

Introducing International Relations

This book has been written at a time when the world's political and economic contours are still in considerable flux following the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Empire in the early 1990s. Many have argued that the Cold War, which dominated the conduct of world politics for over four decades, also dominated the way in which people saw the world. Not only was there a dominant, overriding issue – the possibility of nuclear warfare between the superpowers and their allies – there seemed to be a dominant mode of analysing this state of affairs as well, and that was through a 'realist' lens. Times have changed. Nuclear warfare remains a threat, but it no longer seems likely to engulf the entire world. Alongside traditional concerns with war, there are now a great many other issues competing for equal attention. And although realist theories remain important, alternative approaches have become more prominent and most people are increasingly aware that there are many different ways of seeing the world. I start with some common conceptualizations of periods in world history, for these have a significant, if often imperceptible, influence on how one sees the world of International Relations (IR).

Eras in world politics

Although a new millennium has begun and the Cold War is fast receding into history, the events of 1945–89 are still seen as defining the present period, for this is still the 'post-Cold-War era'. This says some-

thing about the effect that the Cold War had not only on the perception of geopolitical relations but also on how people conceptualize and periodize the wider political world and its historical development in terms of large-scale structures, events and processes. Here it is interesting to note that, at the time, the Cold War era itself was generally referred to as the 'post-war' period while the years from 1918 to 1939 are known as the 'inter-war' period. Large-scale wars, whether hot or cold, therefore acted as defining moments in world politics throughout much of the twentieth century. Considering that that century is widely regarded as the bloodiest yet in terms of lives lost in warfare, this is probably appropriate.

Another way of conceptualizing the present period is by reference to the process of globalization. Although this phenomenon has been in evidence for decades, if not centuries, it has captured the public imagination in a way unmatched in any previous period. This may be partly explained by the fact that the end of the Cold War left a considerable vacuum to be filled. And the idea of globalization, which can be interpreted in many different ways according to various orientations to world politics, is an obvious candidate for filling much of that vacuum. The economic aspects of globalization, in particular, were given a huge boost by the collapse of socialism and the apparent triumph of capitalism, while it was widely assumed that liberal democracy was now the only legitimate form of government. The idea of globalization was also boosted by the rapid development in the 1990s of electronic communications, including the internet which, like many of the economic aspects of globalization, seemed to render borders meaningless.

A further important defining condition – one that has extended for several hundred years and which may be seen as providing the foundations for contemporary globalization – is modernity. For students of IR the beginnings of modernity are frequently traced to the seventeenth century when the sovereign state began to take shape. Modernity is also linked inextricably to technological and scientific development, the rise of industrialization and the (attempted) mastery of nature. In more general social and political terms, however, the beginnings of modernity can be traced back to the Renaissance and the rise of humanist thought, for this represented an early moment in the emancipation of thinking from the strictures of the medieval church. But it is most closely associated with the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment which found practical expression in various revolutions against established authorities in Europe and the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this context, modernity entails the rejection of traditional authority. Since it is progressive in character and embraces a positive vision of human emancipation from the grip of the past, it also

has a strong normative dimension. Above all, modernity promotes the idea of universal human rationality and therefore feeds directly into the contemporary globalist project at both a technical and humanist level. Indeed, globalization may be seen as representing an advanced stage of modernity.

For some, all this is a 'good thing'. It means that a stage has been reached in the progressive history of humankind where it is advancing, in a more or less evolutionary sense, towards a higher and better stage of existence. For others, there are innumerable dangers lurking at every turn. Although the obliteration of humankind through global nuclear warfare (whether by immediate annihilation or through the longer-term effects of an ensuing nuclear winter) is less of a threat, 'advances' in modern science and technology carry threats to human existence in other ways. These range from the way in which carbon-based energy resources are exploited and consumed to the release of genetically modified plant and animal life into the biosphere with as yet unknown and possibly catastrophic consequences. Chemical and biological warfare constitute other obvious threats. But it is not just the physical environment that may be at risk. Others see the broader social, economic and political environment being threatened by a stultifying kind of globalized modernity destructive of diverse local cultures, values and lifestyles.

Having mentioned modernity at this early stage, I must also consider briefly some of the ideas associated with postmodernism for these have had a significant impact on the social sciences in recent years. Since postmodernism is intimately associated with how the world is represented, or how the world is seen, it is especially important to consider some of these ideas in the context of IR. The currency of the terms postmodern, postmodernity or postmodernism in contemporary usage owes much to architectural theory and practice. Postmodern ideas then found their way into literary theory, cultural studies, philosophy, history, educational studies and the social sciences. Postmodernity is also associated with a plethora of other 'posts', including the notion of post-industrial society. The prefix 'post' in postmodernism, incidentally, is generally used in the sense that 'the modern' has been transcended rather than indicating that the modern period has actually finished.

One of the best-known architects writing on the subject, Charles Jencks, has emphasized the introspective nature of the postmodern enterprise inasmuch as it demands a critical review of many deeply held assumptions. It is the kind of intellectual movement that rejects the rational certainties of modernity, and especially those 'meta-narratives' that claim the status of universal truths (see Jencks, 4/1996, esp. part 1). In place of singular truths and founts of authority, a postmodern intellectual stance requires recognition of a range of possible knowledges

drawn from cultures and histories across the globe. Moreover, rather than accepting globalization as a massive unifying, homogenizing or integrating force that is working to mould the entire world in the image of the modern West, a postmodern disposition sees (and in some respects hopes for) a longer-term decline of Western hegemony, an increasing fragmentation of the global system and the establishment of multiple centres of authority. This is therefore a very different view of how the world might develop in the twenty-first century and beyond.

The domain of international relations

The discipline of IR is critically concerned with all the issues mentioned above and they are discussed more fully in the course of this book. But here, some basic definitional and conceptual issues must be addressed. The first concerns the very term ‘international relations’, what it is meant to denote and what images of the world it conveys. When capitalized, as in International Relations, and reduced to the acronym ‘IR’, it names a specific field of academic study taught in universities as a ‘subject’ or ‘discipline’. It is closely related to politics – and is now in fact often referred to as ‘world politics’ – and is generally classified, along with political science as well as economics, sociology and anthropology, as a social science. But it has close relations with history, law and social philosophy as well. As a result, it stands at the intersection of varying intellectual and disciplinary strands of study. Some, however, would dispute its location at this intersection and insist that it belongs firmly to the more ‘scientific’ arena. This particular view reflects a bias towards a positivist interpretation of how the discipline – and the social sciences generally – should be understood. Another view repudiates the attempt at scientism, seeing it as a slavish and fruitless attempt to mimic the natural sciences, and emphasizes instead the importance of historical/interpretative approaches. Both have important implications for methodology. But before exploring the methodological issue, it is necessary to specify what the study of IR is supposed to encompass.

In its simplest and narrowest sense, IR is taken to denote the study of relations between states (that is, nation-states or sovereign states as distinct from states that make up a federal system like the US). In a somewhat broader sense, IR denotes interactions between state-based actors across state boundaries. This includes a variety of non-governmental actors and organizations. An intimately related concern is the state *system* as a whole which has been widely regarded as providing the essential foundation for international *order* which is, in turn, a prerequisite for justice. Whether one adopts the narrower or broader understanding,

however, the central institution is still the state. Indeed, it could be said that the entire edifice of traditional IR is founded on the modern sovereign state.

This may seem straightforward enough. But there are not only many disputes about the proper objects of study and how these should be approached methodologically, there is disagreement as well about the terminology used even in naming the subject. This is in addition to disputes over such matters as the nature of sovereignty, the meaning of security, the notion of world order, the role of norms and values in the international sphere, the function of international institutions, the idea of humanity, the possibility of effective international law, what issues count as matters of ‘international’ concern, the relative importance of structures and agents in world politics, and so on. Not surprisingly, these disputes are reflected in conflicting theoretical and methodological perspectives. This raises the further question of what, exactly, is the purpose of studying IR. And again, there is more than one way of answering this question.

One recent text takes as its starting-point the structuring of the world into states: ‘The main reason why we should study IR is the fact that the entire population of the world is divided into separate territorial political communities, or independent states, which profoundly affect the way people live’ (Jackson and Sørensen, 1999, p. xv). This is a straightforwardly descriptive statement, but it says nothing about how people *ought* to live. In the same book, however, a more specifically normative purpose is expressed in the statement that IR ‘seeks to understand how people are provided, or not provided, with the basic values of security, freedom, order, justice and welfare’ (*ibid.*, p. 2).

The first statement above assumes the absolute centrality of the state to the discipline of IR and therefore reflects a very traditional approach. The broad normative concerns articulated in the second statement, however, are very much in tune with the so-called ‘new agenda’ for IR in the contemporary period – an agenda that moves well beyond the strong focus on inter-state warfare (and its prevention) that characterized much work in IR in previous periods. The preface to an IR textbook written in the Cold War period, when the threat of catastrophic nuclear warfare on a global scale seemed very real, gives a clear example of this focus:

[A] Third World War, fought with nuclear weapons, would involve us all and destroy at least large areas on every continent. Policy planners as well as military strategists have never left any doubts about the seriousness of their deadly intentions . . . The study of international relations is, therefore, hardly just an academic exercise – it is an

investigation of the chances for our physical survival or rather scholars' and intellectuals' attempt to determine what can be done to avoid a collective disaster initiated by so-called political *elites* who act according to certain principles and pursue certain so-called national interests. (Krippendorff, 1982, p. vii)

The issue of war was the primary practical focus of IR throughout the twentieth century – but not just any type of war. Whereas war may be defined in terms of 'lethal intergroup violence' involving virtually any sort of group (Goldstein, 2001, p. 3), and without reference to geopolitical borders, the traditional focus of IR has been on inter-state warfare and its prevention. A further useful concept is 'war system', defined as 'the interrelated ways that societies organize themselves to participate in potential or actual wars', thereby constituting 'less a series of events than a system with continuity through time' (*ibid.*). The concern with war has not disappeared, but IR's 'new agenda' now embraces a vast range of policy issues. These encompass: global environmental concerns (which still include nuclear issues); the epidemiology of AIDS; legal and illegal migration, including refugee movements; the gap between the North and the South in terms of access to and consumption of resources; democratization and the full range of human rights from civil and political rights to the right to development; reform of the United Nations (UN) and its agencies; and the extension of international law and the prosecution of crimes against humanity, whether involving terrorism, religious fundamentalism or international organized criminal activities that range from drug production and trafficking to money laundering and the smuggling of all kinds of goods, including weapons, diamonds, endangered species and people.

The threat of major inter-state warfare was not regarded as a serious possibility for the first decade after the Gulf War (1991), but chronic instability in the Middle East and the increasingly aggressive and militaristic stance of the US and some of its key allies following the events of 11 September 2001 have given rise to much more cause for concern. There has also been the ongoing problem of 'internal conflicts' which continue to claim thousands of lives around the world each year and in which some of the worst basic human rights abuses, including torture, rape, mutilation and massacres of civilians, are perpetrated. Although supposedly contained within the confines of states, these conflicts have impacts well beyond their borders and are therefore recognized as matters of concern for international peace and security. Just one problem stemming from internal conflicts is the huge number of people who are either internally displaced or forced out as refugees. More generally, these conflicts are seen as having significant humanitarian dimensions for

which the 'international community' has a moral responsibility to act or intervene in one way or another. More cynical observers would say that the 'international community' usually acts only when television cameras are around to convey images of human suffering to a global audience – the so-called CNN factor. Whatever its motivation, such action can take the form of simply establishing and running refugee camps, to efforts at international mediation, to physical intervention in the form of 'peace-keeping' and/or the implementation and enforcement of sanctions.

Internal conflicts usually involve a strong element of 'identity politics', in which religious, ethnic or cultural factors are seen as having a prime role to play in both instigating conflicts and maintaining their momentum. Mary Kaldor (1999, p. 6) defines identity politics as constituting 'a claim to power on the basis of a particular identity – be it national, clan, religious or linguistic'. In describing the violent conflicts arising from identity politics as part of the phenomenon of 'new wars', she contrasts the motivating forces with the geopolitical or ideological goals of earlier or 'old wars' where identity was linked more to state interests or forward-looking projects about how society might be better organized, rather than back to an idealized representation of the past (*ibid.*, pp. 6–7). In recent years, conflicts in Northern Ireland, the Basque country, various parts of the Balkans, Chechnya, Israel/Palestine, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Fiji and elsewhere have displayed distinct characteristics of identity politics. The violence involved has ranged from rioting and looting and a relatively small number of deaths in the case of Fiji to genocidal massacres of hundreds of thousands in Rwanda. A number of these conflicts involve claims to self-determination by minorities, sometimes in the form of greater autonomy for a group within the state. But just as often a claim to self-determination comes in the form of secession from an existing state in order to create a new one. Others may be based on a notion that one particular group has superior claims to control of an existing state. In all these instances, the state takes centre stage.

The possibility of culture wars on a regional or global scale has also been much discussed following the publication in 1993 of Samuel Huntington's provocative article on the 'clash of civilizations'. This was conceived as a successor to the great clash of ideologies of the Cold War period with the forces representing liberal democracy and capitalist economics on the one side and, on the other, the communist vision of how politics, economics and society ought to be organized for the greater good. While the author of another well-known article had heralded the triumph of liberal democracy and capitalism as the 'end of history', in the sense that the last great ideological dispute capable of inciting serious international conflict was over and done with (Fukuyama, 1989),

Huntington saw world history continuing in other, disturbing, ways. Of the civilizational entities that Huntington identified the most powerful, and the most likely to come into conflict with each other, were 'the West' on the one hand and an Islamic/Confucian alliance of forces on the other. A number of critics have dismissed Huntington's views as alarmist and/or based on false assumptions about the nature of identity politics and the role of culture in conflict. However, in view of the crises triggered by the attacks of 11 September 2001, purportedly in the name of Islam, Huntington's ideas may seem compelling. This is all the more reason to consider them with care.

To summarize this section, many of the issues and concerns touched on above, from the problems of environmental degradation to ethnic conflict, have obviously been around for decades, if not longer. But the difference now is that they are more widely recognized as issues of genuine concern for students of IR and for the international policy community. Global warming, for example, has at least as much currency as the possibility of large-scale inter-state warfare. For many places in Africa, the main threats to individuals and communities come not only from civil wars but also from disease. AIDS is the most publicized of these, but even more deadly in terms of loss of life in some areas are mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria. State security, moreover, is now rarely under serious threat from external forces. In places like Indonesia, Colombia, Solomon Islands, Sierra Leone and Spain, the main threats to the state come from within. In addition, many 'security' threats now loom in the form of environmental disasters, including a significant increase in the incidence and severity of natural disasters triggered by global warming. Since the end of the Cold War, these and other security concerns have come to the fore, so much so that the concept of security has been undergoing a major transformation. As described in chapter 5, the notion of 'human security' rather than 'state security' is now very much in the ascendance.

Approaches to the study of international relations

A common question arising from all the issues outlined above concerns the adequacy or appropriateness of conventional IR theories and approaches in tackling the items on this new agenda. The conventional theoretical foundations of the discipline as well as the dominant methodological approaches, although still finding much support among scholars and policy analysts, have become much more exposed to the critical glare of alternative approaches since the 1980s. Under 'conventional' theory is included liberalism and realism in both their classic forms as well as

in more recent incarnations. Alternative approaches include feminism, constructivism, critical theory and postmodernism. In one way or another, these alternative positions have challenged both realist and liberal approaches, contributed fresh insights and expanded the intellectual space of the discipline. In chapter 5, I explain how each of these approaches has worked as a critique of both realist and liberal viewpoints on security in the contemporary period, for it is the issue of security that lies at the very heart of IR theory and practice and which therefore provides a key reference point for comparing and contrasting the different theoretical perspectives. But for introductory purposes, some of the main contours of realism and liberalism, as well of alternative approaches, will be sketched here.

The realist approach consists of a cluster of theories developed over the last sixty years or so, although many of its proponents claim that it has its roots in the writings of such luminaries as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Rousseau. There is no single coherent realist theory of international politics, but rather ‘a common centre of philosophical gravity’ in that international politics, as well as politics more generally, is viewed as a constant struggle for power and security (Frankel, 1996, p. x). Similarly, Jack Donnelly (2000, p. 9), while noting the absence of a single definition of realism, nonetheless identifies a realist research programme which emphasizes ‘the constraints on politics imposed by human nature and the absence of international government’. A further key feature of realist thought is the emphasis on the way in which states negotiate the anarchic nature of the international political environment:

From the beginning realism has offered explanations for how political units – today we call them states – protect and preserve themselves in an anarchic environment in which dangers to security and welfare are always present, and even survival itself is not assured. The pursuit by states of their own security and autonomy is impinged upon and limited by other states’ pursuit of their . . . security and autonomy. The relationship among states is thus fundamentally and inalterably a conflictual relationship, with states constantly and continuously jostling with and elbowing each other as they try to improve their security and enhance their autonomy. This restless agitation is made more dangerous because of the anarchic nature of the international system: There is no superior arbiter of states’ conflicting claims, and no superior authority with the ability to enforce arbitration rules. (Frankel, 1996, p. ix)

Realist theory as it developed from the 1930s did so at least partly as a reaction to, and a critique of, liberal internationalist theory of the

inter-war years which realists branded as 'idealism'. But the so-called idealism of this period was only one manifestation of liberal ideology in the study of international politics. James L. Richardson (2000) shows that 'contending liberalisms' have been at work in world politics, as much as in 'domestic' politics, before and after the inter-war period. But as with realism, there are certain themes that remain constant, such as an emphasis on the value of economic freedoms (especially in international trade), support for national self-determination and a world of states organized and regulated according to norms and rules, respect for the doctrine of non-intervention while at the same time opposing authoritarian political rule within states in principle, and a preference for disarmament in security policy.

With respect to the study of gender in IR, the various feminist approaches range from liberal and socialist feminisms to radical, post-colonial and postmodern feminisms. But again, there is a common point of departure and that is that feminist critiques of IR's dominant approaches view these as irredeemably masculinist in their most basic assumptions. Jan Jindy Pettman, for example, argues that traditional IR is in fact one of the most masculinist of the social sciences, with its focus on the 'high politics' of diplomacy, war and statecraft which calls up 'a world of statesmen and soldiers' – in short a world in which the principal actors are male, notwithstanding the occasional emergence of women like Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher (Pettman, 2/2001, p. 583). With respect to realist IR's key concept, power, V. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan argue that the 'gendered division of power makes possible not only the relative denial of formal power to women in the international system but also the exclusion of women's struggles and "women's issues" from the world politics agenda.' To see how this division operates as a mechanism of oppression, they say that two interrelated aspects of power need to be explored: 'the gendered nature of the concept of power (the lens) and the gendered effects of this concept of power (the different positioning of women and men)' (Peterson and Runyan, 2/1999, p. 113).

One of the most interesting questions that feminism raises concerns some taken-for-granted assumptions about 'human nature' – a concept that is deeply embedded in political theory in general and classical realism in particular. If a certain state of affairs is regarded as 'natural' or as inherent in 'human nature', such as a gender hierarchy in which males dominate, rather than simply the result of human construction or agency, there are substantial *political* consequences for social organization, including relations between communities or states. And while the hierarchy is ever accepted as natural, then the status quo of male privilege goes largely unchallenged (True, 1996, p. 213).

The constructed nature of social, economic and political institutions and practices more generally is, as the name suggests, a primary starting-point for constructivist approaches to IR. Once again, there are varying strands which, in the case of constructivism, include feminist variants, postmodern variants, statist variants, critical variants and so on. Generally speaking, constructivist approaches have emerged out of social theory and are a response to dissatisfaction with the failure of conventional theories to take account of the social aspects of the subject matter. According to one commentator, the major unifying element in the constructivist literature 'is a concern with explaining the evolution and impact of norms on national and international security' (Farrell, 2002, p. 72). In addressing the general epistemological approach which makes constructivism distinctive, another exponent explains that 'people always construct, or constitute, social reality, even as their being, which can only be social, is constructed for them' (Onuf, 1989, p. 1). Constructivists such as Nicholas Onuf, however, do not repudiate the reality of the material world, or always draw a sharp distinction between the social and ideational on the one hand, and the material on the other. Rather, they interact in complex and variable ways with neither the social nor the material 'defining each other out of existence' (ibid.). In further explanation of this approach, John Gerard Ruggie says that: 'Constructivists hold the view that the building blocks of international reality are ideational as well as material; that ideational factors have normative as well as instrumental dimensions; that they express not only individual but also collective intentionality; and that the meaning and significance of ideational factors are not independent of time and place' (Ruggie, 1998, p. 33).

Critical theory, like realism and liberalism, claims an intellectual heritage that stretches back over several centuries, drawing on the work of Hegel, Kant and Marx as well as Enlightenment philosophy more generally. Its twentieth-century roots, however, are usually associated with the Frankfurt School which nurtured such thinkers as Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Jurgen Habermas (Devetak, 1996a, p. 147). There are some marked similarities between those who place their work within the general framework of critical theory on the one hand, and those who have adopted a constructivist approach. Some of the intersections are evident in the explanation of critical theory offered by Andrew Linklater (1996) who describes it as a strand of social theory which has four principal achievements. First, in rejecting positivism and the notion of 'objective reality', critical theory focuses attention on the social construction and effects of knowledge, especially with respect to the way in which unfair social arrangements may be produced and reproduced. Second, critical theory

opposes the notion that the structure of the social world as we know it, including the structure of inequalities of wealth and power, is immutable. Third, in addressing issues of inequality, critical theory (especially through the work of Habermas) learns from and overcomes weaknesses inherent in Marxism, not by rejecting class or the mode of production as fundamental to social exclusion, but by extending the analysis to include other forms of exclusion (such as gender and race). Fourth, critical theory has the capacity to envisage new forms of community that break with unjustified exclusion, thereby challenging the moral significance of national boundaries with a view to looking at the possibilities of 'post-sovereign forms of political life' (Linklater, 1996, pp. 279–80). Critical theory therefore has an explicitly normative orientation that goes beyond a mere concern with explanation.

Of all the theoretical approaches in IR, postmodernism seems to be the one that is most difficult to define or summarize. As Richard Devetak points out, proponents of a postmodern approach disagree among themselves over the meaning and definition of postmodernism, as do its critics. Furthermore, the different understandings of postmodernism sometimes amount to fairly minor differences of emphasis, but in other cases the theoretical trajectories and conclusions may be very far apart (Devetak, 1996b, pp. 179–80). What one can say is that postmodernism (which is often taken to incorporate poststructuralism) is associated with the work of such thinkers as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, and is concerned with the relationships between knowledge and power. A common theme is the rejection of objective truth and, as a corollary, of firm foundations for knowledge, including moral knowledge. For this reason, postmodernists are frequently accused of embracing a radical form of ethical relativism or at least of offering only negative critiques of other foundational theories. Yet some postmodern writers within IR are deeply concerned with mounting an ethical critique of such constructions as sovereignty, especially in relation to the exclusionary practices associated with it (see, for example, Ashley and Walker, 1990; George, 1994). In this respect, they share at least some common ground with critical theorists.

Another new direction for IR in recent years, and one stimulated in part by the increasing influence of alternative viewpoints discussed above as well as dissatisfaction with the limitations imposed by conventional approaches, is the extent to which at least some IR scholars are now inclined to draw from other disciplines and sub-disciplines. At the same time, scholars from other disciplines are contributing substantially to debates and discussions that were once considered the preserve of IR. I have mentioned already the close relationship that IR has had with other social sciences as well as with history, law and social philosophy. In the

contemporary world, with a major focus on international criminal activity – which includes both international organized crime as well as politically motivated crimes such as those commonly described as ‘crimes against humanity’ – the relationship between IR and international law is clearly an important one. The strength of contemporary studies in International Political Economy (IPE) is another indication that international politics cannot stand apart from economics. It must engage critically with it, especially if it is to provide a serious and worthwhile critique of important aspects of global distributive justice (see Higgott, 2002).

A further interesting interdisciplinary development has come about through the so-called ‘cultural turn’ in the humanities and in the social sciences. Not only has ‘cultural studies’ become established as a school of critical interdisciplinary learning within universities around the world, but studies in ‘cultural sociology’, ‘cultural history’, ‘cultural geography’, ‘cultural politics’ and ‘legal cultures’ are now commonplace. For anthropology, of course, culture has always been the master concept. Now it is being appropriated – some might say misappropriated – by scholars in other disciplines. Indeed, it has probably become the interdisciplinary concept *par excellence*. In IR and politics more generally, culture has been closely associated with identity politics. And since there has been such an upsurge of interest in this phenomenon in the post-Cold-War period, the culture concept has naturally been given a significant boost along with it. The increased interest in culture among IR scholars has also been seen as symptomatic of a more general opening up of the discipline after the Cold War. According to one commentator, ‘a burst of critical scrutiny’ in IR has meant that various ‘partially convergent critical challenges [have] . . . instituted greater intellectual and sociological flexibility in IR scholarship’ and a return of culture and identity is part and parcel of a ‘moment of robust intellectual openness’ (Lapid, 1996, p. 4).

Intellectual openness aside, it is important to question just how concepts such as ‘culture’ are to be understood in the context of IR. Earlier, I mentioned Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis. His use of the culture concept in this context has been widely regarded by critics as simplistic. Other uses have tended to be somewhat naïve too, especially to the extent that they have taken up a very old-fashioned concept of culture developed in early twentieth-century cultural anthropology (but long since abandoned by many contemporary anthropologists themselves) and applied it quite uncritically in various analyses. This is also evident in some approaches to normative issues in IR.

Another point to consider in terms of new directions for IR, especially if much of the work does become increasingly interdisciplinary, is whether IR will simply dissolve as a subject in its own right with its main

concerns thereafter being absorbed into a more amorphous collection of issues under the general heading of 'international studies' or 'world politics'. The latter is increasingly used as a replacement term since it is seen as allowing for a wider range of issues to be encompassed within it, and is therefore more appropriate for the contemporary period. John Baylis and Steve Smith, the editors of a book with both 'world politics' and 'international relations' in its title, say they have chosen to give prominence to the former term because their interest is 'in politics and political patterns in the world, and not only those between nation-states' (as is implied in the word 'international'). They go on to say that their interest is in relations between organizations that may or may not be states, for example, multinational companies, terrorist groups or non-government organizations (NGOs) such as those that deal with international human rights issues (Baylis and Smith, 2/2001, p. 2). Much the same viewpoint informs the present analysis and so I frequently use the term 'world politics' throughout this book when indicating the general subject matter of contemporary IR.

The term 'international studies' is more explicitly interdisciplinary than 'world politics'. In some understandings it is not based on any one discipline at all but can encompass insights from virtually any of the humanities and social sciences without necessarily assimilating these to a specifically political study of the world, or any particular part of it. International studies often incorporate area studies (e.g. South-East-Asian or European studies), which may include the study of languages, cultural practices, cross-cultural relations, history, geography and so on. These types of study obviously have much relevance for contemporary IR but, many would argue, do not necessarily lie at the core of its concerns, which must retain a focus on international or world *political* concerns.

The interest in and reasons for looking to 'world politics' and 'international studies' as alternative formulations for what IR scholars are supposed to be doing are very relevant matters to think about, especially in light of the various challenges that have been mounted with respect to the state, which is the entity on which the discipline of IR has been largely founded. It is time now to consider this latter issue in a little more detail. To begin, I turn next to the meaning of 'the international', for this is at the heart of a basic terminological dispute that has implications for how the state has been defined and located in IR.

Defining the international

The English legal and political theorist Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) first coined the word 'international' in 1780. He was seeking an English

equivalent for the Latin phrase *ius gentium*. While this translates more or less as ‘the law of nations’, Bentham was probably looking for something that captured more fully the dynamics associated with law as it operated *between* states and which were clearly distinguishable from law as it operated *within* states. In coining the word, and applying it to the sphere both outside and between states, Bentham reinforced the legal status of the sovereign nation-state as well as consolidating a political-legal distinction between ‘the domestic’ affairs of a state on the one hand and its relations with other states in a distinct sphere ‘outside’ the domestic on the other. Most importantly, as soon as the notion of the ‘international’ achieved consolidation as a concept through Bentham’s neologism, the sovereign state itself could be fully conceptualized as the defining political unit for both the ‘national’ and the ‘international’.

This distinction between inside/outside, national/international was accepted for many years as a reasonably accurate reflection of how world order is configured. But it has been criticized in more recent times for masking much more complex realities. Political, social and economic interactions taking place around the globe – beyond the sphere of the domestic – clearly involve much more than state-to-state relations. In international business, including finance, trade, manufacturing and so on, this seems obvious. In politics and at a social level, it may at first be less obvious, but there is nonetheless a great deal of activity that does not involve the state *per se*. NGOs are thriving as international actors in their own right. These include organizations involved in charitable aid, environmental issues, human rights, religious activities and peace advocacy as well as those devoted to less worthy ends, such as migration racketeering, money laundering, arms smuggling, the drug trade and terrorism. Given these developments, the very idea of ‘international relations’ may seem obsolete (Rosenau, 1990, p. 6).

The word ‘international’ has also attracted criticism for conveying the impression that ‘nations’ rather than ‘states’ actually do the interacting. The term ‘United Nations’ has been criticized for similar reasons. Although frequently conflated, the terms ‘nation’ and ‘state’ denote two quite different entities. But like many terms denoting complex concepts, there has been much contestation over adequate definitions. The former refers more or less to ‘a people’ which may be defined as ‘a named community occupying a homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a common public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members’ (Smith, 2001, p. 13). The concept of the state, in contrast, is defined in legal-institutional terms as ‘a set of autonomous institutions, differentiated from other institutions, possessing a legitimate monopoly of coercion and extraction in a given territory’ (ibid., p. 12). The combined term ‘nation-state’ reflects an ideal that

has been at the heart of much theorizing about world order, at least as far as conventional IR is concerned. The ideal is that ‘a nation’ (understood as ‘a people’) should be matched to ‘a state’. In other words, a nation for each state, and a state for each nation. This ideal, which has often been expressed in claims to ‘self-determination’, has proven to be one of the most controversial and difficult matters in the theory and practice of international relations in the modern period.

Despite the presence of ethnic minorities and immigrant communities in almost all countries around the world, a simple way of seeing the world is in terms of equating states with a singular people, for example, France with ‘the French’, Indonesia with ‘Indonesians’ and so on. Nationalism itself is an ideology of the state in so far as it identifies peoples with states. In a student atlas of world politics, the fourth edition of which was published in 2000, the first map, entitled ‘Current World Political Boundaries’, is introduced in terms that, not surprisingly, reflect this conventional approach: ‘The international system includes states (countries) as the most important component. The boundaries of countries are the primary source of political division in the world, and for most people nationalism is the strongest source of political identification’ (Allen, 4/2000, p. 2).

One’s ‘nationality’ is therefore defined in terms of the state in which one lives, or comes from, and this may be regardless of one’s origins or descent. This is especially so in the United States, Australia and, increasingly, Great Britain and other European states with substantial immigrant populations. But nationality can also be very closely tied to notions of race and culture, as is the case with Japan where third-generation Koreans, for example, cannot obtain formal citizenship and all the rights that go with that status.

Mapping the international

Looking at the contemporary world political map, which shows around 190 countries all with assigned names from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, marked out in contrasting colours and with clearly drawn borders, it all seems quite familiar and natural. Unless, that is, you were born more than a couple of decades ago. In this case, you would remember when the map showed many fewer countries – especially in the area of the former Soviet Union – and the current map should therefore strike you as much more colourful and varied. If you were born, say, around the middle of the twentieth century, or before, you may also remember another version of the world political map that had numerous pink-coloured places all around the world, for this was the colour chosen to

denote countries of the former British Empire – later transformed into the Commonwealth.

One of the most important lessons to be learnt from this is that there is nothing permanent about political boundaries. Nor is there anything necessarily ‘natural’ about them – even where a single country is conveniently situated within a self-contained geographical space like an island, or where the boundary between two countries follows the line of a river or mountain range. The construction of political boundaries does not follow an eternal law of nature that is indelibly inscribed on the surface of the globe. Boundaries, such as those that represent divisions between states, are *socio-political* constructs. This means that they have been devised by humans and reflect particular socio-political interests, needs, purposes and distributions of power at a given point in time. In this sense, states and their boundaries are often described as ‘culturally and historically particular’ entities, meaning that they emerged at a specific historical time in a specific socio-political context. This observation, which broadly underscores constructivist, critical theory and postmodernist approaches, serves as a corrective to theories that assume the universal and timeless character of the modern state. In summary, although states and their boundaries – as with any social or political institution – may certainly endure for very long periods, they cannot be regarded as permanent fixtures. Just as they were created by human agency in the past, so too can they be modified or dismantled by the same force in the present or future.

It is clear, then, that the boundaries of states, which form the basis of the ‘international’, are subject to change according to shifting circumstances. So too are their ‘internal’ political structures and regime types. The constitutional monarchy in Britain, the US presidential system, federal institutions from Nigeria to Australia, India, Canada, Germany and Russia – all are subject to transformation. And at the broadest level, the international state system itself is not immune to significant change either, as contemporary globalists are apt to point out. Even so, as a particular type of political community, the sovereign state model and the state system to which it has given rise have rarely been called into question throughout most of the modern period.

Internationalizing the state system

With the process of decolonization that followed the Second World War, there was no question that the former colonies would assume all the trappings of formal sovereign statehood, including eligibility for membership of the newly created United Nations along with the trappings of parlia-

mentary or presidential democratic systems. 'Independence' was in fact just about exactly equivalent to attaining formal, recognized sovereign statehood in an international system of states. With the proliferation of new states in this period, decolonization can actually be seen as giving the formal institution of statehood a significant boost. Indeed, decolonization effectively brought about the internationalization of the modern state system in the second half of the twentieth century – some four hundred years after it emerged in Europe.

Given the nature of the colonial experience and the fact that independence was often achieved through struggle and sacrifice, it is hardly surprising that sovereign statehood was taken up with much enthusiasm in the former colonial world, and has been guarded jealously ever since. Nonetheless, sovereign statehood in terms of independence, while initially promising much, has delivered very little for many people in the former colonial world. And to the extent that they have possessed formal sovereign equality with countries of the First World (or the North) it has scarcely placed them on an equal footing in any other way. On the other hand, where the state appears to have failed in places such as Somalia, Sierra Leone and the Congo, even a poorly functioning state dependent on aid and loans may seem a more desirable alternative.

While colonial empires were declining and new sovereign states were emerging everywhere in the post-war period, the countries of Western Europe embarked on a quite different course. Here, the process of European regional integration or regionalization soon got under way. This process has been ongoing in terms of both depth and breadth. Many see it as bringing about fundamental changes in the nature of European states, especially in terms of the diminution of sovereign powers and autonomous political status. To the extent that the European Union (EU) is seen as a success in economic terms as well as in strengthening regional security, however, it has inspired other attempts at regional integration around the world from Latin America to South-East Asia and Africa (see, generally, Gamble and Payne, eds, 1996).

There is some irony in the fact that Western Europe is the birthplace of a form of regionalism that seems set to displace the sovereign state as a major component of world order. For it was here that the sovereign state first emerged as a form of political community. The standard historical point of reference is the Peace of Westphalia (1648), instituted after a period of warfare inspired largely by religious rivalries between Catholics and Protestants. The Westphalian agreement set out the template not only for the modern state but also for a form of order based on a state system for Europe. The principle of inviolable sovereignty was the most crucial element in the scheme. Around three hundred years later, and in the wake of the vicious war that had its epicentre not far from Westphalia, the European Movement began gathering sufficient

momentum to bring about a significant undermining of the sovereignty principle in both theory and practice. As suggested above, the EU is now widely regarded as a model of successful regionalization to be emulated elsewhere. Whether regional blocs come to displace states as the principal units of world order, however, is another question.

Globalizing the international

Along with regionalization, the phenomenon of globalization has, of course, been touted by many as the principal dynamic that is transforming political and economic relations around the contemporary world. As a force that transcends the mere 'international' with its inescapably statist foundations, globalization is seen as undermining the traditional sovereign state, rendering its boundaries meaningless and its governments impotent in a post-Cold-War era of triumphant global capitalism. In this formulation the traditional tension between the state and the free market is resolved in favour of the latter. But is this really the case? Has state capacity really declined that much in terms of its control over economic and related issues? Or is there simply too much hype about hyper-globalism? Alternatively, was there ever a golden age in which the state, or at least some states, possessed genuine control over a national economy and virtually all key areas of political concern? Another question worth asking here is whether the possible withering away of the state in this manner is a 'good thing' or whether states with a reasonably strong capacity to regulate and govern remain important for issues of both order and justice.

A further aspect of contemporary globalism (a term that captures a variety of state-transcending themes) that must be considered concerns global governance. This is another phrase lacking any great precision in its application. What it does *not* mean, though, is a form of 'world government' whereby all political units in the world (i.e. states) come under the jurisdiction of a single effective governing authority. Notwithstanding the beliefs of some right-wing fringe organizations in the US and elsewhere whose members are convinced that the UN is the harbinger of an oppressive system of world government, the UN is nothing of the kind. Nor is it likely to be as long as one of its foundational principles remains the sanctity of the sovereign state system – even though this has been softened in the post-Cold-War period by an apparent willingness to engage in or endorse acts of 'humanitarian intervention' that may transgress the principle of state sovereignty.

Although lacking precision, the term 'global governance' denotes various methods of formal and informal global regulation that range from the United Nations and its many agencies to bodies such as the

World Trade Organization (WTO) and the organization of Multi-National Corporations (MNCs). These are part of what is frequently referred to as 'global economic governance'. But global governance more generally includes a variety of NGOs as well as diffuse social movements and normative regimes such as the international human rights regime. Indeed, behind many manifestations of global governance, especially of the latter kind, lies a distinct normative theme that puts a premium on the notion of a common humanity with common concerns, needs and interests. In short, the normative side of global governance denotes an orientation to the common good that transcends the 'international' as reflected in the mapping of state boundaries and the traditional emphasis on the principle of state sovereignty, and embraces instead a global ethic of order and justice. Both globalization as a process, and global governance as a set of formally and informally institutionalized practices, may therefore be seen to have absorbed or subsumed the 'international' within a larger framework denoted by the all-encompassing 'global'.

CONCLUSION

A major theme of this book concerns the profoundly normative nature of the IR discipline, which was formally constituted as a field of study in its own right in the aftermath of the First World War. The purpose of IR then was to study, in a very focused and concerted way, the causes of war and the conditions for peace so that the horrors of the kind of warfare experienced in 1914–18 would become past history on a permanent basis. Whatever methods, approaches and theories have been adopted in subsequent years, this normative purpose remains at the heart of the discipline.

There is no one best method of approaching the general field of IR or of organizing its subject matter. However, I have chosen to provide in the next chapter, first, an account of 'states in history' and, second, a more specific discussion of the development of the 'classical tradition' of IR scholarship through an account of the rise of the European state and the development of the international state system in the modern period. The 'states in history' approach is especially important for another of the main themes of this book, and that is that there is nothing fixed or eternal about any particular political or social formation.