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Burkina Faso

The trial concerning the murder of Sankara and his comrades begins

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Thirty-five years after the assassination of Thomas Sankara, the trial of those accused has begun in the capital of Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou. Although this event is a step forward, grey areas persist, mainly due to French manoeuvres.

It was after large-scale popular struggles in Burkina Faso that Thomas Sankara took over the destiny of the nation. He was trying to pursue a policy that at least partially broke with the liberal world order. Measures were taken to promote food sovereignty, protection of resources, promotion of women's rights, and popular participation in the running of the country.

A credible political alternative for the continent

On the international level, he took a position of solidarity with national liberation struggles, in particular that of the Palestinian people, denounced apartheid in South Africa and supported Kanaky's demand for independence at the UN in December 1986. This provoked the resentment of the French right and of Chirac, who had returned to power in the framework of cohabitation. In addition, Sankara's policy was in frontal opposition to Western countries on the question of the legitimacy of the debt of African countries.

The Sankarist experience also represented a danger for the African dictatorships, corrupt and subjugated to the rulers of the West, because it outlined a credible political alternative for the continent. In other words, the African leader was creating a lot of enemies, who would more or less contribute to his assassination. It took place on October 15, 1987. A commando led by Blaise Compaoré's aide-de-camp, Gilbert Diendjéré, executed Thomas Sankara and a dozen of his companions. Thirty-five years later, the trial has opened, but it may not answer all the questions.

A truncated trial

Indeed, the main accused, ex-president Compaoré, suspected of being the instigator of this murderous operation, will not be present. He was exfiltrated by France to Ivory Coast during the insurrection of 2014. And Ivorian President Ouattara is not about to extradite him, because Compaoré armed and financed militias that enabled him to gain power against Gbagbo. The consideration of the international implications in the assassination of Sankara seems compromised by the actions of French leaders.

During his speech in Ouagadougou in November 2017, Emmanuel Macron pledged to deliver France's confidential documents concerning this affair. Although the first two batches were sent successfully, the third batch was delayed. The investigating judge therefore called for the dissociation of the case between the Burkinabé side, in order to be able to launch the trial, and the international side. Four days after the official confirmation of this separation, quite opportunely, the third batch arrived. Consequently, France's actions cannot be raised during the discussions.

The Legion of Honour for the assassin of

Sankara

This manoeuvre by Macron aims to protect the reputation of France (already badly damaged) and its political class. Consensus was in order between Socialist and right-wing politicians against Sankara and in support of the Compaoré regime. Mitterrand declared: "He takes too many decisions. In my opinion, he goes further than necessary." As for his Africa adviser, Guy Penne, he organised a smear press campaign a few days before the assassination of the African leader and subsequently became the president of the France-Burkina Faso Friendship Association. He did not hesitate to declare that under the Compaoré regime, Burkina Faso was "an exemplary democracy and a well-run country".

General Emmanuel Beth, director of military cooperation at the foreign ministry headed by Kouchner, awarded the Legion of Honour in 2008 to Sankara's assassin, Gilbert Diendjéré. As for Claude Bartolone, Socialist President of the National Assembly, in 2012 he refused the establishment of a parliamentary commission of inquiry requested by the EELV deputies and the Left Party on the involvement of France in this crime. The trial began on 11 October and was postponed for a month. A new battle is to have it broadcast and recorded. A [petition](#) has been launched so that this event can remain accessible and contribute to the history of the country, and more generally of Africa.

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