenge rather than a turn-off though.

Perhaps a good place to begin some additional reading is with Vic George and Robert Page's edited volume, *Global Social Problems* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004) to gain a better view of the range of social problems that demand global solutions. From here, David Held and Ayse Kaya's edited *Global Inequality: Patterns and Explanations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006) offers exactly what it says: a discussion of patterns of inequality and the explanations and theories which try to account for it.

A good account of what 'development' means today and has meant in the past can be found in Katie Willis's *Theories and Practices of Development* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), which also looks at attempts to put theory into practice. Alastair Greig, David Hulme and Mark Turner's *Challenging Global Inequality: Development Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) presents another up-to-date alternative.

Anyone interested in the issues raised in relation to measurement of inequality, could try Branko Milanovich's *Worlds Apart: Measuring International and Global Inequality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), which is a stimulating read.

Internet links

The Global Site – scholarly writings on global matters, based at the University of Sussex, Brighton, UK:
www.theglobalsite.ac.uk/

International Monetary Fund:
www.imf.org/

Make Poverty History campaign – London-based:
www.makepovertyhistory.org/

United Nations – multilingual site with enormous amount of information on global issues:
www.un.org/

World Bank – globalization pages of the World Bank Group, has lots of briefing papers, research and other data:
www.worldbank.org/

CHAPTER 14

Sexuality and Gender

(opposite) Other high-profile individuals to be involved in same-sex civil partnerships include Lissy Groner, a German member of the European Parliament.

'By the power vested in me by the state of Massachusetts as a justice of the peace, and most of all by the power of your own love, I now pronounce you married under the laws of Massachusetts', intoned the city clerk, Margaret Drury, shortly after 9 a.m. on 17 May 2004. 'You may seal this marriage with a kiss.' The couple embraced. Marcia Kadish, who had married her partner of 18 years, was overjoyed: 'I feel all tingly and wonderful', she said. 'So much love. Can't you see it is just bursting out of me?' Her partner said it felt like 'winning the lottery'.

Yet the marriage caused great controversy in the United States. 'The documents being issued across Massachusetts may say "marriage licence" at the

top but they are really death certificates for the institution of marriage', said James Dobson, head of the Christian group 'Focus on the Family'. The reason for the controversy was that Marcia Kadish's long-term partner was another woman – Tanya McCloskey. The couple was amongst the first same-sex couples to be married under new laws in the US state of Massachusetts. Throughout the day, one gay couple after another filed out of the local town hall clutching the newly issued papers that would allow them to get married. Outside, thousands of people had gathered to applaud the couples, and to celebrate a right that many of them regarded as self-evident.

The state of Massachusetts has often been at the cusp of liberal reforms in the USA. In May 2004, after months of battles in and out of the state Supreme Court and legislature, Massachusetts became the first state to legalize gay marriage. Although increasing numbers of people in the USA do accept that marriages between homosexuals should be recognized as valid by the law, the majority (55 per cent in May 2004) has consistently been against it (Gallup 2004) and an overwhelming majority of states has laws or constitutional amendments barring 'gay marriage'. Massachusetts joined the Netherlands, Belgium and large parts of Canada as one of the few places in the world where gay marriages *are* legally recognized.

The very possibility of legal gay marriage demonstrates how radically ideas about sexuality have changed in recent decades. After all, it was only in 1967 that male homosexuality was legalized in the UK. Gay marriage also raises questions about sexual orientation: to what extent is sexual orientation inborn and to what extent is it learned? Many of the themes that we examine in this chapter overlap with the questions raised in chapter 9, 'Families and Intimate Relationships'. Human sexuality is tied up with our ideas about love and the question of what makes a good relationship. Increasingly, people argue that a good relationship must be one between equals. Gay marriage has only become possible through a struggle against discrimination and inequality that is still continuing.

We begin this chapter by discussing human sexuality and examine how sexual behaviour is changing in Western society. We then look more specifically at sexual orientation, and particularly at issues surrounding homosexuality in the West. This leads us to the broader issue of gender, and raises questions of what it means to be a man or a woman in modern society. We close with a discussion of gender inequality and look at how women's equality is increasingly finding a global expression.

Human sexuality

Ideas about **sexuality** are undergoing dramatic changes. Over the last few decades in Western countries, important aspects of people's sexual lives have been altered in a fundamental way. In traditional societies, sexuality was tied tightly to the process of reproduction, but in our current age it has been separated from it. Sexuality has become a dimension of life for each individual to explore and shape. If sexuality once was 'defined' in terms of heterosexuality and monogamy in the context of marital relations, there is now a growing acceptance of diverse forms of sexual behaviour and orientations in a broad variety of contexts, as we saw in the discussion of gay marriage above.

In this section, we explore some of the issues surrounding human sexual behaviour: the importance of biological versus social influences, how society shapes sexual activity and the influence of reproductive technology. We then examine some of the recent trends in human sexual behaviour in Western society.

Biology and sexual behaviour

Sexuality has long been considered a highly personal subject. For this reason it is a

challenging area for sociologists to study. Until recently, much of what we have known about sexuality came from biologists, medical researchers and sexologists. Scholars have also looked to the animal world in an attempt to understand more about human sexual behaviour.

There is clearly a biological component to sexuality, because female anatomy differs from that of the male. There also exists a biological imperative to reproduce; otherwise, the human species would become extinct. Some sociobiologists, such as David Barash (1979), have argued that there is an evolutionary explanation for why men tend to be more sexually promiscuous than women. His argument is that men produce millions of sperm during a lifetime and therefore can be seen as biologically disposed to impregnate as many women as possible. However, women only produce a few hundred eggs in a lifetime and have to carry the foetus within their body for nine months, which, says Barash, explains why they focus more on emotional commitment and are not so sexually promiscuous. The biological core of males and females drives their sexual behaviour in society. Barash's argument finds some support in other studies of the sexual behaviour of animals, which claim to show that males are normally more promiscuous than females of the same species.

Many commentators are dismissive of such an evolutionary approach. Steven Rose, for example, argued that, unlike most animals, human behaviour is shaped more by the environment than it is determined by genetically programmed instincts: 'The human infant is born with relatively few of its neural pathways already committed' (Rose et al. 1984). Rose argues that humans have an exceptionally long infancy relative to other animals, which gives them far more time than other species to learn from their experiences.

The claims of sociobiologists such as Barash are fiercely contested, especially as regards any implications for human sexual behaviour. One thing clearly distinguishes humans from animals, however. Human sexual behaviour is meaningful – that is, humans use and express their sexuality in a variety of ways. For humans, sexual activity is much more than biological. It is symbolic, reflecting who we are and the emotions we are experiencing. As we shall see, sexuality is far too complicated to be wholly attributable to biological traits. It must be understood in terms of the social meanings which humans ascribe to it.

Forms of sexuality

Most people, in all societies, are heterosexual – they look to the other sex for emotional involvement and sexual pleasure. Heterosexuality in every society has historically been the basis of marriage and family. Yet there are many minority sexual tastes and inclinations too. Judith Lorber (1994) distinguishes as many as ten different sexual identities: straight (heterosexual) woman, straight man, lesbian woman, gay man, bisexual woman, bisexual man, transvestite woman (a woman who regularly dresses as a man), transvestite man (a man who regularly dresses as a woman), transsexual woman (a man who becomes a woman), and transsexual man (a woman who becomes a man). Sexual practices themselves are even more diverse.

There are a number of possible sexual practices. For example, a man or woman can have sexual relations with women, with men or with both. This can happen one at a time or with three or more participating. One can have sex with oneself (masturbation) or with no one (celibacy). One can have sexual relations with transsexuals or with people who erotically cross-dress, use pornography or sexual devices, practise sado-masochism (the erotic use of bondage and the inflicting of pain), have sex with animals, and so on (Lorber 1994).

In all societies there are sexual norms that approve of some practices while discouraging or condemning others. Members of a

society learn these norms through socialization. Over the last few decades, for example, sexual norms in Western cultures have been linked to ideas of romantic love and family relationships. Such norms, however, vary widely between different cultures. Homosexuality is a case in point. Some cultures have either tolerated or actively encouraged homosexuality in certain contexts. Among the ancient Greeks, for instance, the love of men for boys was idealized as the highest form of sexual love.

Accepted types of sexual behaviour also vary between cultures, which is one way we know that most sexual responses are learned rather than innate. The most extensive study was carried out nearly 60 years ago by Clellan Ford and Frank Beach (1951), who surveyed anthropological evidence from more than 200 societies. Striking variations were found in what is regarded as 'natural' sexual behaviour and in norms of sexual attractiveness. For example, in some cultures, extended foreplay, perhaps lasting hours, is thought desirable and even necessary prior to intercourse; in others, foreplay is virtually non-existent. In some societies, it is believed that overly frequent intercourse leads to physical debilitation or illness. Among the Seniang of the South Pacific, advice on the desirability of spacing out love-making is given by the elders of the village – who also believe that a person with white hair may legitimately copulate every night.

In most cultures, norms of sexual attractiveness (held by both females and males) focus more on physical looks for women than for men, a situation that seems to be gradually changing in the West as women increasingly become active in spheres outside the home. The traits seen as most important in female beauty, however, differ greatly. In the modern West, a slim, small body is admired, while in other cultures a much more generous shape is regarded as most attractive. Sometimes the breasts are not seen as a source of sexual stimulus, whereas in some societies great erotic significance is attached to them. Some societies place great store on the shape of the face, while others emphasize the shape and colour of the eyes or the size and form of the nose and lips.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation concerns the direction of one's sexual or romantic attraction. The term 'sexual preference', which is sometimes incorrectly used instead of sexual orientation, is misleading and is to be avoided, since it implies that one's sexual or romantic attraction is entirely a matter of personal choice. As you will see below, sexual orientation in all cultures results from a complex interplay of biological and social factors which are not yet fully understood.

The most commonly found sexual orientation in all cultures is **heterosexuality**, a sexual or romantic attraction for persons of the opposite sex ('hetero' comes from the Greek word meaning 'other' or 'different'). **Homosexuality** involves the sexual or romantic attraction for persons of one's own sex. Today, the term *gay* is used to refer to male homosexuals, **lesbian** for female homosexuals, and *bi* as shorthand for **bisexuals**, people who experience sexual or romantic attraction for persons of either sex.

Orientation of sexual activities or feelings towards others of the same sex exist in all cultures. In some non-Western cultures, homosexual relations are accepted or even encouraged among certain groups. The Batak people of northern Sumatra, for example, permit male homosexual relations before marriage. Boys leave the parental home at puberty and sleep in a dwelling with a dozen or so older males who initiate the newcomers into homosexual practices. In many societies, however, homosexuality is not so openly accepted or practised. In the Western world, for example, sexuality is linked to individual identity, and the prevailing idea of a homosexual (or

heterosexual) is of a person whose sexual orientation lies within themselves and is therefore a very personal matter, not something to be shared with many others.

In his studies of sexuality, Michel Foucault has shown that before the eighteenth century in Europe, the notion of a homosexual person seems barely to have existed (Foucault 1978). The act of sodomy was denounced by Church authorities and by the law; in England and several other European countries, it was punishable by death. However, sodomy was not defined specifically as a homosexual offence. It applied to relations between men and women, men and animals, as well as men among themselves. The term 'homosexuality' was coined in the 1860s, and from then on, homosexuals were increasingly regarded as being a separate type of people with a particular sexual aberration (Weeks 1986). Homosexuality became part of a 'medicalized' discourse; it was spoken of in clinical terms as a psychiatric disorder or a perversion, rather than a religious 'sin'. Homosexuals, along with other 'deviants' such as paedophiles and transvestites, were seen as suffering from a biological pathology that threatened the wholesomeness of mainstream society.

The death penalty for 'unnatural acts' was abolished in the United States after independence, and in European countries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Until just a few decades ago, however, homosexuality remained a criminal activity in virtually all Western countries. The shift of homosexuals from the margins of society to the mainstream is not yet complete, but rapid progress has been seen over recent years, as the discussion of gay marriage that opened this chapter shows.

Is sexual orientation inborn or learned?

Most sociologists today argue that sexual orientation of all kinds results from a complex interplay between biological factors and social learning. Since heterosexuality is the norm for most people, a great deal of research has focused on why some people become homosexual. Some scholars argue that biological influences are the most important, predisposing certain people to become homosexual from birth (Bell et al. 1981). Biological explanations for homosexuality have included differences in such things as brain characteristics of homosexuals (Maugh and Zamichow 1991) and the impact on foetal development of the mother's *in utero* hormone production during pregnancy (McFadden and Champlin 2000). Such studies, which are based on small numbers of cases, give highly inconclusive (and highly controversial) results (Healy 2001). It is virtually impossible to separate biological from early social influences in determining a person's sexual orientation.

Which body shape is more appealing? The answer differs across cultures.

Studies of twins hold some promise for understanding if there is any genetic basis for homosexuality, since identical twins share identical genes. In two related studies, Bailey and Pillard (1991; Bailey 1993) examined 167 pairs of brothers and 143 pairs of sisters, with

each pair of siblings raised in the same family, in which at least one sibling defined him- or herself as homosexual. Some of these pairs were identical twins (who share all genes), some were fraternal twins (who share some genes) and some were adoptive brothers or sisters (who share no genes). The researchers reasoned that if sexual orientation is determined entirely by biology, then all the identical twins should be homosexual, since their genetic make-up is identical. Among the fraternal twins, some pairs would be homosexual, since some genes are shared. The lowest rates of homosexuality were predicted for the adoptive brothers and sisters.

The results of this study seem to show that homosexuality results from a combination of biological and social factors. Among both the men and the women studied, roughly one out of every two identical twins was homosexual, compared with one out of every five fraternal twins, and one out of every ten adoptive brothers and sisters. In other words, a woman or man is five times more likely to be lesbian or gay if her or his identical twin is lesbian or gay than if his or her sibling is lesbian or gay but related only through adoption. These results offer some support for the importance of biological factors, since the higher the percentage of shared genes, the greater the percentage of cases in which both siblings were homosexual. However, since approximately half the identical twin brothers and sisters of homosexuals were not themselves homosexual, a great deal of social learning must also be involved; otherwise one would expect *all* identical twin siblings of homosexuals to be homosexual as well.

It is clear that even studies of identical twins cannot fully isolate biological from social factors. It is often the case that, even in infancy, identical twins are treated more like one another by parents, peers and teachers than are fraternal twins, who in turn are treated more like one another than are adoptive siblings. Thus, identical twins may have more than genes in common: they may share a higher proportion of similar socializing experiences as well.

Sexuality, religion and morality

Attitudes towards sexual behaviour are not uniform across the world's societies, and even within a single country they undergo significant changes throughout history. For example, Western attitudes to sexuality were, for nearly 2,000 years, moulded primarily by Christianity. Although different Christian sects and denominations have held divergent views about the proper place of sexuality in life, the dominant view of the Christian Church has been that all sexual behaviour is suspect except what is needed for reproduction. At some periods, this view produced an extreme prudishness in society at large. But at other times, many people ignored or reacted against the teachings of the Church, commonly engaging in practices (such as adultery) forbidden by religious authorities. The idea that sexual fulfilment can and should be sought only through marriage was rare.

In the nineteenth century, religious presumptions about sexuality became partly replaced by medical ones. Most of the early writings by doctors about sexual behaviour, however, were as stern as the views of the Church. Some argued that any type of sexual activity unconnected with reproduction causes serious physical harm. Masturbation was said to bring on blindness, insanity, heart disease and other ailments, while oral sex was claimed to cause cancer. In Victorian times, sexual hypocrisy abounded. Virtuous women were believed to be indifferent to sexuality, accepting the attentions of their husbands only as a duty. Yet in the expanding towns and cities, where prostitution was rife and often openly tolerated, 'loose' women were seen in an entirely different category from their respectable sisters.

Many Victorian men who were, on the face of things, sober, well-behaved citizens, devoted to their wives, regularly visited prostitutes or kept mistresses. Such behaviour was treated leniently; whereas 'respectable' women who took lovers were

In Victorian England, a man could keep a mistress or visit prostitutes with impunity. But the sexuality of 'respectable' women was strictly contained within heterosexual marriage.

regarded as scandalous and were shunned in public society if their behaviour came to light. The different attitudes towards the sexual activities of men and women formed a double standard, which has long existed and whose residues still linger on today (Barret-Ducrocq 1992).

In current times, traditional attitudes exist alongside much more liberal attitudes towards sexuality, which developed particularly strongly in the 1960s. In films and plays, scenes are shown that previously would have been completely unacceptable, and pornographic material is readily available to most adults who want it. Some people, particularly those influenced by Christian teachings, believe that pre-marital sex is wrong, and generally frown on all forms of sexual behaviour except heterosexual activity within the confines of marriage – although it is now much more commonly accepted that sexual pleasure is a desirable and important feature. Others, by contrast, condone or actively approve of pre-marital sex and hold tolerant attitudes towards different sexual practices.

Sexual attitudes have undoubtedly become more permissive over the past 30 years in most Western countries, though as the survey results given below in figure 14.4 demonstrate, there are some significant differences globally. For example, in the Republic of Ireland and the USA around one-third of the sample still thought sex

THINKING CRITICALLY

How are your attitudes towards sex and sexuality different from those of your parents and older relations? How do you think such attitudes are related to religious beliefs? Do the changing attitudes of younger generations provide evidence for secularization or are there other ways of explaining these changes?

"We're not doing anything for Gay Pride this year. We're here, we're queer, we're used to it."

before marriage was 'always wrong' and in the Philippines 60 per cent did so. But in Sweden the figure was just 4 per cent and in the Czech Republic it was 5 per cent (Widmer et al. 1998). Such cultural differences show that religious beliefs and traditional norms relating to sexuality have not simply been swept aside in the modern age, but continue to exert an influence on people's attitudes and values.

Homosexuality

Kenneth Plummer (1975), in a classic study, distinguished four types of homosexuality within modern Western culture. *Casual homosexuality* is a passing encounter that does not substantially structure a person's overall sexual life. Schoolboy crushes and mutual masturbation are examples. *Situated activities* refer to circumstances in which homosexual acts are regularly carried out but do not become an individual's overriding preference. In settings such as prisons or military camps, where men live without women, homosexual behaviour of this kind is common, regarded as a substitute for heterosexual behaviour rather than as preferable.

Personalized homosexuality refers to individuals who have a preference for homosexual activities but who are isolated from groups in which this is easily accepted. Homosexuality here is a furtive activity, hidden away from friends and colleagues. *Homosexuality as a way of life* refers to individuals who have 'come out' and have made associations with others of similar sexual tastes a key part of their lives. Such people usually belong to gay subcultures, in which homosexual activities are integrated into a distinct lifestyle. Such communities often provide the possibility of collective political action to advance the rights and interests of homosexuals.

The proportion of the population (both male and female) who have had homosexual experiences or experienced strong inclinations towards homosexual sex is probably much larger than those who follow an openly *gay* lifestyle. The term 'gay' has been used primarily to refer to male homosexu-

als, as in the widely used phrase, 'gay and lesbian' people, though it is becoming increasingly used to describe lesbians.

Male homosexuality generally receives more attention than lesbianism – homosexual attachment or activities among women. Lesbian groups tend to be less highly organized than male gay subcultures and include a lower proportion of casual relationships. In campaigns for homosexual rights, lesbian activist groups are often treated as if their interests were identical to those of male organizations. But while there is sometimes close cooperation between male gays and lesbians, there are also differences, particularly where lesbians are actively involved in feminism. Some lesbian women came to feel that the gay liberation movement reflected the interests of men, while liberal and radical feminists were concerned exclusively with the concerns of middle-class, heterosexual women. Thus, a distinctive brand of lesbian feminism emerged which promoted the spread of 'female values' and challenged the established, dominant institution of male heterosexuality (Rich 1981). Many gay women view lesbianism less as a sexual orientation and more as a commitment to and form of solidarity with other women – politically, socially and personally (Seidman 1997).

Attitudes towards homosexuality

Attitudes of intolerance towards homosexuality have been so pronounced in the past that it is only during recent years that some of the myths surrounding the subject have been dispelled. Homosexuality has long been stigmatized in the United Kingdom and around the world. Homophobia, a term coined in the late 1960s, refers to an aversion or hatred of homosexuals and their lifestyles, along with behaviour based on such aversion. Homophobia is a form of prejudice that is reflected not only in overt acts of hostility and violence towards lesbians and gays, but also in various forms of verbal abuse. In Britain, for example, terms like 'fag' or 'queer' are used to insult a heterosexual male, as are female-related offensive terms like 'sissy' or 'pansy'. Although homosexuality is becoming more accepted, homophobia remains ingrained in many realms of Western society; antagonism towards homosexuals persists in many people's emotional attitudes. Instances of violent assault and murder of homosexuals remain all too common.

» See also the issues raised in the section 'Crimes against homosexuals', in chapter 21, 'Crime and Deviance'.

Some kinds of male gay behaviour might be seen as attempts to alter the usual connections of masculinity and power – one reason, perhaps, why the heterosexual community so often finds them threatening. Gay men tend to reject the image of the effeminacy popularly associated with them, and they deviate from this in two ways. One is through cultivating outrageous effeminacy – a 'camp' masculinity that parodies the stereotype. The other is by developing a 'macho' image. This also is not conventionally masculine; men dressed as motorcyclists or cowboys are again parodying masculinity, by exaggerating it – think, for example, of the 1970s band the Village People and their globally recognized anthem *YMCA* (Bertelson 1986).

Some sociologists have investigated the effect of the AIDS epidemic on popular attitudes to homosexuality. They suggest that the epidemic has challenged some of the main ideological foundations of heterosexual masculinity. Sexuality and sexual behaviour, for example, have become topics of public discussion, from safe sex campaigns backed by government funds to media coverage of the spread of the epidemic. The epidemic has threatened the legitimacy of traditional ideas of morality by drawing public attention to the prevalence of premarital sex, extramarital affairs and non-heterosexual relations in society. But most of all, in increasing the visibility of homosexuals, the epidemic has called the 'universality' of heterosexuality into question and has demonstrated that alternatives exist to the

The Village People demonstrate a particularly extreme parody of 'macho' forms of masculinity.

traditional nuclear family (Redman 1996). The response has sometimes taken hysterical and paranoid forms, however. Homosexuals are depicted as a deviant threat to the moral well-being of 'normal society'. In order to preserve heterosexual masculinity as the 'norm', it becomes necessary to marginalize and vilify the perceived threat (Rutherford and Chapman 1988).

In many ways, homosexuality has become more normalized – more of an accepted part of everyday society, with many countries passing legislation to protect the rights of homosexuals. When South Africa adopted its new constitution in 1996, it became one of the only countries in the world, at that time, constitutionally to guarantee the rights of homosexuals. Many countries in Europe, including Denmark, the Netherlands and Spain, now permit homosexual partners to register with the state in a civil ceremony and to claim most of the prerogatives of marriage, including social security and pension benefits, tenancy rights, possible parental responsibility for a partner's children, full

recognition for life assurance, responsibility to provide reasonable maintenance for partners and children, the same tax treatment as married couples and visiting rights in hospitals. The opportunity to make such a public demonstration of personal commitment has been very popular. For example, in the 12 months following introduction of the UK's civil partnership legislation in 2005, 18,059 gay and lesbian couples became civil partners (figure 14.1)

Nevertheless, as we saw in this chapter's opening example, public attitudes towards equal marriage rights for lesbian and gay people differ widely within societies as well as across the world. Even within one geographical region such as Europe, a wide divergence of national opinion exists (see figure 14.2). A recent Eurobarometer survey (European Commission 2006) asked respondents if they agreed with the statement 'Homosexual marriages should be allowed throughout Europe'. In the Netherlands, 82 per cent agreed, along with 71 per cent of Swedes, 69 per cent of Danes and 62 per cent of Belgians. However, in most of Eastern Europe, only a minority of people agreed; just 11 per cent in Romania, 15 per cent in Bulgaria and 17 per cent in Poland. In only 8 of the then 25 European Union countries surveyed did 50 per cent or more of those in the survey agree with the statement – an interesting finding in a period when more and more governments are moving in the direction of legally acknowledging homosexual unions. As 'public opinion' on sexuality is really quite diverse, with strong disagreements rooted in religious and political beliefs, legislative change and social policy do not always *follow* public opinion, but can also contribute to *changing* it.

More and more gay activists in Europe, the USA and elsewhere are pushing for homosexual marriage to be fully legalized. Why should they care? After all, as we discuss in chapter 9, marriage between heterosexual couples appears to be in decline. Activists care because they want the same status, rights and obligations as anyone else. Marriage in many societies today is, above all, an emotional commitment, but as recognized by the state it also has definite legal implications, conferring

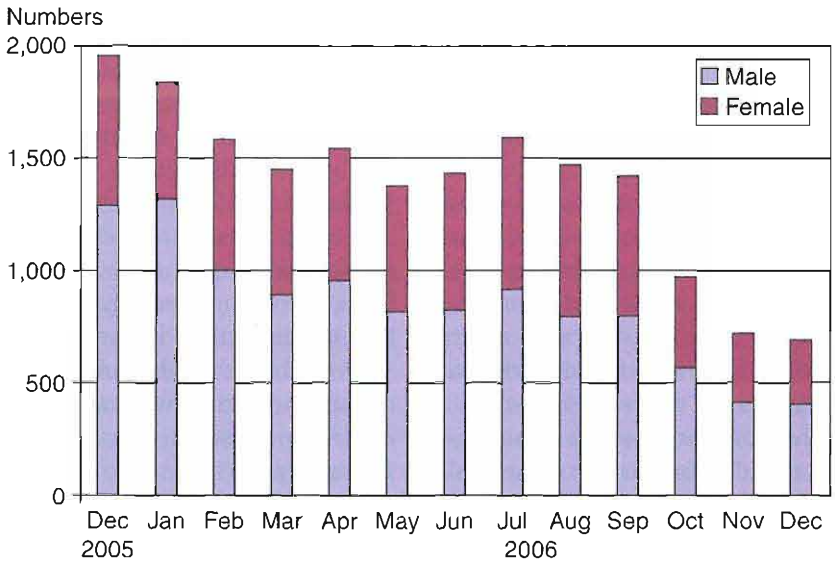


Figure 14.1 Number of UK civil partnerships, December 2005 – December 2006

Source: Office of National Statistics 2006b

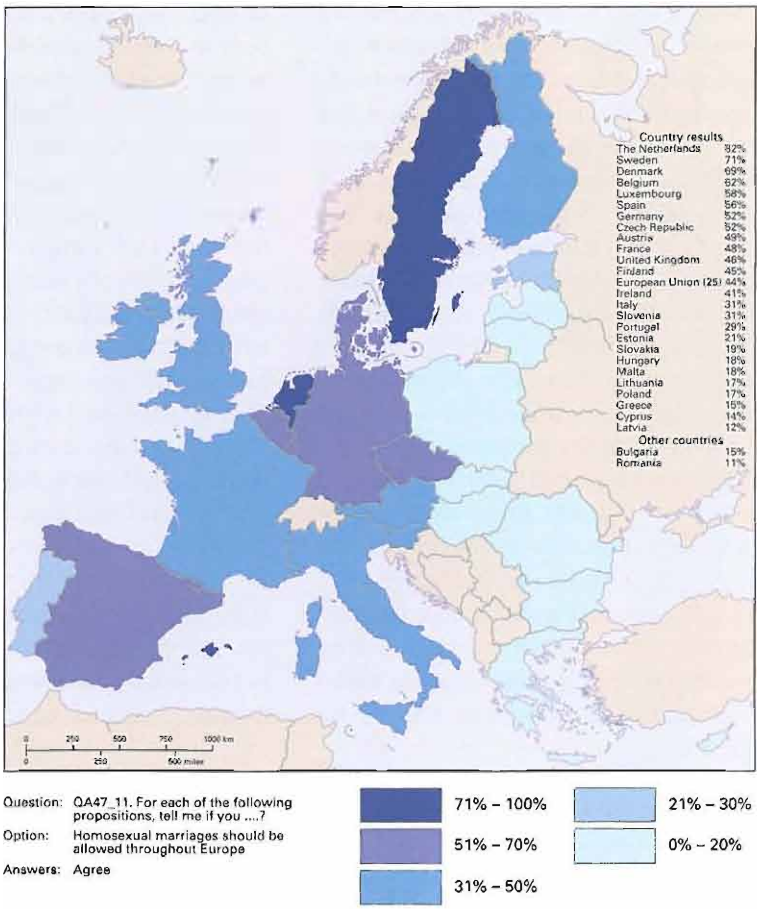


Figure 14.2 European attitudes to 'homosexual marriage', by country, 2006

Source: Eurobarometer 66, European Commission, 2006

upon partners important rights and responsibilities. 'Ceremonies of commitment' – non-legal marriages – have also become popular among both homosexuals and heterosexuals in America, but do not confer these rights and obligations. Conversely, of course, these legal rights and obligations are one reason why many heterosexual couples now decide either to defer marriage or not to get married at all.

Opponents of homosexual marriage condemn it as either frivolous or unnatural. They see it as legitimating a sexual orientation which the state should be doing its best to curb. For example, there are pressure groups in America dedicated to getting homosexuals to change their ways and marry people of the opposite sex. Some still see homosexuality as a perversion and are violently opposed to any provisions that might normalize it. In other countries, homosexuality remains illegal and carries severe legal penalties including long terms of imprisonment and even execution. In 2005, two Iranian teenagers were convicted and hanged, allegedly for the rape of a 13-year-old boy, though human rights groups argued their crime was having gay sex, with confessions extracted under torture (BBC News, July 2005).

Gay and lesbian civil rights

Until recently, most homosexuals hid their sexual orientation, for fear that 'coming out of the closet' would cost them their jobs, families and friends, and leave them open

to verbal and physical abuse. Yet, since the late 1960s, many homosexuals have acknowledged their homosexuality openly, and, as we saw in the discussion of gay marriage above, in some areas the lives of homosexual men and women have to a large extent been normalized (Seidman 1997). Manchester, New York, San Francisco, Sydney and many other large metropolitan areas around the world have thriving gay and lesbian communities. 'Coming out' may be important not only for the person who does so, but for others in the larger society; previously 'closeted' lesbians and gays come to realize they are not alone, while heterosexuals are forced to recognize that people whom they have admired and respected are homosexual.

The current global wave of gay and lesbian civil rights movements began partly as an outgrowth of the social movements of the 1960s, which emphasized pride in racial and ethnic identity. One pivotal event was the Stonewall Riots in June 1969 in the United States, when New York City's gay community – angered by continual police harassment – fought the New York Police Department for two days, a public action that for most people (gay or not) was practically unthinkable (Weeks 1977; D'Emilio 1983). The Stonewall Riots became a symbol of gay pride, heralding the 'coming out' of gays and lesbians, who insisted not only on equal treatment under the law, but also on a complete end to the stigmatization of their lifestyle. In 1994, on the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, 100,000 people attended the International March on the United Nations to Affirm the Human Rights of Lesbian and Gay People. It is clear that significant strides have been made, although discrimination and outright homophobia remain serious problems for many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) people.

There are enormous differences between countries in the degree to which homosexuality is legally punishable (see figure 14.3). In Africa, for example, male homosexual acts have been legalized in only a handful of countries, while female homosexuality is seldom mentioned in the law at all. In South Africa, the official policy of the former white government was to regard homosexuality as a psychiatric problem that threatened national security. Once it took power, however, the black government legislated full equality. In Asia and the Middle East, the situation is similar: male homosexuality is banned in the vast majority of countries, including all those that are predominantly Islamic. Europe, meanwhile, has some of the most liberal laws in the world: homosexuality has been legalized in nearly all countries, and, as we saw above, several countries legally recognize same-sex marriages.

Today there is a growing movement around the world for the rights of homosexuals. The International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), which was founded in 1978, today has more than 600 member organizations in some 90 countries on every continent (ILGA 2008). It holds international conferences, supports lesbian and gay social movements around the world, and lobbies international organizations. For example, it convinced the Council of Europe to require all its member nations to repeal laws banning homosexuality. In general, active lesbian and gay social movements tend to thrive in countries that emphasize individual rights and liberal state policies (Frank and McEneaney 1999).

The political campaigning of lesbian and gay movements in many parts of the world brought about new debates on gender identities and led to the problematizing of what previously appeared obvious: the gender differences and sexual differences are the same. Gayle Rubin (1975, 1984) argued that the typical Western gender difference is between men and women, while the key difference in sexuality is that between heterosexual and homosexual. However, sexuality is often expressed through *gender* distinctions rather than in its own terms. For example, it is common to talk about 'feminine' gay men or 'masculine' lesbians; the implication of this discourse is that gay men

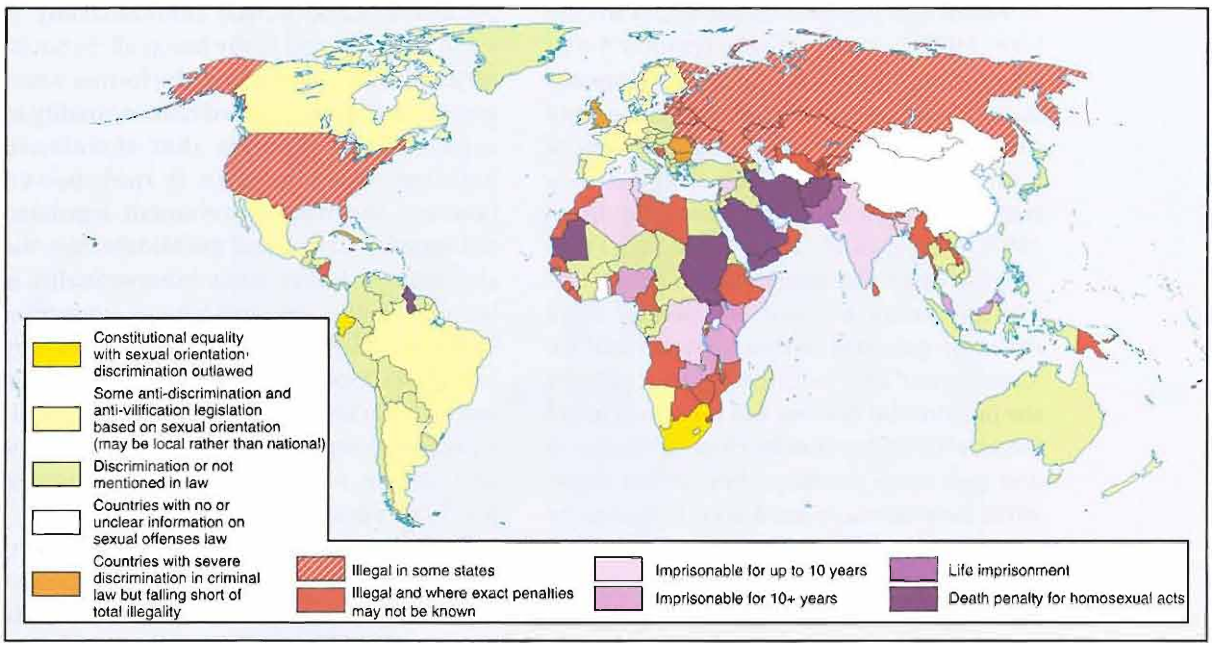


Figure 14.3 Sexual minorities and the law across the world

Source: © 2000 by New Internationalist, www.newint.org; reprinted by kind permission of New Internationalist.

and lesbians are deviant, because they break the norms of *gender*. Rubin was one of the first to argue that, theoretically, it is possible to separate gender from sexuality altogether. This theoretical move is the starting point for queer theory, which marks not only a break with conventional ideas but also from lesbian theory and gay theory, which deal with sexual difference as it relates to female and male gender respectively.

Queer theory builds upon the social constructionist approach to sexuality developed by Gagnon and Simon (1973), and has been heavily influenced by poststructuralist thought, particularly that associated with Judith Butler (1990), Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. In particular, queer theorists challenge the very notion of 'identity' as something that is relatively fixed or assigned to people by socializing agents. Following Foucault, queer theorists argue that gender and sexuality, along with all of the other terms that come with these concepts, constitute a specific *discourse* of sexuality, rather than referring to something objectively real or 'natural'. For example, in his work on the history of sexuality during the 1970s and '80s, Foucault argued that the male homosexual identity that today is associated with gay men, was not part of the dominant discourse on sexuality in the nineteenth century and before. Therefore, this form of identification just did not exist for people until it became part of, or was created within, the discourses of medicine and psychiatry. Identities can then be seen as pluralistic, quite unstable and subject to change over a lifetime.

Queer theorists are also interested in all forms of unconventional sexuality, including prostitution, bisexuality, transgender and so on, many of which are heterosexual rather than, or as well as, homosexual. In this way, queer theory can be viewed as a radical social constructionism that explores the process of *identity creation* and re-creation insofar as this relates to human sexuality and gender. Some queer theorists

also argue that every major sociological topic (religion, the body, globalization and so on), as well as other subjects, including literature and even lesbian and gay studies, should bring queer voices to the centre to challenge the heterosexual assumptions that underlie much contemporary thinking (Epstein 2002).

Critics argue that queer theory tends to study cultural texts (film, novels and so on) and currently lacks empirical support. It may well be that many, maybe most people, do not experience their identity as being as fluid and changing as the theory suggests, but, rather, as something quite firm and fixed (Edwards 1998). If so, it may be that the radical constructionism of queer theorists overestimates the degree to which identities are open to change. We can gain an insight into the empirical evidence by looking at how research into sexuality has been conducted and what particular problems can arise when studying this sensitive area of people's lives.

Researching sexuality

When Alfred Kinsey began his research in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, it was the first time a major investigation of actual sexual behaviour had been undertaken, and many people were shocked and surprised at the divergence between public norms and private sexual behaviour his team discovered (see 'Classic Studies 14.1'). We can speak much more confidently about public values concerning sexuality than we can about private practices, which, by their nature, go mostly undocumented. Still, many other areas of personal life, such as that within families and relationships, is similarly personal, yet has been the subject of many research studies. Why should sexuality be particularly difficult to research sociologically?

Surveys of sexual behaviour are fraught with difficulties. As we saw above, until quite recently sex was a taboo subject, not something to be discussed in either the public or the private realm. Perhaps more so than in any other areas of life, many, perhaps even most, people see sexual behaviour as a purely personal matter and are unwilling to discuss such an intimate subject with strangers. This may mean that those who *are* prepared to come forward to be interviewed are essentially a self-selected sample, which is therefore unrepresentative of the general population.

The social silence in relation to sexual matters has changed somewhat since the 1960s, a time when social movements associated with 'hippy' lifestyles and countercultural ideas of 'free love' challenged the existing order of things, including breaking with existing sexual norms. But we must be careful not to exaggerate their impact. Once the movements of the 1960s had become assimilated into mainstream society, it was clear that some of the older norms relating to sex continued to exert an influence. Some have even argued that a 'new fidelity' may be emerging (Laumann 1994), perhaps partly as a result of concerns about the risks associated with the transmission of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. For example, a 1998 survey of attitudes towards sexual relations in 24 countries (see figure 14.4) showed (with some exceptions) overwhelming majorities to be against extramarital sex, homosexual sex and sex before the age of 16. The survey also found that only a minority were against sex before marriage (Widmer et al. 1998), suggesting that the traditional linkage between marriage and sexual relations has been broken. In this context, sociological research into sexuality today faces the same problem as earlier studies; we simply do not know how far people tell the truth about their sexual lives when asked by a researcher whom they do not know and perhaps do not trust with their highly personal information. However, we must remember the lesson from Kinsey's studies here: such publicly stated attitudes may simply reflect people's understanding of prevailing public norms

Classic Studies 14.1 Alfred Kinsey discovers the diversity of sexual behaviour

The research problem

Do public norms of sexuality really govern people's sexual behaviour? Are sexually 'deviant' practices limited to a tiny minority of individuals? Is it possible that many more people engage in such practices in private, and that public norms fail to reflect this fact? To address these issues, Alfred Kinsey (1894–1956) and his research team set out to collect evidence from the white population in 1940s America. They faced condemnation from religious organizations and their work was denounced as immoral in the newspapers and even in Congress. But they persisted and eventually obtained sexual life histories from 18,000 people, a reasonably representative sample of the white American population (Kinsey 1948, 1953).

Kinsey's findings

Kinsey's research findings were surprising to most people and shocking to many, because they did indeed reveal a large difference between the public expectations of sexual behaviour prevailing at that time and actual sexual conduct. The research team found that almost 70 per cent of men had visited a prostitute and 84 per cent had had pre-marital sexual experiences. Yet, following the sexual double standard, 40 per cent of men also expected their wives to be virgins at the time of marriage. More than 90 per cent of males had engaged in masturbation and nearly 60 per cent in some form of oral sexual activity. Among women, around 50 per cent had had pre-marital sexual experiences, although mostly with their prospective husbands. Some 60 per cent had masturbated and the same percentage had engaged in oral-genital contact. The study also showed much higher levels of male homosexuality than expected, revealing that many otherwise heterosexual men had experienced homosexual feelings.

The gap between publicly accepted attitudes and actual behaviour that Kinsey's findings demonstrated was especially great in that particular period, just after the Second World War. A phase of sexual liberalization had begun rather earlier, in the 1920s, when many younger people felt freed from the strict moral codes that had governed earlier generations. Sexual behaviour probably changed a good deal, but issues concerning sexuality were not openly discussed in the way that has now become familiar. People participating in sexual activities that were still strongly disapproved of on a public level concealed them, not realizing the full extent to which many others were engaging in similar practices.

Critical points

Kinsey's research was controversial in the USA and was attacked by conservative and religious organizations. For example, one aspect of the studies explored the sexuality of children under 16 years of age. Many critics objected to their involvement as research subjects. Religious leaders also argued that open discussion of sexual behaviour would undermine Christian moral values. Academic critics argued that Kinsey's positivist approach collected much raw data, but failed to grasp the complexity of sexual desire underpinning the diverse behaviour he uncovered, or the meanings people attach to their sexual relationships. Later surveys also found lower levels of homosexual experience than Kinsey, suggesting that his sample may have been less representative than the team first thought.

Contemporary significance

Kinsey is widely seen as a founder of the scientific study of human sexuality and his findings were instrumental in challenging the widespread view at the time, that homosexuality was a form of mental illness requiring treatment. It was only in the more permissive era of the 1960s, which brought openly declared attitudes more into line with the realities of behaviour, that the overall tenor of Kinsey's findings came to be seen as providing a realistic picture of sexual behaviour. Kinsey died in 1956, but the Institute for Sex Research, which he headed, continues its research today and has produced much valuable information about contemporary sexual behaviour. It was renamed the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction in 1981 to celebrate his contribution to scientific research in this field.

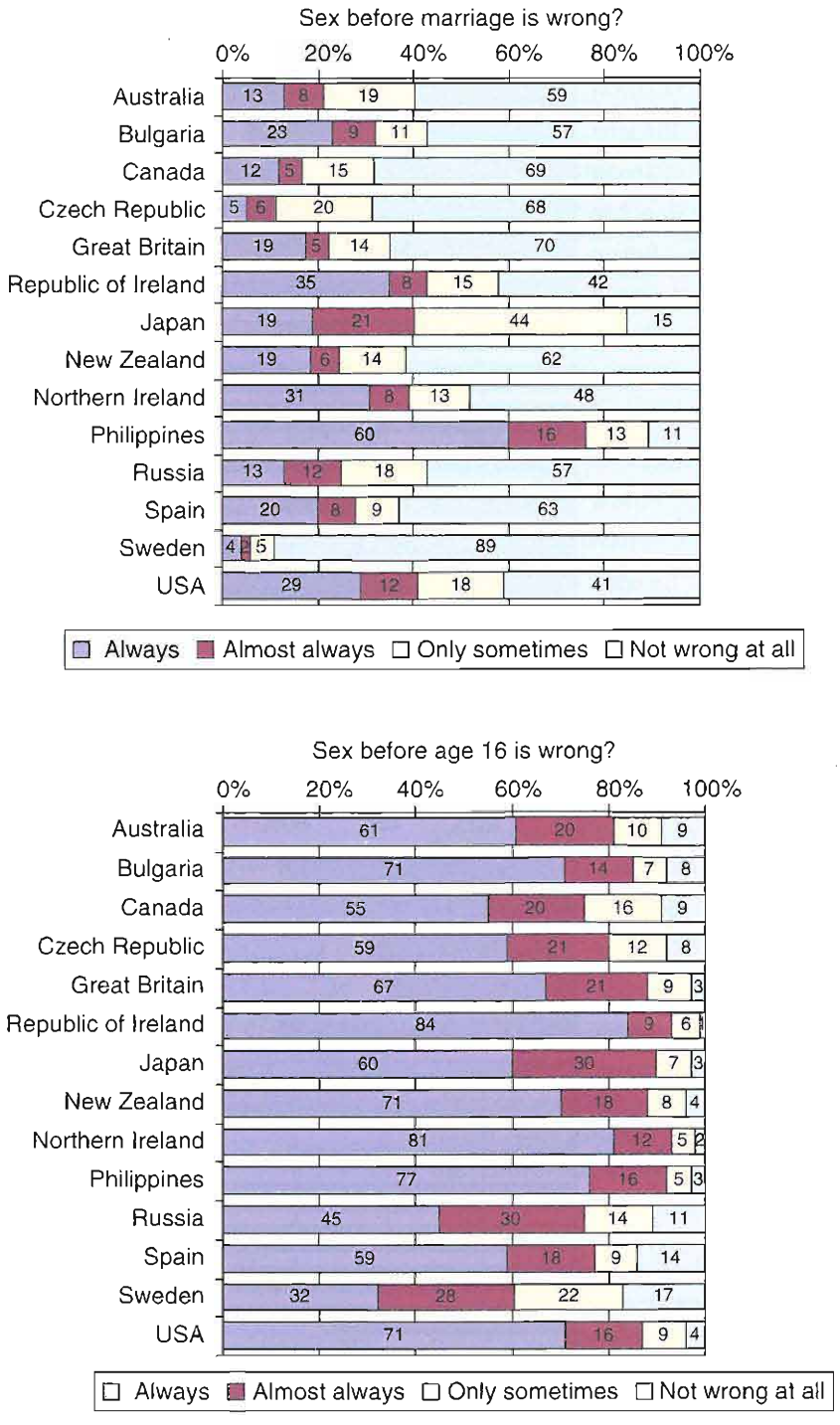
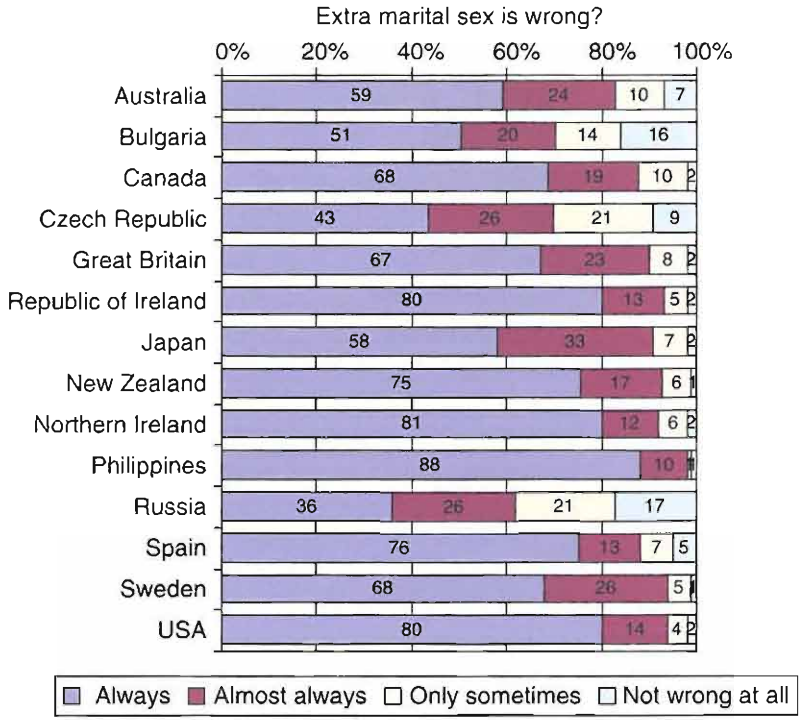


Figure 14.4 Attitudes towards sexual relations, 1998 (selected countries)

Source: Widmer et al. 1998



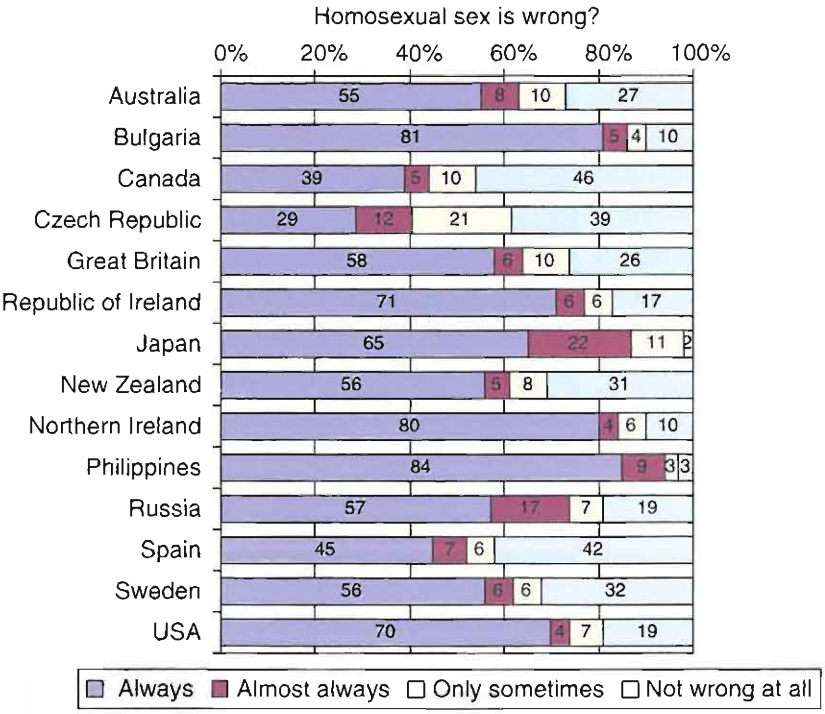


Figure 14.4 (Continued)

rather than accurately describing their private beliefs and sexual behaviours.

The validity of surveys of sexual behaviour has also been the focus of intense debate (Lewontin 1995). Critics have argued that they do not generate reliable information about sexual practices. In one American survey (Rubin 1990), researchers reported that 45 per cent of men aged between 80 and 85 say they have sex with their partner. Critics feel that this is so obviously untrue that it calls into doubt the findings of the whole survey. However, social gerontologists suggest that this criticism may itself be based on negative stereotypes of ageing rather than evidence. They point out that in one study of older men living outside institutions, 74 per cent were indeed sexually active, while others have found that most men even in their 90s sustained an interest in sex. When researching sexuality, sociologists need to be acutely aware of their own, sometimes unevidenced, assumptions.

THINKING CRITICALLY

The survey reported in figure 14.4 was carried out over a decade ago. Which countries appear to have the most 'liberal' attitudes towards sexual behaviour? Which seem to be more 'conservative'? Did any of the findings surprise you? Do you think that if the same questions were asked today, the results would be significantly different? If so, in what ways might they differ?

Gathering evidence on sexual behaviour

Many studies of sexual behaviour have taken the form of attitude and behaviour surveys using postal questionnaires or face-to-face interviews. But evidence in this area can also be collected through the analysis and interpretation of documentary materials such as personal diaries, oral history, magazines, newspapers and other published and unpublished historical materials. These research methods are not mutually exclusive of course, and can be combined to produce a richer account of changing forms of sexuality within societies.

An example of a large-scale survey is that of Lillian Rubin (1990), who interviewed 1,000 Americans between the ages of 13 and 48 to discover what changes had occurred in sexual behaviour and attitudes since the Kinsey studies. According to her findings, there had been some significant developments. Sexual activity was typically beginning at a younger age than was characteristic of the previous generation and the sexual practices of teenagers tended to be as varied and comprehensive as those of adults. There was still a double standard, but it was not as powerful as it once had been.

One of the most important changes was that women had come to expect, and actively pursue, sexual pleasure in relationships. They were expecting to receive, not only to provide, sexual satisfaction. Rubin found that women were more sexually liberated than previously, but most men in the survey found such female assertiveness difficult to accept, often saying they 'felt inadequate', were afraid they could 'never do anything right' and found it 'impossible to satisfy women these days' (Rubin 1990). This finding seems to contradict all that we have come to expect about gender relations. Men continue to dominate in most spheres and they are, in general, much more violent towards women than the other way round. Such violence is substantially aimed at the control and continuing subordination of women. Yet a number of authors have begun to argue that masculinity is a burden as well as a source of rewards, and if men were to stop using sexuality as a means of control, not only women, but men too would be beneficiaries.

The use of documentary materials to study changing forms of sexuality is well demonstrated in Dutch sociologist Cas Wouters's *Sex and Manners* (2004), a comparative study of shifting gender relations and sexuality in England, Germany, the Netherlands and the USA. Wouters studied books on 'good manners' from the

end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth, particularly as these pertained to relationships between men and women and 'courting behaviour' – the opportunities for and limitations on meetings and 'dating' between men and women. Manners books provide advice on how such meetings should be conducted, providing codes of manners on how to meet and behave in relations with 'the opposite sex'.

For instance, in an English publication from 1902, *Etiquette for Women*, the advice given is: 'It is the man's place to pay for what refreshments are had, if the ladies do not insist on paying their share; and if he invited the ladies with him to go in somewhere and have some, then the case is simple enough.' But by the 1980s, the practice of 'going Dutch' – sharing the cost of a date – was well established. One manners book from 1989, reflecting on the old practice of the man always paying for the woman, noted that, 'some still do, but women can't dine endlessly without offering a crust in return' (Wouters 2004: 25–7). This example seems fairly trivial, but in fact it shows how shifting gender relations in the wider society, with more women moving into paid employment and the public sphere more generally (Walby 1990), were also leading to changing behavioural norms between men and women. Wouters's research provides many such examples in relation to sexual behaviour and courtship. By analysing manners books over the course of a century and relating the advice given in these to sociological theories of social change, Wouters argues that the four countries all exhibit a long-term trend away from very formal and rigid codes of manners, towards much more informal codes that allow for a wider range of acceptable courtship behaviour. Hence, those critics of the 'permissiveness' brought about since the 1960s fail to appreciate that such changes are part of a much longer and deeper process of social transformation.

The two studies reported here have many similarities. Both are concerned with changes in gender relations, norms of sexual behaviour alongside private and public attitudes towards sexuality. While Rubin's study tells us something of how people *today* feel about such changes and what impact they are having on contemporary lifestyles, Wouters's analysis of primary documents sets these contemporary findings into historical and comparative perspective. Bringing together the findings from studies using different methods, which also focus on different aspects of changing sexual behaviour, may give sociologists more confidence in their conclusions in this difficult to research area.

Prostitution and 'sex work'

Prostitution

Prostitution can be defined as the granting of sexual favours for monetary gain. The word 'prostitute' began to come into common usage in the late eighteenth century. In the ancient world, most purveyors of sexuality for economic reward were courtesans, concubines (kept mistresses) or slaves. Courtesans and concubines often had a high position in traditional societies. A key aspect of modern prostitution is that women and their clients are generally unknown to one another. Although men may become 'regular customers', the relationship is not initially established on the basis of personal acquaintance. This was not true of most forms of the dispensing of sexual favours for material gain in earlier times. Prostitution is directly connected to the break-up of small-scale communities, the development of large impersonal urban areas and the commercializing of social relations. In small-scale traditional communities, sexual relations were controlled by their very visibility. In newly developed urban areas, more anonymous social connections were easily established.

A United Nations resolution passed in 1951 condemns those who organize prostitution or profit from the activities of

Amsterdam's Red Light District contains many sex clubs, bars and 'prostitution windows' from which sex is sold. In 2006, city officials announced they were shutting down about one-third of the 'windows' in a crackdown on trafficking and pimping in the area.

prostitutes, but does not ban prostitution as such. A total of 53 member states have formally accepted the resolution, although their legislation on prostitution varies widely. In some countries, prostitution itself is illegal. Other countries prohibit only certain types, such as street soliciting or child prostitution. Some national or local governments license officially recognized brothels or sex parlours – such as the 'Eros centres' in Germany or the sex houses in Amsterdam. In October 1999 the Dutch Parliament turned prostitution into an official profession for the estimated 30,000 women who work in the sex industry. All venues where sex is sold can now be regulated, licensed and inspected by local authorities. However, only a few countries license male prostitutes.

Legislation against prostitution rarely punishes clients. Those who purchase sexual services are not arrested or prosecuted, and in court procedures their identities may be kept hidden. There are far fewer studies of clients than of those selling sex, and it is rare for anyone to suggest – as is often stated or implied about prostitutes – that the clients are psychologically disturbed. The imbalance in research surely expresses an uncritical acceptance of orthodox stereotypes of sexuality according to which it is 'normal' for men to actively seek a variety of sexual outlets, while those who cater for these needs are condemned.

Sex work

Today, prostitution is more widely seen by sociologists as just one form of **sex work**. Sex work can be defined as the provision of sexual services in a financial exchange

between consenting adults, though, of course, children (and adults) have historically been – and still are – forced into sex work in both developed and developing countries. Sex workers, like prostitutes, are mostly female, and sex work includes at least all of the following: actors in pornographic films, nude modelling, striptease and lap dancers, live sex show workers, providers of erotic massage, phone sex workers and home-based 'webcam sex' via the Internet, if this involves a financial exchange (Weitzer 2000).

The original 1970s concept of the sex worker aimed to destigmatize the working practices of prostitutes and other women working in the sex industry. Provided that sexual services were exchanged between freely consenting adults, it was argued that such work should be treated like any other type of work and prostitution, in particular, should be decriminalized. Prostitutes around the world today come mainly from poorer social backgrounds, as they did in the past, but they have now been joined by considerable numbers of middle-class women working across the range of sex work described above and many see their work as providing useful and respectable sexual services. As 'Rona', a sex worker with ten years' experience insists:

> Yes, it is a profession – I believe a perfectly respectable profession, and should be viewed as such in the same way as a teacher, accountant or anyone else. I believe that the first step is to obtain recognition for sex workers as legitimate workers in a legitimate industry and profession. . . . Why should the fact that I have chosen to work as a prostitute be considered any different from that of being a nurse, which I once was? There should be no social stigma attached. I work in clean comfortable surroundings, have regular medical check-ups and pay taxes like anyone else. ('Rona' 2000)

The idea of a trade union for sex workers may appear strange, but in the context of ensuring health and safety at work, legal support in disputes over pay and conditions and access to training or retraining (for those who wish to leave the sex industry), these issues lie at the centre of mainstream trade union activity. Sex workers point out that union collectivization may help to root out exploitation and abuse within the sexual services industry. For example, formed in 2000, the International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW), based in London, sees unionization as the first step towards the professionalization of sex work and in 2002 it became affiliated to the GMB, a large general trade union in the UK. The IUSW campaigns for:

- the decriminalization of all aspects of sex work involving consenting adults;
- the right to form and join professional associations or unions;
- the right to work on the same basis as other independent contractors and employers and to receive the same benefits;
- no taxation without such rights and representation;
- zero tolerance of coercion, violence, sexual abuse, child labour, rape and racism;
- legal support for sex workers who want to sue those who exploit their labour;
- the right to travel across national boundaries;
- clean and safe places to work;
- the right to choose whether to work on our own or cooperatively
- the absolute right to say no;
- access to training – our jobs require very special skills and professional standards;
- access to health clinics where we do not feel stigmatized;
- retraining programmes for sex workers who want to leave the industry;
- an end to social attitudes which stigmatise those who are or have been sex workers. (IUSW: www.iusw.org/start/index.html)

Nevertheless, the concept of sex work remains controversial, as many feminists

actively campaign against the sex industry, seeing it as degrading to women, strongly linked to sexual abuse and drug addiction, and ultimately rooted in women's subordination to men. More recently, though, sex work has been reappraised by some feminists who argue that many, though by no means all, women sex workers earn a good living, enjoy their work and do not fit the stereotype of the poor, sexually abused drug addict forced into prostitution by their circumstances (O'Neill 2000). For these women, sex work provides worthwhile jobs that are relatively well paid. Many sex workers see themselves as independent women who have taken control of their lives, which makes them little different from successful women working in other employment sectors (Chapkis et al. 1997).

THINKING CRITICALLY

Why does prostitution continue to thrive into the twenty-first century? How might functionalist theorists explain its persistence over such a long time period? What would an explanation rooted in Marxism focus on? Could either perspective satisfactorily account for the strongly gendered character of prostitution and expansion of sex work? What would a feminist approach add to our understanding of sex work today?

Explaining prostitution and sex work

Why do prostitution and other forms of sex work still exist? Certainly, prostitution is an enduring phenomenon, which resists the attempts of governments to eliminate it. It is also almost always a matter of women selling sexual favours to men, rather than the reverse – although there are some instances, as in Hamburg, Germany, where 'houses of pleasure' exist to provide male sexual services to women. And of course, boys or men also sell sex to other men.

No single factor can explain the persistence of prostitution or sex work. It might seem that men simply have stronger, or more persistent, sexual needs than women, and therefore require the outlets that the sex industry provides. But this explanation is implausible. Most women seem capable of developing their sexuality in a more intense fashion than men of comparable age. Moreover, if prostitution existed simply to serve sexual needs, there would surely be many male prostitutes catering for women.

One possible conclusion to be drawn is that sex work expresses, and to some extent helps perpetuate, the tendency of men to treat women as objects who can be 'used' for sexual purposes. Prostitution expresses in a particular context the inequalities of power between men and women. Of course, many other elements are also involved. Prostitution offers a means of obtaining sexual satisfaction for people who, because of their physical shortcomings or the existence of restrictive moral codes, cannot find other sexual partners. Prostitutes and sex workers often cater for men who are away from home, desire sexual encounters without commitment or have unusual sexual tastes that other women will not accept. Of course, such a 'negative' conclusion ignores the possibility that many female sex workers, like many of the men who also profit from the sex industry, are active social agents who are adept at selling sexual services to men who need and benefit from them. Certainly, that is the way that some sex workers describe themselves and the services they provide.

The global sex industry

'Sex tourism' exists in several areas of the world, including Thailand and the Philippines. Sex tourism in the Far East has its origins in the provision of prostitutes for American troops during the Korean and Vietnam wars. 'Rest and recreation' centres were built in Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea and Taiwan. Some still remain, particularly in the Philippines,

catering to regular shipments of tourists as well as to the military stationed in the region.

Today, package tours oriented towards prostitution draw men to these areas from Europe, the United States and Japan, often in search of sex with minors – although these tours are illegal in more than 30 countries including the UK, Australia, Canada, Japan and the USA, under laws dealing with the 'extraterritorial accountability' of their citizens. Enforcement is patchy though, and in 2004 a UN report noted that Japan had made no prosecutions under its legislation, whereas the USA had made at least 20 prosecutions for sex tourism (Svensson 2004).

A report published in 1998 by the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that prostitution and the sex industry in Southeast Asia have taken on the dimensions of a fully fledged commercial sector, having grown rapidly over recent decades. For example, it is estimated that there are up to 2 million female prostitutes in Thailand alone. Cheaper global travel and the large differential in the exchange rate between Asian and international currencies have made sex tourism more affordable and attractive to foreigners. Furthermore, the sex industry is linked to economic hardship. Some desperate families force their own children into prostitution; other young people are unwittingly lured into the sex trade by responding innocently to advertisements for 'entertainers' or 'dancers'. Migration patterns from rural to urban areas are an important factor in the growth of the sex industry, as many women eager to leave their traditional and constraining home towns grasp at any opportunity to do so. Sex tourism has serious implications for the spread of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases and is often associated with violence, criminality, the drug trade and violations of human rights (Lim 1998).

The trafficking of people, mostly women and girls, across the world has become a much more significant issue in recent years. For example, the trafficking of women into Western Europe to become prostitutes and sex workers is expanding rapidly. Although it is impossible to know exactly how many people become victims of human trafficking, the UN Refugee Agency's (2006) best estimate is that between 100,000 and 500,000 people are trafficked into Europe annually. As EU borders expand with the entry of new countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, more transit routes become available for entry into wealthy Western European countries or the new border countries become final destinations themselves for a growing sex industry.

Governments are moving to legislate against trafficking. In the UK, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 made trafficking for prostitution a criminal offence for the first time (extended to trafficking for domestic servitude and forced labour in 2004). Clearly, globalization enables the more rapid movement of people across national boundaries and new patterns of movement are emerging. In relation to sex tourism and trafficking for prostitution, these patterns are related to the huge disparities in wealth across the world's countries and to gendered power relations. Relatively rich Westerners make short trips into developing countries to buy sex from relatively poor people, while relatively powerless Eastern European women are being forced into 'sex work' in Western Europe by organized gangs of, mostly male, people traffickers. The lives of many victims of the global sex industry are very far removed from those of the liberated and empowered sex workers described by 'Rona' above.

Gender

'Sex' is an ambiguous term. It can mean, as in the previous sections, 'sexual activity'. However, it can also refer to the physical characteristics that separate men and women. You might think that being a man or a woman is simply associated with the sex of the physical body we are born with. But, like

many questions of interest to sociologists, the nature of maleness and femaleness is not so easily classified. This section examines the origins of the differences between men and women. Before we go on, though, we need to make an important distinction, between sex and gender.

In general, sociologists use the term 'sex' to refer to the anatomical and physiological differences that define male and female bodies. Gender, by contrast, concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females. Gender is linked to socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity; it is not necessarily a direct product of an individual's biological sex. Some people, for example, feel that they have been born into the wrong bodies and seek to 'put things right' by switching gender part way through life, or following the lifestyles or dress of the other sex. The distinction between sex and gender is a fundamental one, since many differences between males and females are not biological in origin. Contrasting approaches have been taken to explain the formation of gender identities and the social roles based on those identities. The debate is really one about how much learning there is; some scholars allow more prominence than others to social influences in analysing gender differences.

Sociological interpretations of gender differences and inequalities have taken contrasting positions on this question of sex and gender. Three broad approaches will be explored below. First we will look at arguments for a biological basis to behavioural differences between men and women. Next, attention will turn to theories placing central importance on socialization and the learning of gender roles. Finally, we will consider the ideas of scholars who argue that neither gender nor sex have a biological basis, but are both entirely socially constructed.

Gender and biology: natural differences?

How far are differences in the behaviour of women and men the result of sex rather than gender? In other words, how much are they the result of biological differences? As we saw above, some authors hold that aspects of human biology – ranging from hormones to chromosomes to brain size to genetics – are responsible for innate differences in behaviour between men and women. These differences, they claim, can be seen in some form across all cultures, implying that natural factors are responsible for the inequalities between genders which characterize most societies. Such researchers are likely to draw attention to the fact, for example, that in almost all cultures, men rather than women take part in hunting and warfare. Surely, they argue, this indicates that men possess biologically based tendencies towards aggression that women lack?

Many researchers remain unconvinced by this argument. The level of aggressiveness of males, they say, varies widely between different cultures, and women are expected to be more passive or gentle in some cultures than in others (Elshtain 1987). Critics point out that theories of 'natural difference' are often grounded in data on animal behaviour rather than in anthropological or historical evidence about human behaviour, which reveal variation over time and place. Moreover, they add, because a trait is more or less universal, it does not follow that it is biological in origin; there may be cultural factors of a general kind that produce such characteristics. For instance, in the majority of cultures, most women spend a significant part of their lives caring for children and could not readily take part in hunting or war.

Although the hypothesis that biological factors determine behaviour patterns in men and women cannot be dismissed out of hand, nearly a century of research to identify the physiological origins of such an

influence has been unsuccessful. There is no evidence of the mechanisms which would link such biological forces with the complex social behaviour exhibited by human men and women (Connell 1987). Theories that see individuals as complying with some kind of innate predisposition neglect the vital role of social interaction in shaping human behaviour.

Gender socialization

Another route to take in understanding the origins of gender differences is the study of gender socialization, the learning of gender roles with the help of social agencies such as the family and the media. Such an approach makes a distinction between biological sex and social gender – an infant is born with the first and develops the second. Through contact with various agencies of socialization, both primary and secondary, children gradually internalize the social norms and expectations which are seen to correspond with their sex. Gender differences are not biologically determined, they are culturally produced. According to this view, gender inequalities result because men and women are socialized into different roles.

Theories of gender socialization have been favoured by functionalists who see boys and girls as learning 'sex roles' and the male and female identities – masculinity and femininity – which accompany them. They are guided in this process by positive and negative sanctions, socially applied forces which reward or restrain behaviour. For example, a small boy could be positively sanctioned in his behaviour ('What a brave boy you are!'), or be the recipient of negative sanction ('Boys don't play with dolls'). These positive and negative reinforcements aid boys and girls in learning and conforming to expected sex roles. If an individual develops gender practices which do not correspond to his or her biological sex – that is, they are deviant – the explanation is seen to reside in inadequate or irregular socialization. According to this functionalist view, socializing agencies contribute to the maintenance of social order by overseeing the smooth gender socialization of new generations.

This rigid interpretation of sex roles and socialization has been criticized on a number of fronts. Many writers argue that gender socialization is not an inherently smooth process; different 'agencies' such as the family, schools and peer groups may be at odds with one another. Moreover, socialization theories ignore the ability of individuals to reject, or modify, the social expectations surrounding sex roles. As Connell has argued:

> 'Agencies of socialization' cannot produce mechanical effects in a growing person. What they do is invite the child to participate in social practice on given terms. The invitation may be, and often is, coercive – accompanied by heavy pressure to accept and no mention of an alternative. . . . Yet children do decline, or more exactly start making their own moves on the terrain of gender. They may refuse heterosexuality . . . they may set about blending masculine and feminine elements, for example girls insisting on competitive sport at school. They may start a split in their own lives, for example boys dressing in drag when by themselves. They may construct a fantasy life at odds with their actual practice, which is perhaps the commonest move of all. (1987)

It is important to remember that humans are not passive objects or unquestioning recipients of gender 'programming', as some sociologists have suggested. People are active agents who create and modify roles for themselves. While we should be sceptical of any wholesale adoption of the sex roles approach, many studies have shown that to some degree gender identities are a result of social influences.

Social influences on gender identity flow through many diverse channels; even parents committed to raising their children in a 'non-sexist' way find existing patterns of gender learning difficult to combat (Statham 1986). Studies of parent–child

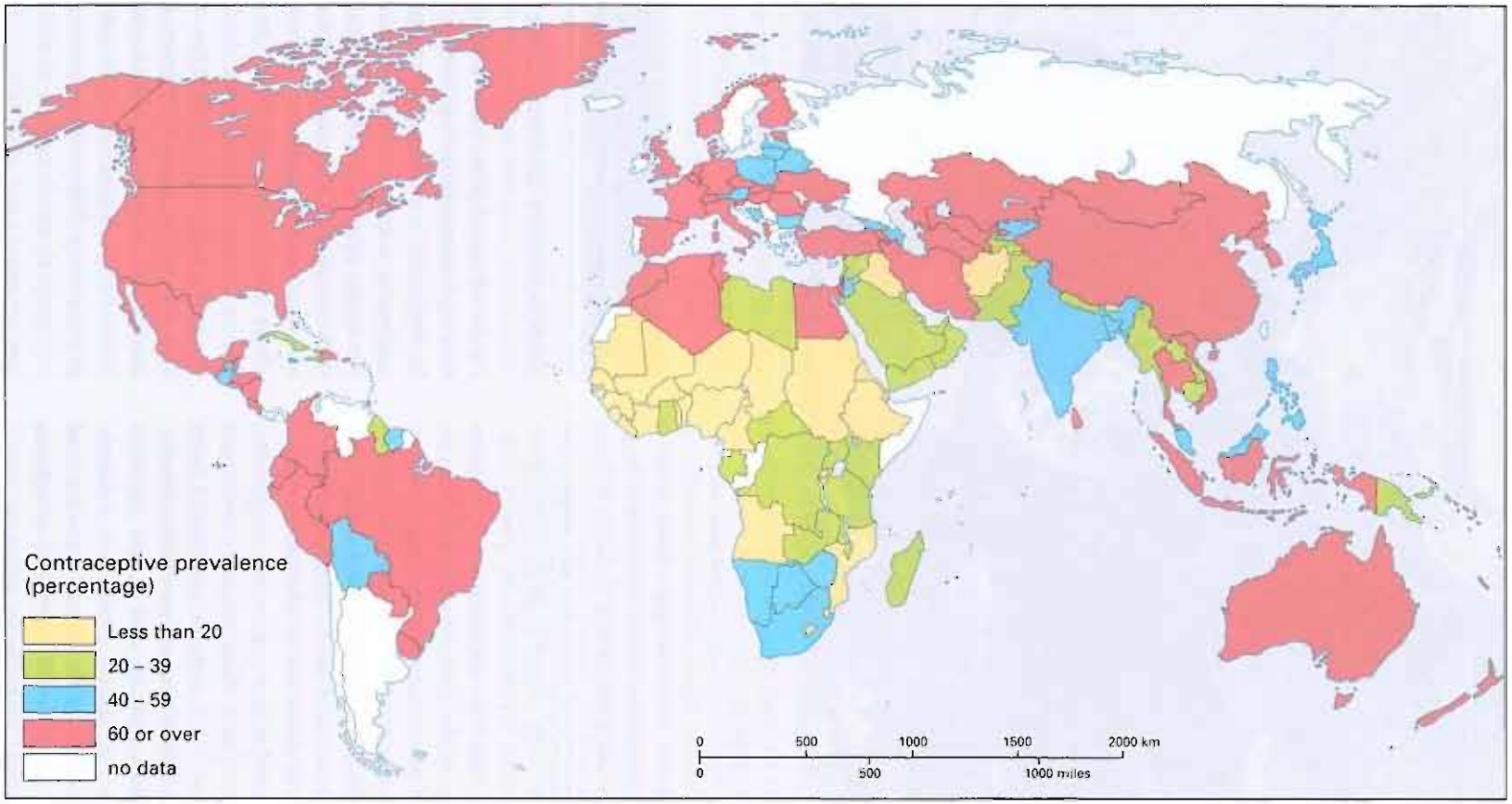
Gendered learning does not take place simply through formal instruction but also occurs in many everyday activities.

interactions, for example, have shown distinct differences in the treatment of boys and girls even when the parents believe their reactions to both are the same. The toys, picture books and television programmes experienced by young children all tend to emphasize differences between male and female attributes. Although the situation is changing somewhat, male characters generally outnumber females in most children's books, television programmes and films. Male characters tend to play more active, adventurous roles, while females are portrayed as passive, expectant and domestically oriented (Weitzman 1972; Zammuner 1987; Davies 1991). Feminist researchers have demonstrated how cultural and media products marketed to young audiences embody traditional attitudes towards gender and towards the sorts of aims and ambitions girls and boys are expected to have.

A more detailed discussion of gender socialization is in chapter 8, 'The Life-Course'.

Reproductive technologies

For hundreds of years, childbirth and child-rearing dominated the lives of most women. In traditional societies, contraception was ineffective or, in some societies, unknown. As late as the eighteenth century in Europe and the United States, it was common for women to experience as many as 20 pregnancies, often involving miscarriages and infant deaths. In many parts of the developing world today, it is still commonplace for women to have a large number of pregnancies over a lifetime. For example, the total fertility rate in sub-Saharan Africa is 5.6, which is double the global average. When researchers asked what was people's ideal number of children, the average was 4.1 in Kenya and 8.5 in Chad and



NB: 'Contraceptive prevalence' is the percentage of women of reproductive age (15–49), married or in partnerships, currently using contraception.

Figure 14.5 Global contraceptive prevalence, October 2005 estimates

Source: United Nations Population Division, 2005. Reprinted by permission of the United Nations Population Division.

Niger, with men reporting a higher 'ideal number' than women.

In many parts of the world, improved methods of contraception have changed this situation in a fundamental way. Far from any longer being natural, it is almost unknown in the industrial countries for women to undergo so many pregnancies. Advances in contraceptive technology enable most women and men around the world to control whether and when they choose to have children, though this also depends on social acceptance and whether they are made available. In many African countries, for example, contraceptive prevalence in 2003 (see figure 14.5) was below 20 per cent; a significant factor in the continuing HIV/AIDS epidemic in those countries.

See chapter 10, 'Health, Illness and Disability', for more discussion of HIV/AIDS as a global issue.

However, contraception is only one example of a reproductive technology. Some other examples of the social shaping of natural processes are described below.

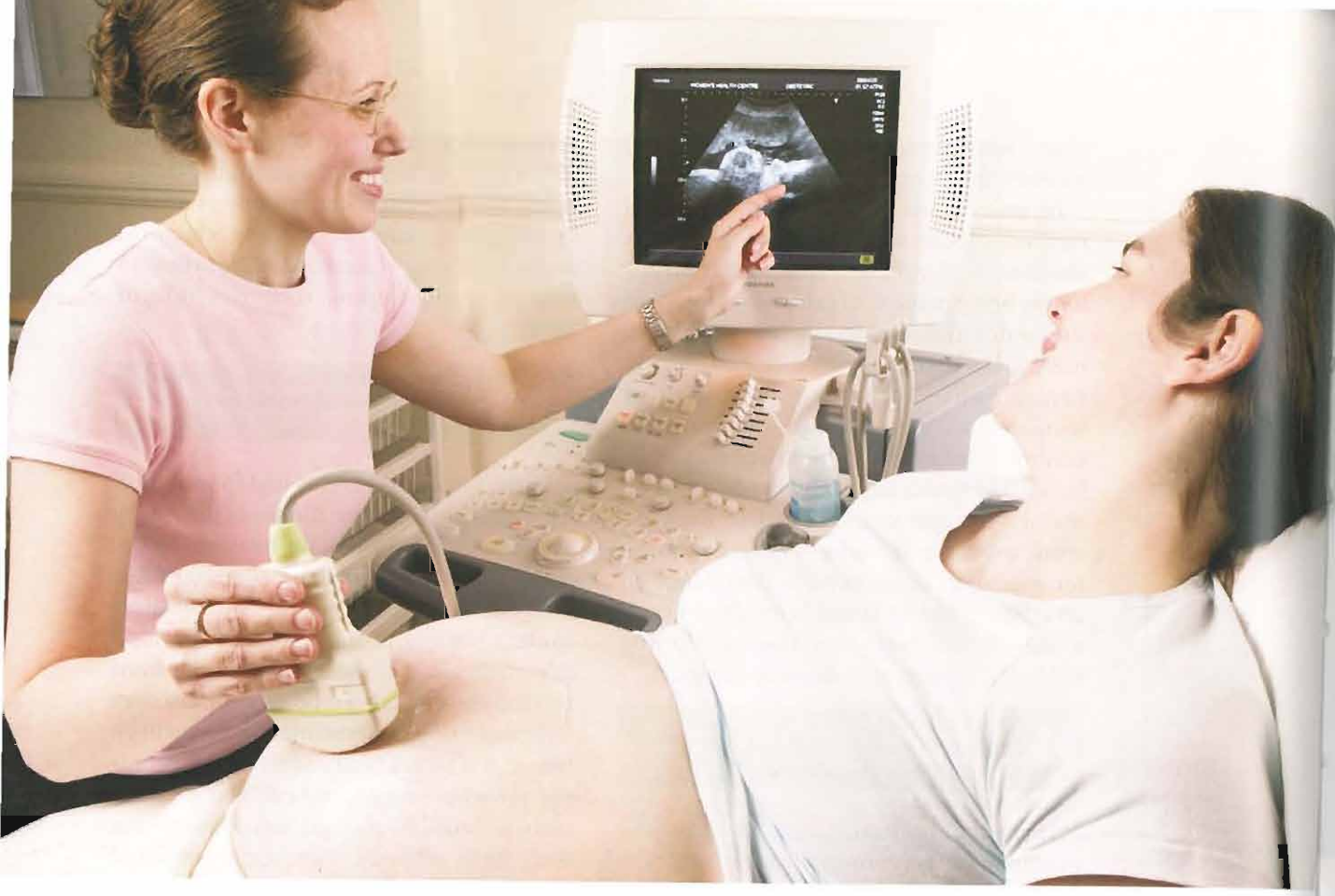
Childbirth

Medical science has not always been involved with the major life transitions from birth to death. The medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth developed slowly, as local physicians and midwives were displaced by paediatric specialists. Today in the industrialized societies, most births occur in a hospital with the help of a specialized medical team, and infant mortality rates are historically low, more than ten times lower than rates in developing countries. However, childbirth is still fraught with danger in many parts of the developing world, where a combination of uneven provision of medical services, a high risk of infection – particularly HIV/AIDS – and very high teenage pregnancy rates make giving birth to new lives a major cause of death for young women as well. Globally, only 10 per cent of all births (13 million per year) are to women under the age of 20, but more than 90 per cent of these births are in the developing world. Hence, complications arising in pregnancy are the leading cause of death in young women aged between 15 and 19 in developing countries (Mayor 2004).

Medicalization of the body is discussed in chapter 10, 'Health, Illness and Disability'.

In the past, new parents had to wait until the day of birth to learn the sex of their baby and whether it would be healthy. Today, prenatal tests such as the sonogram (an image of the foetus produced by using ultrasonic waves) and amniocentesis (which draws off some of the amniotic fluid from around the foetus) can be used to discover structural or chromosomal abnormalities before the baby's birth. Such new technology presents couples and modern societies with new ethical and legal decisions. When a disorder is detected, the couple are faced with the decision of whether or not to have the baby, knowing it may be seriously disabled throughout its life.

The development of *assisted reproductive technologies* since the late 1970s – particularly *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) techniques – have enabled many cases of human infertility to be overcome, though success rates decline rapidly for women over the age of 40 who use their own eggs. IVF involves egg cells from a woman being fertilized outside the womb in a fluid medium, before being returned to the womb where pregnancy occurs. The first successful IVF births were known as 'test-tube babies' because of this laboratory fertilization process. IVF, as with pre-natal tests, turns what was previously thought to be a natural fate into a social choice. An individual's biology is no longer the absolute determinant of whether they can have children. Instead, social factors such as income levels and the availability and accessibility of specialist IVF facilities determine whether biological infertility is such an obstacle.



Modern medical technologies have helped to transform the experience of pregnancy and childbirth for women in the developed world.

Genetic engineering: designer babies?

A great deal of scientific endeavour these days is being devoted to the expansion of genetic engineering; that is, intervening in the genetic make-up of the foetus so as to influence its subsequent development. The likely social impact of genetic engineering is starting to provoke debates almost as intense as those that surround the issue of abortion. According to its supporters, genetic engineering will bring us many benefits. It is possible, for example, to identify the genetic factors that make some people vulnerable to certain diseases. Genetic reprogramming will ensure that these illnesses are no longer passed on from generation to generation. It will be possible to 'design' bodies before birth in terms of colour of skin, hair and eyes, weight and so on.

There could be no better example of the mixture of opportunities and problems that the increasing socialization of nature creates for us than genetic engineering. What choices will parents make if they can design their babies, and what limits should be placed on those choices? Genetic engineering is unlikely to be cheap. Will this mean that those who can afford to pay will be able to programme out from their children any traits they see as socially undesirable? What will happen to the children of more deprived groups, who will continue to be born naturally?

Some sociologists have argued that differential access to genetic engineering might lead to the emergence of a 'biological underclass'. Those who do not have the physical advantages that genetic engineering can bring might be subject to prejudice

and discrimination by those who do enjoy these advantages. They might have difficulty finding employment and life or health insurance (Duster 1990).

The abortion debate

Perhaps the most controversial ethical dilemma created by modern reproductive technologies in modern societies is this: under what conditions should abortion be available to women? The abortion debate has become so intense in many countries precisely because it centres on basic ethical issues to which there are no easy solutions. Those who are 'pro-life' believe that abortion is always wrong except in extreme circumstances, because it is equivalent to murder. For them, ethical issues are above all subject to the value that must be placed on human life. Those who are 'pro-choice' argue that the mother's control over her own body – her own right to live a rewarding life – must be the primary consideration.

The debate in the USA has led to numerous episodes of violence; for example, in 2003 an anti-abortion campaigner was executed in Florida following his conviction for the murder of two people, one of them a doctor who performed abortions. Can such an emotionally polarized issue ever be resolved? At least one prominent social and legal theorist, Ronald Dworkin (1993), has suggested that it can. The intense divisions between those who are pro-life and those who are pro-choice, he argues, hide deeper sources of agreement between the two sides, and in this there is a source of hope. At previous periods of history, life was often relatively cheap. In current times, however, we have come to place a high value on the sanctity of human life. Each side agrees with this value, but they interpret it differently, the one emphasizing the interests of the child, the other the interests of the mother. If the two sides can be persuaded that they share a common ethical value, Dworkin suggests, a more constructive dialogue may be possible.

This young Wodaabe man, from the Gerewol in Niger, is taking part in a formal dance. The kohl on his lips and eyes, and his eye-rolling and grinning are thought to give him extra sex appeal to the young women of the Wodaabe.

The social construction of gender and sex

In recent years, socialization and gender role theories have been criticized by a growing number of sociologists. Rather than seeing sex as biologically determined and gender as culturally learned, they argue that we should view both sex and gender as socially constructed products. Not only is gender a purely social creation that lacks a fixed 'essence', but the human body itself is subject to social forces which shape and alter it in various ways. We can give our bodies meanings which challenge what is usually thought of as 'natural'. Individuals can choose to construct and reconstruct their bodies as they please – ranging from exercise, dieting,

There is a gender dimension to everyday social interaction. Even the way people sit demonstrates gendered socialization. It can be quite disturbing, for example, when men and women break the rules.

piercing and personal fashion, to plastic surgery and sex-change operations.

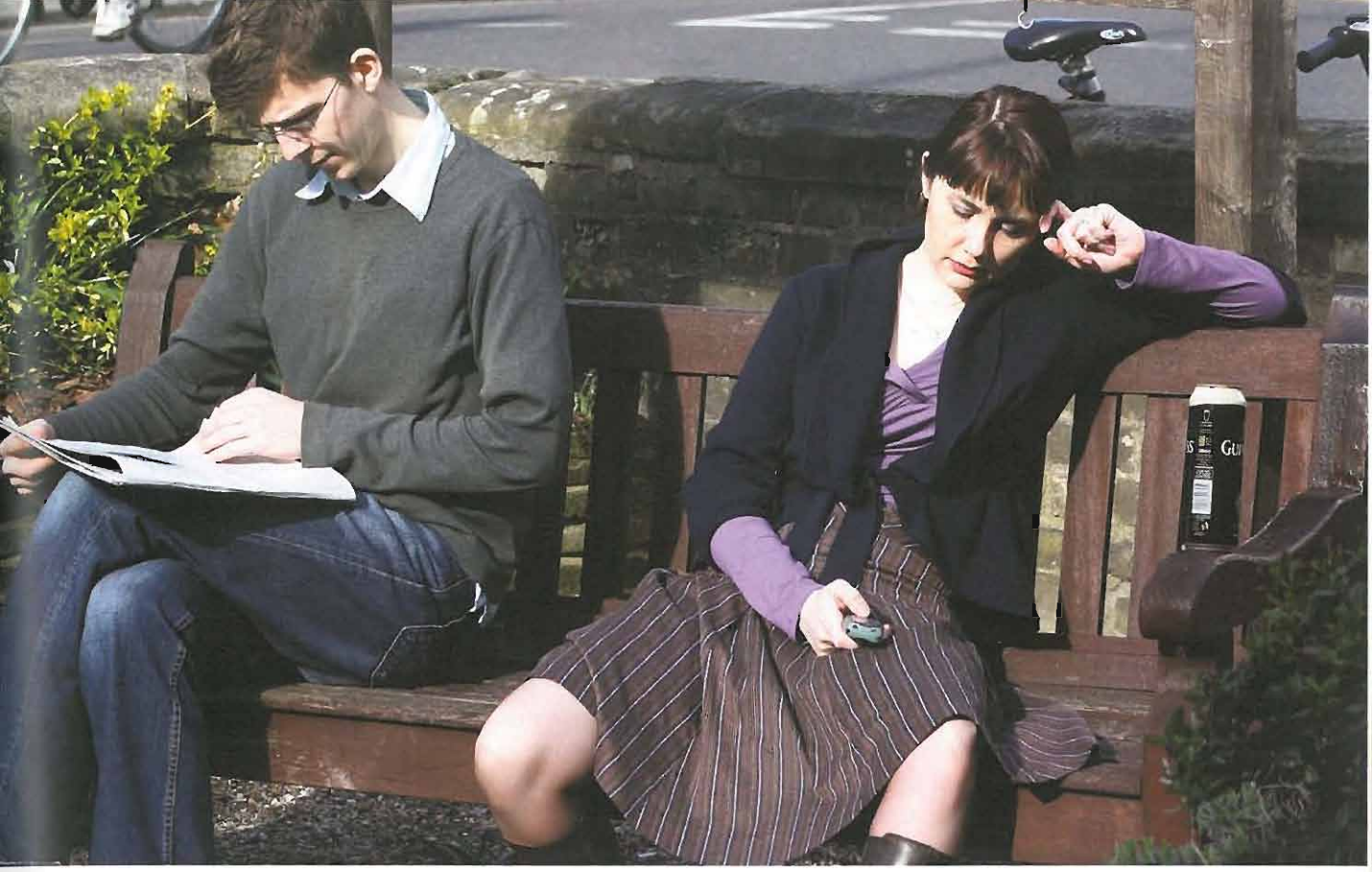
Technology is blurring the boundaries of our physical bodies. Thus, the argument goes, the human body and biology are not 'givens', but are subject to human agency and personal choice within different social contexts.

» For a discussion of the social construction of bodies, see chapter 10, 'Health, Illness and Disability'.

According to such a perspective, writers who focus on gender roles and role learning implicitly accept that there is a biological basis to gender differences. In the socialization approach, a biological distinction between the sexes provides a framework which becomes 'culturally elaborated' in society itself. In contrast to this, some strict social constructionist theorists reject any biological basis for gender differences. Gender identities emerge, they argue, in relation to perceived sex differences in society and in turn help to shape those differences. For example, a society in which ideas of masculinity are characterized by physical strength and 'tough' attitudes will encourage men to cultivate a specific body image and set of mannerisms. In other words, gender identities and sex differences are inextricably linked within individual human bodies (Connell 1987; Scott and Morgan 1993; Butler 1990)

Masculinities and gender relations

Considering feminists' concern with women's subordination in society, it is perhaps not surprising that most early research on gender concerned itself almost exclusively with women and concepts of femininity. Men and masculinity were regarded as relatively straightforward and



unproblematic. Little effort was made to examine masculinity, the experience of being a man or the formation of male identities. Sociologists were more concerned with understanding men's oppression of women and their role in maintaining patriarchy.

Since the late 1980s, however, greater attention has been devoted to critical studies of men and masculinity. The fundamental changes affecting the role of women and family patterns in industrialized societies have raised questions about the nature of masculinity and its changing role in society. What does it mean to be a man in late modern society? How are the traditional expectations and pressures on men being transformed in a rapidly changing age? Is masculinity in crisis?

In recent years, sociologists have become increasingly interested in the positions and experience of men within the larger order that shapes them. This shift within the sociology of gender and sexuality has led to new emphasis on the study of men and masculinity within the overarching context of gender relations, the societally patterned interactions between men and women. Sociologists are interested to grasp how male identities are constructed and what impact socially prescribed roles have on men's behaviour.

The gender order

In *Gender and Power* (1987), *The Men and the Boys* (2001) and *Masculinities* (2005), R. W. Connell sets forth one of the most complete theoretical accounts of gender, which has become something of a 'modern classic' (see 'Classic Studies 14.2'). Her approach has been particularly influential in sociology because she integrates the concepts of patriarchy and masculinity into an overarching theory of gender relations. According to Connell, masculinities are a critical part of the gender order and cannot be understood separate from it, or from the femininities which accompany them.

Connell is concerned with how the social power held by men creates and sustains

gender inequality. She stresses that empirical evidence on gender inequality is not simply a 'shapeless heap of data', but reveals the basis of an 'organized field of human practice and social relations' through which women are kept in subordinate positions to men (Connell 1987). In Western capitalist societies, gender relations are still defined by patriarchal power. From the individual to the institutional level, various types of masculinity and femininity are all arranged around a central premise: the dominance of men over women.

According to Connell, gender relations are the product of everyday interactions and practices. The actions and behaviour of average people in their personal lives are directly linked to collective social arrangements in society. These arrangements are continuously reproduced over lifetimes and generations, but are also subject to change.

Connell sets forth three aspects which interact to form a society's gender order – patterns of power relations between masculinities and femininities that are widespread throughout society – namely, labour, power and cathexis (personal/sexual relationships). These three realms are distinct but interrelated parts of society that work together and change in relation to one other. They represent the main sites in which gender relations are constituted and constrained. *Labour* refers to the sexual division of labour both within the home (such as domestic responsibilities and childcare) and in the labour market (issues like occupational segregation and unequal pay). *Power* operates through social relations such as authority, violence and ideology in institutions, the state, the military and domestic life. *Cathexis* concerns dynamics within intimate, emotional and personal relationships, including marriage, sexuality and childrearing.

Gender relations, as they are enacted in these three areas of society, are structured on a societal level in a particular gender order. Connell uses the term gender regime to refer to the play of gender relations in smaller settings, such as a specific institution. Thus, a family, a neighbourhood and a state all have their own gender regimes. (The formation of masculinities in one such gender regime is explored by Máirtín Mac an Ghaill in 'Using your sociological imagination 14.1' below.)

Change in the gender order: crisis tendencies

Although Connell has set forth a clearly organized gender hierarchy, she rejects the view that gender relations are fixed or static. On the contrary, she suggests that they are the outcome of an ongoing process and are therefore open to change and challenge. She sees the gender order in dynamic terms. If sex and gender *are* socially constructed, Connell argues, then people can change their gender orientations. By this she does not necessarily mean that people can switch their sexuality from homosexual to heterosexual and vice versa, although this does occur in some cases, but that people's gender identities and outlooks are constantly being adjusted. Women who once subscribed to 'emphasized femininity' might develop a feminist consciousness, for example. This constant possibility of change makes patterns of gender relations open to disruption and subject to the power of human agency.

While some sociologists suggest that Western society is undergoing a 'gender crisis', Connell suggests that we are simply in the presence of powerful tendencies towards crisis. These crisis tendencies take three forms. First, there is the *crisis of institutionalization*. By this, Connell means that institutions that have traditionally supported men's power – the family and the state – are gradually being undermined. The legitimacy of men's domination over women is being weakened through legislation on divorce, domestic violence and rape, and economic questions such as taxation and pensions. Second, there is a *crisis of sexuality*, in which hegemonic heterosexuality is less dominant than it once was. The growing strength of women's sexuality and gay sexuality put traditional hegemonic masculinity under

Classic Studies 14.2 R. W. Connell on the dynamics of the gender order

The research problem

Why do some people become male and female role models? What characteristics and actions do role models display and how do those characteristics and actions (and not others) come to be widely seen as desirable? R. W. Connell (1987, 2001, 2005) explored such questions in her studies of the 'gender order' in societies. In particular, she developed a theory of the *gender hierarchy*.

Connell's explanation

Connell argues that there are many different expressions of masculinity and femininity. At the level of society, these contrasting versions are ordered in a hierarchy which is oriented around one defining premise – the domination of men over women (figure 14.6). She uses stylized 'ideal types' of masculinities and femininities in her hierarchy.

At the top of the hierarchy is **hegemonic masculinity**, which is dominant over all other masculinities and femininities in society. 'Hegemonic' refers to the concept of hegemony – the social dominance of a certain group, exercised not through brute force, but through a cultural dynamic which extends into private life and social realms. Thus, the media, education, ideology, even sports and music can all be channels through which hegemony is established. According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity is associated first and foremost with heterosexuality and marriage, but also with authority, paid work, strength and physical toughness. Examples of men who embody hegemonic masculinity include film stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, rappers like 50 Cent and the entrepreneur Donald Trump.

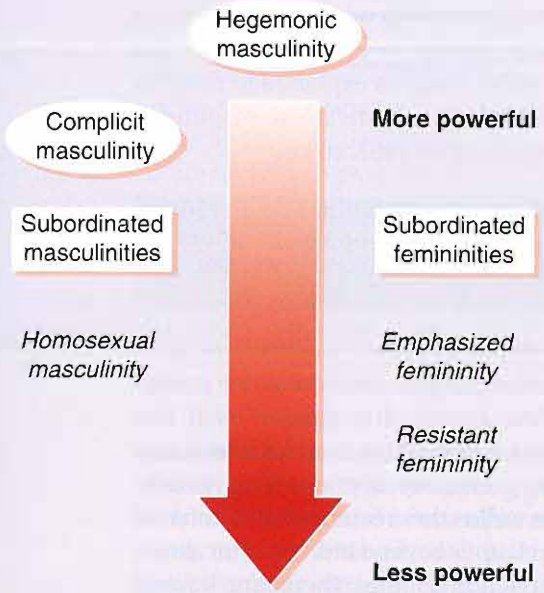


Figure 14.6 The gender hierarchy

Although hegemonic masculinity is held up as an ideal form of masculinity, only a few men in society can live up to it. A large number of men, however, still gain advantage from hegemonic masculinity's dominant position in the patriarchal order. Connell refers to this as the 'patriarchal dividend' and to those who benefit from it as embodying **complicit masculinity**.

Existing in a subordinated relationship to hegemonic masculinity are a number of subordinated masculinities and femininities. Among subordinated masculinities, the most important is that of **homosexual masculinity**. In a gender order dominated by hegemonic masculinity, the homosexual is seen as the opposite of the 'real man'; he does not measure up to the hegemonic masculine ideal and often embodies many of the 'cast off' traits of hegemonic masculinity. Homosexual masculinity is stigmatized, and ranks at the bottom of the gender hierarchy for men.

Connell argues that femininities are all formed in positions of subordination to hegemonic masculinity. One form of femininity – **emphasized femininity** – is an important complement to hegemonic masculinity. It is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men and is characterized by 'compliance, nurturance and empathy'. Among young women it is associated with sexual receptivity, while among older women it implies motherhood. Connell refers to Marilyn Monroe as both 'archetype and satirist' of emphasized femininity and stresses that images of emphasized femininity remain highly prevalent in the media, advertising and marketing campaigns.

Finally, there are subordinated femininities, which reject the version of emphasized femininity outlined above. But on the whole, the overwhelming attention devoted to maintaining emphasized femininity as the conventional norm in society means that other subordinated femininities which resist convention are not given voice. Women who have developed non-subordinated identities and lifestyles include feminists, lesbians, spinsters, midwives, witches, prostitutes and manual workers. The experiences of these resistant femininities, however, are largely 'hidden from history'.

Critical points

Several critics have argued that although hegemonic masculinity appears to be fairly obvious, Connell does not really present a satisfactory account of it. This is because she does not specify what would count as 'counter-hegemonic'. For example, with more men now involved in childcare and parenting, is this part of or a trend against hegemonic masculinity? Unless we know what actions would challenge hegemonic masculinity, how can we know what actions constitute it in the first place? Some social psychologists also wonder *how* men come to 'embody' complicit masculinity; if they do not live up the hegemonic masculine ideal themselves, what does this failure mean for them psychologically and what do they actually do? In short, 'What is missing is more fine-grain work on what complicity and resistance look like in practice' (Wetherell and Edley 1999: 337). Finally, Connell did not theorize the gender order at the global level, though this was the subject of a later work.

Contemporary significance

Given that Connell's work is relatively recent, sociologists are still working through all of its implications. The early work is notable for its wider focus on men and masculinities as well as women in the field of gender studies. However, so far her ideas have been enormously influential in shaping gender studies and particularly in our understanding of how particular gender regimes are stabilized and, potentially, destabilized. As Connell's ideas show that the gender order is never fixed or static, they have influenced not just sociologists, but also political activists within LGBT social movements.

pressure. Finally, there is a *crisis of interest formation*. Connell argues that there are new foundations for social interests that contradict the existing gender order. Married women's rights, gay movements and the growth of 'anti-sexist' attitudes among men all pose threats to the current order. Of course, threats to the gender order do not have to be negative for men. More men today are becoming fully involved in childrearing and a minority have enthusiastically embraced the relatively new social role of 'house-husband', as their wives and partners are able to establish careers and bring in a 'family wage'. Similarly, the idea of the 'new man', who self-consciously rejects the older forms of behaviour associated with hegemonic masculinity in favour of a more caring and emotionally open disposition, brings with it the possibility of new types of relationship. Connell argues that such positive actions of individuals and groups can bring about change in the gender order. The crisis tendencies already in evidence within the existing order could be exploited in order to bring about the eradication of gender inequality (Connell 1987, 2005).

See chapter 9, 'Families and Intimate Relationships', for a more detailed discussion of changes to gender roles within family life.

More recently, Connell has begun to examine the effects of globalization on the gender order. She argues that gender itself has become globalized. This involves interaction between previously distinct, local gender orders as well as the creation of new arenas of gender relations beyond individual localities.

Connell argues that there are several crucial new arenas of gender relations that play a part in the globalization of gender:

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

14.1 Education and the formation of masculinities and sexualities

In *The Making of Men* (1994), Máirtín Mac an Ghaill presented the findings from a piece of ethnographic research at a British state secondary school, which explored its 'gender regime' – the way gender relations play out within the confines of the school. Drawing on Connell's work, Mac an Ghaill was interested in how schools actively create a range of masculinities and femininities among students. Although he was particularly curious about the formation of heterosexual masculinities, he also investigated the experiences of a group of gay male students. His findings revealed that the school itself is an institution characterized by gendered and heterosexual patterns.

The prevailing 'regime' encourages the construction of gender relations among students which coincide with the larger gender order – that is, a hierarchy of dominant and subordinate masculinities and femininities could be detected within the confines of the school. Social influences and practices as diverse as disciplinary procedures, subject allocation, teacher–student and student–teacher interactions, and surveillance all contribute to the formation of heterosexual masculinities.

Mac an Ghaill notes four emergent types of masculinity in the school setting. The *macho lads* are a group of white, working-class boys who are defiant of school authority and disdainful of the learning process and student achievers. Mac an Ghaill concludes that the macho lads are undergoing a 'crisis of masculinity', as the manual and unskilled/semi-skilled jobs which they once saw as defining their future identities are no longer available. This leaves the lads in a psychological and practical dilemma about their futures which is difficult for them to comprehend and even harder to resolve.

The second group is made up of *academic achievers*, who see themselves as future professionals. These boys are stereotyped by the 'macho lads' (and teachers) as effeminate, 'dickhead achievers'. The most common route taken by the achievers in handling the vicious stereotyping, according to Mac an Ghaill, is to retain confidence that their hard work and academic credentials will grant them a secure future. This forms the basis of their masculine identities.

The third group, the *new enterprisers*, are boys who gravitate towards subjects in the new vocational curriculum, such as computer science and business studies. Mac an Ghaill sees them as children of the new 'enterprise culture' which was cultivated during the Thatcher years. For these boys, success in A-level exams is relatively useless for their emphasis on the market and their instrumental planning for the future.

The *real Englishmen* make up the final group. They are the most troublesome of the middle-class groups, as they maintain an ambivalent attitude towards academic learning, but see themselves as 'arbiters of culture', superior to anything their teachers can offer. Because they are oriented towards entry into a career, masculinity for the 'real Englishmen' involves the appearance of effortless academic achievement.

In his study of homosexual male students, Mac an Ghaill found that a distinctly heterosexual set of norms and values – based on traditional relationships and nuclear families – is taken for granted in all classroom discussions that touch on gender or sexuality. This leads to difficult 'confusions and contradictions' in the construction of gender and sexual identities for young gay men, who can simultaneously feel ignored and categorized by others.

transnational and multinational corporations, which tend to have a strong gendered division of labour and a masculine management culture; international non-governmental organizations, such as the UN agencies, which are also gendered and mainly run by men; the international media, which again has a strong gender division of labour and disseminates particular understandings of gender through its output; and, lastly, global markets (in capital, commodities, services and labour) which tend to be strongly gender-structured and can increasingly reach into local economies.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Do you recognise any of the school-based groups in Mac an Ghaill's study ('Using your sociological imagination 14.1') from your own experiences in education? How difficult would it be to change such a school culture? Why do you think the bulk of such school-based studies have focused attention on boys and masculine norms rather then the experiences of girls?

To Connell, the globalization of gender has resulted in interaction between local gender orders and the new arenas of gender relations discussed above, so that it is now possible to talk of a 'world gender order'. She argues that globalization provides the context in which we must now think about the lives of men and the construction and enactment of masculinities in the future.

Theories of gender inequality

We have seen that gender is a socially created concept which attributes differing social roles and identities to men and women. Yet gender differences are rarely neutral – in almost all societies, gender is a significant form of social stratification. Gender is a critical factor in structuring the types of opportunities and life chances faced by individuals and groups, and strongly influences the roles they play within social institutions from the household to the state. Although the roles of men and women vary from culture to culture, there is no known instance of a society in which females are more powerful than males. Men's roles are generally more highly valued and rewarded than women's roles: in almost every culture, women bear the primary responsibility for childcare and domestic work, while men have traditionally borne responsibility for providing the family livelihood. The prevailing division of labour between the sexes has led to men and women assuming unequal positions in terms of power, prestige and wealth.

Despite the advances that women have made in countries around the world, gender differences continue to serve as the basis for social inequalities. Investigating and accounting for gender inequality has become a central concern of sociologists. Many theoretical perspectives have been advanced to explain men's enduring dominance over women – in the realm of economics, politics, the family and elsewhere. In this section we shall review the main theoretical approaches to explaining the nature of gender inequality at the level of society, leaving our discussion of gender inequality in specific settings and institutions to other chapters of the book.

Evidence on gender inequality is introduced and discussed in chapter 11, 'Stratification and Social Class', and chapter 13, 'Global Inequality'.

Functionalist approaches

As we saw in chapter 1, 'What is Sociology?', the functionalist approach sees society as a system of interlinked parts which, when in balance, operate smoothly to produce social solidarity. Thus, functionalist and functionalist-inspired perspectives on gender seek to show that gender differences contribute to social stability and integration. While such views once commanded great support, they have been heavily criticized for neglecting social tensions at the expense of consensus and for promulgating a conservative view of the social world.

Writers who subscribe to the 'natural differences' school of thought tend to argue that the division of labour between men and women is biologically based. Women and men perform those tasks for which they are biologically best suited. Thus, the anthropologist George Murdock saw it as both practical and convenient that women should concentrate on domestic and family responsibilities while men work outside the home. On the

basis of a cross-cultural study of more than 200 societies, Murdock (1949) concluded that the sexual division of labour is present in all cultures. While this is not the result of biological 'programming', it is the most logical basis for the organization of society.

Talcott Parsons, a leading functionalist thinker, concerned himself with the role of the family in industrial societies (Parsons and Bales 1956). He was particularly interested in the socialization of children, and argued that stable, supportive families are the key to successful socialization. In Parsons's view, the family operates most efficiently with a clear-cut sexual division of labour in which females act in *expressive* roles, providing care and security to children and offering them emotional support. Men, on the other hand, should perform *instrumental* roles – namely, being the breadwinner in the family. Because of the stressful nature of this role, women's expressive and nurturing tendencies should also be used to stabilize and comfort men. This complementary division of labour, springing from a biological distinction between the sexes, would ensure the solidarity of the family.

Another functionalist perspective on childrearing was advanced by John Bowlby (1953), who argued that the mother is crucial to the primary socialization of children. If the mother is absent, or if a child is separated from the mother at a young age – a state referred to as maternal deprivation – the child runs a high risk of being inadequately socialized. This can lead to serious social and psychological difficulties later in life, including anti-social and psychopathic tendencies. Bowlby argued that a child's well-being and mental health can be best guaranteed through a close, personal and continuous relationship with its mother. He did concede that an absent mother can be replaced by a 'mother-substitute', but suggested that such a substitute should also be a woman – leaving little doubt about his view that the mothering role is a distinctly female one. Bowlby's maternal deprivation thesis has been used by some to argue that working mothers are neglectful of their children.

Feminists have sharply criticized claims to a biological basis to the sexual division of labour, arguing that there is nothing natural or inevitable about the allocation of tasks in society. Women are not prevented from pursuing occupations on the basis of any biological features; rather, humans are socialized into roles that are culturally expected of them.

There is a steady stream of evidence to suggest that the maternal deprivation thesis is questionable – studies have shown that children's educational performance and personal development are in fact enhanced when both parents are employed at least part of the time outside the home. Parsons's view on the 'expressive' female has similarly been attacked by feminists and other sociologists who see such views as condoning the domination of women in the home. There is no basis to the belief that the 'expressive' female is necessary for the smooth operation of the family – rather, it is a role which is promoted largely for the convenience of men.

Feminist approaches

The feminist movement has given rise to a large body of theory which attempts to explain gender inequalities and set forth agendas for overcoming those inequalities. Feminist theories in relation to gender inequality contrast markedly with one another. Competing schools of feminism have sought to explain gender inequalities through a variety of deeply embedded social processes, such as sexism, patriarchy and capitalism. We begin by looking at the major strands of feminism in the West during the twentieth century: liberal, socialist (or Marxist) and radical feminism. The distinction between the different strands of feminism has never been clear-cut, although it provides a useful introduction. The tripartite categorization has become less useful in recent decades with the introduction of new forms of feminism that draw upon, and cut

across, the earlier strands (Barker 1997). We will conclude this section with a brief examination of two important newer theories: black and postmodern feminism.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism looks for explanations of gender inequalities in social and cultural attitudes. An important early contribution to liberal feminism came from the English philosopher John Stuart Mill in his essay *The Subjection of Women* (1869), which called for legal and political equality between the sexes, including the right to vote. Unlike radical and socialist feminists, whose work we examine below, liberal feminists do not see women's subordination as part of a larger system or structure. Instead, they draw attention to many separate factors which contribute to inequalities between men and women. For example, in recent decades liberal feminists have campaigned against sexism and discrimination against women in the workplace, educational institutions and the media. They tend to focus their energies on establishing and protecting equal opportunities for women through legislation and other democratic means. In the UK, legal advances such as the Equal Pay Act (1970) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) were actively supported by liberal feminists, who argued that enshrining equality in law is important to eliminating discrimination against women. Liberal feminists seek to work through the existing system to bring about reforms in a gradual way. In this respect, they are more moderate in their aims and methods than many radical and socialist feminists, who call for an overthrow of the existing system.

While liberal feminists have contributed greatly to the advancement of women over the past century, critics charge that they are unsuccessful in dealing with the root causes of gender inequality and do not acknowledge the systemic nature of women's oppression in society. By focusing on the independent deprivations which women suffer – sexism, discrimination, the 'glass ceiling', unequal pay – liberal feminists draw only a partial picture of gender inequality. Radical feminists accuse liberal feminists of encouraging women to accept an unequal society and its competitive character.

Socialist and Marxist feminism

Socialist feminism developed from Marx's conflict theory, although Marx himself had little to say about gender inequality. It has been critical of liberal feminism for its perceived inability to see that there are powerful interests in society hostile to equality for women (Bryson 1993). Socialist feminists have sought to defeat both patriarchy and capitalism (Mitchell 1966). It was Marx's friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels who did more than Marx to provide an account of gender equality from a Marxist perspective.

Engels argued that under capitalism, material and economic factors underlay women's subservience to men, because patriarchy (like class oppression) has its roots in private property. Engels argued that capitalism intensifies patriarchy – men's domination over women – by concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a small number of men. Capitalism intensifies patriarchy more than earlier social systems because it creates enormous wealth compared to previous eras which confers power on men as wage-earners as well as possessors and inheritors of property. Second, for the capitalist economy to succeed, it must define people – in particular women – as consumers, persuading them that their needs will only be met through ever-increasing consumption of goods and products. Last, capitalism relies on women to labour for free in the home, caring and cleaning. To Engels, capitalism exploited men by paying low wages and women by paying no wages.

Payment for housework is an important component of many feminists' belief, and is discussed further in chapter 20, 'Work and Economic Life'.

Socialist feminists have argued that the reformist goals of liberal feminism are inad-

equate. They have called for the restructuring of the family, the end of 'domestic slavery' and the introduction of some collective means of carrying out childrearing, caring and household maintenance. Following Marx, many argued that these ends would be achieved through a socialist revolution, which would produce true equality under a state-centred economy designed to meet the needs of all.

Radical feminism

At the heart of radical feminism is the belief that men are responsible for and benefit from the exploitation of women. The analysis of patriarchy – the systematic domination of females by males – is of central concern to this branch of feminism. Patriarchy is viewed as a universal phenomenon that has existed across time and cultures. Radical feminists often concentrate on the family as one of the primary sources of women's oppression in society. They argue that men exploit women by relying on the free domestic labour that women provide in the home. As a group, men also deny women access to positions of power and influence in society.

Radical feminists differ in their interpretations of the basis of patriarchy, but most agree that it involves the appropriation of women's bodies and sexuality in some form. Shulamith Firestone (1971), an early radical feminist writer, argues that men control women's roles in reproduction and childrearing. Because women are biologically able to give birth to children, they become dependent materially on men for protection and livelihood. This 'biological inequality' is socially organized in the nuclear family. Firestone speaks of a 'sex class' to describe women's social position and argues that women can be emancipated only through the abolition of the family and the power relations which characterize it.

Other radical feminists point to male violence against women as central to male supremacy. According to such a view, domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment are all part of the systematic oppression of women, rather than isolated cases with their own psychological or criminal roots. Even interactions in daily life – such as non-verbal communication, patterns of listening and interrupting, and women's sense of comfort in public – contribute to gender inequality. Moreover, the argument goes, popular conceptions of beauty and sexuality are imposed by men on women in order to produce a certain type of femininity. For example, social and cultural norms that emphasize a slim body and a caring, nurturing attitude towards men help to perpetuate women's subordination. The 'objectification' of women through the media, fashion and advertising turns women into sexual objects whose main role is to please and entertain men. Radical feminists do not see any strong evidence that women can be liberated from sexual oppression through reforms or gradual change. Because patriarchy is a systemic phenomenon, they argue, gender equality can only be attained by overthrowing the patriarchal order.

The use of patriarchy as a concept for explaining gender inequality has been popular with many feminist theorists. In asserting that 'the personal is political', radical feminists have drawn widespread attention to the many linked dimensions of women's oppression. Their emphasis on male violence and the objectification of women has brought these issues into the heart of mainstream debates about women's subordination.

Many objections can be raised, however, to radical feminist views. The main one, perhaps, is that the concept of patriarchy as it has been used is inadequate as a general explanation for women's oppression. Radical feminists have tended to claim that patriarchy has existed throughout history and across cultures – that it is a universal phenomenon. Critics argue, however, that such a conception of patriarchy does not leave room for historical or cultural variations. It also ignores the important influence that race, class or ethnicity may have on the nature of women's subordination. In other words, it is not possible to see patriarchy as a

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

14.2 Theorizing patriarchy

The idea of patriarchy has been central to many feminist interpretations of gender inequality. But as an analytical tool, it has also been criticized for failing to explain the changes to and diversity in gender inequalities. Surely, critics argue, we cannot speak of one uniform and unchanging system of oppression for all of history? Sylvia Walby is one theorist who believes that the concept of patriarchy is essential to any analysis of gender inequality. But she agrees that many criticisms of it are valid. In *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990), Walby presents a way of understanding patriarchy that is more flexible than its predecessors. It allows room for change over historical time, and for consideration of ethnic and class differences.

For Walby, patriarchy is 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' (1990: 20). She sees patriarchy and capitalism as distinct systems which interact in different ways – sometimes harmoniously, sometimes in tension – depending on historical conditions. Capitalism, she argues, has generally benefited from patriarchy through the *sexual division of labour*. But at other times, capitalism and patriarchy have been at odds with one another. For example, in wartime, when women have entered the labour market in great numbers, the interests of capitalism and patriarchy have not been aligned.

Walby identifies six structures through which patriarchy operates. She recognizes that a weakness of early feminist theory was the tendency to focus on one 'essential' cause of women's oppression, such as male violence or women's role in reproduction. Because Walby is concerned with the depth and interconnectedness of gender inequality; she sees patriarchy as composed of six structures that are independent, but interact with one another.

1 *Production relations in the household.* Women's unpaid domestic labour, such as housework and childcare, is expropriated by her husband (or cohabitee).
2 *Paid work.* Women in the labour market are excluded from certain types of work, receive lower pay, and are segregated in less skilled jobs.
3 *The patriarchal state.* In its policies and priorities, the state has a systematic bias towards patriarchal interests.
4 *Male violence.* Although male violence is often seen as composed of individualistic acts, it is patterned and systematic. Women routinely experience this violence, and are affected by it in standard ways. The state effectively condones the violence with its refusal to intervene, except in exceptional cases.
5 *Patriarchal relations in sexuality.* This is manifested in 'compulsory heterosexuality' and in the sexual double standard between men and women, in which different 'rules' for sexual behaviour apply.
6 *Patriarchal cultural institutions.* A variety of institutions and practices – including media, religion and education – produce representations of women 'within a patriarchal gaze'. These representations influence women's identities and prescribe acceptable standards of behaviour and action.

Walby distinguishes two distinct forms of patriarchy. *Private patriarchy* is domination of women which occurs within the household at the hands of an individual patriarch. It is an exclusionary strategy, because women are essentially prevented from taking part in public life. *Public patriarchy*, on the other hand, is more collective in form. Women are involved in public realms, such as politics and the labour market, but remain segregated from wealth, power and status.

Walby contends that, at least in Britain, there has been a shift in patriarchy – both in degree and form – from the Victorian era to the present day. She notes that the narrowing of the wage gap and the gains in women's education demonstrate a shift in the degree of patriarchy, but do not signal its defeat. If at one time women's oppression was found chiefly in the home, it is now located throughout society as a whole – women are now segregated and subordinated in all areas of the public realm. In other words, patriarchy has shifted in form from the private to the public realm. As Walby quips: 'Liberated from the home, women now have the whole of society in which to be exploited.'

universal phenomenon; doing so risks biological reductionism – attributing all the complexities of gender inequality to a simple distinction between men and women.

Sylvia Walby has advanced an important reconceptualization of patriarchy (see 'Using your sociological imagination 14.2'). She argues that the notion of patriarchy remains a valuable and useful explanatory tool, providing that it is used in certain ways.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Taking each of Walby's six 'structures of patriarchy' in turn ('Using your sociological imagination 14.2'), what evidence is there of a shift towards public forms of patriarchy? Has this shift intensified the subordination of women within society? What evidence is there that the movement of women into the public sphere has actually been largely *beneficial* for the majority of women?

Black feminism

Do the versions of feminism outlined above apply equally to the experiences of both white and non-white women? Many black feminists, and feminists from developing countries, claim they do not. They argue that ethnic divisions among women are not considered by the main feminist schools of thought, which are oriented to the dilemmas of white, predominantly middle-class women living in industrialized societies. It is not valid, they claim, to generalize theories about women's subordination as a whole from the experience of a specific group of women. Moreover, the very idea that there is a 'unified' form of gender oppression that is experienced equally by all women is problematic.

Dissatisfaction with existing forms of feminism has led to the emergence of a strand of thought which concentrates on the particular problems facing black women. In the foreword to her personal memoirs, American black feminist bell hooks (1997; her name is always written in lower-case letters) argues:

> Many feminist thinkers writing and talking about girlhood right now like to suggest that black girls have better self-esteem than their white counterparts. The measurement of this difference is often that black girls are more assertive, speak more, appear more confident. Yet in traditional southern-based black life, it was and is expected of girls to be articulate, to hold ourselves with dignity. Our parents and teachers were always urging us to stand up right and speak clearly. These traits were meant to uplift the race. They were not necessarily traits associated with building female self-esteem. An outspoken girl might still feel that she was worthless because her skin was not light enough or her hair the right texture. These are the variables that white researchers often do not consider when they measure the self-esteem of black females with a yardstick that was designed based on values emerging from white experience.

Black feminist writings tend to emphasize history – aspects of the past which inform the current problems facing black women. The writings of American black feminists emphasize the influence of the powerful legacy of slavery, segregation and the civil rights movement on gender inequalities in the black community. They point out that early black suffragettes supported the campaign for women's rights, but realized that the question of race could not be ignored: black women were discriminated against on the basis of their race and gender. In recent years, black women have not been central to the women's liberation movement in part because 'womanhood' dominated their identities much less than concepts of race did.

hooks has argued that explanatory frameworks favoured by white feminists – for example, the view of the family as a mainstay of patriarchy – may not be applicable in black communities, where the family represents a main point of solidarity against racism. In other words, the oppression of black women may be found in different locations compared with that of white women.

Black feminists contend, therefore, that any theory of gender equality which does

Can the concept of patriarchy adequately explain the diverse experiences of women across social classes and ethnic groups, for instance in the work environment?

not take racism into account cannot be expected to explain black women's oppression adequately. Class dimensions form another factor that cannot be neglected in the case of many black women. Some black feminists have held that the strength of black feminist theory is its focus on the interplay between race, class and gender concerns. Black women are multiply disadvantaged, they argue, on the basis of their colour, their sex and their class position. When these three factors interact, they reinforce and intensify one another (Brewer 1993).

Postmodern feminism

Like black feminism, postmodern feminism challenges the idea that there is a unitary basis of identity and experience shared by all women. This strand of feminism draws on the cultural phenomenon of postmodernism in the arts, architecture, philosophy and economics. Some of the roots of postmodern feminism are found in the work of Continental theorists like Derrida (1978, 1981), Lacan (1995) and de Beauvoir (1949). Postmodern feminists reject the claim that there is a grand theory that can explain the position of women in society, or that there is any single, universal essence or category of 'woman'. Consequently, these feminists reject the accounts given by others to explain gender inequality – such as patriarchy, race or class – as 'essentialist' (Beasley 1999).

Postmodernist approaches in sociology were introduced in chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives in Sociology'.

Instead, postmodernism encourages the acceptances of many different standpoints as equally valid. Rather than there existing

an essential core to womanhood, there are many individuals and groups, all of whom have very different experiences (heterosexuals, lesbians, black women, working-class women, etc.). The 'otherness' of different groups and individuals is celebrated in all its diverse forms. Emphasis on the positive side of 'otherness' is a major theme in postmodern feminism, and symbolizes plurality, diversity, difference and openness: there are many truths, roles and constructions of reality. Hence, the recognition of difference (of sexuality, age and race, for example) is central to postmodern feminism.

As well as the recognition of difference between groups and individuals, postmodern feminists have stressed the importance of 'deconstruction'. In particular, they have sought to deconstruct male language and a masculine view of the world. In its place, postmodern feminists have attempted to create fluid, open terms and language which more closely reflect women's experiences. For many postmodern feminists, men see the world in terms of pairs or binary distinctions ('good versus bad', 'right versus wrong', 'beautiful versus ugly', for example). Men, they argue, have cast the male as normal, and female as a deviation from it. The founder of modern psychiatry Sigmund Freud, for example, saw women as men who lacked a penis and argued that they envied males for possessing one. In this masculine worldview, the female is always cast in the role of the 'other'. Deconstruction involves attacking binary concepts and recasting their opposites in a new and positive manner.

» Women's movements are discussed in chapter 22, 'Politics, Government and Social Movements'.

Postmodern feminism is said to have the most difficult relationship with the previous strands of feminism discussed above (Carrington 1995, 1998). This is largely because of its belief that many feminists may be misled in assuming that it is possible to provide overarching explanations for women's oppression and to find steps towards its resolution.

Women's movements

The influence of feminist ideas and women's movements has been profound in Western societies, but increasingly, such movements are challenging gender inequality in other areas of the world. Feminism is not merely an academic exercise, nor is it restricted to Western Europe and North America. In today's increasingly globalized world, there is a good chance that those who become active in the British women's movement will come into contact with women pursuing other feminist struggles overseas.

» Freud's views on gender socialization are debated in chapter 8, 'The Life-Course'.

Although participants in women's movements have, for many years, cultivated ties to activists in other countries, the number and importance of such contacts has increased with globalization. A prime forum for the establishment of cross-national contacts has been the United Nation's Conference on Women, held four times since 1975 with a fifth conference to be held before 2010. Approximately 50,000 people – of whom more than two-thirds were women – attended the most recent conference, held in Beijing, China, in 1995. Delegates from 181 nations attended, along with representatives from thousands of non-governmental organizations. One attendee, Mallika Dutt, wrote in the journal *Feminist Studies*: 'For most women from the United States, Beijing was an eye-opening, humbling, and transformative experience. US women were startled by the sophisticated analysis and well-organized and powerful voices of women from other parts of the world' (Dutt 1996).

The Platform for Action finally agreed to by the conference participants called on the

countries of the world to address such issues as:

- the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women;
- violence against women;
- the effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women;
- inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making;
- stereotyping of women;
- gender inequalities in the management of natural resources;
- persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child.

The 1995 conference heard that in China, for example, women are working to secure equal rights, employment, a role in production and participation in politics; and that South African women played a major role in the fight against apartheid and are now working to improve conditions for the poorest groups of people in the country. Peruvian activists told delegates that they have been working for decades to create more opportunities for women to participate in public life; and in Russia, women's protest was responsible for blocking the passage of legislation that encouraged women to stay home and perform 'socially necessary labour' (Basu 1995). According to Dutt, having heard of many such campaigns across the world, conference participants left Beijing with a 'sense of global solidarity, pride, and affirmation' (1996).

THINKING CRITICALLY

Do you consider yourself to be a feminist? What does such a label mean in the twenty-first century? Given the very different social situations of women in the developed and developing countries, how realistic is the idea of a global feminism?

Gender and globalization

In this chapter, most of our discussion has focused on notions of gender within Western industrialized societies. We have seen how the women's movement has given rise to a powerful body of sociological theory to make sense of persistent gender inequalities and to advance agendas for overcoming them. We have also seen how the changing gender order is beginning to transform the dominant form of masculinity, bringing with it new men's organizations and campaigning groups.

In a global age, women's movements are forging international networks and a more global orientation in order to remain effective, though an obstacle to this lies in the different material interests of women in very different national situations. What feminism means to people differs across the world. In parts of the developing world, feminism means working to alleviate absolute poverty and to change traditional male attitudes, which favour large families and dislike contraception, while in the developed countries, feminism means continuing campaigns for equality in employment, adequate childcare provision and the ending of male violence towards women. Bringing together such diverse interests will be a key issue for a twenty-first century global feminism.

Summary points

1. While there is a biological component in human sexuality, most sexual *behaviour* seems to be learned rather than innate. Sexual practices vary widely between and within cultures. In the West, Christianity has been important in shaping sexual attitudes. In societies with rigid sexual codes, the gulf between norms and actual practice can be large, as studies of sexual behaviour have shown. In the West, repressive attitudes to sexuality gave way to a more permissive outlook in the 1960s, the effects of which are still obvious today.
2. Most people in the world are heterosexual, but there are many minority sexual tastes and inclinations. Homosexuality seems to exist in all cultures and in recent years attitudes towards homosexuals have become more relaxed. In some countries, laws have been passed which recognize homosexual unions and grant gay couples the same rights as married people.
3. Sociologists distinguish between sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological differences between male and female bodies, while gender concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between men and women. There is no conclusive evidence to suggest a biological basis to gender differences.
4. Gender socialization refers to the learning of gender roles with the help of agencies such as the family, schools and the media. Gender socialization begins as soon as an infant is born; children learn and internalize the norms and expectations that correspond to their biological sex. They therefore adopt 'sex roles' and the male and female identities (masculinity and femininity) that accompany them.
5. Some sociologists argue that sex and gender are *both* socially constructed, and can be shaped and altered in various ways. Not only does gender lack a fixed 'essence', but the human body can also be changed through social influences and technological interventions.
6. Gender inequality refers to the differences in status, power and prestige enjoyed by women and men in various contexts. In explaining gender inequality, functionalists emphasized that gender differences and the sexual division of labour contribute to social stability and integration. Feminist approaches reject the idea that gender inequality is somehow 'natural'. Liberal feminists have explained gender inequality in terms of social and cultural attitudes, such as sexism and discrimination. Radical feminists argue that men are responsible for the exploitation of women through patriarchy – the systematic domination of females by males. Black feminists have seen factors such as class and ethnicity, in addition to gender, as essential for understanding the oppression experienced by non-white women.
7. Gender relations refer to societally patterned interactions between men and women in society. Some sociologists have argued that a gender order exists in which expressions of masculinity and femininity are organized in a hierarchy that promotes the domination of men over women.
8. In recent years, more attention has been paid to the nature of masculinity. Some argue that wide economic and social transformations are provoking a crisis of masculinity in which men's traditional roles are being eroded.

Further reading

A good introduction to the issues around sexualities is Joe Bristow's *Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 2006), the second edition of which brings debates right up to date. A similarly reliable introduction to the study of gender in sociology is R. W. Connell's *Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).

If you decide to pursue these themes further, then two more challenging books are Jeffrey Weeks, Janet Holland and Matthew Waites's edited volume, *Sexualities and Society: A Reader* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), which contains many interesting chapters, and Chris Beasley's *Gender and Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers* (London: Sage, 2005), which provides a good overview of some challenging theories.

Amy S. Wharton's *The Sociology of Gender: An Introduction to Theory and Research* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) looks at gender through individual, interactional and institutional perspectives. A very good review of the masculinities field is Chris Haywood and Máirtín Mac an Ghaill's *Men and Masculinities: Theory, Research and Social Practice* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2007).

Finally, anyone looking for a reference work in these areas could consult Jane Pilcher and Amanda Whelehan's *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), which contains exactly what it says.

Internet links

Intute: UK academic social science gateway for gender and sexuality:
www.intute.ac.uk/socialsciences/cgi-bin/browse.pl?id=120918&gateway=%

The Women's Library – has lots of electronic and other resources:
www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary/

Queer Resource Directory – a gateway to many resources:
www.qrd.org/qrd/

Eldis – gender issues in developing countries:
www.eldis.org/gender/

Voice of the Shuttle – many gender and sexuality studies resources:
http://vos.ucsb.edu/browse.asp?id=2711

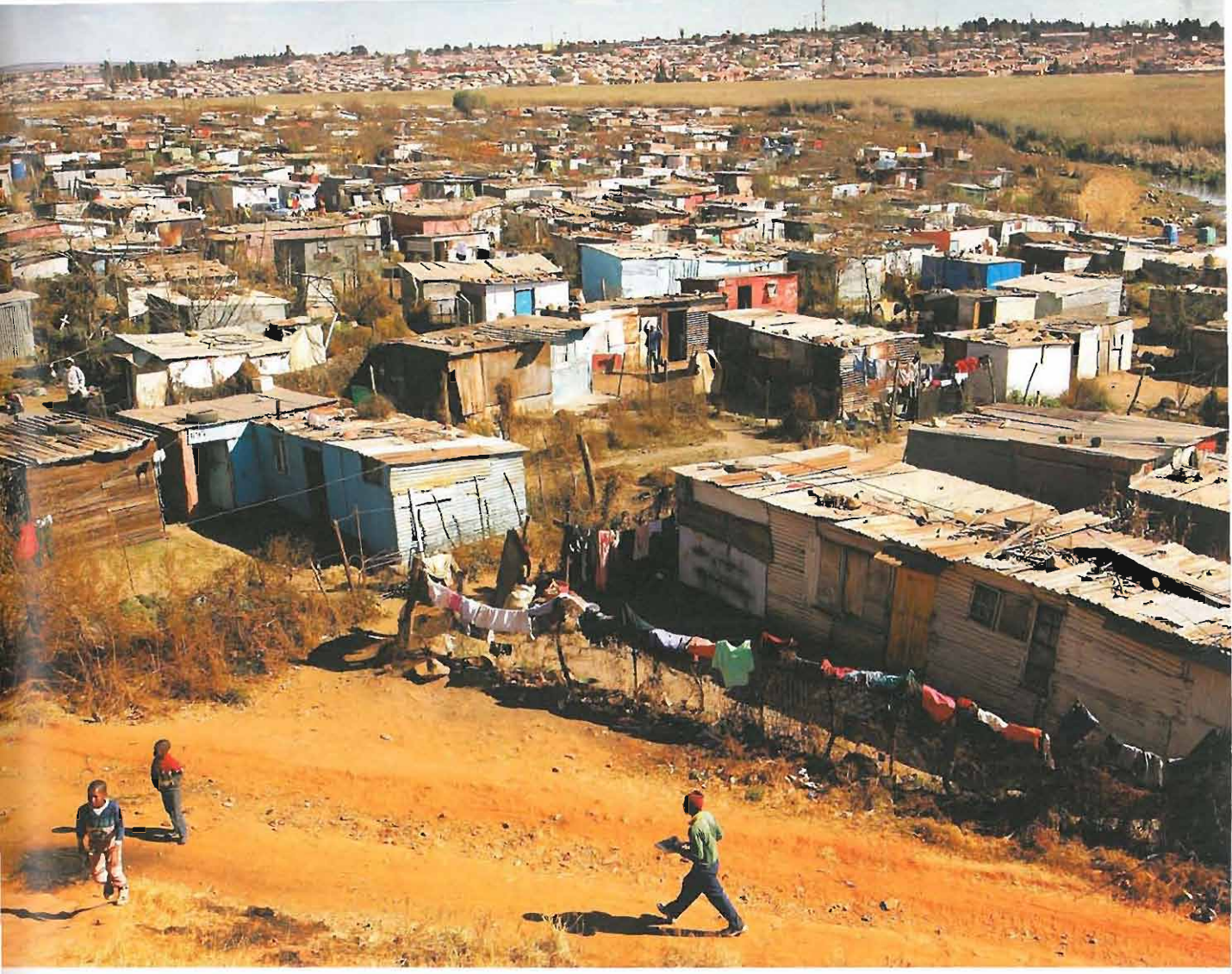
A BBC debate on same-sex marriage:
www.bbc.co.uk/religion/ethics/samesexmarriage/

ILGA –International Lesbian and Gay Association:
www.ilga.org/

CHAPTER 15

Race, Ethnicity and Migration

(opposite) Townships, such as Soweto (pictured here), were home to millions of black and 'coloured' South Africans under the apartheid system.



Until the first free multiracial elections, held in 1994, South Africa was governed by apartheid – a system of forced racial segregation. Under apartheid, every South African was classified into one of four categories: *white* (descendants of European immigrants), *coloured* (people whose descent is traced from members of more than one race), *Asian* and *black*. The white South African minority – around 13 per cent of the population – ruled over the non-white majority. Non-whites had no vote and no representation in the central government. Segregation was enforced at all levels of society, from public places like washrooms and railway carriages, to residential neighbourhoods and schools. Millions of blacks were herded into so-called 'homelands',

well away from the main cities, and worked as migrant labourers in gold and diamond mines.

Apartheid was encoded in law, but enforced through violence and brutality. The National Party, which formalized apartheid in 1948, used law enforcement and security services to suppress all resistance to the new regime. Opposition groups were outlawed and political dissidents detained without trial and often tortured. Peaceful demonstrations frequently ended in violence. After years of international condemnation, economic and cultural sanctions, and growing domestic resistance, the apartheid regime began to weaken. When F. W. de Klerk became President in 1989, he inherited a country already deep in crisis and virtually ungovernable.

In 1990, de Klerk lifted the ban on the African National Congress (ANC), the main opposition party and, in a historic decision, freed the ANC leader, Nelson Mandela, who had been in prison for 27 years. A series of complex negotiations followed, paving the way for South Africa's first national election involving both whites and non-whites. On 27 April 1994, the ANC received an overwhelming 62 per cent of the vote and Nelson Mandela became South Africa's first post-apartheid president.

The task facing Mandela and the ANC was enormous. In a country of 38 million people, 9 million were impoverished and 20 million lived without electricity. Unemployment was widespread. More than half the black population was illiterate and infant mortality rates were more than ten times higher amongst blacks than whites. South Africa was a highly divided society. Decades of white rule, premised on ideas of racial superiority, had left the country scarred and in desperate need of reconciliation for the atrocities of the apartheid regime. Ethnic tensions within the African population flared up in violent outbreaks and civil war threatened.

Mandela's presidency laid the foundations for the emergence of an equitable, multiethnic society before he stood down in 1999. The 1996 constitution is one of the most progressive in the world, outlawing all discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic or social origin, religion and belief, sexual orientation, disability and pregnancy. Mandela's repeated calls for a 'new patriotism' sought to rally 'nervous whites' and 'impatient blacks' into a common nation-building project. Dissenting political groups, such as the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), were brought into government to reduce ethnic and political tensions. Beginning in April 1996 and ending in July 1998, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) held hearings across South Africa to examine the abuses of human rights which had occurred under apartheid. The Nobel laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, headed the TRC's investigations. More than 21,000 testimonies were given and recorded and the TRC hearings were designed to uncover the realities of the apartheid era – from the most horrific to the most banal – for all to see; they were not intended to serve as trials or to mete out punishments. Those who committed crimes under apartheid were offered amnesty in return for their honest testimonies and the 'full disclosure' of all relevant information. Not surprisingly, the apartheid government was identified as the main perpetrator of human rights abuses, although transgressions committed by other organizations, including the ANC, were also noted. Some have criticized the TRC for its inability to 'right the wrongs' that had occurred. Many others believe that the process of gathering testimonies brought into focus the injustices of the old era. South Africa remains a fractured society and continues to struggle against bigotry and intolerance. In 2000, 'hate speech' was outlawed and new 'equality courts' established to hear charges of racial discrimination.

In this chapter we investigate the ideas of race and ethnicity and question why racial and ethnic divisions so frequently produce social conflicts – as in South Africa and many other societies. After considering the

Nelson Mandela being sworn in as President of South Africa in 1994, after 27 years in prison.

ways that social scientists understand and use the concepts of race and ethnicity, we shall turn to the topics of prejudice, discrimination and racism and discuss sociological theories that help to explain their persistence. From there, we will address models of ethnic integration and explore examples of ethnic conflict. In the final sections, we will turn to issues of migration, ethnic diversity and ethnic relations, paying particular attention to trends in immigration and patterns of ethnic inequality, before examining migration on a global level.

Key concepts

Race

Race is one of the most complex concepts in sociology, not least because of the contradiction between its widespread, everyday usage and its supposedly 'scientific' basis. Many people today believe, mistakenly, that humans can be readily separated into biologically different races. This is not surprising considering the numerous attempts by scholars and governments, such as that of South Africa before the ending of apartheid, to establish racial categorizations of the peoples of the world. Some authors have distinguished four or five major races, while others have recognized as many as three dozen.

In many ancient civilizations, distinctions were often drawn between social groups on visible skin colour differences, usually between lighter and darker skin tones. However, before the modern period, it was more common for perceived distinctions between human groupings to be based on tribal or kinship affiliations. These

groups were numerous and the basis of their classification was relatively unconnected to modern ideas of race, with its biological or genetic connotations. Instead, classification rested on cultural similarity and group membership.

Scientific theories of race arose in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They were used to justify the emerging social order, as England and other European nations became imperial powers ruling over subject territories and populations. Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816–82), sometimes called the father of modern racism, proposed the existence of just three races: white (*Caucasian*), black (*Negroid*) and yellow (*Mongoloid*). According to de Gobineau, the white race possesses superior intelligence, morality and will-power, and it is these inherited qualities that underlie the spread of Western influence across the world. The blacks, by contrast, are the least capable, marked by an animal nature, a lack of morality and emotional instability. The ideas of de Gobineau and other proponents of scientific racism later influenced Adolf Hitler, who transformed them into the ideology of the German Nazi party, and other white supremacist groups, such as the Ku-Klux-Klan in the United States.

In the years following the Second World War, 'race science' was thoroughly discredited. In biological terms, there are no clear-cut races, only a range of physical variations in human beings. Differences in physical type between groups of human beings arise from population inbreeding, which varies according to the degree of contact between different social or cultural groups. Human population groups are a continuum. The genetic diversity *within* populations that share visible physical traits is as great as the diversity *between* them. In the light of this evidence, the scientific community has virtually abandoned the concept of race. Many social scientists concur, arguing that race is nothing more than an ideological construct whose use in academic circles perpetuates the commonly held (false) belief that it has a grounding in reality (Miles 1993). Other social scientists disagree, claiming that, as a concept, 'race' still has meaning for many people, even if its scientific basis has been discredited; for sociological analysis, they argue, it remains a vital, if highly contested concept. Some scholars therefore choose to use the word 'race' in inverted commas to reflect its problematic, but commonplace, usage.

Nevertheless, racial ideas in science have a habit of recurring. Debates on the scientific basis of race continue in the field of genetic research, for example, and in parts of the USA, law enforcement has made use of racial profiling (as part of the wider trend towards offender profiling), which assesses the likelihood of individuals in specific racial or ethnic groups committing particular types of offence. Hence, it is probably too early to suppose that we have seen the end of scientific racial theories just yet.

THINKING CRITICALLY

If 'race' can only be discussed by using 'scare quotes', should it now be abandoned as a concept altogether? Are there any compelling reasons to carry on using the concept of race in modern social science research?

What, then, is 'race', if it does not refer to biological categories? There are some clear physical differences between human beings, some of which are inherited. But the question of why some differences and not others become matters of discrimination and prejudice has nothing to do with biology. Racial differences, therefore, should be understood as physical variations singled out by the members of a community or society as socially significant. Differences in skin colour, for example, are treated as socially significant, whereas differences in colour of hair are not. Race can be understood as a set of social relationships, which allow individuals and groups to be located,

and various attributes or competencies assigned, on the basis of biologically grounded features. Racial distinctions are more than ways of describing human differences – they are also important factors in the reproduction of patterns of power and inequality within society.

The process by which understandings of race is used to classify individuals or groups of people is called racialization. Historically, racialization meant that certain groups of people came to be labelled as distinct biological groups on the basis of naturally occurring physical features. During the period from the fifteenth century onwards, as Europeans came increasingly into contact with people from different regions of the world, attempts were made to categorize and explain both natural and social phenomena. Non-European populations were racialized in opposition to the European 'white race'. In some instances, this racialization took on codified institutional forms, as in the case of slavery in the American colonies and apartheid in South Africa. More commonly, however, everyday social institutions became racialized in a de facto manner. Racialization has also occurred *within* Europe, for example in relation to the discrimination against and exclusion of Roma populations within European nation-states. Within a racialized system, aspects of individuals' daily lives – employment, personal relations, housing, healthcare, education and legal representation – are shaped and constrained by their own positions within that system. Race may be a thoroughly discredited scientific concept, but its material consequences throughout history is a telling illustration of W. I. Thomas's (1928) famous theorem that 'if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences'.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Reflect on your own use of the term 'race' in the past; what did you understand it referred to? Given the discussion above, should sociologists now stop using the term at all? How might the concept of 'race' still be used, if at all, in sociological research?

Ethnicity

While the idea of race mistakenly implies something fixed and biological, the concept of ethnicity is one that is purely social in meaning. Ethnicity refers to the cultural practices and outlooks of a given community of people which sets them apart from others. Members of ethnic groups see themselves as culturally distinct from other groups and are seen by them, in return, as different. Different characteristics may serve to distinguish ethnic groups, but the most usual ones are language, history or ancestry (real or imagined), religion and styles of dress or adornment. Ethnic differences are wholly learned, a point that seems self-evident until we remember how often some groups are regarded as 'born to rule' or 'naturally lazy', 'unintelligent' and so on. In fact, there is nothing innate about ethnicity; it is a purely social phenomenon that is produced and reproduced over time. Through socialization, young people assimilate the lifestyles, norms and beliefs of ethnic communities. However, what marks out ethnic groups is often the use of 'exclusionary devices', such as the prohibiting of intermarriage, which serve to sharpen and maintain culturally established boundaries.

For many people, ethnicity is central to individual and group identity, but its significance does vary amongst individuals. It can provide an important thread of continuity with the past and is often kept alive through the practices of cultural traditions. Every year, for instance, the excitement and virtuoso displays of Carnival evoke the Caribbean on the streets of Notting Hill in London, while third-generation Americans of Irish descent may proudly identify themselves as Irish-American despite having lived their entire lives in the United States. Irish traditions and customs are often

Global Society 15.1 Reclaiming black identities

The use of the term 'black' to describe individuals and populations has undergone fundamental transformations over the years and remains highly contested. For a long time, 'black' was a derogatory label assigned by whites. Only in the 1960s did Americans and Britons of African descent 'reclaim' the term and apply it to themselves in a positive way. The term then became a source of pride and identity, rather than a racial slur. The slogan 'black is beautiful' and the motivational concept of 'black power' were central to the black liberation movement. These ideas were used to counter the symbolic domination of 'whiteness' over 'blackness'. As the term 'black' became more accepted within British society, it began to be applied to non-whites who were not of African descent – particularly Asians. It was more than simply a label, however; it also contained an underlying political message. Because black people had all experienced racism and exclusion at the hands of the white population, there was a call for them to mobilize around their common black identity in pushing for change.

In the late 1980s some scholars and members of ethnic minority groups began to challenge the use of the term 'black' to refer to the non-white population as a whole. While acknowledging that non-whites have shared a common oppression, they argue that the term 'black' obscures the differences between ethnic groups.

According to opponents of the term, more attention should be paid to the distinctive experiences of individual ethnic minority groups, rather than presuming a shared experience. Tariq Modood has been one of the leading critics, arguing that the term 'black' is used too loosely – sometimes meaning only people of African descent, and other times referring collectively to Asians as well. He believes that the term over-emphasizes oppression based on skin colour and neglects the large amount of racism that is culturally based. According to Modood, Asians tend not to see themselves as black because of the powerful connotations between the term 'black' and the experience of people of African origin. Finally, Modood points out that 'black' implies an essential identity which is inherently false. Non-white populations possess many diverse identities, just as do groups within the so-called white population (Modood 1994). Nonetheless, the black power movement showed that such essentialist ideas can be a powerful motivator for political activism as well as promoting prejudice and discrimination.

There is no clear consensus about the use of the term 'black' in sociology. While the criticisms raised by Modood and others are surely valid, the term remains a useful way to speak about the shared experience of white racism that most non-whites have encountered. Recent trends within sociology, however, seem to support Modood's concerns. Writers associated with the postmodern school tend to highlight the differences between various ethnic minority groups, rather than dwell on the significance of a collective 'black' identity.

passed down through generations of families and in the larger Irish community. Although it is maintained within tradition, ethnicity is not static and unchanging. Rather, it is fluid and adaptable to changing circumstances. In the case of Irish-Americans, it is possible to see how popular customs from Ireland have been maintained but transformed in the context of American society. The boisterous St Patrick's Day parades in many US cities are one example of how Irish heritage has been recast with a distinctly American flair. Similar examples can be found around the globe in cases where populations – as a result of migration, war, shifting labour markets or other factors – have mixed to produce ethnically diverse communities.

Sociologists favour the term 'ethnicity' over 'race' because it is a social concept with no biological meaning to cause confusion. However, references to ethnicity and ethnic differences can also be problematic, especially if they suggest a contrast with some 'non-ethnic' norm. In Britain, for example, ethnicity is commonly used in the press and

amongst the wider white population, to refer to cultural practices and traditions that differ from 'indigenous' (non-ethnic) British practices. The term 'ethnic' is applied in this way to cuisine, clothing, music and neighbourhoods to designate practices that are 'non-British'. Using ethnic labels in this manner risks producing divisions between an 'us' and a 'them', where certain parts of the population are seen as 'ethnic', while others are not. In fact, ethnicity is an attribute possessed by *all* members of a population, not just certain segments of it. Yet, as we shall see, in practice, ethnicity is most often associated with minority groups within a population.

» The concept of 'identity' is introduced and discussed in chapter 7, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life'.

Minority groups

The notion of minority groups (often 'ethnic minorities') is widely used in sociology and is more than a merely numerical distinction. There are many minorities in a statistical sense, such as people over six feet tall or those wearing shoes bigger than size 12, but these are not minorities according to the sociological concept. In sociology, members of a minority group are disadvantaged when compared with the dominant group – a group possessing more wealth, power and prestige – and have some sense of *group solidarity*, of belonging together. The experience of being the subject of prejudice and discrimination tends to heighten feelings of common loyalty and interests.

Thus sociologists frequently use the term 'minority' in a non-literal way to refer to a group's subordinate position within society, rather than its numerical representation. There are many cases in which a 'minority' is in fact in the majority. In some geographical areas such as inner cities, ethnic minority groups make up the majority of the population, but are nonetheless referred to as 'minorities'. This is because the term 'minority' captures their disadvantaged positions. Women are sometimes described as a minority group, while in many countries of the world they form the numerical majority. Yet because women tend to be disadvantaged in comparison with men (the 'majority'), the term is applied to them as well.

Members of minority groups often tend to see themselves as a people apart from the majority. They are sometimes physically and socially isolated from the larger community. They tend to be concentrated in certain neighbourhoods, cities or regions of a country. Traditionally there has been little intermarriage between those in the majority and members of the minority group, or between minority groups, though this is changing as more African Caribbean men and women marry white Britons. People within the minority sometimes actively promote endogamy (marriage within the group) in order to keep alive their cultural distinctiveness. It is also the case that some white Britons actively oppose all interracial relationships on racialist grounds.

Some scholars have favoured speaking of 'minorities' to refer collectively to groups that have experienced prejudice at the hands of the 'majority' society. The term 'minorities' draws attention to the pervasiveness of discrimination by highlighting the commonalities between experiences of various subordinate groups within society. As an example, disablist attitudes, anti-Semitism, homophobia and racism share many features in common and reveal how oppression against different groups can take similar forms. At the same time, however, speaking collectively of 'minorities' can result in generalizations about discrimination and oppression that do not accurately reflect the experiences of specific groups. Although homosexuals and Pakistanis are both minority groups in London, the way in which they experience subordination in society is far from identical.

Many minorities are both ethnically and physically distinct from the rest of the

population. This is the case with West Indians and Asians in Britain, for example, and with African Americans, Chinese and other groups in the United States. As we noted above, in practice the designation of a group or a set of traditions as 'ethnic' occurs somewhat selectively. While West Indians in Britain and African Americans in the United States are clear examples of ethnic minorities, Britons and Americans of Italian or Polish descent are less likely to be considered ethnic minorities. Frequently, physical differences such as skin colour are the defining factor in designating an ethnic minority. As we shall see in this chapter, ethnic distinctions are rarely neutral, but are commonly associated with inequalities of wealth and power, as well as with antagonisms between groups.

Prejudice and discrimination

The concept of race is relatively modern, but prejudice and discrimination have been widespread in human history, and we must first clearly distinguish between them. **Prejudice** refers to opinions or attitudes held by members of one group towards another. A prejudiced person's preconceived views are often based on hearsay rather than on direct evidence, and are resistant to change even in the face of new information. People may harbour favourable prejudices about groups with which they identify and negative prejudices against others. Someone who is prejudiced against a particular group will not deal with its members impartially.

Prejudices are often grounded in **stereotypes**, fixed and inflexible characterizations of a group of people. Stereotypes are often applied to ethnic minority groups, such as the notion that all black men are naturally athletic or that all East Asians are hardworking, diligent students. Some stereotypes contain a grain of truth; others are simply a mechanism of **displacement**, in which feelings of hostility or anger are directed against objects that are not the real origin of those feelings. Stereotypes become embedded in cultural understandings and are difficult to erode, even when they are gross distortions of reality. The belief that single mothers are dependent on welfare and refuse to work is an example of a persistent stereotype that lacks basis in fact. A great number of single mothers do work, and many who receive welfare benefits would prefer to work but have no access to childcare. **Scapegoating** is common when two deprived ethnic groups come into competition with one another for economic rewards. People who direct racial attacks against ethnic minorities, for example, are often in an economic position similar to theirs. A recent poll found that half of all people who felt 'hard done by' believed that immigrants and ethnic minorities were getting priority over them (Stonewall 2003; *The Economist* 2004). They blame ethnic minorities for grievances whose real causes lie elsewhere.

Scapegoating is normally directed against groups that are distinctive and relatively powerless, because they make an easy target. Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Italians, black Africans, Muslims, gypsies and others have played the unwilling role of scapegoat at various times throughout Western history. Scapegoating frequently involves projection, the unconscious attribution to others of one's own desires or characteristics. Research has consistently demonstrated that when the members of a dominant group practice violence against a minority and exploit it sexually, they are likely to believe that the minority group itself displays these traits of sexual violence. For instance, in apartheid South Africa, the belief that black males are exceptionally potent sexually and that black women are promiscuous was widespread among whites. Black males were thought to be highly dangerous sexually to white women, while, in fact, virtually all criminal sexual contact was initiated by white men against black women (Simpson and Yinger 1986).

If prejudice describes attitudes and opinions, **discrimination** refers to actual behaviour towards another group or indi-

vidual. Discrimination can be seen in activities that disqualify members of one group from opportunities open to others, as when a black Briton is refused a job made available to a white person. Although prejudice is often the basis of discrimination, the two may exist separately. People may have prejudiced attitudes that they do not act on. Equally important, discrimination does not necessarily derive directly from prejudice. For example, white house-buyers might steer away from purchasing properties in predominantly black neighbourhoods, not because of attitudes of hostility they might have towards those who live there, but because of worries about declining property values. Prejudiced attitudes in this case influence discrimination, but in an indirect fashion.

A recent report by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency on racism and xenophobia (EUFRA 2007) listed numerous examples of continuing discrimination in some European societies, including poor housing provision for ethnic minority groups, a lack of adequate educational provision for Romany children and rising levels of racist violence and crime in eight European member states – Denmark, Germany, France, Ireland, Poland, Slovakia, Finland and England and Wales. A key problem identified in the report is the 'paucity of adequate comparable official statistical or quantitative research data' on which anti-discriminatory policy could be founded. Such evidence covers a range of types of discrimination: direct (racist attacks), indirect (inappropriate education) and structural (a lack of adequate housing). The EUFRA report outlines the range of measures taken by EU countries to combat all of these forms of discrimination.

In 1992 the models, Iman and Bethann Hardison, founders of The Black Girls Coalition (a coalition of fashion models promoting aid for the homeless), spoke out about the under-representation of African Americans in all areas of the fashion industry. Sudanese model Alex Wek still represents a relatively rare example of black people in the Western fashion industry.

THINKING CRITICALLY

How satisfactory is the distinction between prejudice and discrimination? For example, is it possible for people to hold prejudiced attitudes and yet not behave in discriminatory ways? Are there any examples of this in your own experience? Should we accept prejudice provided it does not turn into discrimination?

What is racism?

One widespread form of prejudice is racism – prejudice based on socially significant

An anti-Semitic attack on a Jewish cemetery in Germany.

physical distinctions. A racist is someone who believes that some individuals are superior or inferior to others on the basis of racialized differences. Racism is commonly thought of as behaviour or attitudes held by certain individuals or groups. An individual may profess racist beliefs or may join in with a group, such as a white supremacist organization, which promotes a racist agenda. Yet many have argued that racism is more than simply the ideas held by a small number of bigoted individuals.

The concept of institutional racism was developed in the USA in the late 1960s by civil rights campaigners who saw that racism underpinned American society, rather than merely representing the opinions of a small minority of people (Omi and Winant 1994). The concept suggests that racism pervades all of society's structures in a systematic manner. According to this view, institutions such as the police, the health service and the education system all promote policies that favour certain groups, while discriminating against others. A highly significant investigation into the practices of the London Metropolitan Police Service (the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry – see 'Classic Studies 15.1') used and built on a definition of institutional racism devised by Stokely Carmichael, a USA civil rights campaigner in the 1960s:

> [Institutional racism is] the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin which can be seen or detected in processes; attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping

> which disadvantages minority ethnic people. (Macpherson 1999)

The Lawrence Report found that institutional racism did exist within the police force and the criminal justice system (ibid.). In culture and the arts, institutional racism has also been revealed in spheres such as television broadcasting (negative or limited portrayal of ethnic minorities in programming) and the international modelling industry (industry-wide bias against non-white fashion models).

From 'old' to 'new' forms of racism'

Just as the concept of biological race has been discredited, so too is old-style 'biological' racism, based on differences in physical traits, rarely openly expressed in society today. The end to legalized segregation in the United States and the collapse of apartheid in South Africa were important turning points in the rejection of biological racism. In both these cases, racist attitudes were proclaimed by directly associating physical traits with biological inferiority. Such blatantly racist ideas are rarely heard today, except in the cases of violent hate crimes or the platforms of certain extremist groups. But this is not to say that racist attitudes have disappeared from modern societies. Rather, as some scholars argue, they have been replaced by a more sophisticated new racism (or *cultural racism*), which uses the idea of cultural differences to exclude certain groups (Barker 1981).

Those who argue that a 'new racism' has emerged claim that cultural arguments are now employed instead of biological ones in order to discriminate against certain segments of the population. According to this view, hierarchies of superiority and inferiority are constructed according to the values of the majority culture. Those groups that stand apart from the majority can become marginalized or vilified for their refusal to assimilate. It is alleged that new racism has a clear political dimension. Prominent examples of new racism can be seen in the efforts by some American politicians to enact official English-only language policies and in the conflicts in France over girls who wish to wear Islamic headscarves to school. The fact that racism is increasingly exercised on cultural rather than biological grounds has led some scholars to suggest that we live in an age of 'multiple racisms', where discrimination is experienced differently across segments of the population (Back 1995).

The persistence of racism

Why has racism persisted into the twenty-first century? There are several reasons. One important factor leading to modern racism was simply the invention and diffusion of the concept of race itself. Quasi-racist attitudes have been known to exist for hundreds of years. But the notion of race as a set of fixed traits emerged with the rise of 'race science', discussed above. Belief in the superiority of the white race, although completely without value factually, remains a key element of white racism.

A second reason for the rise of modern racism lies in the exploitative relations that Europeans established with non-white peoples. The slave trade could not have been carried on had it not been widely believed by Europeans that blacks belonged to an inferior, even subhuman, race. Racism helped justify colonial rule over non-white peoples and denied them the rights of political participation that were being won by whites in their European homelands. Some sociologists argue that exclusion from citizenship remains a central feature of modern-day racism as well.

A third reason concerns the large-scale migration of ethnic minorities to Britain, Europe and North America – regions which were previously predominantly white (with the exception of indigenous people of North America). As the post-war economic boom faltered in the mid-1970s, and most Western economies moved from being short of labour (and having relatively open

Classic Studies 15.1 Institutional racism in the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry

The research problem

The overwhelming majority of 'Classic Studies' chosen for this book are pieces of research or theoretical studies conducted by professional sociologists. Sometimes, however, research conducted by public bodies or investigators on behalf of government has such a far-reaching impact that it takes on the status of a classic. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report (1999) carried out by Sir William Macpherson is a good example. In 1993, a black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, was murdered in a racially motivated attack by five white youths as he was waiting at a bus stop with a friend in south-east London. The attackers stabbed him twice and left him on the pavement to die. That no one has been convicted of his murder has been seen as a gross miscarriage of justice. Why was no one convicted of such a brutal crime?

Macpherson's explanation

The commission which inquired into the case concluded that the investigation into Lawrence's murder had been mishandled from the very start (Macpherson 1999). Police arriving on the scene made little effort to pursue Lawrence's attackers and displayed a lack of respect for his parents, denying them access to information about the case to which they were entitled. An erroneous assumption was made that Lawrence had been involved in a street brawl, rather than being an innocent victim of an unprovoked racist attack. Police surveillance of the suspects was poorly organized and conducted with a 'lack of urgency'; searches of the suspects' dwellings, for example, were not performed thoroughly, despite tips describing where weapons might be concealed. Senior officers who were in a position to intervene in the case to correct such mistakes failed to do so. During the course of the investigation and subsequent inquiries into it, police withheld vital information, protected one another and refused to take responsibility for mistakes.

As a result of the perseverance of Stepehen Lawrence's parents, three of the suspects were brought to trial in 1996, but the case collapsed when a judge ruled that the evidence presented by one witness was inadmissible. Jack Straw, then Home Secretary, announced a full inquiry into the Lawrence case in 1997; the findings of the inquiry were published in 1999 in the Macpherson Report. The authors of the report were unequivocal in their findings: '

> The conclusions to be drawn from all the evidence in connection with the investigation of Stephen Lawrence's racist murder are clear. There is no doubt but that there were fundamental errors. The investigation was marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers.

The charge of *institutional racism* was one of the most important outcomes of the inquiry. The authors of the report concluded that not only the Metropolitan Service, but many other institutions, including the criminal justice system, were also implicated in a 'collective failure ... to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people'. The Report concluded that 'it is incumbent upon every institution to examine their policies and the outcome of their policies' to ensure that no segment of the population be disadvantaged. Seventy recommendations were set forth for improving the way in which racist crimes are policed. These included 'race-awareness' training for police officers, stronger disciplinary powers to remove racist officers, clearer definitions of what constitutes a racist incident, and a commitment to increasing the total number of black and Asian officers in the police force.

Critical points

Although the Macpherson Report's conclusions were welcomed by many people, some thought it did not go far enough. Stephen Lawrence's mother, Doreen Lawrence, said at the time that the police had investigated her

son's murder like 'white masters during slavery' and although she was positive about the Report's honest appraisal of police failings, it had 'only scratched the surface' of racism within the police force. The most contentious part of the report was its central finding, that not just the Metropolitan Police Service but the criminal justice system as a whole was 'institutionally racist'. The Police Complaints Commission (PCC) found 'no evidence' of racist conduct by the police, and the idea of 'unwitting racism' in the report's definition of institutional racism has been criticized as being too general. Echoing the PCC's conclusions, historian Michael Ignatieff wrote that the real issues from the case were not 'race' and 'race awareness', but 'institutionalized incompetence' and 'equal justice before the law' (in Green 2000).

Contemporary significance

The Lawrence Inquiry Report did not deliver justice for Stephen Lawrence. However, it did help to change the way that people in the UK and elsewhere think about racially motivated crime and its prosecution. The concept of institutional racism, which was devised in the civil rights struggles of late 1960s America, was accepted in an official report commissioned by government. In this way, the Lawrence Inquiry not only imposed new demands on the criminal justice system; it also marked a significant change in discourses of race in British society.

borders) to having large numbers of people unemployed, some members of the native population began to believe that immigrants were filling limited jobs and claiming welfare that they believed they were entitled to. Immigrants became an easy scapegoat for dissatisfied natives, often encouraged by the media. In practice, this widely held fear is largely a myth. Immigrant workers tend not to displace local workers, but are more likely to complement them by doing the work that local people reject, by providing valuable additional skills or creating jobs. Similarly, once they are allowed to work, immigrants are likely to make a net contribution to the government budget as taxpayers.

Sociological theories of racism

Some of the concepts that are discussed above – such as stereotypical thinking, displacement and projection – help explain prejudice and discrimination through psychological mechanisms. They provide an account of the nature of prejudiced and racist attitudes and why ethnic differences matter so much to people, but they tell us little about the social processes involved in racism. To study such processes, we must call on sociological ideas.

Ethnocentrism, group closure and allocation of resources

Sociological concepts relevant to ethnic conflicts on a general level are those of ethnocentrism, ethnic group closure and resource allocation. Ethnocentrism is a suspicion of outsiders combined with a tendency to evaluate the culture of others in terms of one's own culture. Virtually all cultures have been ethnocentric to some degree, and it is easy to see how ethnocentrism combines with stereotypical thought discussed above. Outsiders are thought of as aliens, barbarians or morally and mentally inferior. This was how most civilizations viewed the members of smaller cultures, for example, and the attitude has fuelled innumerable ethnic clashes in history.

Ethnocentrism and group closure, or ethnic group closure, frequently go together. 'Closure' refers to the process whereby groups maintain boundaries separating themselves from others. These

boundaries are formed by means of exclusion devices, which sharpen the divisions between one ethnic group and another (Barth 1969). Such devices include limiting or prohibiting intermarriage between the groups, restrictions on social contact or economic relationships like trading, and the physical separation of groups (as in the case of ethnic ghettos). Black Americans have experienced all three exclusion devices: racial intermarriage has been illegal in some states, economic and social segregation was enforced by law in the South, and segregated black ghettos still exist in most major cities.

Sometimes, groups of equal power mutually enforce lines of closure: their members keep separate from each other, but neither group dominates the other. More commonly, however, one ethnic group occupies a position of power over another. In these circumstances, group closure coincides with resource allocation, instituting inequalities in the distribution of wealth and material goods.

Some of the fiercest conflicts between ethnic groups centre on the lines of closure between them precisely because these lines signal inequalities in wealth, power or social standing. The concept of ethnic group closure helps us understand both the dramatic and the more insidious differences that separate communities of people from one another – not just why the members of some groups get shot, lynched, beaten up or harassed, but also why they do not get good jobs, a good education or a desirable place to live. Wealth, power and social status are scarce resources – some groups have more of them than others. To hold onto their distinctive positions, privileged groups sometimes undertake extreme acts of violence against others. Similarly, members of underprivileged groups may also turn to violence as a means of trying to improve their own situation.

Conflict theories

Conflict theories, by contrast, are concerned with the links between racism and prejudice on the one hand and relationships of power and inequality on the other. Early conflict approaches to racism were heavily influenced by Marxist ideas, which saw the economic system as the determining factor for all other aspects of society. Some Marxist theorists held that racism was a product of the capitalist system, arguing that the ruling class used slavery, colonization and racism as tools for exploiting labour (Cox 1959).

Later, neo-Marxist scholars saw these early formulations as too rigid and simplistic and suggested that racism was not the product of economic forces alone. A set of articles published in 1982 by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back*, takes a broader view of the rise of racism. While agreeing that the capitalist exploitation of labour is one factor, contributors to the volume, John Solomos, Paul Gilroy and others, point to a variety of historical and political influences which led to the emergence of a specific brand of racism in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. They argue that racism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon involving the interplay of ethnic minority and working-class identities and beliefs. In their eyes, racism is much more than simply a set of oppressive ideas enacted against the non-white population by powerful elites (Hall et al. 1982).

THINKING CRITICALLY

Given the persistence of racism over long periods of time, which of the theories discussed above would best explain its longevity? Give some contemporary examples of how racism may be related to group closure, ethnocentrism, resource allocation or social class. Can these theories be combined to explain a specific instance of racism?

Ethnic integration, diversity and conflict

Many states in the world today are characterized by multiethnic populations. Often they have evolved in this way over the course of centuries. Some Middle Eastern and Central European states, for example, like Turkey or Hungary, are ethnically diverse as a result of long histories of changing borders, occupations by foreign powers and regional migration. Other societies have become multiethnic more rapidly, as a result of deliberate policies encouraging migration, or by way of colonial and imperial legacies.

In an age of globalization and rapid social change, the rich benefits and complex challenges of ethnic diversity are confronting a growing number of states. International migration is accelerating with the further integration of the global economy; the movement and mixing of human populations seems sure to intensify in years to come. Meanwhile, ethnic tensions and conflicts continue to flare in societies around the world, threatening to lead to the disintegration of some multiethnic states and hinting at protracted violence in others. How can ethnic diversity be accommodated and the outbreak of ethnic conflict averted? Within multiethnic societies, what should be the relation between ethnic minority groups and the majority population? There are three primary models of ethnic integration that have been adopted by multiethnic societies in relation to these challenges: assimilation, the 'melting pot' and, finally, cultural pluralism or multiculturalism. It is important to realize that these three models are ideal types, and are not in practice easy to achieve.

» Max Weber's use of 'ideal types' is discussed in chapter 1, 'What is Sociology?'

Models of ethnic integration

The first model is assimilation, meaning that immigrants abandon their original customs and practices, moulding their behaviour to the values and norms of the majority. An assimilationist approach demands that immigrants change their language, dress, lifestyles and cultural outlooks as part of integrating into a new social order. In the United States, which was formed as a 'nation of immigrants', generations of immigrants were subjected to pressure to become 'assimilated' in this way, and many of their children became more or less completely 'American' as a result. Most official policies in the UK have been aimed at assimilating immigrants into British society. Of course, even if minorities try to assimilate, many are unable to do so if they are racialized or if their attempts are rebuffed – whether it be in employment or dating or any other context.

A second model is that of the melting pot. Rather than the traditions of the immigrants being dissolved in favour of those dominant among the pre-existing population, they become blended to form new, evolving cultural patterns. With its attractions for a diverse range of ethnic groups, the USA is often said to best exhibit the pattern associated with the idea of a melting pot. Not only are differing cultural values and norms 'brought in' to a society from the outside, but diversity is also created as ethnic groups adapt to the wider social environments in which they find themselves. One often-cited literal example of a melting-pot culture is the chicken tikka masala, a meal said to have been invented by Bangladeshi chefs in Indian restaurants in the UK. The chicken tikka is an Indian dish, but the masala sauce was then added. In 2001, the dish was described by former Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook (1946–2005), as a 'British national dish'.

Many have believed that the melting pot model is the most desirable outcome of ethnic diversity. Traditions and customs of

immigrant populations are not abandoned, but contribute to and shape a constantly transforming social milieu. Hybrid forms of cuisine, fashion, music and architecture are manifestations of the melting pot approach. To a limited degree, this model is an accurate expression of aspects of American cultural development. Although the 'Anglo' culture has remained the pre-eminent one, its character in some part reflects the impact of the many different groups that now compose the American population.

The third model is that of cultural pluralism, in which ethnic cultures are given full validity to exist separately, yet participate in the larger society's economic and political life. A recent and important outgrowth of pluralism is multiculturalism, which refers to policies that encourage cultural or ethnic groups to live in harmony with each other. The United States and other Western countries are pluralistic in many senses, but ethnic differences have for the most part been associated with inequalities rather than equal but independent membership in the national community. It does seem at least possible to create a society in which ethnic groups are distinct but equal, as is demonstrated by Switzerland, where French, German and Italian groups coexist in the same society, though multiculturalism has its critics.

One advocate of multiculturalism, political scientist Bhikhu Parekh (2000: 67), puts forward its central argument, arguing:

> The cultural identity of some groups ('minorities') should not have to be confined to the private sphere while the language, culture and religion of others ('the majority') enjoy a public monopoly and are treated as the norm. For a lack of public recognition is damaging to people's self-esteem and is not conducive to encouraging the full participation of everyone in the public sphere.

Parekh (2000) argues that there are three 'insights' within multicultural thinking. First, human beings are embedded within a culturally structured world, which provides them with a system of meanings. And though individuals are not entirely determined by their cultures, they are 'deeply shaped' by them. Second, cultures also contain visions of what constitutes 'a good life'. But if they are not to stagnate or become irrelevant, each culture needs other, different cultures with alternative visions, which encourage critical reflection and the expansion of horizons. Finally, cultures are not monolithic, but are internally plural with continuing debates between different traditions. The crucial task for multicultural societies in the twenty-first century, according to Parekh, is 'the need to find ways of reconciling the legitimate demands of unity and diversity, of achieving political unity without cultural uniformity, and cultivating among its citizens both a common sense of belonging and a willingness to respect and cherish deep cultural differences' (2000: 78).

Amartya Sen (2007) argues against a 'solitarist approach' to understanding human identities. Solitarism, such as that found in some religious and civilizationist approaches, which perceive a person's national, civilizational or religious adherence to be their primary form of identity, assumes that it is possible to understand people by placing them into just one 'identity group'. However, Sen argues that this approach generates much mutual misunderstanding. In the different contexts of everyday life, we see ourselves and each other as belonging to a variety of identity groups and have little problem doing so:

> The same person can be, without any contradiction, an American citizen, of Caribbean origin, with African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a woman, a vegetarian, a long-distance runner, a historian, a schoolteacher, a novelist, a feminist, a heterosexual, a believer in gay and lesbian rights, a theater lover, an environmental activist, a tennis fan, a jazz musician, and someone who is deeply committed to the view that there are intelligent beings in outer space with whom it is extremely urgent to talk (preferably in English). Each

> of these collectivities to all of which this person simultaneously belongs, gives her a particular identity. None of them can be taken to be the person's only identity or singular membership category. (2007: xii)

The assumption that people have one, unique identity which dominates all others breeds mistrust and often violence, as solitarist identities, which generate an 'illusion of destiny' – such as that of a national people's unique identity that gives them an ancient right to hold territory – come into conflict. Sen argues that a more widespread recognition of the plurality of individual identities holds out the hope of a genuine multiculturalism, set against the divisiveness of a model based on the imposition of singular identities.

Critics of multiculturalism raise concerns about the potential for segregation of ethnic groups if states enable, for example, separate schooling and curricula. Some countries, including France, Norway and Denmark, have drawn back from recognizing multiculturalism as official policy and there does seem to be a backlash against the idea within some sections of most Western societies. We must remember though, that all of these societies are already 'multicultural', in the sense that they are constituted by a diversity of cultures. What is currently being debated is really 'political multiculturalism' – that is, whether multiculturalism should become official state policy and therefore be encouraged and facilitated.

In many developed societies, the leaders of most ethnic minority groups have increasingly emphasized the path of pluralism. To achieve 'distinct but equal' status will demand major struggles, and, as yet, this is a distant option. Ethnic minorities are still perceived by many people as a threat: to their job, their safety and to the 'national culture'. The scapegoating of ethnic minorities is a persistent tendency. With many young people quite often still holding similar prejudices to those of older generations, ethnic minorities in most countries face a future of continued discrimination. This is likely in a social climate characterized by tensions and anxiety, heightened by the invasion of Iraq by USA and UK forces in 2003 and recent terrorism in the name of Islam across the world, along with governments' reactions to it.

Many commentators in the media and politics have turned against the idea of multiculturalism. In the UK and other Western countries, some people, fearful of militant Islam and rising immigration, now argue that multiculturalism risks tearing societies apart, undermining the way of life for the predominantly white majority. In Britain, for example, the tabloid newspapers often report that, in the name of multiculturalism, local councils have attempted to 'ban' Christmas, by forbidding schoolchildren to put on nativity plays or send each other Christmas cards. Whether or not these reports are accurate, they reflect a general feeling that multiculturalism has gone too far, and needs to be reigned in.

However, the meaning of multiculturalism has actually become very confused. People often confuse multiculturalism with *cultural diversity* – they talk about living in a 'multicultural society' when, in reality, they mean that society is made up of people from many different ethnic backgrounds. Others think that multiculturalism is about separatism, or cultural relativism. But this is a very naive way of thinking about multiculturalism. According to this view, we simply have to accept that there are many different cultures across the world and within societies and that none can have primacy over others. This implies leaving all groups to follow whatever norms they like, regardless of the consequences for wider society.

An alternative view is what I will call *sophisticated multiculturalism*. This perspective emphasizes the importance of national identity and national laws, but also the fostering of connections between different social and ethnic groups. This form of multiculturalism is concerned with social solidarity, not separateness as some people claim.

In this form of multiculturalism, different groups have equality of status and we should value diversity and openly respect and interact with other cultures. But equality of status does not mean that we accept uncritically the practices of other groups. The philosopher, Charles Taylor (1992), has written about the need for all people in society to have equal rights and respect, but if they have equal rights they also have responsibilities, and one fundamental responsibility is to obey the laws of the land. Thus, practices such as having several wives, female circumcision or carrying out honour killings may occur within some rural, tribal groups and amongst some sections of South Asian communities, but they are illegal in the UK, Europe and many other regions of the world. Not all the issues are as clear-cut as this, as they are not dealt with fully in law, and have to be worked out on a case-by-case basis. For example, is it appropriate for women to be completely veiled so that their faces are covered in the classroom? Such matters will need to be worked out through open debate with different cultural groups. It is precisely the fostering of this kind of dialogue that is itself an important part of multiculturalism.

THINKING CRITICALLY

What are your own assumptions about multiculturalism? Is it inevitable in a globalizing world or does it bring new problems that mean it should be resisted? Could Amartya Sen's idea of recognizing multiple identifications as 'normal' provide the basis for a more multicultural education? Why do some forms of identification – such as national or religious identity – seem more powerful than others?

Terrorism is discussed in more detail in chapter 23, 'Nations, War and Terrorism'.

Ethnic diversity

Ethnic minority groups make up almost 8 per cent of the overall British population (HMSO 2004), but it is important to note that immigration is now responsible for a declining proportion of the minority ethnic population. For every ethnic group, children are much more likely to have been born in Britain, marking an important shift away from an 'immigrant population' to a non-white British population with full citizenship rights. Since the 1991 Census was the first to ask respondents to classify themselves in ethnic terms, comparing data across studies can be difficult (Mason 1995). The number of people belonging to the largest ethnic minority groups, according to the 2001 Census, is shown in figure 15.1, though it is necessary to be cautious about the accuracy of official statistics. For example, respondents' understandings of their own ethnicity may be more complex than the options offered (Moore 1995). This is particularly true in the case of individuals of mixed ethnic and racial backgrounds, which are growing considerably. The 2001 Census estimated around 670,000 mixed race individuals and the UK has one of the fastest growing mixed race populations in the world.

The 2001 Census showed that Britain's ethnic minority population of 4.6 million people was concentrated primarily in the most densely populated urban areas of England. More than 75 per cent of ethnic minorities live in Greater London, the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the north-west and Merseyside (Strategy Unit 2003). In London, 29 per cent of all residents are non-white. By contrast, the more rural regions such as the north-east, south-west, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have an ethnic minority population of less than 2 per cent (ONS 2002b). Many members of ethnic minorities do not live in the inner city by choice; they moved there because such areas were least favoured by the white population.

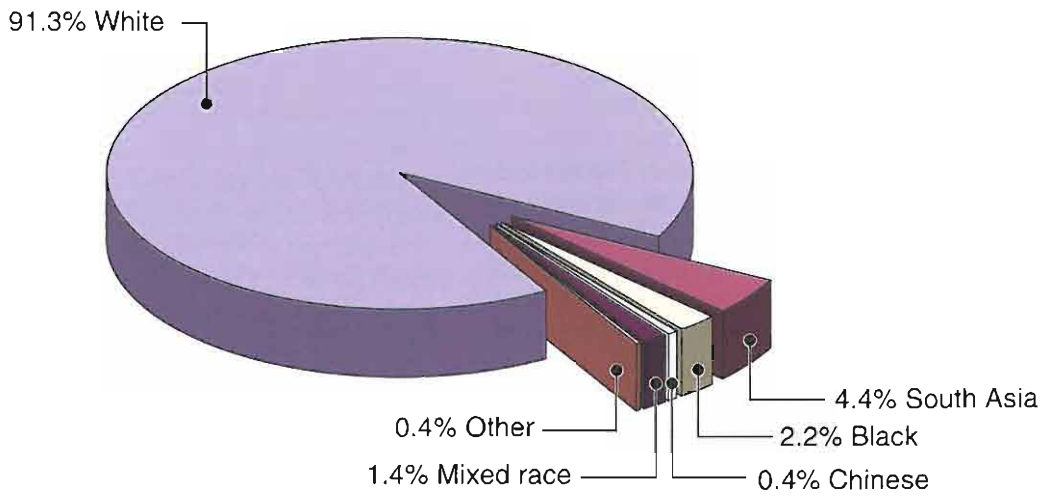


Figure 15.1 Ethnic groups in England and Wales

Source: Census 2001

The 2001 Census also showed that people from the non-white ethnic groups had a younger age structure than the white population in the UK. The 'Mixed' group were the youngest, with half under the age of 16. 'Bangladeshi', 'Other Black' and 'Pakistani' groups also had young age structures, with more than a third of each of these groups being under the age of 16 (ONS 2003a). In terms of gender, the composition of most ethnic minority groups is more balanced between the sexes than in previous times. In earlier years, the bulk of immigrants, particularly from New Commonwealth countries, such as India and the Caribbean, were men. Later policies favoured immigration for family reunification, which helped to equalize the proportions of men and women in many ethnic minority groups. Increasingly, sociologists are emphasizing the need to focus on differences between Britain's ethnic minority groups, rather than speaking generally about the experience of 'ethnic minorities'. For example, black and Asian people in Britain are disadvantaged in comparison with the white population, but there is much differentiation among ethnic minority groups.

Ethnic minorities in labour markets

Employment is a crucial area for monitoring the effects of social and economic disadvantages that result from factors such as gender, age, class and ethnicity. Studies on the position of ethnic minorities in the labour market have revealed patterns of disadvantage in terms of occupational distribution, wage levels, discrimination in hiring and promotional practices, and unemployment rates. We shall consider some of these themes in this section.

Trends in occupational patterns

The earliest national survey of ethnic minorities in Britain, conducted by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) in the 1960s, found that most recent immigrants were clustered disproportionately in manual occupations within a small number of industries. Even those recent arrivals who possessed qualifications from their countries of origin tended to work in jobs incommensurate with their abilities. Discrimination on the basis of ethnic background was a common and overt practice, with some employers refusing to hire non-

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

15.1 Ethnic diversity versus social solidarity?

In a controversial article published in February 2004, David Goodhart, the editor of *Prospect* magazine, argued that there is a trade-off between an ethnically diverse society and one that has the solidarity amongst citizens that allows it to have a decent welfare system to protect those in need. To Goodhart, people are willing to pay taxes – to go towards pensions or unemployment benefit, for example – if they believe that they are paying to help people who are in some way like themselves: people who share at least common values and assumptions. Goodhart called this trade-off 'the progressive dilemma' which faces all those who want both a diverse and a solidaristic society.

As evidence of this trade-off, Goodhart pointed to the Scandinavian countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, which historically have the world's most generous welfare states. He argued that it has been possible to build large welfare systems in these countries because they are fairly socially and ethnically homogeneous, so people are prepared to pay more in taxes. In contrast, welfare states have been weaker in ethnically more divided countries such as the United States.

Goodhart asked if there is a 'tipping point' that occurs somewhere between the proportion of the population in Britain that belongs to an ethnic minority group (fewer than one in ten people) and that of the United States (which is nearer one in three), where a wholly different US-style society is created – that is, one with sharp ethnic divisions and a weak welfare state. He suggested that for this tipping point to be avoided and for feelings of solidarity towards incomers not to be overstretched, it is important that there are limits to the number of people allowed to enter the country and that the process of asylum and immigration is seen to be transparent and under control (Goodhart 2004).

Goodhart's thesis has been heavily criticized. The sociologist Saskia Sassen has argued that, in the long run, integration of immigrants does happen, and that, broadly speaking, immigrants face the same sort of difficulties in becoming accepted today as they did in previous centuries. Historically, all European societies have over time incorporated many, if not all, the major foreign immigrant groups. Past experience shows that it has often taken no more than a couple of generations to turn 'them' into 'us' – the community that can experience solidarity in Goodhart's analysis (Sassen 2004).

The political theorist, Bhikhu Parekh (2004), has also attacked Goodhart's thesis. One of the arguments that Parekh puts forward is that Goodhart gets the relationship between solidarity and the redistribution of the welfare state the wrong way round. Goodhart is convinced that solidarity is a necessary precondition of redistribution. That is a half truth, argues Parekh; one could just as plausibly say that redistribution generates loyalty, creates common life experiences and so on, and therefore paves the way for solidarity. The relation between the two is far more complex than Goodhart suggests in his article.

Bernard Crick (2004), another political theorist, asked Goodhart: 'Solidarity of what?' Goodhart discusses solidarity in *Britain*, but, Crick noted, if he had talked of the 'United Kingdom', it might have reminded him that the UK has been a multinational and a multiethnic state for a long time. Today, the dual status of being British and Scottish, Welsh, Irish or English is an established fact. The question then does not concern either solidarity *or* loss of identity: identity lies partly in being a member of more than one group.

white workers, or agreeing to do so only when there was a shortage of suitable white workers.

By the 1970s, employment patterns had shifted somewhat. Members of ethnic minority groups continued to occupy semi-skilled or unskilled manual positions, but a growing number were employed in skilled manual jobs. Few ethnic minorities were represented in professional and managerial positions. Regardless of changes in legislation to prevent racial discrimination in

THINKING CRITICALLY

In your experience, is Crick right (see 'Using your sociological imagination 15.1'). Are dual identities widely accepted within the UK and Europe? What evidence is there that people in the UK accept and celebrate their 'British' identity? Does the recent devolution of power to a Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament show that 'Britishness' is waning in parts of the UK? Might these lead to the break-up of Britain? What might we learn about the concept of a dual identity from other countries such as Canada and the USA?

hiring practices, research found that whites were consistently offered interviews and job opportunities in preference to equally qualified non-white applicants.

The third PSI survey in 1982 found that, with the exception of African-Asian and Indian men, ethnic minorities were suffering rates of unemployment twice as high as whites, due to the general economic recession, which had a strong impact on the manufacturing sector. Qualified non-whites with fluent English, however, were increasingly entering white-collar positions, and on the whole there was a narrowing in the wage gap between ethnic minorities and whites. A growing number of ethnic minorities took up self-employment, contributing to higher earnings and lower levels of unemployment, especially among Indians and African Asians.

Many observers have suggested that de-industrialization has had a disproportionate impact on ethnic minorities. The shift of the British economy from one based on industry to one driven by technology and the service sector has been harmful to ethnic minority workers who are less well equipped to make the transition into new occupations. However, this conventional view was challenged by findings from the PSI surveys and comparisons of Labour Force Survey and Census statistics (Iganski and Payne 1999). These studies demonstrated that certain non-white groups have in fact attained high levels of economic and occupational success in recent decades, in much the same way as successful white workers. The process of economic restructuring has actually contributed to reducing the gap between ethnic minority and white populations in the labour market. Using data from three decades of Labour Force Surveys and Censuses (1971, 1981 and 1991), Iganski and Payne found that, as a whole, ethnic minority groups experienced *lower* levels of job loss than did the rest of the industrial labour force. The move towards service sector employment had tended to 'sweep up' non-whites and whites alike in a way that narrowed the gap between them.

However, the substantial gains made by certain ethnic minority groups should not be mistaken for the end of occupational disadvantage. Such 'collective social mobility' demonstrates that the forces of post-industrial restructuring are stronger than those of racial discrimination and persistent disadvantage.

Recent investigations of ethnic minorities in the UK have revealed more than ever before the divergent employment trajectories of different ethnic groups. For example, the government's Strategy Unit found that Indians and Chinese are, on average, outperforming whites in the labour market. However, other groups are doing less well: Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and black Caribbeans experience, on average, significantly higher unemployment and lower earnings than whites (Strategy Unit 2003). The fourth PSI survey in 1997 also found employment patterns that vary among non-white women. Caribbean women are much less likely to be in manual work than white women, while Indian women, like Pakistanis, tend to occupy primarily manual jobs. There is a much higher level of economic activity among Caribbean and Indian women, but Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are less active in the labour market. On average,

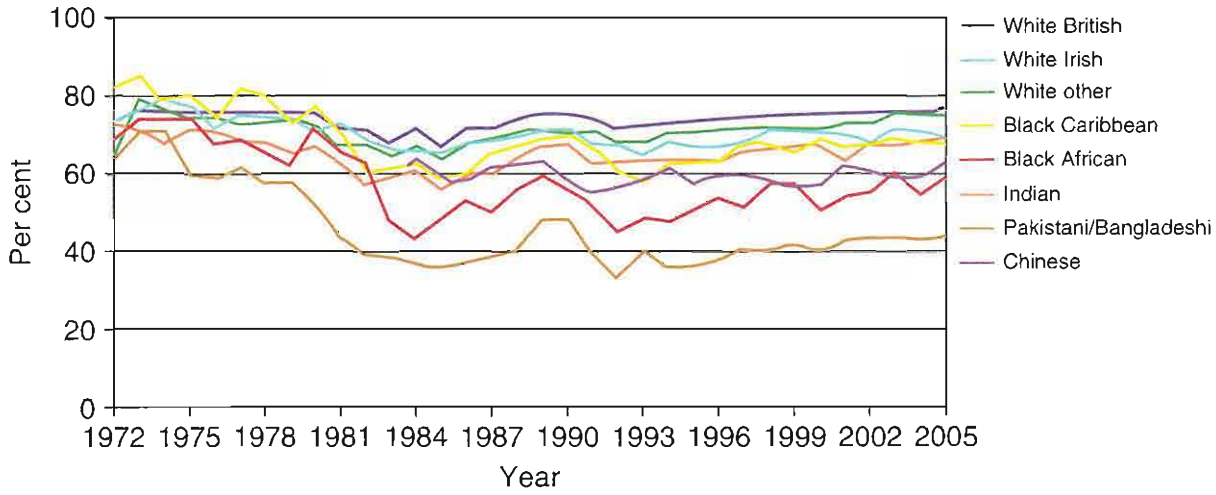


Figure 15.2 Probability of *employment* by ethnic group, UK, 1972–2005 (men aged 16–64; women aged 16–59)

Source: Li and Heath 2007

Caribbean and Indian women tend to have slightly higher full-time earnings than do white women, although among Indian women there is a sharp polarization between those on relatively high incomes and those who are on low incomes (Modood et al. 1997). Figure 15.2 shows how much these employment rates for men and women vary across different ethnic backgrounds.

The most successful non-whites, as measured in terms of level of income, are those South Asians who are self-employed or small employers. The proportion of people in this category has risen steadily over the past 25 years: Indian men and women are now more than twice as likely to be self-employed than whites. Studies indicate that discrimination among wage and salary employers is one reason for the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in self-employment (Clark and Drinkwater 1998). Asian corner shops and other forms of Asian-run business have become such a prominent aspect of British society that some have suggested that they could lead an economic revival of inner-city areas.

It is important not to overstate the prosperity and potential impact of South Asian small businesses, however. Many self-employed Asians work extremely long hours – up to 60 or 80 hours per week – for relatively low levels of overall income. They are registered as self-employed, but are in effect employed by other members of the family who run the business; and they do not have the usual advantages that employees enjoy of sick pay, paid holidays and employer contributions to National Insurance.

Advances within the occupational structure are not always matched by increased representation at the top levels of power. Despite the fact that a higher number of ethnic minorities occupy white-collar professional positions than was the case previously, there appears to be a 'glass ceiling' which prevents all but a few people from the ethnic minorities from advancing to the top positions within large companies and organizations. This is particularly pronounced within the large public sector organizations. In general, ethnic minority men – even the most highly qualified – are only half as likely as white men to be represented among the top 10 per cent of jobs by power, status and earnings (Modood et al. 1997).

Housing

Ethnic minorities in Britain, as elsewhere, tend to experience discrimination, harassment and material deprivation in the housing market. Since the early calls for immigration controls, housing has been at the forefront of struggles over resources between groups and tendencies towards ethnic closure. One reason for this may be that housing is a highly symbolic matter – it indicates status, provides security and interweaves with overall livelihood. As with employment patterns, differentials in the quality and type of housing vary across ethnic groups. Although the non-white population as a whole is more disadvantaged than whites in terms of housing, this is far from a unified picture. Certain groups, such as those of Indian origin, have attained very high levels of home ownership, while others are clustered disproportionately in substandard accommodation or the social housing sector (Ratcliffe 1999).

A number of factors contribute to housing differentials between non-white and white populations, and among non-white groups. Racial harassment or violent attacks, which are still frequent not only in Britain but across Europe, are likely to encourage a certain degree of ethnic segregation in housing patterns. In many European countries, recent evidence shows that Roma communities face the worst discrimination in relation to available and affordable housing (EUFRA 2007). Non-white families with the means to move into more affluent, predominantly white neighbourhoods may be dissuaded from doing so because of ethnic hostility.

Another factor relates to the physical condition of housing. In general, housing occupied by ethnic minority groups tends to be in greater disrepair than that of the white population. A high proportion of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis live in accommodation that is overcrowded (because of the large average size of their households); their housing also tends to be more susceptible to damp and more likely to lack central heating.

People of Indian origin, by contrast, are as likely as whites to occupy detached or semi-detached homes and are less likely than other ethnic groups to reside in inner-city neighbourhoods. African-Caribbean households, on the other hand, are much more likely to rent accommodation in the social housing sector, rather than become home-owners. This may be related to the high proportion of lone-parent families within this ethnic group.

How can ethnic differentials in housing be understood? In a classic study, John Rex and Robert Moore (1967) argued that, as a result of the competitive processes in the housing market, ethnic minorities have emerged as a distinct 'housing class'. According to such an approach, the challenges facing minority groups – from economic disadvantage to racial discrimination – mean that they have few options and little chance to exert control over their housing position. Ethnic minorities are essentially forced to make do with inadequate housing because they have few or no choices in the matter. While there are certainly many constraining circumstances which disadvantage ethnic minorities in the housing market, it would be wrong to imply that they are simply passive victims of discriminatory or racist forces. Patterns and practices change over time through the choices made by social actors.

Poor housing is a significant factor leading to higher levels of poor health amongst some ethnic minority groups, though such health inequalities are strongly correlated with social class position (Cockerham 2007).

See also chapter 10, 'Health, Illness and Disability', for a wider discussion of health inequalities

Understanding the intersecting social inequalities of class, ethnicity and gender have formed the basis for much recent sociological research, and this work has

informed attempts to improve public services for ethnic minorities. Awareness of discrimination can also become an impetus for creative action. This is important, as one independent health service report argued: 'At present, people from the black and minority ethnic ... are not getting the service they are entitled to. Putting it bluntly, this is a disgrace' (Blofeld 2003: 58). An additional factor for ethnic minority groups is racist attitudes within society, which, as the Macpherson Report (1999) discussed above shows, are also institutionally embedded in many public services (Karlsen 2007). We can see this in relation to the operation of the criminal justice system.

The criminal justice system

Since the 1960s, members of ethnic minority groups have been represented in ever greater numbers within the criminal justice system, both as offenders and victims. Compared to their distribution in the overall population, ethnic minorities are over-represented in prisons. In 2002, 16 per cent of male prisoners in England and Wales were from an ethnic minority group (HMSO 2004). There is reason to believe that members of ethnic minority groups suffer from discriminatory treatment once they are within the criminal justice system. There is a higher rate of custodial sentencing among non-whites, even in cases where there are few or no previous convictions. Ethnic minorities are also more likely to experience discrimination or racial attacks once imprisoned. Some scholars have pointed out that the administration of the criminal justice system is overwhelmingly dominated by whites. A small percentage of practising lawyers are black, and blacks make up less than 2 per cent of the police force (Denney 1998).

Non-white groups are all vulnerable to racism of one kind or another – including racially motivated attacks. Most escape such treatment, but for a minority the experience can be disturbing and brutal. It has been estimated that racially motivated incidents represented 12 per cent of all crime against minority ethnic people (compared with 2 per cent for white people) (ONS 2002b). The British Crime Survey also found that emotional reactions to racially motivated incidents were generally more severe than for non-racially motivated incidents.

How can we account for these patterns of crime and victimization? Crime is not evenly distributed among the population. There appears to be a distinct spatial element to patterns of crime and victimization. Areas that suffer from material deprivation generally have higher crime rates and individuals living in such regions run a greater risk of falling victim to crime.

The deprivations to which people exposed to racism are subject both help to produce, and are produced by, the decaying environment of the inner cities (see chapter 6, 'Cities and Urban Life'). Here, there are clear correlations between 'race', unemployment and crime, which tend to centre on the position of young males from ethnic minority backgrounds. Through the political and media creations of moral panic about crime, a public link has been established between 'race' and crime.

The theory of moral panic is discussed in chapter 21, 'Crime and Deviance'.

Yet the experience of many people from ethnic minorities, and particularly young men, is that it is precisely they who are the 'objects of violent exploitation' in their encounters with whites and to some extent also, unfortunately, the police. Sociological studies have been instrumental in revealing racist attitudes among police officers. In the 1980s, a study of police by Roger Graef (1989) concluded that police were 'actively hostile to all minority groups'. He noted the frequency with which officers would use stereotypes and racial slurs when speaking about ethnic minorities. During the 1990s, several high-profile incidents in Britain and the United States raised awareness about

police racism in ways that no study ever could. The racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 has significantly altered the nature of the debate over racism in Britain by demonstrating that it is not restricted to certain individuals, but can pervade entire institutions (see 'Classic Studies 15.1' above). For example, in the first year after the report, more than one-third of police forces had not hired any additional black or Asian officers and the number of ethnic minority officers had fallen in 9 out of 43 forces in England and Wales.

Ethnic minorities are in the greatest need of protection by police and the criminal justice system because they are more likely to be victims of crime, but there are some indications that law-enforcement policies seem to have a racial character that targets non-whites: so-called 'stop-and-search' policies, for example, tend to target non-whites disproportionately. The number of 'stop-and-search' procedures against ethnic minorities fell after the publication of the Macpherson Report in 1999, but has since risen as police forces became more sensitive to the risk of terrorism in the name of Islam. This has led to a rise in the number of cases where British Asians, some of whom are Muslim, have been stopped and searched, with police using new powers granted to them under the 2000 Terrorism Act.

Ethnic conflict

Ethnic diversity can greatly enrich societies. Multiethnic states are often vibrant and dynamic places that are strengthened by the varied contributions of their inhabitants. But such states can also be fragile, especially in the face of internal upheaval or external threat. Differing linguistic, religious and cultural backgrounds can become fault-lines that result in open antagonism between ethnic groups. Sometimes societies with long histories of ethnic tolerance and integration can rapidly become engulfed in ethnic conflict – hostilities between different ethnic groups or communities.

This was the case in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, a region renowned for its rich multiethnic heritage. The Balkans have long been the crossroads of Europe. Centuries of migration and the rule of successive empires have produced a diverse, intermixed population composed predominantly of Slavs (such as the Eastern Orthodox Serbs), Croats (Catholic), Muslims and Jews. After 1991, alongside major political and social transformations following the fall of communism, deadly conflicts broke out between ethnic groups in several areas of the former Yugoslavia.

The conflicts in the former Yugoslavia involved attempts at ethnic cleansing, the creation of ethnically homogeneous areas through the mass expulsion of other ethnic populations. Croatia, for example, has become an independent 'mono-ethnic' state after a costly war in which thousands of Serbs were expelled from the country. A war that broke out in Bosnia in 1992, between Serbs, Croats and Muslims, involved the ethnic cleansing of the Bosnian Muslim population at the hands of the Serbs: thousands of Muslim men were forced into internment camps and a campaign of systematic rape was carried out against Muslim women. The war in Kosovo in 1999 was prompted by charges that Serbian forces were intent on ethnic cleansing by forcing the Kosovar Albanian (Muslim) population from the province.

In both Bosnia and Kosovo, ethnic conflict became internationalized. Hundreds of thousands of refugees spilled over into neighbouring areas, further destabilizing the region. Western states intervened both diplomatically and militarily to protect the human rights of ethnic groups which had become targets of ethnic cleansing. In the short term, such interventions succeeded in quelling the systematic violence. Yet they had unintended consequences as well. The fragile peace in Bosnia was maintained, but only through the presence of peacekeeping troops and the partitioning of the country into separate ethnic enclaves. In Kosovo, a

process of 'reverse ethnic cleansing' ensued after the NATO bombing campaign in 1999. Ethnic Albanian Kosovars began to drive the local Serb population out of Kosovo; the presence of UN-led 'Kfor' troops proved to be inadequate to prevent ethnic tensions from reigniting.

Ethnic cleansing involves the forced relocation of ethnic populations through targeted violence, harassment, threats and campaigns of terror. Genocide, by contrast, describes the systematic elimination of one ethnic group at the hands of another. The term 'genocide' has often been used to describe the process by which indigenous populations in North and South America were decimated after the arrival of European explorers and settlers. Disease, forced relocation and campaigns of violence destroyed many native populations, although the extent to which this was systematically planned remains contested.

The twentieth century witnessed the emergence of 'organized' genocide and carries the dubious distinction of being the most 'genocidal' century in history. In the Armenian genocide of 1915–23, more than a million Armenians were killed at the hands of the Ottoman Turks. The Nazi Holocaust resulted in the death of more than six million Jews and remains the most horrific example of the planned extermination of one ethnic group by another. The ethnic Hutu majority in Rwanda launched a genocidal campaign against the ethnic Tutsi minority in 1994, claiming the lives of more than 800,000 individuals within a span of three months. More than two million Rwandan refugees spilled over into neighbouring states, heightening ethnic tensions in countries such as Burundi and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). More recently, government-backed Arab militias have been accused of ethnic cleansing in Sudan, after an uprising by some of the black population of the Western Sudanese region of Darfur in 2003. Reprisals by the militia led to the loss of at least 70,000 lives and left around two million people homeless.

It has been noted that violent conflicts around the globe are increasingly based on ethnic divisions, as the examples of Rwanda and Sudan show. Only a tiny proportion of wars now occur between states; the vast majority of conflicts are civil wars with ethnic dimensions. In a world of increasing interdependence and competition, international factors become even more important in shaping ethnic relations, while the effects of 'internal' ethnic conflicts are felt well outside national borders. As we have seen, ethnic conflicts attract international attention and have sometimes provoked physical intervention. International war crimes tribunals have been convened to investigate and try those responsible for the ethnic cleansing and genocide in Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Responding to and preventing ethnic conflict have become key challenges facing both individual states and international political structures. Although ethnic tensions are often experienced, interpreted and described at the local level, they are increasingly taking on national and international dimensions.

Migration in a global age

While we may think of immigration as a phenomenon of the twentieth century, it is a process whose roots stretch back to the earliest stages of written history and beyond. For example, the considerable number of Irish, Welsh and Scottish names scattered across England today is a reminder of the traditional flow of people from the so-called 'Celtic fringes' to the urban centres of England. In the early nineteenth century, long before the advent of major immigration from the British Empire's distant colonies, developing English cities attracted migrants from the less prosperous areas within the British Isles. In this section we recount the experience of immigration in Britain, which has played a crucial role in the movement of people around the world, during the period

Global Society 15.2 Genocide in Rwanda

Between April and June 1994, an estimated 800,000 Rwandans were killed in the space of 100 days. Most of the dead were Tutsis – and most of those who perpetrated the violence were Hutus. Even for a country with such a turbulent history as Rwanda, the scale and speed of the slaughter left its people reeling.

The genocide was sparked by the death of the Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, when his plane was shot down above Kigali airport on 6 April 1994. A recent French official report blamed current Rwandan President, Paul Kagame. The report – extracts of which appeared in the daily newspaper *Le Monde* – said French police had concluded that Mr Kagame gave direct orders for the rocket attack. Rwanda has rejected the report, describing it as a 'fantasy'.

Within hours of the attack, a campaign of violence spread from the capital throughout the country, and did not subside until three months later. But the death of the president was by no means the only cause of Africa's largest genocide in modern times.

History of violence

Ethnic tension in Rwanda is nothing new. There have been always been disagreements between the majority Hutus and minority Tutsis, but the animosity between them has grown substantially since the colonial period. The two ethnic groups are actually very similar – they speak the same language, inhabit the same areas and follow the same traditions.

But when the Belgian colonists arrived in 1916, they saw the two groups as distinct entities, and even produced identity cards classifying people according to their ethnicity. The Belgians considered the Tutsis as superior to the Hutus. Not surprisingly, the Tutsis welcomed this idea, and for the next 20 years they enjoyed better jobs and educational opportunities than their neighbours. Resentment among the Hutus gradually built up, culminating in a series of riots in 1959. More than 20,000 Tutsis were killed, and many more fled to the neighbouring countries of Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda. When Belgium relinquished power and granted Rwanda independence in 1962, the Hutus took their place. Over subsequent decades, the Tutsis were portrayed as the scapegoats for every crisis.

Building up to genocide

This was still the case in the years before the genocide. The economic situation worsened and the incumbent president, Juvenal Habyarimana, began losing popularity. At the same time, Tutsi refugees in Uganda – supported by some moderate Hutus – were forming the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Their aim was to overthrow Habyarimana and secure their right to return to their homeland. Habyarimana chose to exploit this threat as a way to bring dissident Hutus back to his side, and Tutsis inside Rwanda were accused of being RPF collaborators.

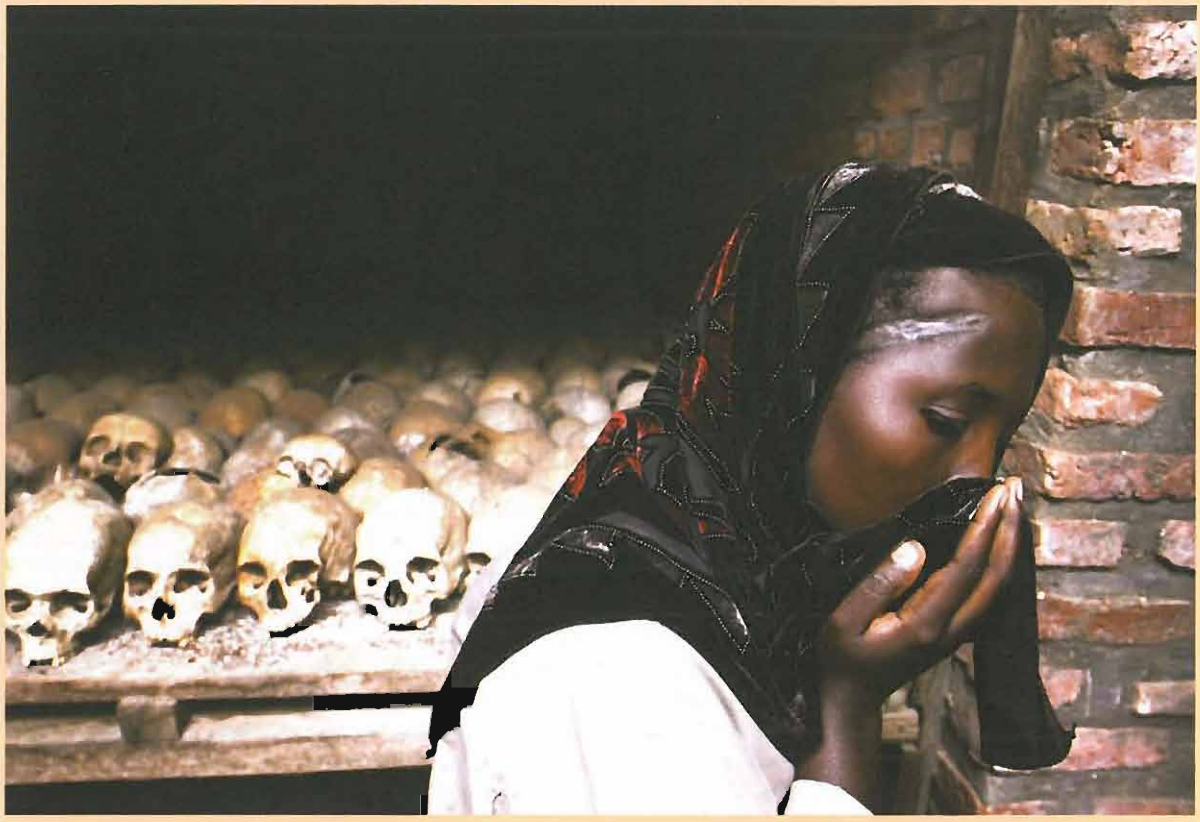
In August 1993, after several attacks and months of negotiation, a peace accord was signed between Habyarimana and the RPF, but it did little to stop the continued unrest. When Habyarimana's plane was shot down at the beginning of April 1994, it was the final nail in the coffin. Exactly who killed the president – and with him the president of Burundi and many chief members of staff – has not been established. Whoever was behind the killing, its effect was both instantaneous and catastrophic.

Mass murder

In Kigali, the presidential guard immediately initiated a campaign of retribution. Leaders of the political opposition were murdered, and almost immediately, the slaughter of Tutsis and moderate Hutus began. Within hours, recruits were dispatched all over the country to carry out a wave of slaughter. The early organizers included military officials, politicians and businessmen, but soon many others joined in the mayhem.

Encouraged by the presidential guard and radio propaganda, an unofficial militia group called the Interahamwe (meaning 'those who attack together') was mobilized. At its peak, this group was 30,000-strong. Soldiers and police officers encouraged ordinary citizens to take part. In some cases, Hutu civilians were forced to murder their Tutsi neighbours by military personnel. Participants were often given incentives, such as money or food, and some were even told they could appropriate the land of the Tutsis they killed.

On the ground at least, the Rwandans were largely left alone by the international community. UN troops withdrew after the murder of ten of their soldiers. The day after Habyarimana's death, the RPF renewed their assault on government forces,



The ethnic Hutu majority in Rwanda claimed the lives of more than 800,000 Tutsis during the genocide of 1994.

and numerous attempts by the UN to negotiate a ceasefire came to nothing.

Aftermath

Finally, in July, the RPF captured Kigali. The government collapsed and the RPF declared a ceasefire. As soon as it became apparent that the RPF was victorious, an estimated two million Hutus fled to Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). Back in Rwanda, UN troops and aid workers then arrived to help maintain order and restore basic services.

On 19 July a new multiethnic government was formed, promising all refugees a safe return to Rwanda. But although the massacres are over, the legacy of the genocide continues, and the search for justice has been a long and arduous one. About 500 people have been sentenced to death, and another 100,000 are still in prison. But some of the ringleaders have managed to evade capture, and many who lost their loved ones are still waiting for justice.

Source: Adapted from BBC News, 1 April 2004

both of imperialist expansion and of the demise of the British Empire.

Although migration is not a new phenomenon, it is one that seems to be accelerating as part of the process of global integration. Worldwide migration patterns can be seen as one reflection of the rapidly changing economic, political and cultural ties between countries. It has been estimated that around 175 million people currently reside in a country other than where they were born, equivalent to around

Across Europe, fears about 'bogus asylum-seekers' have been linked to concerns about national security, especially in the years after 11 September 2001. This picture shows sub-Saharan Africans waiting to be driven to a police holding centre after arriving on a beach in Fuerteventura, Spain.

3 per cent of the world's population (DESA 2002), prompting some scholars to label this the 'age of migration' (Castles and Miller 2003).

Immigration, the movement of people into a country to settle, and emigration, the process by which people leave a country to settle in another, combine to produce global migration patterns linking countries of origin and countries of destination. Migratory movements add to ethnic and cultural diversity in many societies and help to shape demographic, economic and social dynamics. The intensification of global migration since the Second World War, and particularly in more recent decades, has transformed immigration into an important political issue in many countries. Rising immigration rates in many Western societies have challenged commonly held notions of national identity and have forced a re-examination of concepts of citizenship.

Scholars have identified four models of migration to describe the main global population movements since 1945. The *classic model* of migration applies to countries such as Canada, the United States and Australia, which have developed as 'nations of immigrants'. In such cases, immigration has been largely encouraged and the promise of citizenship has been extended to newcomers, although restrictions and quotas help to limit the annual intake of immigrants. The colonial model of immigration, pursued by countries such as France and the United Kingdom, tends to favour immigrants from former colonies over those from other countries. The large number of immigrants to Britain in the years after the Second World War from

Immigration brings about new ideas of what it means to be British, at all levels of society, as this image of a black Queen Elizabeth suggests.

Commonwealth countries, such as India or Jamaica, reflected this tendency.

Countries such as Germany, Switzerland and Belgium have followed a third policy – the *guest workers model*. Under such a scheme, immigrants are admitted into the country on a temporary basis, often in order to fulfil demands within the labour market, but do not receive citizenship rights even after long periods of settlement.

Finally, *illegal forms* of immigration are becoming increasingly common as a result of tightening immigration laws in many industrialized countries. Immigrants who are able to gain entry into a country either secretly or under a 'non-immigration' pretence are often able to live illegally outside the realm of official society. Examples of this can be seen in the large number of Mexican 'illegal aliens' in many Southern American states, or in the growing international business of smuggling refugees across national borders.

The spread of industrialization dramatically transformed migration patterns in the industrializing societies. The growth of opportunities for work in urban areas coupled with the decline of household production in the countryside encouraged a trend towards rural–urban migration. Demands within the labour market also gave new impetus to immigration from abroad. In Britain, Irish, Jewish and black communities had existed long before the Industrial Revolution, but the surge of new opportunities altered the scale and scope of international immigration. New waves of Dutch, Chinese, Irish and black immigrants transformed British society.

In more recent times, a large wave of immigration to Britain occurred when the 1930s Nazi persecutions sent a generation of European Jews fleeing westwards to safety. It has been estimated that some 60,000 Jews settled in the UK between 1933 and 1939, but the real figure may well have been higher. In the same period, around 80,000 refugees also arrived from Central Europe, and a further 70,000 arrived during the war itself. By May 1945, Europe faced an unprecedented refugee problem: millions of people had become refugees and many settled in Britain.

Following the Second World War, Britain experienced immigration on a large scale as people from Commonwealth countries were encouraged and facilitated to come to the UK, which had a marked shortage of labour. In addition to rebuilding the country and economy following the destruction of the war, industrial expansion provided British workers with unprecedented mobility, creating a need for labour in unskilled and manual positions. Government, influenced by ideas of Britain's imperial heritage, encouraged people from the West

Indies, India, Pakistan and other former colonies in Africa to settle in Britain. The 1948 British Nationality Act granted favourable immigration rights to citizens of Commonwealth countries.

With each wave of immigration, the religious make-up of the UK changed. British cities, in particular, are now multiethnic and religiously diverse. In the nineteenth century, immigrants from Ireland swelled the number of Catholics in cities like Liverpool and Glasgow, where many settled. In the post-war period, large-scale immigration from Asia increased the number of Muslims, many from the largely Muslim countries of Pakistan and Bangladesh, and Hindus mainly from India. Immigration brought new questions about what it means to be British and how ethnic and religious minorities can integrate fully into British society.

» Religious diversity is discussed in more detail in chapter 16, 'Religion'.

Migration and the decline of empire: Britain since the 1960s

The 1960s marked the start of a gradual rolling back of the idea that inhabitants of the British Empire had the right to settle in Britain and claim citizenship. Although changing labour markets played a role in the new restrictions, they were also the response to a backlash against immigrants by groups of white Britons. In particular, working people living in poorer areas, to which the new immigrants gravitated for their work, were sensitive to the 'disruption' to their own lives. Attitudes to the newcomers were often hostile. The 1958 Notting Hill riots, in which white residents attacked black immigrants, were testament to the strength of racist attitudes. In an infamous phrase from a 1962 speech in Birmingham, Enoch Powell, a Conservative front-bench minister at the time, envisaged an extraordinary growth in the non-white population in Britain: 'Like the Romans, I seem to see "the River Tiber flowing with much blood".' However, a Gallup poll showed that 75 per cent of the population were broadly sympathetic to Powell's views.

Many anti-racist campaigners have argued that British immigration policy is racist and discriminatory against non-white groups. Since the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962, a series of legislative measures have been passed, gradually restricting entry and settlement rights for non-whites, while protecting the ability of whites to enter Britain relatively freely. For example, among citizens of Commonwealth states, immigration laws discriminated against the predominantly non-white 'New Commonwealth' states, while preserving the rights of mainly white immigrants from 'old Commonwealth' countries such as Canada and Australia. The British Nationality Act of 1981 separated 'British citizenship' from citizenship of British dependent territories. Legislation introduced in 1988 and 1996 increased these restrictions even further.

Britain, like other European countries, has also reduced the possibility of asylum-seekers gaining entry. To be granted asylum, individuals must claim that being forced to leave the country would break obligations that the government has under the United Nations 'Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees' (1951). The agreement obliges signatory nations to protect refugees who are fleeing persecution and treat them as well as other foreign nationals on their territory. Since 1991, there have been more stringent checks on people claiming refugee status, including fingerprinting, reduced access to free legal advice and the doubling of fines levied on airlines which bring in passengers not holding valid visas. As more measures were introduced, an increased number of refusals resulted in a larger number of asylum-seekers being held in detention centres for long periods of time.

In the last 15 years or so, issues of 'race' and immigration have become more important in public opinion surveys across Europe and other developed societies. For

There was a rise in Commonwealth immigrants coming to Britain after the Second World War in response to a national labour shortage, but they often faced racism. Immigration was later restricted.

example, as figure 15.3 shows, race and immigration barely registered in UK surveys from the early 1990s, but the twenty-first century has witnessed an enormous rise in the salience of these issues amongst the public. More than one-third of people in a 2006 Ipsos/MORI poll said that race and immigration, were amongst 'the most important issues facing Britain today'. This placed 'race' and immigration second only to the NHS as the most important issue. Of course, key events can also affect public opinion and although migration issues were rising in opinion surveys in the late 1990s, so-called 'race riots' in parts of the UK also played a part; following the al-Qaeda attacks on the USA in September 2001, the trend has been towards rising concerns about race and ethnicity (see figure 15.4), not just in Britain but across the developed world.

In Europe, concerns over 'race' and immigration have generally followed a similar pattern, but with some interesting differences. Research reported by the Pew Global Attitudes Project (2005) found that in Germany only a minority, 34 per cent, thought immigration from the Middle East and North Africa was 'a good thing', 57 per cent thought it was 'a bad thing' and two-thirds of Germans in the survey disapproved of immigration from Eastern Europe. Public opinion in the Netherlands

Q. What are the most/other important issues facing Britain today? % mentioning 'race/immigration'

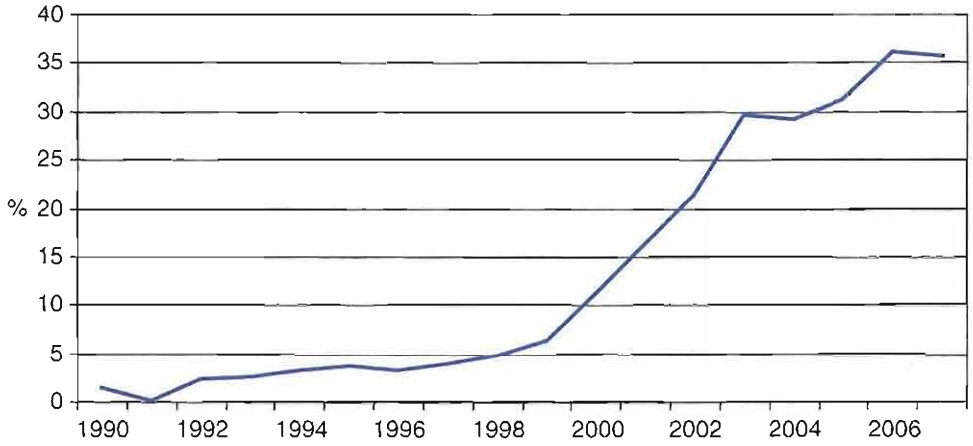


Figure 15.3 Rise in British public concern about race/immigration, 1990–2007

Source: Ipsos/MORI, Sept 2007

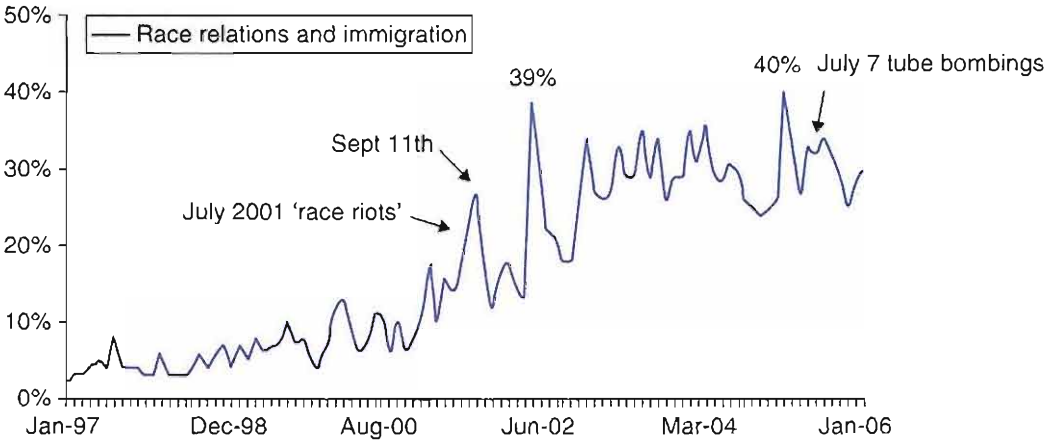


Figure 15.4 Concern about race relations and immigration, 1997–2006

Source: Ipsos/MORI, March 2006

is rather more split, with roughly equal percentages approving and disapproving of immigration from the Middle East and North Africa and Eastern Europe (50 per cent and 47 per cent). In France, a small majority actually approved of immigration from these areas, and in Spain, 67 per cent saw immigration from the Middle East and North Africa as a good thing and 72 per cent approved of Eastern European immigration. Approval is even higher in Canada, with 77 per cent approving of Asian immigration and 78 per cent saying the same of Mexican and Latin American immigration (Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 2005).

As opportunities for immigrants to enter Britain were cut off, there was a sharp rise in the number of people seeking asylum. Depictions, particularly in tabloid newspapers, of 'bogus' asylum-seekers 'swamping'

DAILY EXPRESS

BRITAIN DEFIANT The World's Greatest Newspaper WEDNESDAY JULY 27, 2005 40p

How Patsy Kensit has fought back to be the new Queen of Emmerdale SEE PAGES 18&19

Now schools minister wants to bring back classes of 60 SEE PAGE 9

BOMBERS ARE ALL SPONGEING ASYLUM SEEKERS

THE SCHOOLBOY: Said Ibrahim, circled, in a 1994 class photograph

Britain gave them refuge and now all they want to do is repay us with death

THE suicide bombers who tried to murder scores of Britons were asylum seekers who raked in more than £40,000 in state handouts, it emerged yesterday.

And it was revealed that bomber Shakar Said Ibrahim has served a jail sentence for armed robbery.

He and Yasin Hassan Omar were given sanctuary by Britain when their families fled war-torn eastern Africa. But after being housed, educated and kept on a mixture of benefits, both became consumed by a hatred of the West. Omar was given a total of £40,000

By David Pilditch and Cyril Dixon

in housing benefit and income support over six years, and Ibrahim received £5,500 in jobseekers' allowance during the final year of his campaign to plot carnage.

Just 18 months before the bombing attempt, Ibrahim was granted a British passport.

He swore an oath of allegiance to the Queen before being given the right to travel freely abroad as a British citizen. But the 27-year-old former refugee

TURN TO PAGE 4, COLUMN 2

the UK, have helped to create a distorted image of immigration and asylum. The coordinated terrorist suicide bombings in London on 7 July 2007, which killed 52 civilians and injured 700 others, followed by failed attempts on 21 July, promoted lurid headlines in some British newspapers (see *Daily Express* front page illustrated), suggesting a direct link between such types of terrorism and those seeking asylum, even though the identities and status of the bombers were not even known for sure at the time.

Several surveys have also found that the public grossly overestimates the number of asylum-seekers and refugees coming to the UK and the benefits they receive (for instance, MORI, 17 June 2002). The 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act,

which built on the government's White Paper *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity* (2002), set new requirements for people wanting British citizenship, including a basic knowledge of life in the UK, citizenship ceremonies and a pledge of allegiance. The Act also provided for the housing of asylum-seekers in specially built accommodation centres dispersed around the country, a measure widely criticized by refugee groups as stigmatizing refugees.

Thinking critically

Is the rising public concern with migration issues really justified? Look at the questions asked in the survey results presented above. What criticisms would you make about the way these questions are phrased? How might sociologists investigate public attitudes towards migration, without creating a similar problem?

Migration and the European Union

As part of the move towards European integration, many of the earlier barriers to the free movement of commodities, capital and employees have been removed. This has led to a dramatic increase in regional migration among European countries. Citizens of countries in the European Union – including the ten new member states, largely from Eastern Europe, that joined the EU in May 2004 – now have the right to work in any other EU country. Professionals with highly developed skills and qualifications have joined the ranks of asylum-seekers and economic migrants as the largest groups of European migrants. With this shift, scholars have noted a growing polarization within the migrant population between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

Migration into the EU from non-EU countries has become one of the most pressing issues on the political agenda in a number of European states. As the process of European integration continues, a number of countries have dissolved internal border controls with neighbouring states as part of the Schengen agreement, which came into force in 1995. The agreement has been signed by 31 countries and implemented by 26, which means the latter now only monitor their external borders and allow free entry from neighbouring member states (see figure 15.5). This reconfiguration of European border controls has had an enormous impact on illegal immigration into the EU and on cross-border crime. Illegal immigrants able to gain access to a Schengen state can move unimpeded throughout the entire Schengen zone.

Since most EU states have now limited legal immigration to cases of family reunification, instances of illegal immigration have been on the increase. Some illegal migrants enter the EU legally as students or visitors and overstay their visas, but a growing number of illegal immigrants are smuggled across borders. The International Centre for Migration Policy Development estimates that 400,000 people are smuggled into the EU annually. Italy's long coastal border has been considered one of the most porous in Europe, attracting illegal immigrants from nearby Albania, the former Yugoslavia, Turkey and Iraq. Since joining the Schengen agreement, Italy has tightened its external border significantly. Germany, which receives a disproportionate share of illegal immigrants and applications from asylum-seekers, has been working with the governments in Poland and the Czech Republic to strengthen controls on their eastern borders.

The racism that is associated with anti-immigration sentiment has produced some explosive incidents in Europe, and the 1990s saw a revival in the electoral fortunes of far right parties in several European countries, including France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Denmark and the Netherlands. In the UK, the first-past-the-post system to elect Members of Parliament, where only one candidate is returned in each constituency, prevents minor parties from winning seats

Figure 15.5 The Schengen Zone

in the House of Commons. However, support for the far right British National Party is at its highest point since the 1970s, and the party has several seats on local councils. The anti-immigration UK Independence Party has also seen a surge in popular support, winning 12 seats in the 2004 elections for the European Parliament.

The risks that migrants take in search of a better life often have tragic consequences, for example when 58 Chinese people suffocated in a lorry in Dover off the English coast in June 2000, or when at least 26 people died on an overcrowded Libyan boat attempting to land in Sicily, off the coast of southern Italy, in August 2004. Because of the illegal nature

of most of this migration, the number of people who actually die attempting to enter the West is difficult to gauge, but one recent survey estimated that up to 4,000 migrants drown at sea every year as they attempt to flee persecution or poverty. The research suggests that around 2,000 people die annually in the Mediterranean trying to reach Europe, and similar numbers are thought to die on crossings to Australia and the United States – the two other main destinations for 'boat people' (*Guardian*, 9 October 2004).

The tightening of control over the 'new migrants' is not taking place in a vacuum, however. Informal responses to changes in immigration policies occur in the trafficking and smuggling networks. Trade in human migrants has become one of the fastest growing categories of organized crime in Europe. Just as such criminal groupings manage to shuttle drugs, weapons and stolen goods across borders, they are also capable of smuggling illegal immigrants by various means. Migrants and smugglers join together in drawing on the knowledge and experience of other migrants in making choices about their own movements. In this sense, policy restrictions seem to be provoking new forms of resistance (Koser and Lutz 1998).

Migration and ethnic relations

Like Britain, most other European countries have been profoundly transformed by migration during the twentieth century. Large-scale migrations took place in Europe during the first two decades after the Second World War. The Mediterranean countries provided the nations in the North and West with cheap labour. Migrants moving from areas like Turkey, North Africa, Greece and southern Spain and Italy were for a period actively encouraged by host countries facing acute shortages of labour. Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and Sweden all have considerable populations of migrant workers. At the same time, countries that used to be colonial powers experienced an influx of immigrants from their former colonies: this applied primarily to France (Algerians) and the Netherlands (Indonesians), as well as the UK.

Labour migration into and within Western Europe slowed down appreciably as the post-war boom turned into a recession in the late 1970s. But since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the transformations occurring in the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Europe has witnessed the birth of what has been termed the new migration. This 'new migration' has been marked by two main events. First, the opening of borders between East and West led to the migration of some five million people in Europe between 1989 and 1994. Second, war and ethnic strife in the former Yugoslavia has resulted in a surge of approximately five million refugees into other regions of Europe (Koser and Lutz 1998). The geographical patterns of European migration have also shifted, with the lines between countries of origin and countries of destination becoming increasingly blurred. Countries in Southern and Central Europe have become destinations for many migrants, a notable departure from earlier immigration trends.

Another feature of the 'new migration' is that of ethnic 'unmixing'. In the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia and in some Central European states, shifting borders, changing political regimes or the outbreak of conflict have led to migrations on the principle of 'ethnic affinity'. A clear illustration of this can be seen in the case of the thousands of ethnic Russians who found themselves living in newly independent countries – such as Latvia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine – following the break-up of the Soviet Union. Many of them are choosing to migrate back to Russia as part of a process of ethnic unmixing (Brubaker 1998).

Globalization and migration

So far we have concentrated on recent immigration into Europe, but European expansionism centuries ago initiated a large-scale movement of populations,

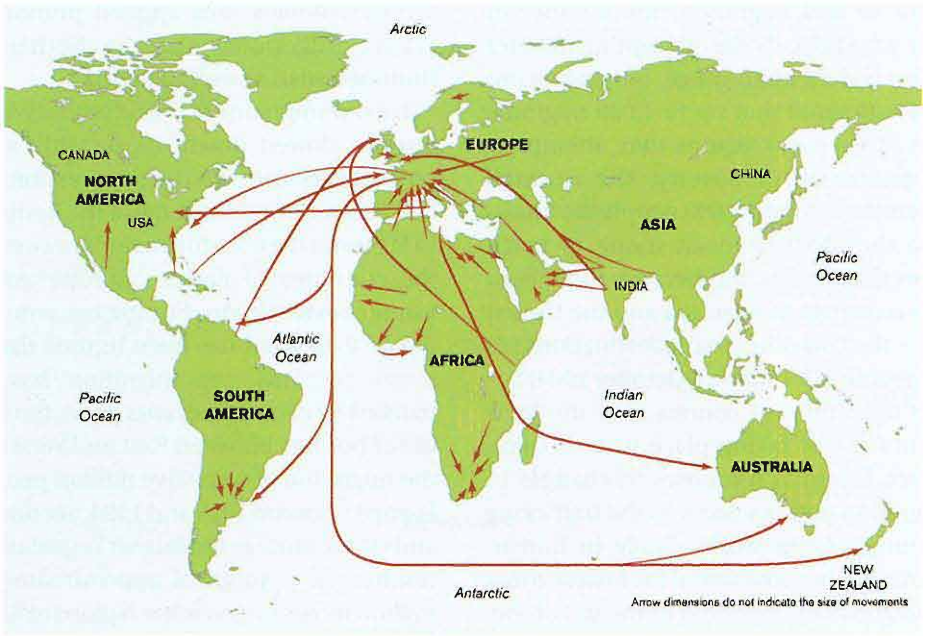


Figure 15.6 Global migrations, 1945–73

Source: Castles and Miller 1993: 67. Reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

which formed the basis of many of the world's multiethnic societies today. Since these initial waves of global migration, human populations have continued to interact and mix in ways that have fundamentally shaped the ethnic composition of many countries. In this section we shall consider concepts related to global migration patterns.

What are the forces behind global migration and how are they changing as a result of globalization? Many early theories about migration focused on so-called push and pull factors. 'Push factors' referred to dynamics within a country of origin which forced people to emigrate, such as war, famine, political oppression or population pressures. 'Pull factors', by contrast, were those features of destination countries which attracted immigrants: prosperous labour markets, better overall living conditions and lower population density, for example, could 'pull' immigrants from other regions.

More recently 'push and pull' theories of migration have been criticized for offering overly simplistic explanations of a complex and multifaceted process. Instead, scholars of migration are increasingly looking at global migration patterns as 'systems' which are produced through interactions between macro- and micro-level processes. While this idea may sound complicated, it is actually quite simple. Macro-level factors refer to overarching issues such as the political situation in an area, the laws and regulations controlling immigration and emigration, or changes in the international economy. Micro-level factors, on the other hand, are concerned with the resources, knowledge and understandings that the migrant populations themselves possess.

» See chapter 14, 'Sexuality and Gender', for a discussion of sex tourism and sex work.

The intersection of macro and micro processes can be seen in the case of Germany's large Turkish immigrant community. On the macro level are factors such as Germany's economic need for

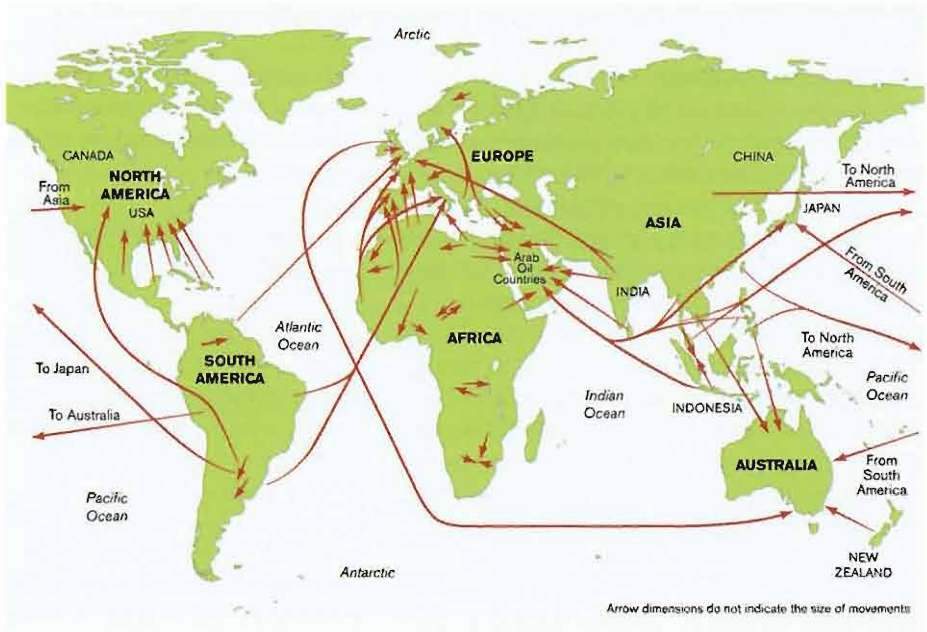


Figure 15.7 Global migratory movements from 1973

Source: Castles and Miller 1993: 6. Reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

labour, its policy of accepting foreign 'guest workers' and the state of the Turkish economy which prevents many Turks from earning at the level they would wish. At the micro level are the informal networks and channels of mutual support within the Turkish community in Germany and the strong links to family and friends who have remained in Turkey. Among potential Turkish migrants, knowledge about Germany and 'social capital' – human or community resources that can be drawn on – help to make Germany one of the most popular destination countries. Supporters of the migration systems approach emphasize that no single factor can explain the process of migration. Rather, each particular migratory movement, like that between Turkey and Germany, is the product of an interaction of macro- and micro-level processes.

Global diasporas

Another way to understand global migration patterns is through the study of diasporas. This term refers to the dispersal of an ethnic population from an original homeland into foreign areas, often in a forced manner or under traumatic circumstances. References are often made to the Jewish and African diasporas to describe the way in which these populations have become redistributed across the globe as a result of slavery and genocide. Although members of a diaspora are by definition scattered geographically, they are held together by factors such as shared history, a collective memory of the original homeland or a common ethnic identity which is nurtured and preserved.

Although today we are most familiar with the diaspora as the involuntary movement of people resulting from persecution and violence, Robin Cohen argues that, in fact, the dominant meaning associated with the term has changed over time. In *Global Diasporas* (1997), Cohen adopts a historical approach to the dispersal of people and identifies five different categories of diaspora. The ancient Greeks used the word to

Classic Studies 15.2 Understanding the new age of migration

The research problem

People have always moved around the world for better job prospects, or to flee persecution. But today, as globalization takes hold, patterns of migration have changed as people take advantage of global transport and travel systems and new opportunities for tourism. How can we characterize and explain these new patterns? How will global migration affect the composition and solidarities within the societies of the twenty-first century? A book on the 'new migration' by Stephen Castles and Mark Miller (1993) was into its third edition just a decade later and has been through many reprintings in the meantime. This suggests that the authors have successfully framed and redefined the field of migration studies to strike a chord with a global audience. In short, their analysis of 'the new migration' has become a modern classic.

Castles and Miller's explanation

Castles and Miller acknowledge that international migration is certainly not new; it has existed from the earliest times. What have changed today though are the sheer size, speed and scope of migration, which have the potential to transform societies. Examining recent trends in global migration patterns, they identify four tendencies, which they claim will characterize migration in the coming years.

First, a tendency towards the *acceleration* of migration across borders as people move in greater numbers than ever before. Second is the tendency towards *diversification*. Most countries now receive immigrants from many different places with a variety of motivations, in contrast with earlier times when particular forms of immigration, such as labour immigration or refugees fleeing persecution, were predominant. Third, there is a tendency towards *globalization*. Migration has become global in character, involving a larger number of countries both as 'senders' and 'recipients' of migrants. Finally, there is a tendency towards the *feminization* of migration. A growing number of migrants are women, making contemporary migration much less male-dominated than in previous times.

Such an increase in women migrants is closely related to changes in the global labour market, including the growing demand for domestic workers, the expansion of sex tourism and 'trafficking' in women and the 'mail-order brides' phenomenon.

Sex tourism in discussed in chapter 14, 'Sexuality and Gender'.

Taken together, Castles and Miller argue that in the 'new age of migration', there will be much more people movement, much more of it will involve women and particular countries will experience a more diverse range of immigrant groups. Migration is also very likely to become normalized as a central feature of the global world we live in; people, governments and international bodies (such as the United Nations) will have to find new ways of managing it.

Critical points

Some have suggested that the analysis presented by Castles and Miller remains quite conventional and does not do enough to link with emerging and potentially overlapping fields, such as the new studies of mobilities (see Sheller and Urry 2004; Larsen et al. 2006). Others argue that their book is centred on states and their fate in the age of mass migration, rather than moving beyond states to explore urban regions. Finally, the inclusion of terrorist activity in the latest edition, has been seen by some critics as rather forced, rather than flowing from their general analytical framework.

Contemporary significance

Castles and Miller have made a significant contribution to the new migration studies by effectively showing how globalization influences patterns of migration and how migration has much greater potential to reshape societies. They have also helped to reshape the field of migration studies by adopting a more comparative perspective than usual and exploring migration from the developed to the developing countries as well as in the other direction. They also manage to link migration patterns to theories of globalization, thus bringing the study of migration into the mainstream of sociology.

describe the dispersal of populations, which resulted from *colonization*. *Victim* diasporas, such as those of the African slave trade, along with Jewish and Armenian population movements, are those in which people suffer forced exile and long to return back to their homelands. *Labour* diasporas are typified by the indentured labour of Indian workers during British colonialism. Cohen sees movements of Chinese people to Southeast Asia during the creation of a *trading* diaspora as an example of a voluntary movement for the buying and selling of goods, not the result of some traumatic event. *Imperial* diasporas are those where imperialist expansion into new lands takes with it people who subsequently make new lives; the British Empire would be the most well-known example. Finally, Cohen makes a case for viewing the movement of people from the Caribbean as an instance of *cultural* diaspora; 'cemented as much by literature, political ideas, religious convictions, music and lifestyles as by permanent migration' (Cohen 1997). In reality though, as Cohen admits, these categories are overlapping and diasporas occur for a variety of reasons.

Despite the diversity of forms, however, all diasporas share certain key features. Cohen suggests that they all meet the following criteria:

- a forced or voluntary movement from an original homeland to a new region or regions;
- a shared memory about the original homeland, a commitment to its preservation and belief in the possibility of eventual return;
- a strong ethnic identity sustained over time and distance;
- a sense of solidarity with members of the same ethnic group also living in areas of the diaspora; a degree of tension in relation to the host societies;
- the potential for valuable and creative contributions to pluralistic host societies.

Although Cohen's typology is a simplification (which he readily admits) and may therefore be criticized for being imprecise for the analysis he undertakes, the study is valuable because it shows how the meaning of diaspora is not static, but relates to the ongoing processes of maintaining collective identities and preserving ethnic cultures in the context of a rapid period of globalization.

Conclusion

In our global age, ideas, goods and people are flowing across borders in greater volumes than ever before in history. These processes are profoundly altering the societies in which we live. Many societies are becoming ethnically diverse for the first time; others are finding that existing patterns of multiethnicity are being transformed or intensified. In all societies, however, individuals are coming into regular contact with people who think differently, look different and live differently from themselves. These interactions are happening in person, as a result of global migration, as well as through the images that are transmitted through the media and Internet.

Some welcome this new ethnic and cultural complexity as a vital component of a cosmopolitan, yet cohesive, society. Others find it dangerous and threatening. One of the main challenges facing our globalizing world is how to generate societies that are more cosmopolitan in character. As the patient efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa have shown, creating a forum for open and respectful communication is a difficult, but effective, first step in initiating ethnic reconciliation.

Summary points

1. 'Race' refers to physical and other characteristics, such as skin colour and intelligence, treated by members of a community or society as socially significant. Many popular beliefs about race are mythical. There are no clear-cut characteristics by means of which human beings can be allocated to different races.
2. Sections of a population form ethnic groups by virtue of sharing common cultural characteristics, which separate them from others in that population. Ethnicity refers to cultural differences that set one group apart from another and exclusionary devices, which reinforce cultural boundaries. The main distinguishing characteristics of an ethnic group are language, history or ancestry, religion and styles of dress or adornment. Ethnic differences are wholly learned.
3. A minority group is one whose members are discriminated against by the majority population in a society. Members of minority groups often have a strong sense of group solidarity, deriving in part from the collective experience of exclusion.
4. Racism means falsely ascribing inherited characteristics of personality or behaviour to individuals of a particular physical appearance. A racist is someone who believes that a biological explanation can be given for characteristics of inferiority supposedly possessed by people of one physical stock or another.
5. Institutional racism refers to patterns of discrimination that have become embedded within social institutions.
6. 'New racism' describes racist attitudes that are expressed through notions of cultural difference, rather than biological inferiority.
7. Three models of ethnic integration have been adopted by multiethnic societies. In the model of assimilation, new immigrant groups adopt the attitudes and language of the dominant community. In a melting pot, the different cultures and outlooks of the ethnic groups in a society are merged together. Pluralism means that ethnic groups exist separately but are seen as equal participants in economic and political life.
8. Multiethnic states can be fragile and sometimes experience episodes of ethnic conflict. Ethnic cleansing is a form of conflict in which ethnically homogeneous areas are created through the mass expulsion of other ethnic groups. Genocide describes the systematic elimination of one ethnic group at the hands of another.
9. Immigration has led to the existence of numerous different ethnic groups within the developed countries, which are now described as multicultural societies. In Britain, as elsewhere, many ethnic minority groups experience disadvantages in relation to the white population – in areas such as employment, income, housing and crime. However, patterns of inequality have been shifting and there are now many differences between ethnic minority groups.
10. Migration is the movement of people from one region or society to another for the purpose of settlement. Global migration, the movement of individuals across national borders, has increased in the years following the Second World War and is further intensifying with globalization. Diaspora refers to the dispersal of an ethnic population from an original homeland into foreign areas, often in a forced manner or under traumatic circumstances.

Further reading

A good place to start your reading is with Steve Fenton's *Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), which is an introductory text pitched at the right level. In a similar vein you could then try Khalid Koser's *International Migration: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), which is exactly what you might expect.

From these, you can move on to Stephen E. Cornell and Douglas Hartmann's *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*, 2nd edn (Pine Forge Press, 2007), an American book which covers a lot of ground and is right up to date. For debates and issues around multiculturalism, see Tariq Modood's *Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller's *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) is very accessible, and though not an 'easy read', it is worth the effort.

If you need reference works, then Les Back and John Solomos's *Theories of Race and Racism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007) is an excellent edited collection covering theories, while David Theo Goldberg and John Solomos's *A Companion to Racial and Ethnic Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002) is another very useful and comprehensive edited collection.

Internet links

Origination – UK Channel 4 site covering British immigrant cultures:
www.blackhistorymap.com/

CRER – Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the University of Warwick:
www.warwick.ac.uk/CRER/index.html

EUCM – European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia – very useful publications and surveys on discrimination and anti-discrimination measures in Europe:
http://fra.europa.eu/fra/index.php?fuseaction=content.dsp_cat_content&catid=1

Intute – Social Science Gateway for 'Racial and Ethnic Minorities':
www.intute.ac.uk/socialsciences/cgi-bin/browse.pl?id=120585&gateway=%

UNHCR – the United Nations Refugee Agency:
www.unhcr.org/home.html

The Institute of 'Race' Relations, UK site:
www.irr.org.uk/index.html

ICAR – Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK:
www.icar.org.uk/

Politeia – network for citizenship and democracy in Europe, based in Amsterdam – links on Roma people:
www.politeia.net/newsletter/politeia_newsletter_45_may_2007/quarterly_theme_roma_in_europe

CHAPTER 16

Religion

(opposite) Mother Theresa became famous for her work amongst India's poorest people.

When Monica Besara, an illiterate mother of five from North Bengal in India, visited the Catholic nuns at the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta it was to seek their blessing before she died. She had what she thought was a malignant tumour in her stomach that modern medical treatment had failed to cure. It was 5 September 1998, exactly one year after the death of Mother Teresa, the nun awarded the Nobel Prize for her work with the sick and poor and the founder of the Missionaries of Charity. The nuns prayed for Besara and placed a medallion on her stomach that had been blessed by Mother Teresa. The lump disappeared overnight.

Besara recalls that she had been suffering with a 'splitting headache, day and night, and the lump in the stomach was unbearably painful'. She remembers a

service at the church to commemorate the anniversary of Mother Teresa's death. 'It is there', she said, 'I had the vision. Mother's death-picture was lying next to the altar. I saw a light like this [she points at a camera flash] coming out of the picture. Only I saw it. At 1 a.m. I got up and found that the lump had disappeared, as had the headache. I walked the next morning like a normal person.'

To Monica Besara and the nuns at the Missionaries of Charity, this was a miracle. A medical team sent out by the Catholic Church to investigate agreed. The nuns issued a statement saying: 'God has worked his miracle through Mother [Teresa] and we are so very happy.' The Pope, as head of the Catholic Church, accepted that a miracle had taken place and ordered the beatification of Mother Teresa, the final step before sainthood – normally attained after the Pope's approval of a second miracle. The beatification went ahead to celebrations around the world in October 2003. In Albania, Mother Teresa's country of origin, the day was observed as a national holiday and 2004 was declared Mother Teresa Year. In her adopted country of India, priests celebrated special masses across the country, children paraded on Calcutta's streets, and the ceremony, held at the Vatican in Italy, was broadcast live on national television. In Rome, films, musicals, cartoons and exhibitions were shown celebrating Mother Teresa's life, and her relics have been put on display.

Despite the Catholic Church's insistence, not everyone is convinced that Monica Besara's recovery was a miracle. Probir Ghosh is founder of India's Science and Rationalists' Society, which specializes in exposing holy men who dupe ordinary Indians into paying for miracle cures. His organization claims a membership of more than 20,000 people and has a mandate to 'free poor and illiterate Indians from superstition'. Ghosh has a simple solution for Besara's dramatic recovery: 'The medication had started having effect, when the so-called "miracle" happened.' Doctors who treated Besara at various hospitals in Bengal made similar statements, and questioned whether the growth was actually a cancerous tumour or something more benign. Ghosh argued: 'Mother Teresa was a great soul and I think it is an insult to her legacy to make her sainthood dependent on bogus miracles. It should be linked to her great work among the poor.'

At times, religion and science seem to be at odds with one another. The debate around the miracle of Monica Besara shows that a religious outlook and modern rationalist thought exist in an uneasy state of tension. With the deepening of modernity, a rationalist perspective has conquered many aspects of our existence; its hold seems unlikely to be weakened in the foreseeable future. Yet there will always be reactions against science and rationalist thought, for they remain silent on such fundamental questions as the meaning and purpose of life. It is these matters which have always been at the core of religion and have fuelled the idea of faith, an emotional leap into belief.

Religion has had a strong hold over the lives of human beings for thousands of years. In one form or another, religion is found in all known human societies. The earliest societies on record, of which we have evidence only through archaeological remains, show clear traces of religious symbols and ceremonies. Cave drawings suggest that religious beliefs and practices existed more than 40,000 years ago. Throughout subsequent history, religion has continued to be a central part of human experience, influencing how we perceive and react to the environments in which we live.

Why has religion been such a pervasive aspect of human societies? How is its role changing in late modern societies? Under what conditions does religion unite communities, and under what conditions does it divide them? How can religion have such a purchase on individuals' lives that they are prepared to sacrifice themselves for

its ideals? These are the questions that we shall try to answer in this chapter. In order to do so, we shall have to ask what religion really is, and look at some of the different forms that religious beliefs and practices take. We shall also consider the main sociological theories of religion and analyse the various types of religious organization that can be distinguished. Throughout, we will consider the fate of religion primarily though not exclusively in relation to the developed countries, for it has seemed to many observers that, with the rise of science and modern industry, religion today has become a less central force in social life than it was prior to the modern age. A key question is whether the developed world really is a secular place, or put another way, can religion survive modernity?

The sociological study of religion

What is religion?

The study of religion is a challenging enterprise which places quite special demands on the sociological imagination. In analysing religious practices, we have to make sense of the many different beliefs and rituals found in the various human cultures. We must be sensitive to ideals that inspire profound conviction in believers, yet at the same time take a balanced view of them. We have to confront ideas that seek the eternal, while recognizing that religious groups also promote quite mundane goals – such as acquiring finance or soliciting for followers. We need to recognize the diversity of religious beliefs and modes of conduct, but also probe into the nature of religion as a general phenomenon.

Sociologists define religion as a cultural system of commonly shared beliefs and rituals that provides a sense of ultimate meaning and purpose by creating an idea of reality that is sacred, all-encompassing and supernatural (Durkheim 1976 [1912]; Berger 1967; Wuthnow 1988). There are three key elements in this definition:

1 *Religion is a form of culture.* Culture consists of the shared beliefs, values, norms and ideas that create a common identity among a group of people. Religion shares all these characteristics.
2 *Religion involves beliefs that take the form of ritualized practices.* All religions thus have a behavioural aspect – special activities in which believers take part and that identify them as members of the religious community.
3 *Perhaps most important, religion provides a sense of purpose* – a feeling that life is ultimately meaningful. It does so by explaining coherently and compellingly what transcends or overshadows everyday life, in ways that other aspects of culture (such as an educational system or a belief in democracy) typically cannot (Geertz 1973; Wuthnow 1988).

What is absent from the sociological definition of religion is as important as what is included: nowhere is there mention of God. We often think of *theism*, a belief in one or more supernatural deities (the term originates from the Greek word for God), as basic to religion, but this is not necessarily the case. As we shall see later, some religions, such as Buddhism, believe in the existence of spiritual forces rather than a particular God.

How sociologists think about religion

When sociologists study religion, they do so as sociologists and not as believers (or disbelievers) in any particular faith. This stance has several implications for the sociological study of religion:

1 *Sociologists are not concerned with whether religious beliefs are true or false.* From a sociological perspective, religions are regarded not as being decreed by God but as being socially constructed

by human beings. As a result, sociologists put aside their personal beliefs when they study religion. They are concerned with the human rather than the divine aspects of religion. Sociologists ask: How is the religion organized? What are its principal beliefs and values? How is it related to the larger society? What explains its success or failure in recruiting and retaining believers? The question of whether a particular belief is 'good' or 'true', however important it may be to the believers of the religion under study, is not something that sociologists are able to address as sociologists. (As individuals, they may have strong opinions on the matter, but one hopes that as sociologists they can keep these opinions from biasing their research.)

2 *Sociologists are especially concerned with the social organization of religion.* Religions are among the most important institutions in society. They are a primary source of the most deep-seated norms and values. At the same time, religions are typically practised through an enormous variety of social forms. Within Christianity and Judaism, for example, religious practice often occurs in formal organizations, such as churches or synagogues. Yet this is not necessarily true of such Asian religions as Hinduism and Buddhism, where religious practices are likely to occur in the home or some other natural setting. The sociology of religion is concerned with how different religious institutions and organizations function. The earliest European religions were often indistinguishable from the larger society, as religious beliefs and practices were incorporated into daily life. This is still true in many parts of the world today. In modern industrial society, however, religions have become established in separate, often bureaucratic, organizations, and so sociologists focus on the organizations through which religions must operate in order to survive (Hammond 1992). As we shall see below, this institutionalization has even led some sociologists to view religions in the United States and Europe as similar to business organizations, competing with one another for members (Warner 1993).

3 *Sociologists often view religions as a major source of social solidarity.* To the extent that religions provide believers with a common set of norms and values, they are an important source of social solidarity. Religious beliefs, rituals and bonds help to create a 'moral community' in which all members know how to behave towards one another (Wuthnow 1988). If a single religion dominates a society, it may be an important source of social stability. If a society's members adhere to numerous competing religions, however, religious differences may lead to destabilizing social conflicts. Recent examples of religious conflict within a society include struggles between Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims in India; clashes between Muslims and Christians in Bosnia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia; and 'hate crimes' against Jews, Muslims and other religious minorities in the United States.

4 *Sociologists tend to explain the appeal of religion in terms of social forces rather than in terms of purely personal, spiritual or psychological factors.* For many people, religious beliefs are a deeply personal experience, involving a strong sense of connection with forces that transcend everyday reality. Sociologists do not question the depth of such feelings and experiences, but they are unlikely to limit themselves to a purely spiritual explanation of religious commitment. A person may claim that he or she became religious when God suddenly appeared in a vision, but sociologists are likely to look for more earthly explanations. Some researchers argue that people often 'get religion' when their fundamental sense of a

social order is threatened by economic hardship, loneliness, loss or grief, physical suffering, or poor health (Berger 1967; Schwartz 1970; Glock and Bellah 1976; Stark and Bainbridge 1980). In explaining the appeal of religious movements, sociologists are more likely to focus on the problems of the social order than on the psychological response of the individual.

Religion in classical sociological theory

Sociological approaches to religion are still strongly influenced by the ideas of the three classical sociological theorists: Marx, Durkheim and Weber. None of the three was religious, and all thought that the significance of traditional religions would decrease in modern times. The advocates of different faiths may be wholly persuaded of the validity of the beliefs they hold and the rituals in which they participate, yet the very diversity of religions and their obvious connection to different types of society, the three thinkers held, make these claims inherently implausible. An individual born into an Australian society of hunters and gatherers would plainly have different religious beliefs from someone born into the caste system of India or the Catholic Church of medieval Europe. However, as we shall see below, although the classical sociologists agreed in this respect, they developed very different theories when it came to studying the role of religion in society.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Should the sociology of religion be a secular enterprise? If it is, does the absence of a *spiritual* dimension mean that its results can only ever be partial? If it is not, can religious sociologists ever approach their research in a properly scientific manner?

Karl Marx: religion and inequality

In spite of his influence on the subject, Karl Marx never studied religion in any detail. His ideas mostly derived from the writings of several early nineteenth-century theological and philosophical authors. One of these was Ludwig Feuerbach, who published a famous work, translated as *The Essence of Christianity* (1957 [1853]). According to Feuerbach, religion consists of ideas and values produced by human beings in the course of their cultural development, but mistakenly projected on to divine forces or gods. Because human beings do not fully understand their own history, they tend to attribute socially created values and norms to the activities of gods. Thus the story of the ten commandments given to Moses by God is a mythical version of the origin of the moral precepts which govern the lives of Jewish and Christian believers.

So long as we do not understand the nature of the religious symbols we ourselves have created, Feuerbach argues, we are condemned to be prisoners of forces of history we cannot control. Feuerbach uses the term alienation to refer to the establishing of gods or divine forces distinct from human beings. Humanly created values and ideas come to be seen as the product of alien or separate beings – religious forces and gods. While the effects of alienation have in the past been negative, the understanding of religion as alienation, according to Feuerbach, promises great hope for the future. Once human beings realize that the values projected on to religion are really their own, those values become capable of realization on this earth, rather than being deferred to an afterlife. Human beings themselves can appropriate the powers believed to be possessed by God in Christianity. Christians believe that while God is all-powerful and all-loving, human beings themselves are imperfect and flawed. However, the potential for love and goodness and the power to control our own lives, Feuerbach argued, are present in human social institutions and

can be brought to fruition once we understand their true nature.

Marx accepted the view that religion represents human self-alienation. It is often believed that Marx was dismissive of religion, but this is far from true. Religion, he writes, is the 'heart of a heartless world' – a haven from the harshness of daily reality. In Marx's view, religion in its traditional form will, and should, disappear; yet this is because the positive values embodied in religion can become guiding ideals for improving the lot of humanity on this earth, not because these ideals and values themselves are mistaken. We should not fear the gods we ourselves have created, and we should cease endowing them with values we ourselves can realize.

Marx declared, in a famous phrase, that religion has been the 'opium of the people'. Religion defers happiness and rewards to the afterlife, teaching the resigned acceptance of existing conditions in this life. Attention is thus diverted away from inequalities and injustices in this world by the promise of what is to come in the next. Religion has a strong ideological element: religious beliefs and values often provide justifications of inequalities of wealth and power. For example, the teaching that 'the meek shall inherit the earth' suggests attitudes of humility and non-resistance to oppression.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Was Marx right about the role of religion in capitalist societies? Can you think of any examples from across the world where religions have opposed rather than supported the dominant social order? Can religions also be a force for political and social change and if so, does this effectively show that Marx was wrong?

Emile Durkheim: functionalism and religious ritual

In contrast to Marx, Emile Durkheim spent a good part of his later intellectual career studying religion, though he admitted that in his earlier work he had not appreciated its enduring social significance. In the twentieth century, the founder of structural functionalism, Talcott Parsons, was also concerned with the role and fate of religion in modern societies.

THINKING CRITICALLY

How accurate has been Durkheim's forecast that 'the old Gods are dead', in relation to the demise of the traditional world religions? What examples can you think of which may suggest that the 'old Gods' have survived rather better than he thought they would?

Max Weber: world religions and social change

Durkheim based his arguments on a very small range of examples, even though he claims his ideas apply to religion in general. Max Weber, by contrast, embarked on an enormous project to study the major religions of the world. No scholar before or since has undertaken a task of such scope. Most of his attention was concentrated on what he called the *world religions* – those that have attracted large numbers of believers and decisively affected the course of global history. He made detailed studies of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and ancient Judaism (1951, 1952, 1958, 1963), and in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1976 [1904–5]) and elsewhere, he wrote extensively about the impact of Christianity on the history of the West. He did not, however, complete his projected study of Islam, which was taken up by later Weber scholars (Turner 1974).

Weber's writings on religion differ from those of Durkheim in that they concentrate on the connection between religion and social change, something to which Durkheim gave little attention. They contrast with the work of Marx because Weber argues that religion is not necessarily a conservative force; on the contrary, reli-

Classic Studies 16.1 Emile Durkheim on the elementary forms of religion

The research problem

There are many religions across the world, some very old, such as Christianity and Hinduism, and some more recently developed, such as Scientology, which dates only from the 1950s. What, if anything, do they all have in common? What is it that allows us to discuss them as 'religions' rather than, say, philosophies? And how should we try to answer such questions sociologically? Emile Durkheim (1976 [1912]) posed just such questions and suggested that the most productive method for discovering the essential character of religion was to investigate it in its simplest form, in small-scale, traditional societies. Hence the title of his classic study, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, which is one of the most influential studies in the sociology of religion.

Durkheim argues that rituals like the Puja ceremonies in Calcutta mark out the spiritual from the ordinary, but in doing so reinforce key social values.

Durkheim's explanation

Unlike Marx, Durkheim does not connect religion primarily with social inequalities or power, but instead relates it to the overall nature of the institutions of a society. He bases his work on a study of totemism as practised by Australian Aboriginal societies, as he argues that totemism represents religion in its most 'elementary' form. In this uncluttered form, he argued, it becomes easier to discern the crucial defining features of religion.

A 'totem' was originally an animal or plant taken as having particular symbolic significance for a group. It is a sacred object, regarded with veneration and surrounded by various ritual activities. Durkheim defines religion in terms of a distinction between the sacred and the profane. Sacred objects and symbols, he holds, are treated as apart from the routine aspects of existence, which are the realm of the profane. Eating the totemic animal or plant, except on special ceremonial occasions, is usually forbidden, and as a sacred object the totem is believed to have divine properties which separate it completely from other animals that might be hunted, or crops gathered and consumed.

But why is the totem sacred? According to Durkheim, it is because it is the symbol of the group itself; it stands for the values central to the group or community. The reverence which people feel for the totem derives from the respect they hold for central social values. In religion, the object of worship is actually society itself.

Durkheim strongly emphasized that religions are never just a matter of belief. All religions involve regular ceremonial and ritual activities in which a group of believers meets together. In collective ceremonials, a sense of group solidarity is affirmed and heightened in what Durkheim called collective effervescence – the heightened feeling of energy generated in collective gatherings and events. Ceremonials take individuals away from the concerns of profane social life into an elevated sphere, in which they feel in contact with higher forces. These higher forces, attributed to totems, divine influences or gods, are really the expression of the influence of the collectivity over the individual. Nonetheless, people's religious *experience* should not be dismissed as mere self-delusion. Rather, it is the *real* experience of social forces.

Ceremony and ritual, in Durkheim's view, are essential to binding the members of groups together. This is why they are found not only in regular situations of worship, but also in the various life crises when major social transitions are experienced – for example, birth, marriage and death. In virtually all societies, ritual and ceremonial procedures are observed on such occasions. Durkheim reasons that collective ceremonials reaffirm group solidarity at a time when people are forced to adjust to major changes in their lives. Funeral rituals demonstrate that the values of the group outlive the passing of particular individuals, and so provide a means for bereaved people to adjust to their altered circumstances. Mourning is not the spontaneous expression of grief – or, at least, it is only so for those personally affected by the death. Mourning is a duty imposed by the group.

In small, traditional cultures, Durkheim argued, almost all aspects of life are permeated by religion. Religious ceremonials both originate new ideas and categories of thought, and reaffirm existing values. Religion is not just a series of sentiments and activities; it actually conditions the modes of thinking of individuals in traditional cultures. Even the most basic categories of thought, including how time and space are thought of, were first framed in religious terms. The concept of 'time', for instance, was originally derived from counting the intervals involved in religious ceremonials.

With the development of modern societies, Durkheim saw, the influence of traditional religion wanes. Scientific thinking increasingly replaces religious explanation, and ceremonial and ritual activities come to occupy only a small part of individuals' lives. Durkheim agrees with Marx that older forms of religion involving divine forces or gods are on the verge of disappearing. 'The old gods are dead', Durkheim writes. Yet he also says that religion, in altered forms, is likely to continue. Even modern societies depend for their cohesion on rituals that reaffirm their values; new ceremonial activities can thus be expected to emerge to replace the old. Durkheim is vague about what these might be, but it seems that he has in mind the celebration of humanist and political values such as freedom, equality and social cooperation.

Critical points

One strand of criticism of Durkheim's thesis focuses on the notion that it is possible to understand the essential character of all religions by generalizing from a few small-scale societies. For example, it seems unlikely that Aboriginal totemism is typical of the large-scale, multinational world religions, which casts doubt on what can be learned about the latter from studying the former. Over the course of the twentieth century, many of the world's societies have become more multicultural with a diverse range of religions existing within a single national society. Durkheim's thesis of religion as a source of the continual recreation of social solidarity may be less persuasive in multi-faith societies and does not properly account for intra-society conflicts around different religious beliefs. Finally, we may take issue with the basic idea that religion is essentially the worship of society rather than deities or spirits. This can be seen as a reductionist argument; that religious experience can be reduced to social phenomena, thus rejecting even the possibility of a 'spiritual' level of reality. For people with strong religious beliefs and commitment, Durkheim's argument will probably always appear inadequate.

Contemporary significance

Durkheim's sociological theory of religion, like his work on suicide (see chapter 1), was of immense significance in establishing the discipline of sociology. It demonstrated that any subject could be approached from a sociological perspective. But he went further; without a sociological perspective we are likely to misunderstand social life and its institutions. By locating religions firmly *within* the social realm rather than outside it, Durkheim effectively demystified religious experience and encouraged the empirical study of religions. As we will see later in the chapter, the emergence of new religious movements and alternative forms of spirituality bear out the functionalist theory that although the old Gods may well be dead or dying, new ones will have to be created as societies undergo significant change. We might well agree with Durkheim that 'there is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself' (1976 [1912]: 427).

Hinduism is the oldest of the major world religions, dating back some 6,000 years.

giously inspired movements have often produced dramatic social transformations. Thus Protestantism – particularly Puritanism – was the source of the capitalistic outlook found in the modern West. The early entrepreneurs were mostly Calvinists. Their drive to succeed, which helped initiate Western economic development, was originally prompted by a desire to serve God. Material success was for them a sign of divine favour.

Weber saw his research on the world religions as a single project. His discussion of the impact of Protestantism on the development of the West is part of a comprehensive attempt to understand the influence of religion on social and economic life in varying cultures. Analysing the Eastern religions, Weber concluded that they provided insuperable barriers to the development of industrial capitalism, such as took place in the West. This is not because the non-Western civilizations are backward; they have simply accepted values different from those which came to predominate in Europe.

In traditional China and India, Weber pointed out, there was at certain periods a significant development of commerce, manufacture and urbanism, but these did not generate the radical patterns of social change involved in the rise of industrial capitalism in the West. Religion was a major influence in inhibiting such change. For example, Hinduism is what Weber called an 'other-worldly' religion. That is to say, its highest values stress escape from the toils of the material world to a higher plane of spiritual existence. The religious feelings and motivations produced by Hinduism do not focus on controlling or shaping the material world. On the contrary, Hinduism sees material reality as a veil hiding the true concerns to which humankind should be

oriented. Confucianism also acted to direct effort away from economic development, as this came to be understood in the West, emphasizing harmony with the world rather than promoting active mastery of it. Although China was for a long while the most powerful and culturally most developed civilization in the world, its dominant religious values acted as a brake on a strong commitment to economic development for its own sake.

Weber regarded Christianity as a salvation religion, involving the belief that human beings can be 'saved' if they adopt the beliefs of the religion and follow its moral tenets. The notions of sin and of being rescued from sinfulness by God's grace are important here. They generate a tension and an emotional dynamism essentially absent from the Eastern religions. Salvation religions have a 'revolutionary' aspect. While the religions of the East cultivate an attitude of passivity in the believer towards the existing order, Christianity involves a constant struggle against sin, and hence can stimulate revolt against the existing order of things. Religious leaders – like Jesus – arise, who reinterpret existing doctrines in such a way as to challenge the prevailing power structure.

Critical assessment of the classical theories

Marx, Durkheim and Weber each identified some important general characteristics of religion, and in some ways their views complement one another. Marx was right to claim that religion often has ideological implications, serving to justify the interests of ruling groups at the expense of others: there are innumerable instances of this in history. Take as an example the influence of Christianity on the European colonialists' efforts to subject other cultures to their rule. The missionaries who sought to convert 'heathen' peoples to Christian beliefs were no doubt sincere, yet the effect of their teachings was to reinforce the destruction of traditional cultures and the imposition of white domination. The various Christian denominations almost all tolerated, or endorsed, slavery in the United States and other parts of the world up to the nineteenth century. Doctrines were developed that claimed slavery was based on divine law, disobedient slaves being guilty of an offence against God as well as their masters.

Yet Weber was certainly correct to emphasize the unsettling, and often revolutionary, impact of religious ideals on pre-established social orders. Despite the churches' early support for slavery in the United States, many church leaders later played a key role in the fight to abolish it. Religious beliefs have prompted many social movements seeking to overthrow unjust systems of authority, playing a prominent part, for instance, in the civil rights movements of the 1960s in the United States. Religion has also influenced social change – often provoking much bloodshed – through the armed clashes and wars fought for religious motives.

These divisive influences of religion, so prominent in history, find little mention in Durkheim's work. Durkheim emphasized above all the role of religion in promoting social cohesion. Yet it is not difficult to redirect his ideas towards explaining religious division, conflict and change as well as solidarity. After all, much of the strength of feeling which may be generated against other religious groups derives from the commitment to religious values generated within each community of believers.

Among the most valuable aspects of Durkheim's writings is his stress on ritual and ceremony. All religions involve regular assemblies of believers, at which ritual prescriptions are observed. As he rightly points out, ritual activities also mark the major transitions of life – birth, entry to adulthood (rituals associated with puberty are found in many cultures), marriage and death (also see van Gennep 1977 [1908]).

In the rest of this chapter we shall make use of ideas developed by all three authors. First, we shall outline the major world

religions and the different types of religious organization. Then we will go on to discuss the sociological debate over secularization, the idea that religion is becoming less significant in industrial societies. From there we will then consider some of the developments in world religion which challenge the idea of secularization – namely the rise of new religious movements and the power of religious fundamentalism.

Religions in the real world

In traditional societies, religion usually plays a central part in social life. Religious symbols and rituals are often integrated with the material and artistic culture of the society – music, painting or carving, dance, storytelling and literature. In small cultures, there is no professional priesthood, but there are always certain individuals who specialize in knowledge of religious (and often magical) practices. Although there are various sorts of such specialists, one common type is the shaman (a word originating among North American Indians). A shaman is an individual believed to be able to direct spirits or non-natural forces through ritual means. Shamans are sometimes essentially magicians rather than religious leaders, however, and are often consulted by individuals dissatisfied with what is offered in the religious rituals of the community.

Totemism and animism

Two forms of religion found frequently in smaller cultures are totemism and animism. The word 'totem' originated among North American Indian tribes, but has been widely used to refer to species of animals or plants believed to have supernatural powers (see 'Classic Studies 16.1'). Usually, each kinship group or clan within a society has its own particular totem, with which various ritual activities are associated. Totemic beliefs might seem alien to those living in industrialized societies, yet in certain relatively minor contexts, symbols similar to those of totemism are familiar – as when a sports team has an animal or plant for its emblem: mascots are totems.

Animism is a belief in spirits or ghosts, thought to populate the same world as human beings. Such spirits may be seen as either benign or malevolent, and may influence human behaviour in numerous respects. In some cultures, for example, spirits are believed to cause illness or madness, and may also possess or take over individuals in such a way as to control their behaviour. Animistic beliefs are not confined to small cultures, but are found to some degree in many religious settings. In medieval Europe, those believed to be possessed by evil spirits were frequently persecuted as sorcerers or witches.

Small, seemingly 'simple' societies frequently have complex systems of religious belief. Totemism and animism are more common among these societies than in larger ones, but some small societies have far more complex religions. The Nuer of southern Sudan, for instance, described by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1956), have an elaborate set of theological ideas centred on a 'high god' or 'sky spirit'. Religions which incline towards monotheism (belief in one god), however, are found relatively infrequently among smaller traditional cultures. Most are polytheistic – there is a belief in many gods.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam

The three most influential monotheistic religions in world history are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All originated in the Middle East and each has influenced the others.

Judaism

Judaism is the oldest of the three religions, dating from about 1000 BCE. The early Hebrews were nomads, living in and around ancient Egypt. Their prophets, or religious

leaders, partly drew their ideas from existing religious beliefs in the region, but differed in their commitment to a single, almighty God. Most of their neighbours were polytheistic. The Hebrews believed that God demands obedience to strict moral codes, and insisted on their claim to a monopoly of truth, seeing their beliefs as the only true religion (Zeitlin 1984, 1988).

Until the creation of Israel, not long after the end of the Second World War, there was no state of which Judaism was the official religion. Jewish communities survived in Europe, North Africa and Asia, although they were frequently persecuted – culminating in the murder of millions of Jews by the Nazis in concentration camps during the war.

Christianity

Many Judaic views were taken over and incorporated as part of Christianity. Jesus was an Orthodox Jew, and Christianity began as a sect of Judaism; it is not clear that Jesus wished to found a distinctive religion. His disciples came to think of him as the Messiah – a Hebrew word meaning 'the anointed', the Greek term for which was 'Christ' – awaited by the Jews. Paul, a Greek-speaking Roman citizen, was a major initiator of the spread of Christianity, preaching extensively in Asia Minor and Greece. Although the Christians were at first savagely persecuted, the Emperor Constantine eventually adopted Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Christianity spread to become a dominant force in Western culture for the next 2,000 years.

Christianity today commands a greater number of adherents, and is more generally spread across the world, than any other religion. More than a thousand million individuals regard themselves as Christians, but there are many divisions in terms of theology and church organization, the main branches being Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

Islam

The origins of Islam, today the second largest religion in the world (see figure 16.1), overlap with those of Christianity. Islam derives from the teachings of the prophet Muhammad in the seventh century CE. The single God of Islam, Allah, is believed to hold sway over all human and natural life. The Pillars of Islam refer to the five essential religious duties of Muslims (as believers in Islam are called). The first is the recitation of the Islamic creed: 'There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the apostle of Allah.' The second is the saying of formal prayers five times each day, preceded by ceremonial washing. The worshipper at these prayers must always face towards the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, no matter how far away that is. The third is the giving of alms (money to the poor), set out in Islamic law, which has often been used as a source of taxation by the state. The fourth is the observance of Ramadan, a month of fasting during which no food or drink may be taken during daylight. Finally, there is the expectation that every believer will attempt, at least once, to make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Muslims believe that Allah spoke through earlier prophets – including Moses and Jesus – before Muhammad, whose teachings most directly express his will. Islam has come to be very widespread, having some thousand million adherents throughout the world. The majority are concentrated in North and East Africa, the Middle East and Pakistan.

The religions of the Far East

Hinduism

There are major contrasts between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and the religions of the Far East. The oldest of all the great religions still prominent in the world today is Hinduism, the core beliefs of which date back some 6,000 years. Hinduism is a polytheistic religion. It is so internally diverse that some scholars have suggested that it

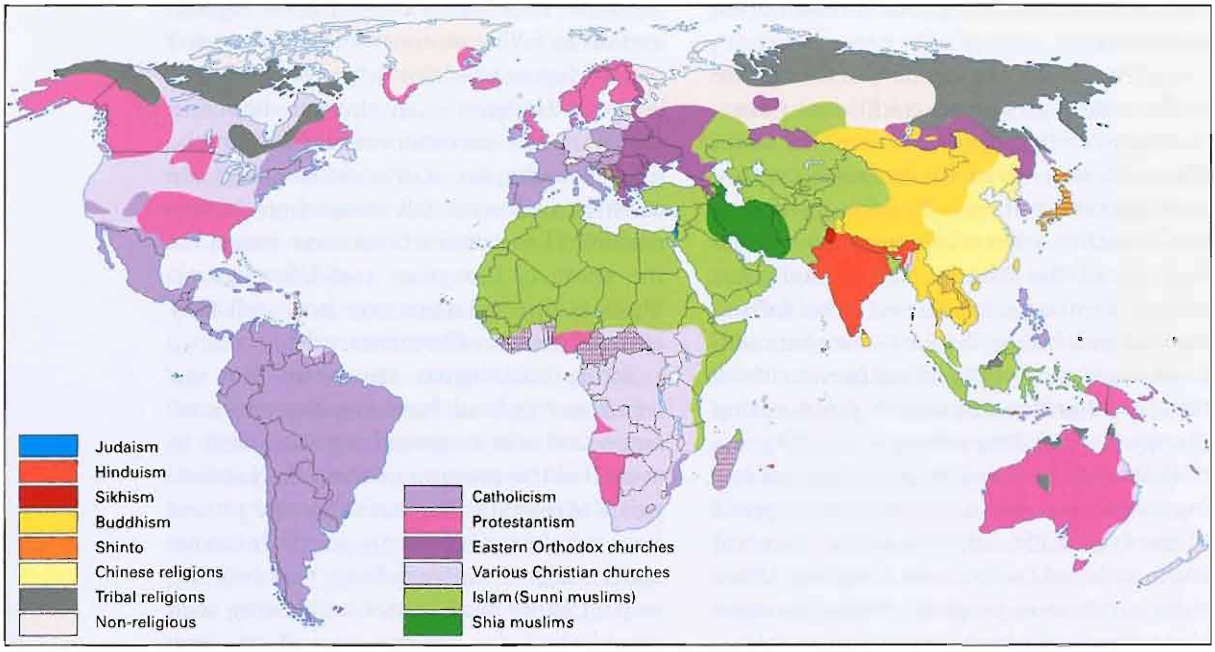


Figure 16.1 Religion and religious belief around the world, 2003

Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2003

should be regarded as a cluster of related religions rather than a single religious orientation; many local cults and religious practices are linked by a few generally held beliefs.

Most Hindus accept the doctrine of the cycle of reincarnation – the belief that all living beings are part of an eternal process of birth, death and rebirth. A second key feature is the caste system, based on the belief that individuals are born into a particular position in a social and ritual hierarchy, according to the nature of their activities in previous incarnations. A different set of duties and rituals exists for each caste, and one's fate in the next life is governed mainly by how well these duties are performed in this one. Hinduism accepts the possibility of numerous different religious standpoints, not drawing a clear line between believers and non-believers. There are more than 750 million Hindus, virtually all living on the Indian subcontinent. Hinduism does not seek to convert others into 'true believers', unlike Christianity and Islam.

Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism

The ethical religions of the East encompass Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. These religions have no gods. Rather, they emphasize ethical ideals that relate the believer to the natural cohesion and unity of the universe.

Buddhism derives from the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha ('enlightened one'), who was a Hindu prince in a small kingdom in south Nepal in the sixth century BCE. According to the Buddha, human beings can escape the reincarnation cycle by the renunciation of desire. The path of salvation lies in a life of self-discipline and meditation, separated from the tasks of the mundane world. The overall objective of Buddhism is the attainment of Nirvana, complete spiritual fulfilment. The Buddha rejected Hindu ritual and the authority of the castes. Like Hinduism, Buddhism tolerates many local variations, including belief in local deities, not insisting on a single view. Buddhism today is a major influence in several states in the Far East, including

Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, China, Japan and Korea.

Confucianism was the basis of the culture of the ruling groups in traditional China. 'Confucius' (the Latinized form of the name K'ung Fu-tzu), lived in the sixth century BCE, the same period as Buddha. Confucius was a teacher, not a religious prophet in the manner of the Middle Eastern religious leaders. Confucius is not seen by his followers as a god, but as 'the wisest of wise men'. Confucianism seeks to adjust human life to the inner harmony of nature, emphasizing the veneration of ancestors.

Taoism shares similar principles, stressing meditation and non-violence as means to the higher life. Like Confucius, Lao-tzu, the founder of Taoism, was a teacher rather than a religious prophet. Although some elements survive in the beliefs and practices of many Chinese, both Confucianism and Taoism have lost much of their influence in China as a result of determined opposition from the government.

Religious organizations

The sociology of religion has concerned itself with non-European religions since its origins in the writings of Durkheim and Weber. Nonetheless, there has frequently been a tendency to view all religions through concepts and theories that grew out of the European experience. For example, notions like *denomination* or *sect* presuppose the existence of formally organized religious institutions; they are of questionable utility in the study of religions that emphasize ongoing spiritual practice as a part of daily life or that pursue the complete integration of religion with civic and political life. In recent decades, there has been an effort to create a more comparative sociology of religion, one that seeks to understand religious traditions from within their own frames of reference (Wilson 1982; Van der Veer 1994).

Early theorists such as Max Weber (1963), Ernst Troeltsch (1981 [1931]) and Richard Niebuhr (1929) described religious organizations as falling along a continuum, based on the degree to which they are well established and conventional: churches lie at one end (they are conventional and well established), cults lie at the other (they are neither) and sects fall somewhere in the middle. These distinctions were based on the study of European and US religions. There is much debate over how well they apply to the non-Christian world.

Today, sociologists are aware that the terms *sect* and *cult* have negative connotations, and this is something they wish to avoid. For this reason, contemporary sociologists of religion sometimes use the phrase *new religious movements* to characterize novel religious organizations that lack the respectability that comes with being well established for a long period of time (Hexham and Poewe 1997; Hadden 1997).

THINKING CRITICALLY

Why should sociologists avoid using terms such as 'cult' or 'sect', which have acquired a negative meaning in society? How might the use of these terms influence their research? Is it *possible* for sociologists to avoid making value judgements during the research process? *Should* sociologists try to avoid making such value judgements?

Churches and sects

All religions involve communities of believers, but there are many different ways in which such communities are organized. One mode of classifying religious organizations was first put forward by Max Weber and his colleague, the religious historian Ernst Troeltsch. Weber and Troeltsch distinguished between churches and sects. A church is a large, well-established religious body – like the Catholic Church or the Church of England. A sect is a smaller, less highly organized grouping of committed believers, usually setting itself up in protest

against what a church has become – as Calvinists or Methodists did. Churches normally have a formal, bureaucratic structure, with a hierarchy of religious officials, and tend to represent the conservative face of religion, since they are integrated into the existing institutional order. Most of their adherents are like their parents in being church members.

Sects are comparatively small; they usually aim at discovering and following 'the true way', and tend to withdraw from the surrounding society into communities of their own. The members of sects regard established churches as corrupt. Most have few or no officials, all members being regarded as equal participants. A small proportion of people are born into sects, but most actively join them in order to further their beliefs.

Denominations and cults

Other authors have further developed the church/sect typology as originally set out by Weber and Troeltsch. One of these is Howard Becker (1950), who added two further types: the denomination and the cult. A denomination is a sect which has 'cooled down' and become an institutionalized body rather than an active protest group. Sects which survive over any period of time inevitably become denominations. Thus Calvinism and Methodism were sects during their early formation, when they generated great fervour among their members; but over the years they have become more 'respectable'. Denominations are recognized as more or less legitimate by churches and exist alongside them, quite often cooperating harmoniously with them.

Cults resemble sects, but have different emphases. They are the most loosely knit and transient of all religious organizations, being composed of individuals who reject what they see as the values of the outside society. Their focus is on individual experience, bringing like-minded individuals together. People do not formally join a cult, but rather follow particular theories or prescribed ways of behaviour. Members are usually allowed to maintain other religious connections. Like sects, cults quite often form around an inspirational leader. Instances of cults in the West today would include groups of believers in spiritualism, astrology or transcendental meditation.

A tragic example of a cult built around an inspirational leader came to light in the USA in 1993. David Koresh, who led the Branch Davidian religious cult, claimed to be a messiah. He was also allegedly stockpiling illegal weapons, practising polygyny and having sex with some of the children living in the group's compound in Waco, Texas. Up to 80 members of the cult (including 19 children) burned to death as a fire engulfed their complex when it came under assault by officials from the US government after a lengthy armed stand-off. Controversy remains over whether the fire was ordered by Koresh, who reportedly preferred mass suicide to surrender, or whether the actions of the federal authorities caused the tragedy.

It should be obvious that what is a cult in one country may well be an established religious practice in another. When Indian gurus (religious teachers) bring their beliefs into the United Kingdom, what might be considered an established religion in India is regarded as a cult in the UK. Christianity began as an indigenous cult in ancient Jerusalem, and in many Asian countries today Evangelical Protestantism is regarded as a cult imported from the West, and particularly the United States. Thus, cults should not be thought of as 'weird'. A leading sociologist of religion, Jeffrey K. Hadden, points out (1997) that all the approximately 100,000 religions that humans have devised were once new; most, if not all, were initially despised cults from the standpoint of respectable religious belief of the times. Jesus was crucified because his ideas were so threatening to the established order of the Roman-dominated religious establishment of ancient Judaea.

Religious movements

Religious movements represent a subtype of social movements in general. A religious movement is an association of people who join together to spread a new religion or to promote a new interpretation of an existing religion. Religious movements are larger than sects and less exclusivist in their membership – although like churches and sects, movements and sects (or cults) are not always clearly distinct from one another. In fact, all sects and cults can be classified as religious movements. Examples of religious movements include the groups that originally founded and spread Christianity in the first century, the Lutheran movement that split Christianity in Europe about 1,500 years later and the groups involved in the more recent Islamic Revolution (discussed in more detail later in the chapter).

Religious movements tend to pass through certain definite phases of development. In the first phase, the movement usually derives its life and cohesion from a powerful leader. Max Weber classified such leaders as *charismatic* – that is, having inspirational qualities capable of capturing the imagination and devotion of a mass of followers. (Charismatic leaders in Weber's formulation could include political as well as religious figures – revolutionary China's Mao Tse-tung, for example, as well as Jesus and Muhammad.) The leaders of religious movements are usually critical of the religious establishment and seek to proclaim a new message. In their early years, religious movements are fluid; they do not have an established authority system. Their members are normally in direct contact with the charismatic leader, and together they spread the new teachings.

The second phase of development occurs following the death of the leader. Rarely does a new charismatic leader arise from the masses, so this phase is crucial. The movement is now faced with what Weber termed the 'routinization of charisma'. To survive, it has to create formalized rules and procedures, since it can no longer depend on the central role of the leader in organizing the followers. Many movements fade away when their leaders die or lose their influence. A movement that survives and takes on a permanent character becomes a church. In other words, it becomes a formal organization of believers with an established authority system and established symbols and rituals. The church might itself at some later point become the origin of other movements that question its teachings and either set themselves up in opposition or break away completely.

» Social movements are discussed in more detail in chapter 22, 'Politics, Government and Social Movements'.

New religious movements

Although traditional churches have been experiencing a decline in membership in recent decades, we see below in table 16.1 and figure 16.3 (pages 697, 700) that other forms of religious activity have been increasing. Sociologists use the term **new religious movements** to refer collectively to the broad range of religious and spiritual groups, cults and sects that have emerged in Western countries alongside the larger mainstream religions. New religious movements encompass an enormous diversity of groups, from spiritual and self-help groups within the **New Age movement** to exclusive sects such as the Hare Krishnas (International Society for Krishna Consciousness).

Many new religious movements are derived from the major religious traditions which we discussed above, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism, while others have emerged from traditions that were almost unknown in the West until recently. Some new religious movements are essentially new creations of the charismatic leaders who head their activities. This is the case, for example, with the Unification Church led by the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, who is seen by his supporters as a messiah, and whose church claims 4.5 million members.

Membership in new religious movements mostly consists of converts rather than individuals brought up in a particular faith. Members more often than not are well educated and from middle-class backgrounds.

Most new religious movements in Britain originated in the United States or the East, although a few, such as the Aetherius Society (founded in 1955) and the Emin Foundation (founded in 1971), were established in Britain. Since the Second World War, the United States has witnessed a far greater proliferation of religious movements than at any previous time in its history, including an unprecedented series of mergers and divisions between denominations. Most have been short-lived, but a few have achieved remarkable followings.

Various theories to explain the popularity of new religious movements have been advanced. Some observers have argued that they should be seen as a response to the process of liberalization and secularization within society and even within traditional churches. People who feel that traditional religions have become ritualistic and devoid of spiritual meaning may find comfort and a greater sense of community in smaller, less impersonal new religious movements.

Others have pointed to new religious movements as an outcome of rapid social change (Wilson 1982). As traditional social norms are disrupted, people search for both explanations and reassurance. The rise of groups and sects that emphasize personal spirituality, for example, suggest that many individuals feel a need to reconnect with their own values or beliefs in the face of instability and uncertainty.

A further factor may be that new religious movements appeal to people who feel alienated from mainstream society. The collective, communal approaches of sects and cults, some authors argue, can offer support and a sense of belonging. For example, middle-class youths are not marginalized from society in a material sense, but they may feel isolated emotionally and spiritually. Membership in a cult can help to overcome this feeling of alienation.

New religious movements can be understood as falling into three broad categories: world-affirming, world-rejecting and world-accommodating movements (Wallis 1984). Each is based on the relationship of the individual group to the larger social world and, though relatively small compared to the world religions, the rise of new religious movements can be seen as reflecting some aspects of wider social changes such as the decline of deference to experts and established authorities amongst younger generations. Sociological interest in new religious movements stems from the 1960s and '70s, when they were seen as challenging mainstream social values. In particular, the fact that young people tended to be disproportionately attracted to some new movements was associated with ideas of religious 'brainwashing', in a moral panic about the future of youth, which was similar in tone to the panics around spectacular youth subcultures.

» See chapter 8, 'The Life Course', for more on youth culture.

World-affirming movements

World-affirming movements are more akin to self-help or therapy groups than to conventional religious groups. They are movements that often lack rituals, churches and formal theologies, turning their focus on members' spiritual well-being. As the name suggests, world-affirming movements do not reject the outside world or its values. Rather, they seek to enhance their followers' abilities to perform and succeed in that world by unlocking human potential.

The Church of Scientology is one example of such a group, widely known of today as a result of the involvement of US actor Tom Cruise. Founded by L. Ron Hubbard in the early 1950s, the Church of Scientology has grown from its original base in California to include a large membership in countries

around the world. Scientologists believe we are all spiritual beings, but have neglected our spiritual nature. Through training that makes them aware of their real spiritual capacities, people can recover forgotten supernatural powers, clear their minds and reveal their full potential.

Many strands of the so-called New Age movement fall under the category of world-affirming movements. The New Age movement emerged from the counterculture of the 1960s and '70s and encompasses a broad spectrum of beliefs, practices and ways of life. Pagan teachings (Celtic, Druidic, Native American and others), shamanism, forms of Asian mysticism, Wiccan rituals and Zen meditation are only a few of the activities that are thought of as 'New Age'.

On the surface, the mysticism of the New Age movement appears to stand in stark contrast to the modern societies in which it is favoured. Followers of New Age movements seek out and develop alternative ways of life in order to cope with the challenges of modernity. Yet New Age activities should not be interpreted as simply a radical break with the present. They should also be seen as part of a larger cultural trajectory that exemplifies aspects of mainstream culture. In late modern societies, individuals possess unparalleled degrees of autonomy and freedom to chart their own lives. In this respect, the aims of the New Age movement coincide closely with the modern age: people are encouraged to move beyond traditional values and expectations and to live their lives actively and reflexively.

World-rejecting movements

As opposed to world-affirming groups, world-rejecting movements are highly critical of the outside world. They often demand significant lifestyle changes from their followers – members may be expected to live ascetically, to change their dress or hairstyle, or to follow a certain diet. World-rejecting movements are frequently exclusive, in contrast to world-affirming movements, which tend to be inclusive in nature. Some world-rejecting movements display characteristics of total institutions; members are expected to subsume their individual identities in that of the group, to adhere to strict ethical codes or rules and to withdraw from activity in the outside world.

Most of the world-rejecting movements place far more demands on their members, in terms of time and commitment, than do older established religions. Some groups have been known to use the technique of 'love bombing' to gain the individual's total adherence. A potential convert is overwhelmed by attention and constant displays of instant affection until he or she is drawn emotionally into the group. Some new movements, in fact, have been accused of brainwashing their adherents – seeking to control their minds in such a way as to rob them of the capacity for independent decision-making.

Many world-rejecting cults and sects have come under the intense scrutiny of state authorities, the media and the public. Certain extreme cases of world-rejecting cults have attracted much concern. For example, the Japanese group Aum Shinrikyo released deadly sarin gas into the Tokyo subway system in 1995, injuring thousands of commuters and killing 12 people. (The cult's leader, Shoko Asahara, was sentenced to death for ordering the attacks by the Japanese courts in February 2004.) The Branch Davidian cult in the United States (discussed above) also grabbed the world media's attention when it became embroiled in a deadly confrontation with US authorities in 1993 after accusations of child abuse and weapons stock-piling.

World-accommodating movements

The third type of new religious movement is the one most like traditional religions. World-accommodating movements tend to emphasize the importance of inner religious life over more worldly concerns. Members of such groups seek to reclaim the spiritual purity that they believe has been

lost in traditional religious settings. Where followers of world-rejecting and world-affirming groups often alter their lifestyles in accordance with their religious activity, many adherents of world-accommodating movements carry on in their everyday lives and careers with little visible change. One example of a world-accommodating movement is Pentecostalism. Pentecostalists believe that the Holy Spirit can be heard through individuals who are granted the gift of 'speaking in tongues'.

THINKING CRITICALLY

How do you think *religious* movements, such as those discussed above, differ from *secular* social movements, such as socialism, feminism and environmentalism? Are there any 'religious' elements within secular social movements? Can religious movements be analysed using the concepts and theories that were designed for studying secular social movements?

Christianity, gender and sexuality

Churches and denominations, as the preceding discussion has indicated, are religious organizations with defined systems of authority. In these hierarchies, as in other areas of social life, women are mostly excluded from power. This is very clear in Christianity, but it is also characteristic of all the major religions.

More than 100 years ago, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, an American campaigner for women's rights, published a series of commentaries on the Scriptures, entitled *The Woman's Bible*. In her view, the deity had created women and men as beings of equal value, and the Bible should fully reflect this fact. Its 'masculinist' character, she believed, reflected not the authentic word of God, but the fact that the Bible was written by men. In 1870, the Church of England established a Revising Committee to revise and update the biblical texts; but, as Stanton pointed out, the committee contained not a single woman. She asserted that there was no reason to suppose that God is a man, since it was clear in the Scriptures that all human beings were fashioned in the image of God. When a colleague opened a women's rights conference with a prayer to 'God, our Mother', there was a virulent reaction from the church authorities. Yet Stanton pressed ahead, organizing a Women's Revising Committee in America, composed of 23 women, to advise her in preparing *The Woman's Bible*, which was published in 1895.

A century later the Anglican Church is still largely dominated by men, although recently this has begun to change. In the Church of England between 1987 and 1992 women were allowed to be deacons, but not permitted to be priests. Although they were officially part of the laity, they were not allowed to conduct certain basic religious rituals, like pronouncing blessings or solemnizing marriages. In 1992, after increasing pressure, particularly from women inside the Church of England, the Synod (governing assembly) voted to make the priesthood open to women with the first women priests ordained in 1994. The decision is still opposed by many conservatives in the Anglican Church, who argue that the full acceptance of women is a blasphemous deviation from revealed biblical truth and a move away from eventual reunification with the Catholic Church. As a result of the decision to allow women priests, some people decided to withdraw from the Church of England, often converting to Catholicism. Ten years later around a fifth of priests in the Church of England are women, and it is expected that there will soon be more women priests than men priests. In July 2005, the Church of England voted to begin the process that would allow women to become bishops, a decision strongly opposed by several senior figures in the Church. In July 2008, the ruling General Synod rejected proposals for separate structures aimed at accommodating traditionalists and instead agreed to introduce a

national statutory code of practice which would include ordaining women bishops.

The Catholic Church has been more conservative in its attitude to women than the Church of England, and persists in formally supporting inequalities of gender. Calls for the ordination of women have been consistently turned down by the Catholic authorities. In 1977 the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in Rome, declared formally that women were not admissible to the Catholic priesthood. The reason given was that Jesus did not call a woman to be one of his disciples. In January 2004, seven women, who had been ordained as priests by rebel Argentinean Bishop, Romulo Antonio Braschi, were excommunicated from the Church and their ordinations overturned by the Vatican. Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) encouraged women to recall their roles as wives and mothers, attacked feminist ideologies which assert that men and women are fundamentally the same and supported policies prohibiting abortion and the use of contraception which place further limitations on women's freedom (Vatican 2004).

Opening up the priesthood to women was a controversial step for many in the Anglican Church.

Controversy in the Anglican Church in recent years has shifted away from gender to the issue of homosexuality and the priesthood. Homosexuals have long served in the Christian Church, but with their sexual inclinations either suppressed, ignored or unobserved. (The Catholic Church still holds to the position set out in 1961 that those 'affected by the perverse inclination' towards homosexuality must be barred from taking religious vows or being ordained.) Other Protestant denominations have introduced liberal policies towards homosexuals and openly gay clergy have been admitted to the priesthood in some of the smaller denominations. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands was the first European Christian denomination to decide that lesbians and gays could serve as pastors in 1972. Other denominations, such as the United Church of Canada (in 1988) and the Norwegian Church (in 2000), have also followed suit.

The controversy over the admission of homosexuals to the priesthood came to the fore in the UK in June 2003 when Dr Jeffrey John, an acknowledged homosexual living a celibate life, was appointed Bishop of Reading. He eventually declined to take the post after his appointment caused a bitter row within the international Anglican Church. In August 2003 the rank and file of the Anglican Church in America voted to elect an openly gay bishop, Reverend Canon Gene Robinson of New Hampshire. A conservative lobby group, Anglican Mainstream, was created to lobby against the appointment of gay clergy and the issue remains unresolved.

See chapter 14, 'Sexuality and Gender', for a wider discussion of sexuality and identities.

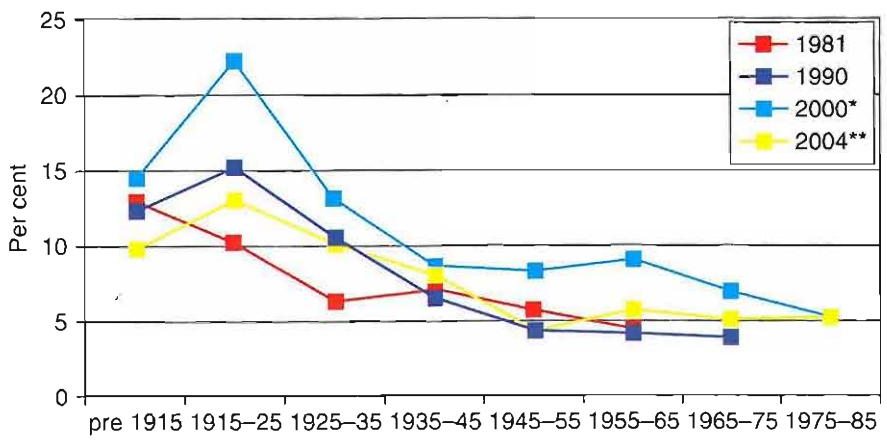
Secularization and religious revival

Secularization

As we have seen, one view shared by early sociological thinkers was that traditional religion would become more and more marginal to the modern world. Marx, Durkheim and Weber all theorized that a process of secularization was bound to occur as societies modernized and became more reliant on science and technology to control and explain the social world. Secularization describes the process whereby religion loses its influence over the various spheres of social life. For example, figure 16.2 uses data from surveys of ten West European countries in which secularization took hold relatively early. It shows that weekly church attendance in these countries dropped significantly over the twentieth century, but seems to have stabilized at around 5 per cent. The survey also shows that the drop in religious belief has not been as dramatic as church attendance, which tends to support the picture of Western Europe as a region of 'belief without belonging' (Davie 1994).

As we will see though, the debate over the secularization thesis is one of the most complex areas in the sociology of religion. In the most basic terms, there is disagreement between supporters of the thesis – who agree with sociology's founding fathers and see religion as diminishing in power and importance in the modern world – and opponents of the concept, who argue that religion remains a significant force, albeit often in new and unfamiliar forms.

The enduring popularity of new religious movements presents a challenge to the secularization thesis. Opponents of the thesis point to the diversity and dynamism of new religious movements and argue that religion and spirituality remain a central facet of modern life. As traditional religions lose their hold, religion is not disappearing, but is being channelled in new directions. Not all scholars agree, however. Proponents of the idea of secularization point out that



* Data for 2000 uses Norway responses from 1997
** Data for 2004 from ESS which uses same question but different methodolgy

Figure 16.2 Weekly attendance by cohort and generation in 10 West European countries, 1981, 1990, 2000, 2004

Source: Kaufman 2007

these movements remain peripheral to society as a whole, even if they make a profound impact on the lives of their individual followers. New religious movements are fragmented and relatively unorganized; they also suffer from high turnover rates as people are attracted to a movement for some time and then move on to something new. Compared to a serious religious commitment, they argue, participation in a new religious movement appears little more than a hobby or lifestyle choice.

The sociological debate

Secularization is a complex sociological concept, in part because there is little consensus about how the process should be measured. Moreover, many sociologists employ definitions of religion which do not coincide – while some argue that religion is best understood in terms of the traditional church, others argue that a much broader view must be taken to include dimensions such as personal spirituality and deep commitment to certain values. These differences in perception will necessarily influence arguments for or against secularization.

Secularization can be evaluated according to a number of aspects or dimensions. Some of them are objective in nature, such as the *level of membership* of religious organizations. Statistics and official records can show how many people belong to a church or other religious body and are active in attending services or other ceremonies. As we shall see, with the exception of the USA, most of the industrialized countries have experienced considerable secularization according to this index. The pattern of religious decline seen in Britain is found in most of Western Europe, including Catholic countries such as France or Italy. More Italians than French attend church regularly and participate in the major rituals (such as Easter communion), but the overall pattern of declining religious observance is similar in both cases.

A second dimension of secularization concerns how far churches and other religious organizations maintain their *social influence, wealth* and *prestige*. In earlier times, religious organizations could wield considerable influence over governments and social agencies, and commanded high respect in the community. How far is this still the case? The answer to the question is clear. Even if we confine ourselves to the last century, we see that religious organizations have progressively lost much of the social and political influence they previously had – and the trend is worldwide, although there are some exceptions. Church leaders can no longer automatically expect to be influential with the powerful. While some established churches remain very wealthy by any standards, and new religious movements may rapidly build up fortunes, the material circumstances of many long-standing religious organizations are insecure. Churches and temples have to be sold off, or are in a state of disrepair.

The third dimension of secularization concerns beliefs and values. We can call this the dimension of *religiosity*. Levels of church-going and the degree of social influence of churches are obviously not necessarily a direct expression of the beliefs or ideals people hold. Many who have religious beliefs do not regularly attend services or take part in public ceremonies; conversely, regularity of such attendance or participation does not always imply the holding of strong religious views – people may attend out of habit or because it is expected of them in their community.

As in the other dimensions of secularization, we need an accurate understanding of the past to see how far religiosity has declined today. Supporters of the secularization thesis argue that, in the past, religion was far more important to people's daily lives than it is today. The church was at the heart of local affairs and was a strong influence within family and personal life. Yet critics of the thesis contest this idea, arguing that just because people attended

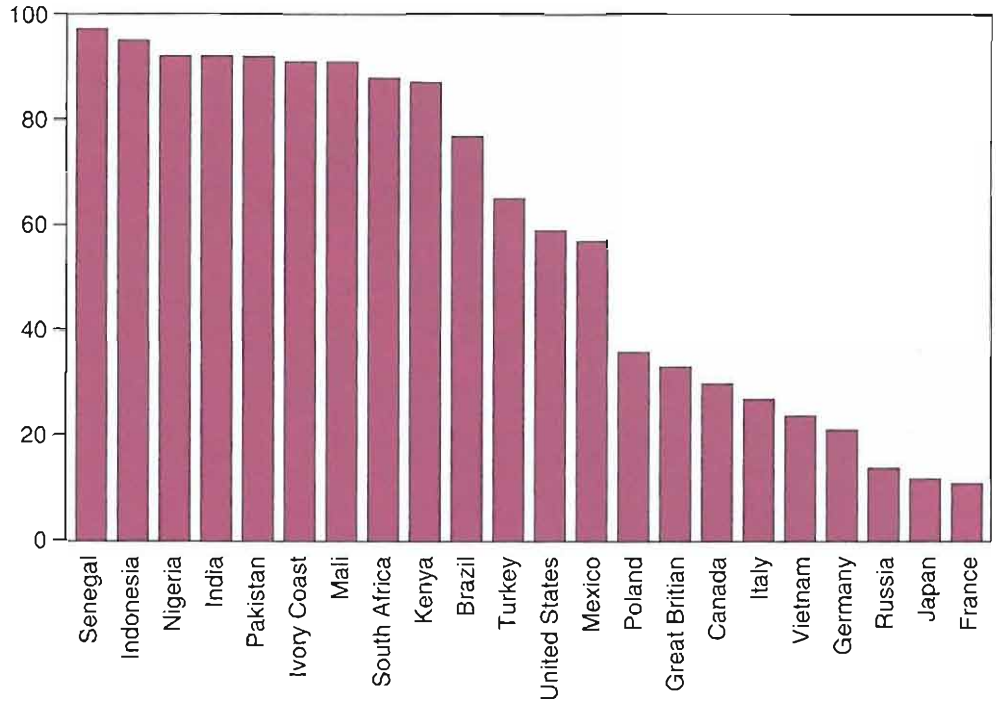


Figure 16.3 The importance given to religion in selected countries (percentage of adult population saying religion is 'very important' in their lives)

Source: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2002

church more regularly does not necessarily prove that they were more religious. In many traditional societies, including medieval Europe, commitment to religious belief was less strong and less important in day-to-day life than might be supposed. Research into English history, for example, shows that lukewarm commitment to religious beliefs was common among the ordinary people. Religious sceptics seem to have been found in most cultures, particularly in the larger traditional societies (Ginzburg 1980).

Yet there can be no doubt at all that the hold of religious ideas today is less than was generally the case in the traditional world – particularly if we include under the term 'religion' the whole range of the supernatural in which people believed. Most of us simply do not any longer experience our environment as permeated by divine or spiritual entities. Some of the major tensions in the world today – like those afflicting the Middle East, Chechnya and Sudan – derive primarily, or in some part, from religious differences. But the majority of conflicts and wars are now mainly secular in nature – concerned with divergent political creeds or material interests.

Nonetheless, if we take Durkheim's characterization of religion as the representation of society's moral rules and collective existence, then an alternative view of secularization emerges. Drawing on Durkheim's ideas, French sociologist Michel Maffesoli (1995) has theorized that we live in the 'time of the tribes'.

Arguing against theories of a growing individualization (such as in the work of Giddens and Beck) and those older theories of a mass society which brings uniformity and the loss of difference, Maffesoli suggests that modern societies are in fact characterized by the rapid growth of small

Skateboarding has become a popular activity amongst young people, but according to Maffesoli, the subculture it generates can also be seen as a 'neo-tribe', which fulfils the members' need for sociability.

groupings of people who band together on the basis of shared musical tastes, ideas, consumer preferences, leisure pursuits and so on. These groups he calls 'neo-tribes' or 'new' tribes. They are like traditional tribes because their existence is based on a shared identity, but they are unlike traditional tribes because they do not have the same longevity. People's commitment to neo-tribes tends to be quite weak, short-lived and they are therefore quite fluid and fragile social entities.

However, Maffesoli's point is that the creation of neo-tribes demonstrates that there remains a very strong human need and quest for social contact and interaction, which does not support either theories of excessive individualization or those of mass society. And this underlying and continual search for human sociability is, in Durkheim's terms at least, a religious search. The old Gods may well be in decline, but there may (still) be 'something eternal in religion'.

THINKING CRITICALLY

The theory of secularization is 'essentially contested'; sociologists still disagree about its real extent and future prospects. If you were to design a research study aimed at resolving this disagreement, what would be your main research questions and what kind of empirical evidence would you collect, which both pro- and anti-secularization theorists might accept as legitimate?

Bearing in mind these three dimensions of secularization, let us review some recent trends in religion in Europe and the United States and consider how they support or contradict the idea of secularization.

Religion in Europe

The influence of Christianity was a crucial element in the evolution of Europe as a political unit. One possible border to what we now define as Europe is down the line of the first great split in European Christian thought in the eleventh century, between Catholic and Eastern Orthodox forms of Christianity. Orthodox Christianity is still the dominant religion in many East European countries, including Bulgaria, Belarus, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine.

In Western Europe the division of the continent into Catholic and Protestant in the sixteenth century marked a second great rupture in Christian thought. This process, known as the Reformation, is inseparable from the division of Western Europe into the relatively stable patchwork of modern nation-states that we still see on the map today. Very broadly, Western Europe divided itself into a Protestant North (Scandinavia and Scotland), a Catholic South (which includes Spain, Portugal, Italy and France, as well as Belgium and Ireland further north) and several more or less denominationally mixed countries (including Britain and Northern Ireland, the Netherlands and Germany).

The Reformation took different forms in different countries, but was unified by the attempt to escape the influence of the Pope and the Catholic Church. A variety of denominations of Protestantism, and relations between Church and State, emerged in Europe. Below we give a brief sketch of religion in some of the major Western European nations.

The Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland) have a state church (the Lutheran State Church of Northern Europe). The population is characterized by a high rate of church membership, but a low level of both religious practice and acceptance of Christian beliefs. These countries have been described as 'belonging without believing'. Particularly in Sweden the close relationship between Church and State is now being questioned. Many people find the idea of a church that is specially privileged by the state inappropriate in an increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse country.

Germany can still be characterized as being divided between Catholicism and Protestantism. However, this is now challenged – first, by a growing Muslim population and, second, by an increase in the number of people who claim no religious allegiance. This second point is partly explained by the reunification of East and West Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the suppression of Christianity in the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe, including East Germany.

France is largely a Catholic country, but it is far more like the Protestant countries of Northern Europe in demonstrating low levels of religious belief and practices (see table 16.1). Of all the countries of Western Europe, France has the strictest separation between Church and State. The French state is strictly secular and refuses to privilege any religion or denomination. This takes in the exclusion of discussion of religion in all state institutions, including a ban on religious education in state-run schools. This strict separation between Church and State also led to the controversial ban on 'conspicuous' religious items in French school which came into place in September 2004, and particularly affected those Muslim girls who wore headscarves.

The *United Kingdom* is a predominantly Protestant country and the 2001 Census reported that some 72 per cent of people described themselves as Christians. Islam is the next most common faith, with almost 3 per cent of the population describing themselves as Muslims. Other significant groups include Hindus, Sikhs, Jews and Buddhists, each accounting for less than 1 per cent of the total population. The extent to which people identified with a religion varied around the UK, with 86 per cent identifying with a religion in Northern

Table 16.1 Adult (aged 15+) attendance at religious services, selected European countries 2002

Country	%
Poland	75.5
Ireland	67.2
Greece	54.6
Portugal	46.9
Italy	44.1
Austria	35.3
Slovenia	30.0
Spain	28.9
Netherlands	20.9
Germany	20.1
Belgium	18.9
UK	18.6
Hungary	18.2
France	14.2
Denmark	9.3

Source: Compiled from Ashworth and Farthing 2007

Ireland, 77 per cent in England and 67 per cent in Scotland. Some 16 per cent – mainly atheists and agnostics – said they had no religion.

Although over 70 per cent of the UK population describe themselves as Christian, a far smaller number attend church regularly. The 1851 Census of religion found about 40 per cent of adults in England and Wales attended church each Sunday, but by 1900 this had dropped to 35 per cent, by 1950 to 20 per cent and by 2000 to just 8 per cent. There are now signs that this trend is slowing, and the general decline in church attendance is unevenly spread. Among ethnic minority populations, attendance at church and religious services has been rising and a number of 'new religious movements' have also attracted followers in Britain.

In the UK, older people are more religious than those in younger age groups. Church-going among young people reaches a peak at the age of 15, after which average levels of attendance slump until people reach their 30s and 40s and enthusiasm is revived; church-going thereafter rises with increasing age. Women are more likely to be involved in organized religion than men. In Anglican churches this is only marginally the case, but in Christian Science churches, for example, women outnumber men by four to one. Religious participation also varies widely according to where people live: 35 per cent of adults in Merseyside and 32 per cent in Lancashire are church members, compared with only 9 per cent in Humberside and 11 per cent in Nottinghamshire. One reason for this is immigration – Liverpool has a large population of Irish Catholics, just as North London is a focus for Jews and Bradford for Muslims and Sikhs.

Italy, *Spain* and *Portugal* are largely Catholic. They demonstrate higher levels of religious belief and practice than most other European countries, especially those in the north. The Catholic Church, based inside Italy, enjoys a high level of influence in all these countries. In Italy, Catholicism is privileged above other denominations and religions. In Spain, the Catholic Church was instrumental in supporting the political right in the civil war which led to General Franco's dictatorship between 1939 and 1975. There is no official link between State and Church in Spain, although the Catholic Church is privileged by its dominance in terms of numbers. In Portugal, despite some constitutional reform in the 1970s, the Catholic Church still has a degree of influence in law (Davie 2000).

Religious minorities

Europe is also home to sizeable non-Christian religious minorities. Although Jews have been present in Europe for centuries, their recent history has been bound up

Global Society 16.1 In Poland, a Jewish revival thrives – minus Jews

Krakow, Poland. There is a curious thing happening in this old country, scarred by Nazi death camps, raked by pogroms and blanketed by numbing Soviet sterility: Jewish culture is beginning to flourish again.

'Jewish-style' restaurants are serving up platters of pirogis, klezmer bands are playing plaintive Oriental melodies, derelict synagogues are gradually being restored. Every June, a festival of Jewish culture here draws thousands of people to sing Jewish songs and dance Jewish dances. The only thing missing, really, are Jews.

'It's a way to pay homage to the people who lived here, who contributed so much to Polish culture', said Janusz Makuch, founder and director of the annual festival and himself the son of a Catholic family.

Jewish communities are gradually reawakening across Eastern Europe as Jewish schools introduce a new generation to rituals and beliefs suppressed by the Nazis and then by Communism. At summer camps, thousands of Jewish teenagers from across the former Soviet bloc gather for crash courses in Jewish culture, celebrating Passover, Hanukkah and Purim – all in July.

Even in Poland, there are now two Jewish schools, synagogues in several major cities and at least four rabbis. But with relatively few Jews, Jewish culture in Poland is being embraced and promoted by the young and the fashionable.

Before Hitler's horror, Poland had the largest Jewish population in Europe, about 3.5 million souls. One in ten Poles was Jewish. More than three million Polish Jews died in the Holocaust. Post-war pogroms and a 1968 anti-Jewish purge forced out most of those who survived.

Probably about 70 per cent of the world's European Jews, or Ashkenazi, can trace their ancestry to Poland — thanks to a fourteenth-century king, Casimir III, the Great, who drew Jewish settlers from across Europe with his vow to protect them as 'people of the king'. But there are only 10,000 self-described Jews living today in this country of 39 million.

Source: Adapted from the *New York Times*, 12 July 2007

The Hasidic 'dance of happiness', pictured here at a wedding in Jerusalem, is one of the mainstays of the annual Jewish festival in Krakow. This celebrates the traditions of the 3.5 million Jews who lived in Poland before the Holocaust. In June 2007, 20,000 people attended, though few of them were Jewish.

with anti-Semitic discrimination and genocide.

In the years after the Second Word War, many Jews who had survived the holocaust left Europe for the newly created state of Israel. These factors meant that the number of Jews living in Europe fell dramatically during the twentieth century from 9.6 million in 1937 to fewer than 2 million by the mid-1990s (as table 16.2 shows).

» Racism and discrimination are discussed in more detail in chapter 15, 'Race, Ethnicity and Migration'.

In the twentieth century, global migration, partly shaped by Europe's colonial history, has also led to the development of sizeable non-Judeo-Christian minorities across the whole of the European continent for the first time. Of these, Islam is by far the largest non-Christian faith, with some 20 million members in the European Union (eumap.org, 2007). The colonial links between France and North Africa account for a sizeable French Muslim population of three to four million. Germany, by contrast, has large numbers of Muslim migrant workers from Turkey and South-East Europe. Britain's Muslim population, as we shall see below, comes largely from the former British Empire countries of the Indian subcontinent (Davie 2000; figure 16.4 shows the migration of Muslims into Europe and their country of origin).

Religion in the United States

Compared to the citizens of other industrial nations, Americans are unusually religious. With few exceptions, 'the United States has been the most God-believing and religion-adhering, fundamentalist, and religiously traditional country in Christendom [where] more new religions have been born . . than [in] any other country' (Lipset 1991). According to public opinion polls, around three out of every five Americans say that religion is 'very important' in their own life, and at any given time around 40 per cent will have been to church in the previous week (Gallup 2004). The overwhelming majority of Americans reportedly believe in God and claim they regularly pray one or more times a day (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2002). Seven out of ten Americans report that they believe in an afterlife (Roof and McKinney 1990; Warner 1993).

About 52 per cent of Americans identify themselves as Protestants and 24 per cent as Catholics. Other significant religious groups include Mormons, Muslims and Jews (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2002). The Catholic Church has shown by far the largest increase in membership, partly because of the immigration of Catholics from Mexico and Central and South America. Yet the growth in Catholic Church membership has also slowed in recent years, as some followers have drifted away. The papal encyclical of 1968, which reaffirmed the ban on the use of contraceptives among Catholics, appears to have pushed many Catholics, especially women, to question the Church's authority. For example, one survey found that 50 per cent of American Catholics now reject the notion that the Pope is infallible when he teaches on matters of morals, such as birth control and abortion (Gallup 2004).

In recent decades, the composition of the Protestant Church in America has also changed. Membership of the liberal or mainstream American churches, such as the Lutherans, Episcopalians (Anglicans), Methodists and Presbyterians, is in decline. But there has been an increase in the membership of conservative, non-traditional, Protestant churches, such as Pentecostalists and the Southern Baptists (Roof and McKinney 1990; Jones et al. 2002). This shows the growing strength of conservative Protestants in the United States.

Conservative Protestants emphasize a literal interpretation of the Bible, morality in daily life and conversion through evangelizing. Twice as many people belong to conservative Protestant groups as they do to liberal

Table 16.2 Jewish populations in Europe, 1937–94

	1937	1946	1967	1994
Austria	191,000	31,000[a]	12,500	7,000
Belgium	65,000	45,000	40,500	31,800
Bulgaria	49,000	44,200	5,000	1,900
Czechoslovakia	357,000	55,000	15,000	7,600[b]
Denmark	8,500	5,500	6,000	6,400
Estonia[c]	4,600	–	–	3,500
Finland	2,000	2,000	1,750	1,300
France	300,000	225,000	535,000	530,000
Germany	500,000	153,000[a]	30,000	55,000
Great Britain	330,000	370,000	400,000	295,000
Greece	77,000	10,000	6,500	4,800
Hungary	400,000	145,000	80,000	56,000
Ireland (Republic)	5,000	3,900	2,900	1,200
Italy	48,000	53,000[a]	35,000	31,000
Latvia	95,000	–	–	18,000
Lithuania[c]	155,000	–	–	6,500
Luxembourg	3,500	500	500	600
Netherlands	140,000	28,000	30,000	25,000
Norway	2,000	750	1,000	1,000
Poland	3,250,000	215,000	21,000	6,000
Portugal	n/a	4,000	1,000	300
Romania	850,000	420,000	100,000	10,000
Spain	n/a	6,000	6,000	12,000
Sweden	7,500	15,500	13,000	16,500
Switzerland	18,000	35,000	20,000	19,000
Turkey[d]	50,000	48,000	35,000	18,000
USSR/CIS[d]	2,669,000	1,971,000	1,715,000	812,000
Yugoslavia	71,000	12,000	7,000	3,500[e]
Total	9,648,100	3,898,350	3,119,650	1,980,900

Note: These figures, collated from many sources, are of varying reliability and in some cases are subject to a wide margin of error and interpretation. This warning applies particularly to the figures for 1946, a year in which there was considerable Jewish population movement. It must also be borne in mind that the boundaries of many European countries changed between 1937 and 1946.
n/a = not available.
[a] Includes 'Displaced Persons'. [b] Total for Czech Republic and Slovakia. [c] Baltic States included in USSR between 1941 and 1991. [d] Excludes Asiatic regions. [e] Total for former Yugoslavia.

Source: Wasserstein 1996; reproduced in Davie 2000: 123

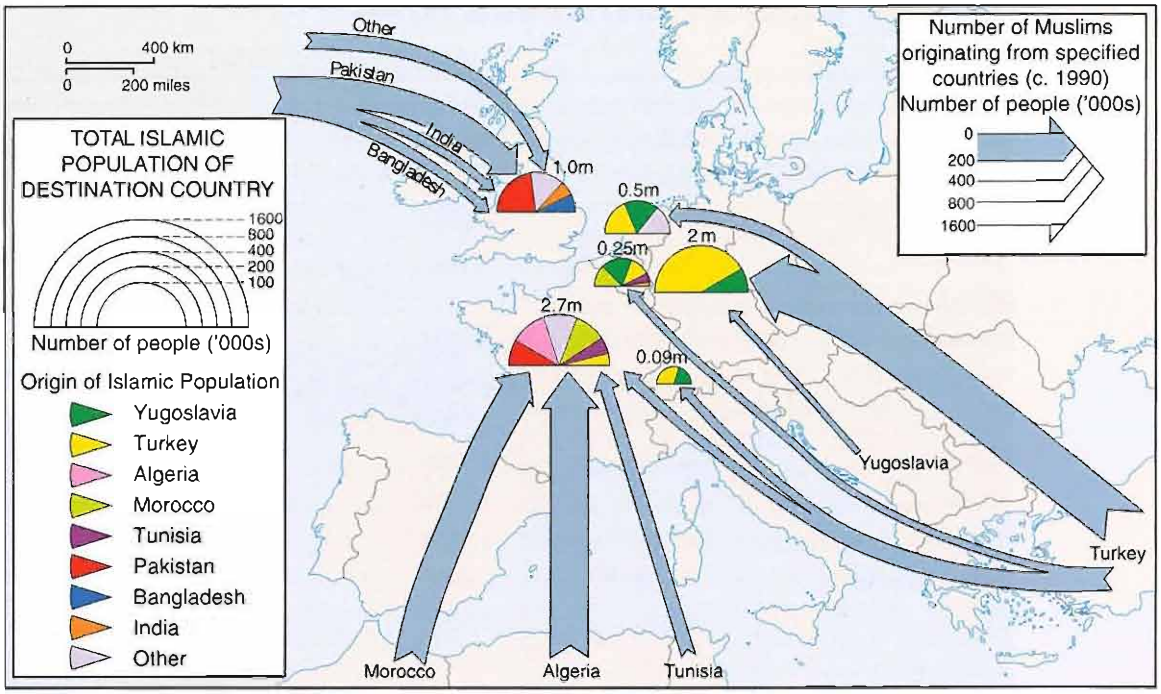


Figure 16.4 Number of European Muslims originating from specified countries and total Islamic population of European destination countries, *c.* 1990

Source: Vertovec and Peach 1997; reproduced in Davie 2000: 128. Reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan

ones, and conservative Protestants may soon outnumber moderates as well (Roof and McKinney 1990). The ageing members of the liberal Protestant denominations have not been replaced by new young followers, commitment is low and some current members are switching to other faiths. Black Protestant churches also continue to thrive in the United States, as their members move into the middle class and gain a degree of economic and political prominence (Roof and McKinney 1990; Finke and Stark 1992).

The Protestant Church in the USA has also seen a huge rise in evangelicalism, the belief in spiritual rebirth (being 'born again'). Evangelicalism can be seen in part as a response to growing secularism, religious diversity and, in general, the decline of once core Protestant values in American life (Wuthnow 1988). In recent years, there has been an enormous growth in evangelical denominations, paralleled by a decline in the more mainstream Protestant religious affiliations. Many Protestants are clearly seeking the more direct, personal and emotional religious experience promised by evangelical denominations. President George W. Bush is a born-again Christian and has said that his faith helped him to overcome a drink problem earlier in life and to start afresh. Bush's born-again Christianity is reflected in his conservative views on gay marriage and abortion. His evangelical religious values were vital in helping him to win a second term as President in November 2004, when he gained the support of the majority of evangelical Christians in the USA who saw these moral issues as crucial.

Evangelical organizations are good at mobilizing resources to help achieve their

The USA has witnessed a dramatic growth in evangelicalism. The support of evangelical Christians helped George W. Bush into power in 2000 and 2004.

religious and political objectives, as the 2004 presidential election demonstrated. In the business-like language used by the religious economists, they have proved to be extremely competitive 'spiritual entrepreneurs' in the 'religious marketplace' (Hatch 1989; also see 'Using your sociological imagination 16.1'). Radio and television have provided important new marketing technologies, used by some evangelicals to reach a much wider audience than was previously possible. Called 'televangelists' because they conduct their evangelical ministries via television, these ministers depart from many earlier evangelicals by preaching a 'gospel of prosperity': the belief that God wants the faithful to be financially prosperous and satisfied, rather than to sacrifice and suffer. This approach differs considerably from the austere emphasis on hard work and self-denial ordinarily associated with traditional conservative Protestant beliefs (Hadden and Shupe 1987; Bruce 1990). Luxurious houses of worship, epitomized by Robert H. Schuller's Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, provide the televised settings for electronic churches, whose congregants are geographically dispersed and are united primarily by means of electronic technology. Theology and fundraising are the staples of televangelism, which must support not only the television ministries themselves, but also schools, universities, theme parks and sometimes the lavish lifestyles of its preachers.

The electronic preaching of religion has become particularly prevalent in Latin

America, where North American television programmes are shown. As a result, Protestant movements, most of them of the Pentecostal kind, have made a dramatic impact on such countries as Chile and Brazil, which are predominantly Catholic (Martin 1990).

THINKING CRITICALLY

The religious economy approach suggests that religion is continually renewed through competition. How could such an approach help us to understand the process of secularization in the industrialized world? What does religious economy tell us, if anything, about the role of spirituality in human affairs?

Although some evangelicals combine a thoroughly modern lifestyle with traditional religious beliefs, others strongly reject many contemporary beliefs and practices. Fundamentalists are evangelicals who are anti-modern in many of their beliefs, calling for strict codes of morality and conduct. These frequently include taboos against drinking, smoking and other 'worldly evils', a belief in biblical infallibility and a strong emphasis on Christ's impending return to earth (Balmer 1989). Their 'old-time religion' clearly distinguishes good from evil and right from wrong (Roof and McKinney 1990).

In the debate on secularization, the United States represents an important exception to the view that religion is generally declining in Western societies. While, on the one hand, the USA is one of the most thoroughly 'modernized' countries, it is, on the other, characterized by some of the highest levels of popular religious belief and membership in the world. How can we account for this American exceptionalism?

Steve Bruce (1996), one of the leading advocates of the secularization thesis, has argued that the persistence of religion in the USA can be understood in terms of cultural transition. In cases where societies undergo rapid and profound demographic or economic change, Bruce suggests, religion can play a critical role in helping people adjust to new conditions and survive instability. Industrialization came relatively late to the United States and proceeded very quickly, he argues, among a population that was composed of a great diversity of ethnic groups. In the USA, religion was important in stabilizing people's identities and allowed a smoother cultural transition into the American 'melting pot'.

Evaluating the secularization thesis

There is little question among sociologists that, considered as a long-term trend, religion in the traditional church has declined in most Western countries – with the notable exception of the USA. The influence of religion has diminished along each of the three dimensions of secularization, much as nineteenth-century sociologists predicted it would. Should we conclude that they and later proponents of the secularization thesis were correct? Has the appeal of religion lost its grasp with the deepening of modernity? Such a conclusion would be questionable for a number of reasons.

First, the present position of religion in Britain and other Western countries is much more complex than supporters of the secularization thesis suggest. Religious and spiritual belief remain powerful and motivating forces in many people's lives, even if they do not choose to worship formally through the framework of the traditional church. Some scholars have suggested that there has been a move towards 'believing without belonging' (Davie 1994) – as we have seen in our discussion of religious belief in the UK, people maintain a belief in God or a higher force, but practise and develop their faith outside institutionalized forms of religion.

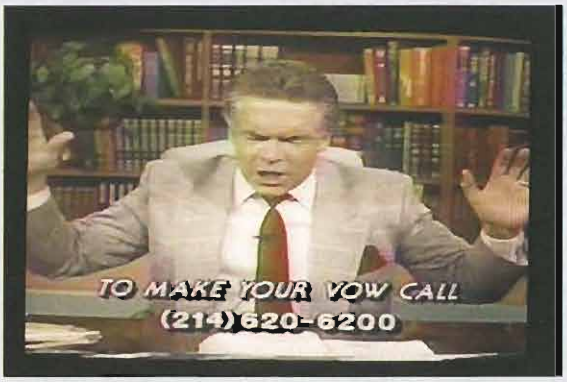
USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

16.1 Competition in the religious economy?

One of the most recent and influential approaches to the sociology of religion is tailored to Western societies, and particularly the United States, which offers many different faiths from which to pick and choose. Taking their cue from economic theory, sociologists who favour the religious economy approach argue that religions can be fruitfully understood as organizations in competition with one another for followers (Stark and Bainbridge 1987; Finke and Stark 1988, 1992; Moore 1994).

Like contemporary economists who study businesses, these sociologists argue that competition is preferable to monopoly when it comes to ensuring religious vitality. This position is exactly opposite to those of the classical theorists. Marx, Durkheim and Weber assumed that religion weakens when it is challenged by different religious or secular viewpoints, whereas the religious economists argue that competition increases the overall level of religious involvement in modern society. Religious economists believe this to be true for two reasons. First, competition makes each religious group try that much harder to win followers. Second, the presence of numerous religions means that there is likely to be something for just about everyone. In culturally diverse societies a single religion will probably appeal to only a limited range of followers, while the presence of Indian gurus and fundamentalist preachers, in addition to more traditional churches, is likely to encourage a high level of religious participation.

This analysis is adapted from the business world, in which competition presumably encourages the emergence of highly specialized products that appeal to the very specific markets. In fact, the religious economists borrow the language of business in describing the conditions that lead to the success or failure of a particular religious organization. According to Roger Finke and Rodney Stark (1992), a successful religious group must be well organized for competition, have eloquent preachers who are effective 'sales reps' in spreading the word, offer beliefs and rituals that are packaged as an appealing product, and develop effective marketing techniques. Religion, in this view, is a business much like any other.



Many 'televangelists' preach a gospel of prosperity rather than austerity, departing from traditional Protestant beliefs. They have proved to be particularly effective businesspeople in selling their religious products.

Thus religious economists such as Finke and Stark do not see competition as undermining religious beliefs and thus contributing to secularization. Rather, they argue that modern religion is constantly renewing itself through active marketing and recruitment. Although there is a growing body of research that supports the notion that competition is good for religion (Stark and Bainbridge 1980, 1985; Finke and Stark 1992), not all research comes to this conclusion (Land et al. 1991).

The religious economy approach overestimates the extent to which people rationally pick and choose among different religions, as if they were shopping around for a new car or pair of shoes. Among deeply committed believers, particularly in societies that lack religious pluralism, it is not obvious that religion is a matter of rational choice. In such societies, even when people are allowed to choose among different religions, most are likely to practise their childhood religion without ever questioning whether or not there are more appealing alternatives. Even in the United States,

where the religious economy approach originated, sociologists may overlook the spiritual aspects of religion if they simply assume that religious buyers are always on spiritual shopping sprees. A study of baby boomers in the USA (the generation born in the two decades after the end of the Second World War) found that a third had remained loyal to their childhood faith, while another third had continued to profess their childhood beliefs although they no longer belonged to a religious organization. Thus only a third were actively looking around for a new religion, making the sorts of choice presumed by the religious economy approach (Roof 1993).

Second, secularization cannot be measured according to membership in mainstream Trinitarian churches alone. To do so discounts the growing role of non-Western faiths and new religious movements, both internationally and within industrialized societies. In Britain, for example, active membership within traditional churches is falling, yet participation among Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, evangelical 'born-again' believers and Orthodox Christians remains dynamic.

Third, there seems to be little evidence of secularization in non-Western societies. In many areas of the Middle East, Asia, Africa and India, a vital and dynamic Islamic fundamentalism challenges Westernization. When the Pope toured South America, millions of Catholics there enthusiastically followed his progress. Eastern Orthodoxy has been enthusiastically re-embraced by citizens in parts of the former Soviet Union after decades of repression of the Church by the Communist leadership. This enthusiastic support for religion around the globe is, unfortunately, mirrored by religiously inspired conflicts as well. Just as religion can be a source of solace and support, it has also been – and continues to be – at the origin of intense social struggles and conflicts.

One can point to evidence both in favour of and against the idea of secularization. It seems clear that, as a concept, it is most useful in explaining changes that are occurring within the traditional churches today – both in terms of declining power and influence and in regard to internal secularizing processes affecting, for example, the role of women and gays. Modernizing forces in society at large are being felt within many traditional religious institutions.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Why do you think many migrant groups display higher levels of religiosity and church attendance than the rest of the population? What factors can you identify which might explain the 'alarming decline in the number of children and young people in church'? What social changes have led to young people not attending churches in large numbers?

Above all, however, religion in the late modern world should be evaluated against a backdrop of rapid change, instability and diversity. Even if traditional forms of religion are receding to a degree, religion still remains a critical force in our social world. The appeal of religion, in its traditional and novel forms, is likely to be long-lasting. Religion provides many people with insights into complex questions about life and meaning that cannot be answered satisfactorily with rationalist perspectives.

It is not surprising, then, that during these times of rapid change, many people look for – and find – answers and calm in religion. Fundamentalism is perhaps the clearest example of this phenomenon. Yet, increasingly, religious responses to change are occurring in new and unfamiliar forms: new religious movements, cults, sects and 'New Age' activities. While these groups may not 'look like' forms of religion on the surface, many critics of the secularization hypothesis argue that they represent transforma-

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

16.2 Migration and religion

The rate of decline in church attendance has been slowed by an unexpected factor – the influx of Christians from Africa and Europe. One of the biggest surveys among Britain's 37,000 churches, published today, finds that the growth of immigrant-led churches has partly offset dwindling congregations elsewhere [Brierly 2006]. The news will cheer Church leaders. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, said the phenomenon was having a healthy impact on mainstream churches.

But the survey also shows that congregations are getting older as young people continue to abandon the pews, which could have a devastating impact in a decade. The 2005 English Church Census, carried out by the independent Christian Research Organization, finds that, between 1998 and 2005, half a million people stopped going to a Christian church on Sunday. The figure is lower than expected because a million left in the previous nine years.

The survey finds that black-led Pentecostal churches in immigrant communities gained about 100,000 worshippers since 1998.

Although churches of all denominations and sizes have stemmed their losses, most growth has occurred in the larger charismatic and evangelical churches. The research shows that black people now make up 10 per cent of all Sunday churchgoers in England, while other non-white ethnic groups add a further 7 per cent. In inner London, fewer than half the worshippers are white, with black Christians accounting for 44 per cent of churchgoers and non-white ethnic groups 14 per cent. The impact of Roman Catholic Croatians and Poles and Orthodox Russians and Greeks has been significant.

The findings will give the churches hope that they are pulling out of the decline they have been in for decades. Overall, however, they are losing far more than they are gaining. While 1,000 new people are joining a church each week, 2,500 are leaving. Just 6.3 per cent of the population goes to church on an average Sunday, compared with 7.5 per cent in 1998, although more people are going midweek.

Dr Williams, who wrote the foreword to the research, said one of its most striking findings was the number of thriving churches started by immigrant communities. 'This is having a big impact on our major cities, where the black majority churches are growing fast', he said. 'People from ethnic minorities are also bringing new life and energy into churches from established denominations such as the Church of England. This is one of the reasons why the Anglican Diocese of London, for example, is now growing steadily.' However, the Archbishop acknowledged that the mainstream denominations faced serious problems as the average worshipper was getting older.

The research, based on questionnaires from 19,000 churches, finds that 29 per cent of churchgoers are 65 or over compared with 16 per cent of the population. It also finds that 9 per cent of churches have no one under the age of 11 in their congregations. 'The last English Church Census, carried out in 1998, showed an alarming decline in the number of children and young people in church', said Dr Williams. 'These latest results suggest we have yet to reverse this, but at least the rate of change has slowed.'

Source: Jonathan Petre, *Daily Telegraph*, 19 September 2006

tions of religious belief in the face of profound social change.

Religious fundamentalism

The strength of religious fundamentalism is another indication that secularization has not triumphed in the modern world. The term **fundamentalism** can be applied in many different contexts to describe strict adherence to a set of principles or beliefs. Religious fundamentalism describes the approach taken by religious groups, which call for the literal interpretation of basic

scriptures or texts and believe that the doctrines which emerge from such readings should be applied to all aspects of social, economic and political life.

Religious fundamentalists believe that only one view – their own – of the world is possible, and that this view is the correct one: there is no room for ambiguity or multiple interpretations. Within religious fundamentalist movements, access to the exact meanings of scriptures is restricted to a set of privileged 'interpreters' – such as priests, clergy or other religious leaders. This gives these leaders a great amount of authority – not only in religious matters, but in secular ones as well. Religious fundamentalists have become powerful political figures in opposition movements, within mainstream political parties and as heads of state.

Religious fundamentalism is a relatively new phenomenon – it is only in the last two to three decades that the term has entered common usage. It has arisen largely in response to globalization. As the forces of modernization progressively undermine traditional elements of the social world – such as the nuclear family and the domination of women by men – fundamentalism has arisen in defence of traditional beliefs. In a globalizing world which demands rational reasons, fundamentalism insists on faith-based answers and references to ritual truth: fundamentalism is tradition defended in a traditional way. It has more to do with how beliefs are defended and justified than with the content of the beliefs themselves.

Although fundamentalism sets itself in opposition to modernity, it also employs modern approaches in asserting its beliefs. Christian fundamentalists in the United States, for example, were among the first to use television as a medium for spreading their doctrines; Islamic fundamentalists fighting Russian forces in Chechnya have developed websites to set forth their views; Hindutva militants in India have used the Internet and email to promote a feeling of 'Hindu identity'.

In this section we will examine two of the most prominent forms of religious fundamentalism: Islamic and Christian. In the past 30 years, both have grown in strength, shaping the contours of national and international politics.

Islamic fundamentalism

Of the early sociological thinkers, only Weber might have suspected that a traditional religious system like Islam could undergo a major revival and become the basis of important political developments in the late twentieth century; yet this is exactly what occurred in the 1980s in Iran. In recent years, Islamic revivalism has spread, with a significant impact on other countries, including Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Algeria, Afghanistan and Nigeria. What explains this large-scale renewal of Islam?

To understand the phenomenon, we have to look both to aspects of Islam as a traditional religion and to secular changes that have affected modern states where its influence is pervasive. Islam, like Christianity, is a religion that has continually stimulated activism: the Koran – the Islamic holy scripture – is full of instructions to believers to 'struggle in the way of God'. This struggle is against both unbelievers and those who introduce corruption into the Muslim community. Over the centuries there have been successive generations of Muslim reformers, and Islam has become as internally divided as Christianity.

Shiism split from the main body of orthodox Islam early in its history and has remained influential. Shiism has been the official religion of Iran (earlier known as Persia) since the sixteenth century, and was the source of the ideas behind the Iranian revolution. The Shiites trace their beginnings to Imam Ali, a seventh-century religious and political leader who is believed to have shown qualities of personal devotion to God and virtue outstanding among the worldly rulers of the time. Ali's descendants came to be seen as the rightful leaders of Islam, since they were held to belong to the

prophet Muhammad's family, unlike the dynasties in power. The Shiites believed that the rule of Muhammad's rightful heir would eventually be instituted, doing away with the tyrannies and injustices associated with existing regimes. Muhammad's heir would be a leader directly guided by God, governing in accordance with the Koran.

There are large Shiite populations in other Middle Eastern countries, including Iraq, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, as well as in India and Pakistan. Islamic leadership in these countries, however, is in the hands of the majority, the *Sunni*. The Sunni Muslims follow the 'Beaten Path', a series of traditions deriving from the Koran which tolerate a considerable diversity of opinion, in contrast to the more rigidly defined views of the Shiites.

Islam and the West

During the Middle Ages, there was a more or less constant struggle between Christian Europe and the Muslim states, which controlled large sections of what became Spain, Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania. Most of the lands conquered by the Muslims were reclaimed by the Europeans, and many of their possessions in North Africa were in fact colonized as Western power grew in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These reverses were catastrophic for Muslim religion and civilization, which Islamic believers held to be the highest and most advanced possible, transcending all others. In the late nineteenth century, the inability of the Muslim world effectively to resist the spread of Western culture led to reform movements seeking to restore Islam to its original purity and strength. A key idea was that Islam should respond to the Western challenge by affirming the identity of its own beliefs and practices (Sutton and Vertigans 2005).

This idea has been developed in various ways in the twentieth century, and formed a backdrop to the Islamic revolution in Iran of 1978–9. The revolution was fuelled initially

The three most prominent leaders of the Islamic revolution in Iran – Ayatollah Khomeini (in the foreground), Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the then President Hashemi Rafsanjani – look down from a poster over a street in Tehran.

by internal opposition to the Shah of Iran, who had accepted and tried to promote forms of modernization modelled on the West – for example, land reform, extending the vote to women and developing secular education. The movement that overthrew the Shah brought together people of diverse interests, by no means all of whom were attached to Islamic fundamentalism, but a dominant figure was the Ayatollah Khomeini, who provided a radical reinterpretation of Shiite ideas.

Following the revolution, Khomeini established a government organized according to traditional Islamic law. Religion, as specified in the Koran, became the

Was the conflict in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s an example of 'civilizational conflict' rooted in religious beliefs and cultures?

direct basis of all political and economic life. Under Islamic law – sharia – as it was revived, men and women were kept rigorously segregated, women were obliged to cover their bodies and heads in public, practising homosexuals were sent to the firing squad and adulterers were stoned to death. The strict code is accompanied by a very nationalistic outlook, which sets itself especially against Western influences.

The aim of the Islamic Republic in Iran was to Islamicize the state – to organize government and society so that Islamic teachings would become dominant in all spheres. The process was by no means completed, however, and forces emerged to act against it. Zubaida (1996) has distinguished three sets of groups now engaged in struggle with one another. The radicals want to carry on with and deepen the Islamic revolution; they also believe that the revolution should be actively exported to other Islamic countries. The conservatives are made up mostly of religious functionaries, who think that the revolution has gone far enough; it has given them a position of power in society which they wish to hold onto. The pragmatists favour market reforms and the opening up of the economy to foreign investment and trade; they oppose the strict imposition of Islamic codes on women, the family and the legal system.

The death of the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 was a blow to radical and conservative elements in Iran; his successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, retains the loyalty of Iran's powerful mullahs (religious leaders), but is increasingly unpopular with average Iranian citizens, who resent the repressive

regime and persistent social ills. The fault-lines within Iranian society between pragmatists and others came to the surface quite clearly under the reform-minded presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005). Khatami's administration was characterized by disputes with conservatives who largely managed to hamper Khatami's attempts at reform of Iranian society. In 2005, the election as President of Tehran's deeply conservative mayor, Mahmond Ahmadinejad, decreased tensions between the country's religious and political leadership, but increased tensions with the West.

The spread of Islamic revivalism

Although the ideas underlying the Iranian revolution were supposed to unite the whole of the Islamic world against the West, governments of countries where the Shiites are in a minority have not aligned themselves closely with the situation in Iran. Yet Islamic fundamentalism has achieved significant popularity in most of these other states, and various forms of Islamic revivalism elsewhere have been stimulated by it.

Though Islamic fundamentalist movements have gained influence in many countries in North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia over the past 10–15 years, they have succeeded in coming to power in only two other states: Sudan has been ruled since 1989 by the National Islamic Front; the fundamentalist Taliban regime consolidated its hold on the fragmented state of Afghanistan in 1996 but was ousted from power at the end of 2001 by Afghan opposition forces and the US military. In many other states, Islamic fundamentalist groups have gained influence but have been prevented from rising to power. In Egypt, Turkey and Algeria, for example, Islamic fundamentalist uprisings have been suppressed by the state or the military.

Many have worried that the Islamic world is heading for a confrontation with those parts of the world that do not share its beliefs. The political scientist Samuel Huntington (1996) argued that struggles between Western and Islamic views might become part of a worldwide 'clash of civilizations' with the ending of the Cold War and with increasing globalization. According to Huntington, the nation-state is no longer the main influence in international relations; rivalries and conflicts will therefore occur between larger cultures or civilizations.

Possible examples of such conflicts were seen during the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, in Bosnia and in Kosovo, where the Bosnian Muslims and Albanian Kosovars fought against the Serbs, who represent an Orthodox Christian culture. Such events have heightened awareness of Muslims as a world community; as observers have noted: 'Bosnia has become a rallying point for Muslims throughout the Muslim world. . . [It] has created and sharpened the sense of polarization and radicalization in Muslim societies, while at the same time increasing the sense of being a Muslim' (Ahmed and Donnan 1994).

» The wars in the former Yugoslavia are discussed in more detail in chapter 23, 'Nations, War and Terrorism'.

In the same way, the American-led war in Iraq became a rallying point for radical Muslims after the invasion in 2003. As an explanation of the causes of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, the American decision to oust the Islamic regime in Afghanistan and the revival of religious resistance to the US presence in Iraq after 2003, Huntington's thesis gained widespread media attention.

However, critics point out that there are many political and cultural divisions *within* civilizations and the forecast of conflict between entire civilizations is unlikely and alarmist. For example, in 1990 Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime in Iraq invaded Kuwait, which also has a majority Sunni population, and between 1980 and 1988,

Iraq and Iran (with a majority Shi'a population) were engaged in armed conflict with each other. The number of 'civilizational conflicts' in the past can also be too easily exaggerated, as many apparently culturally defined conflicts have been more centrally focused on access to scarce resources and the struggles for political power and military dominance (Russett et al. 2000; Chiozza 2002). In such conflicts, it has been, and still is, much more common to see alliances forming across the borders of Huntington's large-scale civilizations.

At the start of the twenty-first century, Islamic opposition is still building up in states such as Malaysia and Indonesia, several provinces within Nigeria have recently implemented sharia law, and the war in Chechnya has attracted the participation of Islamic militants who support the establishment of an Islamic state in the Caucasus. Members of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda terrorist network come from all over the Muslim world. Islamic symbolism and forms of dress have become important markers of identity for the growing number of Muslims living outside the Islamic world. Events such as the Gulf War and the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington have provoked variable but intense reactions within the Islamic world, either against or in response to the West.

» The phenomenon of terrorism is discussed further in chapter 23, 'Nations, War and Terrorism'.

Islamic revivalism plainly cannot be understood wholly in religious terms; it represents in part a reaction against the impact of the West and is a movement of national or cultural assertion. It is doubtful whether Islamic revivalism, even in its most fundamentalist forms (which remain a small minority of the revival as a whole), should be seen only as a renewal of traditionally held ideas. What has occurred is something more complex. Traditional practices and modes of life have been revived, but they have also been combined with concerns that relate specifically to modern times.

Christian fundamentalism

The growth of Christian fundamentalist religious organizations in Europe and, particularly, in the United States, is one of the most notable features of the past few decades. Fundamentalists believe that 'the Bible, quite bluntly, is a workable guidebook for politics, government, business, families, and all of the affairs of mankind' (Capps 1990). The Bible is taken as infallible by fundamentalists – its contents are expressions of the Divine Truth. Fundamentalist Christians believe in the divinity of Christ and in the possibility of the salvation of one's soul through the acceptance of Christ as personal saviour. Fundamentalist Christians are committed to spreading their message and converting those who have not yet adopted the same beliefs.

Christian fundamentalism is a reaction against liberal theology and supporters of 'secular humanism' – those who 'favour the emancipation of reason, desires and instincts in opposition to faith and obedience to God's command' (Kepel 1994). Christian fundamentalism sets itself against the 'moral crisis' wrought by modernization – the decline of the traditional family, the threat to individual morality and the weakening relationship between man and God.

In the United States, beginning with the Reverend Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority in the 1970s, some fundamentalist groups became increasingly involved in what has been termed the 'New Christian Right' in national politics, particularly in the conservative wing of the Republican Party (Simpson 1985; Woodrum 1988; Kiecolt and Nelson 1991). Falwell noted 'five major problems that have political consequences, that moral Americans should be ready to face: abortion, homosexuality, pornography, humanism, the fractured family' (in

Kepel 1994). Taking concrete action, the New Christian Right aimed first at the nation's schools, lobbying law-makers on the content of school curricula and trying to overturn the ban on prayer in school, and moved quickly to support Operation Rescue, the militant organization which blockades abortion clinics. Fundamentalist religious organizations are a powerful force in the USA and have helped to shape Republican Party policies and rhetoric during the Reagan and both Bush administrations.

Falwell initially blamed the 9/11 terrorist attacks against New York and Washington on 'sinners' in the USA. He commented on live television:

> I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the [American Civil Liberties Union], People For the American Way [both liberal organizations], all of them who have tried to secularize America. I point the finger in their face and say 'you helped this happen'. (CNN, 14 September 2001)

Although he later apologized for these remarks, he caused further controversy by stating that 'Mohammad was a terrorist. I read enough by both Muslims and non-Muslims [to decide] that he was a violent man, a man of war' (BBC, 13 October 2002). Again, he apologized for the remark, but it was too late to stop sectarian rioting between Hindus and Muslims reacting against his claims in Solapur, Western India, which left at least eight people dead. Not surprisingly, his comments led to widespread condemnation from Islamic leaders around the world.

Prominent preachers on the New Christian Right have founded a number of universities in the United States to produce a new generation 'counter-elite', schooled in fundamentalist Christian beliefs and able to take up prominent positions in the media, academia, politics and the arts. Liberty University (founded by Jerry Falwell), Oral Roberts University, Bob Jones University and others confer degrees in standard academic disciplines, taught within the framework of biblical infallibility. On campus, strict ethical standards are maintained within students' private lives and sexuality is channelled towards marriage alone. Giles Kepel (1994) says:

> To anybody who has spent some time on the Liberty campus, it is a striking spectacle. The dormitories are single-sex, and strict surveillance, a mixture of coercion and self-discipline, is practised. French kissing is forbidden, and any sexual relations between unmarried students are punished by expulsion. (Married couples live in town.) But kissing on the cheek is permitted, and couples are free to hold hands, though not to put an arm round the partner's waist. Students willingly defend this sexual self-discipline when questioned about it by a visiting stranger; they maintain total repression would be bound to lead to deviant practices, in particular to homosexuality, which (they say) is rife in a rival Fundamentalist university in which all flirting is forbidden. On the other hand, the expression of sexual desire would go against the spirit of the educational aims of the university.

The Christian fundamentalist movement in the United States draws support from across the country, but there is a strong regional element. The American South has become known as the 'Bible Belt' – a swath of land located below the agricultural 'cattle belt', 'maize belt' and 'cotton belt'. Many of America's best-known and most influential evangelists are based in the southern and mid-western states of Virginia, Oklahoma and North Carolina. The most influential fundamentalist groups in the United States are the Southern Baptist Convention, the Assemblies of God and the Seventh-Day Adventists.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Religious fundamentalism appears to have increased during a period of rapid globalization. How might these two phenomena be related? What evidence is there that fundamentalist religion will not be temporary, but may become a permanent feature of our increasingly global human society?

Conclusion

In a globalizing age that is in desperate need of mutual understanding and dialogue, religious fundamentalism can be a destructive force. Fundamentalism is edged with the possibility of violence – in the cases of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism, examples of violence inspired by religious allegiance are not uncommon. There have been a number of violent clashes over the past few years between Islamic and Christian groups in Lebanon, Indonesia and other countries. Yet in an increasingly cosmopolitan world, people of contrasting traditions and beliefs are coming into contact with one another more than ever before (Beck 2006). As the unquestioning acceptance of traditional ideas declines, we must all live in a more open and reflective way – discussion and dialogue are essential between people of differing beliefs. They are the main way in which violence can be controlled or dissolved.

Summary points

1. Religion exists in all known societies, although religious beliefs and practices vary from culture to culture. All religions involve a set of symbols, involving feelings of reverence, linked to rituals practised by a community of believers.
2. Sociological approaches to religion have been most influenced by the ideas of the 'classical' thinkers: Marx, Durkheim and Weber. All held that traditional religions would decline, though each viewed the role of religion in society very differently. To Marx, religion contains a strong ideological element: religion provides justification for the inequalities of wealth and power found in society. For Durkheim, religion is important because of the cohesive functions it serves, especially in ensuring that people meet regularly to affirm common beliefs and values. For Weber, religion is important because of the role it plays in social change, as seen in the development of Western capitalism.
3. Totemism and animism are common types of religion in smaller cultures. In totemism, a species of animal or plant is perceived as possessing supernatural powers. Animism means a belief in spirits or ghosts, populating the same world as human beings, sometimes possessing them.
4. The three most influential monotheistic religions (religions in which there is only one God) in world history are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Polytheism (belief in several or many gods) is common in other religions such as Hinduism. In other religions, like Confucianism, there are no gods or supernatural beings.
5. Churches are large and established religious bodies, normally with a formal bureaucratic structure and a hierarchy of religious officials. Sects are smaller, less formal groups of believers, usually set up to revive an established church. If a sect survives over a period of time and becomes institutionalized, it is called a denomination. Cults resemble sects, but are more loosely knit groups, which follow similar practices, but not within formal organizations.
6. Secularization refers to the declining influence of religion. Measuring the level of secularization is complicated, because several dimensions of change are involved: level of membership, social status and personal religiosity. Although the influence of religion

has definitely declined, religion is certainly not on the verge of disappearing, and continues to unite as well as divide people in the modern world.

7. Rates of regular church attendance in most European countries are low, particularly compared to the United States, where a much higher proportion of the population goes to church regularly. Far more people in Europe and the USA say they believe in God than attend church regularly – they 'believe but do not belong'.
8. Although traditional churches have experienced a decline in membership, many new religious movements have emerged. New religious movements encompass a broad range of religious and spiritual groups, cults and sects. They can be broadly divided into world-affirming movements, world-rejecting movements and world-accommodating movements.
9. Fundamentalism has become common among some believers in different religious groups across the world. 'Fundamentalists' believe in returning to the fundamentals of their religious doctrines. Islamic fundamentalism has affected many countries in the Middle East following the 1979 revolution in Iran, which set up a religiously inspired government. Christian fundamentalism in the United States is a reaction against secular values and a perceived moral crisis in American society. In their efforts to convert non-believers, fundamentalist Christians have pioneered the 'electronic church' – using television, radio and new technologies to build a following.

Further reading

The sociology of religion is a well-established field and there are many good introductions to it. Alan Aldridge's *Religion in the Contemporary World: A Sociological Introduction*. 2nd edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2007) is very well written, as is Malcolm Hamilton's *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2001), which is also a second edition. Both books cover the main issues discussed in this chapter and take readers deeper into the subject. After these, Grace Davie's *The Sociology of Religion* (London: Sage, 2007) is a very good critical assessment of the sociology of religion by a renowned expert.

Steve Bruce's *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002) presents a staunch argument in support of the secularization thesis and for an alternative view you could try Peter Berger's *Questions of Faith: A Skeptical Affirmation of Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003). Given Berger's earlier support for the secularization thesis (which he now sees as a mistake), this is an interesting book by a sociologist with a religious faith.

Finally, two useful, if large, edited collections of essays by scholars of religion are Richard K. Fenn's *Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) and James Beckford and N. Jay Demerath III, *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (London: Sage, 2007).

Internet links

Academic Info Religion Gateway – US-based site with lots of information on many faiths:
www.academicinfo.us/religindex.html

Hartford Institute for Religion Research, Connecticut – US-based Institute that carries out and disseminates research on religions:
www.hirr.hartsem.edu/

The Association of Religion Data Archives – American site aiming to 'democratize access to the best data on religion':
www.thearda.com/

Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory (online) – Peer-reviewed journal with some interesting articles.
www.jcrt.org/

BBC, Religion and Ethics – BBC's UK-based site on all things religious, includes message boards:
www.bbc.co.uk/religion/

Religious Tolerance – Canadian-based site, which 'promotes religious freedom, and diversity as positive cultural values':
www.religioustolerance.org/

CHAPTER 17

The Media

(opposite) Since the late nineteenth century, the character of modern communication technology has been radically transformed. Here, New Yorkers in Times Square watch the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center in real time.

In 1865, the actor John Wilkes Booth assassinated US President Abraham Lincoln in a Washington theatre. It took 12 days before the news reached London. A smaller boat off the south coast of Ireland met the ship carrying the message from the United States and the news was telegraphed to London from Cork, beating the ship by three days. It was not until the 1950s that a dedicated trans-oceanic cable existed to carry telegraphs instantly across the Atlantic – although long-wave radio transmission between continents became possible in the early twentieth century. On 11 September 2001, terrorists hijacked three planes and used them to attack sites in Washington and New York. When the second plane crashed into the Twin Towers in New York, some 20 minutes after

the first tower had been struck, it is estimated that a global audience of two billion people watched the attack on television in real time.

In the twenty-first century, communication technologies enable information to be shared instantaneously and simultaneously with many millions of people almost anywhere around the world. Communication – the transfer of information from one individual or group to another, whether in speech or through the mass media in modern times – is crucial to any society. In this chapter, we will study the transformations affecting the mass media of communications as part of globalization. The mass media includes a wide variety of forms, such as television, newspapers, films, radio, video games and the Internet. These are referred to as 'mass' media, because they communicate to a mass audience comprised of very large numbers of people.

Canadian media theorist, Marshall McLuhan (1964), argued that different types of media have very different effects on society. His famous dictum is that, 'the medium is the message'. That is to say, society is influenced much more by the *type* of the media than by its content, or the messages, which are conveyed by it. A society in which satellite television plays an important part, for example, is obviously a very different society from one that relies on the printed word carried aboard an ocean liner. Everyday life is experienced differently in a society in which television, relaying news instantaneously from one side of the globe to the other, plays an important role, to one that relies on horses, ships or the telegraph wire. According to McLuhan, the electronic media tends to create a global village in which people throughout the world see major events unfold and hence participate in them together. For billions of people around the world, the images of celebrities like Paris Hilton or Madonna are more instantly recognizable to them than that of their neighbours.

We live today in an interconnected world in which people experience the same events from many different places. Thanks to the process of globalization and the power of communications technology to effectively shrink large distances, people from Caracas to Cairo are able to receive the same popular music, news, films and television programmes. Twenty-four-hour news channels report on stories as they occur and broadcast coverage of unfolding events for the world to watch. Films made in Hollywood or Hong Kong reach audiences around the world, while sporting celebrities such as David Beckham and Maria Sharapova have become household names on every continent.

For several decades, we have been witnessing a process of convergence in the production, distribution and consumption of information. Even 30 years ago, ways of communicating, such as print, television and film, were still relatively self-contained spheres, but today they have become intertwined to a remarkable degree. The divisions between forms of communication are no longer as dramatic as they once were: television, radio, newspapers and telephones are undergoing profound transformations as a result of advances in technology and the rapid spread of the Internet. While newspapers remain central to our lives, the way they are organized and deliver their services are changing. Newspapers can be read online, mobile telephone use is exploding, and digital television and satellite broadcasting services allow an unprecedented diversity of choice for viewing audiences. With the expansion of technologies such as voice recognition, broadband transmission, web casting and cable links, the Internet threatens to erase the distinctions between traditional forms of media and to become the primary conduit for the delivery of information, entertainment, advertising and commerce to media audiences.

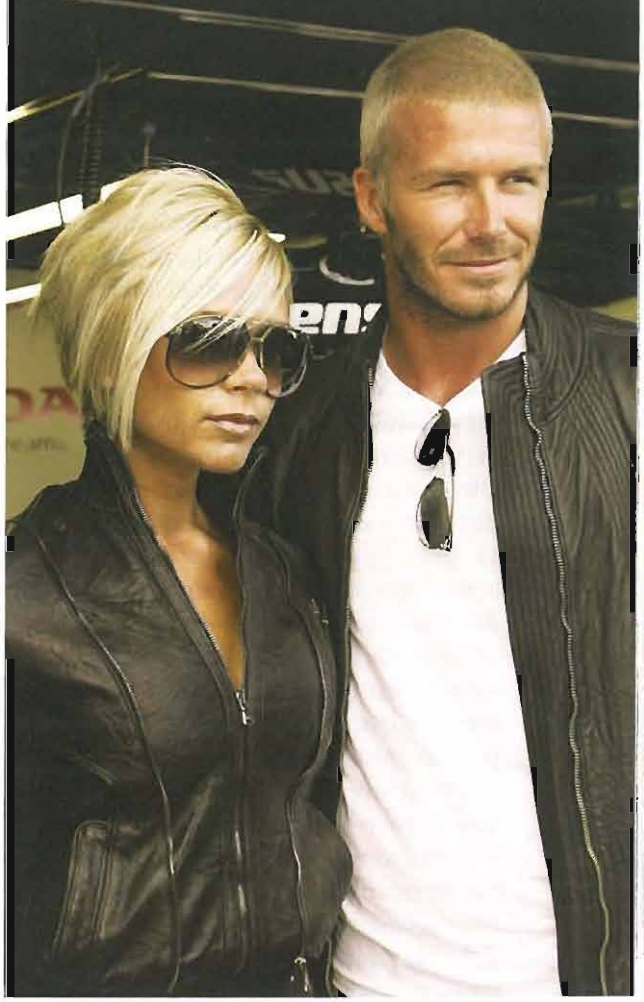
We begin our study by looking at the recent digital revolution in communications, focusing on the Internet and World

Wide Web, which are impacting on societies across the world. We then provide a brief account of other important forms of mass media, including film, television, music and newspapers, before considering some of the main theoretical approaches to studying the media and its role in society. Media representations of different social groups and the effects of mass media on the audience follow, and the chapter ends with a discussion of the ownership and political control of the global media and the resistance to it.

Media in a global age

For most of human history the main means of communication was speech, with face-to-face communication being the norm. In such oral cultures, information, ideas and knowledge were transmitted across generations by word of mouth and the kind of repositories of useful knowledge we are used to – such as books and libraries – just did not exist. Once speech could be written down and stored, initially on stone, the first writing cultures began to emerge, initially in China around 3,000 years ago. Religions have played a major part in the development of flexible communications by finding ways of producing manuscripts and religious texts for study and transportation, such as on papyrus and parchment, to literally 'spread the word'.

An important precursor to the modern mass media was the invention of the Gutenberg movable type printing press in the mid-fifteenth century, which enabled texts to be reproduced. Gutenberg made use of existing technologies – paper and woodblock printing – that originated in Asia much earlier. Yet, although technological advances and new uses of older technologies played a crucial part in the development of the mass media, the influence of social, cultural and economic factors must also be taken into account. For instance, mass forms of printed media could only develop in societies with relatively cheap access to them, and an educated population that was able to take advantage and use them.



How many of your friends around the world would *not* know who these people are?

In the late twentieth century, new digital technologies, such as the mobile phone, video games, digital television and the Internet, have revolutionized the mass media. We will look first at this 'digital revolution' in communications, and especially the Internet and World Wide Web. We then examine the ways in which globalization impacts on other mass media, taking film, television, music and newspapers as our case studies, noting how the digital revolution is also transforming these older forms.

» For more on the Internet and mobile phones, see chapter 4, 'Globalization and The Changing World'.

The digital revolution

In his book *Being Digital* (1995), the founder of the media laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Nicholas Negroponte, analyses the profound importance of digital data in current communications technologies. Any piece of information, including pictures, moving images and sounds, can be translated through a binary system into 'bits'. A bit can be a 1 or a 0. For instance, the digital representation of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, is 1, 10, 11, 100, 101, etc. Digitization – and speed – is at the origin of the development of multimedia: what used to be different media needing different technologies (such as visuals and sound) can now be combined on a single medium (such as DVDs and PCs). In recent years the processing power of computers has doubled every 18 months and Internet speeds have become much faster, making it possible to watch films and listen to music via the Internet. Digitization also permits the development of interactive media, allowing individuals actively to participate in, or structure, what they see or hear. In this section we examine the profound impact that this digitization process has had on the mass media.

One of the most fundamental aspects of the media concerns the very infrastructure through which information is communicated and exchanged. Some important technological advances during the second half of the twentieth century have completely transformed the face of telecommunications – the communication of information, sounds or images at a distance through a technological medium.

New communications technologies stand behind profound changes in the world's money systems and stock markets. Money is no longer gold or the cash in your pocket. More and more, money has become electronic, stored in computers in the world's banks. The value of whatever cash you do happen to have in your pocket is determined by the activities of traders on electronically linked money markets. Such markets have been created only over the last few decades, the product of a marriage between computers and satellite communication technology.

Four technological trends have contributed to these developments: first, the constant improvement in the *capabilities of computers*, together with declining costs; second, *digitization of data*, making possible the integration of computer and telecommunications technologies; third, *satellite communications* development; and fourth, *fibre optics*, which allow many different messages to travel down a single small cable. The dramatic communications explosion of recent years shows no signs of slowing down. Indeed, such a rapid pace of development means that our discussion below of digital technologies and their applications and consequences, may well be starting to date by the time you read this book, as new applications are created and the process of digitization continues.

The Internet and the World Wide Web

By the early 1990s, it was clear that the future lay not with the individual personal computer (PC) but with a global system of interconnected computers – the Internet. Although many computer users may not have realized it at the time, the PC was quickly to become little more than a point of access to events happening elsewhere – events happening on a network stretching across the planet, a network that is not owned by any individual or company.

The potential of the Internet for the growth of international political activism is explored in chapter 22, 'Politics, Government and Social Movements'.

The Internet originated during the Cold War period before 1989. The 'Net' developed out of a system used in the Pentagon, the headquarters of the American military, from 1969. This system was first of all

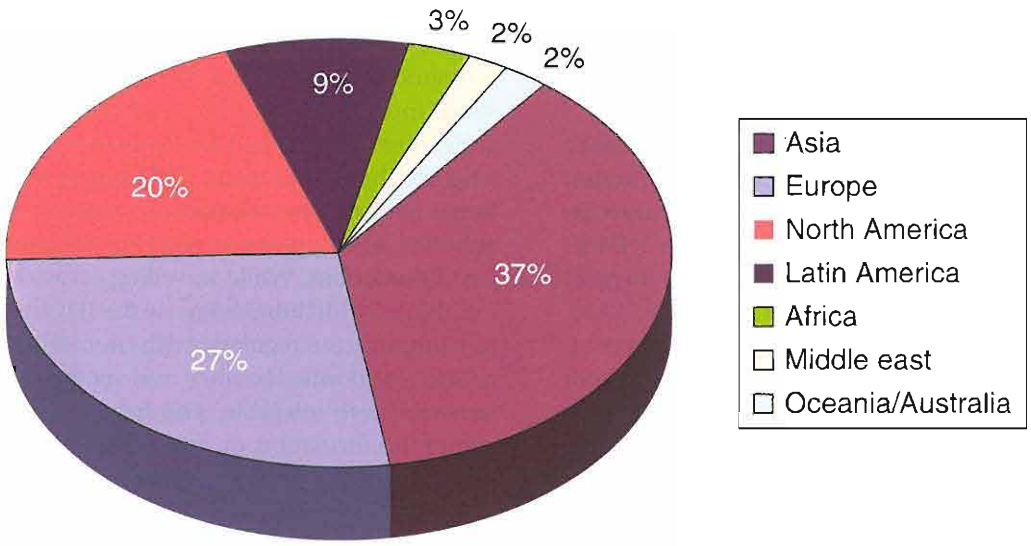


Figure 17.1 Global Internet use, by world region, 2007

Source: Internet World Stats 2007

named the ARPA net, after the Pentagon's Advanced Research Projects Agency. The ARPA sought to allow scientists working on military contracts in different parts of America to pool their resources and to share the expensive equipment they were using. Almost as an afterthought, its originators thought up a way of sending messages too – thus electronic mail, 'email', was born. Until the early 1980s, the Pentagon Internet consisted of 500 computers, all of which were located in military laboratories and university computer science departments. Other people in universities then started catching on, and began using the system for their own purposes. By 1987, the Internet had expanded to include 28,000 host computers, at many different universities and research labs.

The spread of commercial Internet service providers (ISPs) which offered dial-up, and later broadband, access through modems has fuelled the growing proportion of households with online capabilities. Online services, electronic bulletin boards, chatrooms and software libraries were put onto the net by a bewildering variety of people, initially mainly situated in the United States, but now all over the world. Corporations also got in on the act. In 1994 companies overtook universities as the dominant users of the network.

The best-known use of the Internet is the World Wide Web. 'The web' is in effect a global multimedia library. It was invented by a software engineer, Tim Berners-Lee, at a Swiss physics lab in 1990, and the software that popularized it across the world was written by an undergraduate at the University of Illinois. Users generally navigate the web with the help of a 'web browser' – a software program that allows individuals to search for information, locate particular sites or web pages, and mark those pages for future reference. Through the web, it is possible to download a wide variety of documents and programs, from government policy papers to anti-virus software to computer games. Websites have grown in sophistication and many are adorned with intricate graphics

and photographs, or contain video and audio files. The web also serves as the main interface for 'e-commerce' – business transactions conducted online.

With the spread of cheaper home-based personal computers, access to the Internet continues to grow. According to a survey by the UK National Office of Statistics (HMSO 2004), the most common use of the Internet among adults who used it during the previous three months was for email (85 per cent) and finding information about goods or services (82 per cent). The most frequent place of access was the person's own home (82 per cent), followed by their workplace (42 per cent). The survey also found that even in an advanced industrial country like the UK, 37 per cent of adults had *never* used the Internet, a sizeable proportion of the population.

How many people are connected to the Internet globally is not known with any accuracy, but the UN estimated around 10 per cent of the global population were Internet users in 2000. By 2007, this figure had risen to around 18 per cent and it continues to grow. Although user numbers are rising fast, the evidence above shows that Internet access is geographically very uneven. Just 4 per cent of the population of Africa are Internet users, 10 per cent in the Middle East and 12 per cent in Asia, compared with almost 70 per cent in North America, 54 per cent in Australia/Oceania and 40 per cent in Europe (Internet World Stats 2007; see figure 17.2).

The impact of the Internet

In a world of quite stunning technological change, no one can be sure what the future holds. Many see the Internet as exemplifying the new global order emerging at the close of the twentieth century. Exchanges on the Internet take place in the new virtual world of cyberspace. Cyberspace means the space of interaction formed by the global network of computers that compose the Internet. In cyberspace, we cannot know with any certainty details about other people's identity, whether they are male or female, or where in the world they are.

Opinions on the effects of the Internet on social interaction fall into two broad categories. On the one hand are those observers who see the online world as fostering new forms of electronic relationship that either enhance or supplement existing face-to-face interactions. While travelling or working abroad, individuals can use the Internet to communicate regularly with friends and relatives at home. Distance and separation become more tolerable. The Internet also allows the formation of new types of relationship: 'anonymous' online users can meet in 'chatrooms' and discuss topics of mutual interest. These cyber contacts sometimes evolve into fully fledged electronic friendships or even result in face-to-face meetings. Many Internet users become part of lively online communities that are qualitatively different from those they inhabit in the physical world. Scholars who see the Internet as a positive addition to human interaction argue that it expands and enriches people's social networks.

On the other hand, not everyone takes such an enthusiastic outlook. As people spend more and more time communicating online and handling their daily tasks in cyberspace, it may be that they spend less time interacting with one another in the physical world. Some sociologists fear that the spread of Internet technology will lead to increased social isolation and atomization. They argue that one effect of increasing Internet access in households is that people are spending less 'quality time' with their families and friends. The Internet is encroaching on domestic life as the lines between work and home are blurred: many employees continue to work at home after hours – checking email or finishing tasks that they were unable to complete during the day. Human contact is reduced, personal relationships suffer, traditional forms of entertainment such as the theatre and books fall by the wayside, and the fabric of social life is weakened.

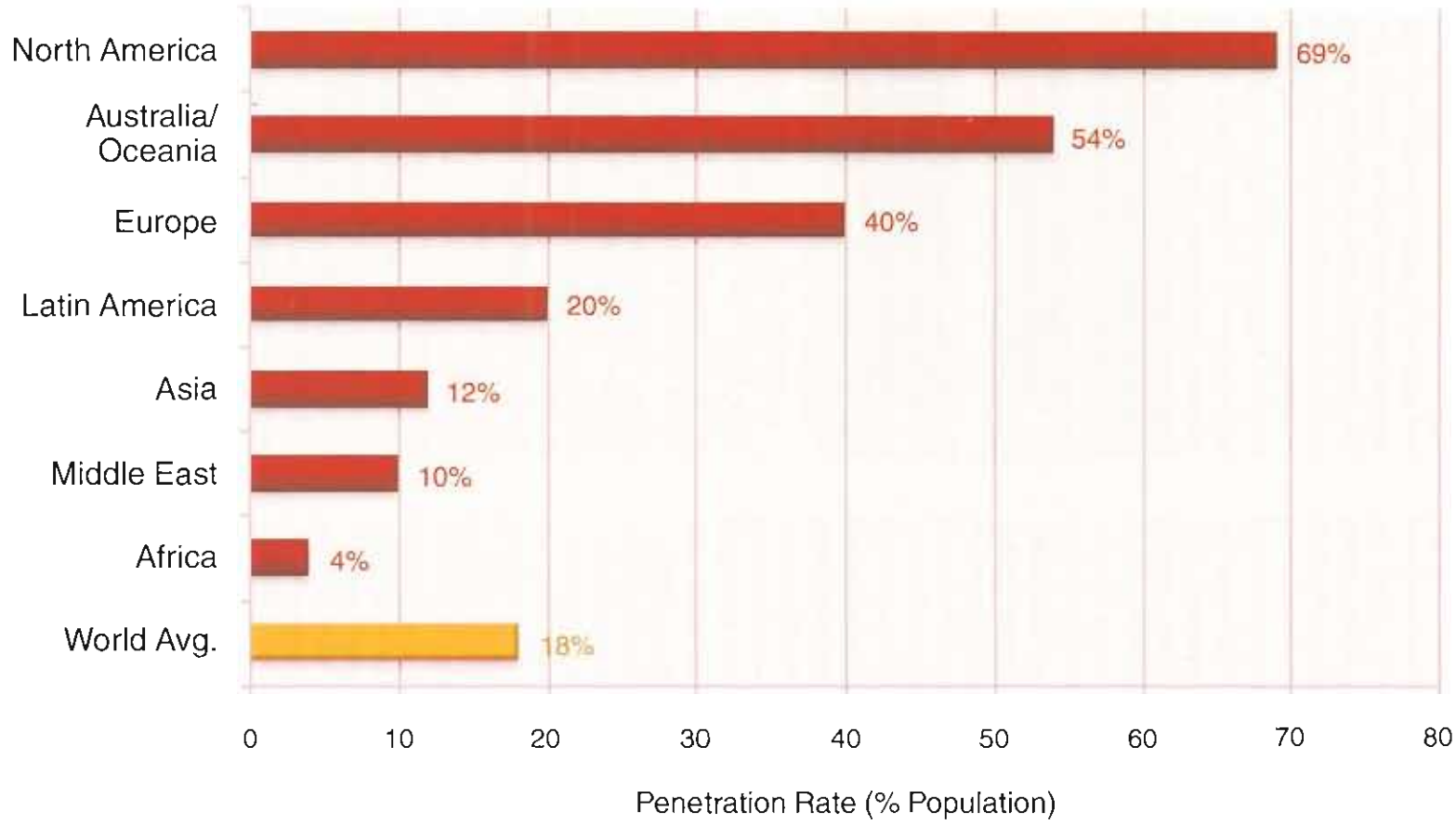


Figure 17.2 Internet penetration by region, 2007

Source: Internet World Stats 2007

In *The Virtual Community* (2000), Howard Rheingold acknowledges both the positive potential of *computer-mediated communications* whilst also accepting that its darker side cannot simply be wished away. Rheingold (2000: 5) is particularly interested in virtual communities, which he defines as, 'social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on . . . public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace'. Rheingold provides an extended description and analysis of a virtual community – a parenting conference – on the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), a computer conferencing system that enables people across the world to engage in open public discussions and to exchange private emails.

Rheingold says that being a part of the WELL is very much like being part of the real physical world, but in disembodied form. Members help each other to solve problems, exchange information and, sometimes, disagree and fall out. As Rheingold says:

> People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind. You can't kiss anybody and nobody can punch you in the nose, but a lot can happen within those boundaries. To the millions who have been drawn into it, the richness and vitality of computer-linked cultures is attractive, even addictive.
> (www.rheingold.com/vc/book/intro.html)

Nevertheless, he also acknowledges the less palatable potential of the Internet. For example, it is possible that the Internet will come to be dominated by business corporations who see members of virtual communities simply as commodities, gathering and selling their details for profit to anyone who wants it. The Internet also offers new opportunities for intensified surveillance and monitoring of the population, which extends state control over people's lives. This 'nightmare vision' owes something to Foucault's ideas on the eighteenth-century Panopticon, a prison design based on the principle of continuous monitoring of prisoners by guards. Rheingold has no magic solutions, but suggests that such criticisms have to be kept in mind by all Internet enthusiasts, who will have to work hard to create a human-centred virtual world.

See chapter 18, 'Organizations and Networks', for a discussion of the Panopticon.

Questions about personal identity, new forms of community and possibilities for democratic participation are discussed in chapter 7, 'Social Interaction and Everyday Life'.

Very similar fears were expressed as television burst onto the media scene. In *The Lonely Crowd* (1961), an influential sociological analysis of American society in the 1950s, David Riesman and his colleagues expressed concern about the effects of TV on family and community life. While some of their fears were well placed, television and the mass media have also enriched the social world in many ways.

Manuel Castells (2001) argues that the Internet will continue to grow because it allows networks to flourish. For Castells, networks are the defining organizational structure of our age. The inherent flexibility and adaptability of networks give them enormous advantages over older types of rational, hierarchical organizations. Castells argues that the Internet gives businesses the capability for global coordination of decentralized and highly complex activities. For individuals, the Internet will enable new combinations of work and self-employment, individual expression, collaboration and sociability, and for political activists it will make it possible for networks of individuals to combine and cooperate and spread

their message around the world. For example, recent social networking sites such as Bebo, MySpace and Facebook, along with video sharing sites such as YouTube, show just how popular web-based communications are becoming for all age groups. Playing on McLuhan's idea that 'the medium is the message', Castells argues that, now, 'the network is the message'.

» Castells' work is discussed in more detail in chapter 18, 'Organizations and Networks'.

THINKING CRITICALLY

How important do you think the Internet is likely to become in the emerging global society? In what ways is it becoming built into the everyday routines of individuals, businesses, workplaces and retailing? On balance, is the Internet a positive development for both individuals and societies?

Film

The first film to be shown to paying customers was in 1895 in Paris, France, where the Lumière brothers' *Arrival of the Train in La Ciotat Station* caused viewers to flee from their seats as the screen slowly filled with an oncoming steam engine heading towards them. While the print media developed slowly over many decades, film and the cinema arrived much faster. The first cinema in the UK opened in 1896 and by 1914 there were more than 500 in London alone. Cinema tickets could be afforded by all classes and the decline in working hours and rise in unemployment in the late 1920s meant the cinema-goers soon formed a mass audience in developed countries.

Audience demands were soon leading cinemas to screen two new programmes a week, each consisting of two films, a B-movie and the main feature. The demand for new films led studios to churn out productions to tight schedules. These films tended to be formulaic and created by bureaucratic organizations with a high degree of specialization and division of labour. As the industry became more commercialized a 'star system' emerged, with studios encouraging interest in the personal lives of actors like Mary Pickford and Rudolf Valentino, whose appearance in a film would ensure a box-office hit.

By 1925, the vast majority of commercially successful films were American in origin. They still are, as table 17.1 demonstrates. Cinemas were increasingly controlled by the American studios, which owned the distribution rights to films. The studios could oblige cinemas to bulk-buy future productions, effectively freezing out competitors. As with the print media, ownership had become largely concentrated amongst a few large corporations. The obvious dominance of American film production raises questions about 'cultural imperialism', as American values, products and culture are promoted through the worldwide distribution of film, especially pronounced in an age of globalization.

There are different ways to assess the globalization of cinema. One is to consider *where* films are produced and the sources of financing that support them. By such criteria, there has unquestionably been a process of globalization in the cinema industry. According to studies by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), many nations possess the capacity to produce films. In the 1980s approximately 25 countries were producing 50 or more films a year, while a small handful of countries – the United States, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and India – led all the others in producing more than 150 films a year (Held et al. 1999).

Another way to assess the globalization of cinema is to consider the extent to which nationally produced films are *exported* to other countries. In the 1920s, when feature films first saw the light of day, Hollywood made four-fifths of all films screened in the world. Today, India, with its growing

Table 17.1 Top-grossing films of all time worldwide at (non-US) box office, 2007

Rank	USA Films	Year	Country of origin	Total gross revenue (US $ millions)
1	*Titanic*	1997	USA	1,235
2	*The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*	2003	USA	752
3	*Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone*	2001	USA	651
4	*Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*	2007	USA	649
5	*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*	2007	USA	642
6	*Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*	2006	USA	637
7	*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*	2002	USA	604
8	*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*	2005	USA	602
9	*The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*	2002	USA	581
10	*Jurassic Park*	1993	USA	563
	Non-USA films			
69	*Spirited Away*	2001	Japan	254
90	*Howl's Moving Castle*	2004	Japan	227
103	*The Full Monty*	1997	UK	211
106	*Bridget Jones's Diary*	2001	UK	210
125	*Four Weddings and a Funeral*	1994	UK	191

Source: Internet Movie Database 2007

Bollywood film productions, produces more films than any other country (more than 1,100 per year), with the United States next (with around 800 per year). However, many Indian films are not shown internationally and although governments of many countries provide subsidies to aid their own film industries, the USA continues to be the largest exporter of film (Hong Kong is the second largest and hence exerts more influence in the global cinema industry. As table 17.1 shows, the top-grossing films of all time at the international (non-US) box office were all US films. In 2003, for instance, US films dominated the UK box office, accounting for almost 62 per cent of takings; films solely originating in the UK, by contrast, accounted for just 2.5 per cent of money taken (UK Film Council, 2003).

Hollywood studios generate well over half of their revenues from the overseas distribution of films. In an effort to increase the size of foreign audiences further, these studios are involved in building multiplex cinemas around the world. Global box office revenues are forecast to rise to $25.6 billion (£14 billion) by 2010, nearly double the 1995 total, as the audiences increase. The spread of video and more recently DVD players has also increased the number of people across the world who are now able regularly to watch films.

Television

The interaction between television and the audience is different from that between the cinema and its audience. Television enters the household in a way that the cinema cannot and does not demand the same level of attention that film does. Television also has an immediacy which film does not: it can report events, as in the attacks in the USA in September 2001, from almost anywhere in the world to a mass audience as they happen.

Bollywood – one part of the Indian cinema industry – produces more films than Hollywood and about a billion more tickets a year are sold for Indian films than for Hollywood blockbusters. Yet US films are still better known around the world and can take in about fifty times as much revenue.

The number of television sets in the developed countries and the amount of time that people spend viewing them increased dramatically from the 1950s onwards. If current trends in TV watching continue, the average child born today will have spent more time watching television by the age of 18 than in any other activity except sleep. Virtually every household now possesses a TV set. Most people will watch television at some point every day and the average set is switched on for between three and six hours per day. Individuals aged 4 and over in the UK watch an average of 25 hours of television a week. Older people watch more than twice as much television as children, perhaps because they are not in school and go to bed later in the evening, and people from lower social classes watch more than those from the top three social classes (see figure 17.3 for UK figures).

Television and social life

Television has become ubiquitous and is now so ingrained into the routines of everyday life, that most people now simply take it for granted as a constitutive part of social life as such. We watch TV, talk about programmes with friends and family and organize our leisure time around TV schedules. The 'box in the corner' is switched on whilst we get on with other things and appears to provide an essential backdrop to out lives. As Roger Silverstone explains:

> Television accompanies us as we wake up, as we breakfast, as we have our tea and as we drink in bars. It comforts us when we are alone. It helps us sleep. It gives us

Figure 17.3 Number of hours of television viewed, by age group, 2002–6, UK

Source: Ofcom, *Public Service Broadcasting: Annual Report*, March 2007

> pleasure, it bores us and sometimes it challenges us. It provides us with opportunities to be both sociable and solitary. Although, of course, it was not always so and although we have had to learn how to incorporate the medium into out lives we now take television entirely for granted. (1994: 3)

It is the way that television contributes to people's emotional and cognitive needs, and assists in designing the routines and habits that create a stronger sense of trust in others, or 'ontological security' (Giddens 1991), that helps to explain its all-pervading existence. However, none of this means that the dominant position of TV is inevitable or unassailable; the technological dimension of television does not determine its social and cultural reception. As 'Using your sociological imagination 17.1' shows, young people's everyday routines and habits today may well be significantly different from those of their parents, with significant consequences for the medium of television.

Several media theorists have been highly critical about the effects of a seemingly ever-increasing diet of television: two influential accounts have been provided by Robert Putnam's work on social capital and Neil Postman (1931–2003), in his tellingly titled *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (1986).

To Postman, television presents serious issues as entertainment because, in his phrase, 'the form excludes the content'. By this, he means that television as 'the form' is a medium that is incapable of sustaining serious 'content'. For Postman, rational argument is best carried on in the form of the printed word, which is capable of sustaining complex and serious content. He harks back to the nineteenth century as an 'age of reason', when the written word was dominant. Postman's argument contains some similarities with Marshall McLuhan's claim that 'the medium is the message', although Postman is much more sceptical than McLuhan about the benefits of electronic media. To Postman, the medium of print creates a rational population, whereas the medium of television creates an entertained one. In a society dominated by the television, news, education and politics are all reduced to entertainment, so that we are, as the title of his book indicates, doing nothing more than 'amusing ourselves to death'.

In a similar vein, Robert Putnam (1995) has argued that in the USA, the significant decline in social capital – mutual obligations and trust – correlates pretty well with the rise of the television. In 1950, around the time measures of social capital peaked, barely 10 per cent of Americans had a television set; by 1959, this figure had risen to 90 per cent. Taking other facts into consideration, such as

education, age and gender, TV viewing is strongly and negatively related to social trust and group membership. Using the same criteria, the correlation of newspaper reading to social trust and group membership is positive. One reason Putnam suggests for why TV viewing erodes social capital is the effect of programme content on viewers. For example, studies suggest that heavy watchers of TV are unusually sceptical about the benevolence of other people – by overestimating crime rates for example. Putnam concludes: 'Just as the erosion of the ozone layer was detected only many years after the proliferation of the chlorofluorocarbons that caused it, so too the erosion of America's social capital became visible only several decades after the underlying process had begun' (1995).

However, in recent years, the evidence is growing that television watching habits are changing, particularly amongst young people, as 'on-demand' services become more popular, Internet use increases and video sharing websites such as YouTube provide new, interactive ways of viewing. Many of the new social networking websites such as MySpace and Facebook, which have grown enormously in recent years, may also show that Putnam's thesis is too pessimistic. There is some evidence that young people are beginning to abandon the relatively passive medium of television in favour of more interactive media. If so, then this is highly likely to lead to changes in television production and output as well.

» Putnam's thesis on the decline of social capital is examined in more detail in chapter 18, 'Organizations and Networks'.

On the other hand, Sonia Livingstone and Moira Bovill's (1999) survey of children's media use in the UK – the first such survey for 40 years – found a developing 'bedroom culture' in the UK, with two out of three working-class children and 54 per cent of middle-class children having a TV in their bedroom. By contrast, in other parts of Europe, TV ownership by children is much lower. In the UK, 72 per cent of working-class and 61 per cent of middle-class children also had a TV-linked games machine and young people spent around five hours a day using various media, with TV being the form they would 'miss most', taking up around half of their media time. By contrast, 55 per cent of children had a home PC with just 7 per cent using the Internet. Twice as many boys (16 per cent) as girls had a PC in their bedroom and just 2 per cent of working-class children had Internet access at home, compared with 14 per cent of middle-class children.

The Internet generated some initial excitement as a means of establishing 'pen-pal' type relationships in other countries, but young people reported much frustration at the difficulties involved in accessing useful information and said it was expensive. Books fared even worse; they were seen as boring, old-fashioned and not trendy, and required too much effort – the sort of things 'your parents approve of'. Much has happened in the ten years since this report, of course, not least the continuing growth in the number of Internet users and the expansion of PC and mobile phone ownership. However, the continuing popularity of TV, the researchers suggest, appears to be rooted in its ability to provide a broad range of 'gratifications': 'excitement', to overcome boredom, for relaxation and to overcome the threat of feeling 'left out'.

THINKING CRITICALLY

Think of your own TV viewing habits. Where do you watch TV? Do you do other things while 'watching' and if so, what? How do you see your viewing habits changing in the next few years? What could TV executives do to make their programmes more attractive to young people?

Digital television

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, television broadcasting technology has been undergoing a revolution, with the

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

17.1: The threat of young viewers turning off?

Broadcasting body says that fewer of us are watching TV, and those that do are not giving it their full attention. Predictions of television's demise may be as commonplace as faked TV phone-ins these days, but when the UK's Royal Television Society warns that viewing habits are changing, it is time for executives to take notice.

The RTS, whose members include every major broadcaster, has commissioned research from OC&C Consultants, which shows that young people in particular are switching off in huge numbers. It found that the under-30s now watch 40 per cent of their 'television' by downloading it over the Internet or viewing it 'on demand' rather than watching it as it is broadcast. More than 10 per cent of viewing by young people is already online, with the youngest groups (under 24) spending the most time on the Internet.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, 73 per cent of the under-30s surveyed are using the Internet more than they did three years ago, and 43 per cent of them are watching less TV. The number of viewers engaging in other activities while they tune in seems to be higher than previously estimated: 81 per cent of under-30s do something else while watching TV; among 15–17-year-olds, the figure is 86 per cent. That suggests that TV is not getting 100 per cent of younger viewers' attention, which could worry advertisers, who pay a premium based on an assumption that they do, according to OC&C.

Young viewers typically use social networking sites or talk on the phone while the TV is on rather than using 'competing forms of entertainment' like a PC console or radio. Fewer people under 30 – 71 per cent – do other activities while using the Internet, although 86 per cent of 15–17-year-olds do so.

The younger the viewer, the more likely they are to complain about the number of repeats, soaps and reality shows, and they moan that there are too many adverts. But it's not all bad news. While most people say having children made them consume less TV, moving in with a partner boosts consumption: those who marry or cohabit spend

Are young people deserting television for more interactive media?

35 per cent of their free time in front of the box. More importantly, older age groups still watch the way their parents did: on the sofa.

It also seems likely that greater choice encourages more viewing, which is good news for broadcasters as the number of homes with multi-channel access increases. By 2012, when the analogue signal is due to be turned off, every household will have digital TV. The research found that under-30s who already have a bigger choice of channels are viewing more TV than their peers.

Under-30s with Freeview, Sky or Cable watch 5 per cent more TV than those with terrestrial only, and ownership of a personal video recorder like Sky Plus or Tivo increases viewing by 7 per cent. Under-30s with multi-channel TV also express greater satisfaction with the programmes on offer.

What can broadcasters and programme-makers do to accentuate this trend, besides boosting their presence on the Internet or posting clips on YouTube? One answer is to create shorter content that is easier to consume online and many broadcasters are starting to experiment with this.

'The industry should be very worried indeed about teenage viewing habits in particular', claims OC&C director Paul Zwillenberg. 'If they don't respond they won't be able to deliver eyeballs to their advertisers. There has been a dramatic and rapid shift in the media consumption habits of under-20s and they need to start doing today what they should have done yesterday but plan to do tomorrow. They've got to throw away the old commissioning handbook and use all the platforms out there.' Reports of TV's demise may be exaggerated, but it must evolve in order to survive.

Source: Observer, 30 September 2007

transfer of programme transmission from analogue to digital. Analogue TV is the 'old' system of broadcasting that has been used to transmit signals to television sets around the country since the 1940s. It converts sound and pictures into waves, which are transmitted through the air and picked up by the aerial on the roof of the house or on top of the television.

Digital TV works by transforming pictures and sound into information that is understood by a computer. Digital transmissions are received in three ways: through the TV aerial and a decoder (often a set-top box), via a satellite dish or via cable. The television acts like a computer and converts this information back into pictures and sound. Broadcasters and service providers argue that digital television not only means more channels, but also a better quality of sound and pictures and additional services. Digital TV offers the possibility of, for instance, interactive television, the Internet, home shopping and home banking. The arrival of digital TV has also created the possibility of single units that merge the personal computer with the television, although these are not yet widely in use.

Once digital take-up has reached a tipping point, the transmission of television on analogue frequencies is expected to stop and has already been agreed in the USA and UK. All transmissions from then on will be digital and this will mark the end of a particular stage in the history and development of television. The number of television channels available has been increasing massively as a result of advances in satellite, cable and digital technology. It is now not unusual to see digital service providers offering monthly subscription packages that give viewers the choice of a staggering 200+ TV and radio channels. Analogue TV in the UK offered just five. Such an increase in digital output offers many more opportunities for TV content providers and, crucially, for

THINKING CRITICALLY

'The introduction of digital television genuinely represents more choice for viewers.' In what ways do you think this statement can be said to be true? What evidence and arguments are there, which suggest that this 'choice' is illusory rather than real?

advertisers, while the advent of pay-per-view and monthly subscriptions is likely vastly to increase the amount that consumers spend on television watching in the future. Of course, the originality, creativity and quality of what they will be watching is another matter entirely.

Music

Music is as old as human societies and its use within societies pre-dates the development of complex languages. The first music is assumed to have come from the human voice, with instruments developing later along with different forms of material culture. Some of the oldest musical instruments have been found in parts of India and China and some of the earliest functional uses of music were within religious rituals and practices. But as these rituals and practices have tended to diminish in modern societies, music has continued to flourish.

Theodore Adorno (1976) of the Frankfurt School of critical theory agued that musical forms tend to reflect the society within which they exist.

» See chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives in Sociology', for discussion of this school.

Many musical forms in capitalist societies, for example, take on predictable structures and offer an easy gratification. They train people to expect uniformity and repetition, and require little effort on the part of listeners to be enjoyed. In his own time, Adorno saw jazz and other popular music as guilty of this. However, although music can promote conformity, it can also foster critical enlightenment and is therefore, at least potentially, an active force in social life. Some forms of 'progressive' music (such as the experimental music of Schoenberg) defy standard musical conventions and, in 'breaking the rules', challenge people's assumptions and force them to think more critically.

Like Adorno, music theorist Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1985), argues that music holds up a mirror to society as its social organization and forms reflect society's own mode of organization. For example, in industrialized societies, music is listened to primarily as recordings, via vinyl records, cassette tapes and, latterly, CDs. Music's hallmark in such societies is therefore repetitive mass production and the erosion of difference. Music becomes background noise in supermarkets, railway stations, restaurants and many other public and private spaces. Echoing Max Weber's comments on music in the bureaucratic age, Attali notes that this endless repetition of recorded music reflects the industrial society that enabled it, which tends to produce uniform products.

However, Attali's thesis goes one step further. He argues that music not only *mirrors* social organization, it also carries a *prophecy* of the future. Music can do this, he says, because musicians rapidly explore and exhaust all the possibilities within a given code (the 'rules of the game', as it were) much more quickly than other forms of cultural output. Music is not bound so much to material things such as projectors or TV sets, but can be passed on and change more quickly. As musical organization is pushed to its internal limits, it is forced to break the bounds of the existing system in order to continue moving forward. An example would be the current battles over downloading and free sharing of copyrighted music. The commercial element of music-making is now desperately struggling to keep pace with an emergent form of music, which continually pushes and breaks the existing commercial 'rules of the game'.

What Attali saw emerging from industrialized music was a form of music-making based on the erosion of boundaries between the composer, the performer and the audience. Instead, people were starting to make music for their own and their friends' pleasure, with little or no commercial motivation. Music was becoming, once again, localized and made for smaller

communities of people. The paradox of Attali's argument is that the movement towards the localization of music is occurring at a time when we seem to be caught up in a much more rapid globalization of the world's societies.

In contrast to such large-scale social structural theories, the 1970s and '80s saw the emergence of a new approach, known as the 'production of culture' perspective (Peterson 1976; Becker 1982). Here, music and other cultural products are viewed as social activities that have to be analysed in relation to the processes and contexts in which they are produced.

For example, Peterson and Berger (1975) studied pop music by looking at 'Number 1' hits in the USA between 1948 and 1973, comparing the number of performers and lyrics. They found that competition between large and small recording companies in the production of music was a key factor in explaining innovations in pop music. In periods of high market concentration (when just four companies produced some 75 per cent of all hit singles), there was little innovation because there was no need to look for novelty or to introduce new products. However, as the large companies lost their monopoly on radio promotion of music and smaller companies were able to gain a foothold, innovation increased. What Peterson and Berger were able to show through their careful analysis of how pop music is *actually produced* (the production of culture) is that innovation and increasing diversity in pop music *followed* changes in market concentration, they did not lead it. Thus, musical innovations in pop music were less to do with creative individual genius or powerful consumers demanding new music and more to do with the prevailing conditions of the music industry, within which pop music was being produced (see also Negus 1999).

This culture of production approach opened the way for more empirical studies of music in society. For example, Tia Denora's *Music in Everyday Life* (2000) is an empirical study that adopts an interactionist approach to explore the way individuals use music in the construction of the self and personal experience. But music is not only something to be used, she argues, it can also influence people's actions in use. For instance, a routine car journey to the shops can easily become a secondary aim to listening to music on the car radio. Hearing a particular opening chord or melody can reorientate people's actions, turning them away from their previous course.

Denora argues that people often behave rather like disc jockeys to their own selves, choosing music to create or change their mood and to alter the way they experience social life. And though sociology has lagged behind other disciplines, such as psychology, in the academic study of music, Denora argues that music is, 'a dynamic material, a medium for making, sustaining and changing social worlds and activities' (2000: x), though this cannot be understood in the abstract and has to be explored within the different contexts in which music is used. In this way, empirical studies could bring together the structural sociological theories of music and individual experience of it, to enhance our understanding of music's 'social powers'. Denora's own book is based on in-depth interviews with women in the USA and UK and participant observation of 'music in action' in an aerobics class, karaoke evenings and music therapy sessions in retail settings, but it also contributes to theories of music in society.

Globalization and the digitization of music

As David Held and colleagues have noted in their investigation into the globalization of media and communications, 'the musical form is one that lends itself to globalization more effectively than any other' (1999: 351). This is because music is able to transcend the limitations of written and spoken language to reach and appeal to a mass audience. The global music industry, dominated by a small number of multinational

corporations, has been built on its ability to find, produce, market and distribute the musical abilities of thousands of artists to audiences around the world. The growth of technology – from personal stereo systems to music television (such as MTV) to the compact disc – have provided newer, more sophisticated ways for music to be distributed globally. Over recent decades, an 'institutional complex' of companies has developed as part of the global marketing and distribution of music.

The global industry in recorded music is one of the most concentrated. The four largest firms – Universal (which absorbed PolyGram in 1998), Time Warner, Sony BMG and EMI – control between 80 and 90 per cent of all music sales internationally (Herman and McChesney 1997). Until January 2000, when it announced a merger with Time Warner, EMI was the only company among the top five that was not part of a larger media conglomerate. The global music industry experienced substantial growth during the mid-1990s, with sales in developing countries particularly strong, prompting many of the top companies to sign up more local artists in anticipation of further market growth.

However, the music industry has been challenged by the arrival of the Internet, which allows users to (illegally) share music for free more easily and extensively than before and to produce and disseminate their own music without the need for large media corporations and marketing drives. This is the kind of development that Attali (1985) forecast would become much more common.

THINKING CRITICALLY

How significant a challenge do you think Internet downloads and file-sharing are likely to be to the mainstream music industry? Are Held and colleagues right to say that music 'lends itself to globalization' more than other media? Why should that be so?

The growth of the global music industry in the post-war period has been due primarily to the success of popular music – originating mainly in America and Britain – and the spread of the youth cultures and subcultures that identify with it (Held et al. 1999). Processes of globalization have therefore been one of the main forces in the diffusion of American and British styles and music genres to international audiences. The USA and the UK are the world leaders in the export of popular music, with other countries having much lower levels of domestic music production. While some critics argue that the domination of the music industry by these two countries undermines the success of local musical sounds and traditions, it is important to remember that globalization is a contested concept. The growing popularity of 'world music' – such as the phenomenal success of Latin-inspired sounds in the United States – shows that globalization may lead to cultural diffusion in more than one direction.

Although the music industry is becoming ever more concentrated in the hands of a few international conglomerates, some observers think that it is the most vulnerable link within the 'culture industry'. This is because the Internet allows music to be shared and downloaded digitally, rather than purchased from local music stores. The global music industry is currently mainly comprised of a complex network of factories, distribution chains, music shops and sales staff. If the Internet removes the need for all these elements by allowing music to be marketed and downloaded directly, what will be left of the music industry? Jacques Attali, whose ideas were discussed above, has argued that the increasing battles over illegal downloading and free sharing of music are a sign of things to come, as the mass production and consumption system of industrialized music begins to break down.

But the music industry is attempting to come to terms with the effects of digitization. Global music sales have been falling, with

annual record sales down from $40 billion (£22 billion) to $30 billion (£17 billion) between 2000 and 2004. The sector has undergone large-scale redundancies and has been forced to restructure. Many in the music industry claim that the swapping of music files, such as MP3s, over the Internet is one of the major causes of this loss of revenue. Research by the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) found that eight million people in the UK claim to be downloading music, 92 per cent of them using illegal sites (BBC 2004c). Although attempts are being made to impose tight controls on the replication of legally purchased music, the pace of technological change is eclipsing the ability of the industry to curtail piracy.

One case that attracted much attention in 2000 was the Napster case. Napster is a software program that allows people to trade files over the Internet – including music copied to files on other sharers' computers. The record industry filed several lawsuits against the small company behind Napster, eventually forcing it to stop providing the file-sharing software. However, since the victory over Napster the music industry has had mixed fortunes in its court actions against the companies that support file-swapping on the Internet. In 2003, a US judge ruled that two file-swapping networks, Grokster and Morpheus, were not responsible for the legal status of files traded on their systems, but the legal battle continues.

As well as attacking the companies that create file-sharing software, the music industry has also taken action against individual computer users. In 2004, the BPI issued a statement claiming it would sue individual music fans who swapped song files over the Internet. This follows similar action by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), which by 2004 had sued more than 5,700 downloaders. In 2003, the RIAA took action against a college student in Michigan, USA, who ran a network offering more than 650,000 files – the equivalent of more than 43,000 albums (BBC 2004c).

The music industry has also begun to adapt to the challenges of the Internet by offering *legal* download services. The downloading is legal because royalties are paid on the songs to record labels and artists. The Internet has seen a large increase, catalysed by the advent of the portable MP3 player, particularly Apple's iPod, and by the rise in the number of online companies offering songs that can be legally purchased and downloaded. By the end of 2004, more than 125 million legal downloads of songs had been purchased and an official 'music download chart' had been established. After initial rejection of the Internet by the music industry, by the mid-2000s its successful adaptation to selling music through legal downloading was perceived by many in the industry to be crucial to its future (BBC 2004b).

Newspapers

The development of the press during the nineteenth century occurred at a time of political and social unrest in Europe. The UK government, for example, exerted its control over the emerging newspaper industry through strict laws on libel and sedition, which prevented political agitation; at the same time, a stamp tax was imposed to ensure that newspapers were only affordable by the well off. The stamp tax had unintended consequences, as illegal and inexpensive pamphlets emerged, spreading radical views amongst the newly industrial working class. The biggest of these pamphlets, such as William Cobbett's weekly *Political Register*, outsold the official, 'stamped' press many times over (Hall et al. 1982).

The stamp tax – condemned by its opponents as a 'tax on knowledge' – was finally repealed in 1855 after a series of reductions, leading many writers to hail a golden era of British journalism marked by a 'transition from official to popular control' (Koss 1973). An alternative view was put forward by James Curran and Jean Seaton

Despite the prevalence of digital media in today's society, newspapers remain extremely popular.

who challenged this view in their historical account of the British press, *Power Without Responsibility* (2003). They argue that the repeal of the stamp tax was an attempt to break the popularity of the radical press and to boost the sales of more 'respectable' newspapers. For Curran and Seaton, the repeal of the stamp tax did not introduce a new era of press freedom, but a time of repression and ideological control, this time by market forces rather than government.

The newspaper was a fundamentally important development in the history of modern media, because it packaged many different types of information in a limited and easily reproducible format. Newspapers contained in a single package information on current affairs, entertainment and consumer goods. The cheap daily press was pioneered in the United States with the 'one-cent daily' paper in New York. The invention of cheap newsprint was the key to the mass diffusion of newspapers from the late nineteenth century onwards.

Curran and Seaton have noted that extra revenue from advertising enabled the cover prices to fall dramatically during this period, making the newspaper affordable for all. They also argue that advertising undermined the radical press as advertisers tended to place announcements in papers to which they were politically sympathetic, and to select papers with a smaller circulation and a wealthy readership, rather than radical papers with a higher circulation which sold to readers who would be unlikely to afford the product advertised.

By the early twentieth century, ownership of much of the UK newspaper industry was concentrated amongst a handful of

rich entrepreneurs. By the 1930s, Lords Beaverbrook, Camrose, Kemsley and Rothermere owned 50 per cent of British national and local daily papers and 30 per cent of the Sunday papers. Critics have argued that the 'press barons', as they became known, used their ownership of national newspapers to promote their own political causes and ambitions (Curran and Seaton 2003).

For half a century or more, newspapers were the chief way of conveying information quickly and comprehensively to a mass public. But their influence has waned with the rise of radio, cinema and – much more important – television and, increasingly, the Internet. Figures for newspaper readership suggest that the proportion of people who read a national daily paper in Britain has declined since the early 1980s. Among men, the proportion of daily newspaper readers dropped from 76 per cent in 1981 to 60 per cent in 1998–9; readership levels are somewhat lower among women, but a similar drop – from 68 per cent to 51 per cent – has taken place (HMSO 2000).

Newspapers, particularly the tabloid press, have become less focused on providing news and more oriented towards reporting, creating and sustaining modern celebrity culture (Cashmore 2006). The role of newspapers and television in creating a climate in which celebrity culture can flourish alerts us to what some sociologists have called, following the 'production of culture' approach (discussed below), the 'celebrity industry' (Turner 2004). But what is a celebrity? In the early 1960s, Daniel Boorstin (1961: 58) noted that 'the celebrity is a person who is well known for their well-knownness'. Although many celebrities today are film stars or sportspeople, they may be known more for their media personalities and private lives than for their achievements. Others become celebrities just by regularly making it into magazines and newspapers (Paris Hilton) or appearing on television (*Big Brother* and other reality show contestants).

THINKING CRITICALLY

Do you think that paper-based newspapers will survive the Internet revolution? How could the newspaper business change, what new practices could it adopt, to maximize its opportunities of gaining and holding on to readers? What does the decline in newspaper sales tell us about recent social change?

Of course, the production of celebrity culture in newspapers and on television requires an appreciative and demanding audience. As consumers, we also participate in the production of celebrity culture and we do it in knowing ways (Gamson 1994). We know that many of our celebrities have no major achievements to offer and that their fame will probably be short-lived. When we get bored with them, we simply move on to the next one. In this way, celebrities have become commodities for our consumption – not literally, but via their representations in the mass media. Nonetheless, despite the apparent public addiction to celebrity, the decline in newspaper sales seems to indicate that celebrity news, in itself, will not be enough to insulate the paper-based newspaper industry from its media competitors.

Indeed, online communication might well bite further into newspaper circulation. News information and celebrity gossip is now available online via numerous websites almost instantaneously and is constantly updated during the course of the day. Many newspapers themselves can also be accessed and read online free of charge to consumers. In the longer term it would seem that the age of paper-based newspapers may be drawing to a close, but newspaper companies are already diversifying their output into new media forms in order to survive.

Theorizing the media

In this section we examine four influential theoretical approaches to the study of the mass media: functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism and recent postmodern media theory. As we will see, there are widely divergent views on the role and functions of the media within societies and our fourfold categorization here is not an exhaustive one in the field of Media Studies.

Functionalism

In the mid-twentieth century, functionalist theorists such as Charles Wright (1960) focused on the ways in which the media helps to integrate and bind societies together. Following the media theorist Denis McQuail (2000), we can identify several important social functions of the media that may work to stabilize the social system.

1 *Information* The media provides us with a continuous flow of information about our society and the world, from webcams and radio reports alerting us to traffic jams, to rolling weather reports, the stock market and news stories about issues that might affect us personally.
2 *Correlation* The media explains, and helps us to understand the meaning of the information it gives us. In this way the media provides support for established social norms and has an important role in the socialization of children, providing a shared framework for the interpretation of events.
3 *Continuity* The media has a certain function in expressing the dominant culture, recognizing new social developments and forging common values.
4 *Entertainment* The media provides amusement, a diversion from the rigours of work and acts to reduce social tensions. This is essentially the function of a release valve for society, allowing people to set aside their problems and conflicts, at least temporarily.
5 *Mobilization* The media can be used to encourage people to contribute to economic development, to support and uphold moral rules and to mobilize the population in times of war. This can be through very direct public campaigns, but also in much more subtle ways, such as the moral tales within soap operas or films, for example.

In recent decades, functionalist theories of the media – along with the functionalist approach in general – have fallen into decline. There are several reasons why sociologists have moved decisively away from functionalism. First, the theory appears to do little more than describe the media's current roles rather than explaining why they are necessary. Second, functionalist accounts have had little or nothing to say about the audience reception of media products, tending to assume that people are relatively passive recipients, rather than active interpreters of media messages. Third, the functions above appear wholly positive, but others have seen the media as a much less benign force within societies. In particular, conflict approaches influenced by Marxism see the modern mass media as destructive of society's cultural vitality.

» Functionalism was introduced in chapter 1, 'What is Sociology?', and discussed in chapter 3, 'Theories and Perspectives in Sociology'.

Conflict theories

In Europe, conflict approaches to the mass media have had more impact than functionalism. Below, we look at two of the most important theories of the media from a broadly Marxist standpoint: the political economy approach, which concentrates on the ownership and control of media forms, and the 'culture industry' approach of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. The important research of the Glasgow Media

USING YOUR SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

17.2 Media bias in the Iraq dossier affair?

To rally support for [the 2003 Iraq] war, the Prime Minister's office published a dossier of charges against Iraq in September 2002. It claimed, among other things, that Iraq could deploy weapons of mass destruction (WMD) within 45 minutes.

Yet with no WMD used by Iraqi forces in the ensuing war and none found, the dossier's veracity came under suspicion. One of its allegations, which George Bush made part of his 2003 state-of-the-union address, was discredited by intelligence sources. Then, in June 2003, a BBC journalist accused Alistair Campbell, Tony Blair's chief spin-doctor, of having 'sexed up' the dossier against the wishes of Britain's security services (in particular, inserting the '45-minute' claim).

A parliamentary investigation cleared Mr Campbell of this charge (he resigned in August 2003). But the BBC refused to back down, sparking a furious row with the government. This took a tragic turn when a government scientist [Dr David Kelly], who'd been exposed as the main source of the BBC's story, committed suicide. An inquiry into his death, which reported in January 2004, cleared the government of 'sexing up' the dossier and largely – but not wholly – vindicated the scientist's employers, the Defence Ministry. Criticism was instead heaped on the BBC, prompting the resignations of its director-general and chairman of governors.

A related inquiry into intelligence failures, headed by Lord Butler, in July 2004 cleared the government of any deliberate attempt to mislead Parliament. But it did suggest that Mr Blair was prepared to exaggerate what turned out to be fairly thin evidence to bolster the case for a war.

Source: © *The Economist* Newspaper Limited, London, 5 April 2005

Group is also rooted in Marxist theory and is discussed below.

Political economy approaches

Political economy approaches view the media as an industry and examine the way in which the major means of communication have come to be owned by private interests. The ownership of the media has often been concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy media magnates. In the era of mass newspaper readership for example, a few so-called 'press barons' owned a majority of the pre-war press in many countries and were able to set the agenda for news and its interpretation. In our increasingly global age, the ownership of media crosses national borders and media magnates now own transnational media corporations, giving them international recognition and influence. Perhaps the best known of these is Australian-born Rupert Murdoch, the owner of Sky Digital, Fox Broadcasting Company and other media institutions.

Advocates of a political economy view argue that, as in other industries, economic interests in media ownership work to exclude those voices that lack economic power. Moreover, the voices that *do* survive are those that are least likely to criticize the prevailing distribution of wealth and power (Golding and Murdock 1997). This view was famously advanced by the American linguist and radical writer Noam Chomsky, in *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievement of Propaganda* (1991). Chomsky is

THINKING CRITICALLY

What does the Iraq dossier episode tell us, if anything, about bias in the media? In times of war and conflict, is it the job of a public service broadcaster like the BBC to support the government or to be critical of it? As a non-commercial company, who should the BBC ultimately be responsible to, TV licence payers or the government of the day?

highly critical of the dominance of large corporations over the American and global media, which results in the tight control of information provided to the public. During the Cold War, for example, these corporations controlled information to create a climate of fear in the West about the Soviet Union. Since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Chomsky argues that the corporately owned media have exaggerated fears of global terrorism, which prevents the airing of other issues that are, arguably, more significant such as the unaccountability of corporations or the lack of democracy from being properly discussed. Chomsky sees the mass media as disseminating propaganda in support of the ruling groups in society.

Ideology and bias in the media

The study of the media is closely related to the impact of ideology in society. Ideology refers to the influence of ideas on people's beliefs and actions. The concept has been widely used in media studies, as well as in other areas of sociology, but it has also long been controversial. The word was first coined by a French writer, Destutt de Tracy, in the late 1700s. He used it to refer to a 'science of ideas', which he thought would be a branch of knowledge. De Tracy's view has been seen as a 'neutral' conception of ideology. Neutral conceptions discuss phenomena as being ideological, but this does not imply they are misleading or biased in favour of particular social classes or groups.

In the hands of later authors, however, 'ideology' was used in a more critical way. Karl Marx, for example, saw ideology as important in the reproduction of relations of class domination. Powerful groups are able to control the dominant ideas circulating in a society so as to justify their own position. Thus, according to Marx, religion is often ideological: it teaches the poor to be content with their lot. The social analyst should uncover the distortions of ideology so as to allow the powerless to gain a true perspective on their lives – and take action to improve their conditions of life. Critical notions of ideology 'convey a negative, critical or pejorative sense' and carry within them 'an implicit criticism or condemnation' (Thompson 1990: 53–4).

John Thompson argues that the critical notion is to be preferred, because it links ideology with power. Ideology is about the exercise of symbolic power – how ideas are used to hide, justify or legitimate the interests of dominant groups in the social order. In their studies, members of the Glasgow Media Group (discussed in the 'Classic Studies 17.1') in effect, analyse the ideological aspects of TV news reporting and how it systematically generates bias. For example, when reporting on industrial disputes, news reports tend to favour government and management at the expense of striking workers. In general, Thompson argues that mass media – including not only the news but also all varieties of programme content and genre – greatly expand the scope of ideology in modern societies. They reach mass audiences and are, in his terms, based on 'quasi-interaction' – that is, audiences cannot answer back in a direct way.

In media and communication studies, a particular type of analysis – discourse analysis – has been widely used in the study of media products. Discourse analysts begin from the premise that language is a fundamental part of social life which is related to all other aspects and, in that sense, all social science has to take account of language and its use (Fairclough 1992). Discourse analysis is used to examine texts of many kinds, though there are different versions of it (van Dijk 1997). For example, some studies engage in a detailed analysis of texts and documents, while others, drawing on Foucault's ideas, connect texts to social theories of society, exploring the way that discourses construct and shape social life itself. Fairclough argues that, 'text analysis is an essential part of discourse analysis, but discourse analysis is not merely the linguistic analysis of texts' (2000: 3).

Classic Studies 17.1 The Glasgow University Media Group brings 'bad news'

The research problem

As we have seen, a substantial proportion of the population no longer reads newspapers. However, for many people, TV news is their key source of information about what goes on in the world. Can it be trusted to give a true and accurate picture of events? Why would the news *not* provide accurate information? And what are the consequences for our understanding of the world around us if it does not? Some of the best-known – and most controversial – research studies concerned with television news have been those carried out by the Glasgow University Media Group in the UK. Over the last three decades, the group has published a series of studies that are highly critical of the presentation of the news. Their early studies, including *Bad News* (1976), *More Bad News* (1981), *Really Bad News* (1983) and *War and Peace News* (1985), were very influential, setting out a research strategy for critical content analysis. Their research strategies were essentially similar in each of these studies, though they altered the focus of their investigations.

The Glasgow Group's explanation

Bad News (Glasgow Media Group 1976), their first and most influential book, was based on an analysis of TV news broadcasts on the three UK terrestrial channels available at that time, between January and June 1975. The objective was to provide a systematic and dispassionate analysis of the content of the news and the ways in which it was presented. *Bad News* concentrated on the portrayal of industrial disputes, whilst the later books concentrated more on political coverage, including the Falklands War of 1982.

The conclusion of *Bad News* was that news reporting of industrial relations was typically presented in a selective and biased fashion. Terms like 'trouble', 'radical' and 'pointless strike' suggested anti-union views. The effects of strikes, causing disruption for the public, were much more likely to be reported on than their underlying or immediate causes. Film material that was used, very often made the activities of protesters appear irrational and aggressive. For example, film of strikers stopping people entering a factory would focus on any confrontations that occurred, even if they were infrequent.

Bad News also pointed out that those who construct the news act as 'gatekeepers' for what gets on the agenda – in other words, what the public hears about at all. Strikes in which there were active confrontations between workers and management, for instance, might get widely reported, while more consequential and long-lasting industrial disputes might be largely ignored. The view of news journalists, the Glasgow Media Group suggested, tends to reflect their middle-class backgrounds and supports the views of the dominant groups in society, who inevitably see strikers as dangerous and irresponsible.

In recent years, members of the Glasgow Media Group have carried out a range of further research studies. The latest edition of the Bad News series, *Bad News From Israel* (Philo and Berry 2004), examined television news reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The study was carried out over a two-year period and was supported by several senior television news broadcasters and journalists who were involved in panel discussions with members of an 800-person sample audience. As well as looking at the television coverage of the conflict and its production, the authors were interested in how the coverage related to the understanding, beliefs and attitudes of the audience.

The study concluded that the television news coverage of the conflict confused viewers and substantially featured Israeli government views. There was little coverage devoted to the history or origins of the conflict for example, which would have contextualized the conflict. The study found a bias towards official 'Israeli perspectives', particularly on BBC 1, where Israelis were interviewed or reported more than twice as much as Palestinians. In addition, American politicians who supported Israel were often featured. The study also found that the news gave a strong emphasis to Israeli casualties, relative to Palestinians (although two to three times more Palestinians than Israelis

died). There were also differences in the language used by journalists to describe Israeli and Palestinian attacks. For example, journalists would often describe Palestinian acts as 'terrorism', but when an Israeli group was reported as trying to bomb a Palestinian school, they were referred to as 'extremists' or 'vigilantes' (Philo and Berry 2004). The message of this body of work is that news reporting can never be thought of as neutral or 'objective'. Rather, news reporting reflects the unequal societies within which it exists and as such, should be seen as systematically biased.

Critical points

The work of the Glasgow Media Group are much discussed in media circles as well as in the academic community. Some news producers accused the researchers of simply exercising their own biases, which they thought lay with workers and strikers rather than government and management. They pointed out that, while *Bad News* contained a chapter entitled 'The trade unions and the media', there was no chapter on management and the media. This should have been discussed, because news journalists are often accused by management of bias against them in disputes, rather than against the strikers.

Academic critics made similar points. Martin Harrison (1985) gained access to transcripts of ITN news broadcasts for the period covered by the original 1976 study and argued that the five months analysed in the study were not typical. There was an abnormal number of days lost because of industrial action over the period and, as it would have been impossible for the news to report all of these, the tendency to focus on the more dramatic episodes was understandable.

In Harrison's view, the Glasgow Media Group was wrong to claim that news broadcasts concentrated too much on the effects of strikes. After all, many more people are affected by strikes than take part in them. Sometimes millions of people find their lives disrupted by the actions of just a handful of people. Finally, according to Harrison's analysis, some of the assertions made by the Media Group were simply false. For example, contrary to what the Group stated, the news reports did normally name the unions involved in disputes and did say whether or not the strikes were official or unofficial.

Contemporary significance

The central point made in the GMG studies holds that the news is never just a description of what 'actually happened'. The news is a complex construction and the process of construction regularly influences what 'the news' is. For example, when a politician appears on a news programme and makes a comment about a controversial issue – say, the state of the economy and what should be done about it – that comment itself becomes 'news' in subsequent programmes.

John Eldridge (1993), editor of one volume of GMG research, points out that what counts as objectivity in news reporting will always be difficult. Against those postmodernists who say that the idea of objectivity is irrelevant, Eldridge affirms the importance of continuing to look at media products with a critical eye. Accuracy in news reporting can and must be studied. After all, when the football results are reported, we expect them to be accurate. The work of the GMG forcefully reminds us that issues of truth and truthfulness are always involved in news reporting and the latter is certainly a worthy subject for sociological research.

Texts can be newspaper articles and personal diaries, but they can also be transcripts of interviews, ethnographic conversations and focus groups, films, television programmes and web pages. *Discourses* are 'systems of thought' or ways of thinking about and discussing the world within a particular framework. Discourses erect boundaries around subjects, which limit what can sensibly be said about them.

For example, the recent discourse on 'Islamic terrorism' sets the terms of debate for discussion of this phenomenon, ruling out alternative conceptions of the actions of

Does mass reproduction equal cultural destruction?

the people involved, as 'freedom fighters' for example. In *critical discourse analysis*, such discursive practices are linked to wider social structures of inequality and power relations, so that the ideological aspects of discourses can be identified and opened up for examination. Fairclough argues that, '. . . language connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles for power' (1989: 15). As we see in 'Classic Studies 17.1', the continuing work of the Glasgow Media Group shows what critical content analysis can add to our understanding of the ideological character of news reporting in conflict situations.

The culture industry

Members of the Frankfurt School of critical theory (see chapter 3, page 76) such as Theodore Adorno (1903–69), were highly critical of the effects of mass media on the population and culture. The Frankfurt School was established in the 1920s and '30s, consisting of a loose group of theorists inspired by Marx who nevertheless saw that Marx's views needed radical revision. Among other things, they argued that Marx had not given enough attention to the influence of culture in modern capitalist societies.

Members of the Frankfurt School argued that leisure time had effectively been industrialized. Their extensive studies of what they called the 'culture industry' – such as the entertainment industries of film, TV, popular music, radio, newspapers and magazines – have been very influential in the field of cultural studies (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002 [1947]). They argued that in mass societies, the production of culture had become just as standardized and dominated by the desire for profit as other

Classic Studies 17.2 Jürgen Habermas on the rise and fall of the public sphere

The research problem

Modern democracies developed alongside the mass media, particularly newspapers and other types of publication. In a very real sense, the mass media enabled and encouraged democracy. And yet today, the mass media is often seen negatively, as trivializing the democratic process and creating a climate of general hostility to politics itself. How did such a radical shift happen? Could it be reversed or is the mass media today inevitably failing democracies? German philosopher and sociologist, Jürgen Habermas, has been widely seen as the last influential intellectual from the Frankfurt School and he took up these questions in a series of important works.

Habermas's explanation

Habermas (1981, 1985, 1989 [1962]) developed themes from the Frankfurt School in different directions, based on his abiding interest in language and he process of democracy. He analysed the emergence and development of the mass media from the early eighteenth century to the present day, tracing the creation and subsequent decay of the 'public sphere'. For Habermas, the **public sphere** is an arena of public debate in which issues of general concern can be discussed and opinions formed, which is necessary for effective democratic participation and oils the wheels of the democratic process.

According to Habermas, the public sphere developed first in the salons and coffee houses of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century London, Paris and other European cities (see the depiction of a salon in chapter 1). People would meet to discuss issues of the moment, with political debate becoming a matter of particular importance. Although only small numbers of the population were involved in the salon cultures, Habermas argues that they were vital to the early development of democracy, primarily because the salons introduced the idea of resolving political problems through public discussion. The public sphere – at least in principle – involves individuals coming together as equals in a forum for public debate.

However, the promise offered by the early development of the public sphere has not been fully realized. Democratic debate in modern societies is now stifled by the development of the culture industry. The spread of mass media and mass entertainment causes the public sphere to become largely a sham. Politics is stage-managed in Parliament and the mass media, while commercial interests triumph over those of the public. 'Public opinion' is not formed through open, rational discussion any longer, but through manipulation and control – as, for example, in advertising. On the one hand, the spread of global media can put pressure on authoritarian governments to loosen their hold over state-controlled broadcasting outlets and many 'closed' societies such as China are discovering that the media can become a powerful force in support of democracy. Yet, as the global media become increasingly commercialized, they encroach on the public sphere in the way described by Habermas. Commercialized media are beholden to the power of advertising revenue and compelled to favour content that guarantees high ratings and sales. As a result, entertainment will necessarily triumph over controversy and debate, weakening citizen participation in public affairs and shrivelling the public sphere. The media, which promised so much, has now become part of the problem with democracy. Yet Habermas remains optimistic. He argues that it is still possible to envisage a political community beyond individual nation-states in which issues can be openly debated and where public opinion will influence governments.

Critical points

Habermas's ideas have been subject to an important critique. The salon culture that he holds up as an arena of civilized, rational debate was strictly limited to the higher social classes and was beyond the reach of the working class. In short, it was an elitist pastime that bore little real resemblance to the needs of mass democratic participation. Habermas's view that the modern mass media are destructive of the public sphere has also been seen as