

Signs in Flow: Transnationalism, Media, and Racism

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Transnationalism and globalism are complex features of the world today. One of their most elaborate articulations can be found in Arjun Appadurai's influential work on the emerging disjunctive and hybrid nature of the global cultural economy. Following a critical conceptual engagement with Appadurai's framework, including his concepts of hybridity and negotiation, this article argues that the present condition of intense, dynamic, and multiple global interactions does not necessarily and uniformly lead to a pluralistic world of hybrid cultures and negotiated identities beyond nationalism or essentialism. The very same condition is also responsible for authoritarian and paranoid formations such as racism.

It frequently has been argued that, in today's globalized world, the transnational flow of cultures, finance, people, and commodities disrupts the borders of even the most "closed" and "detached" societies. The nature of this transnationalism and globalism is often considered in terms of an increasingly decentralized or multicentered, hybridized, and complex world of multiple encounters. In this approach, the effects of transnational flows are not uniform at all; on the contrary, they provide accessibility to global and transnational forms, discourses, and commodities by previously marginalized societies and communities. Such communities do not merely receive these flows in a passive manner; they create and negotiate new, hybrid forms out of them. Media images and information seem to play a pivotal role in this process; they are often regarded as the major arbitrators or mediators of the emerging global hybridization of cultures. This article does not provide a comprehensive review of theories of globalization, but rather it discusses what I consider to be the essential assumptions of the *concept* of globalization.

"Brave New World": Beyond Essentialism?

I begin with Arjun Appadurai's "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," first published as an essay (1990) and then as a chapter of his book, *Modernity at Large* (1996), as a classic formulation of the concept of globalization. This constitutive statement, brilliantly articulated by Appadurai, focuses on the changing nature of the global cultural scene in terms of increasing global cultural exchanges and the resulting hybridization of cultures as well as a strong development toward a

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multicentered global cultural scene. Although I agree with some of the processes and tendencies that Appadurai articulates, I disagree with the consequences he derives from these.

Appadurai (1996) approaches the global cultural economy from within a substantive sociological framework: the new processes of globalization and transnationalization are the long-term effects of what he calls "modernity at large," and the nature of modernity is precisely that it is, first of all, a "strikingly new . . . interactive system" (p. 27). Large-scale global interactions are not unknown in human history, but cultural transactions were restricted in the past when compared with Western modernity, which has overcome problems of time and distance by its powerful maritime technology. As Appadurai (1996) emphasizes: "The intricate and overlapping set of Eurocolonial worlds set the basis for a permanent traffic in ideas of peoplehood and selfhood which created the imagined communities of recent nationalisms throughout the world," while the paradox of nationalism was its "constructed primordialism" (p. 28).

Such successes of maritime technology and print capitalism were "only modest precursors to the world we live in now" (Appadurai, 1996, pp. 27–28). With the technological explosion in the fields of transportation and communication, "we have entered into an altogether new condition of neighborliness" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 29). Since this reminds us of McLuhan's "global village," Appadurai cautions that McLuhan "overestimated the communitarian implications of the new media order" (p. 29). While Appadurai's major concern is to offer a more pluralized and complex view of the world against McLuhan's unthinking West-centered technological determinism, he also admits that today's media create communities with "no sense of place"; it is a rhizomic, schizophrenic, and deterritorialized world. But this process is not uniform, as it leads to rootlessness and alienation on the one hand and fantasies of electronic proximity on the other. Appadurai's major stake lies in his criticism of the thesis of cultural and/or media imperialism (Ritzer, 2004; Schiller, 1989, 1991). Beyond the apparent McDonaldization or Americanization of the world, he wants to argue, there is "the much subtler play of indigenous trajectories of desire and fear with global flow of people and things" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 29). For instance, Philippine affinity for Kenny Rogers or Elvis Presley is so strong that it is often more faithful to the original than Rogers and Presley impersonators in the United States. And yet, for Appadurai, there is more to the Filipino appropriative mimesis than Baudrillard's hyperreal simulation (1983), since nothing assures us that it is a repetition of the same. Even if we consider the Filipino simulation as evidence of a global cultural system encompassing the whole world, argues Appadurai (1996), we cannot not realize that such a system "is filled with ironies and resistances" (p. 29).

Appadurai's main contention is that the United States no longer occupies a central role in the production and propagation of cultural images and models; rather, it is "only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes" (p. 31). Imagination as a social practice plays a fundamental role in constructing new and hybrid cultural landscapes. Proponents of the thesis of cultural homogenization (in its various guises of Americanization, McDonaldization, or commodification) overlook the fact that, when metropolitan cultural forces are brought into new societies, they are appropriated by native cultural forces and are indigenized in manifold emergent forms. Such indigenization is a dynamic and multifarious process, changing from one region or country to another. The crux of the argument is that "the new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might

account for multiple centers and peripheries)" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 32). A "disorganized capitalism" as Lash and Urry (1987) called it, "the complexity of current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 32). Appadurai then proposes an elementary framework for exploring these disjunctures by distinguishing five dimensions of global cultural flows: (1) ethnoscapas, (2) mediascapas, (3) technoscapas, (4) financescapas, and (5) ideoscapas.

It is important to grasp the relationship Appadurai establishes between power and culture. According to him, there is *no central global power* that is unproblematically capable of controlling and running an increasingly complex system of global interactions and the consequent processes of cultural hybridization. Emphasizing contemporary processes of cultural translation, hybridization, and resistance, Appadurai's argument brings up a significant dimension of the contemporary cultural scene, especially against the homogenizing, schematic, and reductive views of media and/or cultural imperialism, which certainly fail to account for a number of complex cultural phenomena. To give a different example: most of the national cinemas in the peripheral countries are modeled on the Hollywood film industry and narrative structure. Such national industries as the Indian Bollywood or the Turkish Yeşilçam have, however, produced entirely original and hybrid narrative structures that can in no way be reduced to mere copies of Hollywood narrative or signifying structures. Appadurai's description of a complex and hybrid global cultural scene is certainly an important anthropological corrective in this sense. Having said this, however, it must also be pointed out that Appadurai's rather generalizing framework overruns itself and fails to give an appropriate account of the relationship between power and culture. Typical of what might be described as the liberal humanist version of postmodernism, there is an implicit passage, in Appadurai's argument, from an analysis of complexity to the existence of freedom via the notion of plurality. He thus attributes an inherent virtue to the process of globalization.¹

What does Appadurai really mean when he says, for instance, that there is no central global power? This tendentious analysis of contemporary global power is not shared by a number of contemporary analyses, which would agree with his observations about the complexity of the global flows or the emerging hybrid forms. A major feature of these analyses is precisely their focus on the new kind of relationship between power and culture: decentralized forms of power brought about by new capitalist dynamics and technologies as well as peripheral resistance create powerful lines of escape and hybridize cultures in unprecedented ways, and yet this does not mean at all that global capitalism ceases to be a powerfully unifying global system. To mention only a few, Gilles Deleuze's (1992) analysis of "society of control," Hardt and Negri's (2000) well-known concept of "empire" as an immanent power without a

¹ In his more recent work, Appadurai has somewhat changed this view and underlined the negative aspects of globalization such as racism, ethnic cleansing, and violence. See his *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (2006). Even in *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai's analysis is certainly a lot more careful than simplistic and defensive positions, which mirror and reproduce vulgar Marxism in reverse. For an example, see Eriksen (2007), who begins by listing what globalization is not: not a new word for economic imperialism or cultural Westernization, not homogenization, not opposed to human rights, not a threat to local identities. In short, stop criticizing it! (Supposing also that the human rights or local identities are beyond criticism!)

center, or media theorist Alexander Galloway's (2001) interesting notion of "protocol" as the form power takes after decentralization. All these analyses take the concepts of power and hegemony to a dimension that is critical of the conventional dichotomy of center versus periphery (such as we see in the classical theories of imperialism), but they would not go as far as the completely decentralized political and cultural scene Appadurai depicts, as they emphasize the *capitalist* nature of the power in question. We must add to this that McDonaldization, Americanization, or Westernization is not the same thing as commodification. While the former are clearly cultural terms, the latter refers to an abstract economic process—namely, culture's becoming commodity, which does not require a foreign culture at all. It is possible to have, in other words, a culturally plural world in which all cultures and cultural products are commodified by the same industrial process. If Appadurai wants to talk about a tension or dialectic between homogenization and heterogenization, this would be one way of doing so. (In this sense, his approach is much closer to classical Marxism than he estimates.)

If, however, it is clear that Appadurai's main concern is not the capitalist nature of global cultural economy, this inevitably brings up the critical question of what he means by the notions of disjuncture, heterogeneity, or heterogenization. The question is pertinent to his main argument on the disjunctive and heterogeneous nature of global cultural economy, since, as it has been powerfully argued by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2002) in their seminal work on culture industry, capitalism is also a major reductive force that creates a culture of *sameness*.² Appadurai would surely make an appropriate warning against the dangers of economic reductionism and the relative autonomy of culture, or the powerful role of imagination, of people's capacity to fiction worlds. This is still no reason for us not to look a little more carefully into what he means by the notions of disjuncture, heterogeneity, and, indeed, difference.

Interestingly, Appadurai never offers a theoretical account of these major concepts he employs; he only provides examples wherever and whenever some explanation is called for. These include the concept of deterritorialization he borrows from Deleuze and Guattari (1983). Appadurai employs the notion of deterritorialization abundantly, which helps him to produce the sense of a "landscape" of freedom, hybridity, and complexity—the very sense of his various "-scapes" as lines of flight. Although the concept of deterritorialization has been the "trademark" of Deleuze and Guattari (certainly their most widely cited concept in the social sciences and the humanities in the last three decades), those who use it have not always been attentive to its intricate status in their works. On the one hand, it is inseparable from capitalism, which is a great decoding force in which flows (capital, labor, money, or signs) are not subjected to an external authority: the abstract force of capital and its axiomatic of quantification create a uniform and undifferentiated body. We need to underline, however, that if no external authority governs

² For an attentive reading of Adorno's concept of popular music and culture industry, see Gendron (1986). Gendron warns that, although Adorno develops a powerful criticism of music and culture industries by demonstrating the capitalist industrial standardization at the core of their products, his useful analogy between "functional" and "textual" artifacts is not unproblematic and leads to an exaggerated account of the extent of standardization in popular music. Criticizing reception studies' naïve concept of consuming communities as well, Gendron calls for a more intricate approach that takes into account three components of the production of meaning: the industrial standardization, the textual difference, and the consuming communities. This would have been useful to Appadurai's framework.

the flows, this means that power is produced by the flow itself—that is, it is immanent to the imperative of capital (which is the point Appadurai might be overlooking when he is critical of theories of *capitalist imperialism*).³ On the other hand, deterritorialization has another sense in Deleuze and Guattari: a radical break with or liberation from any origin, belonging, or fixity.⁴ While Appadurai is not clear on the concept of capitalist deterritorialization, this other radical affirmative sense of deterritorialization as radical break with the logic of identity is lacking in his argument; although he touches on the loss of sense of space, he seems to conceive it as a negative development, in terms of alienation.⁵

³ To follow the main line of Deleuze and Guattari's argument, it is the appearance of the state (or "despotism") that marks the first great deterritorialization in history: the sign is deterritorialized in the flow of (alphabetic) writing, and thus became *the* signifier, or the sign of the sign (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 206). And then there is capitalist deterritorialization, which is a decoding of all previous codes (pp. 222–225). Appadurai employs Deleuze and Guattari's concept in a generalizing manner. Deleuze and Guattari are extremely careful not to use the concept of deterritorialization in this *generalizing* manner, as they carefully distinguish, for instance, two senses of "displacement," only one of which is deterritorializing:

the fact that displacement refers to very different movements: at times, the movement through which desiring-production is continually overcoming the limit, becoming deterritorialized, causing its flows to escape, going beyond the threshold of representation; at times, on the contrary, the movement through which the limit itself is displaced, and now passes to the interior of the representation that performs the artificial reterritorializations of desire. (1983, p. 313)

Identity politics (whether hybrid or not) is an instance of the second, reterritorializing displacement. Further, for Deleuze and Guattari, capitalist deterritorialization is not the opposite of imperialism (as Appadurai seems to think). On the contrary, it is what makes it possible: Europe's "schizophrenic voyage" is a "massive deterritorialization" that ended up in colonizing the Third World (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 224).

⁴ In this second sense, deterritorialization is what Deleuze and Guattari call "schizophrenia" (not a clinical entity; see, for instance, pp. 105, 175–176, 223–224, 314, 331, 335).

⁵ Although Appadurai upholds deterritorialization as a globalizing movement, his reference to schizophrenia is actually closer to Fredric Jameson's (1983) negative sense of a breakdown in linguistic and temporal continuity (see especially pp. 118–120) than Deleuze and Guattari's (1983) affirmative sense of "schizophrenia as absolute deterritorialization" (pp. 175–176). Appadurai writes:

The world we live in now seems rhizomic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), even schizophrenic, calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation, and psychological distance between individuals and groups on the one hand, and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other. (Appadurai, 1996, p. 29)

Appadurai's emphasis on rootlessness and alienation brings him closer to Jameson's Lacanian and Marxist approach, in which schizophrenia is a breakdown of linguistic and temporal continuity, and the schizophrenic "is condemned to live a perpetual present with which the various moments of his or her past have little connection and for which there is no conceivable future on the horizon" (Jameson, 1983, p. 119).

In fact, what Appadurai means by the *complexity* of cultural flows and encounters is better explained by the concepts of "hybridity" and "negotiation": he basically argues that, despite the appearance of a seamless global hegemony, Filipinos, Turks, or Nigerians do not merely repeat global cultural forms; they *indigenize* and thus *hybridize* them; they *negotiate* with them to create their own cultural world, all of which means that we now live in a complex global cultural economy without a central imposing and controlling power. Indeed, the frequent appearance of the notion of negotiation in Appadurai's text shows its significance for him. Imagination, for instance, is not only a form of work or social practice but also "a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility" (1996, p. 31). The concept of hybridity seems to have a similar value and function as evidence of the complex and decentralized structure of the global cultural economy.

It would be unwarranted to claim that Appadurai's argument is empirically false. Social groups, communities, and individuals always negotiate in struggle or resistance, and surely cultures have always been negotiated and hybrid formations owing to multifarious geographical, historical, and social factors. Rather, the problem is conceptual—that is, it lies in the way Appadurai conceives the concept of cultural identity. Since Appadurai's argument presupposes a given opposition between plurality (hybridity, negotiation) and essentialism (primordialism, nationalism), he underestimates the degree to which his framework is dependent on what he simply excludes. When treated as empirical descriptive generalizations (in the way Appadurai does), concepts such as negotiation and hybridity make us forget that the process or relationship they refer to assumes a prior identity, which is *identical to itself*, and which is then negotiated or hybridized with another identity as complete and homogeneous as itself. Although Appadurai is critical of what he calls nationalism's "paradox of constructed primordiality"—that is, the fact that the imagined community imagines itself in terms of a nonimaginative, natural, primordial tie (1996, p. 28)—he is not critical of the concept of identity insofar as identities are seen as constructed or imagined. In this naïve version of nature-culture opposition, culture's *constructed* nature is seen as a *guarantee of plurality* without any further elucidation, while an entirely identitarian problematic is maintained. Hence, the reproduction of the paradox in Appadurai's own argument: what is imagined or constructed has still *the form of identity*, whether it is hybrid, negotiated, or nationally pure and primordial.

Hence, despite his emphasis on diversity, heterogeneity, and complexity, Appadurai conceives of these terms within a decidedly identitarian problematic. In fact, he perceives heterogeneity in a homogenizing manner, as pluralized negotiations of multiple identities each of which is basically and constitutively identical to itself. In this problematic, difference is identity—that is, another identity—and disjuncture or heterogeneity is what comes *after* such a difference, or what amounts to the same thing, the coming together of differences (conceived as identities) forming negotiated, hybrid cultures. As a result, hybridity is not an effect of his argument as the unmasking or deconstruction of identity, but actually takes the *form* of identity—that is, a morally good and preferable form of identity—in Appadurai's approach.

Such a structurally identitarian problematic is bound to remain blind to the complexity and heterogeneity of the homogenizing process of globalization, as it reduces it to a matter of encounters between separate cultures/identities. While Appadurai maintains a strong *political* view about the nature of

global power (as he is against the concept of a central imperial power and for a decentered or multicentered view), this politico-economic and social framework is articulated in terms of its supposed cultural implications. Appadurai's methodological move is rooted in the well-known thesis that people are not passive receivers of hegemonic cultural forms (a view which admits the prior point that they are subjected to a hegemonic power, even though this is constantly avoided by Appadurai under the banner of antireductionism). This old argument, a legacy of the revival of cultural Marxism in the 1970s, is vaguely recast by Appadurai for the flows between cultures on a global level. The argument for active receivers has now gained a new shape, as it is also invested with the inherent goodness of the fact of flow: despite its problematic aspects, the process of globalization is inherently good in the sense that it causes nationalism and primordialism to lose ground and leads to an increasingly transnational, hybrid, plural, and cosmopolitan cultural world, potentially free of such essentialist constructions. To the extent that his approach calls for complexity, and in some sense it does so internally, it is futile to totally reject his point about the complex and hybrid nature of the emerging global scene. Yet its failure of providing a concept of culture that is not identitarian (a failure that is similar to many Marxist approaches of the 1970s) is bound up with a misconception about the nature of globalization.

Distance Abolished: *Just Images*, or *Just Images*?

I take the privileged example of media, or what Appadurai calls the mediascape, to demonstrate my point. The media is often regarded as a powerful epitome of the globalizing pressure, which David Harvey called "time-space compression" (1990, pp. 260–307). In fact, long before Harvey, and long before so-called globalization, the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1962) pointed out how modern technology has led to the conquest of remoteness, as we experience in the media's bringing the world near (pp. 139–143). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger used the German word *Entfernung*, translated as "de-severance": a distancing or separating by means of which we produce nearness, bring things to our practical concern. When a peasant says in his customary manner that the next village is "as long as it takes to smoke a pipe," he is distancing or de-severing in Heidegger's sense—that is, bringing the next village into the world. The village is put away *and* brought near in the *same* act. Interestingly, for Heidegger, de-severance is irreducible to measured distance, even if one uses measure: "'Half an hour' is not thirty minutes," he writes, "but a duration which has no length at all in the sense of a quantitative stretch" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 140). Moreover, when one is oriented toward distance as measurable distance, the very act of distancing or de-severing is *concealed* because it has nothing to do with the fixing of a position in space. In coming near, distance is not cancelled but kept in the peasant's world. One can traverse a distance, but never the distancing or de-severance in which distance and nearness are opened up (Heidegger, 1962, p. 142). Heidegger's insistence on the irreducibility of distance to empirically measured distance implies a desire to protect something like difference as that which keeps its distance even when it is covered.

Although Appadurai suggests that we see globalization as producing a hybrid, plural, and complex world, he has in fact accepted a *prior* commonsensical view that sees globalization as *reduction in real distance*—as "measured distance" in Heidegger's sense. I have already referred to the role of technological development in the opening of his argument, but we need to reread the passage in question to better attend to its deeper presupposition. When Appadurai underlines that

given the problems of time, distance and limited technologies for the command of resources across vast spaces, cultural dealings between socially and spatially separated groups have, until the past few centuries, been bridged at great cost and sustained over time only with great effort. The forces of cultural gravity seemed always to pull away from the formation of large-scale ecumenes, (Appadurai, 1996, p. 28)

he depends on a concept of distance as metric, measurable distance. Similarly, when he refers to the "Western maritime interests," "technology transfers and innovations of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," and "print capitalism" leading to the "large-scale production of projects of ethnic affinity that were remarkably free of the need for face-to-face communication," he obviously gives a *founding* role to a sense of growth, expansion, and progress made possible by economic and technological development (Appadurai, 1996, pp. 28–29). Appadurai's conclusive statement reveals his same presupposition of overcoming of distances as an inherent good: "with the advent of the steamship, the automobile, the airplane, the camera, the computer, and the telephone, we have entered into an altogether new condition of neighborliness, even with those most distant from ourselves" (1996, p. 29). Although Appadurai warns his reader against the McLuhanian communitarian implication and refers to "rootlessness, alienation and psychological distance" as aspects of the same process, these issues are certainly not pursued further by him, as I have already emphasized above.

The above passages could have been read as a necessary reference to the historical fact of technological progress *if* Appadurai had not given such progress as well as the notion of empirically measurable distance it presupposes a founding role in his *cultural* analysis. Appadurai's reading of culture operates a technological reductionism hidden under the rhetoric of hybridity. For instance, he has in mind a kind of identification with global forms that is understood in reference to measured distance:

The lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes they see are blurred, so that *the farther away* these audiences are from the *direct* experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world. (Appadurai, 1996, p. 35; my emphasis)

Appadurai's reference to "the criteria of some other perspective" does not change the nature of his argument, as the physical distance (of a cognitive subject) is a measure of imagination for him.

The issue at stake is certainly not that the real, empirical distance does not matter, but the subjective condition the technological overcoming of distance produces—that is, what happens to one's relating to difference under such a condition. As contemporary media inform us about things happening at the farthest places and bring the world into our living rooms, the measurable, empirical distance is surely a constitutive presupposition of its institutional and epistemological framework. How am I related to the *difference* of an event, culture, identity, religion, locality, or so on when it is brought near by modern technologies of communication? In his relentless criticism of technology and media, Heidegger observed that "the peak of the abolition of every possibility of remoteness is reached by television," and he emphasized that "the frantic abolition of all distances brings no nearness" (1975, p. 165). As far as

television is concerned, as Adams (1993) has succinctly argued, the "world" is brought near "at equidistance from the viewer" and is presented at "equal availability for the viewer" (p. 50); that is, televisual "nearing" is achieved against the background of a *general equivalence and substitutability* of all events and all worlds. Television captures various events and information and locates them in a *world* that Adams (1993) has proposed to call "televisual." This locating is a particular operation that might be seen as an *equivalence of imaging*, in which the heterogeneity of events is subjected to a homogenizing measure (which is, in the final analysis, that of ratings). Television thus *reduces difference into sameness* by creating a place of its own, a televisual world; but since this is a world or place in which difference is devoured and destroyed, it should indeed be described as a "placeless place" (Adams, 1993, p. 52). If we regard television as a major aspect of Appadurai's mediascape, which is itself an instance of globalization, we might describe the latter, with Jean-Luc Nancy (2007), as a destruction of the world, or the creation of an "unworld."

When considered with other, similar experiences such as the rapidly spreading shopping malls (in which we are, in a way, inside the TV) in the so-called peripheral countries now, this placeless place or unworld appears as the other side of Appadurai's pluralistic-identitarian picture of globalization. As I have already emphasized, Appadurai's reference to the rootlessness and alienation caused by globalization remains an abstract and general statement in his overall argument. As he believes that the new global cultural encounters are productive of new hybrid worlds, a stronger emphasis on the argument for alienation, which implies only homogenizing tendencies in the global cultural scene for him, might harm his preferred analysis of emergent hybrid cultural forms. Nancy (2007) might be read as approaching the same problem from a different angle, as he insists that the unworld created by globalization is also a kind of world as much as it is a destruction of the world. In fact, we may see it as a world of spectacular, fantasmatic, and simulacral global forms, images, figures, and stereotypes flowing in all directions, *alongside a growing obsession with and anxiety about form in general*. Difference can never be exhausted in this world, but now its conditions have changed. What the famous director Jean-Luc Godard once said is an apt description of the new condition: "it is not a just image; it is just an image." The standardized production of global capitalist technological imperative is resisted from within its own processes, which not only lead to hegemonic forms but also create lines of flight that go in multiple directions, such as Appadurai's Filipinos imitating Kenny Rogers and becoming someone else in becoming American, or young journalists in Istanbul altering the global form of journalism in unpredictable ways as we observe in the Turkish left weekly, *Express*. It is also true that these lines of flight and deterritorializations are often immobilized and perverted into authoritarian, paranoid formations.

Signs in Flow, Racism in the Global

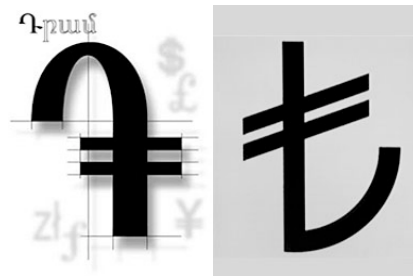
Almost a century ago, confronted with a previous genesis or worlding of the world (that of colonialism and modernity), Victor Segalen had written: "fundamental differences will never resolve themselves into a truly seamless and unpatched fabric; increasing unity, falling barriers and great reductions in distance must of themselves compensate somewhere by means of new partitions, and unanticipated gaps" (quoted in Baudrillard, 1993, p. 129). What is desired and expected from globalization is actually a negotiation or resolution of differences in and into global fantasmatic forms, whereas the very process of globalization takes us also in the other direction—that is, toward the emergence of

unanticipated gaps and the construction of new partitions. It is these gaps and partitions that are overlooked in Appadurai's classic essay.

"Racism," writes Jean Baudrillard, "is one such partition" (1993, p. 129). Psychoanalysis taught us that racism is not originated in a racist doctrine, but the latter is actually originated in unconscious structures. In a strange way, a practical, everyday, and visceral, though virtual, kind of racism is always already there before it takes the form of a doctrine. In this everyday sense, racism has to do with our relationship with others, people who are not like us (a genealogy of this subindividual, everyday level may like to focus, for instance, on the tactics of keeping others at a proper distance and bodily politics of everyday movements). Psychoanalysis approaches racism as the subject's trouble with difference and otherness. In 1974, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan predicted that racism was growing in Europe as an unintended consequence of excessive consumerism. This pathological formation is characterized by the subject's unconscious assumption that the "other" has a surplus or excessive enjoyment which he himself is lacking: for the Nazi, "the Jews are everywhere, running our banks, our economy and our politics"; for the European, "the Oriental harem is a place of utter sexual freedom and enjoyment"; and so on. According to Lacan, this enjoyment is regarded as the racist's very own in the first place, so it is an enjoyment that has been *stolen* from him by the other (1990, pp. 32–33). But racism is not a mere residue of history; the culture of consumerism is especially prone to it because of its tendency to provoke constant enjoyment, its narcissism, and its aestheticism.

I would like to take as my case of racism an everyday instance of what Appadurai would have called "imagination." The announcement of the newly designed Turkish currency sign had mixed reception from the public. There was immediately a discussion on "how appropriate" the design was, and its formal and aesthetic qualities were criticized as well as defended by artists, critics, and pundits. The discussion involved the issue of the autonomy of art (interviewed by the press, the designer admitted the fact of imposition from the jury), the credibility of the jury itself, the appropriateness of the awarded design to national identity, and its modernity or aesthetic features. All this manifested and reinforced the underlying contemporary anxiety about national identity—as the national mythologies that repressed a long history of repression and violence have been challenged from within recently. But there was a particular response that distinguished itself from all the rest and offered a direct answer: it was discovered that the new design was the inverted form of Armenian currency, the *dram*! A small scandal ensued, naturally.

Armenian Dram Turkish Lira



Who would ever think of checking the Armenian currency sign after the official pronouncement of the new Turkish currency sign? And why? These seem to be the fundamental questions here, which we should leave as questions. Supposing that it was mere chance that led to the discovery of the strange resemblance, what is this discovery supposed to mean? A mere similarity? If it were, it would hardly make news. Given the history, we know only too well what it means. A possible scenario is that of a group of Turks who betrayed their country by choosing the historical enemy's sign, whether consciously or unconsciously. But, in fact, few of the news texts have explicitly articulated this kind of manifest racist, paranoid conspiracy theory. Most of them simply put the two currency signs together in a short text that underlined their strange resemblance. Surely this might be sufficient for the extreme nationalist and racist to fabricate a little story of national betrayal by the treacherous left and liberals. More important than this kind of response, however, is the fact of mere visual comparison and demonstration of resemblance. Such obvious resemblance must be thought together with other elements of the present conjuncture: the unexpectedly good performance of the rapidly growing Turkish economy in the middle of a global crisis while Armenia is much poorer, suffering from endemic crisis and unemployment (at least so in the eyes of many Turks), but also the rising voice of Armenian and other minorities in Turkey about the massacre of 1915 as it is now impossible to maintain a century-old silence that has been constitutive of modern national identity in the 20th century. The very fact of "finding" resemblance and the performing of the news discourse itself are suggestive of an uncanny thought that *cannot* be articulated otherwise: *it is the Armenian who has once more stolen our enjoyment from us.*

This instance of virtual and hidden racism is interesting, because, as a clearly global phenomenon, it occurs at the intersection of two different flows: financescapes (the flow of monetary or economic value) and the mediascape (the flow of images and signs). We need to ask a question that Appadurai never asked: What is it that "flows" here, as currency or image? We notice that *something* is repeated, something like a form or shape, and that there is no priority, one figure could be the reverse of the other and vice versa. What flows, then, is something that is repeated in both shapes, yet it has no shape itself. It is something whose shape can never be given, only reshaping itself endlessly. If this shaping anew might be what Appadurai would have called "imagination" as a deterritorializing and liberatory force, then it certainly does not belong to anyone, it is not anyone's exclusive property. And this flow is not a global flow *in the sense Appadurai understands*—that is, in the sense that it goes from one node or address to another on a given map while being negotiated on the way or at the place it arrives—but it is a prior deterritorialized flow, a virtual, mad writing at infinite speed, which is arrested and stabilized in forms, whether national or transnational (and often both), this stabilization or actualization being its very alteration. Each and every form that is stabilized and appropriated is necessarily hybrid, not because it negotiates two given homogeneous identities, but because, having neither source nor destination, neither model nor copy, the deterritorialized sign can only give birth to ever hybrid forms. Hybridity here is not necessarily an effect of globalization; it is indeed *before* culture or identity. What is it, then, that blocks this deterritorialized sign and rigidifies it in the resentful, paranoid formation of racism? If racism has to do with our troubled relationship to the other, to that which is different, then it must have something to do with distancing, or rather with a failure of distancing. This leaves us with the lesson that globalization is not simply a coming together of cultures, a negotiation of differences, but it is *also* the production of a structural and systematic *blindness* to difference, which is brought near in a way that might be described as appropriative or cannibalistic (ethnic restaurants, ethnic music, and ethnic

whatnot). Put on the cultural menu or program—that is, put at the same equidistance from the consumer citizen—difference loses all its otherness while being listed as different. It then turns into an object of envy and resentment. A globalized world will not save us from racism; on the contrary, as it has been proved by its recent rise in Europe and elsewhere, racism is one of the major consequences of the impoverished unworld produced by globalization.

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