

Globalization, Language, and Culture: Reflections on Appadurai's Perspectives**Dr. Narendra Raj Paneru***nrajpaneru@gmail.com***Bhuban Bahadur Bohara**

Sanothimi Campus, Tribhuvan University

bbhuwan@gmail.com

Abstract

Globalization, as a multifaceted phenomenon, influences culture, language, and human interaction on a global scale. This article reflects on Appadurai's theoretical perspectives on globalization, particularly his concepts of disjuncture and 'scapes.' Appadurai critiques the homogenization narrative, emphasizing how global cultural flows like ethnoscapas, technoscapas, mediascapas, financescapas, and ideoscapas shape 'imagined worlds' and cultural identities. These 'scapes' depict the interconnected yet disjunctive realities of globalization, fostering cultural hybridization and deterritorialization. Ethnoscapas illustrate global mobility, while technoscapas and financescapas signify the technological and financial dynamics across borders. Mediascapas and ideoscapas highlight the global dissemination of media and ideologies. The paper also examines how these flows challenge conventional notions of cultural imperialism, proposing an understanding of globalization's cultural impact. By reflecting on Appadurai's insights, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on globalization's implications for cultural diversity and identity.

Keywords: *Globalization, cultural flows, ethnoscapas, technoscapas, deterritorialization, imagined worlds*

Introduction

The present time has been tagged as 'the era of globalization'. There has been a plethora of scholarly works available in the area. Some connect globalization to McLuhan's concept of 'global village' which he coined to describe the increasingly connected human beings via electronic technologies, which virtually eliminated the effects of space and time and contracted the entire world into a metaphorical village (Gibson & Murray, 2012) whereas, some see it as an ongoing process for centuries (O'Rourke, 2000). According to Friedman (as cited in Borcuch et al., 2012) globalization can be delimited into three eras. The first era began in 1492 when Columbus set his journey and explored the New World across the Atlantic. It was majorly led by Spain and evident in the form of the business between the Old World and the New World. It lasted up to around 1800, when the second era began with the expansion of the British empire.

In this era, multinational companies spread throughout the world. The second era is supposed to have lasted up to 2000. However, it evidenced the fall of the Imperial era; two World Wars, and the great economic depression in the 20th century. The third era of globalization which began in 2000 established the internet and digital technology as the change agent. It is the era of software, optical-fibre network, and artificial intelligence.

At present, globalization is viewed from various perspectives; such as, a phenomenon that functions for the free market, economic liberalization, Western hegemony, Westernization (Americanization), global liberal order, the internet revolution etc. (Scheurman, 2018), or a set of global processes that are changing the nature of human interaction across a wide range of social spheres including the economic, political, cultural and environmental (Lee & Collin, 2006), or the expansion of economic activities across political boundaries of the nations (Shahzad, 2006), or it has been seen as the "enlarged movements between countries of people, diseases, messages and ideas" (Scholte, 2005, p.16).

Despite various opinions, at present globalization is a thoroughly consented subject (Scholte, 2005). Especially after the end of the cold war, the discourse of globalization multifaceted, and a great deal of scholarly literature was written on it. One of the scholars who began to contribute in the field of theorizing globalization in the early 1990s was Arjun Appadurai, an American professor and anthropologist of Indian descent. Appadurai was born in Mumbai (then Bombay) in 1949, and had his school education from Mumbai and then moved to the US for his further education. He gained a PhD at the University of Chicago in 1976 (Arjun Appadurai Bio, n.d.). His major works include *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule* (1981), *Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy* (1990), *Modernity at large* (1996), *Fear of small numbers* (2006), and *The Future as a cultural fact: essays on the global condition*.

Appadurai's Main Ideas

Appadurai, a prominent anthropologist and cultural theorist, critically examines the dynamics of globalization and its impact on culture, identity, and power structures. He fundamentally focuses on the fluid and disjunctive nature of global cultural flows and challenges traditional views of globalization as a homogenizing force, instead emphasizing the fragmented and localized adaptations of global influences. His conceptualization of "scapes" provides a framework to analyze the interconnected yet uneven flows of people, technology, media, finance, and ideas. These insights serve as a foundation for discussing the threat of cultural hegemonization, the nature of global cultural flows, and the implications for cultural diversity and resistance.

Threat of Hegemonizing

Appadurai presented the metatheory of disjuncture in his 1990 article *Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy*. In the article, Appadurai throws light upon the contradiction of homogenization and heterogenization as the central problem of modern-day globalization. The homogenization is caused by the commodification and

Americanization or Westernization, which are very often linked together. However, in the article Appadurai argues that such theories like Americanization fail to consider the fact that various cultural element which under globalization reach new societies are often indigenized to the local culture. This may be visible in the form of Indianization, Russianization, Indonesinization etc. There is always a chance of penetration from one culture to another, especially from the dominant one to sub-dominant one. In other words, there is always a threat of absorption by polities of a larger scale to those that are nearby. In such a case, there formed an 'imagined community' (Anderson's idea) for some people but for others, it is like a political prison. In the words of Appadurai (1990), "One man's imagined community is another man's political prison" (p. 295).

Appadurai argues that such fear of homogenization is very often exploited by the nation-states concerning their minorities. They present global commoditization as more real than it is, using their hegemonic strategies and bring a 'national homogenization' oppressing the minorities.

The Global Cultural Flows

He takes global market tied by the disjunction of economy, culture and politics. he argues that the global culture is at disjuncture of some global cultural flows as building blocks, which he gives his own locution 'scapes' as-- ethnoscaples, technoscaples, mediascaples, ideoscaples and financescaples. He claims that these 'scapes' are the building blocks of imagined communities. They are the historical manner in which people perceive their reality. He argues that many people now live in "imagined worlds" and not only "imagined communities". Such imagined worlds created because of the disjunctive and chaotic nature of these flows and they supersede standard geographical thinking in the social-cultural analysis (Heyman & Campbell, 2009).

This article was first published in 1990 and later its extended form was published in his book *Modernity at large* in 1996. Appadurai in this article attempts to sketch the world cultural history in brief. In the past centuries, colonists, merchants, warriors, missionaries etc. tried to interact at the global scale. The attempt from the side of European colonialism was slowed in the past because of limited transportation and communicational technologies but in the modern times because of the advancement in these technologies this interaction has been heightened and enhanced global forces to influence each other. In such cases there created a disjunctive relation between the global cultural Blows which simply cannot be understood by central periphery analysis (Heyman & Campbell, 2009). He discards the conventional notion of viewing globalization as cultural imperialism. He rather views a single global system with various complex subsystems. According to Appadurai, there exists a 'scalar dynamic' in current societies in which lower scales are frightened of being absorbed in the imagined communities of higher scales.

On Appadurai's 'Scapes'

Appadurai argues that the global proposes five conceptual dimensions of global culture which he coins with a common suffix 'scapes'; i.e.; ethnoscapescapes, mediascapescapes, technoscapescapes, financescapescapes, and ideoscapescapes. Here, the use of the suffix "scape" is meant to illustrate that these are cultural vistas which depend on the position of a given spectator and that they are constantly changing. He visualizes these 'scapes' as the building block of the 'imagined communities', which are the historical manners people perceive their reality. With the help of these 'scapes', people deterritorialize them and disjunct themselves from the cultural groups living next to them and relate them to a cultural group far away from them. This deterritorialization weakens their ties to the territories they are living and 'scapes' connect them to a virtual 'imagined community'.

Ethnoscapescapes. People, who move around in the world, as well as the ideas that move with them, and the impact such movement is called ethnoscapescapes. This moving population could be of refugees, immigrants, temporary workers, students studying abroad, tourists, travelling businessmen and women, digital nomads, and so on. At present time this movement has shown substantial influence over the global dynamics. According to Appadurai (1990, p.334), "Ethnoscapescapes include people and groups such as tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles and guest workers who move around the globe—villagers from India to Dubai, Haitians to Canada etc... move more distances than before". For Appadurai (1996) these moving groups and individuals who constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations. Such the landscapes of group identity – the ethnoscapescapes – around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, deterritorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous.

Some examples of ethnoscapescapes can be found in the case of Nepali diaspora moving to different countries across the globe. They deterritorialize themselves with the land they are living in. Haaland (2010) discovered that Nepalese migrants in Myanmar use features of the natural environment in their homeland in metaphoric constructions of a cultural landscape expressing ethnic identity. Though they have been detached to their ethnic origin Nepal generations ago, they preserve 'Nepaliness' as a basis for their belonging to an imagined community. Similarly, Haaland and Gurung (2007) carried out a study entitled 'Globalization of Interaction Systems and the Culture in Ethnicity: Popular Songs and Production of Nepali Ethnoscapescapes in South-East Asia'. In the study, they observed a gifted Burmese Nepalese singer who performed at a cultural show back in 1957 in the presence of Burmese Prime Minister and other foreign delegates. He, along with his group, performed on Hindi songs, which were popular those days. When a British delegate talked to him and commented that what he performed did not display Nepali culture, he was shocked and began exploring his past and Nepali origin. Then he explored the Nepali dance forms, costumes and songs from the older people in the village and the soldiers at the camp. He studied Nepali literature and sang various songs in

Nepali. He in this way discovered an imagined community of Nepali people in Myanmar and deterritorialized him.

Technoscapes. It refers to the global arrangement and movement of all sorts of technology across worldwide boundaries. The expansion of technologies is unbarred by the national boundaries and culture too transmits with the transmission of technologies. According to Appadurai (1990, p. 297), "...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 unskilled and highly skilled labour (Appadurai, 1990, p.298)". Such technoscapes are fueled by the multinational megaprojects in different parts of the world.

At modern times, the multinational companies having roots in a country attracts technologies from different countries. For example, Nepal attracts a great deal of automobile technoscapes every year. In the same way, The US exports military technologies in the different countries of the world. The advancement of the Chinese economy in recent years has spread Chinese technoscapes in the different countries of the world. Another example of technoscape is the global sale of mobile devices and the internet which has shrunken the world into a 'global village'.

Financescapes. It refers to the global movement of capital, including currency, trade and commodity. This sort of cultural flow offers unpredictable demand and business opportunities to the corporates and their products quickly become commodities, leaving them little or no pricing power and under constant pressure by new competitors that undermine profitability. In the modern times, financescapes entail the transfer of capital in forms of cash, or electronic payments, like bank transfers, as well as stocks, crypto-currencies, commodity exchanges, and other forms of virtual currencies. This has been associated with the techoscapes when the capital transfer is eased by the internet portals and global expansion of the online market.

The concept of 'financescapes' is one of the immediate threats of economic globalization, defined as 'crossborder movements' of "loans, equities, direct and indirect investments, and currencies that transcends the power of the nation-state (Powell, 2020, p.3). Appadurai (as cited in Powell, 2020) further describes financescapes as the imperialism of global flows of finance in which uncontrolled and rapid movements of capital can destabilize national economies.

In financescapes, the money uninterruptedly transfers beyond the national boundaries in very often lead to organized crime. According to Powell (2020, p.3), "financescapes are extended through deregulation and have made it easier for vast sums of money to travel the globe and be laundered by criminal organizations without interference from national governments". Every year thousands of elites safely transfer billions of dollars outside their national taxation system to avoid tax (Shields, 2016).

Mediascapes. It refers to the electronic capabilities of production and dissemination of information through media, such as newspapers, magazines, television stations and film production studios. Media has become an omnipresent entity in the present times. Satellite television, Over-the-top (OTT) platforms, video streaming on the internet has totally revolutionized people's media experiences and the mediascapes are easily transcending the national boundaries. This expansion of the mediascapes has posed a threat to the sub-dominant culture to the dominant one. On one hand, the cultural contents from the more powerful cultures are spreading more powerfully than before, and on the other hand, the content that has been marginalized or mal-represented in the mainstream platforms are getting wide exposure because of the publishing platforms like Blogs, localized broadcast stations like FMs, and streaming platforms, like YouTube, Vimeo etc. that are offering endless opportunities of exposure.

The nexus of technoscapes and mediascapes has opened a new arena of opportunities. Availability of microblogging sites, like social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, has made the common people more eloquent than they were ever before and there is the easy availability of the international level of content available on the OTT platforms, such as Netflix, Iflix, Amazon Prime etc. Because of this, all the culture is globally spreading more rapidly beyond the geographical limitations of the nation-state.

When we see the availability of mediascapes in Nepal, we can find a plethora of content and mediascapes. Traditionally, Nepal was a conventional market of Nepali and Bollywood movies, Literature and news content published on the paper. But the development of internet technologies in recent years have made the availability of a variety of content possible. The impact of this availability is clearly visible in the form of cultural hegemony from the side of the Western sides.

Ideoscapes. It refers to the global flow of ideologies. It is a rather complex idea to describe the global cultural flow. However, it can be defined as the combination of audio, text, images, and resultant ideas expressed therein. The flow of ideologies spread via ideoscapes is related to the political discourses of the Enlightenment such as sovereignty, freedom, rights, welfare, representation, and democracy. This type of cultural flow also brings Westernization coated in a liberal democracy, human rights, economic freedom etc. Government and counter government groups use political ideologies to gain power. In this course, such groups make use of mediascapes and technoscapes. Dissemination of ideas has been eased by media technology.

Governments and other organizations create media content coloured with the ideologies they want to spread, and this can easily surpass the geographical limitations of a nation.

The discourse of political system, the role of the market in the public life, terrorism etc. has been created from different power centres and their counter agencies and disseminated easily using media technology. The Western ideoscapes flow in the nations previously under a totalitarian rule after the advancement in the technologies, however,

the counter forces have also utilized this creating a chaotic conflict in many of the Asian, African and Latin American countries. For example, the MCC-BRI conflict in Nepal has come to the surface after China showed its interest in Nepali internal affairs which have so far been a matter of interest only for the Indian side, which used to create Nepal discourse for the Westerners.

Similarly, a nation-state is an ideoscape. Nepal has been idealized as a state of people wearing *Dhaka topi* and *Daura-suruwal*, speaking the Nepali language and worshipping Hindu deities in the past. After the second people's movement, this ideoscape has been challenged by the notion of a multination state, where people speak several languages, follow several religions, wear different types of costumes. In some cases, even the ideoscapes of a nation-state have been challenged by a counter ideoscape. For example, the ideoscape of Kashmir and Khalistan in India, Balochistan in Pakistan, Tibet in China, and to some extent Madhes in Nepal are such ideoscapes which contrast to the conventional ideoscapes of the nation-state.

These 'scapes' seem to be associated with each other and working in synergy, however, they do not fit each-other as their counterparts. Appadurai opines that there is always a disjuncture between them. They work together in many instances; such as; an ethnoscape of migrants carries an ideoscape of certain socio-cultural values. Those migrant transfer remittance to their homeland; sell or buy technologies throughout the world. The nexus of ideoscapes with mediascapes and technoscapes has already been discussed.

Conclusion

Appadurai theorizes globalization with the help of his locution of 'scapes', where he establishes that the global flow of culture is not unidirectional. It has scalar dynamics of cultural flow. The global flow of culture takes place via these 'scapes', ethnocapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes is always in the state of disjuncture. People deterritorialize them via these 'scapes'. He discards the notion of homogenization as an output of globalization. He rather sees this homogenization in different scales, where each dominant cultural entity influences the nearer one creating imagined communities.

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