

Navigating Global Flows through Appadurai's Five Scapes: Asylum Seekers' Experiences in Sankari Chandran's *Safe Haven*

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Abstract

Arjun Appadurai's scapes theory has five interconnected dimensions. The five dimensions are ethnoscaples, technoscaples, financescaples, mediascaples, and ideoscaples. Together, these dimensions form a productive framework for understanding how displaced communities engage with globalization. This paper applies Appadurai's theory to Shankari Chandran's novel *Safe Haven*. It examines how Sri Lankan asylum seekers navigate, negotiate, and actively contribute to global flows within Australia. Chandran is an Australian author whose fiction is deeply rooted in Sri Lankan refugee experience. Her narrative centres on Sister Fina, a woman whose journey of displacement and resettlement reflects the complex realities of an asylum-seeker's life. This study traces the characters' participation across all five scapes, from cultural identity formation and technological connectivity to economic integration, media representation, and ideological engagement. The central argument is that asylum seekers are not passive subjects of globalization. Rather, they are active agents who both shape and are shaped by transnational flows. *Safe Haven* emerges as a significant literary work which portrays asylum seekers by foregrounding their toughness.

Keywords: Ethnoscaples, Technoscaples, Financescaples, Mediascaples, Ideoscaples, Arjun Appadurai, Shankari Chandran, *Safe Haven*, Asylum Seekers, Diaspora

Introduction

Manfred B. Steger defines globalization in *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* as, "a set of social processes that appear to transform our present social condition of conventional nationality into one of globality" (8). Similarly, for Ashcroft et al., globalization is the process by which local communities and individual lives are influenced by worldwide economic and cultural forces, essentially making the world feel like a single place. Arjun Appadurai's conceptualization of globalization provides a new perspective that captures the fluidity and unpredictability of global processes. Appadurai's theory of global cultural flow offers a framework for understanding how culture moves and transforms in a globalized world. In his article "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" Appadurai argues that globalization operates through five interrelated dimensions, what he calls 'scapes'. He discusses about five scapes they are, Ethnoscaples, Technoscaples, Financescaples, Mediascaples, and Ideoscaples. He describes these scapes as 'perspectival constructs' because they are fluid and constantly shifting. For the suffix '-scape' he explains, "allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes which characterise international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles" (296). Appadurai's framework is especially valuable for reading Sankari Chandran's *Safe Haven*.

Because this framework with the novel draws attention to the uneven, contradictory ways in which global flows intersect with asylum seekers local lives in their host country of Australia.

Safe Haven tells the story of Tamil asylum seekers who survive a dangerous sea journey and to be transferred into indefinite detention at Port Camden Detention Centre by Australian immigration authorities. This paper is organized around Appadurai's five scapes. Within each section, the analysis proceeds in three parts. In the first part it examines the life of Fina, the novel's central figure. Second, it explores conditions at Port Camden Detention Centre, where detainees wait through an uncertain legal process. In the third part, it analyses events in the town of Hastings, which is act as a counter space where asylum seekers are together empowered as a community.

Ethnoscapes and Their Influence in *Safe Haven*

Appadurai defines the ethnoscape as "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals" (297). This landscape captures not only the physical movement of people but also how individuals and communities understand their own identity and sense of belonging. *Safe Haven* is saturated with ethnoscape dynamics, drawing together characters from Sri Lanka, Norway, Afghanistan, Iran, Kurdistan, Syria, and Anglo-Australia in a world of constant cultural negotiation.

The novel's central figure, Fina's real name is Dr. Sita Ratnam. She is the most powerful embodiment of the ethnoscape. Born into a Tamil Hindu family in Jaffna, she trained as a doctor, married, and lived through the Sri Lankan civil war. When she on board to Australia, she is no longer Dr. Sita Ratnam but Sister Serafina Daniels. Her current identity inherited from a Catholic nun who died when the vessel capsized. This layering of identities illustrates what Appadurai means when he argues that ethnoscapes involve the fluidity of identity rather than its fixity. Fina inhabits a palimpsest of overlapping and sometimes contradictory identities of Tamil and Catholic, Hindu and nun, asylum seeker and pastoral carer. For people living in motion, Appadurai observes, the imagination "can never... rest too long" (297). Fina's assumed identity as Sister Serafina Daniels allows her to obtain a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa, through this visa she provides pastoral care to detainees. Her Hindu faith, meanwhile, sustains her psychologically. When she swims laps at the Hastings public pool, she whispers thanks to Varuna and recalls the Samudra Manthana who is the cosmic churning of the ocean that produces immortality. Cultural memory persists in the body even after an official identity has been replaced. For Fina, the ethnoscape is not a burden but a living resource.

The detention centre, functions as a compressed ethnoscape. It is a space where multiple displaced communities are forced into proximity. Port Camden holds people from Tamil Sri Lanka, Kurdistan, Syria, Afghanistan, and Iran. Chandran Lucky, an investigation officer sent to Port Camden to examine the death of a soldier named Milton and a young detainee named Kannan Puveendran. Her parents came from Sri Lanka to Australia at the start of the ethnic conflict. She worried that she did not able to learn Tamil and she takes notes in both French and English during her investigation. Inside the detention centre, Lucky finds that she "could follow some of the conversations in Tamil and was able to help Sister Fina with the conversations in French.... By the end of the afternoon, Lucky had learned many new ways to describe pain and grief in old languages" (Chandran 88). Their collaboration temporarily creates, a zone of multicultural understanding within a system designed to enforce deliberate illegibility.

Outside the detention centre, the town of Hastings functions as a counter-ethnoscape. The Nightingale Inn community has consciously rebuilt itself around the arrival of asylum seekers. With forty-seven percent of local rental accommodation occupied by asylum seekers and refugees, the community has established language classes, employment programs, and

cultural exchange initiatives. Professor Jafari, a former mathematician from Tehran, works at DeLuca's Hardware and tutor to the local children in mathematics. The Yazdani family from Kabul names their Australian-born son Bulbul which means 'nightingale' in Farsi. Through this they done a honour to the inn where they found shelter. These formations illustrate what Bhabha identifies as the "productive hybridity that emerges from cultural encounter, through which new meanings, practices, and identities are continuously generated" (Bhabha 2). Through the ethnoscape, asylum seekers create new cultural formations in the places where they arrive.

Technoscapes and Their Influence in *Safe Haven*

Appadurai's technoscape refers to "the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology, and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries" (297). In *Safe Haven*, technology serves as the medium through which both the violence of detention and the resistance to that violence are organized.

The boat on which Fina and the other asylum seekers travel from Sri Lanka is a vessel of minimal and failing technology. Its engine has stopped, its hull is taking on water, and it has no power supply. The Norwegian cargo vessel *Galakse*, captained by Magnus Haversson, discovers the sinking vessel and uses its technological resources to rescue the survivors. This scene makes clear that technology is never neutral. After Fina receives her Safe Haven Enterprise Visa, Port Camden provides her with an institutional email address, a laptop, and internet access to support her pastoral work. Four years later, when Fina is arrested and returned to detention, that same technology is turned against her. Her correspondence is intercepted, her browser is blocked by a firewall, and her movements are tracked by the very cameras she once passed through freely.

Technology also shapes the daily conditions of life at Port Camden. The centre is heavily monitored by CCTV cameras arranged in quadrant configurations on every block. As Lucky discovers during her investigation, "some zones have common codes, others have unique ones so the system can track who's coming in and out, and at what time" (Chandran 133). Satellite feeds from the Australian Border Force complement this surveillance apparatus. Scholar Mares, who have examined Australia's offshore detention infrastructure have documented how surveillance technology functions as an instrument of state control, regulating asylum seekers' movements and denying them privacy. This architecture of surveillance is the technological expression of Port Camden's power to monitor and contain its detainees.

A counter-narrative emerges in Cash's school history project. "He had used the NASA satellites to provide a detailed aerial view of Port Camden" (Chandran 141). When Cash shows this image to Fina, she identifies the *Galakse's* geo-locator number in the surrounding waters and traces the maritime trade routes that pass within ninety-seven kilometres of the island. The same satellite infrastructure that the Australian Border Force uses to monitor vessel movements in the Indian Ocean is repurposed by a child in far-western New South Wales for his school project. Here the technoscape, as Appadurai argues, is never the exclusive property of those who built it.

Financescapes and Their Influence in *Safe Haven*

Appadurai's financescape describes how "the disposition of global capital is now more mysterious, rapid, and difficult to follow than ever before, as currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations move megamonies through national turnstiles at blinding speed" (297). In *Safe Haven*, the financescape operates simultaneously at multiple levels. First through the legal-economic instrument of the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa, then through a crowdfunding campaign for Fina's legal defence, and through the micro-economics of immigrant labour in the town of Hastings.

The most significant financescape's component in the novel is the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa. The SHEV is an instrument of conditional inclusion. It grants a measure of economic participation while keeping its holder permanently precarious, subject to revocation at any moment. Fina is acutely aware of this precarity. In one email to Magnus, she reports that her "visa was revoked, and I've been removed to the detention centre. I'm a prisoner here once more" (Chandran 63). The visa is issued on the assumption that nuns are "of good character" (Chandran 4), a phrase that reveals the moral calculus underlying Australian immigration decision making.

The crowdfunding campaign launched in response to Fina's arrest illustrates the grassroots dimensions of the financescape. Within four days, fifty-seven thousand dollars is raised through online fundraising, drawn from "right across Australia, not just the urban liberals" (Chandran 101). St Paul's Church collects four thousand dollars in a single service. A printing shop in Sydney agrees to print five hundred protest posters free of charge. These flows of micro-capital among individual is small but collectively it is significant. This constitutes what Appadurai calls the grassroots dimensions of the financescape.

The Nightingale Inn represents another model of asylum seeker economic integration. Fina transforms a ruined house into a functioning commercial accommodation, following a business logic developed from personal experience and practical advice from Jill Greenwell. She establishes rental agreements with asylum seeker families through the Refugee Resources Centre and manages the household's income streams. The inn operates simultaneously as a site of economic production and social reproduction, generating income for Louisa while providing affordable housing for recently released detainees.

The novel's most innovative economic narrative is the RSL Shanahan's Curry Pies enterprise. Under Louisa Nightingale's management, the Hastings RSL transforms its food offerings by drawing on the culinary traditions of the asylum seeker community, "Iranian fesenjan with chicken, walnuts, and pomegranate molasses in a pie case; a Sri Lankan vattalappam shaped like a panna cotta; a sausage roll filled with Syrian shawarma" (Chandran 77). Appadurai's insight that financescapes are characterised by disjuncture is borne out precisely here. The asylum seekers' culinary knowledge is a form of cultural capital that helped them to survive in their displacement situation. In these ways, Chandran traces the asylum seekers' active participation in Hastings's economic life.

Mediascapes and Their Influence in *Safe Haven*

Appadurai defines mediascapes as referring both to "the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information" (299) and to "the images of the world created by these media" (297). In *Safe Haven*, the mediascape is the central arena in which the battle over the meaning of asylum seeking is most fiercely contested.

The novel's prologue establishes the foundational mediascape context. Journalist Audrey Kennedy writes for The Guardian about the disturbing images of asylum seekers at sea and the policy of 'stopping the boats'. Four years after the rescue, The Guardian continues to function as the primary channel through which the experiences of Port Camden's detainees reach the Australian public. When Kannan Puvendran dies due to the lack of medical facilities, Fina contacts Kennedy who is the political editor covering offshore detention and she describe the structural violence against his death. Here the "importance of balancing medical progress with humanity, empathy and respect for individual rights in ever evolving technological landscapes." (M. Dhandapani and S. Boopathi 3390) is lost because of the lack of the medical facilities inside the detention center. Thus results to the front-page article and it triggers Lucky's investigation. This sequence enacts Appadurai's observation that mediascapes can function as "communities of sentiment" (299) that motivate collective action. The article does not merely report a death and it creates the conditions under which a death can be recognised as a matter of public concern requiring political response. Whitlock

in his research on refugee narratives, he has shown that media coverage of individual cases plays a crucial role in reshaping public and political attitudes toward asylum seekers.

Safe Haven also traces the construction of an alternative mediascape. Hank's iPhone footage of Fina's arrest goes viral within hours, generating headlines that reframe her identity from 'asylum seeker' to 'nun'. Louisa designs protest posters using a photograph of Fina captioned with the hashtag #bringoursisterhome. A GetUp petition collects signatures from "grandmothers all over the country" (Chandran 128). The Catholic Church's social media networks, described as having "the second-highest social media following in the world" (Chandran 104), disseminate Fina's story to a global audience. These are not accidental mediascape interventions but they are coordinated counter-narratives designed to construct a specific public image for Fina. But it is not about her security threat or an illegal entrant, but for a community member and a sister. *Safe Haven* dramatises this mediascape politics with precision and self-awareness.

Ideoscapes and Their Influence in *Safe Haven*

Appadurai defines the ideoscape as consisting of clusters of "images which 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" (299). In *Safe Haven*, the ideoscape is the site of the novel's most urgent moral arguments. It is about sovereignty versus human rights, the ideology of border protection, and the counter-ideologies through which asylum seekers and their allies resist state power.

The ideology of religious vocation in the novel is complex and multilayered. Fina's private belief in Hinduism are known through her invocations of Varuna, her habit of secretly burning red chillies to ward off misfortune, and her identification with the figure of Sita from the Ramayana which coexists uneasily with her performed Catholicism. In the novel's most philosophically significant passage, Fina retells the story of Sita, who walks into the open earth rather than continue enduring her husband's public humiliation. Sita's declaration that she does not "want this life anymore and I don't want this world anymore" (Chandran 159) is presented not as defeat but as an assertion of sovereignty over one's own body and narrative. The Hindu mythological ideoscape gives Fina access to a language of female self-determination that her Catholic persona cannot quite provide.

The dominant ideoscape of *Safe Haven* is the Australian government's border security ideology, expressed in the phrase "stopping the boats" (Chandran 113). This ideology positions asylum seekers as threats to national sovereignty rather than as human beings in need of protection, and it finds institutional expression in the offshore detention system of which Port Camden is the novel's primary example. The designation 'Suspected Illegal Entry Vehicle' applied to Fina's boat is not merely bureaucratic language, but it is an ideological statement that reduces the passengers to objects of suspicion rather than subjects of rights. Mares in his article writes that Australia's mandatory detention policy has been extensively criticised as incompatible with the nation's obligations under international refugee law. The detention centre, managed by the private security company Deimos on behalf of the Australian government, is the physical infrastructure of this ideology. It is a space designed to make illegibility permanent. Detainees are assigned identification numbers rather than acknowledged by name, the boy Kannan is referred within the system as 'ID 64.17.91'.

The border security ideology in the novel argues that it does not merely detain bodies of asylum seekers but it deliberately destroys the psychological conditions necessary for human flourishing. "The Not Knowing" (Chandran 11), the phrase Fina uses to describe the existential condition of indefinite detention, is not an accidental byproduct of the system but its primary instrument. The uncertainty about release or deportation, the impossibility of making plans, and the absence of any predictable timeline constitute ideology made concrete and inescapable.

Against the state's ideology, *Safe Haven* positions multiple counter-ideologies, none of them simple or uncontested. The most foundational counter-ideological framework in the novel is human rights law, particularly the 1951 Refugee Convention, to which Australia is a signatory. Jill Greenwell, Fina's lawyer, invokes the Convention as the legal ground on which Fina's deportation can be challenged. This position draws on the Enlightenment narrative of individual rights that Appadurai identifies as globalisation's most widely diffused ideological export. But the novel is careful not to present legal rights as straightforwardly emancipatory. Jill herself acknowledges that "there are hundreds of applications heard each year, each applicant facing the real threat of persecution if they're sent home. But despite that, they are still sent home" (Chandran 128). Rights, in the novel's ideoscape, are real but insufficient.

The most resonant counter-narrative in the novel's ideoscape is Griff Nightingale, Cash's deceased father and the founder of the Rural Australians for Refugees Association which is known as RA-RA in Hastings. His initiative embodied a counter-ideology of rural community solidarity that has outlasted him. Within this ideological network, Louisa, Peggy, Jill, Clinton, Hank, and dozens of other Hastings residents build their campaign to keep Fina in Australia. The Nightingale Inn remains the most durable form of counter-power available to those who lack their legal standing.

Conclusion

Appadurai's framework is particularly suited to Chandran's novel because it traces the events of disjuncture based on the uneven, contradictory ways in which global flows produce. In the technoscape, the same infrastructure that enabled her rescue is subsequently turned against her as a tool of surveillance and control. In the finanscape, asylum seekers contribute meaningfully to local economies through labour, entrepreneurship, and cultural knowledge, yet they remain structurally precarious, their participation conditional on a visa status that can be revoked without warning. The mediascape analysis shows that counter-narratives are possible through the viral footage, crowdfunding campaigns, and church networks can temporarily shift the terms of public debate. The ideoscape analysis exposes the novel's deepest disjuncture, between the state's border security ideology and the counter-ideology of human rights law. Rights are real but insufficient, acknowledged on paper while routinely denied in practice. The novel delivers no guaranteed legal triumph and no tidy resolution. What it provides instead is a portrait of survival sustained by culture, community, and solidarity. *Safe Haven* ultimately argues that Appadurai's scapes are not neutral analytical categories but active sites of struggle. For asylum seekers, the same global forces that define contemporary life simultaneously enable survival and facilitate harm. *Safe Haven* affirms the ongoing relevance of Appadurai's framework for understanding the human cost of global flows and the irreducible dignity of those who navigate them.

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