

# CODESRIA *Bulletin*

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## Special Issue

### Tributes to Thandika Mkandawire (1940–2020)



## Scholar, Mentor and Institution Builder



This quarterly Bulletin is distributed free to all social research institutes and faculties in Africa to encourage research co-operation among African scholars. Interested individuals and institutions may also subscribe. Contributions on theoretical matters and reports on conferences and seminars are welcome.

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## Thandika Mkandawire (1940–2020): Scholar, Mentor and Institution Builder

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On 27 March 2020, CODESRIA announced the sad news of the passing of Professor Thandika Mkandawire after a brief hospitalization in Stockholm on 24 March 2020. Thandika, as he was fondly referred to by friends and colleagues, young and old, was buried on 15 April 2020 in Stockholm at a ceremony attended only by family. A simultaneous ceremony composed of family and close relatives was also held in Malawi, his first country of citizenship. The closed and simultaneous ceremonies separated by thousands of kilometers was dictated by the current Covid-19 pandemic which has forced restriction on movement of persons and large gatherings the world over.

Since then, an outpouring of tributes and messages of condolences have been written and shared through CODESRIA and in other organisations that Thandika belonged to, including IDEAS. This Bulletin is a special issue in memory of Thandika and contains tributes and messages that we received. The Council also started an online book of condolences at <https://www.codesria.org/thandikamkandawire/> where we have collected into one space most of Thandika's work. Work on digitizing Thandika's work through the CODESRIA Documentation and Communication Centre (CODICE) has commenced while videos of his speeches have already been uploaded on this site. The Council

### Godwin R. Murunga

Executive Secretary,  
CODESRIA,  
Dakar, Senegal

plans a series of activities in memory of Thandika and will continue to update the community periodically on the plans. It is planned that once done, CODESRIA will be the place to visit to access in one single instance most, if not all, of Thandika's intellectual work.

Thandika Mkandawire was CODESRIA's third Executive Secretary, having served the Council in various capacities since 1983 when he came to Dakar for a six-month stint to lead a CODESRIA programme on the future of southern Africa. The six months ended up as 13 years of extraordinary service to a pan-African community of scholarship. He joined the service of the Council when Samir Amin was Executive Secretary and went on to serve under Abdallah Bujra, the second Executive Secretary. He took over the leadership of CODESRIA in 1985, initially in an Acting capacity and then in 1986 having been appointed by the Executive Committee chaired by the late Prof. Claude Ake and served until 1996 when his mandate came to an end during the Presidency of Prof. Akilagpa Sawyerr.<sup>1</sup> From CODESRIA, Thandika went on to give exemplary leadership to

UNRISD in Geneva where, by all counts, he continued to mobilise research on many of the important issues on which he had pioneered or led while in Dakar. His work at UNRISD has been ably captured in Yusuf Bangura, Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Kate Meagher's tributes included in this special issue of *CODESRIA Bulletin*.

In many respects, Thandika's term of service at CODESRIA was inextricably linked with the institutionalization of the Council as a key player on the African higher education scene and within the terrain of development thought and practice.<sup>2</sup> Under him, CODESRIA grew into a significant actor on the pan-African and global knowledge production sphere, seeking, as he stated in the Preface to the book *Academic Freedom in Africa*, to "pay greater attention to the nature of the research environment on the continent."<sup>3</sup> Thandika's intellectual stewardship of the Council during this period of growth in turn defined his emergence as a doyen of African scholarship, an icon whose intellectual influence was sought after and cherished and an intellectual whose name was invoked widely through published citations, at workshops, symposiums, and in conferences as well as within policy circles. As Karuti Kanyinga illustrates in his tribute, Thandika was also a compelling teacher actively cited in graduate classes across the

continent and beyond. The late Meles Zenawi who led Ethiopia as Prime Minister from 1995 to 2012, acknowledged that Thandika's thoughts on the developmental state influenced his thinking.

So critical to Thandika was CODESRIA that it is not an exaggeration to say that Prof. Ntombizakhe Mpfu Mlilo, while justifiably seeking to reveal the familial side of Thandika, did not include a member in her tribute published in this Bulletin. That member was CODESRIA. The Council had graduated into an integral part of his being and Thandika was as concerned about CODESRIA as he was with anyone dear to him. Thandika celebrated the Council, accepted any invitation to a CODESRIA event, took up any tasks the Council requested of him, worried about it and wished the very best for the Council until his passing on. His last major assignment was as the Chair of the committee mandated by the Executive Committee in 2016 to shortlist applications for the position of Executive Secretary. Before that, he had been a member, together with Akilagpa Sawyerr and Pierre Sane, of the CODESRIA Internal Review Committee undertaking an Internal Evaluation of Membership and Governance.<sup>4</sup> Once one took the responsibility of managing the Council, Thandika took it upon himself to worry about your success and to alert you to the challenges you needed to know of and manage. I was a direct beneficiary of this support especially when we met in Stockholm and had uninterrupted hours of discussion. We both served in the Research Training and Capacity Development Committee of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and were guaranteed periodic meetings in Stockholm. These often turned

unforgettable mentoring sessions. At the 15<sup>th</sup> CODESRIA General Assembly, Thandika walked over to a team of CODESRIA staff and assured me that I should only worry about the success of the first day; the rest will take care of itself.

Thandika's principal contribution will be that he defined what CODESRIA meant to at least four generations of African academics, the first three about whom he wrote<sup>5</sup> and the last one mainly through what they read from and about him and how, as Sharra shows in this issue of the Bulletin, he mentored most of them through interactions at conferences.<sup>6</sup> For many in the fourth generation, a chance meeting with Thandika at a CODESRIA meeting, often the General Assembly, was an unforgettable moment and an opportunity to draw from the fountain of wisdom that he was.<sup>7</sup> His pithy note on "Three Generations of African Academics" in *CODESRIA Bulletin*, No. 3, 1995 elaborates the framework of this influence. That note was as autobiographical as it was a commentary on generations of African academics and it carried as much of Thandika's story of engaging with numerous African knowledge producing institutions as well as his efforts to transform or change the institutions to serve the African continent better.

Born a Malawian in Zimbabwe and having lived in Zambia and worked, among other places, in Zimbabwe in the context of the transition from colonial rule to independence (see the tributes of Mpfu Mlilo and Mandaza), Thandika understood the tribulations of being an intellectual in Africa. After all, he matured into a formidable journalist under Kamuzi Banda's dictatorship and was forced into exile precisely because he refused to

kow-tow to the Ngwazi's totalitarian power. In this, he was among a rare few among whom one can cite Jack Mapanje and David Rubadiri.<sup>8</sup> If CODESRIA then became a space for intellectual exiles and the protection of academic freedom became a key preoccupation of the institution, it is because of these earlier experiences of the founders who defined and redefined the Council's mission to focus on creating an autonomous space for intellectual thought unencumbered, initially, by the dictates of the state and later, by external actors who assumed Africans had no capacity for autonomous intellectual leadership and sought to determine the agenda of African institutions.

In his discussion of the three generations, Thandika reveals the changing nature of the institutional bases of knowledge production in Africa, adroitly illustrating the trials, travails and tribulations of these generations, illuminating the coping mechanisms that individual academics and their institutions implemented as they encountered a harsh state in Africa and an equally adversarial global knowledge production industry. Thandika was aware that the global knowledge networks reserved only marginal space and attention to the continent and insisted on the need to "break local barriers and negotiate international presence."<sup>9</sup>

Thandika demonstrated a mastery of the terrain of African social sciences in a way that perhaps only a few could. He credited this mastery to CODESRIA when he pointed out in an interview with our colleague, Kate Meagher, that "My stay there improved my skills as a social scientist because I had to deal with some of the leading scholars in social science in Africa who were part of the CODESRIA

community.”<sup>10</sup> The broad corpus of his intellectual contribution, the erudition he brought to bear on his academic outputs, the panoramic view that he cast on African realities, and his mentorship of generations of African academics is evident in the avalanche of tributes so far received following his death.<sup>11</sup>

Thandika was at his best when reflecting on his area of specialization – development economics. His unmatched critical engagement on structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), his work on the developmental state, and his lucid framing of the issues of social policy all point to an icon who had mastered the canon and was at ease in interdisciplinary historiography. Thandika’s writings on development may have focused on Africa, but they drew inspiration from a broad observation and reading of the dilemmas of development globally. The work on the developmental state and social policy, for instance, drew lessons from Asian and European experiences; experiences he distilled and put into conversation with processes in Africa. It is for this reason that Thandika always underscored the importance of local agency; a point that he emphasized repeatedly in his Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola Lecture cited above or in his spot-on review of Jeffrey Sachs’s book on poverty titled *“The Intellectual Itinerary of Jeffrey Sachs”*. He noted that “You would expect that from his analysis, Sachs would place Africans at the centre of the development policies. No! After patronizing encomiums directed especially at the grassroots, he allots the driving seat to international experts.”<sup>12</sup>

Thandika’s critique of SAPs delivered some of the heaviest blows to a neo-liberal ‘prophecy’ that lacked intellectual, policy and moral cre-

dentials. His contribution resonated widely and is aptly summed up in his co-authored study with Charles C. Soludo, *Our Continent, Our Future*.<sup>13</sup> He taught that no country has ever developed or risen out of poverty based on external intervention alone. He reminded us that the state is indispensable to development generally and Africa’s development in particular and dismissed the tendency within Bretton Woods Institutions to treating the role of the state simply as that of a “night watchman”. His contribution resonated widely. Thandika understood the importance of “social policy in a development context” and managed to convince us that the locus of effective social policy is good politics.<sup>14</sup> For him, good policy had to be thought through historically and comparatively, but at the end, it needed to focus on a range of welfare needs, the generation of social capital and the reinforcement of legitimate authority. The notion of “transformative social policy” was meant to capture this. This is why his piece on “Good Governance: The Itinerary of an Idea”, rescued the notion of governance from its abuse by the Bretton Woods Institutions and refocused it on state-society relations. For Thandika,

“the main challenge of development was the establishment of state-society relations that are (a) developmental, in the sense that they allow the management of the economy in a manner that maximises economic growth, induces structural change, and uses all available resources in a responsible and sustainable manner in highly competitive global conditions; (b) democratic and respectful of citizens’ rights; and (c) socially inclusive, providing all citizens with a decent living and full participation in national affairs.”<sup>15</sup>

Thandika concluded appropriately that “Good governance should

therefore be judged by how well it sustains this triad”. He entered the verdict that the neo-liberal appropriation of “good governance” failed to sustain the triad. Therefore, his notion of “the making of choiceless democracies” out of the neo-liberal desire for economic deregulation and political liberalization was ground-breaking. Thandika, alongside Adebayo Olukoshi and Bjorn Beckman, understood that the market reform processes in Africa engendered authoritarianism and, as Beckman aptly summarized, “it is resistance to SAP, not SAP itself that breeds democratic forces. SAP can be credited with having contributed to this development not because of its liberalism but because of its authoritarianism.”<sup>16</sup>

Thandika was driven by a genuine pan-African vision, inspired perhaps by years of travel across the continent and the rest of the pan-African world. This allowed him to see the many sides of the continent’s socio-economic realities. As Mamdani’s tribute in this Bulletin mentions, he resisted the desire within the Marxist circles to prioritize class over other entry-points in the understanding of Africa. Thandika appreciated that the experiences of many Africans were also shaped by nationalism. Many times, Thandika felt constrained to caution that CODESRIA was not constituted by a bunch of inflexible radical Marxists and repeatedly pointed out the intense internal debates within the community. Occasionally, he did this even at the risk of revealing otherwise confidential administrative processes.

The need for caution stemmed from the fact that Thandika led a community that held widely divergent, even if, radical views. Often Thandika was unsure if it was

a radicalism driven by fidelity to materialist analytic frameworks or whether it was radicalism informed by nationalist convictions. Thandika understood that European Marxists did not know how to handle nationalism and tended to dismiss it cavalierly in favour of class analysis. He was aware that while class analysis captured the realities of Africans, ideologically, nationalism did shape aspects of African identities and visions in ways that a pure class analysis was unable to comprehend. Thus, some of his most inspirational essays focused on nationalism, pan-Africanism and the state. The chapter on “African intellectuals and nationalism” is majestic in its review of the “turbulent link between African nationalism, African intellectuals and the academic community”<sup>17</sup> while the paper on “The terrible toll of post-colonial ‘rebel movements’ in Africa” contextualises the post-colonial rebel movements within an urban-rural framework and helps explain violence against the peasantry with refreshing analytical clarity.<sup>18</sup> Issa Shivji’s reflections in this Bulletin ably captures the distinct contribution Thandika’s essay makes to the study of the agrarian question and is correct in concluding that this “remains one of his finest, with a sharp eye for the unusual”. It also reveals how much of interdisciplinary thinking Thandika had adopted.

Interdisciplinarity based on nuanced understanding of African realities seemed to come almost naturally to Thandika. He was a grounded scholar in every sense of the word who used nuanced analyses for institution building. Regarding the primacy of interdisciplinarity, Thandika acknowledged that he “learnt the importance of interdisciplinarity in studying problems of development. But I also learned

it was intellectually demanding. It was not enough to bring together a little economics, a little politics and a little history to concoct interdisciplinary scholarship. You have to build interdisciplinary approaches and interdisciplinary institutions.”<sup>19</sup> This was true in how he dealt with and inflected the assumption that development could only happen in the context of the Third World under authoritarian regimes, for instance. Rather than argue for a developmental state, Thandika argued for a democratic, developmental state.<sup>20</sup> He came well prepared to this given his debate on democracy and development with Peter Anyang Nyong’o in the pages of *CODESRIA Bulletin*. Thandika challenged Anyang Nyong’o’s linkage of democracy to development in an instrumentalist way and argued “that democracy should be an end in itself.”<sup>21</sup>

At the time when this debate took place, Africa was going through rapid democratic changes and it was clear that there was a paucity of good analysis of the transformations occurring in Africa. There was a similar dearth with respect to gender analysis. CODESRIA responded by initiating the CODESRIA Democratic Governance Institute, an annual residency of young African academics who gathered to discuss issues relevant to democratization processes in Africa. Started in 1992, the Institute has hosted hundreds of laureates and sharpened the analytical skills and policy ideas of some of Africa’s leading academics and policy practitioners. With respect to gender, following enormous pressure from many African feminist scholars, CODESRIA convened a workshop in 1991 on “Engendering African Social Science.” At the opening session of the workshop,

Thandika questioned whether there was “a corpus of methodologies, approaches or empirical studies based on gender analysis awaiting to be appropriated by a newly converted social science community.” But in closing the workshop, he acknowledged that his initial doubts were a clear illustration of the “triumph of ignorance over intellectual humility and open-mindedness” and accepted that indeed such a corpus existed.<sup>22</sup> CODESRIA began to invest in gender analysis and even launched the Gender Institute in 1995 which has convened African scholars to discuss gender issues since then.

Thandika seems to have learned a critical lesson that enabled him to place and connect his different projects to a broader goal that included the production of quality and relevant knowledge that also embedded an intentional commitment to change Africa. In his Inaugural Lecture for Chair, African Development at the London School of Economics titled “‘Running While Others Walk’: Knowledge and the Challenge of Africa’s Development,”<sup>23</sup> Thandika argues that knowledge is integral to the realization of development and that the agency of Africans and African knowledge producers is key to realizing this. All his intellectual outputs, therefore, demonstrated a sharp consciousness, commitment and fidelity to basic canons of intellectual labour, including that craft of “torturing data” to get the facts that Karuti Kanyinga alludes to. Thandika aspired to see change in the condition of Africans based on an understanding of African realities. He aimed to project the voices of a plurality of Africans and he quickly became the voice of the African social science community in numerous international forums.

Many have marvelled at Thandika's humour, his ability to wittfully cannibalise a concept in order to deliver its hidden, often corrosive, implication for Africa. Nowhere was this more evident than in how he took 'innocent' words like "networking" or concepts like neo-patrimonialism and turned them on their heads.<sup>24</sup> He did this in his soft-spoken manner, often punctuated by sarcastic laughs, knowing full well the power of his cryptic comments. Thus, when the tendency grew in the funding world to demand that Africanists [those working on Africa outside the continent] must partner and 'network' with their counter-parts on the continent, Thandika quickly took note that the demand required African academics in the global South to do the 'working' while Africanists in the North did the 'netting.' Of course, Thandika knew that there was a historic division of labour that trapped Africans into generating data for theory-building in the North and a mere demand for networking would not dismantle that hegemonic structure. He understood this to be a framework enabled by years of unfair practices in the research and publishing industry including the peer review system and editorial gatekeeping in academic journals and major publishing firms. As early as 1995, Thandika had observed that the "routine rejection" by international journals of African submissions perpetuated the very problem it sought to address leading to the "bizarre situation" where "Africanists' publish materials with the latest bibliographical references but dated material while African scholars include the latest information on their countries but carry dated bibliographies."<sup>25</sup> In the end, the outcome was the dilemma of 'working' and 'netting'. Little did Thandika know

that at the apex of his intellectual carrier he would fall prey to this watchful gatekeeping. In 2010–2011 the UK-based Africanist journal, *African Affairs*, having cajoled Thandika both by email and through phone calls to submit his Inaugural Professorial Lecture titled "Running while others walk" for consideration, dismissed it with, among other ridiculous arguments, that the "author does not understand World Bank literature".

As a community, we understand better why Thandika worked so hard to secure CODESRIA as an autonomous intellectual space for Africans and to protect it from the exclusivity tendencies of mainstream Africanist engagement with Africa. At the heart of this autonomy has been a dilemma of funding given the old adage that s/he who pays the piper calls the tune. In many ways, Thandika was responsible for securing the autonomy of the Council when he facilitated the initial engagement with SIDA that has seen CODESRIA grow and institutionalise itself. Not only was he able to secure the funding, but he was also able to negotiate a framework of support in which the Council fully accounted for Swedish taxpayer funds while securing the autonomy to define its research agenda, training priorities and publications. The longevity of the CODESRIA project owes much to the foresight, vision, strategy, mentorship, care, wit, and commitment of many, but among them, Thandika Mkandawire's name occupies a towering space. The Council and its community will surely miss him.

## Notes

1. His farewell note titled "A Kind of Farewell" is published in *CODESRIA Bulletin*, no 2, 1996, pp. 1-4.

2. See his "The Spread of Economic Doctrines and Policymaking in Postcolonial Africa", *African Studies Review*, Vol. 57, Number 1, April 2014, pp. 171–98.
3. See Preface to Mamadou Diouf and Mahmood Mamdani, *Academic Freedom in Africa*, Dakar, CODESRIA, 1994.
4. See their Report titled *Internal Evaluation: Membership and Governance*, Dakar, CODESRIA, 2015.
5. See his "Three Generations of African Academics: A Note", *CODESRIA Bulletin*, No. 3, 1995, pp. 9–12.
6. On the Fourth, see Mshai S. Mwangola, "Nurturing the Fourth Generation: Defining the Historical Mission for our Generation", *Africa Development*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2008, pp. 7-24.
7. See the essays in the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2018 specifically the interview with Nimi Hoffmann in that issue titled "Diagnosing neopatrimonialism: An interview with Thandika Mkandawire".
8. Jack Mapanje's two essays in Kofi Anyidoho, ed., *The Word Behind Bars and the Paradox of Exile*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997, give a good illustration of what this meant while Edward Said's *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002) underscores the "essential sadness" and "crippling sorrow of estrangement" that exile means.
9. See his 1996 Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola Distinguished Lecture "The Social Sciences in Africa: Breaking Local Barriers and Negotiating International Presence", *African Studies Review*, vol. 40, No. 2, 1997, pp. 15–36.
10. See Kate Meagher, "Reflections of an Engaged Economist: An Interview with Thandika Mkandawire", *Development and*

- Change*, Vol. 50 no. 2, 2019, pp. 511–541.
11. <https://www.codesria.org/thandikamkandawire/>
  12. See his “The Intellectual Itinerary of Jeffrey Sachs”, *Africa Review of Books*, March 2006, p. 5.
  13. Thandika Mkandawire and Charles Soludo, *Our Continent, Our Future: African Perspectives on Structural Adjustment*, Dakar and Ottawa, CODESRIA and IDRC, 1998.
  14. See his “Social Policy in a Development Context,” Social Policy and Development Programme Paper No. 7, Geneva, UNRISD, 2001.
  15. See “Good Governance: The Itinerary of an Idea,” in *Development in Practice*, Vol. 17, Nos 4-5, 2007.
  16. Cited in Thandika Mkandawire and Adebayo Olukoshi, “Issues and Perspectives in the Politics of Structural Adjustment in Africa”, in Mkandawire and Olukoshi, eds. *Between Liberalisation and Oppression: The Politics of Structural Adjustment in Africa*, Dakar: CODESRIA, 1995, p.4 & 11.
  17. “African intellectuals and Nationalism” Thandika Mkandawire, ed. *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*, (Dakar and London: CODESRIA in Association with Zed Books, 2005), p.46.
  18. See “The terrible toll of post-colonial ‘rebel movements’ in Africa: towards an explanation of the violence against the peasantry”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2002, pp. 181-215.
  19. See Meagher, “Reflections of an Engaged Economist.”
  20. See his “Thinking about developmental states in Africa,” in *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 25, Issue 3, 2001, pp. 289–314.
  21. See the series of debates in *CODESRIA Bulletin* eventually summarized in No. 2, 1991.
  22. See details in Ayesha M. Imam, “Engendering African Social Sciences: An Introductory Essay,” Ayesha Imam, et al., eds. *Engendering African Social Sciences*, Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series, 1997, p. 1.
  23. See the revised version “‘Running While Others Walk’: Knowledge and the Challenge of Africa’s Development,” in *Africa Development*, Vol. 36, no. 2, 2011, pp. 1-36.
  24. See his analysis of the neopatrimonialism in “Neopatrimonialism and the Political Economy of Economic Performance in Africa: Critical Reflections”, *World Politics*, Vol. 67, no. 3, 2015, pp. 1-50.
  25. See footnote no. 7 in his “Three Generations of African Academics: A Note” *CODESRIA Bulletin*, No 3 1995, p. 11.



*Our Continent, Our Future* is the very first publication to present the African perspective on the Bretton Woods approach to structural adjustment, and it does so with the input and support of top economists and scholars from every corner of Africa. This important book should be read by students, professors, academics, and researchers in development, economics, and African studies; professionals in donor organizations around the world; policymakers in both the governmental and nongovernmental sectors; and all citizens concerned with the future of Africa and issues of sustainable and equitable development.

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## A Transformative Economist: Remembering Thandika Mkandawire

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In an era of financial crises and mounting global inequality that have tarnished the reputation of economists, Prof. Thandika Mkandawire, the late Chair of African Development at the London School of Economics, stood out as an icon of transformative development research. Thandika, as he was called by everyone, young and old, drew on a depth of historical and political vision that cut through the ‘failures of collective imagination’<sup>1</sup> that have so crippled the discipline in recent years. Far from adopting the insularity that often characterizes the field, Thandika was known for breaking boundaries – between generations, between disciplines, between ideological perspectives, between North and South – to create a more informed, more innovative approach to contemporary development thinking. A Malawian of Swedish nationality, Thandika was a disruptor of stereotypes, and a fierce adversary of the Afro-pessimism and Afro-exceptionalism in all its forms. His death on 27 March, just months before his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, is a profound loss to African development scholarship, but he has left a legacy of academic activism and original research that will continue to transform the way scholars, donors and policymakers think about Africa.

### Iconoclastic Thinker

Thandika’s myth-busting approach to the study of Africa was grounded in a lived knowledge of the continent and an insider’s understanding of its political and economic

**Kate Meagher**

London School of Economics,  
UK

capacities. In his early years in the townships of southern Africa, he experienced forced removals, was sent back to what was then Nyasaland to escape poor quality education in the mines, abandoned his A-level exams to fight for Malawian independence as a journalist and protester, and was briefly jailed by the colonial government. His intellectual formation in the US during the height of the civil rights movement, followed by decades of political exile and an intellectually productive period of asylum in Sweden have all contributed to the breadth and originality of his thinking. His eclectic life experience created an intellectual arsenal of historical insight, innovative development perspectives and nuanced institutional analysis that have been the hallmarks of his scholarship.

The result has been a distinguished and unconventional career trajectory. After a few years’ teaching economics at the University of Stockholm, Thandika headed back to Africa in 1978 to serve as one of the founding figures of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) in Senegal. In 1982, he returned to Southern Africa on secondment to help set up the Zimbabwe Institute

of Development Studies just after Zimbabwean independence. He then served as Executive Secretary of CODESRIA from 1986–1996, where he focused on sustaining the creative energies of African social scientists during the neo-liberal evisceration of African universities. As Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) from 1998–2009, Thandika brought the fruit of his grounded heterodoxy into the global sphere, overseeing dynamic research programmes on Social Policy and Development, and Public Sector Reform. In 2009, Thandika became the first Chair of African Development at the LSE, where he continued to pursue his driving objectives of research in the service of African economic transformation.

An iconoclast to the core, Thandika refused to be bound by ideology. He confronted all received wisdom – Marxist and post-structuralist as well as neo-liberal – with rigorous empirical and theoretical critique. But Thandika was an iconoclast with a mission: to challenge the prevailing intellectual models that mainstream economists and policymakers held of Africa. He enlisted a wide range of perspectives into this process. The scholars who influenced him ranged from Arthur Lewis and Alexander Gerschenkron to E.P. Thompson (whom he said he liked for his fluent writing), along with African nationalists such as Nkrumah, Senghor and Nyerere. Even when he was in prison, he

read voraciously, and continued to read across a wide range of literatures all his life, constantly delving into new perspectives in search of fresh insights.

### Iconic Scholarship

Years of reading and original thinking, leavened by a journalist's flair, made Thandika a prodigious and gifted writer. He was best known for his work on the African State and the developmental role of social policy. His iconic article, 'Thinking about developmental states in Africa'<sup>2</sup> offered a scathing critique of the intellectual pathologizing and policy-induced mutilation of African states, leaving a legacy of 'maladjusted states' poorly equipped to benefit from the post-2000 economic resurgence.<sup>3</sup> For Thandika, scholarship had to be more than critique – it needed to map a way forward, offering 'dispassionate analysis in search of a world of passionate possibilities'.<sup>4</sup> Thandika's work on Transformative Social Policy turned attention away from the policy failures of the past to development models appropriate to the realities of Twenty-first century 'late late late development'. This path-breaking research gave a new twist to the social protection turn in development thinking. Drawing on Nordic models of social policy as a source of resource pools and stable social contracts, Thandika showed how social policy can move beyond poverty alleviation to drive economic transformation and employment generation.

Thandika's optimism about the developmental potential of African states under supportive conditions was accompanied by a frank assessment of their weaknesses. As he said in a recent interview, 'It's not that I am a lover of the state on a gut level – I mean, many of my

generation of African academics were refugees, for heaven's sake!'.<sup>5</sup> While Thandika was conscious of the failings of African states, he had little patience for uninformed critique. In various polemical pieces on rock-star economists and post-culturalist ideologues, Thandika meticulously exposed the lack of intellectual rigour behind fashionable perspectives on Africa. He called out the 'interpretive audacity' of big names who relied on loose combinations of anecdotes, regressions and stereotypes to churn out analyses that were 'theoretically thin and empirically vacuous'.<sup>6</sup> With sardonic precision, he took aim at the hubris and veiled racism that submerged complex material, historical and symbolic processes in an undifferentiated morass of culture, rebels and mosquitoes.

As an economic sociologist, I found myself particularly drawn to his work on the role of institutions in African development, some of it tucked away in a secret garden of working papers and unpublished conference papers. This body of work cuts to the heart of issues of taxation, social contracts and informality in contemporary development – now hot development issues that once again show that Thandika was often ahead of his time. Key pieces include his brilliant article 'On Tax Effort and Colonial Heritage in Africa' (2010) and his working paper on 'Institutional Monocropping and Monotasking in Africa' (2009),<sup>7</sup> both of which tilt on an African axis the 'institutional turn' in development economics associated with Douglass North, Daron Acemoglu, James Robinson, and other leading New Institutionalists. In place of dodgy proxies and Manichean notions of 'good' and 'bad'

institutions, Thandika showed how econometrics could be combined with a deep knowledge of African history and political economy to produce genuine insight into how colonial legacies shaped patterns of taxation, informality and inequality in contemporary Africa. In person as well as in print, Thandika was like a walking 'aha moment'. In departmental seminars, he had a knack for raising some little known political or historical fact that allowed both speaker and audience to see the issue in a completely different light. He cut through the homogenizing influence of Africa dummies and patrimonialist narratives to reveal how history, resource endowments and nationalist projects made nonsense of binary analyses and one-size-fits-all models.

In place of the veiled imperialism of demands for Africa to get the institutions, geography, culture or history 'right', Thandika shifted the focus to what kinds of institutions are 'right' for African development. His central concern was how to activate the transformative potential of institutions within African settings, rather than seeking to straightjacket them into Western templates. His eye was on learning from more appropriate development models, borrowed from a variety of successful late development experiences in central Europe, Scandinavia, and East Asia. Development for Thandika was not about copying, but leapfrogging, compressing stages, hybridizing institutions and experimenting in the service of 'development friendly' rather than 'market friendly' institutions centred on the priorities of African countries rather than those of global investors and neo-liberal policy advisors.

At the heart of Thandika's work was an emphasis on the need to

take African institutions seriously. This meant criticizing the tendency to treat them as products of culture and corruption, as well as rejecting the celebration of informal economies, which he saw as glorifying poverty and backwardness. We tended to part company on this last point, since Thandika's own work on the diversity of African informal economies showed why they could be more dynamic in parts of East and West Africa – but I just put it down to a southern-African blind spot. His broader argument that African institutions were about more than the cultural and the small-scale was an important one. Thandika moved the conversation about African institutions from things like customary land tenure and witchcraft to judiciaries, central banks and universities, shaped by the distinctive histories and needs of African societies. In the process, he revealed the damage done by the 'monocropping' and 'monotasking' approach of neo-liberal institutional reform, which treated the value of institutions to foreign investors as their *only* value, sidestepping the complex adaptations required to address concerns of national cohesion, social equity, political legitimacy and economic aspiration. Dismissing the preoccupation with abstract institutional purity, he highlighted the need for hybrid arrangements capable of accommodating ethnic diversity, plural legal systems and the demands of economic transformation. At the same time, he was a sharp critic of the more fashionable notions of 'hybrid governance' currently gaining traction in the donor community. With their focus on bypassing rather than building the state, Thandika dismissed these novel hybrid arrangements as a Twenty-first century version of indirect rule.

## Decolonizing African Development

Thandika was active in decolonizing the social sciences long before it was trendy. Not only did he cite a wide range of African scholars in his own work, but no African Development course worth the name could afford to ignore his work in their reading list. More importantly, he was an active proponent of the decolonization of knowledge about Africa. He once told a CODESRIA colleague who was searching for a reference to back up a point in an article, 'You don't have to cite some Western academic to prove something that you know to be true about your own country. Just write it.' He strongly criticized the aggressive colonizing of African economic thought that has inexorably drawn African economists into the orbit of quantitative modelling, donor consultancy and Randomized Control Trials, crowding out the teaching of more heterodox forms of economics and eroding the capacity for African-centred economic insight. In countries with a desperate need of statisticians, planners, and trade negotiators, Thandika expressed alarm at the waste of valuable resources to churn out endless supplies of mechanical number crunchers through institutions such as the Nairobi-based African Economic Research Consortium (AERC). In a region increasingly unable to write its own policy documents, he lamented the reduction of Africa's younger generation of economists to hewers of wood and gatherers of data.

Thandika's approach to decolonization of knowledge was linked to a wider agenda of institution building. Instead of the bean-counting approach of some decolonization initiatives in Western academia,

Thandika focused on building institutional systems to nurture independent thinking and development solutions grounded in the needs of late developers. At CODESRIA and UNRISD, Thandika presided over active research programmes to challenge prevailing perspectives in the service of African economic transformation and liberation from intellectual slavery. During his time at the LSE, Thandika sought to mobilize resources to bring promising African scholars to the UK to consolidate and write up their research, much like the Rockefeller-funded 'Reflections on Development' programme he ran at CODESRIA. He often found himself swimming against the tide of policy paradigms, global economic interests, and funding imperatives, but he always worked toward building capacities to challenge received development templates that ignored African realities and development needs.

## Remembering Thandika

Thandika's unique combination of intellectual brilliance and twinkly good humour touched the lives of many people. He was central to my intellectual pantheon for years before I met him, through conversations with my late husband, Raufu Mustapha, about CODESRIA debates, as well as my admiration of his elegant writing style, and his incredible capacity to cut right to the core of development issues. So many times after I started teaching, I found myself uncomfortable with a particular position in the development literature, only to find that Thandika had written a critique years before that perfectly articulated the concerns I was struggling to express. I didn't actually get to know him until he took up his professorial post in my

department in 2009, the year after I joined the LSE.

At the LSE, Thandika continued searching for new ways to be of service to African scholarship. In addition to his popular African Development course, he taught in the LSE-University of Cape Town summer school, networked with wealthy African business moguls for funds to build new training and research opportunities for African scholars, and, although he was already over 70 then, took it upon himself to raise additional funds for the Africa Talks public lecture programme he coordinated by undertaking a sponsored run around Lincoln's Inn Fields at the edge of the LSE campus. He often found himself at odds with the Africa research and fundraising ethos at the LSE. While the LSE wanted to bring in funds to build up African research and teaching there, Thandika wanted funding to bring African students to study other things, like Finance, Law or Asian Studies, and to build up research and writing capacities on the continent.

Working and teaching with Thandika was a great privilege, though we had a strange intellectual relationship. Thandika was not a fan of the informal economy, which is the central focus of my research, and I never managed to convince him that informal institutions, drawn from pre-colonial state systems, skilled craft guilds and transcontinental trading networks, could be sources of economic transformation. Yet he taught me more about African informal economies, in his writing and in casual lunchtime conversations than I have learned from most informal economy specialists. When the journal *Development and Change* was looking for people to interview for the 'Reflections on

Development' segment of the 2019 Forum Issue, I jumped at the chance to interview Thandika.<sup>8</sup> It took months to organize the three sessions necessary to complete the interview owing to Thandika's hectic schedule, but they were a wonderful opportunity to sit and listen to the stories that made up his amazing intellectual journey. My son transcribed the recordings, and when he was at loose ends in the months after Raufu died, and was reminded of happier times, listening to Raufu and Thandika discussing...

Revising the final draft of Thandika's reflection coincided with a new round of chemotherapy, which kept Thandika away from the LSE. He was impatient with the way his treatment slowed down his work, though he turned his wavering concentration into an opportunity to hang out with his grandchildren. He was eager to get on with his two book projects on the World Bank's structural adjustment '*mea culpas*', and on transformative social policy. Trust Thandika to have too many ideas to fit into one *magnum opus*. An unexpected additional round of treatment slowed him down further, preventing him from coming back to the LSE in early 2020 to teach his African Development course as he had intended. When I last saw his wife, Kaarina, I had recognized a delicate note of concern in her voice, and I feared this was a worrying turn. But Thandika's main worry when I spoke to him was not about his health, but about finishing his books. This, and his dream of funding promising African scholars to come to the LSE to write up their research, are the two pieces of unfinished business he has left for others to complete. The last time I spoke to him, in early March, he sounded

pragmatic but optimistic and eager to get on with things.

In a world increasingly out of joint, Thandika was a rare gift: lively, erudite, grounded and visionary, he brought to the study of Africa a light that burned through parochial stereotypes and econometric distortions to reveal real people, institutions and development aspirations. His simplicity and generosity of spirit were an inspiration, and his perceptive iconoclasm was like the Zen master's slap – an arresting moment that turns knowledge into insight. Thandika's passing is an immeasurable loss to the global as well as the African academic community. But Thandika was never one to dwell on the past – he only used it to build the way forward. He has left a treasure trove of publications to remember him by, along with a wealth of fond and inspiring moments, and the task of furthering his vision of a just and equitable African future. I offer my heartfelt condolences to his gentle wife, Kaarina, his sons Andre and Joshua and their families, and to the wider Mkandawire family.

Go well, Thandika.

## Notes

1. Heather Stewart, 'This is how the credit crunch happened, Ma'am...' *The Guardian*, 26 July 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/jul/26/monarchy-credit-crunch>
2. Thandika Mkandawire, "Thinking About Developmental States in Africa", in *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2001, pp. 289–313.
3. Thandika Mkandawire, "Mal-adjusted African Economies and Globalisation", in *Africa Development*, Vol. 30: Nos. 1&2, 2005, p. 1–33.



4. Thandika Mkandawire, "From National Question to Social Question", *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on South Africa*, Vol. 69, 2009, p. 155.
5. Kate Meagher, "Reflections of an Engaged Economist: An Interview with Thandika Mkandawire", *Development and Change*, Vol. 50, No. 2 March, 2019; p. 522.
6. Thandika Mkandawire, "The Intellectual Itinerary of Jeffrey Sachs", *African Review of Books /Revue africaine de livres*, Vol. 2, No.1, 2006, p. 4-5.
7. See Mkandawire, "On Tax Efforts and Colonial Heritage in Africa," in *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 10, 2010, p. 1647-1669 and Mkandawire, "Institutional Monocropping and Monotasking in Africa", in Akbar Noman, *et al.*, eds., *Good Growth and Governance in Africa: Rethinking Development Strategies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 80-113
8. See Meagher, 'Reflections of an Engaged Economist,' pp. 511-541.

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## The Familial Side of Prof Thandika Mkandawire\*

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A number of obituaries have been written about Professor Thandika Mkandawire focusing on his work life. Family in Malawi thought it important to have an obituary from Zimbabwe focusing on his mother's side of the family.

His mother was Dedani Esther Siziba from Gwanda District in Matabeleland South, Zimbabwe. She was the first-born in a family of six children, my mother was second, then three brothers, and a younger sister who is still alive. Esther was her Christian name and is the name that was on her formal documents. Her first son, Jordan Nkiwane, was fathered by a young man she was not allowed to marry as her parents said he was a close relative. She later met her future husband, Mr Mkandawire. Old Mkandawire later told us that he was passing through Zimbabwe on his way to South Africa to look for opportunities at the mines. He saw Esther singing at a concert and could not proceed!! Some will know that Thandika loved music

**Ntombizakhe Mpofu Mlilo**

Gwanda State University,  
Zimbabwe

and that he raised some of his living expenses through singing while studying in the USA. Well, he inherited the love of music from his father and the gift of singing from his mother!

They married and had three sons; Godwin (GG), Jeremiah (Thandika) and Joshua. They later moved to Zambia leaving Jordan behind. Because Esther had no daughter, my parents gave her one of my sisters, Irene, and she went to Zambia with the Mkandawires. Thandika, therefore, grew up in a family of three boys and one girl.

Initially there was regular contact with family back in Zimbabwe and I remember my mum, and my twin sister and I at a young age, being in Ndola. I am told we

travelled by train from Bulawayo all the way to Ndola. When the whole Mkandawire family moved to Malawi, communication with our aunt was through letters and she was diligent at writing and keeping in touch. Many have written about Thandika's political life and how he had to be separated from his family in Malawi. It is his mother's persistent letter writing to Zimbabwe that later connected her to her son. Thandika came to work in Zimbabwe after the Zimbabwean independence. His job brought him back to his birth place as if to connect him to his immediate family in Malawi. I was in my last year of my first-degree studies at the University of Zimbabwe when I met Thandika and I told him that his mother and I write each other regularly. Soon after my graduation I told my aunt that I was now working and instead of just writing I can also visit. She coordinated my trip to Malawi in April 1984 very well. I was met by Thandika's cousin at

Lilongwe airport, his Dad met me in Mzimba and we went together to Kanyama village, a village name I was too familiar with as I would write it on the envelopes I addressed to my aunt.

I was pleasantly surprised that the Tumbuka language spoken in Malawi had some similarities with my Ndebele language. Back in Zimbabwe, I gave Thandika my report on his family's trying situation and that his parents were looking after his late brother's six children. After my visit, Thandika's father came to Harare to visit his son. As things improved politically in Malawi, Thandika was able to go home and he moved the family to Lilongwe. He literally overhauled the lives of those six people – a modern-day miracle!! Thandika used to say there are so many unwritten books in Africa, this is one of them. I visited my aunt several times when I was on business trips to Lilongwe. I would marvel at the comfort the family enjoyed but still I would complain about this and that just to keep Thandika on his toes and he would, much to his mum's amusement, say out his usual cry: "Ndebele women. Difficult to please!"

Politics deprived Thandika of family so much but when the situation changed he grabbed the opportunities he got with both hands. He would call, he would visit, he would support both emotionally and financially. For example, when things were reported as hard in Zimbabwe he would call just to check how we were managing and throw in some humour. During one of his calls he asked me if there was a chance of things getting better. I said "oh things will definitely improve". He asked "what are the indicators to support that statement?" Then he went on about how Africans let our leaders off the hook. I retorted that

I was having a simple telephone conversation with a brother and didn't need to punctuate it with proper figures and statistics and, after all, I was not under oath! He drew up our family tree which is still on the net. He would check who is where and would make a point of looking us up when he could. For example he would call to say he had dinner with a niece in Lusaka, in Cape Town; he would ask what Ndebele name is suitable for a new grandchild just born in Malawi; he would want to know how to handle a rift that seemed to be growing between his daughters. He would occasionally send money to my aunt, his mother's youngest sister.

I worked in Addis Ababa from 1998 to 2001. Thandika came to Addis for a writing workshop for one of his books. I was coordinating a course for animal geneticist from sub-Saharan African countries. Our events were at the same venue. On one of the days we had lunch together and he asked, "Do you think when our mothers were going to fetch water at the river as young girls they ever mused about having children and their children running international workshops in Addis Ababa?" We laughed. We wondered if they even knew of Ethiopia, whether they ever thought of any of their children going to high school or university. We swallowed tears of joy and then asked someone to take a picture of us together. Our mothers loved each other and shared a lot, including their children. This love is the one that saw Thandika looking after his nieces and nephews, who in our tradition, cannot be referred to as nieces and nephews but as his children. Similarly, to him we were sisters and not cousins!

Thandika was a true and genuine person and genuine people do succeed as they speak and write about what is from within them

as opposed to what will sell – and genuine things end up selling anyway. He worked hard when in Harare and one time I admonished him for staying too long at work and even working during weekends. His answer was, "Others move up because their uncles put in a good word for them. Unfortunately for you and I, our uncles are Gwanda villagers so we need to do it for ourselves" – and a loud laugh.

He would laugh easily and also cry easily. He couldn't finish his speech at Irene's funeral. When his mother died, he was the only one of her children alive – Jordan, GG, Joshua and Irene had all died. His mother died in Malawi and was buried at the village. According to tradition, it was important that elders in Zimbabwe, as they could not attend the funeral, meet him and pay their condolences. He came to Zimbabwe and we went from village to village and he met all the relevant people who knew him as Jeremiah and it was fun watching him acknowledge being addressed by that name. He also squeezed out as much Ndebele sentences as he could – I had years back, at his request, bought a Ndebele language book and a dictionary for him. The following morning he tearfully told me that he had such a peaceful sleep and when I saw him off at the Bulawayo airport later that week we had such an emotional farewell.

As years went by, we talked less and less frequently. But like one good friend of mine said, "we don't want to burden good relationships with too frequent communication but important is to give that relationship a special corner in our big hearts, and a true friend will know that that special corner exists". When he became critically ill and I realised that I was not going to talk to him, I withdrew to that theory, to that corner of my heart where I had placed him,

and said all my goodbyes and I know he understood.

You will sleep peacefully Thandika, Jeremiah ka Dedani, because you worked hard on this earth and deserve the rest, and after all you will be joining all those people you

loved and who loved you so dearly and who appreciate so much all the hard work you remained behind doing for the family. What is left for us is to accept your departure and carry on with our lives treasuring the memories we will always have.

\* This Tribute first appeared in the Chronicle on 29th April 2020 <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/the-familial-side-of-prof-thandika-mkandawire/>

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## Development-driven, Iconoclastic, Witty, and Informal: Thinking About Thandika Mkandawire (1940–2020)

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The news of Thandika's passing on 27 March 2020 came as a big shock, even though I knew he had been unwell in the last few years. His casual but forceful personality and unbounded energy made me believe that the laws of nature might not easily apply to him. He always seemed to bounce back from adversity with renewed vigour and focus.

He survived two cancers in 2004 and 2009 when he was at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), but continued to work diligently, giving inspiring lectures around the world, writing brilliant academic papers, and generating insightful and provocative ideas. Always sharp, witty, and booming with insights, I felt he would survive the third attack, which, sadly, turned out to be fatal.

Even when, a year ago, he was undergoing a difficult treatment for his illness, he wanted us to co-organise a Summer Institute Programme at the Council for the Development of Social Science

**Yusuf Bangura**  
Nyon, Switzerland

Research in Africa (CODESRIA) on the transfer of power in Africa's fledgling democracies.

Thinking seriously and passionately about development, especially as it relates to Africa, was the defining feature of Thandika's scholarship. He was the quintessential iconoclast—restless, uncompromising, and laser-focused when discussing development and challenging conventional ideas.

For Thandika, dealing with development was like being confronted with 'the fierce urgency of now', to borrow one of Martin Luther King's famous expressions; or, as Thandika himself expressed it, drawing on the late Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere's insight on the subject, Africans 'must run, while others walk'.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to think of a scholar who is as driven as Thandika was

on the imperative of promoting development in Africa. He was never tired of urging like-minded friends and colleagues not to relent on the development project and to combat dominant, but dodgy frameworks and perspectives.

Thandika was solidly rooted in African research and social networks and had numerous friends around the world, as well as a healthy and critical global outlook. He was a voracious reader; had the rare gift of thinking quickly and clearly on his feet; kept a huge library, a part of which he carried around in a USB stick; and had an amazing ability to frame issues in refreshing ways.

Because of his pioneering work in developing social science research in Africa during his leadership of CODESRIA, he became a household name in research communities in virtually all African countries. Young scholars saw him as their mentor. One beneficiary of his research capacity building programme at CODESRIA, the Nigerian political scientist, Jibrin

Ibrahim, recently coined the term ‘CODESRIA Brought Ups’ to describe those who were initiated into the world of cross-national research at CODESRIA.

Thandika’s eleven years as Director of UNRISD (1998–2009) and ten and half years as Professor of African development at the London School of Economics and Political Science (2009–2020) broadened his reach and vision beyond Africa. He became a globally recognised scholar for his writings on the harmful effects of structural adjustment programmes, the possibility of crafting developmental states in Africa, and theorising the transformative role of social policy. He was also respected for his systematic critique and demolition of conventional, neopatrimonialism ideas of the African state.

Thandika’s worldview can be traced to three sources. The first was the oppressive and racist nature of the colonial enterprise. Born in Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia) to a Zimbabwean mother, and having grown up in Zambia (Northern Rhodesia) and Malawi (Nyasaland), his paternal home, he had a mature and informed understanding of the twin evils of colonial domination and racial discrimination before embarking on university studies in the US. Recounting his experience in Zambia, where his father worked as a tailor in the copper mines, he observed that ‘mine schools were designed to produce semi-educated mine workers.’<sup>2</sup>

When Thandika relocated from Zambia to Malawi to continue his education, he was shocked to see that Africans were employed as train drivers—high status jobs that were reserved for whites in Zambia, which had a strictly enforced

apartheid labour market regime. As a secondary school student and later journalist, he was active in Malawi’s anti-colonial struggles. At the age of 21, the colonial government arrested him and six of his colleagues on allegations of ‘sedition and inciting violence’. They spent three months in prison breaking stones. The colonial encounter transformed him into a fierce nationalist, pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist.

The second influence on his worldview was his early realisation that independence did not necessarily mean freedom from despotism. His Malawian passport was revoked in 1965 by the then Prime Minister Hastings Kamuzu Banda government after a ‘Cabinet Crisis’ in which the radical wing of the nationalist movement, with which Thandika identified, was driven out of the seat of power. He had written an article that was critical of the governing party’s youth wing’s attack on Malawi’s new university. Banda was offended by the article and called him a ‘yelping intellectual yuppy’ that he wanted ‘alive if possible, dead if necessary.’<sup>3</sup> The revocation of his passport cost him 30 years of exile. He could only see his parents in Zimbabwe after 20 years when he was invited to help establish Zimbabwe’s Institute of Development Studies. Banda’s despotism instilled in Thandika a visceral hatred for authoritarian rule and belief in the need to ground development in democratic processes.

The third influence was the social democratic character of the Swedish state, which granted him asylum and citizenship, as well as an opportunity to further his studies and teach in one of its universities. He was impressed by the effective way the Swedish state

managed its economy, as well as its redistributive policies and social reforms that produced highly egalitarian outcomes—all achieved without sacrificing democratic principles and processes. In his words, ‘Sweden made one aware of the ways in which ‘embedded liberalism’ could tame the structural power of capital.’<sup>4</sup>

Thandika was a prolific writer—his writings exploded exponentially during his twenty-one years at UNRISD and LSE. He wrote on a wide range of issues—on macro-economic development, structural adjustment programmes, economic policy making, institutions and development, agriculture, industry, the state, social policy, democracy, conflict, nationalism, pan-Africanism, ethnicity, academic freedom, culture and African intellectuals. He also occasionally forayed into literature to illustrate his arguments. He had an opinion—often controversial—on almost every subject in the social sciences and public policy.<sup>5</sup>

It is impossible to address all Thandika’s work in this tribute. However, I will discuss some of his major contributions in the study of development. I will start by examining his understanding of development, which was at the heart of his scholarship. I will then discuss his key works under four themes: combatting Africa’s maladjustment; developmental states and neopatrimonialism; advancing the development agenda in social policy; and grounding development in democratic processes. In the last three sections, I will discuss his role as an institution-builder in social science research, focusing on his leadership in CODESRIA; his ‘outsider’ status in the UN, which covers his tenure at UNRISD; and my personal relations with him as a colleague and a friend.



## The primacy of development

For Thandika, development was the filter or primary lens for assessing public policies and the human condition. His training in economics in the 1960s, when development economics was fashionable, and exposure to the classics in economic history and radical political economy were the building blocks for his conceptualisation of development. Development economics emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, enjoyed much respectability in the 1960s and 1970s, but was eclipsed in the 1980s by neoliberalism. Development economists focused on how late industrialising or poor countries could catch up or bridge the development gap with countries that were already industrialised.

As Thandika observed in summarising the key ideas of this branch of economics in his paper for an UNRISD-IDEAs conference on 'Rethinking Development Economics' in 2001, late industrialisation requires a '*big push* or *critical minimum* effort or a *great spurt* to turn the process of cumulative causation into a virtuous cycle of positive feedback'. The aim is to aggressively move countries from 'a low equilibrium trap' or 'vicious circle of poverty' that history, or in the case of Africa, colonialism, bequeathed them, towards a state of high equilibrium or self-sustained growth rates and transformation.

Some of the influential development economists that Thandika was attracted to were Paul Rosenstein-Rodan, Harvey Leibenstein, Gunnar Myrdal, François Perroux, Arthur Lewis, Albert Hirschman and Alexander Gershenkron. Gershenkron's *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (1962), which Thandika often cited, had a strong impact on his ideas on catch up and structural change.<sup>6</sup> To Ger-

shenkron, late industrialising countries can leapfrog or skip stages traversed by developed countries by learning from prior mistakes. Countries that take catch up seriously are expected to have high growth spurts and rapid rates of industrial growth, will prioritise capital goods over consumer goods, and the state and big banks will play an active role in driving development.

The key lessons Thandika drew from this literature were that development represents: i) sustained levels of high growth, structural change and economic diversification; ii) qualitative improvements in well-being, especially for those in the lower scales of the income or social ladder; and iii) improvements in social relations and institutions. In his inaugural lecture at the LSE, which he titled 'Running While Others Walk: Knowledge and the Challenge of Africa's Development' (2010), he argued that as a 'late, late, late' industrialising continent, Africa should not only study the front-runners of industrialisation but also the development experiences in every part of the world. To Thandika, leapfrogging in development calls for 'levels of education and learning that are far higher than those attained by the pioneers at similar levels of economic development' (p. 18).

Thandika's commitment to economic and social change made him reject the neoliberal turn in economics, which emphasised the importance of getting prices right, deregulation of economies, public expenditure cuts and dismantling of development planning institutions. Under neoliberalism, economics became a study of macro-economic stabilisation and trade liberalisation. Indeed, neoliberalism and the multilateral financial agencies' capture of Africa's policy space negated everything he learned in development economics;

it challenged his dream of rapid industrialisation and fierce sense of nationalism and anti-imperialist beliefs. In his insightful interview for *Development and Change* in 2019, he singled out development as the unfinished business in Africa. In his words, 'pretty much every big dream I had about Africa, except for development, has come true.'<sup>7</sup>

Thandika was also critical of development approaches that largely seek to manage poverty. These include studies that celebrate incremental changes in the lives of the poor, such as the literature on coping strategies of informal low-skilled individuals; micro-credit programmes that barely lift people above starvation income levels; and targeted handouts to the poor that fail to transform lives in meaningful ways. As he argued, where poverty is widespread, it makes little sense to target the poor, as this may be administratively costly, may generate leakages, limit the poor to inferior services, and make it hard to build links or solidarity between the poor and better-off groups in financing and providing quality services. To him, low value-added informal income-generating activities are an index of underdevelopment. While it is important to understand how the poor make a living, the goal of development should be to transform economies and the lives of the poor, not manage or glorify them.

He was also dissatisfied with the anti-growth positions of sections of the environment movement and much of the literature on environmental economics, which he believed does not pay sufficient attention to industrial catch up, including the need not only to transfer resources to poor countries as part of the much discussed climate change mitigation bargain, but also, and more importantly,

to give poor countries policy space and tools to advance the industrialisation project. As he often argued, poor people will only be able to devise effective adaptation strategies to climate change, take the environment seriously and contribute to universal mitigation targets when they have seen substantial improvements in their lives. Unfortunately, his writing on the environment was very thin. It would have been useful to know how strategies for industrial catch up would look like in the context of environmental sustainability, especially as Africa is likely to pay a much higher price than rich regions, even though it is least responsible for the warming of the planet.

### Combatting Africa's maladjustment

Thandika spent much of his time studying, analysing, debating and campaigning against the IMF and World Bank's neoliberal adjustment programmes. Africa's maladjustment, as he described the continent's experience under adjustment, was the one issue that he consistently engaged with for over thirty years in his study of development. Whether at CODESRIA, UNRISD or LSE, he was obsessed with what the multilateral financial institutions were doing to Africa.

He read virtually everything the World Bank wrote on Africa and meticulously tracked the progression of that institution's adjustment policies and programmes. He organised several conferences, wrote many articles in journals and edited books, and published in 1999, with Charles Soludo (an economist who later headed Nigeria's Central Bank), an influential two-volume book, *Our Continent, Our Future: African Perspectives on Structural*

*Adjustment* (1999); and *African Voices on Structural Adjustment* (2003). *Our Continent, Our Future* was a succinct, well-argued and evidence-backed synthesis of Africa's adjustment experience in the 1980s and early- to mid-1990s. *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 1999) described it as 'a valuable primer on current development debates'.<sup>8</sup>

Thandika and Soludo made three important points in that study. First, they were among the first scholars to show that African countries were not the perennial failed states that the multilateral financial agencies and Africanist political scientists imagined them to be. In the logic of these agencies, the post-colonial African state was a captured, neopatrimonial institution that largely served coalitions of narrow urban interests. The multilateral agencies believed that these special interests extracted rents from Africa's state-directed development, leading to price distortions, system-wide inefficiencies, and economic backwardness. The historical record, however, was different. Thandika and Soludo demonstrated that Africa's annual GDP per capita growth between 1965 and 1974 was positive. At an average of 2.6 per cent, it was much higher than the GDP per capita growth of the 1980s, which declined by 1.3 per cent per annum, despite Africa receiving about ten years of neoliberal adjustment medicine. Some countries, such as Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya and Nigeria were, in fact, growth miracles before their economies were plunged into crisis.

Second, Thandika and Soludo demonstrated that the focus on domestic policy failures deflected attention from efforts by African states in building the foundations for industrial development; the big push in social development,

especially in the field of education, which produced a cadre of quality professionals and administrators; and nation-building strategies in a continent that hosts the largest number of ethnic groups in the world. The preoccupation with domestic policy failures also meant that the role of external factors, such as the volatility of global commodity prices, was ignored. In the eyes of the multilateral agencies, if the crisis was caused by domestic policy failures, it was justified to apply shock therapy or the full burden of adjustment on African countries. This distorted reading of the problem caused a rift with African policy makers, who highlighted the significance of deteriorating terms of trade in explaining the crisis. It led to ruptures in policy dialogue and what the agencies liked to call policy slippage.

Third, *Our Continent, Our Future* provides a useful overview of the economics literature that tracked African countries' performance under structural adjustment, and the numerous, but often contradictory and ultimately failed efforts by the World Bank to present the adjustment programmes as successful. While there were positive results in macroeconomic stabilisation, the record on economic growth, industrialisation, agricultural performance, foreign investment flows, domestic resource mobilisation and poverty alleviation was shockingly poor. Many countries that the World Bank classified as success stories, including so-called strong adjusters, often found themselves downgraded as non-adjusters within very short periods. The lesson was unmistakable: the adjustment programmes were largely about macroeconomic stabilisation; they failed to address issues of growth, structural change and the well-being of the poor.

By the mid-1990s, it was obvious to most observers that adjustment was not working. There were strong calls, therefore, for a change of direction. The reform package that emerged added issues of growth, participatory policy making, national ownership of policies, poverty reduction strategies, governance reform and institutions, but did not dilute the fundamental demands for stabilisation, liberalisation and privatisation.

Faced with the stark reality of Africa's poor economic performance and pressures for change, the World Bank was forced to acknowledge many of the policy failures of adjustment but failed to change the way it engaged African economies. Thandika meticulously tracked these acknowledgements of failure, which he called *mea culpas*. When he was at UNRISD, he was my primary source for keeping abreast of the World Bank's policy gymnastics, or *mea culpas*. He published four useful papers on these policy changes and the maladjustment of African economies ('Maladjusted African Economies and Globalisation', *Africa Development*, Vol. XXX, Nos 1 and 2, 2005; 'Institutional Monocropping and Monotasking in Africa', in A. Norman et al (eds.), *Good Growth and Governance in Africa: Rethinking Development Strategies*, 2011; 'Can Africa Turn from Recovery to Development?', *Current History*, May 2014; and 'Globalisation and Africa's Unfinished Agenda', *Macelester International*, Vol. 7, Spring, 1999).

When African economies experienced growth spurts in the late 1990s and 2000s, the multilateral financial agencies quickly forgot about the *mea culpas* and, as Thandika observed, touted the recovery as a delayed outcome of the structural adjustment programmes.

However, the recovery has failed to transform African economies and average per capita incomes in many countries are still lower than in the 1970s. As he put it, 'if you have that many *mea culpas*, you create an economy, and that economy behaves in a particular way.'<sup>9</sup> Understanding the type of African economies that have emerged after more than 30 years of structural adjustment and the World Bank's large number of *mea culpas* was one of the two issues he was working on as book projects before his illness. One hopes that CODESRIA will collaborate with his family to finalise and publish these books, which should be a treasure in the study of African development.

### Developmental states and neopatrimonialism

Development economists recognised the critical role states play in industrialisation. States are useful for correcting market failures, devising catch-up strategies, mobilising and allocating resources, and ensuring that firms comply with rules and development-enhancing targets. For much of the 1960s and 1970s, the development literature on catch up was theoretical and aspirational, and focused largely on Africa, Latin America and South Asia. It had no clear-cut success stories to draw on, apart from the historical experiences of Western societies. East Asia's rapid industrialisation in the 1960s and 1970s hardly featured in the debate.

By the 1980s, however, East Asia's successful state-led industrialisation could no longer be ignored. There was an explosion of scholarly interest in the 1990s in what came to be called the 'East Asian miracle', despite the World Bank's attempt to downplay the state's role in that miracle (*The*

*East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy*, 1993). The concept and literature of the developmental state gained wide currency and strongly challenged the assumptions of neoliberal theory. Thandika devoured that literature, which confirmed many of the ideas he was grappling with in his critique of Africa's adjustment programmes. His article, 'Thinking about Developmental States in Africa',<sup>10</sup> set the tone for the Africa debate. It is his most widely read and cited work, generating more than 1,000 scholarly citations.

The key value of 'Thinking about Developmental States in Africa' was the systematic way Thandika critiqued what he called the 'impossibility arguments' for crafting developmental states in Africa. These arguments range from Africa's presumed lack of ideology, weak state capacity and external economic dependence, to the continent's alleged neopatrimonial systems of governance and rent-seeking behaviour of special interest groups. As he argued, if developmental states are assessed on the basis of ideological dispositions that are developmental, and in which serious attempts are made to deploy the state to the task of economic development, Africa had many such states in the first decade and half of independence.

Using tax efforts and public expenditure patterns as proxies to measure seriousness, it was clear that many African states took development seriously before experiencing hard times in the mid-1970s. Some of these states were among the fastest growing economies in the world, registering growth rates of 6 per cent or higher. Indeed, as Thandika demonstrated, 10 of the 27 fastest growing economies were in Africa. The

savings rates of many countries were also high. The problem, as he argued, is that critics assess the developmental potential of African states by focusing only on the crisis period when the administrative, technical and coordination capacities of most states had been eroded by the fiscal crisis and the anti-state policies of the IMF and World Bank.

The most popular thesis in the ‘impossibility arguments’ on African developmental states is neopatrimonialism. This bemoans Africa’s failure to develop Weberian-type rational-legal bureaucratic state systems. The African state is, instead, said to be mired in redistributive activities that are guided by patron–client and affective relations, rendering economic development impossible. Thandika was highly critical of this literature, which he consistently challenged in many articles. However, because of the framework’s appeal in the study of Africa, he decided to engage it more comprehensively in 2015. The result is his 50-page magisterial article, ‘Neopatrimonialism and the Political Economy of Economic Performance in Africa.’<sup>11</sup> This is a work of outstanding scholarship—rigorous, empirical, and a tour de force on the literature on neopatrimonialism. It is, unequivocally, a demolition of the conceptual edifice on which much of the study of Africa has been constructed. It may well end up as the most important work for devising new ways of thinking about African states, economies and societies. It is, in my view, Thandika’s best piece of work.

Neopatrimonialism is the default explanation for every bad outcome or ‘pathology’ in Africa’s development. Thandika identified the specific mechanisms and

effects highlighted by the literature on neopatrimonialism, and used empirical data, alternative findings in the development literature, and logical reasoning to assess the concept’s explanatory power. The pathological effects of neopatrimonialism range from bad governance, low savings and lack of capitalist classes, to hyperinflation, bloated state bureaucracies, low taxation, interest group capture of industrial and trade policy, and misuse of foreign exchange.

The empirical evidence is, however, different. As he demonstrated, the governance performance of African states is not worse than what should be expected for their level of economic development; Africa’s low savings is a recent development that is tied to the fiscal crisis and almost twenty years of adjustment policies; clientelism is not confined to African capitalism—it is also a salient feature of East Asian developmental states; African countries did not have Latin American-type levels of hyperinflation—indeed, inflation rates in the pre-crisis period were relatively low in Africa; African states employ less people per capita and spend less per GDP compared to other developing regions, suggesting that the continent does not have over-bloated bureaucracies, but is instead largely under-governed; African countries vary greatly in tax efforts, however on the average they collect a higher percentage of taxes than other countries and their tax efforts surpass the minimum of 15 per cent of GDP recommended by the IMF for developing countries; and there is no evidence that special interest groups are the main drivers for initiating industrial and trade policies, even though they benefit from them.

## Advancing the development agenda in social policy

Although Thandika took the social aspect of development seriously, it did not feature prominently in his work before he joined UNRISD. He often made brief remarks on post-colonial social contracts and in discussing social development his main focus was on education and health expenditures. His primary concern in the study of development was economic growth and structural change. This was to change when he arrived at UNRISD—an institution whose *raison d’être* is to examine development from a social lens.

Thandika was at the peak of his powers in advancing a developmentalist agenda in the study of Africa when he joined UNRISD in 1998. How would he address UNRISD’s social concerns and remain faithful to his own agenda as a development economist? UNRISD’s work on ‘the social’ covered a wide range of issues—such as the social impact of economic reforms; environment, sustainable development and social change; gender and development; corporate social responsibility; new information and communication technologies; public sector reform in developing countries; land reform; social integration in urban settings; the international trade in illicit drugs; ethnic conflict and development; political violence and social movements; war-torn societies; agriculture and food systems; social indicators; and participation. There were also a few studies on social welfare policies.

Thandika resolved the problem by injecting his concerns for economic growth and transformation into the study of social policy, and narrowing the issues to be

addressed in social policy to social protection and social services, while paying close attention to issues of equity, social pacts, cohesion and democratic processes. The result was what I believe was his most innovative contribution in development studies—the mega project he christened ‘Social Policy in a Development Context’,<sup>12</sup> which gave social policy the same powers as economic policy in theorising development. There were tensions between this radical turn in conceptualising ‘the social’ and UNRISD’s other programmes that also addressed important social issues.

In the end, ‘Social Policy in a Development Context’ became hegemonic because Thandika was not only a great thinker; he was also a super-effective fund-raiser with a wide network of friends in the donor world. The social policy project became UNRISD’s biggest project in much of the 2000s, generating 18 books and numerous programme papers, journal articles and book chapters. At its peak, it had four or five resident research coordinators, seven external coordinators, and more than 150 researchers worldwide working on different dimensions of the project. Part of that work continues in the research programme of the coordinator of the Africa study, Jimi Adesina, who now organises regular conferences on social policy in Africa, after a series of successful summer programmes he directed for senior African development policy makers in Dakar.

In rolling out the project at UNRISD, insights on the developmental role of social policy were derived from the experiences of successful late industrialisers, especially the developmental states of East Asia and the Nordic social democratic states. The

project contended that for social policy to be developmental, it must do five basic things. It must stimulate economic development or enhance productive capacities; serve as a redistributive channel for narrowing economic and social inequalities; protect people from income loss associated with unemployment, pregnancy, sickness, disability and old age; reduce the burden of reproduction or care work; and act as an automatic stabiliser to the macro-economy in periods of crises. Late industrialising countries used combinations of these roles of social policy in transforming their economies.

Importantly, the project affirmed that social policy can be transformative when it is universal rather than targeted to specific groups, and when it is linked to employment-centred growth strategies, which may allow more people to be incorporated into social insurance schemes that are redistributive across classes, groups and generations. Thandika’s ‘Targeting and Universalism in Poverty Reduction’,<sup>13</sup> which influenced many UN agencies, systematically laid out the advantages of universalism over targeting when crafting social policies.

Four of the five social policy roles discussed above were already well researched in the welfare state literature of advanced economies before the social policy project was launched. Thandika was particularly drawn to the fifth—the productive role, which he felt was under-theorised. This addresses the issue of how social policy can spur innovation by creating conditions for industrial peace; raising human capital, skills and savings rates; converting savings into productive investments; and deepening the financial sector.

The social policy–savings–investment links are best captured by the experiences of late industrialising countries in using pension funds to generate high savings rates and promoting rapid industrialisation. For instance, Singapore’s Central Provident Fund accounted for about 40 per cent of its gross domestic savings in the 1980s, and South Korea’s funds represented 30 per cent of its GDP in the mid-2000s. These funds were used to finance heavy and chemical industries in Korea and universal homeownership in Singapore. Finland, a late Nordic industrialiser, used its own pension funds to industrialise through extensive electrification and public housing provisions.<sup>14</sup>

Thandika wrote extensively on the developmental role of social policy. These publications, which spanned his tenure at both UNRISD and LSE, include the following: *Social Policy in a Development Context*; *Social Policy and Development Programme Paper No. 7*, 2001, UNRISD; *Social Policy in a Development Context* (ed.), UNRISD and Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; ‘Targeting and Universalism in Poverty Reduction’, *Social Policy and Development Programme Paper No. 23*, 2005, UNRISD; ‘Transformative Social Policy and Innovation in Developing Countries’, *European Journal of Development Research*, 19 (1), March 2007; ‘Transformative Social Policy and the Developmental State’, LSE and Institute for Future Studies, n.d.; ‘How the New Poverty Agenda Neglected Social and Employment Policies in Africa’, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, Vol. 11, Issue 1, 2010; ‘Welfare Regimes and Economic Development: Bridging the Conceptual Gap’, in F. Valpy and T. Rosemary, (eds.), *Overcoming the Persistence of Inequality and Pov-*

erty. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; ‘Social Policy and the Challenges of the Post-Adjustment Era, in E. Paus (ed.), *Getting Development Right*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; (with I. Yi), *Learning from the South Korean Developmental Success*, 2014; and ‘Colonial Legacies and Social Welfare Regimes in Africa: An Empirical Exercise’, *Social Policy and Development Working Paper*, No. 4, 2016, UNRISD.

His succinct policy brief on the sixteen lessons drawn from the project, titled ‘Transformative Social Policy: Lessons from UNRISD Research’, is also highly recommended (*UNRISD Research and Policy Brief No. 5*).

### Grounding development in democratic processes

So far, I have presented Thandika as a committed, indeed unflagging, developmentalist. People with this mindset, including the pioneers of development economics, often privilege economic development over everything else, including democracy, or have a benign view of authoritarian rule if it delivers economic growth and transformation. It is very common to hear colleagues in economics and other disciplines in Africa arguing for a benevolent dictator or ‘strong man’ to sort out the problems of the continent. Thandika was very different. He refused to accept a trade-off between economic development and democracy.

He strongly believed in both the intrinsic and instrumental value of democracy. In a popular debate with the Kenyan political scientist, Peter Anyang’ Nyong’o, in the *CODESRIA Bulletin* in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Thandika defended the intrinsic value of democracy against attempts to in-

strumentalise it as a prerequisite for development.<sup>15</sup> Throughout his writings and public interventions, he advocated for democracy to deliver on development, but did not reject it if it did not; instead, he often insisted on more effort to get democracy to deliver good outcomes.

He was a great admirer of East Asia’s developmental states, but detested, in equal measure, their authoritarian history. He always held up the rich tradition of democracy, industrialisation and equity in the Nordic countries as a counter to the authoritarian underpinnings of the East Asian miracles. In fact, to his delight, and as he often pointed out, many studies now treat economic growth and democracy as mutually reinforcing. Thandika’s dislike for authoritarian rule may have been influenced by the harsh treatment he received under Banda’s despotic government in Malawi, causing him to spend 30 years in exile. As head of CODESRIA, he played a big role in defending academic freedom in Africa when, in the 1980s, university academics were under attack as governments tried to implement unpopular structural adjustment programmes.

For Thandika, therefore, development should be grounded in democratic values and processes. In this sense, he shared Amartya Sen’s view of development as freedom—including political freedom. He identified with Sen’s statement that ‘a country does not have to be deemed fit for democracy; rather, it has to become fit through democracy’ which he quoted approvingly in one of his papers on democracy.<sup>16</sup>

There were two sides to Thandika’s treatment of democracy. The first was his defence of new or fledgling democracies against

the technocratic styles of policy making associated with the IMF’s structural adjustment programmes. He coined the term ‘choiceless democracies’<sup>17</sup> to underscore the American Political Scientist Adam Przeworski’s observation that the conditionalities of the IMF and World Bank limit the choices of new democracies, producing, as Przeworski observed, ‘societies which can vote but cannot choose.’<sup>18</sup>

One of the first projects Thandika launched at UNRISD was ‘Technocratic Policy Making and Democratic Accountability’. This examined the tensions between technocratic styles of policy making and democratisation in a selected number of countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The adjustment programmes, we should recall, narrowed policy options to a limited number of objectives that emphasised fiscal restraint, privatisation and liberalisation. To meet these objectives, governments tried to insulate policy making technocrats in finance ministries and central banks from public pressure. This approach to policy making distorted structures of accountability and made governments more answerable to multilateral agencies and investors than to emerging representative institutions and the wider public. It also downplayed the importance of employment, social protection and poverty eradication as policy makers were mainly concerned about stabilisation and market-enhancing activities.

Thandika’s second approach to democracy was instrumentalist. He downplayed, at least at UNRISD, the study of democracy in its own right and insisted that it must be linked to development objectives. The difficulty with this position is that many countries that have held

multiple elections and liberalised their political systems still have strong authoritarian reflexes and are not always responsive to the needs of voters. It may explain why studies on the link between democracy and economic or social development always produce poor or ambiguous results.

Linking democracy to social or economic outcomes may require, therefore, interrogating the quality of democracy itself. How institutionalised are social and political rights? How independent are state institutions, especially the judiciary, electoral management bodies and police, from governing parties and leaders? How competitive, fair and credible is the electoral system? What are the social bases of political parties? How are the poor connected in the political process? Are political parties governed democratically? What is the quality and depth of civil society organisations and mass-based interest groups? And how responsive are governments to citizen demands? Answers to these questions, which fall in the domain of political science, require studying democracy as an issue in itself if we are to understand democracy's role in advancing good or bad social and economic outcomes. Despite his tendency to believe that Africa has passed the democracy test, these are issues that I enjoyed discussing with Thandika as we both tried to understand the links between democracy and developmental outcomes in Africa.

### **An institution-builder in social science research in Africa**

Thandika was not just a great scholar; he was also an innovative institution-builder. He was central in the development of CODESRIA's in-

frastructure for collaborative social science research in Africa when he headed that institution from 1986 to 1996. I am sure his colleagues who worked closely with him at CODESRIA will provide richer insights into this aspect of his work. But let me say a few things, based on my observation as a participant in CODESRIA's work.

It was under Thandika's leadership that CODESRIA's membership expanded beyond the limited circle of deans or heads of social and economic research institutes, to embrace all who teach and do research in the social sciences in Africa. CODESRIA's triennial General Assembly has now become the largest gathering of social scientists in Africa, attracting more than 500 participants, who are mostly sponsored by CODESRIA.

In promoting social science research in Africa, Thandika was concerned about many issues, which can be summed up in seven ways. First, he was critical of the tendency of many Western scholars to publish articles and books on Africa without citing African scholars or engaging with local African debates. Second, he strongly disapproved of debates on Africa that did not include African contributions. Third, he criticised the North-South intellectual division of labour in collaborative projects in which Northern scholars arrogated to themselves more intellectually challenging roles of theory building and delegated less challenging roles of case studies or supply of primary data to African scholars.

Fourth, he bemoaned the crisis of African universities in the 1980s and 1990s, which was linked to the defunding of universities and the World Bank's myopic and destructive view that Africa did not need universities. Fifth,

he worried about the future of young scholars growing up in highly under-resourced university environments. Sixth, he strongly believed that senior scholars should be empowered to inspire and mentor young scholars. And seventh, he was a firm advocate of inter-disciplinary research and breaking of geographical and linguistic barriers in African social science research.

In order to build national and cross-national research capacity, CODESRIA created two important tools—National Working Groups, which encouraged scholars in any country to organise teams and conduct research on any theme of their choice; and Multinational Working Groups, which were headed by senior scholars, involving the participation of scholars from different regions on the continent. The senior scholars are required to produce Green Books, which provide methodological guidance and comprehensive reviews of the literature on the subjects to be studied.

CODESRIA also mounted a well-resourced, Rockefeller-funded 'Reflections on Development' programme, which targeted established and promising young scholars. They were offered USD30,000 each to go to reputable foreign universities or research centres for some research and given office space at CODESRIA on their return to conclude their research and produce book manuscripts. Some of CODESRIA's best books came out of that programme.<sup>19</sup>

Another innovation was the Small Grants Programme, which targeted Master's and doctoral degree students by providing them with grants for their dissertations. This programme was launched in the 1980s when most universities were experiencing difficulties in

funding postgraduate students because of cuts in university budgets. Grantees were required to send copies of their theses to CODESRIA to be deposited in the institution's library, which should now be a rich source of knowledge on various aspects of development in African countries.

Under Thandika, CODESRIA also launched two Summer Institutes—on Gender and Governance—which exposed young academics to the literature and debates on these emerging issues of global concern. Summer Institutes on a variety of issues have since exploded in leaps and bounds.

The popular *CODESRIA Bulletin*, which publishes think pieces, debates and short articles on burning issues, was another of Thandika's innovation. The *Bulletin* is now more widely read than the Council's lead journal, *Africa Development*. It published two famous debates during Thandika's tenure—on democracy, and the Mazrui-Mafeje debate on recolonisation.<sup>20</sup>

### An 'outsider' in the UN

UNRISD was already an established institution with a 35-year history when Thandika was appointed to head it in 1998. It had developed its own rules, infrastructure, networks, and competence for conducting social development research on a global scale. Its staff—those in administration, publications, and research—were well trained, experienced, and highly motivated, and required little supervision. UNRISD's efficiency was of such quality that it could be run on autopilot. What it needed from directors were fresh research ideas and ability to raise funds.

Another feature of UNRISD that played to Thandika's preferences

and strengths is its unique position within the UN system as an autonomous institution with an independent board—made up largely of top scholars from different regions of the world. It also has a tradition of questioning conventional wisdom and advancing critical ideas on contemporary social problems. The administrative hierarchy is relatively flat, with researchers enjoying considerable autonomy in leading projects.

These features of UNRISD suited Thandika very well—he was ideas-driven and iconoclastic, very informal in his personal relations, and not impressed by the trappings of bureaucracy. The dress code at UNRISD was, as in universities, 'business casual' without ties, unless when attending formal meetings. But the Director always dressed formally, which Thandika had to adjust to because of his frequent official meetings. He once told me that he did not like dressing formally, and always looked forward to summer when he could be his normal self in wearing loose African shirts or slightly unbutton his shirt and roll up his sleeves. His informal approach could sometimes confuse those who did not know him. During the closing session of a CODESRIA project planning meeting I once attended in Harare in the 1980s, one of the participants asked the group to censure the Executive Secretary for failing to attend the meeting. Those of us who knew Thandika exploded in laughter because Thandika made some of the most incisive contributions at the meeting. The poor guy obviously expected to see the Executive Secretary in a suit.

The organisational setup and tradition at UNRISD allowed Thandika to focus on ideas, project proposals, fund-raising and his

own research and writing. His strength was not in administration or management. Indeed, we very quickly learned that copies of every paper that required his attention should also be given to his able secretary, Angela Meijer, for easy retrieval. His love of ideas and the efficiency of the staff meant that he could give valuable feedback on projects without interfering in how they were run. I always joked with friends and colleagues that you could go to Thandika with one idea and leave with three or four new ones or seriously question the one you took to him.

As an ideas person, he staunchly defended the integrity of the academic content of research projects even at the cost of losing funds. I would like to narrate two incidents that stuck with me in thinking about him as Director of UNRISD. The first was our effort to secure from the Swedish agency, SAREC, funding for a project on 'Economic Policy Making and Parliamentary Accountability'. SAREC suggested that they would consider funding the project if we worked with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which was headed by a Swede. However, the Head of IPU insisted that we should delete references to the IMF and World Bank in the research proposal. He touched a raw nerve. Thandika chastised him in a telephone discussion on the project for making such a demand. When he dropped the phone, I knew the funding request was up in flames, but he greatly earned my respect for standing up for his ideas and protecting the integrity of our research.

The second incident was in Durban during the anti-racism world conference in 2001. UNRISD had sponsored a parallel conference on 'Racism and Public Policy',



involving the participation of 40 high-level scholars from around the world. We had invited the Ghanaian sociologist, Kwesi Prah, who had taught at the University of Juba and worked on identities and xenophobic practices in Sudan to prepare a paper and lead a discussion on that country. The Sudanese ambassador to South Africa contacted Thandika on the eve of the conference and demanded the withdrawal of the Sudan paper. He ‘threatened’ to take the matter up with Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and convener of the official inter-governmental conference, if his demand was not met.

Thandika told him that UNRISD would not take instructions from governments and Mrs. Robinson had no power over UNRISD’s work. He advised him that the best he could do was to reply to Prah after his presentation, and UNRISD would willingly give him a few minutes to do that. As coordinator of the project, I informed Prah to expect a rebuttal to his paper from the Sudanese mission. The following day, about five members of the Sudanese mission attended Prah’s session and occupied the front row seats. The hall was full to capacity, with more than 500 participants. We thought there was going to be a nasty exchange, but Prah completely disarmed the Sudanese delegation by his brilliant presentation. They did not utter a single word during the discussion of the paper.

Thandika’s relative distance from the day-to-day running of research projects sometimes created problems. One clear case was the preparation of the Institute’s flagship report *Combatting Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics* (2010), which I coordinated. The project’s conceptual framework

had taken a different direction from his original ideas, which I thought were not feasible because of data limitations. He had not consistently followed the evolution of the project, which involved contributions from more than 100 individuals, detailed comparative research in eight countries selected based on the extent of their industrialisation or structural change, and numerous thematic papers.

He questioned the direction of the project only after the first draft report had been discussed in a review meeting. A stalemate ensued that threatened the report’s viability, but his position was untenable because the research staff that worked on the report did not agree with his approach. After a series of heated but inconclusive staff meetings and bilateral discussions, he asked me to lock myself in my office and write the report. I was deeply moved when he said, ‘Yusuf, I know I have been an obstacle, but I’m sure this report will be concluded very quickly as soon as I get out of the way’. He was such a remarkably honest and transparent person that was driven largely by ideas.

### Personal interactions

Let me conclude this tribute by saying a few things about my personal interactions with him. Thandika was remarkably open, welcoming, witty and charming. Every minute spent with him was intellectually and socially enriching. Sometimes it was difficult to tell whether it was his ideas or wit that attracted people to him. He was good in stimulating your brain and making you laugh. Like all humans, he could be impulsive and lose his cool when he did not have his way on issues he felt strongly about. But he did not hold grudges and found

ways to make amends and let you know he was wrong.

His *joie de vivre* was just as intense as his love of intellectual work. I sometimes felt that his enjoyment of life was a stimulant for his academic work ethic and sharp mind. He enjoyed bantering with colleagues and loved music, football, beer, nightclubs, and the arts in general. He was an amazing storyteller and frequent—indeed, very frequent—traveller, having literally visited every part of the world many times over. I always liked to engage him after his missions to hear his jokes and stories about the places he had visited. He was a good listener and observer—quick to feel the pulse of a place and pick up what people were worried about. His jokes and stories could have produced tons of books that would have been the envy of scholars who rely on anecdotes to explain the African condition.

I first heard of Thandika in 1983, when I engaged CODESRIA on a paper I wrote with two colleagues, Abdul Raufu Mustapha and Sa’idu Adamu, on the politics of Nigeria’s economic crisis. I might have met him for the first time in 1985 at a conference CODESRIA organised at the Ahmadu Bello University, where I was teaching, on structural adjustment programmes in Africa. I met him in Sweden in 1986 after another conference on structural adjustment. Thereafter, I became involved in CODESRIA’s networks, attending its workshops and conferences in Dakar and other cities. Even when I moved to Geneva in 1990, CODESRIA, through Zenebeworke Tadesse, Thandika’s Deputy, asked me to join the Carter Centre’s elections monitoring team during Ghana’s presidential and parliamentary elections in 1992.

Thandika introduced me to Dakar's jazz nightclubs and the music and nightclub of Youssou N'Dour in the 1980s, before N'Dour became a superstar. We discussed football a lot. I recall the time Zambia won the African Cup of Nations in 2012. When we met after the match, he thought he could tease me because Zambia defeated a West African team, Cote d'Ivoire, in the final. He laughed and changed the subject when I told him I rooted for Zambia because West and North Africa had dominated the Cup of Nations for too long.

I also recall when Guinea fielded three Banguras in their football team in a Cup of Nations tournament. He rushed to my office the following morning and joked that he did not know that the Bangura clan had so many footballers. I informed him that Bangura is originally a Soso name in Guinea and parts of Sierra Leone, which the Themneh, Limba and Loko in Sierra Leone have appropriated on a large scale through a long history of migration and inter-marriage. I do not even know one percent of the Banguras in Sierra Leone, let alone those in Guinea. He dropped the football talk and launched into a discussion on ethnic identities.

When he was at CODESRIA, he invited me in 1994 to give two seminars at their Governance Institute. Since I was holidaying with my family in Sierra Leone, I decided to take them along. At the end of the seminars, he took us to Gorée Island, an important trading post during the transatlantic slave trade, to see the so-called House of Slaves. As other Africans and African Americans who have visited that island have recounted numerous times, it was an

emotionally draining experience. We later regained our balance when he treated us to a lovely meal—a super huge grilled fish—in one of the restaurants on the island. I still have a picture of him carrying my two-year old son on his chest in the return journey as the boat was trying to anchor on the shores of Dakar.

I introduced Thandika to Nollywood films (Nigerian movies), when the industry was still in its infancy. He fully embraced the films as a source of entertainment and for understanding how young Africans view their world. He was pleasantly surprised that Africans were beginning to make films about their everyday lives and aspirations that appeal to mass audiences—something literary scholars have been unable to achieve on the same scale using the written word. As we both observed in one of our discussions, these mass-produced videos have transcended the more intellectually challenging films that have dominated the Pan-African Film and Television Festivals in Burkina Faso, which most Africans do not have the opportunity to watch.

Thandika was an amazing person who touched many lives in many ways. I will miss his infectious laugh, wit, vision, hunger for development, critical scholarship, indefatigable defence of justice, and effortless ability to relate to people across the divides of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and age. I thank the Mkandawire family in Malawi and Zimbabwe for giving us such a fine, gifted and engaged human being; and Kaarina Klint, his wife, and children, Andre and Joshua, and grandchildren for sharing him with us.

## Notes

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2. Kate Meagher, ‘Reflections of an Engaged Economist: An Interview with Thandika Mkandawire’, *Development and Change*, Vol. 50, No. 2 March, 2019; p. 513.
3. Meagher, *ibid*, p. 532
4. Meagher, *ibid*, p. 519
5. See the bibliography that CODESRIA has prepared of Thandika's work at this link: <https://www.codesria.org/thandikamkandawire/thandikas-work/>
6. Gershenkron's *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*, 1962, Cambridge, The Belknap.
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16. Amartya Sen, 'Democracy as a Universal Value', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 3-17, 1999; p.4.
17. See his 'Disempowering Democracies and the Persistence of Poverty', *Democracy, Governance and Human Rights Governance Paper*, No. 21, UNRISD, 2006.
18. Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, Cambridge: CUP1991, p. 84.
19. See for example, Paul T. Zeleza, *A Modern Economic History of Africa. Vol 1: The Nineteenth Century*, 1993, CODESRIA Book Series; Jimi Adesina, *Labour in the Explanation of an African Crisis*, 1995, *CODESRIA Book Series*; Eghosa Osaghae, *Between State and Civil Society in Africa*, 2004, *CODESRIA Book Series*.
20. See Article exchanges between Mafeje and Mazrui in *CODESRIA Bulletin* No 2, 1995, and *CODESRIA Bulletin* No 3, 1995.

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## Thandika Mkandawire: Tribute to a Mentor and Game-changer

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The passing of Thandika Mkandawire in the morning of 27 March 2020 has been a significant body blow to many of us. Thandika, as he preferred you call him regardless of the age difference, was laid to rest on 15 April 2020. It is still immensely difficult to reconcile oneself with the idea that he would no longer walk among us, enthuse us with his infectious humour, and distil in his gentle manner incredible insights from his well of knowledge and wisdom. A lot may be said about the brilliance of his mind, and his sense of humour. What strikes me most about Thandika is how much he taught us, by his very life, what it means to be human. Thandika had a zest for life and boundless energy that put some of us, many years his junior, to shame. Thandika was remarkably generous and deeply caring. Above all, Thandika was a

### Jimi Adesina

College of Graduate Studies,  
University of South Africa,  
Pretoria, South Africa

person of stellar personal integrity. I knew him as a mentor and a game-changer, and it is in this personal sense that I would like to present this tribute in his memory.<sup>1</sup>

Three people have been immensely influential in shaping my analytical sensibilities and career. The first two are Omafume Onoge and John Ohiorhenuan, who were influential in shaping my thoughts in my undergraduate and graduate studies and early career. Thandika Mkandawire was the third person. The three of them shared characteristics that endeared me to them: a deep disregard for

dogmas, immense capacity for reasoning outside the box, and an unflinching commitment to Africa and its peoples. They were deeply internationalist, as well.

### Initial Encounters

Encounters can be fleeting or enduring. In the case of Thandika, my encounter was both. It began at the inception workshop for the *Reflection on Development* fellowship programme held in Kampala, Uganda in 1989. Earlier that year, I had returned to Ibadan, Nigeria from a workshop in Nairobi, Kenya. This was part of the African Perspectives on Development project to which Ulf Himmelstrand had invited me to participate as a contributing author.<sup>2</sup> On my return from the July 1989 workshop in Nairobi, I walked into John Ohiorhenuan's office in the Department of Economics for

a chat on my experience. As I was about to leave his office, Johnny asked if I had seen the call for application for the Rockefeller Foundation/CODESRIA Reflections on Development fellowship programme. Johnny was a laureate of the inaugural fellowship. I had not seen the announcement and had no idea what CODESRIA was. Having completed my doctoral studies the previous year, I did not think I could apply for such a prestigious fellowship. Johnny was unrelenting in asking me to apply. It took a week, but I eventually decided to apply, framed by outstanding research questions that arose from the paper I presented at the Nairobi workshop. As it turned out, I received a letter from CODESRIA that my application was successful. The letter was signed by a 'Thandika Mkandawire—Executive Secretary.' The inception workshop was hosted by Mahmood Mamdani's Centre for Basic Research and we stayed at the Nile Hotel in Kampala.

I had a more vivid recollection of Micere Mugo and Mahmood Mamdani, both as resource persons, from the workshop than I did of Thandika. In this sense, my initial encounter with Thandika was fleeting. I remember Micere Mugo for her infectious and lively personality, which was only outdone in my recollection by her account, over breakfast on our second day in Kampala, of the nightmare she had the night before. She had relived her experience of torture when she was under arrest by the Arap Moi regime. The previous night, over dinner, Mamdani recounted how under the murderous regime of Idi Amin, the hotel was commandeered by the regime's secret police, the ironically named State Research Bureau (SRB). The SRB used the hotel for the incarceration and torture of its

victims. I was meeting Mamdani for the first time, after having read his works as an undergraduate in Ibadan, mainly *The Myths of Population Control* (1972) and *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda* (1976). Mamdani was already something of an academic rock star after Monthly Review Press published the former, a book that "put the spanner into the works" of the dominant narratives in Population Studies.

A more vivid encounter with Thandika, one that would turn out to be the basis for an enduring relationship, was in July 1990, at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Centre, Italy. The conference was the concluding activity for the Reflections fellowship, where the laureates presented their reports. The conference brought together laureates from Africa and Asia. I presented my fellowship report (*Labour in the explanation of an African crisis*). The fellowship, supported by a grant of US\$25 000, required laureates to spend anything between four to six months at a research outfit (with a good library) preferably outside their countries, 'put their feet up', and reflect on a development issue of their choice.<sup>3</sup> I had chosen to interrogate the narratives of the role of labour in the emergent neoliberal discourse of Africa's development crisis. My research focused on Nigeria. The evening before the resource persons left Bellagio, Thandika invited me to take a walk with him on the grounds of the Bellagio Centre. He said he read my fellowship report and was impressed by it. CODESRIA, he said, would like to launch a multinational research network on *Labour movement and policymaking in Africa*. He would like to invite me to produce the 'green book'—a scoping exercise that would mark out the state of the

art in the literature and define the research agenda for the network. That would be the more enduring encounter with Thandika and a remarkably rewarding association that deepened with the passing years. The fellowship also marked the beginning of my involvement in CODESRIA. The green book would be published in 1992, my report for the fellowship programme in 1994 in the CODESRIA Books Series, and I would go on to coordinate the multinational research network.<sup>4</sup>

### **A mentor with a heart of gold**

A vivid recollection of Thandika's humanness was from my early visits to CODESRIA when its offices were still at Fann Résidence (Dakar). I would be booked into Hotel Miramar (the Plateau, Dakar). I would spend the day working at the CODESRIA office and returned in the evening to the hotel. Thandika always made it a duty to drop by in the early evening to check how I was doing. Often, we would end up in the shop across the street from Hotel Miramar and talk away the evening. The discussions ranged widely but were never frivolous. The same routine would play out whether I was staying at Hotel Miramar or Novotel. Once or twice, I accepted the invitation to go to some clubs in Dakar. What quickly became clear was that I did not have Thandika's energy. By midnight I would ask to be dropped off at my hotel. Thandika would return to the club after dropping me off at the hotel. I would arrive in the office early in the morning to find Thandika already at work.

Thandika's car carried the 'chef du mission diplomatic' (chief of diplomatic mission) licence plate number but was far from what you would expect of a diplomatic mission. It was what in the

Nigerian parlance you would refer to as a 'jalopy'. Threadbare and unpretentious, the vehicle mirrored Thandika's light attachment to material things. Sam Olofin, who met him in Dakar, would comment that Thandika had the instinct of a Catholic priest.<sup>5</sup> While a testimony to Thandika's integrity, his simplicity belies a fierce defence of the autonomy of the African scholarly community and of CODESRIA. Two events stand out in my recollection.

Sometime in 1992, I believe, a delegation from the World Bank came to see him at CODESRIA on a research project they were proposing. I was visiting CODESRIA at the time and using an office across the corridor from his at Fann Résidence. The project funding was to come from the Bank, but the delegation came with the project design and choice of technique. Thandika's response to them was that CODESRIA did not work that way. If the Bank wanted to undertake any project with CODESRIA, they could provide the fund and define thematic focus of the project, but nothing else. CODESRIA would organise for members of the (African social science) community to produce a 'green book', the Council will put out a competitive call for the research project, undertake an independent assessment of applications, and the network will be run independently of the funders. The Bank, he told the delegation, was welcome to send its accountants to examine the financial books for the project, but that would be the limit of their involvement in the project. The delegation left, and the project never took off.

The second instance involved facing down a programme officer at the Dakar office of a Canadian

funding agency that supported the CODESRIA project on structural adjustment and agriculture. The individual had demanded a seat on the scientific committee of the programme. Matters came to a head during the project's workshop hosted by the Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER), in Ibadan. Thandika argued that this was not a demand the individual would make if he were dealing with a European scholarly organisation. As a funder, it would be an egregious subversion of the integrity of the autonomy of the scientific committee appointed by the CODESRIA Executive Committee. The potential for this position to adversely impact the funding for the project was great, but Thandika prevailed. There was no loss in the project's financing. Such insistence on institutional autonomy from funders was Thandika's hallmark, whether at the Council or UNRISD, yet Thandika was exceptionally successful as a fund-raiser. He left the Council and UNRISD in health financial situations.

The defence of the institutional integrity of CODESRIA was not only about the external threat, but Thandika was also vocal about what he considered to be internal threats. An organisation such as CODESRIA can easily become a victim of the gate-keeping syndrome. Thandika was quite vocal about the defence of openness of the Council's programme to people in the community. The integrity of the selection process, the importance of laureates of its activities knowing and being reassured that they gained access based purely on the quality of their works not who they know, were issues that Thandika never ceased to emphasise. It is a testament to the sustenance of the founding principles of the Council

that these framing norms remain firmly in place. The same applies to the epistemic openness of the work of the Council. Thandika never ceased to recount to me the stories of former laureates that he met even after he left the Council Secretariat, who told him that the Council gave them their first break in their academic careers and access to international funding.

At a time when the Council was in great peril, Thandika used the Claude Ake Memorial Lecture that he delivered at the 1998 General Assembly in Dakar to remind the delegates of the intellectual and institutional risks that the Council faced.<sup>6</sup> In addition to being a synoptic overview of the intellectual history of the Council, it offered a robust defence of the ideational heritage of the Council. Intellectually, the defence of one's sovereignty and affirmation of one's autonomy should not be misconstrued as being marooned in an intellectual ghetto. In the context of the tense and combative atmosphere at that General Assembly, the lecture had another role. Thandika called everyone in attendance to respect the institutional demarcation of the responsibilities between the Assembly and the Council Secretariat. The lecture is a document that the Council Secretariat may want to consider placing permanently on its website.

What also became clear from the lecture, and what he would recount many times to me afterwards, was that Thandika was not particularly happy at the turn of events at the 1992 General Assembly, when the Assembly voted into force individual membership of the Council. At its inception, the membership of the Council was made up, exclusively, of institutions of social science research and faculties. That was then, when national

funding for higher education was robust and participation significant. By 1992, the landscape had changed. African higher education landscape was being decimated by the retrenchment of public funding under the regime of structural adjustment. The presence of the institutional members at the 1992 General Assembly was minuscule. Some of us who pushed for the Council being opened to individual membership were concerned with the changing landscape. Equally, we could not fathom how ten or twelve representatives of institutions present could decide exclusively on the institutional structure of the Council, including the election of its Executive Committee. After all, the theme of the Assembly was democratic processes in Africa. Thandika became reconciled with the changes, but always felt we were wrong. The new regulations passed at the 14<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 2015 seem a sensible way forward.

Thandika always felt that the affirmation of the intellectual autonomy of the African social science community and of the Council was something to be demonstrated not merely affirmed. These, he argued, should be evident in the research and publication programmes of the Council and the visibility of the Council's works. For this, an insistence on peer-reviewed, quality output, bringing the works produced within the Council and the community to the reading audience, and the defence of the autonomy of the research groups were paramount efforts by the Council. In this, he had the remarkable support of Zenebeworke (Zen) Tadesse, who headed the Publications Division of CODESRIA for a period under Thandika's leadership of the Council. Zen herself fiercely

defended the autonomy of the Publications Department from intrusion from the other structures of the Council. Attention was paid not only to the contents of the Council's publications, but their form, and the CODESRIA Books Series is a testament to this, during a period that Tade Akin Aina described as the golden era of the Council. The books were properly peer-reviewed, copy-edited, indexed and printed. Before you take a book off the shelf of a bookshop to read, you probably would first have been attracted by the design of the cover, Thandika would say. When the Council initiated its partnership with Zed Books under the leadership of Adebayo Olukoshi, I remember Thandika expressing his immense pride, over drinks at a restaurant near LSE, on seeing the books (the Africa in the New Millennium series) at the LSE Bookshop. This defence of the autonomy of the African social science community stretched to the regular publication of the *CODESRIA Bulletin*, *Africa Development*—the flagship journal of the Council. But it also involved support for disciplinary journals, from *Afrika Zamani* and *African Sociological Review*, among others. The visibility of the work of the Council, Thandika would argue, is vital for asserting the intellectual autonomy of the social science community it serves.

Affirming the intellectual autonomy, also involved responding to the existential challenges that the higher education sector in Africa faced in the wake of adjustment. The Council, under the leadership of Thandika was particularly sensitive to the capacity for intellectual reproduction of the African academy. If in the early years of the Council's existence, you could take it for granted that national-

level public funding would take care of the reproduction of the African academy, by the 1990s it was clear that this was no longer the case. The Small Grants for Thesis Writing (masters and doctorate) was one instrument deployed by the Council under Thandika's leadership to respond to the crisis of producing a new generation of African researchers. In addition to funding the work for the thesis, a crucial part of the programme was the Council's library and archival resource unit (CODICE) shipping out bundles of journal articles and books to the laureates of the small grants programme and developing bibliographies for virtually all major meetings that CODESRIA convened. For a thesis to be at the cutting edge of knowledge production, the candidates have to be familiar with current and relevant literature in their fields. The Green Book programme that foregrounds new research programmes were intended as well to familiarise the applicants with the state of the art in the literature in their fields of research interest.

This attention to the production of the next generation of African social researchers was in tandem with the mobilisation of the older generation of scholars to respond to the challenges that the continent faced. The National Working Group programme initiated under the leadership of Abdallah Bujra was sustained and expanded under Thandika to include major conferences and Multinational Working Groups to support comparative research. New initiatives, such as the Governance Institute and the Gender Institute, were launched in response to changing demands of the community the Council serves. Major conferences, on what Archie Mafeje called the "big issues" of the day, were convened to mobi-

lise the intellectual resources of the community. The lesson, for me, in all these is the necessity to remain nimble footed in responding to prevailing challenges.

Thandika's leadership of the campaign for academic freedom was at the heart of the defence of the scholarly community on the continent. It was not merely that he was himself a victim of dictatorship—stripped of his Malawian citizenship for public opinions he expressed about the Kamuzi Banda regime. It was, also, not that many of the people he interacted with, first in Stockholm and then in Dakar, were people exiled from their countries. It was that the experience of running the continental social science council brought daily accounts of academics arrested, imprisoned, and in several instances, assassinated for their ideas. The high point of the Council's push for a defined protection of academic freedom was the Kampala Declaration. Thandika has provided an account of the tension, in the Executive Committee, in the lead up to the 1990 Kampala conference.<sup>7</sup> Provisions for specific protection of academic freedom would subsequently become part of the constitutions of several African countries in their transition to democracy—including his home-country Malawi. The Kampala Declaration would influence the campaign by academics in Nigeria. It would frame my thinking in the interventions in the debate in South Africa when many were offering academics a Devil's Alternative of transformation or academic freedom.

An important lesson that one repeatedly learnt from Thandika is his abiding faith in the African continent and optimism about what can be achieved when we apply our minds properly to the challenges

we face as a people. In many ways, it is an abiding optimism that he carried from his early involvement, barely out of secondary school, in the independence movement in Malawi. I recollect an incident at the 1992 General Assembly, during one of the tea breaks. Ebrima Sall, who had just defended his doctoral thesis at Paris-1 Pantheon-Sorbonne, sat with us. He commented on the vibrancy and optimism that permeated the debate and the interaction at the Assembly. He contrasted this with his experience of the pervasive pessimism about discussions of Africa that he experienced in France. Thandika's response about Afropessimism was memorable: "Mais, l'Afropessimism, c'est une maladie des européens."<sup>8</sup> But it is an optimism that was grounded in the enormity of the challenge that confronts us while being situational. The theme of the Assembly was 'Democratisation Processes in Africa: problem and prospects.' Many in the room were not only scholars; they had been victims of state authoritarianism and were active in the continent's struggle for democracy.

In its situatedness, it marked his dismissal of postmodernism and its aversion for rationality. Every hundred years, Thandika would say Europeans would writhe and wring in the face of the existential challenges they face. If you experienced two major devastating wars on your territory within a generation, you have the right to question the meaning and purpose of life and existence. The question was, why would the European malady be the preoccupation of Africans and African scholars? Why should we be burdened with seeing the world from the traumatic experiences of others?

This approach to life and scholarship was not unreasoning or idle optimism either. In the wake of the euphoria of *Africa renaissance* in the 2000s and in the wake of the commodity supercycle, Thandika did not cease to remind us of the structural damage that adjustment did to Africa and its ability to convert positive terms of trade into enduring development outcomes. The contraction of African economies was so deep that it has taken three decades for the per capita income in many African countries to return to the level they were in the 1970s. It was not just the contraction but the maladjustment of African economies<sup>9</sup> under the neoliberal regime, and the monocropping and monotasking of institutions<sup>10</sup> necessary for sustained development. The Great Depression lasted from August 1929 to March 1933. Africa's Great Depression, Thandika reminds us, has been far deeper and lasted much longer.<sup>11</sup>

A final lesson from Thandika is how one should not allow personal pains to obscure one's analytical capacity. To state that the regime of Kamuzi Banda inflicted immense personal pain on Thandika would be, to put it mildly. In revoking Thandika's citizenship in 1965, the Banda regime turned into a stateless person and kept him in exile that lasted some thirty years. In the years in exile, he was cut off from parents and siblings, could not attend his brother's burial in Malawi. Even while in Zimbabwe in the early 1980s, the permanent apprehension of being kidnapped by members of Banda's intelligence services was perennial. Yet Thandika could engage in a dispassionate analysis of Banda's regime and what the whirly dictator would do. An instance of this was sometime in 1993 while

visiting Thandika at his apartment in Immeuble Kebe in Dakar. We were on the apartment's balcony, and we were discussing the events unfolding in Malawi. Thandika said to me, if Banda feels that his continued stay in power will imperil Malawi, he will step down. Malawi to him was like his baby.

I would like to end this section of this tribute on an even more personal note. In the post-1990 framing of my scholarship and career, I get the impression that Thandika was always available, affirmed, and help in guiding the paths I walked. He was generous with his time, thoughts, in offering references and testimonials. By the time we met in 1989, I was already pivoting my research interest from the conventional field of Industrial and Labour Relations to Labour and Development. In part, it was because I found much of the field of Labour Relations restrictive and theoretically unhelpful. I felt I needed to apply myself to issues of broader relevance to my context. The Reflections on Development fellowship provided the space to do this, pivoting my focus to issues of social development.

Thandika, as director of UNRISD, invited me to assemble the team and coordinate the sub-Saharan Africa research component of the Social Policy in a Development Context project. The invitation and research project provided me with the space to deepen my work that, for a few years had moved more firmly into the domain of social policy. My concern with how social policy and social development are anchored in the broader development process found kindred spirits in the UNRISD project. The outcome of this is the *Transformative Social Policy* framework that shapes the work (research, training, and capacity building) in which I am

currently involved. The constant breaking of intellectual bread with Thandika and tapping into his immense insight and creativity has indeed allowed me to stand on the shoulders of a giant. It is in the future breaking of bread that I would most sorely miss by his departure.

### **Of Democracy, Development, and Social Policy: A Game-Changer**

In April 2007, Rhodes University (South Africa) conferred on Thandika a Senior Doctorate. Among the external examiners for the award of the degree was Prof Sir Richard Jolly.<sup>12</sup> He noted in his thesis examination report that Rhodes University should consider it a privilege to have its name associated with Thandika. It is an affirmation of both the academic standing of the man and the reach of his ideas. It is not merely that Thandika became more productive with age, in terms of the quality and depth of his scholarship, it was that his contributions and interventions shifted the terms and tenor of the debates. As in his running of institutions (CODESRIA and UNRISD), Thandika was a game-changer. In report after report, a constant word in the examiners' reports for the Senior Doctorate was "originality"

If there were a theme under which to compress the Thandika *oeuvre*, it would be "Democracy, Development, and Social Policy". Thandika trained as an economist, but he was an economist with strong sociological sensibilities in the tradition of Gunnar Myrdal. The interdisciplinarity of his frame of mind and a keen capacity for social observation frequently took him beyond the confines of economics as a discipline.

In the interview he had with the United Nations Geneva Office media office to mark his retirement from the United Nations and the end of his term as the director of UNRISD, Thandika was asked to reflect on his tenure. Concerning the research programme that would mark his profound contribution to the field of development—Social Policy in a Development Context—Thandika argued that if he were to design the project all over, he would do it slightly differently. He asserted that he would make the connection between democracy, development, and social policy more central to the project and make the literature in these, often discreet domains, speak more directly to one another.<sup>13</sup> In a significant sense, this is precisely what the linkages within his *oeuvre* demonstrate. The *Social Policy in a Development Context* project at UNRISD has proved to be highly productive—some eighteen books and over one hundred papers—and influential.

From Thandika's 1975 piece<sup>14</sup> to the 2001 paper<sup>15</sup> and his 2010 inaugural lecture at the London School of Economics,<sup>16</sup> Thandika's relentless focus was on the feasibility of the structural transformation of African economies. Unlike the assumption of a trade-off between growth and equity or development and democracy, for Thandika, development has to be democratic and inclusive. In his usual self-effacing manner, he presented this as the prevailing view within the African intellectual circles:

The general understanding within African intellectual circles then was that the main challenge of development was the establishment of state-society relations that are (a) developmental, in the sense that they allow the management of the economy in a manner that max-



imises economic growth, induces structural change, and uses all available resources in a responsible and sustainable manner in highly competitive global conditions; (b) democratic and respectful of citizens' rights; and (c) socially inclusive, providing all citizens with a decent living and full participation in national affairs.<sup>17</sup>

However, both democracy and inclusivity (equitable, guaranteeing decent living to all within a territory) are not things you see as the ends of development, but as integral to the very process of development itself. This turns inside-out the narratives inherent in classical development discourse and the growth-equity trade-off claims of the neoliberal regime that sought to displace development economics.

However, for Thandika, democracy needs to be valued for its intrinsic reasons rather than in instrumental terms. This was most obviously stated in Thandika's 1988<sup>18</sup> response to Peter Anyang' Nyong'o's<sup>19</sup> argument for democracy, mainly because the accountability that Anyang' Nyong'o claimed comes with democracy would be beneficial for development. In other words, the transition from authoritarian regimes to democracy in Africa is vital because it would facilitate development. "The struggle for democracy" Thandika argued "must be for democracy in its own right." It is the concern with the democratic deficit—in terms of polity that is accountable to citizens, is imbued with deliberative governance, upholds collective and individual rights—that framed Thandika's concern with issues as wide-ranging as academic freedom and the tolls of rebel movements. The 1988 piece cited above, I believe, was the first published work of Thandika that I read. It would

affect my orientation to, and involvement in, the 'pro-democracy' struggle in Nigeria in the 1990s.

Given the high mutual esteem in which Thandika and Anyang' Nyong'o held each other, a lesson for a younger generation is that belonging to the same scholarly community does not mean agreement on most things, much less on everything. Disagreement does not mean community fracture. An intellectual community is enhanced by the vibrancy of its capacity for debate.

As it turned out, the experience of the transition to democracy—in the context of neoliberal disempowerment of new democracies' policy choice, the monocropping and the monotasking of African public policy institutions, the creation of economic policy enclaves shielded from democratic oversight—created anomalies. "Democracy per se does not eliminate poverty", Thandika would later argue. "It is rather the strategies of development that do."<sup>20</sup>

In the context of the so-called "post-development" and the "demise of development" narratives, Thandika was uncompromising in insisting on Africa's right to "catch up". The 'post-development' brigade, he argued mistook the Bandung Conference version of the post-World War II development discourse for the Truman discourse. The latter, which continues to shape the "international development" brigade frames development as "the moral premise for helping 'distant strangers'". The Bandung Conference discourse is, Thandika insisted, "emancipatory".<sup>21</sup> It requires, in Samir Amin's terms, definable 'sovereign national projects'. It is as much a question of existential survival.

Catch-up is not mimicry. For Thandika, development as growth

with structural transformation of the economy and society and the mastery of technology requires a much higher level of knowledge endowment and generation than was available to the pioneers at their development phases. "Catching up requires that countries know themselves and their history that has set the 'initial conditions' for any future progress."<sup>22</sup> Countries need a deep appreciation of themselves and the cultural endowments that they can mobilise in facilitating their development process. It requires significant investment in national institutions of knowledge production and basic research. Countries seeking to develop not only have to know themselves, but they also require deep knowledge of other countries as well.

It is also in the specific context of development and the imperative of inclusivity, not merely as an outcome of development but as integral to the process, that Thandika raised the issue of social policy, and his take on social policy was very specific. The question that preoccupied Thandika was "what does social policy do in a context in which a country wants to develop? What is the transformative role of social policy in such a context?"<sup>23</sup> It involves much more than a preoccupation with social policy as a device for social protection or mopping up the "diswelfares"<sup>24</sup> of industrialisation, which has been the focus of much of OECD social policy scholarship. A poorer, mostly residual version of that is sold to us today as social assistance. It is a take on social policy that is at once concerned with the mobilisation of human, material, and financial resources for facilitating development, as it is in ensuring equitable allocation of the burden of development and the benefits of development. The

outcome was an idea of social policy that emphasises the multiple tasks of social policy and seeks to activate them simultaneously. It became the premise for the concept of Transformative Social Policy. In other words, the mobilisation of social policy instruments for the transformation of the economy, social institutions, and social relations. Inequality (vertical and horizontal) and poverty are not things that you assume ‘development’ will take care of; they are things that must be addressed as you seek the development of the economy and social institutions. Africa must run while others walk, but we run on the legs of democratic, deliberative and inclusive governance.

### Adieu Mwalimu

Thandika’s mentorship capacity and the support he gave to many like me was more by his doing. A kindred spirit that constantly broke bread with you, a fellow traveller that made the journey we transverse a delight—one who validated your thoughts and analytical sensibilities while always offering his thoughts in endless conversations. The originality of Thandika’s thinking was always a marvel to behold. You come away from each encounter, often thinking “I never thought of it that way.” His capacity for observing developments around him was remarkable. He was imbued with endless optimism (of the will), without overlooking every inch of all that ails us. Yet these encounters, the endless conversations and enunciated observations; these were his ways of offering his thoughts for scrutiny and debate—an endless workshopping of ideas, as it were.

Thandika had a distinct way of working. He allowed ideas

to gestate over a period before committing them to paper. You would read something from him and remember that five years earlier, he had ruminated on it in a conversation with you over drinks or dinner. In many ways, he was the quintessential intellectual who passed what I call the Aimé Césaire Challenge: never being walled-off in the particular; never dissolving into the universal. There is never a doubt that the locus of Thandika is Africa—a perennial preoccupation with its travails and victories. But he was also an *internationalist* intellectual who read *every* library and archive, explored every experience and thoughts, regardless of where they came from. His perennial question would be: “what does this mean for Africa?”

Thandika did only make the institutions he ran better for having him as their heads. He made every one of us better for the privilege of our encounters with him, and on the road we travelled with him. He has laid down his spear and left us a treasure trove of ideas. He gave examples of what it means to be human. The next phase of the battle is ours. And this much we can say: Thandika lived a full life.

Adieu Mwalimu.

Adieu Ndugu.

Adieu Mzee.

### Notes

1. A shorter in memoriam has been produced for the *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* and a longer intellectual appreciation of Thandika’s oeuvre is under preparation.
2. The collection was published as *African Perspectives on Development: Controversies,*

*Dilemmas and Openings.* Edited by Ulf Himmelstrand, Kabiru Kinyanjui and Edward Mburugu. St Martin’s Press: New York, 1994.

3. For my Reflections on Development fellowship, Dharam Ghai, as director, had offered me a visiting research fellowship at the UN Research Institute for Social Development in Geneva. I spent four-and-half months at UNRISD, when it was still at Petit Saconnex.
4. See Jimi Adesina *Labour Movements and Policy Making in Africa*, Dakar, CODESRIA, 1992; and *Labour in the explanation of an African crisis: A critique of current orthodoxy: The case of Nigeria*, Dakar, CODESRIA, 1994.
5. At the time, Sam Olofin was professor of Economics and Director of the Centre for Econometric and Allied Research (CEAR) at the University of Ibadan. I was an adjunct Senior Research Fellow at CEAR—on the ‘allied’ side of its work not the econometrics side!
6. The lecture was published as “Social Sciences and Democracy: Debates in Africa”, *African Sociological Review* 3(1): 20-34, 1999.
7. See his “Social Sciences and Democracy”, 1999.
8. My appreciation to Ebrima who reconfirmed my recollection of this event.
9. Thandika Mkandawire. 2005. Maladjusted African Economies and Globalisation. *Africa Development* 30(1&2): 1-33.
10. Thandika Mkandawire, “Institutional monocropping and monotasking in Africa”, *Democracy, Governance and Well-Being Programme Paper Number 1*. UNRISD: Geneva, 2009.

11. Kate Meagher, "Reflections of an engaged economist: An Interview with Thandika Mkandawire", *Development and Change* 50(2): 511-541, 2019.
12. In mid-2006, at a Senate meeting, the portfolio of a candidate for the Senior Doctorate degree was presented for Senate's approval. I remember thinking, "I know someone with an even more impressive portfolio." After the Senate meeting, I contacted Thandika to express my interest in having him put up for the degree. This is not a honorary degree; a candidate being put up for the degree would have his/her portfolio of research outputs examined by an international panel of examiners. He was initially reluctant, largely on the grounds of modesty, but relented after further nudging. In July 2006, he formally submitted a letter to the Registrar of the university indicating his desire to present himself for a Senior Doctorate in Development Studies through the Department of Sociology. Working with one of his staff at UNRISD, we put together the portfolio of his publications. I developed the motivation for his presentation for the degree. This was supported enthusiastically by colleagues in the Department of Sociology. The nomination sailed through the Faculty Board and Senate. A panel of five examiners, all top international scholars, was appointed for the portfolio of publications that Thandika submitted for the degree. Prof Sir Richard Jolly was one of the examiners. The rest, as they say, is history. The official graduation photograph of Thandika being hooded by the Registrar of the university at the degree award ceremony has hung on the wall of my home since 2007.
13. Cf. "Interview with Thandika Mkandawire upon his retirement" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXyEQz1LfeI> (20 Dec 2011).
14. Thandika Mkandawire, "Development planning and wage employment: a review of practice and issues in six eastern African countries", International Institute for Labour Studies, Geneva, 1975.
15. Thandika Mkandawire, "Thinking about Developmental States in Africa", *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 25(3): 289-313, 2001.
16. Thandika Mkandawire. "Running while others walk: Knowledge and the challenge of Africa's development (revised version of the paper delivered as Inaugural Lecture for Chair, African Development at the London School of Economics on April 27, 2010)", *Africa Development* 36(2): 1-36, 2011.
17. Thandika Mkandawire, "'Good governance': the itinerary of an idea", *Development in Practice* 17(4-5): 679-681, 2007, p.680.
18. Thandika Mkandawire, "Comments on Democracy and Political Instability", *Africa Development* 13(3): 77-82, 1988.
19. Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, "Political Instability and the Prospects for Democracy in Africa", *Africa Development* 13(1), 1988.
20. Thandika Mkandawire, "Disempowering new democracies and the persistence of poverty." In Max Spoor (ed.) *Globalisation, Poverty and Conflict: A critical 'development' reader*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 117-153, 2004.
21. "Running while others walk", p.7
22. *Ibid*.
23. Interview with Thandika Mkandawire upon his retirement" op cit.
24. 'Diswelfare' is a concept used often by Richard Titmuss to refer to the adverse impact of social processes or phenomenon on human wellbeing ('welfare'); their negative welfare impact.



## Farewell, Thandika!

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If I am to use a single phrase to describe Thandika to someone younger, someone who had only read him, I would say he combined two rare attributes: he was both a complete intellectual and a complete human being.

It is difficult to think of any significant aspect of human and social life that escaped Thandika's scrutiny. He read voraciously. Unlike many of us, a lot of his reading was without instrumental intent. He had retained the eye of a child, open to newness. He could tell if and when the emperor had no clothes on. He reveled in the joy of discovery, however small or insignificant it be.

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It is hard for me to remember the first time I met Thandika, but it must have been some time in the 1970s in CODESRIA, maybe after he had returned from his one year at the Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies. It took a decade before we became close friends. Ours was a Dakar-based friendship. We explored much together, whatever we could lay our eyes, hands or ears on, whether ideas, food or people. Much of it took place between official business conducted in seminars or meetings. Over interminable cups of coffee in the morning and early afternoon, and beer (FLAG: Thandika called it *Front de Liberation Alcoolique Gauchiste*, in English, *Front for the Liberation of Left-Wing Alcoholics*) and then, as the clock

### Mahmood Mamdani

Makerere University, Uganda  
Columbia University, USA

struck midnight, at Kilimanjaro, where we would often enjoy music and dance into the early hours of the morning. Then a taxi ride to buy some fresh bread (*baguette*) before going to bed. During conferences and meetings, sleep came in two phases: first, three hours after dinner, usually 9 to 12, and then three hours after Kilimanjaro, usually 5 to 8 in the morning.

Thandika's preferred hotel was Lagon 2. Asked why, he would say: "Because it is the only hotel where you see the bar before you see the reception." I shared Thandika's preference for this small boutique-style hotel with modest rooms which faced the ocean, and where the sound of waves against the walls of the hotel unfailingly drew you into a slumber.

Thandika led a balanced life: as much as he loved to immerse himself in Dakar's drink, dance and music-filled evenings, he found even more time to read and to exercise. His favorite mode of exercise, at least the decade we were good friends, was skipping rope as he marked time without changing place. I remember being fascinated when I found Thandika in the midst of the skipping rope routine one morning. He asked

me to try it, which I did as he gave me a brief lecture on its many advantages. He then offered me his rope as a gift. I gladly accepted. The next morning, Thandika was at my door, apologizing for his mistaken judgment: I did not realize how much I would miss the rope-skipping. He extended his hand. I handed the gift back to him.

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Thandika was a man of the world, this world, in many ways. For a start, he knew much about the world he inhabited and continued to explore as if seized negotiated the world incessantly, whenever possible, physically, across geopolitical boundaries and cultural borders. Once we were both in New Delhi, by chance since we were attending different conferences. I introduced Thandika to the family of a friend with whom I had been at the university in the 1960s. My friend's wife had a hard time remembering Thandika's last name, and twice asked him to say it, then a third time to repeat it, but still could not get her tongue around it. Thandika finally turned to her, addressing her by first name, Titli – which too was also a small tongue-twister – he said with ease and grace: "If you find Mkandawire hard to remember and say, just say I-am-kind-of-weary." Titli burst into peels of laughter. She shortened it to "kind-of-weary." From then on, she looked for every opportunity to call him by name. What had appeared as a

cultural wall had suddenly turned into a friendly bridge, a small example of Thandika's genius in negotiating barriers, no matter how big or small.

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The CODESRIA fraternity, and after some time, there developed a sorority too, was among Thandika's central concerns and preoccupations. He put an enormous amount of energy into it, and yet seemed to do it all effortlessly. He had a way with people. In no time, he could grasp a person's bent of mind, what made it twist or turn. He had a way of challenging us, in issues big or small, without evoking resentment of any sort. He would often remind us of the one-sidedness of our passionately held preoccupations. As Executive Secretary of CODESRIA, he often had to deal with an Executive Committee comprising intellectuals convinced that we knew not only how the world worked but also how it should work. In the 1980s, there was one master key to all problems, global or local: democracy. Thandika would tell us: think of how much of your talk on democracy is a power grab. Do not forget that CODESRIA is a continental body. Its membership is spread over the entire continent. Its representatives, the Executive Committee, do not meet except twice a year. The hard work of building CODESRIA is done by the Secretariat. CODESRIA can survive a weak EC, but it will never survive a weak Secretariat, he would add with his customary and mischievous smile.

CODESRIA was proud of its multi-disciplinary orientation. Thandika was perhaps among the first to see through this claim. He recognized one leading note in this multi-disciplinary chant.

This was political economy, then the master discipline. Just about everyone at CODESRIA – whether historian, political scientist, lawyer or literary theorist – everyone claimed to be a political economist. Thandika would often complain we were building this inter-disciplinary community on a shallow foundation. We risked weakening the grounding of every discipline, especially political economy, if we did not move away from this chorus.

Thandika could criticize and accept criticism. If he could dish it out, he could also take it. I remember this when discussing a possible title for my book, eventually called 'Citizen and Subject.'<sup>1</sup> Thandika was particularly upset that I had used a phrase – 'non-racial apartheid' – in my chapter on South Africa. "Without race, there is no apartheid", he said. "Racial discrimination was practiced by every colonial power, long before apartheid," I argued. "Then what do you think apartheid is, just another word?" he retorted. "No, it is the race thing but reinforced, with another wall of discrimination, one built on tribal identity and tribal privilege, added to racial identity and racial privilege," I responded. "So you think apartheid is an African thing. Right?" I had never seen him so upset. Things got hot and voices got raised. We were in a bar, three of us: Thandika, Zene (Zenebework Tadesse) and I. Zene looked worried. She thought we may soon come to blows. As Zene looked for ways of calming things down, we seemed to be going from one bottle of beer to another, each reinforcing the energy and the gusto we seemed to bring to the argument. There was a truce but it was never formally declared. We never discussed the issue again – until the last General Assembly

in 2018.<sup>2</sup> Thandika formulated the question from the floor and graciously listened to my response. We were back on trail.

After Thandika moved from CODESRIA to UNRISD, and from there to LSE, we had less opportunities to meet. Ours became more of an email friendship. He would often share the draft of an article he intended to publish, and I would respond with comments. But the flow of conversation was missing, as was the flow of beer. Anyway, Thandika had given up beer since his cancer operation. I had hoped to bring him to Kampala to spend a couple of weeks, to give a set of lectures and spend some time traveling the countryside. But that opportunity was not to be.

The last time I met him at the General Assembly, over a drink (I do not know what it was, but it was not beer), I asked him how he was. "Old age sucks," was his short reply.

We come into the world, and inevitably pass on, leaving behind traces, called memories. Amongst all colleagues I have had the good fortune of knowing, Thandika came closest to the old adage that the passing of an elder (though 6 years older, he was always much livelier) is like the loss of a library. Let us learn from Thandika, not just mourn him!

## Notes

1. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, 1996, Princeton University Press.
2. See video of the discussion using this link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_ltehDLdfog](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ltehDLdfog)

## Thandika Mkandawire: In Memory of An Intellectual Giant

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**T**handika Mkandawire, the towering Pan-African Malawian-Swedish public intellectual died on March 27, 2020. The world of social thought, as Samir Amin, another departed luminary, called it, is so much poorer that he has left us, but so much richer that he lived for eight decades enlightening the world with his prodigious mind. Through his copious writings, engagements in numerous forums, and teaching in various universities he provoked and animated minds and imaginations for generations across Africa, the diaspora, and world at large. His extraordinary intellectual insights and incisive and surgical critiques of conventional, sometimes celebrated, and often cynical analyses of development and the African condition, to use a beloved phrase of the late Ali Mazrui, the iconic man of letters, were truly inspiring.

Thandika, as we all fondly called him, has joined our illustrious intellectual ancestors, whose eternal wisdom we must cherish and embrace in the continuing struggle for the epistemic, existential, and economic emancipation of our beloved continent.

When I think of Thandika, many images of the luminous beauty and brilliance of his mind come to my mind. His passion for rigor and impatience with lazy thinking. His bountiful joy of living. His love of music and the arts. His boundless faith in Africa and equal opportu-

**Paul Tiyambe Zeleza**

United States International  
University, Africa

nity dismissal for Afropessimism and Afro-euphoria. His devotion to Pan-Africanism and the diaspora. His deep sense of globalism. His lifelong and unromantic commitment to progressive causes. His generosity in mentoring younger African scholars. His exemplary leadership of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). And his remarkable modeling of the life of a principled public intellectual.

He is simply one of the most brilliant people I have ever known in my life. As my wife observed on several occasions, Thandika was the only person she witnessed who I was so enthralled by that I could sit and listen to for hours! To be in his company was to marvel at the power of the human mind for extraordinary insights and the joys of living for he was a bundle of infectious joviality, humor and wit. The breadth and depth of his intellectual passions and unwavering faith in Africa's historic and humanistic agency and possibilities was dazzling.

I had known Thandika years before I met him in person. I had heard

of the fiery Malawian intellectual who as a young journalist had been in the forefront of the nationalist struggle. Like many of us born before independence, his personal biography encompassed the migrant labor political economy of Southern Africa: he was born in Zimbabwe and grew up in Zambia and Malawi. And like many smart and ambitious young people of his generation in the early 1960s, he trekked to the United States for higher education, as there was no university in Malawi at the time. He did not return to Malawi until 1994, after spending 32 years in exile, following the installation of a new democratic government.

He was a student in the United States in the 1960s at the height of the civil rights movement, and as an activist, he immediately saw the intricate connections between the nationalist and civil rights movements in Africa and the Diaspora. This nurtured his profound respect and appreciation of African American society, culture, and contributions, which was a bedrock of his Pan-Africanism in the tradition of Kwame Nkrumah and others. Also, like many activists of his generation the trajectory of his life was upended by political crisis in Malawi, known as the 'Cabinet Crisis' that erupted a few months after independence in 1964.

The octogenarian, conservative and authoritarian Malawi leader, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, fell out with his radical younger ministers

who preferred democratic politics and more progressive development policies. They were forced to escape into exile. Thandika was suspected of sympathizing with the ‘rebels’ as Banda’s regime vilified them, and his passport was revoked. Thus, began his long personal sojourn into exile and the diaspora, and professional trajectory from journalism into academia. His exile began while he was in Ecuador on a project and unable to return to the USA, he got asylum in Sweden.

His experiences in Latin America and Sweden globalized his intellectual horizons and reinforced his proclivities towards comparative political economy, a distinctive hallmark of his scholarship. They also reshaped his interests in economics, pulling him away from its dominant neo-classical paradigms and preoccupations, and anchoring it in the great questions of development and developmental states, areas in which he made his signature intellectual and policy contributions.

Thandika also immersed himself in the great debates of the 1960s and 1970s centered on Marxism, dependency and underdevelopment, African socialism, and the struggles for new international orders from economics to information.

The intellectual ferment of the period prepared him well to participate in African debates about the state, democracy and development when he joined the newly established Institute for Development Studies at the University of Zimbabwe in the early 1980s in the immediate euphoric aftermath of Zimbabwe’s liberation victory. In 1985, he became the head of CODESRIA as Executive Secretary, initially in acting capacity and substantively in 1986.

He joined CODESRIA in the midst of the draconian anti-developmental assaults of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed on hapless and often complicit authoritarian African states by the international financial institutions working at the behest of the market fundamentalist ideology of neo-liberalism propagated by conservative governments in Washington, London, Berlin, Ottawa, and Tokyo.

Through his own comparative scholarship on regional economic histories, development paths, and the patrimonial state in Africa and other world regions, especially Asia as well as national and multinational projects commissioned by CODESRIA, he led the progressive African intellectual community in mounting vigorous critiques of SAPs. Moreover, his monumental work offered alternatives rooted in the historical realities of African economies and societies, the aspirations of African peoples, and the capacities of reconstructed African democratic developmental states.

In the late 1980s, when the gendarmes of neo-liberalism and apologists of Africa’s bankrupt one-party states were railing against democracy, or watching struggles for the ‘second independence’ with indifference or suspicion, Thandika unapologetically called for democracy as a fundamental political right and economic necessity for Africa. He was particularly concerned about the devastation wrought on African capacities to produce knowledge through the willful dismantling of African universities and research capacities.

At a conference of Vice Chancellors in Harare in 1986, the World Bank infamously declared that Africa did not need universities. Mendacious

studies were produced to show that rates of return were higher for primary education than for tertiary education. Rocked by protests against tyranny and the austerities of SAPs, which dissolved the post-independence social contract of state-led developmentalism, African governments were only too willing to wreck African universities and devalue academic labor.

Under Thandika, CODESRIA valiantly sought to protect, promote, and project an autonomous space for African intellectual development, for vibrant knowledge production. That is how I finally met Thandika in person. In 1989, CODESRIA established the “Reflections on Development Fellowship.” I was one of about a dozen African scholars that won the scholarship. My project was on “African Economic History in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.” This resulted in the publication of *A Modern Economic History of Africa. Volume 1: The Nineteenth Century* in 1993, which went on to win the prestigious Noma Award for publishing in Africa. Some regard this as my most important book.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, I like many other African scholars who experienced the devastation of African universities during the continent’s ‘lost decades’ of the 1980s and 1990s are deeply indebted to Thandika and CODESRIA for ensuring our intellectual support, networking, sanity, and productivity. This is at the heart of the outpouring of tributes by African scholars for Thandika since his passing. He was not only one of the most important African intellectuals of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, he was also an architect of an African intellectual community during one of the bleakest periods in the

history of the African knowledge enterprise. His intellectual and institutional legacies are mutually reinforcing and transcendental.

In August 1990, the recipients of the “Reflections on Development Fellowship” met for nearly two weeks at the Rockefeller Conference and Study Center, in Bellagio, Italy. I had not experienced an intellectual indaba like that before. Thandika dazzled the fellows, who included several prominent African scholars, with his incisive comments and erudition, legendary humor, and striking joyousness. Meeting him at Bellagio left a lasting impression on me. His brilliance was accompanied by his uncanny ability to put very complex thoughts in such a pithy way, rendering an idea so obvious that one wondered why one had not thought about it that way before.

Thandika was one of those rare people who effectively combined institutional leadership and intellectual productivity. This was the praxis of his reflexive life, in which administrative challenges inspired academic work. While at CODESRIA, he pioneered and produced important studies on structural adjustment, development, and African universities and intellectuals.<sup>2</sup> In 1987, he edited the groundbreaking collection, *The State and Agriculture in Africa*; in 1995, he co-edited the comprehensive collection on structural adjustment, *Between Liberalisation and Oppression*; in 1999 he co-authored, *Our Continent Our Future*.

After he joined UNRISD, he continued working on his old intellectual preoccupations as he embraced new ones, as reflected in his journal articles and book monographs. The latter include the co-authored, *African Voices on*

*Structural Adjustment* (2002), and the edited, *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* (2005).

Soon after joining UNRISD, which he led from 1998 to 2009, he launched a program on social policy that increasingly reflected his growing research interests. The articles include, “Thinking about Developmental States in Africa” (2001); “Disempowering New Democracies and the Persistence of Poverty” (2004); “Maladjusted African Economies and Globalization” (2005); “Transformative Social Policy and Innovation in Developing Countries” (2007); “Good Governance’: The Itinerary of an Idea” (2007); “From the national question to the social question” (2009), “Institutional monocropping and monotasking in Africa” (2010); “On Tax Efforts and Colonial Heritage in Africa” (2010); “Aid, Accountability, and Democracy in Africa” (2010); and “How the New Poverty Agenda Neglected Social and Employment Policies in Africa” (2010).

In 2009, he was appointed at the London School of Economics as the inaugural Chair in African Development. This gave him space to expand his intellectual wings and produce some of his most iconic and encyclopedic work as evident in the titles of some of his papers. They include “Running While Others Walk: Knowledge and the Challenge of Africa’s Development” (2011); “Welfare Regimes and Economic Development: Bridging the Conceptual Gap” (2011); “Aid: From Adjustment Back to Development” (2013); “Social Policy and the Challenges of the Post-Adjustment Era” (2013); “Findings and Implications: The Role of Development Cooperation”

(2013); “Neopatrimonialism and the Political Economy of Economic Performance in Africa: Critical Reflections” (2015); and “Colonial legacies and social welfare regimes in Africa: An empirical exercise” (2016). He also published monographs including the co-authored, *Learning from the South Korean Developmental Success* (2014), and a collection of lectures he gave at the University of Ghana, *Africa Beyond Recovery* (2015).<sup>3</sup>

Following my encounter with Thandika at Bellagio, our personal and professional paths crossed many times over the next thirty years. The encounters are too numerous to recount. Those that stand out include CODESRIA’s conference on Academic Freedom, held in November 1990 at which the “The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility” was issued; and numerous CODESRIA conferences, workshops, and general assemblies including the one in 1995 where I served as a rapporteur. These forums were truly invigorating for a young scholar meeting the doyens of the African intelligentsia. Like many of those in my generation, I matured intellectually under the tutelage of CODESRIA and Thandika.

In return, when I relocated to the United States in 1995 from Canada, I invited Thandika or played a role in his invitation to conferences in the US. This included the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Center for African Studies at the University of Illinois in 1995 where I served as director of the center, and the 1996 US African Studies Association where he gave “The Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola Distinguished Lecture.” The lecture, later published in the *African Studies Review*



entitled, “The Social Sciences in Africa: Breaking Local Barriers and Negotiating International Presence,” was a veritable tour de force.<sup>4</sup> It brilliantly traced the development of social science knowledge production on Africa and offered a searing critique of Africanist exclusionary intellectual practices.

Later, when Thandika was head of UNRISD, he invited me to join the nine-member Gender Advisory Group to work on a report on the implementation of the United Nations Fourth World Women’s Conference held in Beijing in 1995. Out of this conference came the report, *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World* published in 2005 to coincide with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing conference.<sup>5</sup> In return, I also invited Thandika to contribute to my own edited collections, including *The Encyclopaedia of Twentieth Century African History* to which he contributed a fine essay on African intellectuals.<sup>6</sup>

Our personal encounters were even more frequent and deeply gratifying. In the 1990s, I used to go to Dakar frequently, sometimes several times a year. On many occasions, Thandika hosted me or took me out to sample the incredible culinary delights and vibrant music scene of Dakar nightlife. I recall one night going to a club where Youssou N’Dour was playing. It was an indescribable treat. In his customary insightful and pithy way, he made me understand the social vibrancy of Dakar. In contrast to the apartheid cities of southern Africa from which we were alienated in the townships, Dakar is an old city whose residential patterns and social geography are deeply embedded in the rhythms of local culture.

Another memorable encounter was Christmas in the early 2000s where our two families and close friends spent the entire day at the lake in Malawi. As usual, he regaled us with jokes interspersed with acute observations on Malawian history, society, economy and politics. Last December, he and his dear wife, Kaarina Klint, were in Nairobi. What had been planned as a luncheon turned out into an engagement that lasted until dinner and late into the night. We had not seen each other for several years, although we had been in touch, so there was so much to cover. We excitedly discussed his forthcoming 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration, and the possibility of him joining our university as a Visiting Distinguished Professor.

It turned out to be our last meeting. But what a special day it was. Thandika was his usual self, affable, hilariously funny, and of course he made brilliant observations about African and global developments. Thank you Thandika for the privilege of knowing you and your beautiful mind. You will always be a shining intellectual light for your

generation, my generation, and generations to come of committed, progressive African, diaspora and global academics, researchers, thinkers and activists.

## Notes

1. P.T. Zeleza, *A Modern Economic History of Africa. Volume 1: The Nineteenth Century*, 1993, CODESRIA Book Series.
2. Refer to the full bibliography of Thandika Mkandawire’s work found at this link: <https://www.codesria.org/thandikamkandawire/thandikas-work/>
3. See a collection of lectures Thandika gave through this link: <https://www.codesria.org/thandikamkandawire/videos/>
4. Thandika Mkandawire, “The Social Sciences in Africa: Breaking Local Barriers and Negotiating International Presence,” in *African Studies Review*, vol. 40, No. 2, 1997, pp. 15-36
5. UNRISD, *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*, 2005, UNRISD.
6. Dickson Eyoh and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *The Encyclopaedia of Twentieth Century African History*, 2005, Routledge.



From left to right: Thandika Mkandawire, Zenebeworke Tadesse, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Abdallah Bujra & Adebayo Olukoshi

## Thandika Mkandawire: An Intellectual Giant, an Incurable Pan-Africanist

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**T**handika Mkandawire who passed away in Stockholm, Sweden, on 27 March 2020, after a protracted battle with cancer, was a renowned development economist, an institution builder and a Pan-Africanist of note. He leaves us having contributed to the development of a formidable community of African social scientists over the half a century that coincides with his professional career. Those like me who had interacted with him ever since his days at CODESRIA in 1978, are grateful for having associated with this great man, my elder brother.

Born in Gwanda, Zimbabwe, of a Zimbabwean mother and a Malawian father who was a migrant worker, Thandika spent most of his formative years as a student in Zimbabwe, in the Copperbelt of Zambia, and only arrived in Malawi at the age of 13, as his father believed that education was better in that country than in the Copperbelt. Thandika participated as a young man in the nationalist struggle for independence in Malawi, working variously as a vibrant journalist and publicist, until he found himself exiled by Kamuzu Banda in 1965, ending up as a political refugee in Sweden soon thereafter.

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, CODESRIA, a premier organisation that Thandika helped to found in 1973, was among the first to announce the passing away of Professor Thandika Mkandawire,

### Ibbo Mandaza

Southern African Political  
Economy Series (SAPES)  
Harare, Zimbabwe

describing him as “a brilliant economist and prodigious scholar whose works on African political economy challenged dominant ways of seeing the African continent on a wide range of issues that included structural adjustment and economic reform, democratic politics, neopatrimonialism and insurgent violence.”

Thandika succeeded to the leadership of CODESRIA as its Executive Secretary from 1985 till 1996, but it was also during its formative years that his role was central as the organisation became both the crucible and platform for radical African scholarship, extending its tentacles across the African continent and its diaspora, thereby rendering largely useless the old divides of “Anglophone”, “Francophone”, “Lusophone”, or even “Arabophone”, if there was such a term, in favour of a Pan-Africanist thrust that was simultaneously contagious and irresistible. Thus, to this day, the CODESRIA General Assembly in Dakar, Senegal, is a “pilgrimage” to behold, as Africa’s social science organisations gather over a week of deliberations, mobilising as it does, among the best of the continent’s minds. So sad, then, that the 2021

General Assembly will be without Thandika Mkandawire, for the first time since CODESRIA’s founding in 1978.

For, there were periods during which special projects took him away from CODESRIA. Between 1982 and 1985, we succeeded in persuading the organization to afford us his services at the new Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies (ZIDS); and on the expiry of his term of office at CODESRIA, Thandika moved on to head UNRISD in Geneva (1996–2006); and thereafter the distinguished professorship of African Development at the London School of Economics. That’s excluding the various stints done across Africa, including the University of Cape Town and the Thabo Mbeki Leadership Institute in Johannesburg.

Ultimately, CODESRIA was his home. – Adebayo Olukoshi, Ebrima Sall and Godwin Murunga – who all became Executive Secretaries after him, CODESRIA – and the entire community of African scholars – had never forgotten Thandika Mkandawire. On April 1H3, 2016, CODESRIA organized a conference in Lilongwe Malawi, on the theme “Thinking African Epistemological Issues: Celebrating the Life and work of Thandika Mkandawire”. This was a grand occasion, even though there wasn’t the requisite response on the part of the Malawian community to an event which was a celebration of

one of their icons. Along with other contemporaries like Peter Anyang' Nyong'o and Mike Chege of Kenya, Helmy Sharawi of Egypt, Abdoulaye Bathily of Senegal, to mention only a few among the many that thronged the event, I was honoured and privileged to be party to an occasion which, in retrospect, was a fitting farewell to my elder brother and comrade, even though we would meet again a year later, as we laid our brother Sam Moyo to rest in Harare.

As I will have occasion to elaborate in the conclusion to this tribute to Thandika Mkandawire, the Lilongwe meeting helped me understand that Thandika was a Pan-African par excellence, not confined within the boundaries of a given nation-state; and it also reminded me of one of the most emotional episodes I have ever witnessed in my life. This was the occasion of the launch in Blantyre, Malawi, in 1994, of the book, *Malawi at the Crossroads: The post-colonial political economy*, written by Malawians (most of them in exile at the time – before the demise of Kamuzu Banda in 1994), edited by Thandika's cousin (now late) Guy Mhone and published by SAPES Books in Harare. For both Thandika and Guy, this was their return to Malawi after a whopping 32 years in exile. Thandika would write about the event as part of his obituary on Guy Mhone in 2005: "He was so moved by the event and by the opportunity to finally participate in an intellectual event in Malawi that he broke down in tears and was not able to complete his speech." For me, it was a measure of the man's emotional strength that Thandika himself saw the event through to the end when most of us who packed the Ryans Hotel in Blantyre that night were visibly overcome

by the poignancy of the moment: the return, after more than 30 years in exile, of two of the best intellectuals that ever emerged out of Malawi. It was as emotional an event as it was an opportunity to know and understand the selfless, humble but imposing personality that Thandika Mkandawire was. A great human being, an amazing man. Through him, I grew to understand the tragedy of post-independent Malawi, one often forgotten for its violence and intolerance under Kamuzu Banda, but a near normal for the scourge that has been Africa generally under the post-colonial state.

There is no one who has associated with Thandika that will ever forget his strong sense of commitment to both his work and those he worked with. In Zimbabwe, in particular, we will remember not only his sterling work at the Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies (ZIDS), an institute I had helped establish in 1981, on the back of the (short-lived) euphoria that accompanied independence in 1980, and in the hope that the ideals of the liberation struggle could be sustained and developed through the mobilisation of the best intellectuals and technocrats at Zimbabwe's disposal. Thandika did his best under the most difficult of circumstances, including the vagaries associated with a state increasingly overwhelmed by its own failures and, therefore, the growing disdain (or is mistrust?) for intellectuals. As it turned out, not even Thandika could save ZIDS which, on his departure in 1985, was shunted to an uncertain future at the University of Zimbabwe, to be finally dissolved a decade or so later.

Yet, it was during Thandika's tenure at ZIDS, and in conjunction

with CODESRIA's series of national research working groups, that he helped launch and flaunt Zimbabwe's academia through the book, *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition 1980–1986*, edited by myself and including a host of young ZIDS scholars who became prominent public intellectuals in subsequent years. Among these were the likes of Sam Moyo, Theresa Chimombe, Brian Raftopoulos, Lloyd Sachikonye, Thomas Shopo and Rungano Zvobgo; along with those of my generation like Masipula Sithole, Daniel Ndlela, Clever Mumbengegwi, Joyce Kazembe and Samuel Agere. On my part, I am eternally grateful to Thandika, not only for the opportunity through which I was able to mobilise and constitute the team, but also for mentoring me into the world of institution building, including the establishment of SAPES Trust in 1987.

As Thandika Mkandawire wrote in his Foreword to the book *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition 1980–1986*, the national research working groups which CODESRIA established at the time were part of the capacity building towards the "indigenization" of scholarship in Africa, as a challenge to the "African Studies" industries of the northern hemisphere:

First, there was a growing demand for African scholars to be on the forefront of the studies of their respective countries and thus break the strong hold on the analysis of African reality by researchers elsewhere. If Africa was to be developed, it was incumbent upon African scholars that a large part of our understanding of our societies should be generated from within Africa.... One of the most hu-

miliating experiences of African scholars is witnessing intellectual ‘debates’ on their countries in which nationals are only marginally engaged, if at all...

This book by Zimbabwean researcher is part of CODESRIA’s contribution to the formidable task of extending Africa’s sovereignty in the realm of scientific mastery of the continent’s reality and destiny....

In conclusion, we have to remember Thandika Mkandawire as, among many of his outstanding attributes, a Pan-Africanist par excellence, by which is meant also one not confined to, nor constrained by, the spatial demands of a nation-state. Yes, his exile status meant having had to obtain refuge in Sweden which afforded both a home and, of course, a passport. (In this regard, I recall an incident at one of the European immigration posts in the 1980s: on presenting his Swedish passport, the officer on the other side of the window asked Thandika, “Are you Swedish?” “Yes!” responded Thandika. “You could have fooled me!” retorted the officer, handing back the passport, after routinely stamping it.) Yet here was a person who could be at home in any part of the world, self-confident and, above all, a proud Pan-African. I cited the following excerpt when I was presenting a public lecture on Pan-Africanism in 2018. It was meant to extol both Pan-Africanism and the Pan-Africanist himself; and so, here is Thandika Mkandawire in his own words:

As anyone who understands Bantu knows; *Wakanda* is the plural of *Mkanda* which is,

of course, the abbreviation of Mkandawire. The great question my clan in Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania must answer is how they were left out of Wakanda? On a serious note, when Africa’s sagging pan-Africanist spirits are their nadir, its Diaspora has stood up to remind us of the dream – from William Blyden, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Malcolm X, Bob Marley, W.E.B Dubois, and, of course, Bob Marley “Africa’s Must Unite”.

The history of Pan-Africanism is characterised by see-saw shifts in emphasis as continental or diasporic issues have become dominant. In Africa, as elsewhere, diasporas have played an important role in the reinvention and revitalisation of the “homeland” identity and sense of itself. And today, with the increased capacity to participate in the political life of their homelands, there can be no doubt that the diaspora will be even more immediate to the rethinking of a new Africa.

While Pan-Africanism started as a “stateless” and nationless movement, since the 1958 conference in Accra, it has had to reconcile its more transcendental agenda with the national agenda of new states and nations. And since then the new agenda of Pan-Africanism has been much messier than its earlier variants, leading some to nostalgically long for the “Golden Days” when the Pan-Africanism message, task and articulation were much more coherent and straightforward and with a moral sway that was unchallenged. The sheer size of the continent and the

dispersion of peoples of African descent has meant that the Pan-Africanist project has had to come to terms with a wide range of identities, interests and concerns which include gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, race and geographical allocation, to only name some major one. However, as I have said on several occasions, I do not believe that the failure of Pan-Africanism can be attributed to lack of identification with Africa by Africans chauvinistically mired in their diverse identities, as it is often stated. Nor is it because individual countries have firmly established successful national identities that somehow militate against the Pan-African ideal. “Africa” is probably the most emotionally evoked name of any continent. Its people sing about it, paint it, and wear it more than any continent. Its artists produce hundreds of icons of this much “beloved continent”. Every major African singer has at least sang one song about Africa. Even national anthems often evoke Africa much more than individual country names. This said we need all the cultural reinforcement to the Pan-African project. Black Panther has contributed in a spectacular way to the cultural underpinnings and imaginary of pan-Africanism.

Thandika Mkandawire is survived by his partner Kaarina and his two sons, Andre and Joshua; plus the six children left by his late brothers; and three grandchildren.

## Transcendental Thandika: Tribute to a Global Pan-African Luminary

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In 2011, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) had planned to hold a colloquium in Malawi from 2 to 4 May, to celebrate the lifetime contributions of Prof. Thandika Mkandawire to global knowledge. The colloquium was being organised in collaboration with the University of Malawi and the Archie Mafeje Research Institute of the University of South Africa (UNISA). Three weeks before the colloquium, CODESRIA issued a statement announcing a postponement of the event. The reason for the postponement was “gross violations of academic freedom” at the University of Malawi. CODESRIA wanted to express solidarity with the striking lecturers of the University of Malawi Chancellor College.

The strike was triggered by an event that happened on the evening of 12 February 2011. Then Inspector General of the Malawi Police Service, Mr Peter Mukhito, had summoned University of Malawi political scientist, Prof. Blessings Chinsinga. Prof. Chinsinga was teaching a public policy course, and to illustrate a point, he used an example from the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, referred to as the Arab Spring. One student in the class, a police officer, reported Prof. Chinsinga to his supervisors in the police service. The ensuing academic freedom strike lasted beyond an academic year.

**Steve Sharra**

African Institute for  
Development Policy  
(AFIDEP)  
Lilongwe, Malawi

The colloquium eventually happened five years later, from 11 to 14 April 2016, in Lilongwe. It was themed “Thinking African, Epistemological Issues: Celebrating the Life and Work of Thandika Mkandawire.” I had just joined the Catholic University of Malawi a month earlier. Participants came from different parts of the world, totalling 21 countries, according to the programme. There were 48 presentations, spread over 13 sessions. There were two keynote addresses, one by Thandika Mkandawire himself. It was my fifth or sixth time to meet Thandika in person, someone I had first heard about some 26 years earlier. The story of how I first heard about Thandika is one I feel compelled to narrate.

In narrating the story of my encounters with Thandika, I will describe how he brought me into his fold, inviting me to some of the institutions that shaped and defined his life’s work. I will discuss why Thandika’s work was important for Africa and the for the world, and conclude with thoughts on the legacy he has left for the engaged academy in Malawi and beyond.

Let me start toward the end of my secondary school days. My secondary school English teacher, Mr Lot Dzonzi (who would later become Inspector General of Police, and afterwards Malawi’s Deputy Ambassador to the UN), wanted me to think of myself as a serious writer. He would take me to his friends who were writers and were teaching at the University of Malawi’s Chancellor College. He encouraged me to introduce myself to other writers as well. I met the late Prof. Steve Chimombo, who introduced me to the late Dr. Anthony Nazombe, both of whom were lecturers in the Department of English at Chancellor College. I frequented their offices and showed them my poetry and fiction to which they generously shared their feedback. This was in 1989, and I was 18 years old. One such afternoon, I sat in Dr Nazombe’s office as he went through a poem I had written. We discussed several things, and at some point he mentioned the name Thandika Mkandawire, whom he said was Executive Secretary at CODESRIA. As a teenage secondary school leaver, this did not mean very much to me, until about a decade later.

In August 1997 I arrived in Iowa City, in the American midwest, to attend the University of Iowa’s International Writing Programme (IWP). It was the third time a Malawian writer was attending

the programme. The late Edison Mpina was the first Malawian, in 1982, and Steve Chimombo followed in 1983. A Malawian who was finishing his PhD in Comparative Literature at Iowa, Dean Makuluni, introduced me to an email listserv for Malawians in the diaspora, called Nyasanet, the first ever Malawian social media space. These were very early days of the Internet. Dean Makuluni helped me open my first ever email account and subscribe to Nyasanet. I soon found that Thandika was a prominent voice on the forum, sharing all kinds of content on Malawi's history, African politics, and global economics.

In 1998, the late Kofi Annan, then UN Secretary General, appointed Thandika as Executive Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UN-RISD). It was very big news, and I wrote a news article on it. It was published by *The Nation* newspaper in Malawi. Later, in 1998, I started graduate school at Iowa, and began taking a strong interest in Thandika's academic work. That interest continued throughout my graduate school years. We exchanged quite a few emails with Thandika throughout that period.

Back in Malawi working on a teacher professional development project, Thandika sent me an email, sometime in 2011. He was alerting me to a programme the London School of Economics (LSE) was establishing. It was the Programme for African Leadership (PfAL), and LSE was inviting applications for the first cohort of fellows. To establish the programme, LSE had received a generous donation from one of its alumni, Firoz Lalji, a Ugandan based in Canada. Thandika wanted to make sure I did not miss the opportunity. I

applied, and in 2012 became one of the inaugural LSE PfAL fellows. Thandika was one of our lecturers, and he focused on areas he had done pioneering research in and had become globally renowned for, developmental states and social policy. We had lectures from other world leading scholars in areas that included human rights, climate change, women, HIV/AIDS, gender and population, and leadership ethics.

In the course of the programme, Thandika took me to his office in the LSE Department of International Development, where we had long chats on various matters. One evening we took the tube and went to a fancy London restaurant where we had dinner and a long conversation. To date, PfAL has trained more than 400 young Africans, including three other Malawians. PfAL is now part of a larger initiative under the Firoz Lalji Centre for Africa at the LSE.

From November 2014 to December 2015, Thandika was Visiting Professor and Senior Fellow in Residence in the Building Bridges programme in the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Development Policy and Practice (later renamed Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance). With the facilitation of Dr Marianne Camerer, programme director for the Building Bridges programme, Thandika gave a series of lectures, and ran regional workshops around the broader theme of African Economic Integration. The workshops were held in Dakar, Lusaka and Dar es Salaam, and involved up to 120 participants from 20 African countries. For the Dakar workshop, Thandika and Marianne invited twenty-one scholars, in October 2015. I was at the University of

Botswana at the time, where one of the courses I was teaching was on curriculum and language policy in Africa. My presentation was titled "Breaking the Deadlock: Language, Integration and the African Renaissance," in which I argued about the importance of African languages in the journey toward the African Renaissance.

In his reaction to my presentation, Thandika observed how African languages were enjoying a new lease of life, through mobile phone companies who used local language themes in various promotions of their products. Thandika was a firm believer in the importance of African languages in African development. This is clear in a 2005 book he edited, titled *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*. Amongst the chapters in the book is one by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, on the promotion of African languages as the challenge of Pan-Africanist intellectuals in the era of globalisation. Another one is by Beban Sammy Chumbow, on the language question and national development in Africa.

Before I left Dakar to return to Gaborone, I had a conversation with Thandika, in which he told me about why he had invited me to the workshop. In the course of the workshop, Thandika had shared several stories about his time in Dakar in the 1970s and then again in the mid-1980s through to the mid-1990s. That was when he served as Executive Secretary of CODESRIA. Thandika wanted me to appreciate the role CODESRIA played in Africa's intellectual life and research agenda. Having brought me to CODESRIA's headquarters, it was important that I respond to and participate in as many CODESRIA events

as possible. It would be a great thing for me to become a paid-up member, he added.

Thandika would repeat that exact advice about getting involved with CODESRIA when we met again, five months later. That was in April 2016, in Lilongwe, during the colloquium to celebrate his life and work. He said he had wanted me to participate because it was another CODESRIA event.

I eventually paid my membership to CODESRIA in 2018. That year, CODESRIA held its 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, a triennial event, in Dakar, Senegal. When Thandika saw from the programme that I would be attending and presenting a paper, he sent me an email in which he asked me to bring recent issues of Malawi's daily newspapers and magazines. I brought him copies of *The Nation*, the *Daily Times* and their weekend versions, and *The Lamp* magazine. He always kept up to date with what was going on in Malawi.

I arrived in Dakar on the afternoon of Saturday, 15 December 2018. The following day, David Nthen-gwe, a Dakar-based Malawian working for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), came to pick me up from my hotel. We joined Thandika and his wife Kaarina Klint, at Le Cabanon, a pleasant restaurant overlooking the shimmering, expansive Atlantic Ocean. As we got up to go to the lunch buffet, I noticed that everyone left their phones and tablets on the table. I tagged at David and asked if it was safe to leave our gadgets on the table. "Very safe. Nobody would steal them here." He said. "You mean here at this restaurant, or..." Before I could finish, David replied: "I mean here in Senegal. People don't

steal in this country." I was very surprised. "How do you build a country like that, with no thieves?" I asked. "Now that's a very good question. Let's ask **Thandika**."

We asked Thandika how it was possible that people didn't steal in Senegal. Thandika thought it was because Senegal had not gone through the brutality and hardships other African countries had gone through. When people are treated kindly by their governments, they treat each other kindly too. They do not become violent criminals, he responded. We spent much of that afternoon listening to Thandika talk about his youth in Zambia and Malawi, his secondary school days at Zomba Catholic (famously known in Malawi as "Box 2"), his active participation in the struggle for Malawi's independence, his journalism days at the *Malawi News* in the early 1960s, and many other fascinating topics. He told us about how Aleke Banda<sup>1</sup> turned down a scholarship to go and study for a degree at Harvard, opting to work on the forefront of the struggle for Malawi's independence.

He told us about his studies in the US, becoming stateless in Ecuador during a research trip, and ending up in Sweden where he was offered citizenship. It was chilling to hear him say he still met, in Sweden, one of the people who betrayed him, leading to Kamuzu Banda's order to strip Thandika of his Malawian citizenship. He retold a story he had told me back in 2016 in Lilongwe. While living in Dakar in the 1970s and again in the 1980s, a group of Malawian government officials came to study for their masters' degrees. Thandika taught some of the courses in the programme.

On completing their degrees, the Malawians would not dare

take their masters theses with them back to Malawi. Kamuzu Banda's machinery was notorious for putting people into detention without trial for things they had written, even for research purposes. One of the former students from the 1970s came to meet Thandika in Lilongwe in 2016. "Do you remember the story I told you about those Malawians who came to Dakar for their masters' degrees, but left their theses behind for fear of Kamuzu?" He asked me, pointing toward a Malawian who had come to greet him. "He was one of them." We all burst out into a loud laugh.

Amongst the most memorable sessions at the 2018 CODESRIA General Assembly was a tribute to the late Prof. Samir Amin, an Egyptian Pan-Africanist and political economist who died on 12 August that year.<sup>2</sup> Many scholars present spoke about Prof Amin and his contributions to African institutions, scholarship and freedom. An entire special issue of the *CODESRIA Bulletin* was dedicated to reflections on Amin's life and work.<sup>3</sup> As Director of the African Institute for Economic Development Planning (IDEP) in Dakar, Amin gave CODESRIA an institutional home and a foundation. He became CODESRIA's inaugural Executive Secretary, and amongst the people he worked with in the early years, was Thandika.<sup>4</sup>

That afternoon of Thursday, 20 December 2018, the penultimate day to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> CODESRIA General Assembly in Dakar, Thandika spoke first and set the stage for the Samir Amin tribute session. He said no one had shaped his life the way Samir Amin did. He spoke about how he first met Amin in Stockholm, Sweden.

As a student in Sweden, Thandika had penned a rather critical review of Amin's book and sent it to Amin, not knowing Amin would be coming to Stockholm. Amin came to Stockholm, and Thandika invited him home. They discussed Thandika's review, among other things. "Samir Amin was opposed to typologies but ironically he wrote the best treatment of typologies in African economies," said Thandika.

He went on to say Amin was both Marxist and nationalist, something that was hard for the left, including for people like Kwame Nkrumah and Claude Ake. Said Thandika: "The worst sin you could commit with Samir Amin was not to be nationalist. You could be a bad Marxist, do bad class analysis, but you could set him off if you were not nationalist in the sense of defending Africa and Africa's interests. We will miss Samir Amin. The world will miss Samir Amin in that sense."<sup>5</sup>

As of April 2016, Thandika had ninety-one publications to his name, according to the programme document CODESRIA printed for the colloquium to celebrate Thandika's life and work. There were twenty pieces he had written in various outlets; twenty-four book chapters; thirty-five journal articles, and ten books he had authored or edited. He published a few more works after that, but was spending much of his time working on a book which he wanted to be the most definitive expression of his overall thoughts on how international financial institutions had shaped development economics and African economies.

A good overview of Thandika's thought over the decades can be found in two events. The first is his **inaugural lecture** when he

became Professor and the first ever Chair of African Development at the London School of Economics. He gave that lecture on 27 April 2010. Titled 'Running while others walk: knowledge and the challenge of Africa's development,' it was a much-anticipated event<sup>6</sup>. Thandika argued, in the lecture, that Africa's development problems were problems of knowledge and the undermining of African expertise and experience. He argued for broader systems of education and knowledge, observing that human capital models and education for all campaigns were too narrow to deliver the transformation that Africa needed.

Thandika blamed the problems of African development on types of biases, including anti-education, anti-intellectual and anti-elite biases. The aid establishment had created a reward system that favoured consultancy reports over peer-reviewed journal articles, effectively sidelining home-grown African knowledge. "A people's existence is not defined only by their material conditions but also by their ideas and moral views. Africans do not live by bread alone. That said, bread matters," said Thandika in the inaugural lecture<sup>7</sup>.

He argued that the crisis of African development, brought about largely by neoliberal policies, was related to the crisis of African universities. He called on Africanists at Western institutions such as the LSE to support their African colleagues "against the ravages of the consultancy syndrome that rewards reports over refereed academic papers." He further asked Western academics to support African academics against what he termed the "criminal negligence" of African governments that gave way to pressures to commercialise education systems.<sup>8</sup>

Another occasion that provides one with a brief yet comprehensive narrative of Thandika's intellectual biography is an **interview** he gave to Kate Meagher, published in a 2019 issue of the journal *Development and Change*, from the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.<sup>9</sup> The interview was published under the title 'Reflections of an Engaged Economist: An Interview with Thandika Mkandawire.' In the discussion, Thandika articulated his views on what two decades of structural adjustment policies had done to African economies. He said compared to the American Great Depression of the 1930s, the period of structural adjustment policies in Africa lasted much longer. We should call it, he suggested, the Great African Depression.

Three decades after the SAPs, per capita incomes in Africa were yet to return to levels of the 1970s. The World Bank, he observed, had been expressing *mea culpas* over their policies on infrastructure, higher education, state institutions, sequencing of policies, and policy ownership, among others. "If you have that many *mea culpas*, you create an economy, and that economy behaves in a particular way. These are some of the legacies we should be looking at to understand African economies, not just colonial or pre-colonial legacies."<sup>10</sup>

Thandika was equally critical of African governments as he was of "their peripatetic international advisers". But there was a distinction: "The latter could always walk away from the scene of crime, while African policymakers were left with the smoking gun."<sup>11</sup>

Thandika said he was critical of both "Hopeless Africa" and "Africa rising" tropes, which he said neglected the history of their



legacies and consequences on current realities. Whereas the Great Depression in the West had led to many new economic ideas, in Africa the neoliberal hegemony had blocked any new thinking. Arguing that SAPs had eroded capacities of African states to capture rents from commodity booms, he used the example of Chile which made \$35 billion from copper, while Zambia made only \$200 million from its copper. The erosion of human capital led to the neglect of higher education, resulting in the brain drain, and in the incapacitation of African institutions.

As currently practiced, Thandika was critical of social policy in Africa, which he said was largely donor-driven, and did not link to socio-economic transformation. He said donors had been very clever in “using the little money they give to leverage the entire policy regime.” He urged African governments to seriously focus on domestic resource mobilisation. “There is no money of the required magnitude that will come in from outside,” he said.<sup>12</sup> The majority of global savings, 61 percent, goes to the United States. China was able to industrialise through domestic savings, relying on foreign investment only for technology, not capital. SAPs had subdued Africa’s aspirations and had limited the continent’s visions, said Thandika. Thandika’s numerous works provide greater detail to this and many of his ground-breaking ideas, but it is not the purpose of this piece to get into that kind of detail.

Let me return to my last meeting with Thandika, and then back to the 2016 colloquium and the legacy it created for Malawi’s academic space. On the day I arrived in Dakar for the CODESRIA General Assembly in December 2018, I bumped into him in the lobby of the

King Fahd Palace Hotel, the venue of the conference. We exchanged greetings, and I handed over to him the newspapers and magazines I had brought from Malawi. I asked him about the book he had said he had been working on for some years. He beckoned for us to sit down on a chair. He took out his laptop, opened a document, and went to a page with a graph. That graph, he said, showed how much African economies had been growing from the time of independence up to the time of the SAPs. The decline was dramatic. He said he still had some work to do on the manuscript before it could be complete.

After the colloquium to celebrate Thandika’s life and work in 2016, I returned to campus at the Catholic University of Malawi with a new determination. It had been a phenomenal week celebrating Thandika and engaging in fascinating conversations about higher education in Malawi and in Africa. There had to be a way of continuing with those conversations, at least for the Malawians.

On 28 April 2016, I sent out an email to twenty-five friends and colleagues working in universities in Malawi and abroad. I asked them if there was an association of Malawian university lecturers, and if there was an online forum where they shared ideas. It seemed there were none. I shared with the colleagues an idea about creating a google forum, to be called *Higher Ed Malawi*. A handful of them responded and encouraged the idea. “I think the forum is a brilliant idea but you may have to have a light touch moderation to avoid sectarian capture,” was Thandika’s advice. He became an active presence on the forum.

To date, the forum has just over 400 participants, drawn from uni-

versities and colleges in Malawi and beyond. In June 2018, Malawian academics from the forum organised the first ever international **higher education conference**, under the theme ‘Higher Education in the 21st Century.’ As the conference came to an end, the organising committee was reconstituted, and converted into a task force charged with the responsibility of creating the Universities and Colleges Association of Malawi (UCAM). The new committee is organising the next international higher education conference, to be held later this year.

Admiring the breadth, depth and originality of Thandika’s ideas, I have sometimes wished I had become a development economist myself. But Thandika was much more than a development economist. He transcended disciplinary boundaries. He was a transdisciplinary intellectual and provided penetrating insights into complex global problems. I have attempted to follow his path by being an eclectic reader and lifelong student of ideas.


As one whose main thrust is curriculum and the education of teachers, and latterly public policy, I have drawn insights from Thandika’s views on human knowledge. I have used epistemological lenses to develop a sociological perspective of knowledge production for the purpose that Julius Nyerere ascribed to education in Africa. Nyerere ascribed two purposes to education. One was the process by which a society passes on to the next generation the knowledge and values it holds to be important. The other was a duty to contribute to society and to the greater good of humanity. Thandika fulfilled both purposes, and he has passed on the mantle. May his kind, gentle and compassionate soul rest in peace.

## Notes

1. Aleke Banda joined politics in his late teens, in the struggle for Malawi's independence in the late 1950s into the early 1960s. He worked with Thandika on the staff of the *Malawi News* during the independence struggle. Upon independence Aleke joined Kamuzu Banda's cabinet but was later arrested and detained by Kamuzu for 12 years. He was never charged. He died in 2010.
2. See the intervention at this link: <https://www.codesria.org/thandikamkandawire/>
3. CODESRIA Bulletin, No. 3&4, 2018.
4. Samir Amin tells the story of the encounter with Thandika in his *A Life Looking Forward: Memoirs of an Independent Marxist*, 2007, Zed Books.
5. Thandika Mkandawire, Tribute to Samir Amin, as orally presented, 2018.
6. Thandika Mkandawire, 'Running While Others Walk: knowledge and the challenge of Africa's development', 2011.
7. Thandika Mkandawire, 'Running While Others Walk', p.33.
8. Ibid.
9. Kate Meagher, 'Reflections of an Engaged Economist: An Interview with Thandika Mkandawire.' in *Development and Change*, Vol. 50, No. 2 March, 2019;
10. Thandika Mkandawire, 'Reflections of an Engaged Economist,' p.12.
11. Thandika Mkandawire, 'Reflections of an Engaged Economist,' p.13.
12. Thandika Mkandawire, 'Reflections of an Engaged Economic,' p.21.

**Tuesday, March 31, 2020**

**JUST RELEASED**

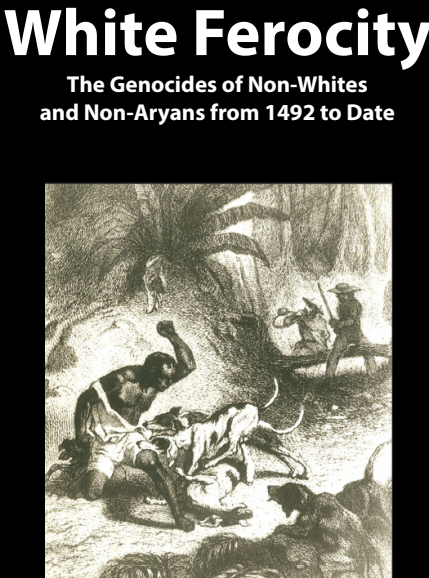


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The slave trade, the conquest of the Americas and the invasion of Africa have deeply transformed the relations between Europeans and other groups. The jump from difference to superiority and racial hierarchy was so swift that it led to the moral collapse of Europe and North America. By shifting the devaluation of so-called 'inferior' beings from non-Whites to non-Aryans, Nazism committed the unforgivable crime of bringing into the heart of the European world a ferocity up to then reserved for other continents. In this book, *White Ferocity: The Genocides of Non-Whites and Non-Aryans from 1492 to Date*, Plumelle-Urbe investigates and demonstrates, with harrowing evidence and analyses, how Europeans justified the destruction of other peoples as unavoidable based on the officially declared belief of others being inferior.


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**Rosa Amelia Plumelle-Urbe**

"Rosa Amelia Plumelle-Urbe's book needed to be written; now it must be read. The magnitude of the crimes described in detail in this book cannot be disputed. ...In my view one might be tempted to say all this belongs to the past. But it should not be an excuse to forget history and the questions that still affect the reality of our world. The year 1492 is not a random date. Not the year of the 'discovery of America'. The year 1492 is when the conquest and destruction of the Americas by Europeans began. Plumelle-Urbe is right to say that the ferocity of the Nazis is not an anomalous, inexplicable occurrence. It is integral to the rationale for implementing ferocity, which, I once again stress, is inherent to capitalism. To understand where this ferocity originates, look at the logic of capital: accumulate, accumulate, regardless of the price (in human terms)."

– Samir Amin (1931–2018)  
Professor of Economics and former Director of  
Third World Forum, Dakar, Senegal

"Rosa Amelia Plumelle-Urbe's work will be struck down by those who glancing through it will form their opinions on the basis of the table of contents, and those who spending just a little more time, but not much, will in one fell swoop dismiss that this Black woman writing about Black people has the distance allowed to anyone speaking about the history of the calamities which have happened where they come from."

– Louis Sala-Molins,  
Emeritus Professor of Political Philosophy,  
Université Paris 1 and Université de  
Toulouse 2, France

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

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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

### **Blade Nzimande**

Minister of Higher Education,  
Science and Innovation,  
South Africa

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.

## Thandika Mkandawire, Pan-Africanist *par excellence*

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**T**handika Mkandawire (1940–2020) had a wicked sense of humour. But he was so considerate that he often made himself the butt of his jokes which typically had a moral. When others struggled to pronounce his surname, he would help them out, “Me kinda weary”.

But as tired as he might have been, he would often summon up the energy for yet another struggle. As Thandika was never one for self-pity, I shall always be ashamed that I did not know that he had succumbed to his *third* battle with cancer on 27 March 2020.

### Loving Africa, loving life

Blessed at birth with two Pan-Africanist names, he was always generous with me, for which I shall always be most grateful. Through example, he showed that a progressive Pan-Africanist could be anti-imperialist without being racist, ethno-populist or jingoist.

Although both trained as economists, we rarely ‘talked shop’, and then usually about some new controversy in economics, preferring instead to banter about everything else which interested us, where there was far more coincidence than I ever expected.

His intellectual reputation had preceded him when we first met a quarter century ago in Dakar, listening to West African instrumental music as I tried to meet filmmaker, author and former

### Jomo Kwame Sundaram

Kuala Lumpur,  
Malaysia

railway worker, Ousmane Sembene. Later I learnt that Thandika was even an impresario of sorts for Senegalese singing sensation, Youssou N’Dour (<https://youtu.be/bFTOqZsLjaw>).

In Buenos Aires for a UNESCO conference years later, we were on a panel with the late Brazilian First Lady Ruth Cardoso and then Senator Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner. Again, he reminded me of his *joie de vivre*, tangoing in La Boca and listening to the music of Astor Piazzolla and Daniel Barenboim. In Johannesburg more years hence, he introduced me to South African pianist extraordinaire, Abdullah Ibrahim.

### A life in exile

Having experienced racist settler colonialism, African despotism and other social injustices firsthand, Thandika’s experiences undoubtedly shaped his choices and thinking. From an early age, his family was forced to move – first from his mother’s Zimbabwe, then Southern Rhodesia, to Zambia, then Northern Rhodesia, and then to his father’s Malawi, then Nyasaland, where he had his secondary education.

Thandika became active in nationalist student politics, then served as assistant editor of *Malawi News* for the newly formed Malawi Congress Party. Then accused of sedition and inciting violence, he was sentenced to 18 months of hard labour after a farce of a trial. On appeal, he was released after three months breaking rocks in a colonial prison.

He later went to study journalism and economics in the US, but could not return after several student activists, including Dr Guy Mhone of the International Labour Office (ILO), had their passports withdrawn by Malawian dictator Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda in 1965.

Stranded for a period in Ecuador, he became a political refugee in Sweden. After a difficult transition, he taught economics in Swedish at the University of Stockholm with Nobel laureate Gunnar Myrdal. His appreciation of social democracy and the now much maligned ‘welfare state’ grew during this unplanned extended sojourn.

### African researchers unite

After a decade in Sweden, Thandika returned to his beloved continent with grants to visit several research institutions. One planned six-month trip later extended to 13 years, including a decade (1986–1996) helming the Council for the Development of Social Science Research (CODESRIA), following the renowned Samir Amin and then Abdalla Bujra.

Advancing African sovereignty required protecting and advancing progressive intellectual development with African scholars at the forefront. CODESRIA saw academic freedom as necessary for African universities to fulfil their crucial role in development.

Thandika's tenure as Executive Secretary was marked by tremendous organisational innovation, and mobilisation of the researchers themselves, rather than their institutions, around emerging themes, often even before they became fads elsewhere.

### **Against the tides**

Despite a quarter century of African economic stagnation from the late 1970s, Thandika rejected the widespread mood of 'Afro-pessimism' among Western scholars of African development, including ostensibly radical social scientists. Instead, he argued that the African malaise was an outcome of its unique colonial and post-colonial histories rather than due to something inherently African.

He also consistently rejected the neoliberal development 'solutions', strategies and policies strongly recommended, if not demanded as conditionalities by international financial institutions and like-minded foreign economic advisors and consultants from the 1980s.

Thandika reminded us how well Africa had done economically and socially, e.g., in extending education and health provision, in the early years after independence before the counter-revolution against development economics.

Almost single-handedly, he countered the narrative that African states were too corrupt to bring

about development, urging Africans to look to East Asian and other developmental states while rejecting authoritarianism as necessary for such development.

### **Social development and the UN**

From 1998 to 2009, Thandika served as Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in Geneva where his considerable mobilisation and fund-raising skills, honed at CODESRIA, injected new life into UNRISD as it entered the new century.

The uniquely independent, but unfunded research institute had first been established in the mid-1960s by later Nobel economics laureates, Jan Tinbergen and Myrdal, to mobilise researchers to work on pressing social issues in the course of economic development.

Under Thandika's leadership, UNRISD provided the analytical heft to the ILO (International Labour Organization) initiated campaign to address inequality and universal social protection, leading to the social dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals, instead of the Millennium Development Goals' narrow World Bank-inspired focus on poverty and targeted social safety nets.

Thandika was also instrumental in helping establish International Development Economics Associates (IDEAS), led by Professor Jayati Ghosh from Delhi, as a South-based network of heterodox development economists, hosting the founding conference in Cape Town days before 9/11 in 2001.

Leaving UNRISD, Thandika became the first Chair of African Development at the London School of Economics and then Professor at Stockholm's Institute for Future Studies. Africa's best-known imperialist must surely have squirmed in his grave when Rhodes University recognised Thandika's work with an earned doctorate, i.e., not *honoris causa*.

### **Viva Thandika! A luta continua**

Thandika had a life well lived indeed, much richer than most of us can even imagine. Sadly, persistent patterns of intellectual hegemony and his iconoclastic predilection and democratic insistence are likely to prevent the typically universal implications of much of his oeuvre from being more widely appreciated.

Thankfully, despite, or perhaps because of various hardships, including long exile, his wide-ranging, progressive intellectual legacy extends beyond his ideas and writings to include the initiatives and opportunities he selflessly created for African intellectuals at CODESRIA.

While he published some of his most significant work after UNRISD, being the perfectionist that he was and still rethinking so much, there was much more in the pipeline which he hesitated to put out, which I hope his family will let CODESRIA publish as works in progress with his erstwhile colleague and intellectual biographer Yusuf Bangura as editor.

## Thandika Mkandawire, The Boss

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I do not like funeral orations. They announce, with brutality and despair, the disappearance of a loved one who has marked his time and left a mark. They strive to tell a story, to unearth a remarkable contribution, to bear witness to its closure, even if we wish for continuity. Notwithstanding our efforts, funeral orations signal death; they bury a person, leaving only a trace, and close a life.

What shall I say about Thandika? What testimony accounts for the complexity of his personality? Following the departure of my colleague Zenebeworke Tadese, from the Publications department, who personally approached me, Thandika recruited me to assist in setting up the CODESRIA research program. I knew CODESRIA publications and some of its coordinators (editors), without being very familiar with them or the institution. I arrived as my colleague Boubacar Barry was just leaving the Council.

Economists and other political economy and social science specialists, but also his closest friends, Issa Shivji, Peter Anyang Nyong'o, Mahmood Mamdani, Zenebeworke Tadese, and his compatriot and young brother Paul Zeleza, will offer more detailed testimonies to best describe him in academic and human terms, where his strong personality and his qualities are displayed with disarming sincerity. They will certainly explore his scientific contribution and analyze the results

**Mamadou Diouf**

Columbia University,  
New York, USA

of his untiring efforts to ensure the sustainability and scientific output of an African institution, which in a world troubled by the consequences of the Cold War, the crisis of post-colonial states, linguistic divides and an array of knowledge production and training traditions, strives to affirm its presence on the academic stage. Some of them will recognize his iconoclastic questions and arguments, backed up by a considerable documentation, produced through poaching from all over the continent.

Two issues, on which he did not specifically elaborate though, inform his research. First, the past and future of a capitalism carried by a dominant "African" bourgeoisie. Thandika was the advocate of a thorough investigation of the manifestations of this nascent "African" capitalism stifled by colonialism (in the colonies of the Gold Coast, Kenya and South Africa), and by postcolonial regimes (Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana). On the other hand, he questioned the "pan-African" commitments of two "resolutely neocolonial" countries, resisting all "socialisms", even an African one – his country of birth, Malawi and Côte d'Ivoire. The two countries have,

for at least three decades, received migrants from neighboring countries. Migrants were granted the right to vote in Côte d'Ivoire. His hypothesis remains to be verified by future research: Malawian and Ivorian plantation economies were heavy consumers of labor.

Rightly or not, I have always thought that some of these iconoclastic issues, including the two I selected, to which may be added his participation in democratic transitions in the late 1980s and early 1990s, are the reason for his interest in the study of structural adjustment programs. A maneuver that, despite his proclamations, systematically explored the second of the three mechanisms that established the "colonizing structure, the incorporation of colonial economies into those of imperial metropolises. The first mechanism is territorial conquest and the last, the reformation of the indigene's (Native's) mind (Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 1988). While contributing to discussions on "delinking" so dear to Samir Amin, Thandika's interventions documented the connection and colonial maneuvers to stifle economic and democratic endeavors in Africa. The concepts framing Samir Amin's analysis of global center-periphery geography of uneven development, indeed favor the systematic deconstruction of imperialist relationships. Thandika's interventions, without departing from this geography, pay more attention

to internal situations in their local African space and the economic, political and social rationale they are associated with. They were not just obliquely concerned with revolutionary rupture, so central to the center-periphery and to unequal development theory; nor to a third way promoted by the non-aligned movement. I always suspected him (perhaps wrongly) of settling in between a theory and pragmatism imposed by his research themes (economic policies and their social and political consequences). A positioning that sometimes intrigued his African leftist friends and Bretton Woods institutions and economists. Had he not become (a little bit) a Swede? Both in his governance of the Council and in his conversations, traces of the social-democrat tradition of his adopted country emerge.

The gap he discerned in the discussions of African academics, during meetings of CODESRIA and other institutions, and their scholarly interventions, made him say that African intelligence had attained a point of incandescence at the margins. Can we reconcile the two, he wondered? He emphasized, with precise examples, the insight that forges from the analyses, which sprung out off the university beaten path, in an ironic and vernacular language, to explore daily life and its manifestations. Both the local ethnography on which they are founded, and the primary theoretical elements they fiddle with, give the analysis an unprecedented scale, he observed. They give a relevant account of colliding paths and of an obscene brutality of the governance of African societies. Analyses that are deeply rooted in the unveiling of internal mechanisms of domination. A quest that remained at the heart of his academic research. Thandika

had always been concerned with the time of the world in its local manifestations.

Thandika was also adept at providing practical and programmatic responses to the consequences of structural adjustment programs on higher education and research infrastructures. For some, including Thandika, in the face of the terrible crisis affecting African universities, CODESRIA must directly participate in the training of the third generation of African humanity and social science researchers (Three generations of African Academics: A Note, *Transformation* 28, 1995). Others felt that the Council should not be diverted from its main task: The promotion of African research in the social sciences and humanities. Thandika managed to maintain a balance by strengthening the presence of academic institutions in CODESRIA's activities and by setting up a small grants program for master's and doctoral thesis students. This is probably the program with the most indisputable success. It has succeeded in maintaining quality research in many African universities and in making many African students competitive on the international educational stage.

On research, Thandika was strongly conscious of the time and space on the world stage necessary to highlight the social science and humanities in Africa, whose interventions affirm the autonomy of the latter and its scientific confrontation with international research. For example, refusal to be an annex is the reason for the establishment, after numerous forums, of the Gender and Democratic Governance institutes. By engaging the discussion on gender in the historical foundations of Africa and the Diaspora, and by calling for "democrat-

ic" governance, he opened a path to plural indigenous reflections that powerfully question the social science and humanities library, and contributed to its review by introducing African experiences.

I would also like to talk about the man I worked with every day for six or seven years at CODESRIA headquarters, first in Fann Résidence and on Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar. He expressed a reluctance for bureaucracy that paradoxically made him the perfect bureaucrat, as evidenced by his successful adventure in the mysteries of UN bureaucracy, as head of UNRISD (1998–2009). He mobilized the institution on social policy issues (in particular, social protection, education, and health) closely anchored in the issue of development. Personally, during this period, Thandika invested in examining the figures that deal with the African situation and the (universal or vernacular) conceptual and political representations of development.

In the mind-boggling mess of his office, he found orderly ways to challenge the bureaucratic order. Thandika knew how to seduce Europeans (Scandinavians in particular) and American foundations. He knew how to take them on, meet their requirements and maintain the autonomy of the Council. The rule was simple: All funding had to meet the needs of programs developed by CODESRIA. Not by donors. Against all odds, he managed to maintain that rule.

He was persuasive because the scientific programs he submitted were solid and well-argued; in the end, intellectual and financial reports were not disputed. How many times have I heard CODESRIA partners say "this time



your boss will get nothing”. His disarming smile, his earthly laugh, his sometimes caustic mood, always light, never aggressive, brought barriers down.

Thandika was a bridge; he could handle the oversize egos of a community that felt cramped and marginal, and to which CODESRIA offered a space of unmatched commitment. His long exile, as well as his professional activities, in Stockholm, Dakar, Harare, Geneva and London, opened up multiple horizons and incommensurate ethnographic acuity. Reading and presence at popular urban spaces combined with a perfect knowledge of Senegalese mbalax and music from Southern Africa that he called Raceland as opposed to *Graceland* by Paul Simon, gave him access to a multiplicity of territories. His cosmopolitanism was under control because it was the product of varied transactions. It made it difficult to identify a home (Malawi?) on the continent.

I have always wondered if his nomadic spirit came from his peregrinations. Thandika was born in Zimbabwe and grew up in Nyasaland (present-day Malawi); he grew up in the mining towns of Rhodesia. Unlike the great majority of intellectuals of his generation, he was not of peasant origin. He was an urban. He had hilarious reflections on the impact of this dominant peasant origin on CODESRIA’s intellectual agenda. I will always remember our unrestrained laughter when I came to tell him that the green color of CODESRIA publications was really “*boring and unattractive*”. I was showing him sketches by a Senegalese artist, Aissa Dionne, tasked with proposing a new cover for CODESRIA publications. His amused reaction was to say: “It is a cover with

the colors of the Sahel, the ochre-brown color of drought as opposed to wet landscapes of green, trees and herbaceous savannas”. In a way, he was highlighting how water and its absence had configured our imaginations and imaginary.

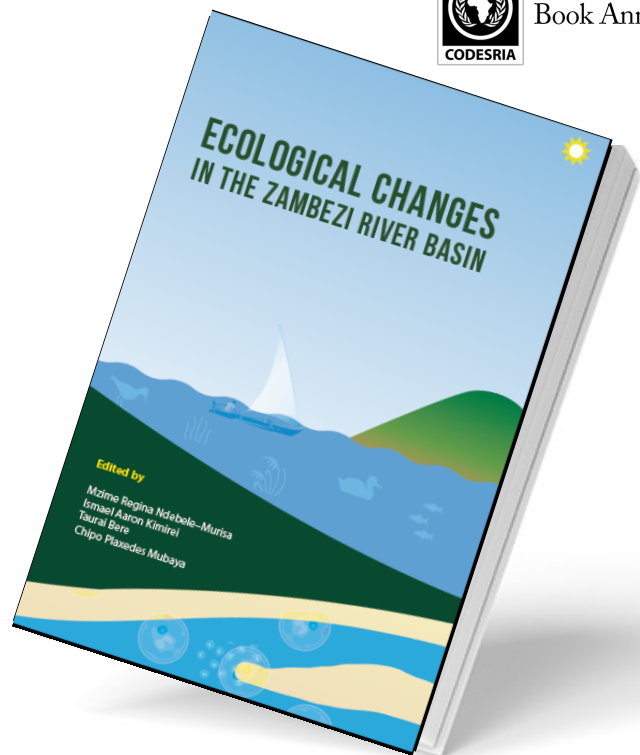
Thandika left CODESRIA; then it was my turn a few years later. We continued our conversation, intermittently, at various meetings of the Council. We met twice a year at the Board of Directors of the American Social Science Research. His favorite joke at every meeting was to conclude by saying that he was my boss. That the situation had changed because of my role as Chair of the Board of Directors.

My reply was always the same. He will forever be “my boss”. He introduced me to the world of African, English-language and international research, and the relations between the many traditions of academic research.

Where did I meet him last? Dakar, or New York? I cannot remember. He calmly told me about his illness. And as usual, he made me laugh, confiding with disgust, that instead of his favorite beverage, beer, he now drank tea. It made me smile. He also said to me: “Aging sucks”, marking a distance with the wisdom attributed to the elderly. A very urban iconoclast.



Book Announcement



This book provides an analysis of the ecological conditions and ecosystem goods and services of the Zambezi River Basin (ZRB), the fourth largest river in Africa. Various environmental and anthropogenic factors; inclusive of climate, environmental flows, hydrology, morphology, pollution and land use changes among others and their interactions are considered as drivers of the river ecosystems. The book therefore, provides empirical and research based evidence to support strategic planning and policy development in the wake of ecological changes that nations and indeed regions such as the ZRB are grappling with while seeking to sustainably manage precious river systems.

## Thandika, Indefatigably Human<sup>1</sup>

On Friday, 27 March 2020, while still coming to terms with soft self-isolation, I received a WhatsApp message from a long-time comrade, Abdou-laye Bathily:

It is true Prof. Thandika has left us for eternity... A bright star has dimmed over our sky. May his soul rest in peace, Amen.

It was devastating! Was it true? I didn't wait for confirmation. I know Bathily too well to doubt the authenticity of the information. What to do, alone as I was? I couldn't run out in the street to meet another comrade, or drive to a comrade's house on campus to mourn together. But why should I mourn, I asked myself. My friend and comrade of many years had lived a full life, a worthy life of which any human being would be proud. He was a decent, humble human being. In storm or stress, humanity never left him. I wouldn't mourn. I'd celebrate my friend's life. That soliloquy birthed a poem in Kiswahili, which was translated into English by another comrade's daughter, Ida Hadjivayanis (appended at the end of this article).

Since then many fine tributes have been making rounds on the social media. Friends have written on his personal life, on his humane character, on his intellectual prowess, on his scholarly curiosity, on his absolute dedication to Pan-Africanism, and on his untiring efforts to creating an African intellectual community. I do not wish to add one more tribute in the same vein lest it

**Issa G. Shivji**  
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

becomes one too many. It reminds me of a stanza from the poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky<sup>2</sup> written on the death of Lenin:

They'll rig up an aura round any head;  
the very idea – I abhor it,  
that such a halo poetry-bred should  
hide Lenin's real, huge human  
forehead  
I'm anxious lest rituals, mausoleums  
and processions,  
the honeyed incense of homage  
and publicity  
should obscure Lenin's essential  
simplicity.

It is Thandika's 'essential simplicity' (which Lenin had) and humour (which Lenin didn't) on which I want to remark through a few personal anecdotes.

I must have first met Thandika in the late 1970s at meetings at the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), which was then headed by Samir Amin, or in the early 1980s at the Zimbabwe Institute for Development Studies (ZIDS) where I gave a seminar. Our late friend Sam Moyo once reminded me that Thandika was present at that seminar. Since then, I met Thandika numerous times – at the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Association of

African Political Science (AAPS), and many other meetings and conferences. Thandika taught me two things: how to operate a printer and watch good movies. In 1987, I spent a year of my first sabbatical at the University of Zimbabwe, in Harare. Thandika paid me a visit at home. I had just completed writing my book on my new Zenith laptop with two floppies but couldn't print it. Thandika offered to help. To his chagrin and my embarrassment, I hadn't connected the printer with the correct port.

On learning to watch good movies, I can do no better than quote a passage from the citation that I read out introducing Thandika as the Distinguished Nyerere Lecturer, 2013, at the University of Dar es Salaam:

Having missed my flight, I was staying with Thandika in Dakar, Senegal, where he spent almost two decades of his 'exile'. Invariably, Thandika would be rushing to the office in the morning. Invariably, he would skip his breakfast. When I woke up, instead of bread on the dining table, I would always find a carefully selected [video-cassettes], which, I must confess, I enjoyed watching so much that I forgot all about breakfast. That was a display of Thandika's characteristic wit, with a characteristic message; Issa, man doesn't live by bread alone! He was commenting on my artistic primitiveness!<sup>3</sup>

When I invited Thandika in 2013 to deliver the Annual Nyerere Lecture, there was a war of words going on between Malawi and Tanzania on jurisdiction over

what Tanzanians call Lake Nyasa and Malawians call Lake Malawi. Thandika shot back with an email.<sup>4</sup>

Thandika: Given the border conflict between our countries how can I be sure you guys won't take me hostage in exchange for oil from the lake?

Issa: Hunh! Very thoughtful question! Wear white all through, ok?

Thandika: Great advice if the White is not interpreted as either surrender or Taliban uniform.

Issa: No, not surrender, a bearer of peace, a euphemism for surrender!

'Thandika had a telling sense of humour, playful on the surface, profound in its message'.<sup>5</sup>

Thandika delivered a majestic lecture painting in broad strokes fifty years of Africa's development trajectory with its woes and aimless wanderings, aimless for Africans but meaningfully aimed by the erstwhile funding agencies and donors to serve their interests.<sup>6</sup>

My last, albeit virtual, encounter with Thandika was just five months ago. In November 2019, I invited Thandika to write an endorsement for our biography of Julius Nyerere. At the time he could not have been in good shape; yet he did one for us. I wrote back thanking him and praising the endorsement as exactly what I wanted. Once again came back his mischievous response: 'That's why I love Tanzanians: low expectations 😊😊'.

I said at the beginning that there have been many tributes covering his large corpus of writings in heterodox economics, social policies, African academic institutions and many other related areas.<sup>7</sup> Yusuf Bangura (in this issue) in his tribute covers this fairly comprehensively.

There is one writing of Thandika's which does not quite fall in any of these areas, but stands out. Its title is tantalising: "The Terrible Toll of Post-Colonial 'Rebel Movements' in Africa: Towards an explanation of the Violence against the Peasantry".<sup>8</sup> I read it when it first came out in 2002, enjoyed it enormously and was intrigued by its thesis. When I set out to write this tribute, I reread it. I felt today, over 17 years later, that Thandika's thesis needs to be revisited in the context of our debates in the Agrarian South Network and in the journal, *Agrarian South*, on the agrarian question generally and the peasant question in particular. What revolutionary potential does the peasantry hold, if any?

Thandika's thesis, in short, is that post-colonial rebel movements have been largely urban-based with the aim of conquering power whose seat is essentially in urban centres. The state's writ runs largely in urban areas. And its presence in the villages manifests itself as a merchant or tax collector. Out of necessity or inability to wage an urban guerrilla struggle, the rebels move to rural areas but have no interest or capacity to mobilise peasants against the state. In this case, in many African countries, barring settler colonies where there was massive land alienation, the peasantry does not lend itself to easy mobilisation. They have access to land and can fall back on subsistence food production, should the need arise. So, there is neither land nor food hunger in the countryside. While some surplus is extracted from the peasantry, this is mainly at the level of the market. Consequently, exploitation is neither easily seeable nor feelable. 'Land to the tiller', the traditional slogan to rally the peasantry for pitting them against feudal landlords, does not strike a chord.

Rebels fail to become Mao's fish in the water. They find themselves on dry land. The result is that the rebels' interest in the peasantry is simply to loot them for food for their own survival. They thus appear as marauders rather than liberators to the peasantry. The peasantry is subjected to relentless violence by the rebels, which further alienates the peasantry from the rebel movement.

It is arguable whether Thandika's generalisations could hold empirically even then, but much more now. We have witnessed massive 'land grabs' since then, in which the state has been instrumental, and in many countries land and food hunger are real issues.<sup>9</sup> While this is not the place to go into details, I would only flag, what I believe to be two gaps in Thandika's understanding of the agrarian and land question in peasant-dominated African formations. One relates to his conception of the exploitation of the peasantry only at the surface level of the market. No doubt this is how it appears, but deeper analysis of political economy of peasant exploitation would show – and there were writings to that effect even at the time Thandika was writing<sup>10</sup> – that, in fact, capital exploits the peasant at the level of production, in that the reproduction of the peasant household falls on the peasantry itself. Besides minimising its necessary consumption, the peasant household also subsidises capital through women's and children's free labour. Thus, the peasant is reduced to living subhuman existence, while exerting superhuman labour.

The second gap is that Thandika does not explore the relation of African formations in question with imperialism. The question of imperialism is conspicuously absent from Thandika's analysis.

This is true both at the level of the domination of imperialism with the extant African countries but also imperialists' ubiquitous support for the rebel movements that he is discussing.

Notwithstanding, Thandika's question on how could such a peasantry be mobilised politically against the feudal-cum-merchant state in alliance with imperialism is valid and remains. In my view, to answer that question one would have to investigate the social configuration, ideology, and aims of the rebel movements themselves. In fact, none of the movements which Thandika has in mind – barring the Eritrean and Ethiopian which would require a separate analysis in their own right – had liberation and emancipation on the agenda. These were movements with the short-term aim of getting into power, in many cases with the aid of imperialism to destabilise the existent governments (for example, Renamo in Mozambique, Unita in Angola, or SLP in Sudan under Salva Kiir).

Having said all this, Thandika's article under consideration remains one of his finest, with a sharp eye for the unusual. It does not shy away from trying to understand a difficult phenomenon in post-colonial Africa. What is more, it convincingly debunks Western authors' explanations verging on the racist. For that alone, we remain eternally indebted to Thandika's magnificent and uncompromised scholarship.

*Thandika our beloved*

*We are grieving*

*The mat is laid for mourning.*

*Thandika smiles: O Issa, why this mat!*

*Celebrate life*

*Death is but an interruption*

*Let it not unsettle you all*

*The struggle must continue*

*To liberate Africa*

*To Unite Africa*

*To create that alternative civilization*

*That overflows with justice and equality*<sup>11</sup>

## Notes

1. This tribute was originally written for *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2020. It is republished in this Bulletin with the permission of the author.
2. V. Mayakovsky, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, in *Lenin 150*, New Delhi: LeftWord Books, pp. 15–118. Published in collaboration with Batalla de Ideas, Expressão Popular and Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, [https://www.thetricontinental.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Lenin-150\\_Leftword.pdf](https://www.thetricontinental.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Lenin-150_Leftword.pdf), accessed 30 April 2020.
3. I. G. Shivji, "Professor Thandika Mkandawire," in W. Soyinka, S. Amin, B. H. Selassie, M. G. Mũgo and T. Mkandawire, with an introduction by I. G. Shivji, *Reimagining Pan-Africanism*, Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2015, pp. 201–204.
4. Shivji, *ibid*, p. 204.
5. Shivji, *ibid*, p. 201.
6. Thandika Mkandawire, "Fifty years of African independence: Personal reflections," in W. Soyinka, S. Amin, B. H. Selassie, M. G. Mũgo and T. Mkandawire, with an introduction by I. G. Shivji, *Reimagining PanAfricanism*, Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, pp. 205–256.
7. See, generally, this Special Issue of *CODESRIA Bulletin*, No. 2, 2020, which has been carrying, and will continue to carry, tributes to Thandika who was CODESRIA's third Executive Secretary.
8. "The terrible toll of post-colonial 'rebel movements' in Africa: towards an explanation of the violence against the peasantry," in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 40, no. 2, 2002, pp. 181-215.
9. See, generally, Sam Moyo, et. al., (eds.), *Reclaiming Africa: Scramble and Resistance in 21st Century*. Singapore: Springer, 2019.
10. See, for instance, I. G. Shivji, "The roots of agrarian crisis in Tanzania: A theoretical perspective", in *Eastern African Social Science Research Review*, Vol. 3, no. 1, 1987, pp. 111–134; reprinted in P. G. Forster and S. Maghimbi (eds.), *The Tanzanian peasantry: Economy in crisis, Aldershot: Avebury*, 1992, pp. 124–150; and for a more recent treatment, U. Patnaik and S. Moyo, with a preface by I. G. Shivji, *The agrarian question in the neoliberal era: Primitive accumulation and the peasantry*. Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2011.
11. This poem was translated from Kiswahili by Ida Hadjivyanis, London, 28 March 2020.

## Remembering Thandika Mkandawire, A Friend and an Indefatigable Scholar

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I remember one weekend in Dakar, Senegal, when Thandika and I had had a long afternoon talking and having some beer in his apartment. We were discussing Marxist approaches to the study of African politics which Thandika thought was rather deficient, with “everything being reduced to relations of production however poorly understood.” The year was 1979, and the African Institute for Economic Planning and Development (IDEP) was at its highest point of radical intellectual fire-power, headed by Samir Amin, the eminent political economist of the “accumulation on a world scale” fame. The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) had just been born literally from the ribs of IDEP, headed by Abdalla Bujra, the well known Kenyan anthropologist. Thandika straddled between the two institutions, subsequently succeeding Bujra to ensure that CODESRIA became the spring board for most young African scholars as astounding social scientists. I remember that afternoon very vividly. Thandika was full of innovative ideas and impatient with some pedantic social science scholarship on the African scene. I was surprised Thandika had hardly published on any of the innovative ideas on which he had expressed so convincingly. So I challenged him to stop being a typical African in love with the oral tradition and begin writing and publishing. It did

**Peter Anyang’ Nyong’o**  
Kisumu, Kenya

not take long before he hit the road, leaving me miles behind in a very short time. Not long ago Thandika sent me the following mail: “Here is an article I recently published in *World Politics*. Remember it is you who once challenged me to begin writing when we were in Dakar. I will never forget that.” The article was on “Neopatrimonialism and the Political Economy of Economic Performance in Africa: Critical Reflections” (*World Politics*, Vol. 67, No. 1, January 2015). I found this article to be perhaps one of the best analyses and critique of development theories in Africa, debunking theories of those who view the state as a pariah in Africa. Those who lump all African heads of state and government as “big men” out to eat state and society to the bone didn’t sit pretty with Thandika in this article either. Seeing the future of Africa as foretold, doomed and bereft of any meaningful development almost for ever is something that could pass as propaganda but not social science.

On 25th of October 2013, Thandika wrote me as follows: “Early this year I met Willy Mutunga (later our Chief Justice) who reminded me of a meeting at your house

where we drafted the principles of the Kenyan constitution. It is nice to see some things come true.” Neither Willy nor I worked on these principles with any idea that after the constitution was promulgated we would occupy the positions that we eventually did. Thandika was, of course, miles away only to be happy eventually that his contribution to our struggle eventually paid some dividends in Kenya’s social progress.

That is why Thandika could never accept a “one shoe fits all” view of Africa’s political economy. Not all African middle classes are “comprador” nor all African states are dependent in the same way on external forces. Class relations are historically given within social formations which can be subjected to analysis by the same theoretical models of political economy that are capable of bringing out their similarities and differences. This comes out very clearly in Thandika’s *World Politics* article I have referred to above. When I was writing the “Introduction” to a book I recently published on *Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy in Africa: Choices to be Made* (Nairobi: Booktalk Africa, 2019), I remember that sometime in the mid-1990s, when we met as Kenyan academics to discuss how we could advance the democratic struggle in our country, Thandika happened to be among us. As usual, he was always very ready to contribute productively



to such discussions. We were so sure that the Moi regime was the only impediment between us and democracy. But Thandika, always ready to be an intelligent gadfly at such times, posed the question: “Have you people thought about what kind of government you want to put in place after Moi which will be acceptable to the Kenyan people and which will achieve the democracy you seem to be

looking for?” From this statement one can see where Thandika’s theory of the “national democratic and developmental state” as a progressive alternative to the presidential authoritarian regimes of the Moi type came from. He had a deep commitment to democracy rooted in popular acceptance by the people because it is, among other things, capable of paying democratic dividends.

On a light note. We used to drink a beer in Dakar called “Flag”. For Thandika, these letters stood for “*Front de Liberation Alcoolique de Gauche*.” We were definitely leftist Africans committed to the liberation of our continent. But we were not always drunk!

Rest in Peace Thandika.

**April 3, 2020**

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## When You Drag a Tree Branch, the Leaves Also Follow: Thandika Mkandawire’s Legacy

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**I**nfluential African intellectuals, many admirers and academics the world over are still distilling the disappearance of one of the most prolific and creative minds they have crossed. The disheartening news hit me under confinement in Cape Town, thinking about the impact Covid-19 was going to provoke across the continent. My first thoughts were about the paradoxes of life. At a time we were going to need Thandika so much, to shepherd us with his constant enthusiasm and energy towards reflection on solutions, alternatives, contestations and doubt, he was gone. It was a selfish thought, I concede. But one that is in line with the way his friends and comrades got used to. He was like a solid tree. A tree that was there for all to lean on and consult, a reference in the landscape. What about the leaves when the branch is disappearing, gone? They are thin, vulnerable. Left by themselves the leaves lose color and energy. That was the way, I am sure, many of us felt.

**Carlos Lopes**

Nelson Mandela School  
of Public Governance,  
University of Cape Town,  
South Africa

Obituaries written on Thandika remind us his legacy must be passed on to the younger generation. I agree. It was people like him that shaped my generation seeking a pan-African public engagement. Thandika was born almost 80 years ago in Zimbabwe. His early life was punctuated with difficulties before he moved abroad to study at Ohio State University. Political choices marked his life from that time, obliging him to live in Sweden (where he acquired nationality), Zimbabwe and Senegal, where he led CODESRIA.<sup>1</sup>

It was at the Fann-Residence neighborhood of Dakar, where CODESRIA Headquarters in the early 1980s was located, that I

first met him. I had heard so much about his contributions from Mário de Andrade, the first President of the MPLA and former Chief editor of the famous Paris-based journal *Présence Africaine*, under whose umbrella I started my professional career in Guinea Bissau. When I visited Dakar, it was to request Thandika to support a young group of researchers that had the audacity of establishing Guinea-Bissau’s first national research institution.

Thandika was generous with his time and invited me for dinner the very first day we met. He was enthusiastic about Guinea-Bissau’s prospects, pledged to help and followed-up with multiple initiatives. I would venture to say a lot of what we end up accomplishing as a group was to not disappoint him. We were so proud of his recognition. But he did all he did as a matter of fact. It was natural in him to share, to self-efface and to totally embrace every challenge with humour. So unique.

Thandika was the anti-thesis of authority. In fact, he devoted a great deal of effort to explain why African intellectuals were often forgotten. But what mattered for him was they being forgotten by the owners of the narrative, like the ‘Africanists’, not the owners of State or economic power. He was adamant that African intellectuals’ analytical contribution was fundamental, their explanation of complexity irreplaceable, provided they themselves were not alienated by the exercise of power to pursue grandeur and notability.<sup>2</sup>

Thandika will be remembered as one of the most important contributors to the construction of a new African narrative. During his 10 years as CODESRIA’s Executive Secretary he became the glue for social sciences across the continent, decisively unifying its various artificial linguistic borders and academic traditions. He gently started this journey under the wings of Samir Amin and the “Dependency School”, before helping construct a more inquisitive approach to explain Africa’s political economy. At that time there was no talk of influencers, we rather used the term organic intellectuals, following the Gramscian tradition.<sup>3</sup> Otherwise we would have recognised in Thandika the ultimate influencer that he was. He marked the last 40 years of African social sciences with new ideas and frames of discussion.

“Thinking about the Developmental States in Africa”,<sup>4</sup> written in 2001 is a landmark interpretation of structural transformation that is more relevant today than ever. The same could be said of Thandika’s robust response to the structural adjustment approach, initially formulated by the Berg Report.<sup>5</sup> A report that dominated Africa’s

policy space for over 20 years through the infamous Washington Consensus.<sup>6</sup>

When later in life I was helping formulate a critique of technical cooperation he joined the party with a brilliant essay on the changes required for a functional administration capable of responding to social imperatives.<sup>7</sup> In fact Thandika’s constant interrogation about the social dimensions of the development debate, certainly inspired by his exposure to the Swedish social democratic experiment, made him a good fit to lead UNRISD<sup>8</sup> from 1998 to 2009. His article on “Transformative Social Policy and Innovation in Developing Countries”<sup>9</sup> originally positioned the debate on what is today a universal agenda for renewed social protection.

His last 2 years at the helm of UNRISD coincided with my appointment to lead the other twin United Nations Institute, UNITAR,<sup>10</sup> and that of Yash Tandon to lead the South Centre. We obviously found ourselves in the same cold city of Geneva a way to firm up our common agenda to further Africa’s research agenda for transformation.

Thandika Mkandawire was awarded honorary degrees by the University of Helsinki, University of Ghana and York University. He was Chair and Professor of African Development at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Olof Palme Professor for Peace with the Swedish Institute for Future Studies as well as Honorary Professor at the University of Cape Town. But he will rather be remembered as the beacon of CODESRIA. The branch we – the leaves – will continue to lean on.

**April 27, 2020**

## Notes

1. Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, the apex social sciences organisation of the continent.
2. Mkandawire, T. (ed), 2005, *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*, Dakar: CODESRIA.
3. Mkandawire, T., 2000, ‘Non-Organic Intellectuals and “Learning” in Policy-Making Africa’, in Jerker Carlsson and Lennart Wohlgemuth, *Learning in Development Co-operation*, Stockholm: EGDI.
4. Mkandawire, T., 2001, ‘Thinking about Developmental States in Africa’, *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 25(3): 289–314.
5. Berg, A., 1981, *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Plan for Action* (The Berg Report). Washington, DC: World Bank.
6. Mkandawire, T., 1994, ‘Adjustment, Political Conditionality and Democratisation in Africa’, in G. Cornia and G. Helleiner (eds) *From Adjustment to Development in Africa: Conflict, Controversy, Convergence, Consensus?*, pp. 155–73. London: Macmillan; and Mkandawire, T. (ed.), 2003, *African Voices on Structural Adjustment*, Dakar/Trenton: CODESRIA/IDRC/AWP.
7. Mkandawire, T., 2002, ‘Incentives, Governance and Capacity Development: What Role for Technical Assistance in Africa?’ in Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Carlos Lopes and Khalid Malik (eds), *Capacity Development. New Solutions to Old Problems*, London: Earthscan.
8. United Nations Institute for Social Development.
9. Mkandawire, T., 2007, ‘Transformative Social Policy and Innovation in Developing Countries’, *The European Journal of Development Research* 19(1): 13–29.
10. United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

## Thinking about Thandika, A Friend, Mentor, and Africa's Foremost Social Scientist

On March 27, 2020, around mid-morning, my friend Said Adejumobi informed me of the passing of our friend Thandika Mkandawire. I received the news with shock and had to call Said back to clarify what he had told me. We both remained quiet on phone for some time. We did not seem to believe what we were discussing. Our personal emotions did not allow us to say much. But immediately after our short and mumbling conversation, I decided to call Bayo Olukoshi in Addis. I thought he would be emotionally stronger to brief me. It was the same on his end too. Involuntarily I sat down reading the messages that Thandika and I exchanged in December 2019 and early in January 2020. I turned my attention to the selfies we had taken with Thandika on December 9, 2019 in Nairobi, over, first, several cups of tea and, later, several beers (with me on my usual red wine, which he helped select, and him on Kenyan Tusker).

### Love of data and objectivity

Several reasons made me counter-check the sad news about Thandika's death. We had been friends since the 1990s. In my interactions with him, I learnt the need to check and counter-check data and information irrespective of the source. Thandika was one person whose dexterity with data remain unparalleled. He did not believe in using data without verifying its objectivity as well

### Karuti Kanyinga

Institute for Development  
Studies (IDS),  
University of Nairobi, Kenya

as the manner in which the data was assembled. He could literally 'torture' data to get facts by comparing different sets and sources. Triangulation – if you may – was a major issue of concern to him. This is what I learnt from him especially at the time of finalizing my PhD studies at Copenhagen's Centre for Development Research (CDR) where he came for research fellowship around 1997.

The second reason for counter-checking the sad news about Thandika was personal. At midnight of November 23, 2019, exactly 00:08 am, I received a message from Thandika. The message read: 'Are you in Nairobi the first 12 days of December?' I immediately replied and said: "Hi Prof: yes I will be; let us keep in touch!" This was the usual way we communicated for a number of years especially when he Joined the London School of Economics. He would send students for field-work to Kenya. Before doing so, he would send me a message asking whether I am around. He would then let me know a student will be coming to see me. And the students he sent to speak to me or seek advice were the type you would love to have around you

for long. They have been brilliant and schooled in 'torturing data' Thandika style.

### Coffee shop or beer bar – the embarrassing choice

Our meeting on December 9, 2019 was also special in a way. He asked me where we would meet in the Westlands part of Nairobi and I could not immediately pick a place. I knew he had been unwell, and I was not sure whether I should take him where we would have a cup of coffee and meal or a place for a drink. I decided a Java restaurant which he loved quite well.

Thandika was open to conversations and especially conversations based on research data, and this meeting happened to be one of such conversations. The meeting over coffee was one of the best I ever had with him. He was finalizing his manuscript on his passionate topic. He was analysing new trends in Africa's development. Many of us certainly know that he was always very creative in the use of data and would find innovative solutions using data that was in the hands of many. In our conversation, I would see his fresh ideas in examining Africa's development challenges and proffering innovative policy solutions.

The manuscript he discussed with me had data on Africa's growth and development from the 1960s to 2019. He called one of the graphs a 'killer graph' because he was able



to examine growth factors from the 1970s to the present. He was of the view that the factors that fuelled Africa's growth in the 1970s are very different from the factors that have been accelerating Africa's growth from the late 2000s period. He identified the service sector and – in some instances the ICT sectors – as responsible for contemporary growth. He argued that these would not have sound impact on Africa's development. This is the argument he wanted me to critique once he was through with the draft.

Thandika was a man of humour. There was an instance in one particular conference in Nairobi where a speaker could not pronounce Thandika's second name, Mkandawire. Thandika simply made it easy for him by telling him to pronounce it in "Mkanda Wire" (*mkanda* is Swahili for rope; and *wire* is the metal thread/rod). This left everyone laughing but easy to pronounce.

He was humorous also whenever he wanted to say something he was sure to pinch. He was humorous even when talking about serious and personal issues. After our coffee, he suddenly asked me: Karuti, I did not know you would bring me to a coffee shop! When did you think I stopped taking the Kenyan Tusker? Of course, I had chosen the coffee shop as a venue because, I thought, I was being considerate. He had had cancer treatment and I thought we should do something light. He replied that the cancer had remained in remission for a while. But in his usual genius way of addressing even the most difficult subjects, he quickly added 'But you know these things change...remission may be temporary or permanent...'.<sup>1</sup>

We proceeded to a different restaurant for a Kenyan beer;

and my red wine which he had the pleasure of selecting for me. I dropped him late in the night at his apartment. I was still having a sense of guilt on my side because we stayed long at night.

### **Influence on African Scholarship**

Sometimes in 1997, Thandika came to Copenhagen for a research fellowship just after his tenure at CODESRIA. It is here at the CDR that I came to really understand and admire the immeasurable amount of support he would lend me and other younger scholars. He had come work with among others our friend and leading Africanist, Peter Gibbon, a friend who was also my supervisor.

Thandika arrived in Copenhagen and had immediate intellectual impact. He had the ability to see things that Danish Africanists could not see. In fact, in some discussion, there was a question on why African scholars were no longer writing as they did in the previous decade and why they were not influencing policy thinking. Thandika simply walked the discussion through the turns and crises of higher education, neo-liberalism and impact on scholarship, and the significance of politics on university education. Again he showed his ability to look at Africa with freshness when he pointed to them two simple facts. One, the consultancy 'industry,' including that of the Danes and Swedes (his home), had drained universities of talents that should have been used for research. This was the basis of his CDR working paper, 'Notes on Consultancy and Research and Development Research in Africa.'<sup>1</sup> Second, he argued, the generation of African leaders that was implementing the neo-liberal Structural Adjustment

Programmes in Africa (SAPs) did not have an understanding of the role of higher education in Africa's development. To him, the first generation of leaders such as Julius Nyerere in Tanzania and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana had a good understanding of this role especially because many of them were educated and had peasantry background (these challenges were later well addressed in a book he edited and published by CODESRIA.<sup>2</sup> He did point out that there was a quest to build a developmental state in Africa that would play the role of building institutions, but this effort was increasingly undermined by restructuring efforts forced by the West. In subsequent discussions, Thandika emphasised to many that the crisis of state's role in development in Africa could not be fully understood by use of neo-patrimonial theories. He pointed out that neopatrimonialism lacked explanatory ability and could not explain the challenges Africa was facing.<sup>3</sup>

I am indebted to Thandika in another respect. We had a habit of occasionally going for simple lunch meals or going for a drink in the evenings. Again nothing fascinated Thandika more than research ideas. One of the evenings, we discussed my research work, the politics of land in Kenya. Before I could end explaining what my main research question was, he immediately quipped: why is land such an issue many years after independence? Where are the large farms that the colonial settlers occupied in the white highlands? This of course led me to poring through the records – and seeing new perspectives in every page I turned.

With a quick review of the data on large farms, I realized that the land question is a political

question and whose solution does not lie in titling or market solution. By then, Thandika had already consolidated his arguments on the paper on 'Crises Management and the Making of Choiceless Democracies' as well as a paper on Malawi's 'agriculture, employment and labour'.<sup>4</sup> Our discussions around these stressed the primacy of the state and highlighted struggles for democratic reforms as central issues in understanding the state of development on the continent.

It was while in Denmark that Thandika was approached to apply for the post of Director at United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). No other African had held this post before and it was evident that regional blocs, including South East Asia, and some European countries were lobbying for their candidates. We had long discussions on what to do and how to do it but, trust me, Thandika does not lobby. It was left to his credentials to speak for him. His writings publications – spoke for him; in addition to extremely good reference letters by prominent scholars.

He continued to publish and his works remain extensively cited on Africa's development. I have included his works in the courses I teach and usually find it refreshing going back to his publications whenever I want to refresh thoughts on Africa's development. In fact, one time I came to learn that my students often joked that one could not be my friend without citing Thandika Mkandawire's works.

## IDS and CODESRIA

Every time we met, Thandika would ask about the state of research at the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi, where I am based.

He was indeed very happy when we met in Copenhagen and learnt that I was based at IDS. This is because of many reasons. First, as he told me and explained during the 15th CODESRIA General Assembly, IDS (Nairobi) and CODESRIA have an organic relationship. The life of both institutions was quite intertwined. CODESRIA has origins anchored in IDS and other development studies centres in Africa.<sup>5</sup>

Thandika explained that in the early 1970s, the directors of development research centres in Africa met several times in Bellagio, Italy, with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. But the African directors of development research institutes, including the then IDS Director, Dharam Ghai, decided to meet more regularly because they had everything in common. They began to convene as Conference of Directors of Economic and Social Research Institute (CODESRIA). The meetings were generally informal and aimed at sharing information and research ideas on the state of development in their respective regions. They met annually and decided to rotate the hosting of the meetings, moving every year from one region to another. Over time, however, Samir Amin, the eminent and quintessential intellectual, decided to host the 'Conference of Directors' at the UN Centre where he was the Director – the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) in Dakar. After getting a 'permanent home' the conference transformed into a Council, the present-day Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA).

With this history, Thandika would always ask me about the state of development research at the IDS and the challenges we face.

When he learnt that I had been appointed the Director of IDS, he immediately wanted to know what help I required from his end; and whether there was room for the public debates similar to the "Kenya Debate" that IDS convened in the 1970s. In our meeting of December 9, he specifically asked me to plan for his 'coming to IDS' to give a public lecture in March/April 2020. He had requested that I pass this message and greetings to old friends, Prof. Peter Anyang' Nyong'o; Prof. Michael Chege; and Prof. Winnie Mitullah. We had agreed that I would do so – begin convening public intellectual debates – and that I would reach out to CODESRIA to add value to these debates. On January 11, 2020, I received another message from Thandika reminding me of our drink and discussion. I remember I was awaiting his manuscript. And he was awaiting the big debate at IDS in March/April, 2020.

Poor me. How I wish we can stop death! Thandika Mkandawire's passing is not easy to just accept on my part. He has left a mark on the academy and his influence will remain for ever in our social science texts on Africa. I truly feel that his mark on African scholarship is indelible.

My heartfelt condolences to his wife Kaarina, his family and many friends across the globe.

Farewell Thandika!

Farewell my mentor!

Farewell my friend.

## Notes

1. Mkandawire, Thandika. "Notes on Consultancy and Research in Africa," Copenhagen: Centre for Development Research (CDR) Working paper, 1998.



2. Mkandawire, Thandika. *African intellectuals: rethinking politics, language, gender, and development*, Dakar and London: CODESRIA in association with Zed Books, 2005.
3. See for instance, Mkandawire, Thandika. "Neopatrimonialism and the Political Economy of Economic Performance in Africa: Critical Reflections". *World Politics*. Vol. 67, No. 3, p. 563-612, 2015.
4. Mkandawire, Thandika. "Crisis Management and the Making of 'Choiceless Democracies' in Africa," in Richard Joseph, ed., *The State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999, p. 119-36 and Mkandawire, Thandika. "Agriculture, Employment and Poverty in Malawi." Harare, Zimbabwe : ILO/SAMAT Policy PA Series, 1999.
5. See the video here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyUkq09U9hc&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyUkq09U9hc&feature=emb_title)

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## Tribute to Thandika Mkandawire, A Beloved Teacher

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I am utterly distraught to learn from my friend Walter that my favourite political economist and teacher, Thandika Mkandawire, has died. My intellectual development took a different direction when I found Thandika Mkandawire after Graduate School, first, through his edited book *The State and Agriculture in Africa* (1987), and subsequently through the brilliant work he did on Africa's economic development, World Bank policies and the African state in the 1990s and throughout the 2000s. I am certain that if I had not come across Thandika when I did, my intellectual development would have veered off in a completely different, almost certainly less fulfilling direction.

I was at the time young, restless, and, intellectually, very adventurous. Graduate school had lit a spark in me. But it had left me somewhat jaded. I had suddenly realised that I did not care for legal doctrine. I liked – and still like – law's forensic tools but I found doctrine sterile: it was either

**Wachira Maina**

Nairobi, Kenya

noisily obvious or complicatedly trivial. This was especially so when lawyers launched into voluble disputations on some arcane point. True, jurisprudence had real insight but then jurisprudence is academic law. Most of the rest of law is applied, or to put it differently, law is to jurisprudence what accounting is to economics.

There I was then, June 1993, a newly minted graduate bristling that my training till then had neither asked nor answered the questions that had taken me to graduate school. I wanted to know what to do when those sworn to implement the laws regularly ignored them. I did not know what incentives or disincentives to put in place to discourage dictators or corporate chiefs from stealing public money. Could such incentives and disincentives be legally designed? I wondered why

theories of sovereignty did not address the ways in which economic prescriptions by multilateral agencies subverted people's control over governments in debtor countries. I knew what the rule of law was and could speak and write with great eloquence about its characteristics. Yet if you asked how institutional design might help secure it, I could not answer you. This background is necessary to explain just what a profound effect Thandika had on me.

My journey towards acquiring the perspectives and tools that would eventually help me grapple with these questions begun in two places, with Thandika Mkandawire's *The State and Agriculture in Africa* and with all-night, whisky-inspired debates and arguments with David Ndii at Invergara Club. (David won't like these confidential disclosures!) Thandika gave me different perspectives on how to understand the state. In this book, I learnt to look into and to question the fiscal basis of the state, any state. That is to say, I learnt to ask how a state raises revenues because, it turned

out, as I learnt later, that revenues and where they came from shaped how the state treated citizens. Does the state raise revenues from taxes or from mineral rents? States that live off taxes – called merchant states – must have some implicit understanding with the key tax-paying groups in society. For this reason, such states are more likely to be more inclusive. States that live off rents – called rentier states – rest on narrow bargains between politicians and the companies involved in extraction. Mineral economies are essentially off-shore economies: Governments in state that have such economies don't care for public support. They survive by repression or co-optation, that is, by buying off opponents.

This analysis opened my eyes to much that I had missed and sent me scurrying in all directions to find more materials. Now I could explain why mineral and oil-rich countries were so fragile or so dictatorial. I now knew why populations in those countries were often poor: politicians would rather squirrel away the money to tax havens than invest in public services.

Mkandawire's was always brilliant. He had an uncanny ability to illuminate a subject and to upend received wisdom with a simple vignette. I remember being extremely impressed by Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis brilliant work on conflict. Collier and Sambanis had put the old canard that African conflicts are caused by ancient ethnic hatreds and grievances with a series of empirical studies arguing that most conflicts could actually be explained by greed, that is, most of them were driven by scramble for lootable resources. Thandika was not persuaded and though I do not know whether he ever wrote an essay that directly responded

to this thesis he wrote a number of penetrating essays that very cleverly chipped away at the argument. His 2002 deceptively low-key essay, "The Terrible Toll of Post-Colonial 'Rebel Movements' in Africa: Towards an Explanation of the Violence against the Peasantry" is particularly on point. Mkandawire asked a simple question, "Why are African rebel movements so violent towards peasants?" He returned the answer, which felt so intuitively right to me, that it was because the rebels were invariably urban elites who had moved their disputes to rural Africa. This was astonishingly obvious when I thought about it. Until 2007, Kenyan elites squabbling over the presidency always took their blood letting to rural areas.

During his days at CODESRIA and later at United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, UNRISD, where he served as Director from 1998 to 2009, perhaps Thandika's most influential work, with colleagues such as Adebayo Olukoshi, was his 20-year interrogation of the neoliberal stipulations of the World Bank's – first as Structural Adjustment Programmes and then as Poverty Reduction Strategies – sold to Africa and the developing countries as the Washington Consensus. He was completely vindicated by the dramatic unraveling of the Washington Consensus in the 2008 financial crisis.

Thandika and a handful of African scholars fought long and hard to liberate Africa's development debate from the stranglehold of the so-called North American Africanists. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s these Africanists were extremely influential in western policy circles. Though their advice was regularly sought, Thandika

was deeply disenchanted with their work. This work problematized under-development in Africa as a result of neo-patrimonial politics with neopatrimonialism being understood in segmental and hierarchical terms. The standard explanatory model has the President and his 'tribe mates' sitting as patrons atop the state, their hands in the public kitty, serving a web of grateful clients who repay him with loyalty and votes. On this view, Africa was under-developed because these neopatrimonial webs undermined or eroded rational policy making.

Thandika couldn't abide this empirically bankrupt argument. He felt that the Africanists were selling snake-oil to policy makers in the Washington and London. He noticed – as did other African scholars that Africanist circles were not only hermetically sealed against African perspectives, they had also become intellectually incestuous – liberally quoting and cross-referencing each other. They were not promoting debate, they were more like congregants at a neoliberal wake. Thandika thought that the neopatrimonial perspective – though highly privileged and valued in donor circles – offered nothing analytically. And even worse, had no predictive value.

Thandika's interpretations of the possibilities of democracy in Africa were always original, cautiously optimistic and always refreshing. He had genuine flashes of insight. He made me question much that I thought self-evident. He hated complacency. I was privileged to participate in many fora with him. I remember, in particular, a discussion panel I shared with him and Prof. Anyang' Nyong'o in Accra Ghana in April 2014 during the "Pan-African Conference

on Inequalities in the Context of Structural Transformation.” It was the first time that I got a really good chance to chat with him. What humility, what gentle persuasion and what intellectual charm. I have been lucky to meet many intellectual giants in my life. The truly great like Louis Henkin, my Constitutional Law Professor in Graduate School, and Thandika Mkandawire are the ones that teach you effortlessly and joyously.

God speed you along. Here is Laban Erapu’s Elegy to walk you to the underworld:

When he was here,  
We planned each tomorrow  
With him in mind  
For we saw no parting  
Looming beyond the horizon.

When he was here,  
We joked and laughed together  
And no fleeting shadow of a ghost  
Ever crossed our paths.

Day by day we lived  
On this side of the mist  
And there was never a sign  
That his hours were running fast.

When he was gone,  
Through glazed eyes we searched  
Beyond the mist and the shadows  
For we couldn’t believe he was  
nowhere:  
We couldn’t believe he was dead.

Adios Maestro.

I WILL MISS YOU.

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## Thandika Mkandawire: A Tribute

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“I’m kinda weary”, is how Thandika Mkandawire suggested I remember his surname when we met for the first time in Dakar in the early 1990s at a CODESRIA workshop on Reflections on Development. He was the Executive Secretary at the time, but shunned the grand chauffeur-driven pomp which usually accompanied his seniority. Instead he drove around Dakar in a small beaten-up French car. I was immediately struck by his endearing modesty and even though he was an extraordinarily busy man, he always gave you the sense that he had time for you. Hence, he was not only respected, but also loved by all of us who were mentored by him. I always felt enormously privileged to be in his company – his effervescent energy, his alive intellect, his wit and of course his *joie de vivre* were all infectious. We are inspired by him and we must honour his memory by continuing his scholarly search for solutions to

**Fred Hendricks**  
Emeritus Professor,  
Rhodes University,  
Makhanda, South Africa

our multifarious continental problems. It is impossible to do justice to Thandika’s oeuvre in such a short tribute. What follows is an attempt to capture a few vignettes of our interaction over the last thirty years which I hope demonstrate not only his breadth of scholarly and political interests but also his personal warmth.

Thandika, as he was widely known, dreamed of setting up a Centre for Reflection for senior African scholars in his fatherland, Malawi, but his standpoint however, was invariably pan-African. While recognising the fact that the colonial borders had not changed in any substantial way since independence, his search was for an African

perspective of and by the continent in its entirety. With his encyclopaedic knowledge of the continent, he managed to embrace everybody from the furthest nooks and crannies of rural Africa to the bustling urban environments where he was most at home. Thandika was, above all, a man of ideas. More than anything, else he loved to engage in debate and discussion and always had an angle that he could back up with his prodigious evidential knowledge of virtually everything, from political economy, to art and music, to history, culture and language. In particular he challenged dominant global discourses about Africa, many of which are informed by deeply racist attitudes parading as scholarly works. He eschewed these stereotypes and instead offered penetrating analyses grounded in African experiences, invariably connected with an abiding commitment to Africa’s development in all its diversity.

The very fact that everybody addressed Thandika by his first name speaks volumes about the manner in which he challenged the stultifying hierarchies in much of African academia. For him, it was not a matter of where you stood on the ladder at your university, as a junior lecturer, or senior professor, a dean or even a vice chancellor. What mattered was the force of your ideas and how you could marshal evidence and theory into an argument. He was thus much more than a mentor; he was an intellectual companion.

Thandika's father was Malawian and his mother was Zimbabwean. Born in Zimbabwe in October 1940, he spent much of his early childhood as well as part of his adult life there and in Zambia following his migrant father. Later, after assuming Malawian citizenship, he was imprisoned a number of times, before going into exile in Sweden where he became a citizen, in line with his broadly social democratic approach to political economy.

The rich tapestry of Thandika's life requires a detailed intellectual biography, not only for his role in shaping ideas about Africa's development, but also in institution building globally. Starting off as a teenage journalist in Malawi to being a student of economics in the US, to entering the realm of academia in Stockholm as an economics lecturer, to the decade as Executive Secretary of CODESRIA in Dakar, to his Directorship of UNRISD and finally to the chair of African Development at the London School of Economics, Thandika has made an inestimable impact. Younger scholars need to appreciate the full might of his ideas as well as the widespread influence of the institutions he built which only a

lengthy all-encompassing account can accomplish.

Following the Reflections on Development workshop in Dakar, I was in close contact with Thandika concerning the *South African Sociological Review (SASR)*. In the wake of the demise of apartheid, there was a flurry of mergers in professional associations. Sociology was not untouched by this euphoria. Consequently the previously whites-only and apartheid-supporting Suid Afrikaanse Sosiologiese Vereniging (SASOV) merged with the anti-apartheid and non-racial, Association for Sociologists in Southern Africa (ASSA) to form the South African Sociological Association (SASA) in 1993. Since the merger effectively meant the jettisoning of the foundations of both associations and the formation of a new active intellectual enterprise, I approached Thandika about the possibility of dropping the "South" to form instead an *African Sociological Review (ASR)* into which the SASR could be incorporated. Thandika's response was, "Give me a proposal, and if the idea is good, we'll find the money for it". Within a week I gave him a proposal and that's how the *African Sociological Review* was established, with his support and stewardship through the various CODESRIA Boards and Committees. One of my treasured memories, a few years later, is Thandika praising the ASR as having become the "flagship of CODESRIA" even though it had been his encouragement and continued interest in the journal that had allowed it flourish, especially as a platform for intellectual arguments.

Our paths crossed several times at various CODESRIA meetings, workshops and General Assemblies. In April 2007, the Humanities Faculty of Rhodes University

awarded him a Senior Doctorate which is reserved for work that according to the Rhodes Calendar of 2020 "...constitute(s) a distinguished contribution to the advancement of knowledge in that field". We are grateful to Jimi Adesina for encouraging Thandika to put forward a selection of his work for examination. The Faculty selected five external examiners from Africa, Asia and Europe and their reports were unanimously in favour of the award of the degree. The prestige of this accomplishment is evident in the fact that in the 114 year history of the university only two senior doctorates have been awarded in the Humanities Faculty. I was Dean of the Faculty at the time and to present Thandika for the conferment of the degree is etched in my memory.

Having ensured that the CODESRIA foundations were firmly rooted after leading the institution for a decade, from 1986 to 1996, Thandika proceeded to become the Director of UNRISD where he transformed the research agenda towards a new broadside against dominant thinking in development, one linking social policy directly to emancipatory outcomes for the masses, captured in the notion of inclusive social policy. Premised on the Nordic experience, Thandika posited that it was imperative for Africa's development to be democratically grounded. As late industrialisers the Nordic experience was vital for the continent and yet it was not integrated into development thinking at the time.

While at UNRISD Thandika launched a research project entitled "Financing Social Policy", and he approached me to do a paper on pensions in South Africa. Basically, he was interested in establishing whether pension funds could be employed in development

as had happened in Finland in particular. “But I know nothing about pensions” was my retort. “You’ll learn” he said and so began a fascinating encounter with a brand-new research area into the role of pensions in development. I will forever remain grateful to him for prodding me in this direction of understanding South Africa’s political economy and its prospects for development. He mentored me along the way, suggesting readings and generally introducing me to new angles of research. I relished the opportunities this engagement with him opened up for me.

CODESRIA hosted a commemorative conference in Lilongwe, Malawi in April 2016 under the theme, “Thinking African, Epistemological Issues: Celebrating the Life and Work of Thandika Mkandawire” in Thandika’s honour. It was also the occasion to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Kampala Declaration on Academic Freedom. I felt very fortunate to be present and used the occasion to highlight some of the many quotable quotes from Thandika’s prodigious corpus, which I have used and in some instances, even over-used, to demonstrate the wide impact of his thought. I recall a few here to provide some context. One example is, “(W)e are probably the only part of the world about which it is legitimate to publish without reference to local scholarship”.<sup>1</sup> At the time he was referring specifically to the so-called Kenya Debate about the role of the indigenous bourgeoisie in development in the context of global capitalism. More recently, he broadened this insight to include other African countries as well. Thus, as another example, in an interview with Kate Meagher published in *Development and Change* he said, “It’s still quite possible to write a whole book on

Nigeria with no reference to Nigerian scholars”.<sup>2</sup>

Lamenting the consequences of the lack of dialogue between scholars in the North and the South, provides further examples when Thandika says, “Any student of Africa is confronted by two research communities that rarely interact. This shows up in the hiatus between the currency of topics and the datedness of the bibliography in African writing on the one hand, and the dated content and current biographies of ‘Northern’ writers on the other hand. A lot is lost in this gap”.<sup>3</sup>

As far as the engagement with the state is concerned, Mkandawire makes the pointed statement that one of our big problems is the “failure of the political class to establish a productive and organic rapport with their own intelligentsia/intellectuals” and that across the continent, only in Algeria and in apartheid South Africa did such an organic link develop between the two.

In July 2015, Thandika published a far-reaching Review Article in *World Politics* entitled “Neopatrimonialism and the Political Economy of Economic Performance in Africa: Critical Reflections”<sup>4</sup> in which he provided a stinging critique of this so-called school of thought in the study of Africa. In response to this article, as editor of the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies (JCAS)*, I organised a Colloquium in conjunction with the Human Sciences Research Council on African Perspectives on Global Corruption using Thandika’s article as a centrepiece. While his article offered a crushing critique of neopatrimonialism as an explanation for Africa’s poor economic performance, it did not directly offer an alternative analysis

of corruption as one of the supposedly major factors. The proceedings of the colloquium were published in *JCAS* Volume 36 Issue 4 of the journal in 2018. It leads with a wide-ranging interview with Thandika conducted by Nimi Hoffman, one of the journal’s co-editors, in which Thandika gives a full explanation for why neo-patrimonialism is so deeply problematic.<sup>5</sup>

The most recent issue of *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* is a special issue on Zimbabwe and it leads with an article by Thandika in which he offers a comprehensive account of the difficulties experienced in Zimbabwe’s transition.<sup>6</sup> He recognises the extreme polarisation in scholarship on Zimbabwe and points to how this has led to simplistic analyses of its failure. Instead, Thandika argues that a fuller understanding of Zimbabwe’s recent history must take account of the multiple (five) transitions it has gone through over the last three decades and how this transition overload has weighed very heavily on the country. The article is vintage Thandika, always mindful of the broader context and eschewing the easy ahistorical answers usually proffered for Zimbabwe’s predicament. It is indeed a great pity that he will not see it in print; nonetheless, it will contribute to the huge archive he has bestowed on us. Furthermore in its own right it will live on as yet another lesson on how to avoid “bad social science” which he so deplored throughout his life. We are very grateful to Kaarina, Andre and Joshua for signing the Author Publishing Agreement (APA) forms on his behalf.

Thandika’s emphasis on historical context induced him to develop a periodisation of various generations of African scholars and he counts himself as part of the first

generation of students who were “airlifted” to study at universities abroad, mainly in the USA. The post-colonial university scene is vastly different to those early days, but it is well to remember this evolution now that Thandika’s passing counts as the end of an era.

I wish to end this tribute to Thandika on a personal note. Thandika was my intellectual mentor, but we also spent many hours after official meetings continuing our conversations, often leading to even greater insights. He was not averse to having fun and was an enormously attractive man, especially away from the stiffness of formal meetings. It was as though Thandika cherished these periods even more, where his creativity was let loose, bursting through the volleys of articulation of the raconteur. And despite this ‘lightness’ he did not countenance sloppy thinking. Thandika also loved music, seeking especially a deeper appreciation of the diversity of African music. This love shone through, whether it was in the backyard nightclubs or at the Maynardville Amphitheatre in Cape Town towards the end of 2015 where I met him at an Abdulla Ibrahim concert. It is not surprising at all that one of his sons is a musician.

We have lost one of our intellectual giants and we feel bereft, but he will be the first to implore us to study and appreciate our continent in ways which allow for our voices to be heard, not via slogans and cheap rhetoric, but instead, by deep penetrating analyses, grounded in the African experience.

## Notes

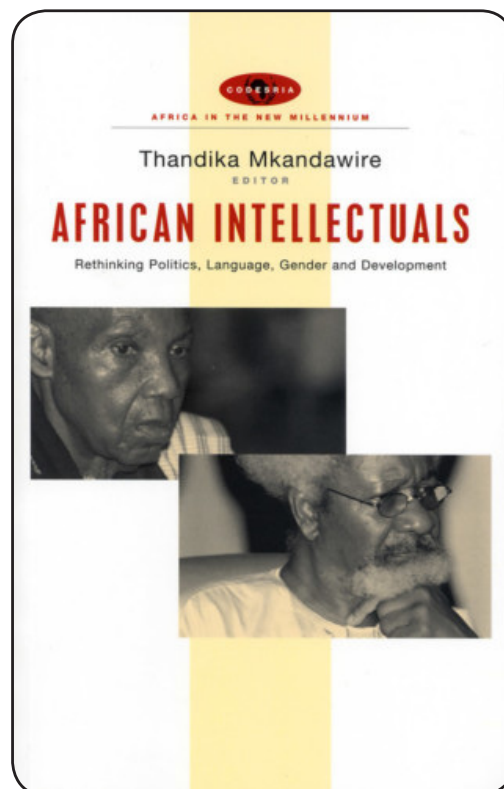
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5. Hoffmann, N. (2018) Diagnosing Neopatrimonialism: An Interview with Thandika Mkandawire. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 36 (4).
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## African Intellectuals Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development

Edited by Thandika Mkandawire



In this thought-provoking overview of the history, fate and possible future roles of African intellectuals both within Africa and in the African Diaspora nearly half a century on from Independence, some of the Continent's most eminent thinkers discuss the issues at stake. Their starting point is the uniquely difficult circumstances confronting intellectuals: regimes intolerant of independent debate, economies in sharp decline, societies wracked by violent conflict, and official languages different from people's mother tongues. Africa has experienced, compared with Asia or Latin America, much higher rates of emigration of its intelligentsia to North America and Europe, as well as frequent displacement from home countries to other parts of the continent.



## Thandika Mkandawire: A Tribute

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I first met Thandika Mkandawire in 1989, alongside Mahmood Mamdani, Micere Mugo, and Ibbo Mandaza. The occasion was the Rockefeller Reflections on Development Fellowships induction for new laureates of which I was privileged to be one. The fellowships were the highest honours in African social sciences at the time and had had Peter Ekeh, Mamdani and Thandika himself as our predecessors. In the 1989/90 class of ten fellows, four of us (Austin Isamah, Jimi Adesina, ??? Adewuyi, and myself) were from the social sciences at Ibadan. You could say those were the days when Ibadan ruled the waves across the continent, and you would be damn right. I was as swollen headed and pompous as an Ibadan ambassador was welcome to be at the time, until I was brought down to earth by Mugo, Mamdani, and Thandika in that order. I remember Mugo, the great Kenyan literary critic who was in exile in Zimbabwe, losing her cool in Nairobi when I refused to answer a query from a graduate student at the University of Nairobi on the grounds that it was too elementary to be deserving of a response. ‘Even if you were the most intelligent political scientist on earth, which you are not’, she screamed at me, ‘you don’t have the right to think of any person too pedestrian to query you!’ ‘And, to face it really, who are you, and what do you really know?!’ My Olympian height collapsed even before it took shape. By the time Mamdani and Thandika added their voices, my humbling was

### Eghosa Osaghae

Professor of Political Science,  
University of Ibadan  
Nigeria

complete. That day, I became born-again, and remain eternally grateful that they all forgave my trespasses and took me as a young scholar in need of proper guidance and mentoring. This opened the door to several years of adoption, respectable fraternity and learning at the feet of Thandika and Mamdani (my Ogas, Nigerian pidgin for Master) especially, as I lost touch with Micere Mugo in the years that followed.

My next meetings with Oga Thandika were in and out of Dakar where he was Executive Secretary of CODESRIA. There were no more thrashings, only encouragement, friendship and support, to ensure that I grew well. We then had more lighter mood interactions. Once when he visited Ibadan, we – the four of us of Rockefeller fame – thought we should give him a taste of Ibadan hospitality in retaliation of his spoiling pastimes any time you were in Dakar. I was in charge of the *suya* arrangement from our pooled resources, and ended up buying up all the *suya* in Sabo that night. That is how I endeared myself to the *suya* merchants, and the story is told till this day of a ‘prince’ who closed Sabo for one night! All in honour of Thandika. We were really glad to be offered the opportunity to let him know the

esteem in which we held him.

Another time, I don’t quite remember where now, Thandika told me the story of an extensive tour of Africa he had with CODESRIA partners from which his respect for Nigeria and Nigerians as the ‘giant’ of Africa increased. Oh, Thandika was a good story-teller and told the stories with the wits of a master that always filled them with important lessons. On this extensive African tour, he told me, he was reminded of how hollow independence was in Africa. From one country to another, he found from arriving at the airport and through meetings and participant observation that Africa was still very dependent, with an irritating servitude towards our colonial masters represented by the development partners he was travelling with. He was beginning to lose hope in Africa when, finally, they landed in Lagos which was the last port of call. Chaos everywhere, but so much motion and noisemaking. But, wait a minute,...as far as the eyes can see, it is African all the way! And for once, there is a reversal in the order of precedence: he now comes first! From the airport and everywhere they went, this was the experience, and his friends who had enjoyed all the privileges to this point were now in a hurry to get out of Nigeria. He told me that for that moment, he appreciated what true independence can mean. Up Nigeria!

What would turn out to be my final meeting with Thandika on this side of existence was in 2014



when I spent time at the University of London as the Emeka Anyaoku Visiting Chair of Commonwealth Studies. He was a Distinguished Professor at the London School of Economics, where he had a mandate to open new vistas of development engagement. There was a lot of catching up and more stories to tell, but the lasting memory of that meeting for me was our discussion on religion. He'd heard that I had become a committed Christian, and he congratulated me. I thought that was the opportunity to preach the gospel. He listened very attentively and told me taking Christianity

more seriously was something he was considering. At least, he said, it would cut the costs of social indulgences and encourage greater personal discipline.

Thandika was an honest and genuine man. He had the infectious smile that told you, you were welcome. He was an accomplished and highly respected scholar, but did not have the airs that he saved me from when I first met him. Thandika was one of the few scholars I know who analyse subjects across the social sciences so easily you would think analysis

is 'natural' to them. Whether in writing or oral exchanges, he was consistently clear-minded, thorough and persuasive. You did not have to agree with him (he was very tolerant of alternative and divergent views) but you always knew where he stood. When CODESRIA initiated the project on generations of social sciences in Africa, it was setting the appropriate framework for celebrating icons whose contributions and impacts will linger on for a long time to come. So let it be with Thandika Mkandawire. Adieu Oga.

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## Thandika's Voice Will Keep Talking to us

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**P**aying tribute to Thandika is a singularly difficult task considering that he touched many people who in turn hold different perspectives about his life and work. Mine is a small footnote that shares selective experiences of how he influenced me, indirectly and directly. The risks of attempting to draw an accurate assessment of Thandika are many, ranging from the possibility of errors of judgement to faulty evaluations. These difficulties are compounded by a lack of very close personal contacts of an individual who rose to prominence in the late 1970s while I was still learning to read and write at primary school. But I can confidently rely on some landmark encounters as firm points of reference to one of the most intelligent and prolific intellectuals, whose presence I started to feel

**Kenneth Inyani Simala**  
East African Kiswahili  
Commission (EAKC),  
Zanzibar

in early 1990s as a young and upcoming scholar at university in Kenya. I, together with some other nascent social scientists, admired with awe the way Thandika and his colleagues at CODESRIA articulated some of the emerging and trending issues at the time. We were inspired to pursue a career in academics.

While I have always been an avowed admirer of Thandika's remarkable optimism of the future of Africa, it is impossible to attempt to present a complete picture of his intellectual philosophy. I shall cite as examples four of what I consider the most

important viewpoints, though not systematic and comprehensive, and speak briefly on each of these encounters, the impressions they formed and the impact they left in my intellectual life.

Before meeting Thandika physically, I had come across his exalted name and brilliant ideas in the prestigious and progressive *CODESRIA Bulletin* that analyzed and explained with honesty and courage, and in simple terms, the African situation. The great experience of reading the publication was instrumental in raising my awareness of a wide spectrum of themes of African history and development, and the canvas of so many different aspects of the continent's reality. With its variety of content, diversity of inspiration, hunger for reality and divergent points of view, the *CODESRIA Bulletin*, I must ad-

mit, had special relevance and fundamental influence in my formative intellectual years. It had a critical and lasting impact on my productive years with CODESRIA being the institution which has turned out to be my richest source of inspiration dealing with real situations of Africa and its institutions.

Thandika's seminal piece "Three Generations of African Academics: A Note," *CODESRIA Bulletin* (1995) marked a turning point in my desire and curiosity to know him better. The impression I got was of someone who was creative, imaginative and enormously enthusiastic about the role of intellectuals in African development. His deep, open and genuine concern for the intellectual development of African scholars like myself, and his breathtaking knowledge and realistic understanding of the state of affairs on the continent inspired and influenced me in profound ways.

I was privileged to join CODESRIA as a young lecturer in the mid-1990s and in subsequent years participated in some of the important activities and events that Thandika initiated or contributed to building. These included a number of Institutes; anniversaries and General Assemblies. CODESRIA and its various publications became and remain special spaces of encountering big ideas and debates about African development. Courageous explorations, brilliant explications and intelligent analysis of development issues from different perspectives have become the rock and foundation for some of the most notable social science and humanities research at CODESRIA. The way scholars of different backgrounds spark provocative debates and articulate their persuasions by unsettling disciplinary borders both epistemologically and

methodologically present us with an idea of which intellectual path Thandika really cared about and was committed to.

As part of the generation of African intellectuals who were passionate and optimistic about African development, Thandika was a wonderful person with a huge presence and a very sharp critical intellect. He emerged as a formidable and prominent proponent of Afro-optimism and had a very clear voice in the debates on the future of the continent. He offered probing constructive insights with positive formulations. He was an active source of strength and one of the most significant and distinguished intellectuals who influenced my academic trajectory earlier in my career.

I was motivated in my academic life by a compelling and overwhelming genuine admiration for Thandika's intelligence. His taste for discussing Africa that engages the present with an originality, a coherence and a radical form of perception that embodies traditional values of intellectualism such as fidelity, thematic resonance, a unity of vision, a realized integration of elements and a propitious choice and use of language influenced my thinking a great deal.

Thandika's thinking and ferocious intellect were reflected in the range of his extraordinary writing that was characterized by a penetrating analytic force that made a lasting impression on the reader. His breadth of knowledge and capacity for alternative thinking of bringing together diverse insights from different disciplinary fields was admirably enriching. This strong crossing of boundaries, this blurring of limits, this questioning of categories and this challenging of old disciplinary divides

provoked my interest to embrace new possibilities and experiment with overcoming the watertight separation between epistemologies and methodologies. It aroused my curiosity and nourished my interest in close reading of forms, objects, and texts of knowledge, how they intersect with each other and the creative dialogues they generated.

Thandika's immense contribution to building CODESRIA into one of Africa's largest and most vibrant intellectual institutions dealing with the development of the social sciences and humanities has shaped my understanding of the disciplines and impacted my outlook in so many ways. The character of CODESRIA and the creative manner of analyzing the inner logic of the influence of events on ideas, and ideas on events from a variety of multidisciplinary perspectives is unique. I believe I speak for many of us who are most indebted to CODESRIA for shaping our thinking with fresh inspiration and influencing our ways of dealing with the interplay of ideas and events from the whole spectrum of social sciences and humanities.

My membership on the Executive Committee of CODESRIA provided yet another opportunity to interact closely with Thandika during the internal review process of the Council in 2015-2016. Three very important activities were to be undertaken simultaneously: review of the intellectual agenda; reform of the governance system and revamping of the membership of the community. While responsibility for the exercise was vested in a tireless and devoted small group of intelligent and accomplished social scientists, I single out Thandika, not just because he was the chair, but for his significant intellectual contribution through discussion,

writing and interviewing. In selecting who to chair, the decision by the EC to propose Thandika to guide the exercise was not difficult: Not only was he acquainted with CODESRIA, but he had a thorough understanding of major and most important aspects of contemporary Africa as illustrated by his critical, judicious and illuminating comments of a large area of issues and events on the continent and beyond. His knowledge, faith and interest in both the continent and the community were great assets we desired to draw from.

Thandika led three small advisory teams of social scientists to remind us that the needed reforms were necessary to ensure that CODESRIA does not remain an outmoded institution. Their submissions were not investigations but rather analytical reports based on facts collected from many sources. Their purpose was to understand the extent and nature of issues at hand in order that responsible discussion may take place unencumbered by misunderstanding and distortion.

Throughout the review process, I came to truly appreciate Thandika as an immensely gifted, highly distinguished and a committed Pan-Africanist intellectual who devoted his time to realistic observation, objective description, acute analysis and constructive criticism of African society and its institutions. His intelligent reflections and comprehensible arguments on the nature and situation on the continent, its institutions and of their potentials and possibilities convinced us that CODESRIA needed reorientation as part of self-renewal towards intellectual maturity. Original in thought and highly efficacious, he was brilliant, sensitive and imaginative in reminding us that

the EC had a noble opportunity to demonstrate that change must not be feared but welcomed and embraced as self-rejuvenation.

Besides gracious and generous wise counsel to the EC, Thandika's enormously valuable experience, historical memory and insights were very helpful throughout the exercise. It was not just his ideas that commanded respect and praise, but the impressive way the noble sentiments were presented with passion and principle that engaged our interest and fascination.

He argued that reforms are designed to make CODESRIA a better institution for the community, staff and development partners. Historically, the growth and vibrancy of CODESRIA has occurred around a series of reforms and that each one has thrust the Council forward. CODESRIA is bred on intellectual engagements that allow for constructive dissent and its cause is strengthened when different opinions are allowed to spur its growth and survival.

Triggered by changes in society and fuelled by a continuing yearning for improvement, a current of the need for renewal surges through CODESRIA so very often. The quest for reforms and innovations was a venerable tradition in the history of CODESRIA, and there were lessons of experience of vigorous self-renewal to learn from where the Council had undergone profound changes in conception of itself and the world in which it operates.

By confronting relevant issues and events timely, honestly and in a just manner, CODESRIA has always sided with rapid institutional evolution. Hence, carrying out necessary reforms should be viewed as a legitimate method of produc-

ing needed institutional change for progressive transformation and facilitating positive change. He reminded us that it was ironic how many of those changes remained peaceful and unnoticed by many.

There were worthwhile lessons to be learnt about the fascinating, interesting and incredible history of CODESRIA, especially its ideological roots and the need to address itself to fundamental questions of development. Thandika counselled members of the EC to devote their energies in the most imaginative way to make CODESRIA resurgent in structure, form and subject in the service of the community. The EC must understand the force driving the desired change and it has a solemn duty to initiate positive actions.

My other encounter with Thandika was when he was chosen to chair a search committee tasked to assist the EC in its responsibility to recruit a new Executive Secretary. In order not to breach the confidentiality of the search committee and deliberations thereof, I will not discuss details of its work but rather focus on attributes that Thandika displayed as chair and which offer vital lessons of experience.

Based on his knowledge and experience of leadership at CODESRIA and other institutions elsewhere, the choice of Thandika was meant to make the search process a positive and effective one, and also bring a higher level of objectivity. Thandika was well qualified to chair the committee because of the high regard and respect he commanded from diverse constituencies. Although he was busy at the London School of Economics, he accepted the responsibility and created and devoted time to the search and selection process and assisted the EC in its hiring responsibilities.

With calm authority and reassuring insight, Thandika was emphatic that both effectiveness and success of CODESRIA depended on quality professional leadership and management practices. Hence, it was imperative to apply best principles and practices in recruiting the ES and fairly select the most qualified and talented candidate, ready and willing to head an institution of CODESRIA's calibre and one who would contribute to making it the progressive and innovative community of scholars that will impact positively on the development of Africa. He argued that quality leadership is a fundamental force in achieving the organization's mandate and a competent ES has a key role to play in setting direction, creating a positive culture and supporting and enhancing staff motivation and commitment necessary to foster and promote success.

I was particularly impressed in the way the whole exercise was conducted in a timely and professional manner to generate a strong pool of candidates and which the search committee played a major role in screening and evaluation. The committee report and recommendations had details that added value and contributed significantly to better hiring decisions by the EC.

The last time I interacted with Thandika was in March 2017 at the London School of Economics Africa Summit Research Conference where I was privileged and honoured to make a presentation at a panel he chaired. My paper was on the strategic importance of Kiswahili language as an important social institution in the process of mobilization and empowerment of the citizens of the East African Community for regional integration and sustainable development.

Not the all-seeing all-knowing dismissive critic type, Thandika's critical analysis of the role of language in general in regional integration and Pan-Africanism was a brilliant synthesis of Africa's linguistic dependence that is often not noticed and addressed in development communication. His comments were not just an off-hand insight and evaluation of my presentation, but provided me with the most comprehensive, extremely perceptive and helpful criticism by pointing out the intellectuals of the generation of Cheikh Anta Diop who staked their reputations on the importance of local languages in African development.

The foregoing encounters with Thandika are some of the high points of my intellectual life. I never failed to learn something every time I met him or his ideas. He was a dedicated and inspiring individual who has impacted entire generations of scholars. He had an affirmative attitude towards Africa's prospects and destiny. He was a scholar with a

sense of mission towards Africa and his obsessive fascination, love, compassion and hope for the continent, as transposed into the various discourses he engaged in, was in favour of more imaginative ways of rendering its existence and that of its institutions. This he did personally, patiently and passionately with power and persuasion.

No complete, critical and genuine discussion of the intellectual history of CODESRIA can ignore Thandika Mkandawire. He has lived long enough and the reality of his life has been determined by the limitations only time imposes on any man. His popular and omnipresent stature in CODESRIA and our lives will not be obliterated by death. His death should inspire us to always aspire to emulate the many impressive things he has accomplished for CODESRIA. Thandika's one way of life has left to the other side, but his spirit lives; for death is life. His voice will keep talking to us.



## Thandika Mkandawire: The Nordic Africa Institute Guest of Honour 2011<sup>1</sup>

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In recognition of his decades' long contribution to the advancement of knowledge production in Africa and in the world Thandika Mkandawire, Olof Palme Professor for Peace with the Institute for Future Studies in Stockholm and Professor of African Development, London School of Economics; formerly Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and Executive Secretary of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), has been appointed NAI Guest of Honour 2011. This is the first such appointment ever and who could better deserve it than Thandika Mkandawire.

Having recently read through most of Thandika's extensive scholarly production on behalf of Rhodes University of South Africa for his promotion to become a senior doctorate of Rhodes University, I am extremely honored to have been asked to make this presentation.

Thandika Mkandawire's special field of activity has been "Development Economics" and/or "Political Economy". He has published extensively from the end of 1970s in several journals and books, which have been in the forefront in his field of study. He is extensively cited in the development discourse in a great number of journals and in many books in the field (423 hits on Google Scholar). In his

### Lennart Wohlgemuth

School of Global Studies,  
Gothenburg University,  
Former Director of  
the Nordic African Institute,  
Sweden

studies he has been dealing with central themes in the discourse of development in general and in Africa in particular. He has been an advocate of the counterpoint arguments to the mainstream discourse of neoliberal economic theory (Björn Hettne 2005).<sup>2</sup> He has with rigour been examining and criticising the mainstream discourse. While the mainstream discourse, for example, maintains that the different measures introduced through the structural adjustment programmes lead to improved conditions for industry in the adjusting countries, Thandika shows already in his article of 1988 *The Road to Crisis, Adjustment and De-Industrialisation: The African Case*<sup>3</sup> that the measures instead lead to de-industrialisation. His arguments from late 1980s and early 1990s, such as the one on de-industrialisation, became established truths in the late 1990s. Although his basic themes are mainly the same, he examines the theory and practice of development from many angles and perspectives. He looks at the problem from the point of fiscal policies, industrial policies, privatisation policies, domestic savings and

domestic as well as external direct investments, the role of the state, the contradiction between economic and political reform and from the point of view of internal and external interventions. At a general level, his most important contribution is that he succeeds in interrogating issues both from an economics and from a political science points of view. He integrates these two disciplines in a way very few other scholars do. Of importance is the way in which he questions the assumptions underlying economic theories. In his articles on the development of development economics, over time he emphasises these points to an extent that it must be breaking new avenues for the discipline. This is for example done by studying carefully the underlying reasons given for State Failure in the African context such as *a) dependency, b) the lack of ideology, c) the weakness of the African state and its proneness to capture by special interest groups, d) lack of technical and analytical capacity, e) the changed international environment that did not permit protection of industrial policies, and f) the poor record of past performance.*<sup>4</sup>

His major area of study in which he also possesses most knowledge is of Africa. His many years of studying Africa also give him ample of knowledge of case studies, which he uses to support his theoretical arguments. However, in the past decade he has widened his

views considerably and brought in examples from both Asia and Latin America. Of interest are his views on what is relevant in the Asian experience for Africa where he again brings in counterpoint views to the mainstream discourse emanating mainly from World Bank-financed studies. *While it is now admitted that the state has played a central role in the development of Asian countries, it is suggested that replication of the Asian experience is somehow impossible for Africa.*<sup>5</sup>

The area in which he definitely has contributed to the advancement of knowledge in the field of development economics is in the interplay between economic reform and democratisation. Here he has even created a special term, which is attributed to him by all scholars in the field namely “choiceless democracies”. It was defined for the first time in his article in “Crisis management and the making of “choiceless democracies” in Africa in the book edited by Richard Joseph in 1999.<sup>6</sup>

All through his work he emphasises the role of the state. His article on “Thinking about development states in Africa” summarises well his arguments, which is present in most of his work. Here also his pioneering critique of the implementation of the neoliberal theories of the 1980s and 1990s comes to fore. He uncovers the contradictions between on the one hand decreasing the size and the duties of the state and on the other adding new demands on the state. “Wrong diagnoses and the jaundiced view of the state have produced a number of paradoxes for neoliberal projects. Structurally adjusting an economy was a state activity that required much more capacity than was implied by simply retrenchment. Most of the measures proposed ac-

tually needed a strong state to see through the major structural changes implied by the policies”.<sup>7</sup>

Mkandawire’s critique on the implementation of the neoliberal theories has been strong and forceful. It has not been one-sided without seeing the problems on the ground and the need for major reforms. His critique is based on a deep understanding and historical knowledge of the situation in Africa and his major contribution is to point at lack of consistency and contradictions in the practical implementation of the theories.<sup>8</sup> His personal experience as a fighter for democracy and Human Rights already at a young age has permeated all his writings and his engagement in these issues all through. Suffice here to mention the campaign for Academic Freedom that he started and led from his position as Executive Secretary of CODESRIA. In recent years he has also added a new dimension to his research and writings, by increasingly pointing at the importance of comparative studies and on using the insights and lessons for developing countries from experiences in other parts of the world including the developed countries themselves. In the recent UNRISD research on social policies this has been a major mode of work. “...both the history and the current use of social policy in the developed countries can provide useful insights and lessons for developing countries”.<sup>9</sup>

In conclusion there is no doubt in my mind that Thandika Mkandawire fulfils the conditions to become the first NAI Guest of Honor. With his extensive publications over a long period of time he has made a distinguished contribution to the advancement of knowledge in development economics with

particular emphasis on Africa. His writings are used as learning materials all over the world and he has through his important position in the past decade been able to engage other researchers in his field of research. His importance for engaging young scholars in particular during his years at CODESRIA should be specially emphasized. He is widely cited and his views have had impact on the discourse and policy implementation over the years. Already at CODESRIA he introduced efficient dissemination policies something he has refined during his years at UNRISD. Being a citizen of both Malawi and Sweden, he has put both Africa and Sweden on the map of development research.

## Notes

1. This presentation of Thandika was done in 2011 on the occasion of the 4th European Conference on African Studies held in Uppsala from 15 to 18 June 2011 after Thandika accepted to be Nordic Africa Institute Guest of Honour in 2011.
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## Running While Others Walked: Remembering Thandika Mkandawire

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*Rama Salla Dieng\* interviews Adebayo Olukoshi\*\* on the life and work of Thandika Mkandawire. Olukoshi shares memories of how Thandika helped to shape development thinking in Africa and beyond.*

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On 9 April 2020, I had the privilege to have a conversation with Professor Adebayo Olukoshi, Director of Africa and West Asia of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA International) on his friendship and comradeship with Thandika Mkandawire. The interview was also a 'reunion' with my former boss, as I worked with Professor Olukoshi when he was the Director of IDEP (the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning) and he contributed to my intellectual development between 2010 and 2015.

**Rama Salla Dieng (RSD):** How, when and where did you first meet Thandika Mkandawire?

**Adebayo Olukoshi (AO):** In 1983, CODESRIA (the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in

**Rama Salla Dieng**  
Centre of African Studies,  
University of Edinburgh

**Adebayo Olukoshi**  
Director, IDEA  
(Africa and West Asia office)

Africa) organised a conference on the economic crisis then facing African countries at my alma mater: Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria. That was the first time I heard about Thandika Mkandawire. Cadman Atta Mills who led the CODESRIA delegation mentioned his name during the debates. CODESRIA was one of the leading research institutions of social sciences on the continent, and inevitably, I connected with them.

The conference was a reflection on the structural nature of the economic crisis in African countries following austerity measures recommended by International Financial institutions (IFIs), and how they could diversify their economies. The questions being asked then were whether the crisis was a temporary hitch due to the neoliberal onslaught or a longer-term crisis.

After my doctorate at Leeds and subsequent return to Nigeria, I was invited to be part of a network set-up by CODESRIA, first on a project on social movements in Africa coordinated by Mahmood Mamdani, Ernest Wamba Dia Wamba and Jacques Depelchin. Later, CODESRIA organised a Pan-African conference at NOVOTEL in Dakar on Struc-



tural Adjustment in Africa. For me, there were two striking insights from Thandika Mkandawire's presentation on Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) in Africa, and their role in the broader neoliberal agenda. Firstly, his introduction was illuminating and far from being just protocol and ceremonials as was the case of such presentations especially in Nigeria. Thandika offered very substantive comments in his welcoming remarks about why we needed to mobilise African thinking on the question of SAPs and how we could interrogate current trajectories and influence future policy directions. He spoke to the heart of the matter and was not immersed in ceremonials. Secondly, despite being the then Executive Secretary of CODESRIA, he stayed with all the invited participants throughout the conference and presented his own paper [Thandika was Executive Secretary from 1985 to 1996]. He highlighted that the thinking on SAPs was a battlefield of policy and power. Therefore, it was empowering and inspiring that he asked for comments from us after his presentation. I presented a paper at that conference after Thandika's.

Back in Lagos, I received a phone call from him as he followed up on the conference and asked me to set-up an internal peer-review committee in order to help publish the conference papers. This will later become our edited book on The Politics of Structural Adjustment in Africa: Between Liberalisation and Oppression, published in 1995 by CODESRIA. That was the

beginning of our intellectual association and friendship.

**RSD:** How would you describe Thandika as a person?

**AO:** Thandika was versatile, multi-talented, and had a broad knowledge of wide topics. There were hardly any subject, academic, or not, on which Thandika did not have insights to offer. He read extensively about varied themes happening in different parts of the world. He had the ability to capture information from different sources and bring a unique interpretative and analytic perspective on issues pertaining to economic development around the world.

Thandika could not be beaten as a serious scholar, but neither could he be beaten at being a social and sociable comrade. There was a joke at CODESRIA that you needed to have a cut-off point at which you could escape if you planned to spend an evening with Thandika because he was so engaging. He discussed a wide-range of topics including music (from Kora to Youssou Ndour or Baaba Maal), history, agriculture and the arts. I remember going to bed at 5 or 6 am after having dinner with him, only to remember that I had to present a paper a few hours after. At CODESRIA, we used to ask him how he could manage all his responsibilities and always be on time.

**RSD:** What do you think are the three most important intellectual contributions of Thandika to development thinking in and on Africa?

**AO:** First, Thandika was of the opinion that a multidisciplinary

lens was necessary in understanding the development trajectory of the African continent. Yet, he also reminded us that we needed to be strong in our own discipline and know it inside out, before going beyond that terrain with our knowledge of other disciplines. Multidisciplinary was not a shortcut for avoiding rigour in analysis but involved drawing insights in order to confront narrowed interpretations of African realities.

Secondly, Thandika insisted that African scholars must not leave the theorization of the development of the continent to anybody. This was something he was simply not ready to accept. Therefore, he always insisted that we invested in the building of theory without being dogmatic so we could bring unique perspectives to the development of the African continent. This was to be done without stigmatising and denigrating the continent. This is something that was replete in the neopatrimonialism, corruption, or the crisis of development literature, which he took issues with. This was eye-opening for us. In addition, he recommended refraining from just observing social and economic events on the surface but to try to understand the logic of the factors at play that produce such outcomes.

Thirdly, he always highlighted the importance of historicising development, and he always tried to analyse development phenomena with a historical perspective, and that's what he did in his own work. For instance, the 1960s and 1970s were described by the World Bank and the IMF as the lost

decades for development in Africa in mainstream development thinking. Thandika showed, with growth figures, that structural adjustment decades were in fact Africa's lost decades, a diversion from development. Just after independence, most African states were faring very well because the leaders, notwithstanding their ideologies, were invested in the theory and practice of development. Yet with SAPs, the majority of them abdicated to the experimentations of the IFIs which they later contested. That was his entry point in joining the debate on developmental states in Africa. He never succumbed to the idea of the impossibility of developmental states in Africa, therefore, the question was never really about their feasibility neither was it about the false dichotomy between developmental and democratic states (as was the case in most South-East Asian states). Authoritarianism was never a viable path, and as a matter of fact, Africa was 'condemned to democracy, in every sense' as he used to say.

**RSD:** To what extent do you think his thought influenced development policy in Africa?

**AO:** Thandika influenced economic policy direction on the continent directly and indirectly. In the first case, he was personally invited to be part of many policy brainstorming sessions for example by Thabo Mbeki in South Africa, Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia. And indirectly, he had a huge intellectual following, and many such leaders convinced by his theoretical thinking tried to apply

it while designing key government policies all over Africa.

After some 16 years at CODESRIA, he joined the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and revolutionised its policy research agenda. He shifted the focus from macro-economic indicators to bring the social back in as a central focus of policymaking (especially through development planning), drawing from comparative insights from many parts of the world, including the salutary examples of Scandinavian countries. Learning from the many economic and financial crises including in South America in 1978-79, East Asia in the 1990s, and the great recession, his own unique contribution is that having sound was not incompatible with good economic performance, in fact it aided it.

**RSD:** Is there a particular lesson you learned from Thandika?

**AO:** 'Whatever you do, do it with energy, commitment and conviction.' Thandika never came across as off-putting. Though he was hard-working, he was never too serious, he was very approachable, gave his time to people and was always smiling. He never turned people away and engaged with their ideas and thoughts. He made everything he did look so simple and effortless that if you did not know the amount of work involved, you could be mistaken to believe he existed in an atmosphere of pure enjoyment!

As Executive Secretary of CODESRIA, he built a for-

midable reputation for the institute without ever giving the impression of being overwhelmed at any point in time. I had the good fortune of being the Executive Secretary after him, and I asked him how he managed as everyday seemed to involve crisis management. He said: 'Yes, yes that comes with the job. When I asked: 'How did you managed to keep such a calm, friendly and inviting demeanour throughout your tenure? Nobody could have assumed you were dealing with so many challenges.' He answered: 'You have to also understand that as Executive Secretary, you are called on to offer leadership and that requires being able to master challenges in a way that encourages people rather than discourage them.' Thandika was a true leader.

**RSD:** What is your favourite memory of Thandika?

**AO:** I have so many memories of him in different settings. Often scholarly and serious, in many other times. Presiding over international events. Memories of him as a researcher in Denmark when I was a researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) in Uppsala. I also have a specific memory of a dinner we had together in Dakar at the beginning of my association with him at CODESRIA. We were then working on editing the book on Between Liberalisation and Oppression: The Politics of Structural Adjustment in Africa. He was very relaxed and I discovered another facet of the man. He was a slow eater who ate intermittently and when his favourite song was being played, he got

up in the middle of the dinner and started dancing. I became very shy as I could not have imagined this side of him, and at the end of the song, he sat down and finished his dinner.

During his time at LSE and at the University of Cape Town (Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance), I never saw him humbled by any challenge in the course of his life.

**RSD:** How did Thandika impact your life?

**AO:** Meeting Thandika, at the time I did, allowed me to grow an additional sense of self-confidence. I have been fortunate to have come out of the radical Zaria political economy school which included the likes of Tunde Zack-Williams, Yusuf Bangura, the late Yusuf Bala Usman, younger scholars such as the late Abdul Raufu Mustapha, Jibrin Ibrahim gave me a strong foundation as this radical thinking was comparable in many ways to the Dar es Salaam School. I also had the privilege of doing my PhD at Leeds which was the home of ROAPE. There I met Lionel Cliffe, Ray Bush who was one of his mentees and friends, Morris Szeftel, then at the Leeds School of Economic and Social Affairs, and at CODESRIA I met Thandika, Archie Mafeje, Shahida El-baz, Mahmood Mamdani, Issa Shivji, etc. who we used to call the 'Grandies of CODESRIA.'

In addition, I had the privilege of not only being a co-editor with him, but also following in his footsteps at CODESRIA to maintain this institution as a shining star of social science research; in the process

this meant I learned quite a lot from him. Learning not to be doctrinaire, learning to marshal an argument properly, and learning to listen to others and hearing where they are coming from in terms of theoretical influences.

When I became CODESRIA's Executive Secretary, Thandika came out of his way to spend a couple of days with me in Dakar to reminisce about the CODESRIA journey, the CODESRIA story. You could not have a better mentoring than that. I was intellectually more self-assured after that as I benefitted from his wisdom and stayed in touch with him and sought his advice. He never hesitated to give me his feedback. We are so much poorer now that he has left us. He handled responsibilities in an exemplary fashion. He was an institution builder.

**RSD:** How can we honour his memory?

**AO:** We need to ensure that this tradition of critical and engaged scholarship that Thandika represented throughout his life is kept alive in the work that we do and we need that now more than ever. Some of the challenges we have encountered in different contexts require a new generation of scholars who are able to address them, borrowing from his confidence, knowledge, work ethics, and sense of diligence and purpose. His generation, who built CODESRIA, understood what their mission was, now your generation needs to discover yours and fulfil it. We all need to ask what should CODESRIA mean to all of us today? What

type of theorising, organising and institution building do we want? CODESRIA needs to be preserved, as well as all of Thandika's writings. CODESRIA has exhaustively compiled his bibliography and is also surveying his writing that is not in the public domain. I know there are many scholars in my generation, including Jimi Adesina, and others, who are working towards a proper memorialisation of his work. He left an immense intellectual scholarship, that needs to be preserved.

**RSD:** Thanks, so much Prof for taking the time to have this conversation with me and ROAPE followers. We are grateful.

\* **Rama Salla Dieng** is a Senegalese writer, academic and activist. She is currently a Lecturer in African and International Development at the Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh. Rama is the editor of the Talking Back series on roape.net and a member of ROAPE's editorial working group.

\*\* **Adebayo Olukoshi** is the former director of the United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), and the current director of the Africa and West Asia office of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. He is also a member of ROAPE's International Advisory Board.

# CODESRIA

*Bulletin*

## Publications Team

**Ibrahim Oanda**  
**Chifaou Amzat**  
**Diama Bèye**  
**Yves Eric Elouga**  
**Sériane Ajavon**

For contributions and enquiries, please write to:

Council for the Development of Social Science  
Research in Africa  
Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop X Canal IV  
P.O. Box 3304, Dakar  
CP 18524, Senegal  
Tel: +221 33 825 98 22 / 23  
Fax: +221 33 824 12 89

Email: [publications@codesria.org](mailto:publications@codesria.org)  
Web Site: [www.codesria.org](http://www.codesria.org)

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