

REVIEW ESSAYS

AFRICA'S PLACE-IN-THE-WORLD

James Ferguson. *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order.*

Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006. x + 257 pp. Map. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$74.95. Cloth. \$21.95. Paper.

Tanya Lyons and GERALYN PYE, eds. *Africa on A Global Stage.* Trenton, N.J. and

Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2006. vii + 215 pp. Notes. References. Index. \$24.95. Paper.

Anne-Cecile Robert. *L'Afrique au secours de l'Occident.* Paris: Les Editions de l'Atelier/Les Editions Ouvrières, 2006. 208 pp. €9.00. Paper.

Leonardo A. Villalón and Peter VonDoepp, eds. *The Fate of Africa's Democratic Experiments: Elites and Institutions.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press,

2006. viii + 324 pp. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$60.00. Cloth. \$24.95. Paper.

Where does Africa fit in the neoliberal global order that has prevailed since the end of the Cold War? That is the broad question that these four books address. The liberal paradigm, often referred to as globalization, has affected the continent both politically and economically. Although it is frequently asserted that globalization has marginalized Africans, the obvious fact remains that Africa is fully part of the globalizing world. Kofi Annan observed in his 1998 report on Africa to the Security Council that there are winners and losers in the globalization process. But just how has Africa been faring on this new global playing field, both in its political experiments and its economic prospects? As James Ferguson asks, what is "Africa's contemporary place-in-the-world"?

As an anthropologist, Ferguson begins by apologizing for writing about the unit of Africa—"a vast, complicated heterogeneous region"—as a "meaningful object of scholarship" (5). He justifies the risks of such an enterprise by arguing that the continent is in fact a real category in the global economy—one that is, however, "nearly synonymous with failure and poverty" (5). While embracing continental-scale analysis in order to address the issue of poverty, Ferguson not surprisingly incorporates his local fieldwork

in Lesotho, Transkei, Zambia, and elsewhere into the discussion.

Moreover, *Global Shadows* is in fact a montage of five previously published articles and four new essays, the first of which constitutes an introduction to the theme of Africa's place in the neoliberal world order. That place, he observes, is a decidedly subordinate position. His fundamental purpose then is to put the "question of the unequal relation between Africa and the West back on the table in a radical way" (23). Ferguson is passionate about the issue of inequality, about issues of social justice on a global scale. This passion infuses the work with a strong moral tone. Globalization, he contends, is less about the transnational flows featured in the standard discourse than about matters of transnational global accountability.

Ferguson begins by critiquing the common understanding of flows of capital in a chapter entitled "Globalizing Africa? Observations from an Inconvenient Continent," a formulation that evokes Al Gore's "inconvenient truth." The inconvenient truth about international capital is that it has not "flowed" seamlessly into Africa's broad development needs, but has rather "hopped" into mineral-extraction enclaves. Capital, Ferguson observes, "is *globe-hopping*, not *globe-covering*" (38, his italics). Although these foreign investments do connect the continent to the global economy, they do not really integrate Africans into higher forms of production that generate a broad range of goods and services. Rather this extractive neoliberalism has produced an inconvenient form of globalization "that divides the planet as much as it unites it" (49).

In the following chapters, Ferguson argues that poverty has been depoliticized (by those who construe it in technical terms) and that economics has been "de-moralized" by ignoring "African traditions of moral discourse on questions of economic process" (82). Wealth has long been understood by Africans, he writes, as a matter of relations among people, and this insight is as valid for the global economy as for a local one. Thus the central issue becomes one of equal rights of membership in global society. He illustrates this in quite original ways, such as by analyzing the Zambian online journal *Chrysalis*, or Jean Rouch's *Les maîtres fous*, or the letter drafted by two Guinean teenagers who died in 1998 while hitchhiking to Europe in the landing gear of an airplane. In various ways these writings all involve claims of membership in world society that Ferguson argues have so far gone largely unrecognized.

In his final chapter, the author returns to the theme of extractive neoliberalism as exemplified by the case of Angola's oil and what he sees as the spreading "Angolan model" (201). Ferguson points out that this mineral extraction model is not really new, but is rather a throwback to the colonial era. This example raises the larger question of whether the "neoliberal world order" has changed very much about Africa's place-in-the-world. Ferguson might have addressed this question more directly than he does. The book is full of interesting insights and interpretations, but it would have benefited from a more thorough conclusion. Even though the

final chapter is one of the new ones written specifically for this book, it does not pull the argument together as well as it might have. Instead Ferguson appears distracted at the end by implications beyond Africa, notably the “‘Angolan’ features” (209) of the American occupation of Iraq. Granting that Iraq is justifiably on everyone’s mind, *Global Shadows* merits a stronger conclusion than Ferguson has provided. It is true that he states at the outset that each essay in the volume can be read on its own, but this virtue becomes a minor vice at the end of the work.

The French journalist and academic Anne-Cécile Robert is also interested in Africa’s place in today’s world economy. She sees globalization essentially as the contemporary expression of worldwide capitalism, and Africa’s situation, therefore, “as the condensed form of the defects of globalized capitalism” (25). None of this sets her conceptually at odds with Ferguson, but as a member of the social science board of the French activist organization ATTAC, one of many grassroots organizations in Europe concerned with reforming the international economic system, she writes from a more activist perspective. Her work is therefore a good example of the arguments of the antiglobalist movement, although it will be of interest to U.S.-based scholars for other reasons as well.

One reason is its form of publication. Published in France (originally in 2004) by Les Editions de l’Atelier/Les Editions Ouvrières, this slightly expanded 2006 edition was co-published in an inexpensive paperback format by six African publishing houses: Editions Eburnie in Abidjan; Editions Jamana in Bamako; Editions Sankofa & Gurli in Ouagadougou; Editions Ruisseaux d’Afrique in Cotonou; Presses Universitaires d’Afrique in Yaoundé; and Editions du Silence in Libreville. There is reason to believe, therefore, that Robert’s essay will be read more widely in Francophone Africa than many other texts. This is all the more likely to be the case because the book enjoys a preface by the Senegalese novelist Boris Boubacar Diop and a new postface by the Ivoirian academic and politician Pierre Kipré, himself the author of a book on globalization (*Mondialisation, cultures, et développement* [Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2005]). As Robert draws extensively upon the writings of yet other African authors, the book ought to serve a useful inter-African function by publicizing the ideas of numerous African intellectuals.

Diop’s preface, in turn, is another site of interest for American Africanists. Diop is becoming better known in the United States thanks to the recent translation of his powerful novel about the Rwandan genocide (*Murambi, The Book of Bones* [Indiana University Press, 2006]). In his introduction, Diop contextualizes Robert’s book as a contribution to the “controversy between Afro-pessimists and Afro-centrists” (10)—evidently there is precious little room for Afro-optimism these days, a point echoed by Ferguson (10–11). Diop attributes Robert’s position in the debate to the omnipresence of the spirit of Cheikh Anta Diop, especially her assessment

of what Africa has to offer to the global conversation about neoliberalism. Diop recounts a telling anecdote about President George Bush's visit to Senegal in 2003: while the American secret service impounded the population of Gorée in a stadium, Senegal's President Abdoulaye Wade virtually begged Bush for cut-rate prices on second-hand military goods. In Wade's request at a moment when the U.S. army had just invaded Iraq, Diop sees a posture unworthy of African dignity. In Robert's book, he sees an effort to restore that dignity by demonstrating that African values offer a corrective to the excesses and inequalities of neoliberalism.

Ferguson and Robert are largely in agreement in their critique of global capitalism. Whereas the former draws upon previous fieldwork and a new continental conceptualization, Robert constructs her argument largely from the writings of such African analysts as Achille Mbembe, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Kwame Ninsin, Mongo Beti, Samir Amin, Ibrahima Thioub, Aminata Dramane Traore, and others. Among political figures her model is Thomas Sankara. While many of these names will be familiar, especially to those who work on Francophone Africa, her essay provides a broad overview of African thinking. Likewise, while the critique of the policies designed by the international financial institutions is not particularly novel, her treatment of these issues constitutes a useful synthesis of African voices.

Like Ferguson, she appeals to African cultural values as an antidote to a "submission to the rules of globalization" (71). She sees a traditional African approach to economic matters informed by notions of solidarity and mutual assistance, a paradigm that is driven not by the market but by the human relations inherent in an economic transaction. In a similar vein, Ferguson writes that "against the truly fetishized view that would see 'the market' as a natural force to which human life *must* submit, the African insight that markets, prices, and wages are always *human* products is a powerful one" (82). Robert illustrates this "relational paradigm" (177) by a formulation that she borrows from the economist Serge Latouche, "le lien prime sur le bien" (143: "the relationship is more important than the material good"). She concludes that African values constitute a potential source of "resistance to liberal globalization and to predatory capitalism" (181). Hence the sense of her title ("Africa to the rescue of the West") and the generally hortatory tone of her book.

Though democratization is not the focus of his work, Ferguson identifies democratization as one of the shadows cast by the triumph of globalization. The neoliberal model certainly generated pressure upon Africa's authoritarian regimes to reform themselves. In 1997, Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle published *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press), a breakthrough volume that analyzed the political reforms of the widely heralded third wave of democratization. Now, in *The Fate of Africa's Democratic Experiments*, Vilalón and VonDoepp have chosen ten of the countries that Bratton and van

de Walle judged to have effected democratic transitions by 1994 in order to analyze the fate of these “experiments.” Fate, we learn, has not been particularly kind.

As the subtitle of their volume suggests, the editors put forward elites and institutions as the key variables in their analysis, and they choose “thick description” as the methodology for the project. The choice of elites makes good sense, as African regimes remain highly patrimonial. In their introductory chapter the editors observe that “all of Africa’s new democracies exhibit major shortcomings in the extent to which their transitions actually transferred power to their citizenry” (9). VonDoepp and Villalón point out that Dankwart Rustow emphasized the key role of elites in processes of democratization in a seminal 1970 article (“Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics* 2, 3 [1970]: 337–63). They in turn attribute elite behavior to the impact of economic factors, international actors and organizations, political culture, and the new institutions (such as constitutions, legislatures, electoral systems) put in place at the outset of the democratic transition. Thus institutions actually become a second-tier variable in the analysis, less “causal, independent variables” (25) than elite-manipulated variables.

One of the principal virtues of this collection is the inclusion of several relatively little known cases—such as Niger, Central African Republic, Madagascar, Republic of Congo, Malawi, and Guinea-Bissau—along with four somewhat more familiar transitions—Mali, Benin, Mozambique, Zambia. The ensemble, therefore, is rich in data. Villalón is probably responsible for the ample representation of Francophone cases—six in all. Another virtue is that the case studies are all written by knowledgeable country specialists who ably provide the desired Geertzian thick description. In the thicket, the guiding variables are occasionally obscured but never entirely abandoned. As a general rule, however, elites trump institutions in most of the cases.

The first two cases, Niger and Mali, offer a striking Sahelian comparison. While both went the route of a national conference and a semi-presidential constitutional regime, they experienced vastly different outcomes. The co-authors of both chapters, Villalón and Abdourahmane Idrissa, see institutional differences at the level of electoral systems as an important part of the explanation of Mali’s relative success and Niger’s repetitive breakdowns. At the same time, they see considerable elite rivalry in both cases. In Mali, leaders with personal charisma and reputations for integrity—Alpha Oumar Konaré and Amadou Toumani Touré—emerged from the fray; nothing comparable occurred in Niamey. Rustow’s emphasis on elite political leadership seems especially pertinent in explaining the divergent fates of these neighboring states.

There are more instances of breakdown than of success in these well-informed case studies: John Clark’s analysis of elite factionalism and crises “generated by the political principals themselves” (122) torpedoing the experience in Congo-Brazzaville; Andreas Mehler’s account of the difficul-

ties of overcoming residual patrimonialism in the Central African Republic; Richard Marcus's description of hollow elections that offered a choice between a corrupt populist and a former dictator in Madagascar; tainted elections and "thuggery" (194) as elite strategies in VonDoepp's Malawi; institutions that failed to constrain elite behavior in what David Simon sees as "democracy unrealized" (199) in Zambia. Although Carrie Manning's well-wrought chapter on Frelimo's internal democratization places Mozambique among the relatively more positive experiences, the author notes that "many rulers in Africa have mastered the art of democratic forgery" (222).

All the authors have produced "thick descriptions" well worth the reading. Joshua Forrest's study of cultural dualism in Guinea-Bissau is one of the more intriguing cases of "mixed results" (a category that Michael Chege emphasizes in his conclusion to the volume). Forrest describes two publics competing for power in the tiny nation's capital: a liberal public striving for constitutionalism and pluralism and an authoritarian public locked into the unilateral politics inherited from Portuguese colonialism and one-party rule. The balance between these competing coalitions, Forrest explains, is held by the army, which has not hesitated to intervene in Bissauan affairs—a development that is not generally a positive augury for democracy; yet Forrest does not rule out the possibility of the military itself reinstating democratic norms (as it did in 2000 and 2004) à la "ATT" in Mali.

Democratization, as Bruce Magnusson points out in his perceptive chapter on Benin, can well be understood as an elite survival strategy (a point that he borrows from James Mittelman's *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance* [Princeton University Press, 2000]) in response to a rapidly changing international structure in the 1990s. Whether the "experiments" failed or succeeded, they present another facet of the impact of globalization on the continent. For example, endogenous stimulants to democracy, such as the 1991 Kampala Conference on "Security, Stability, Development, and Cooperation in Africa" are highlighted in Chege's chapter, in which he places the ten case studies of the volume in the larger context of other success stories (such as Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Senegal, Sao Tomé, Cape Verde, and South Africa). Chege sees the Kampala forum as the point of departure toward the reform of the Organization of African Unity and the establishment of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) with its emphasis on democratic governance. The point is well taken. Yet even Kampala was a response to the end of the Cold War, which ushered in the neoliberal paradigm: that democratization is one of the "shadows" cast by globalization seems well borne out by the cases examined in this stimulating collection.

One might have hoped that *Africa on a Global Stage* would pull the economic and political strands of globalization nicely together. Certainly the editors, Tanya Lyons and GERALYN Pye, place the problematic of globalization at the center of their introduction to the volume. They cite Fantu

Cheru's argument (in *African Renaissance: Roadmaps to the Challenge of Globalization*, 2002) that there are three possible approaches to the challenges posed by globalization—uncritical embrace, resistance, and his preferred strategy of “guided embrace” coupled with regional development and coordination—but they express skepticism that even a guided embrace will serve African interests (3). Nonetheless, despite the ongoing debate about globalization highlighted in the introductory chapter, the collection wanders off in several other directions: the book is less focused on the theme of Africa's “place-in-the-world” than the title implies. Since the title is simply borrowed from the theme of the 2003 annual meeting of the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific held at Flinders University in Adelaide, the volume understandably reflects the diversity of the papers presented at the meeting, and some of them will no doubt interest Africanists far from the shores of South Australia.

Among the topics that seem distant from the “global stage” are chapters on South African history and culture, on psychological issues of identity, on constitution-making in Kenya, and a revisionist essay on the Rwandan genocide. Closer to Cheru's idea of African regional cooperation is Teresa Thorp's essay on intraregional integration agreements among African states; and joining ranks with Ferguson and Robert, Helen Ware contributes a critique of the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which she views as another implement in the toolbox of the “neo-liberal economic paradigm” (157). The final chapter by William Reno deals with both global and internal causes of state failure as well as “wars of state collapse” (193). Reno does move us back toward Ferguson's broad notion of Africa's place-in-the-world. (Not coincidentally, Ferguson cites some of Reno's other work at several points in his book). Reno reminds us that state failure has been a terrible part of Africa's fate since the arrival of the neoliberal world order. Indeed, Reno's “shadow states” (as treated in his books on Sierra Leone and warlord politics) are among the global shadows that Ferguson chose as his central metaphor. Despite the clear evidence of failed states and failed experiments, the Villalón/VonDoepp team does reveal a wider range of political responses to the global forces besetting Africa today.

As the wave of global decolonization swept across Africa in the 1960s, John Kennedy's Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, G. Mennen Williams, famously declared that Africa should be for the Africans. No longer does such a statement raise eyebrows as it did in some quarters during that Cold War era. Africa is for the Africans, but they must take charge of their fate in a complex international political and economic environment. Each of these books casts some light (as well as some shadows) on Africa's contemporary place-in-the-world.

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