Leading Works in Law and Anthropology

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First published 2025

ISBN: 978-1-032-11853-6 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-11855-0 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-22184-5 (ebk)

Chapter 1

'Law and Anthropology' as Interdisciplinary Encounter

Towards Multi-sited, Situated Knowledge Production

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DOI: 10.4324/9781003221845-1

The funder for this chapter is MPI for Social Anthropology.

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

1 'Law and Anthropology' as Interdisciplinary Encounter

Towards Multi-sited, Situated Knowledge Production[1]

Larissa Vetters and Alice Margaria

1.1 Introducing our approach to 'law and anthropology'

This volume follows in the footsteps of previous volumes published in the series 'Analysing Leading Works in Law', but it also charts new terrain in some important regards. As any work concerned with the history of ideas, and in line with the approach that defines the series, it is as much present- and future-oriented as it is an assessment of the past. The particular shape it takes is inevitably influenced by the specific moment in time when it was compiled and the particular concerns and outlooks of its editors and authors. At the same time, the volume's focus is not on a well-defined legal subdiscipline, but rather on a *prima facie* borderless terrain where two disciplines, law and anthropology, meet. Against this background, we – as editors – have built this collection around two conceptual moves that question and reinterpret the meaning of 'leading works', with the aim of grasping the interdisciplinary nature and in-the-making identities of 'law and anthropology'. We have also put forward a third conceptual premise regarding our understanding of 'law', and invited authors to select and analyse a 'leading work' from this vantage point.

In our first conceptual move (explained in more detail in Section 1.2), we define 'law and anthropology' (the label we use throughout this book to denote our position) as an **interdisciplinary encounter** characterised by a conscious choice among legal scholars, legal practitioners, and anthropologists to speak to and learn from each other as intellectual peers, with the common aim of better understanding the transformative processes of legal and social orders in our globalised and increasingly intertwined societies. As a field of scholarship and practice, 'law and anthropology', understood in this sense,

1 We express our gratitude to Jonas Bens, Anya Bernstein, and Brian Donahoe for their invaluable insights and feedback on a prior version of this chapter. Additionally, we extend our thanks to the Department of 'Law & Anthropology' of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology for hosting conversations which have inspired our understanding of the interdisciplinary encounter between law and anthropology. The finalisation of this work was also supported by the University Research Priority Program 'Human Reproduction Reloaded' at the University of Zurich.

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can be open to generating knowledge that may have direct practical and policy relevance. But this willingness to acknowledge the situated, practical effects of such an interdisciplinary encounter has also contributed to a reflexive turn whereby the very *intersections* where the practice of law and the practice of anthropology meet have become an object of interest. The chapters in this volume trace this development and attest that – in the words of Annelise Riles (1994: 600) – 'the project of interdisciplinary investigation and communication *itself* [is] a fertile ground of theoretical and methodological innovation, rather than an accident of subject matter'.

The second conceptual move was suggested by us as editors, but fully relies on the contributors to this volume for its realisation. In line with the space given to autobiographical considerations that are characteristic of the series 'Analysing Leading Works in Law', the term 'leading' herein encompasses a range of interpretations. It refers not only to 'classic works' of established global relevance, but also covers more situated connotations and denotes works that, for instance, have been influential in a specific geographical and/or sub-disciplinary context, have inspired or guided the work of the contributor, or have the potential to assume an influential role in a given context. As explained in Section 1.3, when read together, the contributions to this volume privilege **multi-perspectivity and multi-sitedness**, but also always place **situated knowledge production** above the reproduction of a single dominant narrative.

This perspective ties in with the scope and aim pursued in the book. In line with the approach taken by the series, this volume is designed to explore how the study and practice of 'law and anthropology' have developed thus far, as well as their likely future directions. Yet it does not claim to provide an authoritative stock-taking of the history of 'law and anthropology'.[2] Rather, its aim is to offer plural perspectives on what are considered 'leading works' and to invite further debate and theoretical and methodological innovation. This is reflected, to the degree possible, in the contents of the book, where 'foundational' (primarily Anglophone) works or works that are deemed part of an established canon, on the one hand, and works that remain largely unknown to a global audience, which tend to be more recent and/or produced in languages and traditions that are more localised, on the other hand, coexist and contribute to the envisaged multi-perspectivity.

One of the most contested issues on the meeting ground of law and anthropology is the underlying understanding of 'law' that one applies. We invited all contributors to this volume to start from a specific vantage point, which could then be critically explored. Though this is by no means the only possible stand to take, we start from the **recognition of formal, state-sanctioned law**

2 Numerous anthologies of classic texts have been compiled by, e.g., Peter Sack and Jonathan Aleck (1992), Martha Mundy (2002), and Sally Falk Moore (2005). See also Foblets, Goodale, Sapignoli and Zenker (2022a). We refer the readers to these.

as a central mode of contemporary governance. We organised the volume around this premise, even if authors then proceeded to investigate the porousness of formal law, its various transformations at local, national, and supranational scales, or its entanglements with other normative orders. This is, at least to some degree and in some quarters, still an unusual move that inverts the habitual anthropological reflex to criticise the emphasis on state-centric notions of law as espoused by legal scholarship and to insist on the need for analytical openness to and empirical exploration of non-state forms of normativity (Griffiths, 1986; von Benda-Beckmann, 2008; see also Donovan and Ledvinka, this volume).

Recently, however, this research landscape seems to have become more variegated: on the one hand, transnational legal scholars have increasingly appropriated legal pluralism not only as a descriptive concept, but also as a normative framework (Krisch, 2010; Berman, 2020; Michaels, 2009; see also von Benda-Beckmann and Turner, 2018) and comfortably converse with anthropologists about 'norm-creation beyond the state' (Dann and Eckert, 2022). On the other hand, a growing number of legal anthropologists have empirically traced and critically conceptualised processes of the juridification of the political and the social (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006; Eckert et al., 2012) as well as the travels and translations of international norms (Wilson and Mitchell, 2003; Merry, 2006; Dembour and Kelly, 2007), thereby making the uses of formal (state and international) law by various social actors a central concern of anthropological research. Recently, some prominent anthropologists have diagnosed a (partial) disillusionment with such 'law in excess' and have consequently broadened their analytical purview once more to also capture forms of justice-seeking beyond the boundaries of formal law (Goodale and Zenker, 2024).

In this vein, Mark Goodale (2022, 2024: 5, 21) argues for the necessity of 'dejuridification' and the reinvention of human rights 'as a framework for multi-scalar mobilization and justice-seeking beyond the boundaries of law', and Olaf Zenker and Anna-Lena Wolf (forthcoming) propose a new anthropology of justice for the Anthropocene. Such engagements with present and future injustices critically question the power of formal institutionalised law to transform existing social inequalities or end injustices, and are more explicitly aligned with broader questions of contemporary political order and governance (Goodale, 2022, 2024).

In quite a different mode, one that speaks to legal history and legal theory on a more conceptual level, Fernanda Pirie distances herself from what she considers a critical and indeed normative project of (anthropological and legal) legal pluralism scholarship. Pirie, a legal anthropologist and member of the Oxford Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, calls for greater attention to legal form and 'legalism', understanding this as a 'descriptive' approach to analysing not only state, but also non-state and non-Western law in a comparative perspective. Rather than adopting an expansive 'legal pluralism' understanding of law, Pirie's approach focuses on legalism as a 'mode of thinking' or a 'style of

describing the world and prescribing how it ought to be using general rules and abstract categories' (Pirie, 2023: 13). Taking a different theoretical starting point, Baudouin Dupret, a legal scholar working in the French context and studying law in the Muslim world, advocates a 'legal praxeology' (2022: 76–92) to empirically study positive law 'in action', but combines this with a criticism of legal pluralism for not being able to grasp the specificity of positive law vis-à-vis other normative orders (Dupret, 2022: 29–32, 253–262). Jonas Bens and Larissa Vetters, on the other hand, while likewise calling for the ethnographic investigation of official (state) law, find that 'insights gained through the ethnographic study of unofficial law and legal pluralism can redirect us to explore official law in novel ways and to conceptualise forms, functions, representations and practices of official law in light of fresh questions' (2018: 240). A similar analytical movement from unofficial to official law (rather than a clear-cut break) is visible in Sophie Andreetta and Marième N'Diaye's (2021) call 'to take [formal] law more seriously' in the African context. This is mirrored by a recent trend in French 'law and anthropology' scholarship that, as a means to 'end exoticism', directs the anthropological gaze towards forms of Western legal rationality rather than exclusively towards legal pluralism in the non-Western world (Audren and Guerlain, 2019: 4–5).

The US-based anthropologist Annelise Riles, whom Frédéric Audren and Laetitia Guerlain reference as a source of inspiration in the French context, has repeatedly insisted on the need to pay attention to the technical qualities of formal law as a way forward, not only for better interdisciplinary communication, but also as a means to inspire anthropological and legal theory building (Michaels and Riles, 2022; Riles, 2005). More recently, a new(er) generation of mostly US-based, dual-trained anthropologists and lawyers have asked whether 'a contemporary anthropology of law has any space left for the content of formal law' (Das Acevedo, 2023: 6). In two recently published special issues, they illustrate, in a twofold move, what anthropology can contribute to legal scholarship by turning formal law and doctrine into an object of ethnographic study, and what legal scholarship can contribute to anthropological understandings of the workings of substantive law as a social and cultural practice.[3]

We take these developments and debates as an indication of shifting intra- and interdisciplinary terrains in need of further observation and exploration. Accordingly, the contributions to this volume should be read against the backdrop of and in dialogue with these recent interventions. We have arranged the contributions in a sequence that, we hope, both speaks to and questions

3 These reflections and illustrations were the result of two symposia organised and edited by Deepa Das Acevedo. They appeared in the *Alabama Law Review* 73/4 (2022) with an introduction by Deepa Das Acevedo, and articles by Riaz Tejani, Anna Offit, Meghan L. Morris, and Jeffrey S. Kahn, and in *Law & Social Inquiry* 48/1 (2023), with an introduction by Deepa Das Acevedo, and articles by Anya Bernstein, Matthew C. Canfield, Gwendolyn J. Gordon, and Vibhuti Ramachandran.

these diverse positionings vis-à-vis formal, state-sanctioned law. In so doing, the volume exhibits the complexities that are at the core of the contemporary interdisciplinary dialogue between anthropology and legal scholarship (more on this in Section 1.4).

1.2 'Law and anthropology' as interdisciplinary encounter: multiple traditions, boundary work, and balanced reciprocity

'Law and anthropology' is not a clearly established and institutionalised subfield in law school curricula or legal research at law faculties, nor is it an area of legal scholarship focused on the study of a particular topic (such as, e.g., 'law and religion' or 'law and social justice'). Rather, it is a longstanding site of interdisciplinary encounter that has involved a fair amount of boundary work on both sides. Given that the series 'Analysing Leading Works in Law' is institutionally embedded in legal scholarship and aims to outline the development of different subdisciplines and/or interdisciplinary fields of legal research from this perspective and for a target audience primarily situated in legal scholarship, we dedicate some space in this introduction to retracing developments in the wider field of loosely coupled research traditions and (inter-)disciplinary configurations of law and anthropology. This exercise helps us to highlight previous efforts invested as much in disciplinary boundary-drawing as in interdisciplinary dialogue, and provides the backdrop against which we establish our own understanding of 'law and anthropology' as an interdisciplinary encounter as well as the specific vantage point of this volume within this encounter.

Sociocultural anthropology privileges an analysis of social actors' practices, lived experience, and situated meaning-making in concrete social settings, as elicited by means of ethnographic methods such as participant observation. In its classical period, ethnographic fieldwork was geared towards a holistic understanding of 'foreign' lifeworlds, but in more recent times the discipline has developed increasingly sophisticated conceptual and methodological frameworks for de-familiarising familiar social settings, subjecting researchers' 'own' societies to the same kind of fine-grained ethnographic investigation 'at home', and questioning binary notions of 'us' and 'them', 'familiar' and 'strange', and 'the West' and 'the Rest'. At the same time, holistic descriptions of bounded social groups[4] have given way to more specialised studies of particular aspects of social organisation and meaning-making in much less-bounded and often multi-scalar and transnational contexts.[5] As legal anthro-

4 Malinowski's descriptions and analyses of the people of the Trobriand Islands (now part of Papua New Guinea) in monographs such as *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) and *Crime and Custom in Savage Society (1926)* are examples of such a holistic approach.

5 See, for example, Merry (2016) on the role of numerical indicators in human rights monitoring and global governance; on international criminal justice, see Bens (2022), Niezen (2020), Clarke (2019); for norm-making in international organisations, see Niezen and Sapignoli (2017); and for the regulation of global financial markets, see Riles (2011).

pology emerged as a specialised subfield (see Donovan, 2008; Collier, 1997), varying alignments were formed with other subfields of anthropology, with neighbouring disciplines such as sociology, political science, and cultural studies, as well as with legal scholarship. Attentive reading of major introductory works and review articles provides an initial understanding of how variegated the landscape is and also reveals how, within this landscape, particular constellations of law and anthropology come into being through conceptual and institutional boundary work.

Specific understandings of legal anthropology, or particular alignments of law and anthropology, emerged partly as regional traditions. For example, it has routinely been pointed out how, in British legal anthropology, colonial relations of domination and fieldwork practices in colonial settings shaped the disciplinary developments in the metropole (Chanock, 2022; Schumaker, 2001). The intertwining of colonial rule in Indonesia with the development of Dutch legal anthropology has also been documented in detail (von Benda-Beckmann, 2022; Griffiths, 1986a). How and whether legal anthropology emerged as a specific subfield within institutionalised academic landscapes in former colonies has been less extensively studied. As Fuchs explains in her contribution to this volume, in the Indian context, there is a close institutional alignment and overlap between sociology and anthropology in the study of normative orders and legal struggles among marginalised groups (see also Das, 1974; Baxi, 1986, 2022). In the Latin American context, *indigenismo*, left-wing political movements, and struggles for social justice added an activist flavour to twentieth-century anthropology in general and legal anthropology in particular, while at the same time linking these emerging academic fields with and embedding them in post-colonial nation-building projects (Poole, 2008: 4–5). As Goodale (2008: 216) remarks in a discussion of anthropologies of law in Latin America, 'those who employ an anthropological approach to the legal overwhelmingly do so as part of broader projects for social and economic transformation', often bridging academic and non-academic settings in collaborative forms of research and activism. In the US context, anthropologists' close dialogue with legal realism, critical legal studies, and the Law & Society Association as an umbrella organisation have been mentioned as an important factor shaping the encounter between law and anthropology (Collier, 1997: 122; Peletz, 2018: 93–94; Tejani, 2022). This may also have facilitated anthropologists' ease with studying formal state law at home (Conley and O'Barr, 1993), albeit from a methodological stance that privileged extra-legal factors in the observed legal processes and that was later perceived by some as paving the way for an anthropology of law that sidelined substantive law (Das Acevedo, 2023: 3).

In some continental European contexts, a closer association with legal history and theory as well as with comparative law has traditionally been pursued, particularly by authors affiliated with law faculties or addressing a legal audience. This is visible in the introduction to the English-language version of *Law and Anthropology* by Wolfgang Fikentscher ([2009] 2016). Fikentscher, a German civil law and comparative law scholar who studied with Leopold

Pospisil, conducted ethnographic research on American Indian tribal law and maintained close contact with US scholarship, but formulated a distinct analytical approach of 'modes of thought' as cultural formations that resembles the notion of 'legal families' in comparative law. The essay collection by Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann, published in German as *Die gesellschaftliche Wirkung von Recht* (*The Social Effects of Law*, 2007), however, does not fall into this tradition, but is rather addressed to an international community of legal anthropologists. In the French context, a close affiliation with legal history, legal theory, and comparative law is also apparent in Norbert Rouland's *L'anthropologie juridique* (*Legal Anthropology*, [1988] 1995). Here again, however, there are also other works and authors – for instance, Bruno Latour (2002) and Alain Pottage (2020) – that transcend these boundaries and seem to speak to a more global audience. These works align with Audren and Guerlain's (2019: 5) recent insight that the reconstruction of the anthropology of law in France, currently in an institutional crisis, 'necessarily requires an intense transnational dialogue and a better knowledge of the scientific production in this field in Europe and the rest of the world'. In the Italian context, Rodolfo Sacco (2007, 2015) considered legal anthropology to be an 'alchemy' of sorts, on the borderline between law and history. As such, it makes it possible to bring 'societies without writing' back into comparison, and to also rediscover 'mute law' – namely those sources of law that exist outside of institutions and that regulate social life without being verbalised – in order to grasp the perpetual changeability of law.

Particular configurations of law and anthropology (with more or less attention to formal law) can also be the result of theoretical predispositions. Over time, scholars have tended to privilege either processes and practice or rules and legal ideas (see, for example, Nader and Todd, 1978; Comaroff and Roberts, 1981; Pirie, 2013). According to Sally Falk Moore (2001: 96–97), in the history of legal anthropology, law was variously conceptualised as culture, domination or, more functionally, as a 'problem-solver'. Similarly, some authors have distinguished between analytical-empirical and normative understandings of law (von Benda-Beckmann, 2008). As outlined above, the positioning of some anthropologists against established understandings of law as emanating exclusively from the modern sovereign state has constituted a particularly contested disciplinary boundary object (Griffiths, 1986; Tamanaha, 1993; Kingsley and Telle, 2018; von Benda-Beckmann and Turner, 2018).

Across this spectrum, specific designations – either by means of self-description or external ascription – have been chosen to emphasise a particular angle and/or a distinct combination of anthropological and legal scholarship. Thus, the use of the term 'legal anthropology' tends to denote the comparative, ethnographic study of phenomena considered to be legal in the very broad sense of the 'normative regulation of society' (Donovan, 2008: vii). 'Anthropology of law' could cover the same terrain, but could also be used to signal a focus on a narrower, more state-centred understanding of law and how it plays out in people's lives, depending on where the emphasis is put. Finally, 'legal

pluralism research', until recently, tended to signal a more sceptical stance towards state-centred definitions of law. In his book *Anthropology and Law: A Critical Introduction*, Goodale (2017: 5–6) focuses on the post-Cold War period and distinguishes between the '*anthropology* of law', the 'anthropology of *law*', and (drawing on Niezen, 2014) '*law's* legal anthropology'. Whereas he conceives the '*anthropology* of law' in a broader sense 'as both a response to, and critique of, the wider consolidation of the "neoliberal world order"' and hence in relation to contemporary forms of global and local governance and capitalism, he describes the 'anthropology of *law'* as a more focused endeavour to develop theories and methods of studying law historically and comparatively. Following Ronald Niezen (2014: 186) in his critical exploration of how human rights discourses have 'produced their own distinct legal anthropology' – that is, 'a body of knowledge that includes an understanding of the essence of humanity and the legitimate forms and categories of human belonging', Goodale charts '*law's* legal anthropology' as a third field, in which anthropological knowledge is incorporated, transformed, and instrumentalised in legal scholarship and practice. Both Niezen and Goodale distinguish '*law's* legal anthropology' from the '*anthropology* of law' (here, specifically, the anthropology of human rights) and either critically distance themselves from the former (Niezen, 2014: 186) or consider it the task of anthropologists to accompany and deconstruct '*law's* legal anthropology' and its appropriations of anthropological knowledge as an 'ideologically infused legal practice' (Goodale, 2017: 6). Acknowledging the need for a critical meta-reflection on and observation of 'anthropology in law', some other authors, such as Marie-Claire Foblets (2016), nevertheless argue for the advantages of (more) direct exposure to and engagement with legal practice as a means of improving not only legal practice, but also the anthropological meta-reflection on this practice (for a range of positions on this issue see also Bens, 2016; Hoehne, 2016; Zenker, 2016; Vetters and Foblets, 2016).

Underlying these designations with their built-in distinctions is a long tradition of accentuating the postulated epistemological incommensurability of anthropology (descriptive, inductive, contextualising, reflexive, and critical-deconstructive) and law (normative, deductive, abstract, and system-oriented) in order to explain the difficulties of a dialogue between anthropologists and legal scholars or practitioners (Erie, 2022). In addition to these perceived epistemological incommensurabilities, a number of institutional(ised) incommensurabilities, such as legal scholarship's perceived preference for quantitative empirical methods and a division of labour that assigns to anthropology the foreign and the 'exotic' as its object of study, have entrenched this narrative of 'incommensurability' (Kahn, 2022; Tejani, 2022a).

Annelise Riles (1994: 606) calls such narratives of incommensurability a 'rhetoric of interdisciplinarity built around difference' and speaks of 'complicity among lawyers and anthropologists in maintaining the symbolic importance of disciplinary boundaries' as the basis for interdisciplinary exchange. In an attempt to dissolve these disciplinary boundaries, she identifies an incommensurability

between a reflexive and a normative mode of knowledge about law as existing in both disciplines. And she suggests thinking about this incommensurability not as immutable but as an ongoing interplay between these modes, whereby 'a reflexive observation becomes an argument to stand by, and that argument then can be reconsidered in a reflexive way' (ibid: 645). This transformation of one mode of knowledge into another should – in her view – be seen as both the goal and the strength of interdisciplinary research (ibid: 649).

Other scholars as well have repeatedly questioned this rhetoric of interdisciplinarity built around difference and incommensurability, not only at a theoretical level (Bens, 2016; Erie, 2022; Kahn, 2022), but also in a long line of successful collaborations between anthropologists and legal scholars that have pursued a wide variety of aims. These collaborations range from Karl N. Llewellyn and E. Adamson Hoebel's (1941) descriptive-empirical study of Cheyenne folk law (with its indirect effects on the drafting of the Uniform Commercial Code in the USA, in which Llewellyn was involved; see Conley and O'Barr, 2004) to Laura Nader and Ugo Mattei's (2008) fundamental critique of the rule of law; from more theoretically-oriented collaborations such as Alain Pottage and Martha Mundy's (2004) edited volume on the constitution of persons and things through law and Karen Knop, Ralf Michaels, and Annelise Riles' (2012) mobilisation of techniques of private international law to theorise about multiculturalism, to collaborative explorations of how anthropological expertise can be applied in judicial settings (Foblets, Sapignoli, and Donahoe, 2024). Each of these collaborations entails bringing into play reflexive and normative modes of thinking about law, which are then changed in the process and lead to reformulated normative claims and as well as new reflexive turns.

In their 2003 publication *Anthropology and Law*, James Donovan and Edwin Anderson set out the contours of a broader framework of 'balanced reciprocity' between anthropological and legal scholarship that rests on the premise of 'treating both disciplines as equals on the intellectual playing field' (Donovan and Anderson, 2003: 2). They illustrate the practical and theoretical benefits of anthropology to law, as well as of law to anthropology, by focusing on instances where the practice of anthropology intersects with the practice of law, applying guiding questions such as 'When should the legal scholar or practitioner seek out the counsel of the anthropologist?' and 'Why is the anthropologist unschooled in legal ideas handicapped in the pursuit of even the most basic research endeavors?' (ibid: 3). 'Balanced reciprocity', the authors readily admit, does describe an ideal rather than an actual relationship between law and anthropology, but one that is once again (after a close alliance with law in the founding period of anthropology as a discipline and then a period of separation) coming closer to reality than in the recent past (ibid: 201). Having its origins in the authors' experience of co-teaching a course on law and anthropology at a law school, the book tackles philosophical and conceptual presumptions in both disciplines that need to be addressed for better mutual understanding.

With a specific focus on legal practice (rather than legal scholarship), Coutin (2021) and Coutin and Fortin (2015: 82) have pointed towards similarities in ethnographic and legal practices (conducting interviews, taking notes, collecting documents, creating files, summarising accounts, analysing records, and making arguments) that can be exploited to enrich clinical legal training and (anthropological) research training. They ask whether 'new forms of legal advocacy and ethnographic inquiry [might] result from cross-training, that is, from bringing social science and law students together in clinics that are simultaneously legal and ethnographic' and whether 'new scholarly and advocacy collaborations [could] emerge from such initiatives' (Coutin and Fortin, 2015: 82). Importantly, Coutin (2021: 155–157) also points towards a shift from independent to collaborative research, with its own practical, ethical, and epistemological effects.

Anchoring interdisciplinarity more firmly in legal and anthropological practices and moments in which these practices intersect (rather than in abstract debates about the possibilities and limits of interdisciplinary knowledge exchange from a (self-designated) outside observer position) might not only lead to different forms of disciplinary boundary drawing and alliance making, but could also bring to the fore the applied, engaged, and critical dimensions of such practices.

For the purposes of this volume, we draw upon this second line of thinking that refutes the incommensurability of law and anthropology and rather conceptualises practices of interdisciplinarity as built around the interplay between reflexive and normative knowledge modes, boundary crossings, and entanglements (see Riles [1994], in combination with Coutin [2021] and Coutin and Yngvesson [2023]). 'Law and anthropology' research is hereafter understood as denoting a conscious choice among legal scholars, legal practitioners, and anthropologists to speak to and learn from each other as intellectual peers, with the common aim of better understanding the transformative processes of legal and social orders in our globalised and increasingly intertwined societies. As a field of scholarship and practice, 'law and anthropology' is also characterised by an openness towards generating knowledge that may have direct practical and policy relevance. This willingness to acknowledge the situated, practical effects of such an interdisciplinary encounter – be it in settings where anthropological knowledge is utilised by decision-makers, in the context of critically challenging a specific policy or regulation or with the aim of illustrating the (un)intended effects of formal law – should contribute to a reflexive turn whereby the very *intersections* where the practice of law and the practice of anthropology meet become an integral part and object of interest in 'law and anthropology' scholarship in and of themselves (Zenker, 2016; Sieder, 2018; Wiersinga, 2021; de Konig, 2021; Ledvinka and Donovan, 2021; Holden, 2022; Andreetta and Bianchini, 2024). As part of such a 'balanced reciprocity' (Donovan and Anderson, 2003) between law and anthropology, we have therefore included as leading works not only anthropological monographs that have inspired legal scholarship and practice, but also doctrinal

legal studies that have served anthropologists as reference works and analytical guides, contributed to anthropological debates, and opened up new avenues of ethnographic research and practice. We have, furthermore, encouraged all contributors to explore the practical effects of the chosen 'leading work' on their own research, teaching, advocacy work, or critical engagement with policy-making.

1.3 Knowledge production: multi-perspectival and multi-sited, yet situated

This book draws inspiration from the autobiographical approach that defines the series 'Analysing Leading Works in Law', and takes it a step further by making it a central methodological element. The meaning of 'leading works' is herein given an intentionally subjective and situated twist by allowing the contributors to identify and write about what they consider a 'leading' work based on their personal research trajectories and scholarly experiences. This is an important conceptual move, as it unsettles the presumption of a canon of classical works and instead emphasises the locally grounded and situated nature of what is considered to be an important work in a specific thematic field, national research tradition, or strand of debate. Through this autobiographical character, the book takes a critical stance towards the notion of – or perhaps better, the *myth* of – scientific objectivity, and acknowledges and values the positionality of each contributor as a further lens through which to reflect on the idea of 'leading works'.

We combine this choice with the conscious aim of providing a more geographically diverse picture of 'law and anthropology'. In operational terms, pursuing this aim has entailed having us – as editors – take a dive into various regional research traditions (with the invaluable support of national and regional experts) and make great efforts (not always fruitful) to include authors who contribute to the desired geographical diversity through their chosen leading works and/or their analytical perspectives. This approach is particularly valuable in a field where the Anglophone research tradition has long played a dominant role (Mundy and Kelly, 2002: xvi) and where attempts to portray a more diversified and heterodox research landscape are of a more recent nature (see, e.g., Goodale, 2017: 7–8; Foblets, Goodale, Sapignoli, and Zenker, 2022b: 3–4 and 12–13). *Leading Works in Law and Anthropology* aims to contribute to this endeavour by enlarging its focus beyond classic texts that are internationally recognised as 'leading works', particularly by shedding light on works that have proved to be 'leading' in the emergence or development of 'law and anthropology' in specific national contexts (if not more broadly) or, in the opinions of the contributors, should be considered 'leading', thus reflecting both on the 'path taken' and the 'path not taken' in various regional research traditions. In doing so, this book will also introduce non-English-language works to an English-speaking readership.

This move also has broader conceptual implications: it introduces the rarely emphasised dimension of multi-perspectivity into the dialogue about leading works in 'law and anthropology'. Such multi-perspectivity exists within each chapter, as a chapter's author enters into dialogue with the author of the leading work; it also exists in the totality of all chapters when they are juxtaposed to each other. Borrowing from Goodale's 'anthropological orientation' (2022: 3), this book creates the opportunity for a variety of voices to be expressed – diverse in terms of disciplinary background, research tradition, thematic field, geographical focus, and career stage – to join ongoing conversations on the past, present, and future of 'law and anthropology', thus accounting for and, more importantly, placing a plurality of narratives, perspectives, and experiences into conversation with one another. As Breidenbach (2021: 43) puts it, the 'capacity for multi-perspectivity is one of anthropology's great gifts' as it 'allows us to navigate complexity'. It helps us avoid becoming trapped within a singular (and dominant) viewpoint, and enables us to enlarge the playing field of thought by integrating perspectives from differently situated stakeholders, thus making space for a more global and nuanced view of 'law and anthropology'.

In this volume, multi-perspectivity adds to and intersects with notions of situatedness and multi-sitedness. Multi-sited fieldwork, as understood by George E. Marcus (1995), reflects modes of research that blur the distinction between the local site and the global, both understood not only in geographical terms, by ethnographically tracking actors, ideas, and events through multiple sites. Applying this methodological approach to 'law and anthropology' as a field of research and knowledge production with multiple nodes and sites alerts us to individual research trajectories across different academic settings, to the travelling of concepts, and to the effects of collaboration between researchers and their partners in the field. By embracing multi-sitedness, we acknowledge that some contributors have, for instance, moved from one academic system to another, or have been trained in Europe but remain connected to their native land as their fieldsite, or have established close collaborative ties with scholars placed on the other side of the Atlantic, or have jointly developed their thinking with scholars operating in different fieldsites. For our purposes, multi-sitedness also refers to situations where one's research and teaching develop in different disciplinary settings; where one is embedded in a specific national academic context but is, at the same time, drawn to the international dimension of the questions addressed; where one's academic contributions are meant to address both legal and anthropological, both national and international audiences; or where activism and academic work influence and strengthen one another. All these movements, exchanges, and coexistences inevitably contribute to shaping the contributors' thinking, acting, and research, including their choice of and take on a specific 'leading work'.

Despite frequently moving across various sites and working with globally circulating texts, anthropologists are usually also deeply embedded and situated in at least two contexts that shape their thinking, acting, and research:

the academic context of their current or past 'home' institution(s) and the context of their fieldwork site(s). Even though legal scholars might not necessarily go through a similar professional socialisation that includes fieldwork, they may nonetheless be tied to at least two specific settings: the (home) jurisdiction in which they were trained, and the academic (legal) context in which they work.

Within anthropology, there were powerful academic conventions at play that separated 'home' from 'field', distinguished 'non-native' from 'native' anthropologists, and delineated specific regional bodies of knowledge. These conventions have been critically explored with a particular eye towards the hierarchised relations of knowledge production that are sustained by such conventions. A significant body of work has critically questioned such dichotomies and argued against the fixity of any distinction between the fieldsite and the academic setting (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997) and between foreign and native anthropologists (Narayan, 1993). Others have demonstrated the adverse effects of generating regionalised bodies of ethnographic knowledge (Fardon, 1990), as well as acknowledged the structural effects of metropolitan and peripheral academic settings within an unequal system of global knowledge economies (Ribeiro and Escobar, 2006; Gefou-Madianou, 1993; Bošković, 2008). In doing so, this literature directs our attention to the subtle ways in which authors' situatedness in specific academic or field contexts also shapes and constrains their research, as well as how they navigate existing conventions when they move across sites.

In light of this, it seems realistic to say that all of the contributors to this volume operate within and across multiple sites and hold shifting identifications, but are also shaped and constrained by these sites and identifications. While multi-sitedness emphasises fluidity, situatedness emphasises constraints and conventions. Multi-sitedness and situatedness therefore overlap, influence, and co-construct one another in distinct ways that depend on the researcher's personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender, nationality, education), as well as on the specific time and context in which the researcher is situated.

Read together with multi-perspectivity, this understanding of multi-sited and situated knowledge production thus also enables one to carefully attend to the power relations and asymmetries at play in the process of generating knowledge. Throughout the volume, readers can trace the embeddedness of contributors and selected leading works in context-specific conventions as well as crosscutting connections and relationships in the development of 'law and anthropology'.

In line with this, a final self-reflection on our own situatedness within unequal global economies of knowledge production in 'law and anthropology' scholarship is needed. The structure and the content of the book have been inevitably influenced by our own particular concerns and outlooks as editors. One of us, Larissa Vetters, has been trained in anthropology and holds a PhD in administrative sciences from a German university; she has conducted fieldwork in Bosnia–Herzegovina on international intervention and post-conflict

state-building, as well as in Germany on the transformative effects of migration on administrative law. She works in a department focusing on 'law and anthropology' at an international research institution in Germany. Recently, she has become involved in various judicial training activities in the fields of administrative justice and judicial decision-making more broadly. Alice Margaria is a legal scholar who studied law in Italy and England and, before being appointed assistant professor in a Swiss law faculty, was based in the department in which Larissa works, focusing on 'law and anthropology'. Influenced by critical and gender studies, Alice's scholarship integrates anthropological methods, concepts, and perspectives into the study of legal approaches to family diversity in Europe, focusing especially on the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

These trajectories have shaped our perceptions of 'law and anthropology' scholarship as laid out in this introduction and potentially restrained us from, for instance, finding more contributions from outside Europe and the USA or including certain topics, such as law and time, cultural expertise, transitional justice, or law and the Anthropocene. Situatedness, one could argue, is therefore conducive to truths which are inherently partial, as they are contextually, politically, and historically determined (Clifford, 1986: 6). At the same time, if acknowledged as situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988), this also opens the avenue for multiple truths to be told and to be considered as such. This volume builds on this ambivalence in order to foreground the pluralistic nature of 'law and anthropology' and its nuances, while simultaneously making path-dependencies and constraints visible.

Several contributors have chosen to write about 'leading works' from their own national academic cultures and focus on research topics 'at home'. Along a centre–periphery continuum of 'law and anthropology' knowledge production, these chapters can be placed within an overall Anglo-European-centred perspective, but also evidence distinct lines and communities of interpretation. Some contributors have chosen to write about 'classics' from the US tradition, but have decentred them by bringing them into conversation with their own multi-sited research trajectories or transatlantic research collaborations. Others have either been educated in or chosen to write about settings that could be considered peripheral and/or marginalised sites of knowledge production. They demonstrate how the 'leading work' they selected makes contributions to debates of larger relevance and resonates across postcolonial contexts, thus contributing to 'provincializing' (Chakrabarty, 2008) notions of a classic law and anthropology canon.

Rather than claiming to decolonise or fully decentre knowledge production in the field of 'law and anthropology' by giving equal space to voices and works from the Global South (which is a necessary but not easily achieved endeavour),[6] this volume invites readers to carefully rethink established

6 For calls to do so, see, e.g., Adébísí (2023), Salaymeh and Michaels (2022), and Mogstad and Tse (2018).

narratives of classical Anglophone and European canons, to read between the lines, to establish new connections within and across chapters, and also to take note of and contemplate the gaps. Acknowledging the 'gaps that give space to, and are affected by, other knowledges' (Rose, 1997: 315) is – we believe – the first step in questioning and fracturing the authority and dominance of established academic knowledge in the Global North.

1.4 Structure and content of the volume

At the beginning of this introduction, we put forward a particular understanding of 'law and anthropology' research as recognising and engaging with formal, state-sanctioned law as a central mode of contemporary governance. This understanding was shaped by, and in response to, a number of recent interventions expressing the need to define what 'law' is and is not and exhortations to take 'formal law' seriously as an object of ethnographic study. Our understanding of 'law and anthropology' research, and how it connects to these interventions and exhortations, also constitutes the rationale underpinning the book's unfolding and the order of its chapters.

In Chapter 2, James Donovan and Tomáš Ledvinka revisit longstanding debates about the nature and definition of law. The authors highlight the early attempt of **Leopold Pospisil's *Anthropology of Law: A Comparative Theory*** (1971) to conceptualise 'law' in ways that go beyond a state- and Western-centric understanding. Pospisil's proposal to identify law in the field through a number of empirically observable criteria establishes law as a multi-level cultural universal, and assigns state law a modest status as one among several instantiations of law rather than the entirety of the category itself. Donovan and Ledvinka show how Pospisil's work foreshadows and influences later discussions about legal pluralism, and they foreground the practical and political consequences of narrow, state-centric definitions of law in colonial and contemporary contexts. Extrapolating from Pospisil's book, they advocate an ontological model of law in the spirit of a comparative anthropology based on empirical research that should include at least some immersive fieldwork in an unfamiliar setting, which is intended to shatter the researcher's taken-for-granted assumptions. It is noteworthy that Pospisil himself experienced this process of estrangement and re-familiarisation not only with regard to empirical field research, but also in the academic setting as a legal scholar trained in Europe who turned to sociocultural anthropology in the United States. Donovan and Ledvinka, in turn, make sense of Pospisil's academic trajectory and give further meaning to it through their own interdisciplinary and academically multi-sited collaborative encounter.

The subsequent three chapters of the book shift the focus towards Western legal systems, engaging with leading works that centre on litigation in national and international courts. In legal anthropology, dispute resolution has historically constituted a classic theme. It has been broadly understood as a social process that can take many different forms, inside and outside courts, and

has primarily been investigated from the perspective of litigants (Nader and Todd, 1978; see also Donovan, 2008: 159, 175–186). At the same time, courts (as one type of dispute resolution by means of adjudication) are also a *prima facie* classic site of the application, interpretation, and transformation of formal codified (state and international) law, and have been the primary entry points for legal scholarship. The subsequent chapters capture both of these dimensions and represent a range of fieldsites, regional research traditions, and theoretical approaches. Each in its own way also addresses the question of what an ethnographic study of 'formal law' can or should entail, and how it relates to the study of disputing as a social process.

In Chapter 3, Susan Bibler Coutin begins her exploration of **Barbara Yngvesson's *Virtuous Citizens, Disruptive Subjects*** (1993) by situating it in a strand of ethnographic research on US legal institutions and a broader anthropology of disputing that emerged in the United States from the 1970s onwards. This body of research examined the range of forums and processes through which grievances could be aired, how disputants decided which to pursue, and the strategies through which norms were invoked and reinterpreted by litigants. Yngvesson's ethnographic study of lower court hearings in Massachusetts reveals how disputing reflects and shapes community fractures, tensions, and norms and, in the process, defines the boundaries of community. One reading of Yngvesson's study could be that it privileges ethnographic attention to lay justice and lay actors, such as court clerks, over ethnographic attention to formal law, situating itself 'at the margins of law' and studying disputes with the aim of understanding larger social structures and cultural categories. Yet Coutin elegantly demonstrates that Yngvesson's central concern is precisely with those practices that lie at the intersection of the social and the legal, at once distinguishing one from the other and showing how they co-constitute each other. When Yngvesson empirically traces how a New England court determines which community disputes are legal matters, she traces how the contested boundaries of law and not-law/the social are constituted. Coutin highlights spatiality, a relational mode of analysis, and legal fictions as three themes of *Virtuous Citizens, Disruptive Subjects* that have been taken up and made productive in later 'law and anthropology' research interested in the co-constitution of the social and the legal. It is also along these themes that a longstanding collaboration between Coutin herself and Yngvesson emerged, culminating in the recently published *Documenting Impossible Realities: Ethnography, Memory, and the As If* (2023).

Turning to the Caribbean, in Chapter 4, Ramona Biholar traces the impact of **Mindie Lazarus-Black's *Everyday Harm: Domestic Violence, Court Rites and Cultures of Reconciliation*** (2007) on applied legal research and activism in the region. Relying on meticulous ethnographic work in Trinidadian magistrates' courts, this work – as read by Biholar – sheds light on the inherently contradictory nature of law and legal practices that provide possibilities for, but at the same time limit the protection of victims and survivors of domestic violence in the Caribbean postcolony. This chapter highlights the

multifaceted influence that *Everyday Harm* has exerted, ranging from paving the way for further studies on law and gender-based violence in the region to raising legal practitioners' awareness about the barriers ordinary citizens confront in their efforts to access justice and inspiring judiciary-led research on the experiences of individuals before Trinidad and Tobago courts. The dialogue between Lazarus-Black's work and Biholar's research and teaching illustrates that bringing sociolegal findings (back) into legal research and practice not only feeds into a critical and practice-oriented approach to the study of formal law and legal doctrine, but also enables an authentic and realistic account of what formal law, in fact, can and cannot accomplish. Biholar contextualises past and current reform efforts in the field of domestic violence legislation within the larger history of postcolonial nation-building, the formation of a postcolonial legal identity, and aspirations to postcolonial modernity, thus bringing to the fore the ambivalent ways in which formal law operates in the Caribbean postcolony.

In Chapter 5, Moritz Baumgärtel turns our attention to the realm of an international court and migrant rights in Europe, focussing on **Marie-Bénédicte Dembour's *When Humans Become Migrants*** (2015). In this leading work, disputing is no longer ethnographically explored from the perspective of litigants, but through a historical-anthropological appraisal of the migration case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Dembour empirically uncovers the Court's prioritisation of nation-states' sovereign right to immigration and border control over human rights – what she calls the 'Strasbourg reversal'. In his analysis, Baumgärtel brings to the fore the essence of the book, namely a fine-grained, anthropologically informed reading of the ECtHR's case law (which derives further analytical purchase from a counterpoint-reading of the case law of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights) that goes beyond a doctrinal analysis and allows for a critical appraisal of the ECtHR. Baumgärtel shows that, despite being relatively recent, *When Humans Become Migrants* has already left its mark. Not only has it increased and substantiated the scepticism of legal and sociolegal scholars towards the work of human rights institutions in the area of migration, but it has also demonstrated the added value of contextualising human rights judgments and adopting an anthropologically informed approach – which is at the same time holistic and attentive to detail – to the study of (the ECtHR) case law. In line with recent calls to take law more seriously, therefore, *When Humans Become Migrants* involves a doctrinal analysis, and importantly demonstrates that this can be done in a context-sensitive and critical way. Such a critical, anthropologically informed reading of case law can complement critical anthropological studies of migration governance, which, much like anthropological studies of disputing, frequently tend to focus on the perspective of migrants (and their interactions with street-level bureaucrats or judges), analysing their situated practices and strategies in response to formal law and executive discretion (Tuckett, 2018; Eule et al., 2019; Gill and Good, 2019). Through this chapter, therefore, two research strands – migration studies and disputing

studies – are brought together, thus setting into motion an interplay of two perspectives, namely, through the eyes of the litigants and from the formal law perspective of the Court.

From courts, the volume's attention then shifts to constitutions, statutory laws, and the complex ways in which they at the same time regulate and co-constitute social realities, thus contributing to the (re)production or transformation of social inequalities over time. Once again, the authors of the chapters have chosen 'leading works' that explore formal, written law in quite different settings and from distinct angles.

In Chapter 6, Anne Griffiths takes up **Carol Stack's** findings in ***All Our Kin*** (1974) – a classic of US urban anthropology based on the ethnographic study of kinship practices in marginalised Black communities – and highlights how the interpretation and application of (US) welfare laws shape kinship practices and norms in such a way as to (re)produce structural inequalities. Apart from forcefully contesting the predominant depiction of poor Black families as deviant and dysfunctional, *All Our Kin* – so Griffiths argues – was methodologically innovative in the way it engaged with the everyday realities of these families and demonstrated how they were shaped and conditioned by a powerful blend of scientific study, policy, and law. Going beyond a narrow focus on disputing, Griffiths places Stack's study in the context of other contemporaneous works in what has been called a US 'legal anthropology at home' (Conley and O'Barr, 1993). As Griffiths' own teaching and research experience in family law testifies, *All Our Kin* opened up new ways of comprehending family relationships. Stack's attention to individuals' perceptions of themselves and their relationship to law provides a useful lens through which to understand how legislation moulds to social realities, on the one hand, and to assess ongoing legal attempts to recognise diversity in family life (for instance, in relation to the rights of intersex and transgender people), on the other hand. Griffiths' reading of Stack supports the claim that estrangement from one's own set of normative assumptions and immersion in an unfamiliar value system is a necessary precondition for better understanding the workings of normativity (be it in kinship practices, statutory welfare laws, or the mobilisation of rights in family courts). Griffiths' own career is an excellent illustration that this estrangement can also be realised by reading anthropological works that can equip a scholar such as herself, originally trained in law, with the necessary curiosity and sensibilities to become an ethnographer. Not only producing ethnographies of customary law in Botswana, but also turning the ethnographic gaze on the formal legal systems in which she was trained and in which she teaches, Griffiths has, over the years, developed a keen eye for the reproduction of social inequalities in both contexts.

Equally concerned with the reproduction of social inequalities, Sandhya Fuchs' Chapter 7 on **Kalpana Kannabiran's** ***Tools of Justice: Non-discrimination and the Indian Constitution*** (2012) in many ways takes the opposite path but reaches similar conclusions. Coming from an anthropological background, Fuchs writes about the work of a legal scholar who engaged

in a sociolegal study of formal law, in this case, specific provisions of the Indian Constitution. Kannabiran's nuanced analysis of discrimination powerfully foregrounds how legal texts can engender imaginaries, practices, and revolutionary politics, and depicts the Indian Constitution as a site of resistance against hegemonic power structures. Drawing on *Tools of Justice* as well as her own experience, Fuchs illustrates that, even though it does not address how marginalised communities in India themselves relate to and experience the Constitution, *Tools of Justice* can still serve as a guide in the analysis of ethnographic material concerning the everyday lives of these communities. As Fuchs points out, *Tools of Justice* has become not only a central scholarly work for anthropologists and sociolegal scholars seeking to reflect on the ability of formal legal systems to address everyday social practices of discrimination, but is in itself an artefact of, as well as a catalyst in, the fight against discrimination.

The following two chapters explore yet another realm of formal law, namely the legal principles, doctrines, and techniques that are part of legal education, practice, and scholarship. They engage with legal techniques and doctrines in two distinct domestic settings: US legal education and German administrative law. The authors of these chapters have chosen to write about 'leading works' that come out of their own national academic cultures and focus on formal law 'at home'. Along a centre–periphery continuum of 'law and anthropology' knowledge production, they can be placed within an overall Anglo-European-centred perspective. However, read together, they illustrate how distinct communities of legal practice and legal interpretation come into being, and how these formative processes can be traced with the tools of anthropology.

In Chapter 8, Riaz Tejani showcases **Elizabeth Mertz's *Language of Law School – Learning to Think Like a Lawyer*** (2007) as a powerful example of how an anthropologist (also trained as a lawyer) can shed light on legal thinking-in-the-making in US law schools. He retraces how Mertz employed a methodologically innovative and multi-sited research design encompassing classroom observation, teamwork, comparison, and both qualitative and quantitative analyses of speech patterns in teaching, and was thus able to show empirically how law school students are socialised into a specific style of reasoning and that minority students are disadvantaged in this socialising process. Tejani highlights Mertz's ability to translate her findings across disciplinary boundaries in a particular style of writing. But perhaps most importantly, he directs our attention to the book's impact on law school reforms and on a new(er) generation of often dually trained 'law and anthropology' scholars, who not only follow Mertz in making legal doctrine a subject of anthropological enquiry, but also take her insights to heart in their teaching.

Larissa Vetters (Chapter 9) then draws our attention to another work that was published around the same time as Mertz's *The Language of Law School*, but at first glance could not be more different. Authored by the German public law scholar and later constitutional court judge **Susanne Baer**, ***Der Bürger im Verwaltungsrecht. Subjektkonstruktionen durch Leitbilder vom***

Staat (2006)[7] critically dissects the doctrinal figure of 'the citizen' in German administrative law through an analysis of textual legal sources, primarily with an audience of German public and administrative law scholars in mind. In her reading of Baer's seminal work, Vetters highlights the innovative elements of such a critical doctrinal study when read in conjunction with recent debates in the anthropology of law, bureaucracy, and the state. She shows how, in an academic context where there is institutionally very little actual dialogue between doctrinal public law scholars and sociolegal (much less ethnographically engaged) researchers, an anthropological reading of a study such as *The Citizen in Administrative Law* can be a game changer for 'law and anthropology' researchers who strive to bring 'state law' back into the picture. Vetters thus takes the opposite (and less often taken) but complementary path, foregrounding the many valuable insights that a doctrinal legal work can offer to anthropological audiences and debates on law, bureaucracy, and the state within anthropology.

The final two chapters close the circle and return to some of the perennial questions accompanying the conceptualisation of law, addressing them from within formal law and legal scholarship. Chapters 10 and 11 give space to two leading works, one concerned with travelling norms and principles, and the other with the recognition of foreign law and, more generally, 'alterity' in private international law. Written by legal scholars who mobilise anthropological works, concepts, and tools in different ways, these chapters highlight the sociocultural embeddedness of legal concepts and practices vis-à-vis the perceived universality of human rights and (Western) legal principles.

In Chapter 10, Nola Cammu introduces a classic of kinship anthropology, **Signe Howell's *The Kinning of Foreigners: Transnational Adoption in a Global Perspective*** (2006), written in the early 2000s when transnational adoption was a widespread practice in many European countries. This work sheds light on the flows of exchange of (adopted) children who travel from the Global South to the Global North and legal principles (including the best interests of the child), ideas, and values about parenthood and kinship, which tend to travel in the opposite direction. Cammu shows that, apart from bringing a unique contribution to the anthropological field of 'new kinship studies' (mostly focusing on assisted reproduction), *The Kinning of Foreigners* has impacted legal thinking by documenting and explaining how legality and kinship interplay. This chapter also shows the importance of looking at the principle of the best interests of the child through an anthropological lens that is sceptical of universalist claims, and highlights how Howell's findings may refresh, unblock, and otherwise contribute to ongoing debates concerning other forms of cross-border *kinning* practices, such as transnational surrogacy. Through this chapter, we experience how principles of formal law are filled in

7 Hereafter translated as *The Citizen in Administrative Law: Constructing Subjects Through Guiding Images of the State*.

with ideologically imbued Western cultural meanings that tend to disregard and even erase different cultural perspectives and actual social realities.

Further problematising the erasure of multiple cultural perspectives on normativity in formal law, in Chapter 11, Sandrine Brachotte takes us to the realm of private international law, focusing in particular on its methods and techniques for dealing with 'the foreign'. In her analysis of ***Discours sur les méthodes du droit international privé (des formes juridiques de l'inter-altérité)*** (2019)[8] by the French legal scholar **Horatia Muir Watt**, Brachotte takes critical anthropological debates that view 'othering' as expressions of prejudice and marginalisation, and places them in conversation with Muir Watt's understanding of 'alterity', which is grounded in a fluid, hybrid, and omnipresent definition of 'culture' and is potentially capable of blurring the boundaries between 'us' and 'other'. This chapter therefore foregrounds the substantive richness as well as the political implications of private international law – generally perceived as a highly technical and dry field of law – and its potential suitability for dealing with cultural diversity in contemporary Western societies by acknowledging the existence of 'the foreign' and including it in legal reasoning. Heeding the call by Michaels and Riles (2022: 860) to treat law as technique, this chapter complexifies our understanding of formal law 'as a set of knowledge tools – techniques legal experts use to think and work with'. It invites us to 'thicken' our understanding of formal law, demonstrating that a doctrinal analysis of formal law *per se* may tell us a great deal about how rules and techniques for the recognition of other normativities are constructed from within state-centric legal systems. By highlighting the existence of a plurality of private international law methods (more or less open to recognising 'alterity'), this chapter encourages anthropologists to turn these methods and the communities in which they are practised into objects of renewed anthropological enquiry.

By bringing this combination of leading works together, this volume sheds light on a variety of engagements and encounters with formal law (state and international) in diverse social settings, while at the same time unsettling and expanding notions of law that are often taken for granted in classic legal scholarship. Taken as a whole, the volume invites legal scholars to reflect on their own acting and researching as further channels through which legal findings are produced, and to broaden their analytical horizons regarding the workings of the law in contextual, processual, and cultural terms. To anthropologists interested in the study of contemporary normative orders, the volume issues an invitation to approach a wide range of legal knowledge formations and professional practices as suitable fields for ethnographic enquiry. In such situated enquiries, exercises of self-reflection and critical distancing are not separated

8 Hereafter translated as *Discourse on the Methods of Private International Law (Legal Forms of Inter-alterity)*.

from the field encounter, but become part and parcel of producing knowledge and critique grounded in this encounter.

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