

# Revisiting Appadurai: Globalizing Scapes in a Global World – the Pervasiveness of Economic and Cultural Power

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## ABSTRACT

As we move forward into the mid 21st century, demographers forecast dramatic increases in cultural diversity in the general population of the globe, which will also be reflected in increasing populations. Globalization has also produced a distinctive stage in the social history of populational projections, with a growing tension between nation state-based solutions and anxieties and those formulated by global institutions (Powell, 2011). Globalization, defined here as the process whereby nation-states are influenced (and sometimes undermined) by trans-national actors. Human identity has, itself, become relocated within a trans-national context, with international organisations (such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund) and cross-border migrations, creating new conditions and environments for many displaced people (Estes, Biggs, & Phillipson, 2003). The work of Appadurai has had a large impact on understanding the global dynamics of cultural, technological, political and economic change.

**Keywords:** globalizing scapes, cultural diversity, appadurai.

## INTRODUCTION

For Appadurai (1990), the global situation is interactive rather than singly dominated. The United States no longer dominates the world system of images, but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of "imaginary landscapes." In his widely cited paper "Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy," Appadurai argues that in this new conjuncture the invention of tradition and other identity-markers becomes slippery, as the "search for certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transitional communication" (Appadurai, 1990, p. 5) He also stresses that there are various fears besides that of Americanization: "it is worth noticing that for the people of Irian Jaya, Indonesianization may be more worrisome than Americanization, as Japanization may be for Koreans, Indianization for Sri Lankans, Vietnamization for Cambodians, Russianization for the people of Soviet Armenia and the Baltic republics," and we must acknowledge that "one man's imagined community is another man's political prison." (Appadurai, 1990, p. 6).

Appadurai posits the imagination as “central to all forms of agency, [as] itself a social fact, and [as] the key component of the new global order. To understand, we must bring together an understanding of the Frankfurt school idea of images; Anderson’s imagined community, and the French idea of the imaginary (imaginaire). Appadurai proceeds to offer a new vocabulary that helps us to understand the “new global cultural economy,” itself a product of “disorganized capitalism” and a complex of “fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 328). To understand these disjunctures, he posits an interrelating framework of “global cultural flows” Appadurai (1990, p. 328), termed -scapes because of their fluidity, their dependence on perspective (a landscape looks different depending on how you look and who is looking):

- Ethnoscapes — the ever shifting “landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers, and other moving groups and persons” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 329).
- Mediascapes – “refer both to the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations and film production studios) which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media” (p. 330). “Tend to be image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality (Appadurai, 1990, p. 331)”.
- Technoscapes – “the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology, and of the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” driven by “increasingly complex relationships between money flows, political possibilities, and the availability of both un- and highly skilled labor (Appadurai, 1990, p. 329-330)”.
- Finanscapes – the flow of capital: “currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations move mega-monies through national turnstiles at blinding speed” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 330).
- Ideoscapes – “Also concatenations of images, but they are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 331).

For Appadurai, building on Anderson, these -scapes “are the building blocks of...imagined worlds, that is, the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 329).

These intertwining and fluid landscapes help us to see the dynamic between homogenization and heterogenization at play every in these disjunctures between these global flows. To mark this, Appadurai first splits Marx’s classic fetishism idea into two:

1. production fetishism- “illusion created by contemporary transnational production loci, which masks translocal capital, transnational earning-flows, global management and often faraway workers...in the idiom and spectacle of local (sometimes even worker) control, national productivity and territorial sovereignty” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 333).
2. fetishism of the consumer – consumer turned into a “sign” where the control of producers masks itself via advertising in assertions of consumer agency (Appadurai, 1990, p. 333).

This is a global homogenization which is “repatriated as heterogeneous dialogues of national sovereignty, free enterprise and fundamentalism in which the state plays an increasingly delicate role...as arbitrator of this repatriation of difference.” (Appadurai, 1990, pp. 333-334). The problem of

“reproduction in the age of mechanical art:” enculturation even at family level in age of deterritorialization and instability hastened and made more acute by mechanical arts in media and ideoscapes. Example of gender and violence is getting more and more difficult and torn (Appadurai, 1990, p. 335-336).

Appadurai (1995a) stresses that globalizing and localizing processes, or "global homogenization" and "heterogenization" feed and reinforce each other rather than being mutually exclusive, and he calls for more anthropological studies on the "production of locality". These sociological changes are also reflected in the exchange of ideas and values as well as imagination. As the movement of people influences cities as well as countries, even people who are not mobile themselves come in contact with new ideas, practices, technology, information and economic practices flows of thought go between people. A good way of modelling the complex interchange of thoughts between people is as a cultural economy (Appadurai, 1996).

## **CULTURE AND SCAPES**

The different dimensions of the cultural economy may be and often are disjoint. People in one place may feel one way about economics and another way, incompatible with the first, about immigration. These disjunctures may even be part of a single individual. The disjunctures in the global cultural economy can be explored by looking at the relationship among five dimensions of global flows:

The suffix -scape indicates fluidity and irregularity, because it is a matter of fact that they are all in constant change. As people move, ethnoscares change; as technology is moved around and invented, technoscares change; as capital moves around the world as part of the global economy, financescares change. Extension and changes in reach of media from different places make mediascares change. Different television and radio channels are available in different places. When ideas are exchanged and spread, ideoscares change (Appadurai, 1996).

Global scapes occur in and through the growing disjunctures among these landscapes. These landscapes are the building blocks of multiple imagined worlds of historically situated imaginations of persons and groups around the world. As people encounter the flows, they do so within their historical context. From their context and the flows, they construct a worldview. The scapes are deeply perspectival constructs. Therefore, the worldview that anyone of us constructs depends on who we are, where we are, and what scapes we see and how we interpret them; therefore there will be multiple ways of imagining the world, and so there will be multiple imagined worlds (Appadurai, 1996).

Appadurai sees modernity as the practice of imagining where you would like to be. Following Emile Durkheim, anthropologists view collective representations as objective social realities and facts (Powell, 2005). Appadurai proposes that due to relatively recent changes founded on technological changes, imagination has become such social fact, and that this leads to a “plurality of imagined worlds.” (Appadurai, 1996) He argues that imagination has become part of everyday, ordinary life for ordinary people, instead of being the sole domain of the privileged and powerful.

Ordinary people can and do imagine themselves in different circumstances and different places, due to the increased rates of migration and the technologies that transmit images of other lifestyles and other places. He emphasizes that these lifestyles and places are not fantasy, but are more properly imagined than fantasized. The mediascares that people are exposed to stimulate agency and the imagination

fuels action rather than dreams of escape. This imagination is taking place on an individual scale, but the collective imagination of a group of people that begin to feel and imagine things together is pivotal. As groups share collective imagination, they create new social realities. (Appadurai, 1996) .

## **PROBLEMATIZING FINANCESCAPES AND CULTURE**

The term ‘financescape’ is one of the perils of economic globalization, defined as “cross-border movements” of loans, equities, direct and indirect investments, and currencies that transcend the power of the nation state. Appadurai (2006) further describes financescapes as the imperialism of global flows of finance in which uncontrolled and rapid movements of capital can destabilise national economies.

It is the evolving financescape and its uncertain future that is made visible through the contemporary credit crisis that is rapid due to changes in currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations and the speed at which they move at in the global arena (Estes, Biggs & Phillipson, 2003).

Financescapes focus on the flow of currencies, securities, and of capital. To take an example of organised crime and relationship to financescapes, Financescapes are extended through de-regulation and have made it easier for vast sums of money to travel the globe and be laundered by criminal organisations without interference from national governments. Mythen and Walklate (2006) makes the point that transnational organised crime syndicates are able to protect their financial resources in foreign bank accounts, and are able to network with other criminal organizations in diverse countries to acquire the necessary funding for their activities.

Financial payments for these different services as well as the necessary money laundering is facilitated by escaping nation states the availability of banking secrecy, lack of regulation and electronic financial transfers that can move money within seconds on a global scale. In weak or failing states, such rapid movements of capital are enough to provoke economic and political collapse (Mythen & Walklate, 2006).

Financescapes are also the product of another global dynamic: privatization and the decline of the nation-state. Sere difficulties are inherent in the capacities of individual nation states to “fix” or “correct” problems that may result from the pressures of financial markets with few controls and little social regulation (Marginson & Sawir, 2005). When things go wrong, costly bailouts by the state can be expected for financial speculators. Appadurai (1996) observes that the logic of this financial hegemony is to decrease government expenditures and state intervention through privatization and contracting out and do away with capital contributions.

Following this, Appadurai (2006) has characterised the international financial sector to a ‘casino’ metaphor in which assets are traded increasingly by non-bank, private financial institutions, entirely for speculative profit. The emergence of ‘around-the-world’ 24/7 financial markets, where major cross-border financial transactions are made in cyberspace represents a familiar example of the economic face of globalization (Estes, Biggs, & Phillipson, 2003).

The definition and social construction of ‘the problem’ of state power is transferring from the state and its citizenry to private sector global finance (Appadurai 1996; 2006; Estes, Biggs & Phillipson, 2003). For example, Powell (2006) points to how the economic stakes and social consequences of ‘aging populations’ cannot be underestimated for the upholding of power by multi-national corporations. Looking ahead, the race is on for ‘Global Custody’ through the socially constructed ‘Ticking of the

Pensions Time Bomb', as described by the Financial Times with Europe as a 'battleground' for the US Banks (The Bank of New York, State Street Bank, JP Morgan and Citibank) competing against the European Deutsche, BNP Paribas and HSBC for custody of the growing pensions market and the highly lucrative financial services supporting it. As further incentive to eager financial enterprises, the 'global picture' in private wealth drawn from the lucrative business of pension providing is by 2012 to exceed \$13,000 billion in the USA, \$10,000 billion in Europe, and \$7,200 billion in Asia (Powell, 2011).

In other words, capital flow is being re-invented through pensions in financescapes. Financescapes simultaneously brings home - and exports - the processes of privatization, competition and rationalization as well as the transformation of pension sectors of society through flexibilization and deregulation (Estes, Biggs, & Phillipson, 2003). Financescapes greatly extends the corporate capacity of capital to "exit" a nation (and thereby to escape corporate responsibility and/or taxation) in the course of struggles over regulation of financial resources (Appadurai, 1996; 2006).

### **EXAMPLES OF GLOBAL SCAPES: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY**

Appadurai (1996) examines 'globalization', which he interprets as 'worldwide connectedness' through the idea of 'global scapes'. Following Appadurai (1996), we can postulate five dimensions of such global scapes that influence the work of Universities (and academics) in the globalised environment: ethnoscapes, technoscapes, mediascapes, financescapes and ideascapes.

Taken as an example of the university, it is these dimensions that characterise the construction of knowledge across boundaries. That is, people (academic researchers) travel to conferences, read internationally refereed publications, write for internationally published academic journals and books/monographs, use international perspectives and networks to inform their research etc. The interconnectedness of people provides the ethnoscape of the academic world.

The global technology of the 'world wide web' facilitates the identification of knowledge sources, allows up-to-date access to the latest research, and provides global connectedness through email, blogs and Web 2 data processing capacities. This is the 'technoscape' within which we live our academic lives.

Mediascapes provide information and images from around the world, scripts and scraps of narrative that are the resources that can be infinitely reassembled and provide global relevance to prospective research projects. The use of distance learning by new modes of media such as web based learning packages, learning portals, and on-line undergraduate and postgraduate degrees illustrate the depth and breadth of media information of education beyond the physical layout of the University. Marginson and Sawir (2005) agree, noting that distance education is evolving into a post-Fordist global instructional corporatism of open education.

The ideascapes are the images and big ideas about the potential of global interconnectedness that inform our intentions and underpin our 'realities'. 'The ideoscape of the "global university" promised freedom of a kind, positioning it as an autonomous institution providing passage to knowledge, resources and possibilities unimpeded by national government. The ideoscape of the 'global university' provides the possibility for research to be globally as well as locally relevant.

Financescapes flourish in an open trading environment in which the mode of interaction is as much competitive and cooperative; commercial infrastructures facilitate academic activity and, increasingly, high profile research.

The fact that we recognise these dimensions of 'global flows' so easily as they are present in the modern university, should mean that a globalised research program in universities with a will to locate themselves internationally and globally.

In the field of University education, however, the boundaries and barriers to international research obstruct the global flows. The boundaries which define and, to a greater or lesser extent, inhibit joint research efforts are not only the geographic boundaries of the geo-political world, they are also cultural, methodological and sociological (Danaher & Wyer, 1995). The boundaries within which knowledge is constructed and across which knowledge construction might take place, but which might be obstructive of the global flows are:

- Nation State boundaries: (e.g.) UK, USA and Australia
- Geo-cultural boundaries: (e.g.) East/West
- Geo-economic boundaries: (e.g.) The North/South divide
- Epistemological and methodological boundaries: (e.g.) interpretive and participatory methodologies vs. positivistic research methodologies.

Marginson and Sawir's (2005) and Appadurai's (2006) 'global flows' are, indeed, obstructed by some of the same 'scapes' that characterise global academic work.

Ethnoscapescapes remind us that the academic 'flow' of University personnel is within and towards those already sharing common academic traditions, concepts and languages (Lather, 2004). The technoscapescapes that facilitate and define the academic landscape do not provide a uniform vista of instant and reliable access. In many of the most significant research sites technology is not reliable, access not widely available (Marginson & Sawir, 2005). Although the global university might be connected into the financescapes of international research and commercial patents, international educational research does not figure in the financescape of the global university (Lather, 2004). Moreover, increasingly the research that is most likely to be successful in attracting large-scale funding is that which meets the 'Gold Standard' of randomized field trials (Lather, 2004), rather than participatory, case-based research.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has attempted to explore Appadurai's implicit conceptual toolkit to examine facets of culture. Quite audaciously, he differentiates five dimensions of global "scapes," flowing across cultural boundaries: 1) ethnoscapescapes, the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which people live; 2) technoscapescapes, the global configuration of technologies moving at high speeds across previously impermeable borders; 3) financescapes, the global grid of currency speculation and capital transfer; 4) mediascapescapes, the distribution of the capabilities to produce and disseminate information and the large complex repertoire of images and narratives generated by these capabilities; and 5) ideoscapescapes, ideologies of states and counter-ideologies of movements, around which nation-states have organized their political cultures. We examined the relevance of them to understanding higher education in the age of 'scape'. The ultimate paradox of scape is the problem of escape. A problem all institutions have within the contradictions of multiple scapes.

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