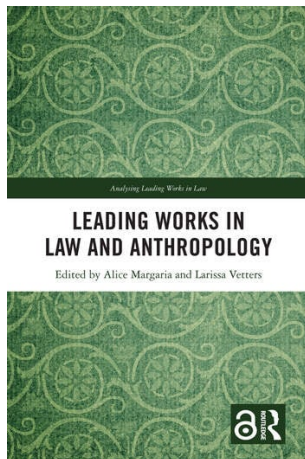




Review of *Leading Works in Law and Anthropology*.
Alice Margaria, Larissa Vetter. Routledge, 2025.

Maidier Zilbeti¹



Edited by Alice Margaria and Larissa Vetter, *Leading Works in Law and Anthropology* is structured around a shared commitment to exploring law as a lived practice and as a process of subjectivation. If we consider the editors' scholar-trajectories, Margaria's work builds bridges between legal theory and socio-legal research, while Vetter's research draws on anthropological approaches to legality and governance. Together, the editors create a dialogical space in which law and anthropology are not merely juxtaposed but critically interwoven. The interdisciplinary space they delineate becomes indispensable for rethinking both anthropology and law in light of some of today's most pressing global challenges.

I was invited to review this volume within the *Analysing Leading Works in Law* series, a collection distinguished both by its intellectual freshness and by a strong commitment to presenting—within their proper contexts—key works that have made decisive contributions to the shaping of the field of law and anthropology. When I received the invitation, I was not familiar with the *Analysing Leading Works in Law* series as an editorial project. My disposition, therefore, was shaped less by prior curiosity than by expectation: an openness to learning marked less by anticipation than by a willingness to be guided along a journey composed of multiple stages—different authors, diverse sociocultural contexts, multiple languages, heterogeneous legal systems, and varied sites of anthropological research: universities, social services offices, national courts, international courts, and international agencies.

Before embarking on this journey, it is essential to situate the context in which *Leading Works in Law and Anthropology* reaches us. We live immersed in overlapping regimes of

¹ Maidier Zilbeti. Department of Philosophy of Values and Social Anthropology, University of the Basque Country. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9293-0454> email: maidier.zilbeti@ehu.eus



information and sensory acceleration. Knowledge circulates simultaneously through multiple channels, often fragmenting attention and leaving little room for critical and relational analysis. Gaining uninterrupted access to spaces of sustained information and deep intellectual formation has become increasingly difficult. These interruptions are often dismissed as noise, undesirable, disruptive, something to be filtered out.

Within this adverse landscape, to which we all contribute daily through accelerated rhythms of production (including academic production) and consumption (including academic consumption), the experience of reading the volume—across its various chapters—was unexpectedly fluid, sustained by a certain tension that facilitated connections from one chapter to the next. For this reason, I wish to acknowledge and thank the editors for the extraordinary work of curation and editing that underpins the book, and the contributors for their role in bringing to light, through the review of key works, the analytical potential of legal anthropology.

All too often—and more frequently than we might care to admit—when confronted with a collective volume, our reading becomes selective. We choose chapters not only on the basis of intellectual affinity but also under the pressure of urgency: the search for something immediately usable, applicable to an ongoing project, a requested article, or an imminent conference lecture. I would caution readers against approaching this volume through such a logic. Once a dialogue with the book is established, a fragmentary reading is far from the being best option.

The compilation displays several key features that help to connect the distinct yet central characteristics of the fields of anthropology and law, while simultaneously reinforcing the interdisciplinary domain.

First, as already suggested, the meaning, richness, and analytical value of legal anthropology emerge cumulatively across the sequence of chapters. The architecture of the volume is not incidental: each contribution builds upon those that precede it.

Second, the volume stands out for its methodological robustness. Across diverse legal and social contexts, the chapters are guided by practices of analytical observation and, in many cases, by fieldwork in which anthropological techniques are employed to generate qualitative data. The plurality of techniques used—direct observation, participant observation, and interviews with a range of actors—reinforces a shared commitment to rigor in anthropological research, particularly in its ethnographic and analytical phases.

Third, the applicability of research is clearly articulated in each chapter. The methodology employed in each work under review, together with its critical analysis, functions here as a bridge toward action. This methodological coherence enables both the transferability and the scalability of the proposals presented, without sacrificing contextual specificity.

Closely related to this last feature is the ethical dimension of the research process. Ethical reflection is made visible not only in the theoretical framing of the issues under study but also in the potential applicability of the results. Beyond the recognition that law and legal frameworks may be discriminatory in their constitution, interpretation, and application, the chapters underscore how the practice of law constitutes processes of subjectivation, with

particular attention to subaltern subjects. Moreover, law and legal systems do not merely regulate behavior; they actively shape moral sensibilities, ethical dispositions, and embodied feelings of justice among those who inhabit and operate within systems of justice.

In conclusion, I would like to pause on the concept of alterity—a concept that functions as a coda in this book, addressed in the final chapter of the volume, but which could equally serve as its point of departure.

Alterity, beyond designating what is strange, different, or distant—whether physically, ethically, or epistemically—also expresses the necessity of entering into a relationship with what is other, since alterity cannot be understood without such a relational engagement. It thus designates a relational, emotional, and embodied encounter, driven by curiosity as a primary motor, aimed at knowing people who share interests, needs, and symbolic systems—including normative systems—different from our own. At the same time, it offers profound feedback about who we are: our ways of being in the world, our affections, our operative ethics, and our sense of justice. Rooted in anthropological thought, alterity is the construct that propels the creation of an entire anthropological discipline, with its diverse theories and methodologies for relating to those who differ from us. In this volume, the analyses of the *Leading Works* of the discipline reveal how alterity is constructed through its multiple expressions and through the performative actions of different actors, while simultaneously proposes more just, more egalitarian, and in no way discriminatory relations—relations of re-cognition of the subaltern—that can have an impact on legal practices at all levels.