

BOOK REVIEW

THE BEST OF ANTHROPOLOGY OF LAW (PART 2)

Martha Mundy (ed.), *Law and Anthropology*. International Library of Essays in law and Legal Theory (2nd series). Aldershot: Ashgate, Dartmouth. 2002. 703 pp.

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The first volume of *Law and Anthropology* (Sack and Aleck 1992) quickly established itself as a major text in the field. For those who might be unfamiliar with the work, it should be said that it consisted of reprints of some of the most influential and original contributions to the field of the anthropology of law.

Because of the success of the entire initial series of which it was a part (The International Library of Essays in Law and Legal Theory), but also because of the rapid growth of theoretically interesting scholarly work in law, Dartmouth recently released a whole new second series. Among these is also a second volume of *Law and Anthropology*, edited this time by Martha Mundy of the London School of Economics and Political Science (UK).

Mundy took the earlier volume as the background to and starting point for her selection for the recent volume. As such, the new collection's focus is mainly on materials and themes central to debates in the 1990s.

The collection brings together twenty-six influential essays, subdivided into five main thematic sections, being (1) 'Law and anthropology', (2) 'Theoretical perspectives of legal anthropology in the 1990s', (3) 'Person and identity: the political subject of state and nation', (4) 'Property: the constitution of owners and objects owned', and (5) 'State and law under colonial rule'. The essays are preceded by an introductory essay by the editor and Tobias Kelly, providing a bird's eye view of both the tenor of the articles and of the mutual relationships between them.

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On an evaluative note, the collection has but a few (relatively minor) shortcomings. The most important of these are of a structural nature. The volume's most obvious drawback in this regard is the fact it is not exactly made for or adapted to quick referencing. Although a name index is included, a thematic one is still lacking just as in the first volume. The volume also lacks any internal cross-referencing other than the few associative links that are made in the introductory essay. It would also have been interesting had the editor seen fit to provide more (inter)related references to the essays (especially those which were published *after* the appearance of the essays themselves, those having appeared prior being of course generally included in the references already), both in order to better situate the articles and to facilitate further research.

Further with regard to content, one might accuse the editors of a certain degree of 'ethnocentrism'. Not only are all of the essays in English – which perhaps from a commercial viewpoint is only logical – but the Anglo-American predominance in authorship is striking as well. On my count all but five of the essays are by Anglo-American writers, or at least authors connected to universities in either the US or the UK. To some extent this has to do simply with the fact that especially the North American contribution to the anthropology of law is more sizable than any other. This is also pointed to by Mundy and Kelly who state that “the material assembled in this volume reflects the hegemony of American production and publication” (p. *xvi*). It would appear doubtful however whether this really accounts for the extreme 'skew' that characterizes the collection. At least partially this will have resulted from lack of information, most likely caused by linguistic barriers of access.

These however are just about the only conceivable points of criticism with regard to the volume, and they are outweighed by far by its many merits. The most basic of course is that the work brings together a large number of important contributions to the anthropology of law, access to many of which would otherwise be difficult.

However, the merits of the volume go beyond merely being a handy compilation of some of the best that the anglophone anthropology of law has to offer. This is mainly due to Mundy's editorial selection which, despite its slightly ethnocentric nature noted above, offers a clear vision of both the diversity and the plurality of the discipline, as well as providing a better understanding of their mutual dynamics and coherence. This may run counter to one's first impression of the volume, for one of the most striking characteristics of the collection is perhaps the apparent lack of diversity and balance

regarding the choice of themes and the relative weight assigned to them. While the first, second and final parts, as listed above, are all very modest in size, the Parts IV and V, on ‘person and identity’ and ‘property’, jointly take up some sixty percent of the volume. In terms of number of articles the apparent ‘disequilibrium’ is even more pronounced, with these parts comprised of 17 out of the 26 essays! However, closer investigation reveals both of the last two themes to be significantly more internally diverse and heterogeneous than one might suspect on the basis of the categorization alone. The editors have managed in the two parts to include or at least touch upon most of the topics that have occupied scholars in the field of the anthropology of law in the last one or two decades. Given the confines of a single volume, it is difficult to see how one could do more justice to the field of anthropology of law while maintaining the degree of theoretical coherence that Mundy has managed to attain in her selection.

I have no doubt that the work – like its predecessor – is nothing less than invaluable for any scholar in the field of the anthropology of law and is set to become a major text in the field.

Reference

Sack, Peter and Jonathan Aleck (eds.)
1992 *Law and Anthropology*. International Library of Essays in Law and Legal Theory. Legal Cultures, No. 3. Aldershot: Dartmouth.