
Forum on the Work of Laura Nader

Laura Nader, *The Life of the Law: Anthropological Projects*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. 262 pages. \$40.00 cloth.

Laura Nader, *Harmony Ideology: Justice and Control in a Zapotec Mountain Village*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990. 343 pages. \$24.95 paper.

Introduction by the Review Essay Editor

Elizabeth Heger Boyle

Laura Nader is a leading scholar in the law and society field. She is an outspoken public critic, and her work has always challenged the power of “legal hegemonies.” Nader believes that dispute resolution systems reflect their societies, with their incumbent economic systems, hierarchical structures, and other institutions. She believes that scholars and policy makers must view law as a part of society rather than as something insulated and isolated from other human institutions.¹

Nader was one of the few women involved in the early years of the Law & Society Association (Garth & Sterling 1998). She joined the anthropology department at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1960. In 1964, she organized the first major conference on law and anthropology, which brought together a number of other key figures from that period. Nader edited and published essays from the 1964 conference and other law and anthropology conferences. She has also authored numerous articles, essays, and books. The latter include *Energy Choices in a Democratic Society* (1980), *Harmony Ideology: Justice and Control in a Zapotec Mountain Village* (1990), *Naked Science: Anthropological Inquiry into Boundaries, Power, and Knowledge* (1996), *Law in Culture and Society* (1997), and *The Life of the Law: Anthropological Projects* (2002).

Eventually, Nader became concerned that LSA members were moving too far from a contextual approach to law; reifying the power and mystery of “autonomous” law instead, and focusing too much on the American legal system. Disappointed by this perceived trend, she informally parted ways with the organization. Although Nader did not remain active in the LSA, her legacy remains. She is the advisor or advisor’s advisor of many anthropologists currently participating in the association. In 1995, LSA awarded her the Kalven Prize for distinguished research on law and society.

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In 2004, the LSA once again recognized the important contributions of Professor Nader. That year marked the fortieth year of LSA's existence, and Elizabeth Mertz organized a special anniversary book panel featuring Nader's work. Carol Greenhouse, Bill Maurer, Mark Goodale, and Jan Hoffman French discussed different periods in Nader's prolific academic history and how they had each been influenced by her. Nader concluded the panel by critiquing what she perceived as the conservatism and ethnocentrism of the LSA and enjoining the audience to be active in thinking critically and working on issues of pressing concern. In the lively discussion that followed the panel, it became clear that many in the packed room shared Nader's fundamental view of law and the world and that many panels at the conference addressed precisely the issues she considered most important. While her perspective is not hegemonic in LSA, it remains perhaps a more important force than she realizes.

Fortunately, a bit of that engaging panel is represented here. Goodale and French were kind enough to write up their comments for publication. Both essays do much more than review Nader's books. In a spirit that Nader herself must appreciate, each essay is also a critique and a call to action.

References

- Garth, Bryant, & Joyce Sterling (1998) "From Legal Realism to Law and Society: Reshaping Law for the Last Stages of the Social Activist State," 32 *Law & Society Rev.* 409.
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