

GLOBAL ISSUES, LOCAL ARGUMENTS: Readings for Writing

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Johnson

ISBN 0-321-24423-0

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SAMPLE CHAPTER

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Introduction

Defining and Exploring Globalization

*Almost overnight, globalization has become the most pressing issue of our time, something debated from boardrooms to op-ed pages and in schools all over the world.**

—Joseph E. Stiglitz, Nobel Prize–winning economist

In this statement, Joseph E. Stiglitz succinctly articulates the immediacy, scope, and importance of globalization. Globalization—the increasing interconnectedness of all parts of the world in terms of communication, trade, business, politics, travel, and culture—affects us every day although its presence may often be masked. Globalization affects what we eat, what we wear, what jobs are available to us, what the population of our cities, and so on.

This text invites you to join worldwide conversations about globalization by reading, examining, and discussing eight of the major global issues that people are arguing about, and by adding your own voice to the public dialogue through your writing about these issues. As you read and enter into these conversations, this text will continuously draw your attention to its overall thesis: that global issues affect us locally and that local matters have global consequences. For example, think about these hypothetical but realistic problems:

- The payroll department of an oil company is moved overseas, causing your mother to lose her job, yet this outsourcing has brought new career opportunities and vital income to some workers in India.
- You have just discovered that your little brother's toys were made in a factory in China where workers toil seven days a week in rooms filled with poisonous fumes; without medical benefits, they struggle with serious illnesses contracted on the job.

**Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 4.

- You have learned that some of the fruits and vegetables you regularly eat were grown by chemical-using agribusinesses in Nicaragua that have displaced and impoverished small subsistence farmers. You wonder if you should investigate produce grown organically by local farmers.
- Your city has experienced an influx of immigrants from different parts of the world. You are interested in the new international restaurants, but you wonder what forces are driving these people to leave their countries and how the United States will integrate these people into life here, for instance, into the schools.

What do these experiences have in common? They are instances of the increasingly apparent global connections that link the everyday lives of Americans with the lives of people around the world: in short, they are examples of globalization. They also suggest problems of globalization that call on us to be informed, to seek solutions, and to make decisions.

Before embarking on your exploration of the global issues presented in each of the following chapters in this text, this introductory chapter invites you to begin thinking about the relationship between your local space and global concerns by doing two exploration activities. The first, a series of questions, resembles those informal, playful quizzes, often about global geography, that newspapers sometimes run. The second activity asks you to think about how visual images of the globe are used rhetorically in public controversies and corporate ads. Both of these exercises suggest significant questions about perception and about the mental, cultural, and geographical locations we inhabit. Both exercises also introduce the idea of multiple perspectives and are intended to stimulate and expand your thinking about globalization and to be an enjoyable challenge.

Finally, this introduction asks you to consider what people mean by the term *globalization*. It briefly sketches the major controversies surrounding the concept of globalization itself and the big-picture questions that underlie global issues. Thinking about what scholars, journalists, and activists are saying about globalization, will prepare you to explore the issues and arguments presented in the chapter readings.

EXPLORATION ONE: HOW WIDE IS YOUR GLOBAL VIEW?

As Americans, we sometimes forget that people living in other countries view the world differently from the way we do. Globalization draws all parts of the world closer together, and yet reduced transportation time and rapid communication should not fool us into believing that there is only one perspective on events, people, and problems. This first exploration activity resembles a newspaper quiz or Trivial Pursuit game with global subject matter. As you seek to answer the questions that follow,

explore how wide your global view is. Try to think beyond an American or Western-dominated perspective of the world. Working individually, with a partner, or with a group, you may want to search for answers to some of these questions by using the Web and by checking general reference books in a library.

Global Pursuit

1. If we consider only the city proper, what are the top-three most populous cities in the world?
2. Tae kwon do is one of the world's most popular martial arts. What country does it come from?
3. What is the world's most popular (consumed by the most people) brand of alcoholic beverage?
 - a. an American bourbon
 - b. a French wine
 - c. a Russian vodka
 - d. a Chinese beer
4. In what cities would you find these buildings, the two tallest buildings in the world?



5. Which continent produces the largest amount of the world's coffee?

6. George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and Ronald Reagan have been U.S. presidents during the last twenty years. What are the names of comparable heads of state in Canada or Mexico during this time?
7. What is the most popular international team sport?
8. The countries with the least access to information and communication technology (computers and Internet connections) are found in which region of the world?
 - a. South America
 - b. Oceania, a group of Pacific Islands including Polynesia (New Zealand), Melanesia, and Micronesia
 - c. Africa
 - d. Eastern Europe
9. What countries are these popular singers and musical groups from?
 - a. Shonen Knife
 - b. Thalia
 - c. Lebo Mathosa
 - d. Los Lobos
10. What is the currency used by the European Union?
11. How many provinces and territories does Canada have?
12. When American companies choose to move their customer service, accounting, data analysis, and software development and maintenance to countries outside the United States (called “outsourcing”) to cut costs, which country is the first choice for these relocated jobs?
 - a. China
 - b. India
 - c. Ireland
 - d. Philippines
13. What do Megawati Sukarnoputri, Helen Clark, and Aung San Suu Kyi have in common?
14. After weapons and drugs, what is the most profitable commodity in illegal global trade?
15. What is the world’s largest Muslim nation?
16. Why is the Indian film industry known as “Bollywood”?
17. According to predictions, which language will have the greatest number of speakers by the year 2050?
 - a. Arabic
 - b. Hindu-Urdu
 - c. Spanish
 - d. Chinese
18. Which country in South America has the largest gross national product (GNP)?

19. Identify and match capital cities with countries: Harare, Samoa, Wellington, Port-au-Prince, Bulgaria, Kabul, North Korea, Sofia, Haiti, Apia, Colombo, Beijing, Afghanistan, Asmara, Pyongyang, China, New Zealand, Eritrea, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe.
20. Which country has the fastest train in the world?
 - a. France
 - b. Japan
 - c. China
 - d. Germany

After you have located answers for the quiz, write informally for ten to fifteen minutes in response to these questions:

1. Which quiz questions and answers surprised you the most?
2. Why was (or was not) this information part of your regular cultural knowledge?
3. Have these questions made you think of other parts of the world as familiar or unknown, as close to home or far away?
4. How did searching for answers to these questions affect your thinking about the importance of being knowledgeable about the world?

After you have responded to these self-reflection questions, your class might discuss your quiz answers, where you found them, and what insights this activity has given you about other parts of the world.

EXPLORATION TWO: PICTURING THE GLOBE

The phenomenon of globalization has also influenced the way we literally *see* the world. Scholar Wolfgang Sachs argues that “the image of the blue planet” has become a rich symbol adopted by diverse stakeholders who put it to very different uses. In fact, he asserts that the “photography of the globe contains the contradictions of globalization.”* He says that the image of the blue and green globe reminds environmentalists that the earth is a finite place, a planet with limited water, air, livable land, and natural resources. Environmentalists, want to convey that because the earth is all we have, we must wisely work together to preserve it. However, for another group of stakeholders—the corporations who do business in countries all over the world—the image of the globe symbolizes the expansive potential of business territory and trade. Depicting the world in its entirety as a blue and

*“Globalization and Sustainability,” in *The Globalization Reader*, ed. Frank J. Lechner and John Boli, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 398.

green ball of continents and oceans with no country borders enables the business community to communicate the message that the world is open and available for economic growth.

When we see images of the globe in ads and on the Internet, it is interesting to speculate how the globe is depicted and how each image is being used rhetorically to shape our thinking. The following activity asks you to examine two images of the globe. One appears on the Web page of a government organization concerned with environmental protection (www.state.tn.us/environment/earthday/), and the second is an image from a stock photography Internet site, (www.fotosearch.com/), in the category “global business.” After looking at these images in Figures 1.3 and 1.4, test out Sachs’s claim and think creatively on your own, using the following questions as departure points:

1. How would you describe the image of the earth as the globe in each figure? (In color, Figure 1.3 is deep blue and green.) What text or objects are shown with the globe?
2. How is the image of the globe being used on the Tennessee Web page?
3. To test out Wolfgang Sachs’s theory, investigate by doing a Google search for environmental depictions of the globe. You might search with the key words “global environmentalism,” “climate change,” “global warming,”



FIGURE 1.3 Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation Earth Day 2005 Home Page



FIGURE 1.4 Global Business Image

and “conservation.” Also investigate corporate depictions of the globe by skimming such magazines as the *Harvard Business Review*, *Forbes Magazine*, *Fortune*, *TIME Magazine*, and *U.S. News & World Report*, looking especially at ads for international travel, communication technology, and computers. How well do the images in these two main contexts fit Sachs’s theory of environmental respect for global limitations and global business’ celebration of expanded opportunity? What do the images of the globe symbolize?

4. Think of a business, a product, and an audience for which you might use the image in Figure 1.4. What words would you use in your ad? What message about the globe would you seek to convey through this image?

The following sections offer several different definitions of globalization, introduce you to the disagreements over these definitions, and prepare you to think about arguments over global issues.

WHAT DOES THE TERM *GLOBALIZATION* MEAN?

When people argue about globalization “from boardrooms to op-ed pages and in schools all over the world,” what exactly are they arguing about? On the most general level, people are debating the meaning of globalization itself.

Disagreements may focus on any or all of these major underlying questions about globalization:



Underlying Controversies about Globalization

- Is globalization a new phenomenon? Or is it simply an accelerated stage in a centuries-long process?
- What forces are driving globalization?
- Is globalization inevitable and uncontrollable? Or is it the product of human decisions and therefore controllable?
- Is globalization harmful or beneficial, a problem or the solution to problems?
- Are there clear winners and losers in globalization?
- How is globalization changing our perceptions and behavior, and most other aspects of our lives?
- Should we welcome, applaud, encourage, resist, protest, or seek to change globalization?

These questions are the foundation of all the global issues explored in this reader. As you discuss the global-to-local connections in the chapters' readings, think about how specific issues and individual arguments tap into these foundational questions.

Three Competing Definitions of Globalization

Most books about globalization begin with the author's definition of globalization as both a process and a phenomenon. Indeed, the term *globalization* has sparked intense discussion and argument. Let's look at three definitions from three different spokespeople.

One common definition of globalization envisions it as the new, defining phenomenon of our historical moment. Thomas L. Friedman, foreign affairs journalist and editorialist for the *New York Times* and Pulitzer Prize winner, articulates this vision of globalization:

Thomas L. Friedman's Definition of Globalization

“. . . it is the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before—in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before and in a way that is enabling

the world to reach into individuals, corporations and nation-states farther, faster, deeper, and cheaper than ever before.”*

Note that Friedman emphasizes “integration” and pervasive, expansive, and accelerated connections. In his view, all parts of the world are being drawn ever closer together by unstoppable historical processes.

Another common definition of globalization zeros in on the *economic* features and forces of globalization. Jagdish Bhagwati, a professor of international economics and a former special advisor to the United Nations on globalization, distinguishes between cultural globalization, the revolution in communication of the recent past and present, and the profound, powerful economic changes referred to as “economic globalization”:

Jagdish Bhagwati’s Definition of Economic Globalization

“Economic globalization constitutes integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, direct foreign investment (by corporations and multinationals), short-term capital flows, international flows of workers and humanity generally, and flows of technology. . . .”†

Still other prominent voices in the globalization debate emphasize the *problems of defining globalization*. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, a professor of theology and ethics, argues that it is crucial that we distinguish between two main definitions of globalization: (1) the “intercontinental connections,” the way that transportation, communication, and technology have facilitated the movement of materials, goods, and ideas around the world and among continents and countries (basically Friedman’s definition), and (2) the dominant model and system of economic globalization (Bhagwati’s definition). Moe-Lobeda asserts that the first kind of globalization describes a process of modernization and technological change that is inevitable and beneficial in many ways, whereas economic globalization is not inevitable and not universally beneficial. She contends that it matters *how* we define globalization because Friedman’s definition of globalization masks the power dynamics driving global economic forces while Bhagwati’s definition downplays who has control of economic forces and who is benefiting the most from the increased connections around the world. Moe-Lobeda and other opponents of economic globalization believe that it needs to be described in terms that reveal how it distributes economic and political power.‡ David Korten, a scholar, activist, and one of the most vocal and well-known critics of economic globalization, provides such a description:

**The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Random House, 1999), 9.

†*In Defense of Globalization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3.

‡“Defining Globalization: A Faculty Roundtable,” in “Debating Globalization: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue” (conference, Seattle University, April 16–17, 2004).

David Korten's Definition of Economic Globalization

"[Economic globalization refers to] the forces of corporate globalization advanced by an alliance between the world's largest corporations and the most powerful governments. This alliance is backed by the power of money, and its defining project is to integrate the world's national economies into a single, borderless global economy in which the world's mega-corporations are free to move goods and money anywhere in the world that affords an opportunity for profit, without governmental interference."*

Economic globalization as an economic model and system is sometimes called "corporate globalization" or "neoliberalism." Among its main principles, neoliberalism as a political-economic philosophy maintains that governments should stay out of trade and give markets free rein; that resources and services such as railroads, electricity, and water should be controlled by private companies; and that the benefits of capitalism and unregulated trade will lead to beneficial economic and social development.

However, some people around the world are questioning and protesting the practical results of following these principles; it is this economic globalization that people are challenging. These people believe that economic globalization is not inevitable and that because it is the product of economic and political decisions made by international trade organizations, multinational corporations, and politicians, this global economic system can be changed.

In this text, the term *globalization* refers to both Friedman's definition of a technologically advanced, increasingly interconnected world and to economic globalization. While many of the chapters and their readings delve into issues of economic globalization, also keep in mind the broader definition as you are reading and discussing.

Promoting and Protesting Globalization

One reason that globalization is so controversial is that the lived experience of it differs depending on people's country, economic class and status, race, gender, age, and even religion.

Supporters praise globalization's sharing of knowledge and technologies. They point to the growth of industries and new markets and the rate at which developing countries are being integrated into the international economy. They argue that globalization in all its forms has brought an improvement in the standard of living and longer lives for many.

Moderate critics of globalization acknowledge the gains and benefits of globalization but voice objections as well, mainly about the unequal distribution of benefits and about problems with the global market. For example, George Soros, an entrepreneur, billionaire, activist, philanthropist, and author,

**When Corporations Rule the World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001), 4.

sees globalization as an opportunity for greater freedom for everyone; however, he argues that the public good and social well-being of people in developing countries, especially, have been overrun by market forces. Similarly, Joseph E. Stiglitz asserts that economic globalization favors the industrialized nations over developing nations, which lack the economic advantages to compete. Stiglitz also argues that global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) put decision-making power into the hands of an elite financial community that is not accountable to the people whose lives are most directly affected by its decisions.

Still others vehemently challenge economic globalization as the ruling economic system in the world today. Environmentalists, advocates for social justice, representatives of indigenous peoples and developing countries, political activists, and some economists see economic globalization as a warping of the market itself. Furthermore, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, David Korten, Indian activist Vandana Shiva, and others believe that economic globalization, with its emphasis on immediate profits, is, in Korten's words, "enriching the few at the expense of the many, replacing democracy with rule by corporations and financial elites, destroying the real wealth of the planet and society to make money for the already wealthy. . . ."* In short, they see economic globalization in its current form as strongly antidemocratic and harmful to people and the environment.

How Should We Make Decisions and Act in Response to Globalization?

The responses to globalization that writers are advocating differ as dramatically as their definitions of globalization and their perception of its value. Knowing about these divergent definitions, perceptions, and responses, briefly described here, will help you examine how they are embedded in the readings throughout this text.

Proponents of globalization primarily campaign for the extension and continuation of the globalization process.

- Many enthusiasts argue that most of the problems countries are experiencing with globalization are related to the current stage of globalization and are temporary setbacks for the global trade system. They say that global trade must continue to grow, and that developing nations must continue to push toward full economic and industrialized maturity. Advocates of globalization such as Jagdish Bhagwati argue that the problems people attribute to globalization such as world poverty and hunger will diminish and that more people will benefit from globalization as these developing countries participate more in the international global economy.

**When Corporations Rule the World*, 5.

- Other supporters of globalization argue that the problems come from people, institutions, and countries that try to interfere with globalization. They warn developing countries, as well as developed countries such as the United States, not to erect barriers to international trade that would interrupt the process of globalization but instead to welcome more open exchanges of culture, goods, and people.

Critics of globalization offer a range of responses.

- Some, such as George Soros and Joseph E. Stiglitz, want to revise the system. Soros calls for new international institutions to balance market forces, to provide for the public good, and to protect the social well-being of people in developing countries and poorer people everywhere. Stiglitz believes that we need to change economic globalization to create more equitable benefits, beginning with transforming the global institutions of the IMF and the WTO.
- Others such as Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, David Korten, and Vandana Shiva maintain that corporate globalization, with its distribution of economic and political power, is inherently flawed. They believe that people everywhere must reject the principle of economic growth, reduce consumption, and commit to preserving the environment and working for social justice in order to end world hunger and poverty.
- Still other opponents of globalization such as Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash focus on the way that global forces have threatened “local spaces.” They claim that it is arrogant and impossible to think “globally” because “[w]e can only think wisely about what we can know well.” They say that global policies represent small groups foisting their local views and interests on other places and peoples. Esteva and Prakash envision an antiglobalization movement composed of “people thinking and acting locally, while forging solidarity with other local forces.”* They urge all of us to resist global policies and forces at the local level as we make our decisions about what we eat, what we buy, and how we live.

Navigating the Controversies

As you read the arguments in this text about global issues and their local connections, try to place the issues in the context of these big-picture questions about globalization: What assumptions have the writers made about the meaning of globalization? Are they assuming that globalization is inevitable? Do they believe that globalization is basically a good thing? Also examine the way their arguments pursue solutions to global problems and strive to win adherents to their views. After reading the multisided arguments in each chapter, consider how they have expanded and clarified your own views and your thoughts about the way these issues influence your life.

*“From Global to Local: Beyond Neoliberalism to the International of Hope,” in *The Globalization Reader*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 412–16.