At an August 2012 workshop at the University of Iowa, an unusual collection of scholars and students presented papers on the 2008 Icelandic financial meltdown. They were from anthropology, business, education, history, linguistics, literature, philosophy, and sociology, although anthropologists made up the majority of the group. Participants were encouraged to draft their papers and read each other’s work posted online before the conference. Then once they assembled in Iowa City, they spent considerable time discussing and critiquing the work in person. The chapters in this book represent the initial thinking that went into the drafts, the collegial critique at the conference, and the final honing of the papers, accomplished with the support of a generous grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF).¹

It seemed to us that discussion of the meltdown, both in Iceland and elsewhere, tended to be narrowly limited to economic issues, even though an increasing number of academic disciplines were weighing in on the various causes and implications of the financial crashes. We believed that the meltdown itself and its complex implications demanded both ethnographic description and some kind of comparison, and that an anthropological perspective, combined with perspectives from these other disciplines, could significantly raise the level of that debate.

The Iowa event turned out to be memorable and successful, with a set of original papers and lively
discussion of many relevant issues. We thank all the people who attended the workshop, especially the presenters and discussants, for their contributions and the amicable company they provided. We also thank Anna Kerttula at the NSF for her support and enthusiasm in funding and arranging the event itself and for the publication of this book. Thanks likewise go to Jo Dickens and her colleagues at the University of Iowa Center for Conferences for their highly skilful handling of travel and logistics, which ensured the smooth running of meetings and related events despite the unexpected interference of nasty storms and inefficient airline companies. Finally, we thank Suzan Erem for her extensive help throughout. Not only did she skillfully attend to important details at the workshop to make things flow smoothly, she also carried out extensive editorial work, writing biographical notes for the chapters, preparing the final version of the articles to make them accessible to a broad readership, and helping us structure the overall volume.

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