

Dining in a Globalized Gozo

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A B S T R A C T

Gozo, the smaller and more rural of Malta's two major islands, is supported by a tourist-centered economy and prides itself on a unique food culture that has evolved over an often difficult past, in which numerous civilizations have come and left their culinary mark. Its population still maintains these traditions, while it also becomes more closely wedded to the more recent global tradition of multinational chain stores and restaurant corporations shared by vast swaths of the continents. Over the summer of 2011, I attempted to study how Gozitans have become assimilated into this mass culture, in doing so necessarily Gozo-fying some of it in the process, and how this has affected the more established practices on the island. I chose to examine the relationship between the island's single McDonald's, which I felt best symbolized the new mass culture, and a café across the street, a small eatery of the type that could exist everywhere, but is intensely bound to that locality through its specifics. As my research progressed, many of the "lines" that I assumed would be obvious became blurred and I realized that I had in a way overestimated the symbolic gesture that individuals feel when going to either of these places. Of course, the ramifications in the concrete world of spending one's money at either place cannot be denied, but these are not clearly present during the act. It would be fatuous to claim that some things should definitely exist in some places and that the intrusion of something seen as foreign somehow devalues them. Nevertheless, the way we spend our money determines, much more than voting or any other political act, the type of society we want to live in and the values we want to pass on. It would be senseless to shamelessly decry the presence of something without clearly understanding why it is there, but a clear understanding of what that something supports is vital to allowing an enlightened public to live their lives freely and deliberately.

Introduction

The Maltese Islands have a rich and dynamic history stretching back several thousand years and have generally been at the periphery of, but strategically very important to, what we call Western Civilization. Over the millennia, powers from Western Europe to Arabia have vied for control of these tiny isles, and the society that calls them home today bears the print of their conquerors in their blood, in their language, and in their customs. The trio of islands consists of Malta, Gozo, and the unpopulated Comino. They were most recently a property of the British Empire before they gained independence in 1964 and the mannerisms and habits of the people are thoroughly "European", as far as the word can prove any useful unit of classification in the swirling and complex mess of organisms we call "humanity". They have a standard of living comparable to other Southern European peoples and are fairly well assimilated into the mass consumer culture that characterizes the Global North. The most

recent manifestation of this affinity is the acceptance of Malta, a few years back, into the European Union and their concomitant adoption of the Euro. Many feel that the transition has helped the Maltese enjoy a higher standard of living, although others complain about the loss of sovereignty and identity that comes with the inclusion into such a populous and bureaucratic machine. During July 2011, I was enrolled in the “Off the Beaten Path” anthropological summer school in Gozo. The program is geared towards offering students an introduction to fieldwork, in which the student creates their own project and is guided along by an enthusiastic and experienced staff based at the University of Leuven. In addition to the fieldwork, various classes are offered, including the anthropologies of food, photography, and tourism, and students are free to attend lectures and other extra-curricular activities that help give them a well-rounded understanding of the field and allow them to become familiar with various issues that are currently being explored by professional anthropologists.

I came to Gozo with no clear idea of what I wanted to study. I had never performed an ethnography before and all my anthropological “experience” had consisted of sitting in classrooms and reading textbooks. I have always been fascinated by how people view food- how they conceive of it, how they use it, how important its consumption is to them, and if they think about the real-world effects of the way they spend their money on it. A few days after I arrived in Gozo, a friend and I stopped in to an unassuming little café in Victoria called Mo’s, which was located across from the only McDonald’s on the island. The meal was great- I had a duck wrap with hoisin sauce and a side of couscous- and I got a brilliant (or so I thought at the time) idea to analyze the two restaurants from as many angles as I could and write a report detailing the day-and-night differences between this great local joint and that ruthless behemoth across the street, which represents everything criminal about how business is conducted in this shrinking world of ours. I would be able to discuss with enthusiastic Gozitans how this monster has been the most visible incarnation of global “Americanization” and with its aggressive commercialism, dubious sourcing, and ever increasing ubiquity, has offended Man, God, and Nature in the process. They would agree, too, how Mo’s has become a beacon for all other family-owned small businesses in its successful venture to offer high-quality meals at reasonable prices, and in a comfortable and friendly milieu, to boot. I dreaded having to traipse into McDonald’s and force their dirty product down my gullet but figured, in the interests of truth and anthropology, that I would be able to take the plunge.

Needless to say, I quickly realized how embarrassingly naïve my expectations had been. Nothing in the world is as black and white as I had wanted the experience to be and my obvious initial bias surely colored my experiences more than any professional anthropologist would have allowed. I couldn’t find harsh enough derision of McDonald’s at Mo’s, and was perhaps a bit too enthusiastic in pressing diners to supply it. I had a hard time discussing anything with anyone at McDonald’s and while this in itself offered much regarding the nature of interpersonal interactions in the restaurant, I was disappointed that I couldn’t get an in depth explanation of what possessed a reasonable person to purchase and ingest such a product. Although my experience didn’t deliver exactly what I had expected and although I, at times, became so frustrated with the research that I could only see the futility and inanity of my endeavor, I learned quite a bit about Gozitan eating habits, as filtered through their public dining inclinations. In doing this I was also able to glean some knowledge of how these everyday choices we make affect, and are affected by, a business’ practices, from their advertizing to their food sourcing. Furthermore, many of the issues I covered can be more broadly assessed to see general patterns that apply not just to Gozo, but also to the developed world, and even humanity, as a whole. Any deep analysis of these issues, as broad in scope and gigantic in import as they are, would require countless more hours than I spent or had the opportunity to spend, and I’m sure I realized nothing that hasn’t already been acknowledged by countless researchers before me. That said, I believe my findings shed a bit of light on our food practices in an increasingly interconnected global marketplace, specifically regarding how individuals relate to independent restaurants vis-à-vis those with a heavy commercial presence in close proximity to each other.

The Setting

One of the more revealing qualities of any business is their presence in the community, both in the concrete world and in the impalpable world of the Internet, television, and radio. Walking east down Triq Ir-Repubblika in Victoria, where the two restaurants are located, one can easily sight the McDonald’s from blocks away. It is located in front of the Arkadia Shopping Complex and multiple story banners boast its presence, as do the iconic McDonald’s golden arches that light up at night. A McCafe extended sign is also clearly visible from quite a ways off and as a pedestrian approaches he or she is drawn to the twin front windows, almost as big as the aquarium glass of a zoo, exposing the familiar sight within. The store appears to be very clean

and modern and is often packed with diners looking for a quick bite. There is a good-sized patio in the front, and there is plenty of floor space inside the restaurant, as well. One can also approach the restaurant from inside the mall, in which case they would first see the sprawling section of tables extending from the McCafe, seating small groups of people enjoying coffee and pastries. Walking through the McCafe, passing the counter and the inside booths and into the McDonald's, similarly fashioned with padded booths and large tables but noticeably geared towards a younger crowd, the place is spotlessly clean, spacious throughout, and somewhat devoid of any personality. There is always a children's TV show playing on the television screen and the restaurant is redolent of the slightly appealing but also nausea-inducing smell of french fries, hamburgers, and artificial flavors. In short, the franchise appears to be exactly what is expected of a chain of its kind. It is visible, spacious, clean, familiar to all, and most importantly, impossible to ignore.

In contrast to the aforementioned scenario, a person strolling down the street is right on top of Mo's before he or she notices it, and could easily pass by without taking any notice whatsoever, especially with the attention-grabbing edifice across the way. The circular red and white sign in front of the café's door may catch their eye, however, and at any given time during the day the patio out front will be jam-packed with diners, sheltered from the sun by a maroon awning and cooled off by a rotating and mist-raining fan. There are pots of plants sitting in front of the patio gate, helping to demarcate the dining area from the sidewalk. This is a noticeably older crowd than one sees across the street, consisting almost entirely of people of drinking age. The scene looks a bit hectic, with waitresses rushing to and fro with plates of salads and sandwiches, but also friendly and inviting, with daily specials written on a chalkboard hanging next to the always-open double doors. Walking through these doors, the restaurant appears a bit tiny and contains only a few tables sitting before the counter, which is tended by one of the waitresses or the owner. A section of the kitchen is visible in the background. The place feels more cozy than claustrophobic, brightly painted and tastefully decorated, and the only time I felt seriously space-deprived was in trying to navigate the airplane-cabin-sized bathroom. It smells nicely inside and has a relaxing atmosphere, despite the fast pace of service. While the restaurant is in no way imposing, it was thoughtfully constructed and is conveniently situated for workers looking to grab a good lunch in the afternoon and also for those content to sip on a cup of coffee and people-watch.

The physical layout of any business, and of a restaurant

specifically, is important because it is the setting against which human interactions take place. We move across space in between material objects and must act within their boundaries. The way a restaurant portrays itself on the street is an invitation inside and the features that it displays attract different kinds of people. If, as is the case of McDonald's, the name is familiar to all, then the primary purpose is to attract customers already sold on its reputation. Indeed, McDonald's is the biggest name on the street and it displays the appropriate scheme-advertize as loudly as possible and people are sure to show up. If the name is familiar only to locals, and even then only to a targeted crowd, such aggressive broadcasting is not necessary. Instead, Mo's opted for a more discreet storefront that appears humble and laid-back. The interior layout helps determine how individuals, staff and customer alike, interact. There is plenty of floor space in between dining booths and tables at McDonald's, giving each party their privacy and making it difficult to converse with others. The patrons of Mo's are squeezed together within a small floor space and sometimes asked to share tables, facilitating interparty discussion. While the physical layout of a restaurant doesn't determine how individuals will act once inside, it sets the stage for the series of events that unfold there every day, and is meaningfully constructed with this purpose in mind.

In addition to the obvious differences in physical presence, Mo's and McDonald's also have vastly different profiles in the media realm. These aspects give the individual a certain perception of a business, in this case being a restaurant, that is in no way tied to the actual experience of visiting the place and experiencing it firsthand. It is difficult to find any information on Mo's outside of the restaurant. They do minimal-to-no advertizing and have only a Facebook group online to testify their existence. This group has a few hundred members. The McDonald's Facebook page has over ten million. They spend millions of dollars per year on television announcements, radio ads, newspaper notices and whatever other communicative measures they can utilize. There are countless pages on the Internet, from pejorative to laudatory, devoted entirely to the McDonald's Corporation, to evidence its global importance. In short, it is almost impossible to escape the reach of McDonald's anywhere in the developed world, even when one does not actually attend, or even pass by, a franchise. In addition, even if a person has never been to the Arkadia McDonald's, they have most likely experienced one elsewhere. On the other hand, one can be forgiven, even if one is Gozitan, for not realizing the existence of Mo's. This is significant because people come to McDonald's with a preconceived idea of what it should be. They have previous experiences

to measure it against and expect another experience to largely adhere to the former ones. They are told on the radio or shown on television what they should expect and do not want to be surprised. Those visiting Mo's for the first time, however, will have nothing to measure their affair against. If they have expectations beforehand they were most likely planted by a trusted individual and not by advertizing executives.

The Experience

It seems fitting that my friend and I did not stumble across Mo's on our own, but were dropped off by a 30ish businessman who had picked us up from the streets of Gharb on his way to work. We had asked him to take us somewhere we could get a good lunch and he quickly recommended the place, which he apparently comes to often. It was immediately apparent upon entering the restaurant, ordering, and taking a seat on the patio, that half the customers were "regulars" and there seemed to be a relaxed and communal atmosphere. The waitresses appeared to be acquainted with quite a few of their guests and some of these guests seemed to know one another as well. Although the restaurant was crowded, people did not appear to feel hurried and many sat alone or with a partner sipping coffee and reading the newspaper. The customer base seemed to consist of people from their late teens to the elderly, many of whom were on their lunch break from work. A few parties were noticeably tourists and I was told a few days later that while this tends to be the case from mid-morning on, in the early morning the crowd is almost entirely local. Most of the time I spent at Mo's was during the lunch hour, and this pattern seemed to hold out. The place was always busy and abuzz with daily chatter, a meeting place for some and a peaceful refuge for others, looking to pass a quiet hour escaping the heat of the noonday sun. Surveying the patio (I spent almost all my time there, as did the majority of other customers) there seemed to be a very low general stress level. People were often there with friends or relatives and I saw only a few children there during my whole experience. The waitresses occasionally asked singles or groups of two to share a table with others and I didn't witness any problems arising from the practice. Neighboring tables would engage in chitchat now and then and would pass newspapers around. I often spoke with other diners- natives, expats, and tourists- and had mostly pleasing experiences. The first person I conversed at length with was an elderly lady who had spent some time living in Manhattan. She attends Mo's daily and was more than happy to talk with me about our respective lives and also to mull over a few questions I had

regarding Mo's and McDonald's. Her answers would prove prophetic of future encounters, as she had little to say of an ideological or social nature, only briefly mentioning food quality, and was much quicker to offer condemnation of the European Union than of any specific corporation. It's worth noting here that although many people I spoke with at Mo's generally abstained from McDonald's, they did so for personal reasons and did not see its presence as any kind of threat. For some reason or other, most people I spoke with fit the same general profile. They tended to be alone or with only one other person (this is likely because I found it easier to approach singles or pairs than large groups), pleasant and engaging but unwilling to speak derogatorily about anything save the EU. About half the people I conferred with were members of the 50+ crowd and the rest were mostly Victorian workers taking a break from their day. Two of these were young professionals who worked across the street at Arkadia. For the most part, they were as interested in me as I was in them, and the conversation normally centered on what we do with our day-to-day lives, what my purpose of being on Gozo was, the scope of the EU's effect on Gozo's politics and economy, and other such topics. I was able to talk to people without making too much of an effort- everyone I spoke with at Mo's was seated close to me or even at my table- and was rarely out of my comfort zone. I had only one bad encounter, when a pair of elderly women all but completely ignored my attempts to talk with them. Of course such outliers are inevitable in any such experiment, but my indignation at such an affront seemed to highlight how positive the bulk of my conversations had been. I saw a few of my informants elsewhere in Victoria and they recognized and seemed pleased to see me. The café, provides a place for Gozitans to relax during the day, with friends or unaccompanied- one can always chat with strangers- and to catch up on recent happenings or to just bury oneself in a good book, aided by a glass or two of wine. Places like this exist everywhere in the world and provide a needed outlet for public relaxation. There are several things, in comparison, that stick out about the Victoria McDonald's/McCafe immediately. The crowd is much younger. In sharp contrast to the easygoing atmosphere across the street, it seems normal that children are running around, arguing and screaming. In general, people do not appear as relaxed, and this is largely due to the profusion of such hellions. Indeed, one of the principle reasons people gave for attending the Victorian McDonald's was the insistence of their children. Many of these youths are noticeably on the heavy side and in their presence I couldn't help but lament the obesity problem, rife as it is throughout the western world. Parties place their order at the counter and proceed to seclude

themselves from everyone else in the restaurant. Very few are reading the newspaper or chatting with their neighbors but most are instead trying to keep their children in line, a task greatly aided by the television set against the wall. Or if childless, they are talking amongst themselves as they quickly eat their meal and go on their way. Customers interact pleasantly, for the most part, with the staff but there is little communication past the ordering exchange, even at times when McDonald's is relatively empty. Trying to communicate with people against this backdrop was one of the more frustrating experiences of my life. Not only was I transgressing conventions by attempting to communicate with fellow customers but I was also trying to broach issues that, if I wasn't careful and courteous, would make me appear to be condescending and disrespectful. As a consequence of these factors, most of my exchanges were brief, awkward, and fruitless. On my initial encounter, I committed a giant faux pas by assuming a party of a man and woman and two young kids to be a nuclear family. The adults were actually brother and sister, and they were taking their young cousins out to lunch, which was a Sunday habit. The resulting conversation was uncomfortable and futile and I sulked away disappointed and red in the face. On another occasion I attempted to talk to a couple college-aged males at the counter and was given mostly one-word answers, with the message clearly being "leave us alone and go on your way". So I did. One of the more pleasant encounters I had was with a young Dutch-Maltese-American couple that had stopped in McDonald's because it was too late in the afternoon to go to Mo's. We had a good conversation, though I did feel a bit imposing as I took a seat across from them and asked if they could spare a few minutes to help me out with some research. This was probably my most successful experience at McDonald's, and even at that it wasn't as enlightening as I'd hoped. I spoke with people in my general age group, for the most part, maybe being too overly cautious to approach families with children, especially after the first debacle. I spent time indoors and out, sitting at McDonald's and at McCafe, and discovered that my encounters were relatively uniform regardless of where they were held. I ran into one of my informants from Mo's as she was picking up a couple Happy Meals for her grandchildren and we had a nice chat, bemoaning my difficulties and exchanging pleasantries. It was, from the beginning, quite clear that McDonald's fills a different role in Victoria than the one filled by Mo's. People come for a break in their day, like any restaurant, but generally come for a quick meal and go on their way. They don't spend much time socializing with other customers and are often driven there at the behest of their children. The place is specifically geared towards

the under-18 crowd and although the McCafe is ostensibly there for an older market, it feels more like a half-thought adjunct to McDonald's, having little personality of its own. The Staff and Their Products

In my encounters with staff members, I received very different treatment at McDonald's than I did at Mo's. The baristas at the McCafe were somewhat short with me the first time I approached them and ordered an Americano. I was a bit taken aback at their rudeness but still asked them a few questions, which were answered tersely and suspiciously and I proceeded to withdraw long before I received adequate answers to my queries. From then on, I received mostly polite service, although it was given perfunctorily and didn't offer much in the way of conversation. After my initial overture was rebuffed, I was more content to study staff-customer interactions from a distance. These interactions were largely uniform, with quick smiles and mostly quick service. I didn't see a conspicuous manager among the mostly young staff, and didn't bother to search for one. The last day I visited the café, the barista was exceptionally friendly and pretty gorgeous as well and I'll admit I felt a bit disappointed with such a positive encounter. Then I felt a bit idiotic for wanting, deep down, for my experience to be as bad as possible. I jotted some quick notes in my journal and left. The waitresses at Mo's were friendly from the start and recognized me even upon my second visit. Unlike at McDonald's they seemed to be full-time, and I later found out that a few of them were members of the owner's family. Unfortunately, every time I was in Mo's, there was too much business for me to, with any good conscience, burden the waitresses with questions about their jobs, but I did get a few good chats in with the owner. I'll call him Matteo. Matteo was a nice man, perhaps in his late 40s or early 50s, and seemed pleased to answer my questions about his business, about Malta's food economy, and about the effect of the EU and McDonald's on Gozo. One recurring subject of fascination with many Gozitans I spoke with was the EU, and specifically how it's ruining their island. Matteo insisted that many problems they bewailed- specifically that of increased food prices- were a result far reaching global issues and had nothing to do with the EU or the Euro. While he denounced the business practices of McDonald's, complaining that their corporation could much more easily weather Malta's sky-high business tax and criticizing their unashamed marketing towards children, he stated that it was not clear that they were adversely affecting his business. While he didn't welcome their presence on the island, he saw it as "normal", and opined that, because Mo's had more recently relocated to the intersection (only a few months before

conducted did my research, whereas McDonald's has been in Arkadia for over a decade), he was actually challenging McDonald's' position in the community. Regarding his food procurement, he affirmed that he sourced locally whenever was possible, but admitted that most of what he sells comes from overseas. The time of year didn't matter, Matteo said. They can find some of what they need in Malta whether it be summer or winter, spring or autumn, but the islands aren't big or diverse enough to supply his business on their own. Still, his openness and his obvious desire for sustainable and local products was encouraging. On that first aborted conversation I had at McCafe, the only answer I got regarding food sourcing was that their food came from "abroad", an answer accompanied by a scornful and as-if-violated countenance.

Even regardless of where it was shipped from, the food quality and presentation differed drastically between the two restaurants. Every meal I received from Mo's was aesthetically very pleasing. The ingredients seemed to be strictly of a biological origin and of high quality. One of my last informants claimed that we were eating the best sandwiches that Gozo had to offer and my experience elsewhere didn't contradict this claim. Everything was served on a tray and in a reusable box, and there seemed to be very little waste as a bi-product of consumption. Almost every customer dined-in, so there was no need for extra packaging. The few meals I ate at McDonald's were unattractive in appearance and difficult to stomach. I had a lukewarm spinach and feta pie that soggily oozed grease all over my hands and another time ordered an insipid chicken wrap that was much tinier than expected, but still sat in my stomach for hours. After that, I was content to stick with coffee. The poor quality of food is, of course, no secret, and was the aspect of the business that people seemed most content to criticize. The Mo's patrons who admitted to occasionally eating across the street claimed that the health risk posed by consuming the food is what prevents them from doing so more often. One lady I met at Mo's who had never been to a McDonald's in her life claimed that their food was nothing but "filth", and she abstained largely because she didn't want the ingested filth to later "leak out" of her. Their food product can hardly be identified as real "food" by some definitions, as its content was dreamed up and concocted more so by chemists than by farmers or chefs. There is an unnecessary high level of packaging for almost everything, and many people opted for carryout, a practice that significantly adds to the waste. The packaging, seemingly shared across the West European market, displays the characteristics of a business geared towards producing things in vast quantities for far-flung people. Even though I was eating my meal in-

store, the wrap I ordered was nestled inside of a German-language box which was itself placed inside a bag printed with French lettering. This surplus of unnecessary waste inevitably finds its way onto Victoria's streets. It seemed to me- and this was corroborated by a few others- that during the time I spent on Gozo, over half of the discarded trash on the street had come from McDonald's. While this perhaps offers free, or almost free, advertizing, it is also a source of annoyance to the pedestrian and is suggestive of the general environmental consciousness shown by the corporation.

The Wrap-Up

While I didn't get what I was looking for, meaning a myriad of explicit descriptions regarding what attracted customers to one place or the other, I received some verbal explanations and was able to discern general patterns of action that seemed to bear over the whole experience. One of the more frustrating conclusions I reached was that most people don't consider the far-reaching effects of their purchase, beyond their personal satisfaction. This isn't to say that those who opt for a quick burger over the other options are selfish or uncaring, but is instead a result of our society's fixation on the here and now, rather than the sometimes-complex and convoluted route things take to get "here". Such an attitude allows people to become easy prey for an advertizing culture that functions to obscure a business' practical affairs for the sake of an appealing, if contrived, marketplace scenario. They are selling the experience more than the product, and the best product is something that can be sourced cheaply and efficiently and appeals to a large section of the consumer base. Children are the targeted market for McDonald's. For one, they are the most susceptible to careful manipulation- they don't normally have the faculties to assess a situation in all its complexities and are easily swayed by images of other children gamboling around with colorful oversized puppets. Also, a consumer won early on is likely to remain loyal throughout his or her lifetime, especially to a product that has an immediate physical effect and is purchased in such a uniform environment, a fact that functions to almost ritualize the experience. Besides the plethora of television advertisements urging children to drag their parents to the restaurant and the brightly colored toys once they get there, McDonald's Malta also sponsors children's parties, offering 4 different themes including the Wild American West and Ancient Egypt. Besides contributing to our distorted collective conceptions of history, these strategies further implant the corporation into kids' psyches by adding their association with a special day.

McDonald's is perhaps better at delivering convenience than any other restaurant on the island. For example, they offer air conditioning to combat the scorching Maltese summers. Numerous people I spoke with mentioned this, both at McDonald's and at Mo's. Another one-time Manhattanite I dined with at the latter admitted that he had almost gone across the street that day- it was especially hot- for this reason. A group of girls I talked to in the McCafe were successfully wooed, in part, because of the a/c. McDonald's also offers a much wider range of open hours than Mo's. They open at 7 am daily and stay open late daily. Mo's is open 8 to 4 Monday through Saturday and is closed on Sunday. They will remain open later, and with an expanded menu in November, in an attempt to garner more business. Obviously, the more hours a restaurant is open daily, the more opportunities customers have of attending. Mo's is only open during the daytime- people busy during the day need to take a break from their activities to go there. On the other hand, McDonald's is open most waking hours, before, during, and after the workday, school day, or whatever else might occupy a person's time. Indeed, I noticed this dissimilarity most acutely when, on the night of the Victoria horse races, I walked by the intersection around 10:00. All Mo's lights were out, but McDonald's was glowing and quite busy. This points to one of the fundamental differences between the two restaurants. Mo's niche is that of the daytime casual coffee shop/café, generally attended by people from their mid-teens and older. McDonald's is a quick and convenient all-day eatery that specifically caters to kids but tries to offer something for every taste.

Conclusion

The "idea" of playing host to a McDonald's, or what its presence in the community represents to people, didn't appear to affect customers' decisions in any way. I occasionally pressed individuals to remark on the homogenizing effect of having the same restaurants everywhere, on the dubious-at-best sourcing policies of most major restaurant corporations, on the level of consumption encouraged by such ventures, etc. I was almost entirely discouraged by answers, which contained a range in tone from a lack of understanding to insouciance to near-offense. The best answer I got was that "we're a free country with a free market and if we didn't want McDonald's here than it wouldn't be". It was hard to refute this point, and I dropped the issue. In retrospect, I may have approached the situation with such a resentful bias that I could only see it from a rather hard-line anti-globalization viewpoint. In other words, my own

unrealistic expectations clouded my ability to see the state of affairs from the perspective of an individual who chooses to focus on the other aspects of a market, an economy, or the role an individual should play in determining these things. While there seems to be an ever-increasing base of people who vocally disdain the presence of multinational multibillion-dollar corporations in their community's food economy, it appears that the majority of us, at least for the moment, consider it a non-issue.

In our modern age, many of us eat outside of our homes once a day, or at least several times a week. We have a myriad of options to choose from, offering different types of cuisine at different prices and importantly, but often overlooked, supported by different managerial strategies. The way we spend our money at these places has a far-ranging effect on other aspects of our economy and society, influencing how farmers farm and how businesses market to their base. It would be to the benefit of all of us if we, as members of the developed world and its incredible surfeit of dining options, attempted to see the entire scope of effects wrought by our choices. A heightened public awareness of sourcing techniques would persuade all businesses, from the largest to the smallest, to attempt to use more eco-friendly and people-friendly strategies to procure their resources. A parental base more concerned with the psychological effects of marketing damaging products towards their children could demand an end towards this type of practice, a strategy that has already been used in some countries. My experience showed me that Gozitans have, in the same way as all Western peoples, accepted a wide range of restaurants, each one tailored to suit a different person, a different mood, or a different niche. Of course each individual has his or her own idiosyncratic tastes and preferences, but taken as a whole, these dispositions coalesce to form a vibrant and dynamic food economy in which highly different options exist side-by-side. Places like Mo's form one end of the spectrum, being locally owned, simply organized, and attempting to keep things as Gozo-centered as practicable. A tightly knit atmosphere encapsulates the area and one might be thought rude to sit in a self-enforced box and completely ignore their neighbors. On the other hand, it is also completely normal and acceptable for someone to relax quietly, read a bit, and enjoy the break in his or her day. McDonald's can be seen as the far end of that spectrum, having a complex and multinational logistical structure and priding itself on offering a great deal of uniformity across the globe. Children are free to run around happily and create minor levels of chaos, but an adult would be thought strange and potentially threatening if they displayed undue attention to an unfamiliar face. The atmosphere doesn't lend itself

to quiet solitary pursuits and most people would rather not loiter once finished eating. As consumers, we form a fluid mass of individuals, visiting all ends of the spectrum when the whim hits us and in doing so dictate how our economy works from the bottom up. It is up to each individual to balance his or her own momentary wants with the systematic effects that result from the fulfillment of those wants, which very concretely affect us all. With enough awareness and diligence in performing this task, we can tweak the fabric of our economy to mitigate the externalities now plaguing our world and still retain the plethora of choices that we all enjoy.