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THE MANY FACETS OF GLOBAL STUDIES

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Designing Global Research

The idea of doing research on global issues and processes can be daunting for scholars that are new to the field of global studies. Contemporary global issues, such as immigration and regional conflict, tend to have both local and global dimensions that are often interrelated in intricate ways. This means that global-scale issues can be enormous in terms of historical and geopolitical reach, and at the same time complex, dispersed and varied at the local level. Moreover, global studies scholars have available to them a vast array of theoretical, methodological and analytical approaches from across the humanities and social sciences. With all these complexities and choices, doing global research can appear to be overwhelming for an individual scholar. This essay seeks to make the process of designing and carrying out research on global issues less daunting and more manageable. The objective is to introduce an accessible way to design sophisticated global research projects that can be carried out within the limited time and resource constraints that most scholars face.

As teachers, researchers and authors, we have been engaged in thinking about what defines global studies for some years. Our most recent book *The Global Turn: Theories, Research Designs, and Methods for Global Studies* (2017) explores some of the theoretical and conceptual developments in global studies and the implications that those developments have for designing global research projects and developing methodologies for global issues. The book introduces some of the characteristics that we think are common in global research, including holistic and integrative approaches that are both critical and interdisciplinary. It also presents analytical perspectives that are open to decentered, distributed and multifaceted processes, as well as open to hybridity, fluidity, and multiple levels of analysis across the local-global continuum (McCarty 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Darian-Smith and McCarty 2016). These global perspectives and ways of thinking are sometimes referred to as 'thinking globally'; shorthand for the habit of putting objects of study into larger conceptual, historical and spatial global contexts and approaching issues from a range of global perspectives (Juergensmeyer 2014).

The approach outlined in *The Global Turn* intentionally includes previously marginalized perspectives and epistemologies in the production of new knowledge. In the longer term, we suggest, this new approach has the potential to open up western scholarship to non-western modes of thinking, in turn fostering inclusive, productive and relevant globally informed scholarship (Darian-Smith 2014, 2016). Engaging with global and non-western perspectives helps scholars break out of the old ways of thinking. They help scholars think past the nation-state, the limitations of an international relations

framework, and possibly even the limitations of conventional modern disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy and so on.

In this brief essay, we build upon specific aspects of global research design that are touched on in our book. Our years of experience in the classroom teaching global research, and our experience taking students into the field to conduct research on global issues, has led us to the conclusion that certain elements of global research design are crucial for scholars that are trying to identify global topics and develop global research projects. This essay focuses on those elements of research design that we have found to be key in helping scholars convert their broad interests in a wide range of global issues into coherent and viable research projects that they can successfully carry out.

The Research Question and Focal Point

We argue that there are two vital steps in the process of global research design. The first step is to develop an exciting research question (and perhaps a subset of questions) that addresses the global issues the researcher is interested in. The research question is essential in that it drives the entire research design including its methodological and analytical elements. The second closely related step is to find a real-world focal point where the kinds of issues that interest the researcher manifest and intersect. Focusing on the research question and focal point, and as the research progresses, being prepared to accommodate their dynamic interrelationship, is central to global research design. It allows the researcher to select from a wide range of theories, global issues and global perspectives that together shape the research question. Likewise, it allows the researcher to deploy any number of methodological strategies, data collection methods, and analytical frameworks that best answer the research question as it is explored through a real-world focus. To put this differently, focusing on (i) the research question and (ii) the focal point helps distil or bring down to a manageable conceptual level the overarching research design which can, as already mentioned, involve an array of theoretical, methodological and analytical options (Figure 1).

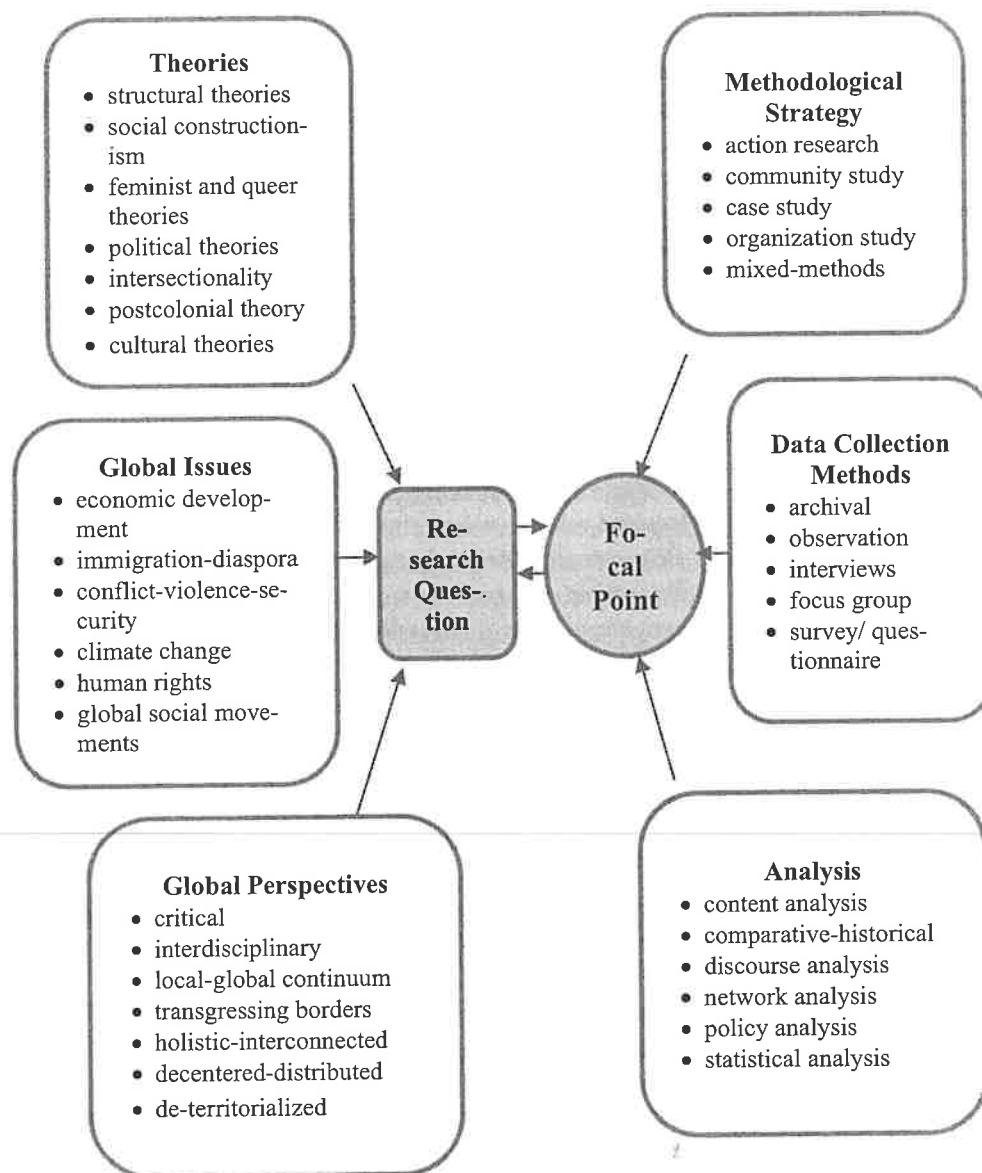


Figure 1: Asking and Answering a Global Research Question

The approach to question-driven research design that we outline below rests on several important insights:

1. Because the local and global are mutually constitutive, most global issues can be studied from a local perspective. Even the largest and most abstract global issues manifest somewhere in the real world in the lives of ordinary people, and hence can be studied at the local level. Once researchers recognize that the local-global continuum is a mutually constitutive process – that the global is in the local and vice versa – it becomes possible to study global issues almost anywhere at any time. Researchers can study the global in any retail shop, in any one person's life history, or in the supply chains enabling food and water for the evening meal.

2. By definition, every substantive global-scale issue has multiple dimensions to it. Researchers looking into the local manifestations of global issues tend to find as many intersecting dimensions as they care to look for. Does the issue have political, economic, sociocultural, religious, historical, and spatial dimensions? The answer will virtually always be, 'Yes, there are multiple global dimensions in my study'. Are intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, class and religion relevant to the study? Again, the answer will almost certainly be 'Yes'. When researchers look, they find that many, if not all, of these dimensions are not only present, but are also relevant to their analyses. The methodological problem is not that there are too few intersecting dimensions; it is more often that there are more intersecting dimensions than the researcher initially imagined or knows how to deal with.

3. Any given global-scale issue is likely to be interconnected with other global-scale issues. Researchers investigating what looks like a local or regional environmental problem are likely to find out that their issue is impacted by global climate change, global market forces, international immigration, regional conflict, or any number of other global processes, problems and issues.

4. To make a research project 'global', the researcher may not need to change what they are doing or even how they are doing it. The researcher need only ask the questions that engage the multiple global dimensions that are almost always present in, and relevant to, pressing real-world issues. Developing a global research question often involves critical, reflexive, and ethical elements. Beyond these characteristics that are common to good research questions in many disciplines, global studies favors questions that are inherently global in their recognition of global contexts, perspectives and the local-global continuum. Acknowledging the interconnectedness of various political, economic, and sociocultural processes is not the end point of a good global studies research question, but rather the starting point. Global research questions examine the historical continuity of these intersections and go on to interrogate the *who*, the *why*, and the specific ways in which these interconnections manifest themselves across a local-global continuum.

The Research Question

The research question or thesis is the central inquiry that drives a particular research project. The importance of a thesis to the research design process cannot be overstated given that at the most basic level doing research is the process of answering a research question. The research question should ultimately determine the entire structure of the research design, including the conceptual framework and related methodological and analytical approaches. Stated plainly, *if you don't have a research question then you aren't doing research*. You might be reviewing the literature or summarizing your observations, but without a research question you are not really seeking to answer anything.

Researchers are typically interested in broad issues such as inequality, development, gender, or the environment. The researcher's broader interests are necessary for motivating their research, but they are not sufficient for carrying out a viable research project. There is an important difference between a general interest and formulating a tangible research question, which would provide the basis for a viable research project. A focused and researchable question is the kind of question that can be answered with the conceptual and methodological tools available, and with the limited time and resources available to the researcher. For most of us, time and resources are in short supply.

Most researchable questions share certain necessary characteristics. A researchable question is one that:

- reflects the researcher's wider interests while carving out a feasible project
- emerges out of, builds upon, and addresses existing literature in some way
- is not impossible to answer (how many angels can dance on the head of pin?)
- does not already have an obvious answer (do the poor wish they had more opportunities?)
- is empirical – it can be answered with evidence that is obtainable via appropriate research methods
- can be answered within the time and the resources available to the researcher

In short, a researchable question is a question that is relevant to the academic literature on a given topic and can be answered with material produced by the researcher. Finding a good research question that is both engaging and productive can be difficult, but there is a knack to it that can be learned. It gets easier once you start looking for and thinking explicitly about what makes a good question.

One characteristic of most good research questions is that they have a critical edge. Critical questions challenge the status quo and the unquestioned assumptions that make things appear a certain way. By approaching things from a variety of perspectives, a good research question often points to a contradiction or implies connections between things we do not think of as related. For example, a good question might highlight the connections between economic production and sexual reproduction, or the exchange between financial capital and cultural capital. You might not at first be able to answer

definitively what those connections are in a specific context, but exploring the connections is likely to generate more focused research questions that are answerable.

The best research questions are also reflexive in that they recognize that the researcher is not an impartial observer who somehow creates neutral or objective knowledge. Researchers should recognize that their own assumptions, abilities, and limitations play a role in shaping the outcome of the research. They should recognize the epistemological chasms between researcher and subject, east and west, and global north and global south. All researchers exist within scholarly communities and bring to their findings their own cultural assumptions and subjective worldviews.

All researchers, and particularly those in global studies, should also recognize the ethical dimensions of their research. The knowledge that academics produce can, and often does, have an impact on the people being studied. We should ask ourselves: what kinds of knowledge are we producing and why are we producing it? What forms of knowledge are ignored, marginalized or silenced? How might the knowledge the researcher produces be used and misused? What impact might the research have in the world? Much research in global studies involves studying asymmetries of power between rich and poor countries, regions, and continents and the impacts of these power dynamics on vulnerable communities. Thinking about how one's research findings may be used inadvertently to further oppressive forces and put marginalized people at risk is a very necessary component of research design.

Research questions that include critical, reflexive, and ethical characteristics tend to have a kind of timeless quality. This is true whether the research is conducted under the banner of global studies or any discipline or interdisciplinary field. The best research questions can be asked almost anywhere and at almost any time in human history. They raise a number of sub-questions that can be addressed explicitly or implicitly, such as:

- As a researcher, what are my assumptions? In what ways are they built into my theory, method, practice, and project?
- What assumptions are built into the terminology of my topic (e.g., aid, development, civil society, democratization)?
- What do the people being studied think the issues are, and how do they make sense of them?
- What assumptions are shared by everyone involved?
- How is consensus built, maintained, challenged, and changed?
- What is hidden in the assumptions that make consensus possible?
- Who are the actors? Why are they involved? Who has power and who doesn't?
- Who are the agents and the opponents of change and what do they stand to gain or lose?
- Who is telling the story? Who benefits from different versions of it?
- How is history being exploited and reinterpreted, and for what purpose?
- How do processes of interpretation, translation, appropriation, and miscommunication play into the issue? Where is there continuity in change and vice versa?

- What points of view are silenced or excluded from the discourse?
- How are processes of domination and exploitation being justified?
- If there is conflict, do some aspects of the conflict go unresolved? Why?
- How do people make sense of, adapt to, or cope with conditions they do not control?
- What alternatives are being proposed or are implied, and why?
- Are some alternatives rejected or accommodated, and is the status quo maintained?

One reason why defining a good research question is difficult is that it is as much about the reaction of the researcher to the question as it is about the question itself. If your research project is to have a chance of being interesting to others, it first has to be interesting to you. If you are not passionate about your own project, then how can you expect others to get interested? Do you find the question intellectually engaging and stimulating? Does it make you reorganize your thoughts and rethink what you have read? Is it productive for guiding and organizing your writing? Does the question make you want to jump up and get to work to answer it? Be ready to explain why you think your project is exciting and important. Be ready to remind yourself why you find the topic exciting. When you are deep in the process of elaborating your research project, it is easy to get bogged down in the details and lose sight of your original motivation. Do not let what is most interesting about your project get lost in the details.

It is very important to note that great research questions do not spring fully formed from the mind. Researchers often start with a simple question that evolves and becomes more refined as the research project develops and a researcher becomes more knowledgeable about the subject. It is a good idea to keep a written record of the various versions of your central research question and sub-questions. Evolving research questions tend to wander about a bit and do sometimes circle back, usually becoming sharper and more subtle in the process. The overall thesis or central research question may not reach its final form until the project is done, and then may morph into the next research project. Even though the research question may evolve during the research process, it nonetheless, and somewhat paradoxically, serves as the foundation for the entire research design. Your research design may need to be adjusted as your research question evolves. It does not matter that the details change as long as you keep the most interesting and important aspects of your work central to your research project.

What Makes a Research Question Global?

Global researchers can use nearly any theory, method or analytical technique from across the social sciences and humanities (Darian-Smith and McCarty 2017). If the theories and methods used in global research are the same as in other disciplines, then what is it that makes a global research project uniquely global? The answer is the type of questions we ask. We argue that in order for a research project to be considered 'global' it should, as a minimum: (1) have an overarching research question that is informed by global perspectives, (2) explicitly address a global-scale issue or issues that manifest at some point

along the local-global continuum, and (3) include one or more global dimensions in the analysis.

A global research question recognizes that many global dimensions are present and may, or may not, be important to a specific analysis. Global research explicitly situates the issue being studied in global contexts that can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- local-global dimensions
- spatial and geographic dimensions
- temporal and historical dimensions
- intersecting political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions
- global intersectional dimensions (e.g., race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, citizenship, language)
- global ethical dimensions (e.g., structural inequality, asymmetrical power relations)

The best research questions in global studies often take into account the local-global continuum. This means locating very abstract global concepts where they touch down in the real world, in the lives of ordinary people. These large abstract concepts often look very different from the perspective of the local or from related micro and macro inside/outside, or emic and etic angles. For example, the way non-academics understand global-scale issues such as climate change or migration is often very different from the way academics understand them. Moreover, in any one society understanding global issues may differ depending on one's social class, ethnicity, gender and religion. And while it is important not to think of societies as homogenous, the way people in the global north typically understand global issues may differ significantly from people living within different cultural contexts situated in the global south. The differences between these various perspectives are often interesting and offer a good starting point for thinking through a strong research question.

Finding Your Focal Point

If the first step to doing global research is developing a global research question, then the second step is to find a focal point for your research. In global studies, the focal point can be nearly anything: a place, a person or group of people, a festival, a local business or transnational organization, a social, economic or political process, or, as we will see, even an object such as a T-shirt or a single fish. The most important feature of the focal point is that it is situated at the intersection of the kinds of global issues and dimensions that you, the researcher, want to investigate.

When researchers learn to see global dimensions, they tend to find more and more of them cutting through their topics. At first, they may think of the various global dimensions passing through their area of interest as separate issues. When crosscutting issues

come into view, it is often as a tangled jumble of seemingly unrelated dimensions (Figure 2).

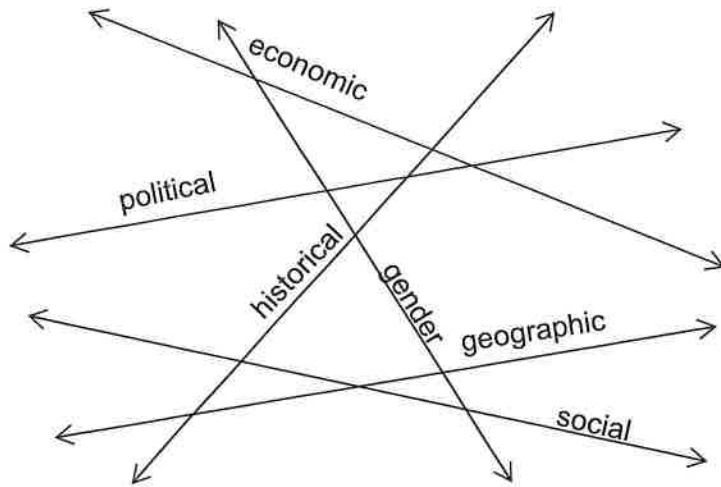


Figure 2. Divergent Global Dimensions

Identifying a focal point, however, will bring order to the chaos. The focal point is the place where all the dimensions the researcher wants to study intersect (Figure 3).

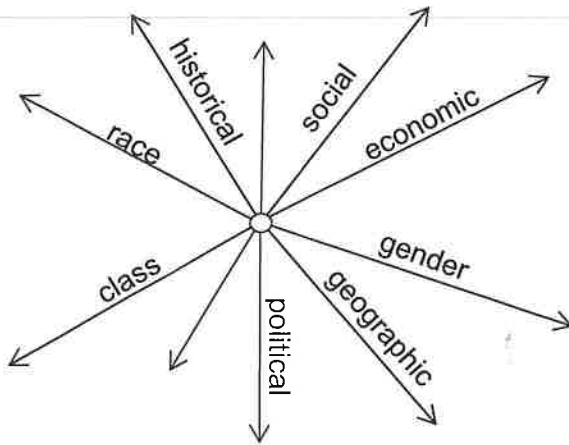


Figure 3. Dimensions Intersecting at a Focal Point

For students, it can be a difficult exercise to find a focal point in the real world where all the issues that interest them intersect. We want to be clear, however, that finding a focal point is a worthwhile exercise. There is a knack to it: it can be learned, and it does get easier once the researcher learns to explicitly engage with issues that span the local-global continuum. Below we discuss three focal points that do just that.

(1) Supply chain studies are an example of a focal point. Several of the earliest and most well-known studies of global processes followed one product such as a T-shirt or pair of shoes through the entire global supply chain (Bateman and Oliff 2003, Iskander 2009). Commodity chain studies can be used to examine the production of a single product from the initial gathering of raw materials, through the international production chain, through distribution and retail markets, on to consumption, into the waste dumps, and finally back into the environment (Rivoli 2005, Hohn 2012). Focusing on the lifecycle of a single product through the global supply chain in this way allows researchers to highlight the increasing complexity of global production lines. It can also illuminate a surprising range of social, political, and economic issues, including the consumption of natural resources, the exploitation of human labour, human rights, economic development, international trade, and the cultural and environmental impacts of mass production and consumption. By picking a focal point and asking the right questions, a researcher of global processes can use a single object to show how these apparently disparate issues are in fact interconnected.

(2) Another example of a focal point is the lifecycle of a single fish. Imagine tagging a single salmon and following it from birth in the headwaters of a river, through its migration downriver and into coastal waters and the ocean, and ultimately its return upriver to spawn in the headwaters again. The migration of that one fish would touch on a host of environmental matters, such as water pollution and biodiversity, and regulatory practices around issues such as water quality, recreational boating, tourism, fishing, and species protection. The river might pass through indigenous land at some point. This could introduce topics relating to indigenous cultures, religions, traditions, and sovereignty. There might be concerns related to dams, water supply, irrigation of farmland, and hydroelectric energy production. Food regulations and interstate transport and commerce would almost certainly be involved. If the one little salmon was lucky, she might survive the river, pass through the estuary, swim through highly regulated coastal waters, and make it into international seas. Here the little fish could play a small but important part in ocean fisheries, related laws and international treaties, and perhaps even be the object of conflict between countries and commercial fishing operators. The point is that even a single salmon can act as a focal point for intersecting global processes.

(3) A third example of a focal point is illustrated in fair trade practices. To demonstrate this for our students, we ask: How may a researcher go about studying the impact of fair trade marketing on coffee production? What, if anything, does buying coffee labelled 'fair trade' at your local coffee shop do for the coffee plantation workers in developing countries? For this exercise, we assume that the supply chain for fair trade coffee reaches from plantations in the global south, through global markets, through

regional wholesale distribution, and finally ends at retail consumption. A topic like fair trade could conceivably be studied at any point along this supply chain, from producer to consumer. How does one go about identifying a focal point with so many options? It turns out to be not as difficult as it may sound.

For the purposes of this exercise, we pick as our focal point a specific fair-trade coffee cooperative. This particular cooperative is made up of coffee growers from a specific region of Costa Rica, but we could have picked a cooperative from nearly anywhere around the world. Focusing the investigation of fair trade on this kind of cooperative has a number of advantages. To begin with, the cooperative's own website makes it clear that it is designed to serve as a pivot point between local growers and world markets, intentionally and explicitly connecting the local to the global and vice versa. By simply picking this regional cooperative, we have already situated our study at a midpoint that gives us easy access to the entire local-global continuum.

In this case, the cooperative's website also conveniently lists the specific benefits that membership in the fair-trade cooperative brings to local coffee growers. The benefits it lists, and even the order they are listed in, are very interesting:

- solidarity
- increased land tenure
- better pay and job security
- health benefits
- education for families

Each of these claimed benefits can be converted into a research question with the potential to lead a student to the evidence they will need to address the original question about fair trade's impact on local growers. In the exercise, we ask students to develop a set of research questions based upon the cooperative's claims. The result is an amazing variety of questions. What is 'solidarity' in this context and why is it listed first? Does belonging to a fair-trade cooperative significantly increase land tenure for coffee growers? Some of the claims made by the cooperative can even be converted directly into testable hypotheses. Do plantation workers in the cooperative have more job security than workers outside the cooperative? Do they get more benefits such as education and health care?

In this example, the local coffee growers, including members and non-members of the fair-trade cooperative, provide a ready-made field of comparable cases. There are also a number of other actors involved, including transnational fair-trade networks, government officials, cooperative operators, plantation owners, and plantation workers and their families. Each group of actors would almost certainly have a different perspective on the issue. It is not hard for most students to see how they could build any number of viable research projects using the cooperative as a focal point.

Further, as part of the exercise we ask students to consider the distributors' perspective by examining the claims that retail coffee outlets make on their corporate websites. These claims are frequently stated in terms that are very different from those used by

producers. Major coffee outlets use terms such as accountability, corporate social responsibility (CSR), equity, ethics, sustainability, and transparency. To round out the exercise we ask students to survey their fellow students on campus about what they think fair trade coffee does, or does not do, for coffee producers in other countries. The responses of the students provide a quick and easy way to access consumer expectations about the purpose and impact of fair trade. Most of our students voice expectations in terms that are again very different from both the producers and distributors. Students tend to use terms such as fairness and social justice.

The fair-trade example illustrates how different micro and macro analyses, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods, can be brought to bear on the cooperative as a focal point and the different global dimensions that pass through it. A focal point enables global studies scholars to use various theoretical and methodological approaches in creative ways to explore different aspects of the issue at hand. Developing a research strategy that explores different perspectives on fair trade provides a very accessible way for students to learn about focal points and how to operationalize a viable study of global processes.

In sum, be it a supply chain, salmon fish, or coffee cooperative, the focal point acts both as the conceptual focus and as a refractor for exploring the multifaceted global issues that happen to intersect at that point. This approach allows researchers to concentrate on one case, but it also gives them a way to connect the case to wider global concerns.

Freedom, Coherence, and Containment

A focal point allows the researcher to corral complexities into one tangible place, thing, or process. A focal point can localize, concretize, humanize and personalize global research in analytically productive ways that make studying complex global-scale processes much more feasible for most researchers. A focal point provides conceptual clarity, analytical freedom, and practical containment of the project, making it possible to produce a coherent project with the limited time and resources that are typically available.

Suppose that a researcher decides that they want to study the intersection of very abstract issues such as gender, the environment, and inequality. Each of these is an enormous topic and the bodies of literature that could be relevant are very large. With a focal point, the researcher becomes responsible for explaining just one real-world case. They can choose to talk about how race and inequality impact the specific case, but they are not required to summarize all the attendant literature on these large topics. The researcher's responsibility is to discuss how the topics factor into the specific example. In short, with a concrete focal point, researchers do not need to summarize the works of Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and Du Bois, and everyone that came after. They need only

incorporate the specific aspects of the literature that touch directly on their particular example.

We recognize that there are practical limitations to how much time one can spend searching for the right focal point. At the same time, we do not want researchers to settle for a focal point that does not allow them to address all of the issues they may want to explore. Our experience indicates that if researchers keep looking, delve further into their topics, read more, learn more, and meet more people working in their area of interest, they will almost certainly find a point where the issues that interest them come together in one tangible example. Once found, the focal point can be used as the starting point for designing a global research project that is viable and relatively contained.

A focal point also provides coherence to the researcher. Finding a tangible focal point changes how they talk about what are often very abstract ideas. As teachers, we can often hear the transition when students go from referring to intangible and incoherent interests to describing a specific and tangible example of their interests. In short, having a focal point saves time, money, and the researcher's sanity! The initial effort spent on finding a good focal point repays the researcher many times over in the clarity and manageability of the project. For these reasons, spending the time to find a focal point is almost always worth the effort.

Limiting the Scope of Your Analysis

Once the researcher has elaborated a central research question and identified a focal point for the study, the next step is to design their research project around the global dimensions that bisect that focal point. One of the biggest challenges in doing global research is that issues are multifaceted and interrelated in complex ways. Multifaceted global issues can be approached from any number of analytical perspectives. Even with a clear research question and concrete focal point there are still a nearly endless number of ways to go about the analysis. In order to maintain focus through the research process it is necessary to limit the scope of analysis to specific dimensions.

The researcher should focus selectively and explicitly on certain dimensions of the analysis as part of the research design process. You can save yourself a lot of trouble by limiting the scope of your study to the specific dimensions that interest you. For example, one of our students designed a project to compare the influx of refugees from the ongoing Syrian civil war into Europe to the influx of Jewish refugees into the same countries during World War II. At first glance the differences between these two refugee crises were so huge, and the time periods so different, that any comparison seemed futile. Despite the obvious differences, however, it was clear that any similarities between these two refugee crises could be very important. By focusing on the news media's coverage of anti-immigrant hysteria in the countries receiving the immigrants then and now, the student was able to design an investigation that could be done in a relatively contained fashion. Deliberately focusing almost exclusively on one aspect of the two cases allowed

that student to manage what would otherwise have been a very complex comparison across space and time.

In sum, even though global issues are multifaceted and interconnected, there is usually a manageable way to limit the scope of the analysis. Be specific about the global dimensions that you want to explore and what interactions you are interested in. Explicitly engage with certain dimensions and not others. Then own it. If you design your research project to examine the intersection of x and y , give yourself permission to say the rest of the alphabet is important but for the purposes of your study will not be examined in any depth, if at all.

Conclusion: Question-Driven Research Design

Designing a global research project that deals with complex global issues can appear daunting. It is all the more daunting when approached from the wrong end. When you start with a given theory or method and try to make global issues fit within a specific theoretical framework or mode of data collection, doing global research can seem nearly impossible. Remember that global research is the process of answering a global research question. We argue that you should start with a research question that fascinates you, then find a real-world example to act as the focal point for your question, and then limit your analysis to the specific dimensions you want to address. If you follow these steps then the process of designing and carrying out a viable global research project can be relatively straightforward.

What theories should I use? Contrary to popular belief, researchers do not use theories because they enable the use of big words. Scholars use theories because they contribute something to the analysis that they are trying to do. Most interdisciplinary global researchers use the unique global perspectives mentioned above. Beyond these basic global perspectives, there are many theoretical frameworks from across the social sciences and humanities that could be useful in the analysis of global issues. If your research question deals with conflict, then you will probably need to engage with one or more conflict theories. If you want to be able to talk about immigration or diaspora, then you will probably need to engage with immigration or diaspora theories. Development? World Systems? Governmentality? Feel free to use these and any other theoretical and conceptual frameworks that suit your analysis. Or don't use them. The German philosophers and French theorists, while profoundly important to social thought, are not in the driver's seat. You are. You decide what theoretical and analytical tools you need to make your argument.

What methods should I use? If you have a concrete example, and know what dimensions you want to explore, then deciding what methods to use becomes a matter of deciding what kinds of evidence you want to draw upon for your analysis. Is the analytical approach you want to use essentially qualitative or quantitative? Then use the appropriate qualitative or quantitative methods. Does your question have local and global

dimensions? Then feel free to use a mix of methods – the method that works best for you at the local level and another for the global level. Use those methods that allow you to quickly develop the evidence you need to make your argument and that allow you to cut directly into the most interesting aspects of your project. If a particular method does not contribute something fascinating to your project, then do not waste your time and energy on it.

Keep in mind that as you move through the processes of designing and carrying out your research that the three main elements discussed in this essay (research question, focal point and dimensions of your analysis) will tend to interact. Any change in one is likely to require adjustments in the other two. There should be an ongoing negotiation between the three. It is also likely that you will encounter new information, innumerable possibilities, distractions and dead ends. Stay focused on developing the kinds of evidence that you need to address the most interesting aspects of your analysis. Give yourself permission to be ruthless in cutting out the things you do not need. This unwavering focus is what makes it possible to engage with global issues, design a viable project, and produce noteworthy results that will encourage people to read your work and hopefully enable you to make a significant scholarly contribution.

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