

Hamba Kahle Mthakathi Wey'ndaba **A Farewell Message to Prof Thandika Mkandawire***

I wish to express my most profound condolences to the family and all the colleagues at the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and beyond, on the passing of Professor Thandika Mkandawire. The sad news was first brought to me by Prof Ihron Rensburg, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg. Rensburg knew Mkandawire very well and respected him immensely.

Indeed, the passing of Prof Mkandawire on Friday, 27 March 2020, has left a big loss on African and progressive scholarship globally. Prof Mkandawire was a towering African intellectual giant. His departure came at the time when the world and our continent desperately need more voices like his, especially at the time of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and the global public health emergency that it has imposed, as well as its wider economic and social implications. I hope that his colleagues at CODESRIA and beyond will build a lasting intellectual monument to honour his contribution to Left and radical social science scholarship in the Southern African region, the African continent and globally.

I first met Mkandawire in Harare, around 1987, in one of the colloquia of the Southern African Political Economy Series (SAPES Trust), ably convened by Dr Ibbo Mandaza. In his contributions, Mkandawire

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immediately struck me as someone with unique intellectual depth and analytical capacity. Together with Guy Mhone, a fellow Malawian-exile then, they were intellectuals of a kind from Malawi, products of the historical conditions in Southern Africa and the continent broadly, and the responses by the people, especially liberation and intellectual struggles.

I found the SAPES Trust to be one of the leading intellectual platforms and think-tanks in Southern Africa. It provided some of us with a crucial link to progressive African thought, a body of thought and scholarship which was mainly prohibited by the apartheid regime in South Africa and at the same time ignored by the mainstream white left-wing (mainly that with a labour bent) and anti-apartheid academia generally in South Africa at the time. As Karl Marx aptly observed in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 'The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life.' Indeed, Marx was right that it is not the consciousness of people that determine their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.

I will remain forever intellectually indebted to the likes of Mandaza for exposing me to the literature of progressive African thought and scholarship in the SAPES Trust, where I interacted with the likes of Mkandawire. This exposure contributed enormously in shaping my own intellectual outlook.

The SAPES platform, in which Mkandawire energetically participated, debated matters around regional integration, what a post-apartheid Southern Africa could look like, the post-colonial state, as well as the impact of the International Monetary Fund, IMF, and World Bank imposed structural adjustment programmes (today's 'structural reforms') in the region.

Indeed, the struggle for liberation in Namibia and South Africa in the late 1980s provided hope against the backdrop of some of the serious reversals and blows against the forces of liberation in the region. These included the counter-revolutionary warfare and destabilisation led by Renamo in Mozambique, the deadly war by UNITA and the apartheid forces in Angola, and the military and economic destabilisation of the Southern African region as a whole by the apartheid regime. I found Mkandawire as one of the leading intellectual lights in the analyses of the experiences of liberation movements in the region and the continent.

As the world confronts Covid-19, and in a Southern Africa facing

a massive crisis of social reproduction that is likely to prove to be a huge burden in the struggle to defeat Covid-19, one cannot help but appreciate some of the foresight and insights from platforms like SAPES and the likes of Mkandawire as far back as the 1980s. As South Africa, for instance, faces the challenges of Covid-19 and its downgrading by Moody's rating agency, I cannot help but look back at some of the lessons we can still learn from those debates led by African scholars in the 1980s, scholars like Mkandawire, Ibbo Mandaza, Pallo Jordan, Sam Moyo, Mzala Nxumalo, Guy Mhone, Patricia McFadden, Lloyd Sachikonye, Brian Raftopoulos, Joyce Kazembe, to mention but some. Indeed, some of the African National Congress and SACP cadres, like Pallo Jordan and Mzala Nxumalo, engaged and contributed to this Left African scholarship in the 1980s.

One important lesson I learnt from the likes of Mkandawire in their analysis of the experiences of Southern Africa with the structural adjustments programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, post-1973, was that not a single developing country has ever been rescued from poverty, inequality and unemployment by either the IMF or the World Bank and developed. In honour of Mkandawire, it would be important to re-open these debates about the role of institutions like the IMF and World Bank in undercutting development in African, South American and other developing countries. In his memory, let us revisit some of his works on the struggles for a developmental state in Africa and the role of African universities and intelligentsia.

Mkandawire was a renowned scholar and academic. Amongst some of his achievements is that he was a founder-member of CODESRIA, a premier organisation of African scholars in the social sciences and humanities. He served as its Executive Secretary from 1985 to 1986. He also worked for the United Nations and lectured at universities like the University of Zimbabwe, London School of Economics and the University of Cape Town, in South Africa.

I must also pay tribute to Mkandawire in my capacity as Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation in South Africa.

Soon after I was appointed Minister of Higher Education and Training in 2009, I met Mkandawire in one of the functions during the President of South Africa's State Visit to the United Kingdom in 2010. He pulled me aside and gave me a mouthful about what irritated him about some features of a post-apartheid South Africa. He shared some of his ideas about what was to be done. I will never forget what he said to me. After congratulating me, he said he hoped I will be one Minister of Higher Education and Training in South Africa who will at least invest a lot into upgrading at least one of the historically disadvantaged institutions to become a respected institution globally and continentally.

Indeed, like many African intellectuals of his age, his bias was towards the development of the University of Fort Hare to be such an institution. He was very critical of South Africa's democracy on this score. His view was that the mistake we were making on many fronts, especially in higher education, was that of wanting to

develop all of our disadvantaged institutions at the same time, but in the process keeping all of them underdeveloped. In other words, he preferred a step by step developmental approach. Perhaps Mkandawire had a point! It is nevertheless these words of his that keep me going in placing a premium on the transformation of our higher education landscape, with a particular bias towards the rapid development of our historically disadvantaged institutions.

Mkandawire's words might help us to rally around and stabilise especially our historically disadvantaged institutions, HDIs, and develop them to become respectable institutions in their own right!

Mkandawire and his generation of progressive African scholars were in many ways trailblazers who understood that the struggle for complete independence of the African countries was simultaneously a struggle against underdevelopment, just as we must understand today that the struggle against Covid-19 must simultaneously be a struggle against all forms of inequality!

Had it not been for the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the global state of public health emergency that it has imposed I would have personally travelled to attend Thandika's funeral.

Hamba kahle Mkandawire.

You were indeed a towering African intellectual giant!

* This tribute first appeared in *Umsebenzi Online*, Volume 19, No. 8, 2 April 2020.

Sincere gratitude to Dr Ibbo Mandaza's tribute to Mkandawire for some of the highlights on his illustrious academic and research career.