

Preface

This book brings together a collection of essays that I have written for different books and journals over the past two decades or so. They have been selected for the sake of theoretical and empirical coherence; all of them address some aspects of what I call “anthropologies of life,” focusing on genomics, bodies, the environment, and their relations. Some of them are new (Chapters 6 and 12), others have been written at different moments for different agendas. Written in 1994, the oldest essay (“Enskilment at Sea”; Chapter 9) may seem an oddity. It did, however, represent a significant and somewhat surprising shift in my writing and perspective and, moreover, it resonates with much of what I wrote later, providing a link between bodies and environments, practices and politics. I have arranged the essays in three sections to provide a general flow from the molecular basis of life to the body and the global scene. The Introduction and Afterword highlight the context and the main issues covered, situating them in anthropological discussions and in the current “biosocial turn.” Assembling the essays, I have edited each of them, sometimes heavily, to connect, update, and avoid repetition. Those who are interested in details that I have omitted should consult “Sources and Acknowledgments” at the end of the book where the relevant original publications are listed.

My work on both the book and the series of projects on which it is based would not have been possible without the friendship and the support I have enjoyed over the years, financial and intellectual. This work has been generously funded by the Icelandic Centre for Research, the University of Iceland, the Nordic Environmental Research Programme, and the Nordic Committee for Social Science Research (NOS-S). Also, invitations to a number of universities and research institutes have been highly useful, alerting me to new avenues and developments. Furthermore, participation in several workshops and collaborative research projects has been personally rewarding and intellectually invigorating.

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