GLOBAL
A Cross-Cultural Perspective
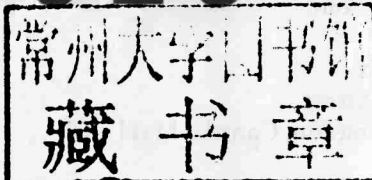# ISSUES

SHIRLEY A. FEDORAK

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ISSUES

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Global Issues

To my students, who have asked these questions.

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AUTHOR PROFILE

Shirley A. Fedorak taught socio-cultural anthropology and archaeology at the University of Saskatchewan for 16 years. In the 1990s she worked on several curriculum projects, including "People in Their World: A Study of First Nations Peoples on the Plains," sponsored by the Saskatoon Public School Board. She has also written and developed multimedia courses in anthropology and archaeology for the University of Saskatchewan's Extension Division.

In addition to serving as lead author for the first, second, and third Canadian editions of William A. Haviland's *Cultural Anthropology* (2002, 2005, 2009), Shirley Fedorak has co-authored a Canadian supplement for archaeology and biological anthropology courses, *Canadian Perspectives on Archaeology and Biological Anthropology* (2002), and the first Canadian edition of William A. Haviland's *Human Evolution and Prehistory* (2005). Her most recent publications include *Windows on the World: Case Studies in Anthropology* (2006), *Anthropology Matters!* (2007), *Pop Culture: The Culture of Everyday Life* (2009), and *Anthropology Matters*, 2nd ed. (2013).

After living in Cairo, Egypt, for five years, where she taught social sciences at Cairo American College, she now lives in Lake Chapala, Mexico, where she continues to write.

Shirley Fedorak considers preparing students for global citizenship one of her most important goals as an educator: "No matter what the discipline, it should be one where students actually learn about what it means to be citizens of the world."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TO THE INSTRUCTOR

Many instructors use global issues to prepare students for their future roles as global citizens. To that end, *Global Issues: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* provides instructors and students with several avenues for considering issues of importance in today's global society: critical analysis of socially relevant and often controversial issues that influence people and societies; cross-cultural comparison of globalization forces at work; the role of local cultures in understanding current global issues; and exploration of the value of global citizenship when considering solutions to global issues. These discussions may also prepare students to meet people who are "different" than they are – who speak a different language, or who look, believe, and behave differently.

The topics addressed in *Global Issues* challenge students to re-evaluate their media-shaped positions and may reduce or eliminate ill-conceived stereotypes and assumptions about "others." Several key concepts, including globalization, identity, cultural relativism, human rights, cultural imperialism, culture change, and various forms of conflict, provide interrelated themes running through *Global Issues*.

PEDAGOGICAL VALUE

Written primarily for first- and second-year university students, *Global Issues* is designed to supplement introductory textbooks dedicated to international, development, and global studies, human geography, political and legal studies, and socio-cultural anthropology. *Global Issues* links concepts commonly discussed in these disciplines to contemporary issues and practices:

- gender stratification and *purdah*;
- cultural relativism and female circumcision;
- cultural imperialism and international aid;
- human rights and birthrates;
- linguistics and language revitalization;
- transnational flow and body image;
- equality and same-sex marriage;
- socio-political reform and social media;
- identity and global nomads;
- political economy and food security;
- ethnopolitics and ethnic conflict;

- globalization and human migration; and
- militarism and global conflict.

Global Issues addresses socially relevant issues that are often controversial or that present an ethical challenge. The spotlight is often on local cultures and how they operate within a "globalized world," and how the processes of globalization affect day-to-day lives. *Global Issues* also takes a critical perspective when examining issues such as food security and American militarism. Each of these topics is designed to generate discussion among students interested in human issues within a global context.

Global Issues offers students the opportunity for cross-cultural comparative studies as they examine interpretations of human rights in the practice of *purdah*, female circumcision, and population growth, or when investigating the underlying reasons for ethnic and religious intolerance. Global variations in the ideal body image, the political power of social media, the socio-economic impact of NGOs in developing countries, human migration, and the dynamics of same-sex marriage also lend themselves to a comparative approach.

Although strongly influenced by an anthropological perspective, this investigation of global issues is not an isolated endeavour. The knowledge and expertise of scholars from history, political science, social justice, international studies, development studies, economics, sociology, human geography, indigenous studies, linguistics, environmental studies, media studies, education, medicine, food studies, agriculture, and gender studies allow students to gain a broader understanding of the questions posed in *Global Issues*. For an insider's view, each chapter offers personal narratives from people directly affected or from experts in a relevant field. For example, Sierra Leone anthropologist Fuambai Ahmadu was circumcised as an adult; she is therefore able to offer both an anthropological and participatory perspective. At times the insights of my students are presented in this work; they are not trained scientists, nor do they have much experience "out in the real world," but what they do possess is a sense of clarity not yet clouded with confusing and conflicting theory. Their candour is often refreshing and eye-opening.

Global Issues complements the subjects covered in social-science textbooks. Instructors may assign readings from *Global Issues* that correspond to the topics covered in class. Some of the topics, such as body image and Third Culture Kids, were chosen because of their interest quotient for students. Other topics were chosen because of their current social or political significance, such as the debate concerning same-sex marriage, or the influence of social media on socio-economic and political revolutions. Some topics, such as language revitalization and food security, were chosen to encourage students to examine a subject seldom considered by young people. Several of the topics, in particular female circumcision, same-sex marriage, and ethnic conflict, were specifically chosen because they are not usually covered in a global studies textbook, yet they are directly linked to cultural imperialism and questions of human rights and global citizenship.

Instructors may draw on a variety of instructional tools to expand students' comprehension of the topics presented in *Global Issues*. The Questions for Consideration and Classroom Activities in each chapter are designed to encourage critical thinking and group discussions, and will challenge students to apply the knowledge they have gained to compare, analyze, and interpret the material. The questions may also guide students in identifying the major themes and concepts found in each chapter. Websites and online lesson plans for instructors will engage students in participatory activities. Many of the chapters also

include maps to assist students in placing the study groups in geographical context. The Suggested Readings in each chapter offer students the opportunity to investigate the subject matter in greater detail and from several viewpoints. Bolded terms throughout the text highlight key concepts that are then defined in the Glossary at the end of the text.

ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT

Global Issues is divided into an introduction, three main sections with issue-related questions, and a conclusion. Although there is a great deal of overlap between sections, Part One contains four chapters with the underlying theme of cultural imperialism and human rights, Part Two contains five diverse chapters that address culture change and changing identities from several perspectives, and Part Three has four chapters that discuss conflict caused by economic, political, and social factors. A basic template is followed in each chapter, including a list of key terms, an introduction, a discussion of the issue, and a conclusion.

In Part One, "Cultural Imperialism and Human Rights," two controversial cultural practices and two interrelated issues are examined within the broader context of cultural imperialism, human rights, and the processes of globalization.

We begin with a cross-cultural comparison of differing, and often contradictory, perspectives on *purdah* and wearing *hijab* in Chapter 1, "*Purdah*: Is the practice of female seclusion and wearing *hijab* oppressive to women or an expression of their identity?" The voices of women who do and who do not wear *hijab* are a major component of this discussion. This chapter is designed to dispel some of the misconceptions that people in the West hold regarding the status of women in Muslim nations, while also addressing the volatile nature of gender stratification and oppression.

Chapter 2, "Female Circumcision: Is this practice a violation of human rights or a cherished cultural tradition?", lends itself to a discussion of the problems with maintaining a neutral, culturally relativistic stance while addressing contentious practices that outsiders classify as human-rights abuses. The political, socio-economic, and historical factors that contribute to the persistence of female circumcision are explored. This discussion offers a forum for the voices of women who value this custom, as well as those who oppose it. With such a sensitive topic, viewing it through the lens of anthropology may assist students in critically assessing the ethics of Western interference in this custom.

Chapter 3, "International Aid: What benefits do NGOs provide developing countries, and how can their presence generate new challenges?", provides an opportunity to critically assess the impact of NGOs on developing nations, using Haiti as our case study. This chapter provides students with information on the nature of aid, the problems inherent in foreign aid, whether disaster relief or humanitarian aid, and the legitimacy of aid agencies that moves beyond the usual Western self-congratulatory tone.

Chapter 4, "Population Growth: Is the world over-populated, and should governments have the right to control birthrates?", questions the prevailing notion that the world has too many people, especially in developing countries, and that this is the main reason for natural-resource depletion and social unrest. It also calls into question the agendas of developed nations and global institutions (e.g., the United Nations) for advocating population control. Students are provided with perspectives from both sides of this debate with the ultimate goal of critically assessing whether the world is over-populated or over-consumed.

Part Two, "Culture Change and Changing Identities," links culture change and changing identities to social reform and questions of personal and national identity in our increasingly globalized world. Here, too, the force of cultural imperialism is addressed.

We begin with an investigation of language loss and the role of linguists and speech communities in preserving endangered languages in Chapter 5, "Heritage Languages: Are they an endangered species?" There are between 6,000 and 7,000 extant languages in the world today, many in imminent danger of extinction, especially if they are indigenous or heritage languages. Indeed, linguist Nicholas Ostler (2001) warns that we are losing two languages a month. Some will not be saved, but others, through the efforts of speech communities and dedicated linguists, may be revitalized or at the very least preserved for future generations. This chapter exposes students to the cultural meaning of language and its importance to identity, the implications of language loss, and ongoing efforts to preserve and revitalize endangered languages.

Chapter 6, "Body Image: How does body image affect identity and status, and how has the transnational flow of Western ideals of beauty impacted other cultures?", provides an opportunity to investigate the flow of Western ideals, in this case, the ideal body, to the rest of the world. For a very different view on beauty, the concept of fatness as symbolic capital among the Tuareg of Nigeria is explored, as is the role of body-modification practices in engendering identities among queer, cyberpunk, and Modern Primitive subcultures. The value of cross-cultural comparisons and the power of the transnational flow of ideas are reinforced in this chapter.

Chapter 7, "Same-Sex Marriage: What are the socio-economic, religious, and political implications of same-sex marriage and changing family structure?", is an examination of how the institution of same-sex marriage is viewed and defined cross-culturally. Three opposing schools of thought – social conservative, critical feminist/queer, and gay and lesbian assimilationist – are featured in this chapter. This discussion may help students make some sense of the debate over same-sex marriage, and provides evidence of how cultural values, practices, and identities are constantly changing, and that the concept of "traditional" has many meanings.

Chapter 8, "Social Media: What is its role in socio-political revolution?", addresses the power of social media in spearheading socio-economic and political protest. This topic is particularly timely given the Arab Spring and ongoing revolutions in the Middle East; however, students should recognize that the use of social media continues to evolve.

Chapter 9, "Global Nomads: Do Third Culture Kids own a national identity?", addresses the impact of living abroad, especially for young people, who are often called Third Culture Kids (TCKs). TCKs are youth who blend elements from all of the cultures they have lived in to create a third culture. As a consequence, they see the world and those around them in a different light than their monoculture peers. TCKs have been largely invisible, yet understanding their world is becoming important because they attend universities in North America or Europe, thereby adding their unique perspectives to the college experience. Their lives and the challenges they face when searching for their identity is the focus of this chapter. TCKs may also represent a microcosm of a much larger question: are globalization processes and the ever-increasing transnational community threatening national identity?

Part Three, "Economic, Political, and Social Conflict," examines various local and global crises and conflicts. As with the previous sections, cultural imperialism, human rights, and globalization processes provide a backdrop for these discussions.

Many reasons are given for the prevalence of world hunger. Chapter 10, "Food Security: What are the economic and political determinants of food security and the global implications of world hunger?", is a critical analysis of food security issues that often runs counter to prevailing assumptions that market-driven agriculture is the most productive method of feeding local and global populations. Indeed, the role of global institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the ongoing process of displacing small-scale farmers with large agribusinesses are probed from a highly critical perspective. This chapter encourages students to peer beneath the surface of world hunger and begin to understand the real reasons why so many people are hungry.

Ethnic and religious intolerance is rampant the world over. In Chapter 11, "Ethnic Conflicts: What are the underlying reasons and the consequences of these conflicts?", the economic, political, social, and religious reasons behind ethnic conflict are addressed through the ongoing conflict in Darfur. Ethnic conflict creates human victims known as refugees; their hardships and the communities and social networks that have evolved in refugee camps are explored through the personal narratives of refugees. This discussion reinforces the fact that cultural institutions are integrated, and that we cannot be informed about complex issues without understanding the interconnections within systems of culture.

The mass migration of people fleeing economic servitude, political instability, environmental degradation, or religious intolerance has increased dramatically in recent decades, often causing conflict and dissension in host countries. In Chapter 12, "Human Migration: What are the socio-economic and political implications of the transnational flow of people?", human migration is situated within the context of globalization processes as we explore discrimination in France, the sex trade in Thailand, and human trafficking in Canada. This chapter offers students an opportunity to consider the conflicts, inequities, and challenges that immigrants face, and may help them develop more empathy for their plight and admiration for their strength and courage.

Chapter 13, "Global Conflict: Is the world safer because of military intervention, and what are the consequences of militarism?", closes *Global Issues*. This is an examination of militarism and just war ideologies, and the consequences of major powers intervening in the conflicts of other nations. As the most powerful promoter of Western imperialism and militarism, the United States is the major focus in this chapter.

Obviously, the questions posed in *Global Issues* will not be answered in any definitive way, but they are probed, analyzed, and critiqued to the point where readers should possess a broader, more balanced sense of these issues. *Global Issues* was written for anyone interested in the study of humankind and the issues that have meaning for people from many walks of life. This is not a theoretical discourse; rather, *Global Issues* challenges readers to rise above their current level of understanding – to think outside and beyond the box.

INTRODUCTION

Key Terms: climate change, cultural diversity, cultural imperialism, cultural relativism, culture, culture change, development, gender inequality, global citizenship, global economy, global issues, globalization, human rights, modernization

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Why should we study global issues? This is a question I have been asked on numerous occasions, often by students who have had little experience with the world outside their own community. As an instructor, I have asked my students a similar question: "Why should we understand the world beyond our borders?" The answer to this question is the subject of *Global Issues: A Cross-Cultural Perspective.*

WHAT IS GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP?

One of the themes running throughout *Global Issues* is global citizenship and its role in creating global communities. **Global citizenship** is the sense that every person belongs to a larger system, beyond family, community, and country. It also means taking responsibility for protecting and respecting our natural and human resources. To become global citizens we need to understand and question the issues that impact all of us, or conversely, affect only a few. In support of this need to understand, *Global Issues* critically examines socio-economic, political, and cultural issues, including food security, same-sex marriage, *purdah*, female circumcision, language loss, human migration, ethnic and global conflict, humanitarian aid, and population growth. *Global Issues* also features topics of special interest to young adults on the cusp of becoming global citizens, such as the influence of social media, body image, and facing the challenges of being global nomads.

Students, the audience for this book, live in a world mired in conflict and socio-economic inequalities. Through rapidly changing forms of media they are exposed to human problems and contentious issues at home and abroad that cause them great concern, and they know that in the very near future they will have to step into that world and make some sense of it. *Global Issues* addresses some of their concerns, and exposes the false notions of gender, racial, and cultural superiority.

GLOBAL ISSUES AND KEY CONCEPTS

Social scientists from many fields have gathered detailed information on global issues, often putting this knowledge to practical use to solve or alleviate societal problems that humans face. This may evoke images of scientists marching into a crisis situation and saving the day, yet more often it is their knowledge and insights that are of value when addressing the concerns of humankind. In *Global Issues* we will explore some of these concerns, drawing on the expertise of disciplines such as political science, history, global studies, anthropology,

and economics. This requires an understanding of several key concepts, including globalization, global economy, and development; climate change; culture, cultural diversity, and culture change; cultural imperialism; cultural relativism and human rights; and conflict.

Global issues are those concerns that require the cooperation of all nations to resolve. Many of these issues are interconnected, and often one type of global issue is responsible for causing other global concerns. This is particularly true of climate change, which has had a profound effect on food security, impacted the availability of natural resources, and greatly reduced biodiversity. **Climate change** refers to long-term changes in weather patterns. Climate change is threatening our global well-being by generating extreme weather events and creating water shortages. Climate change has also reduced agricultural production, resulting in more poverty and hunger, further exacerbating economic and gender inequalities, and forcing mass migration of humans from many developing countries. Energy consumption, the over-consumption of resources, and ultimately the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere have been identified as the main reasons for climate change (ClimateChangeConnection 2013). Therefore, climate change is not just a developing-nation problem – it is everyone's problem. This fact began entering public discourse in North America after Hurricane Sandy devastated the New York and New Jersey areas in 2012.

Globalization, which evolved out of colonialism, is the integration and transnational flow of financial resources (e.g., markets, trade goods, production), people (e.g., international migration, tourism), and information (e.g., ideas, fashion, culture, education) (Bhargava 2006). Globalization has played an important role in creating widespread inequities, over-consumption of natural resources, increasing poverty and growing food insecurity, as well as social unrest, international and ethnic conflicts, and forced migration of people in search of economic and political security. On the other hand, the transnational flow of ideas, mainly via the Internet, has empowered people to demand socio-economic change. This became evident during the Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East in 2011 and 2013, when revolutionaries used social media to call the people to action. Global communication has also assisted in advocacy for gay rights and gender equality. Thus, the sharing of information and increasing awareness of international affairs have encouraged global citizenship.

International trade, production chains (e.g., assembly of various parts of an automobile in several countries), international financial markets, and the sharing of technologies and scientific knowledge – all globalization processes – have created a growing interdependence of people and societies (Bhargava 2006), and a **global economy** that is both stronger and more vulnerable – as witnessed in the collapse of global markets that began in 2008, and in the enormous debt load and near-bankruptcy of many countries that were exacerbated by this global financial crisis. The Internet has also brought to light the standard of living in developed countries and fuelled a desire among people in developing nations to enjoy the same consumer opportunities. This raises the questions of whether there are enough resources, and what impact over-consumption has on food security.

Globalization processes have also threatened traditional cultures. Haviland, Fedorak, and Lee (2009: 34) define **culture** as "the shared ideals, values, and beliefs that people use to interpret, experience, and generate behaviour," or in other words, "the whole way of life." Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973: 362), on the other hand, defined culture as a system of meanings that are embodied by symbols that are unique to each culture, and a culture's

social structure as "economic, political, and social relations among individuals and groups." Obviously, culture is a dynamic force that can be defined in many ways.

Cultural diversity is a hallmark of human existence and is as important to our survival as genetic variation: just as species are threatened with extinction if they lose their genetic diversity, the human species is threatened if it loses its ability to respond to varying environments and situations. Each local culture or society determines the most effective way of making a living, given its circumstances. Globalization processes now jeopardize these traditional subsistence modes; for example, market-driven agribusinesses are forcing small-scale farmers off their land. In our globalized society, cultural diversity is increasingly threatened. Linguistic diversity is threatened by the prevalence and power of English and by the influence of developed nations that question the value of preserving heritage languages. Those involved in preserving endangered languages recognize the importance of linguistic diversity and the cultural knowledge reflected in these languages, yet many of the extant languages of today are in danger of disappearing.

Customs and traditions that outsiders view as unjust, such as female circumcision and *purdah*, are also threatened. Organizations and activists from the developed world are attempting to eradicate these practices, labelling them violations of human rights. Failure to recognize that there are other world views, other ways of living, presents the very real danger of **cultural imperialism** – promoting one nation's values, beliefs, and behaviour over all others. This is particularly prevalent in the West, where economic, political, religious, and military power has been used to "blackmail" other nations into adopting Western values and **modernization**. In fact, modernization usually refers to making others over in the Western image.

Development projects are ostensibly designed to improve the way people live; however, many **development** projects have been accused of imperialistic goals, including foreign investment and humanitarian aid. Development usually contains an element of modernization, such as moving toward an international market economy, and often means that developing countries become beholden to international institutions such as the World Bank for technological and financial assistance.

Although **culture change** is an inevitable and natural process, the speed at which it occurs and whether it is voluntary often determines its benefits or harm. This is why the goals of NGOs or the advocates of population control and the eradication of traditional cultural practices are so conflicting: change in society is inevitable, but outside forces implementing these changes can have a profound effect on the well-being of members of these societies and often originate from questionable ethics. *Global Issues* champions the value of cultural diversity and consistently promotes the worth of other world views and other ways of living.

To mitigate the loss of cultural traditions and beliefs, global citizens need to understand other cultures through their practices, values, and world view – what Overing (1985) calls the moral universe, or in other words, understanding a cultural group based on how the people understand themselves and the world around them. This approach, known as **cultural relativism**, acknowledges that the way "others" see the world is as valid as the way we see the world. This is particularly important when we are examining sensitive subjects such as family size and population growth. A culturally relativistic perspective does not set out to disprove anyone's beliefs or traditions; rather, the goal is to understand the reasons behind these practices within the context of that culture. Indeed, Clifford Geertz