

# ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



**ISRG PUBLISHERS**

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

**ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)**

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – II Issue-VI (November-December) 2024

Frequency: Bimonthly



## The Comintern, Socialism and Revolutionary Social Change in Post-Colonial Africa: Evidence from Egypt, Libya and Burkina Faso

Olusegun Adeyeri<sup>1\*</sup>, Aderemi Bonafacio Britto<sup>2</sup>, Victor Akande<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Department of History and International Studies Lagos State University, Ojo, Nigeria.

| **Received:** 29.11.2024 | **Accepted:** 03.12.2024 | **Published:** 15.12.2024

\***Corresponding author:** Olusegun Adeyeri

Department of History and International Studies Lagos State University, Ojo, Nigeria.

### Abstract

*On the eve of independence in the 1950s/60s, many African leaders denounced western capitalism as being exploitative and retrogressive, and in its place, canvassed and sought to operationalise the notion that socialism was the only way out of the new states' problems and the pathway to nation-building and rapid socio-economic development, which many Africans eagerly awaited as the dividends of political independence. Some African personalities and anti-colonial movements of socialist persuasion emerged to challenge colonial injustice and exploitation, and thus raised the possibility of radical social change in their respective states. African socialist governmental experiments across states shared some overlapping features that created platforms for postcolonial resistance and nation-building. This paper argues that despite the weak links and 'contradictory' relationship between the African nationalist movements and the Comintern, some African nationalist leaders and movements derived inspirations through the Comintern's socialist ideology in their anti-colonial struggles. Using Egypt, Libya and Burkina Faso as main focus, this paper is a discourse of the legacies and significance of the deployment of socialist ideology in post-colonial Africa. Essentially, the study seeks to investigate the extent to which socialist ideology served as an agent of liberation struggle, nation-building and social change in Africa since independence, with particular respect to representative government and socio-economic development. The study adopts the historical method.*

**Keywords:** Socialism, Postcolonial Resistance, Social Change, Nation-Building, Africa.

## Introduction

African decolonization which commenced after World War II coincided with the evolving Cold War between the Western Capitalist bloc of countries led by the United States of America (USA) and the Eastern Socialist bloc of countries led by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In the context of the Cold War, the USSR offered various forms of support to African liberation movements in their quest for independence from European colonial rule. But prior to the advent of the partnership, the Soviet Union had already initiated a process of exporting Socialism to African states through the instrumentality of the Communist International (Comintern) also called Third International, established in 1919 to achieve world Communist revolution. The study of the Comintern's relationship with African liberation struggle and politics in general has received scanty scholarly attention. Much of the existing literature on this subject, including Adi (2013), Weiss (2013), Weiss & Marjomaa (2003), and Riddell (2011) focused on the Comintern's relationship with Africa during the colonial period, mainly 1920s-1930s; only Weiss & Marjomaa paid some attention to the future impact of the Comintern on African nationalism and politics. The prime purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of the Comintern/Socialist ideology on state power, nation-building and social change in postcolonial Africa, with particular focus on Egypt, Libya and Burkina Faso.

### **The Comintern, Socialism and the African Nationalist Movement**

The Comintern was established by revolutionary Socialists from over 24 countries in Moscow, USSR in March 1919. Of particular relevance to Africa was the Comintern's resolve to create an international Communist movement that would champion the struggle against racism and colonialism. Indeed at inception, the Comintern declared its avowed commitment to the liberation of the colonial subjects in Africa and Europe. Based on the successful Bolshevik Socialist Revolution of 1917 in Russia (predecessor of USSR), the Comintern provided methods and approaches for social change across the world. The core operational principles of the Comintern were class struggle, thorough internationalism, staunch commitment to anti-racism, and collaboration with other forces in united fronts (Olende, 2015; Riddell, 2011).

In November-December 1922, two black (Afro-American) revolutionaries, Otto Huiswoud and Claude McKay, played leading roles in the Fourth Congress of the Comintern held in Moscow. Huiswoud, who had joined the Socialist Party in 1918 and became a founding member of the US Communist movement in 1919, attended the Fourth Congress as both an official delegate of the US Communist Party and representative of the African Blood Brotherhood for African Liberation and Redemption (ABB) which he co-founded in October 1919 to pursue Black patriotism/struggle alongside revolutionary socialism. McKay, on his part, attended the congress as an "independent" delegate. It is worth noting that Huiswoud chaired the commission that was set up to prepare theses on the Black Question. In addition, McKay commissioned meetings, and together with Huiswoud, addressed a plenary session of the congress (Riddell, 2011; Enckervort, 2001). An important legacy of the Fourth Congress for African nationalism was the resolution to promote a global black struggle for equal socio-political rights for all Blacks.

Due to the difficulty the Comintern and its allied organizations encountered in establishing direct contacts with African nationalists, they decided to deploy Afro-American Pan-Africanists (like George Padmore and W. E. B. Du Bois), European Communist Parties (particularly the French Communist Party) to propagate Communism across Africa. From 1923, African nationalism received increased attention of the Comintern because of the latter's belief that the British and French Empires were exploiting Sub-Saharan Africa economic resources and could possibly exploit its military resources also, due to mounting pressures back home in Europe, as well as in Asia and Near East. Thus, the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in June-July 1924 decided that the Communist parties of Britain, France and Belgium should jointly establish the Negro Propaganda Commission (NPC) headquartered in Geneva for the chief purpose of propagating socialist revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although the NPC established links with the Pan-African movement put together by Afro-American groups, it did not succeed in creating direct links with Africa largely as a result of the vague attitude of the Western Communists towards colonial rule (Weiss & Marjomaa, 2003, Carr, 1978) and staunch intolerance by the British and French colonial administrations for Communist infiltration.

Communist activism in Africa reached a landmark via the International Congress against Imperialism and Colonialism convened by the League Against Colonial Oppression (LACO) in Brussels, Belgium on 10 February 1927. In attendance alongside the almost 200 representatives from the various colonial territories worldwide were delegates from across Africa such as Josiah Gumede and James La Guma of the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa, Messali Hadj of the North African Star (NAS) of Algeria, Lamine Senghor of the French Communist Party and the Paris-based Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre, and Isaac Wallace-Johnson, leader of the Sierra Leone Railway Workers Union (SLRWU), among others (West, Martin & Wilkins, 2009; Petersson, 2014; Byrne, 2014). The conference, in which the Comintern was an active participant, provided a crucial avenue for African nationalists to interact directly with fellow victims of colonial oppression from different parts of the world as well as compatriots of the international Communist movement. The League Against Imperialism and for Colonial Independence (LAI), formally created at the Brussels conference, ushered in increased Comintern/Communist activity in Africa. With a branch in North Africa, while Sub-Saharan Africa was catered for by the Paris and London branches, from 1927 LAI became the core platform for communication and collaboration between African nationalists and Comintern in the international anti-imperialist struggle (Petersson, 2014).

The International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), which succeeded the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) and the International Negro Workers Information Bureau (INWIB), was established in July 1930 and became the revolutionary trade union arm of the Comintern. ITUCNW, based in Hamburg, Germany, was created to organize and lead the international struggle for the protection and advancement of Black workers' interests in Africa, West Indies and other colonized territories. In doing this, ITUCNW which was set up by the Comintern as an organ of Communist propaganda, agitation and infiltration, sought to connect Black workers across the world and also establish connections with militants and probable revolutionaries in African and Caribbean territories. The International Conference of Negro Workers held in Hamburg in

July 1930 converged revolutionaries and anti-colonialists from Africa and other regions of the world in deliberations that marked a significant step in international collaboration against colonial rule. Some representatives of nationalist movements in Africa such as Eduard Small of Gambia and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya proceeded to get Soviet-sponsored education in Communist universities in USSR, and returned home with intellectual and practical knowledge of revolutionary/liberation struggle. Communist international collaborative initiatives resulted in interconnections between persons of diverse orientations and circumstances as Foster Jones, a Sierra Leonian Seafarer, and Jomo Kenyatta, who later became the first President of postcolonial Kenya (Filatova, 1999; Olende, 2015; Weiss, 2013). Active Communist activity in Sub-Saharan Africa also emerged. As an illustration, Communist cells were created in Kenya, South Africa, Senegal, Nigeria, Madagascar and Sierra Leone, etc. In addition, a Communist party was formed in Madagascar, Eduard Small (founder of the Gambia Labour Union and Comintern/Russian University graduate) staged a general strike in Gambia, while armed rebellions linked to LDRN (though unsuccessful) broke out in French Congo and Cameroon in 1929 and 1931 respectively (Weiss, 2003; Brzezinski, 1963).

Despite the serious challenges, such as deep hostility from colonial authorities, diverse outlooks and inexperienced nature of the nationalist movements, and limited resources ( Olende, 2015; Weiss, 2013) encountered by the Comintern and its associate organizations, Comintern /socialist inspired, directed and funded activity in Africa laid an enduring intellectual and philosophical foundation for revolutionary socialism as a viable ideology and strategy for liberation struggle and postcolonial nation-building and national development by African states even after the Comintern's exit in 1943. The emergence of radical nationalism and shades of socialist governmental experiments in some African states during the post-1940s period should be understood in this context. Against this setting, let us now proceed with our case studies to examine the impact of socialism on liberation struggle, nation-building and social change in Africa.

### **Socialist Ideology, State Power and Radical Social Change in Postcolonial Africa**

#### **Egyptian Revolution of 1952**

Egypt is one of a handful of African states that have so far experimented with Socialist socio-political organization. The harbinger of that experiment was the Free Officers Movement (FOM), a group of Army officers led by Gen. Muhammad Naguib and Col. Gamel Abdel Nasser, who seized power from King Farouk's government in a military putsch on 23 July 1952. Causal explanations for the coup d'état could be sought principally in the harsh economic situation and its attendant social tensions, worsening Egyptian-British relations, and heightening discontent within the army. Since about mid-1951, Egypt's cotton-dependent economy had been undergoing huge crisis characterised by low cotton demand and prices, decline in government revenue, and increasing weakening of purchasing power of Egyptians, among other maladies. On the Political front, the massive proletarian anti-imperial activism of late 1951 and early 1952 ultimately threw Egypt into serious political intrigue, turmoil and instability with Egypt having five governments in just six months preceding the coup. The situation was worsened by growing discontent in the army, particularly among the ranks of young officers, against corruption, nepotism and administrative incompetence by the ruling aristocracy (Munir, 1952). The yearnings of Egyptian masses and middle-class for political stability, good governance

and socio-economic progress facilitated the forceful change of government.

The coupists appointed Ali Maher, a long-standing political ally as Prime Minister because they were initially not interested in the day to day administration of Egypt. But the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) established by the FOM under the chairmanship and vice-chairmanship of Naguib and Nasser respectively was the real power in the country. Due to the determination of the RCC to actualize its staunch ideological ideas and Maher's decline to support the agrarian reform policy of the council, Maher was compelled to relinquish office on 7 September 1952 and Naguib succeeded him. Following protracted conflict between Naguib and Nasser in the aftermath of Naguib's proclamation of himself as President of the newly established republic, Nasser eventually eased Naguib out of power in October 1954, thereby taking full charge of government for the next 15 years (New World Encyclopedia Contributors, 2017).

The revolutionary government from inception took measures that were pro-socialist in character, notwithstanding the allegation that the coupists had no clear-cut political ideology when they seized power. The government initiated a crucial land reform policy weeks after the coup. On 8 September 1952, the government proclaimed the first Agrarian Reform Law that essentially sought to limit the size of land holdings. The policy fixed maximum ownership of land at 200 Feddans, and land owned above this limit was to be expropriated and distributed in plots of two-five Feddans. It created agricultural reform cooperative societies of which beneficiaries must be members. Division of land via inheritance or sale was disallowed. Tenancy was regulated by pegging rent at seven times the land tax in written contracts, while agricultural labour was regulated by establishing trade unions and a minimum age. Further legislations in 1957 and 1959 expanded the cooperative society system to all small landowners having below 15 Feddans, and enactments in 1961 and 1969 tightened the land ownership restriction to 100 and 50 Feddans respectively (Anderson, 2009) For about two decades the government vigorously pursued social justice through the land reform policy which successfully limited the quantity of land that any individual or family could possess in Egypt.

Nationalization of the private sector of the Egyptian economy was another socialist initiative of the revolutionary government. Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal on 26 July 1956 in response to Western powers withdrawal of funding offers for the Aswan High Dam construction foreshadowed an unprecedented nationalization policy in the country. It may be recalled that Egyptian-British relations had been marked by controversy and tension since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In October 1954, Nasser signed a pact with Britain for the quick withdrawal of all British soldiers from the Suez Canal, although provision was made for Britain to use the canal's military bases if any Arab country or Turkey came under external attack. Although the latter provision represented continued British influence in Egyptian territory, the agreement appeared to have ended age-long tension between the two countries. Thus, by December 1955 Egypt had secured commitments for a \$200 million loan from the World Bank, \$56 million and \$14 million grants from USA and Britain respectively for execution of the Aswan Dam project that had huge potential social, economic, energy and environmental benefits. However, Britain and USA withdrew their offers, also endangering the World Bank offer, in retaliation for Nasser's signing of an arms pact with

Czechoslovakia (nominal supplier of USSR arms to Egypt under the agreement) in September 1955. In view of the fact that Egypt's repossession of the Suez Canal would become a reality in 12 years, Nasser's decision to nationalize the canal may be seen to be an unnecessary show of courage or mere retaliation against the Western powers' withdrawal of their funding offers. But a consideration of certain factors on ground in 1956 would suggest otherwise. First, the manner in which the retraction of the US funding offer was done (while a meeting between officials of both countries to iron out grey areas of the US aid proposal was ongoing) was viewed by many Egyptians as a national humiliation. Secondly, considering the critical economic situation, including unfavourable balance of trade (BOT) and balance of payment (BOP), in Egypt at the time, the subsisting and projected revenue from the Suez Canal may have been a strong motivation for the decision to nationalize it (Humphreys, 2001; New World Encyclopedia Contributors, 2017). On these two grounds at least, the nationalization of the Suez Canal was a nationalistic act in Egypt's national interest, as adjudged by Nasser's revolutionary government. Indeed, Egypt's total ownership and control of the canal after months of military and diplomatic skirmishes with British, French and Israeli invasion forces made Nasser an Egyptian/Arab hero as well as symbol of Arab nationalism.

A comprehensive nationalization policy followed as from early 1960s. The government became increasingly active in the national economy through a programme of nationalizing private firms (mostly owned by foreigners) including banks, insurance companies, and heavy industries, direct investment in productive enterprise, and state control and monopoly of many sub-sectors of the economy. Particularly significant was the nationalisation of the Misr Bank Group, the largest holding company in Egypt, to become the Misr Organization, a national Socialist institution collaborating with other government-owned institutions such as the Economic Organisation, Central Five Year Plan Council and the General Military Plants, in order to actualize the government's Socialist policy goals. Nationalization of the Misr Bank Group enabled the government to wield immense authority over the entire economy. To illustrate the extent of government involvement in the Egyptian economy, in 1952 the private sector handled 76% of investments in Egypt, but a handful of decades later the state was responsible for between 80 and 90% of total investments. Moreover, by the beginning of the 1970s all business enterprise with the exception of agriculture and small-scale ventures were under government ownership and control. Even in the case of agriculture, government's introduction of cooperative societies, expansion of the price control system, and the forced profit return enabled it to take a substantial portion of agriculture incomes to fund industrialisation (Kenawy, 2009; Privatization Coordination Support Unit, 2002). Overall, the revolutionary government during its tenure reduced social inequality, corruption and foreign influence in Egyptian affairs, and promoted industrialization and rural urbanization in Egypt. But liberal democratic governance and tenets such as free and fair electoral system, human freedom and privacy, press freedom, and political dissent suffered. This dictatorial character may have been necessitated by the government's desperation to maintain power and sustain the revolution, particularly in the absence of any concrete working class/revolutionary vanguard and cadres as support base.

### **Libya Revolution of 1969**

Like the Free Officers Movement had done in Egypt 17 years earlier, a group of young officers in the Libyan Army toppled the

Kingdom of Libya government of King Idris in a peaceful military coup on 1 September 1969, and renamed the country Libyan Arab Republic to be administered by the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), same name adopted by Egypt's revolutionary government, headed by Col. Muammar Gadhafi. There is need to say that the Libya coup was influenced by Nasser's Arab nationalism. In this context, Gadhafi and his co-plotters, who deeply admired Nasser, were deeply angered and ashamed by Arab armies defeat by Israel in the 1967 War. But the main accusation against King Idris' government was that it squandered the natural resources of Libya (Vandewalle, 1986).

Having overthrown King Idris, Gadhafi set out to develop Libya's economy and modernize the country. In the early phase of his regime, Gadhafi openly denounced Communism, describing it as the greatest danger confronting the world at the time. But certain developments soon changed Gadhafi's stance in favour of Socialist state planning, although he laboured to present his own Socialism as a distinct brand. One such development was the 1974 global economic recession which caused increasing social unrest in Libya, leading to factionalization of the government as some groups were in favour of the interests of the weak capitalist forces in the country, while Gadhafi decided to checkmate them. Secondly, because the fledgling local capitalists were unable to develop the economy, Gadhafi had to change his initial policy aimed at developing local Libyan capitalism to one that promoted government dominance of the economy. Through outright participation or modified participation agreements, Gadhafi effected state takeover of majority shares in all the foreign oil firms operating in Libya. This proved to be an important policy initiative because the oil industry soon became the hub of the Libyan revolutionary society/economy. By 1978, oil revenue constituted 99.9% of total income. Government became the main intermediary between the oil industry and the remaining sectors of the Libyan economy (Vandewalle, 1986; Weston, 2011; Kawczynski, 2011). Under this oil-dominated rentier state economy, a small number of state officials control and administer state revenue, and the remaining population utilize government-distributed state revenue without partaking in the production of such revenue. Similar to the classic Socialist model, individual revenue and wealth in Libya were not based upon individual productivity but by need, according to official state policy, but in reality, other determinants included closeness to the ruling elite, loyalty, etc. The combination of the rentier nature and overdependence of Libyan economy on oil had negative consequences. It undermined productivity and social justice. It changed the basis of citizenship in Libya by making loyalty and compliance basic preconditions for access to state rewards. In addition, the economic system promoted an inefficient taxation system and lack of accountability, failed to ensure full employment and modernization of the economy, and underdeveloped and marginalized Eastern Libya economically and politically (Akl, 2016). Little wonder that Eastern Libya, particularly Benghazi, was the epicentre of the 2011 Libyan Revolution that toppled Gaddafi.

Following the failed coup attempt by Bashir Hawadi and Umar al-Muhayshi, both RCC members, in August 1976, Gadhafi was able to advance his revolutionary agenda of a stateless society further. The release of his *Green Book* in 1976-1979 became the revolutionary government's ideological guide. The book enunciated Gadhafi's views on what form Libya's socio-political and economic organization should adopt. It named the new state Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (SPLAJ) whose system

of government was to be based officially on the Third International Theory or Third Universal Theory as espoused in the *Green Book*. The theory, which was in part inspired by Islamic Socialism and Arab nationalism, was meant to be an alternative to Capitalism and Communism for Third World countries, due to Gadhafi's conviction that the two ideologies had turned out to be invalid. The revolutionary government established the Higher Council for National Guidance to disseminate and implement theory. The Third International theory marked further state interference in the economy. The recently created Revolutionary Committees became important instruments for the implementation of Gadhafi's revolutionary ideas. From 1976, nationalization of all non-occupied dwellings commenced. Towards the end of 1977, the state cut the buying prices for apartments by 30%, from 1977 all available land in the countryside became government property while provision was made for individual farmers to lease just the quantity needed. The remaining privately owned land (on the coastal strip), which were remnants of family or tribal lands of the olden times, also fell under state ownership by 1980. Meanwhile, in May 1978 a new law was introduced for the redistribution of confiscated real estate to people mainly within the low income bracket. In line with the policy on abolition of wage labour, a series of takeover of businesses from merchants and small businessmen also began in 1978, while the bigger businesses and industries were entrusted to Basic Production Committees (handpicked groups of workers in each business). In September 1980, about 40,000 individual private businesses were shut down and were replaced by a handful of government supermarkets, while 10 state agencies handled the importation of all goods and services. The state controlled economy caused serious hardships for the Libyan people. Partly due to mismanagement and increasing economic boycott by the USA, the country suffered high inflation and inadequate/unstable supply and distribution of consumer and industrial goods. At the political level, the society increasingly was subjected to state repression in the name of the revolution. The USA bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi in April 1986 for state terrorism together with USA/multilateral sanctions and their local consequences including shock, fear, anger and confusion, compelled the revolutionary government to introduce some liberal measures from about 1987. In that year and the one that followed, many political prisoners were set free. Attempts were made to curb the excesses of security agencies and Revolutionary Committees, employment and immunity against prosecution were offered to exiles in order to encourage their return to Libya, while Gadhafi also reached out to some opposition leaders. The government introduced waves of reforms for economic liberalization, including the return of private businesses, retail trade, and professional private practice, in order to bolster popular support and stability for the government. In spite of these measures, by 2000, Gadhafi's revolutionary experiment at building a stateless society through popular rule increasingly faltered largely due to increasing socio-economic hardship and discontent among large cross-sections of Libyans (Vandevale, 2008; Political Analysis.org). This was the setting on the eve of the Arab Spring that triggered a chain of events which eventually culminated in the end of the Libyan Revolution of 1969.

### **The Burkina Faso Revolution of 1983**

Thomas Isidore Sankara, a Burkinabe Army Captain, anti-imperialist and Marxist/Socialist revolutionary, became the President of Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) after the military coup d'état led by Blaise Compaore, his colleague in the Army and

close friend, toppled the government of Jean-Baptiste Quedraogo on 4 August 1983. Sankara, who had been in detention for his staunch anti-imperialist activism and huge grassroots followership, was set free by the coupists and made the President of the National Council of the Revolution (NCR) established to pilot the Burkinabe Revolution. Unlike the coups that brought Nasser to power in Egypt and Gadhafi in Libya as well as other coups in several other African countries, the military intervention that brought Sankara to power in Burkina Faso was organized with the full collaboration of many Leftist civilian groups. According to Sankara who had earlier been exposed to Left Wing political ideas in Madagascar and France, the major aims of the revolution were to eradicate corruption, combat environmental degradation, empower women, promote access to healthcare and education, and total liberation from neo-imperialism. Unlike Nasser in Egypt and Gadhafi in Libya who openly denounced Communism but actually operated Socialist policies, Sankara openly identified himself with the Marxist-Leninist ideology, as Mathieu Kerekou and Marien Nguabi had done in the Republic of Benin and People's Republic of Congo respectively. Sankara's anti-imperialist stance and Marxist political ideology as a whole was also influenced by Third World Socialist revolutionaries like Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Mao Tse Tung, Frantz Fanon and Julius Nyerere (Ray, 2017; Cohen, 2017).

Immediately after taking over power, Sankara renamed Upper Volta as Burkina Faso (Land of Upright People) and declared a cultural revolution in the country in order to re-establish the country on the basis of a non-colonialist character. Coinage of the new name, Burkina Faso from two indigenous languages, Mossi and, was part of an attempt by the revolutionary government to affirm the African identity of the emergent 'new' state whose legitimacy was to derive from its multi-ethnic and religious peoples, rather than from the old colonialist geographical framework. As part of the cultural revolution, television news was broadcast to the Burkinabe in indigenous languages particularly Moore, unlike previously when it was cast in French alone. Radio, which was the main communication medium, conducted news broadcasts in 11 indigenous languages. Musical and Dance troupes from various ethnic groups performed during conferences and rallies. In addition, inter-cultural fora and activities such as festivals and competitions were held to enable people of different ethnic origins to discover, project and mutually enrich themselves in order to breed a truly national culture. (Animasawun, 2009; Harsch, 2013). As a consequence, many Burkinabe began to imbibe a strong feeling of national pride and patriotism.

From the early days of the revolution, Sankara anchored his Socialist revolutionary agenda upon the Cuban style Committees for Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), which were action committees (comprised of ordinary people) established across the country. The role of the CDR was akin to that played by workers and peasants councils during the Russian Revolution of October 1917. Sankara declared that the social foundation of the revolution was the people, mainly salaried workers, small-scale merchants and peasants (Riddel, 2017). In line with this, he instituted a broad range of radical reforms to effectively change the embedded social inequalities in the country since the era of French colonial rule. He concentrated the limited resources of the country on the countryside where the country's marginalized majority was domiciled. The state made available increased public services, productive inputs, price incentives, marketing assistance, irrigation, environmental protection and other forms of assistance to poor

farmers and livestock herders. Unlike most African states which relied on food importation and foreign development assistance, revolutionary Burkina Faso pursued food self-sufficiency through aggressive local production and patronage of home-made goods. Sankara drove the Burkinabe to overcome scarcity of food and portable water through collective social mobilization and hard work. From President Sankara to state ministers, military officers/soldiers and ordinary Burkinabe, all were involved in the national task of farm work, road rehabilitation and community development projects in general. He expanded social services significantly. Rural inhabitants had greater access to education and healthcare. Just in a little above two years of the revolution, the government had vaccinated about 2 million children against the core childhood ailments, while about 36,000 rural inhabitants had received basic literacy education. Housing, transportation, child assistance, employment, and family planning also received serious state attention and support (Harsch, 2013; Thomassankara.net; Adeyemi-Suenu, 2017).

Due to the radical and sweeping nature of the reforms, the Burkinabe revolutionary government came under immense pressure and challenges especially from the foreign scene, as it happened in Egypt and Libya. And as was the case in both countries, Sankara's government, particularly the CDRs, resorted to coercive, repressive and autocratic measures to consolidate state power and sustain the revolution. Under this atmosphere, CDR leaders in commando style ordered the people to carry out state directives. Unruly and sometimes armed militant youth members of the committees were involved in series of abuses such as extortion, armed robbery, embezzlement, and forceful collection of taxes and dues, etc. Like Gadhafi in Libya during the latter part of his regime, Sankara took some measures to reduce tension in the socio-political sphere between 1986 and 1987. He released a number of state functionaries of past administrations from prison, and reinstated a large number of teachers and other government workers who had earlier been sacked for political considerations, among other conciliatory measures. But these attempts to reach out to the opposition were eventually the pretext upon which Compaore and some other senior military officers assassinated Sankara in a coup d'état on 1987, which according to the new President (Compaore), was meant to rectify the Burkinabe Revolution. The coup plotters, who were believed to have received active backing from foreign powers particularly France and Cote d'Ivoire, soon after taking over power reversed the Sankara revolution (Harsch, 2013). Sankara's life and government were snuffed out by Western imperialist forces in collaboration with their African collaborators within and outside Burkina Faso due to his fast growing global popularity as a radical Socialist revolutionary and dogged anti-imperialist.

## Conclusion

The Comintern during the era of European colonial rule and decolonization in Africa created the intellectual and ideological foundation for future Socialist revolutionary activism in the postcolonial period. From the 1950s, Socialist activities became increasingly attractive to many youths across Africa. Many African liberation movements moved closer to the USSR in partnership due to the exigencies of the independence struggles in various colonial territories on the continent. More importantly, several African nationalist leaders and personalities began to draw inspiration from socialism in the quest for the desired social change especially in terms of rapid socio-economic development, nation-building, and

total freedom from imperialism. As demonstrated by our case studies (Egypt, Libya, and Burkina Faso), military officers in several African countries seized power through coup d'états and launched various shades of socialist revolution in order to achieve radical social change. In Egypt where Nasser, the revolutionary leader did not profess socialism, Libya where Gadhafi openly denounced communism, and Burkina Faso where Sankara though an avowed Marxist Socialist did not officially declare socialism as state ideology, government was dominated by policy contents of significant socialist character namely state dominated economy characterized by sweeping nationalization, land and wealth distribution reforms, among others. The socialist experiments achieved significant but short-lived success in reduction of social inequality, rapid socio-economic progress, nation-building and the struggle against imperialism and neo-imperialism. The socialist revolutions and their concomitant gains were short-lived as a result of deep internal contradictions in the African countries and continent as a whole. Such anti-revolution contradictions include lack of solid working class movements to provide the necessary support base for socialist revolutionary governments and policies. Another is the presence of neo-colonial collaborators amongst the political, military and business elites who help western imperial forces to destabilize revolutionary governments considered to be a threat to the international capitalist order. The collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s has not also been helpful to the prospects of socialism as a tool for radical social change in Africa in the postcolonial period. However, as the recently emerging trend of memorialization of Sankara in parts of the continent indicates (in the light of continued failure of Western democratic experiments to provide significant benefits of independence in many countries), socialism remains a potential alternative ideological blueprint for radical socio-political and economic transformation of African states.

## References

1. Adeyemi-Suenu, A (2017). "Thomas Sankara: A Humanist and a Revolutionary", Paper presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress of Thomas Sankara Movement, University of Jos, Nigeria, 5 February 2017.
2. Akl, Z (2016). "The Libyan Political Economy: Political Conflict, Crisis Management and Structural Reform", *Centre for Security Studies*. [www.css.ethz.ch/articles/article.html](http://www.css.ethz.ch/articles/article.html) , Accessed 10 September 2017.
3. Anderson, K (2009). "Land Reform: The Invented Tradition of Social Revolution in Egypt",
4. Animasawun, G (2009). "Burkina Faso, Revolution, 1983" in I. Ness (ed). *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest*. [www.Blackwellreference.com/public/toc](http://www.Blackwellreference.com/public/toc). Accessed 16 September 2017.
5. Byrne, J (2014). "The Cold War in Africa" in A. Kalinovsky & C Daigle (ed). *The Routledge Handbook of the Cold War*. London and New York: Routledge.
6. Brzezinski, Z (1963). *Africa and the Communist World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
7. Carr, E (1978). *Socialism in One Country 1924-1926*. United Kingdom: Macmillan.
8. Cohen, S ( ??). "Why the Cold War still matters for Burkina Faso's Contemporary Artists", *The Calvert Journal: A Guide to the New East*.

- www.calvertjournal.com>features>show , Accessed 16 September 2017.
9. Enckervort, M (2001). *The Life and Work of Otto Huiswoud: Professional Revolutionary and Internationalist (1893-1961)*. Jamaica: University of the West Indies.
  10. Filatova, I (199). "Indoctrination or Scholarship? Education of Africans at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union, 1923-1937", *International Journal of the History of Education*, 35, 1.
  11. Harsch, E (2013). "The Legacies of Thomas Sankara: A Revolutionary Experience in Retrospect", *Review of African Political Economy*, 40, (137).
  12. Humphreys, R (2001). *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubled Age*. Oakland: University of California Press.
  13. Kawczynski, D (2011). *Seeking Gaddafi: Libya, the West and the Arab Spring*. London: Biteback Publishing Ltd.
  14. Kenawy, E (2009). "The Economic Development in Egypt during the 1952-2007 Period", *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences*, 3 (2).
  15. Munir, S (1952). "The Military Coup in Egypt", *Fourth International*, 13, 5.
  16. New World Encyclopedia Contributors (2017). "Gamal Abdel Nasser", *New World Encyclopedia*. <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org...> Accessed 5 September 2017.
  17. Olende, K (2015). "The Comintern and the African Atlantic", *International Socialism: A Quarterly Review of Socialist Theory*. iss. 145.
  18. Petersson, F (2014). "Hub of the Anti-Imperialist Movement: The League against Imperialism and Berlin, 1927-1933", *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 16, 1.
  19. Political Analysis. Org. "Gaddafi the Populist Socialist", [www.political-analysis.org...](http://www.political-analysis.org...) Accessed 11 September 2017.
  20. Privatization Coordination Support Unit (2002). *The Results and Impacts of Egypt's Privatization Program-Special Study*. Arlington: CARANA Corporation.
  21. Ray, K (2017). "Thomas Sankara: President of Burkina Faso", *Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/...> Accessed 14 September 2017.
  22. Riddell, J (2017). "Thomas Sankara and National Liberation: Internationalism and Popular Democracy in Burkina Faso, 1983-1987", *Marxist Essays and Commentary*. <https://www.johnriddell.wordpress.com/2017> Accessed 17 September 2017.
  23. Riddell, J (2011). "Black Liberation and the Communist International", *International Socialist Review*. Iss. 81.
  24. Thomassankara.net (. "Facts about Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso", [www.thomassankara.net>...>Articles](http://www.thomassankara.net...>...>Articles). Accessed 18 September 2017.
  25. Vandewalle, D (1986). "Libya's Revolution Revisited", *Middle East Research and Information Project*. [www.meri.org/mer/mer143/libyas-revo...](http://www.meri.org/mer/mer143/libyas-revo...) Accessed 10 September 2017.
  26. Vandewalle, D (2008). *Libya Since 1969*. : St. Martins Press.
  27. Weiss, H. & Marjomaa, R (2003). "Comintern and African Nationalism, 1921-1935", Unpublished Manuscript.
  28. Weiss, H (2013). *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers*. Leiden: Brill.
  29. West, M, Martin, W & Wilkins, F (2009). *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International Since the Age of Revolution*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
  30. Weston, F (2011). "The Nature of the Gaddafi Regime-Historical Backround Notes", [www.marxist.com>nature-of-gaddafi-re](http://www.marxist.com>nature-of-gaddafi-re) . Accessed 9 September 2017.