

PART IV

Global Challenges

A global challenge is a particularly problematic issue on a global scale that affects people worldwide and that requires concerted efforts by various actors to be addressed. Global challenges can be very diverse in nature. Examples include climate change, migration, resource scarcity, security and sustainable development. We will discuss a selection of seven global challenges in the following chapters.

While global *problems* may often be recognized as such, they only become a global *challenge* when a large part of the international community declares that concerted efforts are needed to address it. An example is climate change which was already marked as a global problem by scholars in the 1960s but only became recognized as a global challenge in the 2000s. Conversely, global problems may be denied the status of global challenge, like during the Covid-19-pandemic of 2019-2022 when some state leaders denied its lethal nature calling it a form of flu and consequently saw no need for international cooperation to combat this disease. And then there are certain global events that may be declared a global challenge even if that status is disputed. This has been the case with terrorism ('global war on terror') and with migration: in both instances, critics argued that these issues may indeed have global proportions, but that they don't qualify as a global challenge because they are not as globally threatening as politicians make them out to be.

Challenge multiplier

Global challenges are usually not caused by a single, but by numerous problematic issues. Sometimes they compound each other and become challenge multipliers: for instance, a region that is suffering under a civil war (or famine or climate change) may cause migration which may cause health problems that can lead to a pandemic.

Nexus

Global challenges are usually composed of several global problems and even if they don't always seem related, they are often interconnected or even serve as multipliers. Such a cluster of issues and influences is called a nexus. One of the first steps in addressing a global challenge is to identify its nexuses. For instance, if migration is considered a challenge for a certain region, different approaches can be taken to address that challenge, with each approach creating its own set of nexuses. If the approach is to physically stop the influx of migrants, this creates a nexus of security. This nexus, in turn, fans out into several other nexuses, like border policing or cutting deals with neighboring countries, deals that may include taking in migrants in exchange for financial compensation. If, on the other hand, the approach to the challenge of migration is to address the causes of migration, this creates the nexus

of foreign policy. Since the causes of migration can be multiple (civil war, lack of economic prospects, natural disasters, political persecution), the foreign policy nexus fans out in various other nexuses, each related to one of these – apparently unrelated – issues.

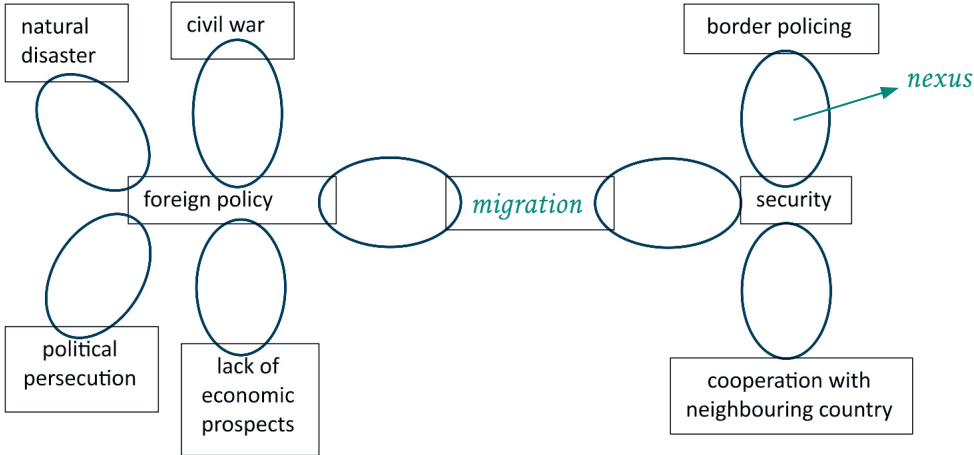


Figure IV.0.1 Nexus ‘migration’

Nexus

A nexus is the mutual influence between issues that belong to different domains and therefore seem unrelated. Global challenges often contain one or more nexuses that need to be addressed to reach a solution.

CHAPTER 1

Information and communication

Communication – or the exchange of information – is essential to the existence of human beings. It is the lubricant that keeps the global structures, trends and challenges going. Communication takes on many forms: arts, language, music, signs and symbols. Language is a vital element of communication, not only to exchange information, but also to frame realities. Saying that someone has ‘died’ or was ‘killed’, ‘murdered’ or ‘exterminated’ makes difference. Similarly, the style and rhetoric used in language has great influence on people. Advertisers know that, and so do politicians and propagandists.

Since the early 2000s, advances in communication technology, especially in terms of the internet and social media, have intensified communication on a global scale in numerous ways. Following the telegraph and telephone in the late nineteenth century came the internet and the mobile phone in the late twentieth century, and the smartphone and social media since the early 2000s. These developments contributed to the advancement and improvement of human life. But they also pose challenges because of misuse and negative effects. While misinformation and propaganda have always been part of human communication, the scale it has reached today poses several problems on a global scale. Whether these problems also pose a ‘global challenge’ as defined in this textbook – that is: concerted global efforts are required to deal with the problem – remains to be seen. But people and governments across the world are struggling with the ways these technologies are used and the effects they have.

Recent technological innovations in communication:

Internet: invented in 1983, popularized in 1990s

Facebook: 2004

iPhone: 2007

Instagram: 2010

ChatGPT: 2023

Worldwide access to internet

In 2024, the number of internet users world-wide stood at 5.44 billion, which means that around two-thirds of the global population was connected to the internet. The highest percentage of users was in Northern Europe (97%), the highest number of users was in China (1 billion).

(Statista.com, 2024)

Digital experiences: the West vs. de Global South

According to professor Payal Arora, the West is suffering from “pessimism paralysis towards all things digital”, which inhibits change and creativity. The Global South, on the other hand, embraces the digital world and incorporates it in the changes needed for progress.

(Payal Arora, *From Pessimism to Promise*, 2024)

Facts and fiction

Age limit to mobile phones?

Neurologists and psychiatrists have pointed at the negative effects of mobile phone use, especially among children and young adults. Some of those effects are mental (anxiety, depression, sleeping disorders) or social (problems in initiating and maintaining social relations). For that reason, more and more schools across the world are restricting or even banning the mobile phone.

Scholars of the Natural Sciences pride themselves on dealing with facts. But we have seen that this is more complex in the Humanities, the academic discipline that underpins International Studies. Students of International Studies are expected to base their findings on empirical observation but they must also try to understand what is happening, why and how. We can use the existence of God as an example. While the academics may argue that the existence of God cannot be empirically proven, the believers may find their belief in God’s existence doesn’t require empirical proof. The student of Humanities, in turn, may dismiss such belief as unscientific but must also inquire into the how and why of this belief. To do so in an academically sound manner requires the use of various methods and theories (see chapter ‘Multi- and Inter-disciplinarity’). This is how the academic world tries to create clarity in the realms of fact, fiction and belief.

There is a problem, however, when such distinctions are not being made. For example, when a proven fact is considered mere fiction, or the reverse, when fiction is presented as proven fact that needs no further empirical proof. Climate change or the effect of vaccination may be empirically proven by natural scientists, but for some people that proof is not a reason to believe it is true. They see these scientific facts as mere fiction and may present their own and different beliefs as factual truths. **‘Knowledge resistance’** is the term for the denial of widely accepted scientific facts in favor of alternative ideas.

From an academic perspective, this reversal of fact and fiction is problematic even though this is nothing new in other domains: politicians and advertisers have

known for centuries that selling a message is more important than its factual content, and that bending the truth may sometimes be needed to make people believe that message. But social media and the possibility of creating deep-fakes have amplified this human behavior on a massive and global scale. It shows how important the act of believing is in human interactions, but at the same time presents students of Humanities (and therefore International Studies) with a considerable challenge.

This chapter will highlight three mechanisms that play a role in these processes of fact-versus-fiction and that are relevant to International Studies: framing, public diplomacy and conspiracy theories.

Framing

Studies that focus on media, communication, politics and literature have developed various theories that help explain the ways in which messages are conveyed. One of these is called Framing Theory. According to this theory, statements made by people do not have meaning in and of themselves but only acquire meaning in the context (the ‘frame’) in which they are used. For instance, the statement “color has no meaning to me”, means something entirely different when said in a discussion on the choice of paint than it does in a discussion on race. And if the latter was said immediately after the abolition of apartheid in South Africa it may have been considered positive (because it may appeal to the notion of the rainbow nation indicating that the color of your skin makes no difference) but not so in the context of Black Lives Matter.

An important role in framing is played by the people involved in the exchange messages. Framing Theory distinguishes between four parties: between those who make statements and those who are addressed, and between insiders and outsiders. For instance, talking about religion has a different impact on believers than on non-believers. A sermon about the Holy Scripture will make little sense to those who were not raised in that faith, and it will mean something different still to those who have studied it but do not belong to the faith it represents.

Framing is happening all the time, intentionally as well as unintentionally. It happens unintentionally when, for instance, we are joking or insulting each other. Unconsciously we are aware of the right frame for the intended audience and purpose, for instance to make others laugh about the joke or be offended by the insult. If the framing is incorrect however, people may laugh at the insult, be offended by the joke, or just raise their eyebrows. Framing also happens intentionally. Politicians, activists, ideologues, advertisers, influencers and all those who want to convey their message to others will be keenly aware of how they frame that message, and they will probably change the framing when addressing different audiences.

CNN-effect

Since the 1990s, news coverage has become permanent with 24-hour news channels, and since the 2010s news is enhanced, propelled and manipulated by social media. News goes so fast that government officials are being confronted with events and compelling television images, pressuring them to act in ways that they otherwise might not have done. This is called the CNN-effect, named after CNN, the first world-wide television network that introduced real-time television coverage of news. Some academics question the theory of the CNN-effect arguing that real-time news coverage does not change the policy but has merely created a new environment in which the policy is made.

Public and cultural diplomacy

Diplomacy is the maintaining of relationships among states on a governmental level. Diplomats, as representatives of one state, maintain contacts with their counterparts of the other state where they are posted. Nowadays, however, states have become increasingly aware that the perception that people abroad have of their country, matters. If the United States spends a great deal of money on infrastructure and development aid in any given country but is nevertheless perceived by the people of that country as an imperialist bully, then something is amiss in America's foreign policy image. For that policy to be effective, it is argued, it must not only focus on the relationship between governments but also on trying to understand the people and society of that other country and perhaps even on trying to influence these people rather than their government. This is what has become known as public diplomacy. One of the first initiatives to develop such policy was taken by the United States after the attacks of 9/11 in 2001. It was inspired by the realization that a large part of the Muslim world resented the United States and this resulted in an American rethinking of its foreign policy in a report with the title *Changing hearts, winning peace*.

Public diplomacy is a part of foreign policy that a) aims at enhancing the state's image abroad by b) actively targeting the public rather than the government of a foreign country, with c) a variety of activities and messages.

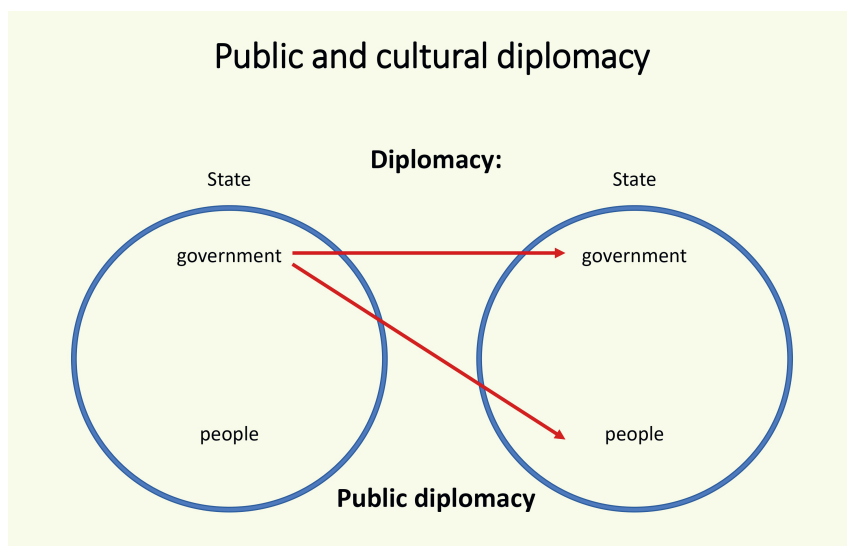


Figure IV.1.1 Public and cultural diplomacy

A subsection of public diplomacy is **cultural diplomacy**. This type of diplomacy deliberately avoids the topic of politics and aims for countries to meet on a common, less controversial ground. This is usual the domain of culture or sports. Most countries apply cultural diplomacy on an incidental basis, for instance by having their embassies organize concerts by musicians from their home country. Some countries have permanent cultural representation abroad, like the United Kingdom (*British Council*), France (*Alliance Française*), Spain (*Instituto Cervantes*) and Germany (*Goethe Institute*). A newcomer in this field is China that for a long time pursued its foreign policies without caring much about its image abroad, but this has changed. It has established the Division for Public Diplomacy as part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rapidly expanded the *Confucius Institutes* around the world, and the Chinese state news agency has a growing number of foreign-language news outlets.

These types of foreign policy are typical forms of soft power. Since the early 2000s, there has been a steep rise in the deployment of this kind of soft power around the world. However, at the same time there was also an increase in so-called sharp power, whereby state-organized centers disseminate false information to influence public opinion in other countries.

These developments show that countries – especially the larger states – see an urgent need for influencing the public opinion abroad, and they do so for different reasons and with a variety of friendly and aggressive means.

The Korean Wave (Hallyu)

Sometimes cultural diplomacy is conducted without governmental action. An example is the South Korean popular culture since the 1990s of so-called K-pop (music), anime graphic novels, films and drama-series, together known as the 'Korean Wave' (*Hallyu*). The world-wide popularity of this culture has greatly enhanced a positive view of South Korea.

Conspiracy theory

The basic framework of any conspiracy is that people work in secret behind the scenes to achieve a certain goal. However, the term conspiracy is used in two ways. One is the secret plot to kill the king, overthrow a regime, start an uprising. History is rife with such plots and some are uncovered or fail in their execution, while others succeed (see text box). The other usage of the term 'conspiracy theory' is usually reserved for something that is much grander in terms of conspirators, the scale of their intent, and the means employed. In this scenario, the conspirators are not made up of a small band of angry anarchists or grumbling generals but are deeply embedded in the state or are made up of secret societies with a global network. Their goal is power, preferably world power. And the means of reaching that goal are either by deception or by creating chaos through violence. The massive vaccination campaigns against the Covid-19 virus are an example of what was perceived as such a plot: it was said that government elites were inoculating entire populations with substances that would submit them to the will of that elite.

Famous secret plots that were uncovered

In 1605, a plot known as the Gunpowder Conspiracy was uncovered with the intention to blow up the Houses of Parliament in London. In 1953, the CIA conspired (and succeeded) in overthrowing the government of Iranian prime minister Mosaddeq who was considered too leftist. In 2016, a massive creation of Russian false accounts was uncovered on American social media that were spreading false information, ostensibly to influence the upcoming elections. In 2022, a large and eclectic group of people in Germany known under the name of Reichsbürger movement was arrested on the charge of conspiring to overthrow the government and establish a new regime in Germany.

Conspiracy theories of the second type are of all times, but they appear to have increased in popularity since the 2010s. Some scholars have argued that the number of conspiracy theories are not higher than before, but that they are merely

disseminated and multiplied more due to social media. Whatever the exact causes, the phenomenon of conspiracy theories does coincide with the development of increasingly blurry lines between fact and fiction.

A typical feature of most of these conspiracy theories is that it is usually hard to prove that they are not true. How do we disprove that man did *not* land on the moon, that the attack on the Twin Towers in 9/11 was *not* orchestrated by the CIA, that a university professor is *not* a member of the Illuminati? From an academic point of view, there is little use in disproving what is already generally accepted as empirical proof. Something much more relevant to students of International Studies however, are the 'why' and 'how' questions: *why* do people turn to such theories, and *how* do such theories impact societies? This line of inquiry leads to two questions: why are conspiracy theories so popular and how do they work?

Popular 'conspiracy theories'

Illuminati: a secret society of elite professionals – doctors, politicians, judges – who control the world.

Reptile humanoids: an alien species has landed on earth and has gradually taken over the ruling elites with the aim to subdue the human species to slavery.

Lady Diana: the car accident was a set-up by the British Royal Palace to get rid of her.

Flat Earth: scientists make us believe that the earth is a sphere while in fact it is a disc.

Popularity

The study of conspiracy theories is ongoing and quite inconclusive due to their elusive nature. Scholars usually steer away from ascertaining what is fact and what is fiction and try to understand the underlying mechanisms. The main characteristic that all conspiracy theories have in common is that 'something is out there that wants to get us'. Such convictions combine the feeling of being threatened and a sense of powerlessness against that threat. Other features of conspiracy theories are a fear of the unknown, a distrust of government or any international governing body, a sense of helplessness and, consequently, self-victimization. These sentiments are in themselves nothing new. They are typical of humankind throughout history. But since the 2010s these conspiracy sentiments have started to become more common and several developments may be conducive to this change. The first is that a period of relative global optimism which had started in the late 1980s (see chapter 'Democracy') was quickly succeeded by a period of uncertainty and deeply felt insecurity. Another development is the globalization of politics and economy, which may give people the impression that they are no longer in control of their own affairs. These developments may have contributed to a sense of powerlessness that, in turn, led to self-victimization: it is not we who are at fault, but others. Finally,

these ideas and sentiments were amplified by social media technologies, which created a constant flow of (mis-)information that is unparalleled in human history.

Impact

The main impact of conspiracy theories seems to be the distrust of governments and elites who are suspected of hidden motives. Several conspiracy theories, like those of the 'reptile-humanoid' or the vaccination, hold that the government intends to control the people, and reduce them to obedient subjects. If such a conspiracy theory gains many followers, the distrust of a government may undermine the socio-political fabric of a society. Similarly, when the refusal to be vaccinated reaches a certain demographic percentage, this opens the way to a new outbreak of diseases that had been eradicated thanks to national vaccination programs.

Another impact of conspiracy theories can be the targeting of a specific group. In Europe, Jews have for centuries been accused of 'blood libel' (sacrificing Christian children) and since the nineteenth century they have become the object of the conspiracy theory claiming that Jews are part of a secret network that controls the world, financed by rich Jewish families. These theories have become embedded in antisemitism. Similarly, the so-called love jihad conspiracy theories that go around Hindu communities in India claim that Muslim men seduce Hindu women to convert them to Islam. And popular in Western countries is the so-called replacement theory, which holds that migrants – particularly those of color and non-Christian – may cause or even want white Christians to disappear.

Further reading

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CHAPTER 2

Sustainable Development

In 2015, the United Nations called sustainable development a global issue that needed concerted international effort to address. The elements that made up sustainable development as a global challenge had already long existed and had been recognized as such. The concept of sustainable development, however, presented an integrated view on several interconnected global problems that international actors could work with. Sustainable development, therefore, is a term that stands for a goal (this is what the world should strive for), a means (this is how it should be done), and a global challenge (to reach this goal and deploy the means, concerted efforts are needed).

From development aid to sustainable development

The precursor of sustainable development was **development aid**. This was the financial aid extended by rich countries to poor countries (later rephrased in the aid from ‘developed’ to ‘underdeveloped’ countries). This financial assistance has been motivated and criticized for a variety of reasons. Motivations for such aid was the argument by former colonized countries that the former colonizers had a debt to pay for their colonizing practices.

Pros and cons of development aid

“A constant stream of ‘free’ money is a perfect way to keep an inefficient or simply bad government in power. As aid flows in, there is nothing more for the government to do – it doesn’t need to raise taxes, and as long as it pays its army, it doesn’t have to take account off its disgruntled citizens.”

(Economist Dambisa Moyo in *Dead Aid: Why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa*, 2010).

“Aid can help to build the free press, or support the training and recruitment of judges, civil society, and independent audit institutions. In fact, aid can play an important part in fighting corruption through generating public demand to end it.”

(Oxfam International, *Good Aid*, YouTube 23 April 2010)

Motivations from within ‘developed’ countries were often framed in terms of civic or religious (usually Christian) duty: fellow human beings needed to be helped. Critics argued that this aid was a continuation of colonization, whereby the ‘developed’

countries maintain control over the lifelines of 'developing' countries. Other critics pointed at the lack of success of this aid, which to them was a waste of or even the very reason that developing countries remained underdeveloped.

In the late 1980s, a change took place in the Western world in the way they looked at the world. This was allegedly prompted by the songs *Feed the World* and *Do They know it's Christmas* sung by a large group of top Western musicians, but the main cause was most likely the end of the Cold War with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Somehow, a general conviction emerged that it was not ideologies (communism, liberalism) that were important, but rather the wellbeing of humankind. Based on these ideas, the United Nations developed the ambitious project of the **Millennium Development Goals**. These were eight goals that were to be met in the first fifteen years of the new millennium, beginning in 2000 and ending by 2015. While this project still had the characteristics of development aid – rich countries gave bi-lateral financial assistance to poor countries – it was the first time that these endeavors were undertaken multilaterally and globally. This approach gave the project a sense of global urgency although the good intentions were not enough to reach the goals within the given time.

Millennium Development Goals (2000 - 2015)

- 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
- 2 Achieve universal primary education.
- 3 Promote gender equality and empower women.
- 4 Reduce child mortality.
- 5 Improve maternal health.
- 6 Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
- 7 Ensure environmental sustainability.
- 8 Global partnership for development.

For that reason, a new set of goals was agreed for the next fifteen years. These were the **Sustainable Development Goals**, as agreed by the United Nations, and they were to be met by 2030. The Sustainable Development goals were not just a continuation of the Millennium goals, they were instead a different concept entirely. It was recognized that everything was related to human well-being was interconnected, so that help in one area would be of little use if other areas were not also addressed. So, for instance, when donors bring in agricultural equipment to work the fields, but there are no trained mechanics to repair this equipment, then within several years this equipment becomes useless. Or one can help a village increase its fruit production, but to make that profitable they need roads and trucks to move it out,

and to build these roads one may run into corrupt government officials. Or one may provide pumps to drill for more wells but if this means a depletion of ground water, then in the long run the land will be unfit for agriculture, and its erosion will affect all nearby lands. From these experiences grew the realization that all issues of development are interrelated and therefore need an interrelated approach.

Sustainable development goals (simplified):

What is to be sustained:

Nature: Earth, Biodiversity, Ecosystems

Life support: Ecosystem, Resources, Environment

Community: Cultures, Groups, Places

What is to be developed:

People: Life expectancy, Education, Equity, Equal opportunity

Economy: Wealth, Productive sectors, Consumption

Society: Institutions, Social capital, States, Regions

From all these ideas and experiences grew the realization that these sustainable development goals were targets not only for a few countries, but for the entire world. This was not a new idea. Ever since the 1970s, several informal societies of politicians and scientists had come up with similar ideas and visions. But now the ideas were turned into policy globally.

Indicators and targets

A practical problem that faces these optimistic endeavors is the confusion about terminology, data, and measurement. How do we measure the success of reaching sustainable development goals? Basically, this is done by means of targets and indicators. The **targets** are the Sustainable Development Goals. The **indicators** are how one measures. Most indicators that measure the success rate of sustainable development activities use some form of quantification: the radio program promoting democracy has had forty hours of airtime, the minimum income in that country has gone up by five percent, a hundred more people in this town have access to clean water. Numbers are an easy way to measure things, but they are not always suitable for a given situation. For instance, poverty is usually measured on the basis of income, and the standard of extreme poverty is set by the World Bank to an income of less than one dollar a day. However, while some communities that have been living in forests all their lives might meet that standard, they do not necessarily live

in extreme poverty, as is perhaps the case for people in cities with five or ten dollars a day.

It is therefore recognized that these indicators do not always reflect the reality of the targets. For many academics it is reason to avoid using them as much as possible (although many cannot find it hard resist this quantitative approach) and try to find different measurement methods. Policymakers, by contrast, prefer to work with targets and using quantitative indicators is a practical means to show whether and how much progress is being made.

The actors

While the policy framework of the Sustainable Development Goals was mostly decided by states, the NGOs (both local and international) do the implementation. These two actors have an intertwined relationship: NGOs are active in the field and are therefore often consulted by the states in developing policies, and the NGOs are largely dependent on the states for the funding of their activities. This creates an interdependent relationship that may sometimes lead to questions about the independence of NGOs (see chapter ‘Non-state actors’).

A special role is reserved for NGOs with a religious background (‘Faith-based organizations’). In the world of sustainable development, their activities and positions in society are often overlooked by mostly secular policy makers. This might be because many FBOs do not need state funding because they have their own resources for that, or because secular states often do not want to accommodate the religious agenda of these organizations and therefore don’t grant them funding. However, it has been argued that collaboration with FBOs might be advisable because they are often much deeper and broader embedded in civil society than secular NGOs and they may have alternative views on sustainable development that can be more effective, especially among the religious communities.

World Bank and FBOs

In 1998, Jim Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, and Lord Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the leader of the English Anglican Church, took the initiative to establish the World Faiths Development Dialogue, a platform which continues until today in supporting faith-based organizations in their work among the very poor.

'Green Islam'

"The role of Islam [in sustainable development] could be one of the decisive factors tipping the planet towards a sustainable future."

(Assistant General Secretary of the United Nations Development Programme, 2009)

Human development

Development and development aid as we knew it from the 1960s through the 1980s was generally seen in economic terms. A country's development was expressed in terms of Gross Domestic Product, the calculated total of private consumption, business investments, government spending and net exports. But this definition and measurement of development did not hold. The measuring stick of **economic growth** was gradually replaced by that of **fulfilled lives**. This new category measured in terms of a healthy life, a good education, a meaningful job, family life, democratic state structures, and so on.

Measuring development in terms of people's lives is called **human development**. This approach is multi-dimensional and plural. Human development is about education as much as about health and about culture as much as about political participation. It deals with fiscal policy as much as health policy, with educational policy as much as gender policy or environmental, industrialization or technological policy. And so on and so forth. In short, human development relates to many aspects that concern people's lives, not only economic ones. It can therefore not be put within a single academic discipline because it encompasses many, including economics, law, sociology, political science, environmental studies, urban studies and philosophy.

The concepts

A key notion in the conceptualization of human development is the **capability approach** which argues that the goal of development should be that people must have the capability of making a fulfilled life for themselves. This capability is expressed by some as the **freedom** to promote or achieve goals that are considered valuable. By others it is expressed in terms of **choices**: development should aim at expanding people's choices, for instance by means of improved healthcare and education, so that people are more capable of achieving their development goals. The capability approach has triggered an interesting discussion. Because what are responsible uses of freedom, what are valuable choices? Is that to be decided by every individual, regardless of how reprehensible, ill-informed, or harmful they may be in their actions? Or should the state interfere, for the sake of the general well-being? For example, if people from a rich country value their annual vacation and

prefer to travel abroad, should the state then give them the opportunities to do so cheaply by deregulating air travel and allowing budget airlines to operate? Or should these choices be restricted because air travel is a significant contributor to climate change, with disastrous effects on the lives of current and future generations, especially among the poor?

Thinkers of human development

The great thinkers about human development are all from Asia. **Amartya Sen** (India, 1933) is one of the great inspirational thinkers about human development and this won him the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 1998. **Mahbub ul-Haq** (Pakistan, 1934-1998) provided the practical framework to put human development into action. **Mohammed Yunus** (Bangladesh, 1940) developed the notion of micro-finance, which won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. **Seyyed Hossein Nasr** (Iran, 1933) is a leading thinker on the spiritual dimensions of human development.

This brings us to another key notion in human development: **agency**. This term means that people are their own masters: they are the ones who decide, act, move, think. Only when people have full agency, will they be able to make the choices needed to improve their lives. For many, therefore, the overarching goal of human development should be to enable people's agency. Only then can they reach the second goal, which is their well-being.

The implementation

The challenge was to put these great ideas into practice. For this, the Pakistani economist Mahbub ul-Haq developed four indicators that are now widely used when implementing policies of human development.

The first indicator is *equity*. This refers to the concept of justice, impartiality and fairness (see chapter 'Equality and Self-determination'). The principle of equity is to create a level playing field of equal opportunity. This may require preferential treatment or affirmative action for those who do not have the same opportunities due to various disadvantages they face, thereby leveling the playing field.

The second is *efficiency*: this means the optimal use of existing resources. This is perhaps the most economics-oriented of these indicators, because efficiency is to maximize opportunities for individuals and communities through optimal use of human, material and institutional resources at the lowest cost. It sounds logical if you think about it, but efficiency has always been, and still remains, a challenge for societies.

The third indicator is *participation and empowerment*: in the human development approach, people are both the ends as well as the means to development.

Empowerment is needed to make the motor of agency work, because only then can people start participating and make life decisions. This principle may sound very social but is very political. Because it implies that people need to be involved at every stage of decision-making processes in their societies. They are not merely the beneficiaries of a state, but act as agents that make society function. This is where the notion of civil society emerges.

The fourth and final indicator is *sustainability*: The term sustainability is often used to refer to the environment, but it also encompasses social and economic dimensions. The notion of sustainability as used here, demands that all these dimensions are addressed together in a comprehensive manner. Only this way, so it is argued, can we reach a degree of human development that is not incidental but enduring.

It must be noted that these ideas still need to be worked out in practice. Ideally, all these concepts and indicators are implemented in a joint manner. But to actually do that is precisely the challenge.

Further reading

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- United Nations, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2015 (online publication)

Resources and climate

Access to basic resources is one of the main interests of people. Water for drinking and farming, wood and oil for fuel, iron and stone for making tools and constructing buildings. With the advancement of technology, the need for more varied resources increased. Oil only became a prime interest from the 1920s onwards, when steam engines were replaced by engines working on diesel. The gradual replacement of oil by electricity since the 2010s increased the interest in rare ores like coltan and lithium, which were of little relevance until then but were now needed for batteries. Even if one were to argue that people today could very well do without a car or a mobile phone, these items are considered vital to the lives of human beings (see chapter 'Economy'), and consequently one is willing to go through great lengths and costs to gain access to the resources to produce them. It shows that the concept of 'essential needs' is subject to interpretation and depends on time and circumstance. Consequently, the resulting dependency on certain resources shapes the behavior of people, companies, and states.

Human considerations in changing resources

The shifts from the use of wood to coal to oil in the 19th and 20th century are usually explained in terms of technological improvement. But there were also social considerations. Water mills could have provided the necessary energy for the English industrialization in the nineteenth century, but the steam engine gave manufacturers more freedom: they did not have to negotiate intricate property rights to access running water, and they could set up their mills close to the labourers in urban centres. Social considerations also played a role in the move from coal (needed to produce steam) to oil: oil exploitation far away did not cause social unrest as was the case with the coalminers close at home.

(Andreas Malm, *The Origins of Fossil Capital: From Water to Steam in the British Cotton Industry, Historical Materialism*, 2013)

The need for access to resources has been a major cause of globalization throughout most of human history. This is particularly the case with natural resources that are location-dependent, like fossil fuels or ores and minerals, because access to them can become a problem when they are distributed unevenly across the world. For instance, the main reserves of oil and gas are in the Middle East, the main reserves of lithium (for batteries) are found in Australia, Chile and Bolivia, while Brazil holds more than ninety percent of the world reserves of niobium which is vital for nano-

electrics. Other natural resources, like foodstuffs or timber, are not that location-dependent because they can be grown elsewhere, but even then some countries may have a monopoly position in the production of these goods, as is the case with wheat, cotton or coffee. Similar monopoly positions may also be attained in the production of high-tech technology, such as microchips and weapons.

Fossil reserves in the world (in 2024)

Known oil reserves (in billion barrels):		Known gas reserves (trillion m2)	
1.	Venezuela 290	1.	Russia 49
2.	Saudi Arabia 270	2.	Iran 29
3.	Canada 170	3.	Qatar 25
4.	Iran 140	4.	Turkmenistan 8
5.	Iraq 120	5.	Saudi Arabia 8
6.	Kuwait 100	6.	US 7
7.	UAE 95	7.	UAE 7
8.	Russia 75	8.	Venezuela 6
9.	Libya 45	9.	Nigeria 5
10.	Kazakhstan 40	10.	Algeria 4

To access resources and products that are not ubiquitous, the world has developed a dense global network of exploitation, production and transportation (which was the origin of the term ‘globalization’). This globalization has also given rise to several global challenges, of which two will be discussed here: dependence on resources and environmental issues and climate change.

Coltan in Congo

Coltan is needed for smartphones, laptops and electric cars. Of the known reserves, 80 percent is in the Democratic Republic of Congo, located in the eastern part near Rwanda. However, the Congolese government has not been able to establish full authority over the exploitation and export of cobalt. This is mostly in the hands of the various rebel forces and Rwandese military that for years have been entangled in violent conflicts in the area.

Global challenge (1): dependence on resources

While the globalization of access, exploitation and distribution of resources may be considered beneficial to the world’s well-being and economy, it has created

dependencies. These dependencies are usually experienced on an individual level (who wants to give up their mobile phone, car, cotton shirt, coffee?) and consequently on a national level (the state will indulge these individual needs by facilitating production, trade, tariff reductions). But many of these dependencies have also become a challenge with global implications. One such challenge is the dependence of peoples and states on certain resources that are scarce or monopolized by a few. For instance, in 1973, when the Arab oil-producing states declared a boycott of oil export to some countries and raised the price of oil significantly, this caused a worldwide energy crisis. The dependency on oil from the Gulf region has also been one of (some argue: the main) cause of the 1991 Gulf War to evict Iraq from Kuwait. To meet this challenge of oil dependency, the United States started developing new technologies to extract oil from American soil by the controversial means of 'fracking', and in doing so have become independent from oil production elsewhere since the 2010s. China, on the other hand, which is in great need of a steady oil supply to sustain its growing economy, secured access to oil in several countries in the Gulf region, and exerts diplomatic pressure to maintain stability in that region to guarantee continued access to that oil (for example, China arranged a peaceful settlement between Iran and Saudi Arabia in 2023, two of the world's main oil producers). China also pursues a determined policy of obtaining and maintaining direct access to rare natural resources used for electronic devices and batteries.

Monopolizing rare earth elements

The demand for rare earth elements that are vital for electronics, renewable energy technology and weapon systems was 125,000 tons in 2021 and is expected to reach 315 tons in 2030. China does not possess these elements, but through investments in countries with such elements holds an estimated 60% of the world's exploitation of these elements, and 85% of the world's processing capacity.

(BRINK News 7 August 2022, Brookings Institute 29 December 2022)

Another global challenge is the dependency on global transport networks. This challenge became evident with the Covid-19 pandemic of 2019-2022. As a result of massive lockdowns, the transport networks were shut down as well. Consequently, people across the world were deprived of certain basic goods, including elementary components for medicines. It raised an awareness that it may not always be advantageous to specialize in the production of a limited number of goods, as certain economic doctrines prescribe, but that diversification of production may allow states to maintain a degree of economic self-reliance.

'Food miles'

With globalization and the constant demand for out-of-season produce, it is estimated that the average meal travels 2,500 kilometers before it lands on your plate.

(*Foodwise*, 'How Far Does Your Food Travel to Get to Your Plate?')

Scarcity of fresh water

Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the earth surface is water.

Of this water only $\frac{1}{20}$ (3.5 % of all water) is fresh water.

Of this fresh water, $\frac{5}{7}$ (2.5% of all water) is locked in the ice and ground, and only $\frac{2}{7}$ (1% of all water) is directly available.

Of this available fresh water, $\frac{3}{4}$ is used for agriculture.

Global challenge (2): environmental issues and climate

Disputes over land, water or other resources are addressed at the negotiation table or in court, but also by hard power: a stronger country may build a dam in the river without having to care that the waterflow to the weaker neighboring country is being blocked; or it may send in the troops to occupy territory that is rich in minerals. This powerplay has been, and still is, part and parcel of human behavior in all three dimensions: local, national and global. In the 20th century, however, it gradually became clear that regional and international cooperation might be needed to address the accessibility and use of certain resources. This awareness targeted three concerns: the protection and depletion of, and pollution by resources.

International treaties on resources

- *The Antarctic Treaty* (1959): the continent of Antarctica shall not be subject to territorial claims, exploitation of resources, or ecological damaging.
- *The Outer Space Treaty or Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies* (1966): no country can claim sovereignty or exclusive rights over celestial bodies or the moon which shall be used exclusively for peaceful purposes; their exploration is free to, and for the benefit and interests of all countries.
- *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (1982): the deep sea (beyond territorial waters) is free for peaceful and scientific exploration (as long as the acquired knowledge is made public afterwards); for mining and exploration, permission is required from the International Seabed Authority.

The **protection of environments** was the goal of international agreements on the protection of Antarctica, the deep sea and the moon. The aim of these agreements was to protect these environments against exploitation. Subsequent mostly national agreements aimed at protecting populations whose identity was closely connected to the land they inhabited. Safeguarding these environments was intended to ensure their survival, because in their belief system, removing them from their land would be tantamount to erasing their existence.

The 'personal' rights of natural resources

Natural resources like woods, rivers or mountains are commonly seen as inanimate objects that need protection from exploitation by means of international agreements. A new approach to such protection is to grant them the status as a '**legal personhood**' with its own rights. Often such rights are granted in recognition of claims of indigenous peoples to those places. Some examples of such legal personhoods are:

- the rainforest Te Urewera in New Zealand, as spiritual homeland of the Tūhoe people (2014).
- Whanganui River in New Zealand as part of the treaty settlement between the government and the Māori people (2017).
- Lake Erie in North America (2019): legal personhood granted by the city of Toledo (Ohio)
- Magpie River in Canada was granted nine rights, including the right to flow, the right to be safe from pollution – and the right to sue (2021).

The second concern relates to one of the effects of using resources: **pollution**. This is commonly dealt with bilaterally, like when states that share a river address pollution caused by factories upstream. It was carbon dioxide emissions, however, that generated awareness and concern globally. The cause of this pollution, it transpired, was largely human by excessive burning of fossil fuels and cattle farming. Scientists have unanimously come to the conclusion that this pollution is heating up the atmosphere which, in turn, is causing a **climate change**. These concerns have been voiced since the 1960s already but have only been treated by the international community as a global challenge since the 2010s. One of these challenges is the predicted large numbers of 'environmental refugees'.

A third concern that is on the mind of the international community is the **depletion of certain resources**. While one may consider this to be a global challenge, the international community has yet to address it as such. To date, the scramble for resources remains mostly a national and unilateral affair.

War or environment?

In 1992, 1,700 'concerned scientists' issued a warning that humanity had the choice to either spend its resources on war and violence, or on preventing catastrophic environmental damage. In 2017, the warning was reissued, this time signed by 15,000 scientists.

(Union of Concerned Scientists)

Actors: the role of the consumer

The source of the environmental and resource dependency problems lies with states and (state) companies, but also with the individual consumer. The production and use of consumer goods make up a large portion of the resource depletion and environmental pollution. This means that the consumers can also play a role in the solution. Here we see friction between *ideas* and *interests*: even if one strongly believes that something needs to be done, how far is one willing to go in changing a lifestyle to meet the requirements of sustainable resource usage?

State, civil society and individual consumers are playing different but interconnected roles. Some individual consumers take the principled decision to change their lifestyle and hope, by doing so, that it may inspire others to follow suit. These actions may turn into social trends, or even into movements and NGOs that raise awareness but also pressure governments. Consumers, when united in action, have shown an ability to make quite a lobbying impact, often by boycotting certain products or producers.

The governments are the ones that can take measures that force an entire population to comply, by means of taxation, obligation or prohibition. These measures, however, may result in opposition from the population or from the professional groups that are most affected (like farmers, for instance, when confronted with measures to stop the use of pesticides or nitrogen emission from cattle). Since the 2010s, the resulting confrontation of interests and ideas have become major issues on the political agendas and the subject of court cases. It has caused both politicians and activists to complain about the decelerating mechanisms of democracy in times when decisive and quick action is needed.

Nexus

Addressing the misuse, lack, or scarcity of resources is a global challenge with multiple issues. Concerted actions to solve any of these issues yield several nexuses. In the case of misusing resources, the (simplified) example of the case of climate

change may illustrate this. Addressing this global challenge is accomplished by focusing on its effects as well as its causes. Both generate several nexuses (see illustration). As regards the effects of climate change, one anticipates – and often already observes – rising sea waters, changing or disappearing agriculture, or freak weather events. These effects, in turn, may prompt people to migrate which then creates yet another nexus (and migration, as seen before, also has its own connections with security, economy, education, etc.). Addressing climate change, therefore, opens up a myriad of nexuses: the main culprit of climate change – carbon dioxide – is produced by cars (nexuses of transport, economy, leisure), by cattle (nexus of food production), by planes (nexuses of tourism, business), by industries (nexuses of economy, production of basic and consumer goods), by heating (nexuses of food production, personal well-being). Solutions are partly found in the requirement of people to abandon certain behavior (no meat, no cars, no planes), or by looking for alternatives (electric and nuclear power, meat substitutes).

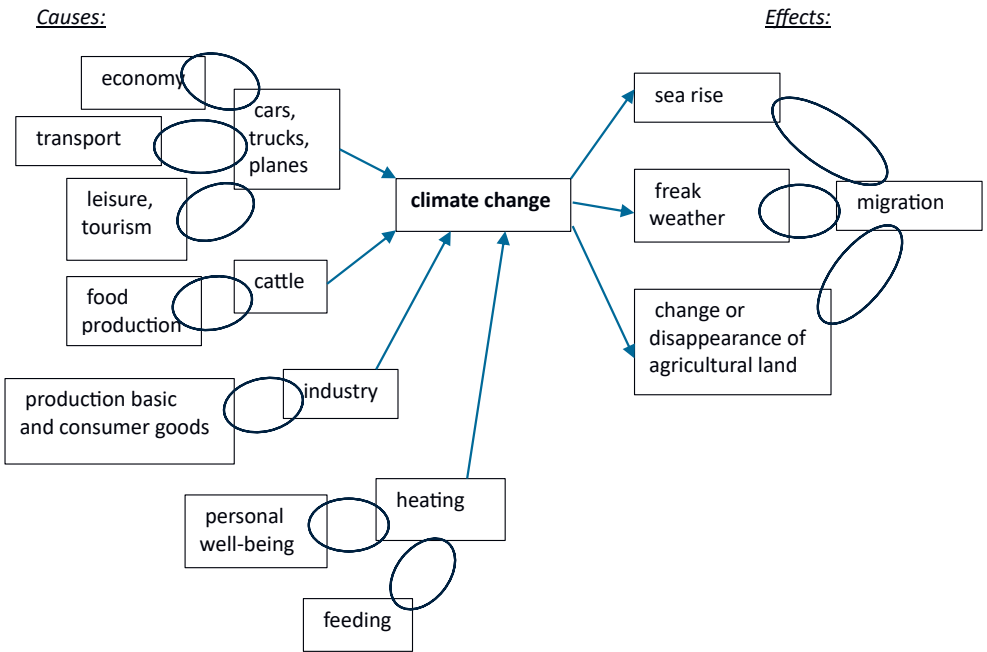


Figure IV.3.1 Nexuses 'climate change'

‘Global’ challenge?

While climate change and the (mis)use of resources are clearly affecting the world globally, it is less clear whether the concerted efforts needed to address this challenge should also be global. Many of the former colonized countries argue that it would be unfair that they should pay for the problems caused by their former colonizers. While this may be the case for carbon dioxide emissions, it is not necessarily the case for other types of pollution (like, for instance, plastic waste in the oceans - see text box).

Who is the polluter?

Carbon emission

1. China
2. United states
3. India
4. Russia
5. Japan
6. Indonesia
7. Iran
8. Germany
9. South Korea
10. Saudi Arabia

Plastics in the ocean

1. China
2. Indonesia
3. Philippines
4. Vietnam
5. Sri Lanka
6. Egypt
7. Thailand
8. Malaysia
9. Nigeria
10. Bangladesh

(<https://www.worldometers.info/co2-emissions/co2-emissions-by-country/>)

(<https://www.statista.com/chart/12211/the-countries-polluting-the-oceans-the-most>)

Another criticism that some former colonized countries level against the measures that are intended to stop climate change is that these measures will deny them the benefits from their upstarting economies while the Western countries have already reaped all those benefits. This is what has been referred to as the equity argument: rather than treating all countries equally (equal measures of carbon dioxide emission reduction, for instance), countries should be treated in accordance with their (in)capabilities. At the same time, for countries with less developed economies it is much easier to make the clean energy transition than it is for the developed economies. Some argue that this may even result in the less developed economies taking the lead in future developments.

Guyana's predicament

In 2015, vast reserves of oil were discovered in front of the coast of Guyana (South America). The income from the oil exploitation can be used for a much-needed development of the country. However, fossil fuels are also the cause for global heating and Guyana is one of the countries that is seriously threatened by rising sea levels.

Further reading

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Security

People may feel insecure for a variety of reasons. Armed conflict is the most obvious reason, but since the 1990s we also see that terrorism, climate change and the absence of social well-being are sources of insecurity. This development has two implications for the world of today. First, the meaning of security has become much broader. Second, security has become a yardstick for many issues that the world faces: we speak of food security, energy security, migration security. It appears as though security addresses most of the basic human needs that until very recently were covered by human rights. This shift from human rights to security will be discussed in greater detail below.

That the term security has become so dominant gives the impression that people feel much more insecure than before. When one looks at the statistics of armed violence, however, this sense of insecurity is unjustified: armed violence may have increased in some forms (civil wars) but decreased in others (war between states, colonial war), and the total has been more or less the same since 1945. This prompts the conclusion that the sensation of (in)security is driven by other sources. One is the geopolitical positionality: insecurity may have increased among Europeans who after decades of peace are faced with a real or imagined threat from Russia, just like a sense of security may have increased among South Americans after decades of oppressive dictatorships had come to an end. Another source of increased insecurity is the multiplying factor of social media: today one has unlimited access to a non-stop stream of images and videos of war and violence on social media as opposed to the time when these images were distributed in limited quantity and frequency by the daily news outlets. Another factor is the sensation of insecurity itself. To feel insecure in the street is not restricted to warzones or places dominated by violent gangs; it also applies to a fear of crime or harassment, and even to the feeling of unease (e.g., because one is the only black man in an environment of white people, or because one is the only bare-headed woman in an environment of women with headscarves – or vice versa). Students reportedly at times feel insecure (or: ‘unsafe’) in a university when they are presented with information that they experience as offensive or too confrontational. It appears that security is not only to be free from fear of war, violence or starvation, but also to be free from feeling a threat to one’s identity or sensitivities.

In this chapter we will discuss how (in)security has become a global challenge and how, in addressing this challenge, there has been an increase in the focus on security.

Defining (in)security.

Security can be broadly defined as “a state of being free from danger or threat” (Oxford Dictionary). More specific qualities of what security means depend on the persons involved and the values by which it is measured. As with the notion of freedom, a distinction can be made between security *from* something (war, terrorism, violence, or other threats), and security *of* something (being secure in food, shelter, and other basic human needs).

Terrorism

One of today’s main global security concerns is terrorism. Terrorism still lacks a clear definition but is usually described as the killing of political leaders or random people with the purpose of disrupting a governmental or political system. But many organizations also use terrorist means for other goals, like the proclaimed liberation of their people or country from oppression or foreign occupation (examples are the IRA in Ireland, ANC in South Africa, PLO and Hamas in Israel, Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka). In many of these instances, terrorism is not a *goal*, but a *means*: this distinction is important for reasons that will be discussed below.

Terrorism has a long history but was first addressed as a global phenomenon during the 1970s, when several so-called left-extremist organizations were actively aiming to destabilize the country (like ‘Lightning Path’ in Peru, JAL in Japan, RAF in Germany, Brigade Rosso in Italy). Terrorism became recognized as a global *challenge* in the early 2000s with the ‘War on Terror’, which focused primarily on the emerging Islamic militantism around the world. This War on Terror was declared by the United States after they had suffered several simultaneous attacks on 11 September 2001, and it prompted a world-wide effort to combat terrorism.

Combatting terrorism usually aims at preventing the attack rather than prosecuting the attackers afterwards (which is the common action taken in any criminal prosecution). To prevent terrorism, state security apparatuses are trying to predict and anticipate terrorist activities. Since the early 2000s, states are also cooperating more than before in exchanging intelligence. As a result, a veritable global counter terrorism industry has emerged with its own information networks. One side effect (or: nexus) of this is the ways in which the counter terrorism may violate the principles of the rule of law. For instance, how far is one willing to go in the interrogation of a terrorist suspect if that may prevent other terrorist attacks? And is one willing to expand the legally limited time for incarceration of a suspect if there is still no sufficient evidence against the terrorist suspect? Another nexus is the way the counter-terrorism measures affect the privacy of the public. People can be monitored and tracked by cameras in the streets and buildings, by means of

their mobile devices, money transfers, travel itineraries. Consequently, balancing the public interest of security and the individual interest of privacy has become a challenge within the larger challenge of global terrorism.

Another way of preventing terrorism is to focus on its **root causes**. This appears to be quite complex. In terms of the 3-I's, the discussion revolves around the question of whether the causes are rooted in *interests*, *ideas* or *identities*. Do people rebel violently (including through terrorist activities) because they are poor, or because they resent oppression, or because they want to liberate their country? If these interests are indeed the root cause, then it is also clear that the terrorism will end once these interests are addressed. To some observers, however, *ideas* rather than *interests* are the main drivers for many terrorist groups. According to these observers, communism, anarchism, or Islamism are belief systems that promote or endorse violence as part of their ideology. Other observers hold that these ideologies are not causes of terrorism but provide the discourse that justifies their actions. From this perspective, countering terrorism means that one needs to counter the ideology (in intelligence terms: to provide a 'counternarrative'). A recent development in terrorist activities is that they appear to be prompted by issues of identity. The terrorist killings by white supremacists are the clearest example, but one might also include the communities who feel that their very existence is under threat and that they are fighting for their survival (examples are the Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Kurds in eastern Turkey). In all cases, however, there is a combination of factors at play that may explain the use of terrorist means.

Peacemaking, building and keeping

Universities today offer courses in Conflict Studies, Terrorism Studies and Security Studies, but hardly ever in Peace Studies. While peace may be defined as the absence of conflict, the processes of peacemaking and peace building require entirely different analyses and actions than ending conflicts. While peacemaking is the action of deciding what conditions are to be met to end hostile relations, peacebuilding is the elaborate process before and afterwards that focuses on trust and social interactions. Peacekeeping, on the other hand, is a term that is usually reserved for a military presence by a third party in a conflict with the aim to prevent further violence.

'Peace' is more than the absence of war, however. Given the widening of domains where insecurity is experienced, it is argued that an equal widening of the notion of peace is needed. Here, the concept of **polarization** is important: the hostile opposition between two or more factions represented by political, ethnic, religious or regional groups (see also the notion of 'multipolarization' elsewhere in this textbook). The manifestation of such hostile opposition has grown to

include discrimination, hate speech, vengefulness and even violence and conflict, both within states and among states. From that perspective, the notion of peace is not only relevant on the global level, but also on the national and local: schools, neighborhoods, cities and societies anywhere in the world (and perhaps mostly so in the West) experience the challenges of such types of polarization.

Peace is a notion that is commonly related to states. The United Nations charter states that it wants to 'maintain peace and security' among states and peoples, but it fails to set any guidelines on how to achieve that. The United Nations mostly started out as a mediator of conflicts, but it gradually grew in a role of preventing international conflicts. While mediation is a typical form of soft power, prevention can also be a form of hard power: the United Nations started to act as the policeman of the world by sending peacekeeping forces to places where conflicts could erupt or after – and that was usually the case – a conflict had erupted, and where peacekeepers were stationed to keep the warring parties separated. These peacekeepers consisted of army units that various states committed to the peacekeeping force of that conflict. This marked an interesting change in many armies, especially in those of smaller states: the national military did not only serve the defence of one's own country, it could also serve the peace processes in countries around the world. Countries who commit their military to a peacekeeping force may do so to contribute to world peace. But more often do they do so to show their goodwill to the world community which, in turn, might pay off in the future when favors are required.

The main problem in peacekeeping is the issue of sovereignty. It is one thing to place a peacekeeping force on the borders between two warring states with the permission of those two states. But it's quite a different thing when a conflict is happening within a country, like a civil war, a massacre, a genocide. What if the government refuses any foreign interference? And what if that government is the main perpetrator of the violence? State sovereignty is generally sacrosanct: no interference is allowed in domestic affairs without the permission of the government. This principle started to waver after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

Genocide in Rwanda (1994)

The Hutu majority government of Rwanda had incited violence against the Tutsi population, and within a matter of days between half a million and a million Tutsis were massacred, mostly with machetes. The world watched in horror, but no country intervened. A United Nations peace keeping mission was already present, but they were not allowed to interfere because their UN-mandate was to oversee the implementation of a peace accord between Rwanda and its neighbour Uganda. When the United Nations finally obtained a Security Council declaration which gave the mandate to intervene in the ongoing genocide, it was already too late.

UNESCO: Peace education

“Building more peaceful, just, and sustainable societies starts with education. It influences all aspects of our daily lives and our overall prospects while being impacted by our health and environment. In the global landscape of worsening climate change, democratic backsliding, persistent inequalities, rising discrimination, hate speech, violence and conflict, it can be a tool to address and prevent these problems in the future.”

(UNESCO: *The Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development*, 2023)

‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P)

When considering the principle of state sovereignty in the case of internal conflicts within a state, like civil war or genocide, it may be useful to draw a comparison with the situation of a burning house, or with domestic violence. Do we wait for the fire department or the police to arrive, or should we rush in to help and prevent worse? In 1999, some members of the international community decided on the latter during the Yugoslavian civil war. When Kosovo declared independence from Serbia (then still officially called Yugoslavia), atrocities committed by Serbian forces against Kosovan civilians shocked European powers, who still had the 1995 images of the massacres committed by Serbian forces against Bosnian Muslims fresh in their minds, and the genocide in Rwanda a year before that. Was the world to stand by and watch another massacre? A resolution to act before the United Nations was blocked by Russia. But NATO, the American-European military alliance, argued that they had a ‘Responsibility to Protect’, and bombarded Serbian forces and strategic targets within Serbia. And again in 2011, NATO invoked this principle to bombard the military forces of Khaddafi who were about to violently suppress the ‘Arab Spring’ revolt in Libya.

Until that point, the United Nations had kept quiet. After all, the sanctity of state sovereignty is one of its foundations. But many (not all!) members of the international community agreed that intervention was sometimes needed to prevent human catastrophes from taking place. This required a rethink of the notion of sovereignty. It was considered politically too sensitive to make the Responsibility to Protect an *exception* to sovereignty. A more elegant solution was *expanding* the notion of sovereignty. It was argued that sovereignty implies a **dual responsibility**: externally, to respect the sovereignty of other states, but also internally, to respect the dignity and basic rights of all the people within the state. It is important to realize that this is not a rule of law set in stone, it is still under discussion, and for many states it is controversial.

Human security

The discussions about possible exceptions to the sanctity of the principle of sovereignty were prompted by considerations regarding citizens of a state rather than the state itself. This meant that the conversations about the relation between the international and national also permeated to the third level of the 3-D-chessboard: to the local and the individual. Before, these levels were usually discussed in different frameworks: states were viewed in terms of security, people in terms of human rights. By the 1990s, these two concepts converged in the notion of 'human security'.

The first official mention of human security was in the *Human Development Report* of 1994. It was introduced because the existing terminology was considered inadequate: 'security' was still too much seen in terms of state security, and in humanitarian law, where not states but people were placed under protection of international law, security was still only seen in terms of armed conflicts. Now, in 1994, the concept of security was to include chronic threats such as disease, hunger, unemployment, political repression. This was termed human security. However, at the time, this notion was not framed in terms of security, nor in terms of law, but in terms of development.

Ever since its introduction, the concept of human security has been evolving. At first, human security was seen in material terms, meaning the struggle against poverty and disease and hunger. Later, human security was extended to include values and identity. Nowadays, the term human security has become common usage both in the academic world and in the world of development policy.

Human security

There is general consensus among policymakers and academics that human security has four key characteristics:

1. Human security may be discussed in material terms, like food, or energy, or migration, but it is about the people.
2. Human security is a global concern because it is of importance to any individual wherever they may be.
3. The consequences of insecurity can travel beyond borders.
4. Early prevention rather than later intervention is the best way to go about ensuring human security.

A question is how the notion of human security relates to human development. Some see a clear distinction between the two: human development has to do with choices, and therefore with empowerment (also described as the security *of* basic human needs), while human security has to do with protection *from* unwanted

situations. But for others, the two are interrelated or even the same. This argument was made by a group of intellectuals from all over the world and included Amartya Sen, who in 2003 produced a report with the telling title *Human Security Now*. They defined human security as the protection of the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfilment. Human security is a dynamic concept, the report says, because its meaning varies across individuals and societies. Because of that dynamic nature, the report deliberately does offer an itemized list of what makes up human security: that needs to be decided separately in every situation. Based on these discussions, the concept of human security has been criticized for being too vague and therefore ineffective as a useful tool of analysis in policymaking.

‘Securitization’

Security has become the new nexus in many global issues that have, since the turn of the millennium, been framed in security terms: economy, pandemic, migration, development. According to some observers, this is the result of an increased ‘securitization’ of these issues. This specific term describes how an issue is presented as being under such a threat that immediate action must be undertaken. Securitization comprises three elements. First, there is an *existential threat*, that is a threat to the very existence of a community. This threat can be physical – being bombed or wiped out in a genocide – but also existential, that is, a threat to the preservation of a culture and identity. Here, security is about survival. The second element is that this threat is so imminent that there is no time to waste, that *immediate action* is required. We can imagine this to be the case when an army marches across the border, but similar images are used with immigrants crossing borders. The third element is the need for *decisive action*, preferably by a strong leader who will not compromise but who will do what it takes to get the job done to safeguard the security of the nation, even if it demands exceptional measures.

The Copenhagen School on ‘Securitization Theory’

Securitization is a successful speech act ‘through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat’.

(Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework of Analysis*, 1998)

Securitization can be legitimate, but the Securitization Theory was developed to describe situations where securitization is an abuse of power for political and populist purposes. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic was a health issue that in 2019 became securitized: it was considered an existential threat because it could kill people extensively and therefore demanded immediate action. In democracies one witnessed leaders setting aside regular democratic processes so they could take decisive action that they claimed to be justified as a safeguard of the nation's security. Many considered this a legitimate securitization, while some claimed that it was an unfounded abuse of power.

Academics observe an increase of securitization as an abuse of power for political and populist purposes. They criticize the ease with which issues are being securitized. Part of that criticism is directed at the exaggerated urgency that is evoked by security language. For example, military metaphors like 'war on drugs', 'war on terror, or 'war on crime' are being used to emphasize – some will say: exaggerate – the urgency of these issues. This type of language evokes the image of imminent threats to society which demand exceptional measures. Other critics point out that when an issue is treated in terms of security, there is a tendency to lose sight of other aspects. This has happened with religion (the focus on Islamically justified terrorism has made religion in general suspect), terrorism (that label prevents one from considering the motives of freedom fighters who use terrorist means), and migration (migrants are perceived as an economic or cultural threat rather than as a people in need or as a solution to economic and demographic decline).

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Unwanted migration

Since the 1990s it is mostly the United States and Europe that have put migration at the top of the list of their political problems. However, many other countries across the world are also dealing with large numbers of migrants. As discussed in the chapter on migration as a global structure, ‘migrants’ is a generic term for people who are moving from one country to other countries (‘international migration’) or within in their own country (‘domestic migration’), either voluntarily or forced, whereby the causes for migration can differ considerably. Migration may become a challenge when one of two issues come into play: the migration is unwanted in the destination country (this is the issue of illegal or undocumented migration) or when there is a sudden and significant movement of migrants (this is the case with displaced persons or refugees). The question, however, is when such a challenge can be considered a global challenge.

Global challenge – who?

International migrants pose a problem when they are unwanted. This is in stark contrast to the migrants who have been invited. For instance, countries like Canada, Australia and the United States have migration policies that regulate migration, primarily by identifying the types of professions that their societies need. Member states of the European Union have opened their borders to each other with the deliberate purpose of having unhindered exchange of ‘goods and people’. Israel welcomes immigration of all Jewish people. In all these instances, migration is wanted, albeit for a variety of motives, and subject to strict regulations.

Migrants can be unwanted for several reasons. **‘Illegal’ (or: ‘undocumented’) migrants** are migrants who enter a country regardless of the migration rules of that country. This type of migration is mostly of an economic nature: people are seeking a better life. This is what international migration organizations call ‘voluntary migration’ (although we have seen that the voluntary nature of such migration can be disputed). These two types of migration are usually undertaken by individuals: people decide for themselves if and when they want to migrate.

The other types of international migration that may pose a problem are the **displaced persons (or: refugees)** who are fleeing war, famine or political oppression. A difference with the ‘undocumented’ migrants is that refugees usually move in large groups at the same time following a sudden disastrous event. This is also known as ‘forced migration’, which may be relatively small on the world scale in 2024 estimated to be (1.4 percent of the total world population) but can be

very substantial for countries who are receiving these migrants. Another important difference is that only refugees who are recognized as such hold **legal status**. Under the international Refugee Convention, these refugees are entitled to settlement in other countries, either as individuals who apply for asylum in another country, or under the auspices of the International Organization of Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR), which will finance and create shelters for large communities of refugees.

A new pressing reason of migration is **climate change**. Rising sea levels, temperature changes and droughts are causing people to move away from their homes. While reference to these people is usually made with the descriptive term 'climate migrants', the legal term 'climate refugees' is also being applied: while the first term is descriptive, the second term implies certain rights of protection under the Refugee Convention.

UNHCR: climate refugees

"In the last decade, the interlinkages between climate change impacts and conflict have become particularly apparent. In 2022, 70 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers fled from highly climate-vulnerable countries, an increase from 56 per cent in 2012.⁸ Climate change and environmental degradation increasingly drive displacement, in combination with social, economic and political factors. Many countries are affected by both conflict and disaster that interact and overlap as triggers and drivers of displacement."

(UNHCR, *Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030*)

Global challenge - where?

A 'global' challenge implies that an event has global repercussions. However, the situation of illegal and forced migration mostly involves two or several countries (one country of origin and one or more neighboring countries of destination). Strictly speaking, problems posed in these situations present challenges to both the originating and arriving countries. The question then is: when does migration become a global challenge? In other words, in what instances does migration affect people worldwide, and needs to be addressed through the concerted efforts of various actors?

Displaced persons or refugees

In the case of displaced persons and refugees, their migration is often very localized (mostly domestic or crossing only one border). It may nevertheless be considered a global challenge because of its frequency and because it happens worldwide. Moreover, a war or a drought that causes a sudden and massive displacement of people anywhere in the world necessitates immediate and large-scale humanitarian aid. These considerations have prompted the international community to establish international organizations like the IOM and the UNHCR to manage such situations. They are equipped with the means and finances to act swiftly and practically. In most instances of a refugee crisis, they will create large camps to shelter the refugees and provide them with food and medical care.

Refugees: countries of origin and destination (2024)

Countries that host the most refugees:

1. Iran (3.8 million)
2. Turkey (3.3 million)
3. Pakistan (3.0-4.0 million)
4. Colombia (2.9 million)
5. Germany (2.6 million)

Countries from where most refugees originate:

1. Afghanistan (6.4 million)
2. Syrian Arab Republic (6.4 million)
3. Venezuela (6.1 million)
4. Ukraine (5 million)
5. South Sudan (2.3 million)

(<https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>)

Illegal or undocumented migrants

Illegal migration can acquire a large regional dimension in case of **lengthy trajectories of international migration**. Europe and the United States are two examples, with undocumented migrants trying to reach Europe from Africa and Asia, and the United States from Central and South America. Here, not only the countries of origin and arrival are affected, but also the countries of transit that lie between. For instance, for decades there has been an increasing flow of illegal migrants from Central and South American countries heading for the United States.

While Mexico serves as both a country of transit and origin, many migrants do not make it across the American-Mexican border, and they remain stuck in Mexico, which therefore becomes the involuntary destination country, thereby creating its own set of problems. A different example of long-distance illegal migration is the one heading for Europe. While the United States is a single-country of destination, the European Union is a multi-country destination with multiple-entry possibilities. If each European country were to take its own measures to regulate or even stop the migration, the problem is not solved but repositioned to the next country. Such unilateral actions can create a waterbed effect: if one pushes on one side, it will rise on the other side. Concerted efforts among the countries of destination will therefore be needed to address this migration issue.

Global challenge - what?

If unwanted 'migrants' of any type (undocumented, refugees, or any other) are said to pose a global challenge, what exactly, then, is that challenge? While these discussions tend to focus on the countries of destination, there are also challenges for the **countries of origin**. For instance, the departure of large segments of the population may leave agricultural land untilled or a society without skilled workers. This may, in turn, generate more migration, leading to a vicious cycle. Psychological and social problems of the migrants themselves pose another challenge: large numbers of displaced persons and refugees, in particular, often face lengthy periods of time when they live in remote places in basic conditions waiting to return to their homeland. While this may be deplorable on humanitarian grounds, it may also give rise to other concerns: the concentrations of large numbers of displaced persons may be disruptive to their psychological wellbeing, and may even cause some among them to be so disgruntled and resentful that there is a possibility that they become a security risk (as was one of the causes of the rise of the Taliban).

The rise of the Taliban

The 1979 invasion of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and the ensuing civil war caused the first large waves of Afghan refugees to Iran and Pakistan. In Pakistan, the refugee camps housed an estimated 4 million Afghan refugees. In these camps, Islamic schools (*madrassas*) provided basic education, but also gave rise to the Taliban ('students') who after 1994 became a prominent force in the civil war. They established an 'Islamic emirate' in large part of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, were thereafter subdued by American-led allied forces, but resurged in 2021 when they took power in entire Afghanistan.

Most discussions about migration as a global challenge focus on the **countries of destination**. The main problem is said to be the number of ‘migrants’, although it is not always clear to whom this generic term refers. Most often it refers to refugees and illegal migrants, but in the public and political discourse of many Western countries this category of migrants is mixed up with residents of these countries who are of migrant origin from non-Western countries. As a result, the discussions of the nature of the migration as a global (or national) challenge are quite diffuse, ranging from the impact of migration on the demographics, economy and society of the country of origin or destination. These will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

“Mass migrations are inevitable, and more than ever, they are necessary. (...) The world of tomorrow is not only full of mobile people but is defined by the mobility of everything.”
(Parag Khanna, *Move. How Mass Migration will Reshape the World*, 2022)

Impact on demographics

A large influx of people can disrupt the demographics of the country of destination. However, the notion of a demographic disruption is relative, and mostly related to the nature of influx and the type of migrants.

In the case of **displaced persons and refugees**, the influx of migrants is usually sudden and substantial. However, the aim of these migrants is not to stay, but to return to their country of origin. Their stay is therefore intended as temporary, although reality may be different. The approximately 700 thousand Palestinians who fled their country in 1948 were given shelter in neighboring countries like Syria, Lebanon and Jordan with the expectation to return, but they still have not. Similarly, millions of refugees from Afghanistan have for decades been living in neighboring countries Pakistan and Iran with the hope of return. In such cases, the original temporary refugee camps have gradually been reshaped into towns and suburbs.

Largest refugee camps in 2024

Kutupalung (Bangladesh): 930,000 refugees (from Myanmar)

Kakuma (north Kenya): 200,000 refugees (from Sudan)

Dadaab (south Kenya): 240,000 refugees (from Somalia)

Za'tari (Jordan): 100,000 (from Syria)

In some instances, refugees have been granted asylum in countries further away. And although they may still aim to return to their home country, many create a new life in their destination country. This seems also to be the case with most of the (legal as well as illegal) labor migrants: they might intend to migrate for temporary work only, but many stay on and build their lives in the destination country and try to acquire legal residence.

If significant numbers of both wanted and unwanted migrants remain in the destination country, this will have an impact on the demographics of that country. In some countries, migration can be a **restorative demographic** factor. In countries where the population is declining, there will be fewer young people to sustain the economy and care for the growing number of elderly people. Migration can restore this balance. On the other hand, migration can also be seen as disruptive to a country's demographics if the migrants are of a **different ethnicity or religion** than the people of that country. This is the case when the self-proclaimed 'original' population fears for a 'dilution' of its characteristic features by people of different color, race, culture or religion (see elaboration below, under 'Impact on society').

Migrant health care workers after Brexit

One of the motivating factors behind the United Kingdom leaving the European Union in 2021 ('Brexit') was to put a stop to migration. However, Brexit also put a stop to intra-European migration. As a result, the health care system lost many of its workers from EU countries. To compensate for this loss of work force, large numbers of health care workers have been recruited from India, Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

(Center for Global Development, *Blog post* 19 February 2024)

Impact on economy

A large influx of people can disrupt a country's economy. This is the case when the influx is sudden and substantial, as in the case of displaced persons and refugees. While in most of these cases the refugees are housed by international organizations, there will always be a spillover into urban areas, resulting in rising rents for houses and apartments, falling salaries, and the shortages and overpricing of food, medicine and daily necessities. An example is the more than one million Syrian refugees in the small country of Lebanon with a population of five million. This was caused by the Syrian civil war in 2014 but was exacerbated by the Israeli attacks in 2024 that caused half a million Lebanese to flee their homes and seek shelter elsewhere in the country. Such disruptions are not usually the case in Western countries, although this economic argument is often used in the political discussions about migration.

Impact on society

The complaints about migration are mostly heard in Western countries, and while the arguments against migration are often couched in terms of demographic and economic disruption, the concerns are usually cultural. These concerns are directed at migrants who are ethnically and culturally different from the residents of the destination country. The arrival of large numbers of such migrants can be seen as disruptive to the cultural structures and social cohesion of that society (although there is always the question of what is the tipping point is of these 'large' numbers: when do they become disruptive to the local culture?). In this way, the discussion of migration shifts from concerns about *interests* ('they take our jobs') to concerns about *identity* ('I cannot be myself anymore') or even insecurity ('I feel unsafe in my own country').

These cultural concerns play no or a lesser role in countries where migrants share the ethnic or cultural identity of the residents of that country. This may explain the welcome of the 6 million Ukrainian refugees in Europe in 2022 as opposed to the 1 million Syrian refugees in 2017. This may also explain why the discussions about cultural concerns are more likely to be heard in Europe and the United States than in countries like Iran or Pakistan, where the millions of mostly Afghan refugees mostly share the culture and language of those countries. One may wonder if the reception of these Afghan refugees would have been different if they had been Ukrainian. Could this, then, be the reason why **racism** or **xenophobia** is more present in these discussions in Western countries, or are these sentiments innate to the Western mindset, as has been argued?

This situation may also explain why discussions about migration in Western countries are often about **identity** and **values**. Obviously, these societies feel that their own cultural identity and value system is threatened by migrants from different backgrounds. Whether this concern is justified is not easily answered, but it clearly plays an important role in the political debates in these societies. What is relevant for the student of International Studies, however, is to realize that these debates encompass the local and national to the global level: they have permeated political and academic debates about global spheres identified on the basis of culture (and often religion), which are in turn assumed by some to be 'clashing' because of the nature of their cultural and religious differences.

Nativism is the term used for the position that the interests and culture of the native citizens should be protected against those of the citizens of migrant origin. Problematic in nativist thought is that the 'native' does not include the indigenous people in countries like America or Australia, nor migrants of colour who have lived there for generations.

Nexuses

When migration is considered a global challenge, then there are numerous nexuses to consider when trying to make a concerted effort to address this challenge. For example, if migration is considered a challenge for a particular destination, that region may seek to physically stop the influx of migrants, but it may also seek to address the causes of migration. These causes can be diverse: civil war, lack of economic prospects, political persecution, natural disasters. Addressing each of these causes will, in turn, open a series of nexuses (see figure IV.5.1). For example, if the cause of migration is identified as a lack of economic prospects (see figure IV.5.1), then creating such prospects may involve the improving education, civil society, and good governance. And if the focus is on education, for example, experience has shown that educating girls contributes considerably to improving a country's economy – another nexus of women's empowerment.

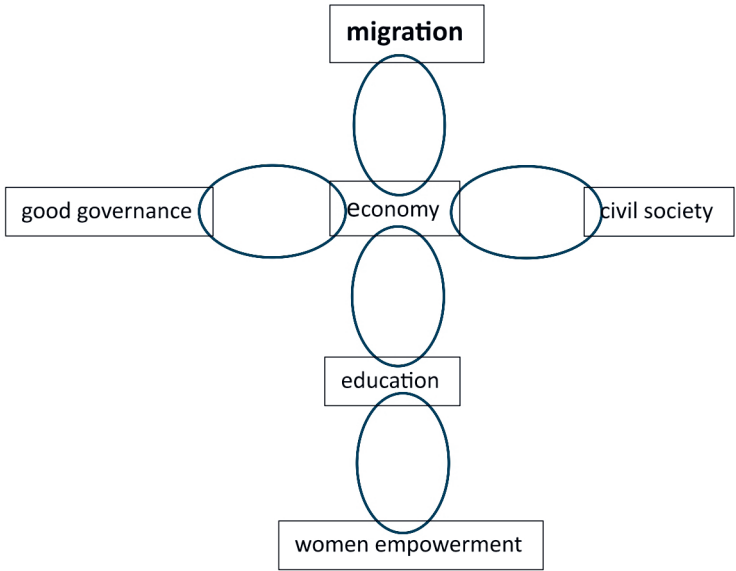


Figure IV.5.1 Nexus migration - economy

If, on the other hand, the country or region of destination decides to physically stop migration, migration becomes a security issue, and another set of nexuses emerges (see figure IV.5.2). One is the strengthening of borders through walls, gates, and border patrols, which is the nexus of policing. Another nexus is cooperation with neighboring countries, where deals can be made, for example, that this neighboring country will host all migrants in exchange for financial (or other) compensation. This may lead to a different set of issues, for instance that this neighboring country

now has political leverage over the country that wants to stop immigration ('we will let the migrants through unless you meet our demands'), or that a large presence of migrants could destabilize this neighboring country (which is a threat to the country that wants to stop migration), or that these migrants could become the recruitment ground for criminal or terrorist organizations (as was the case with the Taliban, who were recruited among the Afghan refugee communities in Pakistan). When these issues are addressed, they become new nexuses.

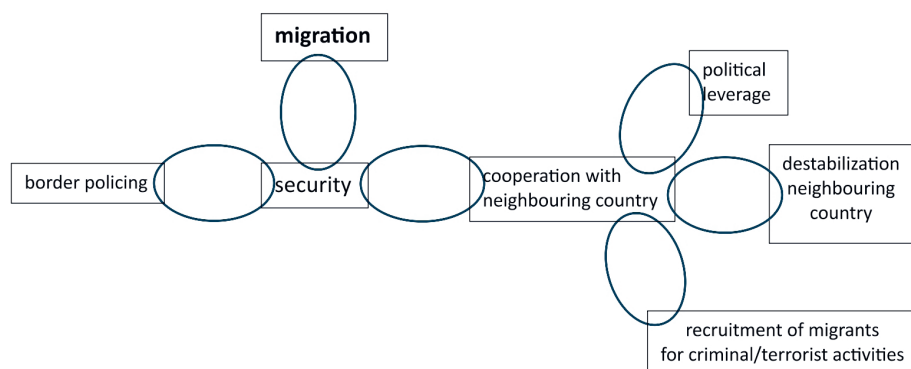


Figure IV.5.2 *Nexus migration - security*

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Pandemics and global health

Epidemics – unexpected or seasonal outbreaks of a disease in in a community or geographically confined population – are a regular occurrence in history. Epidemics do not have to be infectious: for instance, obesity is considered an epidemic in America. An epidemic becomes a pandemic when the disease is infectious, and spreads exponentially across borders. Influenza, for instance, is an annually recurring sickness in Europe, the two Americas and southeast Asia, causing an estimated 300-600 thousand deaths per year. Pandemics cause most concern when they have a high death rate. In the 6th and 14th century, the plague devastated societies in Europe, Asia and North Africa, and in the 16-17th century, smallpox did the same to the indigenous populations of the two Americas. Similarly, cholera outbreaks were regular occurrences in unhygienic and densely populated areas across the world, and the Spanish Flu of 1918 caused an estimated 50-100 million deaths worldwide. Certain serious infectious diseases like polio or yellow fever have been mostly eradicated by means of vaccinations or are confined ('endemic') to certain regions. Malaria is also an endemic disease because the mosquitos that transmit the disease only live to certain areas in the world.

Until recently, pandemics seemed less threatening, either because there were vaccinations against them or because they were relatively quickly contained. The Covid-19 pandemic of 2019-2022 shattered that complacency: it wreaked world-wide havoc with an estimated 7 million deaths and caused massive lockdowns and other restrictive measures. However, Covid-19 should not have come as such a surprise because it had been preceded by a succession of similar pandemics caused by virus transmission between wildlife and humans: in 2003, Sars erupted in in China and spread to 26 countries in four months; in 2005, the Asian flu spread around the world; in 2009, the Swine flu (also known as the Mexican flu) spread to 30 countries within weeks; and in 2014, Ebola broke out in West Africa (but it was quickly contained), killing 1 out of every 3 patients.

While all these pandemics caused global challenges, not all were considered or treated as such. That was different with the Covid-19 pandemic: global concerted efforts went into containing the disease. However, critics have argued that the international response was only deemed necessary once the pandemic affected Western countries. While that may be the case, pandemics like Sars, Swine flu and Ebola, which took place in the decades before that, had been contained with far fewer victims than Covid-19, which might have been the reason for the initial false optimism that Covid-19 could also be quickly contained.

Epidemic, endemic or pandemic?

An epidemic is the unexpected or seasonal increase of a disease in a community or geographically confined population. A pandemic is when the epidemic disease increase is exponential and affects large geographical areas. An endemic disease is confined to a geographical area.

Global action

A global challenge requires an international concerted action to meet the global crisis at hand. Already in 1851, it was suggested that international coordination was required to fight pandemics like cholera, but it wasn't until the United Nations was founded before such a coordinating body came to life. It was mainly on the insistence of non-Western member states that the World Health Organization (WHO) was founded in 1948. All UN states were automatically member of this organization and each country had an equal vote. The goal of the WHO was to improve public health worldwide.

The function of the WHO was not entirely clear at first. Was the WHO to act only in response to crises, or was it to act in a preventive capacity? The first option was subject to much political controversy among the member states, mainly because some member states were unwilling to give up part of their sovereignty in health policies. Preventive action in specific cases, on the other hand, was considered less controversial and in the 1960s the WHO took on the job of eliminating smallpox. This was a very contagious disease that was also deadly: about 3 out of every 10 patients died. Many smallpox survivors have permanent scars over large areas of their body, especially their faces, and some survivors were left blind. The fight against smallpox took place at the height of the Cold War but was one of the few international operations in which the United States and Soviet Union worked together. By 1979, the WHO officially declared smallpox eradicated.

From the 1970s onwards, the WHO started taking on the role of coordinator of global public health rather than only combatting existing or emerging world diseases. The reason for this change was the great addition of new states that had achieved independence as former colonies and had become automatic members of the WHO through their membership of the United Nations. Most of these countries had serious national health issues and were in need of a powerful and active international body to address these problems. This pressure on its role as coordinator was effective because in 1978, the WHO declared health a fundamental **human right** and, consequently, every government was to be responsible for granting its population easy access to health care.

The case of Covid-19

The 3-I's – interests, ideas, identity – provide a useful framework for analyzing the way the world handled the Covid-19 pandemic.

While international solidarity and coordination would have been the most adequate means to fight the pandemic, national *interests* quickly took over. Every state wanted to take care of itself. When Spain and Italy were the first to be hit by the pandemic in Europe in 2020, they asked for extra European financial assistance. This was initially refused with the argument that they only had themselves to blame for their financial distress because of the economic mess they had allowed to persist for years. Especially the fact that Italy was a member of the G7, the group of the seven wealthiest countries in the world, was a point of contention: some EU countries that were not G7 members wondered why they should pay for Italy. While these arguments may make sense from an economic perspective, they certainly lacked in compassion and solidarity in a public health crisis. A similar lack of solidarity arose once a vaccine for Covid-19 was developed: Western countries hoarded these vaccines and were already offering their populations their second or third round of inoculations when people in African countries were still waiting for their first.

Fighting the pandemic also meant states had to prioritize their interests. Did public health trump economic interests? Did public health justify a government intruding on people's lives with requirements for medical checkups, obligatory health insurances, vaccination programs? Was public health so important that it justified school children and students missing months of education and years of social interaction? Although it was predicted that the shutdown of international trade and national economies would lead to a worldwide economic collapse once the pandemic was over, this did not happen. On the other hand, the impact of the lockdowns on the social and psychological wellbeing of people appears to be greater and longer lasting than anticipated.

In several instances, the policy decisions taken by countries hit by the pandemic were not based on interests, but on *ideas*, and mostly beliefs. Some government leaders flatly refused to acknowledge that there was a pandemic at all, or that Covid-19 was much different from any other type of influenza. This kind of attitude wasn't restricted to governments. In quite a few – mostly Western – countries, conspiracy theories arose about governments using the lockdowns and vaccination programs to control the people. An important dimension of beliefs pertained to the notion of freedom, which became an important topic of discussion especially in Western countries. The central issue of the debate was whether people should have the freedom to refuse vaccination or that such refusal would lead to the violation of the right of others to be free of disease and the threat of contamination.

Internationally, *identity* showed up when the pandemic gave rise to a blame game with Africans calling Covid-19 the 'white plague' because they blamed the

Europeans for transmitting it, and Europeans calling it the Chinese disease because it had started in that country. This 'us versus them' was not conducive to the much-needed international solidarity and coordination. Other identity issues played out on the national level, often illustrating cultural differences among people. In some countries people were better at observing the strict lockdown imposed by their governments, while in other countries people revolted against the police and their government. Lockdowns also prompted very different responses from people that can perhaps be explained in terms of cultural identity. An illustrative, albeit stereotypical example is that in the United States there were long lines of people queuing at gun stores in the hours before a lockdown, while in the Netherlands there were long lines at the marihuana shops. The use of face masks also showed interesting cultural differences: in China and most Southeast Asian countries, face masks were used to prevent the spread of germs *to* other people, while in mostly Western countries, face masks were used to be protected *against* the germs of other people.

International mechanisms

When the Covid-19 crisis broke in 2019, the WHO had quickly set up response systems, information exchange networks and had a good working relation with NGOs. The rapid response was largely made possible due to the experiences with earlier pandemics. But this time the WHO was much less successful in its role as international coordinator. There are many explanations for this, but prominent among them was the position taken by most Western countries. They felt confident they had the best health care systems in the world and therefore were disinclined to pass that part of their sovereignty on to the WHO. They preferred to close the borders and retreat in isolationism. While this may be considered the natural reaction of communities in times of crisis, the result was a break with international solidarity which had been the main driver of international politics for so long. It is yet another example of multilateralism being replaced by unilateralism, based on the assumption that national action serves the national interests better than international cooperation. Covid-19 did not cause this way of thinking but merely enforced it: countries with these unilateral political views already had policies in place to keep out international influences as much as possible, whether it was foreign culture, immigrants or the authority of international organizations.

Still, the issue at hand here is public health. National health care systems provide services to individuals and their individual needs. The unique feature of epidemics is that it affects everyone in the same measure. The prevention of such outbreaks requires nation-wide programs of vaccination or, if the outbreak has occurred, nation-wide measures. A similar situation is playing out on a world

scale. When a pandemic hits the world, it doesn't matter that one country has its health care system in order and the other doesn't, because both countries will be equally affected by the disease. Of course, every state has a national responsibility of health care towards its population. But this will not suffice during a pandemic, and some type of international health care will then also be needed. This requires a vision that is multi-dimensional, covering the local, national and global at the same time. It remains to be seen, therefore, if the unilateralist tendencies of the Covid-19 pandemic will persist, or whether the pandemic will prompt states to embrace multilateralism in preparing for the next pandemic.

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CHAPTER 7

Postcolonialism and decolonization

The term postcolonialism has acquired several meanings. In this textbook, two are considered of importance. The first meaning refers to the period and experiences of a former colonized country after colonialism. In African and Asian countries, for instance, postcolonialism represented the process of acquiring self-rule and an identity after the end of colonial rule. The processes of postcolonialism across the world took different forms because the colonial situations differed between countries and even continents: the practices and impacts of colonialism in Africa were different from those in Asia, and yet more different from those in South America (where indigenous populations were eradicated as a result of colonialism and, while Spanish rule may have ended, the Spanish settlers and former rulers never left) and North America (where the impact of settlers on the native population was combined with a massive import of enslaved people from Africa). But postcolonialism also has another meaning, namely, the impact that colonial structures and ways of thinking still have on today's world.

To address these challenges, it is said that 'decolonization' needs to take place, in other words: to undo the lingering effects of colonization, whether in a country that has been colonized, or in the world of today. Decolonization can be considered a global challenge, because it cannot be solved by only the communities who are affected by it, nor only by the communities that had caused it. For this, concerted efforts are needed that address the two (interconnected) types of postcolonialism, namely, the impact of colonialism on nation-building by former colonies and on their participation in the international domain, on the one hand, and, on the other, the impact on (academic) ways of understanding the world and one's position in that world. Decolonization therefore has a socio-political and an epistemological dimension. Both will be discussed below.

Two meanings of postcolonialism

Postcolonialism can mean 1) the period and experiences of a former colonized country after colonialism, and 2) the impact that colonial structures and ways of thinking still have on today's world.

Global challenge (1): socio-political ‘decolonization’

Decolonization originally meant that the former colonized country was to reshape itself into a self-governing entity whereby its political, economic, educational, and other state systems were now under its own direction. In doing so, most former colonized countries have retained aspects of their former colonizer that usually consist of the legal or political system, state institutions, the language, or various cultural influences. Later – the 1990s are usually considered the starting point – the term ‘decolonization’ was also used to indicate the need of a former colonized society to forswear any political, social, cultural, linguistic, or intellectual legacy of its colonial past. In its extreme form, decolonization was a call to remove these remnants of the colonial past in their entirety and replace them with an indigenous legacy. Critics of this type of decolonization, themselves from former colonial countries, have pointed out that foreign influences can very well have become an integral part of the identity of the former colony and its people and should be accepted as such.

Noble prize for Nigerian author Wole Soyinka

The Nigerian author Wole Soyinka writes in the language of the colonizer (English) about (former colonized) Yoruba folklore in Nigerian everyday life of today. In 1986 he accepted the prestigious Nobel prize for literature from a Western country (Sweden) while wearing his national costume. At the ceremony in Stockholm, he had requested music to be played by a Nigerian composer (Fela Sowande) who writes music with the syntax of the colonizer (European classical music) for songs from Yoruba culture.

In either of these interpretations of ‘decolonization’, there remains a challenge to see what exactly is to be understood by decolonization, if it is warranted, and how it can be achieved. In doing so, many perceive this to be a global challenge, that is, a process that needs all (historical) parties involved to work together. If, on the other hand, this effort to decolonize is directed towards unilateral action by societies and countries to decolonize themselves, then it becomes justified to speak of a national, and perhaps regional, rather than a global challenge.

Multipolarization and the global South

The effects of a colonial past are not only felt by individual countries and their societies, they are also a legacy that these countries share. This is one of the reasons these countries are collectively referred to as the ‘global South’. For most of these countries, however, colonialism is not a thing of the past: its structures are perceived as still present in the world today. Some see this in the advanced

economic position of Western countries compared to the global South, and they therefore advocate equity rather than equality. Others see the preservation of the colonial past in certain global structures that are remnants of colonial times, when the West had the power to design and impose these structures. One example is the UN Security Council, where the five permanent seats are held by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China (and each retains veto power). In 2017, 120 (of the 193) countries expressed their commitment to the reforms proposed by the UN Secretary-General in the UN General Assembly, but it remains to be seen if and how these reforms will be implemented.

The lack of permanent seats for Latin America and Africa on the UN Security Council is “an unacceptable echo of domination from the colonial past”

(President Lula (Brazil), speech before UN General Assembly, September 2024)

Since the 1990s, the antagonism between the global North and the global South has been increasingly expressed by the countries of the global South in policies that seek to move them away from political or economic dependence on Western countries. At the same time, fractures are emerging within the global North, with the United States pursuing an increasingly isolationist course. As a result, the structure of hegemonic ‘blocs’ (United States - Soviet Union during the Cold War period, America - Russia - China since the 2000s, but also global North - global South) is fragmenting into states opting for ad hoc relationships rather than subscribing to a single power ‘bloc’. This development is called **multipolarization**, which is a combination of two interacting developments: on the one hand, the power of multiple actors (states, but also powerful individuals and corporations) to influence global events, and on the other hand, the growing antagonism among these actors. For some observers, this is the result of the end of the Cold War, when the bi-polar hegemony represented by the United States and the Soviet Union collapsed. Other observers see multipolarization as a result of the post-colonial antagonism between the global North and South, pitting the former colonized against the former colonizers.

An example of this multipolarization is how Russia and China are positioning themselves as competitors to the West – not only economically and technologically, but also in terms of values. A similar development is the formation of the BRICS in 2009: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa created an alternative to the (Western) G7. All of these member states see multipolarization as a positive situation, albeit for different reasons: Brazil has stated that multipolarity is not anti-Western, but critical of Western domination; India claims the freedom to keep all options open and not to belong to any political camp; China sees BRICS as a counterweight to the G7; and Russia advocates a multipolar order in which

not states but ‘civilizational states’ are entitled to sovereignty. Clearly, pragmatism, opportunism and sentiment all play a role in the multipolarization trend.

Multipolarization

“It has become a truism of foreign policy debates that the world is becoming ever more ‘multipolar’. While the extent to which today’s world is already multipolar is debatable, the world’s ‘multipolarization’ is a fact: On the one hand power is shifting towards a larger number of actors who have the ability to influence key global issues. On the other hand, the world is experiencing increasing polarization both between and within many states, which is hampering joint approaches to global crises and threats.”

(Multipolarization, Munich Security Report 2025)

Multipolarization appears to be a new global trend, but is it also a global challenge? For those who have traditionally held most of the power, it certainly is. For example, the United States has reasserted itself against emerging political and economic powers like Russia and China. Since 2025, this policy has been dramatically intensified and accelerated under the Trump presidency. Multipolarization is also seen as a global challenge by those who believe in multilateralism and the rule-based global environment created by the many international agreements. Both the international cooperation and its legal infrastructure are undermined by the second dimension of multipolarization, that is: antagonism among actors, which creates a global environment in which national interests are pursued unilaterally, often in defiance of international rules. Finally, there are those who see the global trend toward multipolarization not as a challenge but as an opportunity because it allows smaller states to create their own network of alliances and cooperation without having to side with a single powerful entity.

Global challenge (2): epistemological ‘decolonization’

Postcolonialism in academic thought seeks to answer the questions of ‘How do formerly colonized peoples write their own histories and construct their own identities’. The reason for asking these questions is the realization that the way in which peoples from former colonized countries think about themselves, and structure their thought processes, is often defined by the epistemologies of Western thought. It is argued that the Western knowledge production and frames of thought continue to be perpetuated at the national and international levels across the globe: in politics, law, historical perceptions, and the structuring of states and educational institutions. As a result, the ways in which certain global structures have been

shaped in the twentieth century are being called into question, like the economy (why only capitalism, when Islamic or Chinese concepts of economy might pose interesting alternatives?) or the organization of states (why do only five states have permanent seats with veto power in the United Nations?) or human rights (why only address the rights of the individual and not that of communities?). In addressing these questions, some call for the undoing of the domination of Western epistemologies, while others argue for a diversity of epistemologies whereby the Western epistemologies are not removed but included.

‘Decoloniality’

Coloniality is a term that addresses the nexus of power and knowledge, arguing that most knowledge production is done in the global North and that this knowledge has global impact. Decoloniality stands for opening this knowledge monopoly up for other types of thinking, believing and living.

‘Great African History’

In the 1960s, several leaders of newly independent African countries decided that, after the decolonization of their countries, they also wanted to decolonize their histories by rewriting it. UNESCO was put in charge of this historiographical project called ‘Great African History’. Over 350 – mostly African scholars – were assembled to work on the numerous volumes that are still being published.

‘De-colonizing’ universities

Western-style universities and educational systems are dominant in most non-Western parts of the world: either as a residual legacy of Western education in colonized lands, or because former colonial states have reproduced these educational systems when establishing their own universities. Critics argue that such a university system still preserves knowledge and structures of thought that are inherently Western – and, according to some, colonial – in nature. Decolonizing universities can therefore mean two things: some argue that the Western-based epistemologies and curriculums need to be entirely replaced by indigenous ones, others call for widening them by including other epistemologies and curriculums.

Two views on 'decolonizing' universities

"A decolonized university in Africa should put African languages at the center of its teaching and learning project. The African university of tomorrow will be multilingual. It will teach (in) Swahili, Zulu, Xhosa, Shona, Yoruba, Hausa, Lingala, Gikuyu and it will teach all those other African languages that French, Portuguese or Arabic have become, while making a space for Chinese, Hindi etc. Decolonizing an African university requires a geographical imagination that extends well beyond the confines of the nation-state."

(Achille Joseph Mbembe, *'Decolonizing the university: New directions,'* 2016)

Don't create another genre, but expand the existing epistemology, make it better. Just like feminism has not 'de-masculated' universities, but 'feminized' them.

(Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, *Against Decolonisation,* 2022)

Calls for decolonization can also be heard in Western universities. Some critics are concerned that the perpetuation of an academic tradition in which Western worldviews, knowledge, and theories dominate, is a continuation of colonial thinking. Others are concerned that such a tradition leaves little or no room for other perspectives or approaches. This is considered problematic because it may prevent the Western-trained viewer from seeing other viewpoints, structures, or epistemologies. For example, academic perspectives or theories that are perfectly valid in a Western context may make little sense when applied to non-Western contexts, thereby leaving the researcher with a flawed understanding of the topic at hand (see chapter 'Diversity').

Colonial and Postcolonial Studies

Colonial Studies study the histories and practices of colonialism. Postcolonial Studies take a critical view of Western academic approaches towards non-Western cultures and societies and tries to come up with alternative academic approaches.

These criticisms have proven to be valid, and many Western universities are attempting to come to a broader academic perspective on the methods and theories of academic study. These efforts have generated two discussions within the - mostly Western - university communities. One discussion is between those who advocate a broadening of worldviews, on the one hand, and those who argue that universities in Western countries should continue to teach the great books and thinkers of Western civilization, on the other. The second discussion is between those who want to expand existing Western knowledge production and theories with those

from other cultures (thereby expanding the academic epistemology), and those who think that Western knowledge production and theories are essentially false and should be the source of criticism. These discussions are ongoing in the universities. Students of International Studies, by the very nature of their studies, will encounter them constantly. While the discussions may become polarizing, the important rule of thumb for any student should be: 'How can I get the broadest and best view of the topic that I am studying?'

'Universities are the enemy'

The perceived threat of universities as holders and producers of knowledge is not an exclusive post-colonial concern, but also of those who oppose the ideas of post-colonialism:

"Universities control the knowledge in our societies and what we call truth and falsity. They provide research that gives credibility to some of the most ridiculous ideas in our country. (...) If we want to do any of the things we want to do for our country and for the people who live in it, we have to honestly and aggressively attack the universities in this country."

J.D. Vance keynote address at the second National Conservatism Conference, 11 February 2021

(Vance is a Yale-graduate and vice-president under Donald Trump's 2025 presidency).

Communities and peoples

Among some minority communities, like the Muslims in Europe and indigenous peoples in North America and Australia, movements are emerging that claim their own epistemological way of thinking about themselves. This is a response to the majority view of societies in which they live, which has been imposed on these communities. One of the first steps in these processes is the use of one's own name and one's own language: not 'Indians' but Cheyenne or Iroquois, not 'Berber' but Amazigh, not 'Eskimo' but Inuit. Another step is that these peoples acknowledge their own history, especially in light of the historical narrative of the society and country that has subjugated, marginalized and sometimes even erased these peoples.

While this is one way to correct historical wrongs, another way for some peoples and communities is to look forward, reclaiming their own authentic ways of thinking about humanity and the world. For example, some First Nation people in America hold an integrated view of humanity and their environment. Similarly, some Muslim movements advocate a cosmic worldview of global human wellbeing based on Islamic principles. In some communities this type of thinking has taken the form of "Futurism", in which people break away from existing frameworks for thinking and develop their own, based on their own narratives, traditions and

epistemologies. The aim of such thinking is, in the words of one of these thinkers: “to create a distinct future where we are not dependent on the gatekeepers to open the gate, and where we are not required, even to storm those gates, or to go around them.”* As we have seen before, imagination is an important element of this type of future thinking.

Implications of ‘decolonization’ for land rights and self-government

In 1879, the Murray Islands of the coast of Australia were annexed by the British with the legal justification that these lands were ‘no-man’s land’ (*terra nullius*). In the 1992 ruling *Mabo v. State of Queensland*, a majority of the court abandoned the doctrine of *terra nullius*. One reason was that this doctrine was considered legally contradicting, because it made the Aboriginal people of those islands ‘intruders in their own homes’. Another reason was that this doctrine was considered unjust. As a result, the British common law of land rights was declared non-applicable the inhabitants of these islands were restored to their own inherent rights to land. The ongoing discussion among lawyers is now if this reasoning would also apply to inherent rights to self-government.

Further reading

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