

# American Behavioral Scientist

<http://abs.sagepub.com>

---

## **McDonaldization: Linearity and Liquidity in Consumer Cultures**

Bryan S. Turner

*American Behavioral Scientist* 2003; 47; 137

DOI: 10.1177/0002764203256180

The online version of this article can be found at:  
<http://abs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/47/2/137>

---

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *American Behavioral Scientist* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://abs.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://abs.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

# McDonaldization

## Linearity and Liquidity in Consumer Cultures

BRYAN S. TURNER

*University of Cambridge*

*McDonaldization is the most prominent and powerful instance of rationalization in contemporary societies. This article provides a critical assessment of Max Weber's rationalization thesis, develops an alternative to Weber's classical argument, and explores the impact of local cultures on the McDonaldization process. Whereas modernization could be said to follow a linear path of historical development, the differentiation of modernity and the rise of hybrid cultures can be defined as an example of "liquid differentiation." The argument is that Fordist models of unidimensional rationalization are being replaced by a new dynamic in which there is a permanent but unstable interaction between linear and liquid modernity. This concept of a dynamic is important because it avoids the simple dichotomy between McDonaldized modernity and postmodernity.*

**Keywords:** globalization; linearity; McDonaldization; modernity; Weber

**The McDonaldization thesis** has been an important and influential debate in contemporary sociology because it illustrates an issue that has been central to the sociological account of modernity. *The McDonaldization of Society* (Ritzer, 1993) was explicitly a study in Weberian sociology insofar as it described the rationalization of contemporary society. It also can be seen correctly as a contribution to the study of global consumption. The book was revised partly in response to critics (Ritzer, 2000) and has produced a variety of valuable research projects in modern sociology (Smart, 1999). In this discussion, I want to look more closely at the classical problem of rationalization in Weber's economic sociology, present an alternative to the rationalization thesis, and develop an argument that the global project of McDonaldization is imploding as the McDonald's product is differentiated by local cultural circumstances. The linear model of modernization is being replaced by what I will call "liquid

---

**Author's Note:** *For advice and information on McDonald's in developing this analysis, I would like to thank the following people: Ayca Alemdaroglu (University of Cambridge), Mona Abaza (American University of Cairo), Greg Barton and Sue Kenny (Deakin University, Australia), and Bill Thornton (National Cheng University, Taiwan).*

AMERICAN BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST, Vol. 47 No. 2, October 2003 137-153

DOI: 10.1177/0002764203256180

© 2003 Sage Publications

differentiation” as the McDonald fast-food formula interacts with local customs producing hybrid consumer forms that go beyond the early Fordist model of rationalization. Although this global transformation of the McDonald’s product can be described as “glocalization,” it also can be regarded as an important challenge to the Fordist and linear assumptions of the fast-food industry. More generally, glocalization is an important corrective to more general linear models of modernity. As a result, it may well be the case that McDonaldization has reached its economic and cultural limits.

The notion that contemporary cultures are fundamentally different from the early phase of modernity has been conceptualized by Zygmunt Bauman (2000) in his *Liquid Modernity*. Although this analysis of the development of McDonaldization as a movement toward liquid differentiation borrows from Bauman’s concept of liquidity, I do not argue that modernity and postmodernity are simply opposed. Instead, I describe a dialectical process in which linearity and liquidity constantly interact. McDonaldization may be a self-limiting case of Fordist rationalization but, clearly, linear models of management and administration survive and flourish in a world where in more general terms the “iron cage of bureaucracy” has long been challenged by more creative management systems.

The major lines of criticism and comment on the McDonaldization thesis have been fairly well developed. First, there has been an issue about the extent and uniformity of McDonald’s as an illustration of cultural standardization where critics have argued that around the world, McDonald’s products and packaging are adjusted to and modified by local cultures. In Asia, ethnographic studies, for example, in James Watson’s (1997) *Golden Arches East*, have demonstrated that McDonaldization is not a uniform process. I want to develop this criticism not simply as an account of “glocalism” but as a model of postlinear modernization. Second, in the original study, Ritzer failed to provide an account of how McDonaldization as an iron cage could be resisted. In his subsequent work and in the debate, the avenues of resistance have been given considerable attention. The rise of the antiglobalization movement has been a vivid, and occasionally violent, testimony to global political responses to McDonald’s as a symbol of Americanization. The negative social, health, and economic consequences of McDonald’s have been fully explored in both serious political economy and popular critique, for example, in Eric Schlosser’s (2001) *Fast Food Nation* or John Vidal’s (1997) *McLibel*. Finally, there are various contributions to sociological theory that broadly address the question as to whether the debate has contributed anything new to the rationalization thesis that we have inherited from Weber and critical theory. Perhaps the best answer to that criticism comes from Barry Smart (1999), who has observed that the real value of Ritzer’s study has been to force us to attempt a general sociological understanding of the central feature of modern society, thereby “provoking a theoretical and practical debate concerning key novel and defining features of our contemporary world and forcing us to define our response to crucial aspects of our everyday world”

(p. 195). We can take this statement as a broad translation of Weber's injunction that our duty as sociologists is to understand the characteristic uniqueness of the times in which we live.

Much of the critical debate with Ritzer's analysis is not, however, a fundamental challenge to his account of McDonald's because the criticisms often amount merely to extensions, corrections, or additions to the thesis. For example, the ethnographic illustrations about localization or glocalization have primarily brought an empirical richness to the abstract theorization of rationalized production and consumption. We need to develop these ethnographic observations to another level as a genuine theoretical step beyond the Weberian model of rationalism. To engage in a debate over McDonaldization, we need to see the McDonald's case study as a contribution to Weberian economic sociology in the sense that Ritzer has shown us how the rationalization of distribution and popular consumption is a historical elaboration of Weber's analysis of the rationalization of production. To address Ritzer's thesis more directly, we might ask what social or economic transformations of the McDonaldization process would result in the falsification of the rationalization theory? One possible answer is to examine the processes that are undermining the Fordist assumptions of McDonald's outlets bringing about a self-limiting process of rationalization.

In *Resisting McDonaldization* (Turner, 1999b), I considered the issue of McDonaldization as globalization by contrasting two images of society that can be derived from classical sociology, namely, Marx's view of capitalism as a contradictory, conflictual, and destructive socioeconomic system and Weber's notion of the capitalist world as subject to the rationalization process. These somewhat incommensurable narratives of capitalism were reproduced in modern sociology as a tension between the image of society as the McDonald's iron cage in Ritzer's thesis and the uncertainties of risk society in Ulrich Beck (1992). In this commentary, I extend and enhance that earlier contribution by developing a model of the tensions within contemporary patterns of globalization by an examination of two metaphors of modernization, namely, the queue and the web. These two metaphors help us to conceptualize social change in the contemporary world as a dialectic between linearity and liquidity, that is, between production and consumption as a linear abstract rationality of general repetition and production and consumption as endless local liquidity of addition.

### WEBER ON RATIONALIZATION

As with most of Weber's central concepts, "rationality" and "rationalization" have many different meanings. The notion of rational action occurs most frequently in Weber's attempt to define capitalism as a system of rational accumulation of profit (Turner, 1999a). It is customary to define rationalization in multi-dimensional terms. In economics, it refers to the growth of techniques of

measurement such as accountancy in systematic pursuit of profit. In religion, it means the development of rational theologies and theodicies, the decline of magic, and the social dominance of a professional stratum of religious experts. In legal terms, it involves the exclusion of ad hoc legal decision making and arbitrary case law and the formation of a university-educated association of legal experts who produce a coherent body of universal law. In science, it involves the decline of the solitary genius and the routinization of scientific discovery through the creation of the research laboratory. These examples, which are well-known in Weber's comparative sociology, have a number of common features: the decline of charismatic authority in the face of expert systems, the formalization of knowledge, and the monopoly of professional training through various academies. These social transformations produce a standardization of cultural practices by the reduction of arbitrary, accidental, and contingent elements of social action.

Weber's use of the idea of rationalization as a cultural critique is relevant to any contemporary understanding of McDonaldization. We need to see the ambiguities of rationalization as part of Weber's criticism of the negative consequences of technology for culture. The notion that rationalization brings about standardization is part of a broader German critique of the idea of "civilization" as a technical manipulation of nature. This contrast between civilization and culture was a key component of Norbert Elias's (2000) theory of the civilizing process. In the German high culture tradition, *Kultur* referred the development of individuality or, more precisely, personality for which education (*Bildung*) and moral training were essential. German high culture came to place a special value on *Bildungskultur* as the pinnacle of national aspiration, the epitome of national self-respect and achievement. By contrast, *Zivilisation* had a negative connotation, referring to the technological growth of commercial society, namely, the impact of capitalism. In the early part of the 20th century, *Zivilisation* was increasingly associated with the negative features of American industrial civilization that was held to have undermined personality and educated taste by promoting a commercial society that pandered to popular enjoyment. Both the Frankfurt School and conservative critics of modern society shared this rejection of American civilization. For example, the legacy of *Bilungskultur* was the basis of Theodor Adorno's cultural criticism of the shallowness of American society in the articles on "the culture industry" (Adorno, 2001). Whereas civilization was driven by Anglo-Saxon commercialism as a rational or systematic quest for profit, culture was driven by the German concern for personality. It is for this reason that the notion of individualism in the two systems had a very different meaning and significance. English individualism was connected with economic exchange, whereas German individualism was associated with the distinction that follows from discipline and education.

We can see that McDonaldization is a useful contemporary illustration of these forms of technological rationalism. McDonald's and the fast-food industry as a whole are merely an application of routinized Fordist production

methods and scientific management techniques to mass production of food products for immediate consumption. As a global process, it brings an increasing range of service industries under the general framework of rationalization, resulting in McDoctors, McDentists, “junk-food journalism,” and increasingly, McUniversities. McDonaldization, however, must be understood as a generalized process of rationalism.

In summary, the modern criticism of McDonaldization has many parallels with the debate over culture and civilization that was the background to Weber’s rationalization thesis. In this respect, McDonaldization is simply a continuation of the technological attack on the foundations of *Bilungskultur*. To pursue this argument, we need to remain sensitive to two somewhat separate issues: McDonald’s as the specific techniques of scientific management and McDonaldization as cultural standardization or the democratization of culture. Although Smart (1999, p. 17) has suggested that we need to keep these two aspects analytically separate, we can also see how they relate to the democratization of culture. Eating in McDonald’s is a formal democratization of taste, where the McDonald’s experience is economically and socially available to the majority. The McDonaldization of higher education is also a democratization of educational taste in which mass education systems become available through the standardization of content.

### REGULATION AND RISK

Is McDonaldization as a generic process a fundamental aspect of contemporary society? Is the process uniform? Ritzer’s own approach to this question is to suggest that McDonaldization is a master process, but it is periodically confounded or undermined by the “irrationalities of rationality” (Ritzer, 2000, pp. 16-18). Ritzer provides a variety of examples of these irrationalities: they include the negative effects on the environment, inefficiencies associated with traffic congestions, the inconvenience of ATM machines, false friendliness, and dehumanization. These irrationalities are not an alternative to rationalization; they are merely unintended consequences of McDonaldization. Ritzer also considers aspects of social life that appear to fall outside McDonaldization, such as “premodern shopping” in a mom-and-pop store, new businesses that react against McDonaldization, such as the use of bed-and-breakfast arrangements in private homes, or postmodern strategies that reject the uniformity and standardization of modernity. These examples, although interesting, are primarily interpreted as deviations from a dominant ideal type of McDonaldization; therefore, the theory of a master trend is, at least implicitly, defended.

McDonaldization is not a uniform social process but stands rather in a dialectical relationship to the social processes that can be broadly labeled as “risk society” (Turner, 1999b, pp. 83-100). The dialectic of modern society is the oscillation of risk and regulation, or deregulation and regulation. Beck’s emphasis on

risk and Ritzer's analysis of rationalization carry profoundly different interpretations of our modern condition. For Beck, late capitalism is contingent, unstable, risky, and uncertain, whereas the McDonaldization thesis describes societies that are predictable and regulated, that is, McDonaldized. The processes and systems of standardization involved in McDonaldization mean that we encounter a society without surprises, because a regulated system attempts to remove contingency. By contrast, risk societies are, by definition, prone to uncertainty, instability, and crises. We can imagine a sequence in which the growth of risks results eventually in a systemic crisis or indeed a major social catastrophe.

Governments typically react to such crises by creating a system of regulatory controls. These systems of control characteristically employ auditing to measure such risks and hence develop risk management and risk registers. Indeed, alongside the idea of a risk society, we now have the concept of "the audit society" (Power, 1998). Audits should therefore be regarded as important responses to modern risks. In an advanced industrial society, regulatory control systems tend in turn to produce a political reaction that calls for the dominance of the free market, the reduction of state intervention, a return to liberal values, and the restoration of individual freedoms. There is therefore a perpetual cycle of regulation and deregulation whereby governments that promote deregulation have to face the unintended consequences of liberalization, namely, the multiplication of risks. The political difficulties that are the inevitable effects of deregulation force governments to return eventually to audits and regulatory controls.

These cycles of regulation and deregulation describe the political history of successive governments in Western societies, especially in the United States. The pattern of American politics can be understood as an endless oscillation of regimes of regulation and deregulation (Eisner, 1993). The Depression and World War II required massive state intervention and extensive legislation to mobilize society behind the war effort. In a similar fashion, the New Deal produced a considerable volume of legislation to protect workers from the social risks of unemployment and the hazards of industrial technology. These regulatory regimes were followed by liberal periods that deregulated the economy and technological systems. In particular, economic stagflation produced an "efficiency regime" that attempted to liberate the market from state controls. A similar pattern of policies shaped British political history, where the Thatcher and Major governments finally destroyed the legacy of social Keynesianism and centralized regulation. Recent accountancy scandals in the United States will force liberal governments to accept new regulatory regimes that ideologically they are reluctant to (re)embrace.

Globalization has intensified the dialectic of risk and regulation because few governments can successfully regulate their own economies in a context of global competition. Global corporations may simply transfer their operations to other locations where government or union interventions are minimal. Crime works on the same principle. Globalization has simply expanded the opportunities for Mafia-like organizations to proliferate, especially in the global drug

market. Organized crime is now a basic feature of a global culture of consumerism, and throughout Southeast Asia and Africa, the new drug barons of the global drug trade are often a component of the state. The history of the regulation of tobacco is also a classic example and confirms the dialectical pattern of risk, audit, regulation, and deregulation.

Although “risk society” provides an interesting alternative to “McSociety,” Beck’s sociology of risk has two dimensions rather than a single theme. These two components are the risk-society thesis and the concept of “individualization.” Although much attention has been given to “risk society,” the individualization argument has been less influential. This concept can be misleading because it is mistakenly associated with the idea that individualism has increased. By individualization, Beck (2002) means “detraditionalization.” For example, people are liberated from traditional roles and constraints such as the status and class constraints of early capitalism. The decline of the immediate constraints of status has produced profound changes in patterns of leisure, family life, attitudes, and culture. Second, women have been released from the traditional constraints of compulsory housework and dependency. Familial ties and relationships now have to be constantly negotiated and patterns of intimacy are contested and uncertain, or indeed chaotic (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). Third, the work disciplines and routines of capitalism are broken up by more flexible forms of employment, resulting in casualization, decentralization of work sites, and the fragmentation of the life cycle.

The individualization thesis is not a sociological utopia because the “disembedding” of individuals from traditional life patterns results in or requires new forms of social control and integration, that is, “re-embedding” processes. Beck (2002) comments that “alongside the freeing of individuals from traditional constraints, a new standardization occurs through the individual’s dependency upon the employment market. This simultaneous individualization and standardization of our lives is not simply a personal experience. It is institutional and structural” (p. 203). My argument is that Beck’s notion of the dual process of individualization and standardization is parallel to the dialectic of risk and regulation, or dialectic of individualization and McDonaldization. It is not simply that, following Weber or Ritzer, the social world is subject to the single logic of rationalization (albeit with a degree of dysfunctional irrationality) but rather that there is a necessary dialectic between those processes of standardization and formalization and equally powerful processes of individualization. The rational processes of McDonaldization produce individualization as a response to the inflexibility and rigidities of standardized systems through disembedding processes, and in turn, the processes of individualization require compensating processes of standardization through audits and regulations. This dialectic of regulation and deregulation or regulation and risk has been particularly manifest in recent management history where the crisis of accounting in Andersen (including Enron, Xerox, WorldCom, and Johnson and Johnson) has produced demands for more systematic accrediting, regulating, legislating, and



auditing. My aim is to develop the argument further by conceptualizing individualization as a different form of modernity that contrasts the rigid linearity of Fordist models with more flexible or liquid principles of modernity in which hybrid cultures can emerge through processes of distinction, adaptation, and adjustment.

### QUEUING AND WEBBING

In historical terms, McDonaldization is a product of Fordist economies that established linear and specialized forms of production and distribution. The key component of McDonaldization as a form of modernization is the simple principle of linearity. The production and consumption processes of McDonald's are linear with food products coming off a production line, where individual consumers standing in regular queues make choices from a limited range of items, having arrived at McDonald's in queues of vehicles. Food production and delivery also follow in a linear process. Early forms of management rationality involved linear and routinized processes of administration as described in Weber's account of bureaucratization as a linear sequence of bureau. The principles of sequences, queuing, and ordering can be regarded as the elementary forms of McDonald's.

The issue of linearity and modernity has been taken up by Scott Lash (2002, p. 179) in his *Critique of Information*, where he considers the implications of Marshall McLuhan's theories of communication for the understanding of modern societies. For McLuhan, the underpinnings of the Gutenberg age were the phonetic alphabet and the straight Roman road. The phonetic alphabet was furthermore a support for the "lineality" of the grammar of Western romance languages, and thus, the abstraction of the alphabet produces the lineality of communication. The principle of linearity was of course closely bound up with a particular form of power that Max Weber called "caesaropapism," in which a single center of power exercised hierarchical command. McLuhan contrasted Gutenberg linearity with discontinuous forms of communication in societies that were a mosaic rather than a hierarchical structure. As Lash notes, airports, information ports, and teleports give us discontinuities and mosaic social relations in which simple linear forms of classification of knowledge are inadequate to conceptualize and manage the social world of global information. Whereas print cultures produced rigid forms of classification, information cultures require a more flexible strategy of pattern recognition within fields.

From a contemporary standpoint of the critique of information, McDonaldization looks like a decidedly out-of-date form of production and consumption. If linearity in the form of regulated queuing is the fundamental principle of McDonaldization, then modern production methods require information systems that are characterized by their flexibility, mobility, diversity, and open access. Their objective is to remove blockages in queues by Web sites that

have multiple points of entry and exit. If queuing is a good metaphor for the modernity of McDonald's, then the web is the metaphor of flexible production and decentralized access. A queue only works if its linear principle is faithfully observed such that there is only one legitimate entry point. A web, by contrast, only works efficiently, from the spider's point of view, if its prey can enter at any point. Queuing is not a dominant aspect of web usage because webbing does not presuppose linearity. Consumers can be stored in multiple sites and processed through various ports. These new systems presuppose different forms of socialization, regulation, and discipline. In fact, the flexibility of an information society implies different types of identity and, hence, new technologies of the self. New systems of more flexible production and distribution that utilize information technology have created a social world that has coincided with neoliberalism and postmodernism.

Recognition of the decline of modernist linearity arose from various studies of the impact of computer systems on teaching and learning. Three educational reports in particular helped to shape sociological thinking about globalization and education. These were Francois Lyotard's (1984) *The Postmodern Condition*, Marshall McLuhan's (1964) *Understanding Media*, and Daniel Bell's (1974) *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*. They were in different ways reports on the state of knowledge in the context of new media of communication. Lyotard's book, which was commissioned by the Conseil des Universites of the government of Quebec, was influential as an index of the postmodernization of knowledge as a consequence of computerization. *Understanding Media* (McLuhan, 1964) was developed for the National Association of Education Broadcasters and the U.S. Office of Education in 1959-1960. Bell's work on postindustrialism provided an early attempt to understand the contours of an information society where knowledge production would replace or at least dominate industrial production. Because computerized knowledge does not require the linearity of conventional production systems, McDonaldization may not be the only principle of production, distribution, and consumption.

In summary, to analyze McDonaldization as a global phenomenon of modernity, we may consider three axes. These are regulation-deregulation, standardization-differentiation, and linearity-liquidity. These three axes define the paradigm of liquid differentiation. If the juxtaposition of these axes describes McDonaldization as a combination of standardization, regulation, and linearity, then individualization involves a combination of deregulation, differentiation, and liquidity. In terms of political structures, Weber's rationalization process coincided with the evolution of mass parties and the party machine. It entailed a flattening or leveling process that enhanced egalitarianism by providing uniform products or services to a mass audience that is relatively undifferentiated. In terms of management schemes, McDonaldization required bureaucratic processes to ensure uniform outcomes, the result of which is to constrain individualism and differentiated taste. The standardization and dumbing down of culture has been the subject of much cultural critique. In dialectical

opposition to rational McDonaldization is individualization that combines deregulated social and political contexts and the differentiation and fragmentation of tasks and roles. Whereas McDonaldization produces reliability through sameness and linearity, individualization produces flexibility, uncertainty, and “undecideability.” Both McDonaldization and individualization have unintended democratic consequences, albeit of different forms. McDonaldization democratizes by leveling; individualization, by differentiation.

We may analyze different periods of modern capitalism in terms of the preponderance of these combinations. Broadly speaking, Fordism was the dominant mode of production and social organization from the 1930s to the 1960s, whereas the individualization phase corresponds with the era of neoliberal reforms from the late 1970s. In this sense, Beck’s theory of risk society is a sociological description of the neoliberal decades. Although we can think of this contrast in chronological terms, it is more interesting to think of these axes as a set of dialectic relationships that structure modern societies. The ways in which these dialectical tensions develop in different societies will of course be significantly influenced by local history, cultural differences, and the relative impact of neoliberal change. Although actual McDonald’s fast-food stores continue to operate with the managerial techniques and cultures that are modern and Fordist, the macro-environments within which they are set are shaped by deregulated, neoliberal cultures and economies.

### **THE McDONALD MOSAIC: GLOCALIZATION AND DIVERSITY**

There is considerable ethnographic evidence that McDonald’s outlets have adjusted to local circumstances by incorporating local cuisines and values into their customer services. The success of global McDonald’s has been to organize and present itself as a local company, where it specifically aims to incorporate local taste and local dishes—the curry potato pie from Hong Kong, the Singapore Loveburger (grilled chicken, honey, and mustard sauce), and the Teriyaki burger (sausage patty) and the Tukbul burger with cheese for the Korean market. Let us take the Russian example. The Russian experience of Western culture in the last decade has been intensely ambiguous. The obvious seduction of Western consumerism that had begun in the 1970s continued into the early 1990s, and young people in particular rushed to embrace the latest Western consumer goods and habits. Yet unsurprisingly, the promise of a widespread democratic consumer culture has not been fulfilled. Among older Russians, there has been a growing nostalgia for a putative Russian “way of doing things” and a concomitant suspicion of Western cultural institutions.

In this context of disappointed ambitions and expectations, one would expect McDonald’s to be an obvious target of Russian hostility. Even in Western countries themselves, McDonald’s is often seen as representative of the detrimental,

exploitative, and pervasive reach of global capitalism. For many critics, McDonald's exploits and poisons workers. Its culture of fast and unimaginative food is symbolic of the worst aspects of consumerism. From a Russian perspective, the characteristics of McDonald's, including its style—such as its particular forms of graphic design and its presentation of food—its emphasis on customer service and training, and its standardized global presence are decidedly Western. Russia is a society in which, as a result of its communist legacy, personal service, friendliness, and helpfulness are still corrupt bourgeois customs.

Of interest, however, Russians have a decidedly ambivalent view of McDonald's, in part because they are pragmatic in their responses to Western influences. Seventy years of Soviet rule has taught them to be judicious in their use of principle because they have learned to live with inconsistency and contradiction. McDonald's offers a surfeit of cultural contradiction because, notwithstanding the overtly Western style of McDonald's, there are also numerous forms of convergence with Russian habits and values.

First, there is the compatibility of the Fordist labor process, food process, and purchasing protocols in McDonald's with those that were developed during the Soviet period in Russia and that have continued under postcommunism. These processes and protocols, although often different in content, are consistently Fordist in form and structure. In both McDonald's and postcommunist setting, there are clear expectations of standardized and predictable products, delivery of products, staff and their uniform dress, and consumer protocols. In both settings, production and social interaction are rule driven and steered through authoritarian decision-making processes.

Second, the formal standardized structure and method of operation of a McDonald's restaurant is underpinned by an egalitarian ethos. In particular, the egalitarian ethos in Russia has been manifested in disdain for the external trappings of a service culture (as a sign of inequality) and is currently manifested in popular contempt for the ostentatious consumption of "the new Russians." McDonald's presents its food as sustenance for the "common people." In addition, the way of eating the food, using hands rather than knives and forks, appeals to ordinary people in a country where haute cuisine has been seen as, and continues to be defined as, a form of cultural pretension. The service culture of McDonald's is based on a commitment to a formal equality between customer and service assistant.

Finally, the actual content of McDonald's food has a definite appeal to Russian taste. For example, McDonald's food, such as the buns, sauces, and even the meat, tends to be sweeter than the average European or Asian cuisine. Desserts are generally based on dairy produce and include exceedingly sweet sauces. Potato chips and fried chicken appeal to the Russian preference for food fried in saturated fat rather than food that is grilled or uncooked. Thus, although McDonald's might be seen as a harbinger of the worst of Western cultural imperialism, the pragmatic Russian will usually be prepared to frequent McDonald's restaurants because of the quality and compatibility of the food with Russian

taste and the familiarity of the setting and delivery process. However, the cost of McDonald's food in Russia is prohibitive and for many is a luxury item for which the average family must save.

In Australia, by contrast, McDonald's culture is highly compatible with a society that has embraced egalitarianism to such an extent that cultural distinction is explicitly rejected in such popular expressions such as "to cut down tall poppies" and by the emphasis on mateship (Turner & Edmunds, 2002). Historically, the Australian food consumption has contained a high level of meat, especially lamb and beef. Dietary innovations such as replacing lard by canola resulted in a 50% cut in sales in Sydney stores. McDonald's has been particularly successful down under, where it is claimed by the *Weekend Australian* that a million Australians consume more than \$4.8 million burgers, fries, and drinks at the 683 McDonald's stores each day (Dore, Harris, & Whitacker, 2001). McDonald's arrived in Australia in 1971, opening 118 stores in its first year. The company had an important impact on services in Australia, where it led the way in modernizing work practices, corporate culture, and philanthropy. Their business strategy involved the development of community and educational links through Rotary clubs and churches. McDonald's successfully survived much local criticism against American cultural imperialism and developed educational programs that have been addressed to kindergartens and schools. McDonald's built playgrounds and distributed toys. Through the development of McHappy Day, it donates generously to hospitals and charities. It also developed Ronald McDonald House Charities that in 2001 raised \$2.4 million for charity. Ray Kroc's four commandments—quality, service, cleanliness, and value—have been adopted as core elements in a two-unit educational diploma that can be taken in certain Australian high schools as components of their educational experience.

Although it has been a significant commercial success and now controls 42% of the fast-food market, the high-water mark was achieved in the mid-1990s when 145 stores were opened in the space of 2 years. Sales figures have become static, customer satisfaction is declining, and McDonald's has been the subject of public criticism. McDonald's suffered economically when the Liberal Government of John Howard introduced the GST (General Sales Tax) and McDonald's hamburgers were not exempt. The result was 10% decline in sales, and they failed to achieve their target of 900 stores by the year 2000. McDonald's has responded to this decline in several ways, including the diversification of their products into McCafes and by moving up-market into Mexican-style restaurants and sandwich bars.

In Asia, McDonald's outlets have been successful in penetrating local markets. In the process, however, McDonald's products have been changing. The doctrine that societies that are connected by trade do not go to war is being tested in the case of China and Taiwan. For example, Taiwan has 341 and the People's Republic of China has 326 McDonald's restaurants. The new Chinese elite in its drive to industrialize and modernize society has accepted McDonald's outlets

because McDonald's is seen to epitomize healthy food based on nutritious ingredients and scientific cooking. Although the Party is still in control and formally promotes communist ideals of loyalty and dedication, young people have adopted the Ronald McDonald backpack as a sign of modernist consumerism. McDonald's entered Taiwan in 1984, where it now sells 92 million hamburgers and 60 million McNuggets to a population of 22.2 million. McDonald's has become ubiquitous partly by adding corn soup to its regular menu once it was realized that no meal is complete without soup. McDonald's in Taiwan also abandoned its antiloitering policy once it accepted the fact that students saw the air-conditioned McDonald's as an attractive and cool venue for study. Other changes in this densely populated society followed, such as building three-storey outlets that can seat more than 250 people at a time.

South Korea is another society that enthusiastically embraced McDonald's. The first outlet was opened in Apkujong-dong in Seoul during the 1988 Olympic Games and expanded rapidly to become the second largest fast-food service retailer after Lotteria. The World Cup provided important marketing opportunities for McDonald's, and the company sought to increase its outlets, adding another 100 restaurants. The company initiated a "Player Escort" scheme to select Korean children to participate by escorting soccer players to the football dome. The current McDonald's president Kim Hyung-soo has adopted the sociological expression "glocalization" to describe the customization of McDonald's menus to satisfy the demands of local customers by developing Korean-style burgers such as Bulgogi Berger and Kimchi Burger. Another promotional strategy has been to make Internet available in its restaurants located in famous hang-out places for Korean youth, such as the ASEM mall and Shinchon.

The market in Asia is also diversifying as further Westernized commodities and lifestyles are imported. For example, the *Tapei Journal* of September 6, 2002, reports about the growing demand for coffee in Asia, where it is now beginning to challenge the cultural hegemony of tea. Coffee was first introduced into Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945). After the departure of the Japanese, consumer interest in coffee waned, but by 1950, instant coffee had become popular as U.S. troops were stationed in Taiwan. By the 1960s, coffee houses had become trendy places among the intellectual elite and Tapei's Star Café was a popular place for intellectual debate. In today's market, Japanese coffee is not competing with Western-style blends and brewing methods, and in the last 5 years, Starbucks has become as widespread as McDonald's. The coffee house attempts to sell a lifestyle as much as a beverage and it invites people to congregate by treating the coffee house as a surrogate living room. Starbucks also has to compete with Barista, Dante, IS, and Detour, which offer Western music, coffee, and space to hang out.

McDonald's has responded by creating McSnack, in part to catch up with a new wave of Korean soap operas depicting romanticized coffee-house scenes. It offers chicken and beef curry rice, bagels and English muffin sandwiches, and

waffles (Lue, 2001). It also offers nine different hot and cold coffee drinks. The important feature of the coffee craze is that Korean customers expect to loiter in the outlets, which are used as meeting places and spaces for study. McDonald's staff tolerate customers who sit for hours inside the restaurant or on chairs outside hardly buying anything. During their university examinations period, students are packed into McSnack and so actual customers often find it difficult to secure a seat. Customers also bring food into McSnack from other restaurants to eat at the nice, clean, air-conditioned outlets.

These national case studies show us how McDonald's fast-food outlets interact with local cultures. Perhaps the best illustration of these local tensions is in the Middle East, where 300 McDonald's have opened, mainly following the Gulf war. McDonald's has been successful in Saudi Arabia, where McDonald's has spread rapidly, despite periodic fundamentalist boycotts, and where its stores are closed five times a day for prayers. The company now intends to open McDonald's in Afghanistan. In Turkey, McDonald's started to open branches in the 1980s in Istanbul and Ankara. Although McDonald's has expanded to around 100 outlets, almost half of these are in Istanbul. There is a McDonald's in Kayseri, the center of the Islamist vote in Istanbul. The only remarkable protest against McDonald's was held at the Middle East Technical University when it tried to open a branch there in the 1990s, but this protest came from socialists not Islamic students. Ironically, Muslim couples often use McDonald's as a place to meet because they know that their traditionalist parents would not dine there. McDonald's in Turkey also has been sensitive to Islamic norms and it offers *iftar*, an evening meal served during the Ramadan. In Egypt, McDonald's has also become popular and serves sandwiches, Egyptian boulettes, and other local items. Although Egyptian intellectuals condemn Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald's as examples of Western corruption of local taste and cuisine, McDonald's now exists without conflict alongside street vendors and local cafes.

McDonald's outlets have paradoxically been popular in many Muslim societies, despite strong anti-American sentiments, because parents recognize them as places where alcohol will not be served. In addition, the mildly exotic Western taste of a burger and fries is an alternative to local fare. Indonesian youth use McDonald's in the same way that Western youth gravitate toward shopping malls. With temperatures consistently in the 30°C range (90°F) and humidity often more than 80%, McDonald's is simply a convenient, clean, and cool place to be. The company has once more adapted to local taste introducing sweet iced tea, spicy burgers, and rice. The economic crisis in early 1998 forced McDonald's to experiment with a cheaper menu as the price of burgers exploded. McDonald's customers remained with the company to consume McTime, PaNas, and Paket Nasi. For many years, McDonald's has advertised its products as *halal*, reassuring its Muslim customers that its products are religiously clean. Similar to Egyptian McDonald's, in Indonesia, a postsunset meal is offered as a "special" during Ramadan. To avoid any criticism of Americanization,

McDonald's is a local business that is owned by a Muslim, whose advertising banners proclaim in Arabic that McDonald's Indonesia is fully owned by an indigenous Muslim (Guarente, 2001). Proprietors also will proudly boast their Muslim status by the use of post-pilgrimage titles such as *Haji*.

### CONCLUSIONS: CULTURAL LIQUIDITY

These local case studies show how the rational model of McDonald's adjusts to local cultural preferences, but the result is a diminution of the original McDonald's product (the burger and fries). In fact, the more the company adjusts to local conditions, the more the appeal of the specifically American product may be lost. At the end of the day, McDonald's simply is a burger joint. Therefore, following Smart's argument, we need to distinguish between specific studies of McDonald's and macro-studies of McDonaldization as rationalization. To understand these macro-developments, I want to consider the tensions between linear continuity of the product and the mosaic of McDonald's outlets that result from glocalization. The contradiction is that McDonald's corporate culture has in some respect been reduced to its minimal component of quality service, but the conditions under which it delivers its products and the nature of these products are wholly diverse. The basic feature of this argument is that localization of the product is more than merely product differentiation, but it in fact points to a different logic of post-Fordist liquidity.

In this article, I have attempted to distinguish between the global characteristics of McDonald's fast-food industry and the broader question of rationalization in the form of McDonaldization. The global reach of McDonald's is hardly at issue, and I have attempted to illustrate some of the complexity of that reach through several vignettes of McDonald's in Russia, Australia, the Middle East, and Asia. The spread of McDonald's clearly illustrates the fact that McDonaldization has been a powerful force behind the administrative rationalism of modern societies. With globalization, rationalization has become a global dimension of the basic social processes of any modern society. In this sense, the McDonaldization thesis is also a potent defense of the continuing relevance of Weber's general sociology of modernity. I have, however, argued that there have been major political and technological changes that have modified and challenged the dominant McDonaldization paradigm. The first was neoliberalism, which ushered in a period of three decades of deregulation that produced a risk society and processes of individualization, the basic principles of which are not those that characterized McDonaldization. The second was computerization and modern electronic information systems that have introduced new principles of organization, administration, and knowledge. These changes can be conceptualized in terms of two contrasted principles of organization, namely, the queue and the web. These two images of social processes broadly correspond to McDonaldization and individualization.



More fundamentally, the diversification of McDonald's through its interaction with local cultures has produced new management strategies, consumer cultures, and product range that depart radically from the Fordist linearity of the original model. McDonald's is slowly disappearing under the weight of its fragmentation, differentiation, and adaptation. It is perhaps therefore not surprising that there is evidence of a significant economic crisis of McDonald's as it approaches what we might call its terminal port. In November 2002, McDonald's announced the closure of 175 outlets in 10 countries, including a complete withdrawal from the Middle East and Latin America. It is anticipated that the company will open around 600 restaurants in 2003, which compares with a figure of 2,000 in 1996. McDonald's is considering the closure of six of its flagship London restaurants in such prime locations as Oxford Street, Haymarket, and Regent Street (Ezard, 2002). These potential closures are indications that the unstoppable march of McDonald's through urban society has come to an end. These closures are typically explained in economic terms by reference, for example, to increased competition, the cost of real estate, and a decline in global tourism, but there are also important cultural and social processes involved, namely, liquid differentiation.

## REFERENCES

- Adorno, T. (2001). *The culture industry*. London: Routledge.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Polity.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage Ltd.
- Beck, U. (2002). *Individualization: Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences*. London: Sage Ltd.
- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2001). *Individualization: Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences*. London: Sage Ltd.
- Bell, D. (1974). *The coming of post-industrial society*. New York: Basic Books.
- Dore, C., Harris, T., & Whitacker, M. (2001, December 22-23). Underneath the arches. *Weekend Australian*, pp. 18-19.
- Eisner, M. A. (1993). *Regulatory politics in transition*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Elias, N. (2000). *The civilizing process*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Ezard, J. (2002, November 16). McDonald's may close in West End. *The Guardian*, p. 7.
- Guarente, M. (2001, November 18). Siege mentality. *Sunday Business*, pp. 8-11.
- Lash, S. (2002). *Critique of information*. London: Sage Ltd.
- Lue, A. (2001, August 32). McDonald's mum on "Mc" restaurant Starbucks challenge. *Tapei Times*.
- Lyotard, J. -F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. London: Routledge Kegan Paul.
- Power, M. (1998). *Audit society: Rituals of verification*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon.
- Ritzer, G. (1993). *The McDonaldization of society*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.
- Ritzer, G. (2000). *The McDonaldization of society* (New Century ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.
- Schlosser, E. (2001). *Fast food nation*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

- Smart, B. (1999). *Resisting McDonaldization*. London: Sage Ltd.
- Turner, B. S. (1999a). *Classical sociology*. London: Sage Ltd.
- Turner, B. S. (1999b). McCitizens: Risk, coolness and irony in contemporary politics. In B. Smart (Ed.), *Resisting McDonaldization* (pp. 83-100). London: Sage Ltd.
- Turner, B. S., & Edmunds, J. (2002). The distaste of taste: Bourdieu, cultural capital and the Australian postwar elite. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 2(2), 219-240.
- Vidal, J. (1997). *McLibel: Burger culture on trial*. London: Macmillan.
- Watson, J. L. (Ed.). (1997). *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

**BRYAN S. TURNER** is a professor of sociology at the University of Cambridge. With John O'Neill, he is the founding editor of *The Journal of Classical Sociology*. He recently published (2002) with June Edmunds, *Generations: Culture and Society* (London: Sage Ltd.). His current empirical research includes the study of generational change among Muslim students, especially members of the Ismaili community. He recently edited (2003) *Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology* (London: Routledge).