

**The Sociology of Cultural Resistance to Globalization:  
Strong Aesthetic/Weak Structure**

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***Abstract***

The article critically reviews a number of theories of globalization. Contemporary sociological theories of globalization are criticized because they are often historically shallow, they do not adequately consider forms of cultural resistance to global standardization, and finally they often neglect the role of the state in orchestrating responses to external global transformation. In order to develop these critical assessments, the article concentrates in particular on George Ritzer's study of McDonaldization and especially his recent book on the *Globalization of Nothing*. Ritzer contends that much global culture is devoid of authentic substance, has no sensitivity to place or time, and denudes local cultures of their distinctive contents. His work has taken an increasingly pessimistic direction, reinforcing his dependence on Max Weber's notion of the rationalization of society. Against Ritzer, this article argues that there are two important dimensions to cultural resistance to nihilistic globalism, namely the presence of a strong cultural aesthetic and the mobilization of political power to resist standardization. The argument examines a variety of historical circumstances where societies with strong aesthetics and political will have resisted external, global pressures towards standardization.

***Keywords***

globalization, rationalization, hybridity, strong aesthetic, multiculturalism

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### **Introduction: The Globalization Debate**

There are a number of theories that may be regarded as anticipations of globalization theory such as theories of the internationalization of the corporation, world systems theory, civilizational analysis, theories of computerized knowledge, information and postindustrialism, and reflexive modernity and risk society. There are a number of important questions that have yet to receive adequate answers: is globalization simply an extension or development of 'late modernity' or are there long-term roots of globalization? If globalization is a distinctive break with the past, is existing sociological theory equipped to answer contemporary problems about globalization? Theories that emphasize the technological and economic causes of globalization (such as computerization of information and communication or economic and fiscal deregulation in the neo-liberal revolution in the 1970s) show little appreciation of long-term cultural, religious and social conditions. Whereas Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens tend to see globalization as an aspect of late modernity in terms of risk society and reflexive modernization, Roland Robertson has analyzed long-term cultural developments such as the unification of global time, the spread of the Gregorian calendar, the rise of world religions, the growth of human rights culture, and the globalization of sport as important long-term developments.

Sociologists such as Scott Lash and John Urry who emphasize the historical discontinuity of globalization also tend to argue that existing sociological traditions are either irrelevant or unhelpful when it comes to explaining and understanding globalization. Urry (2000) stresses the idea of flows and networks as the dominant characteristics of 'mobile societies'. Giddens (1990) has argued that past sociologists equated society with the nation state. Because the nation state has been eroded, many assumptions of classical sociology are redundant. By contrast Ritzer (2000) argues that McDonaldization is a key feature of consumer and cultural globalization, and that McDonalds is a classic illustration of Max Weber's notion of rationalization. The relevance of classical sociology to understanding globalization is thus a contested issue. In defense of the classics we can note that Emile Durkheim identified the emergence of a cosmopolitan culture in Europe that anticipated aspects of political globalization, while Marx's view of the internationalization of capital and the history of the socialist International could also be viewed as relevant to contemporary debate (Turner 1999a).

Although these issues are highly contested, the following critical points must inform any theory of globalization: internationalization is not the equivalent of globalization; there were major changes in the 1970s (in finance,

computing and economics) and in the 1980s (fall of organized communism and the end of the Cold War) that are associated with globalization, but it is important to be sensitive to long-term historical events and conditions such as the impact of two world wars and the historical consequences of world religions; whether we emphasize short-term financial changes or long-term social and cultural conditions will depend partly on how we define 'globalization'; and finally it is not true that classical sociologists uniformly defined society as the nation state. For example Georg Simmel's theory of the social consequences of money on social relations is not a theory of the nation state.

One persistently critical issue in the contemporary literature is that we do not possess an entirely satisfactory definition of globalization as a process. Robertson has complained with some justification that theorists have overstated the economic nature of globalization (such as free trade, neo-liberalism, financial deregulation, integrated production and management systems) to the neglect of its social and cultural characteristics (such as the cultural characteristics of world religions). From a sociological perspective, we need to examine globalization as the interconnectedness of the world as a whole and the corresponding increase in reflexive, global consciousness. Perhaps the most elementary definition is that offered by Marshall McLuhan namely the rise of the global village. McLuhan's ideas on the media first appeared in the 1950s when he worked with Edward Carpenter on *Explorations: Studies in Culture and Communications* which was the basis for the influential *Understanding Media* (McLuhan 1964). Globalization in this framework is the impact of new media of communication on the compact nature of social space, whereas 'globalism' or 'globality' refers to the cultural condition of globalization. Sociologists have noticed that globalization produces a complex interaction between the local and the global. This interaction often produces a complex hybrid culture that is a consequence of globalization. The interaction between and intensification of local and global has been defined as 'glocalisation' (Robertson 1992:173). In Japanese business and marketing, the strategy of 'global localization' became important in 1960s as a principal sales practice .

The other main controversy in defining the field is disagreement as to its consequences. There is a division of interpretation over globalization as either standardization such as McDonaldization or cultural and ethnic hybridity. These are two highly contradictory views of globalization between Ritzer for whom McDonalds is a world without surprises and Beck for whom globalized risk society is a social world that is full of surprises—it is one of contingency and complexity. Perhaps another version of this contradiction is between cool

markets (McDonalds) or hot politics (Jihad) in Barber's *Jihad versus McWorld* (Barber 2001).

Although there is no accepted definition of globalization, we can define globalization in substantive terms as the following: the growing frequency, volume and interrelatedness of cultures, commodities, information, and peoples across time and space; the increasing capacity of information technologies to reduce and compress time and space creating the global village; the global diffusion of standardised practices and protocols for processing global flows of information, money, commodities and people; and the emergence of people, institutions and social movements to promote, control, monitor or reject globalisation (or globality) (Beckford 2003:119).

### **Dimensions of Globalization**

We also need to attend to the various dimensions of globalization and their causal priority. These include the economic and technological (global markets); informational and cultural (global knowledge); legal and political (human rights and globalization); globalization of health and illness. Before 9/11 the mood of much sociology (such as Giddens's Third Way vision of globalization) was optimistic. More recent writing has begun to turn to militarism, war, terrorism, slavery, drugs and crime as equally important dimensions of global processes. The growth of global slavery in the modern world economy is a case in point (Bales 1999).

In contemporary globalisation literature there is therefore an important division between utopian versions of globalisation that perceive important opportunities for global justice, human rights and cosmopolitanism, and dystopian versions that emphasise the destruction of local cultures; the dominance of consumerism, and the growth of international terrorism and crime, and revolutionary visions that perceive the implosion of the world order such as Hardt and Negri's *Empire*. A more balanced view of the political opportunities are presented in J. Keane Keane (2003) *Global Civil Society* (2003).

In this article I am primarily concerned to comment on the negative view of the consequences of global consumerism in George Ritzer's *The Globalization of Nothing* (2003) in which the cultural consequences of economic globalisation are interpreted as a unidimensional destruction of the distinctive qualities of 'local' artefacts.

### **Consequences: Heterogeneity and Rationalization**

There are significant problems therefore in existing approaches to globalisation. There is frequent confusion between internationalisation, transnationalism, and globalisation; there is a tendency to take very short term, historically shallow view of globalisation; we need to pay attention to the contradictory nature of globalisation such as the mixture of local and global (glocalisation), standardisation and hybridity, and traditional and modern components; and finally there is a tendency towards reductionism (treating globalisation as simply a consequence of economic deregulation, or technological determinism (in information theories), and a neglect of cultural and social determinants (such as world religions). In this discussion, I attempt to counter these tendencies by examining the resistance to economic globalisation and westernisation that has been influenced primarily by religious and cultural values.

Contemporary views of globalisation are often coloured by economic arguments because the recent phase of globalisation has been shaped by the neo-liberal revolution of the 1970s. Dominant aspects of globalisation in the last twenty years have been sharply influenced by economic neo-liberalism and hence many nation states adopted similar strategies to manage the aftermath of the OPEC oil crisis of 1973, the fiscal crisis of the late 1970s and the opportunities that were made available by the collapse of Soviet Communism in 1989. There has been a globalisation of management strategies involving the adoption of a common discourse and set of managerial practices such as right-sizing, downsizing, outsourcing, subsidiarity, and incentivisation. This has involved the creation of an enterprise culture. The consequences of neo-liberal economic globalisation have been significant including increasing intra-national and international increases in income inequality as measured by Gini coefficient; a significant decline of social capital and a rise in infant mortality rates, homicide and suicide especially in the societies that were part of the Soviet system; and increases in black market activities associated with drugs, slavery and crime. The emergence of risk society theory (Beck 1992) is an effect of the perception that deregulated environments create greater social and environmental risks that are uninsurable and unmanageable.

Beck's study of risk society was published in German in 1986 and was in many respects a response to national conditions such as the pollution of the Black Forest, but it captured the pessimistic mood of the 1990s in terms of major environmental and health disasters—Bhopal, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, CJD, HIV/AIDS, Thalidomide, and more recently Mad Cows Disease, Foot and Mouth Disease, and SARS. Beck's concept of risk society has ignored the fact that deregulation has been typically followed by the necessity to re-regulation, control and audit. In the UK deregulation of utilities

often required a battery of techniques for monitoring and control. Processes of deregulation appear to require a period of auditing. If ENRON was a product of problems in American accountancy, global deregulation of financial services has prompted a response that calls for higher levels of auditing (Power 1998). There is a global cycle of deregulating, risk, crisis, auditing and deregulation (Turner 1999b).

### **Cultural Globalisation and Hybridity: Religion**

I have attempted implicitly to put forward a view of globalisation as having deep historical roots, as being multidimensional, and as being constituted by both social-cultural causes alongside political economic causes. I have criticised mainstream globalisation theory for its neglect of religion. However, if there is one dominant cultural viewpoint, it is theory of hybridisation namely the growth of cultural diversity in which there is also borrowing, simulation, and syncretisation. We can see this aspect in religious globalisation (Beyer 1994). While the world religions have been involved in inter-civilisational interaction (ecumenicalism) for centuries, modern communication and transport have made the 'worldness' of the world religions a practical and realistic goal. The Islamic pilgrimage (*hajj*) is a good illustration. It is possible to argue that prior to modern period, religions existed as religious cultures that were heavily intermixed with local beliefs, magic, and superstition. Globalisation has meant that the world religions have emerged as more coherent and institutionalised as 'religious systems' rather than merely 'religious cultures'. This global institutionalisation has meant increasing demands for adherence to orthodox belief and practice. Orthodoxy in the Abrahamic religions underpins the demands of global fundamentalist movements. But these movements are not confined to the Abrahamic religions. The Moonies (Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church) have a specific mission to become completely global. The Baha'i faith and the Buddhist Soka Gakkai International have an explicitly global ideology. Increasing interaction between religions has converted them into religious systems involved in struggles to differentiate and define themselves more precisely and exclusively against their rivals.

While Jewish communities have been for centuries subject to violence and exclusion being ejected from Spain for example in 1290 and 1492, religio-ethnic conflict is more likely in the modern period where identity politics have become dominant. Globalisation has increased conflicts over cultural identity by converting localised religious cultures into self-reflexive religious systems whose identity exists by virtue of its difference from other traditions. In 1893

the World Parliament of Religions met in Chicago, and one consequence was the growth of Hindu nationalism as an attack on the creation of a secular Indian state (Juergensmeyer 1993). This systematisation of religious cultures is in part a consequence of the export of western latin Christianity—a process that Derrida calls ‘globalatinisation’(Derrida 1998). This intensification of religious identity has been further enhanced by the spread of global fundamentalism (primarily Christian and Muslim) which has involved an attack on what I call traditional ‘religious cultures’ such as Sufism. Religious fundamentalism employs modern technologies such as TV , video-cassettes, and websites to spread its message that by returning to fundamentals (for example fundamntal or selected texts) modernises traditional cultures. This process of radical self-reflexivity involves not only a struggle between Christianity, Judaism and Islam, but also struggles within Islam between Sunni and Shi’ite traditions, and between Catholic and Protestant.. The politics of (religious) identity are the basis of claims by writers like Samuel Huntington (1996) that religion has become the fault line between West and East. The clash of civilizations is primarily between Christianity (that allegedly separates religion and politics) and Islam that allegedly does not. A similar argument is adopted by Ben Barber in *Jihad versus McWorld* (2001). These arguments are problematic because they fail to consider the fundamentalist movements in Christianity and Judaism as well as in Islam, they underplay the heterogeneity of Islam , and they equate fundamentalism as anti-modernism (Turner 2002). Religious fundamentalism is a threat to western secularism, but it is equally problematic for Palestinian secularism or modernist Islamic movements in Indonesia. In short, the notion of an elementary division between liberal democracies in the West and militant Islam in the East is simplistic. Religious globalization is inherently paradoxical. While the dominant trend is to create tensions between religious systems in which identity politics, at its worst, requires ethnic cleansing, there is considerable religious hybridity in western religious markets where New Age groups and other ‘quest cultures’ seek spiritual enlightenment through a playful hybridization of everything (Roof 1999).

Globalization both forces religions to compete in a global market place and hence compels them to differentiate themselves; fundamentalization reinforces this process. At the same time, especially in North America, the religious market places allows individuals ‘to do their own thing’. The implications of individualism in the religious market in the West is that religion, at least popular religion, will become a component in the entertainment industry. The pop star Madonna is the most spectacular illustration of this process.

### Resisting Globalization

Perhaps one of the best illustrations of the consequences of global economic change has been the spread of McDonalds as both a method of management in the fast-food industry and in consumer life-styles (Ritzer 2000). Although McDonalds has maintained a common service ethos (speed, cleanliness, cost, and predictability), its adjustment to local cultural norms is perhaps a perfect example of glocalisation. In Russia, McDonalds no frills ethos perfectly matches the preference for no trappings in the service industry and contempt for luxury of the 'New Russians'. In many Muslim societies, despite hostility to American culture, Muslim parents like McDonalds because their children are safe (from alcohol). In Indonesia, McDonalds has adjusted to local requirements during Ramadan. In Korea, students like to take their homework and own food to local McDonalds where they hang out, thereby compromising emphasis on speed. In Asia generally, McDonalds serves rice and green tea (Turner 2003b). In his work on McDonaldisation, Ritzer accepted the evidence for glocalisation in which the process of rationalisation is both modified and delayed. However, in *The Globalization of Nothing* (Ritzer 2003) the process of global economic domination appears to be more powerful and all embracing. There is little evidence in his account for successful cultural resistance to these (western) processes of global modernization. By contrast, I attempt to develop a theory of cultural resistance in which religions may contribute to the creation and maintenance of strong aesthetic cultures that may be capable of either co-opting or resisting cultural negation. In order to present this argument, we need to take a much longer historical view of these struggles. Western economic globalization has to be analyzed initially in terms of nineteenth-century imperialism and the nationalist and reformist movements that were engendered by western cultural imperialism. Both nationalism and fundamentalism developed responses to western hegemony, and contemporary cultural politics can be regarded as manifestations of earlier struggles.

We may call Ritzer's analysis in *The Globalization of Nothing* a theory of negative globalization. He defines 'nothing' as products and services of a global consumer culture that are 'lacking in distinctive substance' (Ritzer 2003:2). In a more elaborate version, he argues that we have moved into a phase of the global economy where 'nothing' refers to 'a social form that is generally centrally conceived, controlled, and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content' (Ritzer 2003:3). Consumption items and services that are nothing occupy no-place, are often provided by impersonal means (or no-person), and offer no personal service (because they are provided



by machines), By contrast consumption items that provide something are typically from a specific place, and offered by actual people in real time. To some extent, Ritzer's contrast between nothing and something is another version of the contrast between the global and the local, or between the universalistic and the particularistic.

We could argue that the nothing-something dichotomy is in fact the dialectic that produces glocalisation. Ritzer develops this aspect of the McDonalidization debate by creating a new term 'grobalization'. The notion of grobalization refers to the argument that the world is becoming more capitalistic, Americanized and westernized; it is the claim that the social world is becoming more standardized. Whereas glocalisation refers to the increasing hybridity of the world that is the product of both global and local forces, grobalization refers to the imperatives for growth in the world economy; hence growth + globalization = grobalization. The core to Ritzer's new book is Figure 5:1 in which he produces a property-space in terms of the two dimensions: glocal/grobal and something/nothing. The two most important cells are something and glocal (such as local crafts and traditional craftsmen producing for a local market) versus nothing and grobal (such as Disney world and a mass market).

Although Ritzer has in his defense of the McDonalidization thesis developed arguments about resisting McDonalds's culture, the new work on nothing does not systematically spell out the conditions whereby these processes might be resisted. In Ritzer's terms, we might ask how something is preserved against the forces of nothing. We need to think sociologically about how both grobalization and nothing might be resisted. If we think about these two dimensions as representing the politico-economic dimension and the cultural dimension of globalization, then similarly we might conceptualize the problem along both political and cultural dimensions.

There are two general conditions of resistance to negative globalization. One is cultural which is shall refer to as the strong aesthetic condition of (national) resistance. This dimension involves a form of cultural conservatism. A strong aesthetic acts as the carrier of national and local traditions that defines the 'distinctive substance' (or 'something') of a community. The second condition is political namely a viable and robust civil society that provides the basis for decisive (cultural) leadership. This dimension is the strong politics, and it is a largely progressive element. These two dimensions give us conceptually a property space consisting of four sub-types. Societies that combine a strong aesthetic of cultural conservatism with a strong politics (civil society plus leadership) can resist negative globalization because they can either resist cultural standardization or appropriate external values and

practices through the mediation of their our traditions and political structures without destroying their own aesthetic. Those societies that lack both a strong aesthetic and an effective political leadership can offer relatively little resistance to negative globalization and their local traditions are quickly destroyed. These two dimensions that produce four sub-types are generated from a critical reflection of Ritzer's typology (Figure 5.1) in order to conceptualize four ideal typical relationships of weak and strong cultural resistance.

By a strong aesthetic I mean a (national) culture that is coherent to such an extent that its architecture, domestic spaces, musical idiom, poetic traditions and national mythologies give expression to a more or less distinctive and integrated cultural form. In the language of a traditional anthropology, we might refer to this aesthetic as an organic culture. A strong politics is equivalent conceptually to a dynamic and responsive civil society that makes possible a positive sense of public space and public opinion. A strong politics presupposes a public culture in which debate and disagreement are respected and promoted. A (national)society can resist negative globalization if it has a strong aesthetic that can absorb, appropriate and re-interpret global cultures, and if it has a strong politics in which the undesirable aspects of global (McDonald) values and institutions can be analyzed and selectively rejected or incorporated. Effective resistance to negative globalization does necessarily involve reactive parochialism; effective resistance has elements of glocalisation, but a glocalism in which the host culture remains hegemonic. The determinants of a strong aesthetic are: a national religion; a viable and dynamic language and possibly a distinctive script; museums and a national university system; a national broadcasting system and independent newspapers and media of communication; public and domestic principles of design and representation; a national mythology. A strong aesthetic is the idiom or underlying principle(s) that give a culture some degree of coherence and integration.

A weak aesthetic means that there is no underlying idiom or theme, and globalization produces an exhaustion of idiom and its eventual demise. The globalization of nothing means that a community no longer possesses an hegemonic cultural idiom.

We might identify two rather separate conditions for strong politics. There is a top-down form of political leadership in which the state attempts to exercise hegemonic control of cultural development and leadership. This statist form of political leadership was characteristic of both nationalist and fascist politics (in the 1920s and 1930s). There is as it were a bottom-up or

democratic form of cultural politics in which civil society is critical in maintaining a way of life that can resist standardization. The determinants of strong democratic politics that are capable of exercising cultural leadership are: national systems of representation; a history of voluntary associations and intermediary institutions; a national church or religious tradition; regional representations; collective ownership of national media and communications; robust citizen institutions. A strong democratic politics can be conceptualized in terms of Alexis de Tocqueville's communal democratic institutions. The most effective forms of cultural resistance takes place when the state orchestrates and articulates both national culture and civil society to express a national or collective aesthetic that is relatively coherent and expressive. A strong aesthetic is a (national) habitus of taken-for-granted practices and beliefs that infuse everyday life, architectural norms, national dance, museums and other modes of collective memory.

We can conceptualize these national or societal dimensions within the framework of a theory of cultural and social capital. Societies can resist negative globalization if they possess cultural capital and can strategically resist the standardization that is implicit in McDonaldization or the globalization of nothing. They can also resist these processes if they have an effective associational basis to social life or social capital to act as a social glue that provides a protective social shell. When I use the phrase 'cultural resistance', I do not necessarily imply that this resistance involves conscious, self-reflexive opposition to negative globalization. Fascist or nationalist politics of cultural involves a deliberate attempt to impose an aesthetic if necessary by forceful and authoritarian leadership.

For example in the 1920s and 1930s, there were strong statist attempts to impose various forms of public art in order to counteract liberal decadence. In Italy there were significant struggles to impose fascist standards over both the functions and contents of public art.

This fascist art embraced an aesthetic that combined avant-garde aspects with populist and monumental, and the Novecento painters developed the use of murals and mosaics to depict pre-Renaissance Italian traditions (Stone 1998:115). In the modernization of Turkey, Ataturk borrowed ideas from Germany to develop monumental art, gymnastics, architecture and dress to create a powerful aesthetic. The caliphate was abolished in 1924 and the modernization of Turkey assumed a secular direction. A new bureaucratic middle class imposed western dress, secular education, and western legal traditions. In recent times, Turkey has been heavily expose to western popular culture and the political ambition to join the European Union has forced it to adopt a pro-western political agenda. Alongside the new consumer shopping

centers, monumental statues of Ataturk look anachronistic. Old men still crowd into the traditional coffee houses and tea rooms (Meeker 2002:342), but students are more likely to patronize McDonalds and western bars. However, Turkey has a rich popular and folk culture that is resistant to globalization. For example, there has been an important revival and invention of a folk dance tradition. This revival is associated with Selim Tarcan (1875-1953) who had observed the growth of folk dancing in Sweden in the 1890s which he realized was important for the growth of Swedish national identity. Tarcan's choreography of the *zeybek* dances was important in the growth of Turkish national dance, which eventually found support from Ataturk who witnessed a performance in Izmir in 1925. In the same period, folk dancing as a national expression was promoted by the People's Houses which were republican institutions that also encouraged research and practice in folk culture. By the 1980s folk dancing spread through the urban middle classes because it was taken up seriously by university students who formed clubs to cultivate this national genre.

In general, it is possible to argue that dance has played a major role in establishing a nationalist aesthetic that is highly resistant to globalization (Ozturkmen 2002). Russia provides another example. Russian classical ballet emerged out of a series of artistic experiments with music, dance and drama in the 1890s in St. Petersburg. The Imperial Ballet Schools were important in fostering the high culture of ballet, which explored the Russian fairy tale and folk traditions as a source of artistic inspiration (Lieven 1936). Russian ballet became influential in Paris as a result of the creative work of Sergei Diaghilev who brought *Boris Godunov* to a French audience in 1908. European audiences wanted to see Russian national idioms and rejected the cosmopolitanism of Diaghilev's repertoire. Russian ballet constructed a strong national aesthetic that expressed an integration between high culture and Russian peasant themes, and was influential in literature, music and art (Figs 2002).

High classical ballet has remained important as an aesthetic of Russian national culture, despite the commercial globalization of ballet through figures such as Rudolf Nureyev

While Italy, Turkey and Russia present instructive historical illustrations, it probably in the case of Japan that we see the most significant attempt to protect a national aesthetic tradition and culture against westernization and globalization. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 represented a determined effort to avoid economic and cultural domination from the western powers. The reform of traditional Japan involved dismantling its feudal past and borrowing

institutions and ideas extensively from foreign powers. The new constitution was Prusso-German, British traditions were used to modernize the navy, and western dress was encouraged. The Japanese state sought modernization on the principle 'rich country, with strong army' (Kennedy 1990:207). After their defeat in the Second World War, Japan was forced to adopt further western reforms (of labor law, political institutions, and educational institutions), and yet remarkably Japan has remained distinctive (Benedict 1946). Japan has experienced profound globalization, but it has remained a country of something. How has this occurred? Japan has remained a highly disciplined and coherent society with strong religious traditions, especially Buddhist and neo-Confucian. Japanese culture has successfully absorbed and embraced western consumerism without undermining its indigenous traditions. Commentators like Karel van Wolferen (1990:267) in *The Enigma of Japanese Power* have argued that Japan succeeds because it has sustained a myth of national homogeneity that legitimizes an authoritarian and hierarchical system, masking its real heterogeneity. While Japanese institutions impose and require loyalty and discipline, Japan successfully avoids globalism by protecting its cultural aesthetic and exercise political leadership to avoid any dilution of its heritage. This religio-cultural ethic is probably most manifest in its tea culture and diet, but its technological products, especially cars, exhibit the clean-cut and precise sense of design that pervades objects in the Japanese cultural field. Although McDonalds is a prevalent feature of Japanese popular culture, it appears to have little significant impact on traditional diet, tea drinking, the presentation of food, or consumption of *sake*. Preparation and consumption of tea remain essential features of Japanese everyday life; tea is not simply an aspect of high culture or Zen Buddhism (Okakura 2001).

These examples provide us with an understanding of hierarchical and (often) authoritarian strategies to resist cultural nothingness. Nationalistic movements in the 1920s and 1930s resisted the global spread of (American) consumer cultures by harnessing national and folk idioms to strategies of nation building. We might argue that these were top-down authoritarian strategies to construct cultural citizenship as frameworks for the nation state. By contrast with these nationalist strategies, the Scandinavian societies combined a strong aesthetic sense of difference with social democratic politics. Music played an important role in romantic nationalism in Norway through the works of Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) and through Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) who used the Finnish national epic (the *Kalevala*) in his vocal works. Although in the twentieth century the Scandinavian countries have been heavily influenced by economic globalization and by the European Union, a strong sense of Scandinavian design plays an important role in protecting their

cultures from rapid nullification. Because English has become the global language of the world economic system, language maintenance is very important in protecting a local or national aesthetic. Small language communities such as the Finnish language are particularly exposed to globalization, which partly explains the determination of French governments to protect their own language.

The paradox of Ritzer's argument may well be that the negative consequences of globalization have a more significant effect at the core (the liberal democracies of North America and the United Kingdom) than they do at the periphery. Those societies that are most exposed to multiculturalism, migration, cultural fragmentation and hybridity are more open to cultural nothingness than societies at the periphery of the global market. The liberal justification of the free market in economic commodities also embraces a free market in cultures and aesthetics, and hence it has relatively little resistance to cultural marketization. America is too diverse to possess a dominant aesthetic, and its popular culture is an essential feature of its economy. Standardized products (Pepsi, McDonalds, Ford motorcars and Starbucks) are an essential feature of American consumerism. We could argue that England developed a strong aesthetic around the music of Edward Elgar (1857-1934) and the arts and crafts movement that was inspired by William Morris who was a major influence on British art and design until his death in 1896. In the contemporary period, it is by contrast difficult to argue that Britain has a national aesthetic, and its 'special relationship' to America means that it is culturally as well as politically increasingly subordinate to the American cultural market. One paradox therefore with Ritzer's globalization thesis is that it is the core of the global market that is most exposed to standardization processes that rob local artifacts of their distinctiveness.

One consequence of this process which we can call the erosion of idiom is that the liberal democracies are under political pressure from the Right to restore traditional, local or national cultures and to avoid the cosmopolitan societies that appear to be associated with cultural hybridity.

One curious feature of Ritzer's thesis is that he neglects the likely impact of religious fundamentalism on the globalization of nothing. He is perfectly aware of the fact that the western churches have 'customers' and are subject to McDonaldization (Ritzer 2003:177), but he does not systematically consider religion as a force against globalization and nothing. Postmodern consumerism obviously has a profound impact on Islam (Ahmed 1992), and fundamentalism has been important as a social movement or movements challenging the loss of distinctiveness that follows globalization. The veil has become an important

identity (Hammami 1997). In contemporary Egypt, the veil is often associated with upper-class chic fashion. Although the veil has multiple meanings, Ritzer's theory needs to address the variety of conservative, traditional and fundamentalist movements that reject cultural inclusion in the global village. Japanese society appears to have successfully accepted and promoted modernization, but it has imposed its own aesthetic brand on global products and ideas. Islamic fundamentalism represents a political and cultural attempt to resist incorporation into western consumerism. In America, while there are radical movements such as the House of Islam, there are also many ways in which the practice of Islam does not accept standardization. Because Islam requires certain daily dietary and religious practices, there is an Islamic economy that produces religious commodities such as prayer timepieces, but we do not have to regard these as a reduction in distinctiveness (Smith 1999:143).

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