

PART I

What is International Studies?

The aim of International Studies is to understand the global complexities of the world in which we live by means of the role that people play in these complexities. International Studies has the character of a 3-D chessboard due to the interaction of local, regional, and global dimensions. This interaction is the focal point of study with the human individual as the main driver. In addition to these approaches, this textbook introduces three global scopes that will help the student of International Studies understand and analyze the 'global complexities': global structures, global trends and global challenges. These scopes will provide the framework of this textbook, whereby each scope will be elaborated in several thematic chapters.

This textbook approaches International Studies as a field of study that will enable students to navigate the three dimensions and the complexity of global issues. Rather than being a specialist in any academic field, International Studies students will be given a broad overview of the various fields and disciplines and therefore the ability to look beyond traditional academic boundaries. To accomplish this, this textbook offers five interconnected approaches to International Studies: interaction of the local and the global; the human perspective; the contemporary perspective; inter- and multidisciplinary; and diversity. Each approach will be discussed separately in the chapters below.

A **global event** is any situation that has global repercussions, like a tsunami that hits numerous coastal areas, or a war that causes massive migration. A **global complexity** is one or a series of global events that create a complex social or political situation on a global scale, like the Ukraine-Russia war that has caused a large stream of refugees, impacted international grain supply, and stirred global political alliances.

CHAPTER 1

First perspective: interaction of the local and the global

The first perspective we consider in International Studies is the ability of the local to become global, and vice versa, and the interaction of the two. This may sound self-evident, but is very complex from an academic perspective because it demands continuously zooming in and out. The following notions will help navigate these multiple dimensions.

3-D chessboard

In International Relations, it is now recognized that domestic and global policies are interconnected (also known as ‘intermestics’), and that studying them separately or, worse, focusing on one while neglecting the other, does not contribute to a full understanding of the situation under study. International Studies as conceived in this textbook, translates this notion of intermestics into three spatial dimensions not unlike a 3-D chessboard. These dimensions are **the local, the national and the global**. The local can range from the level of the individual to that of an organisation or a town, the national refers to states and the global to everything that surpasses the state (like international organizations and corporations). In the second half of the 20th century, the national and global dimensions also started merging into a hybrid form called region, and ‘regionalism’ has become the name for states who endeavor to create spheres of shared economy, politics or culture.

In between and intersecting with these three dimensions are numerous other actors at play, like international corporations, transnational communities, criminal organizations and religious institutions. Yet in the middle of all of them is the **human individual**, because it is only human individuals who can set any of these dimensions into motion.

Intermestics is a term used in International Relations to denote the inter-connectedness between domestic and international policies.

The interaction of these **three dimensions** is the field of study of International Studies. For instance, local events may spark national uprisings that, in turn, can resonate on a global level. The Tunisian salesman who set himself on fire in 2011 in response to police abuse, triggered a national uprising that set in motion a series

of revolts across the Arab world. Or the highly infectious Covid virus that erupted in China and quickly spread across borders, growing into a worldwide pandemic. Likewise, national events can have global as well as local repercussions elsewhere in the world. The 2023 actions of the Israeli army in Gaza not only caused friction among states globally but also within states across the world. Global events can also have both national and local effects, such as climate change, or a political-military divide like the Cold War, or an international human rights treaty.

With the emergence of communication technology, these three dimensions have acquired a virtual parallel: contacts made among people on any of the three levels can now also be made without these people physically meeting. While this may speed up the communication and information flows, it is also cause for concern. Can people handle that much information? Can people function socially when they do not meet physically? What is the effect of all this on the cohesion of societies, the performance on the work floor, the governance of a corporation or a country? These and other questions have become pertinent after the Covid-19 pandemic (2019-2022) and still need answers.

The **3 dimensions** stand for three spatial dimensions: local, national and global. These dimensions, in their interconnectedness, are the domains in which human action takes place. In addition to the **physical** interaction among people in any of these dimensions, there also is an increasing **virtual** interaction by means of the multiple forms of communication.

Whatever global events or complexities are studied by students of International Studies, they require students to realize that the spatial dimensions play a role, and that the students should be able to move back and forth from one to the other to understand the issue at hand.

Two processes

On the 3-D chessboard of International Studies, we can discern two processes of interaction: globalization and glocalization.

Globalization

While the term *global* is an adjective that describes the nature of an event, *globalization* is a noun that refers to a process. Globalization means that the world has become **interconnected**: countries cooperate on a worldwide scale, large corporations do business across the world, international human rights organizations

are campaigning in multiple countries, disasters and wars are immediately visible to everyone on social media, and pandemics move across borders faster than ever before. It must be noted that globalization can have two meanings: it may refer to the political, social, economic or other human processes that have become globalized, but it may also refer to the policies that governments have put in play that, in turn, have set such processes in motion. In this textbook, globalization refers to the processes.

Because of this interconnectedness, local events can have global repercussions, and vice versa. In 2005, for instance, a cartoon in a small local Danish newspaper about the prophet Mohammed led to demonstrations all over the Muslim world and created global tensions between the Western and Muslim world. Similarly, the arrest and subsequent death of an Afro-American man in the United States in May 2020 spurred the Black Lives Matter movement that led to protests all over the Western world.

Being interconnected oftentimes creates **interdependence**: an action by one of the stakeholders of a global network can have repercussions for the entire network. The worldwide economic crisis of 2008 started with the popping of a financial bubble in the American housing market, and this led to a financial crisis on a global scale because the worldwide financial sector had become interdependent. Likewise, the 2019 Covid-19 pandemic started in China but quickly spread due to the globalized and very dynamic transport networks. To stop the pandemic, these networks had to be shut down, which had enormous implications worldwide on a social and on an economic level.

Globalization means that states, organizations, and people are interconnected on a worldwide scale.

The terms '**international**' and '**global**' are often used interchangeably. However, there is a slight difference: 'international' usually refers to states or regions; 'global' denotes an interconnectedness on a world scale that can be among a variety of actors.

Glocalization

So far, we have discussed how local issues can have global consequences. When it happens the other way round, so when global events have local consequences or local expressions, it is called glocalization. For instance, the idea of socialism gained worldwide popularity in the early twentieth century, and became a truly global ideology, but was adapted to local tastes and circumstances: the socialism of the Soviet Union was different from that in China, and the socialist leader Nkrumah of Ghana had different ideas from his colleagues in Asia and South America, just

like the socialists in northern European countries had their own interpretation of socialism. Of a completely different order is rap music, which is another example of glocalization: it has taken the world by storm, but the fact that it is performed in the local language and deals with local issues makes that this global phenomenon has become very localized. The interaction of globalization and glocalization takes place on numerous levels. If we visualize a network spanning the world, we can imagine all kinds of goods, information and ideas circling the world at dazzling speed, being uploaded, so to speak, into the global networks of communication and transported, downloaded everywhere in the world.

Glocalization is when global events or phenomena have local consequences or local expressions.

Three scopes

In addition to the 3-D chessboard with its two processes of globalization and glocalization, this textbook introduces three different scopes through which we can view these dynamics: structures, trends, and challenges.

Global structures

When people are active on a local or national level, they are often confronted with structures or mechanisms that exist everywhere, and that have become pervasive in human interactions. In this textbook we call these global structures. At some point in time, they were created by humankind and they are characterized by a certain degree of permanence and pervasiveness.

There are two kinds of global structures. Some are almost as old as humankind, like belief systems, the patriarchy, the arts, the economy, war and peace, migration. These structures may take very different forms (belief systems exist as mythologies, religions, ideologies; economies can be based on barter or on money, or they may be aimed at the redistribution of wealth or at the protection of private property), but their essence remains the same. In many instances, that essence has evolved into a variety of traditions. The other kind of global structures is what people have developed at various points in history and which have since become engrained and permanent across the world. Examples include the nation-state, international organizations, international law and diplomacy.

The process of globalization may enhance but also disrupt established global structures. An example of such disruption is the ancient global structure of diplomacy, whereby rulers and governments communicate with each other through ambassadors. In modern times, until half a century ago, everything international was

handled by national Ministries of Foreign Affairs and their international networks of embassies. Museums or companies that wanted to establish relationships with colleagues abroad would solicit the help of their embassies. But because of globalization, that is often no longer the case. Large companies don't bother with diplomats but establish their own international contacts. And directors of museums or mayors of large cities may not ask permission or advice from their Ministry of Foreign affairs but establish their own relations with cities and museums abroad.

A **global structure** is a mechanism or organization that is globally embedded in human interactions and is the result of cooperation or tradition. A global structure is always human made. See Part 2 for further discussion.

Global trends

What is referred to in this textbook as a global trend is when a manner of thinking or behaving gains worldwide recognition or emulation. An example is nationalism: it emerged in the nineteenth century and quickly enveloped the entire world. Nationalism 'caught on' globally and had enormous repercussions locally. Other examples of such trends are modernization and secularization in the first half of the twentieth century, religionization since the 1970s, securitization since the 2000s. The reason and timing of global trends is often unclear. We can merely observe that such trends happen and greatly influence people's thinking and actions worldwide.

The difference between a global trend and a global structure is that a global trend is not yet fully embedded in human interactions. Some global trends may gradually evolve into global structures (like the nation-state), but some trends may also lose their traction and dissolve (for instance, it is argued that the global trend of international cooperation that started in late 1940s is on the decline). Some global trends transformed in unexpected ways. It was believed, for instance, that the modernity of the twentieth century, with its emphasis on rationalism and science, would push religion to the background or even make it obsolete. It did not: religion became a factor of social and political significance from the 1970s onwards. Similarly, it was believed that national and international solidarity would make nationalism disappear. It did not: in the second half of the twentieth century, nationalism started to re-emerge with a force that took everyone by surprise.

In International Studies it is important to recognize global trends because they may explain much of what is happening in a certain period. Nationalism, for example, was an incentive in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to think about a society as a single people that shared the same language, history and religion. This led to many cases of ethnic and religious cleansing and contributed to the high number of states in the twentieth century. The study of today's global trends is a challenge however, because it is hard to recognize them: people usually

consider the times they live in as ‘normal’ and not as part of an upcoming or passing trend, and even when people do realize something is happening that helps define their time (as was the case with populism in the 1990s, or with the decline of multilateralism in the 2020s) it’s often difficult to identify exactly what it is and how it affects the world.

A **global trend** is a manner of thinking or behaving that gains worldwide recognition or is emulated globally. Global trends happen at moments and in ways that are usually unforeseen. See Part 3 for further discussion.

Global challenge

A global challenge is a problematic issue on a global scale that affects people worldwide, and that needs to be addressed by the concerted efforts of various actors on an international scale. Examples include climate change, migration, ‘policing’ of international peace and justice, and sustainable development. These global complexities cannot be solved on a national level: international cooperation is needed to address them.

An interesting aspect about global challenges is that they usually only gain that status once they are recognized as such. There is, in other words, a difference between the *existence* of a global challenge and the *recognition* of one. For instance, scientists and policymakers have been warning against climate change since the 1970s, but it only became a global challenge when it was put on the international agenda in the early 2000s. Another example is terrorism: nationalist and left-wing terrorism existed around the world in the 1970s, and Muslim militants were a menace in the Arab world during the 1990s, but it was only considered a global threat after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 against Americans on American soil and after subsequent attacks in Europe. Conversely, policymakers may also decide *not* to allow a problematic global issue to turn into a global challenge. This has been the case with the Covid-19 pandemic, when the presidents of the United States, Brazil and Belarus tried to downplay the gravity of the corona pandemic, refusing to consider it an issue of national emergency, let alone something that needed an international approach.

A **global challenge** is a problematic issue on a global scale that affects people worldwide, and that needs to be addressed by the concerted efforts of various actors. A global issue becomes a global challenge once it is recognized as such. See Part 4 for further discussion

Some examples of interacting and overlapping global structures, trends, challenges

Migration: People have been migrating for as long as they have been inhabiting the earth. As such migration is a global structure. But many of today's migrations – especially of refugees and illegal migrant workers – are also designated as global challenges, and to address them, global structures like international treaties on refugees and the International Organization for Migration are called upon.

Democracy: while democracy has a long history and manifests itself in many ways, it became a truly global trend in the 1990s: democratic reforms took place in many Asian, African and South American countries, and people took to the streets in countries like China, Mongolia and most eastern European countries calling for government reforms that would lead to democracy. Demonstrations like these would recur in the decades after that, ranging from the Color Revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan to the Arab Spring in 2011 and the uprisings of 2019 in Hong Kong, the Middle East and South America. These events showed the glocalization of democracy in the many different ways that countries view and structure their democracy. And whereas most Western countries saw this global trend as the start of a better and more liberal era that should ideally turn into a global structure, states like Russia and China considered these developments a global challenge.

Pandemics: Pandemics are a recurring phenomenon in the history of mankind (think of the plague or the Spanish flu). Recent pandemics, like the Mexican flu (2009) and Ebola (2014) were treated as local problems. Covid-19 in 2019 was at first also considered a local issue (China), but once it started to spread it became clear that concerted efforts were needed worldwide to fight this disease: Covid-19 became a global challenge. Some global structures were severely affected by it, like the global economy, while other global structures, like the World Health Organization, geared up to confront it. The glocalization of the pandemic showed in the different manners in which it was handled in each country.

Climate change: In 1972, the Club of Rome, a think tank of intellectuals and business leaders, published *The Limits to Growth*, a study on the problems the planet was facing due to excessive production and consumption. This was one of the first warning signs for the global challenge of climate change. But it took until the 2000s for climate change not to be an issue of discussion but a generally accepted scientific fact, and as such also an accepted global challenge. Global structures like the United Nations are at the forefront of addressing this challenge.

Further reading

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CHAPTER 2

Second perspective: people

International issues are commonly studied by an academic discipline called International Relations. Their focus is on international politics and economics, and therefore predominantly on the ways states interact. However, in International Studies the dominant focus is on the role of people. This domain of academic study is reserved for Social Sciences and Humanities. But whereas these disciplines usually focus on individuals and communities in their local environment, International Studies explores the role of these people in a global context. This textbook provides the following concepts that will help the student of International Studies understand the interaction between the individual and the global world.

Agency

In International Studies, the dominant focus is on the role of people – as persons, from the individual worker or parent to religious or national leaders – but also on their ideas and cultures, on their organized forms as communities and, in a final stage, on the roles they play in states and international organizations. These are the mentioned three dimensions of the local, the national and the global. A key notion when studying the role of the individual in these three dimensions is **agency**, which refers to the power and potential of individuals to shape their own lives. This does not mean that people are the determining factor in what is happening in their lives. Much happens that is outside of their control. The question is then how they will respond which effectively is also a form of agency.

The notion of agency challenges the traditional approach of studying states and (usually male) leaders by contending that *all* people play a role. Studies have subsequently been directed at uncovering the voices and roles of women, people of color, the enslaved, and people of lower socio-economic classes. The notion of agency allows students of International Studies to get a much wider view of the actors who play a role in the global complexities of this world.

Agency refers to the power and potential of each individual to shape their own life.

While agency is a useful concept for studying individuals, some academic challenges remain. One such challenge is how to study the needs and desires of individuals when considering that these individuals interact with each other. Are the needs and desires really those of the individuals who express them or are they

influenced by or copied from peer groups (family, friends, communities)? Or are these needs and desires perhaps an intricate part of the political, economic and social dynamics that play on a national and global scale? In the social sciences this dilemma is also known as the '**structure-agency duality**', which explores the balance between free will of the individual and the constraints or other influences of their environment. The assumption is that social structures such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, family and culture, but also political structures like laws, bureaucracies, governments and states may limit (or motivate!) individuals to exercise their agency. Studying these processes will help students of International Studies understand the dynamics of global events.

The **structure-agency duality** explores the balance between the agency of the individual and the constraints or influences of their environment.

Another challenge when exploring the concept of agency is how this may affect others. The focus of agency is usually on the individual's needs, desires, drives and capacities. Agency studied in this manner may then explain much about people's individual behavior, but not how that agency interacts with local, national or global issues. When researching the impact that people may have on others and how they may set something in motion that may or may not have a global impact, the Social Sciences often use the notion of the **change agent**. This is a notion that has been applied in a wide variety of contexts, ranging from the mass communicator and educator to human rights activists. Oftentimes the term change agent is used in combination with the concept of leadership, but the two are not necessarily the same. Consider, for example, a group of people who want to protest against something, so they post a time and place for this protest on social media, and several hundred people show up. Some people present made the first move in this scenario and may be considered change agents, but there is no act of leadership.

A **change agent** is someone who advocates or causes change in an organization or society. The notion of change agent is often used in conjunction with – but is not always the same as – the notion of **leadership**.

3-I's

Agency considers the actions of people, but another important question is what motivates people in today's global setting: what makes them tick? The answer to this question is of course immensely complex but can, for the sake of simplicity, be

reduced to what this textbook refers to as the **3-I's: interests, ideas, identities**. Examples of people's basic **interests** include safety, food, water, health, and access to resources (whereby the needed resources may change over time: for instance, lithium as a raw material for electrical batteries has recently become of primal importance). The second 'I' is that of **ideas**, which encompass ideologies and religions, whereby the belief in these ideas is a powerful motivator. The third 'I' stands for **identities**, which has multiple components, such as language, culture, customs and histories.

The **3-I's** stand for **interests, ideas, identities**. They represent the basic motivators for people's behaviors and thoughts.

The 3-I's play a role in all global events and complexities of today. Sometimes because people are the cause of such events. If they are, the 3-I's are at the root of people's *actions*. Certain ideas may be the cause for war, for instance, just like the pursuit of certain interests may lead to the establishment of large corporations and the development of technologies, or to economic meltdowns and the depletion of resources. In other instances, people may need to *respond* to regional or global events like a pandemic, climate change or migration, and are forced to make choices and take decisions which are always driven by their interests, ideas or identities. For instance, migration can be welcomed out of economic interest or feared as a negative impact on a society's identity. Covid-19 was believed by some to be a mere flu, by others to be a public health hazard, and by yet others to be a government conspiracy to gain more power. These perceptions are decisive for how that global event is dealt with: it can make quite a difference if an issue is considered an economic opportunity, a political challenge or a social problem. Sometimes perceptions are so widely shared that they have a global impact (a process that has accelerated exponentially with the emergence of social media). After Covid-19, for instance, it appears that the mistrust of vaccinations became a global trend.

Humanities

As mentioned, the main disciplines involved in studying International Studies are Humanities and Social Sciences. Many universities distinguish between the two: 'Humanities' are all disciplines that study the thoughts of people and their expression thereof (like history, languages, theology, philosophy, arts) while 'Social Sciences' are all disciplines that study the behavior of people (like anthropology, psychology, sociology, political sciences). In this textbook, however, we are joining all these subjects together under the heading 'Humanities' as the study of the behavior

and thoughts of people. Furthermore, as we will see in the next chapters, Law and Economics, although often treated as disciplines separate from Humanities, also play distinctive roles in International Studies.

Humanities in this textbook is the study of the behaviour and thoughts of people.

Academic studies are traditionally divided into Humanities and Natural Sciences (which deal with the material world, like flora and fauna, planets and stars, living organisms and lifeless materials). A distinct difference between the two categories is that the Natural Sciences have the possibility of conducting accurate measurements through which they can prove or disprove hypotheses. That is also why they are called the exact sciences. The Humanities, on the other hand, have a much more elusive research object: humankind. And humans have a few characteristics that can make accurate measurement challenging.

First, humans appear to be rather unpredictable. For instance, the large political events in recent decades that had a global impact, like the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the Arab Spring in 2011 were not predicted by the hundreds of experts that were monitoring these areas. Contrary to the Natural Sciences, humans, it seems, are not governed by laws that, once we understand them, can be used to predict what people will do.

Second, while both humans and animals are motivated by *interests* – survival, food, resources – humans are typically also motivated by *ideas* and *identities*. Revolutions have been started because of ideas, wars because of national identities. The Americans rose in revolt spurred on by a piece of paper that started with ‘We, the people’, and the Belgian revolt of independence was sparked by an opera. The many calls for freedom or independence are more than a claim of rights, just like a demonstration for peace is more than an appeal to principles. Often there are underlying driving forces of human emotions like hope, despair, fear, pride. These are human qualities that are not always easy to put in a simple academic equation. The same applies to the many forms of communication that humankind has at its disposal like language, arts, music. Speeches are known for having roused entire populations, giving them a sense of unity and purpose. Similarly, music is one of those typical human abilities that can wield enormous power: there are plenty of examples of songs that unite and empower people, whether during religious gatherings, rock concerts or revolutions.

The third characteristic that distinguishes the Natural Sciences from Humanities is that students of Humanities are humans themselves. Studying one’s own species poses certain academic problems. Can students of Humanities, being humans themselves, be sufficiently objective and neutral in the pursuit of these studies? This question challenges the academic quality and integrity of study. Some scholars

hold an **absolutist** view by claiming that Humanities are just another science, and they practice the study of Humanities with empirical research based on evidence and hard truths. Others hold a **relativist** view: they argue that the subjectivity of the researcher cannot be denied or neutralized and must therefore be taken into account when conducting research (see also chapter 'Diversity').

The relativist viewpoint gained momentum with the theory of **Postmodernism** which argues that reality and morality are not set in stone but are human constructs. According to postmodernists, since there are no laws of nature that determine how humankind works, and one can never prove that God or the universe has set rules that determine what is right or wrong, there remain only the rules set by humans themselves. In other words, according to this viewpoint, people shape their own way of looking at the world. Postmodernism, therefore, is against lending permanence and authority to knowledge and values. While this reasoning has a certain logic, it also risks making any kind of research into humankind almost impossible.

Further reading

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CHAPTER 3

Third perspective: the contemporary

International Studies as presented in this textbook regard the world from the perspective of the here and now. We do not work our way from the past to the present, but we start with the present and look at the past only if it can help us understand the present. There are two reasons for this approach.

The focus on today

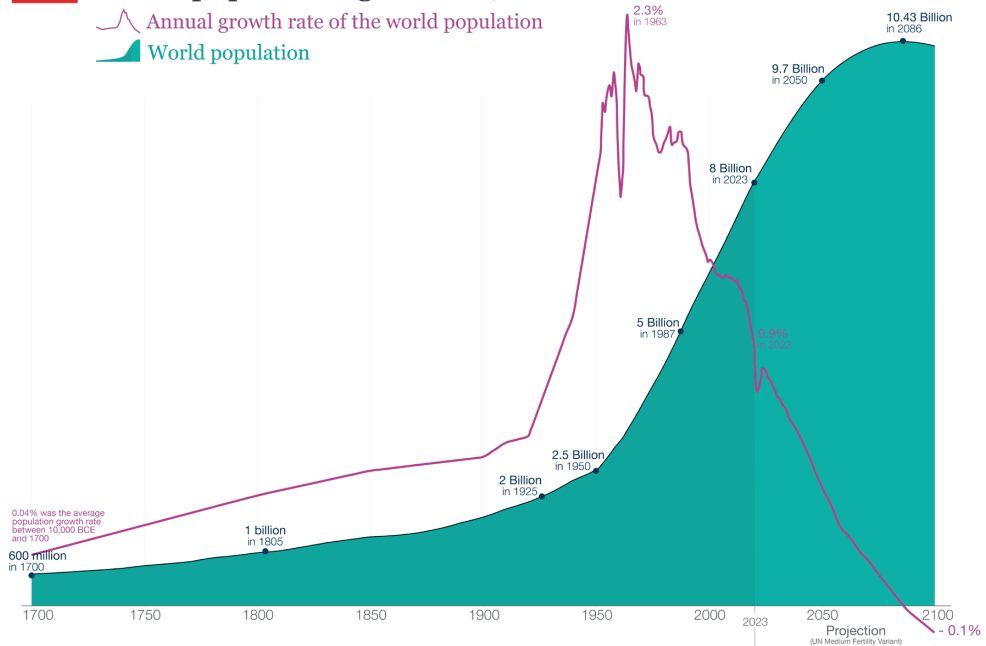
The first reason to take the perspective of the here and now is simply that our present world and its current events are what we engage with every day. In International Studies we want to make sense of the world around us as it is now. But to study this contemporary world in an academic fashion is not easy. We are too involved, too close, it's happening now and so we have little time for distance or reflection. That goes against the nature of most scholars who want to be able to take a step back and take time to study and consider. But students of International Studies are often confronted with issues that are playing out in real life, right now. International Studies as expounded in this textbook aims to train students to use a broad knowledge combined with a set of analytical tools from various disciplines to evaluate the world around us as it is evolving today.

Recent global changes

The second reason to take a contemporary perspective is that our world has undergone some unprecedented global changes in the past decades that affect us here and now. Perhaps the most significant one is demographics: the world population has doubled since 1970. This has an impact on the world's resources, food production and climate. Another unprecedented phenomenon is the enormous increase in literacy worldwide. This means that more people than ever before have access to information. With the advancements of social media technology since the turn of the millennium, this access has grown to global proportions.

World population growth, 1700-2100

Annual growth rate of the world population
World population



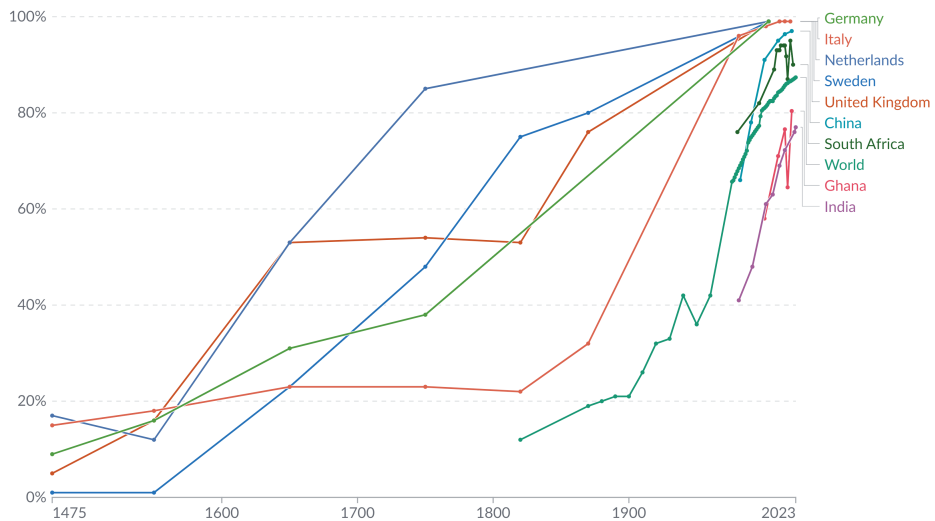
Data sources: Our World in Data based on HYDE, UN, and UN Population Division (2022 Revision)
This is a visualization from [OurWorldinData.org](https://ourworldindata.org), where you find data and research on how the world is changing.

Licensed under CC-BY by the authors Max Roser and Hannah Ritchie.

Figure I.3.1 World population growth

Literacy rate, 1475 to 2023

The share of adults aged 15 and older who can both read and write.



Data source: World Bank (2024); Various sources (2018)

OurWorldinData.org/literacy | CC BY

Note: Specific definitions and measurement methodologies vary across countries and time.

Figure I.3.2 Literacy rate

Another factor of considerable change in the recent past is the increase of the number of actors on the world stage: in addition to a rising number of states (the number of UN member states has almost quadrupled since 1948), there is also an increasing number of non-state actors that play a role in international and global politics: international corporations (like Shell or Procter & Gamble), humanitarian and ecological organizations (like Amnesty International, Greenpeace and Oxfam), international economic organizations (like the IMF and World Bank), but also criminal and militant organizations. All these developments have contributed to an increase in encounters between local, national and global levels – in short: globalization.

Also, many new *global structures* have emerged over the past decades. International treaties, international bodies (like the International Organization for Migration, the World Health Organisation), regional cooperations (like ASEAN, African Union or the European Union), international financial systems – these are just a few examples of the mechanisms and organizations that operate on a regional or global level. Most are the result of intensive international cooperation.

A similar recent development is the emergence of new *global trends*. Until the twentieth century, the ordering principle between people in almost all societies was based on social standing, colour, gender or religion, structures which were gradually dismantled during the twentieth century. These traditional social classifications were replaced with the notion of equality – a concept that has a long history but that was arguably been put into full practice since the second half of the twentieth century. This has been a game changer (even if practicing genuine equality wasn't always successful, and is still work in progress), not only for national societies but also for the international community, as we will see in later chapters. Similarly, but in a much later stage, identity has become dominant in public and political discourse since the 2010s, with #MeToo and Black Lives Matters as prominent movements with a global impact.

Did these changes make our world a different world? That's not a question this textbook intends to answer. We merely observe that right now, the world is very much driven by recent global developments.

Crisis

Working on present issues often requires dealing with unexpected events. In the 1950s, when British prime minister Harold MacMillan was asked by a young journalist about the greatest challenge for a statesman, he famously answered “Events, dear boy, events.” Unexpected events may sometimes take the form of what is called a ‘crisis’. This has become a catch word in today's parlance: it usually refers to a problem that was not foreseen and that needs immediate attention. This, in

turn, often means that ongoing matters are being put on hold and all resources and time are directed at solving that crisis. A crisis may require – or serve as an excuse for – solutions that break with existing tradition, law or bureaucracy. Whether these solutions are beneficial or detrimental to a society or its people depends on how you look at it: for instance, an administrative crisis may lead to an overhaul of an institution to make it more effective, an economic crisis may prompt a restructuring that affects people's jobs, and a social crisis is usually the pretext for revolutionaries or the military to start a revolution or stage a coup. Since the early 2000s, the characterization of an event as a 'crisis' is often done in terms of security, which has its own dynamics (see chapter 'Security').

'Crisis'

"In all the human and social sciences, crisis appears as a key concept; in history, of course, to characterize epochs or structures. Political science tries to operationalize the term and distinguish it from 'conflict'. (...) 'Crisis' is often used interchangeably with 'unrest,' 'conflict,' 'revolution,' and to describe vaguely disturbing moods or situations. (...) The concept of crisis, which once had the power to pose unavoidable, harsh and non-negotiable alternatives, has been transformed to fit the uncertainties of whatever might be favored at a given moment."

(Kosseleck Reinhart and Michaela Richter, 'Crisis', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2006)

The past and the future

This emphasis on current events may give the false impression that the past is not relevant. To the contrary. The past is of crucial importance to understand the present: how did we get here? That sounds like a simple history lesson, but it isn't. There are different ways to look at the past. For instance, do we believe that humankind improves as we move forward in time (which is often implied by the term 'progress')? And is the sequence of events that we call history a series of events that logically follow one after another, with a subsequent series of causes and effects, or is it all random? And to what extent is history colored by people's identity, their culture or their ideas about society or politics? These questions are of great relevance to students of International Studies.

To understand the present, we need to appreciate how the roads taken in the past have brought us to where we are today. This is called **process tracing** which is the analysis of all the elements that may have led to a certain event. This may sound very straightforward, but the analysis itself as well as its underlying assumptions can be quite complex because of their human dimensions. Were these roads leading up to

significant events taken deliberately or randomly, were decision makers consciously choosing war or merely sleepwalking into it, were people driven by material interests (land, resources, power) or by emotional or cultural considerations (honour, anger, revenge)? And, perhaps most importantly, can the road taken ever be un-taken, in other words, is reversal of actions possible?

Process tracing is the analysis of all the elements (historical, cultural, political, religious, etc.) that may have led to a certain event. Important questions in this analysis are **when** (when did events take place, in what order), **what** (what are the constituent elements of this process, what are the dynamics at play), **why** (why are the elements of this process relevant, and why did they happen in the sequence they did) and **how** (how did the combination of all these elements lead to the event under study).

While the roads taken have led us to today, we make choices today that have an impact on our **futures**. Today, therefore, acts as a linchpin between the past and the future. And while many leaders try to make decisions that are aimed at the future – agreements on climate change, wars to eradicate terrorism, economic policies to alleviate poverty – many of these decisions are also prompted by the urges of today: we want a better life, we want a better world, or we simply want more. And we want it now. Thinking about the future therefore requires some effort to look beyond the present. In doing so, we can distinguish two ways of thinking about the future. One way tries to predict what may happen in the future. This type of thinking about the future tries to answer the question ‘What can we expect?’ by extrapolating existing data into the future. Examples are the future of Middle Eastern politics, world economics, the state of technology in fifty years. The other way of thinking about the future explores new possibilities which previously seemed unthinkable by asking the question ‘Where do we want to be in the future?’. Contrary to the intellectual exercise of prediction, this requires thinking outside the box. This may lead to scenario-based thinking, but can also express itself through arts, literature and other non-academic pursuits. Change agents are typically people who take leaps forward by imagining something that to many seemed unimaginable.

Future thinking: prediction and imagination

Prediction answers the question ‘What can we expect?’ by extrapolating existing data into the future. Examples are the future of the politics in the Middle East, the economy in the world, the state of technology in fifty years. **Imagination** asks the question ‘Where do we want to be in the future?’ and explores new possibilities which previously seemed unthinkable.

Researching today's issues

One of the challenges faced by students of International Studies researching a situation that is taking place today – apart from the choice of methods and theories (see next chapter ‘Multi- and inter-disciplinarity’) – is the choice of research data. Academic research commonly makes use of either primary sources (field work, court rulings, policy documents, original writings, etc.) or secondary sources. Secondary sources are required to be academically sound, which usually means that they must be peer-reviewed. The process of research, peer-reviewing, and publishing is time consuming which means that at best, secondary academic literature is usually only available two or three years after the event. Students who want to research events or situations that are happening ‘now’ are therefore faced with the problem of finding sufficient literature on the subject. One option is to use reports produced by international organizations, research institutions and think tanks. These often make use of scientific methods to collect data, but their reports are not always academically sound because they may be selective or even biased in the collection and presentation of their data. It is therefore advised to take into account two factors when using such reports.

First, students should assess the ‘color’ of the institution that has produced the report: who are its financiers and what are its aims? Is the institution established to promote certain political or commercial viewpoints, or is its aim merely to collect certain data? And are the institution’s reports valued by other researchers? The outcome of such preliminary research does not necessarily have to disqualify that organization, but it should make students more alert to possible flaws in the information provided. One way to deal with such reliability issues is to make a cross-section of several reports on the same topic and either come to a weighted average of the information or acknowledge that the information is still inconclusive.

The second factor to consider is that the student discards any opinion or advocacy that such reports may contain and only uses the facts and data that they provide. This will require the student to make an assessment on the way that these data have been collected. If this data appears to be haphazard or based on hearsay or on local newspapers, then it might be best not to use it. Information provided by autocratic states should also be handled with suspicion. However, the data in such reports is often provided by local actors, such as human rights organizations. But whatever the source of information, it is up to the student to make a critical evaluation of it. Once the useful data is distilled from the – preferably more than one – report, the student should use academic methods and theories (see next chapter) to make an analysis of these data. Existing secondary academic literature on similar cases may also prove useful as a matter of comparison.

Further reading

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CHAPTER 4

Fourth perspective: multi- and interdisciplinarity

In the previous chapters we have seen that the student of International Studies must learn to navigate the 3-D chessboard of the local, the national and the global. Traditionally, these three dimensions are also represented by different academic disciplines: Anthropology to study the local, Sociology and Political Science to study the national, International Relations to study the global. To this we may add the multiple disciplines that are represented by the 3-I's: *Interests* are studied by disciplines like Economics and Political Science; *Ideas* by Religious Studies, Philosophy, Arts and Literature, Law, History; *Identity* by Cultural Anthropology, Linguistics, Area Studies. How to navigate this multitude of disciplinary approaches?

Multi- and inter-disciplinarity

Academic disciplines tend to highlight a particular angle of a situation. For instance, people may fight each other because of a lack of resources (that is a typical economical perspective), or because they dislike each other (that would interest anthropologists), because the other has customs that are considered blasphemous (Religious Studies), because the other is breaking rules (that's how lawyers look at it) or because leaders have whipped up their people with inflammatory rhetoric (Communication Studies and Linguistics). International Studies wants to provide a framework of study that enables the student to use as many academic perspectives as are needed to understand a particular global complexity. Ideally speaking, the perspectives of as many different disciplines as possible should be represented in the study of this one topic, but even the combination of two or three disciplines will already yield more and newer insights than the use of a single discipline.

Combining two or more disciplines is called the **multidisciplinary** approach. This is beneficial to reaching a better understanding of the issue at hand, but it also poses a challenge to the student because it adds to the already complex 3-D chessboard that is International Studies. Not only does one need to zoom in and out from the individual to the global level and back, and to move from one place on the globe to another; one also may have to switch from one academic discipline to another. The academic scholar specialized in one discipline will scoff at this approach: it is too much and will therefore harm the quality and detail of the research. That may be true. But what the International Studies student will be able to do that the specialist cannot, is to connect the dots across various geographical

and disciplinary areas, which may result in a better understanding of global complexities than a mono-disciplinary specialist will be able to assess.

Another approach that some scholars advocate is to take the elements of various disciplines and merge them in a new, coherent framework that is tailor-made for the study of the issue at hand. This is known as the **interdisciplinary** approach. This requires a high degree of knowledge of the academic disciplines that one intends to synthesize. Most researchers, however, remain in their mono-disciplinary field, and if they venture into multidisciplinary research, they usually do so by cooperating with colleagues of different disciplines to jointly study the issue at hand, each from their own disciplinary angle.

Multi-disciplinarity is the use of more than one discipline to understand the issue at hand. **Inter-disciplinarity** is the mixing of more than one discipline, thereby creating hybrid disciplines that provide new perspectives on the issue at hand. Since disciplines have become specialized fields of study, each with its own terminology and methodologies, it is relatively easier to use a multi-disciplinary approach (which only requires that the student has mastered the selected disciplines or cooperates with those who have mastered them) than to create a new and academically sound interdisciplinary approach.

Theory and methodology

Every discipline in Humanities has developed its own set of methodologies and theories. A **theory** offers an explanation of what we observe. Theories do not represent truths but provide ways of understanding. Neither are theories scientific laws that accurately describe, determine and predict how things work. The more accurate a theory is in explaining events, and the wider the range of situations that the theory can be applied to, the more valid it will be considered.

Different disciplines may ask different questions and therefore develop different theories. For instance, if one is to study the demonstrations in Hong Kong against Chinese rule in 2019, does one look at it from a political, sociological, international, cultural, media, or other perspective? Framing theory can be helpful when taking the political perspective, social movement theory when taking a sociological perspective, Orientalism when taking the perspective of Western media coverage, post-colonialism when viewing the situation in the context of Hong Kong as a former British colony. Not all theories are valid to a particular case: it is up to the student to select the one that is most helpful in understanding the issue at hand.

Theories are explanations of what we observe. These explanations are not hard truths ('this is so') but offer degrees of plausibility ('this could be understood in that way'). A theory will be considered more valuable if it is a) simple in its premises, b) proven accurate in its use, and c) applicable to more than one situation.

A **methodology** describes the manner in which research is carried out. It first involves the selection of period, actors and data. For instance, in the case of the 2019 demonstrations in Hong Kong against Chinese rule, should we study the Chinese government or the Hong Kong demonstrators, or perhaps the international media, the local police force, the parents of the demonstrators or the Hong Kong media? And is the data for the research collected by means of interviewing the main stakeholders, or going through newspaper articles or court records, or cataloging graffiti and slogans, or checking posts on social media, or perhaps a combination of these? Once these determinations have been made, the student needs to select the appropriate academic method by which to collect and interpret this information. For instance, Literature Studies have methodologies to interpret and understand written texts and oral presentations, Anthropology has elaborated methodologies to collect information from people (by means of interviews, participating observation, autobiographical research, etc.), History focuses on primary sources that are the written and oral sources of the actors themselves. The main purpose of these methodologies is to build a research approach that leads to an understanding of the research topic that is comprehensive, balanced and unbiased and, most importantly, that leads to information that is verifiable – in other words, information that can be checked and would yield the same outcome if it were to be repeated by others.

In the course of working in various disciplines and with various theories and methodologies, the student of International Studies will also be confronted with various **epistemologies**. This stands for the systems and processes of knowledge that are typical to a particular religious, cultural or political environment that the student is studying. The Western academic environment, for instance, has its own epistemology which is based on a rational system of deductive reasoning, with a focus on the individual, and a division between the religious and the secular spheres. Confucian or Islamic epistemologies, to name two other examples, may use very different paradigms. For instance, the divine is an intricate part of Islamic thinking, and the collective is central to Confucian thinking. Different epistemologies may therefore give very different outlooks on the same topic of study.

Epistemology is the approach to knowledge and how to arrive at it. A particular religious, cultural, or political environment can have its own epistemology, each with its own foundations, methods, and truth validation.

The challenge for the student of International Studies is to find ways through the myriads of epistemologies, theories and methodologies. The student should bear in mind that methods and theories are tools that are meant to make research easy, not to complicate the student's life as a researcher. The standards set by academic disciplines may sometimes appear as straightjackets or restrictive molds, but they are merely guidelines to come to research results that are academically sound. At the same time, the student of International Studies should keep in mind that the goal is to understand the 3-D dynamics of the topic of study, which requires a broader view than most other fields of study require.

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CHAPTER 5

Fifth perspective: diversity

This final perspective ties together the previous four perspectives because of the element that unites them all: the student. Whereas the previous perspectives were related to the world around the student, students of International Studies should also be aware of their own perspectives on that world. These perspectives can be part of the students' personalities and backgrounds, but also of their academic environment. Two examples may illustrate the latter: the international classroom and the Western context of instruction.

International classroom

International Studies often attract students from diverse backgrounds, creating an 'international classroom' where students are exposed to different experiences and circumstances. Exposure to such a variety of behaviors and views may act as an eye-opener to some students, while others may find that confronting or even offending. Teachers and students must find a way to deal with this. However, it may be better not to avoid such confrontations, because this diversity offers International Studies a unique learning environment that allows such conflicts to take place on a scale that is small and presumably safe.

Western context

At Western universities, International Studies is currently most probably taught in English, using academic literature in the English language, that in most cases is also produced at Western universities. The advantage of a single academic language is that it enables international communication. A disadvantage is that the richness of academic resources available in other languages may be lost. One way to prevent that may be for International Studies students to make use of their own languages, and to master any language of their region of interest.

Another disadvantage of this situation is that the study of International Studies runs the risk of becoming Western-oriented. Indeed, Humanities scholarship at Western universities has in recent decades come under substantial criticism for two reasons. One is that Western scholarship has developed its own epistemology that may provide views of the world that are limited (because other epistemologies are neglected) or even skewed (because Western scholarship may be ill-placed to fully understand and appreciate certain non-Western ideas or behaviours).

The other criticism of Humanities scholarship at Western universities is that it may have biased tendencies towards the rest of the world. This bias, so the critics say, is the result of these Western academic institutions being rooted in colonial times. In those days, many Europeans saw themselves as the pinnacle of civilization and considered Western culture, religion and customs the measuring stick for how things should be, and everything that was different was spoken of in terms of primitive or backward. In the 1970s, it was Edward Said who drew attention to the fact that this nineteenth-century condescending and negative manner of looking at the 'Orient' had also permeated European media and literature and had not really dissipated since. This bias, which was also shown to be prevalent in scholars, became known as **Orientalism**, after the title of Said's book. The notion of Orientalism has since become a warning sign for Western scholars and much has been undertaken since to correct these views. Some critics have argued that this bias in attitude is not exclusive to Westerners; they coined the term 'Occidentalism' for prejudiced views that non-Western people may have of the West and how that may permeate their academic scholarship. However, most universities in the non-Western world are modelled on Western universities, with Western curricula, textbooks and theories that may very well continue to disseminate an Orientalist narrative (see chapter 'Postcolonialism').

Orientalism originally denoted the essentialist approach to 'the Orient' as constituting immutable and stereotyped characteristics of Arab and Asian culture and traditions. Orientalism is also used in a more general way as the imbedded bias that Westerners may have towards other parts of the world, and that also has permeated the Western academic knowledge production. It has been argued that Orientalism is not an exclusive Western attitude since similar biases to 'others' exist in other parts of the world as well.

The above illustrates how the student of International Studies may be confronted with situations in the learning environment that pose academic challenges. To address these challenges, the student must be able to work with diversity. Two types of diversity will be discussed here.

Academic diversity

In past decades it has become clear that sound research in the domain of Humanities does not only depend on good analytical and methodological skills. When academics work on topics that involve numerous cultural, religious, racial and other dimensions, their personal disposition also becomes an important

factor: does the topic solicit affinity or aversion, or perhaps preconceived notions about it? Self-awareness of one's views, attitudes and background are therefore of paramount importance to conduct research that is academically sound. This is called **positionality**, a concept that requires every individual student to reflect on the manner in which they relate to the topic of research. Such reflection, however, is not an easy task when we realize that many of our preconceptions are so deeply embedded in our minds that we don't even consider them to be subjective.

The acknowledgement of one's positionality is no guarantee that we can undo it. Oftentimes we will be unable or unwilling to do so. For instance, gender equality is a non-negotiable given for some, while others will hold that the differences between man and woman are a fact of life. Better, therefore, is to recognize such personal convictions and traits for what they are, and to take them into consideration when conducting research. One way to work with any pre-set views we may have is to compensate for it by considering the views of fellow researchers. For instance, one might argue that a research project on underground rap music is best to be undertaken by students who share the age, background, and culture of those rappers. But such an **insider's perspective** could cause researchers to overlook certain aspects because they feel they are so self-evident that they are not worth considering or registering. Positionality can then be helpful, but more helpful might be to invite an **outsider's perspective**: why not call in a white middle-aged person who has little affinity with the subject but who may therefore ask the questions considered trivial by the insider? Such a diversity of views and experiences may provide a more profound understanding of the topic of study.

The concept of **positionality** holds that students of Humanities need to reflect on their own position on the topic of research.

Positionality is not only important when researching people, but also when researching ideas, processes or texts. Imagine the Argentinian student reading Japanese literature, or the Norwegian scholar analysing South-African political speeches, or the non-believer studying religious texts. They may all run the risk of missing essential elements because they have no intimate knowledge of their topic of study. Still, their outsider's perspective may yield interesting insights. The main task for any scholar, therefore, is to have some self-awareness in their approach of such texts (positionality), and to refer to other views (diversity). Just as multidisciplinary brings in the different views from various academic disciplines, diversity of researchers may bring different perspectives of the same issue or event.

It must be noted that the notions of the insider and outsider can be used in two ways. The *researcher* can be an insider or outsider to the people or ideas that are being researched. This is what positionality refers to. But the insider or outsider approach

can also apply to the *method of research*: does the researcher merely describe people or ideas or does the researcher follow their inner logic and epistemology. The first is called the *etic* approach whereby the researcher takes the position of an observing outsider who contents with observing, recording and describing. The second is called the *emic* approach whereby the researcher tries to capture the inside perspectives of the people or ideas under study.

In the **etic** approach the researcher takes the position of an observing outsider. In the **emic** approach the researcher tries to capture the inside perspectives of the people or ideas under study.

Diversity of views

While the student of International Studies may be aware of any bias or preconceived notions, they furthermore also need to consider any views they may encounter that are different from their own. This diversity of views may be confusing to some and interesting to others, but academically they can be used to the student's advantage when trying to understand global complexities, as the following examples may illustrate:

Geography

Our place of origin or residence determines our sense of location on the globe. That place is the center of our world and serves as the reference point when using words like 'far' and 'nearby', or 'north' or 'east'. While these terms may seem objectively descriptive, they can also be quite normative. For instance, to speak of the North and the South in the world is not only an indication of place. In the past decades, it has also referred to socioeconomic standing: the North stood for rich and developed and the South for poor and underdeveloped. Nowadays, this dichotomy has acquired



Figure I.5.1 World map

a political-historical meaning: the 'global North' stands for rich, former colonial countries that allegedly want to maintain their privileges, while the 'global South' stands for former colonies that are trying to get a place at the international table.

Generation

Generations look at the world differently: the older generations have seen things happen, the younger generations see things in the making. The stereotype would then be that the older generations are conservative ('we stick to what we know') while the younger generations are ambitious ('we need to make changes'). A famous proverb has it that 'If you're not a liberal when young, you have no heart. If you're not a conservative when old, you have no brain.' But there is more. Usually, global events which take place during one's late teens and early twenties determine one's world view: in my case, I belong to the Cold War generation, raised with fear of 'the bomb', while I see how the generations of students passing before me today are imprinted by terrorism in the 2010s, a pandemic in the 2020s, and have an overall angry desperation about climate change. These are historical imprints that determine the concerns and actions of each generation.

History

People may have radically different perceptions of the same history. What is a 'liberation' organization to one, may be a 'terrorist' organization to the other. Europeans consider the conquests of Alexander the Great and the Romans as the spread of civilization, while they perceive the conquests by Arabs and Ottomans as acts of aggression. From the perspective of the Chinese and the Mongols, the Aztecs and the Inca's, the British and the Spaniards, their conquests are seen as shows of power leading to grand civilizations, while others will perceive them as forces of destruction that obliterated entire cultures.

Social class

In my class of International Studies, I teach over 500 students whom together usually represent over fifty nationalities. An 'international classroom' indeed! But how diverse is such a class, really? They represent different cultures, and many of these students may be even bi- or multicultural, but the overall majority is middle or upper class. This is not a reproach – we are who we are – but these students need to face the fact that they represent a minority in the world and that their position in society may very well influence their view of the world.

Religion

It is tempting to judge a believer only on the merits of that person's belief thereby dissociating religion from its cultural environment (see also chapter 'Beliefs and belief systems'). But while religions may have their belief systems and epistemol-

ogies, every believer is also part of a local culture. Catholics in America, Brazil, Uganda and Korea may share the same faith but their different cultural backgrounds may affect their practices of that faith. We may view this as a form of glocalization of religions: their belief structures are global, but their local manifestations can be different, based on their cultural environment.

There are many more examples like these. Suffice it to conclude that the students of International Studies can only be successful in understanding the world 'out there' after proper self-reflection on their own cultural context 'in here'.

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