

Appadurai Arjun.**Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger.**

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In his previous book, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), anthropologist Arjun Appadurai took what some critics called an optimistic look at the emerging forms of kinship, social solidarity, and transnational identities ushered in by globalization. In his current and certainly much darker and urgent book, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*, he examines the elements of globalization which have contributed to a resurgence in violent forms of national and cultural identification.

Fear of Small Numbers is an important and useful book. In six short and clearly written chapters, Appadurai offers a compelling explanation about the sources of global unrest, terrorism, and ethnic strife. Conceptually the text owes much to both Hannah Arendt's examination of totalitarian thought and Mary Douglas' Purity and Danger, and anyone acquainted with this literature will find many of Appadurai's arguments familiar. Looming large in this work are the sociological concepts commonly used to analyze political oppression and mass murder: the we/they of sociological theory, the construction of a collective other, the dynamics of stereotyping and the psychological mechanisms that call for purity and expunging the other. This is a book grounded in a tragic European past and linked to the chaotic global present.

Appadurai, a former student of Arendt's, argues that the Achilles' heel of modern liberal societies is nationalism because it is ultimately built on notions of exceptionalism, the belief that a national ethnic group is unique and ultimately different if not better than the rest. Ethnonationalist positions are not something that are confined to the lunatic fringe of neo-Nazi skinheads, African demagogues, or Al-Qaeda terrorists. They are rooted in classical liberal thought which is ill-equipped, argues Appadurai, to deal with the politics of majorities and minorities.

In the liberal imagination the masses are treated as large numbers that have lost their rationality and are shaped by outside forces, such as a state, a charismatic leader, public opinion, or myth. The minority excites sympathy in liberal thought because they embody the power of individuals to dissent. The positive values ascribed to minorities are fundamentally procedural rather than substantive. They have much to do with dissent, rational debate, and the rights to free speech and to question majoritarian religious opinion, and very little to do with difference and belonging.

Minorities quickly become a problem in a modern global context because they challenge national narratives of social cohesion and homogeneity. When majorities within a nation are reminded of the slim margins which allow them to maintain their dominance they contribute to fantasies of national incompleteness, to rage, and ultimately to a desire to purify the land of the minority. Ethnic identity is the flash point of such struggles and the intimate violence they produce, neighbour killing neighbour, amounts to a displacement into the cultural field of deeper global processes.

At the heart of Appadurai's argument is the contention that ethnic hatreds may not be necessarily about primordial fears but are an effort to exorcise the emergent forces of globalization. Globalization is new in a number of ways, writes Appadurai. Finance capital, especially speculative forms, is faster, more abstract, more invasive of national economies than before. Global capitalism with its "cellular" post-Fordist, post-industrial, flexible economy and electronic information technologies creates great wealth but is also responsible for new imbalances between rich and poor

nations. Global migration within national boundaries has loosened the glue that attaches individuals to national ideology. Global flows of mass-mediated images of self and other create sites for the expression of hybrid identities which unsettle large-scale national ones. Meanwhile the modern state encourages counting, classifying, and surveying populations and these accounting procedures underline who gets classified as a national minority or majority.

Globalization is also a force without a face. It is hard identify, let alone fight it, but minorities can be quickly identified and more easily blamed for the changes and uncertainties globalization has created. The geography of anger, Appadurai's subtitle for the book, refers to how social certainties and uncertainties are mapped in intricate and complex ways over geographical territory. As national sovereignty is challenged by the forces of globalization and familiar cultural structures are torn apart, there inevitably is a backlash that stresses blood and soil. Christian, Indian, and Muslim fundamentalism are attempts to mobilize the certainties of identity and the sacredness of nation. Violence, especially the spectacular violence associated with terrorism, genocide, and wars, is a way of producing a more stable identity and cultural certainty. In a rather twisted and brutal sense, Appadurai suggests, the genocide of Rwanda is "community-building" (p.7) by other means. It is also an example of the construction of a "predatory identity" where one group begins to feel that the existence of the other group is a danger to its survival. Similarly, the ethnic violence within modern India between Muslims and Hindus is part of an unstable mix of global and regional forces which produces contradictions and insecurities about who belongs within the nation and who shares the entitlements of the state. These forces tend to be countered by tribal national politics, such as those found in the BJP (the Hindu nationalist party) which relies on the construction of an ethnicized Muslim and calls for national purity.

For Appadurai, the geography of anger oscillates dialectically between forces of permanence and change, between tradition and modernization, fragmentation and homogenization. The fuel of the geography of anger is new information technologies which speed up, circulate and recontextualize local grievances into global settings. The spark is the uncertainty about the enemy within, and the anxiety about the incomplete project of national purity.

The geography of anger is further enabled by two distinct forms of organizations: the "cellular" model of global capitalism and terrorism, and the "vertebrate" model organized through the central spinal system of international balance of power, nation states, military treaties, and economic alliances. The contrast between a flexible, opportunistic, and mobile form of organization, and a more structured model of nation states and international organization, provides much of the tension in a world where culture and geography are disjunctive and can no longer be superimposed in a simple direct fashion.

Appadurai's focus on the "disjunctive" makes his analysis interesting and more supple than many others. Samuel Huntington's argument about the "clash of civilizations," argues Appadurai, correctly places culture at the heart of the struggle and captures "a sense of generalized war against the west" (p.115). Yet Huntington's model is a vertebrate model for a cellular world. It assumes that civilization flows from a coherent and unidimensional geographic base such as "the West" or "the Muslim world." Globalization has fractured this illusion and has created a disjunctive world where the fear and power assigned to minorities can change quickly and dramatically. The world today is filled, argues Appadurai, with angry diasporic minorities-- Sikhs, Basques, Kurds, Tamil Sri Lankans, Chechens, etc. --with potential for cellular organization. What is more important: members within these communities can morph from one kind of minority-- weak, disempowered, disenfranchised and angry-- to another kind: cellular, globalized, transnational, and armed and

dangerous. Their anger can be focussed on specific nation states, but primarily on the U.S.A. which is seen by many as the driver of globalization.

What marks today's fractured political world, claims Appadurai, is a return to ideologies which intensify suspicions and uncertainty among groups and leads to what he calls "ideocide": a new form of ideological totalitarianism which targets whole nation and ways of life for extermination. Terrorism driven by "ideocide" blurs the line between military and civilian space, and divorce war from the nation. It intensifies our anxieties about national identity, state power, ethnic purity, but unlike minorities in nation states terrorists cannot be easily exorcised or eliminated. Not only are their identities hidden but their motives seem opaque, the strategy of terror arbitrary and designed to provoke further uncertainty in everyday life. Terrorism opens us to the possibility that anyone may be part of a sleeper cell and the fear of this uncertainty (not the fear of small numbers, but the fear of one, the suicide bomber) produces its own intensive campaigns of group violence and its own incentives for cleansing the other.

There is a tendency in this otherwise fine book for the author to slip into an almost compulsive need to coin new terms which are unnecessary and muddy the waters: "ethnocide," "ideocide," and "predatory identity," for example. While there is a genuine need to formulate new concepts that may explain eruptions of ethnic identity and genocidal violence, Appadurai's formulations can at times be both overwhelming and too slight.

Appadurai's writing and thinking seems to work through the rhetoric of accumulation; nouns pile up in this text rich in ideas and metaphors. But in the end, the phenomena Appadurai tries to describe and capture --the geography of anger-- remains indistinct. He cannot seem to get the picture into proper focus. This may be because the effects of globalization are protean and the topic, despite Appadurai's best efforts to pin it down, escapes easy categorization.

Throughout his narrative Appadurai relies on psychodynamic theory but surprisingly he makes no mention of masculinity and the role it may play in the social production of mass death, a theme which many psychoanalytic oriented critics, such as Klaus Theweleit in his magisterial *Male Fantasies* (1987), have analyzed with great intelligence. Appadurai, furthermore, accepts the conclusion that anxiety, uncertainties, unsettled identities, focus our hatred towards minorities and underwrites the genocidal and ethnic cleansing that we have witnessed since the post-Cold War world of the 1990s. Yet there is no clear analysis of specific national situations. India, a country about which Appadurai knows a great deal, is the model he relies on for many of his generalizations. But one wonders how much of a "window" is India to the rest of the world; its history and evolution into the world's largest liberal democracy seems as a very special case. Home to more than one billion people, twenty-three officially recognized languages and a multitude of religions, postcolonial India has always been a country of contradictions and disjunctures and now, because of globalization, even more so.

That being said, Appadurai makes unique conceptual contributions to a number of major questions about globalization. He brings to the complex, mobile, transnational phenomena of globalization some of the traditional concerns of the anthropologist: an eye for everyday experience, a feeling for the importance of social solidarity, an understanding of the culture and psychology of purity, and certainty and uncertainty. As a transplanted Indian who lives in the US-- he now holds the John Dewey chair at the New School University in New York-- he also has insight as to how international Goliaths can preserve themselves by being less bellicose and more charitable, and how marginalized Davids can engage in "deep democracy" organized along cellular lines that would empower and enrich them. *Fear of Small Numbers* closes with this uplifting message but its overall feel is one of

measured aspirations, for the forces of globalization have opened up a Pandora's box and we should not underestimate the human capacity for self-delusion and destruction.

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