Connecting the Local and the Global - Understanding International Relations through Global Networks

Susan Forde[1] and Stefanie Kappler[2]

If you look in your pocket or around your home you will likely find coins or notes, currency directly links us and relates to the international; coins and notes typically place us geographically and in spending connect you to the international. How we spend money, what films we watch and what foods we eat, where we work and how we work, where we go on holiday and what clothes we buy are all interconnected to the international sphere. These perceivably local choices and experiences directly relate to the international, perceivably the everyday local constructs the international (cf. Nordstrom, 2004).

Everyday individuals operate within global networks of capital which construct and maintain international relationships, diplomatic ties, economic ties, divisions of labour, supply, demand, and overarchingly economic inequality and disparities. We therefore construct the international through different social interactions and consumptions, which do not comply neatly with what we assume to be neat boundaries between local, national and international levels of analysis. In contrast, Latour (2005), a sociologist and philosopher, points us to the complex networks through which all these levels are linked. Against this background, no actor or 'problem' (including war, violence, poverty and so forth) can be considered solely local or international. Instead, they always have international dimensions and local implications, and vice versa. The origins of a seemingly localised civil war can only be read through international structures (such as colonialism), international economic processes (arms trade), international interests (voiced through intervention and diplomacy) as well as competing value systems as they emerge in the international realm.

In that sense, localised demand for the year round availability of strawberries has led to importing from warmer climates such as Morocco, similarly fast paced textile consumption in

---

[1] Susan Forde is a PhD student at Liverpool Hope University working on identifying post-conflict social legitimisation of spaces and places.

[2] Stefanie Kappler is Lecturer in International Relations at Liverpool Hope University and Director of the Archbishop Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies.

more developed countries (MDC) and fewer working condition regulations (wages and safety) in less developed countries (LDC) leads to an outsourcing of textile production to China or Bangladesh, to name but two examples. These processes directly relate 'our local', internationally to different locals and the everyday movements of these locals. At the same time, they show the extent to which we can only understand international dynamics through an analysis of local dynamics, and vice versa.

<u>The Local is Global: Protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2014</u>

Let's look at one concrete example. In early February 2014, the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced mass protests in which people were campaigning against the post-war political and economic structures in their country. Looking at official definitions of the protests we may be led to believe that the ferocity of these protests are due to 'local' hooligans utilising 'the situation to create chaos' and not an outburst of tension following decades of corruption piqued by factory closures and privatisation and frustrations (Niksic, 2008). However, if we take a closer look, the International Relations toolkit assist us in analysing the situation in more depth. If we look at the next layer, we see most recently a history of international involvement through neoliberal peace processes and western economic influence in the form of neoliberal economic principles. Indeed, to understand what is happening in Bosnia-Herzegovina locally, we have to take into account the multiple transitions the country had to go through during the course of the last centuries.

An analysis of the country's colonial past (the Ottoman and Habsburg empires) casts light on the creation of economic structures, which have been made dependent on external intervention. This was not last carried forward during the involvement of the Western world before, during and after the war in the early 90s. Bosnia's transition to democracy, and from a socialist to a capitalist economic system was facilitated by actors such as the European Community, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The kinds of reform envisaged by those institutions in turn required heavy restructuring of the Bosnian economy, including the privatisation of the state economy. This eventually led to

massive unemployment, which persists to be one of the major challenges in the country (Pugh *et al,* 2008: 148). Similarly, the Dayton Peace Agreement, carrying the handwriting of the United States and European actors, encouraged a political system based on ethnic competition rather than dialogue and can be considered at the roots of the current protests in their attempt to challenge such deeply ingrained structures.

As this example shows, we can only understand the nature of the current protests in Bosnia by investigating the global structures lying at their origin. This includes the fields of the International Political Economy (dealing with the nature of global economic structures and resource distribution); global sociology (the analysis of social movements and global ideologies), the role of international organisations as well as Peace and Conflict Studies (as a way of capturing the post-conflict legacy which have led to the division of Bosnian society in the first place). A focus on 'local' circumstances always necessitates an investigation of their wider international connections, as well as the networks of actors who are at the origin of the construction of economic and political systems (cf. Latour 2005).

At the same time, the dimension of the 'international' only makes sense in its local application. It is impossible to understand peacebuilding (the ambition to embed peace in grassroots and institutional frameworks) as an abstract term without looking at the ways in which it is being implemented in particular contexts, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, or elsewhere. Jansen (2014) has clearly illustrated how the West can learn from the seemingly localised protests in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and it can certainly not be neglected that the genocide in Rwanda has had an impact on how the Western world has intervened in Libya and other states as well. It is almost considered consensual that the failure of the United Nations (UN) to prevent the genocide in Rwanda has led to a rethinking of the extent to which the UN should or has to become involved in seemingly domestic affairs of countries. This can be seen as materialising in debates around the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) and the associated calls to the international community to intervene in states in which the security of individuals seems jeopardised - which is, however, still a contested concept (cf. Bellamy 2005).

Digital Global Connections: Satellite Sentinel Project

So why study IR? Highlighted above studying IR means studying the local, the national and the international, contemporarily we see the connections between the local and the international with the rise of social media and increased visibility of international conflicts or internal disturbances. Let's therefore look at how social media and technology are trying to firstly deter and secondly speed up response times to intra and inter-state violence. You may know George Clooney from the television series ER or the films Oceans 11 or Gravity, but did you know about the Satellite Sentinel project, a 'publicly founded' effort by Clooney and John Prendergast (a human rights activist and author) (Satellite Sentinel, 2010)? Currently, DigitalGlobe satellites monitor and capture events in Sudan and South Sudan which are verified on the ground these events are then spread through professional networks and also social media to increase the visibility of the conflict globally to different locales. For instance, when browsing Facebook or Twitter at home or school, you are actively engaging with the international sphere at a glocal (the mixing 'of the global and the local') level, as the internet provides an international collaboration of knowledges (Ritzer & Atalay, 2010: 319; Foucault, 1991)

The Satellite Sentinel project seeks to 'deter a return to full-scale civil war between northern and southern Sudan' through documenting events and attempting to gain 'world attention' for 'visual evidence' which identifies 'grave violations of the Geneva Conventions and other war crimes' (Satellite Sentinel, 29th May 2011). This project highlights the power of knowledge (specifically sourcing knowledge) and transferring local information to other global locales we can identify that local issues do not exist in a vacuum and that accessing information from local sources can provide different perspectives (Satellite Sentinel, 2010; Foucault, 1991).

<u>IR Theories and toolkit</u>

Theories of international relations highlight 'features' of focus this regards what inspires action in the international system for example is it the nature of a state to be aggressive, is state action purely influenced by maintaining economic the economic well-being of the state, is it state action dominated by social and historical circumstance? Barry Buzan identifies that IR theories as 'camera lenses' contemporarily this can be compared to 'instagram filters' which change the focus of the picture (1996: 55- 56). Within the discipline of IR you have the opportunity to focus on political economy, state/ global security, post- conflict, development and many others. Studying IR and diplomacy can complement and enrich many different other areas of study in particular, politics, sociology, geography, law, languages, medicine, economics, geology, gender studies, religious studies, biomedical studies, business studies, anthropology, media and film. These subjects also highlight the network of connections within international relations and diplomacy.

At a 'local' level there are individuals such as you and I, who operate within geographies or counties with boundaries and borders. These borders may be natural (such as cliffs) or man-made borders (we need a passport cross at these points). Additionally, we might learn about other countries and social practices through media and film, news sources and films or popular tv shows. As we move through our local social geographies we spend money and contribute to the global economy, as previously mentioned if we are buying strawberries from Morocco or a t-shirt from Bangladesh, our actions are linked to the international by a multiplicity of generally unnoticeable fine gossamer threads. These threads gain weight in their collectivity facilitate the movement of capital. Just to name a few examples: watching a film produced in Hollywood USA, buying imported clothes, fruit and drink; enters a cyclical relationship of producer supply and consumer demand.

The international system is comparative the construction of a ladder, compiled of different pieces; the ladder is useable as a ladder because of many different rungs. In a similar way, local individuals make up the national and in-turn create the international systemically through international organisations and diplomatic channels. As previously mentioned the international

system is constructed locally and by local actors in our everyday movements. As discussed above, consumer demands have an impact which transcends local ability to supply and creates new glocals for example, think about the variety of restaurants you may have visited in your hometown, maybe Italian or American, but you might never have visited these countries (Ritzer & Atalay, 2010: 319).

The Global and the Local: Connected through Gender?

So what happens when locales cannot keep up with supplying year round strawberries or affordable textiles? To keep costs low and to attract consumers the location of production shifted and created a new international division of labour which deindustrialised 'more developed countries' (MDC) and shifted production to 'less developed countries' (LDC). This new international division of labour is also significantly affected by gendered discrimination in the workforce, and reflects systemic gender roles. Gendered work divisions are identifiable when an individual's employment possibilities or expectations is limited by predefined gender roles through specific 'notions of masculinity and femininity' (Butler,2011). Gendered work is an international condition that we can reflect on at a local level with perceptions of the 'traditionally' feminine careers such as nurses or care workers compared to the masculine 'firemen or policemen'. From 'Carmen Miranda' (a Brazilian star used to promote 'friendlier relations between the U.S and Latin America' and also to create consumer familiarity with a particular banana brand) to female nannies and air stewards (Enloe, 2000: 2; Hochchild, 2003). IR and social science theories can locate the typically gendered nature of participation in and creation of the new international division of labour.

Studying IR

The above examples are an introduction to some aspects of studying IR, as an IR and diplomacy student you will watch the news and develop skills to critically reflect on the social, political, historical, and geographical context of events. You will relate the current events to your IR knowledge base and develop a reflexive understanding of the global relevance of a perceivably local event. Seminars and tutorials will become your forum for discussing these

current events with your fellow students and within the context of the weekly course topic focus.

The study of International Relations in the UK is approached critically and is comparatively less quantitative than IR studies in the United States which comes under the Political Science umbrella. When you pick Liverpool Hope University as your place of study, you can combine your IR studies with the Politics course if you wish to do so.

Studying IR at Liverpool Hope University is an immersive and involving experience; it is a combined honours course and can be studied alongside sixteen other courses including Social Policy, History, Law, Media & Communication, Philosophy & Ethics, and Geography to name but a few. While studying IR at Liverpool Hope alongside seminars and tutorials you will attend weekly lectures benefiting from frequent guest speakers and will also participate in discussion and dialogue within these forums. As your studies progress there will be opportunities for immersive field work research most recently students visited Berlin, Madrid and Belfast. In lectures you will learn from senior academics and graduate teaching assistants conducting cutting edge contemporary research in the department.

 Additionally, you will learn about the challenges of securing and maintaining peace by academics from the renowned Archbishop Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies (tutu.hope.ac.uk); and will also have the opportunity to attend the centre's seminars, roundtables and to volunteer at the yearly conference. Understandably you will be wondering what are your options after an undergraduate degree in combined IR; well, many undergraduate IR students go on to develop careers in media, the voluntary sector, within international organisations, in international law and diplomacy, or postgraduate studies and research. Study IR, study the world.

Bibliography

Bellamy, Alex (2005), "Responsibility to Protect or Trojan Horse? The Crisis in Darfur and Humanitarian Intervention after Iraq", *Ethics & International Affairs*, Vol.19 (20), pp.31-54.

Butler, Judith (2011) Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Routledge. Google eBook. Available from:

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=ynQPYXUQF64C&pg=PA319&dq=glocalization+defined&hl=en&sa=X&ei=jQBMU8ntEe7d7QacsIHwBw&ved=0CDEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=glocalization%20defined&f=false [Accessed: 20th February 2014]

Buzan, Barry in Smith, Steve; Booth, Ken; Zalewski, Marysia (1996) International Theory: Positivism and Beyond, Cambridge University Press. P.55-56

Enloe, Cynthia H. (2000) Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics. University of California Press. p. 2

Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (2013) Satellite Sentinel Project. Available from:

http://hhi.harvard.edu/programs-and-research/crisis-mapping-and-early-warning/satellite-sentinel-project [Accessed: 20th March 2013]

Hochschild, Arlie Russell (2003) The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, With a New Afterword. University of California Press.

Jansen, Stef (2014) Can the Revolt in Bosnia and Herzegovina Send a Message To the Wider World? Available from: http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/blog/can-the-revolt-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-send-a-message-to-the-wider-world [Accessed 13th February 2014]

Latour, Bruno (2005) *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Niksic, Nermin (2008) Prime minister of Bosnia's autonomous Bosniak-Croat federation in 'Bosnia protesters attack presidency building. Aljazeera. 8th February 2014. Available from: http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2014/02/bosnia-braces-more-protests-20142754844558298.html [Accessed 8th February 2014]

Nordstrom, Carolyn (2004) Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-first Century. University of California Press,

Pugh, Michael; Cooper, Neil; Turner, Mandy (2008) Whose Peace? Critical Persepectives on the Political Economy of Peacebuilding. Palgrave Macmillan. Series Editor Stuart Croft. p. 148

Ritzer, George; Atalay, Zeynep (2010) Readings in Globalisation: Key Concepts and Major Debates. John Wiley & Sons. p. 319

Satellite Sentinel Project (2010) Our Story. Available from: http://www.satsentinel.org/our-story [Accessed 10th April 2014]

Satellite Sentinel (2011) Satellite Sentinel Project Releases New Visual Evidence of Government of Sudan War Crimes in Abyei. Available from: http://www.satsentinel.org/press-release/satellite-sentinel-project-releases-new-visual-evidence-government-sudan-war-crimes-abyei [Accessed: 10th March 2014]