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PREFACE

Don Kalb

At the American Anthropological Association meetings in Denver, November 2015, I met Ståle Knudsen for a beer. Ståle was trying to convince me that I should try to land a prestigious Norwegian grant for his Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Bergen, a *Topforsk* grant paid by the Trond Mohn Foundation, the Norwegian Government, and the University of Bergen. The department had agreed to invite me to give this a try, Ståle confided. I knew several colleagues in the department because I had been loosely engaged with Bruce Kapferer's Egalitarianism project (an ERC Advanced Grant). The European environment was in fact brimming with exciting projects in anthropology at the time. I myself was directly involved as a co-leader in a big project at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology on "Financialization" with Chris Hann (my co-director), Tristram Barrett, Charlotte Bruckermann, Natalia Buier, Dimitra Kofti, Marek Mikus, and Hadas Weiss. With Mao Mollona I was simultaneously working on a book on the "Worldwide Mobilizations" of the early 2010s with a focus on class and urban commoning. An edited collection on anthropologies of class that I had been doing with James Carrier (eds) and a group of senior and junior anthropologists with whom I had collaborated for a long while (among others around *Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*) had just been published (2015). Another friend, Susana Narotzky, was leading yet another big ERC Advanced Grant project on the consequences of the recently imposed austerity on Southern Europe. Some of the same people were again loosely involved with her group. The financial crisis of the West that had exploded into the open in 2008–10, and then again with the Euro crisis of 2012–14, was slowly ebbing away at that moment, but the rise of the Right after the failed (or tamed) left-wing rebellions of 2011, in the West as well as in Eastern Europe, Turkey, Russia, India, the Philippines (Brexit and Trump would come up soon), plus ongoing fiscal austerity combined with "quantitative easing," generated a vital sense that global democratic capitalism was deeply in crisis and that anthropology had to find ways to respond to this big elephant in the room. We were all aware that much greater collaboration

than had been common in our discipline would be a boon for that. The big international grants that were boosting the discipline in the European science area (ERC, Max Planck, national institutions) were an excellent vehicle for that. I accepted Ståle's unexpected proposal and began to think about what, next to all these exciting things that were already going on in my direct academic environment, I wanted to do. I felt that, after dealing at length, theoretically and ethnographically, with the notion of class (2011, 2015, 2018), with the rise of the neo-nationalist Right in Europe (2011), with urban protest (2018), with finance, credit, and debt (2020), it was time to move up a notch in abstraction towards the concept of value *tout court*. I was interested in the (contradictory) value forms that were developing in global capitalism. And I imagined that a theoretically guided global ethnographic approach with two handfuls of projects that would be in a loose but conceptually generative conversation with each other over a longer time should be exciting and educational for all of us. Those projects would be strategically located on the East–West axis (from China to the United States) that had been so super dynamic lately, a dynamism that was both the cause and the outcome of the global capitalist turbulence that we were witnessing. I fleshed out a research proposal, “Frontlines: Class, Value, and Social Transformation in 21st Century Capitalism” (which became “Frontlines of Value”), which was subsequently chosen from among several contenders by an eminent committee consisting of Göran Therborn, Michael Burawoy, and Saskia Sassen. This book is one of the outcomes of this project.

I have many people to thank. Eldar Bråten and Ståle Knudsen were crucial for bringing me to Bergen, as were Göran Therborn, Michael Burawoy, and Saskia Sassen, who believed in the original idea and, perhaps, in my competence. My postdocs and researchers were a brilliant lot, ready for mutual engagement under the creative umbrella I had put up. Thanks to all of you, Katharina Bodirsky, Charlotte Bruckermann, Stephen Campbell, Thomas Cowan, Dan Hirslund, Sharryn Kasmir, Oana Mateescu, Patrick Neveling, Sarah Winkler-Reid; you taught me more than you may be aware of. Alina Cucu, Jaume Franquesa, Jeff Maskovsky, Ju Li, Gavin Smith, Luisa Steur, and Ida Susser participated in workshops in Wroclaw and Bergen that ultimately led to this book. I personally thank Chris Hann and the financialization research group in Halle, Bruce Kapferer and his egalitarianism group in Bergen, and Susana Narotzky and her “Austerity” project in Barcelona, for sustained exchanges that have found their way in one way or another into the Frontlines project. My former environment at CEU in Budapest, which I was sad to leave in

2017, gave me a sprinkling of brilliant students as well as a set of colleagues who kept up a top notch and engaged intellectual climate. I thank, in particular, Ayse Caglar and Judit Bodnar of the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology. For important ongoing conversations I thank (and here I'll have to leave out many): Alpa Shah, Lesly Gill, Nina Glick Schiller, David Harvey, Sharryn Kasmir, Sian Lazar, Winnie Lem, Mao Mollona, Don Nonini, Steve Reyna, Don Robotham, and Biao Xiang (I am meeting some of you in the Political Economy Reading Group that Don Nonini and Ida Susser have been organizing). The editorial group around *Focaal—Journal of Global Anthropology* (and *Focaalblog*) has been an inspiration and a joy throughout. All contributors to this book felt honored and excited by the supremely insightful comments that two anonymous reviewers for Berghahn Books gave on earlier versions of the chapters.

I myself have a big friendly debt to Gavin Smith that is still outstanding: he has been an invaluable and insidious interlocutor on capitalism and anthropology for over two decades, and this book is therefore dedicated to him.