The Political Thought of Thomas Sankara and its Contemporary Relevance

by

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Abstract

On 4 August 1983, a thirty-three year-old army captain seized power in Burkina Faso and embarked on what can be described a revolutionary journey. Over the next four years, until his assassination in 1987 the government, led by Captain Thomas Sankara, attempted to redeem Burkina Faso from the clutches of neo-colonialism. Through popular mobilisation and organisation, infrastructure (schools, hospitals, bridges) was built, millions of children were vaccinated and diseases such as river blindness were eliminated. Women, long-subjugated by patriarchal systems took up space and led their own initiatives in freedom, including holding senior roles in the public service. On the international stage, practical solidarity was extended to countries either fighting or threatened by neo-colonialism despite the fact that Burkina Faso was poor and was itself threatened by France and her lackeys.

What Sankara inherited in August 1983, twenty-three years after Burkina Faso's independence, was a fragile neo-colonial state which was not allowed by dominant imperialist interests to set an example of what true independence means. So, in just four years, it was all over. Sankara was assassinated by his comrades and the revolutionary project he had led came to a halt. The tragedy of Sankara was the tragedy of all those attempts at revolution which occur before mass movements have had the opportunity to develop and organise themselves independently of the state. Despite this, it is apparent today that Sankara has been influential on current political movements and parties in Africa, from Burkina Faso to South Africa. One of these political movements is the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South Africa.

This half-thesis is an investigation of Sankara's political thought. It also examines the extent to which his answers to questions of nationalism and pan-Africanism both matched and differed from his predecessors. To accomplish the latter, a brief but critical analysis of the writings of Amílcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah is made.

KEY WORDS: Burkina Faso, Sankara, Colonialism, Independence, Freedom, Neo-Colonialism, Pan-Africanism, Mass Movement, Imperialism

Dedication:

For Africa, until victory.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction

Burkina Faso's political reorientation in a time of neo-colonialism

The history of Burkina Faso[1] – between 1983-1987 – shows the limitations of the postcolonial state when politics with an emancipatory content are introduced but are not led by independently-organised popular masses who resist reactionary elements, both local and foreign, fighting to maintain neo-colonial order. As will be shown in this half-thesis, the postcolonial state in Africa is built on the fear of regression into a pre-colonial past, underpinned by the assumption that dismantling colonial architecture signifies a return to backwardness (Cabral 1972; Fanon 1963; Gandhi 1998; Martin 1985). Hence, most African leaders in power after independence were reduced to 'managers' of the state, running affairs in the interest of the colonial and national bourgeoisie (Tandon 1982). The programme for development advanced by these leaders was state-driven (Neocosmos 2017; Shivji 2003). They also faced significant threats, both politically and economically, because once state-driven development collapsed into a neo-colonial endeavour, largely untransformed colonial economies plunged many postcolonial states into a position of vulnerability from neo-colonial interests (Neocosmos 2016; Shivji 2003). Such neo-colonial forms of domination were advanced and supported by liberal international finance institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank; multinational corporations; and in the Congo soon after independence, for example, with the complicity of the United Nations (UN) (de Witte 2002).

At the 1961 All-African People's Conference held in Cairo, Egypt, neo-colonialism[2] was defined as "the survival of the colonial system in spite of formal recognition of political independence in emerging countries, which become the victims of an indirect and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, military, or technical means" (cit. Martin 1985:

[1] In 1984, on the first anniversary of the military coup that brought Thomas Sankara into power, the name of the country was changed from 'Upper Volta' to 'Burkina Faso' – the Land of Upright People. For consistency's sake, 'Burkina Faso' will be predominantly used to refer to the country, including in reference to some events that may have occurred before the name-change was effected, especially the events from 1983. Elsewhere, for relevance of context and meaning, use of 'Upper Volta' is maintained. And, in some direct quotes where Sankara refers to the 'Voltaic people', 'Voltaic society' or 'Voltaic masses' this has been maintained.

[2] This half-thesis maintains the position that there are no major differences in definition between neo-colonialism and imperialism. Therefore, and where applicable, these terms are used interchangeably but in most cases, use of neo-colonialism, as defined by the Cairo conference is maintained.

190-191). Some of the distinguishing features of neo-colonialism include, for example, the insistence that former French colonies become part of the Franc Zone[3] (FZ) and use a common currency, *Communauté Financière Africaine* (CFA), which is pegged to the French Franc, with convertibility of the former guaranteed by the French Treasury[4]. Nicolas van de Walle (1991) states that "the FZ's economic structures after independence promoted a specific political economy, with patterns of accumulation and redistribution that produced clear winners and losers and favoured a distinctive consumption model. State elites established ruling coalitions in each of the countries of the Zone on the basis of this political economy" (van de Walle 1991: 385).

Through such an arrangement, therefore, France was – and still is – able to extend its control of former colonies beyond the economy to other significant areas such as national security (providing aid, technical assistance[5], supplying weapons to security forces and testing weapons on African soil[6]); culture, by ensuring that education curricula were modelled along France's own and that media, especially film and television, reinforced positive images of France; and through multilateral relationships, by building influential local and international networks that could be activated whenever the need to defend France's national interests arose (Profant 2010). Others, Martin (1985) for example, have concluded that "through the linkages established between the accession to international sovereignty and the signing of model co-operation agreements, France [has] managed to institutionalize her political, economic, monetary, and cultural pre-eminence over a number of African states, which thereby [remain] almost totally dependent on her" (Martin 1985: 191; see also Nkrumah 1973).

[3] The Franc Zone consists of France and 15 African states, nearly all of which were once colonized by France. These include: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo in West Africa, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon in Central Africa, and the Comoros

[4] Through this arrangement, France is able to control and influence the monetary policies of the 15 African states that use the CFA. One of the conditions for continued use of the CFA is that the countries that do so must at all times maintain at least 65% of their foreign exchange reserves in the French treasury (van de Walle (1991).

[5] This also took forms of military training and Thomas Sankara was himself a beneficiary of such initiatives, having received military training in Pau, France. Several French military advisors have also served in African militaries and some are permanently stationed in Africa to this day (Decalo 1973; Profant 2010).

[6] In 1960, France ran a series of nuclear tests in the Sahara Desert. This was during the early days of its entry into the nuclear arms race as it was trying to assert itself as an imperial power. The nuclear tests were condemned by progressive Africans, including Kwame Nkrumah who used Ghana's sovereignty to mobilise criticism of the tests (Mazrui 1977; Profant 2010).

Thomas Sankara, like Julius Nyerere in Tanzania before him, was one of the first African leaders in power to confront neo-colonialism. Save for a few countries like Eritrea, Namibia, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and South Africa, by the time Sankara came into power in 1983, most of Africa had been independent for at least twenty years. Owing to a raft of colonial reforms across Francophone Africa, Burkina Faso was granted independence by France on 5 August 1960. In 1966[7], the country experienced a first military coup, which came in the aftermath of mass protests led by trade unions and students' movements over the rising cost of living, the lack of economic opportunities and little infrastructural development (Brittain 1985; Campbell 2018; Harsch 2013; Keese 2007; Sankara 2007). In this coup, Aboubakar Sangoulé Lamizana, an army officer, replaced president Maurice Yaméogo, and immediately instituted a military regime whose repression subsequently limited the activities of trade unions and students' movements, for example (Decalo 1973). Horace Campbell (2018) states, for instance, that in Burkina Faso "after independence, protests by students and labour unions became the dominant form of political expression and from the early years of independence, the military intervened to curb the search for power by the oppressed masses[8]" (Campbell 2018: xiii). As explained below, the Burkina Faso military often acted to defend the interests of local and foreign elites, turning itself into an agent of French neo-colonial interests.

Significant International developments between 1955 – 1983

Following the 1955 Bandung conference in Indonesia, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a progressive alliance of states, was formed in September 1961. Twenty-nine (29) states from African and Asia that were fighting colonialism came together to form the bloc. NAM consistently tried to use state collective agency to resist neo-colonialism while mobilising practical solidarity to threatened states. In 1960, Congo's popular independence leader, Patrice Lumumba, was overthrown by his former ally, Mobutu Sese Seko. Lumumba was subsequently assassinated by Sese Seko's own allies, assisted in this reactionary effort by the Belgian government, the United States of America's (USA) Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and UN

[7] 1966 is also the year Sankara, aged nineteen (19) at the time, joined military school, eventually graduating three years later in 1969.

[8] In one of his public addresses in March 1983, Sankara stated: "The army has always had the possibility of taking power, but it never wanted democracy." Although there were no coups between 1966-1980, the role of the military in preventing mass-led actions that could threaten state power was significant, mainly because high-ranking military elites were also beneficiaries of the neo-colonial status-quo (Harsch 2013; Martin 1987; Sankara 2007).

troops (de Witte 2002). Lumumba was in power for about two months only. In Algeria, which gained independence in 1962, Ahmed Ben-Bella's pro-peasants and workers' government was, in 1965, overthrown by his former ally, Houari Boumédiénne, having only been in power for three years. In 1966, Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown via a military coup[9] executed by local military personnel assisted by the USA. He was exiled to Guinea, whose leader was Sekou Touré[10].

The Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau revolutionary, Amílcar Cabral, was assassinated by members of his own party, Partido Africano da Independência – União dos Povos de Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC), in January 1973. Cabral's assassins were assisted by agents of the Portuguese colonial state. In spite of Cabral's assassination, the PAIGC declared independence in September 1973. Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau eventually attained independence in 1975, along with other Portuguese colonies of Mozambique (June 25) and Angola (November 11). In Angola, reactionary attempts to overthrow the independence government were made by the USA and its allies, using the governments of apartheid South Africa and Congo under Sese Seko as instigators. These attempts failed, thanks to Cuban troops who arrived in Angola to help the government. In Grenada, a leftist government came into power in 1979, having taken power from a pro-imperialist government that led at independence in 1974. Maurice Bishop, who led the revolutionary New Jewel Movement that took power in 1979, became Prime Minister. He was assassinated – in October 1983 – while fighting USA-sponsored militants in his country. The Bishop government was subsequently replaced by a neo-colonial government, installed after the USA invaded Grenada, a few weeks after his assassination. In Ghana, 1981, a young military officer, Jerry Rawlings, led a coup and captured state power. Rawlings' was a coup that was backed by popular support drawn from predominantly poor Ghanaians, and was driven by the claim that is was correcting historical wrongs that had enabled the proliferation of neo-colonialism in Ghana, especially since the 1966 coup that had resulted in

[9] According to Decalo (1973), "Ghana's 1966 coup…was primarily designed to redress military grievances; it hence had no ideological overtones, nor was there any concrete programme of action aimed at solving the country's problems" (Decalo 1973: 122). Imperialist interests, the USA's especially, used these grievances to support Nkrumah's overthrow.

[10] One of Nkrumah's most significant acts of Pan-Africanism was the initiation of the Ghana-Guinea Union, aimed at unifying independent African states. It was also a significant move because it was the first time former Anglophone and Francophone colonies were seen as coming together to bridge the colonial divide. As is discussed elsewhere in this half-thesis, the partnership between Ghana, under Jerry Rawlings, and Burkina Faso under Sankara can be seen as influenced by this thinking.

Nkrumah's fall[11]. In all the cases cited above, except with Rawlings' coup, the leaders were overthrown and replaced with compliant, pro-Western governments that allowed neo-colonialism to proliferate.

The examples above show the differences that existed in how nationalist leaders, with their credentials of being part of the mass movement, perceived themselves and how western countries such as the USA and other imperial nations perceived them. After gaining independence, African states were drawn into global power contestations between the USA, her allies such as France, and the Soviet Union in what is commonly known as the Cold War. On the other hand, the anti-colonial struggle was, principally, a struggle against imperialism, which is rooted in capitalism. Indeed, the popular aspiration for independence was to replace the colonial (imperial) state with a socialist state although bourgeois interests, local and foreign alike, were opposed to following this ideological path (Schraeder 1994). Significant support (military training and supply of weapons, for example) for various anti-colonial struggles came from the Soviet Union as well as communist China. On a global scale, therefore, the ideology of capitalism, with its dominant feature of imperialism, was the ideology of the West, and since most national liberation movements had relied on Marxist-Leninist theory to craft their struggle against colonialism, the ideology of socialism was used to express popular aspirations for freedom. Using its hegemonic power, however, the West routinely sought to discredit national liberation movements and newly-independent states in Africa by using anti-socialist and anti-communist propaganda while promoting capitalism – which necessitated neo-colonialism – as the preferred ideology to maintain stability while advancing 'democracy' and 'development'. Lumumba's fall in the Congo, for example, was partly a result of the effectiveness of such anti-communist propaganda (de Witte 2002). In fact, one of the main reasons why NAM was formed was precisely to demonstrate the desire of the African and Asian states to remain non-aligned with neither ideology of the West (USA and its allies) nor the East (Soviet Union, China and their allies).

Theorists such as Issa Shivji (2003) have lamented that nationalists such as Lumumba and Sankara who took their independence seriously as the condition under which their own history

[11] Rawlings was criticised, however, for eventually yielding to economic pressure advanced by the IMF to introduce austerity programmes, which he had accused the regime he deposed of contemplating (Luckham 1994).

could be made found themselves threatened, by imperialism (the West) once in power, or just before they assumed power. Says Shivji (2003):

> while independence meant that the African state was formally sovereign in international law, in practice, its independence and sovereignty were heavily circumscribed. The Cold War created even more limitations for African sovereignty. Nationalist leaders who took their independence seriously became the potential targets of imperial wrath (Shivji 2003: 6).

The rise of Thomas Sankara

Given his poor upbringing, Sankara's options in life were limited and a career in the military came as an exceptional opportunity (Murrey 2018). He joined military school in Kamboinsé in 1966. A military training stint in Madagascar (Antsirabé military academy) followed after graduation in 1969. While in Madagascar, Sankara was exposed to a series of popular protests and strikes, the most significant one occurring in 1972, which saw the overthrow of president Tsiranana. These protests were led by students and workers from across the country who were raising concerns around cost of living and access to social services such as education, health and recreation (Sankara 2007).

Sankara returned to Burkina Faso in 1973 and was assigned to a military academy in the second largest city, Bobo-Dioulasso, tasked with training new military recruits. A 1974 border war between Burkina Faso and Mali[12] saw Sankara rise to prominence across the country, lauded for his bravery during the war. As his stature grew, Sankara was assigned to a newly-established national commando centre in Pô, south of the country. This centre later proved significant when the plan to seize power was hatched. Sankara's military duties required that he mostly work with low ranking personnel, most of them his peers, or younger and from similar poor backgrounds as him. They were, therefore, excluded from the military elite's ventures into the national economy which were often in alliance with French and other imperial

[12] Among France's colonies in West Africa, Burkina Faso was the poorest and therefore deemed of little interest to France. After independence, however, it was sometimes caught up in proxy battles. This war with Mali (which was reignited again in 1985 while Sankara was president) is an example. So too the tension that exists between Ivorians and the resident migrant labourers from Burkina Faso.

economic interests. Yet, these junior officers could also see how neo-colonial manoeuvres by France and other imperialist countries were undermining Burkina Faso's sovereignty through the military and other public institutions, bringing into question Burkina Faso's independence as a result. In essence, therefore, the military was divided between those in favour of nationalism and those in favour of French neo-colonial domination[13] (Sankara 2007). Hence, those within the army who were in favour nationalism began to align more with the poor and ordinary citizens and their aspirations to rid the country of neo-colonialism. Harsch (2013) states, for example, that Sankara and other junior army officers routinely "maintained secret contact with several Marxist-inspired groupings…." (Harsch 2013: 361; see also Wilkins 1989: 379). Describing Sankara as a 'Praetorian Marxist[14]', Botchway & Traore (2018) state, also, that it was because of Marxist influences on Sankara that "the [August 1983] revolution was highly critical of elite privilege(s) and sought to implement various forms of regulation over economic enterprises in an effort to implement policies that would see wealth and health extend to the impoverished masses, particularly those in rural areas" (Botchway & Traore 2018: 27-28).

1983 was a tumultuous year for Burkina Faso. In January, Sankara was appointed Prime Minister. This appointment was an effort by president Jean Baptiste Ouédraogo[15] to secure his own legitimacy and restore stability. Ouédraogo hoped Sankara's presence in government could help stave off a coup, especially one supported by junior army officers led by Sankara. Sure enough, with Sankara barely one month in government, there was indeed an attempted coup against the Ouédraogo-led *Conseil du salut du peuple* (Council of Popular Salvation – CSP). The coup attempt failed because it did not have the support of junior military officers[16], whose influence was rapidly growing.

[13] In the Political Orientation Speech, delivered two months after August 1983 coup, Sankara said: "the colonial army was replaced by a neo-colonial army with the same characteristics, the same functions, and the same role of safeguarding the interests of imperialism and its national allies" (Sankara 2007: 81).

[14] Although he displayed Marxist leanings in his thought, Sankara was not an avowed Marxist. In fact, he often criticised Marxist dogma while he was in power.

[15] Between 1980-1983, Burkina Faso experienced a series of military coups which resulted in rapid changes of government. In 1983 alone, two coups took place and one was attempted. Sankara came into power via the second coup of August 1983.

[16] See, for example, Luckham's (1994) analysis of the role junior military officers play in coups.

One of Sankara's earliest engagements as Prime Minister was to attend a NAM summit in New Delhi, India. It was at this summit that he met, for the very first time, Cuba's Fidel Castro, Grenada's Maurice Bishop and Mozambique's Samora Machel, among others. Also in 1983, Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi[17] visited Ouagadougou at Sankara's invitation. Writers and commentators such as Elliot P. Skinner (1988) have said this visit was organised without president Ouédraogo's knowledge. Sankara repeatedly defended the CSP's visits to Libya and North Korea saying at a mass rally, for example: "we will go wherever the interests of the Voltaic masses are to be found. We saw the achievements in Libya – hospitals, schools, houses, and all of it available for free…. If we could transform Upper Volta tomorrow the way Qaddafi has transformed Libya, would you be pleased, yes or no[18]?" (Sankara 2007: 60). "Yes!" masses shouted (*ibid*). Except, of course, that unlike Libya, Burkina Faso had virtually no natural resources which could be exploited to fund rapid social development at a similar scale.

Sankara also regularly criticised France's role in Africa, and in Burkina Faso in particular. For example, at a mass rally in Bobo-Dioulasso on 15 May 1983, he emphatically stated France had no business intervening in Burkina Faso's affairs. "Alarm bells sounded in Paris" (Harsch 2013: 361) and a day after the address, Guy Penne, African affairs advisor to French president, Francois Mitterrand, arrived in Ouagadougou, protesting Sankara's remarks. The following day, on 17 May, Colonel Somé Yoryan led a coup which saw Sankara and other military officials arrested. Blaise Compaoré managed to escape arrest, retreating to the Pô military base, where he was in command. Brittain (1985) describes this coup, instigated by France[19], as "one of the most audacious neo-colonial interventions in post-colonial African history" (Brittain 1985: 44). This development shows, as stated above, that within the military in Burkina Faso,

[17] Libya played a critical role in the August 1983 coup. It supplied arms and was responsible for training some of the militants who marched from the Pô military base to Ouagadougou to help free Sankara and usher him into power. A growing body of literature also shows that Libya was responsible for training some of the militants who took part in the coup against Sankara in October 1987 (Peterson 2018).

[18] Some literature, Peterson (2018), for example, suggests it was precisely because of Sankara's reluctance – if not refusal – to follow Gaddafi's 'Green Book' to the letter in executing the Burkina Faso revolution that resulted in Libya playing an active hand in the October 1987 assassination. Published in 1975, the 'Green Book' encapsulates Gaddafi's political philosophy, from Democracy to Socialism to Internationalism.

[19] Others, Martin (1985) for example, state that "France has militarily intervened about 20 times in various African states between 1963 and 1983, in blatant contradiction with the sacrosanct 'non-interference' principle, albeit usually justified on the grounds that the preservation of her interests in Africa – and of those who protect these - were at stake" (Martin 1985: 194).

there were divisions between those who favoured French neo-colonial domination and those in favour of nationalism[20] or self-rule at the least (Agyeman 1988; Luckham 1994). In fact, Sankara often repeated the claim that "Burkina Faso's independence was "merely a transformation of [French] domination and exploitation of our people" (Sankara 2007: 81).

Following Sankara's arrest, demonstrations broke out in Ouagadougou demanding his and others' release from jail. A few days later, the government, which was still led by Ouédraogo, partially yielded to these demands and placed Sankara under house arrest, only for him to be jailed again a few weeks later. In the succeeding months, and with Compaoré's organisation, Sankara's supporters within the military and others from left-leaning organisations and movements (trade unions, students' movements, women's movements etc.) went to the Pô military base and received accelerated military training in preparation for a planned counter-coup[21] (Luckham 1994). On the evening of 4 August, the eve of Upper Volta's 23rd independence anniversary, at least two-hundred and fifty (250) militants marched to Ouagadougou and overthrew Ouédraogo's government. The CSP was replaced by the *Conseil National de la Révolution* or National Council of the Revolution (CNR), which installed Sankara as president. In a brief radio broadcast, Sankara claimed the seizure of power was motivated by the need to "defend the interests of the Voltaic people and to achieve their deep aspirations for liberty, for genuine independence, and for economic and social progress[22]" (Sankara 2007: 67). Over the next two days, mass demonstrations in support of the coup broke out across the country.

Burkina Faso's reorientation

[20] Luckham (1994) suggests this disparity exists especially between senior (and therefore more privileged and economically-invested) officers and junior (less privileged and poorer) officers within military hierarchies. Elsewhere, Dolgopolov (1981) says of the junior officers in most African armies that "their ties with the bourgeois-land lord circles are generally weak and they are close to the people. They not only, therefore oppose imperialist and feudal oppression; they also under certain conditions and to certain extent, oppose capitalist relations, too" (cit. Beckman 1986: 54)

[21] Support for some of the activities at Pô came from Libya, with the blessing of Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi (Peterson 2018).

[22] Some commentators, (Agyeman 1988; Luckham 1994) for example, caution that all military coups claim to be acting in line with popular interests. These claims, they suggest, have to be tested against how power, once seized, is exercised.

What followed were reforms, some of which had already been promised months before while Sankara was Prime Minister. For example, at a March 1983 mass meeting in Ouagadougou, Sankara had said:

> the people have never had the power to establish a political democracy here. The army has always had the possibility of taking power, but it never wanted democracy. For the first time, we see an army that wants power, that wants democracy, and that genuinely wants to link up with the people…. That's why we believe that this army, which is taking control of the destiny of Upper Volta, is the people's army (Sankara 2007: 55).

Martin (1987) describes the August seizure of power as Sankara's "return to full power" (Martin 1987: 78). Sankara's own claim that "this army, which is taking control of the destiny of Upper Volta, is the people's army" (Sankara 2007: 55) has to be understood within the context of the participation of various social movements, particularly trade unions, students' and women's organisations, as opposed to Burkina Faso's bourgeoisie and other elites, local and foreign alike, in events leading up to the seizure of power. It was, in essence, an attempt at reconfiguring the power matrix from within the military apparatus and project it onto the system of governance within the state. This was imperative because, as observed by Issa Shivji (1982) for example:

> in a neo-colonial state, state power rests in the hands of a local class or classes which constitute the ruling class. This class or classes have their own class interests arising from the place they occupy in social production, which in the longer run, coincide with the interests of imperialism as a whole…. [Therefore] the various neo-colonial ruling classes exhibit different degrees of independence from particular imperialist powers, in line with the conjuncture of class alliances and struggle at particular times (Shivji 1982: 180).

Since the military in Burkina Faso was central to how state power was both acquired and exercised, especially in the control of the economy and politics, turning the military against neo-colonial interests was seen by Sankara as one of the key steps in ridding the country of bourgeois influences over the state (Campbell 2018; Sankara 2007). Harsch (2013) observes,

for example, that "unlike the country's previous military interventions[23], the August 1983 takeover was conducted with the direct collaboration of several leftist civilian groups, whose leaders also filled prominent government posts" (Harsch 2013: 361). Others, Brittain (1985), for example, have also made similar observations, stating that, "the first Sankara government included civilians from all significant Marxist groups[24]" (Brittain 1985: 45). Given the centrality of the military, and its tendency to co-opt rather than being all-inclusive, reorganisation of the army meant that:

> gone are the days when our national army conducted itself like a corps for foreign mercenaries in conquered territory. Those days are gone forever. Armed with political and ideological training, our soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and officers engaged in the revolutionary process will no longer be potential criminals, but will instead become conscious revolutionaries[25], at home among the people like a fish in water[26] (Sankara 2007: 101).

The metaphor that ends the statement (fish in water[27]) reflects Sankara's thought on the army as being an army that is not removed from society but one which understood its place as belonging to the barracks, only coming out during periods of war (see, for example, Luckham 1994: 53). This thinking is similar to Cabral's thought on military violence against colonialism and neo-colonialism: "we are armed militants, not militarists", meaning the "democratic aspirations of the people [can be] located in the people's army" (cit. Neocosmos 2017: 127).

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[23] Previous military interventions had been orchestrated by high-ranking military elites with the direct and indirect support of neo-colonial powers such as France (Harsch 2013; Martin 1987; Sankara 2007).

[24] These groups included, among others, the African Party for Independence (PAI) and the Patriotic League for Development (LIPAD), which had formed a coalition, the latter being predominantly a social movement and the former an organised political party endorsed by LIPAD.

[25] For a broader discussion on Sankara and the use of militarism to advance social change, please see the analysis by De-Valera N.Y.M Botchway and Moussa Traore (2018) in 'A Certain Amount of Madness: The Life, Politics and Legacies of Thomas Sankara' ed. Amber Murrey. Pluto Press.

[26] As observed by Decalo (1973), "a change in political style, a redistribution of political and economic power among the elites, and the expansion of military interests is more often than not the most significant outcome of army rule" Decalo (1973: 117). In Sankara's case, he was aware of the need to fundamentally reform the army if the vision for social and political change in Burkina Faso was to be realised. Four years in power were not enough to achieve this, sadly.

[27] The expression originates with Mao Zedong who maintained that the people's army should be among the people like a fish in water. The expression was extended to guerrillas of liberation armies in Africa during the 1960s.

In fact, responding to a question on the army's intervention in state political affairs, Sankara said: "no lasting coup can be perpetrated against the people. Consequently, the best way to avoid the army usurping power by and for itself[28] is to already have the Voltaic people sharing this power. That is our goal" (Sankara 2007: 71). Therefore, sharing power initially meant the inclusion of leaders of social movements and trade unions in key government positions (see, for example, Brittain 1985; Harsch 2013; Martin 1987). Leaders from these movements were seen as legitimate representatives of the people. After August 1984, however, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) became instrumental in the power-sharing objective. The CDRs were seen as allowing for more broader and direct control of the revolutionary trajectory as they allowed for popular grassroots participation in deciding what was to be done, unlike non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other formalised social movements. Eventually, the CDRs clashed with the social movements, trade unions and NGOs, all of which relied on representation rather than direct expression of popular will by the masses themselves[29].

A Burkina Faso revolution (1983-1987)?

Did the August 1983 seizure of power by Sankara result in a revolution? Or was it a revolution from the beginning? Sankara (2007) himself claims it was. Some scholars, (Luckham 1994) for example, recognise that there "are difficulties in delimiting the scope of inquiry [on revolutions, which may] be part of the reason why coups have proved resistant to explanation" (Luckham 1994: 28). There is general agreement, however, that revolutions can be assigned to the three categories: spontaneous, planned and negotiated (Beckman 1986; Decalo 1973; Kamrava 1999; Luckham 1994). Hence, if the August 1983 seizure of power in Burkina Faso by Sankara and his group was a revolution, then the event falls into the category of a planned revolution. Others, Kamrava (1999), for example, make additional distinctions under the category of planned revolutions, stating that there are "those that are headed and carried out by guerrillas and those that initially start out as military coups, generally referred to as 'revolutions

[28] In one of his public addresses in March 1983, Sankara stated: "the army has always had the possibility of taking power, but it never wanted democracy." Although there were no coups between 1966-1980, the role of the military in preventing mass-led actions that could threaten state power was significant, mainly because high-ranking military elites were also beneficiaries of the neo-colonial status-quo (Harsch 2013; Martin 1987; Sankara 2007).

[29] The CDRs are analysed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

from above'" (Kamrava 1999: 333). The Sankara-led coup would fall in the category of the latter.

To what extent, therefore, can the Sankara-led coup be classified as revolutionary? This half-thesis, takes the view that in Burkina Faso, the period 1983-1987 can be described as a revolutionary precisely because of the way in which the army, having seized power, proceeded to exercise it. This rationale follows Decalo's (1973) explanation that "the true motives of the officer corps may be better perceived through the analysis of their policies after the takeover" (Decalo 1973: 114). Others, Kamrava (1999), for example, have followed similar thinking, stating that "it is not always easy to distinguish exactly when a military coup is just a coup and when it constitutes the beginning of a revolution from above, although the manner and nature of the social and political changes initiated after the transfer of power are a good general set of guidelines" (Kamrava 1999: 334). Admittedly, such revolutions that brought social and political changes were very few in Africa, especially in the 1980s hence "only a small minority can be considered "structural," in that they…ushered in major political, economic or social transformation" (Luckham 1994: 33). Since independence, "military coups were Africa's main mechanism for the circulation of elites" (Luckham 1994: 26). But, as stated above, the Sankara-led coup in August 1983 ushered in several social, political and economic changes that attempted to turn Burkina Faso from being a neo-colonial state into a truly independent African state free from the clutches of imperialism. It was, therefore, revolutionary.

Sankara's relevance to contemporary African politics

Martin (1987) concludes, for example, that "Sankara typifies that new brand of post-World War II African military men who have not been associated with French colonial ventures and who are fiercely nationalist and particularly sensitive and sympathetic to the needs and aspirations of the African masses" (Martin 1987: 78). Sankara assumed power twenty-six (26) years after the sub-Saharan Africa independence milestone in Ghana (1957) and twenty-three (23) years after Burkina Faso's independence. His brief but effective moment in power (1983-1987) is inspiring the imagination of many people across Africa, especially young people in politics. He is remembered as a visionary and exceptional leader, whose selflessness exposes the contemporary characteristics of post-colonial Africa – corruption, violence, poverty, inequality and imperialism. It is apparent today that Sankara has been influential on current

political movements and parties on the continent, from Burkina Faso to South Africa. One of these political movements is the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South Africa. Such influence can clearly be seen in the EFF's apparel but it arguably extends to their ideology also.

It is, after all, against the neo-colonial condition that Sankara saw himself as fighting, recognising the people of Burkina Faso as revolutionaries (all eight million of them!) and therefore as people who could speak for themselves and make their own history without necessarily relying on the state for the realisation of their aspirations. Hence, where the people of Burkina Faso had been reduced to victims of their own colonial and neo-colonial history, not its agents, Sankara attempted to subvert this order by presenting a new way of thinking about and practicing politics in the postcolonial state (Decalo 1973; Luckham 1994; Sankara 2007). This new way of thinking addressed three issues previously confronted by nationalist thinkers in the context of colonialism and neo-colonialism: 1) What was the meaning of freedom in a postcolonial society? 2) What were to be the relations between the masses of the population and the state/party, and 3) how was internationalism to be conceived?

This half-thesis is an investigation of the extent to which Sankara's thought, and solutions to these questions, differed from his predecessors. To accomplish this, a brief but critical analysis of the writings of three of the most important theorists of African nationalism will be made with the aim of elucidating the differences and similarities concerning the three issues above. These three theorists are Amílcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon and Kwame Nkrumah. All three were radical theorists of African nationalism who, in various ways, can be said to have staked out the content of African nationalism. They addressed the fundamental issues outlined above to various extents and in various ways. These three thinkers will provide the context within which Sankara's thought will be located in succeeding chapters.

This half-thesis is made up of three (3) sections and is structured as follows: 'Section One' covers the Introduction and Literature Review (Chapters 1-4). Section Two is concerned with an analysis of Sankara's thought while he was in power (Chapters 5-6). Section Three (Chapters 7-8) outlines Sankara's relevance to contemporary youth movements in Africa, particularly the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South Africa. It also contains the concluding remarks.

Chapter 2: The thought of Freedom under Colonialism

Thinking Freedom

The prospect of independence in Africa raised significant hopes, dreams and aspirations among the colonised people about the changes that would occur as a result of colonialism ending. Such aspirations included the quest for freedom, meaning the desire to be left alone to build societies and institutions that would advance their social, political and economic well-being without being subordinate to the dictates of colonialism – to be makers of their own history. Albert Memmi (2006) states, for example, that "the end of colonisation should have brought freedom and prosperity. The colonised would give birth to the citizen, master of his political, economic and cultural destiny" (Memmi 2006: 3). Colonialism, however, was designed to oppress and repress those it dispossessed while maintaining the power and privileges of foreign oppressors. As a result, particularly in most of Sub-Saharan Africa, "Black people were denied civilisation, culture and history" (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1996: 11; see also Cabral 1972; Parry 2013; Sithole 2016). The import of this denial of 'civilisation, culture and history' was that the colonised could not lay any "legitimate claim to rights[30]" (Mamdani 1992: 2230) because they were "people without a history" (*ibid*). Hence, without rights, the colonised could be exploited and excluded from social progress – the making of history (Cabral 1972).

Therefore, the dominant discourse underlining this prospect was one of freedom – that an emancipated, free, just and equal society would replace the oppressive colonial regime and enable the political, social and economic progress of formerly colonised peoples. Thus, state sovereignty (independence) became the rallying call in the anti-colonial struggle (Gandhi 1998; Mbembe 1992; Memmi 1974; Memmi 2006; Neocosmos 2016; Shivji 2003). The major question, however, revolved around the relationship between independence and freedom. Were the two to be equated or were they different? If the latter, how was freedom to be attained? Memmi (1974) concludes that "revolt is the only way out of the colonial situation" (Memmi 1974: 171). That is why the coloniser made various attempts to prevent revolt by "continuous incapacitation of [national liberation movement] leaders and periodic destruction of those who,

[30] While the dominant discourse on 'human rights' only gained hegemonic status after 1945, following the end of World War II, colonialism predates this moment.

despite everything, manage to come forward; by corruption or police oppression, aborting all popular movements and causing their brutal and rapid destruction" (Memmi 1974: 171). He says, in fact, it is rather surprising that under the colonial situation, revolts are not as frequent and as violent (*ibid*). From the perspective of the coloniser, the end of colonialism was marked by the arrival of independence. However, if 'independence' was to be granted under the control of an 'assimilated', 'responsible' and ostensibly 'sensible' bourgeoisie who would be reluctant to completely break ties with their colonisers and think everything anew, it would be – colonisers thought – difficult to entirely dismantle colonialism altogether. It could, therefore, exist under slightly different conditions – neo-colonialism, to be specific – and independence would be reduced to either rhetoric or farce, or both (Fanon 1963; Shivji 2003).

Others, Mahmood Mamdani (1996), for example, have concluded that "the post-independence struggle tended toward deracialisation, not to decolonisation[31]" (Mamdani 1996: 149). Indeed, one of the major limitations of thinking freedom under colonialism was the tendency to substitute decolonisation with deracialisation without holistically interrogating imposed colonial prohibitions by raising particular questions on how the freedom thus won would be evidenced by the expression of 'national consciousness' (Fanon 1963).

Whose nation is it anyway?

Other limitations were embedded in the question of who – under the colonial condition – was the legitimate bearer of rights? And, if freedom was to be won by overthrowing the colonial state (exercising the right to self-determination), what form was the postcolonial state to take as the guarantor of these rights, whether individual, private property or national? Mamdani (1992) cautions that "notions received from Euro-American liberalism – that the bearer of the right to 'self-determination' is the nation, and that of 'human rights' is the citizen – are so restrictive that they have the unfortunate result of disenfranchising increasing number of groups and individuals under present conditions in Africa" (Mamdani 1992: 2229). To fight for freedom under colonialism is, primarily, to fight the unjust act of being collectively denied "civilisation, culture and history" (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1996: 11; see also Cabral 1979). Therefore, the collective production of civilisation, culture and history in the colonial aftermath

[31] This point will be further developed in Chapter 3, which discusses the statist, neo-colonial path taken by national liberation movements after independence.

cannot be a passive, individualistic act. It requires that those who gain freedom by achieving independence – the formerly oppressed – become makers of their own history and shapers of their own destinies as they decolonise. As Peter Hallward (2011) observes, for example, "decolonisation is precisely this, the conversion of an involuntary passivity into a possessed or assumed activity" (Hallward 2011: 217).

Fanon (1963) goes further and argues that if the attainment of freedom does not produce requisite consciousness for the building of the nation, then the freedom that comes with independence is worthless, and the sacrifices made in the struggle against colonialism are vain. Fanon's (1963) assertion, for example, that "the living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people; it is the coherent, enlightened action of men and women" (Fanon 1963: 165) implies the requirement, if not demand, of continuous action in the production of civilisation, culture and history – the nation. This is so precisely because these three are products of the "collective building up of a destiny" which action is "the assumption of responsibility on a historical scale (Fanon 1963: 165). 'Historical' because to be a free and independent nation is to be in control of your destiny as peoples become makers of history within the nation.

Thus, 'collective building up of a destiny' means there is – or ought to be – a common understanding of what path should be charted in building the nation after independence. It also means that the freedom gained, as partially evidenced by the arrival of independence, is to be treated not as an end in itself, but as the creation of conditions necessary for negating colonialism, completely doing away with its ideological apparatus by developing new concepts, generating and implementing new ideas and discovering new practices that make it possible for an emancipated, just and equal society to be created. The accompanying dictum during this moment , albeit a limited one, was this: "seek ye first the political kingdom and all shall be given unto thee[32]", as said by Kwame Nkrumah (1973). This is not to suggest that political independence is equal to a just and equal society. Rather, it is to emphasise that political independence – as the dominant thinking during this period suggested – should necessarily point towards the state-led process of building a just and equal society. Of course,

[32] 'Economic Freedom' was to follow upon 'Political Freedom' so to speak, the latter having been equated with bourgeois influence on the state, made possible by elites in the nationalist party and those associated with them, for example, merchants of international finance capital who often acted in the interests of their countries.

this was a contradiction in itself because the postcolonial state went on to reproduce the same inequalities and injustices inherited from the colonial state. As will be shown in Chapter 4, the logic of first seeking the 'political kingdom' primarily required that the national liberation movement that acquired state power continue being nothing less than a liberation movement in power and confront neo-colonialism[33] so as to be an effective counterforce to bourgeois interests and imperial influences over the state (Cabral 1979).

As such, the exercise of freedom cannot be passive, but should be treated as the condition which enables the 'living expression of the nation', the coming into being of a new society. For Fanon (1963), therefore, the individual who elects to be passive – the 'onlooker' – betrays this historical demand for collective nation-building and in so doing, he or she invalidates the anti-colonial struggle. Thus, in the process of nation-building, "every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor" (Fanon 1963: 161). In constructing a nation that is the full expression of dreams, hopes and aspirations expressed during the anti-colonial struggle, ideas (ideology) are given shape, content and form by the physical and mental labour (practice) that is deployed to meet the construction needs of the nation. Fanon's independent nation, therefore, is a nation that is birthed through "the muscles and the brains of the citizens" (Fanon 1963: 162). Hence, initiatives that do not contribute to the development and advancement of citizens' awareness and national consciousness (political and cultural education) are better ignored, if not rejected altogether because they neither develop nor reinforce the importance of independence and necessity of freedom.

Here, Fanon means that every action taken in an effort to build the nation must be deliberate. Such actions must result in people becoming more aware and conscious of their duty towards the nation. In so doing, the people are able to continuously reaffirm their independence and protect their freedom. Thus, if popular activities in the nation do not inspire the affirmation of freedom, then it is pointless at best, Fanon (1963) argues, to have waged the anti-colonial struggle; or it may simply be wasteful, at worst, for the state to dispense finances, time and other resources in constructing infrastructure that does not enhance national consciousness. To buttress this point, Fanon (1963) gives an example of the construction of a bridge. He says, "if

[33] What we see eventually, however, are national liberation movements that follow a sequence from movement to nation to party and to state and are thus unable to confront the problem of neo-colonialism because the new national bourgeoisie in power aligns its political and economic interests with those of former colonisers, a betrayal of popular aspirations (Neocosmos 2016; Shivji 2003).

the building of a bridge does not enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then that bridge ought to not to be built and the citizens can go on swimming across the river or going by boat" (Fanon 1963: 162). While this point might seem 'harsh' (Neocosmos 2016), manipulative or even against the free choice of citizens (Memmi 1974), the point is that the participation of masses in the construction of the nation should not only reinforce ownership, national consciousness and belonging; it must also reveal the level of effort required to completely dismantle colonialism and its ideological apparatus so that everything can be thought and started anew (Fanon 1963).

Chapter 5 will show, for example, how Sankara appeared to follow similar thinking to Fanon's regarding the building of the nation. In a 1983 public address, Sankara spoke about self-reliance in constructing the country's physical infrastructure. He said:

> you are going to build in order to prove that you're capable of transforming your existence and transforming the concrete conditions in which you live. You don't need us to go looking for foreign financial backers, you only need us to give the people their freedom and their rights[34] (Sankara 2007: 62-63).

When the need later emerged, for example, to build a railway line that linked southern and northern parts of Burkina Faso in order to facilitate the movement of people and goods, multilateral donors and international finance institutions described the programme as unfeasible. But, determined to pursue the railway construction, the government succeeded in mobilising the masses to build the railway line with their bare hands, literally, in what came to be famously known as the 'Battle of the Railroad' (*La Bataille du Rail*). "Through this initiative," Martin (1987) writes, "the revolutionary regime meant to dramatically emphasize the fact that it will not be dictated to, even by such powerful international financial institutions as the IMF and the World Bank, and that it is intent upon keeping firm control over its national strategy of development" (Martin 1987: 83; see also Harsch 2013: 365). This was one of Sankara's earliest actions against the threat of neo-colonialism, posed by international finance institutions such as the IMF and World Bank. In other speeches, he used the building metaphor,

[34] Admittedly, this formulation of 'giving' people their rights is problematic. Rights are acquired through struggle as has been argued. However, the interpretation here is that in Burkina Faso's context, which was in this revolutionary moment twenty-three years after independence, rights had been systematically eroded because of statist politics, which were made worse by the involvement of the military in politics since 1966. Thus, Sankara was alluding to a negation of the prevailing practice at the time he came into power.

referring to Burkina Faso as "one vast construction site" (Sankara 2007: 108; see also Sankara 2007: 326). In so doing, Sankara invoked the image of a nation coming into being.

The limitations of state-driven development

One of the major limitations in Fanon's (1963) thought on nation-building is the type of state that emerged after independence. It was a state that intervened on behalf of the masses and led the process of nation-building (development). One of the distinguishing characteristics of this state was its tendency to conflate the ruling political party with the state and vice versa. Hence, if we are to unpack Nkrumah's dictum – "seek ye first the political kingdom and all shall be given unto thee," we see a logic that enmeshed the party and the state and hid any differences (Nkrumah 1973). Justification for this conflation was advanced through the discourse on unity, the need to keep the nation united as it was being built. This was the case, for example, in Nkrumah's Ghana and Julius Nyerere's Tanzania. But, as the state substituted itself for popular agency, it relied on political slogans, supplemented by coercive instruments (military, militia, police etc.) to, at best, encourage citizens to participate in nation-building or, at worst, maintain a semblance of national participation while actively demobilising popular movements, especially autonomous cooperatives (Tanzania), trade unions and vibrant student movements (Burkina Faso), for example (Amin 2014; Mazrui 1982).

The ruling party often perceived these movements as threats to its power because it did not control them (Mamdani *et. al* 1988). As such, there were repeated attempts to either co-opt, absorb or delegitimise such popular movements (trade unions, teachers' unions, student movements, women's cooperatives etc.) and collapse them into the state. Mamdani, Mkandawire and Wamba-dia-Wamba (1988) state, for example, that "the suppression of democratic demands and of autonomous and popular movements in the name of 'development' was a concern…" (Mamdani *et. al* 1988: 974). 'A concern' because once the postcolonial state appropriated popular agency, it narrowed the meaning and exercise of freedom to only those activities that did not threaten the ruling party's hold on state power (Agyeman 1988; Neocosmos 2016; Shivji 2003). As a result, political elites and their allies (imperial interests) proved difficult to challenge while they were in power.

Identity, Citizenship and pan-Africanism

The other limitation within the thought of freedom under colonialism arose from questions on citizenship and belonging in the postcolonial state. Whose agency would be relied upon in building the new nation? Significantly, who belonged to the new nation and who did not? Although these questions were not raised, broadly, from the perspective of rights, growing influence of the liberal Euro-American, post-World War II discourse on rights in colonies, however, had implications on the extent to which rights, whose basis is freedom, could be enjoyed in the new nation. Here, Mamdani's (1984) discussion of what he describes as the 'Nationality Question' is instructive. Identifying two contradictory movements: (i) the movement of nationalities; and (ii) the national movement, he articulates how culture, tradition, tribalism and ethnicity all have a "changing historical and class character", which makes it necessary "to analyse over time the interests and stance of each class *vis-a-vis* the nationality question" (Mamdani 1984: 1046). Hence, what are generally understood in Africa as tribes are, in fact, *nationalities* and as these nationalities grow, there is also progress in the rise of classes and state agency. Thus, "the distinguishing political characteristics of a nationality was the rise of the state" (*ibid*). The postcolonial state, in particular, became the stage on which these *nationalities* contested each other for dominance, with the prevailing class interests assuming state power with the possibility of making their ideas the ruling ideas while excluding others (Mamdani 1984; Mazrui 1982).

Mamdani (1992) also argues that the assumption of rights as a citizens' prerogative "was swallowed – hook, line and sinker – by African nationalists on the morrow of independence" (Mamdani 1992: 2231). This was done without considering that "the equation of human rights with citizen rights is not a conclusion that can be easily drawn from a consideration of African social reality, [for] much of Africa is a land of migrant labour" (*ibid*). Labour migration is the result of colonialism's demand for labour in areas where there was economic activity, for example, agricultural (farms) and extractive (mines) sectors. Because of the liberal thinking on rights after independence, however, we see African migrant labourers (Burkinabès in Ivory Coast, Malawians in Zimbabwe, Basotho in South Africa, for example) being threatened with deportation or xenophobia – or both – because they are not recognised as fully belonging, and therefore worthy of rights. Mamdani (1992) further states that "since 'human rights' in liberal theory flow from membership of a political community ('citizenship') and not of a labouring community ('residence'), this single fact has been sufficient to strip millions of migrant labourers of their 'human rights' legally" (Mamdani 1992: 2231-2232; see also Wamba-dia-

Wamba 1996). Thus, although the agency of the migrant labourer was relied upon in the anti-colonial struggle as part of the *national movement*, when it came to the building of the new nation after independence, *nationality* (tribal and ethnic difference) was mobilised to not only divide those who may have fought colonialism on the same side but, significantly, to exclude those who did not fit specific criteria, categories and hierarchies imposed by ruling elites (Neocosmos 2016). It is, perhaps, ironic that most postcolonial states, Nyerere's Tanzania being a notable exception, quickly turned to emphasising secondary differences after independence as opposed to pursuing non-identitarian politics that would have recognised all people who would have fought in the anti-colonial struggle as fully belonging to the independent nation. There were some notable exceptions, however.

For Cabral, as an example, anyone who was fighting for the independence of Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau belonged, fully. As he said,

> …in Guiné and Cape Verde today the people…mean for us those who want to chase the Portuguese colonialists out of our land. They are the people, the rest are not of our land even if they were born here. They are not the people of our land; they are the population but not the people. This is what defines the people today (cit. Neocosmos 2016: 127).

Still, in most postcolonial states, questions regarding tribal or ethnic belonging were raised despite one of the dominant thoughts of freedom under colonialism – as Cabral proves – being the idea of the anti-colonial struggle transcending identity and territorial boundaries – pan-Africanism (Fanon 1963; Neocosmos 2016; Sankara 2007; Shivji 2003; Wamba-dia-Wamba 1996). So, "national liberation could only be non-identitarian and pan-African in its vision, and this pan-Africanism could only be popularly based[35]…" (Neocosmos 2016: 117). Hence, to tie the thought of freedom under colonialism to colonial boundaries was to promote division and difference among the colonised. This non-identitarian and pan-African national liberation practice, as illustrated by Neocosmos (2016), was "a form of global consciousness – the realisation that no Black person will be free until all Black people are free…" (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1996: 10; see also Shivji 2003: 6). The implied meaning here was that the

[35] Neocosmos' (2016) conclusion here is predominantly drawn from Fanon's thought. The opposite, as has been stated, was true for most African countries.

independence of one colony was not complete until every other colony became independent (Nkrumah 1973). Within this thought, we see how connected nationalism was to pan-Africanism. In fact, nationalism arose from pan-Africanism, not vice-versa (Shivji 2003).

One of the foremost thinkers and architects of pan-Africanism, George Padmore (1956) recalls that pan-Africanism was conceived "as a dynamic political philosophy and guide to action for Africans in Africa who were laying the foundations of national liberation organisations….[it] was intended as a stimulant to anti-colonialism (Padmore 1956: 105). Thus, pan-Africanism was relied upon in crafting the programmes and strategies of the national liberation movements. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the most prominent proponent of pan-Africanism in power, after independence, was Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, who had played a key role at the 1945 Fifth Pan-African Congress, organised by Padmore, himself building on previous work by W.E.B du Bois. In independent Ghana, for example, Nkrumah granted all Africans, including those in the diaspora, Ghanaian citizenship. Du Bois even renounced his USA citizenship and assumed Ghanaian citizenship. Nkrumah also sought to unite independent African states, Guinea (under Sekout Touré) and the Congo (under Lumumba) by signing cooperation agreements which were anticipated to pave the way for building a unitary African state[36] (Nkrumah 1973). We also saw Sankara, once in power, leading a pan-African solidarity programme that was not only focused on the African continent but also extended to other countries – Grenada, Nicaragua, Palestine, and USA, for example.

[36] The idea of a unitary African state was problematic in how it was conceived. There were to be hierarchies and Nkrumah appears to have wanted to be the Head of this state, effectively reproducing the identitarian nature of the state despite its pan-Africanist outlook.

Chapter 3: The nationalist party, popular freedom and bourgeois interest in the state

As the social and political forces that claimed to be representing collective aspirations for freedom of subjugated people in colonised Africa, national liberation movements thought the process of liberation in different ways, depending on each country's circumstances. Within the thinking of national liberation, two distinct issues stood out. One was the idea of freedom, and unlike what has been discussed in Chapter 2, after independence the discussion revolved around the relationship between popular movements and state power. What was to be the relationship between popular movements and the nationalist political party that was backed by mass support in its acquisition of state power? In what ways was this relationship conceived, if at all? Further, these questions can be expanded to ask: how was the relationship between the people and the state conceived by the nationalist political party after the attainment of independence? Was it uniformly the case, as Fanon maintained, that the party "hastens to send the people back to their caves" after independence? (Fanon 1963: 147).

These are questions that gripped what Neocosmos (2016) has described as the National Liberation Struggle (NLS) mode of politics in Africa. He suggests that this mode covers the period 1945 (the year in which the Fifth Pan-African Congress took place in Britain) to 1975, two years after Cabral's assassination. The year 1945 is also the year in which World War II ended. Since some European countries were invested in the colonial enterprise, the post-war period had notable effects on the colonies. Among these was the introduction of reforms in several colonies, some of which led to several countries attaining independence. It was also a period during which neo-colonialism took root. This half-thesis is concerned with the thought of three nationalist thinkers who emerged during this period. Here I will be briefly concerned with the context within which their thoughts on national liberation movements and the nationalist political party were generated and expressed. As already noted these are Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral.

Kwame Nkrumah

During a brief stint in Britain, Nkrumah played a key role in the organisation of the Fifth Pan-African Congress[37]. "By 1945," Padmore (1956) writes, "interest in the future status of

[37] As has already been mentioned in Chapter 2, the Fifth Pan-African Congress was largely organised by George Padmore, who was inspired by the previous efforts of W.E.B Du Bois who had been the leading force behind the first four of these pan-African gatherings.

Africans and peoples of African descent was sufficiently widespread to bring together for the first-time representatives of the newly-formed colonial trade union and labour movements and the emerging nationalist forces in the African territories" (Padmore 1956: 148-149). Discussions at this Congress reinforced, it appears, Nkrumah's own aspirations for independence in Ghana. Time spent with Padmore, who had been associated with the Communist Party (Russia), may also help explain why Nkrumah was sought by the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), a nascent movement, to return to his homeland and lead its political activities in the anti-colonial struggle[38].

While in Ghana, Nkrumah was in and out of prison for advocating what he termed 'Positive Action' – "civil disobedience, non-cooperation, boycotts, and strikes designed to disrupt the country without resort to violence" (Birmingham 1998: 34). Padmore (1956) traces Nkrumah's approach to the fifth Pan-African Congress, recounting: "a programme of *Positive Action,* based on the Ghandist technique[39] of non-violent action was endorsed by the Fifth Pan-African Congress in 1945, and first applied in the Gold Coast[40] in 1950 by Kwame Nkrumah" (Padmore 1956: 151). Chapters to follow will, however, show how Nkrumah eventually acknowledged the role of violence in the anti-colonial struggle.[41]

Ghana, led by Nkrumah, attained independence on 6 March 1957, setting in motion rapid political developments across Africa that saw many more colonies attaining independence. In power, Nkrumah faced threats to unseat him from opposition political parties, and there were several attempts on his life (Biney 2008). These threats, contrasted against his vision of a unitary state, appear to have necessitated the introduction of the one-party state. He managed to achieve this by restricting the operating space for opposition parties and other movements,

[38] Part of the UGCC's invitation may itself have been motivated also by favourable reports of Nkrumah's other political activities, executed under the banner of the West African National Secretariat, an initiative set up by Nkrumah after the Manchester gathering in 1945 with the goal of creating a unitary socialist state in West Africa (Shepperson & Drake, 2008).

[39] The 'Ghandist technique' had gained currency following India's independence in 1947, victory of which was partially attributed to Ghandi's non-violent methods in the anti-colonial struggle.

[40] Under colonialism, Ghana was known as Gold Coast.

[41] The case for violence in the anti-colonial struggle, prominently advanced by Frantz Fanon, including at a 1958 Accra conference organised by Nkrumah, insists that that the non-violent approach could not have been possibly adopted in all colonial contexts, certainly not Algeria, for example. Nkrumah accepted this argument and thereon openly endorsed resort to violence within certain colonial contexts.

trade unions, student bodies and women's cooperatives, for example. These movements were perceived as threats to state power because they were independent of both party and state control. Having achieved the 'political kingdom[42]' it became necessary for Nkrumah, it seems, to protect state power by ensuring that only one dominant party, a vanguard, was responsible for delivering social and economic development to the citizenry.

Frantz Fanon

Chapter 2 has shown how Fanon thought both individual and collective agency in nation-building – the nation is born through the "muscles and brains of citizens" (Fanon 1963: 162). In other words, national consciousness is gained and reinforced through the actions individuals and masses undertake, collectively, in constructing a nation without colonialism (Fanon 1964: 103). The nationalist party plays a significant role in mobilising individuals and the masses towards this mission (Fanon 1963). However, the nationalist party must be a party whose strength is drawn from the "combined efforts of the masses [who are] led by…intellectuals who are [themselves] highly conscious and armed with revolutionary principles" (Fanon 1963: 140). For Fanon, this minimum requirement is important because after independence, the nationalist party may sink into "an extraordinary lethargy" (Fanon 1963: 137). Thus, he warns that if the party is not led by "highly conscious" individuals (*ibid*), it will "make itself into a screen between the masses and the leaders" (Fanon 1963: 137). Here, Fanon means if the nationalist party in power does not guard against bourgeois capture by resisting and betraying the duty marked for it (committing class suicide in Cabral's terms),

> …the party, a true instrument of power in the hands of the bourgeoisie…ensures that the people are hemmed in and immobilised. The party helps the government hold the people down. It becomes more and more clearly anti-democratic, an implement of coercion. The party is objectively, sometimes subjectively, the accomplice of merchant bourgeoisie (Fanon 1963: 138).

[42] Chapter 2 has discussed the import of Nkrumah's famous dictum – "seek ye first the political dictum and all things will be added unto thee", which was his guiding political philosophy that state sovereignty was the basis for achieving social and economic development in the postcolonial state.

While Fanon is unable to think of popular emancipation beyond the party, which reflects the dominant thinking of his time, he is also aware of the limitations of a nationalist party– that it may turn itself towards bourgeois interests, not those of the masses. This turn occurs partly as the consequence of popular movements such as trade unions, students' movements and women's organisations being systematically depoliticised, either as a way of subduing revolt against colonialism (Memmi 1974), or as they collapse into the nationalist party ahead of independence (Neocosmos 2016; Shivji 2003). As will be shown see in Chapter 5, in Burkina Faso under Sankara, there was reluctance to create a political party after the seizure of power in 1983[43]. Instead, Sankara encouraged the creation of organic movements that would mobilise the masses in defence of revolutionary change. That is how, for example, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) and the Union of Burkinabè Women (UFB) were set up as 'semi-autonomous[44]' popular movements, although there were some criticisms, which will be analysed in the same chapter.

Amílcar Cabral

Amílcar Cabral is one of the foremost thinkers on national liberation in Africa. A four-year stint in post-war Portugal[45] revealed a world in which he encountered various writings, including those from the Negritude movement, thanks to regular interaction with kindred spirits from other Portuguese colonies in Africa, notably Angola and Mozambique. Consequently, a political plan for "struggle against the Portuguese" (Cabral 1979: xxv) was hatched. Reflecting on these encounters, Cabral (1969) says:

> I remember how some of us, still students, got together in Lisbon, influenced by the currents which were shaking the world, and began to discuss one day what today could be called the re-Africanisation of our minds…. All of us, in Lisbon, some permanently others temporarily began this march, this already long march towards the liberation of our peoples (Cabral 1969: 62).

[43] Some observations, Kamrava (1999) for example, agree that "for [military revolutionaries], party organization is only of secondary importance, even after power has been captured" (Kamrava 1999: 338).

[44] Although these movements operated freely, they still derived their power from the CNR, thus not totally independent.

[45] Portugal had the prominent colonies of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique, among others.

Arguably, Cabral's important intervention is on the role of culture in the national liberation struggle. He says, "any attempt to clarify the true role of culture in the development of an independence movement can contribute to the people's struggle against imperialist domination" (Cabral 1972: 40). Here, Cabral is concerned about the resilience of culture in resisting colonialism. He says:

> people are only able to create and develop the liberation movement because they keep their culture alive despite continual organised repression of their cultural life; continuing to resist culturally even when their political and military resistance is destroyed (Cabral 1972: 40-41).

As the anti-colonial struggle enters its most decisive stages, the indigenous petty bourgeoisie discovers it can only win the liberation struggle by 'returning to the source' and completely identify with the masses who rely on culture to resist colonialism. But Cabral (1972) cautions against this 'return to the source' being a disingenuous and opportunistic manoeuvre by the indigenous petty bourgeoisie. Cabral's caution is proved by how even culture itself becomes contested after independence, deployed to systematically exclude others whilst concentrating social, economic and political benefits only to selected interests. Thus, after independence, opportunism is seen in how the indigenous petty bourgeoisie from the nationalist party renege on the promises made during the anti-colonial struggle. They start pursuing narrow class interests that subsume the postcolonial state to neo-colonial interests, which results in the exclusion of the masses from benefiting from independence[46] (Amin 2014; Decalo 1973; Schraeder 1994).

Bourgeois interest in the state

In the hands of the bourgeoisie, therefore, the postcolonial economy, relies on the same colonial method of reproducing inequality and injustice. As Fanon (1963) illustrates, "in the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich

[46] For example, Decalo (1973) cites Ruth First (1970) and says: "the new post-independence elites are only distinguished by 'their inability to conceptualize the promise of independence other than in terms of their own immediate interest'" (Decalo 1973: 126).

because you are white and you are white because you are rich" (Fanon 1963: 31). In the postcolonial state, the same logic follows, only that the bourgeoisie acquire wealth because they are part of a bureaucratic and comprador elite that directly benefits from managing an untransformed economy in the interest of former colonisers, international finance networks and multinational corporations while systemically excluding the masses (Amin 2014; Decalo 1973; Neocosmos 2016). Elsewhere, Memmi (1974) argues that colonisation was all about political and economic exploitation, all of which continued after independence. Others, Shivji (2011) for example, say "colonialism was anything but democratic. It was a despotic state meant to control, subjugate and dehumanize the colonised so as to facilitate the exploitation of the natural and human resources of the colonies" (Shivji 2011: 5). To fight colonialism is, as Cabral (1969) says, to "free the process of development of the national productive forces" (Cabral 1969: 83). However, colonial patterns of managing the economy in the interest of a few elites were perpetuated in most countries after independence (Decalo 1973; Schraeder 1994). Hence, as neo-colonialism became entrenched, tribal and ethnic differences were also amplified to further marginalise and exclude undesired groups from the process of nation-building (development) and more significantly, to prevent them from accessing the socio-economic and political benefits of independence (Amin 2014; Charney 1987; Schraeder 1994).

This happened because once in power, the nationalist party treated the question of freedom as political, not necessarily social. Such contradictions, therefore, affirmed statist forms of politics in the postcolonial state. The net effect was that the emancipatory aspirations of other groups were ignored altogether in nation-building. As Neocosmos (2016) points out, "it was through the party that freedom was to be actualised both in the form of political independence and in the form of socio-economic development, which was to provide the much-needed economic independence from the West to the benefit of all in the nation" (Neocosmos 2016: 120). Yet, as Shivji (2003) observes, "the National Question [remained] unresolved. Nation-building [turned] into state-building. Nation [was] substituted by party and party by leader, the father of the nation" (Shivji 2003: 8; see also Amin 2014: 33). This logic, thus, completed the state's turn towards bourgeois and specific ethnic interests, much to the betrayal of popular independence aspirations for freedom, social and economic advancement (Charney 1987; Mazrui 1982).

Chapter 4: The nationalist party and neo-colonialism

Self-invention after Independence

"The colonial aftermath," writes Leela Gandhi (1998), "is marked by a range of ambivalent cultural moods and formations which accompany periods of transition and translation. It is, in the first place, a celebrated moment of arrival – charged with the rhetoric of independence and the creative euphoria of self-invention" (Gandhi 1998: 5). It is the moment of shaping the independent nation's identity. Memmi (1974) cautions, however, that "the necessity of self-renewal is as obvious as the ambiguity involved. While the colonised's revolt is a clear attitude in itself, its contents may be muddled; for it is the result of an unclear situation – the colonial situation" (Memmi 1974: 180). An 'unclear situation' yes, but one that cannot prevent the process self-invention nonetheless. That is why, for example, Fanon (1964) states that "the Algerian combatant is not only up in arms against torturing parachutists. Most of the time, he has to face problems of building, or organising, of inventing the new society that must come into being" (Fanon 1964: 103).

After independence, complexities of relying on a largely untransformed state to meet popular aspirations revealed the limitations of how freedom under colonialism was thought (Neocosmos 2016). Three key factors can be attributed to this failure: the overall configuration of the postcolonial state, the limitations of single-party politics and the political question concerning the economy (Memmi 2006; Neocosmos 2016; and Shivji 2003). It is through the latter question, for instance, that we are able to critique the neo-colonial turn taken by the nationalist party in power. On the ambivalence with regards to the management of the economy after independence, Memmi (2006) argues "this could have been anticipated. Whenever a leader of the anti-colonial struggle was asked for details about his social programme, he would respond vaguely, 'The time is not right, we'll know better after liberation'" (Memmi 2006: 4). This was disingenuous because after independence, the nationalist party in power proved clueless when it came to running the economy (Amin 2014; Martin 1985). In fact, Fanon (1963) concludes that:

> the objective of nationalist parties as from a certain given period is, we have seen, strictly national. They mobilise the people with slogans of independence, and for the

> rest leave it to future events. When such parties are questioned on the economic programme of the state they are clamouring for, or on the nature of the regime which they propose to install, they are incapable of replying, because, precisely, they are completely ignorant of the economy of their own country[47] (Fanon 1963: 121).

Yet, the 'creative euphoria of self-invention' (Gandhi 1998) must necessarily enable the creation of a new society. This did not happen because colonialism never quite relinquished its hold after independence was attained; the nationalist party in power allowed neo-colonialism – political and economic domination – to manifest. As mentioned in previous chapters, the colonial reforms introduced from 1945 through mid-1960s allowed the colonial state to continuously reinvent itself and adapt to changes taking place as the anti-colonial struggle gained momentum. In fact, Fanon (1963) says these reforms arose from the 'veritable panic' of colonialist governments, and their purpose was to "capture the vanguard, to turn the movement of liberation towards the right and to disarm the people" (Fanon 1963: 55). Elsewhere, Fanon (1964) writes about how the FLN in Algeria, for example, refused to accept such colonial-era reforms. He says:

> this refusal of progressive solutions, this contempt for the 'stages' that break the revolutionary torrent and cause the people to unlearn the unshakeable will to take everything into their hands at once in order that everything may change, constitutes the fundamental characteristic of the struggle of the Algerian people (Fanon 1964: 103).

Still, if the 'revolutionary torrent' is not broken and the march towards independence occurs, "the nationalist project of the decolonised seems to be exhausted before it really begun, primarily because those nations suffer from a historical handicap – they have been born too late" (Memmi 2006: 55). On this point, Memmi (2006) outlines several reasons for his observation – neo-colonialism, 'persistent lethargy of the people' (*ibid*), and ambiguity on the idea of national territory. All these reasons, he says, force those who inherit the colonial state at independence to "acknowledge that [their] nation is too fragile to avoid being, in one way or

[47] Fanon (1964) also states: "true liberation is not that pseudo-independence in which ministers having a limited responsibility hobnob with an economy dominated by the colonial pact" (Fanon 1964: 105). Fanon insists this because it is quite clear to him, for example, that "the national economy of the period of independence is not set on a new footing" (Fanon 1963: 121).

another, a satellite, and that independence, obtained with such difficulty, remains threatened" (Memmi 2006: 56; see also, Agyeman 1988: 404; Shivji 2003).

In Burkina Faso for example, the military coup that brought young military officers led by Sankara into power in August 1983, was rooted in the analysis of the prevailing conditions in the country's twenty-three years of neo-colonialism since gaining independence in 1960. This analysis took account of how the country's independence had been granted, not as a result of popular organisation and resistance, although sporadic elements of this had existed in various forms – strikes, protests, civil disobedience etc. Said Sankara:

> in 1960, French colonialism – hounded on all sides, defeated at Dien Bien Phu[48], and grappling with tremendous difficulties in Algeria[49] – drew lessons of those defeats and was compelled to grant our country its national sovereignty and territorial integrity…. From the popular masses' view, it was a democratic reform, whereas from imperialism's point of view, it was merely a transformation of the forms of its domination and exploitation of our people (Sankara 2007: 81).

The 'tremendous difficulties in Algeria' Sankara talks about have already been explained by Fanon (1963) as the fact that unlike the case of other French-dominated territories, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast, for example, "at no moment has the FLN appealed to the generosity, to the magnanimity, to the good-nature of the coloniser" (Fanon 1963: 100). Hence, Sankara's conclusion that "Burkina Faso's independence was "merely a transformation of [French] domination and exploitation of our people" (Sankara 2007: 81) in comparison to Algeria's anti-colonial struggle. This conclusion is not without foundation, given that Sankara appeared at a time when Burkina Faso society was reeling from neo-colonialism, having been deprived of emancipatory content at independence.

Over-celebrating an underachieving Africa

[48] The Dien Bien Phu event is particularly significant because of how it showed that French imperialism could be defeated via organized popular mass action.

[49] Throughout this half-thesis, Algeria's anti-colonial struggle is referenced through the analysis' of Frantz Fanon's thought.

Wamba-dia-Wamba (1996) has stated that at the time of its occurrence, Africa's political independence was over-celebrated when it was, in fact, a 'limited victory' that "reproduced, with minor changes, the colonial partition of Africa and the imperial restricting of her economy" (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1996: 12). Memmi (1974) notes that "in the midst of revolt, the colonised continues to think, feel, love and live against and therefore in relation to the coloniser and colonisation" (Memmi 1974: 183). Thus, the attempt at decolonisation had its own limitations even before the moment of independence arrived. Hence, it is not surprising that decolonisation stalled after independence, revealing "a combination of the operations of coloniality of power and ineptitude of African leaders [that] help to explain [the] failures of decolonisation" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012: 72). 'Ineptitude' here must be understood as limitation, which was largely influenced by the competing ethnic, tribal and class interests that emerged before, but were amplified after independence (Mamdani 1984). Yet, as others have argued…

> …the struggle for independence was a struggle for an oppressed people to be in control of their entire [destiny], to be makers of their own history. But something went wrong at the raising of the flag. We Africanised and nationalised the colonial game; we normalised the abnormalities of the colonial system and called it national and African (wa Thiong'o 2013).

Within the national liberation movement, there were indeed vested ethnic, tribal and class interests that relied on 'normalising colonial abnormalities' – unfettered access to state resources for personal benefit, elevated and privileged social status based on ethnicity and class dominance – for purposes of social, economic and political control (Cabral 1972; Ekeh 1975; Mazrui 1982; Schraeder 1994). State power was, thus, acquired "in the name of narrow nationalism" (Fanon 1963: 131) as opposed to the broad national interest of completely doing away with colonialism and its entire apparatus.

Class contradictions in the postcolonial state

Cabral (1972) distinguishes three groups from among the classes represented in the national liberation movement as follows:

> a minority which clings to the dominant colonialist class and openly opposes the [national liberation] movement to protect its social position, a majority who are hesitant and indecisive and another minority who share in the building and leadership of the liberation movement. But the latter group, which plays a decisive role in the development of the pre-independence movement does not truly identify with the masses of the people, with their culture and hopes, except through struggle… (Cabral 1972: 43).

The latter description is directed at the petty-bourgeoisie, which class he also says is "indispensable to the system of colonial exploitation" (Cabral 1972: 42). Here, he means that this class acts as a guarantor of colonialism because it draws some benefits from the colonial enterprise, for example, administrative jobs and access to certain opportunities that may bring personal advancement. As long as the class exists, therefore, colonialism is likely to progress, and even advance its architecture by way constant reinvention as we see happening in the postcolonial state. Here, we see the petty-bourgeoisie wielding significant influence, which allows it to access state power and therefore control the management of state bureaucracy in the interest of local and foreign bourgeoisie. Fanon (1963) describes the same class as a "little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster" which, because of these characteristics, "threatens to slow down the total, harmonious development of the nation" once independence is won (Fanon 1963: 41). He goes even further and states that this class "must simply be stoutly opposed because, literally, it is good for nothing" (*ibid*; see also, Abane 2011).

Yet, to heed Fanon's call and oppose this 'good for nothing' class is to ignore a most significant fact that this is a class that "stands midway between the masses and the local representatives of the foreign ruling class" (Cabral 1972: 42). Others, Yash Tandon (1982) and A.M Babu (1982), for example, argue that it is precisely because of the interests of the bourgeoisie that the postcolonial state lends itself to neo-colonialism, whose most distinguishing feature is imperialism. Hence, if the argument holds that the postcolonial state is untransformed (Neocosmos 2016), then it is also true that the economy in this state is untransformed because it continues to serve local and foreign bourgeoisie interests. It can, therefore, be concluded that persistent "[neo-colonialism] is a direct offspring of the dominance of finance capital in the entire capitalist world, developed and underdeveloped" (Babu: 1982: 1).

After all, it is from the movement and dominance of finance capital in the postcolonial state that class distinctions, contradictions and struggles appeared. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012) observes, "the achievement of political independence only changed the composition of the managers of the state, not the character of the state, which remained much as it was in the colonial era" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012: 77). Therefore, after independence most African countries "believed that development and modernisation depended on strong government control and direction of the economy, a strategy inherited from the colonial era and encouraged by an influential school of Western development economists" (Meredith 2006: 143). Of course, this was also in line with Nkrumah's logic of first seeking the political kingdom (one-party state) with the hope of dispensing socio-economic benefits (development) in the aftermath (Nkrumah 1973). It is precisely this logic that produced what other theorists, Issa Shivji (2003) for example, have referred to as a 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie', which is principally concerned with accumulating private wealth via its control of state institutions and in the course of managing the postcolonial state on behalf of dominant imperial interests (Shivji 2003; see also, Beckman 1986). This class, therefore, is central to the political economy of the postcolonial state.

The Party and the State

Memmi (2006) says after independence, we notice that "there has been a change of Masters, but, like new leeches, the new ruling classes are often greedier than the old" (Memmi 2006: 4; see also, Beckman 1986; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012). In this regard, therefore, 'self-invention' in the independence aftermath was not necessarily the creation of a new society but rather, the creation of conditions that allowed the national bourgeoisie to better establish its own power and advance its social position while excluding the masses. Fanon (1963) laments that…

> …the national bourgeoisie, who are quite clear as to what their objectives are, have decided to bar the way to [continental] unity, to that coordinated effort on the part of two hundred and fifty million men to triumph over stupidity, hunger and inhumanity at one and the same time. This is why we must understand that African unity can only be achieved through the upward thrust of the people, and under the leadership of the people, that is to say, in defiance of the interests of the bourgeoisie (Fanon 1963: 132).

However, as shown in Chapter 3, Fanon is unable to think of a way that this 'upward thrust of the people' can occur outside of a political party so that the leadership of the people can truly triumph. For example, he describes the nationalist party as "the modern form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, unmasked, unpainted, unscrupulous and cynical" (Fanon 1963: 132). Yet, his vision of a nationalist party in power is one of a party whose programme – a "humanist programme" (Fanon 1963: 131) – is guided by the masses in everything it does. The nationalist party in power should, in fact, operate as though it were a national liberation movement in power[50] – decentralised, dependable, honest and trustworthy (Fanon 1963). The party Fanon envisions here is almost similar to the party Cabral was fashioning out in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, albeit with slight differences. Perhaps the most distinct difference between Fanon's nationalist party and the PAIGC is that the latter was centralised, but however acted in consultation with, and as the vanguard of the masses during the anti-colonial struggle[51]. In fact, in some of the liberated zones, the PAIGC put into practice what it was claiming to be fighting for – building schools, hospitals and facilitating grand economic activities through the development of industry and trade. All this was done before the party acquired state power. The PAIGC approach is similar to the one also employed by the FLN in Algeria during the anti-colonial struggle (Fanon 1963). Reflecting on the PAIGC's relationship with the masses, its principal anchor in the armed struggle Cabral (1969) said:

> in our new mobilisation, we avoided all generalisations and pat phrases…we started from the concrete reality of our people. We tried to avoid having the peasants think that we were outsiders coming to teach them, how to do things. We put ourselves in the position of people who came to learn *with* the peasants, and in the end the peasants were discovering for themselves why things had gone badly for them (Cabral 1969: 128-129, emphasis in original).

Cabral's thought here can be contrasted with Nkrumah's dictum, "seek ye first the political kingdom and all things will be added unto thee". Nkrumah evidently sees the nationalist party in power as a vanguard, which is why he is in favour of the one-party state – the benefits of

[50] This thinking is similar to Cabral's, who insisted on the nationalist party that wins elections to capture state power becoming a national liberation movement in power by ridding itself of the limitations of party politics and greed.

[51] This half-thesis in not concerned with the concept of political representation but the writer is aware of the contradictions in both Cabral and Fanon's conceptualization of the Party and how it ought to represent the masses' aspirations for freedom and independence as accurately as possible.

political power are to be appropriated and dispensed by the state on behalf of the masses. Political independence, achieved through the nationalist political party is the medium through which popular aspirations for freedom are to be actualised. Cabral (1979), however, is of the view that the nationalist political party cannot achieve all its objectives if it appropriates popular agency and centralises power in the state. The party is not to be divorced from the masses; it should rather operate as a national liberation movement in power (Cabral 1979). We did not see the type of leader in power Cabral would have become, following his assassination on the eve of independence. However, most African countries, after independence, were confronted with a party "which used to call itself the servant of the people, which used to claim that it worked for the full expression of the people's will [but] as soon as the colonial power puts the country into its control hastens to send the people back to their caves" (Fanon 1963: 147).

Fanon sees the limitation of how the nationalist party was constituted as a threat to it being responsive to the masses and meeting popular aspirations for freedom. For him, in order to have a party that is the "direct expression of the masses" (Fanon 1963: 151), it is crucial that the postcolonial state "rid itself of the very Western, very bourgeois, and therefore contemptuous attitude that the masses are incapable of governing themselves [when] in fact, experience proves that the masses understand perfectly the most complicated problems" (*ibid*). We find here echoes Cabral's (1972) prophetic warnings about the petty-bourgeoisie who 'return to the sources' not to fully identify and struggle with the masses[52], but to seek advantages and opportunities to emerge, in the independence aftermath, as part of the national bourgeoisie in power. Says Cabral (1972):

> so the return to the sources is of no historical importance unless it brings not only real involvement in the struggle for independence but also complete and absolute identification with the hopes of the mass of the people who contest not only the foreign culture but also the foreign domination as a whole. Otherwise, the return to the sources is nothing more than an attempt to find short term benefits, a kind of political opportunism (Cabral 1972: 43).

[52] Cabral says the only way the petty-bourgeoisie can fully identify and struggle with the masses is by committing class suicide – not yielding to the temptation to use state resources to advance their political ambitions, social positions and economic interests, most of which are facilitated by former colonisers.

In Burkina Faso, Sankara offered similar thoughts on the party. Interestingly, political parties were immediately banned[53] after the August 1983 seizure of state power, although leftist organisations and social movements in alliance with the government were allowed to operate freely. Said Sankara:

> the future is leading us toward an organisation much more developed than the current mass mobilisation, which is by necessity much less selective. So a party could come into existence in the future, but we don't intend to focus our thought and concerns on the notions of a party. That could be dangerous…. If leaders create a party just by an act of will, you open the door for all kinds of opportunism (Sankara 2007: 220).

Here, Sankara demonstrates both the potential and the limitation of the party. Given that his context was different from that of Fanon and Cabral, who both theorise the party from the subjectivity of the anti-colonial struggle, it is not surprising to see a less enthusiastic vision of the party from Sankara, who theorises the party from the perspective of resisting neo-colonialism through state power. One of the reasons for this is because Sankara emerged at a time when it was, in fact, nationalist parties that had presided over the failures at decolonisation across Africa. In Burkina Faso, specifically, successive military regimes since 1966 were the ones that allowed neo-colonialism to proliferate as evidenced, for example, by a series of reactionary military coups that took place since independence, leading to frequent changes of governments, especially between 1980-1983 (Beckman 1986; Luckham 1994).

However, Sankara – like Fanon – is unable to think of a postcolonial state without a nationalist party despite his lack of enthusiasm for one. He cannot quite see the farthest mass mobilisation can go while popular control of the state is led by the military, for example. As will be shown in Chapter Five, Sankara's way of circumventing this limitation was the introduction of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution[54] (CDRs), organic structures set up to defend the ideology of the revolution and ensure its sustainability. By the time he was assassinated in

[53] This was consistent with typical behavior after a military coup. See, for example, Agyeman (1988); Beckman (1986); Luckham (1994).

[54] These were inspired by the Cuban Revolution, and were under the direct control of the party. In Ghana, Jerry Rawlings also introduced CDRs. In the absence of a party in Burkina Faso CDRs were also subordinate to the CNR, from where they derived their power. They were, therefore, not independent.

1987, no political party had yet been established and the CDRs were severely weakened, which left his government vulnerable to a coup (Beckman 1986: Campbell 2018; Luckham 1994).

Theorists such as Neocosmos (2016) have pointed out that while the preference for a nationalist party reflects the dominant thinking during the anti-colonial struggle and immediate post-independence era, the failure by theorists such as Fanon, Cabral – and to some extent Sankara – to think beyond the party, and consequently the state itself, shows the limitations in their analyses of freedom and emancipatory politics (Neocosmos 2016). Hence, the state, through a nationalist party, or through the military as was the case in Burkina Faso, continued to appropriate popular agency, collapsing it into statist politics, leaving the masses with little or no say in how they were governed, and in how social and economic development could be achieved.

Chapter 5: Burkina Faso 1983: A moment of Political Reorientation

Who are the enemies of people?

Almost two months after the August coup, on 2 October 1983, Sankara outlined the CNR's political programme in what came to be known as the Political Orientation Speech. He claimed the people of Burkina Faso had rallied behind the CNR[55] "in order to build a new, free, independent, and prosperous Voltaic society; a new society rid of social injustice and of the age-old domination and exploitation by international imperialism" (Sankara 2007: 77). He also described the coup as a "victory over international imperialism and its national allies [and other] backward, obscurantist, and sinister forces[56]" (*ibid*). Sankara linked the seizure of power to events of 1966 (the overthrow of the independence government[57]), as well as other intervening events such as mass protests, coups and counter-coups, occurring in the period leading up to August 1983. Stated Sankara: "the August revolution[58] thus triumphed by presenting itself both as heir to and as a deepening of the popular uprising of January 3, 1966" (Sankara 2007: 78). Thus, the Political Orientation Speech was rooted in analysis of the prevailing conditions in the country since independence, and how these were largely the result of neo-colonialism. Therefore, in Burkina Faso…

> …neo-colonial society and colonial society do not differ in the least…. Thus, the colonial administration [was] replaced by neo-colonial administration identical to it in every respect. The colonial army was replaced by a neo-colonial army with the same

[55] As Luckham (1994) explains, it is difficult to analyse who, in a military government, actually makes decisions or, at least, to see how decisions are arrived at. Although in such governments the source of state sovereignty is the Head of State (as Sankara was in Burkina Faso), this power is "artificial" (Luckham 1994: 42) as evidenced by the rise of counter-forces from within the same ranks. In the CNR's case, it was precisely the rise of Blaise Compaoré, Sankara's deputy, that provides evidence of this artificiality of the power held by Sankara.

[56] Chapter 1 has mentioned, for example, that after France protested one of Sankara speeches (delivered in May 1983) in which he criticized France, the latter sent an envoy to Burkina Faso and on the following day, a coup was carried out, resulting in Sankara and some of his allies getting arrested. Hence the proclamation of victory over imperialism after Sankara and his group seized power in August 1983.

[57] Please see Chapter 1 for background information on this event.

[58] As mentioned in Chapter 1, this half-thesis, takes the view that in Burkina Faso, the period 1983-1987 can be described as a revolutionary precisely because of the way in which the army, having seized power, proceeded to exercise the power in advancing radical social, political and economic changes. This rationale follows Decalo's (1973) explanation that "the true motives of the officer corps may be better perceived through the analysis of their policies after the takeover" (Decalo 1973: 114).

> characteristics, the same functions, and the same role of safeguarding the interests of imperialism and its national allies (Sankara 2007: 81-82).

Sankara was of the view that there had not been a decisive break in both theory and praxis regarding the path taken by Burkina Faso before and after independence. An analysis of who the enemies of the people were followed – those who had denied the making of history by the masses. According to Sankara, enemies of the people revealed themselves through the nature of their reaction to the unfolding social, political and economic changes introduced since August 1983. He singled out the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, which used the state apparatus to advance its industrial capitalist interests; the comprador bourgeoisie, which benefited from the state's capitalist links with imperial interests; and what he termed the 'middle bourgeoisie', which was usually undecided and could only act if compelled to by its opportunistic instinct[59]. Traditional institutions and structures were also singled out because they had "joined with the reactionary bourgeoisie in oppressing Voltaic people [by putting] the peasant masses in the position of being a reservoir of votes to be delivered to the highest bidder" (Sankara 2007: 88).

The 'people', then, were those among the population "who consider imperialist domination and exploitation to be an abomination and who have continually demonstrated this by concrete, daily struggle against various neo-colonial regimes[60]" (Sankara 2007: 89). They were made up of the working class, who have "everything to gain and nothing to lose" (*ibid*); the petty-bourgeoisie, only when they act in the majority interest; the peasantry, "a principal force…that has paid the highest toll for imperialist domination and exploitation" (Sankara: 2007: 90); and finally, the lumpen-proletariat, "declassed individuals who…become fervent defenders [of the revolution]" if appropriately incentivised (*ibid*; see also Martin 1987: 79).

Thinking everything anew

[59] These class distinctions have already been extensively discussed in previous chapters, citing Amílcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon.

[60] This thinking is similar to Cabral's definition of 'the people' in Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau. He says: "In Guiné and Cape Verde today the people…mean for us those who want to chase the Portuguese colonialists out of our land. They are the people, the rest are not of our land even if they were born here. They are not the people of our land; they are the population but not the people. This is what defines the people today" (cit. Neocosmos 2016: 127)

After August 1983, the nation was not to be built in accordance with race, indigeneity, tribe, ethnicity or nationality but rather, by anyone fighting to eliminate imperialist domination and exploitation. This non-identitarian practice is similar to what Fanon (1963) envisions as guiding both the anti-colonial struggle and the building of the nation after independence (Fanon 1963; Mamdani 1992; Neocosmos 2016). Moreover, the country was to get a new name, in 1984, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the coup. No longer was it to be known as Upper Volta, its colonial name, but it would assume a new name and identity as Burkina Faso, 'the Land of upright People'. Harsch (2013) observes that:

> by drawing the name from two different indigenous languages (and taking the 'bè' suffix in 'Burkinabè' from yet a third), the government affirmed the African identity of the new state it was trying to fashion, a state that sought to draw legitimacy not from colonial geographical designation but from the diverse peoples who live in it (Harsch 2013: 363).

A guitarist himself, Sankara wrote the new national anthem, *L'Hymne de la victoire* ('Song of Victory'). The national flag was also changed from red, white and black horizontal stripes representing the tributaries of the Volta River, to two horizontal stripes of red and green with a five-pointed star super-imposed in the centre. About the inspiration of the star on the flag, Sankara spoke about it in tribute to Che Guevara, the slain Argentinian revolutionary. Said Sankara:

> Che is Burkinabè. He is Burkinabè because he participates in our struggle. He is Burkinabè because his ideas inspire us and are inscribed in our Political Orientation Speech. He is Burkinabè because his star is stamped on our [flag] (Sankara 2007: 422).

The political programme was informed by a class analysis because it was being effected "in a country still characterised by the lack of an organised working class conscious of its historic mission, and which therefore possesses no tradition of revolutionary struggle[61]" (Sankara 2007:

[61] The author is aware that revolutions do not always depend on the existence of a working class, as demonstrated by experiences in China and Vietnam, for example. As someone who was confronting neo-colonialism, however, Sankara invoked the working class to reveal the extent to which the state had been captured by the bureaucratic bourgeoisie for self-enrichment and advancement. Notably, this analysis came after the seizure of power in August 1983. In seizing power, and has been stated in Chapter 1, it was the militants from the Pô base and a section of the Left, not predominantly the working class, who were at the forefront. For analysis of these dynamics see, for example, Kamrava (1999).

90-91). On this point, Sankara demonstrates understanding of the social reality within which the seizure of power in August 1983 had taken place. Being a military-led process, the political programme factoring class analysis was thus important in establishing a new nation, especially one which would not need to rely on a military-bureaucratic elite alliance to sustain neo-colonialism and pursue narrow social, economic and political interests. Hence, by opposing neo-colonialism in crafting a different developmental path, a precedent was being set which, in the absence of other fully independent and organised social forces, could only come from a progressive army in power. As others have stated, Beckman (1986) for example, "in Africa, the leading role of the army becomes particularly important because the class structure is amorphous and the political parties, if any, are not strong enough. In this situation, the army is 'the most organised social force[62]'" (Beckman 1986: 54).

At a global level, practical international solidarity for the new government was not forthcoming. Sankara expressed disappointment in not receiving material support from countries he perceived as allies. "Given the risks we are taking – for we are leading a genuine revolution here – and maybe we lack modesty, but given what we think we could represent for Africa, we don't understand this wait-and-see policy, this lack of interest, this lack of urgency to help us on the part of those who should most logically do so[63]" (Sankara 2007: 201-202). Neighbouring countries, especially Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger and Togo were not particularly enthusiastic about the revolution either. This created tensions which culminated, in 1985, in a border war between Burkina Faso and Mali[64]. Martin (1987) states, for instance, that at the Entente Council of February 1985, held in Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso was "deliberately marginalised and obliquely accused of being responsible for a number of destabilisation attempts which had recently affected Niger and Togo" (Martin 1987: 86). Others, Peterson (2018) for example, have observed that "Sankara's appeal to African youth meant that neighbouring African heads of state could not simply ignore the revolution he led" (Peterson

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[62] Samuel Decalo (1973) cites Aristide Zolberg (1968) and describes the army as sometimes "the best organized trade union" which leads to its interventions in politics (Decalo 1973: 109).

[63] Several accounts, see for example Peterson (2018) show how the August 3 revolution was supported by countries such as Libya. However, Libya then withdrew support for the Sankara-led government and is subsequently alleged to have had an active hand in the overthrow of the government in October 1987.

[64] Reference to this war has also been made in Chapter 1. This was the second time the countries were at war, having done so in 1973 as well.

2018: 36). Only Ghana, under Jerry Rawlings, was friendly to Sankara's government, evidenced by the joint-military exercises that took place in 1983 and subsequent years, including sending troops for parade during Burkina Faso's commemoration of the second anniversary of the coup in 1985. As mentioned above, Libya[65] was initially friendly towards Sankara's government but this friendship did not fully meet all the needs. Outside Africa, it was Cuba that, in 1983, entered into scientific, economic and technical agreements with the Burkina Faso.

Regardless, Sankara was unfazed, spurred by the fact that "in place of the old state machinery, new machinery [was] being built, capable of guaranteeing the democratic exercise of power by the people and for the people" (Sankara 2007: 91). In any case, relying on external support, even ideologically-aligned support, would have meant taking away the agency of the masses whose aspiration was to develop new ideas and consciousness in giving shape and form to the unfolding social, economic and political changes. Sankara was not oblivious to this point, stating:

> we should also add that we are the ones who are making our revolution. So much the better or worse for us, we must accept the consequences. After all, no one asked us to make it! We could have mortgaged off our country and put it up for rent – someone would have paid. We are the ones who decided that all forms of outside control should be rejected. We are the ones who should pay the price (Sankara 2007: 202).

On aid and debt

Foreign aid was treated with suspicion and was routinely scrutinised for its intended purpose, whether it was Africa-to-Africa, West-to-Africa or between allies. The concept of aid itself went against the aspirations of the revolution, which emphasised self-reliance and dignity. To work around this, Sankara (2007) said:

> aid must go in the direction of strengthening our sovereignty, not undermining it. Aid should go in the direction of destroying aid. All aid that kills aid is welcome in Burkina

[65] Although Libya appears to have been instrumental in lending political support to the Burkina Faso revolution under Sankara, there is a growing body of scholarly work that suggests some of Sankara's assassins had received training and other support in Libya, courtesy of Colonel Muammar Gaddaffi.

> Faso. But we will be compelled to abandon all aid that creates a welfare mentality (Sankara 2007: 125).

The question of aid was linked to that of debt – whether African countries had an obligation to repay debt, mainly held by the IMF and World Bank. Harsch (2013) discusses Sankara's refusal to give priority to areas of concern, whether health, education or environment, as dictated by aid. Says Harsch (2013), for example, "the CNR also explicitly rejected the programmes of the [IMF] and World Bank, largely because of their neoliberal policy prescriptions[66]" (Harsch 2013: 365). On debt, specifically, Sankara not only spoke against it in Burkina Faso but also asked the Organisation of African Unity[67] (OAU) to take collective action against debt by not repaying it. Sankara's justification for the refusal was that this debt was not the responsibility of African countries, which had not only suffered colonialism but it had, in fact, become an important tool in entrenching neo-colonialism[68] in Africa. To the OAU, therefore, Sankara said:

> it was the colonisers who put Africa into debt to the financiers – their brothers and cousins. This debt has nothing to do with us. That's why we cannot pay it. The debt is another form of neo-colonialism, one in which the colonialists have transformed themselves into technical assistants. Actually, it would be more accurate to say technical assassins[69]…. The debt in its present form is a cleverly organised reconquest of Africa… (Sankara 2007: 375).

By linking debt question to colonialism, Sankara was making it clear that the colonial economy, which had benefited from international debt facilities, was actually an economy that had largely served the coloniser and a handful of the indigenous bourgeoisie who were invested in colonial economies (Amin 2014; Charney 1987; Martin 1985; Schraeder 1994). As for the rest of the

[66] In Ghana, Rawlings who had justified seizing power by claiming the deposed regime was toeing the IMF and World Bank line soon found himself accepting IMF conditions in less than two years. Such was the extent of the pressure from these liberal finance institutions that they would not relent until the targeted government fell in line or capitulated.

[67] Formed in 1963, the OAU is predecessor to the African Union (AU), established in 2002.

[68] This was true in the context of, for example, structural adjustment programmes and other austerity initiatives imposed by the IMF and World Bank. However, most postcolonial governments were very corrupt and used public funds to finance their lavish lifestyles, which resulted in their countries becoming heavily-indebted.

[69] Frantz Fanon describes them as "war criminals" (1963: 80).

people, dispossessed and marginalised – the damned of the earth – it was their pain, sweat and blood that sustained the colonial economy yet they did not derive any profit from it, let alone social and economic advancement. Sankara was, therefore, correct to draw the link between debt and neo-colonialism (Sankara 2007).

In holding this view, Sankara's thought manifests itself within the same realm as Fanon's (1963), when he warned that independence in Africa was often granted against the warning of independent nations regressing into pre-colonial backwardness. And so, Fanon (1963) says, "you may see colonialism withdrawing its capital and its technicians and setting up around the young state the apparatus of economic pressure…. In plain words, the colonial power says: 'Since you want independence, take it and starve'" (Fanon 1963: 76-77). Fanon (1963) further states that the West, in fact, owes Africa because its economic success was built on colonial resources. Says Fanon (1963):

> we say to ourselves: 'It's a just reparation which will be paid to us.' Nor will we acquiesce in the help for underdeveloped countries being a programme of 'sisters of charity'. This help should be the ratification of a double realisation: the realisation by the colonised peoples that *it is their due*, and the realisation by the capitalist powers that in fact *they must pay* (Fanon 1963: 81, emphasis in original).

Defending the revolution

There is similarity of thought between Fanon and Sankara on the question of independence and neo-colonialism, especially on the features of aid and debt. Writing from within the subjectivity of anti-colonial struggle, with the benefit of a few examples from across Africa, such as Algeria and Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah, Fanon theorised a postcolonial state like Burkina Faso under Thomas Sankara, but he might not have fully imagined how this state would be configured in reality. Fanon (1963) says, for example, "the underdeveloped countries ought to do their utmost to find their own peculiar values and methods and a style which shall be peculiar to them…[because]…everything needs to be reformed and everything thought out anew" (Fanon 1963: 78 and 79). 'Thinking everything anew' means the deployment of "forced labour" and the masses should, therefore, offer themselves as "slaves of the nation" although "we cannot believe that such an effort can be kept up at the same frenzied pace for very long" (Fanon 1963: 79). It is an assertion that Sankara considered. "Interestingly enough," Sankara

said in 1985, two years after the revolution, "there is less exuberance and yet it's easier to convince people. The phenomenon has lost some of its novelty and, up to a certain point, its sparkle, its alluring glow. The revolution has become our normal rhythm…. Today there is no self-satisfied euphoria, but there is a conscious enthusiasm" (Sankara 2007: 217 and 218; see also Kamrava 1999).

Aware of the domestic threat faced from reactionaries, and reluctant – if not opposed[70] altogether – to creating a political party, Sankara encouraged the creation of CDRs[71] through which 'conscious enthusiasm' for the revolution could be reproduced and sustained by the masses. Said Sankara (2007):

> CDRs are the authentic organisation of the people for wielding revolutionary power. This is the instrument the people have forged in order to take genuine command of their destiny and thereby extend their control into all areas of society….The revolution, as an accurate theory for destroying the old order and building a new type of society in its place, can only be led by those who have a stake in it (Sankara 2007: 94-95).

Hence, Sankara was not only thinking anew, but he was also thinking beyond the establishment of a political party. He may have been thinking of the democratic exercise of power beyond the state itself, given the emphasis on democratising popular power through the CDRs, although these, however, derived their power from the CNR, and therefore remained within the limitations of state-driven politics. Regardless, this distinction is important because it helps us to see the contradictions between state power and popular power in Burkina Faso. In Sankara's thought, therefore:

> the main idea behind the creation of the CDRs is to democratise power. The CDRs will become organs through which the people exercise local power derived from the central power, which is vested in the National Council of the Revolution (CNR). The CNR is

[70] Luckham (1993) says "military rulers have tended to proclaim their distrust of politics" and thus prefer to institutionalise only through institutions they can trust and control (Luckham 1994: 44).

[71] These CDRs were inspired by the Cuban Revolution, where they were under the direct control of the party. In Ghana, Jerry Rawlings also introduced CDRs. In the absence of a party in Burkina Faso CDRs were also subordinated to the CNR, from where they derived their power. They were, therefore, not independent.

> the supreme power…whose guiding principle is democratic centralism[72]" (Sankara 2007: 96-97).

Thus, the National General Secretariat of the CDRs was tasked with structuring these CDRs "internally on a clear basis and to organise them on a national scale" (Sankara 2007: 96) so that they could "organise the Voltaic people as a whole and involve them in the revolutionary struggle" (Sankara 2007: 94-95; see also Beckman 1986). This form of mass organising and mobilisation is akin to a political party approach, complete with vanguard characteristics. However, with political parties banned in Burkina Faso, and with the space for holding national elections closed, CDRs became avenues for expressing and defending popular power although the full extent of that power was subordinate to the CNR. Overall, the CDRs proved popular, especially in the first year of the revolution. "They involved many people, especially among the poor, who previously had never taken part in any political or associational activity…. Such inclusiveness often alarmed socially conservative Burkinabè – especially traditional chiefs and elders in the countryside – but it also infused the committees with the vitality that made many of their mobilisational activities so effective[73]" (Harsch 2013: 366). Others, Brittain (1985) for example, state that the CDRs "turned out to be crucial to the popular mobilisation and [were] the basis of the regime's chances of success" (Brittain 1985: 45).

In fact, it was not only traditional chiefs in the countryside who were alarmed at the success of the CDRs in mobilisation. In urban centres, left-leaning social movements such as LIPAD, which initially shared power in the government, and were responsible for various mass demonstrations in years before Sankara was in power, demanded that a political party be formed, which would be controlled by them (LIPAD) and not the military. This proposal was rejected by the CNR because of the popularity of the CDRs and the suspicion that LIPAD was acting in its own narrow interests. There were no mass protests in defence of LIPAD's position.

[72] The notion of 'democratic centralism' is also one used by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South Africa. A discussion will follow in Chapter 7.

[73] 1984 government efforts such as those resulting in at least 2.5 million children being vaccinated against yellow fever, meningitis, measles etc. were successful because of the mobilizing power of the CDRs. So was the reforestation campaign (1985) which saw at least 10 million trees being planted in an effort to fight desertification. And, the famous 'Battle of the Railway' (*La Bataille du Rail*) which saw citizens use bare hands and minimal equipment to build a railway line between Ouagadougou (south) and Tambao (north) was largely through CDRs.

Thus, within a year of the revolution, support for LIPAD came more from the reactionary right than the progressive left (Phelan 2018; Zeilig 2018). As tensions grew, evidenced by numerous changes in LIPAD's representation in government and the arrest and detention of some its members, LIPAD started mobilising against the government. Eventually, the movement was left out of key government posts altogether. This development did not raise significant disaffection among the popular masses, suggesting that LIPAD had lost credibility and support in the eyes of the popular masses (see, for example, Brittain's (1985: 45) timeline of related events). Still, and as already indicated in Chapter 4, by the time Sankara was assassinated, the establishment of a political party was being considered. However, Sankara expressed caution:

> the nature of the party, how it is conceived, and how it's built will certainly not be the same as it would have been had we built a party before coming to power. We'll have to take a lot of precautions in order to avoid falling into leftist opportunism[74]. We can't let the masses down. We have to be very careful, selective and demanding (Sankara 2007: 383-384).

In the early years of the revolution, therefore, the CDRs acted as the buffer that protected the Sankara government and gave it legitimacy. In later years, as the CDRs suffered numerous contradictions and were weakening, they could not provide sufficient protection and defence of the CNR's power, which left Sankara and his government vulnerable to a coup. In fact, Campbell (2018) says the CDRs "depended on the energies of Sankara and did not become institutionalised enough to prevent his murder and the reversals of the gains of the poor…. [Sankara's] personal qualities could not substitute for the more rigorous form of political organisation that were required to shift power decisively into the hands of workers, peasants and soldiers" (Campbell 2018: xiv; see also Luckham 1994: 55). Others, Botchway & Traore (2018), for example, have concluded that "until Sankara was physically eliminated, the social change process (revolution) had the figure, ideas and deeds of Sankara, guiding, underlying, polarising and operationalising it (Botchway & Traore 2018: 24). In short, the CDRs failed to prevent a coup because they were not independent from Sankara's persona.

[74] 'leftist opportunism' was criticism of LIPAD and other movements that had initially backed the August revolution but now wanted to take power for themselves. The criticism is also within Cabral's realm of thought, when he cautioned against the petty-bourgeoisie who 'return to the sources' on the eve of independence, but only as an opportunistic endeavour and not out of revolutionary concern.

That said, in Sankara's insistence that the revolution "can only be led by those who have a stake in it" (Sankara 2007: 95), we also find echoes of Fanon's thought that the masses who fight against colonialism and neo-colonialism must necessarily have the consciousness [political and cultural education] to understand that the success of the fight to both overthrow colonialism and build a new nation wholly depends on them, not just one person (a figurehead), or a nationalist party (vanguard). Thus, whatever structures are set up, decentralised CDRs for example, they must still elevate the masses' consciousness – "to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that is we go forward it is due to them too" (Fanon 1963: 159).

Dispensing popular justice

The People's Revolutionary Courts (*Tribunaux populaires de la revolution*, TPRs) were introduced to dispense 'popular justice'. The first session of the TPRs coincided with the 18th anniversary of the 3 January 1966 coup, which was backed by the popular masses protesting against the failure by the state to deliver social and economic development in line with independence aspirations. Sangoulé Lamizana, who became president after the coup, and was subsequently deposed in another coup (1980), was one of the first people to appear before the TPR[75].

Sankara was present at the first TPR session. He said: "the world of exploiters, the plunderers, and all those who profit from the neo-colonial system are trembling because the Voltaic people have now become masters of their destiny and want to render their own justice" (Sankara 2007: 111). Led by judges who had been chosen by workers, and were themselves drawn from sections of the working class, "the TPRs' most important contribution to the new era was in breaking the mystique of power which had held Upper Volta's 95 per-cent illiterate masses in thrall to one of the smallest and most exploitative elite classes in post-colonial Africa" (Brittain 1985: 46). In fact, Martin (1987) says the TPRs served to demonstrate the determination of Sankara's government in exhibiting new practices as well as to give the masses the opportunity,

[75] Here, we see Sankara's effort in trying to demonstrate clear linkages between his efforts and key historical moments in Burkina Faso's national history. This attempt was aimed at making the connection to independence and the freedom that comes with it clear so that the masses could understand what possibilities were available to them in creating a new society and building a new nation so many years after gaining independence.

and more importantly, the power to adjudicate over matters affecting their lives. "By allowing the people to become both witness and actor in the process of revolutionary justice, the TPRs would contribute to demystify and democratise the judiciary" (Martin 1987: 80). In this way, the masses had become makers of their own history, "masters of their destiny" (Sankara 2007: 111), thereby fulfilling an aspiration expressed during the anti-colonial struggle.

Women in the new nation

Many other changes were encouraged and introduced throughout the period of the revolution. Significantly, women occupied an important role. In the Political Orientation Speech, for example, the programme addressing women's needs was outlined second, just after the question of the army and its place in the revolution had been answered. Notably, this was even before the economy was mentioned (Harsch 2013). Said Sankara, echoing sentiments expressed in Mao's China:

> our revolution is in the interests of all oppressed and all those who are exploited in today's society. It is therefore in the interest of women, since the basis of their domination by men lies in the system through which society's political and economic life is organised. By changing the social order that oppresses women, the revolution creates the conditions for their genuine emancipation…. We do not talk of women's emancipation as an act of charity or out of the surge of human compassion. It is a basic necessity for the revolution to triumph. Women hold up the other half of the sky (Sankara 2007: 102).

In Burkina Faso, women accounted for more than half of the population, estimated to be around fifty-two (52) percent. In the government formed after 3 August 1983, key posts (finance, family affairs, health etc.) were allocated to women and even in the CDRs and other organised structures such as the Women's Union of Burkina (*Union des femmes du Burkina,* UFB), women had room to participate and influence the trajectory of the revolution. (Harsch 2013) observes that "from the onset, Sankara emphasised the emancipation of women as one of his central social and political goals – a rarity for any president in Africa at the time" (Harsch 2013: 366). Filtering through organised structures and contributing to popular consciousness on women emancipation, such emphasis also found expression in numerous public engagements made by the government. For example, on the occasion of International Women's Day (8

March) in 1987, Sankara delivered a speech in which he gave an analysis of neo-colonialism and imperialism and how they had worked against women's emancipation. He also gave an analysis of the sufferings of women around the world, including apartheid South Africa. Finally, he gave an analysis of Burkinabè women and how the oppression they faced needed to be broken. Insisting, once more, that his speech was not mere rhetoric, Sankara's thought on women emancipation can be summarised as follows:

> we have no need for a feminised apparatus to bureaucratically manage women's lives or to issue sporadic statements about women's lives by smooth-talking functionaries. What we need are women who will fight because they know that without a fight, the old order will not be destroyed and no new order will be built. We are not looking to organise what exists but to definitely destroy and replace it (Sankara 2007: 369).

Thus, destruction of the old order saw the introduction, for example, of solidarity days with women, days on which it was the responsibility of men to take up the roles traditionally assigned to women such as house-keeping, market shopping and cooking, while the women rested or devoted their time to other issues or to leisure. Also, calls were made for the support of women's economic initiatives, from food markets to fashion, so that women's emancipation could not leave out their economic emancipation as well. This was expanded to also include the issue of wage disparities between men and women in formal employment. In this practice, we find echoes of Fanon's (1963) thought regarding the need to mobilise men and women as quickly as possible in the independence aftermath – "women will have exactly the same place as men, not in the clauses of the constitution but in the life of every day: in the factory, at school and in the parliament" (Fanon 1963: 163).

Revolution by example

Everything he asked the masses to do, Sankara had to it as well in order to set an example and demonstrate that his government was, indeed, different to previous governments that had pandered to neo-colonialism and were corrupt.[76] Asked if he was not wary of a backlash should

[76] Some analyses of coups in Africa conclude that after seizing power, the army prioritises its own corporate interests over those broader society (Agyeman 1988; Beckman 1986; Decalo 1973;). In Sankara's case, however, we see the opposite, with the army and the civil service being stripped of numerous benefits and privileges. Resources saved from this exercise were ploughed into social and economic developments, notably the building

the masses begin to feel the sacrifices demanded of them were unbearable, Sankara replied, "not if you know how to set an example" (Sankara 2007: 203). Hence, one of his very first acts in government was to reduce his own privileges as president, including those of ministers and other public servants. Sankara earned the equivalent of US$100 per week. "By lowering salaries," Sankara said, "by adopting more modest lifestyles, but also through better management of the funds we have, and by preventing their misappropriation, we've been able to generate some surplus that allows for modest investment" (Sankara 2007: 200).

Adopting 'modest lifestyles' meant, for example, the handover for sale to the national lottery all the luxury Mercedes-Benz and Chevrolet vehicles used by senior government officials. Proceeds from the sale were directed to the national budget. The president, his ministers and senior officials travelled in small Renault vehicles, sufficient enough to facilitate mobility. First Class travel was banned and every government official, including Sankara himself, travelled Economy Class. All civil servants were required to type or write on both sides of the paper, not just one side. They were also encouraged to wear, to work, clothes woven by Burkinabè designers with cloth from the country, popularly known as *Faso Dan Fani* (woven cloth of the homeland or *pagne tissé de la patrie*). This was not only for purposes of supporting the local fashion industry, most of it run by Burkinabè women, but broadly, to reinforce the idea of self-reliance and instil in the masses a sense of pride and dignity. On numerous occasions, local and international alike, Sankara often swapped his military fatigues for the *Faso Dan Fani.*

At one OAU meeting in Ethiopia, he encouraged his fellow presidents to do the same in their countries as a way of discouraging expensive imports. Justifying these measures, Sankara said: "you have to dare to look reality in the face and dare to strike hammerblows at some of the long-standing privileges – so long-standing in fact they seem to have become normal, unquestionable" (Sankara 2007: 199). 'Long-standing' and 'normal' because they were part of an intrinsic culture rooted in neo-colonialism, which paved the way for continued social, cultural, political and economic subjugation by erstwhile colonisers and their local allies. In fact, commentators such as Martin (1985) have stated, for example, that "France perpetuates her multi-dimensional domination over her former colonies, thereby retarding the process of decolonisation and also directly or indirectly affecting the state machinery and ruling elites in

of schools, hospitals and infrastructure such as railway lines to facilitate mobility of people and goods within the country.

francophone Africa" (Martin 1985: 203). Given that Burkina Faso, like most former French colonies, was run according to French systems of governance[77] (public administration, judicial services, legislative institutions etc.) it can be seen why – in thinking everything anew – Sankara had to fight against the country's "acute cultural dependency" on France (*ibid*; see also Sankara 2007; Rao 2000: 170).

Surviving threats

If we take into account, for example, that there were a series of coups, counter-coups and attempted coups in Burkina Faso between 1980 and 1983, which all point to the instability of the governments that were coming in and out of power, we are able to analyse the four-year period of the Sankara-led revolution as one that managed to restore stability and inspired numerous ways of thinking about freedom in an independent state. Sankara's government obtained its staying power from popular support because it responded to the needs of the people by resolving questions raised during the anti-colonial struggle and after independence. Although varied in some ways, Sankara's programmes mirror Fanon's (1963) thought regarding a humanist programme that must direct actions of a postcolonial government if it is to defeat neo-colonialism. Hence, Sankara insisted: "to achieve a new society, we need a new people, a people who have their own identity, a people who know what they want, who know how to assert themselves, and who know what is needed to reach the goals they've set for themselves" (Sankara 2007: 392). Indeed, he also demonstrated awareness of the threats he faced, not least from the reactionary wing of the army itself, prophetic warnings of which abound in Fanon's (1963) writings. As Beckman (1986) observes, "strong commercial links also penetrate the state apparatus including the armed forces. Public institutions are central in circulation and accumulation. Any attempt to challenge the imperialist domination of the society is therefore likely to lead to confrontation with these broad and politically important commercial strata" (Beckman 1986: 58). Aware of this fact, Sankara refrained, in 1985:

> indeed, quite a few people are not pleased with us and our revolution. I was going to say that it's quite natural given the class interests we defend. It's thus logical and normal

[77] Schraeder (1994) notes, for example, that "the more centralized French formula of ensuring a strong executive – the Elysee model – was introduced into the former Francophone colonies" (Schraeder 1994: 71).

> that we have enemies, class enemies, since we are determined to defend our class interests to the detriment of theirs and we're fully justified in doing so (Sankara 2007: 240).

Two years later, on 15 October 1987, he was assassinated and the social, economic and political programmes he had led with popular support from the masses were halted, a significant chunk of them getting reversed altogether.

Chapter 6: Burkina Faso's Pan-Africanism and Internationalism

Pan-Africanism in a time of instability

"The [CNR] is not directed against any country, state or people. It proclaims its solidarity with all peoples and its intention to live in peace and friendship with all countries, in particular with all of Burkina Faso neighbouring countries" (Sankara 2007: 67). This is the assurance that was given regarding the new government's pan-Africanist and Internationalist agenda. It was the appropriate message to send, given the prevailing political instability in the country since 1980. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Burkina Faso's neighbouring countries, most prominently Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger and Togo were not happy with the August 1983 change of government and what it necessarily represented as a lesson for other African states opposed to neo-colonialism, especially former French colonies (Peterson 2018). By 1983, France's domination of its former colonies had yielded significant results[78] and some countries were being played against each other to further French interests. An example is the December 1985 border war[79] between Burkina Faso and Mali over the control of the Agacher Strip, a piece of land believed to be containing large mineral deposits, which France wanted to exploit.

When French president, Francois Mitterrand, visited Burkina Faso in November 1986, Sankara expressed his opposition to France's imperialism. This included a protest against the supply of arms to Iraq during its war with Iran, France's support of the occupation of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic by Morocco, France's military interventions in Chad, which saw at least 1,200 soldiers being permanently stationed there, and the April 1986 bombing of Libya in which France sought to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi. Sankara also protested against the warm reception, in France, of Angolan militant, Jonas Savimbi and one of the architects of apartheid in South Africa, Pik Botha.

[78] In 1956, France introduced a policy popularly known as '*loi cadre'* which was specifically directed at managing relations with former French colonies, in favour of France. It is through this policy that some key neo-colonial agents were able to plan and execute daring interventions in independent African territories (Fanon 1964). These include Jean Foccart and Guy Penne, the latter being the French representative who arrived in Burkina Faso in May 1983 and a day later, Sankara and some members of his group were jailed after an attempted coup. For some analysis of external influences in coups, see Mazrui (1982).

[79] This war lasted five days (25-30 December) and resulted in a number of casualties. The territorial dispute was taken to the International Court of Justice which gave both countries almost equal access to the territory, thus resolving the matter.

Burkina Faso thus pursued a pan-African and internationalist policy to defend its revolution by linking this pursuit to local contexts, especially insisting on the role of culture in mobilising support for Burkina Faso's domestic policies and national security. This half-thesis looks at how culture was not only used to reinvent the new nation, but also deployed to advance a programme of pan-Africanism and internationalism.

Culture as the basis for Pan-Africanism

As mentioned in Chapter 5, some of Sankara's practical actions in power had an intrinsic link to culture and counter-culture – from national dressing to women's emancipation to the whole idea of freedom, independence and dignity, symbolised by the name change from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso. Hence, Burkina Faso's pan-Africanism and internationalism arose from her attempt at recovering and emphasising a national culture. Thus, the country's very international engagements commonly became the expression of its own cultural (r)evolution.

"If culture is the expression of national consciousness," writes Fanon (1963), "I will not hesitate to affirm that in the case with which we are dealing, it is the national consciousness which is the most elaborate form of culture" (Fanon 1963: 199). As shown in Chapter 5, the re-invention of Burkina Faso necessitated the creation of new values and institutions – 'new consciousness' – arising from thinking 'everything anew' (Fanon 1963: 79). After all, "it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows" (Fanon 1963: 199). Hence, the growth of Burkina Faso's international consciousness became evident in how it expressed solidarity with the 'disinherited of the world' in Africa and beyond. As Sankara said on the fourth anniversary of the revolution, "Burkina Faso will always be present where fraternity and militant, active solidarity are being defended" (Sankara 2007: 400). Although poor, weak and of little clout within the global political matrix, in the brief moment that Sankara was in power, this aspiration to 'always be present' highlighted the country's internationalist aspirations. Burkina Faso's was not, therefore, a universal culture premised on values and standards set by the Euro-American logic of superiority but rather, values and standards emanating from the 'humanist programme' (Fanon 1963) that had been adopted since August 1983.

According to Gandhi (1998), colonialism "marks the historical process whereby the 'West' attempts systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the 'non-West'"

(Gandhi 1998: 16). In this regard, therefore, any attempt at self-invention in the (neo-) colonial aftermath needs to be aimed at a recovery of a culture that has been negated, disabused and appropriated. So, within this realm, it is worth noting that "colonialism does not end with the end of colonial occupation," because the end of colonialism does not signify the restoration of Culture in itself (Gandhi 1998: 16*)*. Rather, as Fanon (1963) observes, "in the colonial situation, culture, which is doubly deprived of the support of the nation and of the state falls away and dies. The condition for its existence is therefore national liberation and the renaissance of the state" (Fanon 1963: 196-197; see also Cabral 1972). Hence, the dividend of independence should be "the leap [which] consists in introducing invention into existence" (Fanon 1986: 229). In other words, the gains that come with independence or revolution must be visible, experienced and shared in order to build a new society, crafted on a new humanity which is itself inspired by culture.

Cabral (1972) has provided, perhaps, the strongest argument on culture, observing that victory against colonialism is only possible not necessarily because of the talks between representatives of the national liberation movement and the colonisers, or even sustained armed struggle, but because the colonised are able to hold on to, and preserve, their culture despite every possible attempt by colonialism to destroy it. Says Cabral (1972):

> the [colonised] people are only able to create and develop the liberation movement because they keep their culture alive despite the continual organised repression of their cultural life, continuing to resist culturally, even when their political and military resistance is destroyed. It is cultural resistance which at any given moment can take on new forms – political, economic, military – to fight foreign domination (Cabral 1972: 40-41).

Interestingly, Sankara's most passionate intervention on culture came in Harlem, New York on the margins of a United Nations (UN) General Assembly. He was inaugurating an exhibition on Burkinabè art at the Third World Trade Centre when he spoke. "We want to be left free, free to give our culture and magic full meaning" (Sankara 2007: 145). Here, Sankara echoed – in both speech and accompanying action – Fanon (1963):

> the responsibility of the African as regards national culture is also a responsibility with regard to African-Negro culture. This joint responsibility is not the fact of a

> metaphysical principle but the awareness of a simple rule which wills that every independent nation in an Africa where colonialism is still entrenched is an encircled nation, a nation which is fragile and in permanent danger (Fanon 1963: 199).

This 'permanent danger' is most apparent when it is not met with resistance anchored on practical pan-African and International solidarity because "pan-Africanism, in its purest form, inspired great hopes not only for Africans but for Blacks of the diaspora as well" (Sankara 2007: 246). It is precisely because of his awareness of the 'permanent danger' – the same danger faced by, for example, Cabral, Lumumba and Nkrumah – that Burkina Faso's pan-Africanism and internationalism evolved in the manner it did. Moreover, such resistance began with a psychological shift in understanding the colonising power and its objective of subjugation. It is for this reason, then, that theorists like Bantu Steven Biko warned, for example, that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (Biko 2004: 101-102). Possession of someone's mind comes with the power to alter memory and imagination and therefore alienate one from their culture (wa Thiong'o 2003). Hence, as Gandhi (1998) observes, "the psychological resistance to colonialism begins with the onset of colonialism" (Gandhi 1998: 16).

Justifying Harlem, New York as the first choice for exhibiting Burkina Faso culture, Sankara said:

> it's because we feel that the fight we're waging in Africa, principally in Burkina Faso, is the same fight you're waging in Harlem. We feel that we in Africa must give our brothers in Harlem all the support they need so that their fight too becomes known… Every African head of state who comes to New York should first stop in Harlem. Because we consider our White House to be Black Harlem (Sankara 2007: 143 and 145).

Sankara also announced that Burkina Faso would be creating a centre for the study of global Black Culture so that "everything that enables us to assert our identity [can] be studied in this centre[80]" (Sankara 2007: 146). The centre was to be open to everyone – "we call on all Africans

[80] Plans for the establishment of this centre were already underway when this speech was made. However, the centre was only opened in 1990, three years after Sankara's assassination.

to come study at it. We call on Africans from Africa, we call on Africans from outside Africa, and we call on Africans from Harlem. Let everyone come participate on their own level for the development and fulfilment of the African" (*ibid*).

While in Harlem, Sankara also spoke at an event organised by the Patrice Lumumba Coalition and the All-African Peoples Revolutionary Party (AAPRP), which was founded in 1968 by Kwame Nkrumah and Stokely Carmichael[81], a leading member of the Black Panther Party. Scheduled to address the UNGA the following day, he promised to speak in defence of the dignity of the oppressed. At the UN, therefore, Sankara said:

> there will be no further assaults on our sense of decency and our dignity…. Our revolution in Burkina Faso embraces the misfortunes of all peoples…. We wish to be the heirs of all the world's revolutions and all the liberation struggles of the peoples of the Third World (Sankara 2007: 161 & 165).

It is this form of practical international solidarity that best explains Burkina Faso's pan-Africanism and how it not only contributed to the fight against neo-colonialism but also shaped Sankara's nationalism.

The power of youth

Among other presidents of his time, Sankara was always the youngest, which risked having his ideas dismissed as youthful exuberance. For example, at a NAM summit in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1986 Sankara, aged 36, spoke about his disappointment and frustration as a young African leader who came into power at a time when NAM seemed ambivalent towards the struggles of colonialism (Palestine, South Africa, Namibia and Western Sahara) and neo-colonialism. "Our united front has been cracked," he said, "our combativity has ebbed. No one fears our movement anymore. But while ridding ourselves of the enthusiasm, romanticism, and lyricism of the founding fathers – attitudes that were understandable given the reality of the time – we must give our movement a new boost" (Sankara 2007: 310). Within a year, he was assassinated and there never was any considerable 'boost', although Namibia went on to attain

[81] Stokely Carmichael later renamed himself Kwame Ture – borrowing from Nkrumah's first name and Sekou Toure's (Guinea president) surname.

independence in 1990, followed by the end of apartheid rule in South Africa in 1994. Both the questions of Palestine and Western Sahara are still unresolved today. Yet, in reminding NAM of its founding energy and purpose, Sankara was again expressing hope and confidence in collective action and struggle as the only approaches that could help rid African countries of neo-colonialism. Thus, if his criticism of NAM came across as youthful exuberance, then Burkina Faso's pan-Africanism and internationalism, under Sankara, has given new dimension to how contemporary African youth think about the state of their countries. Sankara's legacy no longer belongs to Burkina Faso exclusively, but it has been used where struggles against neo-colonialism are taking place.

In 2014, for example, when an uprising against the Compaoré government took place in Burkina Faso, Sankara's name was invoked, even by protestors who were either very young or had not been born as yet during the time Sankara was president (Soré 2018). Youth-led movements in Burkina Faso such as *Génération Cheikh Anta Diop*, also known as *Mouvement des Sans Voix* (Voice of the Voiceless) and *Le Balai Citoyen* (The Citizens' Broom) are largely credited with bringing out the fall of Compaoré (Engels 2018). Elsewhere, in Senegal for example, movements such as *Y'en A Marre* (We Are Fed Up) have also risen to prominence for the part they played in the fall of long-time president Abdoulaye Wade in 2012. All these movements, in particular, either invoked Sankara in their actions or claim to be 'Sankarist' in nature. As Kabwato & Chiumbu (2018) observe, "the various youth-led movements present real possibilities for the deepening of anti-racist and anti-imperialist revolutionary struggles across sub-Saharan Africa…. Sankara remains an inspiration for many young people across the continent" (Kabwato & Chiumbu 2018: 301). It is apparent today that Sankara has been influential not only on current movements but also on political parties in Africa. One of such political party is the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South Africa, which is discussed below.

Chapter 7: The fight for Economic Freedom in South Africa

100 years of liberation and a massacre

In 2012, the African National Congress (ANC), the oldest political party in Africa turned 100. Also in 2012, the Marikana massacre occurred – at least thirty-four (34) striking mineworkers were shot dead by South African police who had been called in to end a strike about a wage dispute. At least seventy-eight (78) others were injured. This incident occurred at a kopje near mining operations run by Lonmin (formerly London and Rhodesia Mining, LONRHO), a United Kingdom-listed company specialising in platinum mining in South Africa's North-West province. Current ANC and South Africa president, Cyril Ramaphosa, a former trade unionist who was vying for a deputy president post in the ANC in 2012 appears to have played a hand in the massacre. At the time, Ramaphosa was a shareholder and non-executive board member at Lonmin. During a commission of inquiry into the massacre, it emerged that he had sent an email – a day before the massacre – to his comrades in government as well as Lonmin management, urging 'concomitant action' in dealing with the mineworkers' strike. "The terrible events that have unfolded cannot be described as a labour dispute. They are plainly dastardly criminal and must be characterised as such. There needs to be concomitant action to address this situation[82]," Ramaphosa reportedly said.

Writing a year later, journalist Greg Marinovich, who was in Marikana on the day of the massacre said:

> what is now clear is that the infamous Cyril Ramaphosa e-mails 24 hours before the massacre calling for 'concomitant action' against 'criminals' by the police was not an isolated act of political interference. It is clear that the police were guided by the interests of both big business and by the political players connected to big business. The Marikana operation can be seen as an action by a mercenary force at the behest of

[82] Please see 'Cyril Ramaphosa: The true betrayal'. By Ranjeni Munusamy. 27 October 2012. Available: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-10-27-cyril-ramaphosa-the-true-betrayal/#.WrR0e5NuauU Accessed: 20 May 2017.

powerful people in and outside the ruling African National Congress[83] (Marinovich 2013).

Birth of a movement

Also in 2012, ANC Youth League (ANCYL) president, Julius Malema, was facing disciplinary action from his party, accused of bringing the party into disrepute by calling for, among other things, the nationalisation of mines, expropriation of land without compensation, supporting land reform in Zimbabwe and calling for the removal of Botswana president, Ian Khama, whom he alleged was a puppet of the USA[84]. Malema, his deputy Floyd Shivambu and others, were subsequently expelled from the ANC. Left without a political platform, Malema used the Marikana massacre to further his political career. He was emboldened, perhaps, by the fact that earlier in February 2012, striking miners at Impala Platinum mine, also in the North-West province, had warmly received him when he addressed them, urging the workers to go back to work but insisting, also, that they should benefit from mining operations they were sustaining with their physical labour.[85] In '*The Coming Revolution: Julius Malema and the Fight for Economic Freedom*' (2014), a book edited by Shivambu, the Marikana intervention is defined as a 'turning point' because "the culmination of our continued involvement with the struggles of the people was Marikana" (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 44).

From Movement to Party

1n 2012, however, the EFF was not yet a political party. It is possible that Malema and his group, knowing their growing influence among mineworkers because of their radical message[86] calling for the nationalisation of mines, may have wanted to force the ANC to

[83] Marikana massacre: SAPS, Lonmin, Ramaphosa & time for blood. Miners' blood. By Greg Marinovich. 24 October 2013. Available: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-10-24-marikana-massacre-saps-lonmin-ramaphosa-time-for-blood-miners-blood/#.WrR0e5NuauU Accessed: 20 May 2017

[84] The USA has a military base in Botswana.

[85] Please see, for example: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-02-29-malema-to-striking-miners-its-time-to-negotiate/#.WrSIqpNuauU Accessed 27 May 2017.

[86] Please see: 'Malema is out but his message is the in thing' by Levi Kabwato. Link: https://thoughtleader.co.za/levikabwato/2012/03/08/malema-is-out-but-his-message-is-the-in-thing/ Accessed: 20 June 2017.

reconsider the decision to expel them. Thus, the ground for establishing a political party was cleared. Says the EFF (2014):

> the Marikana mineworkers, fearless, determined and solid forces, inspired us when we decided to ask all South Africans "What is to be done?" We all knew that the ANC was not the platform to fight for economic freedom[87], but we needed guidance and direction from the people of South Africa and they indeed provided that guidance and direction (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 51).

To answer the Leninist question – 'what is to be done?' – the EFF organised a series of nationwide public consultations[88] which culminated in a 'National Assembly on what is to be done'. Seven issues were tabled for adoption – expropriation of land without compensation; nationalisation of mines, banks and other strategic sectors of the economy; building state and government capacity; free quality education, healthcare, housing and sanitation; protected industrial development and the introduction of the national minimum wage; development of the African economy based on unity and cooperation; and open, accountable, anti-corruption government (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 58). Subsequently, a media briefing was held at Constitution Hill, "which is a symbol of South Africa's political emancipation, which we as Economic Freedom Fighters believe should be elevated through concrete programmes to economic emancipation[89]" (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 60). Here, it was revealed that…

> …the character of the Economic Freedom Fighters will be that of a radical, left, and anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist Movement with an internationalist outlook anchored

[87] The implicit idea here was that although South Africa had gained political freedom in 1994, 'economic freedom' which had been promised in ANC key documents such as 'The Freedom Charter' had not yet been realized for the majority of South Africans. This logic follows Nkrumah's thinking that after the political kingdom is sought, everything else (social and economic development) will follow.

[88] In the year following Malema and Shivambu's expulsion from the ANC, their central message at public meetings was 'Economic Freedom in our Lifetime'. It was from this message that the name 'Economic Freedom Fighters' arose and was eventually adopted as the name of the political party, once it was formed in readiness to contest elections in 2014. In the period June-July 2014, however, the EFF was still a movement since it had not yet been registered as a political party.

[89] Please see footnote (86) above.

> by popular grassroots formations and struggles. EFF will be the vanguard[90] of community and workers' struggles and will always be on the side of the people (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 61).

Two weeks later, the party was officially formed, stating that "Economic Freedom Fighters will therefore be an independent economic emancipation movement which will contest political power in all spheres of government" (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 70).

EFF practice as a political party

If Marinovich's (2013) analysis is correct, that the Marikana massacre "can be seen as an action by a mercenary force at the behest of powerful people in and outside the ruling African National Congress,[91]" then the EFF's official launch in Marikana, "as a salute and honour to the mineworkers who were killed by the ANC government" (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 75) can be read as a challenge to the state's collusion with local and imperial interests in the killing of mineworkers who were demanding a wage increase. Fanon (1963) foresaw the collusion between the nationalist party in power and foreign corporations in using brute force to suppress popular aspirations for social and economic development. Says Fanon (1963):

> in these poor, underdeveloped countries, where the rule is that the greatest wealth is surrounded by the greatest poverty, the army and the police constitute the pillars of the regime[92]; an army and police force (another rule which must not be forgotten) which are advised by foreign experts (Fanon 1963: 138).

[90] This aspiration to be a 'vanguard' was the strongest indication yet that the EFF wanted to transform itself into a political party because only a political party can be a vanguard.

[91] Marikana massacre: SAPS, Lonmin, Ramaphosa & time for blood. Miners' blood. By Greg Marinovich. 24 October 2013. Available: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-10-24-marikana-massacre-saps-lonmin-ramaphosa-time-for-blood-miners-blood/#.WrR0e5NuauU Accessed: 27 May 2017.

[92] Fanon's analysis of the army and police force as being a pillar of repression for the state is a Marxist reading of the army. The deployment of brute force at Marikana – at the instigation of a local lackey – demonstrates the state's collusion with international finance capital to defend local and foreign interests of the elite. It is, therefore, neo-colonial. In Burkina Faso, Sankara's insistence that the army he led after seizing power must be a 'people's army' is borne out of the aspiration to have an army that defends ordinary people, not the interests of local and foreign elites (Beckman 1986).

Marikana, therefore, presents the stage on which postcolonial and post-apartheid contradictions reveal themselves in South Africa, punctuated by a former trade unionist-cum-business elite mobilising state resources, including militarised force, to defend a London-listed mining company against workers demanding higher wages. This is precisely the type of imperial interest in the postcolonial state that Fanon (1963) warned against. In fact, in 2018, Ramaphosa became president of the Republic of South Africa[93]. About the ANC's lethargy, Malema says the party…

> …is no longer speaking to the angry masses of our people. They speak to them through television, they speak to them through newspapers…they've abandoned their responsibility to provide leadership to the poorest of the poor, and we have had to assume that responsibility" (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 259).

The assumption of this 'responsibility' is, however, contradictory. Before they were expelled from the ANC, Malema and others were, like Ramaphosa, part of a national bourgeoisie that benefited from its intrinsic links with the state's political and economic apparatus. These benefits manifested in lavish lifestyles accompanied by allegations of illicit behaviour such as tax evasion and fraud[94], for example. Despite this, the EFF went on to contest elections in the 2014 general elections, six months after launching. The party received just over one million votes, amounting to six per-cent (6%) of the total vote. This came with twenty-five (25) seats in Parliament. In the 2016[95] local government elections, the party gained just over eight (8) per-cent (8%) of the total vote. Although it did not win any municipalities, its electoral margins allow it power to play a 'kingmaker' role where coalition arrangements are inevitable[96].

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[93] This followed the resignation of president Jacob Zuma who was accused of being corrupt and turning towards bourgeois interests as opposed to those of the masses.

[94] Please see 'Malema's assets to be auctioned off'. Link: https://ewn.co.za/2013/02/10/Malemas-assets-to-be-auctioned-off Accessed 27 May 2017.

[95] Please see 'What the numbers tell us about EFF support'. Available: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/2018/03/21/is-the-eff-2019s-dark-horse-lets-look-at-the-numbers_a_23391412/ Accessed 27 May 2017.

[96] Some studies have shown that EFF support in 2014 and 2016 is drawn from middle-aged voters who have had at least three years of higher education. Other studies, see for example Simkins (2015), suggest significant EFF support is drawn from neither poor people nor young people as the party's posturing suggests. Please see: 'Who voted for the Economic Freedom Fighters in the 2014 National Election?'. Available: https://hsf.org.za/publications/hsf-briefs/who-voted-for-the-economic-freedom-fighters-in-the-2014-national-election Accessed: 10 November 2017.

Radicalism or high-sounding rhetoric?

The field of electoral politics in South Africa is, however, proving quite limiting for the stated radical objectives of the party. For example, the party's constitution states:

> the basic programme of the EFF is the complete overthrow of the neo-liberal anti-black state[97] as well as the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes; the establishment of the dictatorship of the people in place of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the triumph of socialism[98] over capitalism (Economic Freedom Fighters 2004: 76).

Among the party's ideological influences in Africa – Fanon, Cabral, Nkrumah and Sankara, for example, only Nkrumah and Sankara acquired state power and could translate their thought into practice, albeit briefly. Cabral was assassinated two years before independence. Fanon never saw an independent Algeria. Even with Sankara, his introduction to the EFF ideology did not occur 'organically'. Ahead of the 'National Assembly on what is to be done' EFF approached various social movements, seeking their support. One of the movements approached was the September National Imbizo (SNI) led by Andile Mngxitama, a Black consciousness proponent. At SNI, Mngxitama advanced the 'Sankara Oath,' which held that public representatives should follow Sankara's example of a modest lifestyle while expressing deep commitment to the people. The EFF adopted the 'Sankara Oath,' saying:

> this is largely influenced by Thomas Sankara, a revolutionary leader from Burkina Faso, whose revolutionary ethos meant that he lived an ordinary life and did not fall into the temptation and luxuries that often come with the occupation of political office. The Sankara values are admirable and something which the EFF Founding Manifesto encapsulates (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 66).

[97] The deduction here is that because the EFF sees the South African state as neo-liberal, therefore pro-imperialist, it is thus anti-black in character because it does not respond to the popular needs and aspirations of the Black majority in the country.

[98] Here, the EFF relies on Deng Xiaoping's comment on what Socialism is: "Socialism means eliminating poverty". Therefore, "the scientific socialism EFF subscribes to should necessarily lead to the development of the productive forces, and ensure greater workers' control of the economy…" (EFF 2014).

Mngxitama was eventually expelled from the party, having been one of its representatives in Parliament. He formed his own party, Black First, Land First (BLF) which also has the 'Sankara Oath'. At the beginning of his parliamentary stint, however, he wrote a newspaper column titled 'Letter from Parliament'. In the 'letter', Mngxitama narrates the story of his encounter with privileges afforded to Members of Parliament (MPs), including the brand-new BMW luxury sedan that awaited him, with a chauffeur.

> He [the chauffer] asks if I have a car like this. I laugh. I say to him: 'They are already corrupting us on our first day.' He let rip: a torrent of complaints about how government wastes money and doesn't pay the people who matter. I tell him that politicians are generally the scum of the earth. He pauses and then asks: "Aren't you one of them?" I assure him that there is a new breed that has just came in[99] (Mngxitama 2013).

Curiously, the 'Sankara Oath' never gained much traction within the EFF. None of the party's MPs have refused to accept the benefits that come with their positions. And, despite the claim that the party represents the working class, symbolised by the attire of red overalls, mine hats and domestic worker outfits, the salaries and benefits drawn by EFF members in Parliament are significantly higher than those of the workers which the EFF claims to represent. The party, therefore, is contradictory; their thought and practice are at odds and it is unlikely this will change should they capture state power. In fact, it is most likely that the contradictions will be magnified should the EFF ever get into power.

Such contradictions, as indicated above, include the privileges the party's MPs are awarded monthly, including a salary upwards of USD7000[100], dedicated vehicles with chauffer services as well as housing in Cape Town[101]. Also, in Parliament, the EFF has resorted spectacle by introducing a disruptive culture. This performativity is often linked to speaking truth to power, as was often exhibited whenever members of the party disrupted, for example, national assembly addresses by former president, Jacob Zuma. Such performances are seen as break

[99] Please see: 'Letter from Parliament' by Andile Mngxitama. Available: https://mg.co.za/article/2014-06-05-letter-from-parliament-andile-mngxitama Accessed: 5 June 2017.

[100] By contrast, the minimum wage in South Africa is approximately USD240.

[101] Parliament seats in Cape Town. The EFF has its headquarters in Johannesburg, 1,400km away. As such, EFF MPs are constantly travelling between Johannesburg and Cape Town, usually at the expense of the state. In their 2019 elections manifesto, however, the EFF is calling for parliament to move to the capital, Pretoria, as a way of minimising costs.

from Western-inspired forms of parliamentary behaviour which are inherent in constitutional democracies. They seek to show radical militancy. For this, the EFF has been frequently sanctioned and have been, on several occasions, forcibly removed from Parliament by security details. There have been calls from other political parties, chief among them the ANC, to ban EFF attire, for example. But, the EFF has been defiant:

> [we] will never be bossed around to abandon the worker overalls in parliaments across the country because this is who it represents…. Legislature is a place of work and it must represent the people: EFF is there to say the regalia of workers is also welcome in the Houses of Parliament as part of respectable and honourable decorum (cit. Kabwato & Chiumbu 2018: 299).

EFF's Internationalism

EFF claims is seeks to avoid repeating mistakes from similar socialist initiatives elsewhere. The party has said, for example, "in the pursuit of socialism, we do not want to make mistakes that were made by socialists all over the world" (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 84). Says Malema:

> we draw inspiration from different economies that have succeeded and we looked at what has failed and what has worked…. We look at the leadership of Sankara, and how that can help us improve the leadership style we want to practice. So, there are generally many African examples that we look into which received massive attack from the imperialist forces so that they do not succeed, and we are saying, how do we learn from that? (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 232).

Thus, EFF resorted to symbolism to express its international programme, best encapsulated by the red beret "as the symbol of its struggles, militancy and radicalism…[this] is not just an item of clothing but a symbol of commitment to the with desired values and conduct" (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 103). Among the notable revolutionaries who wore berets are Che Guevara and Sankara. The beret, significantly, is a military symbol and with Malema describing himself as the Commander-in-Chief of the EFF, the party's militarism can be criticised against the republican constitutional framework within which it operates in South Africa. It is unclear if the EFF has a political programme to acquire state power outside of

contesting national elections as per democratic norms in South Africa. So far, they have largely confined themselves to constitutional limitations, contesting elections and using strategic litigation to seek redress or compel the government to act on specific demands.

Also, the party cannot fully express its international programme without necessarily acquiring state power. Although it states that "our aspirations for South Africa are aspirations for the African continent and the world and our international relations, co-operation and solidarity programme are founded on the principle that economic emancipation should be extended to all people across the globe" (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 202), there are no indications, currently, that the EFF has organisational capacities and resources that can meet this aspiration. Hence, a lot of the EFF's proposed international political programmes can only be seen for their practicality should the party ever capture state power. Notably, the EFF has already collapsed itself into statist forms of politics and has been emptied of any emancipatory content as is suggested by its rhetoric.

Hence, the EFF appears content with issuing public statements, for example, in support of Palestine, Western Sahara and occasionally on independence and other anniversaries of significant countries like Ghana (Nkrumah), Mozambique (Samora Machel) and Palestine. In terms of working "towards ending the global imperialist dominance of the West" by building "relations with all progressive nations in Latin America, Asia and the African continent" so as to "establish a world order that is not dominated by the West" (Economic Freedom Fighters 2014: 202), the EFF also appears constrained, if not disinterested altogether. There appear to be no such links, especially outside of Africa. As observed by Kabwato & Chiumbu (2018), for example:

> while the rhetoric of international solidarity has been strong, the EFF has not built effective transnational connections and, in most cases, the party has been inward looking. This failure to connect transnational movements can be explained by the fact that the EFF, now operating as a registered political party in a liberal or constitutional democracy, is constrained in many ways from achieving some of the issues outlined in their founding manifesto (Kabwato & Chiumbu 2018: 299)

In any case, by participating in elections to gain state power, the EFF will not escape the statist politics it has collapsed into, especially if it acquires state power. Hence, whatever

emancipatory content the party currently expresses in rhetoric, it is already empty because state-driven politics have forced the party to appropriate popular agency in advancing the programme for radical social and economic development – 'economic freedom in our lifetime'.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Standing in imperialism's way

"Imperialism is everywhere," Sankara said in 1983, adding, "through the culture that it spreads, through its misinformation, it gets us to think like it does, it gets us to submit to it, and to go with all its manoeuvres. For goodness' sake, we must stand in imperialism's way" (Sankara 2007: 54-55). 'Standing in imperialism's way' meant that the Burkinabè imagination had to be challenged and people were encouraged to think anew. Sankara added:

> as I've already told you, it (imperialism) will move on to a violent phase. It is imperialism that has organised troop landings in certain countries that we know. It is imperialism that has armed those who are killing our brothers in South Africa. It is imperialism that assassinated the Lumumbas, the Cabrals and the Kwame Nkrumahs[102] (*ibid*).

The reference to Lumumba (Congo), Cabral (Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau) and Nkrumah (Ghana) is significant because of the link Sankara made between neo-colonialism and the fall of Lumumba's government in 1960; Cabral's assassination in 1973, two years before most Portuguese colonies won independence; and the 1966 coup plot against Kwame Nkrumah, which forced him into exile in Guinea.

Moise Tshombe's secession in the Congo's mineral-rich province of Katanga, supported by Belgium, France and the USA, shows how neo-colonial interests mobilised and amplified ethnic differences against one another with the aim of creating division. Lumumba was assassinated by locals who were assisted in capturing him by Belgium, France and the USA. Likewise, Cabral was assassinated by his own comrades because some in the PAIGC wanted to build a nation based on ethnic interests while he (Cabral) was not. In this case too, the assassins were supported by the Portuguese. "For four years, one of the fundamental aims of the Portuguese has been to kill not only myself, but also other leaders of the party. Because

[102] Although Nkrumah was not assassinated per se, he was a victim of a coordinated coup between Ghanaian military officials and western countries such as the USA. The coup forced Nkrumah out of power and subsequently into exile in Guinea. He never returned to Ghana.

they believe that if they kill me it is finished for our fight,"[103] Cabral said. And, the coup against Nkrumah, which eventually forced him into exile in Guinea, was executed by Ghanaians who had the support and backing of imperial powers such as the USA[104] (Beckman 1986; Luckham 1994). After the coup, a memorandum addressed to USA president, Lyndon Johnson stated: "the coup in Ghana is another example of a fortuitous windfall. Nkrumah was doing more to undermine our interests than any other black African. In reaction to his strongly pro-Communist leanings, the new military regime is almost pathetically pro-Western[105]."

Masses standing against imperialism?

Significantly, all these three major developments which show the extent neo-colonial intervention in parts of Africa were met with muted reactions from the masses. It must be asked, therefore, why the masses in these countries did not rise and protest against Lumumba's assassination in the Congo, Cabral's assassination in Guinea and Nkrumah's ouster Ghana? Although Lumumba and Nkrumah had successfully managed to acquire state power, and Cabral was also on the verge of doing the same, popular masses were still not organised independently, outside the state, for them to be able to exercise and express their collective power. Hence, once the state power was usurped through the removal of a popular leader, it proved difficult for the masses to lead independently-organised protests or resistance because the source of their power had become the state, not necessarily themselves (Beckman 1986; Luckham 1994; Neocosmos 2016). Examples of coup attempts in Burkina Faso (1983[106]) and Venezuela (2002), however, provide us with a counter-narrative to the fate that befell Cabral, Lumumba and Nkrumah and illustrate the emancipatory potential held by masses who are independently organised, outside the limitation of statist politics, through a popular leader.

On 11 April 2002, Venezuela president, Hugo Chavez was ousted from power for 47 hours. Having been elected in 2000, Chavez was confronted with a strike called by the National Federation of Trade Unions (CTV). When the strike action turned towards the presidential

[103] Please see: https://www.nytimes.com/1973/01/28/archives/death-for-a-symbol-of-hope-the-world.html. Accessed 15 April 2018.

[104] Please see: https://www.nytimes.com/1978/05/09/archives/cia-said-to-have-aided-plotters-who-overthrew-nkrumah-in-ghana.html. Accessed: 15 April 2018.

[105] Please see: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v24/d260. Accessed: 15 April 2018.

[106] This event has already been analysed in earlier chapters.

palace, Miraflores, the reactionary wing of the military called for Chavez to resign but he refused. However, the military went ahead and installed Pedro Carmona from the Venezuela Federation of Chambers of Commerce (Fedecámaras), who immediately suspended the Constitution and dissolved both Parliament and the Supreme Court. By the second day of the coup, however, as Carmona attempted to undo everything Chavez had put in place since coming into power, the progressive masses, certain trade unions, other movements and some elements within the military started fighting back against Carmona and demanded that he, in fact, resign. These groups organised protests outside the presidential palace. Soon, in the capital, Caracas, media outlets had been taken over by the pro-Chavez supporters and Carmano eventually yielded to pressure, especially after Chavez's presidential guard at Miraflores took back command of the presidential palace, and resigned, fleeing into exile. The Burkina Faso (1983) and Venezuela (2002) examples point to power of independently organised masses who do not need state power behind them in order to become effective in resisting neo-colonialism – to make their own history. This is what Cabral, Lumumba and Nkrumah lacked once they were confronted with neo-colonial threats to their power after independence. Four years into power, Sankara would face the same fate, a direct contradiction with the way through which he had come.

Aftermaths

Why did the masses in Burkina Faso not rise up in defence of the revolution on October 15, 1987 in the aftermath of Sankara's assassination? As has been stated in Chapter 5, in the early years of the revolution, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) acted as the buffer that protected the Sankara government from local and external threats. However, as the CDRs suffered numerous contradictions and started to weaken as years went by, the revolutionary project collapsed into statist politics by failing to create alternative systems for popular political expression. The CDRs could no longer provide sufficient protection and defence of the CNR's power, which left Sankara himself and others vulnerable to a coup. We see, therefore, the failure by Sankara – much like Nkrumah, Fanon and to some extent Cabral before him – to imagine and practise forms of politics that do not result in the appropriation popular agency by the state – or a popular leader – in order to meet the masses' aspirations for freedom. The claim that Sankara derived his power from 'popular masses' clearly was not enough to protect him from being assassinated four years after coming into power (Luckham 1994: 43).

What Sankara inherited in August 1983, twenty-three years after independence, was a fragile neo-colonial state that could not be allowed by imperial interests to set an example of what true independence and freedom for popular masses means. Therefore, any attempt that was made to redeem Burkina Faso from the clutches of neo-colonialism faced reactionary resistance from both local and foreign actors. Thus, Burkina Faso, and Sankara's brief moment in power – between 1983 and 1987 – shows the limitations of the postcolonial state when politics with an emancipatory content are introduced but are not led by, or founded upon independently-organised popular masses who resist both local and foreign domination by asserting their collective power independent of the state. Hence, the tragedy of Sankara is the tragedy of all those attempts at revolution which occur before mass movements have had the opportunity to develop and organise themselves independently.

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