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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.

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Customer Reviews

"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.

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