

Sankara **BBC** Focus on Africa Magazine, Nov- Dec 2007

The programme is divided into Part 1 and Part 2. Part 1 is about Sankara's life and ideas, part 2 is about Sankara's assassination, the struggle to find out who was behind his killing, and his legacy.

We were going to start with an introduction from the presenter Bridget Kendall, and then begin by asking the BBC Journalist and Burkinabe Lamine Konkobo to tell us a bit about Burkina Faso as a country, and ask then ask Amber Murrey about Sankara's early life and how he joined the army.

Then we wanted to ask you Aziz how Sankara met Blaise Compaoré. I think they met in the army? ...

Sankara met Blaise compaore while he was in the army, he was 25 years old, they both attended a military internship program in Morrocco, He trusted his so much, that he introduced Blaise to his fellow members of an underground leftist organisation in the army, without using the normal proper steps of scrutiny. They were like twin brothers. Blaise was raised by Sankara's father as his own son, he will eat everyday in the Sankara family house.

Then we were going to ask Amber about the coup that led to Sankara becoming president.

Then we wanted to ask you Aziz how it was decided after the coup that Thomas Sankara should become the leader – rather than Blaise, for instance?

He was already leading the group of revolutionaries in the army. In september 1981, Sankara was appointed as state secretary of information of Saye Zerbo' gouvernement and resigned a few months after and became very popular. When the putsch of baptiste ouedraogo occurred in 1982, he became prime minister, toured many countries, and was already very popular, and his policy already upset french and regional leaders. On the aftermath of guy penne 's visit, he was the french advisor of President Mitterand visiting

the country, Sankara was arrested and became more famous again. Freed from prison by the unrest in the 1983 revolution, he was the natural leader awaited by the people.

Then we were going to speak about Sankara as president, and we wanted to ask you Aziz what you think was the importance of the 1984 speech to the UN.

What impact did it have?

As one of the youngest leader to ever speak at the UN, he spoke on behalf of the wretched of the earth, and advocated the right of self determination and self reliant development of all the so called third world countries, defended the women, the native etc. It was an humanistic and holistic powerful speech that rally most of the people fighting against apartheid, the debt, women emancipation, the environment etc Thomas Sankara embodied the hope for change that was based primarily on the efforts of the people of his country. Sankara was a dedicated and organic intellectual, who spoke and worked on behalf of the masses as a leading figure of the so-called 'Global South'.

After talking about some of his policies, we were then going to mention that Thomas Sankara led a very simple life, without the usual trappings of presidents, and we wanted to ask you Aziz to give us some examples of this...

To prove that a self reliant development was possible you need to be the raw model, individually and collectively. Thomas Sankara, among other priorities, focused on agriculture and farmers to stimulate national revival, and the nation to be proud of consuming local goods. He raised the income of workers and reduce the salary income of the state civil servants. He sought to create an internal market for a variety of consumer goods accessible to the masses and meet the greatest number of basic needs. He promoted women's emancipation and changes in men's attitudes toward women. Men would go to the market, to help alleviate women exploitation. He took a patriotic approach to managing public funds, campaigning against debt and the impoverishment of Africa, and agitating for internationalism that challenged the subordination of Africa by the global economic system. He was driving a simple car, earning a small income, suppress most fancy lifestyle and was

proud to wear the local outfit called faso dan fani made from the local cotton fabric. Ministers should travel economy class. Never use their function car out of the office hours.

We will also look at with Lamine some of the challenges facing ordinary people who had to adopt Sankara's ideas so quickly, and then at some point, we wanted to ask you Aziz, whether you think Sankara was maybe a bit before his time?

Maybe not a head of his time, but clearly ahead of his society and most of his countrymen. Thomas Sankara knew the risks he ran, for he respected and was conscious of the long line of martyrs stretching back to the dawn of African decolonisation: Ben Barka, Mondlane, Moumié, Um Nyobé, Rwagasoré, Lumumba. He choose to priviliedge clean water for all instead of champagne to the very happy few

In short, he took on many radical initiatives that confronted the norms of the global system. He quickly alienated himself from local, regional and international supporters, especially from within his own backyard in Francafrigue.

Then we go into Part 2 of the programme, and we were going to ask Lamine a bit about the tensions that led up to Sankara's assassination.

Then we wanted to ask you Aziz to describe the events that led up to the assassination. I understand that Sankara was in the presidential palace at the time.

That was the last African revolution, interrupted by the bloodshed of 1987, just as it was starting to bear promising fruit. In my position of coordinator of the collective of lawyers, you understand that I cannot speculate on the alleged circumstances. But It's likely that a joint international and local plot was behind the killing of Sankara and his ten comrades. A dozen of people are today on custody awaiting a trial. Apparently Sankara left the weekly mass sport event , and arrived in sport outfit at the conseil de l'entente for an important meeting. He was awaited by other ministers and colleagues, Soon after two cars arrived full of soldiers who started firing. Sankara exited the room and said to his colleagues, stay, don't move, they just want me and raised his arms, and was shot, then they enter the room and killed every one around to the exception of one, alouna traore, from whom this testimony came from. Sankara's death certificate cites 'natural causes' – at the same time as 12 other people – no explanation for their deaths has ever been given . 20 years latter the forensic

report showed that he received several bullets shots many under his axilas, which proved that he did raised both arms above his head. Suspicion for the assassination falls on his best friend, Blaise Compaoré, backed by a network of local and external supporters. Minister of Justice at the time of Sankara's death, Compaoré became president of Burkina Faso for 27 years

We were then going to look at how Blaise Compaore took over, how he promised a state burial that never happened, and then we wanted to ask you Aziz, as someone who has represented the Sankara family for more than two decades with a group of more than 20 lawyers, how difficult was it for the family to find out what had happened?

Very difficult, no explanation was ever given. Most of the family was harassed and escaped Burkina and sought asylum in various countries. Blaise start killing most of the comrades who help him to take power. It is said that behind every great man is a great woman. In the case of Thomas Sankara, that woman is Mariam Serme. The courage and resistance of this woman in the face of adversity is an example of resilience for all of Africa. As a First Lady, she was humble and undertook her professional obligations as a woman of the people. She remains convinced that social progress cannot occur without a radical change in the status of women. On the death of her husband and friend in the company of his comrades, she proved a model of dignified resistance. She supported the International Committee for Justice for Sankara (CIJS) in filing a complaint regarding the circumstances of Sankara's death

We were then going to ask you Aziz about how you brought the case to the UN in 2006.

Twenty years ago, the Group for Research and Initiative for the Liberation of Africa (GRILA, a Pan-Africanist group to which I belong) answered Mariam Sankara call for justice by creating an international campaign with a two-pronged strategy that was both political and legal. It has been my privilege to co-ordinate a team of 22 lawyers defending Mariam and her sons, who put together a case for a full investigation into the murder of President Sankara and a dozen of his colleagues.

From 1997 to 2001, the CIJS exhausted all of the legal recourses available to it in Burkina and was shamefully blocked at the level of the Supreme Court by a judiciary controlled by the Compaore regime. The government of Burkina Faso, under the presidency of Blaise Compaoré, along with a highly compromised judicial system, blocked all efforts by the

Campaign to bring the case to court locally. The absence of a public inquiry and legal proceedings to determine the identity and civil and criminal responsibilities of Thomas Sankara's assassins and the failure to rectify his death certificate constitute a serious denial of justice. The failure to establish the competence of the military courts was an obstruction of justice. The decision to charge an abnormally high deposit was an obstruction of justice. The case was subsequently dismissed due to the non-payment of a symbolic deposit on behalf of one of the plaintiffs, Auguste Sankara; as a minor, Auguste should have been exempted from paying such a deposit under the legislation in force.

After exhausting all possible legal recourses within Burkina, the Campaign brought the case before the UNHRC. In 2006, the UNHRC decided in favour of the International Justice for Sankara Campaign, demanding that the government of Burkina Faso take action to shed light on the circumstances of Thomas Sankara's death (Communication no. 1159/2003, UN Doc. CCPR/C/86/D/1159/2003 2006).

The UN Human Rights Committee, seized by the CIJS, deemed that, following judgment No. 46 of the Supreme Court of Burkina Faso of 19 June 2001 (rendering definitive decision no. 14 of the Court of Appeal, declaring the jurisdictions of common law incompetent) the authorities of Burkina Faso had effectively refused to send the case to jurisdictions of the Ministry of Defence, where judicial proceedings would have begun before the military tribunals (as provided by article 71(1) and (3) of the Code of Military Justice). It was concluded then that the prosecutor wrongfully stopped the procedure. The Committee concluded:

<ext>The family of Thomas Sankara has the right to know the circumstances of his death ... the refusal to conduct an investigation regarding the death of Thomas Sankara, the official non-recognition of the location of his remains and the non-rectification of his death certificate, constitute inhumane treatment regarding Mrs. Sankara and her sons, contrary to article seven of the Pact.

With respect to paragraph 3(1) of article 2 of the Pact, the State party is required to ensure a useful and effective remedy for Mrs. Sankara and her sons, consistent, notably, with the official recognition of the location of his burial site and damages for the pain and anguish that the family has undergone.

The State party cannot explain the delays at issue and on this point. The Committee considers that, contrary to the arguments of the State, no ban can invalidate the action before the military tribunal, and from this point, the decision regarding non-denunciation of the matter before the Minister of Defense returns to the prosecutor ...

We were also then going to mention how the investigation is moving forward since Compaore resigned.

Diendere, Compaore's military supporters tried to stop the judicial advances by trying a coup. He failed. We have now a very courageous judge. The investigation is almost finished on the national level, some inquiries remain on the international level, as people from Liberia, Ivory Coast, United States and France were involved in the international plot that killed Sankara. We hope that we will have a fair trial.

And then we were also going to say how France has just agreed to declassify secret documents relating to Sankara's death, and how some of this is as a result of your campaigning and that of Bruno Jaffré. We then wanted to ask you Aziz, what difference will that make having these documents available?

We hope we will obtain the genuine and true original documents, from the USA and from France. CIJS remains confident that the new regime in Ouaga will find the appropriate and impartial structures to ensure that our 20 years of work will end with some level of truth as we turn the page on impunity once and for all. CIJS repeats its plea to civil society in France, the US and Côte d'Ivoire, urging their assistance in opening up the files that can reveal the identity of anyone with a hand in Thomas Sankara's assassination. CIJS is thankful for the initiative, Justice Pour Sankara, Justice Pour l'Afrique, which is being simultaneously pursued by Bruno Jaffré and comrades. This initiative has gained the support of many Members of Parliament for declassifying the French archives regarding Thomas Sankara's assassination. Visiting Burkina Faso in November 2017, French President Macron promised that all documents will be declassified.¹ We are also grateful to the Burkinabè people for their ongoing support and encourage them to be vigilant and keep up the struggle against impunity.

As we draw the programme to a close, we wanted to ask you Aziz what you think is Sankara's legacy today?

We salute the resistance of the people of Burkina Faso, particularly the progressive forces and those engaged youth of Burkina, who shouted '*Sankara lives*', while overthrowing the regime of Compaore, and were killed. We honour the martyrs. The Pan-Africanist path forged by Sankara provides a roadmap for a societal project in a polycentric world – a multiply centred world in which the popular masses of the South and North are fed up with the dominant North-South monologue will be heard. Sankara embodied a self-directed, Pan-African development; making a radical break with the previous disorder but also from rigid cultural attitudes. A project which needed popular support, the enthusiasm of the masses, a sense of sacrifice by the 'haves' – in short a set of conditions that made of Thomas, like certain other of his illustrious pan-African predecessors, visionaries ahead of their time. His widow Mariam Sankara, repeating the popular saying, insisted, 'Whatever the length of the night, the day will appear'. **Sankara inspires a non-aligned and Pan-Africanist spirit for the twenty-first century: the formation and crystallisation of intellectuals who are organic to the interests of the masses and the working class, those victims of imperialism**

ⁱ https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/burkina-faso/qui-est-thomas-sankara-liconeanticolonialiste_2494741.html#xtor=EPR-502-%5Bnewslettervideo%5D-20171203-%5Bvideo4%5D