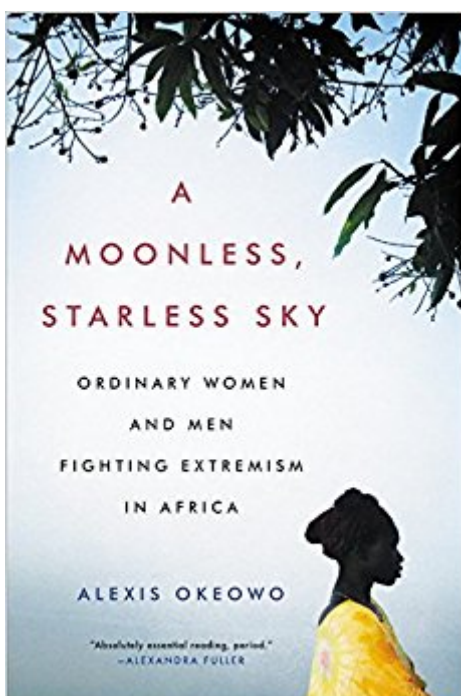


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# A Moonless, Starless Sky: Ordinary Women And Men Fighting Extremism In Africa



## Synopsis

"Absolutely essential reading, period."---Alexandra Fuller, bestselling author of *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* In the tradition of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, this is a masterful, humane work of literary journalism by New Yorker staff writer Alexis Okeowo--a vivid narrative of Africans who are courageously resisting their continent's wave of fundamentalism. In *A Moonless, Starless Sky* Okeowo weaves together four narratives that form a powerful tapestry of modern Africa: a young couple, kidnap victims of Joseph Kony's LRA; a Mauritanian waging a lonely campaign against modern-day slavery; a women's basketball team flourishing amid war-torn Somalia; and a vigilante who takes up arms against the extremist group Boko Haram. This debut book by one of America's most acclaimed young journalists illuminates the inner lives of ordinary people doing the extraordinary--lives that are too often hidden, underreported, or ignored by the rest of the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Evocative and affecting.... Okeowo's in-depth, perceptive reporting gives a voice to ... extraordinarily courageous--and resilient--women and men."--Publishers Weekly (starred review)  
"Remarkable.... Okeowo writes with beauty and grace.... Refreshingly, she does not give in to easy answers.... Clear-eyed, lyrical, observant, and compassionate--reportage at its finest."--Kirkus (starred review)  
"Finally, finally, finally--a humane, skillful storyteller with sound reporting instincts has dug into the middle of the stories we think we've already heard out of Africa. Alexis Okeowo can write prose as arresting as Ryszard Kapuscinski's, she's got Katherine Boo's big heart,

but she has her own fresh way of approaching the work, one that is terribly overdue. Absolutely essential reading, period."--Alexandra Fuller, New York Times bestselling author of *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* and *Quiet Until the Thaw*    "Alexis Okeowo's startling and brilliant account of fierce horrors and tender hopes is one of the best records I have ever read of a world that has been made and remade time and again out of struggle and faith. Okeowo is just the kind of reporter we need to hear from when it comes to Africa, the 'new' old world: truthful, accurate, deep."--Hilton Als, Pulitzer-Prize winning author of *White Girls*    "From an abolitionist who once owned a slave to women basketball players in a war zone, Alexis Okeowo has an alert and thoughtful eye for the unexpected. The portraits and voices she brings us from Africa are so vivid that the reader can easily forget the determination and bravery it must have taken to gather them in these unhappy corners of the continent."--Adam Hochschild, New York Times bestselling author of *King Leopold's Ghost* and *Spain in Our Hearts*    "Spectacular reporting. Full of fresh, unexpected detail. If you want to get an immediate sense of the lives, both quotidian and extraordinary, of Africans in some of the continent's most troubled countries, read Alexis Okeowo's book."--William Finnegan, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Barbarian Days*    "Alexis Okeowo has gone to the hardest continent and come away with a series of tales about the fight against fanaticism and despair. The result is a deeply sensitive portrait of modern Africa and a microscope on the human condition in the most difficult circumstances."--Dexter Filkins, Pulitzer-Prize winning author of *The Forever War*    "In *A Moonless, Starless Sky*, Alexis Okeowo has wandered as a reporter into some of Africa's most difficult and dangerous corners and delivered something remarkable: real characters, women and men, fully rendered."--Howard W. French, author of *Everything Under the Heavens*

Alexis Okeowo is a staff writer for the *New Yorker* and a fellow at New America. Her work has appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine*, the *Financial Times*, *Time*, and *Fortune*, among many other publications. The daughter of immigrant parents, Okeowo grew up in Alabama and attended Princeton University. She was based in Lagos, Nigeria, from 2012 to 2015, and now lives in Brooklyn.

Focusing on four stories from four different countries--Uganda, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Somalia--*A MOONLESS, STARLESS SKY* puts a human face on the terror and different forms of extremism plaguing Africa. Okeowo, who grew up in Alabama the daughter of Nigerian immigrants, was raised in a culture of her parents' homeland. She eventually moved to Nigeria to report on the social issues afflicting the continent. The structure of the book is a little disjointed; we get extended chapters about

the four principle stories that take us up to a point, then we stop and start back with the first story. It would've been a little better, perhaps, to tell each story all the way through. However, Okeowo deserves high praise for her humanistic approach--even the vile warlords and criminals in these stories are explained in a way that makes their deplorable beliefs and actions understandable (which is different than justifiable; some people have a problem getting that). While Okeowo's main goal is to shed light on people taking a stand, risking all, she isn't afraid to examine their flaws, nor lament the fact that in some cases, there isn't a true "good" side. The troubles plaguing Africa are complex and delicate, but Okeowo shines a light on the plight of so many people. This is a timely book that is not only well-written, but is a near must-read for people today.

The frame of which is the reader's reference, structures the story being told. In, *A Moonless, Starless Sky*, my frame is one in which Earth's real wealth is living wealth; not one in which corporate money lending robots determine our shared future, in which life is nothing more than a commodity and, Earth is nothing but a dead rock to be exploited. Africa exemplifies this frame in spades. Her rich resources are being mercilessly exploited at the expense of her people, and her living environment. Through four stories, representing different aspects & locations in Africa, the reader shares in the stories of those people suffering - this story's frame needs to be changed to one where wealth is based upon the living. There is the narrative from Uganda about the children abducted and forced to become violent soldiers against their will. There is a narrative of slavery that is well and very alive in Africa being concerning Mauritania. Another tells of young women struggling just to do something as simple as playing basketball, and finally a government clerk that is fighting back. These are stories where the frame; is based upon one of an economy that does not value life; and that demands a paramount paradigm shift - towards one of a worldwide economy based upon living wealth; not one based upon current digitized ones & zeroes, issued by privately owned zombie cartel banks. A perfect example is in the first story concerning Uganda, where the LRA is attacking the very population it was claiming to protect. A common 21st Century corporate fascist robot meme of destroying the village to save it. Ironically, the LRA's saving grace from these corporatized robots/...the LRA's independence from technology was one of their greatest strengths, allowing them to avoid their hunters by using messengers and handwriting letters to communicate, and eschewing phones and two-way radios. U.S. officials acknowledged the rebels were unlike any other enemy they had faced. Of course, with corporate fascism, their schools are privatized, and thus vast majorities cannot get an education. Then there's the problem of amnesty for children forced into a violent war. It's ok to free bankers who literally put millions of families out on the

streets[crime that pays, is crime that stays]. But children, forced by gunpoint into violence, are subject to death penalties. And even when they are freed, they face a virtual social death from the community at large; a social dissonance coupled with cognitive dissonance. All because the choices given by a society that are starkly simple: the lesser of two evils. Our current 21st paradigm. A paradigm that needs to change its economy worldwide to one based on living wealth; not the current dead one, based upon a dead exploited rock and humans as simply commodities to be exploited as well. The Africa pictured here is writ large to magnify what is wrong with our current system. The story's frame needs to be changed; so its ending has, a chance of one worth living.

This is a solid book. Interesting, informative, affecting, and easy to read. I blew through it in two days. I was intrigued by the comparison of this book to "Behind the Beautiful Forevers" and while this book was good, I don't think it was nearly as good as "Behind the Beautiful Forevers." That book was written in such a way that I would have assumed it was fiction if I hadn't known it was true and that a journalist wrote it based on her research/interactions with the "characters" in the book. This book tells four stories, each taking place in a different country; each with people facing incredible challenges (slavery and terrorism among others). Okeowo tells their stories simply and effectively. The only criticism I have is that the author does insert herself into the stories on occasion. One part in the story of LRA survivors Eunice and Bosco, she goes into to her Nigerian parents history of immigrating to the U.S., their experiences living in the Deep South, and their apprehension about her moving to Africa. I thought that was a little odd. I mean, the author discusses her history with Africa in the preface and this interlude seems to me like it would have fit better up there instead of in the middle of the second half of Eunice and Bosco's story. But that's the only critique I have, really. Like I said, I really enjoyed the book and would recommend it to anyone interested in learning more about how everyday people in Africa are living and dealing with immense challenges like terrorism, slavery, and re-integrating into society after being kidnapped by extremists. The challenges are immense and the situations thought provoking, but there is also a hopeful tone to the book as these courageous people stand up to terror and injustice and try to live their lives.

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