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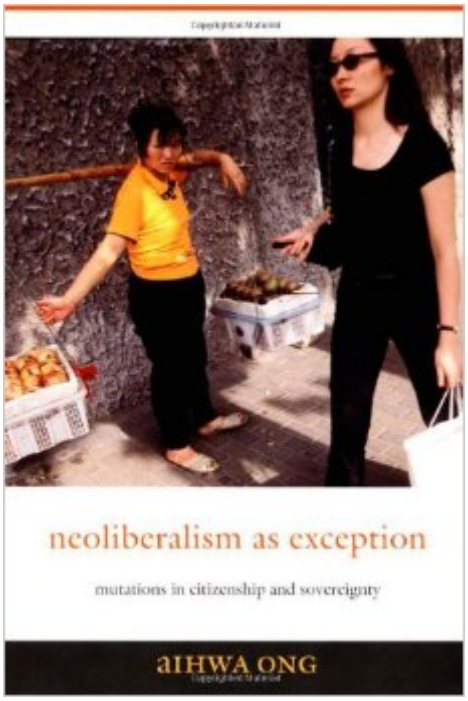
Neoliberalism As Exception: Mutations In Citizenship And Sovereignty



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Synopsis

Neoliberalism is commonly viewed as an economic doctrine that seeks to limit the scope of government. Some consider it a form of predatory capitalism with adverse effects on the Global South. In this groundbreaking work, Aihwa Ong offers an alternative view of neoliberalism as an extraordinarily malleable technology of governing that is taken up in different ways by different regimes, be they authoritarian, democratic, or communist. Ong shows how East and Southeast Asian states are making exceptions to their usual practices of governing in order to position themselves to compete in the global economy. As she demonstrates, a variety of neoliberal strategies of governing are re-engineering political spaces and populations. Ongâ ™s ethnographic case studies illuminate experiments and developments such as Chinaâ ™s creation of special market zones within its socialist economy; pro-capitalist Islam and womenâ ™s rights in Malaysia; Singaporeâ ™s repositioning as a hub of scientific expertise; and flexible labor and knowledge regimes that span the Pacific.Ong traces how these and other neoliberal exceptions to business as usual are reconfiguring relationships between governing and the governed, power and knowledge, and sovereignty and territoriality. She argues that an interactive mode of citizenship is emerging, one that organizes peopleâ ”and distributes rights and benefits to themâ ”according to their marketable skills rather than according to their membership within nation-states. Those whose knowledge and skills are not assigned significant market valueâ ”such as migrant women working as domestic maids in many Asian citiesâ ”are denied citizenship. Nevertheless, Ong suggests that as the seam between sovereignty and citizenship is pried apart, a new space is emerging for NGOs to advocate for the human rights of those excluded by neoliberal measures of human worthiness.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages
Publisher: Duke University Press Books; First Edition edition (July 19, 2006)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 0822337487
ISBN-13: 978-0822337485
Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 0.7 x 9.2 inches
Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)
Average Customer Review: 3.0 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (1 customer review)
Best Sellers Rank: #720,150 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #113 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Social Theory #400 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Political

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Customer Reviews

Carl Schmidt defined sovereignty as ultimately the power to call a state of exception to the normalized condition of the law. Drawing on the German philosopher, Giorgio Agamben uses the exception as a fundamental principle of state rule that is predicated on the division between citizen in a judicial order and outsiders stripped of juridical and political protections. Aihwa Ong, a Berkeley anthropologist, offers a milder version of the state of exception: the sovereign exception she is interested in "is not the negative exception that suspends civil rights for some but rather positive kinds of exception that create opportunities, usually for a minority, who enjoy political accommodations and conditions not granted to the rest of the population."Aihwa Ong is interested in the spaces and identities opened up by neoliberalism as exception--the market-oriented and calculating technologies of government used by otherwise interventionist states in East Asia--, and by exceptions to neoliberalism--the management of populations who are deliberately excluded from neoliberal considerations, either positively or negatively. She focuses on "the interplay among technologies of governing and of disciplining, of inclusion and exclusion, of giving value or denying value to human conduct.

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