

6

Theorizing Glocalization and Grobalization

The primary objective in this book is to offer a new way of thinking about, of theorizing, the cultural aspects of globalization. While there are implications for other aspects of globalization (e.g., economic, political), my primary focus has been on culture, especially consumer culture (for more on this, see Chapter 7). In the process of rethinking and reconceptualizing globalization, and in order to accomplish the book's objective, I have had to create an equally new way of thinking about that which is being globalized (nothing, something, and the nothing-something continuum), especially in the realm of consumption. The objective in this chapter is to examine the implications of all of this for cultural theories of globalization.

My concern throughout has been with the hegemony of the concept of glocalization (associated with cultural hybridization; see Chapter 1) and the need for a parallel emphasis on the idea of grobalization (that is central to cultural convergence also discussed in Chapter 1). This is addressed in this chapter primarily through a close critique of work that overtly and covertly privileges the idea of glocalization. In the process of critiquing that work, we will see that not only is there a parallel need to theorize grobalization, but in fact what is often discussed under the heading of the former can be seen as really involving the latter.

Theorizing the Globalization of Culture

The theoretical origins of this analysis lie in the growing hegemony of the concept of glocalization and even the emergence of a theory, or a paradigm, that takes that concept as its focus and even as its name.¹ As is clear in this discussion, especially in Chapter 5 and the model developed there, I certainly accept the importance of glocalization. Indeed, it occupies a central place there as one pole in the glocalization-globalization continuum. However, that is precisely the point—it is *not* all there is to globalization, even in a given locale, *and* it may not be the most important aspect of globalization, at least on a case-by-case basis. It is only one element, albeit a key one, in thinking about globalization. We *always* need to look at the ways in which glocalization and globalization interpenetrate, and we need to do this without operating with the foregone conclusion that it is glocalization (or globalization) that tells all, or even most, of the story. Thus, even with my great interest in globalization and its various subprocesses, I recognize that it is only part of the overall process of globalization.

To put this another way, if we want to elevate glocalization to the level of a theory, or a paradigm (as many seem to want to do), there is at least as much reason to do the same with globalization. While the latter term has not been used explicitly before, it has certainly been central implicitly to the study of globalization under a variety of other more specific headings—capitalism, colonialism, neocolonialism, Westernization, Americanization, McDonaldization, Disneyization, and much more.

It may well be that glocalization and globalization are the two leading paradigms in the study of the globalization of culture. If glocalization is seen as a paradigm, then work on hybridization, creolization, and much else, especially the work of a number of anthropologists,² can be included within it. In terms of globalization as a paradigm, in addition to the work in areas mentioned above, we can also include neoliberalism and realist theories of state power relations. In fact, we could, at this point, begin the delineation of these, and perhaps other, paradigms in the study of globalization, but that is a highly complex task that would involve not only dealing with theory but also a range of other issues such as the appropriate research methods for each paradigm.³ For the purposes at hand here, instead of beginning such a complex undertaking, it would be best to focus on the far more modest preliminary task of seeking to gain a greater understanding of glocalization and globalization as the two poles of a continuum the entirety of which encompasses much, if not all, of globalization, at least in very general terms.

140 The Globalization of Nothing 2

By the way, it should be noted that there is much else involved in globalization than just grobalization and glocalization. Thus, theorizing the process in anything approaching its entirety would involve much more conceptual, as well as theoretical and paradigmatic, development than is being, or even could be, undertaken here.

Of course, there is a second, parallel continuum and set of theoretical ideas—nothing-something—that is equally important to this work. These ideas are certainly useful in thinking about globalization, but they are perhaps of far greater utility and importance in thinking about the social and cultural world in general and a far wider array of social and cultural processes. Similarly, they are not only useful in theorizing globalization but also have much broader applicability to social and cultural theory in general. We will not follow that more general line of thinking here, although we will return in Chapter 7 to the something-nothing continuum and its relationship to globalization in general, and the glocalization-grobalization continuum in particular, in the context of their relationship to consumer culture.

The origin of the concept of grobalization lies in both my previous work on processes like McDonalidization and Americanization and my critical reaction to the growing hegemony of the idea of glocalization. However, my conceptualization of nothing (and something) has a somewhat different origin lying mainly in the substance of my work in the sociology of consumption, specifically on fast-food restaurants, cathedrals of consumption, and credit cards and my desire to come up with an overarching concept that encompassed them and much else, at least in part. The concept of nothing eventually came to mind as that concept, and as I reviewed what turned out to be a voluminous amount of highly diverse work on it,⁴ my own sense and distinctive definition of that concept began to emerge. Thus, while grobalization is a new concept, nothing is a very old idea that is defined in a new way in this book. Once I had a definition of nothing, it became clear that I needed the concept of something, a parallel definition of it, and a something-nothing continuum to parallel and juxtapose with the grobalization-glocalization continuum. While nothing, and the something-nothing continuum, are crucial to this analysis, they will occupy a secondary role in this chapter, where the primary focus is globalization, especially globalization theory. Rather than discussing this in very abstract terms, the focus will be on a critical analysis of culturally oriented work in the sociology of sport and in anthropology (which, of course, is by definition oriented to culture) that tends to privilege glocalization. The objective is to show that while they focus explicitly and implicitly on glocalization, grobalization is, or should be, an integral part of their, indeed any, analysis of the globalization of culture.

Analyzing Sport: Use and Abuse of the Concept of Glocalization

In order to illustrate the critical starting point of this analysis of globalization, as well as the need for a broader analysis of it, I begin with a review of a work that looks specifically at the relationship between sport and globalization. While it is not directly concerned with our focal interest in consumer culture, its focus is primarily cultural. As we will see, it is representative of much work on globalization in that it accords far too much attention to glocalization and, in the process, underplays the significance of globalization, to say nothing of the relationship between them. I use this critical analysis, and the one that follows, as a basis for outlining, at least briefly and provisionally, what I think a more complete and well-rounded examination of the globalization of sport, and much else, might look like.

David Andrews and Andrew Grainger see sport as both a central element of the global popular (culture) and as an important vehicle for institutionalizing the global condition.⁵ For example, as a globalizing force, the Olympic Committee has more members than the United Nations. They argue that at first, sport was clearly local, but by the early 20th century, a global sport system and imaginary had developed. In the second half of the 20th century, that trend accelerated as sport was increasingly colonized by capitalism.

The Andrews and Grainger analysis is heavily informed by the global-local nexus, and they go to great lengths to argue that sport today is best seen as glocal (and not grobal, or as a romanticized local phenomenon). In fact, in a useful elaboration, they distinguish two types of the glocal as well as two subtypes of the second type. The *organic glocal* is globalized, internationalized sport that has been incorporated into the local. The *strategic glocal* involves transnational corporations exploiting the local, either through *interiorized glocal strategizing*—global sport co-opting and exploiting sport's local dimension (and as we will see as in much else in the Andrews and Grainger analysis of glocalization, this sounds very much like a form of grobalization)—or through *exteriorized glocal strategizing* (importation and mobilization of sporting differences into the local market). Let us take a closer look at these two types of the glocal as well as the subtypes under the heading of the second broad type.

Organic Sporting Glocalization

We can begin with a deconstruction of Andrews and Grainger's definition of organic sporting glocalization as

142 The Globalization of Nothing 2

the process whereby either globalized or internationalized sport practices (depending on their spatial reach) become incorporated into local (communal, regional, but primarily national) sporting cultures and experienced as authentic or natural (hence organic) signs of cultural collectivity. In a general sense, organic glocalization is associated with local responses to the sporting flows that accompanied broader forces of social transformation (colonization, modernization, urban industrialization, etc.).⁶

There is no question that Andrews and Grainger are describing glocalization, or at least that end of the global-glocal continuum, in discussing the incorporation of sport into the local, local responses, and experiencing things as authentic and natural signs of the cultural collectivity. However, what is most striking about this definition is that they are dealing much more with processes that would meet the definition of globalization and fall far closer to the global end of the continuum. These include “globalized or internationalized sport practices,” “sporting flows,” and most generally the “broader forces of social transformation.” Included in the latter are some of the broadest forms of globalization such as “colonization” and “modernization.” Thus, it is clear that Andrews and Grainger are devoting at least as much attention, if not more, to globalization as they do to glocalization in their discussion of organic sporting glocalization. The point is that this form of globalization, indeed all forms of globalization, cannot be discussed, as Andrews and Grainger demonstrate, without discussing *both* glocalization *and* globalization.

Strategic Sporting Glocalization

Andrews and Grainger turn next to strategic sporting glocalization, which is

a more recent phenomenon derived from changes in the spatial ambition, organization, and imagination of late capitalism . . . associated with the advent of transnational as the dominating logic of economic expansion and the transnational corporation as the “locus of economic activity.” . . . Rather than treating, and hoping to realize, the world market as a single, un-differentiated entity (as in previous stages of development in the global economy), transnational capitalism has become increasingly concerned with commercially exploiting (through negotiated incorporation and commodified reflection) the local differences its international antecedent previously sought to overcome.⁷

This is an even more striking illustration of the fact that glocalization cannot be discussed without discussing globalization.

Indeed, this entire discussion of strategic sporting globalization deals, in the main, with grobalization. This is clear in the following ways:

1. It is strategic; that is, it relates to the strategies employed by grobalizing forces.
2. It deals with capitalism, especially late capitalism, one of the three central grobalizing processes discussed in this book.
3. More specifically, it deals with the transnational corporation, which is, of course, the most important component of contemporary capitalism as a grobalizing process. Indeed, the very label “*transnational*” communicates a sense of grobalization.
4. Use of terms like “expansion” and “exploiting” clearly imply grobalization.
5. Finally, contemporary transnational capitalism is described as more ambitious than its antecedents in the process of grobalization (exploiting, incorporating, and commodifying local differences).

Interiorized Glocal Strategizing

Andrews and Grainger then turn to the first of two subtypes of strategic sporting glocalization, “interiorized glocal strategizing,” which they see as referring to

the manner in which global capital has aggressively co-opted local sport cultures and sensibilities into its expansive regime of flexible accumulation . . . not for global dissemination per se, rather for local market accommodation, and incorporation, as a constituent element of the broader transnationalist project. Thus, the architecture and convictions of the hegemonic corporate sport model [have] become truly globalized.⁸

Note the grobalizing terms and ideas associated with this concept and explicit in the preceding quotation—“strategizing,” “aggressively co-opted,” “expansive regime,” “incorporation . . . [in] the broader transnationalist project,” and the “hegemonic corporate sport model.” In fact, the authors are forced to acknowledge explicitly that this form of globalization *is* grobalization as it is practiced by such grobal entities as “commercially-driven sport organizations and governing bodies; professional sport leagues and tournaments; sport management companies; media and entertainment corporations; sporting goods manufacturers; and, allied corporate sponsors.”⁹

What is it, then, that makes this in any way a glocal phenomenon? The answer is that these grobal forces are strategizing ways of seeking to

capitalize on, to exploit, local sporting practices. But even here, Andrews and Grainger point out that the appeals to “indigenous sporting and cultural authenticity” are “contrived” by globalizing forces. In the end, what is produced is just one more component of a “global economy of sporting locals”—in other words, the forces of globalization are not only exploiting local sporting practices, but the latter are part of a larger global project involving many of these sporting locals. While there is certainly a glocal element to each of these, the main thrust of this discussion focuses, once again, on globalization rather than glocalization.

Exteriorized Glocal Strategizing

The second subtype of strategic sporting glocalization is “exteriorized glocal strategizing,” which

involve[s] the importation and mobilization of what are commonly perceived to be externally derived expressions of sporting difference into a local market. Here, for those sport consumers looking to express their alterity from the cultural mainstream, the aim is to provide the opportunity to consume the sporting Other. For instance, the exportation of American sport forms even more than the American film and music genres that have become the cultural vernacular of the global popular.¹⁰

Yet again, the emphasis here is on globalization as, for example, in ideas like “importation” and “exportation” of American sport forms (and other forms as well). Exporters and importers are seeking to provide local sport consumers with the means to express their differences. This seems to speak to the power of globalization, not only than sport in sport but also in film, music, and elsewhere. The latter may be even more involved than sport in providing locals with the means to express their differences, even dissatisfaction, with globalization. This is an extraordinary perspective on the power of globalization, which is even involved in providing locals with the means to express their hostility to that process. This is, indeed, a powerful process when it is self-assured enough to intrude on, and shape, the very opposition to it.

Monoculture?

Striking in the above quotation is a phrase I have extracted for further deconstruction. In describing the globalizing ambitions of American sport, film, and music, Andrews and Grainger contend that they are “far from seeking to realize a sporting monoculture.” The authors then go on to discuss the various ways in which locals identify with (or against) these things,

as well as the various ways these things are received, defined, and consumed. There is no question that all of this is accurate, and, in fact, it lies at the heart of thinking about glocalization. *However, globalizing forces do not need to seek, or achieve, a monoculture in order to profoundly shape the local.* This kind of exaggerated argumentation is a characteristic way of privileging the glocal and dismissing the global. That is, by underscoring the obvious point that we do not, and will never, have a global monoculture in sport or anywhere else, the critics go on to reject the whole idea of globalization (or, more likely, its specific variants like Americanization) because it has not succeeded in producing such a monoculture. However, while this all-or-nothing argument makes it easy to reject globalization (or related ideas) and accept glocalization, it ignores the powerful, albeit certainly not all-powerful, process of globalization.

In their conclusion to this section of their essay, Andrews and Grainger offer a more balanced summation that integrates the glocal and the global. That is, they argue that “today’s sporting locals can only exist and operate within the structures and logics of the global.”¹¹ If we substitute “glocal” for “local” and “global” for “global” in that quotation, as I think we can, we arrive at the kind of more balanced analysis of the relationship between glocalization and globalization being championed in these pages.

Practices, Spectacles, and Bodies

Andrews and Grainger go on to distinguish between glocal sport practices, spectacles, and bodies. In terms of practices, there is the transposition of imposed, transplanted sporting practices into local contexts where they are transformed by the local. The way in which Indians came to transform British-imposed cricket is treated as an excellent example of this.¹² However, whatever the merits of this argument in the specific case of cricket and India,¹³ the following is Andrews and Grainger’s opening argument on “glocal” sport practices:

Once characterized by a patchwork of locally-bound, traditional forms, sport’s premodern diversity has collapsed into a relatively small number of *highly regulated, standardized and bureaucratized* sport practices that now dominate and define the sporting landscape. . . . The reasons for this sporting *consolidation* are manifold, yet primarily need to be understood in relation to the sweeping social transformations in western Europe in the period after 1700, that resulted in the establishment of an increasingly industrialized, urbanized, and *Westernized world order*. . . . [C]ontemporary sport is the *regulated* embodiment of the distinctly modern Western (and specifically North Atlantic) values of competition, progress and achievement. [italics added]¹⁴

They then go on to discuss the British role in this process, talking in terms of the “*imperiallly*” inspired relationship between Britain and the rest of the world, the resulting “global sporting *hegemony*,” and how many traditional sports were “*subsumed* within, or largely *expunged* in the face of the *unrelenting march of the modern sport order*” (italics added).¹⁵

To be noted, of course, is the fact that *all* the terms I have italicized in the preceding quotations, even though they are discussed under the heading of glocalization, could hardly constitute stronger descriptors of the *grobalization* of sporting practices.

Nevertheless, Andrews and Grainger then turn to glocalization, contending that the “patterns of sporting diffusion were certainly not globally uniform.”¹⁶ Of course they weren’t, and no one would ever argue otherwise! The issue is *always* the relative mix of heterogeneity and homogeneity, of glocalization and grobalization. It is *never* one or the other!

The discussion then turns to cricket in the West Indies and, based on Appadurai’s work in India, focuses on the resistance in those settings and how the game was used to create local forms of subjectivity and resistance. They conclude, following Appadurai, that “the empire had struck back.” But how had it struck back? By playing the English game of cricket! While I agree there is glocalization going on here, it seems clear that grobalization is also at work in the global dissemination of the English pastime.

Andrews and Grainger next discuss “glocal” sport spectacles and once again begin, paradoxically, by discussing them in terms that clearly deal with grobalization. Their focus here is on the consumers of media content rather than attendees at sporting events, and they emphasize the commodified spectacle produced by the mass media, as part of the “culture industry” (and sport is seen as a part of it as well), designed to be imposed on people and even to “penetrate [their] consciousness.” What is disseminated are sport spectacles that are “sporting ‘muzak’” that flatten out local sport differences. Again, I could hardly do a better job of describing the process of grobalization as it relates to mediatized sport.

Of course, Andrews and Grainger are unwilling to give this idea its due, and turn immediately to a discussion of how such a (grobalizing) perspective is misleading, inaccurate, and superficial. They seek to demonstrate this in a discussion of the “glocalized” Olympic Games, saying that it “is more a spectacular unity-in-difference [read glocalization] than a serious contribution to global homogenization [read grobalization].”¹⁷ Clearly, this quotation better reflects the view that in discussing the Olympic Games, and much else, we need to be attuned to both glocalization and grobalization.

The example they use is of the games’ opening ceremonies and how they are designed to “stage” the local (nation). Thus, the Olympics are seen as

reflecting myriad local representations and furthermore are interpreted and lived differently from one locale to another. Again, while this is true, we must also recognize that the local spectacles are created on the basis of the globalizing of the central importance of spectacles as well as a global model of how such spectacles are to be staged and intensified by the control exercised by the global media for whom the spectacles are staged. As Andrews and Grainger point out, there are global international feeds of Olympic events that can be embellished locally by those nations that can afford to do so. It must not be forgotten in this context that the media are one of the great globalizing forces in the world today (Andrews and Grainger discuss News Corporation and its efforts to “advance globally uniform processes and technologies”), and they are central to the globalization of sport. And as Andrews and Grainger admit, only more well-to-do nations can embellish global feeds with local content that reflects local interests. Poorer nations are doomed to globalization, especially the globalization of nothing, at least in this context, because all they are likely to receive are the global feeds of sporting events. The media presentations of these events are, of course, centrally conceived and controlled and lacking in distinctive content.

Finally, Andrews and Grainger discuss glocal sport bodies. Here too they focus on what I would think of as globalizing—“corporate sport’s scouring of the world for superior athletic talent.”¹⁸ That is, they are referring to the big-time sports—professional (and to lesser extent college) basketball in the United States and soccer (usually called football outside the United States)—that are increasingly dominated by wealthy individuals and corporations. (A good example is the recent purchase of the fabled Manchester United football team by American entrepreneur Malcolm Glazer.) They are willing to do—and pay—whatever is necessary to bring great talent from anywhere in the world to their teams. This clearly involves the imperialism of the wealthy teams, as well as the countries in which they reside—almost always the United States or the global North. Quoting a well-known sport sociologist, Andrews and Grainger note: “[T]he core states dominate and control the exploitation of resources and production.”¹⁹

Following their usual pattern, they immediately disown and desert a globalizing perspective for glocalization, arguing that “it would be wrong to assume unidimensionality” (which, of course, need *not* be assumed to accept the relevance of the idea of globalization) because “there are various iterations of, and motivations for, the sport migrant experience the *variations* of which depend on the sporting migrants’ range of movements, length of stay in any one given space, and level of remuneration.”²⁰ All of this is interpreted through the lens of the various types and subtypes of glocalization while all the while globalizing terms like “corporeal neocolonialism,” “social and

economic rape,” and transnational corporations incorporating “localities into the imperatives of the global” are employed in the discussion. Most damningly, Andrews and Grainger conclude this section of their essay by discussing an “external and commercially inspired locus of control, which produces little more than *generalized recipes of locality*.”²¹ The production of such recipes is unquestionably grobalization. Reasonably, they then go on to say that this may be a “corollary of sporting glocality.” Bravo! Here we see a reasonable position in which the glocal is not elevated far beyond its importance and is seen as merely a corollary of something else—and that can be nothing other than the grobal. The essay concludes, predictably, with a discussion of “sport within the glocal age.” However, if Andrews and Grainger had not simply *assumed* the dominant glocal paradigm and examined their own argument carefully, to say nothing of the globalization of sport, they would have seen that what they were describing was actually sport in the grobal-glocal age!

Analyzing McDonaldization Anthropologically: More Use and Abuse of Glocalization

I now turn to a much broader example of the exaggerated importance of the phenomenon of glocalization, this time in a body of literature in anthropology. Rather than focusing on grobalization in general, this literature revolves more around a critique of the more specific grobalizing process of McDonaldization. It is traceable to the work of a well-known Harvard anthropologist—James Watson—and some of his students.

McDonald’s in East Asia

The key document in this tradition is Watson’s edited volume, *Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia*.²² The heart of this anthology is five essays by five anthropologists, including one by Watson, on McDonald’s in five areas in East Asia—Beijing, Hong Kong, Taipei, Seoul, and Japan in general. As an anthropologist, Watson does not appear to know or use the term *glocalization*, nor is it referenced in the Index (the term is more popular among sociologists), but that is clearly what he sees when he looks at East Asia, and much the same is true of the authors of each of the other essays in his volume.

In the Preface, Watson describes the origin of his interest in the impact of McDonald’s in East Asia and begins with a 1989 visit to a McDonald’s in the New Territories area of Hong Kong. After a number of visits to that

restaurant, he realized the importance of the phenomenon he was observing—that McDonald's had become central to the lives of many people there. He recruited the other authors involved in the anthology, and all were astonished to discover “how deeply fast food chains had affected the lives of people we thought we knew well.”²³ Clearly, such a statement reflects a deep understanding of glocalization, but that is not the direction Watson and the other authors intended to take.

Rather, Watson is animated by what he considers a destructive fad among anthropologists “to become increasingly detached from the interests and preoccupations of ordinary people.”²⁴ Thus, he sees the work in this volume as part of a trend in anthropology to redefine the field as the study of everyday life. In the case of McDonald's, he seeks to “situate the global [McDonald's] in the local.” He goes on to say that “our aim is to determine how McDonald's worldwide *system* has been adapted to local circumstances in five distinct societies.”²⁵ Thus, the focus is on the local and how McDonald's adapts to it. This means, of course, that what is *ignored* are the ways and degree to which McDonald's imposes itself on the local. While there is no question that McDonald's adapts, there is also no question that in various ways it imposes itself on the local. In mentioning McDonald's worldwide system, Watson clearly recognizes that glocalization exists, but because of his commitment to redirect anthropology in the direction of the local and everyday life, he is simply not going to deal with it. To my way of thinking, in so doing, Watson is excluding from consideration at least half of what is needed to understand fully globalization.

This orientation leads Watson and the other authors in the methodological direction of “personal interviews and informal conversations with consumers.”²⁶ While this is a perfectly acceptable methodology, it further biases the researchers in the direction of the local, since all they are likely to see and hear about is the local and they are likely to interpret the global as the local. To develop a more balanced view of the global-glocal continuum, the researchers would have been well advised to *also* interview managers, as well as executives of McDonald's throughout East Asia and at central headquarters in the United States. It is they who would have been able to tell the researchers about the ways in which McDonald's glocalizes throughout East Asia and the rest of the world.

In his Introduction, Watson early on indicates not only the starting point but also the conclusion of the volume: “Since the early 1970s, an entire generation of Japanese and Hong Kong children has grown up with McDonald's; to these people the Big Mac, fries, and Coke do not represent something foreign. McDonald's is, quite simply, ‘local’ cuisine.”²⁷ Key here is what these phenomena “represent” to East Asians. There is no question

150 The Globalization of Nothing 2

that East Asians can and do redefine these things as local, but just as clearly, the phenomena they are redefining are global in character. Again, fully half the equation is omitted from Watson's analysis. Watson concludes, "East Asian consumers have quietly, and in some cases stubbornly, transformed their neighborhood McDonald's into local institutions."²⁸ Lacking the term *glocal* here, Watson uses the idea of the "local," but since globalization is involved—in this case the spread of McDonald's to East Asia—it is clear that Watson is really describing some combination of the global (or global) and the local, or the glocal. It would be more accurate to substitute the term "glocal" for "local" in the preceding quotation.

Watson's *bête noire* is, of course, globalization, but lacking such a term or concept, he focuses instead on "cultural imperialism." In order to demean this idea, he argues that this is the view of both (presumably misguided) Chinese officials and "European and American intellectuals." Watson all but says that to adopt such a perspective is wrong-headed and the orientation of ill-informed Chinese officials and fuzzy-thinking intellectuals who have not immersed themselves in the local context. Later in his Introduction Watson explicitly addresses my work and the McDonaldization thesis and implicitly dismisses it almost immediately by linking it to the dreaded "cultural imperialism." To dismiss such ideas in this way is a clear case of anti-intellectualism and involves a very limited conception of globalization.

Watson further biases the argument by associating cultural imperialism with a view of McDonald's as an "evil empire" and as "an irresistible force."²⁹ Few really see McDonald's as an evil empire, and even in my largely critical analysis, I am careful to point out some of the positive characteristics of McDonald's and McDonaldization. More important, no one portrays McDonald's as an irresistible force. This is another extreme term that is employed to dismiss cultural imperialism, McDonaldization, and, implicitly, globalization. While these forces are not irresistible, they *are* nonetheless powerful, and we cannot and must not ignore that fact. This view is implicit when Watson argues that "McDonald's does not *always* call the shots" (*italics added*).³⁰ Of course it doesn't, but the clear implication is that McDonald's *does* call the shots some of the time. This is another way of saying that it involves *both* globalization and McDonaldization.

Later, Watson does much the same thing by arguing that "consumers are not the automatons many analysts would have us believe."³¹ Of course no "analysts" are cited here, and the fact is that few, if any, believe any such thing. What many do believe, including me, is that McDonald's goes to great lengths to control its customers. However, there are limits to this. Agents always possess the ability to act in unanticipated and idiosyncratic ways. McDonald's customers are *not* automatons, but their actions *are* nonetheless tightly and highly controlled.

Interestingly, Watson understands the nature of the McDonald's system and the way in which it exports that system to the rest of the world. He discusses the company manual and the ways in which it carefully details how things are to be done—down, for example, to the thickness of the pickle slices—and ultimately how “[n]othing is left to chance.”³² The exportation and employment of the centrally conceived company manual to the far reaches of East Asia is an excellent example of globalization. Also fitting into the thrust of this argument is Watson's recognition of the fact that the food, the nature of the menu, the character of the work, and the structure of the restaurants are much the same, if not identical, throughout the world. Furthermore, if McDonald's leaves nothing to chance, doesn't this apply, as well, to the actions of consumers in East Asia, at least to some degree?

Toward the close of his introductory essay Watson does come to a conclusion that is not dissimilar to the argument being made in this book:

The process of localization is a two-way street: It implies changes in the local culture as well as modifications in the company's operating procedures. Key elements of McDonald's industrialized system—queuing, self-provisioning, self-seating—have been accepted by consumers throughout East Asia. Other aspects of the industrial model have been rejected, notably those relating to time and space.³³

I don't think it distorts this statement much to say, in my terms, that Watson is describing McDonald's in East Asia as existing somewhere between the extremes of glocalization³⁴ and globalization.

Even clearer from this point of view is that Watson concludes from his own analysis of McDonald's in Hong Kong that it “is no longer possible to distinguish what is local from what is not.”³⁵ Or, more specifically, “Hong Kong consumers have accepted the basic elements of the fast food formula, but with ‘localizing’ adaptations.”³⁶ Again, this all could easily be rephrased, in the terms used here, to argue that the local and the global increasingly interpenetrate, and therefore what is really being described is that which lies somewhere on the global-glocal continuum, albeit closer, at least in Watson's view, to the glocal end of the continuum.

While Watson takes great pains to show the power of the East Asian consumer, he also recognizes how McDonald's, in turn, has transformed that consumer. One of the most striking examples is the role that McDonald's played in transforming Hong Kong children into consumers. Prior to the late 1970s, Hong Kong children rarely ate outside the home, and when they did, they had no choice in terms of what they ate; they ate what they were told to eat. McDonald's catered to the children's market and offered them choice, and it thereby played a central role in the fact that today children are active

and choosey consumers in the Hong Kong market. Similarly, the celebration of birthdays in Hong Kong (often at McDonald's) is another recent change in which McDonald's played a central role.

Yet, in the end, Watson feels compelled to return to his "hobby horse" and argues: "[T]he ordinary people of Hong Kong have most assuredly *not* been stripped of their cultural heritage, nor have they become the uncomprehending dupes of transnational corporations."³⁷ Agreed! But neither have they been unaffected by globalization in general and McDonaldization in particular. Hong Kong consumers are not dupes, but neither are they all-powerful in the face of McDonald's various impositions on them.

In another analysis in the Watson volume, McDonald's in Japan is seen as "*Americana as constructed* by the Japanese."³⁸ Again, this kind of terminology can easily be rephrased as a glocal phenomenon involving the integration of the grobal ("*Americana*") and the local ("*Japanese*"). While power is accorded to the Japanese consumer, McDonald's did lead to many significant changes in, for example, table manners. Eating sandwiches with bare hands is a problem for the Japanese, and the solution is that sandwiches are often served cut into small pieces and with toothpicks for eating the pieces without using one's bare hands. There are certain "culturally prescribed" foods that must be eaten with bare hands, but in those cases the hands are first cleansed with wet towels. Ohnuki-Tierney observed that this norm was largely unaffected by McDonald's, since most "ate their hamburgers in the paper wrapping in such a way that their hands did not directly touch the food."³⁹ However, the norm of not eating while standing "has received a direct hit from McDonald's."⁴⁰ In other words, in terms of these two dimensions, the Japanese, at least when this analysis was done in the mid-1990s, retain some local traditions (not touching food with bare hands), but in others (not eating while standing) they have tended to surrender to global norms. Another way of putting this is that Japanese behavior in fast-food restaurants can be placed somewhere between the glocal and grobal extremes; it certainly cannot be adequately described as simply "local." Ohnuki-Tierney concludes that the changes that have occurred are "particularly significant"⁴¹ to Japanese society. In other words, things that are very dear to Japanese culture have been changed dramatically, and perhaps forever, by the globalization associated with McDonald's.

Thus, the most general point here, as in the discussion of sport, is that the anthropological analysis of McDonald's in East Asia leads to the conclusion that while it is couched in other, often antagonistic, terms, what is actually being described is the interplay of the grobal and the glocal in a variety of specific contexts.

In the interpretation being offered here, McDonald's is clearly a global force that must adapt to local realities, and in the process it moves toward the glocal end of the global-glocal continuum. There are many other examples, beyond those already discussed, of adaptations made by McDonald's throughout the world, especially in this case in East Asia:

- "McDonald's experience in Beijing is a classic case of the 'localization' of transnational systems. . . . When customers linger in McDonald's for hours, relaxing, chatting, reading, enjoying the music, or celebrating birthdays, they are taking the 'fast' out of fast food. . . . It is . . . tempting to predict that, twenty years from now, the 'American' associations that McDonald's carries today will become but dim memories for older generations. A new generation of Beijing customers may treat the Big Mac, fries, and shakes simply as local products."⁴²

- In Hong Kong, customers are also more likely to linger, and they do not bus their own debris, employees rarely smile, and napkins are dispensed one at a time. "It is no longer possible to distinguish what is local and what is not. In Hong Kong . . . the transnational *is* the local."⁴³

- In Taipei, McDonald's is also a hangout, and regular customers come to know one another quite well. "[M]any consumers treat McDonald's as a home away from home. . . . This establishment has become 'localized' in that it plays a key role in the routines of everyday life for many people who live in the neighborhood."⁴⁴

There are many other examples of this ilk in the Watson volume, and they are all taken, as in the quotations above, to indicate how local McDonald's has become in East Asia. While that is one interpretation, another is that there, as everywhere else, what we are witnessing is the creation of phenomena that have both global and glocal characteristics, phenomena that lie somewhere on the global-glocal continuum and involve, in some measure, *both* global and local elements. Indeed, in every locale there is a unique mix of all of this, with the result that the positions of, let's say, local McDonald's vary in terms of their specific position on the global-glocal continuum.

McDonald's in Russia

Melissa Caldwell, a student of Watson's, continues and expands this line of thinking in her analysis of McDonald's in Russia.⁴⁵ What she describes is a process by which McDonald's has been "localized" there, although she,

154 The Globalization of Nothing 2

unlike Watson, possesses the term *glocal*, which is certainly a better term for what she describes. The integration of a global force like McDonald's into the local is clearly glocalization. However, she prefers *localization* because she believes that terms like *glocalization* reify distinctions between the indigenous (local) and the imported (global).

Caldwell describes various aspects of what she thinks of as the localization of McDonald's in Russia. She associates this with the Russian notion of *Nash* (or "ours"). This idea encompasses both the homeland (Russia) and the physical space of one's home. Thus, McDonald's has become Russian, has come to be considered "home," home lives have been brought to McDonald's, and it has been brought into Russian homes. Russians are seen as having become comfortable with McDonald's; it has become familiar, and they have come to trust it. For example, as in various places in East Asia, Russians have come to treat McDonald's as home by, for example, holding important family occasions such as birthday parties there. However, her most important contribution to this line of argumentation is that Russians have gone further and "domesticated" McDonald's—they have made it and what it has to offer both familiar and comfortable. That is, they have brought it not just into their communities but even their homes by preparing and cooking their versions of McDonald's food there. One example is the preparation of milk shakes, largely unknown in Russia before the arrival of McDonald's, at home, as well as in many other venues. Muscovites also are now more likely to cook hamburgers at home, although the preparations sometimes take highly creative forms such as fried cabbage instead of hamburger between two slices of bread. Similarly, fried potatoes have become a staple, and children may well react negatively if potatoes fried at home are not exactly like their counterparts at McDonald's. As elsewhere, especially in the United States, fast food has become the standard, especially for children, against which virtually all other food is measured.

Caldwell clearly is uncomfortable with the idea of McDonaldization and, by implication, globalization. Furthermore, she is even uncomfortable with the idea of glocalization, arguing that it is not a completely satisfactory idea to describe what she finds in Russia:

Muscovites do not simply appropriate and refashion foreign elements as happens in processes of glocalization, but rather reorient their attitudes, feelings and affections in order to experience and know the foreign as something mundane and, hence, part of the local landscape. Despite the power of McDonald's to position itself as local, Muscovites are the final arbiters of this distinction.⁴⁶

As we did with many of the arguments on sport, let us deconstruct this quotation:

1. Although there is recognition of globalization in the form of the “power of McDonald’s,” it is largely dismissed, unanalyzed, and reduced to the power to “position itself” (even this involves globalization) as part of the local rather than imposing itself on it.
2. At the same time, the use of the concept of glocalization (while it is acknowledged) does not go nearly far enough, as far as Caldwell is concerned. Foreign elements are *not* simply appropriated and refashioned but *transformed* into something mundane and part of the local landscape.
3. Great power is accorded not only to the local but also to individuals, the agents, who are here seen as the “final arbiters.”

These three points serve to underscore an argument made earlier about the affinity between those who prefer glocalization (and in this case, localization) and a postmodern orientation (although Caldwell, like most others who do this work, is certainly not a postmodernist). Thus, like most postmodernists, she rejects totalizing forces like globalization and McDonaldization and (over)emphasizes the power of both the local and the agent.

So, to Caldwell, “McDonald’s is more than a localized or a glocalized entity in Russia. By undergoing a specifically Russian process of localization—Nashification—it has become a locally meaningful, and hence domesticated, entity.”⁴⁷ But what is it that has been localized, domesticated? In this analysis it is largely the food and to a lesser extent the way customers use and relate to McDonald’s restaurants. However, what we need to remember is that it is *this* food and *those* restaurants that have been globalized. The processes of localization and domestication are taking place within the context of, and could never have occurred without, globalization. In fact, in our terms, and as with all the other works being described here, what Caldwell is describing is the integration of the global and the local and the creation of phenomena that can clearly be positioned somewhere on the global-glocal continuum.

Beyond the Food

Furthermore, what Caldwell and most other analysts of McDonaldization and, implicitly, globalization analyze is primarily the food and the ways in which the settings for food consumption are utilized by consumers. They see local adaptations in the food and the use of the restaurants and use this as the basis for rejecting McDonaldization (as a form of globalization). However, this ignores the fact that the heart of McDonaldization does not lie in *either* the food or the settings but rather in the *principles* by which the fast-food restaurant, as well as other McDonaldized entities, are run. When

one looks at those principles (or, in other terms, systems and structures)—efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control through nonhuman technologies—what one sees is that they have been globalized, more or less in toto, everywhere McDonald's and other McDonaldized systems have gone.

In fact, a few insightful analysts have recognized the importance of those principles, and the systems that they produce, to the process of McDonaldization. For example, Alan Bryman, who created the idea of Disneyization as a parallel to McDonaldization and as another example of globalization, makes it clear that it is the basic principles (efficiency, predictability, etc.)—*not* the food or the settings themselves—that lie at the base of McDonaldized (and Disneyized) systems.⁴⁸ And he argues that those principles and systems remain essentially the same whatever goods or services are offered and wherever in the world they are proffered. In fact, he goes on to argue that these principles and systems are “potentially more insidious processes because they are far less visible and immediately obvious in their emergence than the appearance of golden arches or of magic kingdoms on nations’ doorsteps.”⁴⁹

Uri Ram offers a more complicated account of McDonaldization that takes into account both products (and services) and principles (and structures).⁵⁰ He differentiates between one-way (structural) and two-way (symbolic) models of globalization. The latter involve more of a global-local mix—that is, they are more glocal, whereas the former is more purely global in nature. The one-way model involves structures, and this idea is very close to the interrelated ideas of systems and principles that lie at the heart of McDonaldization. Furthermore, a one-way model implies the kind of processes suggested by the idea of globalization. Thus, for example, McDonaldization involves the one-way globalization of structures, systems, and principles. The two-way model involves products (and their associated symbols), including, say, the Big Mac. Such products are more likely to be glocal, to adapt to local realities, and to involve both global and local symbols. Furthermore, as symbols they can coexist with other very local symbols. Thus, in the Israeli case examined by Ram, the Big Mac coexists with the falafel, thereby creating a unique two-way, glocal combination of highly symbolic foods. However, even here Ram is forced to equivocate, arguing that such symbolic differences have done little more than to survive. In other words, the implication is that they too are likely to succumb to the one-way process of globalization. That is, falafel will become so McDonaldized (globalized) that it will become indistinguishable from the Big Mac. However, until that happens, Ram sees a continuation for the foreseeable future of the combination of structural uniformity and symbolic diversity. He calls this “glocommodification,” but in my terms it involves a

combination of the grobal and the glocal. In other words, what exists in Israel in this case at the present time can be located somewhere between the extremes of grobalization and glocalization. However, the clear trend, as far as Ram is concerned, is further movement toward the grobal end of the continuum.

It may well be that anthropologists, given the nature of their discipline, are locked into the concept of the local. After all, what defines the field is the ethnographic study of locals, of specific locales and their defining characteristics. Thus, anthropologists have difficulty moving from the local to the glocal, and of course they have even greater problems adopting a notion of grobalization. While anthropologists may have good disciplinary reasons for their inability to see these processes (at least in these terms), there is no excuse for those in other fields, especially sociology, to don the same blinders. While it may be acceptable, even desirable, for those in a given discipline to have a specific focus, it is incumbent on them to at least acknowledge and recognize the broader contexts in which their focus exists.

Take the most recent developments in the relationship between McDonald's and the Chinese market. In terms of the food, McDonald's continues to adapt to local tastes (although it also continues to sell its usual fare) by selling such foods as rice burgers (beef or chicken patties between two compressed rice cakes) and triangle wraps (a tortilla-type wrapper that might include beef or chicken, vegetables, and rice).⁵¹ However, the big change undertaken by McDonald's was the introduction in 2005 of the drive-through (called De Lai Su—Get It Fast) to its restaurants. This structure is so foreign to the Chinese that McDonald's had to print flyers instructing people on how to use them and deploy employees in parking lots to direct customers to the drive-through lanes. The whole idea of takeout food is foreign to most Chinese, who, until now, have preferred leisurely meals in restaurants when they go out for a meal. But China is moving strongly in the direction of a car culture, and McDonald's is betting that more people will echo the sentiments of a Shanghai electronics company manager who regularly uses the drive-through at lunchtime and who says (sounding *very* American): "I don't have time to sit in the restaurant. . . . The pace of life here is very fast."⁵²

Thinking About the Fate of the Local

A crucial issue in the preceding sections, and more generally in globalization theory, is the impact of globalization on the local. Melissa Caldwell and Eriberto P. Lozada, Jr. have addressed this topic in an essay titled "The Fate

158 The Globalization of Nothing 2

of the Local.”⁵³ They are explicitly and implicitly addressing a range of theories associated with the idea of globalization and the implications of that process for the local. They argue that among the implications of that paradigm are that globalization imposes itself on the local, it destroys heterogeneity and leads to homogeneity, and as a result it greatly alters, if not destroys, the local.

They acknowledge the fact that globalization does greatly impact on, change the fabric of, the local, but its impact is, in their view, ameliorated by a number of factors. The local is populated by agents who are not passive in the face of globalization; they are not cultural “dupes.” They do not simply accept globalized cultural practices but rather are selective and adopt some while rejecting others. In addition, global commodities are not simply imposed on them, but locals actively want, and seek out, at least some of them. Then, the impact of globalization is not equal; those with more social and economic resources will be better able to resist than others. The net result of all of this is that it is difficult to generalize about the fate of the local in light of globalization, and that fate will be different from one setting to another.

They also argue that much of the concern about the fate of the local in the era of globalization is animated by mythical ideas about the local. Among those myths are the ideas that the local is an area untouched by civilization’s modern conveniences; that the cultural practices of the local are unique, static, exotic, and primitive; that they are small in scale; and that they are locales where “everyone knows your name.” Much of the concern about the local and its demise is animated by these ideas, and if the local is idealized, romanticized, and mythical, then there is far less reason to be concerned about threats to something that never really existed.

Perhaps their most potent argument is that the local is not what most globalization theorists think it to be. That is, they see it as a thing, but Caldwell and Lozada see it as a process of social change. The local is constantly being created and re-created by a wide range of larger and smaller social processes and social changes. Furthermore, it is an ongoing accomplishment of those who comprise the local, and that accomplishment is fragile and therefore subject to constant change and disruption. Relatedly, it is the “location-work” of locals that creates the local, and that location-work is ongoing and continual. In sum, the local is a dynamic, interactive, and continually renegotiated process.

This leads to the view that the local is not a thing being buffeted by globalization but is itself a process that has been, and is, always affected by innumerable such processes.⁵⁴ There is nothing new about what is happening to the local today, and the implication is that the local, at least viewed

as such a process, will continue to survive, if not flourish. As they put it, “[L]ocality is not lost in the tide of globalization.”⁵⁵

There is no question that Caldwell and Lozada offer some unique and useful ways of looking at the local. However, they do seem to exaggerate the power of the local and of those who live in such settings. At the same time, they underestimate the power of the global forces impinging on them. While it is true that the local has always been affected by larger forces, there is something new and more powerful about globalization today.

What about the local from the point of view of the argument being made in this book? Clearly, the whole idea of the glocal assumes a local that is being integrated with the global. However, is there a local that exists independent of the global? Theoretically, it is certainly possible to conceive of a local existing independent of the global (and glocal). Prior to the recent and dramatic expansion of the global, the local was empirically predominant and easy to identify. However, the fact is that it is now increasingly difficult to identify the purely local. The vast majority of that which at one time could have been thought of as local is strongly influenced by the global. This means, among other things, that local products are likely now to be intertwined with imports from other parts of the world and themselves exported to other places to be integrated with that which is indigenous to them. In any case, the point is that the local, at least in the sense of anything that is *purely* local, is fast disappearing from the world scene.

This has many implications. For example, the disappearance of the truly local has dire implications for global cultural diversity. Where are the most important differences in the world to come from, if everything that we think of as local is, in fact, glocal? One answer, of course, is from distinctive glocal creations in different locales throughout the world, but those innovations will be, from the outset, informed and affected by the global. This will inherently limit their capacity to be true cultural innovations. More promising would be the interaction of two or more glocal phenomena producing unique entities that are not reducible to the glocalities that lie at their source. It may be that with the death of the local, the best hope for cultural innovation lies in the interaction among glocalities. It seems clear that distinctive glocal mixes will continue to provide diversity, but it also seems likely that it will not approach the amount and degree of diversity that existed throughout the world when it was possible to find something approaching the genuinely local.

Thus, the argument being made here (and in Chapter 1) is extreme as far as the local is concerned. That is, I am contending that we are witnessing the *death of the local*, at least as we have known it. This is a view that

160 The Globalization of Nothing 2

would upset many globalization theorists, especially those discussed herewith. And this argument holds even taking into consideration the interesting and useful arguments made by Caldwell and Lozada about the nature of the local. The bottom line is that it is increasingly difficult to find anything local in the world that has not been affected by globalization. It can either be utilizing global elements (e.g., raw materials from other parts of the world), or it can be reacting against globalization and seeking to sustain or re-create the local. However, in either of those cases, and in virtually any other one can conceive, it is increasingly difficult to find anything local unaffected by the global. It is that which leads to the view that we are witnessing the death of the local.

The idea of the death of the local is seemingly contradicted by a recent article by Darrel K. Rigsby and Vijay Vishwanath in the *Harvard Business Review* titled "Localization: The Revolution in Consumer Markets."⁵⁶ While the authors do not directly address globalization, they argue that in the United States, especially, many large companies are moving away from standardization and in the direction of localization. However, this does not mean that they are selling products tailored to the local market (something), but rather that they are tailoring the mix of their general products (nothing) to local markets. Thus, for example, while Wal-Mart sells three types of chilies in all its stores, it allocates almost 60 other types according to local tastes. In the terms of this book, Wal-Mart is distributing different mixes of various types of nothing, depending on the nature of local markets. This is the essence of what is meant by localization in this context. It is certainly *not* the idea that Wal-Mart is selling something (in this case, locally conceived and controlled chili that is produced by local cooks and is rich in distinctive content) in its various locales. To take another, even more extreme, example, Wal-Mart discovered that while ant and roach killer sold well in the South, the word *roach* put off northern customers. Rather than create a unique product for the northern market, Wal-Mart simply relabeled the same product "ant killer" and saw its sales increase dramatically.

That what is being discussed in terms of localization involves nothing is clear in the use of the idea of "templates" (and "modules") in this context. That is, Wal-Mart uses a variety of templates to decide what set of things should be found in a particular type of locale (e.g., Wal-Mart's near office parks should have prominent islands with easy-to-obtain ready-made meals). As pointed out in Chapter 4, such templates are basic patterns that are conceived and used centrally to create each new form. Since the same pattern is used over and over, each iteration of the form is more or less exactly the same as every other. Thus, even in a case of what is called

“extreme localization,” Tesco in the United Kingdom uses five templates for selling its foods—traditional grocery store, one-stop hypermarket, a smaller supermarket, a tiny convenience store, and a Web site. Again, the use of a limited number of templates has no relationship to what is discussed in this book as that which is local and something. Thus, what is seen by Rigsby and Vishwanath as a revolution in localization is better seen as still more evidence of the death of the local.

Contributions to Cultural Theories of Globalization

Given this critique, what can we say in summation about the contributions of this book to cultural theories of globalization? I think they can be summarized in a series of succinct statements:

1. Globalization is a very broad process that encompasses a number of major subprocesses.
2. One way of looking at globalization is to see it as encompassing a wide range of processes that form a continuum ranging from the well-known “glocalization” on one end to the newly coined “globalization” on the other.
3. The idea of a continuum makes it clear that most of what we think of as globalization falls somewhere between these two poles.
4. Another way of saying this is that both glocalization and globalization are “ideal types” with few, if any, actual global processes being one or the other.
5. Thus, in looking at global processes or phenomena, we must assess their relative degree of glocal and global elements.
6. The local is largely downplayed in this formulation largely because it has been, or is being, decimated by the global. That which remains of it is integrated into, and adulterated by, the global.

I should add that while I do not go into the issues here, I believe that these ideas and orientations are also of relevance to other theories of globalization, including those dealing with economic and political issues. Clearly, the ideas of globalization and glocalization, as well as something and nothing, can easily be extended to these domains and theories.