

**THE ORDEAL OF MODERNITY IN AN AGE OF
TERROR**

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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THE ORDEAL OF MODERNITY IN AN AGE OF TERROR

Sometime during the increasingly tense European summer of 1938, the Anglo-Polish anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, sat down to write an introduction to a new book by one of his students, Jomo Kenyatta; a book based on the graduate thesis the latter had written under his supervision at the London School of Economics. A scientific rationalist and atheist, as well as an anti-racist, anti-fascist and anti-communist, Malinowski was most of all in that fraught time a deeply frightened liberal watching Europe slide into war. During the 1930s he had shifted his focus from the South Pacific to Africa. Over the course of that decade he had become increasingly critical of European colonialism, particularly of what he regarded as its deeply destructive impact on indigenous societies. In his brief introductory essay, Malinowski reflected on Kenyatta's work and, no doubt, on their many long conversations during the three years Kenyatta had studied with him. He commented on the dilemma of the educated African who had "suffered the injury of higher education" and noted that "an African who looks at things from the tribal point of view and at the same time from that of Western civilization experiences the tragedy of the modern world in an especially acute manner."¹

And what was this tragedy of the modern world? Malinowski immediately added, "For to quote William James, 'Progress is a terrible thing'."² What was called 'progress' in Malinowski's era and 'development' in ours refers to global

social processes that have not simply enriched a few and impoverished the many, but, more tragically, have generated intense moral and political crises in every society and led to the most destructive violence against humanity and nature in history. Modernity and its cultural and institutional expressions in scientific rationality, capitalism, and the nation-state, have engulfed the world in increasingly intense waves of global expansion from its Western European origins. The celebrated victory of liberal democracy and humanist social democracy in the West itself was not secured until the middle of the last century, and is threatened again in this. And, as Sigmund Bauman has brutally reminded us³, the same social forces of modernity that made possible liberal democracy, the welfare state, individual freedom and human rights, and the achievements of modern science and medicine, also made possible the Nazi holocaust and the Soviet gulag.

Today, the desperate atrocities of global terrorism have brutally upset the amnesiac euphoria of Western elites over the ‘fall’ of Communism and betrayed the fantasy expectations of neo-liberal globalization. Modernity remains an unfinished project, a continuing source of bitter conflict as well as epochal change both in the West and in the non-Western societies in which it was abruptly and forcibly introduced. The ordeal of modernity is the enduring ‘tragedy of the modern world’, and its impact on African societies large and small is the context

and defines the issues for all of us who study the experience of the continent over the past three centuries.

As a graduate student, I wrote a paper on the psychology of terror. I was proud of it then, I am not now; but the conclusion comes back to haunt me: the object of terror is not violence in itself, but its use to destroy security and trust in the protection of social institutions, in the stability and orderliness of everyday life, and in the ability of those in power to protect. Terror is the state of disorder, unpredictability and overwhelming risk and menace that annihilates our trust in the social world. It is the deeply ambiguous and often destructive consequences of modernity in Africa that I wish to discuss tonight. I will examine, first, the social ordeal of capitalist modernity in the West and its relationships to the development of liberal democracy and the reconstructions of moral economy. Second, the distinctive African experience of modernity, and, finally, the current epoch of globalization and the profound immiseration, social decay, state failure and acute vulnerability that makes it for Africa an age of terror; an era, as in the titles of two of the most profound reflections on the experience of modernity: *Things Fall Apart*, *All that is Solid Melts into Air*.⁴

In 1944, while in exile in Britain, the anthropologist and Africanist, Karl Polanyi, published *The Great Transformation*, a cultural history of the industrial revolution in Britain.⁵ In 2001 it was republished in a new edition with an

introduction by the economist, Joe Stiglitz, who apparently lost his position as chief economist at the World Bank in 1999 by suggesting that the rigid conditions of the Bank's and IMF's structural adjustment programs for developing countries were not appropriate in all situations. Polanyi's account focused on the two central institutions of capitalist modernity in the West: the self-regulating market and national state, and their interaction in what he called the "double movement", the first a deliberate, politically engineered disembedding of the market from its subordination to other social institutions and its regulation by the state in order to create freely fluctuating factor markets for land, money and labor; and the second a spontaneous political reaction to protect nature and humanity from the destructive ravages of the free market. The self-regulating market, he noted, was a utopian dogma of secular salvation pursued with religious zeal by market liberals, the apostles of 'laissez-faire'.⁶

He begins by noting that prior to modern times no economy had ever existed that was controlled by markets. Human economies were as a rule submerged in social relations, and people acted not to safeguard their individual interests in the possession of material goods, but to safeguard their social standing, social claims and social assets. Material goods were valued only in so far as they served these ends. The economic system was, therefore, a function of social organization in societies that were generally neither egalitarian nor democratic, but in which

production and distribution were allocated by principles of reciprocity and redistribution within the social hierarchy. Concentration of political power and material wealth among social elites was legitimated by redistribution to meet the needs of material and social security within the community. Each human community, to borrow E. P. Thompson's concept⁷, has a moral economy, i.e., the relations of law and custom defining the reciprocal obligations of elites and common people and governing the production, distribution and redistribution of the material means of existence. Each moral economy was also the challenged and contested basis of legitimate authority and wealth; the central focus and outcome of hegemonic struggle. And relations of ruler and subject typically took the form of patron and client, the anthropologists' 'lopsided friendship', in a myriad of local variations from the most informal of social ties to the most elaborately differentiated system of ranks and formalized customs of behavior between superiors and subordinates. Authority in pre-capitalist moral economies was typically patriarchal within family groups and, extending the kin metaphor, an authoritarian paternalism in the wider society.

“The great transformation” of which Polanyi writes was, of course, the transition from mercantile to industrial capitalism through the creation of a self-regulating market, first in Britain between the 1780s and 1830s. This was, he notes, a complete transformation of the structure of society. Instead of the economy being

imbedded in social relations, social relations were now embedded in the economic system. All economic interactions now took the form of supposedly freely entered contractual exchanges of commodities produced for sale in the market. This involved most of all the development of markets for what he called the ‘fictitious commodities’ of land, labor and capital: no longer was their allocation determined by social relations and custom, but solely by supply and demand in the marketplace.

The creation of a labor market was the most fiercely resisted and its effective creation dates only from the repeal of the ‘Old Poor Law’ in Britain in 1834. With it, society became an accessory of the market and the way of life of the common people was not just profoundly altered but subject to unprecedented havoc and dislocation. Social conditions under the Industrial Revolution were, in his words, “a veritable abyss of human degradation”.⁸ More than unparalleled poverty, urban squalor, disease, and insecurity, the industrial revolution and the self-regulating market were unprecedented cultural calamities that destroyed customary institutions and their moral economy, and induced that condition of disorienting uncertainty and disorder that I call the state of terror.

More profoundly still, the culture of modernity that powered the key institutions of industrial capitalism and the nation state undermined and threatened to destroy the central cultural foundations of any existing social order.⁹ First, and

most important, was what Max Weber described as “the disenchantment of the world”, the secularization of nature and society through the systematic development of rational knowledge and its instrumental application. A world understood as the contingent outcome of scientific laws in which instrumental rationality permitted purposeful intervention to control nature and society. Rather than divinely ordained necessity or fate, events were now the deliberate outcome of human agency and choice. Marx called this the movement from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. Second, and closely related to secularization, was the transformation of conceptions of time and space, of human behavior and society itself, from the concrete to the ever more abstract and beyond the range of direct human experience, but open to deliberate manipulation. This included what Marx called the reification and fetishization of labour; its transformation from the human substance into a commodity that could be bought and sold and continuously applied in new ways. Even capital has been transformed by abstraction from precious metals to paper tokens to electronic bits existing only in computer memories. Third, the development of human agency and instrumental rationality is based on the understanding of probability and risk in a contingent world. It is the most challenging cultural expression of secularization; as suggested by the title of Peter Bernstein’s history of probability and risk, *Against the Gods*.¹⁰ The calculation and management of risk is the basis of extending agency and

predictable control in both capitalist enterprise and the state. Innovation and creation become self-conscious and planned; and focused on the creation of counter-factual states that did not exist before.

Finally, the culture of modernity rests upon the transformation of social trust from personal and concrete to abstract and universal. From trust in persons grounded in ties of kinship, community and reciprocal relations of power and dependence embedded in the ontological frameworks of religious cosmologies and the meaningful routines of social tradition itself, to an impersonal abstract trust based upon the anticipated probity and competence of unknown others in complex, large-scale institutions of national and, indeed, international scale. Trust is always partially an act of faith that institutions and individuals will behave as they are supposed to and always involves some calculation of risk. Trust rested on the basis of a bourgeois culture that provided a framework of business ethics applicable, in particular, to the contractual exchanges that were the heart of the system. Trust in the reliable behavior of others in the market made possible the counter-factual future orientation of capitalist modernity. Moreover, from the late 18th century the development of more abstract system trust rested on the application of instrumental rationality through expert systems of technical and professional knowledge that organize the natural and social environment.¹¹ These provide the basis for the

rational calculation of risks and benefits and the reduction of uncertainty in the systems of production and exchange of modern industrial capitalism.

However, before such systemic trust could be effectively established, the destructive impact of the self-regulating market had to be curbed by the second part of what Polanyi called the “double movement”: a spontaneous social movement of self-protection to bring the self-regulating market under social control and develop the basis for a new hegemonic moral economy. It dominated the political agenda of the 19th and 20th centuries and focused primarily on the state, which having been the primary actor in creating the self-regulating market, was now seen as the principal agent of social protection and management. From factory legislation regulating hours and conditions of work, the legal creation of limited liability corporations, the central regulation of money supply, and social legislation for education, health and pensions; to national policies of tariffs and trade regulation, Western states acted to bring the market under control, subordinate it to social interests, and use it in deliberate projects of national development.

Social responses to the self-regulating market and modernity defined the entire spectrum of political and social movements. On the left, ‘scientific’ socialists pressed the modernist project towards its ultimate rationalist conclusion in a socialist order free of the contradictions and inequities of capitalism.

Anarchists rejected it entirely in favor of spontaneous cooperation as utopian as the invisible hand of market liberals; and invented modern terrorism in ‘the propaganda of the deed’. On the right, anti-modernism flourished in movements of religious revival, romantic reaction, and conservative nationalism, only too ready to accept the wealth and weaponry of industrialism, while rejecting its secularizing culture and reinventing ‘tradition’ as an instrument of social order¹². At every step of the way it was a deeply contested process, marked by intense conflict and repeated violence. The outcome, in the form of secular liberal democracy, was never the inevitable result of liberal principles, but more the contingent outcome of strategic and co-optative reforms by hard-pressed regimes that blunted threats of revolution, restored a degree of social stability and order, and provided some improvement in material conditions and security for the bulk of the population. Moreover, the dominance of liberal democracy was not secured in Western Europe until after the bloodiest world war in history, and in Eastern Europe, not until the collapse of Communism in 1990.¹³

Trust is also essential to the functioning of liberal democratic states, and systemic trust in state institutions sustains trust in the apparently separate spheres of the market and civil society. The national state requires trust not only in the competence and probity of politicians and public officials who can rarely be personally known, but also in the fairness and efficacy of the institutions of the

state itself. Liberal democracy is based on the development of a widespread trust, cutting across cleavages of class, region and ethnicity that political institutions act as disinterested arbiters of clashing interests. This trust involves an essential public belief that the political process can be used to pursue differing visions of social interests and that institutional rules provide for transparency and accountability in the formulation and implementation of public policy. It is, in turn, the fundamental basis of political agency; without it risk and unpredictability render collective organization and action literally unthinkable.¹⁴ It makes possible and encourages the pursuit of collective political objectives of principle and policy, rather than a politics of narrow materialism and self-interest. Thus, we can act politically in liberal democracy in pursuit of supra-personal principles because we trust that elections are fair; unknown bureaucrats are competent and unbiased in the administration of policy; and that politicians and leaders of interest associations, whom we support, but cannot know personally, will not give all the jobs and contracts to their friends and relatives, sell out to the opposition and run off with the money.

The achievement of civic trust in Western liberal democracies facilitated the construction of a new hegemonic moral economy. The state increasingly became the guarantor of social security. The process culminated in the aftermath of the Great Depression and World War Two in the creation of the Keynesian moral

economy that dominated state policy in Western democracies for a generation, marrying state macro-economic management of the market with a commitment to full employment and the full range of welfare services. The achievement of such a renewed moral economy has varied over time and from society to society. Each major era of crisis in the capitalist world system has occasioned major restructuring of production and markets, and with that another major crisis of moral economy and political legitimacy. The hegemony of the Keynesian moral economy linking capital, labor and the state itself fell into crisis during the 1970s and for the past 25 years has been under increasing attack as we have entered what political economists call the Third Industrial Revolution of neo-liberal globalization. This has been marked in the West by unprecedented attacks on public services of health, education and human security, along with the most dramatic widening of the inequalities of wealth and income distribution in more than a century.¹⁵ Moreover, civic trust in the institutions of liberal democracy has been persistently undermined by particularistic ties of individuals and factions, clientelism and cronyism, and by institutional bias, opaque decision-making, and special deals and preferential access to public goods.

Industrial capitalism, the nation-state and the culture of modernity came to Africa and the rest of the non-Western world primarily through the forceful imposition of Western hegemony, most importantly in the epoch of the first

globalization of the self-regulating market during the 1870-1914 period. Mike Davis has recalled to modern memory the lethality of the famines of this era. Some 30 to 60 million died in India, where the Raj refused to interfere with the 'natural laws' of the market, so that Indian wheat was shipped to London while Indian peasants boiled the thatch of their houses for food and ate their small children; and in China, where the sadly decayed empire of the Qing, its ever normal granaries empty and the Grand Canal silted up, could provide no relief for its starving peasants.¹⁶ The political elites of non-Western states in Asia and Africa readily understood the threat from the European powers and its basis in industrial modernity. Their characteristic response was an attempt at a defensive, conservative modernization, moving from the purchase of modern weapons to seeking to develop the means of making them. This was selective modernity, taking from the West only what would sustain and enhance their power. It was, however, grounded in the untenable contradiction of seeking the science and technology that they believed was the basis of Western power, but rejecting the secular culture of modernity that threatened to dissolve the hegemonic cosmologies, religious systems and moral economies on which their own power and institutions were based. This led, often enough, to bitter internal conflicts, sometimes ending in civil strife, between modernizers and traditionalists. In the end, only one of these efforts at conservative modernization, that of Japan,

succeeded in both warding off the threat of Western imperialism and establishing a secular industrial nation-state.

In Africa, for example, the most powerful of the West African states, Ashanti, failed in this process, which included a bitter civil war between reformers and conservatives in the 1880s. In 1895, an Ashanti embassy arrived in London to negotiate with the British, who were dealing in bad faith, as they were already planning the conquest of Ashanti in the following year. While in London, the ambassadors took time to negotiate a contract with a British entrepreneur for a comprehensive turn-key development of the kingdom covering everything from transportation and communications, to educational and health institutions, a new police force, establishment of a mint and banks, mining and manufacturing, improved agriculture, and the publication of news papers. Had their command of English been better, they might have been more careful about signing a contract with a gentleman named George Reckless!¹⁷

The encounter with Western modernity was posed with even greater urgency under colonial domination. Malinowski understood that the relationship was not an equal exchange, but based upon European domination established largely by force and involving a very selective introduction of Western institutions and culture to serve specific European interests. Nevertheless, he insisted on the tenacity and continuity of African cultures and their vigorous response to colonialism. The

result, he believed, would not be the demise of African cultures and their replacement by a facsimile of Western modernity, but rather what he called a *tertium quid*, a third way creating a new civilization in which Western and African elements were combined in ways that radically modified and reinterpreted both; his version of the double movement. By the 1930s Malinowski increasingly recognized the importance of the project of conservative modernization being pursued not only by indigenous African political elites, such as King Sobhuza II of Swaziland, to whom he was introduced by his student Hilda Kuper during his only visit to Africa in 1934, but also by the first generation of a new literate intelligentsia, like his student Kenyatta.¹⁸ It was an attempt to selectively control social change and preserve a sense of continuity, order and authority against the turbulent commotion of colonialism: “Order and Progress” was Jomo Kenyatta’s motto.

To what extent, then, did the development of the ‘*tertium quid*’ take place in colonial Africa? Thirty years ago the British economist Geoffrey Kay caused a minor sensation when he suggested that Africa’s problems were not that it had been exploited by capitalism, but that it had not been exploited enough.¹⁹ The relative weakness of colonial states and their reluctance to press the development of capitalist labor and commodity markets beyond a point where metropolitan trading interests and local tax needs were satisfied resulted in confused, disorderly

and incomplete capitalist transformations of subject African societies. To maintain control and sustain the limited extraction of labor and commodities, colonial states relied on indirect rule through local African authorities, both indigenous and colonial creations, who were rewarded by channels of clientelistic access to state resources. Colonial officials became, in effect, patrons of their African clients/collaborators. Patron client relationships, already deeply embedded in most African societies, became the dominant social relation of power, the fundamental idiom of politics and the mode of access to the state and the resources of modernity.²⁰

The confusions, inequities, and conflicts resulting from the intrusions of state and capital into African societies made modernity, as John Lonsdale put it, into a “monster of social disruption,” and in both its opportunities and oppressions an instrument of moral danger and confusion. Former understandings of moral economy and political legitimacy that defined the reciprocal obligations of ruler and ruled, rich and poor, elders and youth, men and women were called into question. Ethnicity and class, long seen by Africanists as alternative bases of social cleavage, are actually intimately linked products of the same social forces and expressions of the moral and political crises of colonial modernity.

The disruptions of colonial modernity were experienced as a crisis of moral economy, a challenge to indigenous understandings of the legitimate bases of the

inequalities of wealth and power, authority and obedience, and the reciprocities and loyalties of social relations. Contests over property rights and access to resources, including the new opportunities of modernity through state and capital, and social differentiation and class formation became inseparable from debates over the legitimacy of political authority and the definition of moral and political community cast in ethnic terms. Colonial states and markets provided differential opportunities and threats to the position and reciprocal obligations of all. For chiefs and elders there were opportunities to increase control over land and property and to increase wealth through the patronage of the state and favored access to markets, but also threats from the loss of control over youth and women who found opportunity in migrant labor and trade. Male loss of control over women, particularly of their labor and offspring, provoked widespread moral panic in community after community. Confrontations over class formation were subsumed within disputes and discourses about custom, social obligation and responsibility, and the bounds of the moral community. The deep politics of patron-client relations was the terrain of social struggle, its arguments the idiom of the search for political authority and accountability in times of disorienting change and disorder. Modern African ethnicities originate in attempts to reconstruct political community against the threat of class formation. In arguing out conflicts to redefine an accepted moral economy, Africans became members of self-conscious ethnic

communities both larger in social scale and more sharply demarcated than what had existed before. This internal discursive political arena through which ethnic identities emerged out of multiple, selective imaginings of ‘tradition’, culture and identity from European as well as African sources, is what Lonsdale and I have termed moral ethnicity.

A moral economy of a sort, tenuous and constantly disrupted, emerged in colonial Africa, but constructed *within* newly expanded ethnic communities, urban and rural, and based on the pervasive patron-client networks. In disordered and threatening social circumstances ethnic communities became the focus of an increasingly desperate search for security and stability. As Peter Ekeh has pointed out, ethnic communities became mega-kinship systems meeting individual security needs and dispensing material benefits through the direct and indirect reciprocities of internal networks built on the relations of “big men and small boys”.²¹ And the networks of clientelism remained the principal mode of linkage to the post-colonial state, providing access to its diverse resources and protection from its erratic and unpredictable power to harm. The state remained an alien entity, both a threat and an opportunity, the focus of an amoral contest for its resources among competing ethnic networks. Politics became an increasingly opportunistic food chain, in which, as Chabal and Daloz remind us, legitimacy “continues to primarily rest on practices of redistribution.”²² And thus, the ‘politics of the belly’ and the pervasive

metaphors of eating and being eaten with which Africans so often describe the political process. This is the arena of political tribalism, not the moral ethnicity of a community of rights and obligations, but the political solidarity and mobilization of that community against the competing interests of rival ethnicities. Social trust in Africa is largely contained within ethnic communities, and even here the materialism of relations makes loyalties shallow. There was and continues to be little basis for the development of systemic civic trust in the state as an impersonal arbiter of conflict or an honest and disinterested distributor of public resources.

Indeed, capitalism and the secular nation-state simply do not exist as fully-formed institutional and cultural systems in sub-Saharan Africa, with the possible exception of South Africa: no double movement, no *tertium quid*. Instead, neither state power nor ruling coalitions have been organized around transformative projects directed towards either capitalism or the nation-state. Such a project actually threatens the established bases for the accumulation of wealth and power, and the patronage politics that sustain elites and ethnic factions. African states are stalled in a heaving, chaotic pluralism of clashing institutional and cultural elements. People attempt to find in ethnic communities, each internally divided and contested, a degree of support and security, with some semblance of cultural and moral coherence in an environment of intense, even desperate competition for resources. The state is a conglomeration of agencies and offices to be captured and

manipulated, beneath the façade of the official ‘development’ ideology, for individual and communal benefit. The arbitrary and authoritarian use of state power to accumulate wealth reflects the limited development of the impersonal exchange relations of the capitalist market and of the state as disinterested arbiter of political conflict. Not only do ethnic and patronage politics inhibit the development of a coherent national dominant class with a project of social transformation, but also the fragmentation and privatization of state power undermines its ability to act towards such a project of national development.

For a while, during the exhilarating days of independence in the 1960s and into the 1970s, the ramshackle structures of the state and market, and the networks of ethnicity and patronage that pervaded them, powered by substantial inflows of aid and modest ones of investment, produced economic growth in most states and a degree of industrialization in some. Aid and growth fueled, in particular, the most prized forms of patronage in the public sector jobs of a growing white-collar salariat and in community access to schools and health facilities. Modest progress towards modernity appeared to be occurring, through the rhizomes of ethnicity and patronage that persisted even when elected governments were replaced by military regimes and increasingly authoritarian civilian governments.

And then came the 1980s. From the most profound structural crisis of Western capitalism of the late 20th century emerged the third industrial revolution.

For the Western capitalist powers it meant an effort to revise the Keynesian moral economy of the 1945-70 epoch of expansion; for the rest of the world it brought the most sustained attempt since the 19th century to aggressively spread everywhere with fanatic religious zeal the “unrealizable fantasy” of the self-regulating market: globalization.²³ The UN Global Report on Human Settlements noted that by the 1990s “Under what were almost perfect economic conditions according to the dominant neo-liberal economic doctrine, one might have imagined the decade would have been one of unrivalled prosperity and social justice.”²⁴ Instead, as Mike Davis notes, “the brutal tectonics of neo-liberal globalization since 1978 are analogous to the catastrophic processes that shaped a ‘third world’ in the first place, during the era of Victorian Imperialism (1870-1900)”.²⁵ The modest economic and social gains of the first decades of independence were wiped out. The World Bank country report on Nigeria for 2003 acknowledged that per capita income in Africa’s most populous country was now lower than it had been at independence.²⁶

This social catastrophe has been, moreover, primarily an urban phenomenon. In the earlier experience of Western modernity, cities had been the central focus of capitalist industrialization, the development of classes, and the creation of modern secular scientific culture, as well as the principal site of the growth of the central institutions of the nation-state and of the mass movements and political struggles

of the double movement to contain the destructive excesses of the self-regulating market. In contemporary Africa, Asia and Latin America however, extreme economic decline has been combined, against all conventional economic logic, with sustained high rates of urban population growth; 5-8% per annum in Africa alone. And the UN Report placed the blame for this squarely on neo-liberalism and structural adjustment programs.²⁷ The result, in Davis' vivid phrase, has been the "mass production of slums", especially in Africa, where Lagos now sits as "the biggest node in the shanty town corridor of 70 million people that stretches from Abidjan to Ibadan: probably the biggest continuous footprint of urban poverty on earth."²⁸ Ethiopia and Chad now have the unenviable distinction of the highest percentage of slum dwellers among their urban populations, a staggering 99.4%; while Maputo and Kinshasa have the poorest urban dwellers, two thirds of whom earn less than the cost of their minimum daily nutritional requirements.

The metastasizing shanty towns of structural adjustment are populated by former peasants and small farmers whose livelihoods and communities have been devastated when they were thrown into global commodity markets dominated by multi-national agribusiness, and an urban middle class and working class immiserated by the slashing of the public sector and ruin of import substitution industries. Today, the 'informal sector' is not a field for enterprising micro-entrepreneurs but an increasingly ruthless economy of survival, employing 60% of

the urban labor force in Africa and estimated to provide 90% of the new jobs over the next decade.²⁹ A large proportion of the population of Africa has been reduced, in the chilling Victorian word, to a social “residuum” effectively expelled from the global market. And to this we must add the threat to life and institutions of the almost biblical plague of AIDS.

The UN Habitat report identifies the “main single cause of increases in poverty and inequality during the 1980s and 1990s was the retreat of the state.”³⁰ The degradation of the already limited capacities of post-colonial states has had two further consequences. First, it has made it impossible for African states to pursue the interventionist and protectionist policies that all developed capitalist states, including the new industrial nations of Asia, have deployed to manage the market, guide industrial development, and construct some semblance of a functional internal moral economy.³¹ Second, the already tenuous and contested moral economies of Africa’s ethnic patronage systems have been increasingly strained by the evaporation of resources and escalating conflicts within and between communities for the appropriation and redistribution of what remains. The democratization process since the 1990s provides no solutions. Multi-party elections produce governments that can, in practice, pursue only the neo-liberal policies required by the IFI’s and the G8 John Gray describes it as “an attempt to legitimate through democratic institutions severe limits on the scope and content of

democratic control over economic life.”³² Without the ability to pursue alternative social and economic policies, governments of whatever party are simply alternations of competing ethno-patronage networks of the political magnates. This means not only no effective economic growth, but also no double movement, no tertium quid.

Without an effective state and political process, the response of the impoverished millions in Africa cannot be the secular mass movements of modernity that shaped the liberal democracies of the West. Throughout Africa today there are few if any effective trade unions or parties of the working or middle classes, partly because there are few such workers left and the scope of action within democratized polities remains so constrained. Instead they cling to the deteriorating networks of ethnic patronage, including the culture of witchcraft and occult powers that surround “Big Men”; or turn to the analgesic balms of populist Islam or Pentecostal Christianity.³³ The condition of existential dread and insecurity that neo-liberalism has laid upon African societies is the age of terror and the ordeal of modernity in our times.

¹ Bronislaw Malinowski, “Introduction” to Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: the Tribal Life of the Kikuyu* New York: Vintage Books, nd (first published 1938), p. ix

² Ibid.

³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989

⁴ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* London: Heinemann, 1967; Marshall Berma, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* New York: Viking Penguin, 1988.

⁵ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* Boston: Beacon Press, 1957 (first published in 1944)

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-50.

⁷ E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* London: Penguin Books, 1993, especially Chapter IV, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century” and Chapter V, “The Moral Economy Reviewed”

⁸ Polanyi, *Op.Cit.* p. 39.

⁹ These points are synthesized from, among other sources, Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991; Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983; and Donald M. Lowe, *History of Bourgeois Perception* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

¹⁰ Peter L. Bernstein, *Against the Gods: the Remarkable Story of Risk* New York: Wiley, 1998.

¹¹ Margaret Jacob,

¹² Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983

¹³ As Mark Mazower reminds us in, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* New York: Vintage Books, 2000

¹⁴ John Dunn “Trust and Political Agency” in Diego Gambetta, ed., *Trust* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988

¹⁵ From among almost daily examples, see Roger Lowenstein, “The End of Pensions,” *The New York Times Magazine*, October 30, 2005.

¹⁶ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World*, London: Verso Books, 2001.

¹⁷ Ivor Wilks, *One Nation, Many Histories: Ghana Past and Present* (Aggrey-Fraser-Guggisberg Memorial Lectures, 1995) Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1996, pp. 48-51

¹⁸ Sobhuza articulated the project for them all when he later told Hilda Kuper, “European culture is not all good; ours is often better. We must be able to choose how to live, and for that we must see how others live. I do not want my people to be imitation Europeans, but to be respected for their own laws and customs.” Hilda Kuper, *An African Aristocracy: Rank Among the Swazi* London: Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 1 He corresponded with Malinowski for several years, particularly on how to integrate Western education with Swazi institutions and culture. See Paul Cocks, “The King and I: Bronislaw Malinowski, King Sobhuza II of Swaziland and the Vision of Culture Change in Africa,” *History of the Human Sciences*, 13, 4, 2000, pp. 25-47.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Kay, *Development and Underdevelopment: a Marxist Analysis* London: Macmillan, 1975, p x.

²⁰ The next two paragraphs are based on Bruce Berman, “‘A Palimpsest of Contradictions’: Ethnicity, Class and Politics in Africa,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37, 1, 2004, pp. 24-29.

²¹ Peter Ekeh, “Individuals’ Basic Security Needs and the Limits of Democratization in Africa,” in Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyoh and Will Kymlicka, eds. *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, Oxford: James Currey; Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004, pp. 34-36.

²² Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, Oxford: James Currey; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, for the International African Institute, 1999, p. 3 and ch. 3.

²³ This new attempt of market fundamentalism is critically analysed in John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, London: Granta Books, 1999. He specifically connects his analysis of the contemporary period with Polanyi’s of the nineteenth century.

²⁴ UN-Habitat, *The Challenge of the Slums: Global Report on Human Settlement* London: Earthscan Publications, 2003, p. 2.

²⁵ Mike Davis, “Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat,” *New Left Review* 26, March/April 2004, p. 23.

²⁶ World Bank, *Nigeria: Country Brief* Washington, September 2003.

²⁷ “The primary direction of both national and international interventions during the last twenty years has actually increased urban poverty and slums, increased exclusion and inequality, and weakened urban elites in their efforts to use cities as engines of growth.” UN Habitat, *Challenge of the Slums, Op.Cit.*, p. 6.

²⁸ Davis, *Loc.Cit.*, pp. 11, 15.

²⁹ *Challenge of the Slums, Op.Cit.*, pp. 103-104.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

³¹ Robert Wade, *Governing the Market: Economic Theory and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialization* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2nd paperback edition, 2004; and Bruce Berman, “African Capitalism and the Paradigm of Modernity: Culture, Technology and the State,” in Bruce Berman and Colin Leys, eds., *African Capitalists in African Development* Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1994

³² Gray, *Op.Cit.*, p. 9; and Rita Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy: Development Discourse and Good Governance in Africa* London and New York: Zed Books, 2000

³³ Davis, *Loc.Cit.*, pp. 27-33.