The Conceptual Promise of Glocalization: Commonality and Diversity

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The production of neighborhoods is always historically grounded and thus contextual. That is, neighborhoods are what they are because they are opposed to something else and derive from other, already produced neighborhoods ... [The] context-generative dimension of neighborhoods is an important matter because it provides the beginnings of a theoretical angle on the relationship between local and global realities (Appadurai, 2001: 104-105).

Preliminaries

It will be proposed here that the distinction between the local and the global has serious limitations, ones that are rapidly becoming recognized both in academic scholarship and in activist movements concerned with various aspects of a world marked by the intensification of globwide connectivity and global consciousness. To take but two examples, Friedman (1998:110) speaks of the necessity to locate the ways in which the "local and the global are always interlocked and complicitous," while Dirlik (1996, 2001) addresses the theme of "the global in the local." But rather ironically, as we will shortly see, this has for quite a long time been recognized by those engaged in marketing and advertising.

Ideally it would be preferable to outline fully my own theory of globalization here, but space limitations preclude this. Nonetheless, much of this is to be found, *inter alia*, in Robertson (1983); Robertson (1992); Robertson (2001a); and Robertson and White (2003). In these and numerous other publications, going back at least as far as Nettl and Robertson (1968), I have — at first, implicitly and, particularly since Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture (1992), explicitly — developed the concept of glocalization. This concept was given rather extensive treatment in Robertson (1994) and Robertson (1995) and is central to much of my current work (e.g., Guilanotti and Robertson, 2001; Robertson, 2002). Almost needless to say, what at the time and subsequently appears, to be, or to have been, conceptual breakthrough(s) is in the middle or long run placed in context with the realization that there was parallel work occurring when what one thought was a unique innovation was being made. Such is the case with the concept of glocalization (Swyngedouw, 1997).
It should also be said, by way of introduction, that I was greatly struck in the early 1990s by learning that something similar to the term glocalization — namely, *dochakuk* (roughly, indigenization) — was being use in Japanese business practices, in reference to the ways in which goods or services are produced and, more important, distributed according to particularistic, local criteria. In this connection it is certainly worthy of note to report that upon the occasion of a recent visit to Japan in December, 2002, the first newspaper I read, on my way from Narita International Airport into the city of Tokyo, was the English-language *Japan Times*. A prominent article in the latter proclaimed that a new term had entered journalistic discourse in Japan — namely glocalization! One of the main points of the article was to maintain that the widespread fear that local cultures are being overwhelmed by global, allegedly homogenizing processes, was unwarranted insofar as the diffusion between and across sociocultural formations of any set of ideas or values must of necessity adapt to particular, local circumstances. Otherwise they could not “stick” (unless imposed by military force and surveillance), in any case, my own experience in this regard is especially interesting, insofar as, from my perspective, the concept of glocalization “came from” Japan and yet, on the other hand, it has only recently arrived in Japan. This is indeed a paradigm case, not without irony, of the global circulation of an idea involving its adaptation to its own point of origin - as if it were new to the latter. It may well be that similar ideas are to be found in other parts of East Asia and, indeed, other parts of the world, in fact I suggest that the general idea of ongoing processes of glocalization has been historically ubiquitous on the global scale.

**Ambivalence and the Global-Local Theme**

Thus since the mid-1990s, glocalization has gradually come to occupy an increasingly central place in studies of globalization - so much so that we are, perhaps, on the verge of substituting glocalization for globalization or, more likely, using the two concepts in tandem. I wish briefly to sketch out the rationale for, in effect, collapsing the antinomy between the local and the global into the single, but complex, theme of the glocal. Stating my own stance as succinctly as possible, we do not so much live in a global age as a number of social scientists, historians and others have recently argued (e.g., Albrow, 1996) as a glocal one — an age in which the quotidian, *reflexive* synthesis of the local and the global is an ever-present feature and, also, a dilemma of most of human life. It constitutes the most significant phenomenological dimension of the ambivalence and ambiguity of the contemporary human condition — with ethical implications, which I will briefly address later. While the world-as-a-whole is characterized by much sameness and homogeneity, there are equally significant respects in which it is marked by difference and heterogeneity. This contrast is, in effect, encapsulated in the motif of global-local (Robertson, 1995). In a somewhat different way it is also captured in the universal-particular conceptual nexus - but this aspect of our general focus cannot be explored here (Robertson, 1992). I have tended to regard analytical attention to the local as a focus on the *spatial* dimension of sociocultural life; in contrast to attention to the — thus far, more emphasized
Appadurai (2001) considers his own concern with the production of locality as "primarily relational and contextual rather than scalar or spatial." While I do not see my own position as being, in the last instance, a departure from that of Appadurai, it is worth dwelling on the, at least superficial, differences between us. Appadurai comes to the issue of what he calls "global cultural flows" from within the heretofore strongly marked boundaries of anthropology, whereas I have worked primarily from within the equally protective fence of sociology. Clearly the study of matters global is, with increasing speed, breaking down many disciplinary boundaries, not only within the human, but also the natural and physical sciences. However, in spite of the rapidly crystallizing sense of cross- or transdisciplinarity occasioned by our recognition of increasing connectivity and of global consciousness — the most generally defining features of globalization (e.g., Robertson, 2001a) — virtually all contemporary academicians wear, however reluctantly, disciplinary "badges."

Thus, Appadurai (2001) asks whether anthropology can retain any special rhetorical privilege in a world where locality seems to have lost much of its ontological meaning? Can the mutually constitutive relationship between anthropology and locality survive in a dramatically delocalized world? Hence, in spite of his by now transparent "transdisciplinarity", Appadurai still appears to be constrained by his prior anthropological moorings. In fact, his perspective is related to Dumont’s question as to how anthropologists can simultaneously subscribe to the view that all human beings are similar and yet insist on the fact that every society is distinctive, indeed unique (Dumont, 1979; Robertson, 1992:25 ff.). It is probably because social and cultural anthropology were so concerned with relatively — or in a few cases, actually — isolated societies in its most significantly formative stages that some of the most conspicuous anthropologists of today are particularly sensitized to the global-local problematic. This can probably be no better exampled than by Geertz’s famed emphasis on the hermeneutics of locality (1983) — of local, "thick" culture — in contrast to his more recent (and convincing) recognition of the connectivity of virtually all "cultures." Indeed not merely is this evident in some of his more recent writings (e.g., Geertz, 1987; Robertson, 1992:180-181) but also in his highly commendatory review of Tsing’s In the Realm of the Diamond Queen (Tsing, 1993), the latter illustrating very well the sense of the global-within-the-primal/local and the way in which even primal cultures have a well-developed, if not "accurate", sense of the wider world (also Tsing, 2000).

Sociology as a discipline has been, perhaps, even more confined than anthropology, mainly because of its strong adherence until rather recently to the national-society, or nation-state, paradigm. Even more than that, the rhetorically-constructed and relatively separated discipline of anthropology has involved the notion that sociology has, for various reasons, become obsessed with its own narcissistic modernity (Beck, 1992). One can (still!) encounter sociologists who appear surprised to learn that many (but by no means) all anthropologists are strikingly sensitive to and much involved in the study of the global arena (cf. Inda and Rosaldo, 2002).
Here we cannot spend much space on spelling out more extensively the reasons for the apparent paradox of, to slightly exaggerate, anthropology being even more concerned with the global circumstance than sociology. The most obvious reasons for the difference is that social anthropology - particularly in Britain - was born from the colonial encounter with primal societies. Thus the, often only implicit, presupposition of anthropology - notably in its highly influential British form - that the discipline was fundamentally "global" (or, better, "imperial") in its reach. No such assumption of the world-as-a-whole underpinned sociology — "the science of modernity." Much of this has to do with the fact that, after Weber and Durkheim, sociology flourished most, until very recently, in the USA, where there has been much blindness — notwithstanding the Vietnam venture - to America's imperial reach. Even the theme of globalization was very slow to take-off in the social sciences in the USA compared with the flowering of such interest in that topic — in its multidimensional, as opposed to its unidimensional, economistic focus — in Britain, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Australasia and, somewhat later, Germany. When it did emerge strongly in the USA it was much more in the ideological form of opposition to economic globalization. The theme of imperialism is now rapidly regaining steam in the context of recent US history since 9/11. And this will probably enhance the general interest in globalization.

Spatiality

The reason for my emphasizing the local as adding a spatial dimension to the study of globalization, *contra* Appadurai, is mainly because sociology has — again until recently — been centered upon diachronicity, or temporality. In fact from Marx onward, the so-called classical sociologists through Max Weber were, above all, preoccupied with the shift from pre-modern to modern societies. Thus to speak of glocalization is meant to ensure that the general discussion of globalization encompasses the cross-cutting dimension of locality along spatial lines. In other words, the relative inattention to spatiality is, when we look back, a conspicuous feature of so-called classical sociology (and, in varying degree, other human sciences of the period, 1880-1920).

It should be emphasized at this stage that a significant amount of my overall thesis refers to the claim that it is only in "the modern" era that the global-local "puzzle" has arisen. We need, in other words, to be sensitive to the possibility that the puzzle itself is "a consequence of modernity" (cf. Giddens, 1990). It is clear that for a long, long time what is now called globalization has involved the adaptation of panlocal developments to local circumstances. Perhaps the history of the Roman Catholic church — as well as other "world religions" — illustrates this particularly well. Indeed, one might "heretically" go so far as to say that the differentiation of the idea of the supernatural into not merely distinctive monotheistic, Abrahamic religions (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Islam) but also, in Weber's sense, into "Oriental" religions (e.g., Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism) has involved a long process of glocalization. Moreover, it is not only with respect to religion that one can historically apply the idea of glocalization. One could readily apply the idea to a very
large spectrum of sociocultural practices — ranging from particular institutions, such as the educational and the military, to genres, such as music, the visual arts, sexuality and eroticism, and so on. It also has much to do with isomorphic relationships among features of many nation-states. In this respect, it has been shown — e.g., by Meyer et al. (1997) - that nation-states have remarkably similar features, but that in any one nation-state a particular gloss is given locally to the more generally similar. Nonetheless it appears that a central feature of what we — with increasing difficulty - refer to as a singular modernity is in fact the global-local problematic. (There is, of course, much academic writing these days about multiple modernities [e.g., Arnason, 2001].)

The dynamics of glocalization involve a number of established themes in the human sciences, among them diffusion theory and the diffusion of innovations. Here emphasis is placed upon the potential or actual fit between the translocal and the local. Another vital aspect of the dissection of the dynamics of glocalization is that of cross-societal emulation. In brief, the latter topic involves the ways in, and the degrees to, which — in our time — nation-states differentially adopt or reject features of other societies. Indeed this might well be designated as the primary aspect of long-term globalization — one that has become globally institutionalized in terms of various "league tables" concerning which nation-state is "best" or "worst" in a particular domain — education, sport, social welfare, crime, and so on.

**The Panlocal Production and Reproduction of the Local**

To subscribe to the idea of "the local in itself" — without contextualization or framework — makes no sense. It is a misleading commonplace for people to assert that the local represents "the real we" or "the real they." For this is a fallacious and essentialist argument. A sense of "we" or of "they" ("I/me/us" and "them") depends, as G.H. Mead, in particular, taught us, upon a pragmatic synthesis between — to oversimplify the matter — the I and the Me. It is a peculiar aspect of the history of social thought that the link between Meadian pragmatism and the local-global problematic should have gone unrecognized for so long. Part of the puzzle in this regard can be explained by the strong tendency to consider globalization only as a macroscopic issue, speaking of it as if it were analogous to a massive tidal wave sweeping over our everyday lives whereas it actually involves "real people" in their everyday lives, interactions and geographical movements (Robertson and White, 2003), as well as the networking of localities.

The tendency to differentiate between the global and the local is a modern one, insofar as the conditions for the cognition and affect of locality have arisen concomitantly with, or as a result of, various developments that have been crucial in the incomplete (and, in some respects, disastrous) making of the contemporary world. These conditions include, *inter alia*, the genealogies of map-making, travels, pilgrimages and voyages of "discovery." Indeed, one of the pivotal themes in the most general discussion of globalization is that of investigating the differential genealogy of ideas such as the global, the
local, the universal, the particular, and so on. This is a formidable agenda. Indeed we should move to these complex questions before more serious work is undertaken with respect to the buzzword-theme of globalization. To put it all too briefly and simply, the problematic of globalization/glocalization is one of the most salient themes of our time and is of particular concern, or should be, to those involved in pedagogy.

Globalization is without meaning unless it takes with the utmost seriousness that this concept involves the complex linking of socially constructed "localities." Moreover, the present concern with the local being overwhelmed by the global is but another way of saying that (reified) localities are becoming too interconnected. There is, then, no small irony in the fact that the emphasis on the protection of the local has been produced in global terms (Robertson, 1997). The local has been globalized; just as the global has been localized. Thus, the idea of the local and the global standing in a dialectical relationship does need discussion here; for at least the emphasis on dialecticity acknowledges the complicity of the connection between the local and the global. So too should the network approach of Castells (1996; 1997; 1998; Castells et al., 1999), for, in effect the global appears in Castells' work as, indeed, the connectedness of, inter alia, localities. (See also Levitt [2001] on "local-level global religion").

But let us consider more directly the illogicality of conceiving of the global and the local as essentially in tension. Perhaps the best way of doing this is to point to the fact that in "the real world" the human sciences claim to study it is largely assumed that "the problem" is not that of analytically reconciling the local and the global, but, rather, the strategy of so doing. From the leaders of the so-called world religions — most notably and instrumentally — the (Roman) Catholic Church to present business practice, it has been largely been assumed, not that the global and the local stand in an inevitable relationship of tension but rather that "the problem" is to decide on the best way of collating them. Hence, as I have previously stated, the conception of micromarketing (largely, in the West) or of dochakuaka, the Japanese way of expressing the inevitable and unavoidable connection of the global and the local, literally meaning indigenization (de Mooij, 1998; Tharp, 2001; Canclini, 2001).

**Normative Issues**

Indigenization as an idea invites us to reverse the currently orthodox way of addressing the general theme of globalization. For it suggests that we think of what is usually these days called globalization as a symbolic way of addressing the issue of the insertion of so-called local "traditions" and practices into the global arena. By and large, so-called indigenous movements seek not, these days, to reject "the world", but rather, to berecognized as part of it. I cannot here addresses the theme of recognition theory, but can point only to its global significance (Lash and Featherstone, 2002). The complicity of the global and the local is well-illustrated by the ways in which contemporary indigenous movements are becoming increasingly global. Specifically, many such movements of First Nation or "native" peoples
continue to form and/or join transnational, international, or global organizations precisely in order to defend or promote their rejection of modernity (cf. Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin, 2002). So, in this respect, glocalization is to be advocated as a way of recognizing and (loosely) incorporating indigenous movements.

Tomlinson (1999:196) has suggestively adapted the idea of glocalization so as to render the concept of cosmopolitanism as "ethical glocalism." This is an attractive proposition since it emphasizes, inter alia, the "directionality" of cosmopolitanism and that it involves respect for a large range of cultures and practices. On the other hand, it draws attention to some of the limitations of glocalization, so far as the implementation of the latter is concerned. Tomlinson's idea has the limitation that - at least, in its simplistic form — all cultures should be respected. Whether he actually means that ethical glocalism should be stretched that far or not, the question is raised as to whether all cultures should be equally respected. My own answer to that query is definitely in the negative — for a variety of reasons that cannot be elaborated here.

Finally, as has been mentioned already the dichotomy of the global and the local has become a very prominent theme in so-called anti-globalization movements (e.g., Hines, 2000). In such movements the local has been valorized in opposition or resistance to the global (Robertson, 1997). And it is only relatively recently that anti-globalization protesters have begun to acknowledge that they themselves are part of the globalization/glocalization process. Hence the increasing popularity of the theme of "globalization from below" and of the idea that to a significant extent globalization is in our hands.

**Conclusion**

The foregoing has largely been a critique of the contemporary, conventional and "politically correct" way of addressing - indeed, raising - the local/global, or global/local problem. I have attempted — be it all briefly — to maintain that this very "antinomy" is a form of false consciousness. We need, not just academically, to comprehend the human condition (Parsons, 1978) as fully as possible.

This has been written from a neo-sociological perspective. The "neo" has been added as a qualifier only because there is a - perhaps receding — tendency to think of sociology as a specialized discipline. Its comprehensiveness - its more than occasional boldness - is part of the present thesis concerning globality and locality. So while I have often mentioned cross- or transdisciplinarity, I am suggesting that sociology is potentially the most inclusive of disciplines, although modern anthropology may well also have solid claims to that description. In any case, the themes of commonality/diversity; sameness/difference; homogeneity/heterogeneity; universality/particularity; global/local — and yet more binaries — demand much more attention than they have as yet received. Of paramount importance are the ways in which these antinomic relationships have continued to be reproduced. For far too long, this family of antinomic connections has pervaded our thinking, both in the East and the West.
Why?

Footnote

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