In the studies of globalization that have burst with force into the social sciences literature in recent years, the focus of attention is steadily moving from the unifying and standardizing effects of the process (the ‘McDonaldization’ syndrome [Ritzer 2000]) to the persistence of diversity, disjuncture, inequality and marginality within the global system (Appadurai 1990, Hobsbawm 2000, Robertson 2002, Chase-Dunn 2002, Grant and Short 2002a, Preyer and Bös 2002). There is growing realization that globalization produces two opposite effects which nevertheless influence and reinforce each other: on the one hand the growing homogenization of societies and their integration into the world arena, on the other hand the continued quest for local identities and idiosyncrasies (Entrena 2002: 221, Castles and Davidson 2000: 6). Several scholars have attempted to account for the process whereby local units have adopted both global trends and influences, and have striven to be incorporated in an integrated whole. But, in the process they have also modified those effects by giving them a distinct local touch more in tune with local cultural traditions or socio-economic constraints. There has also been greater acceptance of local idiosyncrasies within the global system, a greater global valorization of particular identities (Pieterse 2000: 102).

Terms such as ‘glocalization’ or ‘hybridization’ have been suggested in this regard to explain the seemingly complex and contradictory phenomena experienced in the local units and various peripheries facing the global trends (Pieterse 2000, Robertson 2002, Grant and Short 2002: 197–199, Kincheloe 2002: 166–169). In the discussion of McDonaldization, the point has been made that eating in McDonalds is a status symbol in many Asian countries, a display of affluence, modernity
and global incorporation. Within the United States, however, it is, on the contrary, associated with lack of distinction and quality (Kincheloe 2002: 2). Also, the example of the proliferation of ethnic cuisines in the West has been given to show that influences of globalization flow not only from the global to the local but also from the local to the global (Grant and Short 2002: 12, Robertson 2002: 34).

It has also been claimed that the global trends have affected different groups very differentially. Some groups have been left relatively less affected by the influences of globalization or have been specifically excluded from or marginalized within the new global whole (Hoogvelt 1997, Grant and Short 2002). The exclusion and marginalization affect both the populations of the postindustrial societies themselves and the relations between those societies and the more peripheral post-colonial societies. Within postindustrial countries, Hoogvelt draws attention to ‘two thirds societies’ where one third of the adult citizens are marginalized by long-term unemployment (Hoogvelt 1997). As for the differences between countries, Hoogvelt’s study shows how most African countries are virtually excluded from global development, are assigned a marginal role within the global system and attention in them is directed mainly to the containment of anarchy. It is further stressed that the gap between the richest and poorest one-fiftieth portions of the world’s population was twice as big in the 1990s than what it was 30 years earlier. While global per capita income tripled over the period of 1960 to 1994, more than a hundred countries had by the end of the century per capita incomes that were lower than what they had in the 1980s and some in the 1960s and 1970s (Stalker 2000).

Whatever the reasons and the dynamics involved, the brief discussion above shows quite clearly that globalization which was supposed to create a more unified and integrated world paradoxically generates in its midst important niches of marginal groups and identities. But here an important analytical distinction has to be added: Some of those marginal groups are not simply remnants from a previous past as yet less affected by new trends, nor groups specifically excluded from, disenfranchised or discriminated against in the new global whole or being pushed to its margins because they do not play an active role in it. On the contrary, some marginal groups are marginal because of the important role they play in globalization. Not only are they the results of the same socio-economic or cultural forces that lead to a tightening of global ties and interdependence, they actually lubricate those forces, help them grow