



Heeding anthropological mottos in the study of law

Marie-Benedicte Dembour
December, 2020



#1

Webinar
Series
in honour of

**Sally
Engle
Merry**
(1944-2020)





When: 11 December 2020 / 2-3.30 pm CET

Link: <https://zoom.us/j/93210372616...>

ID: 93210372616

Password: 4JzWZ6

Abstract

Even though I have been based in a school of law for thirty years, my scholarly contributions do not come across as legally conventional. This is no doubt due to my doctoral training, which was in social anthropology. This will have given my work an anthropological edge. My contribution to the volume *Research Methods for International Human Rights Law Beyond the Traditional Paradigm* (Gonzalez-Salzberg and Hodson eds, 2020) tries to explain what such an edge entails. Four 'anthropological mottos' are identified: #1 Aim at establishing how the small nitty-gritty stuff of social life connects with the big picture; #2 Pay attention to the gap between theory and practice; #3 Be aware of power relations and their framing and silencing effects; #4 Do not stop at surface level but always dig deeper. Whilst these mottos are not specific to anthropology, it would be hard to meet an anthropologist who does not today abide by them. Once I had formulated them, I could retrospectively see that they had guided my research all along. I had always been aware that my point of departure in research is first and foremost empirical, and that this led me to ponder elements of legal data fellow academic lawyers do not necessarily stop to consider and to delve into issues they would tend not to address. Going further, one could say that what makes my approach distinctively anthropological is that I understand law to be a social field in and of itself (as opposed to a normative construct, even one which lends itself to be studied 'in context').



See you on Zoom!

Here is the full [schedule](#) of the webinar series.

You can also access the webinar videos on [Allegra's YouTube channel](#).