1. The Four Processes of McWorld

Every spot of habitable Earth is experiencing globalization. People commonly think of the economic effects of this phenomenon, however cultural effects are equally far-reaching and influential. The cultural effects of globalization create many conflicts, such as rejection of Western lifestyles (McWorld), loss of many forms of traditional culture and a profound identity crises among many groups and peoples. While people in the West often believe their products and symbols as culturally benign, they have, in fact, immense social, political, and economic impact through global interaction.

According to Huntington we can distinguish four distinct processes of cultural globalization. The "Davos" culture began and spread as a result of the international interaction of businessmen. The "Faculty Club" culture is the “internationalization of the Western intelligentsia, its values and ideologies.” The "McWorld" culture is the acceptance of popular Western, particularly American culture worldwide. The fourth factor of cultural globalization is the spread of "Evangelical Protestantism." These four processes relate and interact with each other. For example, when the "Davos" culture tries to protect the interest of the tobacco industry, the "Faculty Club" culture promotes anti-smoking movements (Berger, pp. 420-6). All of these four pillars of Western globalization are often seen as a threat to traditional non-Western cultures and to their social norms and values practiced for centuries.

2. English as New Lingua Franca

English is the carrier of the four faces of global culture. It “has become the medium of international economic, technological, and scientific communication” (Berger, p.427). Most elites around the world know English. Fluency in English opens opportunities for knowledge, jobs, and advancement. As a result many local languages are endangered. We in the U.S. perceive this loss of traditional languages perhaps as a benign effect of globalization, but many of those who are affected develop resentment and rage. Responses range from Islamic fundamentalists to French, Russian, and Quebec governments creating a variety of laws and measures to restrict the use of English in street signs, entertainment, and computer terminology (Drohan and Freeman, p. 432f).

Many groups and nations want to maintain their cultural uniqueness as a strong guardian of their roots, identity, norms, forms of interaction and expression. But sticking with local customs and ways of living is also seen as economically advantageous. For instance, the French want to keep their methods of making cheese since they profit from exporting French products, cuisine, and savoir vivre.
3. The Juggernaut of Western Globalization

Another reason for resentment against globalization results from the fact that it "is an uneven and an unequal process," where the “jet-setters” control and create cultural products and where the less endowed and less powerful ordinary people--who are most “effectively imprisoned" by culture--are at the passive, receiving end (Robins, p.195f). For example, Bali is--like most tourist destinations of third world countries--part of a dependent economy usually relying on the "Davos" culture. Tourists ignorantly help to erode traditional cultures and economies by spreading Western ways of conducting business and importing their forms of entertainment, technology, and "McWorld" ideologies. In Bali untainted sceneries, traditional fashion, temples, and religious dances only remain as tourist attractions. Otherwise, the islanders adapt a Western environment with the goal to satisfy and appeal to increasing numbers of tourists because they create income. Another example cited in the reading are the Philippines, where natives excel at perfect replicas of American singers at loss of their own indigenous styles of music. "McWorld" is so effective that “every Filipino dreams that he will grow up to be an American” (Iyer, p.117).

Ideally one would expect a two-way interaction where the "Americanization" abroad is matched by a diffusion of the U.S. “American" culture. However, the flow of culture is in fact unequal and one-sided in favor of the hegemonic Western cultures. As a result, many governments and peoples resist cultural interaction. Therefore, with “these defensive and protective responses to cultural encounter, we are a long way from the celebration of cultural hybridization” (Robins, p.197).

4. Globalization as Enrichment

But the experience of globalization does not necessarily lead to the destruction of a unique cultural life. “New global elements [can] coexist alongside existing and established local or national cultural forms” (Robins, p.197). The flow of information can also help to offer new choices where people can select what they like and then incorporate it into their culture without giving up traditions, norms, values, and attitudes that are important for them. In fact, the different degrees of how people accept and utilize dissimilar cultures makes globalization a complex process. For example, in some places local and global languages can coexist. In other places local languages may be lost because there is no written form and because people abandon them as their primary means of oral communication.

We also know of examples where Western countries are at the receiving end of globalization processes. Immigrants import their lifestyles, cuisine, food staples, music, clothing etc. into Western countries. Their entrepreneurial ambitions are built upon Western ways of conducting business and the new opportunities available to them. Often they start a family business serving primarily their ethnic clientele. But then Westerners (sometimes as a result of their travels abroad) begin to consume and adopt exotic products and ways of living too. Today almost every American town has ethnic restaurants. And every supermarket sells ethnic food for affordable prices--although
products (spices, culinary methods, etc.) are often adapted to the tastes and meals of Westerners. However, a similar mass consumption of Western products in less developed countries is still missing because they cannot afford to import Western commodities. Again, this shows the inequality of the globalization experience.

5. The Complexities of Globalization

Given these complexities, it is hard to develop a uniform definition of globalization. What is clear, however, is that globalization affects many aspects of peoples lives in the wealthy as well as in the poorer countries. Globalization is an ongoing and man-made process. It can be changed by a multitude of social, economic, and political events worldwide, as the 9/11 events and its aftermath indicate.

In our class reading, Berger focuses on the four pillars that promote Western-style globalization. Iyer uses Bali as an example of how globalization transforms a pre-modern society into a casino-like tourist paradise where money can buy everything. Robins talks about the economic and cultural experiences of globalization. Warde looks at the experience with globalization in Western countries at the example of imported ethnic cuisines. Finally Drohan, Freeman, and Fishman analyze the role of English as an agent and tool of global change. All these authors help us to understand the complexities of globalization from different point of views. Since globalization is an ongoing challenge, none of these authors provide solutions or offers final truths. They show that groups and individuals experience globalization differently at different places. But we still do not know where globalization will lead us and if it has a future. Many questions remain open. Is a hybridization of cultures possible? Is U.S. American culture a global model that "fits all sizes"? Are our values and norms universally applicable?

6. Questions for class discussion

1) Is the dominance of U.S. American culture a threat to the existence of other cultures? What do other like about it and what do they detest? Why?
2) While experiencing globalization, how important is it that people of different cultures, especially U.S. Americans, understand and learn about other cultures?
3) Do you think governments should censor foreign cultures and languages and restrain the flow of global information and interaction?
4) Could resentment against globalization cause it to slow down?
5) Is a hybridization of cultures something we should strive for?
6) Why do people in the same locales experience globalization differently and people in different places experience it similarly?
7) Is it beneficial to have a global language? If so what language should we use? Why did Esperanto never catch on?
8) Has the "Davos" culture been such a global norm that those who do not follow its "culture" will be unsuccessful to conduct their business profitable and efficiently?