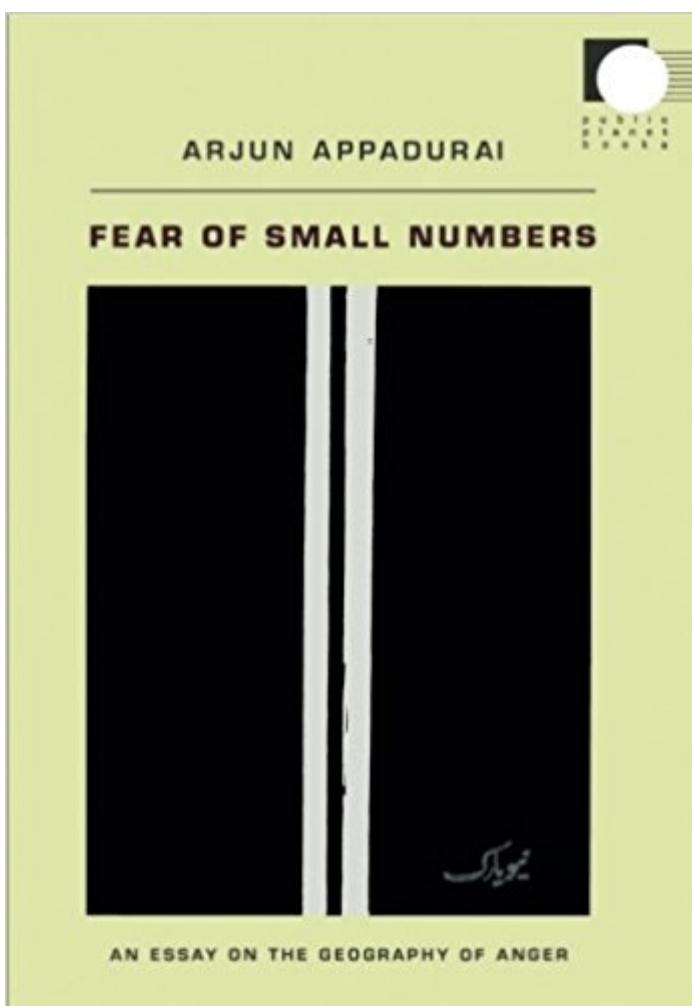


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# **Fear Of Small Numbers: An Essay On The Geography Of Anger (Public Planet Books)**



## Synopsis

The period since 1989 has been marked by the global endorsement of open markets, the free flow of finance capital and liberal ideas of constitutional rule, and the active expansion of human rights. Why, then, in this era of intense globalization, has there been a proliferation of violence, of ethnic cleansing on the one hand and extreme forms of political violence against civilian populations on the other? Fear of Small Numbers is Arjun Appadurai's answer to that question. A leading theorist of globalization, Appadurai turns his attention to the complex dynamics fueling large-scale, culturally motivated violence, from the genocides that racked Eastern Europe, Rwanda, and India in the early 1990s to the contemporary "war on terror." Providing a conceptually innovative framework for understanding sources of global violence, he describes how the nation-state has grown ambivalent about minorities at the same time that minorities, because of global communication technologies and migration flows, increasingly see themselves as parts of powerful global majorities. By exacerbating the inequalities produced by globalization, the volatile, slippery relationship between majorities and minorities foments the desire to eradicate cultural difference. Appadurai analyzes the darker side of globalization: suicide bombings; anti-Americanism; the surplus of rage manifest in televised beheadings; the clash of global ideologies; and the difficulties that flexible, cellular organizations such as Al-Qaeda present to centralized, "vertebrate" structures such as national governments. Powerful, provocative, and timely, Fear of Small Numbers is a thoughtful invitation to rethink what violence is in an age of globalization.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Arjun Appadurai is already known as the author of striking new formulations which have greatly illuminated contemporary global developments, notably in *Modernity at Large*. In this new book, he tackles the most burning and perplexing problems of collective violence which beset us today. The book is alive with new and original ideas, essential food for thought not just for scholars, but for all concerned with these issues.

•Charles Taylor, author of *Modern Social Imaginaries*

In this book, Appadurai follows up *Modernity at Large* with a look into the seamy side of globalization. Analyzing the growing inequalities and endemic violence of the past decade, he still sees signs of hope in less noticed trends of 'globalization from below.'

These are important new thoughts from an influential thinker of our times.

•Partha Chatterjee, Director, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, and Professor of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York

*Fear of Small Numbers* makes an engaging reading. . . . The book provides a fine introduction to the conjunction of globalization, violence, and identity politics. Not overburdened with jargon or scholarly references, the book is accessible to readers both within and outside of academia and to an undergraduate audience. It will interest anthropologists, political scientists, policymakers, and students of conflict resolution and globalization.

• (Michelle Ruth Gamburd American Anthropologist)

*Fear of Small Numbers* is an important contribution to the study of one of the most harmful aspects of modernity, violence against minorities. . . .

[It is] groundbreaking both for social theory and for political action. Even its questionable assertions inspire reflection on important issues. I highly recommend this book to all people interested in the fate of the contemporary world.

• (Laura Pearl, Comparative Studies in Society and History)

"In this book, Appadurai follows up "Modernity at Large" with a look into the seamy side of globalization. Analyzing the growing inequalities and endemic violence of the past decade, he still sees signs of hope in less noticed trends of 'globalization from below.' These are important new thoughts from an influential thinker of our times."

--Partha Chatterjee, Director, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, and Professor of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York

"Fear of Small Numbers" by Arjun Appadurai offers an exceptionally astute and often original analysis on the topic of violence and globalization. Drawing on his extensive knowledge gained over an impressive career as a scholar, consultant and activist, Mr. Appadurai brings an unique and internationalist perspective to bear on the subject. Written with a high degree of intelligence, clarity and conciseness, Mr. Appadurai's book convincingly explains how much of today's violence is tied to economic and social forces that are peculiar to our moment in history, thereby providing much-needed insight into how we might begin to address and resolve the problem of violence in our time. Mr. Appadurai contends that globalization has created mass uncertainty by demolishing the state's ability to control its own economic destiny; as a consequence, the production of cultural cohesion has gained greater importance than ever for the nation state's bid to retain relevancy. Unfortunately, the globalization game can easily destabilize national borders and upset the state's attempts at social cohesion by creating mass unemployment and encouraging inflows and outflows of destitute workers. Under these conditions, the downtrodden can sometimes become scapegoats for the nation's failures; in extreme cases, the poor and disenfranchised may become victims of violent purges that are driven by the majority population's heightened social and economic anxieties. However, Mr. Appadurai believes that terrorism constitutes the truly nightmarish side of globalization. Mimicking transnational corporations by organizing themselves in flexible, decentralized production networks, terrorist groups threaten the survival of the nation state. Terrorist rage is often directed at the U.S. as a consequence of its perceived cultural and economic hegemony as well as for its frequent exercise of military power around the world, especially in the Middle East. Mr. Appadurai points out that suicide bombers attempt to make political statements by personalizing themselves and their victims in deliberate and pointed contrast to the anonymous mass violence inflicted by U.S. air bombing campaigns. While Mr. Appadurai understands that some of these outsider perceptions of the U.S. may be difficult to accept, we probably need to acknowledge the author's point about how the unequal distribution of wealth and the sometimes indiscriminate and reckless deployment of U.S. power may be contributing to political destabilization and violent backlash if we wish to address some of the root causes of terrorism in a meaningful way. Mr. Appadurai goes on to discuss how the rise and fall of the BJP in India illustrates how political struggle can coalesce around ideas of cultural identification and exclusion. We learn how relatively small segments of the population can challenge legal and religious doctrines in a manner that can seem threatening to the majority population, elements of whom sometimes lash out violently against perceived threats in ideologically motivated attacks. On the other hand, the author finds hope in the many grass-roots activist networks around the world who are working for positive

socioeconomic change. Mr. Appadurai believes that such organizations can create a much-needed "third space" for democratic deliberation and decision making, thereby helping the global economic system to work towards just ends. I give this timely and important book the highest possible rating and recommend it to everyone.

Appadurai's work, *Fear of Small Numbers*, is not as profound as his *Modernity at Large*. He breaks down the issue of ethnic and political violence to the fact that, through globalization, the differences between groups have been getting smaller and smaller. This decrease in difference, as he posits, is one of the causal factors of the increased levels of violence that we have witnessed throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In terms of works on globalization, I would give this an average grade.

Difficult reading but excellent material makes it worthwhile

One of the best books I've ever read

Great job. I enjoyed reading this work. A must read for college chaplains. Especially those actively engaged with the public domain on and off campus.

This seems to be a season of scary books, nonfiction but full of emotion. I have mentioned Amy Chua's "World on Fire" and my hesitation to read it in any but tiny doses. Now I have finished a book more moderate in its first impression, but strong and ultimately quite inspiring. Professor Arjun Appadurai manages in a slim volume to evoke a very dark and entirely conceivable future for our globalizing earth, and then suddenly lets the light in, with an almost religious effect. Good for him! And good for all of us, especially for anyone who enjoyed Robert Neuwirth's rather longer work, "Shadow Cities".

Appadurai draws on his former work on globalization in *Modernity at Large*, to propose a set of exciting and innovatively original reflections on the agendas set by post-September 11. The way terrorism is a sequel to former globalizing tendencies, and has been used in local contexts to deal in a discriminating way with 'difference', and 'minorities', is set against larger issues, such as the question of the role of the territorialized nation-state, and deterritorialized global terror. The interest of his approach resides in the fact that it considers a wide range of examples from South Asia to

Europe, and the US, thus making the more evident how reductive - to say the least- are views of contemporaneity derived from Huntington's Clash of Civilizations. Appadurai is a genuinely original thinker, an exception in a world which sees a daily proliferation of repetitive and obvious approaches to such issues. An inspiring book I strongly recommend!

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