5
Scapes of Abjection

Until the miners’ strike of 1984–5, these two young men were close friends. They have now been driven apart by choices that men should never have to make. Gary’s family desperately needs his income. Shamed, labelled a ‘Scab’, he goes back to the mine for his weekly pay cheque. Tony will never forgive him. Spotting Gary in the local grocery store, and choking with rage, Tony throws Gary’s trolley, screaming ‘Got enough food there, SCAB?’ Tony is hungry. His little brother is hungry. His dad’s on strike. He’s on strike. Gary should be too. Tony spits the remainder of his point. ‘What ya doin’ eh? EH? You’re my best mate! First rule of the Union, Gary, you NEVER cross a picket line.’ Flanked by his father, Tony throws Gary out of the store, accompanied by a verbal postscript: ‘We’re all fucked if you forget that.’ But Gary reminds father and son of a truth they are trying not to see, replying: ‘We’re all fucked anyway.’

Set in a Northern England pit village, this story is from *Billy Elliot* (2000) the popular English film written by Lee Hall. It tells of the impending ‘rationalization’ of the coalmines under Thatcher, the (year-long) miners’ strike of 1984–5 and the ruthless treatment of the strikers by the state. The National Coal Board eventually closed 20 pits across England. This not only meant the loss of 20,000 jobs, stripping these men of their income, identity and pride, it also led to deep and bitter divisions within the working class. Young Billy’s journey to become a ballet dancer is played out alongside his brother’s struggles on the picket line and the emotionally fierce dividing politics of working-class masculinities under the pressure of global economic restructuring. Billy’s brother and his best mate are the
two characters who are fighting in the scene above: a scene that resonates with the experiences of many working-class men and their families who lived through Thatcher’s brutal Britain.

This film points to some of the costs of economic globalization for certain groups of males, the beginnings of the end of the social contract between labour and capital and the bitter emotional intensities involved. It highlights the divisions that can arise between males who are downwardly mobile – sinking towards poverty in an increasingly integrated global economy. Our focus here is on the noxious mobilities and immobilities associated with poverty, gender and race in places beyond the metropolis and the scapes of abjection associated with them.

Appadurai (1996, 2000) considers the cultural significances of mobility through his notion of scapes and it is this notion that provides our starting points in this chapter. Ethnoscapes, he says, are:

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 [that] constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree.

(Appadurai 2000: 95)

For Appadurai, the lived cultures of ethnoscapes are reconstructed and often reconfigured in global ideoscapes (moving political ideas) and mediascapes (electronic images and sounds). As we noted in Chapters 1 and 2, Appadurai’s ‘scapes’ come together to form imagined worlds. Such imagined worlds are ‘multiple [and] . . . constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the global’ (1996: 2). Here, we extend the notion of ethnoscape and relate it to some ‘moving groups’ and some fixed groups who remain within nation-states, but whose lives have nonetheless been reconfigured by global scapes. We focus on two groups of people who are widely acknowledged as economically and culturally marginalized and stigmatized; the welfare poor and Aboriginal people. Our concern is the unjust politics of the interlaced scapes associated with them.

We seek to add a further political edge to Appadurai’s, ‘scapes’ and his notion of imagined worlds through Fraser’s notions of injustice, Bauman’s work on ‘global hierarchies of mobility’, and particularly Kristeva’s (1982) notion of the ‘abject’. Collectively, these concepts assist us