

# Global meaning-making: critical analysis and advocacy for a diverse world

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## Introduction

Global meaning-making emanates from the view that there are important local and global issues that demand our consideration. These issues are tied to human rights concerns as they relate to social, cultural, economic, and health matters, as well as to the natural world. They pertain to matters of equity and discrimination, opportunity and access, responsibility and respect, and sustainability and health. The notion of global meaning-making supports responses to these issues that wed critical engagement with socio-political analyses and advocacy—enlisting understandings of globalism, multiculturalism, postcolonialism, and diversity (especially with regard to issues of race, indigeneity, and migrations). More broadly, it entails those socio-cultural views of meaning-making and critical theoretical and sociological interrogations of society (especially postcolonialism) that rose toward the turn of the last century.

At the local level, global meaning-making responses relate to [Ladson-Billings' \(1994\)](#) quest for “culturally relevant schools that ... provide educational self-determination, (and) honor and respect the student’s home culture” (pp. 135–137). They are tied to notions of the cultured learner and teacher emanating from Canada (see the Québec Charter; [Ministère de l'Éducation, 2001](#)). As [Paré \(2004\)](#) suggested, “the cultured teacher is ... a broker who establishes links between students and the world” (p. 3). The tools employed in such a process similarly resonate with scholars of multiculturalism (especially translanguaging), who argue that all meaning-makers are multilingual as they enlist their ever-expanding repertoires of experiences to understand and contemplate meanings ([García and Kleifgen, 2020](#); [Gee, 2001](#); [Gutiérrez et al., 2009](#); [Lee, 2020](#); [NASEM, 2018](#); [Purcell-Gates, 2006](#)).

Befitting forms of shuttling back and forth been the local and wider world, global meaning-making also weaves together notions of cosmopolitanism (e.g., what has been described as public diplomacy) with a disposition toward respect for cultural diversity ([Hull and Stornaiuolo, 2014](#); [Stornaiuolo and Nichols, 2019](#)). As with [Rizvi's \(2009b\)](#) discussion of cosmopolitanism, global meaning-making is “a political philosophy, a moral theory and a cultural disposition” (p. 253). It is, as [Nussbaum \(1997\)](#) has suggested, a process of critical reflection and reflexivity—one that identifies with the global human community and engages one’s ability to imagine across cultural differences. As [Luke \(2004\)](#) explained, this involves:

... exploring the conditions for intercultural and global intersubjectivity ... an engagement in globalized analyses that continually situate and resituate learners ... their local conditions, social relations and communities, in critical analyses of the directions, impacts and consequences of global flows of capital, bodies, and discourse (pp. 1438–1439, 1441).

Such work is consistent with advocates of local cultural expectations, as seen in [Giddens \(1999\)](#), who argues for a global dialectic, or [Park \(2017\)](#), who espouses “a paradigm shift ... with a de-imperialized, de-colonized, and de-Cold War mentality” (p. 760). As [Soysal \(1994\)](#) has argued:

The state is no longer an autonomous and independent organization closed over a nationally defined population. Instead, we have a system of constitutionally interconnected states with a multiplicity of membership. [Hence] ... the logic of personhood supersedes the logic of national

citizenship, [and] individual rights and obligations, which were historically located in the nation-state, have increasingly moved to a universalistic plane, transcending the boundaries of national states (pp. 164–165).

The commitment to the importance of diversity is consistent with the view of the world as pluralistic—comprised of coexisting, criss-crossing spaces with multicultural and multilingual aspirations as well as ecological goals (de Sousa Santos, 2007a,b, 2013; de Sousa Santos et al., 2007; Grigorov and Fleuri, 2012; Misiaszek, 2015).

Global meaning-making thus aligns with calls for responsive, ethical and proactive engagements with the socio-politics of planetary considerations (e.g., Abdi, 2015; Andreotti and de Sousa, 2011; Misiaszek, 2015; Torres, 2015). Accordingly, critical analysis and advocacy are seen as integral to global meaning-making—especially pursuits that espouse postcolonial ethical stances (e.g., Smith, 2005) and the liberatory educational aims of Freire (1973) and Boal (1993) to go beyond reading the *word* to reading the *world*. This is exemplified by the ongoing Indigenous concerns raised and activism pursued by First Nations, Maori, and Australian Aboriginal educators in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada, which honor and respect Aboriginal ways of knowing and languages (e.g., Battiste, 1998; Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Bishop, 1994; Nakata, 2001, 2004; Ocholla, 2007; Rigney and Hattam, 2018; Smith, 2000, 2015, 1999; Woods and Biermann, 2009). It is consistent with the design principles proposed by Gutiérrez (2011, 2016) for ecologically resistant and culture accommodating research that include the following:

(a) deep attention to history and historicity, including how they relate to resilience, sustainability, and equity; (b) a focus on re-mediating activity, that is, a focus on reorganizing the functional system rather than individuals; (c) employing a dynamic model of culture with an understanding that cultural and other forms of diversity are key resources for sustainability; (d) a persistent emphasis on equity across the design process in the theorization, design, and implementation; (e) an emphasis on resilience and change, where change implicates the individual, the collective, and the ecology; and (f) an end goal of transformation and sustainability.

Gutiérrez (2016, p. 192).

### Dimensions of global meaning-making: key processes

Global meaning-making aligns with pursuits valuing heterogeneity over homogeneity; accommodation over assimilation; and contextually bound engagements over broad generalized prescriptions. These values are ensued as meaning makers engage with:

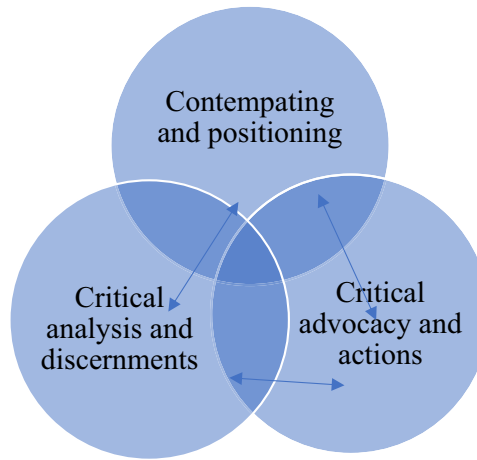
- Addressing pressing local and global issues;
- Interrupting existing frames, especially cultural hegemony;
- Decolonizing and opening spaces for the sovereignty of and respect for diverse cultures and their self-determination;
- Accommodating cultural dynamics within and across communities—via adaptation, translanguaging, fusion, and border-crossing;
- Reading self and deconstructing identity as one engages with diversity, indigeneity, and decolonization;
- Being mindful, and finding a higher moral plane;
- Interrogating truth/post-truth;
- Being activist or actionist.

Tierney (2018a,b).

Forms of participation may shift as meaning-makers traverse multiple public spheres, identities, and approaches in their contemplations, analyzes, and responses. As individuals contend with various cultures, this process may align with context-specific negotiations or navigations of cross-border meaning-making (e.g., García and Kleifgen, 2020; Horowitz, 2012; Nelson et al., 2016). This may involve “... an instantiation of boundary crossing where an individual deliberately and consciously pushes against society’s ideological constraints” (Gutiérrez et al., 2017, p. 53). Singularly or collectively, it may entail forms of consultation and leveraging as meaning-makers negotiate the norms of societies and communities—in respectful ways that do not defy or defile, unless intended to disrupt the systems antithetical to the pursuits themselves.

Undeniably, certain kinds of shuttle diplomacy are complex, especially as meaning-makers themselves engage in or affiliate with movements of social transformation as activists, allies, or cultural development workers (Bishop, 1994, 2009; Butler, 2011; Campano et al., 2010; San Pedro, 2018). Challenges to the dominant cultural interests will be ill-fated unless meaning-makers approach matters reservedly as they engage with and seek to shift the socio-political currents that they encounter.

Global meaning-making requires responding to local concerns with an eye to both local considerations and global matters. Global meaning-making can therefore take on diverse forms, move in different directions that stem from multiple perspectives, different interpretations and are shaped by various forms of reconciliation arise (e.g., in cases where intra- and intercultural developments and differences, and parsimony between local and global communities, are negotiated).



**Fig. 1** Dimensions of global meaning-making.

Under the umbrellas of contemplation, analysis, and advocacy, **Fig. 1** attempts to capture the intersecting and iterative nature of global meaning-making—and how they interface with one another. As suggested the clusters entail:

- Adopting a contemplative countenance and probing positioning via socio-political currents, including observing, listening, interrogating, and enlisting multiple perspectives;
- Analyzing how people, events, and issues are represented and positioned by authors and audiences, and how their responses and perceptions enlist multiple perspectives and repertoires of experiences (including multilingualism and rhetorical analyses to discern socio-political matters and possibilities);
- Acting upon deliberations of discernments as one enlists forms of ethical, respectful, and responsive social consciousness as an advocate, activist, and ally.

Befittingly, global meaning-making is diverse rather than predetermined. Its dimensions are more intertwined than discrete, and more recursive than linear.

### Sites of contemplation

Befitting this cross-cultural deliberation model, global meaning-making requires contemplation based upon investigations of global and local meanings in terms of their antecedents and constitutions—especially their historical, cultural, and ecological relevance to sociopolitical considerations. As global scholar and comparative educator, [Hayhoe \(2021\)](#) has suggested, cross-cultural deliberations are prompting individuals to adopt a “listening intellect” to engage with the significance of developments on a deeper level—“requiring us to open our minds and hearts to the other” (p. 13). And, as Hayhoe and others have contended (e.g., [Andreotti and de Sousa, 2011](#); [Smith, 1999](#); [Spivak, 1988, 1990](#); [Takayama et al., 2017](#)), being contemplative involves reflexivity, respectfulness, and self-consciousness; it requires staying attuned to what is presented, by whom to whom, and why, when, and where. It also requires an awareness of the intentions and possible effects of various meanings. It likewise demands forms of shuttle diplomacy as one delves into the worlds of others while remaining conscious of the intrusion of one’s own history and its potentially skewed perceptions. Global meaning-makers are not just seeking to understand or present themselves. They are examining ideas in terms of the various subtexts that they might represent or advance.

The basis for contemplations can be quite varied and mixed. They might be spurred by momentary reflections—regarding everyday self-monitoring, incidental exchanges, or news releases—or they can involve extended considerations of an issue or an event in chat rooms, in the media, or across other venues. They may emerge from conversations with friends, family, or community members; they may be derived from “across the aisle” exchanges with strangers or those previously identified as outsiders (e.g., from other cultures or opposing points of view). They might arise in different spaces and experienced as proximate or firsthand, distant or through secondary accounts, or a combination thereof. Oftentimes they reflect our everyday literacies as meaning-makers view or encounter various forms of media (e.g., films, television, news media, social media or websites). They might stem from events that are experienced or witnessed such as incursions between individuals, groups, communities or nations.

Nowadays many of our lives exist across multiple time zones with different communities. We engage in global exchanges on the condition of our worlds especially as we experience the events occurring. Sometimes these events are spurred by natural disasters or political upheaval or forms of terrorism; at other times they may be spurred by efforts to engage with or learn from one another, to aid or to join together in partnerships around regional or planetary concerns. Some might be based in global charters and declarations by global organizations such as the United Nations; others might stem from movements tied to human rights or environmental concerns. Certainly, a number stem from natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts, hurricanes. Others involve

inequitable treatments such as women have experienced especially in terms of their education (United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, 2017; United Nations Educational Social Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2014; UNESCO, 2015a; UN Girls Education Initiative, 2017).

Take, if you will, the various forms of global meaning-making that have arisen recently with the events experienced in Europe. For example, within and across the various sectors of the world, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to intense contemplations, analyses and acts amid global considerations of democracy versus autocracy, sovereignty and self-determination together with analyses of motives and actions, responsibilities and ethics. Many of us have been a mix of witness and participant as we have engaged in forms of global meaning-making with these events.

Oftentimes we experience events as they unfold from global sports to acts of terrorism. Such was the case for those of us who grappled with the global news of the Australian white supremacist who killed some 51 Muslim worshipers at two mosques in Christchurch in 2019. The event brought to the surface a range of existing and longstanding issues and debates, including concerns over global terrorism and the rising white supremacist movement; the consequences of interconnectedness with global media; and the precipitousness of hate speech across tweets, blogs and political policy speeches (e.g., as disseminated by online figures from Pewdiepie to Donald Trump). Among the most poignant moments following the attacks occurred with the comments of New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who reminded her community and the global community at large of the need for a moral compass that embraced each another as one, with all our differences. Her words sharply contrasted with the vitriol and negativity around migration elsewhere in the world. As she stated: "Many of those who would have been directly affected by this shooting may be migrants to New Zealand. They may even be refugees here. They have chosen to make New Zealand their home, and it is their home .... They are us ..." (New Zealand Herald, 2019, paras. 3–5).

Similarly, across several countries, especially those involving Indigenous populations, the uncovering of the gravesite of children taken from their families and placed in Residential Schools in Canada spurred global contemplations about the history of assimilation by Church and State (Callimachi, 2021; Tilmouth, 2021; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In Australia particularly, the finding resonated with Australia's atrocious history of assimilation and genocide of Aboriginal populations—still manifested in its systemic discrimination and lack of recognition or respect for Indigenous rights and sovereignty. The events in Canada thus triggered contemplations mixed with analysis and advocacy as they contributed to a greater public reckoning with inequities and racism. For Australians, these stories were educative, provocative, and fueled support for Aboriginal demands for their own transformative change—serving as antecedents to a reconsideration the systemic forces that have shaped the Australian nation and culture, including the unacceptable racism that persists and is perpetuated by the lock that white settler privilege holds over Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society.

In Australia, for example, these matters resonate with an awakening of settler society to their miseducation, ignorance and complicity with Australia's racist history. For Australian settlers, several books and movies exposed the history including: Willmott's (1988) *Pemulwuy: The Rainbow Warrior*—the story of Australian Aboriginal resistance to British occupation that was kept invisible to outsiders and across generations of Australian immigrants; Behrendt's (2004) modern day story, *Home*, in which she, an urban Aboriginal, visits her place of heritage in a remote rural area where her community experienced horrific treatment; or movies, such as the 2002 film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, directed by Phillip Noyce and based upon the 1996 novel *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* by Doris Pilkington Garimara, which follows three girls trying to return to their home following their abduction by government authorities. In Australia, they resonate with the argument presented books challenging misinformation and the faulty understandings of the ways of being of the Australian Aborigines such as Pascoe's (2014) *Dark Emu* (Pascoe, 2014) that described the sophistication of Australian Aboriginal agricultural pursuits or accompanied questioning of the western material terms for judging Aboriginal practices such as the book by Indigenous anthropologists and archeologists, Peter Sutton and Keryn Walshe who challenge Pascoe's measures of development with fuller discussions of Aboriginal life spiritually and ecologically as very advanced hunter-gatherers (Sutton and Walshe, 2021). And, with other commentaries (especially data on education, health, and economics, incarcerations and suicides), add to the need for scrutiny of the hegemonic lock that assimilation, racist and other limiting views holds on Australian society.

There are numerous contemporary texts expressing similarly challenging ideas that call for contemplation and cultural analyses. Take, if you will, *The Poet X* by Acevedo (2018)—a novel in verse examining the struggles of growing up as a Dominican American teenage girl. Or consider the post 9/11 tensions uncovered in *Home is Not a Country* by Safia Elhillo (2021). These are stories involving cultural and intergenerational spaces where authors prompt forms of border crossing. They are stories that readily question socio-political issues and currents, in overt and edgy ways that resonate with the everyday—affording readers opportunities to enlist their translanguaging repertoires of cultural perspectives, languages, and insights as they explore the worlds of diverse populations (e.g., Garcia, 2009; Garcia et al., 2017).

Matters being dealt with these books may be global but are not necessarily foreign. Baldwin's (1974) *If Beale Street Could Talk* moves readers across multiple perspectives, cultures, and worlds. It is a story that engages readers in complex social dynamics within and across families, communities, and cultures. Readers are prompted to actively transact with these cultures, bringing their own selves and their societal experiences into play as they contemplate the events and the cultural forces flowing through the text. And, as Baldwin seems to suggest, Beale Street is not just one place within one story. It represents what for many is a familiar story of differential treatment and injustice tied to race—concerns most recently being confronted by movements such as Black Lives Matter and tied to events such as the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis. Perhaps in tandem with such events, it is a story to contemplate and ponder, and to analyze and act upon.

## Analyses

In terms of socio-political analyses, global meaning-making entails adopting different critical frames as vehicles for examining circumstances. Analyses might emanate from close observations of circumstances, or through needs assessments. They might entail examining the rhetoric of politicians and the subtext. Indeed, politicians' speeches and tweets can be sites that lend themselves to various analyses related to how politicians position themselves, key issues, their followers, and their opponents. For instance, in her university course on the use of rhetorical strategy in public discourse, [Mercieca \(2015\)](#), an American political rhetorician and educator, asks students to examine their world news and consider the strategies employed to either advance false storylines/narratives or to pivot away from, rather than confront, core issues. Without accusing news outlets of lies, she has her students screen the array of sources for instances of rhetoric crafted to disguise or override truth, perpetuate certain conspiracies, or sustain narratives that advance insurrection or violent mob behavior. Through this exercise, students engage in rhetorical analyses that address how authors present ideas and consider how audiences are shaped and perhaps coerced into believing and acting in certain ways ([Mercieca, 2015](#); [McMurray, 2021](#)).

The media is replete with analyses focused upon the representation of events, the warrants and evidence of claims being made as well as the motives and politics suggested, implied and verifiable. Consider the focus in recent years on Donald Trump or Vladimir Putin especially the analyses of their speeches and in terms of their goals and their positioning against what is viewed as known and possible agendas. For Donald Trump, it is often aligned with discussions of salespersonship such as Trump espouses in *Trump: The Art of the Deal* ([Trump and Schwartz, 1988](#)) or partisanship, and concern over truthfulness. For both Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, their representation of history and rationalization of actions are reminiscent of Orwellian discussions of society *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, ([Orwell, 1947](#)) along with the politics ([Orwell, 1984](#)) of language discussed in [Orwell's \(1984\)](#) seminal article, "Politics and the English Language:"

Political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind (p. 366).

Accordingly, analyses of events can occur at several levels and involve multiple frames and perspectives. Analyses might involve critical examinations of the politics of persuasion, evaluating claims in terms of foundation and evidence. They might entail confronting regressive or insular tendencies of a "post-truth" world ([Peters, 2017](#))—those ideas and rhetorical approaches that advance the suppression of environmental and social developments, or dismiss universal truths through the use of unfettered hyperbole, misrepresentation, oppressive personifications, and false equivalencies. They might address matters of local concern such as social services or individual rights. They might extend the scope to issues of choice and multicultural considerations, such as language use. They might enlist some of the books written in more than one language about cross-cultural engagements (e.g., *My Papi has a Motorcycle*, by Isabel Quintero) to invite and legitimize the multilingual repertoires that meaning-makers bring to explore, imagine, exchange experiences and perspectives, and respond to the issues represented. Such analyses may be spurred by the use of sociological frames (e.g., [Arendt, 1973](#); [Bourdieu, 1993](#); [Connell et al., 2017](#)); rhetorical analyses (e.g., [Burke, 1969](#); [Kubota and Lehner, 2004](#); [Lakoff, 2016](#); [Orwell, 1984](#); [Toulmin, 1958](#)); cross-cultural, critical race, feminisms and gender theory (e.g., [Butler, 2011](#); [Enciso, 1997, 2004](#); [Rogers, 2017](#); [Rogers and Soter, 1997](#)); as well as postmodernism (e.g., [Peters, 2017](#)) to examine how people and ideas are positioned and travel (e.g., [Leander and Sheehy, 2004](#); [Stornaiuolo et al., 2017](#)). Befitting global meaning-making such analyses entail cultural analyses that delve into potential subtexts and socio-cultural-political undercurrents.

## Advocacy

Global meaning-making also involves advocacy ranging from local problem-solving to cross-cultural negotiations directed at leveraging. Indeed, the ideological foundation of critical global meaning-making pursuits is tied to pursuing change in ways that support local sustainable efforts or, if necessary, to challenge the hegemonies that advance forms of exceptionalism and privilege. As [Andreotti and de Souza \(2011\)](#) have suggested, there is a need for readers to interrogate ideas, especially in terms of systems. In particular, they suggest readers should be alert to both colonizing constructions of the world (e.g., hegemonic, ethnocentric, ahistorical, depolitic, paternalistic, and simplistic) as well as to their own complicities with the continuation of colonialist systems.

Global meaning-making therefore involves a critical countenance, growing out of a contemplation of and response to the systems at play in ways that advocate for and at times challenge their premises, roles, or influence. Building upon the critical work of [Spivak \(1988, 1990, 1999\)](#), [Andreotti and de Souza \(2011\)](#) call for a global responsiveness and imaginary that disrupts the normative and challenges the colonized status quo. Such work underscores the importance of identifying individual desires as a way to "de-mystify the fantasies behind them and to open up possibilities previously unintelligible to the invested self" ([Andreotti and de Souza, 2011](#), p. 225). As [Stein \(2017a\)](#) has similarly suggested, there is need for a decolonizing orientation,

to interrupt and denaturalize the epistemological and ontological frames of modern existence that are produced through violent and unsustainable relationships and processes— ... to reimagine and recreate what is possible—and to ask about the role of education in facilitating these other possibilities (p. 44).



Inherent to this critical global meaning-making perspective on advocacy is the view that all of us are planetary dwellers with a shared view of human, societal, and planetary rights, along with an interest in the sustainability of our diversity. To share this planet requires an interest in spaces that support cross-cultural engagements—those to which all can bring cultural capital that is distinctive to their meaning-making; where all can actively contribute to a global trajectory built upon support for diversity; where differences without violent intent are respected. Global meaning-making is wedded to decolonizing spaces and knowledge emancipation, where the cultural capital (knowledge and ways of knowing) of various meaning-makers is respected (de Sousa Santos, 2007a).

Global meaning-making involves opening up and supporting the quest for new spaces for contemplation, analysis, and transformation (i.e., of matters pertaining to issues of bias and respect for differences). As Kay (2018) described in his book, *Not Light, but Fire: How to Read Race Conversations in the Classroom*, global meaning-making might be construed as pursuing and opening up new spaces for contemplating complex issues such as racism and prejudice, akin to what have been described as “brave” spaces (Ali, 2017). Such spaces afford meaning-makers opportunities to relate their engagement to people and events within and across worlds—from neighborhood incursions such as shootings by the police, protests, or severed relationships among friends, to more global events. They open up opportunities to share experiences, reflections, and concerns. As translanguaging advocates argue, these spaces advance multiculturalism through pedagogical initiatives that engage meaning-makers’ linguistic and experiential repertoires; expand the community; and challenge the prevailing monolingualistic hegemony within systems (e.g., Garcia et al., 2017).

As advocates and activists, global meaning-makers act as cultural protagonists, siding with local and global diversity, responsibility, and equity against hegemonies that seek to overpower and discriminate. Global meaning-making entails advocating for an accommodation of differences rather than ignoring them. As Haluza-DeLay (2003) asserts: “Knowledge uncovers the oppressive structures and confronts power. However, it is not the ‘knowledge’ alone that does this, but the process by which the knowledge is taken up and used in the community, altering ‘common-sense’” (p. 86). In accordance with activism, global meaning-making involves.

thinking, talking about, researching and theorizing about what is going on, what they are going to do next and how to analyse the situations they face, whether in relation to attending a demonstration, a meeting, a confrontation with institutional forces or planning the next action or campaign.

Kinsman (2006, p. 134).

The activism associated with global meaning-making befits Gramsci’s (1982) view that scholars should be “organic” rather than “traditional intellectuals;” that is, they should engage with the public rather than focus on perpetuating their insular academic theories. This notion is not unlike Freire (1973) conscientização, or transformative change, or what Lather (1986) termed “catalytic”. Moreover, it is consistent with educators engaging in resistance and activism (e.g., Simon and Campano, 2013; Wandera, 2020) and all of us engaging a model of reading and inquiry that aspires to be transformative (Dion et al., 2020). As Goodwin (2012) suggests, it should be “an orientation to inquiry with an obligation to action” (p. 3), involving participation that is tied to local interests and pursued cyclically. Activism is integral to global meaning-making, and the goals of activism are forms of engagement that mobilize communities. As Hall (1978) and Choudry (2015) suggest, activism involves continuously testing, acting on, trying out, and repeating the cycle as one moves forward. It shifts the role of reader from that of a distant observer, critic, or director to a supporter and ally (Bishop, 2009).

Advocacy, activism, and respect entail supporting worlds with fewer walls—campaigning for fewer jurisdictional constraints that often dismiss, censor, or immobilize those who are “othered” within and across communities. Ideally, global meaning-making is not solitary or insular; engagements are participatory and expansive. It involves colleagues and collaborators with knowledges often left out of or overlooked by colonizing Western perspectives, such as those with Indigenous histories, migrant pasts, and cultural moorings from places such as Oceania, Asia, the Americas, and Africa. It seeks spaces that support participatory forms of reading that move beyond contemplation, analyses, understandings and interpretations to responses involving advocacy.

Such advocacy has been exemplified by research projects with youth, involving the use of social media for political purposes (and in conjunction with social movements). For example, Rogers et al. (2015) explored how homeless youth enlist new and critical literacies, especially the multimodal possibilities afforded by various digital media, to engage various publics and themselves in speaking out about societal issues and counter faulty public constructions of their identities. Their projects initiated and described the purposeful enlistment of a mix of genres and forms to foment reflective and responsive engagement, including forms of cultural criticism and civic engagement by youth. As Rogers et al. (2015) describe in their study, young people’s enlistment of digital resources supported “expressions of resistance to the inheritance of the broken promises of democratic citizenship and their ability to imagine new possibilities of public engagement” (p. 2). The youth they observed engaged in “juxtaposing ... hybridizing ... remixing” (p. 102) to create counternarratives and to speak for themselves. As Henry Jenkins and his colleagues describe in their book, *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism, Connected Youth and Digital Futures* (Jenkins et al., 2016), various innovative forms of youth-led activism demonstrate how young activists’ uses of media and networking might mobilize and engage others in coordinated pursuits that establish points of contact politically, culturally, and institutionally; stimulate the civic imagination; and

explore paths and possibilities in ways that they describe as vertical (from expert to novice, or in terms of institutional hierarchies) or horizontal (peer to peer). As others have suggested the power of forms of symbolic esthetic forms to raise consciousness and engagement in societal issues (e.g., Clover, 2013a,b; Clover and Stalker, 2007).

### Border-crossing across multitopic spaces

As implied, being a global meaning-maker entails being multilingual—befitting models of a pluralist world or postmonolingualism (e.g., see Escobar, 2018; Perry, 2020; Perry and Pullanikkatil, 2019; Singh and Lu, 2020; Thiong'o, 1986, 2012). It requires agility and responsiveness, as well as potentially significant forms of accommodations. Such forms of renaturalization, community consultation, and cross-cultural understandings may be less than transparent unless one has language skills and informants (Ndimande, 2018).

As Massey (2005) suggests, spaces for such cross-cultural exchanges require Westerners to look inward and outward, within and across public and private spaces. These spaces operate through intercultural networks (Luke, 2011; Rizvi, 2021), following the bottom-up and sideways flows of people, ideas, and acts (Abdi, 2015; Campano et al., 2010; King, 2017; Tierney, 2017a,b). It may be that “uptakes” occur horizontally or syncretically across sites or boundaries, not unlike the translanguaging that occurs at borders (e.g., Gutiérrez, 2014; Gutiérrez and Rogoff, 2003; Nelson et al., 2016), or the line-stepping, or testing of boundaries, by individuals or groups. As Gutiérrez et al. (2017) describe:

Line-stepping is an instantiation of boundary crossing where an individual deliberately and consciously pushes against society's ideological constraints. Rather than seeing boundaries as static, we recognize their dynamism. By subtly identifying and testing a line, the line-stepper learns how and where lines are permeable and the available latitude in their enforcement. At times, youth will encroach the lines without going over them; at other times, they will cross the lines, attempting to ascertain the severity of the consequences of their boundary crossing (p. 53).

With these global meaning-making crossings and exchanges, there are fusions—in the form of mixing, remixing, adapting, and taking up ideas (e.g., by endorsing, refuting, protesting, or mocking). These may involve artistic renditions, or fusions tied to different epistemologies. With increased access, heightened bandwidth, and a variety of outlets, digital spaces offer global meaning-makers less-regulated venues to assemble, explore, share, and connect. When these fusions are not pursued respectfully, ambitions that are profit-oriented, commodifying, or politically-fueled can override either the diverse interests or the proprietary rights of individuals or communities. The role of the digital in society the power and the significance of digital affordances for global meaning-making should not be underestimated (Deuze et al., 2012; Luke, 2018). These literacies “serve as vehicles to name our worlds, interact with others, imagine, test ideas and change our world. The affordances have become as integral to meaning-making, as air is associated with breathing” (Beach and Tierney, 2016, p. 135). Various digital media can offer individuals and groups new vehicles for speaking out about societal issues, including matters of their identity (Beach and Smith, n.d.; Beach et al., 2017). For example, digital media may offer spaces that impose, override, colonize, standardize and restrict diverse cultural expressions and their agency. On the other hand, media platforms can also provide palates for widening the forms, as well as the reach of and possibilities for, existing or alternative engagements (e.g., Kim, 2016). Indeed, affordances can be prefabricated or customized with designs that are either barren or fertile sites for sharing and advancing ideas.

### Being ethical, respectful, and responsive

Global meaning-making is not exempted from ethical considerations—especially in terms of respect for and responsibility toward others (e.g., Butler, 2011; King, 2017; Kristeva, 1991; Levinas, 1974/1981, 1993, 1995). To be contemplative, there is need to move outside of one's bubble—to engage with and consider others and the socio-political systems at play. Considerations of broader systems include examining how and what they regulate, and whose interests are served, compromised, or forfeited in the process. Also key to this contemplative process of global meaning-making and advocacy is the pursuit of actions that are respectful and supportive. In keeping with goals of examining and interrogating one's own motives and positioning, it is crucial that actions and engagements are not presumptuous or out of place with the rights and interests of others, especially in terms of self-determination and sovereignty.

To engage in global meaning-making requires occupying a moral ground that bridges across and within nations, identities, cultures, and communities (e.g., between the privileged and the marginalized; across gender and races; and between Indigenous and immigrant cultures). It encompasses a journey across complex and diverse terrain (ecologically, epistemologically, and ethically). As Kohlberg (1981) suggests, there may be a seventh level of moral reasoning, to which global reading and research should aspire—a level that looks more broadly at the ethics of decision-making, aligned with a fuller and ongoing consideration of the future of a society. As Appadurai (2005) comments, this requires more than adopting an ecumenical and generous approach; it requires suspending certainty and opening oneself up to debate, to differences, and to considering grassroots internationalism as a crucible for emergent new forms of global ethics. It is consistent with arguments made by de Sousa Santos et al. (2007)—and, more recently, those by Chinese and global scholars such as Shi Zhongying (Shi and Li, 2018; Tierney et al., 2021)—of the need to decenter western epistemologies as the metonym for knowledge (i.e., to instead position the west, as a range of constituent knowledges, among other knowledges).

To achieve these moral goals, there is a need for aspirational spaces where cross-cultural meaning-making can occur on multiple levels and proceed in a manner that is responsive, respectful, relevant, and energizing. As Maori scholars [Smith \(2000, 2015\)](#) and [Smith \(1999, 2005\)](#) have argued, cross-cultural engagements should proceed in a manner that is respectful of the histories, ways of knowing, needs, hopes, and values of all. The specific circumstances of “others” should be respected, including geographies of time and space, and the ecological systems’ local norms, self-realization, and self-determination. In these challenging times, global meaning-making is not straightforward—indeed, it contends with the kind of “tricky ground” that [Smith \(2005\)](#) described for researchers attempting to navigate within and across Indigenous spaces.

As such, global meaning-making requires deliberations relative to: (1) How authors are positioning themselves; the topics and socio-cultural features that they are exploring; and the reader; and (2) How readers might position themselves—or find themselves positioned—in terms of the ideas represented and their own responses. These deliberations extend the tenets for a meaning-maker’s assessment of their own understanding. Beyond the scope and quality of their recall, readers are instead engaged in contemplating their own responses as actors in the author-reader exchange, and with the socio-cultural frames in mind. This requires a cultural reading of the people, ideas, and events, especially in terms of their politics, biases, and assumptions; the interests that are being pursued; the historical context; and how they (i.e., people, ideas, events, information) are mixed. It entails recognition of oneself and others as both audience for and subject of comments or portrayals for different purposes.

### Final reflections: key considerations for global meaning-making

Global meaning-making does not offer a scripted reading of the world to be applied in a singular or monolithic fashion. Its dynamic processes are by their very nature diversified, multilayered, and multifaceted, involving fusions and adaptations of ideas and styles. Global meaning-making involves complex negotiations that are not preset or standardized, but anchored in ethics—ethics aligned with respect for the local, the pursuit of reciprocity between local and global, and ecological eclecticism ([Tierney, 2018a,b, 2020a,b](#)). The dimensions of global meaning-making outlined here are more akin to a set of values and guidelines—like compass points for telescopes, in search not of the destination but of the path forward.

Global meaning-making is a call to override the current predilection to exist in cultural cocoons and digital bubbles. It breaks away from pretailored worlds governed by practices and policies that perpetuate insularity, and use divisive representations of others (explicitly or implicitly) in public rallies, rarified scholarly spaces, or sites for teaching and learning. Instead, it involves what [Hymes \(1990\)](#) describes as a kind of dialectic between insider-outsider perspectives. Global meaning-making is rarely solitary; instead, engagements are participatory. It involves multiple colleagues and collaborators with local knowledges, Indigenous histories, migrant pasts, and cultural moorings from a range of places—including Oceania, Asia, the Americas and Africa.

### The dance of global meaning-makers

For the global meaning-maker, these meaning-making engagements involve crisscrossing global time and space. It not only involves forms of cultural studies but also participatory engagements, sometimes with the aid of cultural intermediaries. At one level, a reader’s sophistication in terms of engaging with these processes is relative. It is anchored in their pre-existing knowledge about people, places, and times; their adroitness and the tools available to support them as they move with others within and across borders of space and time; and their ability to adapt and adjust to shifting norms and expectations. At another level, global meaning-makers require knowledge of themselves as they step in, out, and to the side of worlds to observe and engage with others with respect. Global meaning-making thus requires self-interrogation of one’s own enculturation—a continual scrutinizing of one’s interests, activities, positionality, perspectives, and biases. As [Spivak \(1988\)](#) cautions, such self-examinations should be ongoing, lest they become aligned with the systems they purport to challenge.

Global meaning-makers should be especially careful not to position themselves as the saviors or champions of others. As [Abdi \(2015\)](#) warns, well-intended allies or advocates should be alert to those tendencies that merely give the appearance of eclecticism:

[There is] a European predestination to save non-cultured natives from themselves ... [and] we should not discount ... the need to see beyond the fog of the still problematically benevolent political correctness as the creators of the new scholarship are somehow oblivious in turning the gaze upon themselves and societies (p. 16).

This undoubtedly requires a study of self that seeks to challenge both self-righteous objectives to enfranchise as well as failures to self-implicate. Global meaning-makers should, as [Spivak \(1988, 1990\)](#) suggests, be contemplative as they reconcile their complicity with their own privilege, and adopt dispositions and approaches that are not presumptuous, colonizing, or recolonizing.



### Global meaning-makers as critical culturalists

Indeed, global meaning-making entails reckoning with oneself and one's cultural ways of knowing as one journeys across borders with others, with and for the interests of all. It represents a mix of participatory literacy, promoting approaches that are cooperative, collaborative, and contrastive while being respectful and reciprocal. It befits a planetary view that is ecumenical and emancipatory. A key thesis undergirding the rationale for global meaning-making is the advancement of "other" alongside of "all," in concert with accommodation for (rather than assimilation of) differences; that is, the pursuit of eclecticism in support of a global complementarity or inter-operationality. It entails a turn from self-righteousness to critical reflexivity, and from imposition and imperialism to respect and restraint. As global meaning-makers develop cross-border understandings, they also challenge their insularity, ignorance, and historic depreciation of others. They interrogate their complicity with their own advancement—reckoning with their own assertions of global jurisdictional mandates, or engagement in misinterpreting, misrepresenting, or disregarding the sovereignty, languages, ways of knowing and cultures of others. Similar to what Cochran-Smith (2000) suggested in her discussion of racism, global meaning-makers need to interrogate their "own complicity in maintaining existing systems of privilege and oppression" (p. 186).

Global meaning-makers are therefore expected to read for socio-political currents and pursue critical forms of advocacies that are committed to advancing diversity. In so doing, they engage in an ethics of respect for others and support for personal sovereignties. At the same time, they are never untethered from their own histories, predispositions, and positioning (e.g., the influence of mainstream imperial forces of colonization, as seen in marketing strategies tailored to digital user profiles). To fuse self with others, global meaning-makers must engage with persona and ethos, the pragmatics of language use, and notions of identity over space and time. As they consider the diverse circumstances within and across countries and cultures, their communications may take the form of translanguaging and other means of criss-crossing meaning-making communities. As Willinsky (1998) suggested, meaning-makers should engage not as imperialists but as critical culturalists, working across borders with a view of themselves as foreigners in support of others (see also: Kristeva, 1991).

### Global meaning-making is contemplative, analytic, and advocacy-oriented

As noted by postcolonialists, meaning-makers can too often find themselves confined to sites where forms of epistemological imposition and resocialization occur. These insular sites might be tailored to Eurocentric traditions that befit colonialist or assimilationist models rather than those espousing epistemological eclecticism, Indigeneity, and internationalism (Abdi, 2015; Connell, 2007; Nozaki, 2009; Takayama, 2009; Takayama et al., 2017). Unwittingly, everyday meaning-making pursuits and understandings can be permeated by media that silences concerns and reinforce complicitness with regulatory practices. By contrast, the pursuit of global meaning-making is a call for exchanges to flow across and within a futuristic, pluralistic world. Its approach to everyday literacy involves shared responsibilities as well as alternative spaces that afford expression and exert change. These ideas reflect Gutiérrez's (2008) discussions of a third space—an aspirational hybrid space wherein exchanges flow across cultural identities and positionalities, in accordance with the socio-political dynamics of students' worlds and their communities. Within this third space, improvisations within and across borders and identities serve to both empower engaged individuals and improve the group.

Global meaning-making requires support for and commitment to engaging with forms of border-crossings, as one steps across or out of line. It is more provocative than neutral, and more disruptive than disassociated. In that way, it is similar to forms of counter discourse, coupled with proactive engagements, such projects or praxis, directed toward transformative change. To these ends, global-meaning making processes of contemplation, analysis, and advocacy are crossed with the following combination of stances:

- Responsive: To be open to consider and address matters of human rights and planetary responsibilities that arise or exist locally and globally;
- Perspectival: To enlist different perspectives, especially those stemming from considerations of context and relevance, so that engagements are respectful, responsive, and proffer understandings of events that illuminate different understandings;
- Evaluative: To delve into different readings to consider the assumptions, norms, and tenets that serve as the bases for perspectives and understandings—that is, to bear responsibility for judging the ideologies represented in and by the text, including the systemic forces at play that undergird societal hierarchies and frame exchanges;
- Reflexive: To maintain responsibility for recognizing one's frames and their nature or potential for influence—especially in terms of limiting or skewing understandings; to acknowledge self-interest; and to respect the interests of others (i.e., systemic forces, Indigenous interests and ways of knowing, etc.);
- Proactive and Transformative: To promote and pursue agency, advocacy and transformative change (i.e., forms of systemic change that address the development needs of communities in ways that are respectful, organic and sustainable).

In other words, global meaning-making involves a mindfulness toward the world. It demands agency, responsibly and respectfully acting upon socio-political discernments in ways that are ethical and community-based. It entails acceptance and reconciliation that are informed by a planetary epoch outlook and embrace plurality and universal rights. And it requires reckoning with, challenging, and changing hegemonies, with a reverence for the sovereignty and various ways of doing by others. Indeed, it is the standard for transformative engagements globally—distinguished from engagements that seek merely to understand others, analyze and critique

socio-political systems, embrace multiculturalism, or promote culturally-responsive or reciprocal education or pronouncements. Whereas prior notions of meaning-making may have defined bringing life to the page as simply building on and from one's background knowledge and experiences, global meaning-making represents a shift in the intimacy of one's engagement with texts and the world of media. It suggests discernments and contemplations that move beyond the page as one considers possibilities, recognizes one's role in relation to others, and acts carefully, respectfully, responsibly. Further, as action-oriented meaning-making, this process engages readers in interrogating their own readings and the socio-political dispositions of the texts before responding—seeking to eschew actions that are well-meaning but perhaps presumptuous or may align with systems and hegemonies that undermine their intent.

## Closing summary

Global meaning-making assumes all behaviors are political; that responsible and responsive meaning-making respects and serves the interests all of our worlds; and that meaning-makers' engagements seek to change, challenge, or mitigate unjust systems. This view builds upon discussions among the growing circle of literacy scholars invested in global thinking, especially those researchers who investigate translanguaging, hybridity, global mobility (e.g., Lam and Warriner, 2012; Nelson et al., 2016; Pieterse, 2005; Rizvi, 2009a; Robertson, 1985), and global citizenship (e.g., Torres, 2015; UNESCO, 2015b). It stems from the search for other spaces, as discussed by Gutiérrez (2008, 2011) and Gutiérrez et al. (1999), and the argument for a more generous countenance that is respectful of cultures (e.g., Campano et al., 2010; de Sousa Santos, 2007b, 2013; Singh et al., 2005; Stein, 2017b). It draws heavily upon issues of mobility—in terms of people, cultures, and literacies. It is consistent with the model of community-based literacy events and practices explored by Victoria Purcell-Gates (2006) and her colleagues (Purcell-Gates et al., 2011); explorations of the participatory dynamics of literacy across time and space (e.g., Dyson, 1988, 1989; Jenkins et al., 2009); and pursuits of epistemological diversity, especially Indigenous ways of knowing (e.g., Assié-Lumumba, 2017; Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Bishop, 1994; Connell, 2007; de Sousa Santos, 2007a; Nakata, 2001, 2004; Rigney and Hattam, 2018; Rigney et al., 2018). It also aligns with the transliteracy framework outlined by Stornaiuolo et al. (2017). This transliteracy approach explores dimensions such as emergence, uptake, resonance, and scale as a way of capturing “different kinds of relations among people and things—whether in horizontal, vertical, rhizomatic, or other relationships—and highlight(ing) people's literacy practices within and across systems that (re) produce, exacerbate, and/or challenge social inequities” (Stornaiuolo et al., 2017, p. 84).

Broadly speaking, global meaning-making comprises a triad of critical contemplation, analysis, and advocacy, stemming from the convergence of socio-cultural, critical, and globalist views. As noted, it builds upon socio-cultural views of reading (e.g., Garcia and Kleifgen, 2020; Lee, 2020; Purcell-Gates, 2006); discussions of globalism (Rizvi, 2009a; Robertson, 1985; Singh et al., 2005); and postcolonial epistemologies (e.g., Connell, 2007; de Sousa Santos, 2013; Said, 1979, 1993). Global meaning-makers are akin to researchers as they position themselves, grapple with their identities, and scrutinize texts amid the cauldron of global socio-political forces involved. They examine events, settings, characters, and issues from different perspectives as they observe and participate aesthetically, vicariously, efferently, and critically. Their worlds (virtual, real, read, or reported) involve complex social dynamics within and across individuals, families, communities, and cultures. Hopefully, in keeping with discussions of pluralism, they come to see how the worlds of others are also part of their own. They may contemplate and contribute to transformative engagements arising from disrupted complacencies, changed understandings, and questions regarding the systems that perpetuate perceived cultural and planetary affronts.

Global meaning-making involves cultural moves that go beyond comprehension approaches focused upon just reading for understanding. It moves beyond evaluation of texts in terms of their factual bases, or the quality of their arguments. Instead, it entails examining texts, positions, and cultures—as well as the people within them. It asks meaning makers to unmask, reflect, and act upon socio-political analyses. It is at the cusp of enacting change that embraces pluralism and does not slight diversity. It aligns with challenges to our critical illiteracies and calls for reading our worlds.

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