

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01030-7 - Globalization and Global Justice: Shrinking Distance, Expanding Obligations

Nicole Hassoun

Excerpt

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PART I

Introduction: Shrinking distance

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WORLD POVERTY

Tamil shivers on the floor. Her youngest child holds her hand and her husband puts a cold cloth on her forehead. She has been up all night, delirious. At first, she had a high fever but then seemed to have difficulty following conversation and became extremely agitated. At one point, her husband said, she was hallucinating and thrashed about so much she had to be restrained. Now she is unconscious in a coma. If Tamil had had access to a doctor, better medicine, or was not so malnourished, she might be more likely to survive. If she had anti-malarial prophylaxis or a bed net, she might not have caught malaria in the first place. Tamil is too poor to afford a bed, never mind a bed net or proper medical care.

Tamil got malaria when her family moved to the provinces from the city to try to work on her parents' rice farm. Unfortunately, after a few years, they realized they could not make ends meet. They had to move back to the city. The Philippines had to increase rice imports to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). This greatly decreased the demand for local rice. Few of the agricultural extension offices that provided fertilizers and technical support when Tamil was a child were operating. They could not get help from the government or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Tamil's family now lives in one of the Smokey Mountain temporary housing units in Metro Manila.¹

Before she got sick, Tamil's family said their lives were better in Manila than it was in the province. Farming is seasonal; after the crops

¹ This story is intended to illustrate some of the problems poor people face that can undermine their ability to reason and plan. Although I did not discuss their health problems with the people I met at Smokey Mountain and Pyatas in 2004, the rest of the story comes primarily from interviews with people living in these places. For another example of some of the problems malaria can cause, see: Flower et al., "Blind, Breathless, and Paralysed from Benign Malaria," 438.

were harvested, there was little to eat. When they lived on the farm, Tamil's family suffered from malnourishment-related health problems. Tamil's eldest daughter probably suffered from iodine deficiency which caused severe hypothyroidism. She has the distorted facial features of cretinism. Her physical development was quite slow and she may not ever be competent to live on her own. There is some chance that the rice Tamil's family gets now will be fortified with iodine or vitamin A (lack of which can also cause retardation). The government distributes rice for free to the residents of Smokey Mountain. Tamil's children can also get vitamin supplements from a local aid organization: The Philippine Community Fund.

Living on Smokey Mountain is difficult, though. Smokey Mountain is one of the world's most infamous garbage dumps. The towering stories of garbage have been burning for decades. The stench is unbelievable. The living conditions in the temporary housing units are poor, even by standards in the Philippines. Tamil's family buys clean water, but they bathe in a leaching pool that is created by the run-off from the garbage.

Though Tamil's family is less likely to get malaria in the city, they are exposed to many other debilitating diseases in the dump. Partly because of the poor living conditions and lack of basic sanitation, they are likely to suffer from dysentery and typhoid. Dysentery and typhoid, if untreated, can lead to fever, shock or listlessness, and delirium. The dump also contains many heavy metals and other toxic substances that can lead to mental disabilities, severe emotional problems, or even autism. Other poverty-related diseases like dengue and tuberculosis can cause mental and physical disabilities as well.

Before she got sick Tamil started a business selling comote (a root crop) in the local market. Her husband used to work as a construction worker. The Asian financial crisis, brought about partly by bad lending in an already over-inflated real-estate market, brought an end to that.² There are few jobs in construction. He now works as a pedicab driver.

Fortunately, Tamil's other children help by working every day, though they have had to drop out of school. They are "scavengers" – they pick up garbage and sell it to the recyclers. Sadly, even when the kids of Smokey Mountain (and most of the rest of the Philippines) do go to school, they

² Blustein, *The Chastening*.

usually do not get far. Tamil's 16-year-old, for instance, only completed first grade.

Tamil's family lives in the temporary housing, partly, because people started paying attention to the horrible living conditions within Smokey Mountain itself after another Manila dump collapsed. The collapse at the Pyatas dump killed hundreds of people. It was not an everyday disaster of the kind that regularly happens on a dump (e.g. when a child, because it is hard to see amongst the refuse, is run over by a garbage truck). So, the government decided to move the 21 stories of waste from the similarly dangerous Smokey Mountain to a safer location. President Ramos also wanted to provide people living on the dump with houses and employment.

In 1997, Mr. Ramos hired a company called RII to build permanent (concrete) and temporary (wooden) housing, to move the mountain, and to provide the people with jobs. In exchange, RII got to reclaim and sell land in Manila bay (where the US embassy is located). RII reclaimed over 70 hectares of land in the bay. They only built 21 of the 30 planned permanent housing buildings. Worse, they did a poor job. Now many of the permanent buildings are sinking. Further renovations are necessary. Otherwise, the National Housing Authority will not approve the buildings for habitation. No one is willing to pay for fixing the units.³ After the Asian financial crisis, no one bought the land RII reclaimed. Now RII refuses to fix the units unless the government comes through with its part of the bargain. Even though the bureaucratic wheels were greased when the new president Joseph Estrada was elected,⁴ RII's taxes remain high.

The only people who have moved into the permanent housing were transferred there three years ago because of a fire in the temporary housing complex.⁵ Tamil's family was not lucky enough to move into the permanent housing.

³ Hassoun, Nicole, unpublished interview with Arthur Pasqua Jr., Manila, Philippines, 2004. Hassoun, Nicole, unpublished interview with Chito Nombres, Manila, Philippines, 2004.

⁴ As the company official in charge of handling bribes reported, "somewhere around 30–50 people were bribed, up to Estrada." Hassoun, Nicole, unpublished interview with PhileCO representatives, Manila, Philippines, 2004. The bribes ranged from 55,000 pesos to 45 million pesos and were given at the going rate of 10 percent for each of the requested favors – "anything below 10 percent is an insult." Hassoun, Nicole, unpublished interview with PhileCO representatives, Manila, Philippines, 2004.

⁵ Hassoun, Nicole, unpublished interview with PhileCO Representatives, Manila, Philippines, 2004.

Still, Tamil's family is luckier than most of the families who work at Smokey Mountain. They live next to, rather than in, the garbage. Only a few years have passed since Pyatas collapsed and the residents of Smokey Mountain were moved into the temporary housing. Migration to the city continues. Both Pyatas and Smokey Mountain have new tenants.

Tamil's husband hopes that one day they can transfer to the permanent housing. They are saving the money to move. In order to do so, they must be able to pay the mortgage. There is also a seven-year waiting list for the permanent housing. Tamil's family has some money from her kids who are working. Right now, however, her family is still trying to save the 1,000 pesos (US\$20) needed to join the local cooperative "Precious Jewels." If Tamil recovers, this will be their first priority. If Tamil's family can join the cooperative, she can take out loans of up to 2,000 pesos to expand her business or if someone in her family gets sick.

Joining the local cooperative is about the only way that Tamil's family can get credit. They have no collateral. The banks charge incredibly high interest rates. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs), designed by international financial institutions (IFIs) like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), often require countries to liberalize interest rates. In countries like the Philippines, with inadequate banking regulatory frameworks and fragile business sectors, liberalization can lead banks to raise rates.⁶ The IFIs require countries to adopt SAPs when they need loans. When I visited, the Philippines had had 19 such loans.⁷

Despite their difficulties, Tamil's family will continue to work hard to overcome the obstacles they face. If Tamil recovers, her children will probably have a brighter future.

Many families are like Tamil's.

Some 831 million human beings are undernourished, 1197 million lack access to safe water and 2747 million lack access to standard sanitation ... About 2000 million lack access to essential drugs ... Some 1000 million have no adequate shelter and 2000 million lack electricity ... Some 876 million adults are illiterate ... and 250 million children between 5 and 14 do wage work outside their household – often under harsh or cruel conditions: as soldiers, prostitutes, or domestic servants, or in agriculture, construction, textile or carpet production.⁸

⁶ Villanueva and Mirakhor, "Interest Rate Policies in Developing Countries."

⁷ Hassoun, Nicole, unpublished interview with Vikram Haksar, Manila, Philippines, 2004. For current statistics, see: World Bank, "Country Lending Summaries – Philippines."

⁸ The UN International Labor Organization (ILO) says that 215 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are working (ILO, "Accelerating Action Against Child Labour," 9). Of these, 115 million children are doing "hazardous work" a proxy for the number involved in the "worst forms"

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The poor characteristically lack the resources or capabilities necessary to secure adequate food, water, shelter, education, health care, social support, and emotional goods.

Tamil's story illustrates how the global poor are likely to suffer from diseases that undermine even their basic capacities. Some of these people will become so seriously ill that they cannot even make important decisions for themselves. Others will die. In 2004 about a third of all deaths, 18 million a year or 50,000 every day, were poverty-related.⁹ The 18 million who died in 2004 were joined by another 18 million in 2005 and another 18 million in 2006 and so on.¹⁰ For comparison: Imagine a plane flying over 18 mid-sized US cities and killing all of their inhabitants every year. This book is concerned with the kind of severe deprivation that leads to so much suffering and death.

GLOBALIZATION AND GLOBAL JUSTICE

Tamil's story also illustrates that even the world's poorest members are not living in utter isolation. When the WTO requires countries like the Philippines to increase imports or decrease tariffs, it can transform poor people's lives. When the IMF or World Bank (WB) requires countries like the Philippines to implement SAPs, the poorest often feel the effects. Sometimes these programs impact individuals' access to even basic public services and social support programs.¹¹ Sometimes they impact access to loans or jobs.

With globalization distance is shrinking. Decisions made in one country often affect others and the poor people living in them. International institutions also impact the poor in many ways besides those mentioned above. Both national and international policies can, for instance, exacerbate financial or food crises.¹² Sometimes international organizations apply economic sanctions, air traffic controls, and arms embargoes on rogue countries and groups within them that threaten international security.¹³ Sometimes they intervene militarily.¹⁴ Globalization is reaching its fingers into even the most remote corners of the earth. Few escape its grasp.

of child labor, which include bonded labor, forced participation in armed conflict, prostitution, and the trafficking or production of illegal drugs (ibid., 22, 56–60).

⁹ World Health Organization, *World Health Report 2004*, Annex Table 2.

¹⁰ In 2009, there were 4,099,679 cases of *Plasmodium falciparum* malaria alone. World Health Organization, *World Malaria Report 2009*.

¹¹ IMF and World Bank, "ESAF Policy Framework Paper."

¹² Headey and Fan, "Reflections on the Global Food Crisis."

¹³ Roberts, "United Nations."

¹⁴ United Nations, "Security Council Seeks Expansion of Role."

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This does not mean that globalization is a bad thing. But globalization raises important questions of global justice. The face of the world is changing. The past 100 years have seen the incredible growth of international institutions, norms, rules, and procedures. Today 192 countries are members of the United Nations (UN). The UN has programs promoting everything from international peace, trade, and development to good environmental policy.¹⁵ There are 187 country members of the WB and IMF. The WB and IMF encourage macroeconomic stability and provide advice and help to developing countries.¹⁶ There are 153 countries in the WTO. The WTO oversees 97 percent of world trade.¹⁷ There are also many international treaties, customary laws, and international conventions. They apply to everything from human rights to the global environment – from the depths of the seas to outer space. Does the fact that the world is becoming more inter-connected change institutions' duties to people beyond borders? Does globalization alone engender any ethical obligations?

Historically social and political philosophy has focused on intra-national issues and institutions. But, as more people, goods, and money flow across state lines, it is increasingly important to consider what, if any, obligations extend beyond borders.

A new ground for obligations to the poor

The first half of this book provides some new arguments for significant obligations to the global poor that are intended to address liberals of many persuasions. Those who endorse liberalism care about individual freedom and believe the relationship between rulers and ruled must be free in some sense. Liberalism can be contrasted with certain varieties of consequentialism. On the relevant versions of consequentialism, the only reason to preserve individuals' freedom is if doing so brings about the best results on some other metric (e.g. utility). Liberalism can also be contrasted with totalitarianism in which governments need not protect basic freedoms at all. Subsequent chapters say more about the kind of liberalism to which this book's arguments appeal, as well as several other important concepts like *libertarianism*, *coercion*, *legitimacy*, *autonomy*, *liberty*, *basic capacities*, and *institutional system*.

¹⁵ United Nations, "United Nations Member States."

¹⁶ World Bank, "About Us." IMF, "About the IMF."

¹⁷ World Trade Organization, "Members and Observers."

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The key idea behind the first half of this book's main argument is this: There are many coercive international institutions. These institutions contain rules that are backed by sanction. Coercive institutions must be legitimate; they must have a justification-right to subject people to coercive rules. For such institutions to be legitimate, they must ensure that their subjects secure sufficient autonomy to autonomously agree to their rules. For most people to secure this basic minimum of autonomy they must be able to reason and plan. To reason and plan, everyone needs some food and water and most require some shelter, education, health care, social support, and emotional goods. Since everyone is subject to some coercive international institutions, these institutions must ensure that these people secure these things. This is an important conclusion in a world where over 2.7 billion people live on less than what US\$2 a day buys in the USA.¹⁸

In making this argument, this book defends some kind of "capability" or "needs" theory, but not on the familiar grounds of humanity or justice suggested by authors like Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, Simon Caney, and Gillian Brock. Its main claim is not that concern for our shared humanity requires ensuring that people secure basic human capacities. Nor does this book rely on this obligation being a requirement of justice (although it starts from an idea implicit in the social contract tradition – focusing upon what social arrangements people could freely accept). Rather, this book argues, roughly, that legitimacy requires coercive institutions to ensure that their subjects secure basic capacities. Whether or not concern for humanity or justice requires that these people secure these capabilities, coercive institutions must ensure that their subjects secure this much because they are *coercive*. Autonomy-undermining poverty is incompatible with the legitimate exercise of coercive power. Ending such poverty is not (just?) a general requirement of morality or justice.

This book engages with the literature on cosmopolitanism and statism in a new way.¹⁹ Statists – like Thomas Nagel and Richard Miller – believe that those within states have stronger obligations to their compatriots than to outsiders. They usually grant that there are obligations of humanity, but deny that there are obligations of distributive justice to the global poor. This book argues, however, that legitimacy is closely connected with justice. So, statists have a reason to take its arguments seriously. Further, statists accept some obligations besides obligations of humanity and

¹⁸ Chen and Ravallion, "How Have the World's Poorest Fared since the Early 1980s?" 141–69.

¹⁹ I would like to thank Aaron James and Josh Cohen for discussion on this point. I also owe thanks to Dale Dorsey, Alex London, and James Nickel for extensive comments on this chapter.

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(limited obligations of) justice. Consider, for instance, how John Rawls holds that there are duties – though not duties of humanity or justice – to respect a short list of human rights in the *Law of Peoples*. So, even if legitimacy and justice are unrelated, statisticians have reason to respond to the first half of this book's conclusion. Namely the claim that, for coercive institutions to be legitimate, they must ensure their subjects secure what they need to avoid autonomy-undermining poverty.

Furthermore, the argument sketched above is, in some respects, similar to the “coercion-based theories” defended by Nagel and Miller. It just denies that only coercion exercised by the domestic state requires justification. This book argues that there are many coercive international institutions. At least statisticians who, like Michael Blake, start from a concern with legitimacy to argue for some priority to compatriots should engage with this book's argument.²⁰ In making this case, this book defends a cosmopolitan concern with what is necessary for people, independent of where they live, to agree to be subject to coercive institutions.

Yet cosmopolitan theories are often defended on quite different grounds. In some ways, this book's argument is similar to Thomas Pogge's argument in *World Poverty and Human Rights*. This book starts from a concern for individual freedom to defend some significant obligations to the global poor. Pogge argues, however, that we have such obligations because those of us in the developed world are harming the global poor. His argument may, ultimately, be successful. Still, there are significant reasons to worry about whether he has established his crucial premise in a way that everyone who is concerned about individual freedom can accept. Mathias Risse and Alan Patten argue, for instance, that libertarians may reject Pogge's baseline for harm. So it is noteworthy that this book's argument proceeds from entirely different premises (and reaches a slightly different conclusion). It suggests that international institutions are *coercing*, not necessarily harming, the global poor. So, these institutions have significant obligations to these people. This book argues that this is something even those least likely to believe there are significant obligations to the global poor are likely to accept. Furthermore, this book suggests that coercive institutions bear a corresponding obligation to ensure their subjects secure food, water, shelter, and so forth. (Though Pogge may be right to hold that, ultimately, the buck stops with those of us in the developed world who have helped implement, and uphold these institutions.)²¹

²⁰ Blake, “Distributive Justice, State Coercion, and Autonomy,” 257–96.

²¹ This book's novel argument is intended to appeal to liberals of many sorts. Such liberals need only agree that people must be able to object to being subject to coercive rule. This book's