

## **Biosocial Becomings**

### Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology

All human life unfolds within a matrix of relations, which are at once social and biological. Yet the study of humanity has long been divided between often incompatible ‘social’ and ‘biological’ approaches.

Reaching beyond the dualisms of nature and society, and of biology and culture, this volume proposes a unique and integrated view of anthropology and the life sciences. Featuring contributions from leading anthropologists, it explores human life as a process of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’, and demonstrates that humanity is neither given in the nature of our species nor acquired through culture, but forged in the process of life itself. Combining wide-ranging theoretical argument with in-depth discussion of material from recent or ongoing field research, the chapters demonstrate how contemporary anthropology can move forward in tandem with ground-breaking discoveries in the biological sciences.

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Integrating Social and  
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## Preface

The articles in this book were developed in response to an invited panel (*Human Becomings: Beyond the 'Biological' and the 'Social'*) which we organized at the biennial meeting of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) in Maynooth, Ireland, in August 2010. When reading submitted panel abstracts for the biennial meeting and planning the event a few months before it actually took place, the EASA organizers had been struck by the absence of any proposal to seriously engage with the 'biological' and its implications for the discipline of anthropology. This seemed rather strange in the light of repeated critiques in recent years of the nature/society dualism, of the increasing frustration with received theoretical paradigms, and of growing demands for some form of integration of the social and the biological in a variety of fields and disciplines both in the humanities and social sciences (social and cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy) and in the life sciences (biological anthropology, human genetics, evolutionary and developmental biology, environmental science). The need for integration seemed all the more pressing in the context of the study of humans, traditionally divided between the two radically separated subfields of biological-physical and social-cultural anthropology.

As a result, we were invited to organize a panel to address the theoretical dualism of nature and society and to explore possible new directions for anthropology and related disciplines. Our panel summary generated extensive interest and we received far more abstracts than we could cope with, given the time constraints of the conference. The panel itself was very well attended and generated keen interest and discussions which continue in the form of a new network that has been set up under the umbrella of the EASA: <http://www.easaonline.org/networks/biosoc/index.shtml>.

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We would like to thank the EASA and the organizers at Maynooth who offered us a platform for the lively discussions that took place. We also thank Cambridge University Press and their anonymous reviewers who warmly embraced the concept we promised. Finally, we thank our universities for financial support.

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