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Arjun Appadurai
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Introduction

In 1996, I published a book under the title of *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. The present book is a sequel to that early effort to think anthropologically about the world that opened up after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In the years since, I have had occasion to learn from those critics of *Modernity at Large* who found it too celebratory, perhaps even breathless, about the new world of open borders, free markets, and young democracies that seemed to have entered world history. In part as atonement, I wrote a short book with the title *Fear of Small Numbers* (2006) to explore why the triumphant globalization of the late 1980s produced major ethnocidal movements in the 1990s and major civilizational wars—including the war against Islam—in the first decade of the twenty-first century. I tried in this later book to complement my interest in global flows with a focus on global bumps, borders, black holes, and quarks, diacritics of the new global order.

At the same time, over the last decade, I have regularly been going to Mumbai, where I have engaged with two—not wholly unconnected—projects. The first is an ongoing collaboration with the members of a remarkable movement of housing activists, which is the source of much of my discussion in part 2 of this book. They showed me what is possible, and the odds against it, in the worldwide effort to make the urban poor the shapers of a better destiny for themselves. They struggle against the slumification of Mumbai, the hard evaluative demands of their global funders, the suspicious eye of the state, and the criticisms of their fellow activists in the burgeoning civil society of urban India. But they also have assets—and dreams as well. These assets and dreams are being constantly turned into strategies that constitute my main evidence for what I call the politics of possibility—against the politics of probability—in the era of globalization. The lessons they have taught me about actually existing democracy, about critical cosmopolitanism, and about the capacity to aspire, are put before the reader in the middle part of this book. These lessons unfolded for me in the context of my growing understandings of crime, speculation, corruption, and the cinema in contemporary Mumbai. So the backdrop of the city and the foreground of housing activism cohabit in part 2, and amount to an ethnography of aspiration in a harsh global mega-city.

The second project is one I helped to initiate in Mumbai, starting with very few resources, in the year 2000. This project is a non-profit research collective called PUKAR (Partners for Urban Knowledge Action and Research), which is now just over a decade old. Its primary mission is to re-conceive research so that it can be made available as a technique to those who are on the margins of

the current educational system, mostly young men and women who have used the tools of research to advance new urban agendas and visions as well as personal dreams for a better urban future. This experiment is the basis for chapter 14 of this book, which seeks to argue that research, more democratically conceived than it is today, should be a human right.

This journey is the animating force of the book. But to turn it into a credible narrative, as a culturally oriented social scientist, I had to reconstruct and reorganize my own journey over the past few decades. One requirement of this retro-engineering was to revisit my initial ideas about globalization, about flow, circulation, region, imagination, and nation. That backward look is the main burden of part 1 of this book. In this part, I revisit a much earlier moment when I had begun to think about circulation and the politics of value, and persuaded a group of colleagues to investigate "the social life of things" as they move across regimes of value, enable new commodity paths through diversions, and bridge worlds far apart in space and time through their own capacity to morph, without losing their cultural significance.[1] When the results of this inquiry appeared in print, I was not aware that it contained an unknowing glimpse of the world to come in the 1990s and since, in which new material flows would both shrink our geographies and expand our imaginations. The long essay I originally published in 1986 is reproduced in an abridged form as the lead-in to the present book, as it presents a broad picture of the heterogeneous journeys of our materialized sociality that seems relevant even now, linking our markets, our moralities, and our many modernities. The remaining chapters in part 1 take up other aspects of the uneven journeys of nation, sacrifice, memory, and violence in the journey from the colonial world to our present disjunctures of space, place, and loyalty. Violence appears prominently in these chapters as both a limit and as a fantasy, as the always seductive technology to help us distinguish our bodies, our nations, and ourselves even as globalization draws them into increasingly promiscuous alliances.

Likewise, the chapters in part 1 are a dialogue with my own journey through places, problems, and disciplines. Above all, two recurrent themes mark this journey. One is the effort to work through and from the archive of anthropology, returning to its centers and mining its peripheries. From my earliest graduate years, I saw culture as the great counterpoint to economy, and in much of my work over the last four decades I have sought to understand what this counterpoint is about. It informs my work about finance, about development, about cities, about media, and more. Above all, this is why the spirit of Max Weber haunts and animates this book. Weber's comparative studies of meaning, speculation, salvation, charisma, and much else remain for me the most heroic

1 A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

example of an honest engagement with the varieties of human experience and the concomitant variety of human institutions and innovations.

Hence it is that a reflection on my debt to Max Weber is the topic of the first chapter of the final part of this book, which seeks to lay the foundations for an anthropology of the future, by which I mean an anthropology that can assist in the victory of a politics of possibility over a politics of probability. I am certain that this goal can be arrived at by many paths, and this is also why I remain deeply interested in the work of many other theorists of globalization whose main preoccupations might seem very different from my own. As this last part of the book suggests, the future is ours to design, if we are attuned to the right risks, the right speculations, and the right understanding of the material world we both inherit and shape. And since, following Marx, we cannot design the future exactly as we please, it is vital to build a picture of the historical present that can help us find the right balance between utopia and despair. The chapters in this book are thus also part of an analytic diagnosis of our current global condition.

Like most of my peers, this sort of diagnostic effort has forced me to ponder two questions: the first is whether globalization has changed shape, force, or form in any significant way in the more than twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, a period that might be seen as the age of high globalization. The second question is about our own disciplinary and critical optics, about those prejudices that make us value some problems more than others and that give greater weight to some parts of our humanity than to others. My own answer to these questions, substantially a product of unplanned twists and circumstantial turns rather than of a highly defined theoretical agenda, is to be found in the details of the chapters to come, since useful anthropological insights continue to be most nuanced when they are least general. Still, I have come to see a dominant drift in the process of globalization in the last two decades, to which I now turn.

As to the object of globalization, both theories and observations continue to proliferate. My own view is that a deep trend of the last twenty years, doubtless with its own longer history, is the broadening of risk-taking and risk-bearing as properties of human life that link distant societies, cross national and market boundaries, and connect both the institutions of power and the agencies of ordinary human beings worldwide. This trend has been noted by Ulrich Beck[2] and other scholars, who have developed a picture of "risk society" as a dominant global social form. There is no doubt that as statistical understandings of disease, catastrophe, welfare, and governance become increasingly dominated by quantifiable models of risk, governmentality worldwide increasingly takes on the character of a risk-management enterprise. What has been less widely

2 U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London: Sage Publications, 1992.

noted is the growth of risk-based orientations to everyday life among ordinary human beings in many different locations. Small loan and microcredit beneficiaries have begun to think about debt, investment, and loss in statistical terms. Increasing numbers of people engage in forms of market-based speculation, such as day trading, currency trading, and credit-based shopping. Astrological practices everywhere co-exist with more statistically-defined ideas about chance and uncertainty. Likewise, forms of gambling on the racetrack, poker, and the like increasingly operate in the milieu of marketized models of risk and uncertainty. The financial meltdown of 2007–2010 is the great tsunami that binds large global banks, national governments, small investors, shopkeepers, farmers, and traders in an intricate web of speculative practices and institutions that unite the most diverse classes and fractions of the world population. No catastrophe today falls outside the net of market manipulators, speculators, and hedge-fund managers. An unprecedented multiplicity of threads links these high-end risk-takers to the everyday bearers (and victims) of risk-based strategies in every society. And it is not only the world of virtual market devices (such as credit swaps and catastrophe bonds) that assists in building this web, but also the interlinked fluctuations in the markets for such global commodities as gold, bluefin tuna, tulips, rare earths, and many other commodities, which tie the fates of miners, fishermen, farmers, and small traders to the macro-risk management strategies of banks, states, and transnational corporations. The troubling managerial ethos produced by this global web of risk-making and risk-bearing groups characterizes what I call (in chapter 15) the ethics of probability. So, while the worldwide flow of goods, people, images, and ideologies still best defines the era of globalization, I would suggest that its emerging diacritic is the domination of techniques and mentalities oriented to manipulating or withstanding risk, understood as the statistical representation of any and all of life's uncertainties.

This worldwide shift has not left our own disciplinary and critical techniques and lenses untouched. The disciplines with which I am most concerned also reflect some of these world changes in their own changed priorities in the last two decades. Economics, which is my shadow interlocutor throughout this book, moved into the study of risk in the early part of the twentieth century, with the path-breaking work of Frank Knight.[3] Since then, risk has been a major topic in economic theory and is perhaps the central concept in the field of economics, which now constitutes a major sub-field of business economics. As I suggest in chapters 12 and 15, Frank Knight's original concern with risk and uncertainty was reduced to an exclusive preoccupation with risk, since it was more susceptible to numerical modeling. More importantly, the explosion in models of risk encouraged a cozy traffic between modeling risk and the

3 F. H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2009 (1921).

practical business of exploiting risk for purposes of profit in the financial markets. This loss of critical edge in much of mainstream economics is in no small part a cause of the reckless financial practices that underlay the recent global meltdown. So as economics, particularly business economics, has become largely the study of risk, at the same time the manipulation of economic models has itself become a major source of risk for the global markets and the global economy. This field of study within economics has become both the mirror and the engine of financial profiteering.

The situation is somewhat more cheerful in the fields of design and planning, as more design theorists and critics become concerned with sustainability and seek to incorporate risk into their design thinking. This is most noticeable in the field of architecture, as for example in the growing centrality of "green" standards for building design and construction. It is also becoming a more salient feature of many kinds of design involving infrastructure, as they have come to be more conscious of sustainability as a core value as regards transportation, manufacture, and consumer behavior as contributors to environmental degradation. This is a topic I address in chapter 13.

As for anthropology, the discipline that has provided the backbone for much of my own work, globalization has certainly become a growing focus of anthropological interest in the last two decades, as evidenced in studies of migration, mediation, medicine, science, and technology undertaken from an anthropological perspective. Still, there is an underlying pull in the core concepts of anthropology—such as culture, diversity, structure, meaning, and custom—toward earlier concerns with persistence, stability, and fixity in the cosmologies of different societies. This tendency has limited the anthropological contribution to the study of how different human societies organize the future as a cultural horizon. And although this tendency is beginning to be challenged in various recent anthropological calls for the study of "the good life" and of "happiness" as cultural visions, there is still a desperate need for some more basic reorientation in anthropology so as to encourage robust contributions to the study of the ways in which humans construct their cultural futures. In many ways, this need is in large part the justification for the arrangement of the chapters of this book and is the central preoccupation of its final chapter, which is also reflected in the title of the book.

In the end, as we are reminded forcefully by those who are most articulate about global warming, environmental degradation and the possibly short future of our species as the central architects of the future of nature, it is vital to collaboratively envisage and build a robust anthropology of the future. This requires a full-scale engagement with the variety of ideas of human welfare and of the good life that surround us today and that survive in our archives of the past. This search can no longer be content with analyzing the cabinet of curiosities that anthropology originally opened to our eyes. It needs a full-scale debate

about the best ways to design humanity in what could well be its last chapter in the mysterious story of nature as a whole. In this sense, the anthropology of the future and the future of anthropology may well provide the best critical energies for one another.

Part I

MOVING GEOGRAPHIES