# 1 Cultural globalization

Globalization is the process by which the world is becoming increasingly interconnected as a result of massively increased trade and cultural exchange. Globalization has been taking place for hundreds of years but has sped up enormously over the last half-century mainly due to technological advances.

As a result of globalization, we now exchange our ideas and cultures more easily. This cultural globalization has been seen as a trend toward homogeneity that will eventually make human experience everywhere essentially the same. Will we really have one single world culture in the future? Or will we have more diverse cultures all around the world influenced by global cultures?

**A Before reading the article below, discuss the meaning of the following words:**

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- accoutrements
- hubris
- benign
- belligerent
- totalitarian
- obliterated
- concertinaed
- engendering
- personification
- paradox

## We are globalized, but have no real intimacy with the rest of the world

The underlying assumption with globalization is that the whole world is moving in the same direction, towards the same destination: it is becoming, and should become, more and more like the west. Where once democracy was not suitable for anyone else, now everyone is required to adopt it, with all its western-style accoutrements.

In short, globalization has brought with it a new kind of western hubris – present in Europe in a relatively benign form, manifest in the US in the belligerent manner befitting a superpower: that western values and arrangements should be those of the world; that they are of universal application and merit. At the heart of globalization is a new kind of intolerance in the west towards other cultures, traditions and values, less brutal than in the era of colonialism, but more comprehensive and totalitarian.

The idea that each culture is possessed of its own specific wisdom and characteristics, its own novelty and uniqueness, born of its own individual struggle over thousands of years to cope with nature and circumstance, has been drowned out by the hue and cry that the world is now one, that the western model – neoliberal markets, democracy and the rest – is the template for all.

The new attitude is driven by many factors. The emergence of an increasingly globalized market has engendered a belief that we are all consumers now, all of a basically similar identity, with our Big Macs, mobile phones and jeans. In this kind of reductionist thinking, the distance between buying habits and cultural/political mores is close to zero: the latter simply follows from the former. Nor is this kind of thinking confined to the business world, even if it remains the heartland. This is also now an integral part of popular common sense, and more resonant and potent as an international language because consumption has become the mass ideology of western societies. The fact that television and tourism have made the whole world accessible has created the illusion that we enjoy intimate knowledge of other places, when we barely scratch their surface. For the vast majority, the knowledge of Thailand or Sri Lanka acquired through tourism consists of little more than the whereabouts of the beach.

The net effect of all this is a lack of knowledge of and respect for difference. Globalization has obliterated distance, not just physically but also, most dangerously, mentally. It creates the illusion of intimacy when, in fact, the mental distances have changed little. It has concertinaed the world without engendering the necessary respect, recognition and tolerance that must accompany it. Globalization is itself an exemplar of the problem. Goods and capital may move far more freely than ever before, but the movement of labour has barely changed. Jeans may be inanimate, but migrants are the personification of difference. Everywhere, migration is a charged political issue. In the modern era of globalization, everything is allowed to move except people.

We live in a world that we are much more intimate with and yet, at the same time, also much more intolerant of – unless, that is, it conforms to our way of thinking. It is the western condition of globalisation, and its paradox of intimacy and intolerance suggests that the western reaction to the remorseless rise of the non-west will be far from benign.

*www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/apr/17/comment.globalisation*

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## B Answer the following questions:

1 What are the factors driving globalization?

2 Why do you think the writer uses the phrase 'with our Big Macs, mobile phones and jeans'?

3 Choose the correct phrases from the text to complete the following sentences. Base your answers on information as it appears in the text. Use no more than five words for each sentence.

- **a** Western hubris has brought the idea that Western values should be _____.
- **b** An increasingly globalized market has encouraged a belief that our identities are now _____.
- **c** Television and tourism have created the illusion that we know other places well, but really we _____.
- **d** Globalization means everything should be allowed to move freely but that migration has become _____.

4 From statements a to d, select the two that correspond to the paragraph that starts 'In short, globalization has brought with it…'.

- **a** America is more powerful in its belief that Western values should be those of the world than Europe.
- **b** Western values can still be applied differently across the continents.
- **c** Other cultures have been marginalized since colonialism.
- **d** Western values are the easiest to adopt and that is why Europe and America believe they should be the values of the world.

5 From statements a to d, select the two that correspond to the paragraph that starts 'The new attitude is driven…'.

- **a** Items such as Big Macs, jeans and mobile phones symbolize the idea that consumers all have the same identity.
- **b** We can learn everything we need about other cultures through television.
- **c** Tourism is being reduced to just visiting beaches, not discovering new cultures.
- **d** Consumption is the mass ideology of western societies, but only applies to the business world.

6 From statements a to d, select the two that correspond to the paragraph that starts 'The net effect of all this…'.

- **a** Globalization brings people physically closer so we are able to connect more.
- **b** Physically the world has changed quickly but our tolerance of difference and other cultures hasn't evolved at the same rate.
- **c** Migration has become a symbol of the intolerance to difference.
- **d** Labour, goods and capital all move freely due to globalization.

7 From statements a to d, select the two that correspond to the whole article.

- **a** The writer believes that the negatives of globalization can be changed.
- **b** The writer believes the West will celebrate the rise of other cultures and powers.
- **c** The writer believes the opposite ideas of intimacy and intolerance are a factor of globalization.
- **d** The writer believes that individual and unique cultures are slowly being squashed by the values of the West.

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