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**ONLINE BOOK REVIEW**

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**Tobias Kelly***University of Edinburgh****Laws and Societies in Global Contexts: Contemporary Approaches***

Eve Darian-Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

*Law and Societies in Global Context* is an excellent introduction to qualitative Law and Society scholarship. The book, though, is not intended to be a summary of new directions (although it does that too). Rather, Darian-Smith states that her aim is to promote a "rethinking of some of the basic assumptions about what constitutes law in a global world" (p. 6). For Darian-Smith, this involves a move away from a focus on the nation-state, and a turn towards exploring the complexity of legal processes that operate above, below, and through the state at multiple different scales. She wants scholars to pay attention to the supranational, transnational, international, and global forms of legal and extra-legal order, as much as to the specifically localized legal processes, and then to take stock of the interactions, contradictions, potentials, and inequalities produced. She therefore hopes to encourage a more expansive global perspective. In particular, Darian-Smith wants to challenge state-centered interpretations of law, which she sees as dominating much of the mainstream Law and Society research. In doing so, she calls for researchers to pay attention to new (or even old) forms of legality that do not map neatly onto state based forms of jurisdiction and notions of citizenship.

Darian-Smith is an advocate of an approach that foregrounds legal pluralism (or what she calls "radical legal pluralism" (p. 4). This is pluralism that is everywhere. Law, society, and context are turned into laws, societies, and contexts. More broadly, the approach of the book can be described as constructivist, and is heavily informed by post-colonial theory, seeking to challenge the privileging of western legal epistemologies. There is also a concomitant political project that underpins the work, one that aims to play a part in imagining "alternative understandings of law, justice, or common good beyond that articulated by a political and economic elite" (p. 20). For Darian-Smith, it is only by paying attention to the multiple forms of legal order and disorder that shape people's lives that scholars can begin to recover any emancipatory residue that may be found in legal processes.

Darian-Smith is addressing a wider audience of Law and Society scholars, not only legal anthropologists. As such, it is driven by an anxiety about what she sees as the parochialism of American and European Law and Society

scholarship. She is not saying that there is no academic work that challenges such parochialism, but simply that it has had a limited impact within mainstream Law and Society circles. Many of the concerns of the book, such as the critique of supposedly western epistemologies or the desire to get away from the state, will be familiar to anthropologists. However, there is much for anthropologists to learn from the book too. The broader intended audience of Law and Society scholarship means that the book draws on a wider range of authors than is often the case in anthropology books. There are some interesting surprises, and fresh approaches throughout. In this sense Darian-Smith also challenges anthropological parochialism.

The book consists of two broadly introductory chapters on the challenges of Law and Society research, followed by chapters on the forms of legal knowledge, law and space, human rights, and race. The individual chapters are used to flesh out the general argument about the need for a global approach to legal processes, as well as to examine the inequalities produced by current formal legal arrangements. The end of each chapter contains a selection of recommended readings, as well as leading selected texts. These texts are well chosen, providing some of classic essays, but also some lesser known, but no less important and original pieces. The book therefore acts as both a programmatic and provocative introduction and as a reader.

Taken together the book serves as an excellent introductory text, and I can see many undergraduate and postgraduate courses being built around it, both for social scientists and lawyers. The particular strength of the book is that it promises to push the reader to think more carefully about where researchers locate the law, and how they study it. Darian-Smith has written more than an introductory text though, as there is a clear and strong argument running through the pages, and it will be of interest to more senior scholars as well.