

Thomas Sankara's Legacy: Forging the Burkinabe Cultural Identity

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Abstract

This paper explores the legacy of Thomas Sankara, the first president of Burkina Faso, whose brief yet impactful time in power from 1983 to 1987 continues to influence Burkinabè identity and Pan-African political thought. Sankara's policies were grounded in an ideology that focused on decolonization, Pan-African unity, anti-corruption, women's emancipation. He fostered a national identity rooted in indigenous African values through his dedicated promotion of local and traditional culture, language, and independence. This paper examines the influence of Sankara's ideology, both during his life and after his death, as Blaise Compaoré attempted to use his regime to erase Sankara's place in Burkinabè history. It also investigates the resurgence of Sankarist ideals in political parties, social movements, and youth activism in contemporary Burkina Faso. While acknowledging the limitations and contradictions of Sankara's leadership, this paper argues that his revolutionary vision played a central role in constructing a resilient Burkinabè identity that persists beyond his assassination and continues to inspire collective action and national pride today.

Thomas Sankara was the first president of Burkina Faso, creating the position after organizing a coup d'état in 1983. His presidency ended with his assassination in 1987, ordered by the same man who helped him create and carry out the revolution in 1983: Blaise Compaoré. Sankara achieved much during his time in power, but he is most strongly remembered for his ideology and the impacts it had on the collective cultural identity of Burkina Faso. Sankara's ideology was based in Pan-Africanism, a desire for the political union of Indigenous Africans, independent from non-African supervision and influence. His strongest principles were his stances on anti-corruption, women's emancipation, and decolonization. He used symbolic acts to reinforce the policies and laws he enacted, bolstered by his determination to lead by example. Sankara's public image was characterized by selflessness and transparency, which added to his authority and his popularity, both domestically and internationally. Sankara facilitated a thriving Burkinabè culture based in the Indigenous cultures of the region, promoted through various policies enacted by his government. After his assassination, Sankara has been immortalised through the cultural memory held by the Burkinabè people, which was reinforced as scholars began to study his ideology in depth. Many movements have drawn inspiration from Sankarist ideology, with some being entirely based upon his ideas and goals. Sankara's approach to the leadership of Burkina Faso was not without flaws, and draws much criticism even now. His strategies did not have much time to create long-term changes, and his time in power was very short. Despite these shortcomings, Thomas Sankara's image and ideology were instrumental in constructing a Burkinabè identity that persists in Burkina Faso until today.

France invaded the area now known as Burkina Faso as part of the Scramble for Africa in the 1890s, officially making it a French protectorate in 1896. It became a self-governing colony named the Republic of Upper Volta in 1958 and gained full independence from France in 1960. Upper Volta sustained four coup d'états before the one led by Thomas Sankara in 1983.²⁵⁵ After Sankara's coup d'état, the country was renamed from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, to both shed French colonization and embrace Indigenous African cultures within the country.

Considerable research has been conducted concerning the life and ideology of Thomas Sankara, as he was an unprecedented figure in contemporary African politics. Many scholars have attempted to define his legacy and what made it so impactful, as well as attempted to analyze the various factors that have contributed to the persistence

²⁵⁵ Ernest Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara: a Revolutionary Experience in Retrospect," *Review of African political economy* 40, no. 137 (2013): 360.

of said legacy.²⁵⁶ Some research looks at Sankara's impact within Burkina Faso;²⁵⁷ other research investigates his impact in the broader context of the African continent.²⁵⁸ Various people have contributed to accounts of Sankara's life, from his brother Paul Sankara, to his widow Mariam Sankara, and other advisors and staff who worked with him during his time as president.²⁵⁹ Ernest Harsch is a research scholar at Columbia University's Institute of African Studies, and has written multiple books and journal articles about Thomas Sankara and topics surrounding him. Harsch spoke with Thomas Sankara himself multiple times during Harsch's time as a journalist covering economic developments in Burkina Faso.²⁶⁰ His closeness with Sankara provides a sympathetic perspective of the man, aiding in the study of his image and impact. However, this also introduces significant bias towards him, which Harsch acknowledges in his works. Also consulted for this essay were several papers investigating the political movements that have drawn concepts or originated from Sankara's ideology.²⁶¹ Research conducted more recently, specifically after Burkina Faso's 2014 revolutionary activity and 2015 coup d'état, usually touches on Sankara's influence on the events, even though twenty-seven years had passed between his assassination and the 2014 revolution.²⁶² Discussion about Sankara as an inspiration, martyr, and critical motivational figure for both Burkinabès and other Africans is significant; however, the discussion of his impact on Burkinabè identity is much less common.

Thomas Sankara was born in Yako, Upper Volta, in 1949. His father was a police officer, and as he was employed by the colonial state, his family lived a relatively privileged life.²⁶³ After primary school, Sankara pursued sixth grade in the secular education system, and was studious throughout his education.²⁶⁴ When he was seventeen, he received a scholarship to Prytanée Militaire de Kadiogo, a military academy in Ouagadougou, where he was exposed "to a revolutionary perspective on

²⁵⁶ Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 358–374.; Shaka Yesufu, "A Critical Evaluation of Thomas Isidore Noel Sankara's Servant Leadership Style of Government in Burkina-Faso." *Eureka, Social and Humanities* (Online), no. 2 (2022): 93–102.; Zakaria Soré, "Balai Citoyen: A New Praxis of Citizen Fight with Sankarist Inspirations." In *A Certain Amount of Madness*, ed. Amber Murrey (Pluto Press, 2018), 225–240.

²⁵⁷ Leo Zeilig, "Burkina Faso: From Thomas Sankara to Popular Resistance," *Review of African political economy* 44, no. 151 (2017): 155–164.

²⁵⁸ Felix Kumah-Abiwu, and Odeyemi, Olusoji Alani, "Sankara's Political Ideas and Pan-African Solidarity: A Perspective for Africa's Development?" in *A Certain Amount of Madness*, ed. Amber Murrey (Pluto Press, 2018), 194–208.; Soré, "Balai Citoyen," 225–240.

²⁵⁹ Ernest Harsch, *Thomas Sankara: an African Revolutionary* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014), 1–160.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁶¹ Soré, "Balai Citoyen," 225–240.; Kumah-Abiwu and Odeyemi, "Sankara's Political Ideas and Pan-African Solidarity," 194–208.; Fiona Dragstra, "We Are the Children of Sankara: Memories as Weapons During the Burkinabè Uprisings of 2014 and 2015," in *A Certain Amount of Madness*, ed. Amber Murrey (Pluto Press, 2018), 335–348.

²⁶² Zeilig, "Burkina Faso: From Thomas Sankara to Popular Resistance," 155–164.

²⁶³ Harsch, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary*, 12.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

Upper Volta and the world.”²⁶⁵ After Sankara graduated, he was selected for advanced officer training in Antsirabé, Madagascar. Here, he learned more about agricultural methodology, a variety of political theories, and other non-military subjects. Sankara also witnessed revolutionary change within Madagascar during his time there, as a military takeover of the island’s conservative, pro-French regime.²⁶⁶ Thomas Sankara returned to Upper Volta at twenty-four years old, trained in both military strategy and revolutionary ideas.

Sankara’s first command post in Upper Volta was at Bobo-Dioulasso, training new army recruits. Here, he implemented the strategies and civic education he had learned in Madagascar.²⁶⁷ He was transferred to Ouagadougou in 1974, where he oversaw the army’s engineering corps. While in this position, Sankara became aware of how many people were “diverting funds, materials, or food or giving their own relatives lucrative jobs.”²⁶⁸ He openly criticized these corrupt practices, which alienated him from his peers and superiors. Sankara continued to rise through military ranks for many years, purposely avoiding political positions until 1981, when he was briefly instated as the Minister of Information.²⁶⁹ He spent his time in this position encouraging journalists to reject state intimidation, and left the position with a dramatic speech broadcasted on live radio, criticizing the current party in power for serving only their own interests.²⁷⁰ In 1983, Sankara was appointed Prime Minister, the right hand man to current President of Upper Volta, Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo.²⁷¹ His rousing speeches upstaged President Ouédraogo, and his revolutionary messaging alarmed French authorities and conservative officers. His outspokenness resulted in his arrest in 1983, which sparked large demonstrations throughout the capital of the country, primarily composed “high school students, youths from poor neighbourhoods, and some trade unionists.”²⁷² A political stalemate continued for two months, until Sankara led a successful coup d’état in August of 1983,²⁷³ marking the beginning of Sankara’s iconic time as the first President of Burkina Faso.

Sankara was clear in his goals and ideas for the new revolutionary process that had just begun. In October of 1983, he gave his *Political Orientation Speech*, outlining his plan for the creation of a new Upper Volta. In this speech, Sankara stated his priorities as, in order of importance: the reform of the army, advancement of women’s

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 17.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 18.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 19.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 20.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 28.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 30.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 32.

²⁷² Ibid., 36.

²⁷³ Ibid., 38.

political status, and economic reconstruction.²⁷⁴ The new missions to be undertaken by the national army were as follows: to be “able to fight any enemy inside and out, and participate in military training”,²⁷⁵ to participate in agriculture and economic production in order to “live and suffer among the people it belongs to,”²⁷⁶ and finally to arm their soldiers not only with military training, but also with ideological and political training, in order to promote the creation of conscious revolutionaries.²⁷⁷ Advancement of women’s political status would be achieved through the creation of a new mentality amongst Burkinabè women, letting them “assume the fate of the country alongside the man.”²⁷⁸ Finally, Sankara’s goals concerning economic reconstruction revolved around the reformation of land, administration, and education.²⁷⁹ Sankara constructed these political priorities intentionally, to forge a self-sufficient, independent, and proud decolonized African state. Thomas Sankara’s ideology was a unique mixture for the time, which made him a striking political figure to both the people of Burkina Faso and Africa.

Thomas Sankara’s desire for a strong Burkinabè identity situated in a pan-African community is evident throughout the entirety of his time in power and is ever present in his strongest ideas and policies. One of the best examples of his pan-African principles is the name ‘Burkina Faso,’ accompanied by the term ‘Burkinabè’. Sankara wanted to “kill off Upper Volta in order to allow Burkina Faso to be reborn,”²⁸⁰ and the careful consideration in the crafting of the name ‘Burkina Faso’ is a direct reflection of that. ‘Burkina Faso’ roughly translates to ‘Land of Upright People’, and is a composite of several languages Indigenous to the region; ‘Burkina’ comes from the language of Mooré, meaning “worthy people” or “men of dignity”; ‘Faso’ comes from the language of Jula, meaning “house” or “republic”; finally, the ‘bè’ suffix in ‘Burkinabè’ was taken from the language of Fulfuldé.²⁸¹ Efforts to promote the many different Indigenous cultures of the region were undertaken even before the name change, with state media beginning to actively promoting various languages and cultures when Sankara took power in 1983. This was done by having television newscasts stop delivering exclusively in French, adding radio broadcasts in eleven of Burkina Faso’s Indigenous languages.²⁸² Once in power, Sankara supported a variety of cultural festivals, and the country saw an “unprecedented blossoming of African

²⁷⁴ Thomas Sankara, “The Political Orientation Speech,” transcript of speech delivered over radio in Burkina Faso, October 2, 1983.
www.thomassankara.net/the-political-orientation-speech-thomas-sankara/?lang=en.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Harsh, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary*, 366.

²⁸⁰ Thomas Sankara, “Asserting our identity, asserting our culture,” 1983 in *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution*, ed., Michel Prairie, (United States of America: Pathfinder Press, 2007), 143.

²⁸¹ Harsh, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary*, 67.

²⁸² Ibid.

cultural and ethnic representations”²⁸³ during his era. These efforts to promote Indigenous cultures, languages, and appreciation forged a strong Burkinabè identity based in pride for their African heritage and thriving cultural scene.²⁸⁴

Sankara’s desire for the Burkinabè identity to be based on cultures Indigenous to the region was partially driven by his anti-Western, anti-colonialist stance. He believed that Western interference had stifled the development of culture in most, if not all African countries.²⁸⁵ In order to amend this suffocation of culture, Sankara worked to cut the West out of Burkina Faso’s economy, culture, and identity, to allow the country to develop a self-sufficient economy that the Burkinabè people could be proud of. Sankara’s facilitation of the Burkinabè identity began through his revolutionary efforts, and was strengthened by his dedication to meaningful cultural events and practices. His hope was that these cultural attitudes would trickle down into the general public successfully, allowing Burkina Faso to develop a concrete identity with a thriving culture.

Sankara’s ideology was based on his strong pan-African ideals, with many beliefs surrounding African solidarity, collective identity, and economic independence.²⁸⁶ His stance on decolonization was deeply informed by this pan-Africanist base. Sankara advocated for all African countries to refuse to pay their colonial debts, stating that “[t]he debt is another form of neocolonialism, one in which the colonialists have transformed themselves into technical assistants. Actually, it would be more accurate to say technical assassins.”²⁸⁷ Sankara made great strides within Burkina Faso to reduce reliance on foreign aid and resources, but did not achieve his goal of spreading this practice to the greater continent. Sankara was also staunchly anti-corruption. He had openly criticized the corruption of army officers and government officials he had encountered during his time overseeing the Upper Volta Military Engineering Corps, and openly supported activists who exposed high-level corruption during his time as Minister of Information. Sankara believed that corruption was “nurtured by imperialism and neocolonialism,”²⁸⁸ and was determined to shed all colonial influences. Once he became President, Sankara had many officials of both previous regimes and current officeholders tried for corruption.²⁸⁹ Another major pillar of Sankara’s ideology was the emancipation of women, made clear in his *Political Orientation Speech*, where he stated that “[the] Revolution and liberation of women go together.”²⁹⁰ Sankara was sincere in his commitment, and made many reforms concerning women’s rights, including the establishment of a minimum marriageable age, the widow’s right to

²⁸³ Ibid., 68.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Sankara, “Asserting our identity, asserting our culture,” 146.

²⁸⁶ Kumah-Abiwu and Odeyemi, “Sankara’s Political Ideas and Pan-African Solidarity,” 203.

²⁸⁷ Thomas Sankara, “A united front against the debt,” 1983, in *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution*, ed., Michel Prairie (United States of America: Pathfinder Press, 2007), 375.

²⁸⁸ Kumah-Abiwu and Odeyemi, “Sankara’s Political Ideas and Pan-African Solidarity,” 204.

²⁸⁹ Harsch, “The Legacies of Thomas Sankara,” 369.

²⁹⁰ Sankara, “Political Orientation Speech.”

inherit, and multiple public campaigns against issues such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage.²⁹¹

Sankara's success as a leader and as an inspiration was greatly reinforced by his use of symbolic gestures in his policies, fortified by his determination to lead by example. He purposefully enacted policies that had genuine impact on the economy and the community in a way that was visible and meaningful. To help embrace Indigenous culture and promote the domestic cotton market, civil servants were required to wear traditionally designed and locally created outfits made from Faso dan Fani fabric on a regular basis. The practice of weaving Faso dan Fani fabric had been all but eradicated as people bought more imported fabrics, and the cotton produced in the region became almost entirely exported. For International Women's Day, Sankara encouraged men to take on the duties of their female counterparts to understand women's role in the community. He often employed the use of mass public assemblies, in which central government budgets were designed, while the makers of said budgets were subjected to questioning from the public.²⁹² This helped demystify how the state functioned and allowed the public to voice their concerns in an effective and direct manner.

In addition to the symbolism he used to reinforce his policies, Sankara always led by example. He was one of the least paid Presidents in Africa during this period, with a salary of US \$450 per month.²⁹³ Civil servants had similarly reduced salaries as a reinforcement that they worked for the good of the community, not for monetary gain. Sankara's projected image was one of sincerity, openness, and humility. He rode a bicycle everywhere, played soccer on the public field with his advisors and staff every week, and discouraged people from chanting his name.²⁹⁴ He publicly denounced any form of personality cultism pertaining to himself, refusing to have his picture on display in public buildings, and discouraged all other forms of personality worship.²⁹⁵ Sankara's image was forged with the intention of placing emphasis on the Burkinabè people's connection with their leader as equals, and to remind the people that his leadership was focused on the people, instead of on himself. This image has lasted to the present day, where Sankara is hailed as a hero both within Burkina Faso and across the continent.²⁹⁶

²⁹¹ Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 369.

²⁹² Ibid., 371.

²⁹³ Yesufu, "A Critical Evaluation of Thomas Sankara," 98; As of April 2025, \$50 USD would be the equivalent of \$800 CAD.

²⁹⁴ Harsch, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary*, 29.

²⁹⁵ David Smith, "Burkina Faso's Revolutionary Hero Thomas Sankara to Be Exhumed," *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, March 6, 2015.

www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/06/burkina-fasos-revolutionary-hero-thomas-sankara-to-be-exhumed; Yesufu, "A Critical Evaluation of Thomas Sankara," 97.

²⁹⁶ Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 359.; Harsch, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary*, 83.

Thomas Sankara was killed in a coup d'état in 1987, led by his former ally Blaise Compaoré. Compaoré was Sankara's deputy during his presidency, and served as both Minister of State at the Presidency and as Minister of State for Justice. Compaoré went on to claim the presidency for himself, and was in power until another coup d'état ousted him in 2014. During his regime, Compaoré did his best to suppress Sankara and the effects he had on Burkina Faso's population. Compaoré wanted to build Burkina Faso around the image of himself, rather than Sankara.²⁹⁷ He had Sankara buried in a mass grave with the other men killed in the 1987 coup d'état, with no grave markers and no ceremony.²⁹⁸ Sankara was actively slandered on television and on the radio, being called a "traitor", "fascist", "messianic", and a "paranoiac misogynist."²⁹⁹ Open mention of Sankara was taboo, and it was even more risky for any Burkinabè to express admiration or appreciation of Sankara, an attitude that lasted for many years after his assassination.³⁰⁰ Unfortunately for Compaoré, by prohibiting talk of Sankara and his ideology, Compaoré motivated those against his own regime to rally around Sankara, effectively making a political martyr of the former president. Sankara's place in the cultural memory of Burkina Faso was only further cemented with Compaoré's efforts to erase him from the minds of the people. As his regime progressed, Compaoré realised that Sankara's position in the greater Burkinabè cultural memory was firmly entrenched. He eventually allowed Sankara to be openly celebrated again, and designated Sankara as a national hero in 2000.³⁰¹

One of the factors that Compaoré underestimated in attempting to sully Sankara's legacy was his significance in the pan-African consciousness. The former president was not a hero solely to the Burkinabè, but an inspiration across Africa. Sankara's popularity was rooted in what he represented to the whole of Africa, which had been struggling with corrupt leaders ignoring their basic needs since the colonization of the continent.³⁰² Additionally, Sankara represented a true split from the West, economically and culturally, which only added to his popularity amongst Africans. His legacy is one of inspiration and revolution, both to those fighting Compaoré and to those outside of Burkina Faso, living and fighting elsewhere in Africa.³⁰³ Sankara's sudden assassination immortalised him, and Compaoré's attempts to diminish the effects of the Sankara era on Burkina Faso and the rest of Africa further cemented Sankara's place in both the Burkinabè and the African cultural memory.

Thomas Sankara was a source of hope for many Burkinabè during his presidency, and his legacy continues to provide that same hope for Burkinabè today. His ideas are often given as alternative solutions to crises in Burkina Faso both by those

²⁹⁷ Dragstra, "We Are the Children of Sankara," 345.

²⁹⁸ Harsch, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary*, 90.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

³⁰⁰ Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 359.; Dragstra, "We are the Children of Sankara," 344.

³⁰¹ Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 359.

³⁰² Yesufu, "A Critical Evaluation of Thomas Sankara," 101.

³⁰³ Zeilig, "Burkina Faso: From Thomas Sankara to Popular Resistance," 161.

who identify as Sankarist and those outside his ideological affiliation. The term ‘Sankarist’ in reference to a political alignment was not used while Sankara himself was alive, but emerged with the study of his revolution and rule by scholars after his death.³⁰⁴ It was further popularized in 2000 when it was first used as an identifier by a political party, which called itself the ‘Union for Rebirth / Sankarist Party’.³⁰⁵ Since then, more political parties built on Sankarist ideals have developed, and have elected a few deputies to the National Assembly since 2002.³⁰⁶ However, factionalism and fragmentation between them have caused votes for Sankarist parties to be split, and no majority has been achieved by any one party.

In addition to political parties, Sankarism has been an inspiring basis for many social movements. The Balai Citoyen, which translates to ‘Citizen Broom’, is one of the more remarkable social movements based on Sankarism. The name indicates their goal, which is to “rid the country of ‘dirt’, including the greed of political corruption.”³⁰⁷ It officially launched in 2013, and its origins dates back to 2011. Balai Citoyen is primarily composed of journalists, students, and human rights activists.³⁰⁸ They are committed not only to the movement’s primary goal of anti-corruption, but also to preserving the legacy of Sankara, through celebration of his actions and preservation of his memory.³⁰⁹

Separate from organized movements, it is remarkable that the contemporary youth still draw on Sankara and his ideology for revolutionary inspiration, despite being born after his death. During Compaoré’s time in power, youth protestors would refer to themselves as ‘les enfants de Sankara’, or ‘the children of Sankara’.³¹⁰ This clear expression of contempt for Compaoré and his regime is made more impactful by the knowledge of Compaoré’s attempts to wipe Sankara from the cultural memory of the Burkinabè people. The youth of Burkina Faso use Sankara, his image, and his words as “contemporary weapons for social and political movements.”³¹¹ Sankara and his ideologies are a powerful rallying point, bringing together intergenerational Burkinabè, and creating a strong sense of national unity and pride. People who lived during Sankara’s regime draw pride from seeing his policies in action, and the youth claim him as a part of their national heritage and an icon from which they draw motivation and hope.

While Sankara is hailed as a hero to the Burkinabè people, his ideology had flaws that were not dealt with during his time in power. His visions were vast and ambitious. They often lacked a clear implementation plan, with no other successful examples to

³⁰⁴ Yesufu, “A Critical Evaluation of Thomas Sankara,” 98.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 99.

³⁰⁶ Harsch, “The Legacies of Thomas Sankara,” 359.

³⁰⁷ Soré, “Balai Citoyen,” 225.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 226.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 237.

³¹⁰ Dragstra, “We are the Children of Sankara,” 345.

³¹¹ Ibid., 342.

prove if his methods would work. Sankara was also impatient with anyone who insisted that his sights were set too high for the current economic or political position of Burkina Faso. In some situations, he was right to ignore these complaints. UNICEF did not believe that his vaccination drive would succeed, but agreed to support him despite their reservations.³¹² Sankara managed to achieve the vaccination target despite the misgivings others expressed about the plan. However, his plans often had unintended consequences. For example, the CDRs, or Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, were Sankara's main vehicle for the participation of Burkinabè citizens in the governance of Burkina Faso. They were intended to allow local governance to be directly involved in the development of smaller communities, in addition to compensating for the shortcomings of the military.³¹³ Unfortunately, their history is tarnished by the abuses committed by the young and inexperienced activists that comprised most of these units.³¹⁴ Sankara had big dreams, and while many of them worked in his favour, there were some serious flaws to his system of governance.

The modern Burkinabè identity gained much of its cultural shape under the direct influence of Thomas Sankara. While he was alive, Sankara strove to create a thriving culture within Burkina Faso, shaped by his anti-colonialism and anti-Western ideals. This manifested in the promotion of Indigenous languages, festivals, and traditions, while shunning Western influences like fashion. His pan-African approach allowed for multiple Indigenous cultures in the region to weave together to create the Burkinabè identity, while still retaining their distinct cultures. This culture was further reinforced by the creation of new holidays, traditions, and customs, introduced through government policy and strengthened by Sankara's practice of leading by example. Even after his death, Thomas Sankara's ideology continues to influence the political thoughts and developments of the Burkinabè people. His assassination gave him the status of a martyr, and the study of his ideology has inspired many people, especially Burkinabè youth, to pursue Sankarism as a political alignment. Sankara may only have served four years as Burkina Faso's first President, but his impact continues to reverberate throughout the country. He will continue to motivate and inspire the Burkinabè people as an upstanding political figure and virtuous national hero, for as long as he remains in the cultural memory.

This paper was written in the Spring semester of 2023 for Dr. Adebisi Alade's HSTR 360: Africa in the World.

³¹² Harsch, "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara," 371.

³¹³ Harsch, *Thomas Sankara: An African Revolutionary*, 35.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

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