What creates positive intercultural interactions?

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1 OPENING THE CONVERSATION

STUDYING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **1.1** Identify the opportunities and challenges of intercultural communication in the context of globalization.
- **1.2** Describe three definitions of culture that influence intercultural communication in the global context.
- **1.3** Explain how our social location and standpoint shape how we see, experience, and understand the world differently.
- **1.4** Describe the goals and six points of entry into intercultural praxis.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS

We, the people of the world—over 8 billion of us from different cultures—find our lives, our livelihoods, and our lifestyles increasingly interconnected and interdependent due to the forces of globalization. Since the early 1990s, changes in economic and political policies, governance, and institutions have combined with advances in communication and transportation technology to dramatically accelerate interaction and interrelationship among people from different cultures around the globe. Deeply rooted in European colonization and Western imperialism, the forces of this current wave of globalization have catapulted people from different cultures into shared physical and virtual spaces in homes, in relationships, in schools, in neighborhoods, in the workplace, and in political alliance and activism in unprecedented ways. Yet our lives, livelihoods, and lifestyles are also increasingly polarized, fragmented, and vulnerable. Greater proximity, magnified economic inequity and insecurity, and real and perceived ethnic and racial tension have led to a backlash against globalization. Anti-immigrant, protectionist, and populist rhetoric and policies, fueled by xenophobia and racism, have given rise to new forms of ethnic nationalism, isolationism, and violence around the world.

Today, advances in communication technology allow some of us to connect with the world on wireless devices sitting in the backyard or in our favorite café. An estimated 66% of the world's people wake up each morning assured of instant communication with others around the globe, a dramatic increase in Internet access of 11% since the start of COVID-19 in 2019–2020 (Internet Telecommunication Union, 2022). Yet, nearly a quarter of the global population lives on less than USD $3.65 per day and almost 50% live below the USD $6.85 poverty line, starting their day without the basic necessities of food, clean water, and shelter (World Bank Group, 2022). Through the Internet, satellite technology, and cell phones, many of the world's people have access to both mass media and personal accounts of events and experiences as they unfold around the globe. However, in this time of instant messages and global communication, 781 million or about 13% of young people and adults worldwide, two thirds of whom are women, do not have the skills to read (World Population Review, 2023). Today, advances in transportation technology bring families, friends, migrants, tourists, businesspeople, and

strangers closer together more rapidly than ever before in the history of human interaction. Yet some have the privilege to enjoy intercultural experiences through leisure, recreation, and tourism, whereas other people travel far from home and engage with others who are different from themselves out of economic necessity and for basic survival.

People from different cultural backgrounds have been interacting with each other for many millennia. What makes intercultural communication in our current times different from other periods in history? The amount and intensity of intercultural interactions; the degree of intercultural interdependence; the patterns of movement of people, goods, and capital; and the conditions that shape and constrain our intercultural interactions distinguish our current context—the context of globalization—from other periods in history. Consider the following:

- About 281 million people live outside their country of origin, which is about 3.6% of the global population. COVID-19 had a major impact on migrants. Beyond health concerns, many migrants were trapped by immobility and unemployment. The pandemic showed how critical migrant workers who fill essential roles are as workers and as economic providers through remittances (World Migration Report 2022).
- What is causing the severe political polarization that is pulling democracies apart across the globe, including in India, Turkey, Indonesia, Poland, Kenya, and the United States among other places? Media industries in general and social media in particular certainly amplify divisive and polarizing rhetoric of leaders. "Perhaps most fundamentally, polarization shatters informal but crucial norms of tolerance and moderation—like conceding peacefully after an electoral defeat—that keep political competition with bounds" (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019, para. 12).
- By 2024, an estimated 5.1 billion people, more than 60% of the world's population, will use social media networks. WeChat or *Wēixìn* (微 信), developed in China in 2011 by Tencent, is one of the largest messaging and payment apps in the world, connecting 1.3 billion users in China and around the world. But Facebook, with over 3 billion active users, remains the most popular social media network worldwide (Dixon, 2023; Thomala, 2023).
- Ethnic tension, conflicts, persecutions, human rights violations, violence, and natural disasters exacerbated by climate change have forcibly displaced 110 million people around the world. More than half of the refugees and persons in need of international protection are from Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, 2023). More than 1.5 million Palestinians or 70% of the population of Gaza were displaced in November 2023 one month after the Israel military offensive following the attack by Hamas (United Nations Relief and Works Agency, 2023).
- The United States is projected to become a "majority minority" nation for the first time in 2044. While the non-Hispanic, White population will remain the largest single

group, no group will make up a "majority." Racial and ethnic minorities, 41% of the U.S. population in 2022, are projected to comprise 50.3% of the population in 2044 and 56% by 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

- In 2022, Qatar leveraged the FIFA Men's World Cup as a form of "soft power." As the first World Cup in the Middle East and the first in a majority-Muslim country, Qatar 2022 was historic not only because of the 3.4 million fans who attended from around the globe but as a highly successful national effort to enhance Qatar's appeal as an economic hub and increase their geopolitical influence. In contrast to the "hard power" of military or economic threat, "soft power" often mobilizes culture—sport, music, fashion, and other forms of popular culture—to attract attention, promote a nation's image, and garner global prominence (Mahmood, 2023).
- The gap between the wealthy and the poor is increasing within countries and around the world; 10 of the richest men in the world own more than 3.1 billion people. The wealth of the 10 richest men doubled since the beginning of the pandemic. The incomes of 99% of the world's population decreased as a result of the pandemic. "This was never by chance, but by choice. Extreme inequality is a form of 'economic violence'—where structural and system policy and political choices that are skewed in favor of the richest and most powerful people result in direct harm to the vast majority of ordinary people worldwide" (Oxfam, 2022, p. 12).

Clearly, cultural interaction is occurring, and intercultural communication presents both opportunities and challenges. The goal of this book is to position the study and practice of intercultural communication within the context of globalization and the backlash to globalization, which then enables us to understand and grapple with the dynamic, creative, conflictive, and often inequitable nature of intercultural relations in the world. This book provides theories, conceptual maps, and practical tools to guide us in asking questions, making sense, and taking action in regard to the intercultural opportunities, misunderstandings, and conflicts that emerge today in the context of globalization. Throughout the book, intercultural communication is explored within this broader political, economic, and cultural context of globalization, which allows us to foreground the important roles that history, power, and global institutions—political, economic, and media institutions—currently play in intercultural communication.

This first chapter is called "Opening the Conversation" because the relationship between you, the readers, and us, the authors, is a special kind of interaction. We start the conversation by introducing various definitions of culture that provide different ways to understand intercultural communication today. Then, some of the opportunities and challenges of studying intercultural communication are addressed by introducing positionality, standpoint theory, and ethnocentrism. This chapter ends with a discussion of intercultural praxis. As we "open the conversation," we invite you to engage in an ongoing process of learning, reflecting, and critiquing what we have to say about intercultural communication and how it applies to your everyday experiences.

DEFINITIONS OF CULTURE

Culture is a concept we use often but have a great deal of trouble defining. In the 1950s, anthropologists Clyde Kluckhohn and Arthur Kroeber (1952) identified over 150 definitions of culture. Culture is central to the way we view, experience, and engage with all aspects of our lives and the world around us. Thus, even our definitions of culture are shaped by the historical, political, social, and cultural contexts in which we live. Historically, the word *culture* was closely linked in its use and meaning to processes of colonization. In the 19th century, European anthropologists wrote detailed descriptions of the ways of life of "others," generally characterizing non-European societies as less civilized, barbaric, "primitive," and as lacking "culture." These colonial accounts treated European culture as the norm and constructed Europe as superior by using the alleged lack of "culture" of non-European societies as justification for colonization. By the beginning of World War I, nine-tenths of the world had been colonized by European powers—a history of imperialism that continues to structure and impact intercultural communication today (Young, 2001). With this assumption of the superiority of European culture, the categorization system that stratified groups of people was based on having "culture" or not, which, in turn, translated within European societies as "high" culture and "low" culture. Those in the elite class, or ruling class, who had power, were educated at prestigious schools, and were patrons of the arts, such as literature, opera, and ballet, embodied **high culture**. Those in the working class who enjoyed activities such as popular theater, folk art, and "street" activities—and later movies and television—embodied **low culture**. We see remnants of these definitions of culture operating today. The notion of culture continues to be used in some situations to stratify groups based on the kinds of activities people engage in, thereby reinforcing beliefs about superior and inferior cultures. Over the past 50 years, struggles within academia and society in general have legitimized the practices and activities of common everyday people, leading to the use of the term **popular culture** to reference much of what was previously considered low culture. However, in advertising, in media representations, and in everyday actions and speech, we still see the use of high and low cultural symbols not only to signify class differences but also to reinforce a cultural hierarchy. The appeal and consumption of U.S. culture around the world, which coincides with the superpower status of the United States, can be understood, at least partially, as a desire to be in proximity as well as have contact with the United States and, therefore, to exhibit the signs of being "cultured."

Anthropologic Definition: Culture as a Site of Shared Meaning

The traditional academic field of intercultural communication has been deeply impacted by anthropology. In fact, many of the scholars like Edward T. Hall (1959), who is considered the originator of the field of intercultural communication, were trained as anthropologists. In the 1950s, Hall, along with others at the Foreign Service Institute, developed training programs on culture and communication for diplomats going abroad on assignment. Hall's applied approach, focusing on the micro-level of human interaction with particular attention to nonverbal communication and tacit or out-of-awareness levels of information exchange, established the foundation for the field of intercultural communication (Rogers et al., 2002).

Clifford Geertz, another highly influential anthropologist, emphasized the pivotal role symbols play in understanding culture. According to Geertz, culture is a web of symbols that people use to create meaning and order in their lives. Concerned about the colonial and Western origins of anthropology, he highlighted the challenges of understanding and representing cultures accurately. Anthropologists engage in interpretive practices that, for Geertz, are best accomplished in conversation with people from within the culture. In his widely cited book, *Interpretation of Culture*, Geertz (1973) said culture "denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life" (p. 89).

Culture, then, from an anthropological perspective, is a system of shared meanings that are passed from generation to generation through symbols that allow human beings (not only men!) to communicate, maintain, and develop an approach and understanding of life. We refer to this here as **culture as shared meaning**. In other words, culture allows us to make sense of, express, and give meaning to our lives. Let's look more closely at the various elements of this definition.

At the core of this definition is the notion of symbols and symbol systems. **Symbols** stand for or represent other things. Words, images, people, ideas, and actions can all be symbols that represent other things. For example, the word *cat* is a set of symbols (the alphabet) that combine to represent both the idea of a cat and the actual cat. A handshake—whether firm or soft, simple or complex—a raised eyebrow, a hand gesturing "ok," a veil, a tie, or "bling" are all symbolic actions or things that carry meaning. An image or an object such as the U.S. flag, the twin towers, a cell phone, a happy face emoji, or graffiti are also symbols that stand for ideas, beliefs, and actions. How do we know what these and other symbols represent or what they mean? Are the meanings of symbols somehow inherent in the things themselves, or are meanings assigned to symbols by the people who use them? While the meaning of symbols may seem natural or inherent for those who use them, the anthropological definition that was previously offered indicates that it is the act of assigning similar meanings to symbols and the sharing of these assigned meanings that, at least partially, constitute culture.

The definition by Geertz (1973) also suggests that culture is a system. It is a system expressed through symbols that allow groups of people to communicate and to develop knowledge and understanding about life. When we say culture is a system, we mean that the elements of culture interrelate to form a whole. The shared symbols that convey or express meaning within a culture acquire meaning through their interrelation to each other and together create a system of meanings. Consider this example: As you read the brief scenario that follows, pay attention to what you are thinking and feeling.

Imagine a young man who is in his mid to late 20s who works at a job making about $100,000 a year. OK, what do you think and how do you feel about this man? Now, you find out that he is single. Have your thoughts or feelings changed? For you, and for the majority of students like you in the United States, the picture of this man and his life is looking pretty

good. Generally, both female and male students from various cultural backgrounds in the classroom think and feel positively about him. Now you find out that he lives at home with his parents and siblings. Have your thoughts or feelings about him changed? Without fail, when this scenario is used in the classroom, an audible sigh of disappointment comes from students when they learn that he lives with his parents. What's going on here? How does this information contradict or challenge the system of meaning in the dominant U.S. culture that was being created up to that point? The image of this young man, who was looking so good, suddenly plummets from desirable to highly suspect and, well, according to some students, "weird," "strange," and "not normal." The dominant U.S. culture is a system of shared meanings that places high value and regard on individualism, independence, consumerism, and capitalism, which are symbolically represented through the interrelated elements of income, age, sex/gender, and in this case, living arrangements. Students in the classroom who ascribe to the dominant cultural value system ask questions like the following: Why would he want to live at home if he has all that money? Is he a momma's boy? What's his problem? Does he have low self-esteem? Others, operating from similar assumptions, suggest that he might be living at home to save money to buy a house of his own. In other words, he may be sacrificing his independence temporarily to achieve his ultimate (and, of course, preferable) goal of living independently.

After the disappointment, disbelief, and concern for this poor fellow has settled down, we often hear alternative interpretations from students who come from different cultural backgrounds or who straddle multiple cultural systems of meaning-making. The students suggest that "he lives at home to take care of his parents," or that "he likes living with his family," or "maybe that's just the way it's done in that culture." These students' interpretations represent a different system of meaning-making that values a more collectivistic than individualistic orientation and a more interdependent than independent approach to life. The students who do speak up with these alternative interpretations may feel a bit ambivalent about stating their interpretation because they realize they are in the racial or ethnic minority, yet they have no problem making sense of the scenario. In other words, the scenario is not viewed as contradictory or inconsistent; rather, it makes sense. Our purpose in giving this example at this point is to demonstrate the ways in which culture operates as a system of shared meanings. The example also illustrates how we—human beings—generally assume that the way we make sense of things and the way we give meaning to symbols is the "right," "correct," and often "superior" way. One of the goals in this book is to challenge these ethnocentric attitudes and to develop the ability to understand cultures from within their own frames of reference rather than interpreting and negatively evaluating other cultures from one's own cultural position.

In summary, a central aspect of the anthropological definition of culture is that the patterns of meaning embodied in symbols that are inherited and passed along through generations are assumed to be shared. In fact, it is shared meaning that constitutes culture as a unit of examination in this definition of culture. The cultural studies definition of culture from a critical perspective offers another way to understand the complex notion of culture.





Are the meanings associated with these images shared or contested within cultures and across cultures?

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Cultural Studies Definition: Culture as a Site of Contested Meaning

Whereas traditional anthropological definitions focus on culture as a system of shared meanings, cultural studies perspectives, informed by Marxist theories of class struggle and exploitation, view **culture as a site of contestation** or **culture as contested meaning** where meanings are constantly negotiated (Grossberg et al., 1992). Cultural studies is a transdisciplinary field of study that emerged in the post–World War II era in England as a challenge to the positivist approaches to the study of culture, which purported to approach culture "objectively." The goals of Richard Hoggart, who founded the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and others who followed, such as Stuart Hall, are to develop subjective approaches

to the study of culture in everyday life, to examine the broader historical and political context within which cultural practices are situated, and to attend to relations of power in understanding culture. Simon During (1999) suggested that as England's working class became more affluent and fragmented in the 1950s; as mass-mediated culture began to dominate over local, community cultures; and as the logic that separated culture from politics was challenged, the old notion of culture as a shared way of life was no longer descriptive or functional.

Through a cultural studies lens, then, the notion of culture shifts from an expression of local communal lives to a view of culture as an apparatus of power within a larger system of domination. A cultural studies perspective reveals how culture operates as a form of **hegemony**, or domination through consent, as defined by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist theorist. Hegemony is dominance without the need for force or explicit forms of coercion. In other words, hegemony operates when the goals, ideas, and interests of the ruling group or class are so thoroughly normalized, institutionalized, and accepted that people consent to their own domination, subordination, and exploitation. Developments in cultural studies from the 1980s forward focus on the potential that individuals and groups have to challenge, resist, and transform meanings in their subjective, everyday lives. John Fiske (1992) stated, "The social order constrains and oppresses people, but at the same time offers them resources to fight against those constraints" (p. 157), suggesting that individuals and groups are both consumers and producers of cultural meanings and not passive recipients of meanings manufactured by cultural industries. From a cultural studies perspective, meanings are not necessarily shared, stable, or determined; rather, meanings are constantly produced, challenged, and negotiated.

Consider, for example, the images of nondominant groups in the United States, such as African American; Latinx; Asian American; American Indian; Arab American; or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) people. Nondominant groups are often underrepresented and represented stereotypically in the mass media leading to struggles to affirm positive identities and efforts to claim and reclaim a position of respect in society. When any of us—from dominant or nondominant groups—speak or act outside the "norm" established by society or what is seen as "normal" within our cultural group, we likely experience tension, admonition, or in more extreme cases, shunning and violence. As we engage with media representations and confront expected norms, we challenge and negotiate shared and accepted meanings within culture and society. Meanings associated with being an African American, a White man, Latinx, or transgender are not shared by all in the society; rather, these meanings are continuously asserted, challenged, negotiated, and rearticulated. From a cultural studies perspective, meanings are continually produced, hybridized, and reproduced in an ongoing struggle of power (Hall, 1997b). Culture, then, is the "actual, grounded terrain" of everyday practices—watching TV, consuming and wearing clothes, eating fast food or dining out, listening to music or radio talk shows—and representations—movies, songs, videos, advertisements, magazines, and "news"—where meanings are contested.

Older definitions of culture where a set of things or activities signify high or low culture still circulate, but the cultural studies notion of culture focuses on the struggles over meanings that are part of our everyday lives. Undoubtedly, the logic of understanding culture as a contested site or zone where meanings are negotiated appeals to and makes sense for people

who experience themselves as marginalized from or marginalized within the centers of power, whether this is based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, or nationality. Similarly, the logic of understanding culture as a system of shared meanings appeals to and makes sense for people at the centers of power or in a dominant role, whether this position is based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, or nationality. This, itself, illustrates the struggle over the meaning of the notion of culture.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that we all participate in and are constrained by oppressive social forces. We all, at some points in our lives and to varying degrees, also challenge and struggle with dominant or preferred meanings. From a cultural studies perspective, culture is a site of analysis—in other words, something we need to attend to and critique. Culture is also a site of intervention, where we can work toward greater equity and justice in our lives and in the world in the ongoing struggle of domination and resistance.

The initial aim of the transdisciplinary field of cultural studies to critique social inequalities and work toward social change remains today; however, the academic field of cultural studies as it has traveled from England to Latin America, Australia, the United States, and other places has taken on different forms and emphases. In the mid-1980s, communication scholar Larry Grossberg (1986) identified the emerging and significant impact cultural studies began to have in the United States, particularly in the communication discipline. Today, as we explore intercultural communication within the context of and backlash to globalization as well as rising ethnonationalism, a cultural studies approach offers tools to analyze power relations, to understand the historical and political context of our intercultural relations, and to see how we can act or intervene critically and creatively in our everyday lives.

Globalization Definition: Culture as a Resource

Influenced by cultural studies, contemporary anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) suggested in his book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* that we need to move away from thinking of culture as a thing, a substance, or an object that is shared. The concept of culture as a coherent, stable entity privileges certain forms of sharing and agreement and neglects the realities of inequality, difference, and those who are marginalized. He argued that the adjective *cultural* is more descriptive and useful than the noun *culture.* Consequently, focusing on the cultural dimensions of an object, issue, practice, or ideology is to recognize differences, contrasts, and comparisons. Culture, in the context of globalization, is not something that individuals or groups possess, but rather a way of referring to dimensions of situated and embodied difference that express and mobilize group identities (Appadurai, 1996).

George Yúdice (2003) suggested that **culture** in the age of globalization has come to be understood **as a resource**. Culture plays a greater role today than ever before because of the ways it is linked to community, national, international, and transnational economies and politics. In the first decades of the 21st century, culture is now seen as a resource for economic and political exploitation, agency, and power to be used or instrumentalized for a wide range of purposes and ends. For example, in the context of globalization, culture, in the form of symbolic goods, such as TV shows, movies, music, and tourism, is increasingly a resource for economic growth in global trade. Mass culture industries in the United States are a major contributor to

the gross national product (GNP) and function globally as purveyors of U.S. cultural power (Crothers, 2021). Culture is also targeted for exploitation by capital in the media, consumerism, and tourism. Consider how products are modified and marketed to different cultural groups; how African American urban culture has been appropriated, exploited, commodified, and yet it operates as a potentially oppositional site; or how tourism in many parts of the world uses the resource of culture to attract foreign capital for development. Although the commodification of culture—the turning of culture, cultural practices, and cultural space into products for sale—is not new, the extent to which culture is "managed" as a resource for its capital-generating potential and as a "critical sphere for investment" by global institutions like the World Bank (WB) is new (Yúdice, 2003, p. 13).

Culture, in the context of globalization, is conceptualized, experienced, exploited, and mobilized as a resource. In addition to being invested in and distributed as a resource for economic development and capital accumulation, culture is used as a resource to address and solve social problems, such as illiteracy, addiction, crime, and conflict. Culture is also used today discursively, socially, and politically as a resource for collective and individual empowerment, agency, and resistance. Consider how a multiracial and multicultural coalition of women organized the Women's March on January 21, 2017, which became the largest single-day protest in U.S. history and spread worldwide "to harness the political power of diverse women and their communities to create transformative social change" (Women's March, 2020). Groups of people in proximity to each other or vastly distant organize collective identities that serve as "homes" of familiarity; spaces of belonging; and as sites for the formation of resistance, agency, and political empowerment. Consider how spaces of Spanish-English bilingualism, specifically places where U.S. Spanish is spoken such as digital and social media spaces, educational and community spaces, as well as entertainment and political spaces, can create a sense of belonging, resistance to full assimilation, and empowerment by leveraging cultural knowledge, language, and representation (Sánchez-Muńoz & Retis, 2022).

Or consider how hip-hop culture—transplanted and refashioned around the globe—uses music, dance, style, and knowledge to give voice to those who are silenced, to challenge discrimination, and to create platforms for activism that support cultural and economic empowerment. Today, in the context of globalization "the understanding and practice of culture is quite complex, located at the intersection of economic and social justice agendas" (Yúdice, 2003, p. 17).

COMMUNICATIVE DIMENSIONS

COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

What is the relationship between communication and culture? The three different approaches to culture illustrate different assumptions about communication.

According to the *anthropological definition* of culture as a shared system of meaning, communication is a process of constructing a shared reality among a group of people using mutually agreed-upon symbols, language, gestures, and practices. In this case, culture

functions as a set of rules and expectations that help people express, interpret, and make sense of communication. Communication produces and maintains the cultural rules and expectations by repeating and ingraining the pattens of behavior and exchange over time.

In the *cultural studies definition*, culture is a site of contested meaning. According to this view, communication is a process through which individuals and groups negotiate and struggle over the "agreed on" and "appropriate" meanings assigned to reality. Unlike the anthropological definition that views of culture as mutually shared, the cultural studies definition focuses on how certain views are privileged and normalized while other perspectives are marginalized or silenced through communication. Culture forms at the dynamic intersection of these negotiations and struggle for power and visibility. Communication is a process that brings together these multiple and opposing norms and perspectives into interaction.

Finally, in the *globalization definition* that views culture as a resource, communication is a process that allows people to put the resources into use. In this case, communication can be viewed as a productive process that enables change. Much like money, fossil oil, and labor, culture in the context of globalization can be used to meet our needs and wants. It is through communication that people leverage culture to build collective identities and exploit or mobilize for personal, economic, or political gain. Communication is a process of using cultural resources.

As you can see from our previous discussion, there are various and different definitions of culture. The concept of culture, itself, is *contested*. This means that there is no one agreed-on definition, that the different meanings of culture can be understood as being in competition with each other for usage, and that there are material and symbolic consequences or implications attached to the use of one or another of the definitions. The definitions presented here—(1) culture as shared meaning, (2) culture as contested meaning, and (3) culture as resource—all offer important and useful ways of understanding culture in the context of globalization. Throughout the book, all three definitions are used to help us make sense of the complex and contradictory intercultural communication issues and experiences we live and struggle with today.

SITUATING YOURSELF AS INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATOR

In recent years, when we ask students to speak about their culture, many find it a highly challenging exercise. For students who come from the dominant culture, the response is often "I don't really have a culture." For those students from nondominant groups, responses that point to their ethnic, racial, or religious group identification come more readily; however, their replies are often accompanied by some uneasiness. Typically, people whose culture differs from the dominant group have a stronger sense of their culture and develop a clearer awareness of their cultural identity earlier in life than those in the dominant group.

Cultural identity is defined as our situated sense of self that is shaped by our cultural experiences and social locations. Our identities develop through our relationships with others—our

families, our friends, and those we see as outside our group. Our cultural identities are constructed from the languages we speak, the stories we tell, as well as the norms, behaviors, rituals, and nonverbal communication we enact. Histories passed along from within our cultural group in addition to representations of our group by others also shape our cultural identities. Our cultural identities serve to bond us with others, giving us a sense of belonging; cultural identities also provide a buffer protecting us from others we or our group see as different from ourselves; and cultural identities can also function as bridges connecting us to others who are viewed as different. Our cultural identities intersect with and are impacted by our other social identities, including our ethnic, racial, gender, class, age, religious, and national identities. In the context of globalization, our identities are not fixed; rather, our identities are complex, multifaceted, and fluid.

What definitions of culture do you think are operating in the minds of my students when asked to speak about their culture? How might their cultural identities—consciously or unconsciously—affect their understanding of culture? What accounts for the different responses among students from dominant and nondominant cultures? We can see how the anthropological definition of culture as shared meaning and culture as something that groups possess is presumed in the students' responses. Students who identify with U.S. dominant culture are encouraged to see themselves as "individuals," which often underlies their claim that they "have no culture." Since their culture is pervasive and "normal" in the United States, European American or White students don't recognize the language, stories, values, norms, practices, and shared views on history as belonging to a culture. While students in nondominant groups see themselves as having culture or a cultural identity based on the ways in which they are different from the dominant group, dominant group members see the difference of nondominant groups and label it "culture," and their own seeming lack of "difference" as not having culture. Although the dominant culture is also infused with "difference," it is not as evident because the cultural patterns of the dominant group are the norm.

Additionally, we can see how those from the dominant culture often understand culture as a resource, which others have, but which they, rather nostalgically, are lacking. The historical and ongoing marking of nondominant groups as racially, ethnically, and culturally different by the dominant group has resulted in the mistaken belief and dangerous assumption that the dominant group has no culture. A dimension of the backlash to globalization has been the emergence or reassertion of White ethnic identity. Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (2016) describes an interesting phenomenon in her book, *Strangers in Their Own Land*. Based on research from 2011 to 2016, White working and middle-class people who form the core of the conservative right in Louisiana fear their culture, their claims as White Americans, and their economic viability are under attack and endangered. Their anger and experience of loss of culture, entitlement, and jobs echoed across the United States and were successfully mobilized as a political resource in the 2016 presidential election and again in the 2024 presidential election. Interestingly and importantly, the fact that people from the dominant group do not see their culture as a resource is highly problematic. When members of the dominant group do not recognize their culture as a resource, their knowledge and access to cultural privilege and White privilege are erased and made invisible by and for the dominant group (Frankenberg, 1993; Nakayama & Martin,

1999). We can also see the cultural studies definition of culture as contested meaning manifested in the differences between these students' responses.

To a great extent, culture or cultural dimensions of human interaction are unconsciously acquired and embodied through interaction and engagement with others from one's own culture. When one's culture differs from the dominant group (e.g., people who are Jewish, Muslim, or Buddhist in a predominantly Christian society, or people who identify as African American, Asian American, Latinx, Arab American, or Native American within the predominantly White or European American culture) then he or she is regularly, perhaps even on a daily basis, reminded of the differences between his or her own cultural values, norms, history, and possibly language and those of the dominant group. In effect, people from nondominant groups learn to "commute" between cultures, switching verbal and nonverbal cultural codes as well as values and ways of viewing the world as they move between two cultures. If you are from a nondominant group, the ways in which the dominant culture is different from your own are evident.

This phenomenon is certainly not unique to the United States. People of Algerian or Vietnamese background who are French, people who are Korean or Korean–Japanese in Japan, or people of Indian ancestry who have lived, perhaps for generations, in Africa, the Caribbean, or South Pacific Islands are likely to experience a heightened sense of culture and cultural identification because their differences from the dominant group are seen as significant, are pointed out, and are part of their lived experience. Cultural identities serve as a place of belonging with others who are similar and a buffer from those who perceive you and are perceived as different.

On the other hand, people from the dominant cultural group in a society are often unaware that the norms, values, practices, and institutions of the society are, in fact, deeply shaped by and infused with a particular cultural orientation and that these patterns of shared meaning have been normalized as "just the way things are" or "the way things should be." So, to return to our earlier question, what accounts for the differences in responses of my students when asked about their culture?

Positionality

The differences in responses can be understood to some extent based on differences in students' **positionality**. Positionality refers to one's social location or position within an intersecting web of socially constructed hierarchical categories, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, and physical abilities, to name a few. Different experiences, understanding, and knowledge of oneself and the world are gained, accessed, and produced based on one's positionality. Positionality is a relational concept. In other words, when we consider positionality, we are thinking about how we are positioned in relation to others within these intersecting social categories and how we are positioned in terms of power. The socially constructed categories of race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, religion, and ableness are hierarchical systems that often connote and confer material and symbolic power. At this point, consider how your positionality—your positions of power in relation to the categories of race, gender, class, nationality, and so on—impacts your experiences, understanding, and knowledge about yourself and the world around you. How does your positionality impact your intercultural communication interactions?

Standpoint Theory

The idea of positionality is closely related to **standpoint theory** (Collins, 1986; Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1983) as proposed by feminist theorists. A standpoint is a place from which to view and make sense of the world around us. Our standpoint influences what we see and what we cannot, do not, or choose not to see. Feminist standpoint theory claims that the social groups to which we belong shape what we know and how we communicate (Wood, 2005). The theory is derived from the Marxist position that economically oppressed classes can access knowledge unavailable to the socially privileged and can generate distinctive accounts, particularly knowledge about social relations. For example, German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, writing in the early 19th century, suggested that while society in general may acknowledge the existence of slavery, the perception, experience, and knowledge of slavery is quite different for slaves than for masters. One's position within social relations of power produces different standpoints from which to view, experience, act, and construct knowledge about the world.

All standpoints are necessarily partial and limited, yet feminist theorists argue that people from oppressed or subordinated groups must understand both their own perspective and the perspective of those in power in order to survive. Therefore, the standpoint of marginalized people or groups, those with less power, is unique and should be privileged because it allows for a fuller and more comprehensive view. Patricia Hill Collins's (1986) notion of "outsiders within" points to the possibility of dual vision of marginalized people and groups, which in her case was that of a Black woman in predominantly White institutions. On the other hand, people in the dominant group—whether due to gender, class, race, religion, nationality, or sexual orientation—do not need to understand the viewpoint of subordinated groups and often have a vested interest in not understanding the positions of subordinated others in order to maintain their own dominance. As put forth by feminist theorists, standpoint theory is centrally concerned with the relationship between power and knowledge and sees the vantage point of those who are subordinated as a position of insight from which to challenge and oppose systems of oppression.

Standpoint theory offers a powerful lens through which to make sense of, address, and act on issues and challenges in intercultural communication. It enables us to understand the following:

- We may see, experience, and understand the world quite differently based on our different standpoints and positionalities.
- Knowledge about ourselves and others is situated and partial.
- Knowledge is always and inevitably connected to power.
- Oppositional standpoints can form, challenging and contesting the status quo.

Ethnocentrism

The application of standpoint theory and an understanding of the various positionalities we occupy may also assist us in avoiding the negative effects of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is derived from two Greek words: (1) *ethnos*, meaning group or nation, and (2) *kentron*, meaning

center, referring to a view that places one's group at the center of the world. As first conceptualized by William Sumner (1906), **ethnocentrism** is the idea that one's own group's way of thinking, being, and acting in the world is superior to others. Some scholars argue that ethnocentrism has been a central feature in all cultures throughout history and has served as a mechanism of cultural cohesion and preservation (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997); yet the globalized context in which we live today makes ethnocentrism and ethnocentric approaches extremely problematic. The assumption that one's own group is superior to others leads to negative evaluations of others and can result in dehumanization, legitimization of prejudices, discrimination, conflict, and violence. Both historically and today, ethnocentrism has combined with power—material, institutional, and symbolic—to justify colonization, imperialism, oppression, war, and ethnic cleansing.

One of the dangers of ethnocentrism is that it can deny individuals, groups, and even nations the benefits of broader points of view and perceptions. Ethnocentrism is often marked by an intensely inward-looking and often nearsighted view of the world. On an interpersonal level, if you think your group's way of doing things, seeing things, and believing about things is the right way and the better way, you are likely to judge others negatively and respond arrogantly and dismissively to those who are different from you. These attitudes and actions will likely end any effective intercultural communication and deprive you of the benefits of other ways of seeing and acting in the world. If you are in a position of greater power in relation to the other person, you may feel as if it doesn't matter, and you don't really need that person's perspective. From this, we can see how ethnocentrism combines with power to increase the likelihood of a more insular, myopic perspective. Interestingly, as our world becomes more interconnected in the digital age and we have increasing access to information and points of view different from our own, we also see how virtual spaces are monetized and how social media apps, personalized through Big Data, show users what they want to see, hear and consume. "What it does is limit people's exposure to anything they don't want to see. It creates silos and makes sure that these different worlds don't converge" (Kulkarni, 2017). Media silos validate and reinforce the point of view held by the user intensifying polarization, intolerance, and ethnocentrism.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

IDENTITY AND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

Who am I? Where do I belong? What does it mean to be who I am? These questions shape one's lifelong explorations of their identity. Understanding your identity is crucial for navigating the layers of differences—social, ethnic, national, racial, gender, sexual, socioeconomic, among others—that shape intercultural communication. As we face the increased and more consistent impacts of climate change and extreme weather events, it is also important to think about the question of who we are in the broader context of ecology. Anthropocentrism is an idea that human beings are the central and most important lifeform on this planet with superior intelligence and morality over other living beings. It is a form of ethnocentrism, but at the level of the species. Anthropocentrism deeply informs Western

religious, political, and social worldviews—it is a standpoint that claims human beings are the creator of history and the beneficiary of its progress. Environmental philosophers and activists claim the anthropocentric worldview is the root cause of ongoing environmental destruction that prioritizes economic gain at the expense of the natural environment and other non-human species.

Lily Mendoza (2024) argues that the way we understand "culture" is anthropocentric because it assumes human beings are separate from nature, and positions "culture" as what distinguishes humans from the rest of the natural world. Mendoza claims that culture should be understood not as a set of characteristics associated with a group of people, but rather as "adaptive strategies for surviving and thriving developed over epochal time spans in symbiotic reciprocity with particular given ecologies." That is, culture evolves from a situated, reciprocal relationship between a group of people and the natural environment over an extended period of time. If you think about your culture as knowledges, practices, and meanings derived from a relationship with nature, how would you describe your culture and cultural identity? How does anthropocentrism relate to the dehumanization of BIPOC communities, women, people with disabilities, undocumented migrants, and those who live in poverty?

On a global scale, ethnocentrism can affect perceptions of one's own group and can lead to ignorance, misunderstandings, resentment, and potentially, violence. In late December 2001, the *International Herald Tribune* reported the results of a poll of 275 global opinion leaders from 24 countries. "Asked if many or most people would consider US policies to be 'a major cause' of the September 11 attacks, 58 percent of the non-US respondents said they did, compared to just 18 percent of Americans" (Global Poll, 2001). According to the report, findings from the poll indicate "that much of the world views the attacks as a symptom of increasingly bitter polarization between haves and have-nots." In response to the question of how there can be such a difference in perception between what Americans think about themselves and what non-Americans think about Americans, authors Ziauddin Sardar and Meryl Wyn Davies (2002) suggested the following:

> Most Americans are simply not aware of the impact of their culture and their government's policies on the rest of the world. But more important, a vast majority simply do not believe that America has done, or can do, anything wrong. (p. 9)

In a more recent poll by the Pew Research Center addressing current issues, about 31% of respondents in other countries see the United States as less tolerant than other wealthy countries and about 21 % see the United States as more tolerant. Interesting the reverse is true for Americans. Forty-four percent see the United States as more tolerant and 22% as less tolerant than other wealthy nations. While people who were surveyed in other countries are divided on whether the United States is more or less democratic, people in the United States are much more likely to say the United States is more democratic than other countries (Fetterolf, 2023).

Being a student of intercultural communication at this point in history presents unique opportunities and challenges. The increasing diversity of cultures in educational settings, workplaces, entertainment venues, and communities provides an impetus and resource for

gaining knowledge and alternative perspectives about cultures that are different from one's own. The accelerated interconnectedness and interdependence of economics, politics, media, and culture around the globe also can motivate people to learn from and about others. Yet for those positioned in the United States, rhetoric proclaiming the United States as the greatest and most powerful nation on Earth can combine with an unwillingness to critically examine the role of the United States in global economic and political instability and injustice. This can result in highly problematic, disturbing, and destructive forms of ethnocentrism that harm and inhibit intercultural communication and global intercultural relations. Ethnocentrism can lead to one-sided perceptions as well as extremely arrogant and misinformed views that are quite disparate from the perceptions of other cultural and national positions and dangerously limit knowledge of the bigger global picture in which our intercultural communication and interactions take place. The denial of climate change by President Trump and shifts in direction on environmental policies in the United States, including the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Climate Accord in July 2017, illustrate this well. At the G20 (Group of 20) summit in Hamburg, Germany, 19 of 20 leaders from the world's largest economies moved forward collectively with a detailed blueprint to address climate change without the United States, noting Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Accord (Erlanger et al., 2017). During the first days of his second term, President Trump once again withdrew the United States from the Paris Climate Accord (Perez & Waldhotz, 2025). The unwavering support of the United States for Israel in the Israeli-Hamas conflict provides another example. Spearheaded and defended by President Biden, the unconditional support of the United States for Israel contrasted sharply with the rest of the world as indicated by the U.N. General Assembly resolution's call for a humanitarian cease-fire in December 2023. One hundred and fifty-three nations voted in favor of the humanitarian cease-fire, 10 voted against, and 23 nations abstained. Not a single major global power voted with the United States and Israel (Jobain et al., 2023).

Positionality, standpoint, and ethnocentric views are closely tied to our cultural identities. Our identities, based on socially constructed categories of difference (i.e., middle-class, White male, American citizen), also position us in relation to others. Our positionality gives us a particular standpoint (i.e., "in American society, anyone can become successful if they work hard") and ethnocentric views may emerge (i.e., "American culture is more advanced and civilized than other cultures") if we have a limited understanding of others' positionalities and standpoints. When cultural identity is understood as a situated sense of self, we see how our positionality is not neutral, our standpoint is never universal, and our ethnocentric views are always problematic.

The study and practice of intercultural communication inevitably challenge our assumptions and views of the world. In fact, one of the main benefits of intercultural communication is the way in which it broadens and deepens our understanding of the world we live in by challenging our taken-for-granted beliefs and views and by providing alternative ways to live fully and respectfully as human beings. Ethnocentrism may provide temporary protection from views, experiences, and realities that threaten one's own, but it has no long-term benefits for effective or successful intercultural communication in the context of globalization.

INTERCULTURAL PRAXIS IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

One of our goals in this book is to introduce and develop a process of critical reflective thinking and acting—what we call **intercultural praxis**—that enables us to navigate the complex and challenging intercultural spaces we inhabit interpersonally, communally, and globally. We hope that by reading this book you not only learn "about" intercultural communication but also practice a way of being, thinking, analyzing, reflecting, and acting in the world in regard to cultural differences. Differences based on race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and nationality are real. Differences manifest in language, dress, behaviors, attitudes, values, histories, and worldviews. When people from diverse backgrounds come together, differences exist. Yet the challenge in intercultural communication is not only about cultural differences; differences are always and inevitably situated within relations of power. Thus, a central intention of the intercultural praxis model is to understand and address the intersection of cultural differences and hierarchies of power in intercultural interactions.

All moments in your day—when you are interacting with friends, coworkers, teachers, bosses, and strangers; when you are consuming pop culture in the form of music, clothes, your favorite streaming shows, movies, and other entertainment; when you hear and read news and information from the media and other outlets; and in your routines of what and where you eat, where you live, how and where you travel—are all opportunities to engage in intercultural praxis. To begin to understand intercultural praxis, I offer six interrelated points of entry into the process: (1) inquiry, (2) framing, (3) positioning, (4) dialogue, (5) reflection, and (6) action.

The purpose of engaging in intercultural praxis is to raise our awareness, increase our critical analysis, and develop our socially responsible action in regard to our intercultural interactions in the context of globalization. The intercultural praxis model provides a blueprint for joining our knowledge and skills as intercultural communicators with our ability to act in the world to create greater equity and social justice. Education scholars Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, Diane J. Goodman, and Davey Shlasko (2023) defined **social justice** as both a goal and process in their book *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*: "The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (p. 3). Social justice includes a vision of the equitable distribution of resources where social actors experience agency with and responsibility for others. The process of reaching the goal of social justice should be "democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change" (Adams et al., p. 3).

The six points or ports of entry in the intercultural praxis model direct us toward ways of thinking, reflecting, and acting in relation to our intercultural experiences, allowing us to attend to the complex, relational, interconnected, and often ambiguous nature of our experiences. All six ports of entry into intercultural praxis are interconnected and interrelated. As we foreground each one individually, keep the others in your mind and consider how they inform the foregrounded port of entry. The six points of entry into intercultural praxis are introduced here and developed in greater depth through subsequent chapters (see Figure 1.1).

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Intercultural Praxis Model

Inquiry

Inquiry, as a port of entry for intercultural praxis, refers to a desire and willingness to know, to ask, to find out, and to learn. Curious inquiry about those who are different from ourselves leads us to engagement with others. Although it may sound simple, inquiry also requires that we are willing to take risks, willing to allow our own way of viewing and being in the world to be challenged and perhaps changed, and willing to suspend judgments about others in order to see and interpret others and the world from different points of view. A Vietnamese American student, Quynyh Tran, recounted an intercultural experience she had before enrolling in one of the authors' intercultural classes. When being introduced in a business setting to a man she did not know, she extended her hand to shake his. He responded that it was against his culture and religion to shake hands. She remembers feeling rather put off and offended by his response, deciding without saying anything that she was not interested in talking or working with him!

Reflecting on this incident in class, she realized that she missed an incredible opportunity to learn more about someone who was different from herself. She realized that if she could have let go of her judgments about those who were different and had not reacted to the man's statement as "weird, strange, or unfriendly," she may have been able to learn something and expand her knowledge of the world. She regretted not stepping through one of the doors of entry into intercultural praxis. Yet by entering into reflection, she learned from this experience that inquiry, curiosity, a willingness to suspend judgment, and a desire to learn from others can be tremendously rewarding and informing. She could also see that what she reacted to as "weird" and "strange" was framed by her culture and positionality.

Framing

We propose **framing** to suggest a range of different perspective-taking options that we can learn to make available to ourselves and need to be aware of in intercultural praxis. First, the concept and action of "framing" connotes that frames always and inevitably limit our perspectives and our views on ourselves, others, and the world around us. Frames focus our attention highlighting certain perspectives and interpretations while also minimizing or dismissing others. We see and make sense of things through individual, cultural, national, and regional frames or lenses that predispose us to perceive and interpret people, things, and events in particular ways. As we engage in intercultural praxis, it is critical that we become aware of the frames of reference from which we view and experience the world. It is also critical to learn how to shift our perspective; to have the flexibility and capacity to see how and why others make sense of the world the way they do. In our current polarized political climate, it's often easier to simply dismiss and denigrate others who see, experience, and frame the world differently and at the same time insulate ourselves from perspectives that challenge our own. Is it possible to work toward understanding the perspectives and experiences of others even if or perhaps most particularly when the perspectives and experiences are different from our own? Understanding doesn't require that we agree or support the other perspective. It means we are trying to imagine our way into the world of the other person to understand where the person is coming from. We need to exercise our perspective-taking options to recognize the limitations of a single perspective and the benefits of multiple points of view.

Second, "framing" means that we are aware of both the local and global contexts that shape intercultural interactions. Sometimes it is very important to narrow the frame, to zoom in, and focus on the particular and very situated aspects of an interaction, event, or exchange. Take, for example, a conflict between two people, two groups, or two nations from different cultures, such as a conflict between neighbors, between a person of color and the police, or between the United States and North Korea. It's important to look at the micro-level differences in communication styles, how verbal and nonverbal communication may be used differently, how the two people may perceive their identities differently based on cultural belonging, and how the two may have learned to enact conflict differently based on their enculturation. However, to fully understand the particular intercultural interaction or misunderstanding, it is also necessary to back up to view the incident, event, or interaction from a broader frame. As we zoom out, we may see a history of conflict and misunderstanding between the two groups that the individuals represent; we may observe historical and/or current patterns of inequities between the two groups that position them differently; and we may also be able to map out broader geopolitical, global relations of power that can shed light on the particular and situated intercultural interaction, misunderstanding, or conflict. As we zoom in and foreground the micro-level of intercultural communication, we need to keep the wider background frame in mind; it provides the context in which meaning about the particular is made. Similarly, as we zoom out and look at larger macro-level dimensions, we need to keep in mind the particular local and situated lived experience of people in their everyday lives. "Framing" as a port of entry into intercultural praxis means we are aware of our frames of reference. It also means we develop our capacity to flexibly and consciously shift our perspective from the particular, situated dimensions of intercultural communication to the broader global dimensions, and from the global dimensions to the particular while maintaining our awareness of both.

Positioning

Where are you positioned as you read this sentence? Your first response may be to say you are lounging in a chair at home, in a café, in the break room at work, or in the library. If you "zoomed out" utilizing the framing strategy in the previous discussion, you may also respond by stating your location in a part of a neighborhood, city, state, nation, or region of the world. **Positioning** as a point of entry into intercultural praxis invites us to consider how our geographic positioning is related to social and political positions. As you read these sentences, where are you positioned socioculturally? The globe we inhabit is stratified by socially constructed hierarchical categories based on culture, race, class, gender, nationality, religion, age, and physical abilities, among others. Like the lines of longitude and latitude that divide, map, and position us geographically on the earth, these hierarchical categories position us socially, politically, and materially in relation to each other and in relation to power.

Understanding how and where we are positioned in the world—the locations from which we speak, listen, act, think, and make sense of the world—allows us to acknowledge that we, as human beings, are positioned differently with both material and symbolic consequences. It is also important to note that your positionality may shift and change based on where you are and with whom you are communicating. For example, it could vary over the course of a day,

from occupying a relatively powerful position at home as the oldest son in a family to having to occupy a less powerful positionality in your part-time job as a personal assistant. Sometimes the shift may be even more drastic, as in the case of someone who is a doctor and part of a dominant group in her home culture and then shifts class and power positions when she is forced to migrate to the United States for political reasons. She finds herself not only part of a racial or ethnic minority group but also positioned very differently when her medical degree is not recognized, forcing her into more manual work and part-time student positionalities.

Positioning, as a way to enter into intercultural praxis, also directs us to interrogate who can speak and who is silenced; whose language is spoken and whose language is trivialized or denied; whose actions have the power to shape and impact others; and whose actions are dismissed, unreported, and marginalized. Positioning combines with other ports of entry, such as inquiry and framing, encouraging us to question whose knowledge is privileged, authorized, and agreed on as true and whose knowledge is deemed unworthy, "primitive," or unnecessary. Positioning ourselves, others, and our knowledge of both self and others allow us to see the relationship between power and what we think of as "knowledge." Our knowledge of the world—whether knowledge of meridians of longitude and latitude or hierarchical categories of race, class, and gender—is socially and historically constructed and produced in relation to power.

INTERCULTURAL PRAXIS

NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCES

To begin using the intercultural praxis model as a tool for navigating the complexities of cultural differences and power differences in intercultural situations, read the following statements and consider your response to each. On a continuum, do you strongly agree with the statement, disagree, or is your response somewhere in between?

- Hard work is all it takes for me to succeed in school, work, and life.
- Big cities are generally not safe, and people are not as friendly there.
- I find social interaction and communication with others generally easy and seamless.
- The police are viewed with suspicion in my neighborhood.
- Going to college/university is my primary responsibility.
- I feel free to express my own gender identity in front of others without fear of judgement or harassment.
- Religious freedom is what makes the United States a great country.
- I have to work twice as hard to prove I am as capable and competent as others.
- For the most part, I can go anywhere in my city, town, or region without feeling afraid for my safety.
- The United States is a country of immigrants. Politicians should stop criminalizing migrants and figure out their legal paths to citizenship.
- Interracial and intercultural relationships cause problems. People should stay with their own kind.
- I am the first in my family to go to college.
- I sometimes wonder what life would be like if I were of a different race or gender.
- I can get financial support from my family to pay for college/university, if necessary.

- The built environment (i.e., desks, stairs, sidewalks, entrances, public space) is generally designed to suit my body size, ability, and mobility.
- I am free to make decisions about my body and health without the fear of punishment by the government.

After reading the statements above, consider the following by using the Intercultural Praxis Model:

- How do your cultural frames inform your responses?
- How are your responses related to your positionality?
- Share these statements with a friend, partner, or coworker and then dialogue about how your responses may be similar or different.
- Reflect and dialogue with others about how our differences in terms of power and positionality impact our standpoints.
- Reflect on the assumptions and judgments you may have about people who would agree or disagree with each of these statements.
- How is dialogue with people who are different in terms of culture and positionality a step toward creating a more equitable and just world?

Dialogue

While we have all heard of **dialogue** and likely assume that we engage in it regularly, it's useful to consider the derivation of the word to deepen our understanding of dialogue as an entry port into intercultural praxis. A common mistake is to think "dia" means two and dialogue, then, is conversation between two people. However, the word *dialogue* is derived from the Greek word *dialogos. Dia* means "through," "between," or "across," and *logos* refers to "word" or "the meaning of the word" as well as "speech" or "thought." Physicist and philosopher David Bohm (1996) wrote the following:

> The picture or the image that this derivation suggests is of a *stream of meaning* among and through us and between us. This will make possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which may emerge a new understanding. It's something new, which may not have been in the starting point at all. It's something creative. (p. 6)

Anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano (1990) suggested that "dialogue" necessarily entails both an oppositional as well as a transformative dimension. Given the differences in power and positionality in intercultural interactions, engagement in dialogue is necessarily a relationship of tension that "is conceived as a crossing, a reaching across, a sharing if not a common ground of understanding" (p. 277).

According to philosopher Martin Buber, dialogue is essential for building community and goes far beyond an exchange of messages. For Buber, dialogue requires a particular quality of communication that involves a connection among participants who are potentially changed by each other. Buber refers to such relationships as I–Thou, where one relates and experiences another as a person. This relationship is quite different from an I–It relationship where people are regarded as objects and experienced as a means to a goal. Dialogue occurs only when there is regard for both self and other and where either/or thinking is challenged, allowing for the possibility of shared ground, new meaning, and mutual understanding.

Dialogue offers a critical point of entry into intercultural praxis. Cognizant of differences in cultural frames and positionalities as well as the tensions that emerge from these differences, the process of dialogue invites us to stretch ourselves—to reach across—to imagine, experience, and creatively engage with points of view, ways of thinking and being, and beliefs different from our own while accepting that we may not fully understand or come to a common agreement or position.

Reflection

While cultures around the world differ in the degree to which they value reflection and the ways in which they practice **reflection**, the capacity to learn from introspection, to observe oneself in relation to others, and to alter one's perspectives and actions based on reflection is a capacity shared by all humans. Many cultures, including the dominant culture of the United States, place a high value on doing activities and accomplishing tasks, which often leaves little space and time for reflection. However, reflection is a key feature of intercultural praxis. Consider how reflection is central to the other points of entry into intercultural praxis already addressed. To engage in curious inquiry, one must be able to reflect on oneself as a subject—a thinking, learning, creative, and capable subject. The practices of framing and positioning require that one consciously observe oneself and critically analyze one's relationships and interrelationships with others. Similarly, reflection is necessary to initiate, maintain, and sustain dialogue across the new and often difficult terrain of intercultural praxis.

Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire (1998) noted in his book *Pedagogy of Freedom* that critical praxis "involves a dynamic and dialectic movement between 'doing' and 'reflecting on doing'" (p. 43). Reflection is what informs our actions. Reflection that incorporates critical analyses of micro- and macro-levels of intercultural issues, which considers multiple cultural frames of reference, and that recognizes our own and others' positioning enables us to act in the world in meaningful, effective, and responsible ways.

Action

Influenced by the work of Freire (1973/2000), the concept of intercultural praxis refers to an ongoing process of thinking, reflecting, and acting. Intercultural praxis is not only about deepening our understanding of ourselves, others, and the world in which we live. Rather, intercultural praxis means we join our increased understanding with responsible **action** to make a difference in the world—to create a more socially just, equitable, and peaceful world.

Each one of us takes multiple and varied actions individually and collectively that have intercultural communication dimensions and implications every single day of our lives. We take action when we decide to get an education, decide to go to class or not, and select classes or a field of study. Our actions in an educational context are influenced by cultural, gendered, national, and class-based assumptions, biases, or constraints. We take action when we go to work and when we speak out or don't about inequity, discrimination, and misuses of power. Watching, reading, or listening to the news is an action that affords opportunities to understand how cultural and national interests shape, limit, and bias the news we receive. A choice to seek out independent or alternative media sources, which are typically funded by community members

versus corporations, is an action that can facilitate inquiry, expand our frames of interpretation, and bring awareness to how we and others are positioned. Our consumption of products, food, and entertainment are all actions. When we know who has labored to make the goods we consume and under what conditions, we confront ourselves and others with the choices we make through our actions. We take action when we make decisions about whom we develop friendships and long-term relationships with and when we choose not to be involved. When we feel strongly enough about an issue, we are moved to organize and take action.

What informs our choices and actions? What are the implications of our actions? In the context of globalization, our choices and actions are always enabled, shaped, and constrained by history, relations of power, and material conditions that are inextricably linked to intercultural dimensions of culture, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, language, and nationality. Intercultural praxis offers us a process of critical, reflective thinking and acting that enables us to navigate the complex and challenging intercultural spaces we inhabit interpersonally, communally, and globally. Intercultural praxis can manifest in a range of forms, such as simple or complex communication competency skills, complicit actions, and oppositional tactics, as well as through creative, improvisational, and transformational interventions.

SUMMARY

As we "open the conversation," it is evident that there is a critical need for skillful and informed intercultural communicators in the current context of globalization and backlash to globalization. To assist us in making sense of intercultural communication in the rapidly changing, increasingly interdependent, and inequitable world we inhabit, we introduced various definitions of culture: (1) culture as shared meaning, (2) culture as contested meaning, and (3) culture as resource. Each definition provides different and necessary ways of understanding culture in our complex age. Studying intercultural communication in the context of globalization offers opportunities and challenges. To guide our approach and to increase our awareness, the basic concepts of positionality, standpoint theory, and ethnocentrism were introduced. Because we want to become more effective as intercultural communicators, thinkers, and actors in the global context, intercultural praxis—a set of skills, processes, and practices for critical, reflective thinking and acting—was outlined to navigate the complex, contradictory, and challenging intercultural spaces we inhabit. In the next chapter, we explore the historical, political, and economic factors and forces that have contributed to globalization and discuss various dimensions of intercultural communication in the context of globalization.

KEY TERMS

Action
Cultural identity
Culture as a resource
Culture as contested meaning
Culture as shared meaning
Dialogue
Ethnocentrism
Framing

Hegemony
High culture
Inquiry
Intercultural praxis
Low culture
Popular culture
Positionality
Positioning
Reflection
Social justice
Standpoint theory
Symbols

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Discussion Questions

In the past decade, global streaming services like Netflix and Hulu became popular. In what ways do these services shape globalization? Which definition of culture best describes this phenomenon?

While the global pandemic caused by COVID-19 had a far-reaching impact on people around the world, individuals experienced different levels of challenges with respect to health care, employment, education, and childcare. How do you think your positionality shaped the way you experienced the pandemic?

Cultural identity is defined as a situated sense of self shaped by cultural experience and social location. In what ways does your participation in social media shape your cultural identity? Are your expressions of cultural identity different depending on the platform you use?

Video-sharing apps such as TikTok and YouTube give billions of users a platform to create and share their creative content for self-expression. Do you think the increased access to diverse personal content helps alleviate ethnocentrism around the world? In what ways do social media inform your views of other cultures and people?

The chapter defines intercultural praxis as a process of critical, reflective thinking and acting shaped by six ports of entry. How is this approach different from learning a predetermined set of rules and norms for intercultural communication? Why does intercultural praxis emphasize the self-reflexive process of thinking and acting rather than following established rules of communication?

Activities

1. Exploring the Cultural Dimensions That Shape You:
   a. Using the definitions of culture discussed in this chapter, write a brief paragraph exploring the cultural dimensions that shape you. How do you understand your culture as a system of shared meanings? As a site of contestation? As a resource?

(For example, as an American, I value independence and individualism, which are cultural values that I share with many others from the United States. As a woman, I feel like I am constantly negotiating representations of what it means to be a woman. My gender culture is a site of contestation. Women, in this society, are often turned into objects like resources that can be exploited, packaged, and sold. Yet I am proud to be a woman and experience this cultural

dimension of myself as an empowering resource. As a White American, I know my experiences are different from other racial groups. I am learning how I am different from others and not just how they are different from me as a member of the dominant group. The privileges I have from being White are resources, even, or especially, when I can't see these invisible advantages.)

   b. Share your paragraph responses with your classmates and discuss the similarities and differences between your cultural dimensions.
   c. Discuss the usefulness and limitations of each definition of culture.

2. Positioning Yourself and Your Cultural Dimensions:
   a. Using your responses to the first activity, develop your ideas on how you are positioned in relation to others in terms of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, religion, and ableness.
   b. Discuss how your positionality influences your standpoint on the world around you and how you engage in intercultural communication.

3. Intercultural Praxis—Group Activity:

In a group of four to five students, consider and discuss the following:

   a. Inquiry: What do you already know about each other? What stereotypes, preconceptions, and assumptions might you have about students in your class or those in your group? What would you like to know about the cultural background of those in your group? What skills and experience do you bring to the process of inquiry?
   b. Framing: In what ways does your cultural background frame the way you see and experience others in your group? What frames of reference are useful in understanding the members of your group? What can you see if you "zoom in" and look at the micro-level in terms of the cultural dimensions of your group? What can you see if you "zoom out" and look at the macro-level in terms of the cultural dimensions of your group?
   c. Positioning: How are you positioned sociohistorically in relation to others in your group? How does your positionality change in different contexts and frames of reference?
   d. Dialogue: With whom do you frequently engage in dialogue? How can you expand the circle of people with whom you engage in dialogue? What qualities are required to engage effectively in dialogue? How do relationships of power shape the process of dialogue?
   e. Reflection: As you reflect on your inquiry, framing, positioning, and dialogue, what have you learned about yourself, your group, and intercultural praxis?
   f. Action: How and when can you engage in intercultural praxis? How can you use what you have learned in this chapter to effect change for a more equitable and just world? What are the consequences and implications of lack of action?
   g. Finally, discuss the challenges of engaging in intercultural praxis. Keep your dialogue and reflections from this group activity in mind as you read the following chapters.

How do you imagine life in Mumbai (Bombay), India, as different from or similar to your life?

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2 UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **2.1** Describe the complex and contradictory influences of globalization on intercultural communication.
- **2.2** Explain the important role history plays in shaping intercultural communication today.
- **2.3** Identify the intercultural dimensions of economic globalization.
- **2.4** Identify the intercultural dimensions of political globalization.
- **2.5** Identify the intercultural dimensions of cultural globalization.

INFLUENCES OF GLOBALIZATION ON INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Scenario One: In the hallway of a university in Southern California, three students—Hamza, an international student from Morocco; Cathy, who came to the United States four years ago from France; and Immaculee from Rwanda, who immigrated 17 years ago—spend the 15-minute break during their intercultural communication class speaking with each other in French, relishing in the comfort that speaking a language of "home" offers, and forming an intercultural relationship, however temporary and transitory. Why would they all speak French?

Scenario Two: In the fall of 2018, the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) was signed by all three countries. USMCA, promoted by President Trump, was a revised and *rebranded* version of the 25-year-old **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**. Assessments of the trade agreement three years after implementation indicates USMCA has strengthened regional international cooperation, which is critical given disruptions in supply chains due to COVID-19, climate change concerns, and risks associated with reliance on China (Meltzer et al., 2023). Yet in 2025 at the start of President Trump's second term, he threatened to impose stiff 25% tariff or taxes on all imports from Mexico and Canada and a 10% tariff on goods from China (Domonoske, 2025). What impact do trade agreements like USMCA and tariffs have on you as a consumer? On workers? Who benefits?

Scenario Three: Which movie star is wealthier than George Clooney, Robert DeNiro, or Adam Sandler? Many automatically think of a U.S. star, but the answer is Shah Rukh Khan (SRK), India's most successful actor also known as "King Khan" and the "King of Bollywood." Indian cinema is the largest film industry in the world with an annual production of nearly 2,000 films. Mumbai's (Bombay) Hindi language film industry, Bollywood, is now a global phenomenon, where Shah Rukh Khan holds center stage. In 2023 when *Pathaan*, the high budget action film came out, its success heralded the return of SRK and become one of the highest grossing Hindi films ever (Sharma, 2023). Outside of Indian American communities, why are so few in the United States aware of this international superstar?

Scenario Four: In the largest international climate protest since the COVID-19 pandemic, over a million people took to the streets in 50 countries where demonstrators demanded their governments phase out the use of fossil fuels (Abnett, 2023). Youth from around the world are leading global climate action. Greta Thunberg, the Swedish activist, inspired the global movement, "Fridays for Future" (FFF), when she sat alone in August 2018 outside the Swedish parliament with a sign reading "School Strike for Climate." Within a few short months, 20,000 students from around the world joined her weekly school strikes, which became "Fridays for Future." A year later, 6 million people demanded action in the Global Week of Climate Action. Strikes for climate action continued digitally during the COVID-19 pandemic enabling the movement to become more international and inclusive of voices of more marginalized groups (Igini, 2022).

Scenario Five: Filipina American Grace Ebron recalls,

> "I arrive at the Rome Airport, thrilled at the notion of living in Italy. As I step out of the customs hall, I immediately see my boyfriend, waiting to meet me. His parents, whom I've never met, are with him and as I turn to them with my perfectly rehearsed Italian greeting, they appear very confused. 'No- no' they stammer, a perplexed expression on their faces. They turn to Massimo: 'But where is your girlfriend—the American? Why did she send the maid?'" (Ebron, 2002).

What themes are interwoven through the fabric of all of these scenarios? Without erasing the obvious and more subtle differences between the situations, what common factors and forces shape the world that these scenarios describe? Hamza, Cathy, and Immaculee made personal journeys from different parts of the globe to the United States and found themselves relating to each other through a common language and connected to each other through a history of colonization. Through worldwide distribution of Hindi films, numerous websites, and social media, fans from around the world can stay up to date on Shah Rukh Khan's latest public appearances and movies. Supported by rapid communication and transportation technologies, free-trade agreements like USMCA, the revised and rebranded NAFTA, create favorable conditions for corporations to trade goods, exchange intellectual property, and make profits. Thus, President Trump's threat of tariffs on Mexico, Canada, and China in his second term caused concern around the world from the automobile industry to the stock market. The youth climate justice movement was catalyzed by Greta Thunberg, a 16-year-old Swedish high school student who protested and demanded that the Swedish government reduce carbon emissions in accordance with the Paris Agreement. Her lone, persistent message—"school strike for climate"—attracted media attention and galvanized youth around the world. Forming intercultural alliances in unprecedented ways, youth activists are coordinating actions within and across nations, demanding that governments take steps on the global climate catastrophe and impending ecological collapse (Abnett, 2023). Grace Ebron, excited to reconnect with her Italian boyfriend, benefits from her global mobility but is confronted with stereotypes and racialized assumptions due to colonial histories and the migration of Filipina laborers to Italy as part of a development policy based on the export of labor.

All the scenarios illustrate the dynamic movement, confluence, and interconnection of peoples, cultures, markets, and relationships of power that are rooted in history and yet are redefined and rearticulated in our current global age. Through advances in technology—both communication technology and transportation technology—and open markets, people from around the globe with different cultural, racial, national, economic, and linguistic backgrounds are coming into contact with each other; consuming each other's cultural foods, products, and identities; developing relationships and struggling through conflicts; building alliances and activist networks; and laboring with and for each other more frequently, more intensely, and with greater impact today than ever before. In the workplace and the home, through entertainment and the Internet, in politics and the military, and through travel for leisure, work, pleasure, and survival, intercultural communication, and interactions have become common, everyday experiences.

This chapter begins with an introduction of the central roles that history and power play in intercultural communication and explores the broader context of globalization within which intercultural communication occurs today. To grasp the complexity of globalization, the backlash to globalization, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we examine facets of economic globalization, political globalization, and cultural globalization. Each facet is treated separately here to highlight the ways intercultural communication is integral to globalization. Yet these three facets of globalization are inextricably intertwined; thus, the interrelationship between economic, political, and cultural issues is also addressed.

Definition of Globalization

As illustrated in the five scenarios, the context of globalization within which intercultural communication occurs is characterized by the following:

- An increasingly dynamic, mobile world facilitated by communication, transportation, and computer technologies, accompanied by an intensification of interaction and exchange between people, cultures, and cultural forms across geographic, cultural, and national boundaries
- A rapidly growing global interdependence socially, economically, politically, and environmentally, which leads to shared interests, needs, and resources together with greater tensions, contestations, and conflicts
- A magnification of inequities based on flows of capital, labor, and access to education and technology, as well as the increasing power of multinational corporations, global financial institutions, and the consolidation of wealth among the few
- A historical legacy of colonization, Western domination, and U.S. hegemony that continues to shape intercultural relations today

These characteristics of globalization point to the centrality of intercultural communication as a fundamental force shaping our current age. In face-to-face interactions, our differences across cultures in values, norms, verbal and nonverbal communication, and communication

styles often lead to misunderstanding and misperceptions. Our assumptions and attitudes based on differences in physical appearance—socially constructed as racial, gender, class, and religious systems—frequently condition our responses and shape who we communicate with, build friendships and alliances with, in addition to who we avoid, exclude, and engage in conflict with. The increased exposure today through interpersonal and mediated communication to people who differ from ourselves deeply impacts how we make sense of, constitute, and negotiate our own identities as well as the identities of others. Additionally, histories of conflict between and among groups, structural inequities rooted in the past and exacerbated today, along with ideological differences frequently frame and inform our intercultural interactions.

Globalization refers to the complex web of forces and factors that have brought people, cultures, cultural products, and markets, as well as beliefs and practices, into increasingly greater proximity to and interrelationship with one another within inequitable relations of power. The word *globalization* is used here to address both the processes that contribute to and the conditions of living in a world where advances in technology have brought the world's people spatially and temporally closer together; where economic and political forces of advanced capitalism and neoliberalism have increased flows of products, services, and labor across national boundaries; and where cultural, economic, and political ideologies "travel" not only through overt public campaigns but through mass media and social media, consumer products, and global institutions, such as the WB, the IMF, and the WTO. For many, the conditions of living in a globalized world include elevated uncertainty, polarization, and tension. Increased migration and displacement, magnified economic inequity and insecurity, as well as real and perceived ethnic, racial, and religious tension have led to a backlash against globalization in recent years. Anti-immigrant, protectionist, and populist rhetoric and policies, fueled by job insecurity, xenophobia, and long histories of racism, have given rise to new forms of ethnic nationalism, isolationism, and violence around the world.

We recognize that globalization is an extremely complex concept and perhaps the ideas and vocabulary used here are new to you. For that reason, in the following pages, we "deconstruct" the main forces and factors that contribute to globalization while addressing the consequences of globalization for people's lived experiences and for intercultural communication. As the book progresses, we explore together the multiple and layered meanings of the word and how globalization is understood differently by people and groups with different interests, positionalities, and standpoints.

The Role of Power in Intercultural Communication

Let's return to the scenarios again. While intercultural interactions can be engaging, delightful, informing, and even transformative, they are also often challenging, stressful, contentious, and conflicting. What else can we say about these scenarios? What other themes or threads are evident? Are Hamza, Cathy, and Immaculee positioned equally in terms of power? Are their claims of "French-ness" the same? Are they likely to experience similar or different receptions from people in the United States based on race, nation of origin, gender, class, religion, and the elevated anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric today? Are the United States, Canada, and Mexico positioned equally in terms of political and economic power? Are international business

relations influenced by these inequities? Well, sure, most of us would answer. Therefore, it is important to consider the impact on intercultural relations when the people communicating come from different and inequitable positions of power.

Have you heard of Shah Rukh Khan? If you said, "no," you are not alone among people from the United States. Khan, or "King Khan" as he is affectionately known, is one of the biggest movie stars in cinematic history and enjoys worldwide renown. So how, in this global age with highly advanced mass communication technology, is it that so few Americans outside the Indian American community know about this superstar? While Bollywood (the film industry in India is primarily centered in Mumbai and is often referred to as "Bollywood," a melding of the city's colonial name, Bombay, with Hollywood) produces over 1,700 feature films per year, roughly two and a half times more than Hollywood, and reaches a larger audience worldwide, U.S. films continue to dominate the U.S. market. Why do you think that is?

Scientists first identified the Earth's "greenhouse effect" nearly 200 years ago, and consensus among scientists emerged in the 1980s regarding the impact of human-made carbon emissions on global warming. In January 2021, shortly after President Biden was sworn into office, he signed an executive order for the United States to rejoin the Paris Agreement, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which President Trump withdrew the United States from in 2017 and again 2025. Climate change deniers or skeptics use a wide range of media platforms to attack activists, spread divisive content and confusion with the sole purpose of delaying climate action. **Climate disinformation** refers to misleading and deceptive content that undercuts the impact of climate change, the role of humans in climate change, and the urgent need to act in accordance with scientific evidence and the Paris Agreement (Pörtner & Roberts, 2022). Who funds campaigns to spread doubt and deny climate change and whose interests are served by? Who—what countries and corporations—are most responsible for climate change and who is most impacted?

In our study of intercultural communication in the context of globalization, we must consider how global movements of people, products, cultural forms, and cultural representations as well as responses to global challenges such as climate change are shaped and controlled by relationships of power. What and who is controlling positions and practices of power, and how have these power relationships been established? For example, it is important for us to ask about and investigate the media giants who shape the content and the distribution of news, information, and popular culture. The extreme concentration of wealth in the United States is leading to extreme concentration of power enabling the ultra-rich to tighten their grip of control over the government, the economy, and media (Oxfam America, 2025). How are political and economic policies and decisions impacted in a world where the top 1% control as much wealth as the remaining 99%? How are people-driven movements, such as the Global Strike for Climate Justice, #MeToo movement, #BlackLivesMatter, and United We Dream, the largest immigrant youth-led community of activist in the United States, among many others, building power bases, independently and together, to challenge global capitalism, imagine alternatives, and bring about social change? In later chapters, we delve into how differences in power between individuals, groups, nations, and global regions have come about historically and what trends we see for the future.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

GLOBALIZATION OF CLIMATE ANXIETY

In a global survey involving 10,000 children and young people (aged 16–25, from Australia, Brazil, Finland, France, India, Nigeria, Philippines, Portugal, the UK, and the United States), the researchers found that 59% of the overall respondents were "extremely worried" and 84% were at least "moderately worried" about climate change (Hickman et al., 2021). In the past decade, the term "ecoanxiety" has come to describe the "heightened emotional, mental or somatic distress in response to dangerous changes in the climate system" and "a chronic fear of environmental doom" (Tsui, 2023, p. 302). While ecoanxiety is a globally shared emotion, those in the low-income countries and regions, such as India, Philippines, and Nigeria, reported the higher levels of negative impact of climate change on their ability to function daily, whereas the United States and the United Kingdom reported the lowest rate of disruption (Hickman et al., 2021). Climate change impacts those who are most vulnerable economically and socially, especially when a natural disaster and extreme weather cause the loss of community and housing, loss of livelihoods, forced migration, food insecurity, and a lack of access to energy and clean water. Also, extreme heat poses a greater threat to those without adequate air conditioning and access to healthcare.

The disparity in ecoanxiety is also evident among the U.S. populations. A survey of more than 2,300 Americans shows that "Hispanics/Latinos (69%) and African Americans (57%) are more likely to be Alarmed or Concerned about global warming than are Whites (49%). In contrast, Whites are more likely to be Doubtful or Dismissive (27%) than are Hispanics/Latinos (11%) or African Americans (12%)" (Ballew, 2020, para. 4). Faced with racism and socioeconomic disparities, the BIPOC communities face a higher risk and vulnerability to the impact of climate change. The survey also showed that both Hispanics/Latinos and African Americans expressed greater willingness to partake in political campaigns to convince elected officials to take action for combating climate change.

Environmental humanist Sara Jaquette Ray (2021) cautions us that while ecoanxiety can be a productive force for climate action, it can also stoke fear, hate, and xenophobia toward refugees, climate migrants, and those who are most vulnerable. She warns us that ecoanxiety can mask one's desire to get back to "normal life," especially when it is experienced by those who live with relative privilege and comfort. The chronic fear of doomed future can make people susceptible to disinformation and scapegoating, making it challenging to galvanize collective action. While ecoanxiety is a global phenomenon today, one's identity and positionality shape how it is experienced. Does ecoanxiety ring a bell when it comes to describing your general emotional wellbeing? Has any recent natural disaster shaped the way you think about the future? How does your intersectional identity expose or shelter you from the impact of climate change?

THE ROLE OF HISTORY IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Certainly, as we know from a study of history, for several millennia people have traveled and moved great distances exchanging cultural goods, ideas, and practices and experiencing significant intercultural contact. While both the Islamic and Mongol empires had broad reaches,

Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton (1999) noted in their book *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* that the European conquest starting in the 16th century transformed global migration patterns in ways that continue to impact us today. During the European colonial era, people moved primarily from Europe, Spain, Portugal, and England but also from France, Holland, Belgium, and Germany to the Americas, Oceania, Africa, and Asia for the purpose of conquest, economic expansion, and religious conversion. Settlers from these countries then followed, reinforcing the flow from Europe to the outlying colonies. Between the 1600s and the 1850s, 9 to 12 million people were forcibly removed from Africa and transported to the colonies—primarily in the Americas—to serve as enslaved laborers during the transatlantic slave trade. In the 19th century, Indians (from the subcontinent of India) subjected to colonial British rule were relocated as laborers—often as indentured servants—to British colonies in Africa and Oceania. The process of colonization, which was based on the extraction of wealth through the exploitation of natural and human resources, established Europe as the economic and political center of the world and the colonies as the periphery (Young, 2001).

Later in the 19th century, after the British and Spanish colonies in the Americas had gained independence from colonial rule, a mass migration occurred with the expulsion of working-class and poor people from the economically stretched and famine-torn centers of Europe to the United States, Canada, and the Southern Cone, including Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, and others. Movements of indentured laborers from Asia—primarily China, Japan, and the Philippines—to European colonies and former colonies—mainly the United States and Canada—swelled the number of migrants to over 40 million during the 25 years before World War I (WWI).

WWI brought the unprecedented closure of national borders and the implementation of the first systematic immigration legislation and border controls in modern times. The ethnically motivated violence of World War II (WWII) led to the movement of Jews out of Europe to Israel, the United States, and Latin America. In the wake of unprecedented devastation of human lives, economies, and natural habitats experienced across Europe, Russia, and Japan as a result of WWII, the first institutions of global political and economic governance—the United Nations, the **World Bank (WB)**, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**—were established. The **World Trade Organization (WTO)**, which replaced GATT in 1995, introduced major reforms to international trade, covering not only goods but also services and intellectual property.

Since the 1960s with the rebuilding of European economic power and the rise of the United States as an economic and political center, we have seen a shift in migratory patterns. While earlier periods saw the movement of peoples from the center of empires to the peripheries, increasingly, people from the former colonies or peripheries are migrating toward the centers of former colonial power. In search of jobs and in response to demands for labor, migrants moved from Turkey and North Africa to Germany and France, respectively, and from more distant former colonies in Southeast Asia and East and West Africa to England, France, Germany,

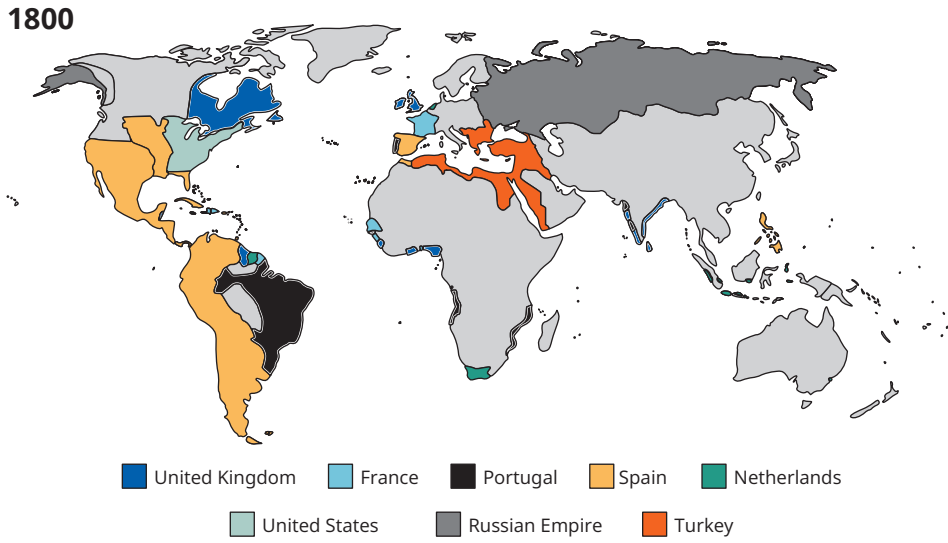
Italy, and the Scandinavian countries. Today, migrant data include origin and destination links between two countries indicating migration "corridors" globally. The movement of migrants from Mexico to the United States is the largest corridor with nearly 11 million people from Mexico living in the United States. The second largest corridor is from Syrian to Turkey where nearly 4 million refugees from the decade-long civil war in Syria have fled. The third largest corridor is from India to the United Arab Emirates where over 3 million laborers from India have migrated. The fourth largest corridor is between Russia and Ukraine where similar numbers—about 3 million—have moved from Russia to Ukraine and the reverse (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021).

In the last two decades, the numbers of people seeking asylum, refugees fleeing internally strife-stricken countries in the developing world, and more recently, those who have been displaced by war, persecution, and violence in the Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central America have risen. While COVID-19 radically impacted migrants and migration patterns around the world with catastrophic consequences, the scale of international migration has increased in the last few years with nearly two-thirds being labor migrants (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). The number of forcibly displaced people rose to the highest level, with 110 million people displaced worldwide in 2023 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023). Today, there is more South-South migration, or migration of people from countries in the Global South to other countries in the south, than South-North migration.

As noted earlier, people have engaged in intercultural contact for many millennia, yet the European conquest starting in the 16th century transformed global migration patterns in ways that continue to impact intercultural relations today. The brief historical overview of world migrations since the colonial period reminds us that movements of people and therefore intercultural interactions are directly related to economic and political forces. It also suggests that intercultural misunderstanding and conflict occurring today between individuals, groups, or nations may be rooted deeply in histories of dispute, discrimination, and dehumanization.

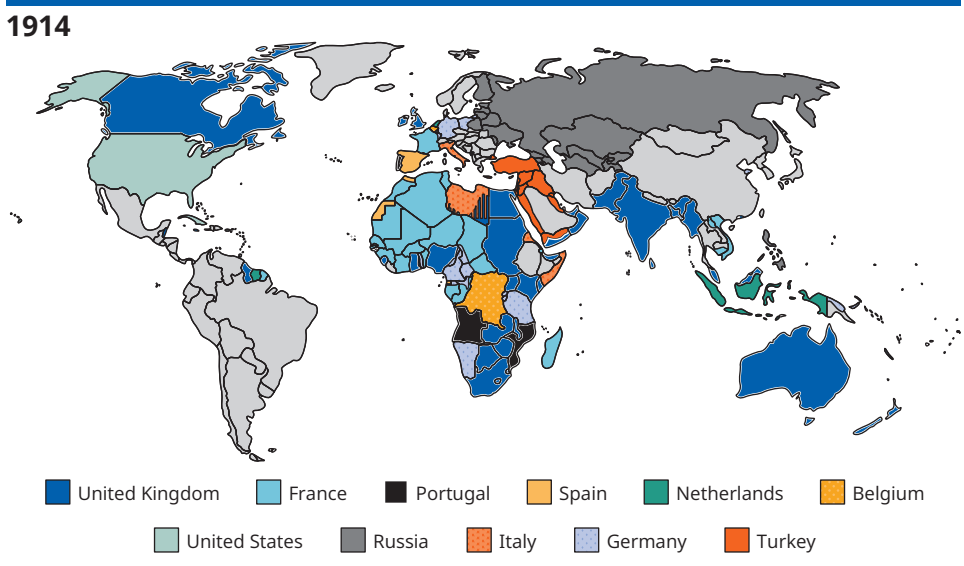
In addition, the brief overview points to how networks of connection and global relationships of power experienced today are a continuation of worldwide intercultural contact and interaction over the past 500 years. Therefore, to understand the dynamics of intercultural communication today, we must place them within a broad historical context. The process of colonization by Europe of much of the world, which included the exploitation of natural resources and human labor, established Europe and later the United States as the economic and political centers of the world. The colonial process initiated the division between "the West and the Rest" that we experience today. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 reflect the colonization and global expansion of the West that propelled the development of capitalism, which required then, and continues to require today, the expansion of markets and trade and the incorporation of labor from the former colonies, or what have been referred to as the Third World or developing countries (Dussel, 1995; Wallerstein, 2011).

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Colonized World in 1800



Wikimedia Commons (2008a)

FIGURE 2.2 ■ Colonial Powers 1914



Wikimedia Commons (2008b)

INTERCULTURAL PRAXIS

SOCIAL MEDIA AND GLOBALIZATION

Social media platforms have played a significant role in political, economic, and cultural globalization by connecting people and communities through real-time interactions and information while bypassing the gatekeeping of traditional mass media. The birth of social media has also exacerbated the political polarizations and ideological divisions exponentially in the past two decades. In *The Chaos Machine: The Inside Story of How Social Media Rewired Our Minds and Our World*, Mark Fisher (2022) details the rise of social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram) that fundamentally changed the way communities and identities are communicated and experienced.

The social media platforms' primary goal is to maximize engagement, viewing time, and user activity to profit from advertising sales. Extreme and outrageous contents are more likely to result in longer and greater engagement by users, making these posts more likely to appear based on the algorithmic selections. The social media algorithms tap into people's dopamine-driven psychological need for group affirmation (in which disparaging the outgroup is one effective method) and moral-emotional words that elicit greater engagement. The algorithmic filtering of social media contents provides endless feeds of selective (mis)information in a self-perpetuating cycle of expression and response. In the age of social media, moral outrage is automated, amplified, and incentivized by algorithms. While people around the world can be more easily connected via social media, they are also more segmented into micro-communities that create echo-chambers of narrow beliefs and perspectives.

How does your social media feed reflect your positionality, identity, and standpoint? If you see your social media feed as a mirror, what do you see reflected? How can you be more mindful of how algorithms are controlling the content on your social media feed?

The terms *First World, Second World*, and *Third World* are relics of the Cold War period and are concepts initially used to describe the relationship between the United States and other countries. The **First World** referred to countries friendly to the United States that were identified as capitalist and democratic. The **Second World** referred to countries perceived as hostile and ideologically incompatible with the United States, such as the former Soviet bloc countries, Cuba, China, and their allies, which were identified as communist. The **Third World** referred to countries that were seen as neutral or nonaligned with either the First World (capitalism) or the Second World (communism). Although the relationship between the First World and Third World was ostensibly positive, the history of the last half of the 20th century reveals the so-called Third World as sites of anticolonial struggles and battlegrounds between the First and Second Worlds. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the meaning of First and Third Worlds is less clearly defined and more closely associated with levels of economic development. The terms ***developing country*** and ***developed country***, more commonly used today, are based on a nation's wealth (gross national product [GNP]), political and economic stability, and other factors. The terms ***Global South*** and ***Global North***, also in usage today, highlight the socioeconomic and

political division between wealthy, developed nations (former centers of colonial power) in the Northern Hemisphere and poorer developing nations (formerly colonized countries) in the Southern Hemisphere. As is evident, the labels, products of historical moments, are flawed and limited in their accuracy and represent a particular standpoint. As this book unfolds, significant historical periods that have shaped and continue to shape our world today, such as European colonization and the period immediately following WWII, will be discussed in greater depth.

INTERCULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

While the term *globalization* came into common usage in the 1990s, the various factors or forces that constitute globalization have been in play for a much longer time. To make sense of this rather unwieldy and highly contested concept, we examine three interrelated facets of globalization: (1) economic globalization, (2) political globalization, and (3) cultural globalization. Throughout the three sections that follow, the intercultural communication dimensions are highlighted and the interconnection between the three facets is noted.

In the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) described at the beginning of the chapter, what intercultural challenges and benefits can you imagine when multicultural and multinational teams from these three countries engage in business? Why have U.S., European, and Japanese corporations established export production centers, or **maquiladoras**, in Mexico over the last 30 years and more recently in Central America, China, and India? When a Japanese multinational corporation is located in India and employs people from Japan, India, and the UK (United Kingdom), what intercultural issues are likely to arise? How do cultural differences in values, norms, and assumptions play out when Filipinas leave their homes and country out of economic necessity to work in the homes of middle- and upper-class families in Italy as introduced in Scenario Five? What role do history and relationships of power play in the lives of approximately 10 million Filipinos who endure tremendous hardship as overseas workers in Europe, the Middle East, the United States, and Singapore?

Global Business and Global Markets

Economic globalization—characterized by a growth in multinational corporations; an intensification of international trade and international flows of capital; and internationally interconnected webs of production, distribution, and consumption—has increased intercultural interaction and exchange exponentially. To get a sense of how you are situated within this web of economic globalization, think about your daily activities, the products and services you consume, and your future goals and dreams. Your smartphone, for example, that wakes you every morning and connects you instantly to your world likely contains raw materials mined in China, specifically, Mongolia; components from Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Philippines, Vietnam, China, and Singapore; and is assembled in China often under exploitative working conditions. Take a look at the labels on your clothes or shoes. Where does the raw material come from, where were the products made, and under what conditions? How far did the gasoline used to fuel your mode of transportation travel to reach you? Given the climate crisis, why are we still

so petroleum dependent? How have your job prospects and wages changed since your parents' generation? When you dial customer service or answer a telemarketing call, what country does the person live in who is talking to you? Will you live and work in your country of origin? With whom will you work, and how will cultural differences impact your workplace?

By considering these questions, you begin to see how economic globalization has magnified the need for intercultural awareness, understanding, and training at all levels of business. Cultural differences in values, norms, and behaviors play a significant role in team building, decision-making, job satisfaction, and marketing and advertising, as well as many other aspects of doing business in the context of economic globalization. Some intercultural misunderstandings are rather humorous and others disturbing; however, they point to the difficulties of "translating" business practices, products, and markets across cultures. For example, when Coca-Cola was first introduced in China with thousands of advertising signs, the company named the product by approximating the sound, ke-kou-ke-la, in Chinese characters, yet the meaning translated to "bite the wax tadpole" or, depending on dialect, "female horse stuffed with wax." After considerable research, the Chinese characters representing the produce were changed to a more suitable meaning—"happiness in the mouth."

French luxury brand Dior, accused of racism on Chinese social media, quickly pulled an advertisement on Instagram that showed an Asian model pulling up the corner of her eye accompanied by the caption, "Channel your feline fierceness." The ad was reposted by netizen on Chinese social media platforms sparking criticism for discrimination against Asians. Prior accusations of cultural appropriation and stereotypical representation have been made against Dior by Chinese consumers (Wang, 2023). As amusing and horrifying as intercultural mistakes can be, they are also often very costly. "There can be a cultural gap from one country to the next where campaigns, slogans and initiatives don't resonate or make sense to the end user" states Mariko Amekodommo, CEO on an international marketing and consulting firm. "Companies can avoid basic marketing mistakes, like slogans that don't translate appropriately, by putting in the due diligence to research and understand the new market" (Schooley, 2023, para. 4).

The examples direct our attention to the intercultural dimensions of economic globalization. Languages are complex and nuanced repositories of culture. Languages, both verbal and nonverbal, convey meanings about the values, beliefs, and assumptions of a culture. Translation across cultures can lead to confusion, misunderstanding, and communication failures if the culture as a system of meaning, as discussed in Chapter 1, is not understood. The confluence and interplay of languages in the global context also leads to hybrid forms, such as *Spanglish*, which challenge shared systems of meanings within cultures and introduce what may be viewed as "outside" and "undesirable" influences. Yet, as the demographics in the United States shift toward 20% Latinx many of whom speak Spanish or Spanglish, advertisers are considering how and when to use Spanish, English, or Spanglish to reach their target audience. While grandparents prefer Spanish, their grandkids gravitate towards and resonate with *Spanglish*, which seems to be similar with other hybrid languages (Trovall, 2023). The increased occurrence and acceptance of hybrid languages (Spanglish, Hinglish, Konglish, etc.) also points to the hegemony of English as a global language, which, through the proliferation of the language, shapes perceptions, values, and perspectives globally.

As we have seen, advances in technology—both communication and transportation technologies—have enabled the growth of multinational corporations, an increased global interconnection in the production of goods and services, and the distribution of products through global markets. What other forces combine with advances in technology to define economic globalization?

Free Trade, Economic Liberalization, and Labor Unions

Have you noticed the movement of U.S. workers walking off the job and onto picket lines? Do you know someone—an auto worker, a nurse, teacher, barista, or Hollywood writer—who has joined thousands across the country on labor strikes? In 2023 alone, nearly a half a million workers engaged in close to 400 strikes. Called the "summer of strikes" or hot strike summer" in the summer of 2023, many strikes lasted well into the fall, winter, and the new year. From the United Auto Workers strike, the Writers Guild of America strike, and the health care workers walkout at Kaiser Permanente to threats to strike from airline pilots and UPS employees, workers, negotiating their first contracts since the pandemic in the midst of rising inflation and exorbitant pay disparities between workers and management, are demanding higher pay, better benefits and improved working conditions (Smith-Schoenwalder, 2023).

While the number of strikes has grown recently and a new, more assertive generation of labor organizers are taking leadership roles, the United States has 70% fewer strikes today than in the 1970s. Union membership has been in decline since the late 1970s, which, along with trends associated with economic liberalization, has led to vast disparities between the top 1% of workers such as CEOs and management and the average worker (Meyersohn, 2023). Broadly speaking, **economic liberalization**, also known as trade liberalization, or **free trade**, means that the movement of goods, labor, services, and capital is increasingly unrestricted by tariffs (taxes) and trade barriers. Historically, taxes and tariffs on foreign products and services were put in place by national governments to protect the jobs, prices, and industries of a nation-state. The countries we consider today as developed nations, or First World nations, used protectionist policies (taxation of foreign-made products and services) until they accumulated enough wealth to benefit from free trade. In fact, until the last 35 to 45 years, the United States opposed "free-trade" policies in an effort to protect U.S. jobs, products, and services (Stiglitz, 2002).

The 1990s and 2000s, however, saw the promotion and support of **free-trade agreements** by the United States and other First World nations, which liberalized trade by reducing trade tariffs and barriers transnationally while maintaining protection for some of their own industries. **Neoliberalism** is an economic and political theory—a new kind of liberalism—promoting free trade, privatization of natural resources (water, natural gas, air) and institutions (education, health care, prisons, the military, and security), reliance on the individual and minimal government intervention, and deregulation or nominal support for social services. The use of the term "liberalism" is often confused with the term "liberal," which refers to people who support progressive reform. In fact, neoliberal policies and people who identify as "liberal" are most often at opposite ends of ideological spectrums in relation to political and economic policies.

As a result of neoliberalism and free trade along with advances in transportation and communication technologies, manufacturing sectors and service sectors of the economy have moved

offshore or outside the geographic boundaries of the corporate ownership's country of origin. In search of cheaper labor, few if any labor and environmental regulations, and tax breaks, U.S.-based multinational corporations relocate their sites of production to Mexico, Central America, and China, as well as other Asian countries such as Vietnam, Singapore, and the Philippines. The movement of jobs to production centers outside the United States as part of the enormous growth in international trade over the past 35–40 years has had a tremendous impact on workers and working conditions in the United States.

The signing of the NAFTA by Canada, Mexico, and the United States in January 1994 was one of the first and boldest experiments in free trade or economic liberalization supporting the free movement of goods, services, and capital without trade or tariff barriers. Nearly three decades after the experiment of NAFTA was initiated, the implications of its policies remain highly controversial and contested. As you can imagine, people with varying standpoints, positionalities, and interests have judged its success or failure differently. Communication about the free-trade agreement on corporate and governmental websites, in the news, in face-to-face interactions, and at protest sites differs greatly based on its impact on people's lives and livelihood. Mr. Trump, as a presidential candidate and as president during his first term, rallied vocally against NAFTA as a "disaster" (Restuccia et al., 2018) and promised to "terminate NAFTA entirely" (Canadian Press, 2018). He claims that the agreement was "unfair" to the United States and that the new **United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)** signed by the three countries in fall 2018 was the remedy (Trump, 2018). Yet as economist and former senior vice president of the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz (2017) noted the United States has gotten most of what it has negotiated for in trade agreements. The issue is that what U.S. negotiators asked for serves the interests of corporations, not most Americans—the average working- or middle-class person. In his second term, President Trump threatened to impose high tariffs or taxes on Mexico and Canada, two of the U.S.'s primary trading partners, with the goal of greater cooperation on immigration control and drug trafficking. Using taxes on imported goods from Mexico and Canada to enhance border control could negatively impact U.S. businesses by disrupting supply chains, increasing costs to consumers, and escalating inflation (Domonoske, 2025).

While often touted as beneficial for all, free-trade agreements such as NAFTA or its replacement USMCA impact corporations, governments, workers, and consumers very differently. Free-trade agreements, which are central to neoliberal globalization, generally create lower prices for consumer goods and services as multinational corporations move production to developing countries where costs for labor and environmental protections are much lower. People in developed countries enjoy the benefits of lower prices on consumer products; however, stable working- and middle-class jobs—those in manufacturing and service sectors—are lost, and labor unions are weakened. While job opportunities increase in developing countries, working conditions are often dismal and workers often do not have the buying power to purchase the consumer good they produce. Generally, corporations benefit through increased profits, as do elites in both developed and developing countries, which further reinforces economic inequities within and across nations.

Political scientists studying the effect of international trade on labor organizing and strike activity in the United States found that globalization effects the bargaining position of labor thus impacting strike activity. Initially, the uncertainty caused by increased exports and imports propelled by free trade caused more work stoppages; however, over time trade competition from increased imports reduces labor union membership and the frequency of strikes. In other words, neoliberalism and free trade have created an overall decline in unions and union bargaining power (Abouhard & Fordham, 2020). However, labor unions are now on the rise after decades of stagnant wages for low- and middle-income workers while the wealthiest Americans have expanded their wealth, and corporate profits have soared exponentially since the pandemic. The abysmal working conditions of "essential workers" and disparities in the workplace were highlighted during the pandemic giving laborers increased leverage to demand better pay, benefits, and working conditions (Meyersohn, 2023).

Clearly, economic globalization and the policies of free trade have dramatically accelerated the amount and intensity of intercultural communication. Individuals, families, institutions, and businesses as well as nations are increasingly interwoven into complex webs of intercultural relations. Using intercultural praxis, we can see how the economic context, the broader macro-frame, propels and shapes intercultural interactions between groups, visible through the meso-frame, and between [among] individuals, when we shift to the micro-frame. It is also critical to underscore how different actors on the global stage—governments, multinational corporations, labor union representatives and factory workers, farmers, and environmental and citizen rights groups—are positioned differently; thus, their experience with, frame for, and meaning-making about economic globalization are vastly different.

Global Financial Institutions and the Rise of the Oligarchy

The global youth climate justice movement introduced in Scenario Four echoes other movements such as Occupy Wall Street, and the Alter-Globalization or Global Justice movement that came to the world's attention during the protests against the WTO in Seattle, Washington, in November 1999, where over 40,000 people from around the globe, representing a wide variety of groups and interests, rallied together to challenge the decision-making power of the WTO. In addition to concerns by union organizers about competition from cheaper labor abroad and worries by labor groups about bad working conditions in other countries, environmental activists were deeply disturbed by the unregulated outsourcing of pollution—just as the youths in the global climate movement are today. While dismissed and mocked in the interim, 20 years after the Seattle Protest many of the protesters' criticisms of free trade have proven true (Smith, 2014). Global financial institutions, GATT (now the WTO), IMF, and the WB, which were set up immediately following WWII to maintain global economic stability and to address poverty through development, may seem quite distant from your everyday life. However, these three organizations are the primary institutions on a macro, global level governing economic globalization, which affect the price you pay for consumer goods, your job opportunities, and your future on the planet as the students in the global youth climate movement emphatically state.

Economic globalization, spearheaded by free-trade agreements that are often mandated by the IMF, financed by the WB, and negotiated and monitored by the WTO, certainly has led

to increased intercultural business transactions and economic interdependence internationally. From a business perspective, individuals and companies must become effective in communicating interculturally in order to participate and compete in global markets. Multinational corporations are by nature composed of people from different national and cultural backgrounds who are accustomed to "doing business" differently, not to mention the range of languages, managerial styles, work ethics, negotiating styles, and marketing practices brought together in multinational and multicultural teams.

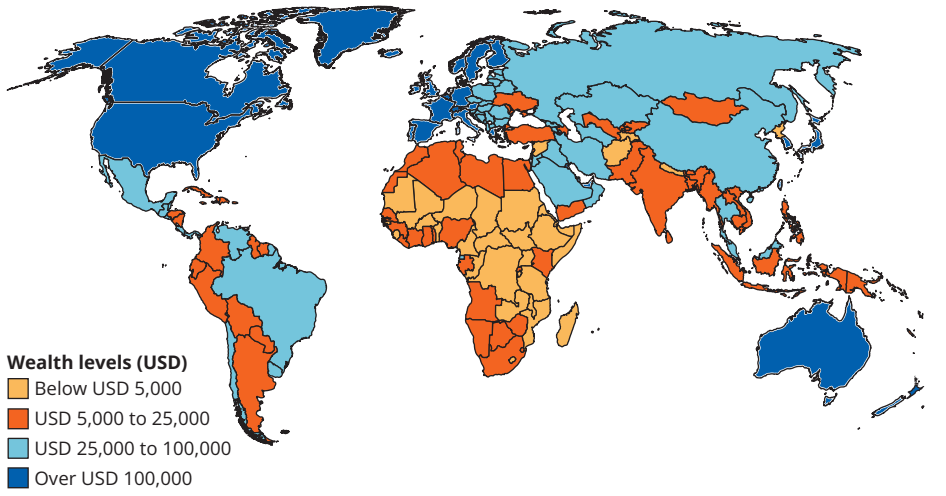
The integration of global markets within and across developing and developed countries offers some individuals and groups opportunities to increase their wealth. Large numbers of people, particularly in China and India, have moved out of poverty as a result of integrated global markets. However, economic globalization and the policies of neoliberalism have resulted in increased economic disparities between the wealthy and the poor not only globally but within the United States and have magnified economic stratification based on race and gender (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2018; Stiglitz, 2019; also see Figure 2.3).

A small group of ultra-rich Americans control more wealth in the United States than ever before. Today, five billionaires together own more than a trillion dollars in wealth. **Oligarchy** is the ability of ultra-wealthy elites to mold political decision-making in ways that increase their wealth (Oxfam America, 2025). While corporate elites have always influenced government, political scientist Daniel Kinderman noted the United States is in uncharted territory—turbocharged oligarchy—given the higher degree of control top corporate executives have. Former President Biden, in his farewell address, warned of "an oligarchy taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power, and influence that literally threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms, and a fair shot for everyone to get ahead" (Pereira, 2025, para. 2). Industries in the United States from technology to pharmaceuticals to food have been consolidated by a small number of corporations allowing a few owners and executives an oversized portion of power. What does oligarchy look like? Oligarchy means the consolidation of wealth among a few and the upward redistribution of wealth from everyday people through tax cuts. It also means the elimination of public programs, further privatization of public institutions, as well as the dismissal of rules and regulations and the removal of regulators that previously provided oversight and prevented excessive corporate power and monopolies (Oxfam America, 2025).

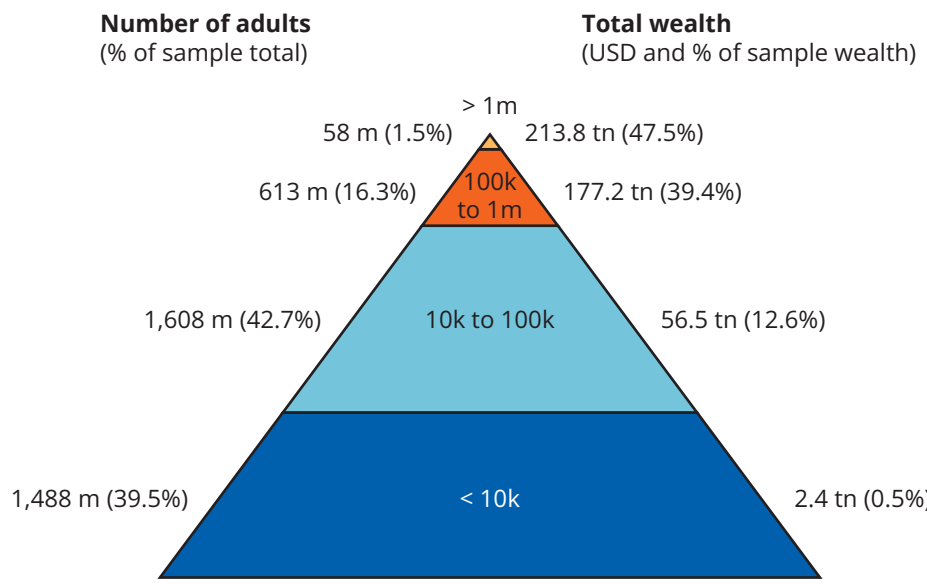
After this brief discussion, we see more clearly how economic globalization and neoliberalism intensify the need for intercultural communication as regions, groups, and nations are integrated—by choice or force—into global markets. Economic liberalization and free-trade agreements increase economic interdependence and propel migration around the world creating intercultural collaboration and conflict. We also see how economic globalization magnifies the gap between the wealthy and the poor exacerbating economic stratification in the United States based on race and gender. Accelerated economic integration, increased migration, and growing wealth disparities go hand in hand with political policies, political rhetoric, and political interests. As political and economic agendas coalesce and collide, people and cultures are deeply impacted. In the next section, the political dimensions of globalization are explored and the impact on intercultural communication is discussed.

FIGURE 2.3 ■ Global Wealth Distribution by Population and Region

World Wealth Map 2022



The global wealth pyramid 2023
Split by wealth band in USD



Davies, J., Lluberas, R., & Shorrocks, A. (2023). *Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report 2023*. https://www.credit-suisse.com/about-us/en/reports-research/global-wealth-report.html

INTERCULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL GLOBALIZATION

Political globalization, deeply intertwined with economic dimensions of globalization, is characterized by the interconnectedness of global politics, the formation of bodies of global governance and global movements of resistance to inequities in political power. Global economic interdependence over the past 35 years has resulted in increased inequities, distrust of ruling elites, and insecurity about the present and future. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered the largest economic crisis in over a century. Economic inequities within and across nations increased and the recovery from the crisis has been equally uneven (World Development Report, 2022). Political backlash against and retreat from globalization had taken hold before the pandemic and were characterized by trends in nation-state politics of protectionism, ethnic nationalism, and authoritarianism. Brexit (Britain + Exit), the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, exemplifies the rejection of globalizing and integrating forces, the mistrust of the ruling class, and a desire to return to the sovereignty of the nation-state. The slogans of Brexit supporters, "We Want Our Country Back," "Refugees Not Welcome," "Let's Take Back Control," and "EU Rats Go Home Now," are telling. The slogans express a sense of loss of control, ownership, and belonging from the point of view of the dominant group and target people perceived as "other"—migrants and refugees. Undergirded by **xenophobia**—defined as the fear of outsiders—and deep-seated racism, similar populist movements rooted in ethnic nationalism have surfaced in Europe, the United States, Australia, and other parts of the world. While trends emerged in the early decades of globalization toward democratization, we now see counter moves toward authoritarianism worldwide enforced by growing violence and militarism. We also see an increase in global justice movements and networks of local social justice organizations addressing intersectional issues that affect people's everyday lives and imagining another world based on social, political, and economic justice.

Ethnonationalism, Authoritarianism, and Militarism

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1990, and the end of the Cold War, a widely held belief coalesced that liberal democracy and capitalism went hand in hand to bring about both national and global prosperity and peace. Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington (1993) documented a global trend toward democratization since WWII. While the concept and practice of democracy are contested, **democratization** in this case refers to the transition from an authoritarian to a democratic political system that ensures the universal right to vote. A correlation between free-market capitalism and democratic governance exists, yet research and experience also provide ample evidence that the two are in conflict with one another. True free-market capitalism inevitably results in inequitable distribution of wealth and resources, which is fundamentally undemocratic and tends to produce tension and unrest that destabilizes democracies (Ingraham, 2020).

A decade and a half after the Occupy Wall Street movement, the central message of economic inequities between the very wealthy 1% and the rest of the 99%, which stems from neoliberal globalization, has also led to political inequality. In the United States where there are few constraints on campaign contributions, "one person, one vote" has become "one dollar, one vote" (Stiglitz,

2023). In 2024, 150 billionaire families spent $1.9 billion in support of presidential and congressional candidates. Arguable, billionaires like Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, and Jeff Bezos bought themselves a seat at the table in the Trump administration (Oxfam America, 2025). Political inequity is self-reinforcing as those in power pass tax policies that benefit the wealthy and reduce government regulation on corporations. As economic and political inequity grows, questions regarding the degree to which the systems of capitalism and democracy are rigged gain traction.

In this context, conservative, right-wing politicians have mobilized the anger, discontent, and resentment regarding inequity targeting immigrants and people of color for the failures of globalization. Similar to the slogans of Brexit supporters, the first Trump campaign and presidency from 2016-2020 and the second campaign leading up to the 2024 elections and his second term rely heavily on rhetoric that equates immigrants with criminality, carnage, and savage invasion, tapping into deeply held racialized fears and resentments of the "other." President Trump's slogan, "Make America Great Again," panders to a sense of loss and being left behind economically, politically, and culturally that resonates with some Americans. The slogan evokes a nostalgic return to a time in the past when things were better. But it's important to ask the question: better for whom? "Make America Great Again" functions as a dog-whistle for White nationalism. A **dog-whistle** is a coded message communicating particular meanings to certain groups that can also be defended as legitimate to others. Dog-whistles produce high-frequency sounds that can be heard by dogs and not humans. Thus, used metaphorically in a political context, statements like "Make American Great Again" are dog-whistles heard by disaffected White Americans as signs of support and approval for White nationalism while also defended by politicians, specifically President Trump, as legitimate calls to rebuild America.

Ethnonationalism also known as ethnic nationalism is a form of nationalism based specifically on ethnicity. For ethnonationalists, the defining characteristic of a nation-state is understood as shared ethnic heritage, bloodline or "race," language, religion, or ancestry. Thus, adherents to White nationalism believe White identity should be the unifying principle of Western countries, and they seek to reverse demographic changes as a way to preserve a White majority (Beirich, 2019). While ethnonationalism is clearly on the rise in Europe and the United States, the trend is not solely in Western countries; rather, a wave of ethnonationalism has currently inundated many parts of the world in a diverse array of countries, including Turkey, India, Israel, and Myanmar.

Despite the promises or perhaps, precisely because of the unfulfilled promises of liberal capitalism and democracy for universal prosperity and individual human rights, we are living in "the age of anger" as defined by public intellectual Pankaj Mishra (2016), where "authoritarian leaders manipulate the cynicism and discontent of furious majorities." The French word *ressentiment*, translated in English as *resentment*, is a complex and layered emotion of intense envy, humiliation, and powerlessness where hostility is directed at individuals or groups seen as the cause of one's frustration and anger. Mishra (2016) noted that *ressentiment* has grown in proportion to the spread of liberal democratic principles of equality and that individualism and has become particularly pronounced today because of deepening contradictions:

> The ideals of modern democracy—the equality of social conditions and individual empowerment—have never been more popular. But they have become more and more difficult, if not impossible, to actually realize in the grotesquely unequal societies created by our brand of globalized capitalism. (Mishra, 2016, "The Problem," para. 5)

Thus, authoritarian leaders across the globe arouse and harness populous anger, discontent, and resentment—responses to the contradictory conditions of neoliberal globalization—to advance ethnonationalist movements predicated on anti-immigrant and anti-democratic rhetoric, practices, and policies. For example, Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orbán, a self-described populist and leader of the far-right Fidesz party in Hungary, has dramatically altered democratic institutions and norms since reclaiming the prime minister role in 2010. He orchestrated the revision of the constitution in 2012 cementing Hungarian nationalism and Christianity into law and the Fidesz party into dominance. He campaigned and won a fourth-term victory in April 2018 on a nationalist, anti-Muslim immigrant, and anti-Jewish agenda after systematically undermining political opponents by changing election rules, consolidating state media loyal to him, and radically changing the courts to give the executive branch power over the judiciary (Pascus, 2019).

Eerily similar indicators of the rising threat of authoritarianism and the decline of democracy in the United States include former President Trump's ongoing criticism of media as "the enemy of the people," his disregard for the co-equal and separate powers of the three branches of government, and his assault on the rule of law, democracy, and the capital on January 6, 2021, to prevent the legitimate transfer of presidential power. President Trump's first weeks in office during his second term were described as a "shock and awe" strategy planned for years and outlined in Project 2025, a lengthy set of proposals produced by the right-wing think tank, the Heritage Foundation. The Heritage Foundation argues the goal of Project 2025 is to "take down the Deep State and return the government to the people" (Project 2025, n.d.). Alternatively, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) along with those working to uphold democracy and fight against authoritarianism view Project 2025 as a blueprint to radically reshape the U.S. federal government by expanding the power of the president and imposing an ultra-conservative agenda that will have perilous implications for civil rights (Wendling, 2025; Zamore, 2024).

Demonstration against global warming. How does climate change impact communities differently?

iStock/Diamond Dogs

For the past four decades, the United States, under the leadership of both political parties, has systematically militarized the southern border, criminalized migrants, and created repressive conditions in communities such that the U.S.–Mexico border has become one of the most militarized in the world. **Militarization** refers to the process of a society organizing itself for military conflict and the use of violence. In earlier decades, the build-up on the U.S.–Mexico border was framed as part of the "war on drugs," then "the war on crime," "the war on terror," and most recently, "the war on migrants." Pedro Rios, director of American Friends Service Committee's U.S.–Mexico Border Program, noted, "When we talk about border militarization, it's no exaggeration—there are real, palpable aspects of enforcement that are militaristic in nature. And they are often lobbied for by private corporations that profit from these policies" (Bolante, 2017). Operation Gatekeeper, initiated in 1994 during the Clinton administration, was intended to stem the flow of undocumented migrants on the U.S.-Mexico border. Yet, according to the Southern Border Community Coalition (2023), for nearly three decades "… our southern border region has suffered from hyper-militarization, unaccountable agents who operate within a culture of impunity, and dangerous and deadly walls" (para. 1).

The dramatic increase of both state and federal military troops on the southern border—over 5,000 Texas National Guard, guardsmen from 14 Republican-led states, and over 3,000 federal service members—indicates an escalation of border militarization, the further politicization of the border during a presidential election year, and the on-going battle between state and federal agencies regarding who has the power to enforce immigration law (Mitchell, 2024). The militarization of the border similar to the militarization of the police in the United States and around the world advances militaristic rhetoric, policies, practices, tactics, and equipment to address social issues, which normalizes a culture of violence, erosion of civil liberties, and the violation of human rights.

The rise in ethnonationalism, authoritarianism, and militarism globally is marked by hateful, dehumanizing, and violent rhetoric and policies that scapegoat immigrants, women, and people of color, as well as religious and sexual minorities. Increased economic inequity resulting from neoliberal globalization has created a political arena where those most disadvantaged economically are now targeted as the "problem," or cause of discontent. While the specter of the "Other" has long been used to incite anxiety, fear, and hatred, the conditions are particularly ripe to edge democracies toward more authoritarian forms of governance in subtle and more blatant ways.

Ideological Wars

Ideology is defined as a set of ideas and beliefs reflecting the needs and aspirations of individuals, groups, classes, or cultures that form the basis for political, economic, and other systems. Dominant ideologies include beliefs about gender, race, class, religion, and nation as well as the economy, politics, and the environment. For example, for the past 35 years dominant ideologies regarding globalization have characterized it as an opening of borders and markets for the unfettered flow of products, ideas, capital, labor, and people across national boundaries. Proponents of this version of globalization—global leaders and corporate elites—argued globalization was beneficial for everyone. But three decades later, there are clear winners and

losers in the project of neoliberal globalization. Emerging populous leaders are now positioning migrants and immigrants in the center of the battle blaming them for the ills of globalization. This shifting narrative identifies a target of discontent for those who are losing out and deflects attention from those who gain. The term **ideological wars** refers to clashes or conflicts between differing belief systems that are used to strategically advance certain interests.

From the post-WWII era until the fall of the former Soviet Union in 1990, the pivotal ideological war occupying the United States imaginary and shaping U.S. foreign policy was the "Cold War," framed as a struggle of capitalism/democracy over or against communism/totalitarianism. Since then and particularly post-9/11, U.S. leaders have waged the "war on terror," which President George W. Bush coined following the September 11th attacks in 2001, as a fight not only for America's freedoms but the world's freedoms (Bush, 2001). While espousing tolerance and pluralism, President Bush repeatedly used "us vs. them" rhetoric playing on narratives of a clash between Western and Islamic civilizations. He later described the war on terror as a "crusade," evoking the Holy Wars in the 11th century when Muslims were depicted as a threat to Western Christendom (Kumar, 2012). In an effort to de-escalate inflammatory anti-Islamic rhetoric and reject the notion of a clash of civilizations, President Barak Obama used the term *extremist* to refer to specific terrorist groups. But in his first address to Congress in 2017, President Trump intensified his rhetoric to "radical, Islamic, terrorism," falsely conflating Islam, as a religion with "terrorism." Described by President Trump and his inner circle as a political–religious ideological war threatening Judeo-Christian civilization, values, and liberal democracy, the war on "radical Islamic terrorism" has been framed as the defining struggle of our time (Friedman, 2017).

Following the brutal attacks by Hamas, the Palestinian militant group, on October 7th, 2023, where 1,200 people were killed in Israel and hundreds taken hostage in Gaza, President Biden spoke decisively in support of Israel's right to defend itself and condemned Hamas as a terrorist organization. The Biden administration continued to defend Israel even as it called for and delivered humanitarian aid to Gaza. Prior to the terrorist attacks, more than half of Americans had positive views on Israel (Dinesh & Silver, 2023) and immediately following, support for Israel surged; however, ongoing U.S. military aid to Israel in its war to eliminate Hamas, which has resulted in over 46,000 Palestinians deaths, the displacement of most of the 2.3 million population, and widespread disease and hunger in Gaza, has come under scrutiny by U.S. lawmakers, foreign leaders, human rights organizations, and the United Nations (Masters & Merrow, 2024). Pope Francis warned Israel against committing terror and stated in a public address that the conflict had "gone beyond war. This is terrorism" (Faiola et al., 2023). Additionally, South Africa filed a case in the International Court of Justice against Israel accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza. Official government rhetoric shifted in the United States amidst rising public pressure to address the humanitarian crisis caused by Israeli military action, deaths of humanitarian workers, and the escalating death toll of Palestinians (Ward et al., 2024). Contestation over beliefs as well as shifting public opinion globally and within the United States in this case illustrate the concept of ideological wars.

The ideological war on terror spanning the first two and half decades of the new millennium is a multifaceted campaign of nearly limitless scope. While ideological wars are struggles over competing belief systems, they have very real consequences and costs in terms of human

lives, resources, and rights. The war on terror has been used to advance major increases in U.S. military spending, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, covert operations in Yemen and other countries in the Middle East, the detention of accused enemy combatants without trial at Guantánamo Bay, the incursion on civil liberties through the U.S. Patriot Act, the development of new security institutions such as the Department of Homeland Security, and the wide-reaching surveillance and intelligence-gathering powers of the National Security Administration (NSA). According to Brown University's Institute for International and Public Affairs *Cost of War* report, the United States has spent nearly $8 trillion on the war on terror, more than 940,000 people have died directly from the violence, several times that many have died indirectly from the wars, and millions of people have been displaced as refugees (Crawford, 2021).

Others argue the most pressing ideological war facing the world today is the rise of authoritarianism and autocracy, which is threatening liberal democracies across Europe, Asia, and in the United States. **Liberal democracy** refers to a form of governance that values individual rights and human rights, the rule of law, free and fair elections, checks and balances in the government, and civilian control over the military. Global democratic freedoms are on the decline while autocratic capitalism in countries such as China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia is on the rise. "Freedom in the World 2024 finds that global freedom declined for the 18th consecutive year in 2023. The breadth and depth of the deterioration were extensive—political rights and civil liberties diminished in 52 countries and improved in only 21" (Grothe, 2024). While the insurrection that occurred on January 6, 2020, and the refusal by former President Trump to publicly accept the results of the election are vivid examples of the decline of democracy in the United States, the erosion of democracy, according to the Brookings Institute (Williamson, 2023), in democratic institutions includes election manipulation and executive overreach.

Since 2010, states have implemented laws reducing voter access, engaged in gerrymandering that precludes competition, and politicized the administration of elections. Further, Congress is gridlocked and highly partisan, the impartiality of the judicial branch is questionable, and the executive branch has increased its role and power. Research by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Kleinfeld, 2023) suggests that the American people are less ideologically polarized than they think; yet, U.S. politicians are highly ideologically polarized believing in, espousing, and voting for policies that are very different, which is a trend since the 1980s. While voters are not as ideologically polarized as they think, they are emotionally or affectively polarized holding deep dislike for candidates and members of parties different from their own.

Ideological wars frame issues in the public arena in ways that profoundly affect intercultural communication in people's everyday lives. Ideological battles often employ false dichotomies—for example, requiring adherence to a belief in freedom versus adherence to Islam or immigrant rights versus national safety and unity—to galvanize the public while obscuring the complexities and nuances of intercultural issues. Rhetoric that emerges from ideological wars often scapegoats one group—for example, Muslims, immigrants, or transgender people—for the challenges and ills of the world, or a society, instilling and perpetuating prejudices and animosity as well as inciting violence between cultural groups.

Global Governance and Social Movements

One of the critical issues of globalization in the 21st century is the question of governance. Questions of governance on global, national, state, and local levels are closely linked to intercultural communication. Who is at the table, literally and figuratively, when decisions that affect people close by and in the far reaches of the world are made? Whose voices are represented, and whose interests are served? What standpoints and positionalities are silenced or dismissed? Whose language, ideologies, political processes, and economic systems dominate? Whose rules, behaviors, communication styles, values, and beliefs are privileged and normalized?

In late May 2023, more than 250 technology experts—including OpenAI and Google executives—signed a statement that artificial intelligence (AI) poses a threat of human extinction comparable to nuclear war and pandemics. National security experts followed claiming that increased dependence on AI will transform warfare and intensify the risk of nuclear war (Patrick, 2023). Others are more concerned with the daily and ongoing impact of AI in perpetuating racism, sexism, and other forms of bias (Nobel, 2018). Despite these significant dangers, international and national leaders are far from agreement about how to regulate and manage these technologies.

Climate change is affecting everyone on the planet; yet, some countries have reaped the benefits economically and other countries have been damaged. For example, the United States, the top carbon emitter, has caused $1.9 trillion in climate damage in other countries, including Brazil, Indonesia, Venezuela, and Nigeria; yet, carbon pollution by the United States has benefited the United States by more than $183 billion with Canada, Germany, and Russia also profiting from U.S. emissions (Borenstein & Costley, 2022). In fall 2023, the European Union (EU) signed the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism into law. The law imposes taxes on carbon-emission imports from trading partners that have less strict emissions requirements than the EU. Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, known as the BRICS nations, call the law discriminatory and lodged a complaint with the WTO (Patrick, 2023).

Given the challenges of AI, climate change, geopolitical conflicts, and shifts toward a more multipolar world order, preparedness for global challenges and risks is more critical than ever; yet, lack of consensus internationally and global cooperation often impedes preparedness, prevention, and accountability. Stiglitz (2017) noted in his *Globalization and Its Discontents Revisited*:

> Globalization has long been governed by the developed countries for their interests—and most especially for the financial and corporate interest within those countries… The disparity between the economic realities of the twenty-first century and governance structures created in 1944 for the World Bank and the IMF have become increasing evident, even more so after 2008. (p. 361)

Change has been slow. The G7 or group of 7, an annual meeting of international leaders composed of the United States, UK, France, Germany, Canada, Italy, and Japan, met in its 50th year of existence in June 2024, mainly addresses global political issues. The G20, the group of 19 countries plus the EU, which includes both advanced and emerging economies, manages the global economy. Australia, Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, and Turkey have been added to the G7 group of nations when

addressing economic issues, which is clearly more inclusive; nevertheless, representation regarding global political issues is still very limited and exclusive, and for smaller nations with over a third of the world's population, representation is absent.

However, individuals, groups, and organizations are coming together across national, ethnic, and cultural lines to form intercultural alliances that challenge the domination of global financial and political institutions and work together to create alternatives to economic and social discrimination and exploitation. The **global justice movement** refers to "a 'movement of movement,' that includes all those who are engaged in sustained and contentious challenges to neoliberal global capitalism, propose alternative political and economic structures, and mobilize poor and relatively powerless people" (Anantram et al., 2016, p. 563). Since its inception and first meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001, the World Social Forum (WSF) has become the largest international gathering of participants in the global justice movement. In opposition to government leaders who have claimed over the decades that "there is no alternative to neoliberal globalization", the WSF asserts that "another world is possible" (p. 565).

In an interview with Madeleine de Trenqualye (2023), Naomi Klein, award-winning journalist, author, and climate activist for over 20 years, shared advice to students and young people who are concerned about climate change and want to advance climate justice:

> I think the most important thing is to just find other people. Trying to think through this by yourself is a recipe for feeling like a failure and getting dispirited very, very quickly. The benefit of being part of a broader movement is knowing that some people are doing some things, and other people are doing other things, and nobody has to do everything.
>
> I always tell students to find a movement you feel comfortable in, make sure it's interlinked with other movements, and then work in coalition as broadly as you can. And then marry your passion with need. Whatever you want to do, find a way to connect it with the climate crisis…Because this is the work of our lifetimes. (para. 21–22)

Today, social movements such as the climate justice movement, #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo movement, and the reproductive rights movement are increasingly global in scope, address the connections across and among issues impacting people's everyday lives, and imagine another world based on social, political, and economic justice. For example, climate justice activists recognize that communities of color are disproportionately impacted by climate change; that climate justice is linked to access to food, water, health care and education; as well as living wage jobs, affordable housing, and gender equity, and that climate justice connects the dots between toxic environments, police brutality, and mass incarceration (Calma & Rosa-Aquino, 2019).

Additionally, over the past two decades, international research and analysis has shown how climate change can undermine the safety and security of nations states; yet, what has largely been overlooked is the impact on the global climate of war making and military spending (Weir, 2024). Israel's war in Gaza, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as well as other wars on the planet have tremendous impact on global climate. Militaries account for an estimated 5.5% of global greenhouse emissions making the military carbon boot print the fourth largest in the world after the United States, China, and India (Lakhani, 2024). What will hold governments and militaries accountable for their carbon boot prints? Can the global climate justice

movement provide a framework to unite the interconnected issues of climate, social, and political justice so that another world is possible?

Political globalization is complex and often contradictory. At this point, it is important to note that the backlash against globalization has led to a rise in ethnonationalism, authoritarian, and increased militarism globally. While some argue that our current times are marked by an increased sense of alienation, powerlessness, and apathy toward political engagement, the wide range of participation in intercultural resistance movements and multicultural activism, the global justice movement, and the climate justice movement suggests otherwise.

INTERCULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION

As people move around the globe—whether for tourism, work, or political asylum; in the military; in search of economic opportunity; or for survival—we carry our culture with us and make efforts, however elaborate or small, to re-create a sense of the familiar or a sense of "home." While the complex notion of culture cannot be reduced to objects that are tucked away in a suitcase or packed in a backpack, the things we take as we move, travel, or flee are significant in representing our culture, just as the languages we speak, the beliefs that we hold, and the practices we enact. In the following section, we introduce a few of the more salient aspects of **cultural globalization**, including migration and the formation of cultural connectivities, cultural flows within the context of unequal power relations, and hybrid cultural forms and identities.

Migration and Cultural Connectivities

Due to the forces of globalization, people from different cultural backgrounds—ethnic/racial cultures, religious cultures, class cultures, national cultures, and regional cultures—find their lives, their livelihoods, and their lifestyles increasingly intertwined and overlapping. People from different backgrounds have been engaging with each other and experiencing intercultural contact for many millennia; however, the degree and intensity of interaction, the patterns and directions of movement, and the terms of engagement in the context of globalization are different than in earlier eras of human interaction. All this, as anthropologists Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo (2001) claimed, points to "a world in motion. It is a world where cultural subjects and objects—that is, meaningful forms, such as capital, people, commodities, images, and ideas—have become unhinged from particular localities" (p. 11). They argued that culture, in the context of globalization, is **deterritorialized**, which means that cultural subjects (people) and cultural objects (film, food, traditions, and ideas) are uprooted from their "situatedness" in a particular physical, geographic location, and **reterritorialized**, or relocated in new, multiple, and varied geographic spaces. Meanings of cultural forms, such as Hindi movies starring Shah Rukh Khan or TV programs from the United States, such as *Suits* or *Yellowstone* that are streamed around the world, take on different meanings in different locations. Similarly, a person's or group's sense of identity, who migrates from Iran to Israel to the United States, for example, is reinscribed in new and different cultural contexts, altering, fusing, and sometimes transforming that identity.

In previous times, when people moved voluntarily or forcibly to distant locations, they likely stayed there. While they may have had intermittent contact with home, they were unlikely to visit frequently or maintain regular communication as is possible today through the Internet, nor were they likely to consider several places in the world as "home." Today, due to advances in communication and transportation technology, we see the emergence of global circuits of cultural connection and community interconnection between multiple geographic locations crossing national and continental boundaries. Someone who migrates from Latin America, India, or China to the United States may return regularly to work or visit. We also see the formation of economic and social networks or associations that operate internationally where communities of people from one location—for example, Mexico or South Korea—may unite to support each other in the new location and maintain ties and connections, sending financial support or **remittances** as a community to the city or regional community at home.

The reality of groups of people migrating to new locations and maintaining connections to "home" is not a new phenomenon. Take, for example, the notion of **diasporic communities**, groups of people who leave their homeland and who maintain a longing for—even if only in their imagination—a return "home," such as the expulsion and dispersion of the Jews during the Babylonian Exile in 700 BCE, the African diaspora that forcibly uprooted and transplanted Africans to the Americas and the Caribbean during the period of British colonization, or the Armenian diaspora in the early part of the 20th century that resulted from the genocide of approximately 1.5 million Armenians. What is different today in the context of globalization is that communities are able to maintain transnational connections that are not only in the imagination but where "home" can literally be in multiple places, where one's neighborhood may cross national boundaries, and where one's community is spread around the globe.

What are the effects of the uneven distribution of cultural products globally?

Courtesy of Kathryn Sorrells

Cultural Flows and Unequal Power Relations

With Starbucks' 38,000 coffeehouses in more than 80 countries, Apple's global footprint, Coca-Cola ubiquitous in even the most remote areas, and Mickey Mouse one of the most internationally recognized figures, what are the implications for local and/or national cultures? Responses to global flows of culture and cultural products range from outraged efforts to protect local cultures to a full embrace of the "McDonaldization" of the world, yet what are the effects of the global flow of cultural products on local and national cultures? Is the flow of cultural products, such as music, films, food, and media evenly distributed with equitable, multidirectional movement? Most observers, even proponents of economic globalization, recognize an asymmetrical power relationship that magnifies inequities in the flow of culture and cultural forms. What are the implications of dramatically uneven distribution of culture and imbalanced diffusion of cultural products that are ideologically infused?

Some argue that globalization has brought about a homogenization, and specifically an **Americanization** of the world's cultures, that need to be examined carefully not only from an economic point of view but also from the perspective of U.S. dominance and cultural imperialism. **Cultural imperialism** is the domination of one culture over others through cultural forms, such as popular culture, media, and cultural products. Economic globalization has exacerbated an inequitable spread of U.S.-based corporations and cultural products that, while providing additional goods and services, also has led to the bankruptcy of local industries and has had a dramatic impact on local cultural values, traditions, norms, and practices. In many parts of the world, resistance to the influx of "foreign" ideas, products, and practices is rooted in a sense of threat to traditional, local cultural values, norms, and practices. For example, since economic liberalization in India in the 1990s, celebrating Valentine's Day has become increasingly popular, but some in India, particularly Hindu fundamentalist groups, reject what is viewed as Western influence. Valentine was a relatively obscure Catholic saint until the mid-1800s when U.S. greeting card entrepreneurs began marketing cards. The practice of gift-giving between lovers was mainly limited to the United States and Britain in the 20th century. Yet today, the middle class across Asia celebrates the holiday. While perhaps seemingly harmless, the highly commodified holiday is experienced by some as an incursion on and displacement of local traditions of courtship, love, and family relationships. On February 14th, Hindu fundamentalist groups organize demonstrations against Valentine's Day burning Valentine's Day cards and harassing couples (Flock, 2018).

For over 25 years, Hollywood films have been censored and edited in China to remove content that did not conform with Communist party ideas. The practice has escalated more recently to outright banning of films. For example, *Doctor Strange Love in the Multiverse of Madness*, was banned because the film promotes Falun Gong, a spiritual movement that has been banned in China for being a cult. Other films such as *Spider-Man: No Way Home* was barred because Sony Pictures refused to remove images of the Statue of Liberty from the film (Jennings, 2022). The conflict between the Chinese government and the N.B.A. (National Basketball Association) that started in 2019 when Houston Rocket's general

manager, Daryl Morey, tweeted "Fight for freedom, stand with Hong Kong," eased in 2022 as China's state-run TV network began airing N.B.A. games again. The Chinese government, angered by the 2019 tweet in support of pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, demanded an apology from the N.B.A. and cancelled all broadcasting in China. The N.B.A. has specifically targeted and cultivated audiences in China, which now has more fans than the United States and brings in hundreds of millions of dollars of revenue to the N.B.A. (Deb, 2022).

France, where the French language and cultural practices, such as finely prepared food and films, are integrally linked to national cultural identity, there is active resistance to how U.S. popular culture, the English language, and fast-food chains have invaded the physical and representational landscape of the country. Responding to a sense of loss of culture, political leaders pass laws intended to protect the distinctiveness of French culture (Crothers, 2021).

The "struggle to survive" for non-American cultures and for many nondominant cultures within the United States, is an ongoing, daily contestation between [among] local/national cultural industries, products, and identities and the overwhelming dominance of U.S. cultural products, cultural industries, and culturally produced identities in the world market today. The unequal diffusion of Western, specifically United States, cultural products, identities, and ideologies and control of mass media can be seen as a form of cultural imperialism, where cultures outside the center of power (those outside the United States or those within who do not identify with the dominant mainstream culture) are saturated through market-driven globalization by American cultural ideals, and become, over time, increasingly "Americanized" and homogenized by and assimilated to American culture.

John Tomlinson (1999) argued that cultural imperialism in the context of globalization is a continuation of earlier forms of imperialism as evidenced in the colonization process of the 16th to 19th centuries and represents "an historical pattern of increasing global cultural hegemony" (p. 144). Cultural imperialism today can be understood as the domination of Western cultural forms—from music to architecture to food to clothing styles—Western norms and practices—from gender norms to dating practices to eating habits—and Western beliefs—from individualism to Western-style democracy to Western notions of "freedom" and human rights—around the globe.

As you can imagine, U.S. cultural imperialism, the Americanization of the world, and the notion that the cultures of the world are becoming homogenized—meaning that cultures, over time, will become the same—are hotly debated topics within the cultural dimensions of globalization. So, what do you think? How does this picture of the world mesh with your experience and understanding? Even those who fervently oppose the notion of homogenization recognize the tremendous impact U.S. popular culture and U.S. cultural industries have on cultures around the globe. However, they also suggest that the cultural imperialism approach is too one-sided, limiting, and simplistic. If the world's cultures are not becoming homogenized and yet are deeply influenced by the distribution and dissemination of U.S./Western cultural products and ideologies, then what is going on?

COMMUNICATIVE DIMENSIONS

ALGORITHMIC GLOBALIZATION

Imagine you are taking a trip to the city you always dreamed of visiting. After arriving at the airport, you call for an Uber to take you to the apartment you reserved on Airbnb: a studio apartment with modern, minimalist furnishings, a flat screen TV, Wi-Fi connection, and walking distance to many local shops and restaurants. Once you get there, you open Google Maps on your smartphone and search for a local coffee shop nearby. You find a popular place with a high rating and many attractive photos of latte art and sleek interior with large windows. You arrive at the café and find the space to be welcoming, cozy, and oddly familiar. You take a picture of your beautifully designed latte and post it on Instagram. As you enjoy your latte, you scroll your social media feed and wait for reactions from your followers and friends.

The strange thing about the above scenario is, according to journalist Kyle Chayka (2024), you could experience the exact same scenario in any large cosmopolitan cities around the world. Chayka (2024) uses the term algorithmic globalization to describe how tourist cultures around the world have been filtered and homogenized to boost the likelihood of algorithmic recommendations. For example, café owners create a space and menu for the sake of "Instagramability" that entices the tourists to take photos and post on their social media to promote their business. The same goes for Airbnb hosts who want to attract users who are eager to showcase their vacation rental on social media and post reviews. Social media algorithms are more likely to pick up trending locations and images, therefore encouraging the business owners from places like New York, Copenhagen, and Kyoto to follow similar design choices and Instagramable backgrounds. Over time, places that are geographically and culturally separated start appearing alike, generating similar expectations and practices among tourists.

Digital technology plays a fundamental role in globalization. Search engine algorithms help you filter the large amount of information into automated recommendations based on preference and popularity. At the same time, algorithms also dictate what's available as information and what kind of choices you make in the real, physical world. In what ways do algorithms shape your daily decisions? What do you think is the role of algorithms in intercultural communication?

Hybrid Cultural Forms and Identities

Without erasing the asymmetrical power relations and the dominance of United States and Western cultural forms, it is important to note the power, voice, and agency of those who are affected by or are recipients of these dominant U.S. cultural products. Can we assume, for example, that similar meanings are derived from television shows, such as *Suits, Yellowstone*, or *The Big Bang Theory*, when they are viewed by people in India, Costa Rica, and China, or even in different cultural communities within the United States?

Inda and Rosaldo (2008) identified another important question to ask. Is the flow of culture and cultural products only from the West to the rest of the world, or is there movement in multiple directions? The international success of Indian superstar Shah Rukh Khan indicates that

there are directions of flow and circuits of cultural influence influencing cultures around the world other than those originating from the United States. The winner of the online reader's poll for *Time* magazine's 2018 Person of the Year was the South Korean K-pop boy band BTS, beating out other famous artists and global leaders. The group's songs, while originally sung mostly in Korean, have expanded to English and Japanese garnering an increasingly global audience (Mitchell, 2022). Japanese animation or anime has exploded over the last few decades from a niche market into a global cultural phenomenon. Expanded distribution, growth of merchandizing, and increased streaming platforms have contributed to the industry's market success and global reach. While seen as entertainment and economically valuable, anime also teaches the world about Japanese culture, history, mythology, and social life (Chandio, 2023; Singh, 2024).

These examples disrupt assumptions that globalization of culture is synonymous with Americanization. When we look closely at our lived experience in the context of globalization, we see that the overlap and intersection of cultures create **hybrid cultural forms**, or a mix that produces new and distinct forms, challenging the idea that there is only a unilateral dissemination of culture and cultural forms from the United States and Western cultures to the rest of the world. Take, for example, reggaeton, a blend of rap and reggae with Latin influence and origins, which soared into popularity in the mid-2000s. After being nominated for a Latin Grammy in 2005, Daddy Yankee, the Puerto Rican reggaeton artist, said in an interview, "In the past year we didn't have a true genre that speaks for the Latinos. Right now we have that with the reggaeton" (Daddy Yankee Interview, n.d.). In his 2014 song "Palabras Con Sentido" (Spanish for "Words With Sense"), Daddy Yankee responded to criticism of reggaeton as social poison, arguing that urban music saves lives and provides work. I am sure that you can think of other music forms that could be considered hybrid or fusion forms, such as jazz, rock, Raï—originating from Western Algeria with Arabic, French, and Spanish influence—or Kwaito, a fusion of U.S. house music and African rhythms popular in townships in South Africa.

Communication scholar Radha Hegde (2002) defined the creation of hybrid cultures and hybrid cultural forms as a type of resistance that nondominant groups employ out of fear of total assimilation and as a means of cultural maintenance in the midst of powerful dominant cultural forces. "Hybrid cultures, therefore, are not always a romantic return to the homeland; they are also cultures that develop and survive as forms of collective resistance" (p. 261). Throughout this book, we explore in greater detail how individuals, cultural groups, communities, and nations adapt to, resist, and negotiate their collective cultural identities, sense of cultural agency, and cultural productions within the context of U.S./Western cultural imperialism and the global forces of cultural homogenization.

SUMMARY

Do you have a clearer understanding of globalization at this point? As you can tell, it is an extremely complex phenomenon with multiple historical, cultural, political, and economic influences. In this chapter, globalization is defined as the complex web of forces and factors that have brought people, cultures, cultural products, and markets, as well as beliefs and practices into increasingly greater proximity to and interrelationship with one another.

Globalization is characterized by an increasingly dynamic and mobile world that has led to an intensification of interaction and exchange between people, cultures, and cultural forms across geographic, cultural, and national boundaries. It has also resulted in a rapidly growing global interdependence, which translates into shared interests, needs, and resources, as well as greater tensions, contestations, and conflicts over resources. A magnification of inequities based on flows of capital, labor, and access to education and technology, as well as the increasing power of multinational corporations and global financial institutions, is a very real part of globalization. These forces and factors did not just develop independent of world history. Rather, globalization must be understood in relation to the **historical legacy of colonization**, Western domination, and U.S. hegemony that shapes intercultural relations today.

While it is somewhat artificial to divide globalization into economic, political, and cultural aspects, we can more easily highlight and understand the intercultural dimensions of globalization by this approach. As workplaces, communities, schools, and people's lives become more intricately interwoven in global webs, intercultural communication is increasingly present in all areas of our lives. To analyze, understand, and effectively act in intercultural situations, we need to be able to take broad macro-level perspectives as well as micro-level views. The purpose of this chapter was to introduce you to global dynamics that shape intercultural communication—including neoliberalism, the role of institutions of global governance like the WTO, IMF, and WB as well as the global resistant and global justice movements; the roles of ethnonationalism, militarization, and ideological wars; and cultural imperialism and cultural hybridity—that influence who we interact with, frame our attitudes about and experiences of each other, and structure our intercultural interaction in relationships of power. Since intercultural communication is an embodied experience and most often an embodied experience of "difference," our next chapter focuses on understanding how and what our bodies communicate, how our bodies have been marked by difference historically, and how performances of the body communicate in the context of globalization.

KEY TERMS

Americanization
Climate disinformation
Cultural globalization
Cultural imperialism
Democratization
Deterritorialized
Developing country/developed country
Diasporic communities
Dog-whistle
Economic globalization
Economic liberalization
Ethnonationalism
First World
Free trade
Free-trade agreements
Global justice movement
Global South/Global North
Globalization
Historical legacy of colonization
Hybrid cultural forms
Ideological wars
Ideology
International Monetary Fund (IMF)
Liberal democracy

Maquiladoras
Militarization
Neoliberalism
North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)
Oligarchy
Political globalization
Remittances
Reterritorialized
Second World
Third World
United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)
World Bank (WB)
World Trade Organization (WTO)
Xenophobia

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Discussion Questions

Consider the scenarios at the beginning of the chapter. What themes are interwoven through all the scenarios? Without erasing the obvious and more subtle differences between the situations, what common factors and forces shape the world that these scenarios describe? What intercultural communication issues are evident in the scenarios?

How was the impact of COVID-19 pandemic shaped by globalization? How would you apply concepts such as xenophobia, neoliberalism, and ideological wars to how people in different countries responded to the pandemic?

In what ways is climate change impacting your local culture and economy? How is intercultural communication relevant for the climate justice movement?

Reflecting on the history of your own country, what historical event(s) would you consider as most significant in shaping your experience of intercultural communication today?

Activities

1. Historicizing Globalization—Group Activity:
   - **a.** The class is divided into three groups. The first group is assigned to research the history of economic globalization, the second group on political globalization, and the last group on cultural globalization.
   - **b.** Each group should focus on three to five major historical events, time periods, key individuals, institutions, and so on that shaped the course of globalization from economic, political, and cultural dimensions.
   - **c.** Each group draws a historical timeline.
   - **d.** Compare the three timelines and examine how the three facets of globalization are interconnected with each other.

2. Spatializing Globalization—Group Activity:
   - **a.** In small groups, research the current global movement of people, circulation of information and products, political and economic partnership, international and regional conflicts, and so forth.
   - **b.** Draw a map so that people can understand the dynamics of globalization visually.

c. Once the global map is drawn to describe the macro picture of globalization, discuss the following questions:

i. What are the patterns of movements you can see on the map?

ii. What are the relationships of power you can read in the transnational movements of people and commodities shown on the map?

iii. If you were to position yourself in the map of globalization, where would you find yourself geographically, economically, politically, and culturally?

iv. How are the patterns of global movements reflected in the dynamics of intercultural communication at the interpersonal and local levels?

3. Research the IMF, WB, and WTO—Group Activity:

a. In small groups, research the three international organizations that are the powerful players of globalization.

b. Report your findings to the class and discuss how the roles and functions of international organizations shape the process of globalization today.