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IN MEMORIAM

"A Titan"

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Jim had a fierce intellect, a lawyer's trap-door mind. A scion of deconstruction who loved to slice and dice the field before elaborating his own intervention, his essays and books built out their arguments, brick by brick, leading to conclusions that seemed crystal clear and inevitable—"ah, yes, of course"—even though they typically ran against the grain of orthodoxy.

I found his work, across four decades of publishing, always novel. An early favorite was the article, "The Bovine Mystique: Power, Property and Livestock in Rural Lesotho" (1985), which argued that cattle in village economies in Lesotho were not so much marketable commodities as social/symbolic signifiers and repositories of prestige-wealth for male migrants working in the mines in South Africa. His analysis blew the wheels off developmentalist conceptions of Lesotho (deployed by the World Bank) as a "subsistence" economy rather than a bedroom community and labor reserve for the South African mines. This argument led seamlessly into Ferguson's magisterial and widely influential, *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1994), a book which, along with Arturo Escobar's *Encountering Development* (1995)—both models of clear-headed Foucauldian analysis—transformed the field of development studies in anthropology in the 1990s.

Expectations of Modernity (1999) challenged and scrambled scholarly understandings of how to think "modernity" along Zambia's renowned copper belt, a site of early research by anthropology's Manchester School and more recent work on China-Africa. There, despite the "expectation" that modernity and its purported good life would arrive soon, time seemed to be going in reverse and the promise that Zambia/Africa would soon join those metropolitan exemplars living "at the end of history" was exposed as wrong-headed. Ferguson's claim that Zambian longing for the modern was less about cultural desire and mimicry than aspiration for global inclusion became influential, even canonical, in anthropological studies of the modern, and staked a claim—against much mainstream anthropology—to the importance of political economic over culturalist approaches.

Global Shadows (2006) continued Jim's theoretical assault on his home discipline—this seemed a guiding principle—in urging anthropologists to move beyond their

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default focus on analyzing local culture(s) to address broader issues of representation, such as journalistic portrayals of Africa as shredded by crisis and failure. A nice riff in *Global Shadows*—which, again, was staged as critique of his discipline, in this instance of fashionable anthropological ideas at a time when "transnationalism" was all the rage—was his insistence that global capital on the continent "hopped" in and out of extractive enclaves rather than "flowing" seamlessly across "borderless" transnational space.

Jim concluded his oeuvre with a book about the most unlikely, albeit prescient, of topics, which delivered on his own injunction to engage policy issues typically ignored by anthropologists. *Give a Man a Fish* (2015), the published version of his 2009 Lewis Henry Morgan lectures, took up the issue of distributive politics through a study of cash handouts—"basic income grants"—in Southern Africa, in which he advocated turning away from economists' and states' preoccupation with industrial production and wage labor toward a paradigm of distribution.

Jim also had the gift of authorial collaboration, most notably through the influential essays with Akhil Gupta about the often-unacknowledged assumptions and structures of knowledge generation in our discipline. Jim and Akhil's coauthored pieces became required reading in theory courses in US anthropology. Though I never knew him to be a coauthor with his equally talented Foucauldian partner and soulmate, anthropologist Liisa Malkki—a power couple, if there ever was one—they shared analytic affinities and the art of lucid writing, and clearly had a strong influence on one another's work throughout their academic lives.

The better I got to know Jim—not well, he was always discrete and private in his interpersonal relations, at least with me—I came to see his trademark impish grin as the perfect complement to his anthropological persona as cerebral provocateur and maverick theorist. For me, that smile spoke volumes.

When Jim Ferguson passed, at far too young an age, we lost an inordinately fecund mind and titan of the discipline, someone who not only had his finger on the pulse of anthropology but also played an outsized role in reshaping our discipline.

Author Biography. **Charles Piot** has a recent book on Togolese migration to the US via the Green Card lottery. He is currently working on the digitalization of the informal economy in Togo.

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