
Book Reviews

Jinee Lokaneeta, Editor

Law and Societies in Global Contexts: Contemporary Approaches. By Eve Darian-Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 428 pp. \$36.99 paperback.

Reviewed by Jothie Rajah, American Bar Foundation

Eve Darian-Smith's core message is straightforward and urgent: the issues that matter unfold on a scale that is global, yet we live life on a scale that is local, and continue to think and teach sociolegal studies on a scale that is national. If law is to find meaningful ways to address pressing concerns such as food security, people smuggling, climate change, and terrorism, then sociolegal scholarship must adopt a global perspective: a perspective that "destabilizes our modern and linear understanding of what law is, where law appears, and how law works . . . recognizing that domestic law as it plays out within states is, and always has been, constitutively linked to issues of global economic, political, and cultural power" (378). The complexities, dynamism, and pluralism of a global sociolegal perspective becomes the axis around which this book simultaneously builds on the sociolegal tradition of interrogating the hegemonic while repairing the analytic inadequacy of state-centric law.

Importantly, the book maps a way forward by first reviewing and assessing sociolegal studies in terms of its histories, politics, contexts, and content. This is no mean feat given the breadth of the field, and the abundance of the literature embraced by its interdisciplinarity. As part of this review, Darian-Smith highlights the provincialism of conventional introductory sociolegal texts in the United States: "They typically present U.S. law as if it is the only legal system operating in the world, and, moreover, one that does so in a geopolitical silo" (5). Dismantling sociolegal provincialism is one of the many significant contributions of this book.

Just as *Laws and Societies in Global Contexts* moves away from state-centric law to illuminate sites of legalities below and above the level of the state, the book abandons "predictable topics such as social control, lawmaking, legal administration, courts and

juries, dispute resolution, capital punishment, crime, the legal profession” (5) in favor of themes and topics that enable fresh ways of seeing. These are: the production of legal knowledge (Chapter Three), reimagining legal geographies (Chapter Four), securing peoples (Chapter Five), and re-racializing the world (Chapter Six). The topics of these chapters are framed by an early insistence that analysis with a global sociolegal perspective should be foregrounded by attention to “two persistent and interlocking themes” (39) that together “provide the ultimate challenge for long-term peace and human security in the twenty-first century” (39). These are, first, law as “a dynamic artifact of cultural engagement” (39), and second, “assemblages . . . of overlapping legal systems that embody a diverse range of cultural values, norms, and meanings” (39). Among the ways in which Darian-Smith engages the tensions and complexities of these two themes is a consideration of legal pluralism, illustrated with examples of popular, political, and legal institutional responses to Shari’a law, and the laws of indigenous peoples, in the industrialized “West.”

In every instance, Darian-Smith’s argument about analytic approaches through which a global sociolegal perspective might be actualized is framed by her own substantive and clear-sighted commentary, augmented by lists of suggested readings that demonstrate the potency of these new ways of thinking and seeing, and then illuminated by consciously global, quietly revolutionary, sociolegal scholarship produced from 2001 onwards. For example, instead of framing law and society through the jurisdictional and territorial space of “nation-state,” Darian-Smith urges us to think in terms of “communities” and “societies”; illustrating her point about the need to *see differently* in terms of the scales, levels, territories, and spaces in which legalities occur and relate to each other with a deftly edited excerpt from Saskia Sassen’s 2008 article, “Neither Global nor National.”

By providing a new constellation of topics, yet consistently orbiting these topics around the axis of a global sociolegal perspective, the book brings coherence and clarity to otherwise overwhelming and unwieldy concerns. For example, on the production of legal knowledge, Darian-Smith supplies this compass, “three central questions that should always be asked are (1) whose legal knowledge is in play; (2) what cultural biases does such knowledge embody and convey; and (3) what alternative or additional forms of legal knowledge and consciousness may be present that up to now, given the historical dominance of a Euro-American formal understanding of law, have been silenced, ignored, or deemed irrelevant” (98). As these orienting questions demonstrate, the book consistently revitalizes sociolegal scholarship’s counter-hegemonic pillar,

while redirecting attention to the complexities of our contemporary, globalized world. Darian-Smith's commentary, the reading lists, and the excerpted material, are all profoundly grounded in material reality, and the urgent need for law to address this material reality.

For all these reasons, *Laws and Societies in Global Contexts* is a book that will be invaluable to many readers. It has the accessibility and compactness of an introductory text, but it also supplies scholars who are established in the field with a valuable compendium of emerging yet influential literature that has found a way to come to grips with the complexities and pluralism of the global perspective needed to address global issues. This book is a finely honed toolkit equipping students, researchers, and teachers to meet Darian-Smith's impassioned call to keep law relevant; showing us how to do so through the lens of a global sociolegal perspective. Thus, while it is customary for a review to identify a weakness, and offer a corrective, and I have been conscientious in attempting to do so, its weaknesses, if any, elude me.

Reference

Sassen, Saskia (2008) "Neither Global Nor National: Novel Assemblages of Territory, Authority and Rights," 1 *Ethics & Global Politics* 61–79.

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Disposable Heroes: The Betrayal of African American Veterans. By Benjamin Fleury-Steiner. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012. 200 pp. \$36.00.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Brown, Department of Criminal Justice Studies, San Francisco State University

It is not often that one reads an academic book and is transported into another world, where the words of research subjects dominate, and the stories are left bare to expose the raw, entangled webs that make up people's lives. Benjamin Fleury-Steiner's *Disposable Heroes* accomplishes this task in an eminently readable and engaging book that details how racism and poverty shape the lives of African-American veterans. Fleury-Steiner's decision to excerpt at length from interview transcripts, while eschewing the heavy hand of