

GROWTH AGAINST DEMOCRACY

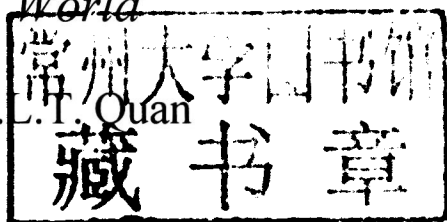
H. L. T. QUAN

SAVAGE DEVELOPMENTALISM IN THE MODERN WORLD

Growth Against Democracy

*Savage Developmentalism in the Modern
World*

H. L. I. Quan



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Growth Against Democracy

For Elizabeth and Cedric Robinson

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Chapter One

Pray the Devil Back to Hell: Savagery & the Promise of Modernity

The Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.

—Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Promises are the uniquely human way of ordering the future

—Hannah Arendt, *Crises of The Republic*

Since 1981 the United States has followed a policy until the last year or so, when we started rethinking it, that we rich countries that produce a lot of food should sell it to poor countries and relieve them of the burden of producing their own food so thank goodness they can leap directly into the industrial era. It has not worked. It may have been good for some of my farmers in Arkansas, but it has not worked. It was a mistake. It was a mistake that I was a party to. I am not pointing the finger at anybody. I did that. I have to live every day with the consequences of the lost capacity to produce a rice crop in Haiti to feed those people, because of what I did, nobody else.

—U.S. President William Jefferson Clinton

CAPITALIST ACCOUNTING

Savage developmentalism is a phenomenon that chronically haunts the modern world. It evidences the things seen and unseen. *It is lived, witnessed, and can be explained.* Former President of the United States Bill Clinton is clearly haunted by the consequential policies that his administration embraced. Yet it is not without irony that Clinton claims singular responsibility for the

unmaking of Haiti because Clinton himself is not unaware that a long history of colonialism and neocolonialism is the main architect of the making and unmaking of modern Haiti.¹ It is surely not a mystery that a program of development that rests fundamentally on expansionism, state-defined order and antidemocracy would entail cruelty, violence, and repression. These consequential outcomes are both savage developmentalism's logic and its computation.

The materiality of savage developmentalism, however, is more than a specter. According to the United Nations (UN) data, over half of the world, or more than three billion people, live on less than \$2.50 (USD) a day. The poorest 40 percent of the world's people accounts for 5 percent of global income whereas the richest 20 percent controls 75 percent of that income. The wealthiest 2 percent of adults own more than 50 percent of global household wealth; and 1 percent owns 49 percent of all global assets. The poorest 50 percent owns less than 1 percent of global wealth (UNU-WIDER 2006, 1).² A billion children are deprived of one or more services essential to survival and development. For example, nearly a third of the world's population (2.5 billion) lacks access to improved sanitation, while one in three lives in slum-like conditions (UNU-WIDER 2006).³ During the first nine years of the 21st century, some 88 million children died, mainly killed by poverty, hunger, preventable diseases, and related causes. Each day, more than 22,000 children "die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, far removed from the scrutiny and the conscience of the world" as it seems that "being meek and weak in life makes these dying multitudes even more invisible in death" (UNICEF 2009, 18-19).⁴ Nearly a billion adults are unable to read a book or sign their names, even if "one percent of what the world spent every year on weapons was [all that was] needed to put every child into school" (Shah 2010). Not without irony, and as public institutions of higher learning and museums of history are privatized and looted, state apparatuses have become increasingly *more creative* in finding solutions to service corporate entities.⁵ All the while, a global campaign against "terrorism" ensures that war-dependent economies continue to expand (Johnson 2004; Bacevich 2005; Suskind 2006).

This disconcerting litany barely disaggregates the accounting of contemporary capitalism and its conceits. But, does this grotesque overabundance of human misery incite discomfort among scholars of modernity? It is, of course, neither controversial nor profound to observe that these are times of gigantic crimes and global catastrophes.⁶ At a minimum, we are living in a very troubling time. Yet, without question, communities of people have always, in troubling times, managed tremendous feats of wisdom and courage to accomplish unimaginable things. Indeed in times of greatest trials and injustices, ordinary people have risen up, individually and collectively, to confront forces of repression and unreason (Ransby 2003; Robinson 1983;

Zinn 2003, 2006). They do so, often because there seems to be an irresistible impulse to negate injustices and unfreedom, and because the state fails to secure what is erroneously believed to be *its* theological power of exception: the sovereignty over human life.⁷

While leaving others to take up the specific acts of democratic resistances or popular “rages against the machine,” this work maps the terrains that make such counter stances necessary. Specifically, diplomacy and war—the interstices between the state and capital—are interrogated to ascertain the metalogics of modern developmentality. *Growth Against Democracy* builds on the critical works of David Harvey and others on neoliberalism, capitalist development, and empire (Harvey 2003, 2005, 2006; Mills 1997; Ong 2006; Robinson 1983; Polanyi 1944) to lay the groundwork for an honest assessment of neoliberal economics and diplomacy and its impact on human life. The particular discursive space that I want to map, in fact, has been saturated and tyrannized, and even midwived into a technology. I am referring to a developmentality that has reasoned violence and antidemocracy as progress and life, while simultaneously insinuating itself into the deep structure of modern thought. Aristotle, perhaps the first Western materialist, warned against judging a society merely in terms of its income or wealth. So, rather than assessing a social phenomenon, be it development or capitalism, only in good times, I propose that we assess the *achievements* of capitalist development in times of crises. This work, therefore, explores savage developmentalism as a modern metalogic and instantiates it by looking at specific moments of “crisis.” These are not crises of capitalism per se, but are difficulties, disturbances, and/or calamities at large rather than specific to the economic system. Judging from the sampled accounting of neoliberalism above, it is not an exaggeration to say that we live in a time of a generalized crisis.

Our present condition demands that we take stock of what Claude Lévi-Strauss called our “memory bank.” In this memory bank are myths of creation and the many folklores of our dominant mode of expression: capitalism (Lévi-Strauss 1962). Myths, Lévi-Strauss explains, are “capable of generalizing and [are thus] scientific, even though [they are] still entangled in imagery” (20). They work “by analogies and comparisons even though [their] creations . . . always really consist of a new arrangement of elements, the nature of which is unaffected by whether they figure in the instrumental set or in the final arrangement” (20-1). At one level, the production of knowledge about capitalism, wedded to the discourse of development, has been about the reproduction of imaginary species and societies capable of explaining our insatiable appetite for material wealth and violence.⁸ Karl Polanyi, for instance, argued that the coupling of greed and economic rationality as human nature, and market values as social values, is meant to naturalize capitalist values and priorities (Polanyi 2001, 258).

At the heart of savage developmentalism is structured otherness. By savage developmentalism I am referring to a type of developmentality that centers on expansionism, order, and antidemocracy. The daily worldwide death toll as a result of malnutrition, disease, state-organized violence, and environmental degradation are, by and large, displaced by stories about technological and financial innovations, and other fantastic tales of modern progress. This is a symptom of a savage mind and a civilization that can neither control itself nor define its destiny. Yet, our dominant discourse of development persists in its epistemological certainty that *development is destiny*. As Debal Deb observes, “No sane person is opposed to development . . . [and] in fact, everybody, every society, every nation *ought* to develop” (2009, 15). I argue that the great promise of and faith in progress is part of a process of dissociative anesthesia against savagery, and the normality with which we accept development as *telos* (or as our collective destiny) is only possible if we, in fact, are sufficiently anesthetized to dehumanize the human consequences of economic development. The habitual exoticization and marginalization of otherness allows us to disown rhetorically the world we inhabit so that we may define it as *other* (Taussig 1986, 1993). We define savagery, in our codified hallmark of civilization—the *Oxford English Dictionary*—as cruel, ungovernable, and uncontrollable. Under the guise of civility and civilization, late twentieth and early twenty-first century capitalism *is* cruel, ungovernable, and uncontrollable (Bello 2009; Greenberg, Dratel, and Lewis 2005; Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009; Mbembe 2003; Patel 2008). That unfettered speculative financialism brought the global economy to the brink of total meltdown, with legislative overseers having nary a sense of how to prevent similar future crises, suggests that this latest apparition of capitalism is indeed ungovernable (Phillips 2008). Moreover, and as Walden Bello (2009), Raj Patel (2008), and others have pointed out, amidst plenty, food prices have rendered dozens of countries in total chaos as displacement and starvation confronts millions. Such calamities demonstrate not only economic disorder, but also the brutal and disastrous nature of neoliberal food and other economic regimes. *The end of history*⁹ *is liberalism triumphant, and everyone wants to come to America!*

The production of knowledge about capitalist societies persists in masquerading exploitation, alienation, and cultural degradation as progress, order, and world advancement. It seems almost too vulgar to evoke human misery as a consequence of war, displacement, and work as part of the hip, cosmopolitan global assemblage that is the main stuff of social theoretical production. This book, therefore, is a modest attempt to elucidate some aspects of savage developmentalism. Indeed, a creed that rests largely on expansionist and antidemocratic programs of development reigned for much of the twentieth century and relied on a regiment of savage logic and violence to compute its accomplishments. Amidst plenty, life itself has had to be qual-

ified as livable and unlivable while the politics of sheer life¹⁰ circumscribe the majority of the world's population. Something is seriously amiss. *We live in a world where capital is free and humans are illegal.*

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, and as indicated by the accounting of contemporary wealth and inequality, evidence of savagery and unlivable life is everywhere. If the civilizing missions of nineteenth century imperialism had counted "new" lands as part of the settler's divine right to rule, then its twentieth and twenty-first century successors have been tallying peoples and cultures as the manifestations of capitalist achievements and destinies. Even the consoling lies of Rumsfeldian proportions¹¹ could no longer masquerade the violence and antidemocracy that have so characterized neoliberal programs of development and other projects of modern empire (Harvey 2003; Johnson 2004).

*Even as the End of History*¹² marks the rise of market fundamentalism as the most dominant articulation of Western triumph, questions about the promise of modernity remain stubbornly simple, often centering on the quest for livable life. The accumulative accounting of dispossession, displacement, and lives prematurely dispatched by over half a millennium of modernity makes lies of developmental truths—most notably, the idea of inevitable and universal progress accompanying globalized capitalist expansionism. *We tell ourselves these things so they must be true!* Stories about the inevitable betterment accompanying colonization and structural adjustment programs¹³ are told aplenty but they are not necessarily less fallacious. Today, even a few billionaires acknowledge that there is a massive disconnection between wealth accumulation by a few and the unaffordability of life by the many (Novack and Ebeling 2010). We have available to us the material and discursive capability for contemplating such feats as replicating the Big Bang and genetically engineering fish for visual pleasure; yet, that, at the same time, we totally lack agreement or appreciation for the basic prerequisites of a livable life (i.e., food, shelter, medicine, education, beauty) seems fantastically tragic. *We have yet to have star wars; instead, we have food wars.*

The three instantiations of modern development explored in this book are of neoliberal character. There are few protagonists, except for the men and women who refuse to be rendered invisible, expendable, and powerless. Their very existence consistently manages to trip up the "system" that brought about a series of policy responses that may or may not advance the cause of livable life. While the details of their lives and struggles for justice, dignity, and livable life do not in fact people this work, they are ghosted¹⁴ to provide a pre-recognition of the perennial refusals, acts of incompletion, and campaigns of insurrections by the majority of the people against the adverse effects of capitalism, especially violence, cruelty, and premature deaths. The antagonists, however, are many and more definable. They are the grand structures and large processes of capitalism such as white supremacy, global-

ization, financialization, and war. They are the logic that makes expansionism seem natural, de-democratizing seem necessary, and war, progressive. Collectively, the three examples are iterations of a *too familiar* story about economic development in the modern world. Each is an iteration of the *same, though, much older* story about the manifested logic of capitalism. Each seeks to render visible capitalist expansionism, the need to secure state-defined and controlled order, and the violence and degradation that often result from growth strategies. In these times of the ubiquitous national security state, with its awesome “power of exception”—the ability to create national emergencies where none exist so that it may exercise the coercive and bureaucratic ability to entirely suspend the liberal juridical order and life itself—these examples bring to the fore the conceits of our modern theocracy and its latest eschatology—neoliberalism (Agamben 1998, 2005; Mbembe 2003; Ong 2006).

Neoliberalism, as Harvey explains, is a “theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneur freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2005, 2). These presumptions of neoliberalism can, of course, be contrasted with the reality of the practices of neoliberal economics, where universalized expansionism induces uneven development, trade is often managed, markets, particularly financial markets, are rigged, and property rights are confounded with historically racialized and gendered privileges. Because neoliberalism “interacts with regimes of ruling” that would produce a particular set of “administrative strategies” (Ong 2006, 6-13), a neoliberal developmentalism would elect, among other things, market fundamentalism as a mode of governing, where unfettered markets (free of state interventions) would create the most optimal economic and cultural outcomes. As Aihwa Ong explains, this form of governance relies on “market knowledge and calculation for a politics of subjection and subject-making” (13). She maintains that, “This political technology centered on the management of life” relies on “a series of regulatory controls exerted on the population and on individuals in order to harness and extract life forces” (13). Thus, the rise of neoliberalism also coincides with the maturation of the national security state, wherein the regiment of governing includes the state’s exercise of sovereignty over life itself. As Ong concedes, however, neoliberalism is “merely the most recent development of such techniques that governs human life.” More than six decades ago, Polanyi (1944) had already documented the twin development of capitalism and the modern state in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe in *The Great Transformation*. Similarly, today we witness the neoliberal state’s authoritarianism functioning as an enforcer of

market fundamentalism (Harvey 2005, 79). As Polanyi understood then, and as the case remains today, *the relationship between development and antidemocracy is not incidental.*

In encountering the historical examples in this book, we find the many folktales of capitalism (and of modernity) that instantiate neoliberalism and its particular forms of governmentality. Such utterances about capitalism are both familiar and compelling. They support the narratives of the moral imperatives of modernity, development, modern development projects, and the presumed faith and trajectories of those who are deemed un/modern. For those who would modernize, the rewards are “betterment of life, easing of life’s hardship, increasing life’s opportunities, comfort and leisure” (Deb 2009, 15) and enlightenment. In this parlance and imperative of the modern progress, colonial and imperial encounters, and even genocide, become civilizing missions—campaigns to bring industries, commerce, and reason to the backward and parochial natives. As each of these iterations occurs, the process of repetition and of familiarization *habituate our thinking on and adulation of* modern developmentality. Following each iteration (or reiteration), we become better acquainted with, and, thus, become better learners of developmental thinking. So, presumably, as we reiterate the lessons of capitalism, we become modern. Telling capitalist tales is, thus, part of becoming modern and being functional, as we *formulate ever more sophisticated and coherent myths about the natural coupling of development and democracy.*

We invent stories not only to explain where we come from but also as life-aid so that we may live with ourselves, in real or imagined communities (Anderson 1983). What we say to ourselves and to others about the rise and fall of civilization, the accent and decline of capitalism, and the making and unmaking of economies helps us make sense out of something that may not be sensible—such as greed is good, or that the *88 million children who died between 2000 and 2009, chiefly as a result of poverty, preventable diseases, and related causes, are part of the collateral damage of globalization.* Folktales about capitalism thus contribute to the normalization of a certain logic that advances and intensifies the process of wealth accumulation and appropriation. This undeveloping, and in no small measure, directly contributes to the unmaking of life (or creating unlivable life) and toward what Achille Mbembe calls, “necropolitics.”¹⁵

Given that there is no “modernity without coloniality,” as Walter Dignolo (2000) points out, the modern world has been besieged by a plethora of reiterations of savage developmentalism and antidemocracy. As Franz Fanon graphically detailed in *Wretched of the Earth*, the containment of the colonized and the deterrence of decolonization must necessarily be the primary tasks of the colonizers, for “in decolonization, there is therefore the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation” (1963, 37). He further explained:

The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and blood-stained knives which emanate from it. For if the last shall be the first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists. That affirmed intention to place the last at the head of things, and to make them climb at a pace (too quickly, some say) the well-known steps which characterize an organized society, can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, that of violence. (37)

Fanon also understood that decolonization requires the leaving of dreams and abandoning “old beliefs and friendships from the time before life began” because he recognized that a system that is “never done with talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them” is not worth retaining or mimicking (311). Nevertheless, our modern memory bank is replete with stories of civilizing missions and the need for institutionalization meant to teach us about lessons in unfreedom.

Growth Against Democracy is thus, first and foremost, a radical critique of development as a modern project. It is a modest accounting of capitalism’s various apparitions, and makes use of critical international political economy (or critical IPE), articulation theory, and critical cultural studies to mount an interdisciplinary critique of modern development, globalization, and neoliberalism as imperial projects of the modern world. It seeks to delineate the terrains of what I call, “savage developmentalism” by exploring some of its more prominent iterations. The specific iterations I take up here are the conceits of capitalism (i.e., expansionism, order, and antidemocracy) and are illustrated by three instantiations: Japanese and Brazilian economic entanglement during military Brazil, China’s recent and aggressive pursuit of African resources and markets in the midst of humanitarian and economic crises on the continent, and the U.S. involvement in the reconstruction of postwar Iraq in 2003. Through these illustrations, I hope to demonstrate that violence and repression are endemic to modern developmentality given that expansionism and antidemocracy are epistemological *a priori*.¹⁶

The three historical cases (Brazil-Japan, China-Africa, and U.S.-Iraq) probe the discursive practices of modern developmentality, exploring the coercive and juridical dimensions of trade, diplomacy and war, respectively. I study them because they are exemplars of development projects informed by the logic of development as *telos*. These illustrations make visible the consequences of the pursuit of public policies based on the idea that development should be human destiny. The Brazil-Japan case exemplifies neoliberal logic and its pursuit of foreign finance that requires a powerful national security state, and savage developmentalism is analyzed at the macro level in its mature and coercive stage. In 1964, when the Brazilian technocrats deposed a democratically elected president and installed themselves into office, they elected authoritarianism as the enforcer of a neoliberal economic strategy. The ensuing antidemocracy is thus the material consequence of a specific