

Some Remarks Concerning the Concept of *Glocalization*

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Abstract. The present study is aimed to scan the explanatory relevance of the concept of glocalization in some seminal works of George Ritzer. In the first instance, we will try to relate the manner in which Ritzer understands glocalization to the uses of other authors or other related concepts of the cultural globalization theory (hybridization, creolization, scapes). On this occasion, we will reveal the (partially “hidden”) cultural and philosophical assumptions, underlying Ritzer’s use of this concept: the understanding of the individual, mainly seen as a rational agent, as well as the positive value attributed to the postmodern type of cultural mixture. We will further argue that, despite its intentions, the manner in which Ritzer defines glocalization is in fact very close to a homogenized conception of globalization. In addition, we will show that Ritzer eludes the explanatory dimension of glocalization (much less the critical one), in favor of a descriptive stance, excessively used. We will give also a critical analysis of the way in which Ritzer attempts to enrich the explanatory quality of glocalization by linking it with a new concept that he elaborated, the grobalization. In the end, we would like to connect Ritzer’s concept of glocalization with a social/sociological model exposed by the French sociologist Alain Touraine, hoping to better clarify the mentioned problems.

Key words: glocalization, George Ritzer, globalization, grobalization, hybridization, creolization, scapes, Alain Touraine.

The purpose of our paper is, on one hand, to bring to light the specific philosophical presuppositions that George Ritzer articulates on the concept of *glocalization*, mainly in his books *The Globalization of Nothing* (2004, 2007), *Globalization: A Basic Text* (2010) and *Globalization: The Essentials* (2011), and, on the other hand, to highlight the difficulties that characterize its efficiency, considering that it does not provide an adequate response to some problems of the contemporary society. Our approach does not intend to become an exhaustive thematic analysis, but only a critical variation, allowing us the freedom of certain hermeneutic excursions.

It is generally accepted that *glocalization* is a concept introduced in the late 1980s in the space of the Japanese marketing, that became – according to *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words* – “one of the main marketing buzzwords of the beginning of the nineties” (as cited in Robertson 1995, 28), being popularized in the theoretical landscape of the next decade through the efforts of authors such as Roland Robertson (Robertson 1992, 1995) or Eric Swyngedouw (Swyngedouw 1997, 2004). Their studies attempted to free it from its original sense, narrowly related to the micromarketing or to the “capitalistic business practices” (Robertson 1995, 29), introducing new elements related to the social, cultural and political dimensions,² and to mainly use it as an alternative to the concept – much

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2] In this context, Swyngedouw speaks of the “socio-spatial power choreographies” (2004, 26) and Robertson of the “global culture” (1995, 31).

more used (but also vaguer than this one, at least in the first instance) – of globalization, an alternative that could capture much more from the complex reality of phenomena and processes ‘hidden’ by the latter.³

In his turn, in the 2000s, George Ritzer will try to use this concept through a sociological approach that captures the cultural and the economic factors. More precisely, Ritzer deals with the concept of glocalization from the explicitly assumed perspective of the “globalization of *culture* in general, especially the globalization of *consumer culture*” (Ritzer 2007, 6). His study leaves the purely economic theories of globalization aside, because they focused in his vision too much on production, neglecting consumption, and he turns instead to the cultural theories of globalization, more open to this essential phenomenon of the contemporary society. Ritzer’s alternative, based on consumption, is probably more responsive to the dynamics of the global cultural phenomena (in the *descriptive* sense), but it will create some problems concerning the *explanation* of the same phenomena, as we shall try to show.

I.

In the first phase of Ritzer’s analysis, *glocalization* appears as a key concept of one of the three major types of approaches to the cultural globalization, namely cultural hybridization, established as an alternative to the unilateral conceptions defined as cultural differentialism, respectively cultural convergence (focused on the cultural heterogeneity and cultural homogeneity); additionally, it may even end the disputes between them (Robertson 2003, 462).

The cultural hybridization studies “the mixing of cultures as a result of globalization and the production, out of the integration of the global and the local (...), of new and unique hybrid cultures that are not reducible to either the local or the global culture.” By amalgamation, blending, integration etc. of various global and local trends, new cultural forms arise, specific rather to a cultural effervescence than to a process of aggression or confrontation (typically for many political and economic theories on globalization). Thus, this view is *apparently* closer to the one of the cultural differentialism, almost becoming an alternative – more complicated and less clear – of it. In Ritzer’s own terms, hybridization is, consequently, “a very positive, even romantic, view of globalization as a profoundly creative process out of which emerges new cultural realities, and continuing, if not increasing, heterogeneity in many different locales.” (2011, 159)

3] Also, we could note that Robertson (1992, 5) believes that “cultural factors enter into the domain of *Realpolitik* much more than has been conceded by many, but certainly not all, of those specializing in the study of international relations and related matters. It might be said that, again in varying degrees, all of international politics is cultural that we are (but one must not certainly exaggerate the novelty of this) in a period of globewide *cultural* politics (and also, of course, in a period when culture has become more explicitly politicized, which has to do with the politics of culture).”

From this perspective, in a (very) general way, glocalization “can be defined as the interpenetration of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas.” (Ritzer 2011, 159)

There are several things that can be said about Robertson’s theory to which Ritzer refers, but two of them seem to be essential for the present analysis: 1) “individuals and local groups have great power to adapt, innovate, and maneuver within a glocalized world,” they are “important and creative agents,” and 2) “social processes are relational and contingent (globalization provokes a variety of reactions – ranging from nationalist entrenchment to cosmopolitan embrace – that produce glocalization)” (Ritzer 2010, 255).

II.

The next level of analysis is configured by reviewing the concepts that can be seen both as synonyms and competitors, for capturing the defining aspects of glocalization.

Among neighbor or related concepts, Ritzer mentions hybridization itself, a cultural hybrid being understood as „the combination of two, or more, elements from different cultures and/or parts of the world.” The examples of hybridization that he offers from the area of consumption (events, products etc.) are particularly spectacular and touristic, even “defiant” sometimes: „the Ugandan tourists visiting Amsterdam to watch two Moroccan women engage in Thai boxing, Argentineans watching Asian rap performed by a South American band at a London club owned by a Saudi Arabian, and the more mundane experiences of Americans eating such concoctions as Irish bagels, Chinese tacos, Kosher pizza, and so on.” (Ritzer 2011, 160)

At this point, we believe that several necessary observations impose themselves. Naturally, Americans’ culinary experiences (and experiments) are, as Ritzer observes, “more mundane,” but we could not say the same thing about the previously mentioned Ugandan tourists who nonchalantly travel by plane from their poor country to one of the most expensive cities in the world only to watch... a Thai boxing match. But this is the advantage of an approach that restricts itself to the consumption aspect (as a constant reality), to the description of the elements involved in its composition, without questioning *the causes* of these phenomena and without trying to explain them more profoundly. Let’s suppose, in the particular case above, that those tourists are among *the very few* Ugandans who can afford such a luxury travel: they may be, for example, the children of a corrupt local leader,⁴ the local “result” of strong social imbalances/inequalities, created by the penetration of foreign economic capital in Uganda and by its associated corrupt political

4] It should be noted that Uganda is perceived as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, ranking 29 (immediately after Russia) in Corruption Perceptions Index 2012 published by Transparency International (see <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/>).

power etc. In other words, this case would undoubtedly be more relevant for the peculiar socio-political situation of Uganda, and not for the global hybridization.⁵

Next, not all scholars who study the glocalization phenomenon accept this theoretical framing or approximation. Khondker disagrees with the equivalence or the synonymy between the two terms, hybridization appearing to have a broader sense that includes the glocalization seen as a particular case, being its proximate genus in a logical sense: „In the discussion of glocalization some writers tend to conflate it with hybridization. This may be somewhat misleading. Glocalization involves blending, mixing adapting of two or more processes one of which must be local. But one can accept a hybrid version that does not involve local.” Shortly, „*glocalization to be meaningful must include at least one component that addresses the local culture* (emphasis added)” (Khondker 2004, 17).⁶

Another definition of hybridization, corresponding to Ritzer’s theoretical framing, is provided by Nestor García Canclini. For him, hybridization is equivalent to „sociocultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices.” (García Canclini XXV) We don’t want to show that Ritzer’s examples are incompatible with the other definitions of hybridization (this would be incorrect and, considering the plethora of existing theorizations, an easy endeavor, generally speaking, not just in this case), and, in addition,

5] For instance, the distinction introduced by Sklair between “development” and development. He uses “‘development’ to denote ‘capitalist or distorted development’ and development (without the inverted commas) to denote a different form of non-capitalist (in fact, anti-capitalist) development.” Also, Sklair shows the difference between economic growth and development: “The crucial difference is that development includes everything that is already included in economic growth plus criteria of distribution of the social product, democratic politics and the elimination of class, gender and ethnic privileges.” (1994, 165) It is obvious that, in this case, we are dealing with an example of “development” and not of development, which indicates that it is a positive phenomenon only in terms of market-based mechanisms and consumption, the cultures/nations which include those individuals being totally excluded. We could supplementary develop this point by invoking the term he further introduced, the one of “culture-ideology of consumerism.” The effect of this ideology „is to increase the range of consumption expectations and aspirations without necessarily ensuring the income to buy. At its present stage of ‘development,’ capitalism is built on the promise that a more direct integration of local with global capitalism will lead to a better life for everyone.” (178) This happens especially in the “Third World,” as Russell W. Belk noted in the quote provided by the same Sklair: “quite unlike the evolution of consumption patterns in Europe and North America, Third World consumers are often attracted to and indulge in aspects of conspicuous consumption before they have secured adequate food, clothing, and shelter” (apud Sklair 178). Obviously, we could not deny the ‘reality’ of Ritzer’s examples, but only their meaning. And, in the light of such criticism, many examples cease to be the manifestation of glocalization, becoming instead a proof of disintegration of social values that expressed once the cohesion of the concerned groups. Anyway, this will not be a problem for the sociologists of the post-social society, as we will see later.

6] The same culture can provide examples for both phenomena. Restricting ourselves to the cases observed by Khondker in Singapore, we could mention the higher educational system, „a hybridized version comprising the original British model and the US model” (or, generally, „in matters of technology and business practices where two different systems or modes are combined for better results, system of values and practices”), and the examples of glocalization from „the area of mass communication and especially in the area of television programming” (Khondker 2004, 17).

that they often go too far than the existence of a somehow stable socio-cultural reality allows. Thus, if we remember one of García Canclini's definitions, the hybridization leads to the emergence of new realities, of new *structures, objects* or *practices*. However, beyond their spectacular nature in terms of consumption, the examples of Ugandan tourists or those of Argentinians listening Asian rap are conclusive for none of the previous outlined items that, we appreciate, define a socio-cultural space with a minimal crystallization (this is necessary even if we accept a sort of liquid postmodern reality).

Moreover, such an approach neglect also a deep dimension, which can be called political (and historical too). This is not a simple theoretical accessory, but a powerful explanatory element and its use is necessary for avoiding the distortion of the cases in question. The conflictual component (we avoid to call it dialectical) of the glocalization/hybridization process cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between the preferences or the interests of a consumerist type. There is something very serious – and for many people, very painful – at stake in these processes. Moreover, beyond this moral 'judgement,' we can observe the ability of these concepts to really be scientifically useful. As the previous author notes, „hybridization is not a synonym for fusion without contradiction but rather can be helpful in accounting for particular forms of conflict generated in recent cross-cultural contact and in the context of the decline of national modernization projects in Latin America.” (García Canclini XIV)⁷

*Creolization*⁸ is another related concept introduced by Ritzer's analysis. Originally used to refer to people who are a mixture of races, the term creole „has been extended to the idea of the creolization of language and culture involving a combination of languages and cultures that were previously unintelligible to one another.” (Ritzer 2011, 160)

Another author who practically equalizes creolization and glocalization is David E. Nye (2006, 608). Many previous observations will remain valid if we observe that what matters for Nye, in this process, is “how variety emerges out of intercultural negotiation,” and that his examples are similar to those selected by Ritzer: “combinations as Cuban-Chinese cuisine, Norwegian country-western music, and ‘Trini’ homepages.” (Nye 2006, 607) It is a process of “selective appropriation” in which “people at the periphery create

⁷] However, for García Canclini, the political resistance and struggle could be replaced by negotiation, which seems to have both conscious and unconscious character, moving itself from commercial to dialogical, from a rational activity to the existence itself: “The culturally hybrid features resulting from cross-class interaction force us to recognize that alongside struggle there is also negotiation. And negotiation does not appear as a process external to the constitution of the actors, to which they might resort on occasion for political convenience. It is a mode of existence, something intrinsic to the groups that take part in the social drama. Negotiation is located within collective subjectivity, in the most unconscious culture or politics and daily life.” (García Canclini 2001, 146) Moreover, consumption “to a certain extent constitutes a new mode of being citizens” (2001, 26). The key issue, indicated by García Canclini himself, is other and is well synthesized by Goodman: “The problem is that this new mode of social choice is dominated by for-profit corporations and no new models of consumer involvement have emerged that would provide a satisfactory replacement for citizen participation.” (2007, 345)

⁸] See Stewart 2007.

their own environment' and this creolized cultural production often may be re-exported." (608) Creative production, consumer choice, differentiation (and not standardization) by combining and mixing, individuality and individualism, re-export, all these take place at the periphery (at the periphery of the Western world, of course).⁹

Finally, Ritzer mentions the term "scape" proposed by Appadurai, with its five main instantiations ("ethnoscapes," "mediascapes," "technoscapes," "financescapes," and "ideoscapes"), conceived as some processes with „fluid, irregular, and variable shapes and (...) consistent with the idea of heterogeneization" (Ritzer 2011, 161). As in a "total" play, these scapes have not an objective character but they are „perspectival constructs", and they could be called „imagined worlds" (Appadurai 1996, 33).¹⁰ It is important to note that the individual seems to have here an unusually high power over the context (scenic, in this case). As Ritzer concludes, "while power obviously lies with those in control and their imaginings, this perspective gives to those who merely live in these scapes, or pass through them, the power to redefine and ultimately subvert them." (2011, 161)

We can justifiably ask, in order to draw a partial conclusion and beyond any discussion concerning their more or less complete intertwinement, definitions, and semantics, *what do all these terms and Ritzer's favorite examples* (used to mark out glocalization)¹¹ *have in common?* First of all, they point to the picture of a *strong individual/group*, an autonomous, emancipated, independent entity, having rational options and being culturally inspired from the Western tradition; this entity is capable of significant resistance in the "struggle against globalization," using his own "weapons" (values, resources etc.) without any suspicion that the development of these tools could generate the proliferation of the globalization itself, by perverting the "local" and creating another local element for the global consumption type.

9] The analogy used by Nye is conclusive for the spirit that animates sometimes these approaches: "Just as inside the United States former slaves and immigrants created their own cultural worlds, selectively appropriating elements of different cultures, so too other cultures that come into contact with Western society engage in a creolizing process. What results is not a standardized world, but a potentially endless process of differentiation. Just as in the 1920s mass production did not obliterate batch production, which was more flexible and responded to changing consumer demands, fears of standardization were exaggerated. 'Glocalization' or creolization is common. However much critics may focus on the supposed homogeneity of a machine culture, the owner of every house, car, and telephone in Levittown can express individuality through consumption." (2006, 608)

10] Appadurai notes that "[t]he suffix *-scape* allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles. These terms with the common suffix *-scape* also indicate that these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors (...). These landscapes (...) are the building blocks of what (...) I would like to call *imagined worlds*, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (Appadurai 33).

11] Ritzer explicitly notes that "[a]ll of the above – glocalization, hybridization, creolization, and scapes – should give the reader a good feel for what is being discussed here under the heading of cultural hybridization." (2011, 160)

If we are asked to give a concrete example, we should think how “local” and “authentic” (as a form of “cultural resistance”) is the rural tourism promoted by Romanian ‘peasants’-entrepreneurs, who cleverly sell and manipulate superficial folk traditions to the naive buyers. As Robertson wrote, “glocalization involves *the construction* of increasingly differentiated consumers, the ‘invention’ of ‘consumer traditions’ (of which tourism, arguably the biggest ‘industry’ of the contemporary world, is undoubtedly the most clear-cut example). To put it very simply, diversity sells.” (Robertson 1995, 29)

This rural tourism appears to be strongly accepted by two types of public audiences: local nostalgists, longing for the Golden Age of the Romanian peasants or for their own childhood,¹² and tourists from anywhere – but having a strong model in the Western tourist who sincerely appreciates all the ‘real’ cultures of the Earth – eager to live in the middle of a living culture – finally, they are mundane and peaceful victims of the illusion of recovering the original meaning of Life. Also, Robertson see how “[t]he proliferation of, for example, ‘ethnic’ supermarkets in California and elsewhere does to a large extent cater not so much to difference for the sake of difference, but to the desire for the familiar and/or to nostalgic wishes.” (1995, 29) Regarding the previously mentioned first audience, what they actually obtain, besides a pseudo-culture (or perhaps just because of it), is a capitalist spirit of the Romanian ‘village.’ This spirit is learning to grow from his previous mummified corpse;¹³ in fact, the resurrection consists precisely in selling his new aseptic and marketed body.

Of course, the modern tourism could open a special discussion on the meanings of glocalization. Without insisting on this subject, we will mention Zygmunt Bauman’s position, who argues that this phenomenon is not at all a democratic behavior of the human being in general (analyzed in the context of the *freedom of movement*, inherently associated to the contemporary tourism) but „a restratification of society based on the free mobility of some and the place-bound existence of others.” Therefore, the alleged or desired hybridization did not actually take place: “Tourist flows, for example, are mainly unidirectional (e.g., west to east or developed to less developed countries). For this reason, tourism has sometimes been described as a new form of imperialism, which causes acculturation and radical social change rather than hybridization (the inevitable consequence of sustained foreign influence over time).” (Smith 2011, 269)

Returning to the analysis of Ritzer’s use of glocalization, we believe that this case requires a specific observation, similar to the one that Kaufmann makes to Ohmae;¹⁴ shortly, the first appreciates that the latter’s views on his theory concern [only, we add] „the individual as an economically-determined agent”, which implies that “[the] individuals

12] To restrict ourselves to these very plausible reasons.

13] The neo-liberalism is not the only responsible for the disaster of the Romanian village – we speak about a victim of the communist period too. Communism accelerated a general (worldwide) process whose manifestations were elsewhere maybe slower (depending of the geographical area).

14] He contributed to the popularization of the glocalization idea, whose origin can be identified in the Japanese marketing space in the late 1980s.

can satisfy all of their needs for 'well-being' in the global marketplace." But, as Kaufmann comments, this is "a horrendous simplification that ignores a class of goods that cannot be priced and which economists like to bury in appendices and footnotes under the label 'non-pecuniary'. 'Non-pecuniary' goods, like a feeling of historical rootedness or a sense of immortality, cannot be priced, packaged and produced in a global marketplace." (1996, 343)¹⁵ In other words, the purely material goods prevail, while the other types of 'goods' (ineffable or spiritual, I dare to say) are judged by the marketing policies belonging to the first category, being reduced to a commercial-transactional dimension like a stock market game.

There is, consequently, something that could be called "*organic optimism*" (not considering the ideological aspects), which is shared not only by Ritzer's theory, but also by all those who reduce man to a simple consumer (mainly because they do not even mention other social dimensions of the human being), or by the glocalization theories in general. Kaufmann, as we noticed above, records Ohmae's optimism, though he simultaneously highlights the other side of this theoretical approach, the one of "forgetting" about "[the] persistent anomie and social dysfunction in the developed world." Obviously, under these circumstances, „he [Ohmae] has shown little inclination to acknowledge the social costs of his borderless world" (Kaufmann 1996, 343). Also, Thornton shows that the optimism determines the theory of glocalization, at least concerning Robertson's formulation of it (he speaks of "Robertson's optimism towards glocalization" [Thornton 2000, 81]); an *a priori optimism*, we add, which *already* decided the value and the future of the object of study from the manner in which it is previous theoretically constituted (the mixture of its various components, in this case). The problem here is not the optimism *in itself*, but the manner how it methodologically affects and determines the research results from the point of view of the (already formulated) conclusions. This optimism does not depend on the evaluation of some theoretical or practical effects, but on the original, underlying semantics, which implacably guides the investigation.

We mentioned above a characteristic element for Ritzer's theory, the presence of a strong, emancipated, independent, rational individuality, inspired by the Western cultural tradition. In the first edition of the book (the situation does not change in the second edition), Beckfield noticed what he called an U.S.-centrism, i.e. that "nearly all the examples offered in support of the book's claims come from the U.S. context" (2007, 171). On the other hand, as we have seen, even the (brief) examples extracted from the other geographical areas basically copy the Western consumer's pattern – the global citizen is the Western consumer. In other words, a global theory of consumption/a theory of

15] The continuation is instructive too, because any approach (even the one of Ritzer) shows that the state borders – a simple "artifact of the 18th and 19th centuries" to Ohmae (1995, 7) – seem to vanish, favoring all consumers: "It just so happens that nations are a major source of these non-market goods, goods essential to people's well-being. Hence, while the elimination of nations may increase people's consumption of marketed goods, it will eliminate crucial non-market goods and lead to less well-being, not more." (Kaufmann 1996, 343)

global consumption generalize – (un)consciously? – a particular type of human subject, a subject who acts all over the world.

However, Ritzer's examples send us also to the idea of *a mixture, beneficial in itself*, the mark of vitality, of a sharp postmodern creativity of the contemporary civilization. This time, the model seems to be the artist, as far as we refer to the individuals (and not to the groups), more or less explicitly; we could identify him to a romantic-Nietzschean type, whose main work is his own life, whose spirit is fortified by this game of continuous crises, someone who creatively subordinates the forces opposed to his will.

In addition, and not rarely in the case of such interpretations, the whole reality assumes the character of a scene, of a ludic space (in Appadurai's terminology) – life is conceptually subordinated to the art, and not vice versa.

In fact, in Ritzer's case, the human subject model intertwines the modernism with the postmodernism, creating a mixture of Apollonian and Dionysian where the human being becomes, on one hand, a rational individual eager to overcome the simple reason by participating to the other cultures, and, on the other hand, a ludic experimenter who remains lucid during his actions, understood in economic terms. According to Thornton's remark, with reference to Robertson, „by dissolving the simplistic either/or of modernist homogeneity versus postmodernist heterogeneity, Roland Robertson sets the stage for a trans-local or 'glocal' cultural studies" (Thornton 2000, 81), an observation which applies to Ritzer's case too.

We could say that we consider here a new type of man, understood as a new kind of consumer, an individual synthesis of reason and Romanticism. The most edifying references can be identified in the work of the neo-Weberian Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, which conspicuously thematize this aspect.¹⁶

Hence, in the first edition of *The Globalization of Nothing* and maybe not coincidentally, Ritzer confesses that he is inclined "to being both elitist and incurably romantic, nostalgic about the past, and desirous of a world more characterized by something than nothing" (cited in Beckfield 2007, 170). In addition, the manner in which he sees himself is perhaps "transferred" to the subjects of his examples, the nostalgic reflexivity impregnating his vision upon them.

III.

Further, Ritzer's works follow another level of conceptual construction, the glocalization being clarified/specified as a theoretical tool not only by itself, but also through a tandem or conceptual binomial. Thus, Ritzer is committed to a syncretic or eclectic approach, which necessarily combines the ideas of homogenization and heterogenization, forging a new concept, the *grobalization* (from the verb "to grow"). He believes that this

[16] Usunier's lines, shown below, captures another form of the same idea.

action introduces a concept that “would give a more balanced view” of globalization, supplementing “the undoubtedly important idea of glocalization” (Ritzer 2004, 73).

A brief comment on this matter. The idea of a conceptual binomial aiming to hermeneutically link complementary aspects of the contemporary reality is not unique. For example, answering a question of Simon Dawes that envisaged to clarify the relationship between the two terms of the *solidity-liquidity* “dichotomic metaphor”, Zygmunt Bauman states: „I did not and do not think of the solidity-liquidity conundrum as a dichotomy; I view those two conditions as a couple locked, inseparably, in a dialectical bond (something like what probably François Lyotard had in mind when observing that one can't be modern without being post-modern first...).” (Dawes 2011, 132)

Let's now return to our analysis. First of all, we appreciate that Ritzer intended to add a touch of realism when he introduced the concept of glocalization into his analysis; in this way, he (re)integrates some economic, financial or political elements to a reality that seemed to evaluate on strictly cultural coordinates. Thus, glocalization “is the imperialistic ambitions of nation-states, corporations, organizations, and the like and their desire, indeed need, to impose themselves on various geographic areas throughout the world.” (Ritzer 2011, 319) It is multiform, being conducted on different levels, and assuming “sub-processes” like the capitalism, Americanization or McDonaldization – which are appreciated as some “central driving forces in glocalization” (172).

Ritzer's conceptual binomial combines two fundamental sides of reality and/or historical and cultural theories (which are generally separated and opposed, the chosen option being criticized in the light of the other), namely modernity and postmodernity: “it should come as no surprise that glocalization and glocalization offer very different images of the impact of transnational processes. After all, they tend to stem from the antithetical bases of modern and postmodern social theory.” (Ritzer and Ryan, 57) We appreciate that, for Ritzer, both aspects are co-essential and constitutive for the contemporary society, defining its specificity. The two elements are antagonistic, but they cooperate for making a (single) reality or even a different type (or a new type) of reality. From this perspective, we can argue that our contemporary society is, simultaneously, both modern and postmodern. Ritzer himself believes that „*In the real world, there is always a combination, an interaction, of glocal and global processes. Anywhere one looks in the world, one sees both the glocal and the global. (author's emphasis)*” (2007, 25)

There are, we believe, at least two kinds of primary issues arising in the function of this binomial. One of them is linked to the relationship between globalization and glocalization and it originates in the set of observations that we have previously introduced. Ritzer's conceptual binomial construction contains something like the action-reaction phenomenon, a physical interaction between two forces, introducing (even unintentionally) some logical and epistemological legitimacy to both of them. But do they really are so distinct and so opposite as they seem to be at the first glance? Relying on the previously mentioned observations, we appreciate that the heterogenization that Ritzer proposed through the concept of glocalization is false and misleading, and it only

subordinates the *sui generis* differentialization to the homogenizing trend of globalization (of globalization, in Ritzer's language), transforming it into a convergent component of this one (so not an *opposable* or *parallel* component). It only distorts the profound reality of a constant, continuous and real opposition through a perverse, intimate, indirect etc. assimilation; the local – at least in the examples offered by Ritzer – is this way conquered by the global force.

Theoretically, even if the glocalization is situated between homogenization and heterogenization, being proximate to the latter, its own function distributes it in the vicinity of the former one. Briefly, it describes how the global absorbs and perverts the local. Or, if you prefer a more spicy language, it presents the forced cohabitation or the concubinage between those two components, itself the result of a rape, as the great victory offered to the raped.¹⁷

We could even translate/replace these two components by introducing two other terms – “hard globalization” instead of “globalization” and “soft globalization” instead of “glocalization” – which would have (at least) the advantage of a more direct determination. This reminds somehow the distinction between *globalization from above* and *globalization from below*, introduced by Kellner and Pierce (2007, 389).

A second set of issues can be given through the relations between globalization and globalization, because, at least in the first instance, they seem to share certain phenomena (the driving forces of globalization mentioned by Ritzer), the general sense of capital expansion and the exercise or the augmentation of power (political, economic, and financial). In other words, why do we need a new term to designate, *within globalization*, a particular trend of it (the globalization), having the same characteristics of the former as a whole? According to the well-known Ockham's razor, why we cannot just keep glocalization (instead localization) in a clarifying, explanatory tandem with the globalization? Khondker' statement, unfortunately undeveloped, goes in the same direction: “Ritzer in discussing glocalization has added another – should I say, redundant – convoluted term ‘globalization’” (2004, 15). Of course, we could also keep both glocalization and globalizaton within the same reality, but doing this we must proceed to a *critique* of globalization as a descriptive term standing for this whole reality.

There are two theoretical approaches that are likely referring to the essences of the two opposed phenomena which, according to Ritzer, compose the reality of globalization (or they explain it). Shortly, in his view, “while modern theories like those associated

17] The idea of a metaphorical register of a couple, contained in the description of this kind of binomial, is to be found in Bauman; for him, the concubinage seems to resist, even if it is full of troubles: “Glocalization’ is a name given to a marital cohabitation that has been obliged, despite all that sound and fury known only too well to the majority of wedded couples, to negotiate a bearable *modus co-vivendi* – as the separation, let alone a divorce, is neither a realistic nor a desirable option. Glocalization is a name for a hate-love relationship, mixing attraction with repulsion: love that lusts proximity, mixed with hate that yearns for distance. They are (...) doomed to cohabitation. For better or worse. Till death do them part.” (2011)

with the Marxian and Weberian traditions are closely linked to the idea of glocalization, glocalization is more in tune with postmodern social theory.” (Ritzer 2007, 17-18)

We appreciate that Ritzer does not seem concerned about an explanation of a complex reality, but he rather tries to present (and justify) his own approach as a synthesis between theories that can (or want) capture only one of the opposite aspects of that reality. These theories (like the past realities/societies themselves, namely the modernity and the postmodernity) are depicted in a historical sequence, so that Ritzer’s approach seems to borrow something from a Hegelian overcoming, a theoretical (but in fact concrete) *Aufhebung*.¹⁸

Usunier and Lee suggest almost the same thing when they mention the three types of *globalized consumption*, though the Hegelian interpretation is excepted here:

The first component is based on modernity and on fordist consumption; it corresponds to low-cost/fair-quality, weakly differentiated, utilitarian products, embedded in fairly low-context consumption experiences. (...) The second element is a postmodernist type of consumption: fragmented, continually re-assembled and re-interpreted. (...) The third element corresponds to people who are aware that consumption is now a key driver for culture and that their choices as consumers will influence their culture. (2005, 138)

From this perspective, Ritzer’s theory seems to correspond to a new kind of person (or consumer, because, for some analysts, there is no difference between these terms) – we can notice this aspect if we look for *The McDonaldization of Society* (1993): “This radically modern type of person behaves both opportunistically and critically, with a willingness to display diversity in consumption” (Usunier and Lee 138). Nevertheless, whether the theory overcomes sometimes the reality, whether it voluntarily anticipates or even causes it, the question remains open.

Of course, we should be, maybe, more temperate in doing such historical valuations and we should take into account, for example, an analysis of Frederic Jameson’s hypothesis, stating that the postmodernism is only a new phase in the capitalist development. Thus, “[p]ostmodernism is not the cultural dominant of a wholly new social order (...), but only the reflex and the concomitant of yet another systemic modification of capitalism itself. No wonder, then, that shreds of its older avatars – of realism, even, fully as much as of modernism – live on, to be rewrapped in the luxurious trappings of their putative successor.” (Jameson 1991, XI)

And, as we can see above, this „new” postmodern era or a presumable time of a new consumer will certainly contain (and not reject) the realism of modernity...

Finally, we could discover that, even apparently opposed to a mechanical lifestyle, based on a certain type of material (and financial) accumulation, typical for modernity,

18] Let us note the Ritzer’s warning too: “I should make it clear that I am not arguing that those who emphasize glocalization are postmodernists; in most cases they certainly are not! I am simply arguing that at least some of the views of those associated with the idea of glocalization are in tune with postmodern thinking and perhaps are affected by the mood and orientation emerging from the ‘postmodern turn.’” (2007, 222)

the postmodernism served, in fact, the capitalist force that it often denounced, exalting, in the same time, the creativity, the variety and the difference. The postmodern approaches refuse any direct, coherent and 'logic' (op)position to the social reality (this type of approach would have required the obsolete and defective search for new "foundations") and they present the reality itself as a symbolic-linguistic expression, denouncing its dominant *language* and translating its elements (institutions, regulations etc.) through a symbolic terminology. Consequently, this vision becomes a 'necessary evil,' an instrument (and not an opponent) of the political and economic authority, provoking an axiological confusion which more supports than undermines the *status quo*.

IV.

In the end, we would like to connect Ritzer's concept of glocalization with a social/sociological model exposed by the French sociologist Alain Touraine, hoping to better clarify the mentioned problems. We probably "judge" Ritzer's position in the above paradigm because we fail to detach ourselves from a classical social model, ignoring what Touraine seemed to ask: „why should we not wonder today if this 'social' vision is not beginning to disappear or even whether it has not already been replaced by another vision?" (Touraine 230). In other words, we cannot accept that we are witnessing today to a 'social end'; this should not surprise us too much, at least theoretically, because, since Nietzsche, we discovered all kinds of 'deaths' or 'ends': of God, Grand Narratives, history, art etc.

For Touraine, the 'classic' sociology was formed through the idea of society, "the keystone of the whole social representation of social life" (Touraine 230), a holistic idea, accompanied by more or less explicit communitarian valuations. There was, historically speaking, an alternative to this vision:

The only powerful enemy of the idea of society has been that of rationalization, that is to say, the triumph of reason. Today, like yesterday, many defend the idea that human beings act, both individually and collectively, in function of the rational pursuit of their interests and that social organization calls on increasing rationality which can be seen both in the use of new technologies and in the capacity to forecast consumer behavior. (Touraine 2005, 231)

As a consequence, the alternative can be identified with an "elementary form of utilitarianism." (Touraine 2005, 231) However, we are facing today the phenomenon of "destruction of what was the sphere of sociological thought." Two categories of factors contributed to this situation. Some of them have an economic and technological nature, so the contemporary world cannot control them anymore (from a social perspective); this might be rephrased like that "we have gone from a period dominated by state interventionism to a period in which markets, financial and commercial networks, etc. predominate". On the other hand, "we are seeing a mobilization of beliefs, religious powers and political-religious demands which exceed what can be managed by the

institutionalized mechanisms for change.” In conclusion, for Touraine, “the social sphere tends to disappear somewhere between the economic world and the cultural universe, interests and beliefs.” (233)

What would be the effect of this new reality on the sociological approach? Shortly, we must eliminate the idea that one side represents reason, markets and liberalism and the other an identity often associated with a nation, an ethnic group or a religion. It is wiser to find in each actor the contradictory presence of these two orientations, neither of which is capable of elaborating the social mediations, institutional or representative rules which would enable the dual aspect of his or her behavior to be integrated. (Touraine 2005, 233)

Thus, the contemporary societies should be called “post-social” places, “meaning they no longer have internal control over themselves.” (Touraine 2005, 234) We could talk in this context about a (global) phenomenon of *desocialization*, which means the irreversible weakening of any classic social forms (from family to state), and Touraine approves this idea. Naturally, the present forces (the market is their emblem) cannot be defined through the old sociological/social categories. Still, in this case, the effect (i.e. the fluid social reality) seems to be taken as the cause itself. Would we still confuse the *explanandum* with the *explanans*?¹⁹ Maybe we should represent *the effect* of desocialization through the introduction of *causes* of those social actors who take – economically, politically, etc. – advantage from this (very confused) situation.

Moreover, even if we do not make that critical remark, we appreciate that “desocialization” is a ‘hard’ word – descriptively speaking, this time – unsuitable for the new realities/identities of the contemporary world. We should use instead a term like *re-socialization*, namely *fast* re-socialization, realized through the whole variety of highly dynamic mechanisms of the present “global” market, including consumption, mass-media, internet, etc. In tandem with desocialization, re-socialization would indicate more accurately (at least) some social trends of re-coagulation of today’s society. However, this will certainly not cancel the previous observation.

If we interpret Touraine’s words, the postmodernism has (at least) the merit of questioning “any unitarian principle of thought and action, of any correspondence between a unitarian principle of this type and a historical period or a geographical region.” According to him, the postmodern theorists „introduce a profound dehistoricisation into the analysis, reinforced by the new insistence placed by the humanities on language, communication and signs, whereas in the previous generations the accent was on the description and analysis of societies.” (2005, 243)

On the other hand, for Touraine we should be able to overcome this position. Thus, he reintroduce a new form of historical explanation by appealing to the notion of

19] Bauman reproaches the same thing to the postmodern ethicists (like Gilles Lipovetski), in the beginning of his *Postmodern Ethics* (Bauman 1993, 3). This is maybe a kind of logical failure for the postmodern explanations in general.

the hypermodernity, for instance, which allows the synthesis (on a new social level) of the previous elements. It is, we believe, a structural approach, analog to Ritzer's proposal, requiring the existence of a new individual typology and cultural community, creating, in Touraine's terms, a new kind of social and actually post-social resistance – "the birth of a post-social, *cultural* model of representation and action. (author's emphasis)" We would deal, in this case, with real "units of conscious and autonomous action" (as we call them) acting on the contemporary world scene, resulting from the process of globalization and being perfectly adapted to this one. As Touraine assessed, "it is in this new model of representation and action that the self-transforming action of society appears to be the strongest and above all with the least intermediaries. (...) The creative capacity, instead of grappling with outside objects, has turned inwards to become an end in itself and to better resist both economic and military forces and communitarian ideology." (Touraine 2005, 244)

Beyond the undeniable sociological 'inventiveness,' is this cultural model (theorized by Touraine or used by Ritzer) the expression of a reality or is it rather a *desire* of reading the social reality in a different manner? Is the contemporary individual so 'strong' indeed, able to represent the most powerful force of resistance against a social otherness that is always threatening him? Actually, this vision is a kind of paradoxical reaffirmation of the modern individualism and an expression of a generalized (social, political, etc.) autism encouraged by postmodernism, a background where the mass-media and a continuous consumption offer *the illusion* of an unprecedented economic and historical power (at least for the favorites).

Finally, referring to what might be called the social limitation of Ritzer's work and the glocalization conception, arisen from his 'programmatically' set principles, we ask ourselves if we can sincerely reiterate (at least from a theoretical position, explicitly assumed) Jason Beckfield's interrogation. In the review of the first edition of *The Globalization of Nothing*, he synthetically expressed his reservations and his hopes: "There is substantial evidence that does globalization mean more than this, and I hope that future editions of *The Globalization of Nothing* will do more to connect the realm of consumption to other pressing social problems." (Beckfield 2007, 172) Obviously, *The Globalization of Nothing 2* (or the *Globalization: The Essentials*) has not reached those expectations. We will ask instead, rhetorically, if the *social* dimension can be recovered as a decisive (and independent) element of the theoretical approach, in the framing of the global *consumer culture* analysis...

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