

A Rejoinder to the Comments on Democracy and Political In- stability

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As usual, Thandika has, with wit and sharp observation, poked some holes into my argument. In essence, Thandika accuses me of making an "instrumentalist argument" by associating democracy with development, or making a case for democracy because it leads to, or is correlated with, development. Logically, argues Thandika, "correlation does not suggest causation." Further, it is doubtful whether such a correlation exists in Africa. Perhaps much more damaging to my thesis is that higher rates of growth have been achieved under dictatorial and authoritarian regimes than democratic ones. Finally, Thandika concludes that democracy is good in itself, period. A conclusion we also arrived at in our book, *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa*.

While I would find it difficult to disagree with Thandika's lucid argument, let me take this opportunity to do two things: (a) elaborate on some of the points he has raised, and (b) remind the reader, who may not have read my essays referred to, about some of the key issues raised so that some of Thandika's points can be seen in their appropriate contexts. If Thandika's points are read in isolation, they may easily be subject to misinterpretation; in the context of the essays referred to they not only make a lot of sense, but they help us carry the arguments a little further--and in the process get rid of some foggy ideas in our minds.

Instrumentalism

My writings on democracy and politics in Africa raise historical and contextual issues, not merely logical ones. In doing so, of course, I do not want to defy logic, but I also do not want to read history in which some kind of logic "straight jackets" my arguments. In the article on the "Disintegration of the Nationalist Coalitions", I make a statement which is worth recalling if we have to confront this charge of instrumentalism in our historical context:

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"..whereas the authoritarian presidency may be said to have ensured reasonably stable periods of accumulation evidenced by high growth rates almost throughout the 1960s and 1970s, this has not necessarily been accompanied by a stable political process. Intra-bourgeois conflicts have, as a result of the brittleness of the authoritarian presidential system, been settled very violently; and although such violence has not led to a complete rupture of the system, there is no guarantee that these conflicts may not lead to such rupture in the future if the system does not change (through some democratic opening)"¹.

Africa, since independence, has had more than her fair share of repressive and undemocratic regimes. Even in the "democracies within one class" that Thandika refers to in the case of Malawi, one wonders whether the "one class" really participates in policy formulation and policy options as the "one race" does in the "apartheid democracy" in the Republic of South Africa. One cannot deny that Banda's reign has been accompanied by some economic growth in Malawi. At the same time, one cannot deny the brittleness inherent in the political regime. In other words, in the case of South Africa, the apartheid state is accountable to white society--particularly the white bourgeoisie. The state cannot therefore impose on society any crazy model of political domination or economic disaccumulation. In the rest of Africa, however, under the various types of repressive and authoritarian regimes, we have examples galore of such models imposed or "impossible" from above because the narrowly based political regimes have little compunction--at least in the short run--not to do so. Were they to have more sense of accountability they would, *logically*, be less liable to imposing such models of political repression and economic disaccumulation. It is perhaps appropriate to hear, at this juncture, what a former African Head of State, retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, recently said on this issue at his Africa Leadership Forum in Ota, Nigeria:

"Once in power, some of our nationalist parties began to behave as if they were what they had never been - the sole

1 Peter Anyang'Nyong'o "State and Society in Kenya: The Disintegration of the Nationalist Coalitions and the Rise of Presidential Authoritarianism, 1963-78", *Africa Development*, Vol. XI, no. 4, 1986, p. 179.

embodiments of the social will and purpose of our countries. In time, power came to be concentrated not so much in one party as in one man, coadjuted by a phalanx of sycophants. Dissent, for which there had always been a secure and honoured place in traditional African society, came to be viewed with ill-conceived hostility, almost as if it was treason. The result of this political rigidity was to shut off the springs of creativity in our people. The men and women of spirit who are the leaven of every society either began to go into exile (of which Thandika is a living example) in foreign countries or withdraw into a stultifying private life; to their own loss, yes, but to the even greater loss of society at large (the disaccumulation of human resources). Our recovery must therefore begin with a recuperation of those values which are the foundation of every true humane society which is in turn the foundation of social creativity."

I have no doubt in mind that part of the "foundation of every true humane society" that Obasanjo refers to is "democracy"; and the "foundation of social creativity" or the "foundation of development" in the modern world must, of necessity, be found in democracy.

Thandika, like a good product of bourgeois economics, sees development in very narrow terms: economic growth. Those other values that even men like Dudley Seers associate with development--in and of itself--such as equity, social justice, human creativity, etc do not seem to bother him very much. If that is so, how would we explain what is happening in China today? Obviously repressive regimes have ensured periods of economic growth: Franco's Spain is a quotable example. But that does not really mean that democratic regimes would not have done equally well. In Africa, at this point in history, there are many social forces completely disillusioned with the balance sheet of repressive regimes--either as guarantors of economic growth or of political freedoms--that their thirst for democracy is a thirst for both better economic living conditions as well as freer political system.

Yet Thandika says that it is quite possible--and indeed logical--that if one model of authoritarianism or repression has failed to ensure high rates of growth, then it could as well be the case that another model--perhaps much more efficient--would do so. But even models of authoritarianism, in order to ensure high rates of growth, *have to be class based*. In our analysis of the disintegration of the nationalist coalitions" in Africa, we have established the class base of the authoritarian presidencies, and the extent to which it is alienated

from the nascent bourgeoisie to the extent that its politics could, under certain conjunctures, easily go against the interests of this bourgeoisie--or important fractions thereof. This is one of the reasons why we find the concept of "bureaucratic authoritarianism" rather inapplicable--so far--to the African situation. The class base of bureaucratic authoritarianism (BA) in Latin America has not, as yet, found its counterpart in Africa. The absence of this class base, and the alliance of social classes that provide the basis for BA, is what leads us to look into the social basis of other models of authoritarianism in Africa.

Wherever we encounter presidential authoritarianism in Africa we also encounter different forms of popular pressures for democracy. These pressures arise, no doubt, out of the economic and political inadequacies of presidential authoritarian states to ensure what has increasingly now been called "sustainable development", but that we, in the social sciences call "viable social reproduction with industrialization." I find it difficult to support Thandika's notion that, in our context, democracy may not necessarily lead to viable social reproduction with industrialization.

The High Growth Rate Thesis Revisited

The countries which have had high growth rates in Sub-Saharan Africa since independence are Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire and Malawi (of the non oil producing countries). These also happen to be countries where there have been more accountability of the state to its social base--however narrow this is--when compared to the other military dictatorships and no-party regimes. There is therefore a prima facie case, in the context of Africa of the post-independence period, to argue that where there has been more respect for democratic practices (however minimal) higher rates of growth and more successful models of accumulation have been ensured.

Further, to think that Africa could have "benevolent dictators" or "nation-building emperors" such as were to be found under the Meiji Restoration in Japan is to ignore the major factor behind the emergence of such "great individuals": their social base. To have an authoritarian political will to accomplish the heroic tasks of rapid accumulation for industrialization, accompanied, no doubt, by appropriate social reorganization of society, is to be ready to count on some substantial social machine and support. Given where we are now in Africa, few people would entrust any single individual with this kind of responsibility. The history of African political leadership is strewn with too many adventurous destroyers rather than makers. The Gorbachevs of Africa will have to emerge from within the

popular movements for democratic societies rather than self appointed messiahs filled with authoritarian political wills. The less participatory political systems have become in Africa, the more politically decadent and economically backward they have tended to become. I happen to see no exception to this rule as of now.