



## Glocalization: a critical introduction

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Glocalization: a critical introduction**, by Victor Roudometof, London and New York, Routledge, 2016, xv + 188 pp., £28.99 (pbk), £90 (hbk), ISBN 9780415722438

As Victor Roudometof immediately points out, glocalisation is an under-theorised concept: strictly speaking, there is no theory or school of theories on glocalisation, as such, in the literature. This is quite amazing, particularly given the popularity of the term and its large diffusion in different social, economic, and political spheres, as well as in academic discourse. Surprisingly, to date there is no book in circulation that specifically discusses this concept. Consequently, *Glocalization: A critical introduction* is a welcome novelty, which fills this gap. However, while there is no attempt to distinctly theorise glocalisation on its own terms, this does not mean that there are no relevant interpretations, whereby theorists have sought to creatively engage with it. Nevertheless, what is needed (and where the author greatly succeeds) is to add glocalisation to the social-scientific vocabulary, as an analytically autonomous concept, and not as a mere appendage to globalisation, cosmopolitanisation, or theories of global diffusion.

One of the main strengths of *Glocalization: A critical introduction* is that it explores and clarifies the varied literature circulating around the term ‘glocalisation’, which has many different and contrasting, and (sometimes even) conflicting concepts or meanings. As a matter of fact, the author states that the trilogy of *global*, *local*, and *glocal* are in need of unambiguous sound definitions from theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Roudometof’s book is structured into two parts. The first is devoted to a history and critical assessment of the theoretical use of the term, *glocalisation*. It then offers an alternative perspective and a clear, effective, and applicable definition, explaining the limitations of the term *globalisation* and the value of defining glocalisation. The second part of the book illustrates how the concept of glocalisation can be used to broaden our understanding and analysis of a wide range of issues in world politics, including the twenty-first-century culture of consumption, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and religious traditions. Roudometof usefully clarifies the different interpretations of the term ‘glocalisation’ and its development. In particular, he devotes special attention to the three authors who, more than any others, have devoted deep reflection on processes of glocalisation: Roland Robertson, George Ritzer, and Ulrich Beck.

Robertson (1992) was the first person who introduced the concept of ‘glocalisation’ into social and scientific discourse. From that moment, he refined the idea in order to respond to those who criticised him (e.g. Radhakrishnan, 2010; Ritzer, 2003). While accepting some of their criticism, in his monist perspective, Robertson (2013) states that today, only the *glocal* exists (we are neither *global* nor *local* any more). The *glocal* is the outcome of the historically long struggle between the

global and the local, whereby both lost. In Robertson's vision, unlike the general viewpoint, in the end, globalisation does not produce uniformity (even if this was its original colonial aim), but differences and fragmentation of the world into a multitude of glocal realities – although they might indeed have the mould of being global. Like the Hindu conception of deities: there is one essence and multiple realities. Today, glocalisation is (the result of the failure of) globalisation, which was lost in its own hegemonic project.

With a different touch, Alexander (2003) sees glocalisation as globalisation refracted through the local. Through the metaphor of refraction, the local is not annihilated, absorbed, or destroyed by globalisation but, rather, it operates symbiotically with globalisation and shapes the telos or end point. The result is heterogeneity (e.g. pop music, some organisational techniques, some specific religions, and so on). Glocality is defined as experiencing the global locally or through local lenses (which can include local power relations, geopolitical and geographical factors, cultural distinctiveness, and so on). According to Meyrowitz (2005), we live in 'glocalities'. Each glocality is unique in many ways, and yet each is reciprocally influenced by global trends and global consciousness.

In addition, Ritzer (2003) agrees that pure global and pure local no longer exist anymore. Perhaps, the (conventional) pure local existed at one time; but, with the advent of capitalism, it disappeared after having lost the struggle with globalisation. In fact, isolated realities (e.g. remote or culturally pristine tribes) are rare. When the local disappears, what is left is the glocal, because local and global are mutually exclusive. However, Ritzer (1993, 2003) balances Robertson's optimistic vision, by highlighting additional negative aspects of glocalisation. Unlike Robertson, Ritzer maintains a dualist perspective. Hence, globalisation is a general process with two ideal-type outcomes: the *grobolution* and the *glocalisation*. The former (based on growth) is a form of hard imperialism (Americanisation) pursued by nations, corporations, and organisations. Such a process of grobolution happens when the same product is delivered, in the same way, around the world.

Glocalisation, on the other hand, is a soft and subtle colonialism, a *top-down* adaption to the local, while still maintaining an unbalanced relation with the local, which remains subordinate to the glocal. In other words, the glocal overcomes the local. Principles of glocalisation have been implemented by some international managerial styles, worldwide organisations, religious enterprises (e.g. Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Soka Gakkai, a Japanese Buddhist religious movement), cross-cultural business and marketing, commercial strategies (e.g. Coca-Cola), specific products [e.g. Mattel (with multicultural Barbie dolls – see Varney, 1998), Procter & Gamble, Starbucks, Nike, and so on]. McDonalds is probably the most quoted case: in different countries, this company customised its original menu by taking into account local preferences, tastes, or other particularities, in order to meet customers' desires and needs (see Ram, 2004; Vignali, 2001).

By the way, Roudometof informs his readers that there is also a new cultural phenomenon, which represents an interesting revenge of the local to the global. This new trend has been called *lobalisation* (Chew, 2010), in which locally

manufactured cultural products (e.g. pass-off menswear in China) are packaged and circulated in a locality under the guise of prestigious imported products. The practical significance of such a global cultural dynamic is that 'lobal' products are beginning to diffuse broadly around the globe, and they can negatively affect global original-brand manufacturers and local creative industries.

The third scholar highlighted by Roudometof is the late Ulrich Beck (1944–2015), whose 'cosmopolitanisation theory' (Beck, 2000, 2006) has a strong affinity with issues raised by glocalisation. According to Roudometof, Beck's key innovation and major contribution is the conceptualisation of cosmopolitanism as a sociological research programme. He proposes the construction of a cosmopolitan sociology with its own conceptual and methodological resources, which will better understand the current cosmopolitan transformation. Beck considers cosmopolitanisation as a non-linear, dialectical process in which the universal and particular, the similar and the dissimilar, the global and the local are to be conceived, not as cultural polarities but as interconnected and reciprocally interpenetrating principles. His vision brings to mind Tao philosophy and Robertson's (1992) formulation of globalisation as the interpenetration of universalism and particularism. As a matter of fact, Roudometof sees a close affinity between glocalisation and cosmopolitanisation; although Beck insists on the originality and difference of his viewpoint. Hence, the comparative presentation of these three theorists' ideas helps readers to grasp the basic fault lines in the debates over glocalisation.

In the second part of the book, the author addresses many interesting issues and discusses the concept of glocalisation in different spheres: the relationship between glocalisation and social space and modernity or modernities (Chapter 5); the placement of glocalisation within the broad and multifaceted domain of culture (Chapter 6); corporate commercial and management strategies (homogenising, indigenising, glocalising, and the recent cases of localisation and llobalisation – Chapter 6); the entanglements between glocalisation and transnationalism and cosmopolitanism (Chapter 7). Examples and illustrations abound throughout the text. However, what is clearly presented to the reader is not a simple list of cases. Far from it. On the contrary, the author engages in a difficult yet fruitful activity to include examples within a charming and seductive theoretical explanation. In this way, he successfully avoids falling into the trap of the anecdotal.

The last chapter is devoted to a reflection on the limits of the glocalisation. In the author's critical perspective, the glocal turn does not provide a solution or masterful heuristic that can overcome *all* conceptual difficulties. In other words, glocalisation should not be seen as a new grand narrative for the social sciences and the humanities. To this end, the author enlists three main limits. The first relates to the fact that the glocal turn is precisely the concept's bounded explanatory power. Whereas glocalism advocates an unbounded version of glocal, the author states that researchers should advocate a bounded version of glocal. The second limit is concerned with the contrast between the great deal of effort that has been placed in developing an interpretation that establishes glocalisation as an analytically autonomous concept, and the lack

of discussion of the glocal vis-à-vis the *local*. The third limit pertains to the necessity for rethinking the concept of globalisation itself. No treatment of glocalisation can be final and comprehensive without reconsidering its relationship to its older and far more established sibling, namely globalisation. In the voluminous literature on globalisation, there is no shared definition of the concept and no authoritative vantage point from where to establish a simple or straightforward correlation between the global and the glocal.

*Glocalization: A critical introduction* offers a compelling introduction to, but also critique of previous interpretations, approaches, theories, and worldviews that relate to the notion of glocalisation. Various interpretations of glocalisation are criticised by the author, but not immediately dismissed, because his intention is to synthesise them, and hence advance the intellectual debate. In the author's vision, *all* work on glocalisation remains partial or incomplete; hence, thinking about glocalisation implies the necessity for further conceptual development on related concepts.

In his epilogue, the author's argument emanates from the realisation that twenty-first-century social theory should not propose catch all concepts that supposedly offer meaningful answers of universal applicability. It should rather engage with social complexity as an existing reality and offer interpretations that preserve the ambiguity of outcomes and the necessary detachment that forms the very basis for intellectual reflection and interpretation. Roudometof's book can be mined by readers coming from diverse intellectual traditions, disciplines, regions of the globe, and fields of study because it is full of numerous precious stones that are suitable for all tastes. It is the author's intention that *Glocalization: A critical introduction* is predicated upon a realisation that the scholarly community needs to gain sufficient detachment from glocalisation, in order to be in a position to meaningfully interpret and appreciate the concept, without engaging in glocalist polemics. Through this reflexive process, scholars may gain the capacity for a more fruitful engagement with the notion of the glocal. In conclusion, glocalisation is a new addition to the conceptual vocabulary of the humanities and social sciences, and should be integrated as an autonomous concept into these fields and disciplines.


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