ARTICLES

Between Afropolitans and new Sankaras Class mobility and the reproduction of academics in Burkina Faso

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Abstract: Using the notion of Afropolitanism, which refers to highly mobile and well-connected “Africans of the world,” this article examines the relative privileges of university graduates within Burkina Faso across generational divides. Comparisons emerge between cohorts graduating in the 1970s and the 2010s. While graduates of the 1970s enjoyed access to a privileged status through their local university education and a related network of global cosmopolitan qualifications and credentials, contemporary students have only limited access to this route of class mobility. The frustration engendered by this helps to explain the shape of the uprising that ousted the president of Burkina Faso in 2014, as the diminishing access to Afropolitan identities pitches the younger generation of students into different emerging constellations of political mobilization.

Keywords: academics, Burkina Faso, class, generations, mobility

“La patrie ou la mort nous vaincrons” (Homeland or death, we shall overcome)—such was the motto of the famous national leader and revolutionary figure of Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara, in the 1980s. This emotive call to action was resurrected, resung, reshared, and retweeted in 2014 as many Burkinabe, among them also students, mobilized and took to the streets to overthrow a government that they saw as part of a corrupt political elite out of touch with their needs and that prevented their access to aspirational promises for a brighter future as “highly mobile and well connected, successful young Africans of the world,” in the words of Taiye Selasi (2005), a novelist and photographer, who in one of her essays names them “Afropolitans.”

The theorist and philosopher Achille Mbembe has also reflected on the notion of Afropolitans.¹ He emphasizes the position of Africa and Africans in the global world and argues in a recent interview that “Afropolitanism is a name for undertaking a critical reflection on the many ways in which, in fact, there is no world without Africa and there is no Africa that is not part of it,” and further, “Afropolitanism is a geography of circulation and mobility” (Mbembe and Balakrishnan 2016: 29, 34).

Although the notion of Afropolitans does not represent an emic expression stemming from within Burkina Faso, I perceive its semantic relation to mobility and cosmopolitanism raised by both Selasi and Mbembe as helpful to cap-

ture what past students often represented and that of which present-day students dream. Furthermore, one of the concept's critiques, which argues that the term promotes the rapacious consumerism of the African elites who represent that "mobile Afropolitan class" (raised by, e.g., Dabiri 2014, 2016; Gehrmann 2016), is indeed helpful for my purpose, as young students also have materialistic dreams about their future lifestyle. In fact, it is the students' dreams combined with Sankara's ideology that adds to the picture and promotes a more nuanced perspective "between Afropolitans and new Sankaras." I return to this complex of themes and historic actuality throughout this article when examining students, both past and present, and how they position themselves in relation to their national history, and in particular to revolutionary moments and heroic political figures. This contribution compares university cohorts from the 1970s, when the public university was institutionalized in independent Burkina Faso—back then called the République Haute-Volta, or the Republic of Upper Volta—with students enrolled in the 2010s. This article's main concern is to understand the reproduction of Burkinabe academics and the related class mobility amid political transformation processes. By comparing the two generations of students, their life histories and ways of organizing, this article first reveals the diminishing access to class mobility through the local university, as the homeland no longer holds the promise of a well-connected and upwardly mobile Afropolitan identity. The frustration engendered by this disruption of upward class mobility second helps to explain why student union movements have lost much of their good reputation and did not play a vanguard role during the 2014 Burkinabe uprising. Finally, the article demonstrates the need for a transnational and global historical perspective, as national or continental borders cannot confine the reproduction of academics, class mobility, and political transformation processes.

The article is organized as follows: the first section provides the reader with background information on the history and context of higher

education and universities in (West) Africa and Burkina Faso. The next section focuses on the present-day campus of the public university in Ouagadougou, including its politics, students, and professors. The third section portrays two students of the 1970s, and the final section concludes by discussing the reproduction of academics, the challenging passing of "Afropolitanism" or "middle-class status" from one generation to the next, and new means of organizing for political change in contemporary Burkina Faso.

Life courses and the university as political arena

The points of departure of this article are the life course experiences of different generations of students at the public university in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, which since 2015 has been called Université Ouaga 1 Professeur Joseph Ki-Zerbo, abbreviated to Université Ouaga 1 Pr JKZ (see, e.g., Bassole 2015). Ouagadougou's public university was founded in 1969 as the Centre d'enseignement supérieur and became an official university in 1974 (McFarland and Rupley 1998). Compared to the neighboring former French colonies, this was a relatively late development: Senegal, for instance, established the first francophone university in 1957, renamed Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar in 1987 (Ouedraogo and Traore 2010: 3). Thus, the République Haute-Volta, or the Republic of Upper Volta, as the country was called after independence in 1960 and until 1984, did not have any institutes of higher education before 1969.² By then, the education of the national leaders, or cadre, was—just as during the colonial period—accomplished at the universities of neighboring countries like Senegal or Côte d'Ivoire, or in Europe, mainly in France (2010: 4).

In general, the literature states that the universities of West Africa (at least the European-style ones; Islamic universities are far older) were mostly built after World War II and related to the colonial administrators' demand for local

staff (Eckert 2000: 244).³ Moreover, there were only a small number of institutions of higher education. In postcolonial West Africa many of the newly independent states invested in the creation of universities or higher education institutions, and the transition from the colonial to postcolonial period was also marked by the “intellectualization of political culture,” to quote the well-known Africanist Ali A. Mazrui (1978: 17). Hence, the first generations of graduates, often trained in France or Great Britain, returned to their motherlands and inspired not only the creation of local universities but also postcolonial politics. They became the intellectual and political elites of their countries. An insightful article by Andrea Behrends and Carola Lentz (2012) sheds light on these developments in Ghana by describing the history of formal education over three generations of highly educated men and women from a marginalized region in northern Ghana. They show that the very first of them were elites, whereas the following generations have often struggled to achieve or maintain some degree of middle-class status. Thus, higher education was and is an avenue to higher status, but while the first generation of locally trained academics are often described as sociopolitical elites, present-day students instead often struggle to make ends meet and are not necessarily part of the local struggle to be part of the recently much-hyped “Africa rising” and related scientific discourses on the African middle classes.⁴

However, independence and postcolonial political transformation processes also brought the military forces back into leading positions, which frequently resulted in serious conflicts between academics or intellectuals and military-trained leaders. Moreover, tensions between colonial-trained educators/professors and postcolonial students shaped the early years of many institutions of higher education in West Africa.⁵ Much of the literature, including recent contributions, that deals with higher education in Africa is at least partly concerned with the complex topic of the politics of and around educational systems and institutions.⁶

Following this brief regional, institutional, and historic background of (West) African universities, I now proceed to change our perspective and take a closer look at people “making” and “living” the public university in Ouagadougou. In other words, I shall follow Thandika Mkandawire’s call to have a closer look at people actually “animating the universities in Africa” (1995: 75) instead of emphasizing only the crisis of institutions of higher education and their dilapidation—not least in order to understand the reproduction of academics in Burkina Faso.

“Thousands of new Sankaras”: Today’s students

The initial focus of my oral life history research project was a group of older people who studied and graduated in the 1970s.⁷ During my fieldwork, I supplemented these historical narratives by interviewing current professors and students as well. Finally, this article also draws on participant observation of present-day university life collected during my fieldwork between January and September 2014 in Ouagadougou, when I spent a considerable amount of time on campus between more formal interviews.⁸ During that time, I learned that the university represents a highly political arena and that, both in the past and in the present, many students are actively involved in various associations, union movements, or political parties that seek to actively shape the political landscape.

Present-day campus life

One of the students I became acquainted with during my field stays was George Ouédraogo. At the time of our conversations, he was 27 years old and studied history, one of approximately 35,000 students who were enrolled at the Université Ouaga 1 Pr JKZ in 2014.⁹ His case illustrates what I consider typical for many present-day students: George lived with his uncle about 12 kilometers from the city center and university campus in the peri-urban outskirts.

Each morning, he lined up with hundreds of other people who used the road to the city center—rarely on foot, mostly by bicycle, motorbike, or car. Neither of his parents, who lived in the countryside, had attended university, and they had a rather moderate income—again quite common for many present-day students: most students at the public university in Ouagadougou come from rather precarious households with parents who did not attend higher education institutions.¹⁰ Unlike in the 1970s, better-off families and highly qualified parents in the 2010s no longer send their children to the public university but, depending on their resources, prefer to enroll them at other, more prestigious private local institutions of higher education or at private or public universities abroad. There has been increased privatization of the school system in Burkina Faso since the 1990s, and private universities started to establish themselves particularly in Ouagadougou (Pilon 2004). In this context, Anne-Emmanuèle Calvès and colleagues state that growing disappointment vis-à-vis public schools in particular has pushed wealthy urban families to send their children into the private system, a trend that has increased social selectivity (2013: 136). Jacinthe Mazzocchi (2014) also argues that the university in Ouagadougou lost much of its good reputation in the 1990s, when Burkina Faso signed the structural adjustment programs required from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (in 1991). The major cuts to public spending and concomitant liberalization processes had deleterious effects on education, for instance, by reducing the number of professors per student and decreasing student allowances (2014: 6).

In contrast to the narrative of external pressure put on the Burkinabe state and its education system, Keith Hinchliffe's (1985) World Bank working paper hints at another facet of the story by mentioning the immense amount of money spent in countries like the Republic of Upper Volta/Burkina Faso to establish and maintain higher education institutions in the 1980s. Hinchliffe relates these high costs, for

instance, to how teaching was organized and alludes to the fact that the staff-student ratios were very low compared to other countries in the world. Moreover, he depicts the high expenditures in nonacademic areas and describes the immense costs of students' support, which in the case of Burkina Faso amounted to 81 percent of the total primary school budget (1985: 4)—hence, he suggested corresponding budget cutbacks, which were later realized as Burkina Faso signed the structural adjustment programs in 1991 (5).

It is possible to conclude that foreign alternatives/interventions and private institutions have undermined the university as a public and local vehicle for education and upward class mobility. Yet, these transformations have also drained local public interest and investment into this state-supported institution of middle-class reproduction because local elites now seek to sustain their own position as Afropolitans and reproduce this status through their own children, rather than through a new generation of students from the countryside. This can be observed in the context of George Ouédraogo's many activities that help him to survive economically. Hence, he was not just a student but has worked in various places. At the time of our conversation, he taught history at the high school level and gave private lessons to some pupils from better-off families, among other things.¹¹ At the same time George was preparing his master's degree in history on the *Tribunaux populaires de la révolution*, the People's Revolutionary Tribunals established during Sankara's presidency. George was particularly interested in one aspect of Sankara's system of courts: the idea of sending defendants to trial for corruption, tax evasion, or "counterrevolutionary" activities. As George talked about Sankara and the tribunals, I quickly learned that he, like many other young people in Ouagadougou, saw Sankara as his idol. He proudly recited his speeches and showed his fascination for Sankara's way of looking at things, trying himself to follow his principles. George was one of the "new Sankaras" growing up after Sanka-

ra's assassination in 1987, and he embodies the veracity of a popular Sankara quote: "You can kill Sankara today, but tomorrow thousands of new Sankaras will be born" ("Tuez Sankara aujourd'hui, demain naitront des milliers d'autres Sankara," quoted in, e.g., Hagberg 2015: 118).¹² Being a "new Sankara" went hand in hand with distancing himself from those in power—at the time of research from President Blaise Compaoré and his entourage, who were later ousted by the social movements of 2014.

To gain a better understanding of these events and the revolutionary position of past and present students at the university, a brief excursion into Burkina Faso's history is necessary. Blaise Compaoré, former ally and friend of Sankara, was later involved in a coup d'état during which Sankara was murdered. Compaoré thereafter became head of state and remained president of Burkina Faso from 1987 until 2014. His resignation followed the so-called Burkinabe uprising, which refers to a series of demonstrations and riots in Ouagadougou in October 2014 that quickly spread to other cities in Burkina Faso (Hagberg et al. 2015). The unrest began in response to attempts at changing the constitution to allow Compaoré to run again for president and extend his 27 years in office. The protests were driven by masses of people, many of whom were university students and young graduates. Sankara's slogan (inspired by Che Guevara) "*La patrie ou la mort nous vaincrons*" (Homeland or death, we shall overcome) was, as discussed earlier, omnipresent and served as a popular refrain, also for songs from local musicians and in discussions on social media like Facebook or Twitter. In the end, Compaoré yielded to pressure from the streets and fled the country. Soon after, a transitional government took over and organized presidential elections in 2015.

Campus life at the time of research in the first half of 2014 can be characterized as being in preparation for the "next revolution," and students were also part of the Burkinabe uprising. Importantly and contrary to former periods of political change, strikes, and civil unrests, the student unions and associations like the Associ-

ation nationale des étudiants burkinabè (ANEB) were not at the forefront of the political changes of 2014. Instead, social movements like *Le balai citoyen* (the Citizen's Broom, or the Civic Broom), an association that arose in 2010, figured among the key actors.¹³ Other important participants included women's movements, the movement *ça suffit*, the Collective anti-référendum, opposition parties, and others (for details, see Hagberg et al. 2015: 203). These movements were also actively present on social media and followed by many students like George.

There is much literature on student union movements such as the ANEB, for instance, contextualized by the social unrests between 1998 and 2001, which followed the assassination of the journalist Norbert Zongo, or in 2011, when the student Justin Zongo died after being assaulted while in police custody.¹⁴ Against the background of the reproduction of local academics and the blocked paths for social mobility through the university, it is, however, not surprising that student unions have lost much of their reputation as sites of hope and promise. Social movements like *Le balai citoyen*, in contrast, captured current discontent much better and were successfully represented by "new Sankaras" and "Afropolitans." An example is one of the movements' leaders, commonly known as Smockey: a son of a Burkinabe father and a French mother, he studied in France and became a well-known artist in different settings and countries (De Bonneval 2011). Thus, he represents both a mobile African of the world and a strong supporter of the Burkinabe cause.

To sum up, my first conversations with young people on the campus of the university in Ouagadougou introduced me to some aspects of Burkina Faso's sociopolitical terrain, the complex world of present-day students and young graduates, and "the past in the present," as shown by personalities like Thomas Sankara, who constantly influence the life and perspectives of young graduates, also in terms of the complex dynamics of knowledge production, the universities' relation to the former colonies, and the politics of and around the university

campus. Earlier utopian aspirations of nationhood that promised personal social mobility through political revolution and economic development were historically based on university institutions (including union movements), with students as both the drivers of change and the beneficiaries of its outcomes. Nowadays, other social movements appear to be more successful. To fully understand these generational cleavages, it is worth turning to more senior members of the university, who enjoy many of the privileges to which students aspire.

In between: Current professors

During my research stay, I got to know some of the present-day professors, that is, the teachers of the current generation of students, and I conducted several interviews to familiarize myself with their professional career trajectories. Most of them studied in the 1990s, probably a couple of years in Burkina Faso and then on to obtain their doctorates in countries like France or Belgium. Because of their academic development, they have had fairly mobile life trajectories and experienced different regional settings within and beyond the African continent. One could describe these highly qualified people who return to their country of origin as “returnees”; however, the chance that they will continue their mobile lifestyle for professional reasons remains quite high. Mr. Somé shall serve as an example here, in that he represents a well-known professor of philosophy for whom it was difficult to find much time to participate in an interview. The few times I got to talk to him, I learned that he had studied in Burkina Faso, completed his studies in France, and then had the opportunity to become a professor back at the university in Ouagadougou, which, as he explained to me, was an opportunity he did not refuse—among other reasons to “help to develop the country.”

In Ouagadougou, I soon learned that Professor Somé was not only a successful academic who had written many books and articles but also a popular opinion leader. He was often in-

terviewed by local newspapers and asked to reflect on current political issues, including topics that went beyond educational matters at the university, and he was frequently invited to several roundtables. I was able to participate in one of these events, which discussed the topic of political ideology and was organized by the local research institute L’institut Général Tiémoko Marc Garango pour la gouvernance et le développement (IGD) and the Fondation internationale du parti centre suédois (CIS). During that conference, Professor Somé gave a lecture and discussed the necessity of having a political idea, a kind of future vision for society, with the mainly young audience. Professor Somé on that occasion also accused contemporary youth of only having individualistic and capitalist dreams instead of pursuing more social goals.

Overall, professors like Mr. Somé can be described as representatives of a cosmopolitan academic class enmeshed in global networks with wide-reaching international contacts and as local opinion leaders. Revealingly, many of the professors I interviewed were not especially successful and complemented their teaching with engagements in consultancy projects to increase their income. These secondary jobs often led to their reduced presence on campus, which was criticized by students like George Ouédraogo who experienced huge difficulties in making appointments with their professors. In regard to the reproduction of local academics, the relationship between current professors and students exemplifies the breakdown of direct contact between established professors and the students, who are no longer trained to take their place. This disjuncture between pathways toward Afropolitanism appears even more pronounced when we examine the life histories of students who graduated in the 1970s. These men built cosmopolitan identities on the foundation of their student careers at the local university, yet they enroll their children in other institutions, thereby bearing witness to the declining position of the university in a global marketplace of academic credentials and professional qualifications.

Afropolitans, nation builders, academics: The students of the 1970s

In the 1970s, campus life in Burkina Faso differed significantly from nowadays—the university had 374 students in 1974, most of whom had a bursary and lived in student dormitories. As for politics, times were restless and in particular shaped by the military: from the dissolution of the First Republic (1966) to the proclamation of the Second Republic (1970) and its dissolution (1974), the country sailed on to become the Third Republic (1977). In 1980, the regime of Lieutenant-Colonel Aboubacar Sangoulé Lamizana, who had been in power since 1966, was finally overthrown after massive protests and Colonel Saye Zerbo from the Comité militaire de redressement pour le progrès national (CM-RPN) took power, only to be overthrown two years later by the Conseil provisoire de salut du peuple (CPSP), headed by Commander Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo. It is Ouédraogo who installed Sankara as prime minister, but Sankara was briefly imprisoned in 1983 and, soon after his release, joined Blaise Compaoré and Henri Zongo in a military putsch that overthrew his former ally Ouédraogo. After this, Sankara became head of state, and the CPSP was replaced by the Conseil national de la Révolution (CNR). On the revolution's first anniversary, the country was renamed Burkina Faso. Three years later, in 1987, after a coup d'état and the assassination of Sankara, Compaoré became the new head of state and remained in power until 2014.¹⁵

This is by necessity a broad outline of Burkina Faso's recent history, which has specifically been informed by a succession of military men. However, as the following short biographies of students of the 1970s will show, not only the country's history has influenced the life trajectories of the local educational elite (and vice versa), but events, processes, and movements in other countries and continents have as well. In general, my intention in gathering life histories and contextualizing them as events is not so much to establish the credibility of personal narratives as historical accounts but rather to

view each interview as an encounter with self-representations in which interviewees position themselves within their national landscapes and Afropolitan imaginaries (Rosenthal 1993). Therefore, details that go beyond the linguistic domain (such as time, location, demeanor, dress, housing) are noteworthy, as well as interviewees' understanding of historical events and their positioning as part of a national vanguard.

Between teaching and public service

Mr. Sanogo resided in a huge house that included an annex and a garage and that was walled and guarded by a watchman. Our talks took place outside the building on the spacious and covered veranda with comfortable armchairs, pretty flowers, and friendly dogs. The housemaid always served us beer, not local ones but Desperados, which was formerly brewed by a French beer company (Brasserie Fischer) but is nowadays owned by Heineken, a multinational company based in the Netherlands. During one of our meetings, his grandchild stayed with us for a while and was later picked up by his father, that is, Mr. Sanogo's son. On that occasion Mr. Sanogo mentioned in passing that his own children mostly went to private institutions of higher education or attended university abroad rather than the local university in Burkina Faso.

Once Mr. Sanogo started talking, it was very difficult to interrupt him or to ask questions. My research assistant and I accepted the challenge and ended up sitting on the veranda several times to listen to his narratives on his life and career trajectory and to at least try to ask one or two questions. Interestingly, Mr. Sanogo had certain story lines that he repeated each time and that hence refer to the compositional structure of Mr. Sanogo's orally narrated life history.

Mr. Sanogo was born in 1946 in Bobo-Dioulasso. Like many students past and present, he completed his primary and secondary education in Catholic institutions, which are often organized as residential boarding schools run by predominantly European Catholic priests or monks. While some of my interview partners

stressed their families' influence when explaining why they ended up in these boarding schools—most often parents or uncles were members of the military and pushed the children into formal education—others reminded me that the colonial authorities forced them to go to school. Mr. Sanogo, however, had a different explanation and said, with a twinkle in his eye, that he himself had wanted to go to that particular school because the pupils there had nice uniforms with berets, and he wanted to have that attire too.

Although designated to become a priest, in the 1960s he decided instead to become a teacher and attended the teachers' college in Bobo-Dioulasso. He explained that decision and change of course various times to me, and always with reference to his wife, Claire, whom he met around that time.

In 1966, the local authorities selected him to continue his training at the university in Dakar, Senegal, and Mr. Sanogo went there to study philosophy. However, in May 1968, associations of Senegalese students called for a strike of indefinite length and for a boycott of all examinations (see Bianchini 2004). As a reaction, police quashed riots on campus, and armed forces expelled foreign students from the country (e.g., Stafford 2009: 129). They were said to have fomented the unrest. It is important to note that at that point in time the first generation of Burkinabe students were often enrolled at the university in Dakar before coming to the newly established public university in Ouagadougou. In Senegal, they actively participated in the student movements of the time. The creation of the *Fédération des étudiants d'Afrique noire en France* (FEANF) in France in 1950 is described as the initial phase for social movements among African students, including in the Burkinabe context, as, for instance, Joseph Ki-Zerbo was among their members and later presided over the *Association des étudiants voltaïques en France* (AEVF), a structure related to the FEANF (Bianchini 2015: 87). Ki-Zerbo went on to become the cofounder of the *Mouvement de libération nationale* (MLN). In 1960,

all of these groups formed the *Union générale des étudiants voltaïques* (UGEV), based in Dakar. With the opening of the public university in Ouagadougou, the UGEV also opened a branch in Burkina Faso: the *Association des étudiants voltaïques de Ouagadougou* (AEVO), afterward renamed the *Association nationale des étudiants burkinabé* (ANEB), which is still actively present on campus these days.

However, Mr. Sanogo did not get lost in details about 1968—or about his own commitment to the protests in Senegal—but instead emphasized that he was later sent to France to finish his studies. He completed his diploma and returned to Burkina Faso in 1969 to start teaching philosophy at the high school *Prytanée militaire du Kadiogo* (PMK), where Thomas Sankara was one of the students, and at the *Cours normal des jeunes fille*, where Jacqueline Ki-Zerbo, the wife of Joseph Ki-Zerbo, was also teaching. In the politically turbulent years that followed, Mr. Sanogo gave up teaching and entered the state administration to work for the Ministry of Education and Culture. However, another person with a higher university degree soon replaced him. Mr. Sanogo instead got a scholarship to go to the United States and finally obtained his PhD from the University of Southern California before returning to Burkina Faso in 1982. Because of his connections with Sankara, whom he knew from high school, in the following years he again worked for the Ministry of Education. Toward the end of the revolutionary period, he also became a professor at the university in Ouagadougou and, following the assassination of Sankara, decided to remain there. But around 2000, after he had written a dissentient article for a local newspaper, the university administration suddenly cast doubt on his qualifications and degree and initiated proceedings to review him. He decided to leave campus and instead started to work as a consultant for various research projects, financed among others by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

At the time of research, he was still busy with this type of work and often present at different

roundtables or workshops, mostly sponsored by international donors or research institutes.

Pioneers and unionists

I was waiting for Gabriel Somda, born in the early 1950s, at the cafeteria of the principal office of the national Radio Broadcasting and Television Station of Burkina Faso (Radiodiffusion télévision du Burkina Faso, RTB) and had never seen him before. I had thought I would meet a person in suit pants and probably a short-sleeved shirt. Instead, a man dressed in fashionable jeans, T-shirt, and baseball cap dynamically headed toward my table and, after greeting countless people, took a seat in a casual and unceremonious way. In fact, Mr. Somda looked like he did not respect age—or the related attributes of seniority I often saw in Ouagadougou—and instead created a completely different kind of accessible image outside of the established forms of hierarchy.

Mr. Somda began to study linguistics at the newly established university in 1974 after completing his primary and secondary education in different towns of the country. After a couple of years, he applied to the African Institute for Cinematography (Institut africain d'éducation cinématographique, INAFEC) and was accepted. Already one year later, however, he was excluded from that institute and from the university because he actively participated in local student protests between 1978 and 1979. The student union movements organized these protests, and Mr. Somda was an active member of the aforementioned AEVO. Because he was unable to continue his studies in Burkina Faso, his parents decided to send him to Abidjan; however, he explained to me that the authorities had already blocked his matriculation there, making it impossible for him to continue with his studies. Instead, he decided to make music and travel to Lagos, among other places, where he was inspired by Fela Kuti's Afrobeat. In 1981, he nevertheless returned to Ouagadougou and finished his studies at the university and the INAFEC, respectively. Right after receiving his

diploma in 1983, he started to work for the RTB and worked there until 2013. At the time of our conversation, he was busy launching his own recording studio and worked for the RTB on a project-by-project basis.

Mr. Somda explained to me that the RTB was actually one of the first national radio and TV stations in francophone West Africa and was almost constantly on air. He and a couple of others of the same generation were the first producers there who had a university background—they were pioneers, he proudly explained me. Because of his passion for music, he was asked to produce music clips and, more generally, culture-related broadcasts, and he had the opportunity to work in various cities in the world.

Over the course of our conversation, I learned that his brother was a very close and rather well-known ally of Sankara, and that Mr. Somda also knew many of the current ministers and politicians because many of them were also members of the student union movement ANEVO (later ANEB), which, as he sarcastically noted, had once battled against those in power only to now themselves suppress student unrests. He was adept at navigating the political terrain and continuously worked for the RTB, and he was even able to pursue private endeavors such as the production of music clips. However, he himself related his steady career not to his successful maneuvering but to his personality and ideology, which is strongly informed by his ethnic background, the Dagara-speaking community, and related beliefs. To underpin this, he explained that he had long ago left the Catholic Church but remained strongly attached to local beliefs into which he had been initiated years before. According to him, that was also why his wife had left him to live in Bobo-Dioulasso instead of Ouagadougou. His only child, a daughter, stems from another relationship.

Afropolitans at ease

To summarize, the samples of biographical material of students of the 1970s show a diversity of actual paths, entrance points, and exits in

how they tried various educational pathways, sometimes changing educational institutions and punctuating their educational experiences with periods of employment and travel. Hence, their own actions, also based on their distinctive perceptions and motivations, have shaped their educational and vocational decision making. However, the political circumstances strongly influenced their experiences and led to often very mobile life trajectories that underwent several changes of course. Whether a student of the 1970s nowadays spends his afternoons on his own private veranda with children who study in the United States strongly depends on the capability and creativity to maneuver the often complex political terrain. Mr. Sanogo and Mr. Somda have succeeded quite well: Mr. Sanogo pursued his studies at the first institutions of higher education designated to educate future teachers, and later became a public servant and a university professor, while Mr. Somda profited from studying languages as well as cinematography and started to work at the national Radio and TV station. Both men can be described as Afropolitans in the sense that they were highly mobile and well connected. Hence, the students of the 1970s actually represent a type of pioneer, or proto-Afropolitan, who returned to their roots. Moreover, this generation of academics helped to form a nation in the making and coestablished a particular perspective of their country's future, as well as their own, by becoming part of student unions like the ANEVO (later ANEB) or by taking up Sankara's revolutionary ideas. Finally, they formed part of "the upper echelons of educated professionals, civil servants, military, clergy and politicians in Africa" (Lentz forthcoming: 3) and thus represented national elites—not only in their own words but also in the way in which they entered scientific debates.

Conclusion

This article started with a discussion of the reproduction of academics and its relation to class mobility amid political transformation

processes in Burkina Faso. A point of comparison between the 1970s and the present is that the university as an institution draws in or enrolls students from similarly humble and mostly rural backgrounds. Hence, Mr. Sanogo (who enrolled in the 1970s) and George Ouédraogo (who studies nowadays) both came from rural areas and had parents who had little formal education. Moreover, in their lives as students similar political ideals and ways of organizing themselves exist—be it in union movements or associations. As my example of the young 27-year-old history student shows, these historical parallels mean that political ideals of the past still resonate today. George was interested not only as an academic in the legacies of Thomas Sankara; he was also committed to Sankara's ideas and ideals in order to give sense to his everyday life. It goes without saying that these similarities provoke questions related to the making of locally educated people and future leaders of the country.

In the 1970s, future elites were trained at the public university in Ouagadougou. Yet, the local university no longer represents a vehicle for class mobility anymore: those graduates who successfully completed their degrees and became part of an educated elite send their children abroad rather than to the Université Ouaga 1 Pr JKZ. They thereby simply try to pass on their Afropolitan, that is, mobile life trajectory in the hope that a diploma from a European or US university would be more helpful to "become somebody" or to remain part of a middle class in the sociopolitical terrain back home.

In contrast, present-day students and graduates in Ouagadougou do not represent Afropolitans and remain unsure whether they can even expect a middle-class future. Thus, their student experiences are different compared to those of the 1970s when, as discussed, Mr. Sanogo and Mr. Somda studied in the context of regional exchange, pan-Africanism, and student union movements, and benefited from small student numbers as well as financial support from the state when studying both at home and abroad. Budget cuts, structural changes, and political

transformation processes since the 1990s have altered local educational opportunities, and entering professional life has become very difficult, especially in the context of finding desirable jobs commensurate with students' degrees. Nowadays, the transition from education to work is far more difficult, or at least elongated. Without state funding and because of their humble backgrounds, students are forced into various parallel activities, and most of them work while enrolled to make ends meet. Many of them struggle to make the transition from these piecemeal jobs to stable employment with future prospects.

Despite, or maybe because of, these changes, present-day students are still inspired by the heroes and ideologies of the past. They creatively combine these ideals with more contemporary aspirations for a good life and new ways of organizing themselves. While their everyday life is extremely localized and their capacity to progress physically and financially restricted, they are well connected to the outside world through virtual networks. Thus, they are part of a global youthscape that is both capitalistic and nostalgic. And yet, when they coordinate themselves as a local youthful body, they become strong political actors with the power to change the course of national history, as the developments in Burkina Faso in 2014 showed. Although students of the 1970s enjoyed international connections, migratory experiences, and good job prospects, contemporary students have the power of sheer numbers as they mobilize en masse within a mainly local context but equipped with global tools. Struggles over class mobility and generational hierarchy intersect within the shifting landscape of academic institutions and the opportunities they provide to those aspiring to attain a novel status. Importantly, the lasting legacy of particular political figures transcends generation and class, and retains the power to motivate and mobilize a younger generation.

Formerly powerful student union movements, however, appear to have lost much of their efficacy, and students increasingly follow social movements that are not specific to stu-

dents, such as *Le balai citoyen*. By doing this, they participate in political change and dream of Afropolitan status—but not only in Burkina Faso: the Burkinabe uprising and its key actors and movements represent a great inspiration for many people and social groups in neighboring countries and farther afield. These findings highlight the importance of discussing the makers and breakers of African universities, their claims to the past, and their ambitions to train future professors and decision makers in transnational perspective.

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Notes

1. There is much debate on who actually “invented” the term (see, e.g., Coetzee 2016).
2. On 11 December 1958, the Republic of Upper Volta became a self-governing colony within the French Community. Before attaining autonomy, it had been French Upper Volta and part of the French Union. On 5 August 1960, the country gained full independence from France. Under the rule of Thomas Sankara, who came to power through a military coup d'état on 4 August 1983, the country changed its name from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso (on 4 August 1984), meaning *pays des hommes intègres*, that is, “land of honorable people” or “land of incorruptible people.”
3. Pierre Van den Berghe explains that the first European-style university appeared on African soil in 1827, when the Fourah Bay College was established as a theological seminary in Sierra Leone (1973: 15).
4. Scientific interest in the so-called middle classes has recently experienced a renaissance; for overviews with an anthropological approach, see, e.g., Carrier and Kalb (2015) or Heiman and Fehérvári (2012) or, particularly helpful in the context of this article, Lentz (2015, 2016).
5. See Sanou (1981) and Sanou and Charmillot (2010) for further information on the university in Ouagadougou.
6. For insightful contributions that discuss the relations of power and knowledge production, see Mazrui (1978) or Ogen and Nolte (2016).
7. I have conducted interviews with both female and male academics, but the number of male informants predominated; this representatively reflects gender distribution at the university in the 1970s. Nowadays, the distribution is much more balanced. For the purpose of this article, I decided to include a male representative for present-day students as well, as the discussion of gender issues with regard to academic reproduction is not the key topic here. In order to guarantee their anonymity, all names contained are pseudonyms.
8. I spent a total of five months in Ouagadougou, and this was split into two field visits, both of which were funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).
9. Data for 2014; cf. Cissé (2017). For comparison, in 1974 the university had 374 students, and in 2010, 45,000 students, 10,262 of whom were first-year students (Ouedraogo and Traore 2010: 4, 18).
10. For similar observations, see Mazzocchi (2014) or Kobiané et al. (2009, 2010).
11. This simultaneity of many different income-generating activities is quite typical for young people living in West Africa (and beyond) (see Engeler 2016; Engeler and Steuer 2017).
12. The articles of Ernest Harsch (1998, 2009, 2013) also discuss the legacies of Thomas Sankara.
13. See also Le balai cityoyen's website at www.leb-alaicityoyen.com (accessed 11 December 2017).
14. Discussed, e.g., in Bianchini and Korbéogo (2008); Hagberg (2002); Hilgers and Mazzocchi (2010); Loada (1999, 2006); Mazzocchi (2006, 2009, 2014).
15. For useful information about the history of Burkina Faso and Thomas Sankara, I recommend the special issues of the journal *Politique africaine* published in 1985 and 1989, both of which are introduced by Otayek (1985, 1989).

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