

**Foblets, Marie-Claire, Mark Goodale, Maria Sapignoli, and Olaf Zenker: The Oxford Handbook of Law and Anthropology.**

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The *Oxford Handbook of Law and Anthropology* is a collection of essays written jointly by anthropologists and legal scholars. The almost fifty chapters in the book explore diverse themes at the intersection of anthropological and legal theory and practice, ranging from the entanglements of law, culture, and politics on a global scale to questions of legal space, power, and technology.

The *Oxford Handbook of Law and Anthropology* is one of the few academic texts published in recent years that could be described as a *magnum opus* in both in its scope and its intellectual aims. The book represents an ongoing interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary conversation and collaboration between legal scholars and anthropologists, rather than merely a finished product, and sets out priorities for the future of legal and anthropological research. In their introduction to the volume, the editors outline how the handbook came to be. To further the production of critical scholarship in law and anthropology, they adopted what they call an experimental, ‘fourfold’ approach (p. 2). They began by selecting approximately equal numbers of legal scholars and anthropologists, who were encouraged to co-author chapters where possible. Contributors then reviewed each other’s chapter drafts. Finally, the editors organized a conference during which all authors were given the opportunity to present and discuss their chapters in an interdisciplinary setting.

The complex discussions, reflections and (dis-) agreements fostered throughout this process are reflected in the structure and content of the volume, which successfully highlights the vast range of evolving themes, questions, and theories at the intersection of legal and anthropological research, while also offering an alternative, cross-disciplinary reading of law and anthropology as a global arena of systematic research. Inspired by the interdisciplinary research programme of the Max Planck Institute in Halle, Germany, the book systematically demonstrates that “law” and “anthropology” are often articulated in different historical and cultural contexts in different ways’ (p. 5).

The book is structured into five thematic parts. The first part of the volume, which contains fourteen chapters, introduces the history and scope of interdisciplinary work in law and anthropology. However, the editors explicitly point out that these chapters do not aim to offer a historical reconstruction of law and anthropology scholarship in a genealogical sense but mean to ‘present a collective overview of the field that is thoroughly decentred and heterodox’ (p. 4). The initial chapters therefore marry discussions about the cultural and historical variety of legal practice with reflections on the law’s complicity in processes of empire creation and the production of global structural inequalities. One example is Sindiso Mnisi Weeks’s chapter concerning the political and social pitfalls of transformative constitutionalism in South Africa (Chapter 3). Drawing on anthropological theories of legal culture, Weeks argues that the goal of the South African constitution to transform a deeply unequal society is partially undermined

by legal culture in practice, by judicial acts that engender continuity with the past (p. 57). Weeks's chapter shows how ingrained, everyday cultural practices can counteract legal agendas in invisible ways and may unintentionally reproduce historical systems of inequality. Thus, the chapter highlights the importance of studying legal and cultural processes in tandem and of analysing their impact in the context of local, historical processes. Other chapters in this section examine topics like the relationship between law and indigeneity in Latin America (Gil, Chapter 8) and legal uses of anthropology in twentieth-century France (Audren and Guerlain, Chapter 12)

Part II of the book builds on these insights by identifying recurring themes in legal and anthropological research. The editors define 'recurring themes' as topics that have both been formative in the field and are likely to endure as analytical guideposts in the future. The ten chapters in this section of the volume comprise themes such as the role of language in law (Mertz, Chapter 15), legal relations of space and time (Griffiths, Chapter 16), and rights and social inclusion (Goodale, Chapter 23). The editors also draw attention to the analytical overlaps between the various themes. For example, they point out that at the heart of recurring themes in law and anthropology lies the insight that legal forms 'impose limits to the ways in which the law can be mobilized for the social good' (p. 5). According to one contributor, Thomas Duve, one of the most analytically potent aspects of the chapters in this section lies in their ability to showcase how different legal cultures and traditions 'are used to construct and express individual and social identities' (p. 352).

The third, central part of the book, which comprises six chapters, then turns a critical lens on to the disciplinary relationship between law and anthropology itself by interrogating the role anthropologists can practically play in legal settings. The authors in this section explore the possibilities and limits of using ethnographic data in support of legal arguments in the courtroom and beyond, and consider the role anthropological experts can and should play in legal settings. Many of the chapters in this section focus on the role of anthropologists in different court settings, ranging from international hearings (Jakubowski, Chapter 26; Wilson, Chapter 28) to domestic court disputes (Hanschel and Steyn, Chapter 30). These chapters explore if and how anthropological knowledge can challenge legal world-views and to what effect judicial actors hear and accept arguments involving culturally specific motivations in court proceedings (Renteln, Chapter 25). Other chapters focus on the role of anthropologists in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). Drawing on anthropological studies of ADR processes in a variety of cultural settings, Faris Elias Nasrallah (Chapter 27) suggests that there may be 'shared tendencies among states, societies, organizations, and individuals alike to seek to resolve disputes on their own terms and in forums that derive their authority from shared normative understandings' (p. 494) that are not necessarily derived from legal codes. This tendency, Nasrallah argues, forces us to seriously rethink the boundaries between law and anthropology, and between the institutional and the cultural.

The nine chapters in the fourth and penultimate part of the book then explore what the editors consider to be one of the main insights of the volume, namely that

'law broadly defined has its limits as a mechanism for social change, economic redistribution, and the provision of justice' (p. 9). However, the realization that the law has limits should not lead to a condemnation of legal engagements writ large, but rather be a starting point for improved understanding of when, and under what conditions, law can deliver justice, and what types of law apply to what contexts. In her discussion of law and humanitarian intervention, Erica Bornstein explains that humanitarian intervention raises complex controversies about legal scale and jurisdiction on the transnational and local levels (Chapter 34). However, she also argues that sometimes local interventions can pave the way to national and translational legal reform down the line. Bornstein concludes that these complexities highlight the need to further investigate anthropologically how the limits of law can be pushed and transformed by local voices. These insights also resonate with other chapters in the section. While Rachel Sieder examines how Mayan indigenous rights activists in Guatemala have rejected mainstream legal interpretations and infused legal practice with their own world views and values to mobilize law to their advantage (Chapter 38), Sarah Levin describes how Chinese human-rights defenders have formulated innovative forms of rights-based advocacy (Chapter 39).

While the first four parts of the Handbook focused on the evolution and ongoing complexities of legal and anthropological research, the final ten chapters of the volume look firmly towards the future by foreshadowing some of the most pertinent questions and theoretical pathways in the field of law and anthropology. Here some authors analyse, as Dann and Eckert state in Chapter 44, the 'increasing deterritorialization' of law (p. 808). They propose that scholars explore how social norms may be created in a world that is moving increasingly beyond established models of national sovereignty and corresponding state laws. Meanwhile, others charter new ways of understanding legal processes through the lens of embodied and affective interactions (Klarke, Chapter 48). What ties the final ten chapters together is a common concern with a decline of the Westphalian nation-state model and an acute awareness that future research in law and anthropology must pay close attention to how technological advances shape social and normative orders.

The book concludes with a nuanced reflection on the role of socio-legal researchers themselves. The editors encourage the reader to think about law as a form of 'differentially embodied presence [that is] positioned in particular moments and long durées' (p. 12). This presence is a prism through which new perspectives on the interaction between society, culture and anthropology can be gained, but also one which itself transforms the social and legal space.

In many ways, the *Oxford Handbook of Law and Anthropology* is an intellectual gift that keeps on giving. For researchers in law and anthropology, and sociolegal studies more widely, it can act as a reference volume, a thematic guide to current research, and/or a theoretical sounding board. The vast scope of the volume turns it into a sort of inspirational treasure chest, which researchers can rummage through to find analytical touchstones for their own analyses.

While the range and multiplicity of contributions in the volume create a unique opportunity for the nuanced and multi-perspectival analysis of current issues in the field of anthropology and law, the sheer quantity of chapters can sometimes feel a little overwhelming for a reader. Moreover, despite the great amount of theoretical and methodological material covered in the volume, some pressing issues in law and anthropological scholarship could have been explored more comprehensively. For example, a more extensive analysis of the relationship between legal evidence and evolving digital technologies and digital capitalism could have strengthened the volume even further. Some chapters in the volume discuss how new techno-scientific regimes have shaped legal truth production (Turner and Wiber, Chapter 41). However, what remains underexplored is how algorithms and social media platforms have introduced new private legal players into transnational legal processes that pose new challenges for regulation (Udupa 2021), while also giving rise to new modes of vernacular justice (Cearns and Fuchs forthcoming).

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that, as an intellectual project, as well as a collaborative effort across disciplines, *The Oxford Handbook of Law and Anthropology* represents a rare feat that has already become part of the canon of foundational scholarship in law and anthropology.

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## References

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- Udupa, Sahana, Gagliardone Iginio, and Peter Hervik eds. 2021. *Digital Hate: The Global Conjuncture of Extreme Speech*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.

**Fuchs, Sandhya: *Fragile Hope: Seeking Justice for Hate Crimes in India*.**  
358 pp. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024. ISBN 978-1-50-363834-1

*“The dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope...”*  
Paulo Freire, 2005:91.

The term ‘hate crime’ refers to acts of violence committed against historically oppressed groups that are intended to reinforce their subordination. One such group is India’s Dalits (formerly untouchables or outcastes), which historically have been