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Global Shadows: Africa In The Neoliberal World Order



Synopsis

Both on the continent and off, Africa is spoken of in terms of crisis: as a place of failure and seemingly insurmountable problems, as a moral challenge to the international community. What, though, is really at stake in discussions about Africa, its problems, and its place in the world? And what should be the response of those scholars who have sought to understand not the Africa portrayed in broad strokes in journalistic accounts and policy papers but rather specific places and social realities within Africa? In *Global Shadows* the renowned anthropologist James Ferguson moves beyond the traditional anthropological focus on local communities to explore more general questions about Africa and its place in the contemporary world. Ferguson develops his argument through a series of provocative essays which open "as he shows they must" into interrogations of globalization, modernity, worldwide inequality, and social justice. He maintains that Africans in a variety of social and geographical locations increasingly seek to make claims of membership within a global community, claims that contest the marginalization that has so far been the principal fruit of globalization for Africa. Ferguson contends that such claims demand new understandings of the global, centered less on transnational flows and images of unfettered connection than on the social relations that selectively constitute global society and on the rights and obligations that characterize it. Ferguson points out that anthropologists and others who have refused the category of Africa as empirically problematic have, in their devotion to particularity, allowed themselves to remain bystanders in the broader conversations about Africa. In *Global Shadows*, he urges fellow scholars into the arena, encouraging them to find a way to speak beyond the academy about Africa's position within an egregiously imbalanced world order.

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Customer Reviews

“Global Shadows is one of the most thoughtful, provocative, intelligent books written about Africa in a very long time. It raises in the most profound possible way the question of what precisely Africa is in the twenty-first century: a place, a predicament, an imaginative object, a discursive trope, a ‘place-in-the-world’ whose economies and social orders, governance and geography, are undergoing bewilderingly complex transformations. James Ferguson challenges us to understand those transformations, this place-in-the-world, in an altogether fresh manner.” —John Comaroff, University of Chicago

“Speaking rationally about Africa is not something that has ever come naturally. This book is a tour de force. James Ferguson shows that a radical critique of the most obtuse and cynical prejudices about Africa can be made without one repeating and perpetuating these prejudices under some other guise.” —Achille Mbembe, author of *On the Postcolony*

“Ferguson’s is a substantial voice for and about contemporary Africa. *Global Shadows* is of general interest to Africanists and includes several essays that can be used productively in the classroom. . . . Together, [the essays] make a statement that, in its collective impact, is even more perceptive than in its unconnected parts.” (Sandra T. Barnes *American Ethnologist*)

“Unlike many essay collections, Ferguson’s adds up to a coherent whole, and is marked by his talent for providing fresh insights into stale or stagnant discussions. . . . Without doubt, and regardless of one’s perspective, *Global Shadows* is a major gift to the discipline. It is a confident, thorough, and thought-provoking book that raises important questions not only about the idea of Africa but also about the future of anthropology.” (Matthew Engelke *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*)

“Ferguson’s latest book is certainly a good read and presents a clear argument about Africa’s engagement with the global system. . . . This is an extremely useful book for anyone interested in understanding the complexities of Africa’s role in a neoliberal world order.” (Rosaleen Duffy, *Modern African Studies*)

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those transformations, this place-in-the-world, in an altogether fresh manner."--John Comaroff,
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After spending a few months researching, working, and living in South Sudan and South Africa for several months I began to cringe when I heard people talk about "Africa" as if it was a unitary place whose population was relatively homogenous where all the countries experienced the same problems and were basically interchangeable. Many area studies specialists have scoffed at the do-gooder perspective of "Africa" that often treats the massive continent as if it was a single country. Ferguson moves past this academic snobbery and engages a cross-section of African locations, problems, and possibilities from the perspective of the "place-in-the-world" or concept of "Africa" as the broader world has tended to see it - and indeed as the West basically created it, first through colonial policies and then through structural adjustment and similar "neoliberal" or economically "neo-colonial" strategies that largely sidelined popular rule on the continent. Starting from the perspective of a historical juncture at which African people were robbed of their democratic voices at the same time as African states began to be blamed for the problems that had been created through failed globalizing economic policies, Ferguson moves through the social, environmental, and political ramifications of Africa's location in the "shadows" of the value-extracting developed world and of the "shadow" markets and practices that are involved in popular perceptions of Africa. While the five-star rating by no means indicates that I agree with all of Ferguson's perspectives or that I bought all of his arguments, it does mean that from my perspective, this work was very thought-provoking and useful and I would highly recommend it to anyone engaged in NGO work, studying Africa, or interested in the international political and economic order's effects on the developing world. An interesting, very readable, and stimulating book.

For those interested in "Africa," development, or neoliberalism, this book is sure to offer new insights. Brilliant.

It completely reshaped my worldview. A critical look at all of the social-political views we take as common sense. It's not just applicable to Africa, but the whole world.

Awesome

This book was very interesting and brought up a lot of ideas I hadn't really considered before.

Ferguson will challenge everything you think you know about globalism and will help you understand the complexity of the term "global."

Whether you are interested in contemporary anthropological theory or Africa, this book will expand the way you think about some of the most important issues of our time.

Ferguson has obviously been embedded in African studies for a considerable length of time, and this series of essays reflects that in its depth. As indicated in the introduction, the author works to evaluate the relationship between Africa and globalization from a pan-Africanist view. Using a series of case studies from his own research and others, Ferguson succeeds in painting a picture of a globalized Africa that often goes beyond conventional understandings of the continent. As a student of international development, I have almost exclusively looked at Africa through the lens of humanitarian crisis. This book provides the reader an opportunity to engage with the continent in a much more complex sense. I would certainly recommend it as the best text on Africa I've read so far.

good

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