Values, World Society and Modelling Yearbook 2017

Values, World Society and Modelling Yearbook 2017

By

Gordon Burt

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables

Figures

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 1964, in the preface to the book *Conflict in Society*[1], Tony de Reuck wrote about the formation in 1963 of the Conflict Research Society (CRS); about the appointment of Michael Nicholson as a senior research fellow at Lancaster University; and about John Burton, founding Chair of the CRS.

When I joined the Conflict Research Society in 1982, there were two key figures. I never met John Burton but everybody talked about him. Values were at the heart of John Burton's approach to conflict resolution. *World Society*[2] was the title of one of his books. Michael Nicholson I did meet – and continued to meet over the next couple of decades. *Formal Theories in International Relations*[3] was the title of one of Michael's books – 'formal theories', in other words modelling. So there you have it: values, world society and modelling.

Thank you to my many friends in the CRS who have over the years shared their ideas with me and stimulated my thinking; and encouraged and supported me in taking my work in this direction.

The CRS conference in 2017 was hosted by the *Changing Character of War Programme* at Pembroke College, Oxford. The plenary presentation by Lars-Erik Cederman was entitled *The Threat to Liberalism and the Future of War*. There was a panel on *Scientific Approaches to the Study of Conflict* with stimulating contributions from Meredith Anne Sarkees, John Tirman, Steven Ratuva and Altaf Ali. Their ideas were the inspiration for parts of Chapters 6 and 7 of this book.

It has now become the custom for the front cover of the Yearbook to have a photograph of my family. Here they are at the top of the Great Orme just above Llandudno. They are what values are all about. I have much to thank them for. Also Llandudno was where my parents – long gone now - went for their honeymoon in 1937. What a pity they could not see these Yearbooks, due in no small measure to their example and their nurturing.

---

[1] De Reuck, Anthony and Julie Knight. (Editors) *Conflict in Society*. London: CIBA Foundation, 1963.
[2] Burton, John W. *World Society*. London: Macmillan, 1972.
[3] Nicholson, Michael. *Formal Theories in International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Looking beyond the headlines … How have the fundamental characteristics of social systems and their trajectories manifested themselves in world society in the year 2017? Is the world becoming a better place in terms of wellbeing, wealth, health, peace and the environment? Events and anniversaries in 2017 reveal the changing structure of power in world society: while the West is growing and still dominant the relative growth in the East is greater. Perhaps the rise and fall of nations is not what matters or at least is not the only thing that matters. Other cultural formations also rise and fall: languages, religions and political cultures. How have different social groups related to one another and how have social divisions manifested themselves in the different systems of society? There was a surprising election in the UK and the results are analysed in terms of a gravitational model of party trajectories in political space. Finally there is the fascinating 358-year trajectory of mathematical knowledge relating to Fermat's Last Theorem and modularity.

Trends continued in 2017: global warming; advancing technology; the dominance of the USA; rapid growth in India and China; and sometimes religious strife amongst Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews and others. The volcanic outbursts from Donald Trump, the new president in the White House, contrasted with the assured calm displayed by China's Xi Jinping at home and globally. Trump's style caused nervousness at home and around the world. China's activities caused nervousness among its Pacific neighbours. North Korea continued its nuclear missile development in the face of angry words from Washington, UN resolutions, sanctions and diplomacy. Vladimir Putin's relations with Russia's near neighbours – the Baltic states, Ukraine, Turkey, Syria and Iraq – created nervousness in the West. Joint, though separate and not always harmonious, action involving both Russia and the USA succeeded in rolling back Isis in Syria and Iraq. Saudi Arabia and Iran continued their involvement in the disastrous situation in the Yemen. In Europe, Catalonians were divided in their opinion about staying in Spain or leaving; Brexit discussions continued within the UK and between UK and

the European Union as a general election produced a minority government; in France the astonishing ascent of centrist Macron took him to the presidency; Angela Merkel struggled to form a centrist coalition in Germany; and in Austria a coalition formed involving the far right. President Maduro entrenched his leftist government in Venezuela. Anarchy continued in Libya while in the south of the continent the long rule of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe ended, and the position of President Zuma of South Africa weakened. The Rohingya refugees fled persecution in Myanmar.

The 2017 Yearbook looks at the year from a *Values, World Society and Modelling* perspective, selecting a few events and topics that are explored in greater depth. Like its predecessors[1], it makes no attempt to be a comprehensive or representative account of the year's events. It draws on the monthly issues of the *Commentary* which were produced during the year under the banner of *A New Agenda*.[2] *A New Agenda* seeks to explore all aspects of society using all the academic disciplines paying special attention to values ... with special interest in modelling ... not disinterested in practice ... and aspiring to high academic standards. The rationale for the New Agenda is discussed in more detail in the 2014 Yearbook.[3]

Overview of the chapters

2 World Society in 2017

The aim of this short chapter is to try to get an idea of what it might mean to talk about what happened in world society in 2017.

---

[1] Burt, Gordon. *Values, World Society and Modelling Yearbook, 2014*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2016.
Burt, Gordon. *Values, World Society and Modelling Yearbook, 2015*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2017.
[2] Burt, Gordon. "A New Agenda." Accessed 1 June 2015.
https://sites.google.com/site/gordonburtmathsocsci/home/a-new-agenda.
[3] Burt, 2016, op. cit., xii, 1-3.

What happens each year is a unique mixture of the prosaic and the sensational; the normal and the notable; continuation and change; good and bad, positive and negative; and betterment and deterioration. News stories tend to select the sensational and the negative.

The year's headlines. Trends continued: global warming; advancing technology; the dominance of the USA; rapid growth in India and China; and religious strife amongst Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews and others …

An insight into ongoing everyday activities is provided by the average household weekly expenditure in the UK. However what is normal everyday activity for the average British household is not the experience of everyone in world society. The homeless in the UK; the cholera cases in the Yemen; the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar; and two million people in Guinea-Bissau with a GDP equal to what Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia paid for a painting, a yacht and a chateau.

What happens involves a structure of actors in a structure of relationships which have an ongoing trajectory over time. One day's news provides an insight into the complex structure of relationships existing in world society. Conflicts were present in relationships involving the social divisions of race, nation, religion, politics, class, gender, age and sexual relations. People's concerns for '*Our Values*' gives rise to *Tension and Volatility in a Multi-Level Geopolitical Structure*, creating *Progress and Destruction, Independence and Incorporation.*

3 Rules in Society: Age, Gender, Ethnicity and Religion

This chapter is about how different social groups relate to one another and how social divisions manifest themselves in the different systems of society: in the political system, in the justice system, in the education system, etc.

A senate election in Alabama illustrates how age, gender and ethnicity can divide societies and how they can manifest themselves in voting behaviour.

The rest of the chapter focuses on the justice system. The situation in prisons in the UK is studied. Gender is the social division most strongly associated with prison: the prison population is overwhelmingly male – specifically, the male prison propensity is 24 times the female prison propensity. Prison propensity is high amongst the young. The majority of prisoners are white, but black people have a much higher prison propensity: four times higher. The majority of prisoners are Christian, but

Muslims have a much higher prison propensity: four times higher. Also, in Scotland, Muslims have a high relative male/female prison propensity.

Different offences have different prison propensities. The propensity gap between men and women is much the same for most offences, but men have a greater propensity for sex-related offences. Here, z-scores are used.

There are problems making international comparisons, but leaving these aside the data exhibits sizeable differences in prison propensity between countries. There is also a distinct geographical pattern: within Europe, a western bloc of countries has low prison propensities and an eastern bloc has high prison propensities.

The Lammy Report, discussed Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) over-representation in the UK Criminal Justice System and identified a variety of factors. Errors in the justice system in the UK include: differential policing in stop and search; and weaknesses in the disclosure process at the trail stage.

Sociological studies of differential policing in the USA are noted and related to the police shooting of a homeless man in Skid Row in the USA. The shooting of a black man by a citizen in 2013 prompted the formation of Black Lives Matter. In Charlottesville contention about the history of slavery led to fatal confrontation between white supremacists and anti-racists.

There are encounters in prison: prisoners with prisoners, and prisoners with prison staff. There are almost as many harming incidents in prisons as there are prisoners; 60% of these concern self-harming and 40% other-harming; and 74% concern harming fellow prisoners and 26% harming staff.

The recent Newcastle case of ethnicity and sex grooming prompts a consideration of a report produced in 2012. "There were 16,500 children in England who were at high risk of child sexual exploitation." The evidence is incomplete. The situations are varied and complex. The offence is a horrendous but somewhat rare event. It is carried out by groups on several individuals. It is about young and middle-aged adults harming children. It is mostly about men harming women - but there are a few male victims and a few female perpetrators. White people are underrepresented in both victim and perpetrator populations. Black people are highly over-represented in both victim and perpetrator populations. Asian people are underrepresented in victim populations but highly overrepresented in perpetrator populations.

A variety of models is presented of how rules operate in society. In the binary attribute model each individual either follows a rule or they do not. In the signal-detection model an individual is or is not a rule-follower; and

society classifies them as a rule-follower or does not. Each of these models has a process version. Models of groups and populations can be based on models of individuals. A model of observed behaviour and percentages involves the concepts of propensity, attribute, z-score, explanatory variables, 'success', 'ability' and 'easiness', choice and cultural space, prevalence and propensity, encounters and differential treatment.

4 UK, 2017: Mass and Gravity in Political Space

The election wasn't supposed to happen in 2017 and Theresa May wasn't expected to lose her majority. The events surrounding this surprising election are discussed in the first part of the chapter and the modelling of the results is presented in the second part of the chapter.

Six headlines between March and June tell the story of the campaign. The road to the election in 2017 is traced from the election in 2010 to the election in 2015, to the Brexit referendum of 2016 and the April 2017 decision to call an early election. The results of opinion polls, local elections and by-elections in this period are noted … and then the final excitement of the election morning headlines and the exit poll. The political process concentrated power, transforming the voting results into seats in parliament and into government. It changed the distribution of power. The government had lost its overall majority but as the leader of the largest party, Theresa May, reached an accord with Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party and formed a minority government. Labour gained votes and seats. Some parties lost representation or experienced decline, big names fell, party leaders resigned or were weakened. In particular there was increased pressure on prime minister Theresa May.

Age and newspaper readership had a strong link with party preference – whereas gender had only a weak link. The list of social categories in order of increasing strength of association with party preference is: gender, class, job sector, home, education, work, nation, age and media (newspaper readership). In the south, seats were mainly Conservative whereas in the north and in London fewer seats were Conservative.

Models of the 2017 results are presented. One model represents the result as a point in percentage space. Another model uses a stepped geometric series to represent the size distribution of party votes as an order function. In a third model, as a distribution in political space.

Comparing the 2015 and 2017 elections, volatility (which is related to modular distance in percentage space) was greater for votes than it was for seats. The biggest party's share of the vote increased from 2015 to 2017 and this was reflected in a difference in the order functions. Labour in the

centre-left of political space was the major gainer. Flows in political space followed a gravitational law.

The results of the 2017 election are discussed in relation to models of the party vote trajectories over the period 1945 to 2015.

5 Power Trajectories: Western Dominance and Eastern Growth

Events occur in physical space and depend on the physical configuration of space. In particular human events depend on the configuration of planet earth, on its geography - and they also depend on technology. Changing geography and changing technology changes the nature of events.

Movements of people, objects, ideas and information generate interactions. Interactions may involve the projection of power. The structure of power in world society is a major determinant of the structure of value outcomes. The pursuit of value leads to the pursuit of power. This creates pressure for change to the power structure, generating power trajectories, leading to the rise and fall of dominant powers. Events and anniversaries in 2017 illustrate these general points.

Land and sea travel began in pre-history but air and space travel and radio communication have only been developed in the last hundred years or so. Only in the last six hundred years has there been significant contact between Europe-Asia-Africa and America and other land masses. Within Europe-Asia-Africa the primary long-distance route was a land route, the Silk Road, but this was superseded from the 1400s onwards by the Europeans with a sea route from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean and then the South China Sea.

The passage of a Chinese naval flotilla through the English Channel prompts Paul Kennedy to reflect on the 500-year rise of Western naval power and its current waning in the face of growing Asian naval power. Also, contestation between Western powers has waned and contestation between Eastern powers has grown. Within the West, mastery shifted from Europe to America. Within Europe, mastery had earlier shifted from Mediterranean states to Atlantic states. There, power shifted from Portugal and Spain to the Netherlands, France and Britain. Within Asia, power has shifted from Japan to China. These points are evidenced by the current and projected naval balance and also by the rise and fall of US Ship Force Levels between 1886 and 2016. In recent years, with the growing power of China, there has been a return to the idea of the Silk Road.

Britain's control of Hong Kong ended in 1997, its control of India ended in 1947 and its control of Palestine ended a year later in 1948. The

British Indian Empire gave way to the independent states of India and Pakistan in 1947, with East Pakistan becoming Bangladesh in 1971. In India the party which was dominant at independence has declined. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 paved the way for the foundation of the state of Israel, following the mandates of Britain and France over parts of the defeated Ottoman Empire, thus changing the population balance in Palestine.

The land powers of Europe and the Middle East – the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Russian Empire - collapsed following defeat in the First World War. The first two empires were dismembered and the third was diminished. The Russian Revolution of 1917 brought about a total transformation of the power structure: the end or decline of monarchy, aristocracy, priesthood, land and property ownership and the creation of a party and a one-party state, with communist ideology and state control of the economy. Russia's borders expanded and contracted, finally with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now the Communist party gains only a small percentage in elections – 13%.

Advancing technology over the past century or so has brought air and space travel and radio wave communication. Finally the configuration of planet earth has changed with the melting of the polar ice cap. Each of these has been a feature of global power politics in 2017.

6 Cultural Trajectories: Languages, Religions and Political Cultures

The previous chapter was about the rise and fall of nations. Perhaps though what is important is not which countries have power but which cultures have power. There is of course a tendency for the ruling culture to be the culture of the ruling country – or sometimes the culture of a country which was formerly the ruling country. In this chapter we look at the cultural trajectories of calendars, religions, languages and political cultures. The chapter ends by returning to religious strife and struggling with the question: what really matters?

The notion of 'the year 2017' is a cultural form. It is part of Western culture and is internationally widespread but it is not universal. Its reference is to the birth of Christ two thousand years ago. It is a cultural event which has travelled far in space and time.

The dating of the October revolution of 1917 leads us to look first at the schism between the Western Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, then at the further schism caused by Martin Luther's

starting of the Reformation in 1517 and finally at the great diversity of churches and religions which exist today. More than half the world has religious beliefs with a four-thousand-year cultural history which runs from the ancient city of Ur in southern Iraq, to the Middle East to the world.

There are 7102 languages in the world. There is a typical power law distribution: a few languages have many speakers and many languages have few speakers. Nine of the twelve most common languages are European. However Chinese is top, Hindu-Urdu 2nd and Arabic 5th. The 'language export ratio' is high for the European languages spoken in the Americas: English and Spanish with a ratio of 8 and Portuguese with an astonishing 19.

We then consider political cultures. Prompted by Cederman's analysis of the liberal world order we reflect on the political culture of world society: the domestic political culture, the political culture of inter-state relations and the political culture of global norms. We consider: the transition from monarchies/empires to republics; the contestation between liberal democracy, capitalism, socialism and fascism (quoting Putin, Xi Jinping and Trump); and dissatisfaction in democracies and in non-democracies. A consideration of "the human costs of history" focuses on the debates and actions in 2017 relating to colonialism and empire and to Western discourses. Finally a foundational aspect of political culture is the balance it places between cooperation and conflict: in international relations theory between interdependence and power politics; and in game theory between positive-sum games and zero-sum. Illustrating this we contrast Barack Obama's farewell speech and Donald Trump's national security strategy; different perceptions of Xi Jinping's view on a new global political culture; and Narendra Modi and Trump at Davos 2018.

7 Value Trajectories: Wellbeing, Wealth, Health, Peace and the Environment

Are things getting better? Are people better off? Are people healthier? Is the world more peaceful? Has environmental quality improved? What of the future? What threats do people perceive?

Good things happen and bad things happen. Sometimes things improve and sometimes things get worse. So we are left with the question, are things getting better on average?

Human history thus far has been characterised by an increasing population, and technological, economic and social development.

The IMF Annual Report of 2017 reports that GDP has grown over the past seventy-six years. This growth has been uneven: GDP has grown fivefold in advanced economies and tenfold in emerging markets and developing countries. However there are concerns about productivity growth.

In *The Lancet*, *The global burden of disease* reported that mortality rates have decreased and life expectancy has increased (by 14 years) in the period 1970-2016. The rate of change has been fairly constant over the period. In the under-5 age group there were 16 million deaths in 1970 but just 4 million deaths in 2016.

National media sometimes emphasise 'our combatant deaths'. What about 'theirs'? What about non-combatants? What about other human costs besides death?

Is the world more peaceful? Pinker and others conclude from the evidence that it is, but Sarkees offers an alternative analysis and conclusion. The research on this question has examined a wide variety of variables. A conceptualisation of variables is offered. Statistical models have a variety of possible trajectories with varying probabilities … in particular lowest and highest, and mean, median and mode trajectories … so there are both optimistic and pessimistic possibilities. A unit root model of war death rates exemplifies these points.

What is global warming? Does global warming exist? Are specific extreme events caused by global warming? Is it caused by human society? Is it a serious threat? Can the threat be averted? Are the proposed actions sufficient to avert it? An overview of the radiation flows between the sun, the earth's surface and atmosphere and space is presented. A recent report revises the global warming estimates used in the Paris 2015/2016 agreement and a simplified model is presented.

An international survey by the Pew Centre asked about the threats perceived by people in 38 different countries. The top four threats were: IS, climate change, cyberattacks and the global economy. An analysis identified two clusters. The threats in cluster A were: US, global economy, climate, cyberattacks and China; and the threats in cluster B were: Russia, IS and refugees. (Note: correlation does not imply cause.)

8 Knowledge Trajectories: Fermat's Last Theorem and Modularity

This chapter is about two theorems which are very easy to state but very difficult to prove. The proving of Fermat's Last Theorem (FLT) has involved a 'knowledge trajectory': a 'world society' of mathematicians

working together over a period of 358 years towards a single goal –
working in a spirit of collaboration mixed with individual competition,
guided by the shared values of truth and beauty in mathematics. The Feit-
Thompson Theorem (FTT) is not so old: its 255-page proof was produced
in 1961. Associated with these two proofs, two of Britain's most
celebrated mathematicians were in the news in 2017. Andrew Wiles was
awarded the 2016 Abel Prize for Mathematics for his proof of Fermat's
Last Theorem. Sir Michael Atiyah produced a new (possibly valid!) proof
of the Feit-Thompson Theorem which was just 12 pages long.

    This chapter is unable to engage with the full conceptual depths of
these two theorems. Instead it seeks to understand the statements of the
theorems and the associated underlying mathematical ideas, starting with
the ideas in primary school mathematics - but moving fairly quickly
beyond that!

    We start by proving that all numbers are interesting! We then do some
school mathematics, presenting some basic ideas about prime numbers and
illustrating these ideas by asking 'are you in your prime?' and 'is 2017 a
prime number?'. Next a discussion of right-angled triangles and
Pythagoras' Theorem leads to a statement of Fermat's Last Theorem.
Drawing on Simon Singh's book, certain key stages are noted on the three-
centuries-long road to the proof of Fermat's Last Theorem.

    Attention then turns to the Feit-Thompson Theorem. Basic ideas in
group theory are introduced with special attention to subgroups and
subgroup series, leading finally to the statement of the theorem.

    The chapter returns to Fermat's Last Theorem and sketches the logical
structure of the proof and notes the crucial role played by modularity.

How the 2017 Yearbook relates to my previous work

The Yearbooks analyse contemporary world events drawing on
foundational ideas in academic disciplines. Mathematical social science
underpins the modelling approach which is evident throughout. These
foundational mathematical ideas are discussed in my book *Conflict,
Complexity and Mathematical Social Science*[4]:

> "This book seeks to present a foundational mathematical approach with
> rigorously developed, properly grounded theory … The concept of conflict
> is grounded in and developed from a system of ideas relating to value. …

---

[4] Burt, Gordon. *Conflict, Complexity and Mathematical Social Science*. Bingley:
Emerald, 2010.

The topics of mathematical social science are grounded in and developed from a foundational mathematical science."[5]

Throughout, the Yearbooks adopt an interdisciplinary approach drawing on both Humanities and Science. This relates to the very deliberate attempt to *do* Humanities and Science in my chapter *A Foundational Mathematical Account of A Specific Complex Social Reality: Conflict in A Midsummer Night's Dream*[6], a case study of the relationship between foundational ideas and complex social reality. It also relates to my chapter *Debating the mathematical science approach to international relations*[7].

The chapter titles for my earlier books are given in Tables 1.1 to 1.3 below.

---

[5] Burt, 2010. op. cit., p. 1.
[6] Burt, Gordon. "A Foundational Mathematical Account of A Specific Complex Social Reality: Conflict in A Midsummer Night's Dream." In *Cooperation for a Peaceful and Sustainable World. Part 1*, edited by Bo, Chen, Manas Chatterji, and Hao Chaoyan. Bingley: Emerald, 2012.
[7] Chapter 15 in Burt, 2010, op. cit.

Table 1.1 The chapters in *Conflict, Complexity and Mathematical Social Science*

---

1 Introduction and overview
     Modelling
2 Set theory and social reality
3 Mathematics, logic, artificial intelligence and ordinary language
     Value
4 Possibility and probability: value, conflict and choice
5 Theory, evidence and reality: the mean and median of competing groups
6 Social design, ethics and the amount of value
     Society
7 Change, multiple-entity systems and complexity
8 Mathematical psychology
9 Models of choice
10 Mathematical sociology
11 Mathematical political science and game theory
12 The mathematical economics of social participation: complexity
13 Life and history: the speculative pursuit of value
14 World history: the growth and distribution of power, truth and value
15 Debating the mathematical science approach to international relations

---

Table 1.2 The chapters in *Values, World Society & Modelling Yearbook, 2014*

---

1 Introduction and Overview ... Arts and Science
     Values
2 Individuals and Societies, Needs and Cultures
3 Individuals: Activities, Happiness and Other Values, Emotion, Personality
4 Relationships: Family and Friends, Care and Therapy, Nurturing Flourishing
5 The Life of an Individual ... Feeling at Home in the World
6 'Our Values': Unanimous? Universal? Exceptional? Good? Safe?
     World Society
7 The World Today: Tension and Volatility in a Multi-Level Geopolitical Structure
8 World History: Progress and Destruction, Independence and Incorporation
9 Ukraine: United or Divided? West and East; Living with Others
10 Scotland: 'Our Values'? Independence? More Varied and Less Distinctive
11 The World Economy: Growth and Inequality
12 Gender: Culture and Psychology, Literacy and Education
13 World Chess 1914, World Football 2014: Performance and Prediction
     Modelling
14 Look at Social Reality ... Look at the Universe ... And See Mathematics!

Table 1.3 The chapters in *Values, World Society & Modelling Yearbook, 2015*

---

1 Introduction and Overview ... Arts and Science
        Values
2 Transcending adversarialism: The John Burton Memorial Lecture 2015
3 Life as a journey
4 'Our values': the Enlightenment … the Prophet
        World Society
5 World society in 2015
6 Social and psychological space - geographical variation
7 Time series: social value, violence and population
8 Nigeria, Greece and Ireland: geography and one-dimensional political space
9 Northern Ireland: multidimensional political space and geography
10 The UK general election, 2015: prelude and outcome
11 Democracy: satisfaction? … dissatisfaction? … value space
12 Time series: UK general elections - 1945 to 2015
        Modelling
13 Sets and functions; time and space
14 Value spaces; the earth in space and time

CHAPTER TWO

WORLD SOCIETY IN 2017

Overview. The aim of this short chapter is to try to get an idea of what it might mean to talk about what happened in world society in 2017.

What happens each year is a unique mixture of the prosaic and the sensational; the normal and the notable; continuation and change; good and bad, positive and negative; and betterment and deterioration. News stories tend to select the sensational and the negative.

The year's headlines. Trends continued: global warming; advancing technology; the dominance of the USA; rapid growth in India and China; and religious strife amongst Christians, Muslims, Buddhists. Jews and others …

An insight into ongoing everyday activities is provided by the average household weekly expenditure in the UK. However what is normal everyday activity for the average British household is not the experience of everyone in world society. The homeless in the UK; the cholera cases in the Yemen; the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar; and two million people in Guinea-Bissau with a GDP equal to what Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia paid for a painting, a yacht and a chateau.

What happens involves a structure of actors in a structure of relationships which have an ongoing trajectory over time. One day's news provides an insight into the complex structure of relationships existing in world society. Conflicts were present in relationships involving the social divisions of race, nation, religion, politics, class, gender, age and sexual relations. People's concerns for '*Our Values'* gives rise to *Tension and Volatility in a Multi-Level Geopolitical Structure*, creating *Progress and Destruction, Independence and Incorporation.*

How should we characterise world society in 2017?

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times … in short, the period was so far like the present period, that its noisiest authorities insisted on its

being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."[8]

How should we characterise world society in 2017? Should we look at the headlines and the reports of journalists in the newspapers? … or should we look at the statistical accounts? Both are informative. Both sensational events and prosaic events did indeed occur in 2017. Also the sensational events of 2017 were different from the sensational events of previous years … and these same general remarks about 2017 could also have been made a year ago about 2016. That is what one would expect from a complex system like world society. Combining these various thoughts we can characterise 2017 in the following way:

differently sensational and prosaic as usual

a mixed year – a somewhat different variety of events as usual

some things stayed the same; not so many changed
some things changed a little; not so many changed a lot
some things continued in the same direction; not so many changed
    direction

some things improved; not so many things deteriorated

We can think of world society as a system which operates in such a way as to exhibit a pattern of normal functioning together with less common patterns of abnormality. Abnormalities may be local or more widespread – they may start local and become more widespread involving a larger part of society. Abnormality may be either positive or negative.

For example most people are healthy most of the time but everybody has illness some of the time and a few people have illness most of the time. Most households are safe most of the time but a few households experience catastrophic failure. Most cities have a normal routine but a few cities are visited by abnormal events. Most states function in an acceptable way but a few states are categorised as 'failed' states … occasionally there is concern that a state has broken international rules.

---

[8] Burleigh quotes Dickens in his title and in his preface in order to convey the quandary of characterising the current times.
Burleigh, Michael. *The Best of Times, the Worst of Times. A History of Now.* London, Macmillan: 2017.
Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. London: All The Year Round, 1859.

What is world society doing at any one point in time? One answer to this is to look at one day's news. What we find is a rich variety of events involving a rich variety of actors in relationships in a complex structure. These events are not all the events - they are the abnormal events and are often of a negative conflictual nature.

Thinking of world society as a system, we can consider its structure and its process. World society involves a complex structure of relationships. The relationships are ongoing processes and we can consider the trajectory of these ongoing relationships. The trajectory may contain both normal and notable events, the latter tending to be selected as news.

The year's headlines

Trends continued: global warming; advancing technology; the dominance of the USA; rapid growth in India and China; and sometimes religious strife amongst Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews and others.

The volcanic outbursts from Donald Trump, the new president in the White House,[9] contrasted with the assured calm displayed by China's Xi Jinping at home and globally. Trump's style caused nervousness at home and around the world. China's activities caused nervousness among its Pacific neighbours. North Korea continued its nuclear missile development in the face of angry words from Washington, UN resolutions, sanctions and diplomacy. Vladimir Putin's relations with Russia's near neighbours – the Baltic states, Ukraine, Turkey, Syria and Iraq – created nervousness in the West. Joint, though separate and not always harmonious, action involving both Russia and the USA succeeded in rolling back Isis in Syria and Iraq.[10] Saudi Arabia and Iran continued their involvement in the disastrous situation in the Yemen.

In Europe, Catalonians were divided in their opinion about staying in Spain or leaving; Brexit discussions continued within the UK and between UK and the European Union as a general election produced a minority government; in France the astonishing ascent of centrist Macron took him to the presidency; Angela Merkel struggled to form a centrist coalition in Germany; and in Austria a coalition formed involving the far right.

---

[9] Editorial. "Temperamental Trump. The US president is devaluing his office by neglecting traditional statecraft in favour of personal feuds and off-the-cuff pronouncements." *The Times*, January 5, 2018: 33.
Wolff, Michael. *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*. Henry Holt. 2018.
[10] Parfitt, Tom and Hannah Lucinda Smith. "It's mission accomplished in Syria, declares Russia." *The Times*, December 8, 2017: 31.

President Maduro entrenched his leftist government in Venezuela. Anarchy continued in Libya while in the south of the continent the long rule of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe ended, and the position of President Zuma of South Africa weakened. The Rohingya refugees fled persecution in Myanmar.

Normal everyday activities

Each day the sun rises. Here in the UK in February the days are lengthening. Thomas' first lambs have been born. The trains have (mostly) been following their daily schedules taking people to their accustomed workplaces and to leisure pursuits and then back home again. People, families, schools, organisations and governments follow their everyday activities. Special occasions, milestones, birthdays are reached and celebrated. One view of everyday activities is provided by the average household weekly expenditure in the UK.[11] See Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Weekly household expenditure in the UK

	£
Transport	72.70
Housing (net), fuel and power	72.50
Recreation and leisure	68.00
Food and non-alcoholic drinks	56.80
Restaurants and hotels	45.10
Miscellaneous goods and services	39.70
Household goods and services	35.50
Clothing and footwear	23.50
Communication	16.00
Alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs	11.40
Health	7.20
Education	7.00
Total	528.90

---

[11] Hosking, Patrick. "Spending on cigarettes and alcohol falls to 15-year low." *The Times*, February 17, 2017: 1-2.
ONS:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/expenditure/bulletins/familyspendingintheuk/financialyearendingmarch2016

However what is normal everyday activity for the average British household is not the experience of everyone in world society.

In the UK a charity providing long-term accommodation and support for homeless under-25s has also set up an emergency helpline which has been called by more than 1,600 young people in its first six months.[12]

There are one million cases of cholera in war-torn Yemen and 80% of the population has little or no access to food, fuel, clean water or healthcare.[13]

In Myanmar, conflict between the Buddhist majority and the Muslim Rohingyan minority, created a refugee crisis with people fleeing into Bangladesh.[14]

In Guinea-Bissau just under two million people have a gross domestic product of just over a billion dollars …

… and at the other extreme, just over a billion dollars is what Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia paid for a painting, a yacht and a chateau.[15]

> "In his home country he is leading an austerity drive, but abroad he has been identified in the past year as the buyer of a $500 million yacht and a Leonardo da Vinci painting for $450 million … According to research by *The New York Times*, he is the ultimate owner - through a series of shell companies - of the world's most expensive house, a $300 million (£225 million) Louis XIV-style palace near Versailles."

A complex structure of relationships: one day's news

World society involves a complex structure of relationships. The relations may be cooperative or conflictual – the latter being given prominence in the news. A brief glimpse of the great array of these conflicts is provided by the twenty or so items which appeared in just a single day's news on Tuesday 5th September 2017 in *The Times*. Conflicts were present in the social divisions of race, nation, religion, politics, class, gender, age and sexual relations. Table 2.2 presents a selection of the headlines.

---

[12] Brindle, David. "Emergency helpline saves invisible young homeless from wretched life on streets." *The Observer*, December 17, 2017: 19.

[13] Trew, Bel. "One million cases in Yemen cholera crisis." *The Times*. December 22, 2017: 42

[14] Philp, Catherine. "Malala tells Suu Kyi to speak out on refugee crisis." *The Times*, September 5, 2017: 30-31.

[15] Spencer, Richard. "Saudi prince's $300m chateau is the world's most expensive home." *The Times*, December 18, 2017.

Race. (1) Bell Pottinger, one of the City of London's best-known PR firms, was expelled from the Public Relations and Communications Association for association with a "potentially racially divisive" campaign in South Africa, promoting a narrative of "economic emancipation from white monopoly capital". (2) Calhoun College at Yale University has been renamed Hooper College because John Calhoun, a 19th century vice president of the USA, was a leading proponent of slavery.

Nation. The North Korean testing of a nuclear bomb prompted an emergency session of the UN security council with the UK and France supporting the US call for increasing the pressure but China and Russia reluctant to do so.

Table 2.2 Conflictual social relations: one day's headlines

North Korean leader is begging for war, America tells UN
Children at risk of sexual exploitation
Home schooling fuels extremism, police chief warns
Religious groups defend MP over grooming claim
Protest over Lidl's disappearing cross
Non-believers outnumber the faithful by widest margin yet
Couple hit guests at wedding
Law student who ridiculed Isis is accused of hate crime
Crackdown on fantasists who win payouts for sex abuse lies
Blackmailer ordered web rape of baby
Englishman aims to lead Scottish Labour
Childhood is under threat as never before
Race and sex abuse
Rebel religion. Violence against Muslims in central Africa threatens to turn into genocide
Malala tells Suu Kyi to speak out on refugee crisis
Outrage in Ankara after Merkel dashes Turkey's EU hopes
Bishop shelters 2,000 Muslims from massacre
'Dictator' forces paper to close
Yale drops slave owner in favour of female admiral
Bell Pottinger expelled from PR body over race campaign

Nation, class, politics. (1) In a TV election debate in Germany Merkel and Schultz discussed stopping the talks about Turkey's EU membership, prompting complaints from Turkey of populist Turkey-Erdogan-bashing. (2) Richard Leonard is the favourite to become the new leader of Scottish Labour and has defended his English, private-school past. He said that nobody should be criticised for where they were born or went to school.

Religion, ethnicity. (1) In the Central African Republic, a bishop has sheltered 2,000 Muslims threatened with a massacre. The country is predominantly Christian with a minority of Muslims. Government is weak and there are Christian and Muslim militia groups. (2) In Burma, the military and the Buddhist majority are attacking the Muslim Rohingyan minority and causing a refugee crisis with people fleeing into Bangladesh. (3) In the UK, a police conference was told that "segregated, isolated communities, unregulated education and home schooling were a breeding ground for extremists and future terrorists". (4) Photos of Greek churches on Lidl's food packaging appeared with the cross removed "to maintain neutrality in all religions" but this has prompted complaints. (5) In London wedding guests outside a synagogue were attacked by two strangers in an anti-semitic attack. (6) In the UK, 71% of those aged between 18 and 24 said they had no religion whereas only 27% of over 75s said this. People in the USA are much more religious.

Religion, age, sexual relations. A number of Sikh, Hindu and Pakistani Christian groups have written a joint letter criticising Labour's "weak response" to a frontbencher who spoke out about the race factor in sex-grooming cases.

Sexual relations. Ministers will crack down on compensation paid to fantasists who make false accusations of sexual abuse.

Age, sexual relations. (1) Ministers have appointed Eleanor Brazil as commissioner for children's services in Croydon after an Ofsted report identified failures including leaving young people at risk of sexual exploitation. (2) A man in Durham UK has been jailed for 16 years for "online" rape after blackmailing youngsters in the USA to commit serious sexual offences while he was thousands of miles away watching them over the internet. (3) The charity Girls Not Brides UK is campaigning to raise the minimum age for marriage from 16 to 18 in an attempt to stop the practice of forced marriages.

General. (1) Media: The Cambodia Daily was closed down by the country's prime minister. (2) Social media: an Edinburgh law student welcomed the US bombing of Isis tunnels but was accused of Islamophobia by another student who had referred to black men as "trash".[16]

---

[16] Deng, Boer. "North Korean leader is begging for war, America tells UN." *The Times*, September 5, 2017: 1.

Karim, Fariha. "Children at risk of sexual exploitation." *The Times*, September 5, 2017: 4.

Simpson, John. "Home schooling fuels extremism, police chief warns." *The Times*, September 5, 2017: 6.