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Q8(a)

Critically examine Arjun Appadurai's conceptualization of the global cultural economy.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Anthropology GS 1 · 20 marks · The Nature of Culture

2.1 The Nature of Culture: The concept and Characteristics of culture and civilization; Ethnocentrism vis-a-vis cultural Relativism.

Core demand of the question

- Critically examine Arjun Appadurai's conceptualization of the global cultural economy
- Write at 20-mark length

Revision summary

Appadurai models globalisation as five disjunctive scapes, not as homogenisation.

Ethno-, media-, techno-, finance-, and ideoscapes move at different speeds.

Imagined worlds extend Anderson's imagined communities.

Deterritorialisation is the social condition of that map.

The model fits migrants, media, and remittances.

- **Critique:** thin production, weak borders, and the immobile poor must be added.

Introduction

Arjun Appadurai pictured the global cultural economy as irregular flows, not as a single Western culture covering the earth. The **five scapes** and their disjunctures are the model, and the critique is what the model underplays.

Body

The model

- In **Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy** and then **Modernity at Large**, **Arjun Appadurai** argued that globalisation is not cultural homogenisation.
- **He named five dimensions of global flow: ethnoscap**es of tourists, migrants, and exiles; **mediascap**es of images and news; **technoscap**es of machines and software; **financescap**es of capital; and **ideoscap**es of state and opposition ideologies such as freedom and rights.
- **These scapes move at different speeds, so they are** disjunctive: capital can arrive without people, images without investment, and migrants without rights.
- **Imagined worlds**, extending **Benedict Anderson's** imagined communities, are the social facts people inhabit when they live in more than one scape at once.
- **Deterritorialisation is the condition of that life: group, money, and sacred geography no longer sit inside one village fence, a point that also meets George Marcus's** multi-sited ethnography.

What the model does well

- It fits Gulf Malayali labour, satellite television, remittances, and Hindutva or human-rights talk as one field, not as separate chapters.
- It refuses the old isolate of **Malinowski's** island as the only unit of culture.
- It keeps imagination as a social practice, which is why film, cricket, and WhatsApp rumours belong in political economy.

Criticisms

- Class, factory, and agrarian production are thinner than in **Wolf** or **Sidney Mintz**; scapes can sound like circulation without a shop floor.
- The state is present in ideoscapes but can look weaker than visas, camps, and border police actually are.
- Five lists invite mechanical answers that tick scapes without showing a disjuncture in one case.
- Some critics say Appadurai over-credits mobility and under-credits people who cannot move, including many indigenous communities locked by mines rather than by airports.
- Gender and caste in India need more than a flow diagram; the household still rations who migrates.

Critical use in an answer

- Keep the **five scapes** as a map of disjuncture.
- Ground them in one chain, such as a Kerala-Gulf ethnoscape plus a financescape of remittances plus a mediascape of telephone serials.
- Add production, border, and inequality so the conceptualisation does not float.

Flow diagram

Ethnoscape -> Disjuncture
Mediascape -> Disjuncture
Technoscape -> Disjuncture
Financescape -> Disjuncture
Ideoscape -> Disjuncture
Disjuncture -> Imagined worlds

Conclusion

Appadurai's global cultural economy is a theory of disjunctive scapes and imagined worlds, not of one McWorld. It remains the best teaching map of cultural globalisation if class, border, and immobility are written back in.

Facts & figures

Disjuncture and Difference

Appadurai's essay that set out the five scapes of the global cultural economy.

Modernity at Large

The 1996 book that developed imagined worlds, deterritorialisation, and the work of the imagination.

Five scapes

Ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, financescape, and ideoscape as dimensions of global flow.

Benedict Anderson

Imagined communities of the nation; Appadurai extends imagination beyond the territorial nation-state.

Deterritorialisation

The unbinding of people, money, and meaning from a single local territory.

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