



Gísli Pálsson

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Professor Gísli Pálsson was born in the fishing community of the Westman Islands, Iceland, on December 22, 1949. After receiving his BA-degree in Social Science at the University of Iceland in 1972, he studied Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, England (M.A. 1974, Ph.D. 1982). He has been married to Dr. Guðný Guðbjörnsdóttir, Professor of Educational Psychology, since 1973. Dr. Pálsson and his wife have two children, Páll Óskar Gíslason (25) and Rósa Signý Gísladóttir (18).

Since he finished his postgraduate studies, Dr. Pálsson has been employed by the University of Iceland. In 1992 he was granted Professorship and in 1998 he was appointed Director of the Institute of Anthropology. He has lectured at several other universities, including the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Copenhagen, the University of Iowa, and the University of the Sea, Spain.

Dr. Pálsson has contributed extensively to anthropological books and journals. His writings focus on a range of

issues, including human-environmental interactions, fishing communities, the human body in social theory, the social aspects of language, and the anthropology of the Icelandic sagas. He is the author, editor, or co-editor of 15 academic books and he is the author or co-author of approximately 80 articles in reviewed journals and edited books. His main books are *The Textual Life of Savants* (1995), *Coastal Economies, Cultural Accounts* (1991), *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives* (1996, co-editor), and *Images of Contemporary Iceland* (1996, co-editor).

Currently, Dr. Pálsson's research focuses on the social implications of biotechnology and concerns about the collection, storing, and exchange of human bodily material and medical information. Also, he is engaged in research on ecological knowledge and the social implications of climatic change. Dr. Pálsson has done anthropological fieldwork in Iceland and The Republic of Cape Verde. He has participated in several international research projects, including a project organised and funded by the Beijer Institute at the Swedish Academy of Science in Stockholm (1993-1997).

Dr. Pálsson is a member of several international scientific societies and he has held important international responsibilities. He was a member of a scientific committee established by the National Research Council of the United States and the US Congress to review the implications of individual quotas in fishing. He has also actively participated in public discussions on the role of practical knowledge in fishing, the social aspects of resource management, public policy on language and culture, and the social implications of biotechnology.

In 1995, Dr. Pálsson was invited as Research Fellow at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences (SCASSS), Uppsala, Sweden. In April 2000, he was awarded the Rosenstiel Award in Oceanographic Science at the Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, the University of Miami, for excellence in the field of marine affairs, specifically in world wide marine policy.

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For Whom the Cells Toll: Debates About Biomedicine

In this paper I analyze recent debates on a central medical database on Icelanders. My aim is to situate these debates in the domestic context, focusing on the contribution of anthropology to the understanding of central issues at the intersection of biotechnology and society. Events in Iceland call attention to similar developments in the larger world. Modern biotechnology and bioinformatics have opened up an entirely new world in which a multitude of different kinds of human bodily components as well as genetic and medical information can be isolated and used for commercial, medical, and scientific purposes. While these developments are generally met with heavy criticism and organized opposition, responses vary from one context to another. In order to explore current moral debates on biotechnology I suggest the perspective of moral landscapes recently developed in anthropology. Such a perspective, I think, helps to understand the topography of moral debates and, consequently, to define the options available for informing public decisions on contested issues such as those surrounding modern biotechnology.