

Vigilance as a Practice of Postcolonial Freedom

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The notion that popular vigilance is central to safe-guarding democratic freedoms is a key pillar of republican political thought. Yet, this conception does not translate well to postcolonial contexts without some reconceptualization. In this article, I take up the ways in which two African statesmen and political theorists, Julius Nyerere and Thomas Sankara, reconceptualize the practice of vigilance in the postcolonial context. Both theorists demonstrate that the collective exercise of vigilance is a qualitatively different political practice in the postcolonial context because citizens must simultaneously target internal domination from elites and external domination from international institutions and former colonial powers. Furthermore, they underscore that a shared political vision in the form of a national ethic is crucial for generating and guiding mass practices of vigilance. Doing so, Nyerere and Sankara articulate a distinct tradition of postcolonial republicanism that better conceptualizes the challenges of stabilizing state–society relations in postcolonial Africa.


In a 1967 speech on the Arusha Declaration, Julius Nyerere evokes a well-known republican maxim that connects freedom and vigilance—“the price of freedom is eternal vigilance.” He evokes this maxim as a rallying cry to galvanize the citizens of Tanzania to remember their disempowered position in the global economic system and to remain vigilant toward those actors who have an interest in taking advantage of this disempowerment:

The Arusha Declaration says: To govern yourself is to be self-reliant....The International Monetary Fund is not a friend of Tanzania or any poor country. It is an institution used by imperialist countries, which govern it to control the economy of a poor country and destabilise the governments of countries they do not like. Tanzania is one of the countries, and we must not forget it – or allow people to think we have forgotten it. It has been said that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. So, let us be vigilant! If you agree to give them a goat, they will demand a camel.
(Nyerere 1969, 12)

It is notable that an African president of a newly independent country draws on the key republican maxim that liberty must be safeguarded through eternal vigilance to affirm the sovereignty of Tanzania and the central principles of self-reliance, which he understood as foundational for building a self-sufficient agricultural economy. Here, Nyerere gives expression to a unique tradition of republicanism in African political thought that emerged during twentieth-century struggles for decolonization and in the process of establishing postcolonial democracies in Africa. It is a tradition

that has largely been underexamined in political theory as the focus has been on the Euro-American tradition of republicanism with its roots in classical Greek and Roman political thought. This oversight has meant that the reformulations of republicanism by African political theorists in the postcolonial context have largely been unappreciated.

This article turns to Julius Nyerere and Thomas Sankara as two African anti-colonial theorists who articulated a tradition of postcolonial republicanism (Chang 2021; Getachew 2019; Grovogui 2006; Ramgotra 2017) in Tanzania and Burkina Faso. They sought to reimagine the civic virtues and political practices that could sustain the sovereignty of newly independent nations in Africa. Specifically, they underscore the centrality of the republican political practice of citizen vigilance for sustaining the democratic freedoms of newly independent nations within a broader context of international inequality. Unlike accounts of republican vigilance in Western political thought, Nyerere and Sankara underscore how vigilance as a mass democratic practice is mobilized differently in a postcolonial context where the state is disempowered by external forces of imperial domination. I draw on Nyerere and Sankara’s writings to demonstrate how these two theorists recast and reformulate this central political practice of republicanism to articulate a distinctly postcolonial and African account of republicanism. In my reconstruction, I argue that practices of vigilance in the postcolonial context take on a qualitatively different political form and remain largely illegible to contemporary scholarship on republicanism. Nyerere and Sankara’s writings on mass practices of state–society contestation in Tanzania and Burkina Faso provide the critical political vocabulary through which I redescribe and make legible the specificity of African practices of vigilance, which work toward challenging imperial relations of domination at local, national, and international levels

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Received: February 07, 2022; revised: January 09, 2023; accepted: August 16, 2023.

and provide the basis for their account of republicanism in Africa.

To set the stage for my interpretive work on Nyerere and Sankara, I first contextualize vigilance as a civic virtue within Euro-American republicanism and emphasize the centrality of this virtue in republicanism to curb imperium as an exercise of public power. I then consider how republican political theorists would conceptualize the emergence and practice of this civic virtue in postcolonial contexts. I contend that vigilance would be applied to the postcolonial context in a modular fashion (Anderson 1983), such that postcolonial states would be evaluated on their ability to successfully replicate vigilant and contestatory relations between state and society, without sufficient attention to the international context of inequality in which vigilance as a political practice is enabled and stabilized. Modular thinking has been problematized in the social sciences and humanities for flattening out the socio-historical differences that determine how Western ideologies, political practices, institutions, and norms are received in colonial and postcolonial settings (Chatterjee 1993; Cooper 2001; Goswami 2002). Yet the structure of modular thinking remains latent in republican political thought. As Siba Grovogui writes, “Modular republicanism supposes the West to incipient and ascendent society, with fully coherent civilizations, ideational, or ideological paradigms,” which results in the assumption of “the sufficiency of Western institutions and the presumption that they have been consistently applied at home and abroad” (Grovogui 2006, 143).

African political theorists had to break with modular republicanism by reformulating and innovating republican political practices to account for the international context of domination and inequality in which postcolonial democracies were established. Thus, in the remaining sections of the article, I turn to Nyerere and Sankara as a vital resource for understanding the relationship between the national and international realms. I argue that mass practices of vigilance are pitched toward multiple domains of domination that encompass the domestic regime, foreign states, and international institutions that exert influence on national affairs. In other words, both Nyerere and Sankara articulate a more demanding conception of vigilance in the postcolonial context because citizens have to target multiple forms of imperium: internal domination from elites and external domination from international institutions and former colonial powers. As a result, Nyerere and Sankara characterize vigilance as a substantially different political practice in postcolonial states that occupy a weaker structural position in the international sphere. Vigilance as a political practice must democratically control national and international regimes while being grounded in a clear conception of national community in order to avoid the regression of vigilance into corrosive forms of distrust, alienation, and suspicion toward a weakened national state. Ultimately, this article argues that Nyerere and Sankara offer a normative framework that is rooted in postcolonial republican political thought,

which can better conceptualize and address the challenges of democratic citizenship in nation-states that do not occupy a structurally dominant position in the international sphere.

CIVIC VIGILANCE IN REPUBLICANISM

The notion that liberty must be safeguarded through practices of vigilance is a prominent theme in Euro-American republican political thought. In 1790, John Philcot Curran articulated one of the earliest and clearest connections between liberty and vigilance in his speech on the disputed elections for the mayor of Dublin where he laments that the mayor is no longer chosen by the citizens of Dublin but rather appointed by the British crown. He states, “The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance; which condition if he break, servitude is at once the consequence of his crime, and the punishment of his guilt” (Curran [1790] 1871, 94–5). He attributes the loss of this democratic right to choose a representative for the city to the widespread indolence of the citizenry, or an inability to vigilantly defend liberty against encroachments from a few powerful citizens.

In the United States, the relationship between vigilance and liberty reemerges as a foundational idea of American republicanism. Specifically, abolitionist and lawyer Wendell Phillips connects liberty and vigilance in a speech before the Massachusetts Antislavery Society in 1853. He states, “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. Power is ever stealing from the many to the few” (Phillips [1852] 1863, 52).¹ Phillips was not the first to rearticulate the relationship between vigilance and liberty in this formulation and in fact the phrase “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty” circulated widely in the popular press and political writings during the nineteenth century. Frederick Douglass uses the phrase in reverse order as “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance” in a number of his speeches before and after the civil war (Douglass 1848; 1888). Importantly, in the context of abolitionist struggles and the Reconstruction era, there was a renewed emphasis that liberty is secured through the political work of vigilance. For Phillips, the work of eternal vigilance takes expression as “unintermitted agitation” (Phillips [1852] 1863, 52), while for Douglass vigilance involves a persistent commitment to the universalization of civil rights. He contends that vigilance must work to maintain “a sacred regard for the rights of all men” (1848). Both Phillips and Douglass underscore the deep political commitment, and the personal and

¹ The phrase “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance” was used by a number of political figures in the United States. Among them are James Jackson, a member of the first U.S. Continental Congress and a senator and governor of Georgia (Charlton 1897, 84–7); Andrew Jackson (Jackson 1837); James Buchanan (Buchanan, Henry, and Moore 1908, 130); Frederick Douglass (Douglass 1848). Douglass uses the phrase “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance” in several other speeches (Mieder 2001). Furthermore, Anna Berkes research has also shown that the phrase was misattributed to Thomas Jefferson in a number of 19th century U.S. newspapers (Berkes 2010).

collective sacrifices that are necessary to sustain mass practices of vigilance when they assert that “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.” Curran never brought this aspect of vigilance to the surface in his original formulation that made the preservation of liberty a matter of collective responsibility.

In contemporary political theory, Philip Pettit retrieves this republican theme connecting liberty and vigilance within a neo-republican framework of constitutional governance and democratic citizenship (Laborde and Maynor 2008; Lovett 2010; Pettit 1997). In *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, Pettit underscores the centrality of vigilance as a civic virtue necessary for vivifying institutions that facilitate citizen contestation of government decisions. The permanent possibility of contesting government decisions through a vigilant citizen orientation is vital in Pettit’s neo-republican conception of freedom as grounded in non-dominating relationships between citizens and their government. As Pettit writes, “the republican emphasis on vigilance stems from a belief that those in authority must be subject to quite demanding checks and constraints: that this may be the only way to guarding against arbitrary will and coping with corruptibility” (Pettit 1997, 278). Thus, vigilance reemerges in contemporary neo-republican scholarship as a civic virtue that aims to curb the overreach of state power.

For Pettit, vigilance takes on a very specific meaning as a virtue that must be balanced with trust, or “the confident reliance on authorities” (276). Without an equilibrium between vigilance and trust, both of these virtues fail to do the work of supporting republican institutions and laws. Pettit contends that in societies where the civic virtues of vigilance and trust have not matured together, it is important to disseminate messages of approval and disapproval through an “intangible hand” that can encourage the co-development of these virtues (268–9). Importantly, the emphasis on vigilance as a civic virtue assumes its modularity and transferability to other societies because it functions much like a regulatory norm that must be reproduced elsewhere in a very specific equilibrium with institutional trust to advance freedom as non-domination as the organizing ideal of the polity.

However, what resources can republican political thought offer to conceptualize how contestatory political practices emerge in contexts where citizen vigilance and institutional trust are out of balance because of a state’s weak structural position in the international realm? For instance, in *Worldmaking After Empire*, Adom Getachew advances the concept of “burdened membership” to capture the unequal integration of postcolonial states into the international system through the logic of inclusion–exclusion, “where non-European nations were excluded from the full rights of membership but remained subject to the obligations of inclusion” (Getachew 2019, 20). Getachew argues that postcolonial state formation and self-government are forged against this backdrop of international domination such that internal domestic deficits like weak state capacity and low institutional

trust can only be understood at the “nexus of entanglements between the international and national” (54). A central question that emerges from Getachew’s intervention and reformulation of international domination is: how to reconceptualize citizen contestation, a fundamental principle of republicanism, when citizen vigilance and institutional trust are out of balance (internal domestic deficit) as a result of the unequal integration of states into an international order constituted by centuries of colonial rule?

Republican political theorists have made commendable efforts to preserve the ideal of non-domination in international relations (Bohman 2008; Halldenius 2010; Ivison 2010; Laborde 2010; Pettit 2010; Skinner 2010), and specifically to address the ways in which international domination dramatically impacts the capacity of states to secure freedom as non-domination in the domestic realm (Laborde 2010; Pettit 2010; Skinner 2010). However, they rarely attend to the ways in which citizen practices of contestation emerge differently in societies that occupy a burdened position in the international realm and thus provide few resources to analyze this question. The imperative of the works that conceptualize global justice within a republican framework is to rectify the problem of international domination and inequality in order to engender a domestic context that can sustain the needed equilibrium between civic virtues such as vigilance and trust. Consequently, most of the works in republican global justice focus on questions of institutional design at the international level in order to give rise to a fertile domestic context in which civic virtues can flourish.

For instance, in “A Republican Law of Peoples,” Pettit calls for strategic alliances between states to downsize the hegemony of a few powerful states: “States that are so weak in any dimension that they are subject to domination of others can unite in common causes in order to give themselves the required muscle to resist the power of the stronger” (Pettit 2010, 84). Pettit makes this argument for strategic alliances at the international level because “individuals will not be fully free if their state is dominated by other states” (77). In other words, Pettit connects institutional coordination at the international level to the imperative of fostering relations of non-domination at the domestic level. Cécile Laborde moves beyond political domination in the international realm to elaborate a critical republicanism that encompasses economic and social forms of domination. She calls for “restructuring institutional governance to give greater power and voice to poor countries in international organizations” because such institutional restructuring at the international level can improve “absolute resource preconditions (nutrition, basic health care, and education)” at the domestic level “without which individuals cannot function as citizens at all” (Laborde 2010, 53–4). To put it another way, it is imperative for poorer nations to have a greater voice at the international level in order to foster the necessary socio-economic conditions at the domestic level that can nurture democratic capabilities for contestation and oversight within their political communities.

Thus, the antidote to international inequality and domination in contemporary republican political thought are remedial responses of institutional design and coordination at the global level (Bohman 2009; Macdonald 2015; Ronzoni 2017). Despite the long-standing emphasis in republicanism on citizen contestation and vigilance toward political power in the national realm, there are very few efforts to extend these civic virtues toward an international sphere in order to democratize and de-imperialize international relationships of domination, inequality, dependency, and exploitation between nation-states. In part, this is because republicans do not imagine that a robust political community can exist at the international level. As Laborde explains, “republican cosmopolitanism is an oxymoron because, at the global level, it is not possible to reproduce the practices, institutions, and virtue essential to founding and maintaining republics” (49). More recently, Erez and Laborde have sought to revise this seeming incompatibility by articulating a form of republican cosmopolitanism, in which they provide the motivational basis for citizens within a republic to counter international domination (Erez and Laborde 2020). Yet, even in their account, the full scope of how national civic practices could be internationalized to counter domination remains unclear.

Given this, virtues like citizen vigilance—essential for founding and maintaining republics—are largely circumscribed to the nation-state. They are not imagined as having the capacity to control and exercise oversight over international systems of power and coercion. This results in part from assuming the modular transmission of the practice of vigilance to other national contexts, which face multiple forms of domination. Although new directions in contemporary republican thought seek to expand republican virtues and practices beyond the national scale, more theoretical resources are needed to consider how these practices of critical political engagement can be internationalized.

Thus, I turn to postcolonial republicanism to conceptualize national or cross-national political practices of citizen contestation that target multiple forms of imperium: internal domination from elites, and external domination from international institutions and more powerful nation-states. In the next sections of the article, I turn to biographical writings on Julius Nyerere and Thomas Sankara and to their speeches and published writings. The biographical writings elaborate on the Cold War context in which a republican virtue like civic vigilance had to be cultivated. Specifically, they portray a context in which postcolonial nations like Tanzania and Burkina Faso were disempowered internationally and where institutional trust and vigilance were out of balance nationally. This context makes it necessary to imagine an alternative republican framework that can conceptualize citizen vigilance in postcolonial states that face multiple forms of imperium. For this I turn to the speeches and published writings by Nyerere and Sankara to illustrate how they reconceptualized the practice of vigilance as a key aspect of African postcolonial republicanism.

VIGILANCE AND AFRICAN UNITY

When Nyerere evokes the well-known republican maxim that connects freedom and vigilance in the American context—“the price of freedom is eternal vigilance”—as a rallying cry to galvanize the citizens of Tanzania to remain vigilant toward international actors, there is a general sense that the newly established independence of Tanzania is fragile, and needs to be safeguarded through the collective efforts of the demos at large. Nyerere draws on the core republican idea that citizens must have the individual virtue to contest and exercise oversight over the political and economic institutions that rule over them by cultivating widespread political practices of vigilance. Yet, it is also clear that the context in which Nyerere calls for mass vigilance among the citizenry is different from that which is imagined in Euro-American republicanism. Nyerere took the helm of leadership during the height of the Cold War (1962–1979) when newly independent African nations like Tanzania were vulnerable to pressure and influence from the Soviet Union and China as a result of the Sino-Soviet split in the Eastern Bloc, and also from Western Bloc powers like Britain and the United States. He tried to staunchly maintain a policy of non-alignment throughout the Cold War in order to formulate and implement independent economic policies that could meet the specific challenges and crises faced by Tanzania. It is within this broader context of the Cold War conflict that Nyerere invokes republican vigilance as a mass democratic practice that must be oriented externally toward imperial encroachment and internally toward leaders and civil servants who betrayed key tenets of the national ethic such as self-reliance and non-alignment. Traditional conceptions of republican vigilance that emphasize the importance of cultivating relations of contestation and accountability toward national representatives and institutions were insufficient in this postcolonial context of Cold War conflicts.

In other words, the political and economic institutions that citizens must exercise vigilance toward were not circumscribed to the national domain. Whereas Euro-American republicanism typically evokes vigilance to describe the political practices of contestation between state and society within the nation-state, Nyerere had to frame this relationship within a larger international context. Consider the opening quote of the article again. Here, Nyerere establishes that the foundational principle of the Arusha Declaration is “self-reliance.” As he says, “to govern yourself is to be self-reliant” (Nyerere 1969, 12), which he contends is to rely predominantly on the resources (land and people) that are available to a particular nation as much as possible. His contention is that self-reliance is the basis upon which to build international relations (economic and political), rather than from a position of total interdependence in an unequal global system (318–22). Nyerere calls for mass practices of vigilance in order to preserve this core principle of self-reliance in the Arusha Declaration, which he argues is threatened by

external actors such as the IMF and more powerful nation-states that seek to exercise political control over postcolonial nations like Tanzania in the midst of Cold War battles. Thus, the relationship of contestation that Nyerere delineates in his speech on the Arusha Declaration is between the citizens and leaders of disempowered nation-states, and the agents that represent the interests of more powerful nation-states and multinational economic institutions. It is this international relationship of contestation that demands practices of vigilance to preserve the Arusha principle of self-reliance. Given this, Nyerere's invocation of the republican maxim "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance" in the postcolonial Cold War context reframes the scope and reach of practices of vigilance such that they are directed externally to contest domination from nation-states, corporations, and multinational economic institutions that undermine Tanzanian economic self-reliance. In this sense, Nyerere resituates the republican value of freedom as non-domination that underscores the importance of being free from arbitrary control by an alien power by affirming the ideal of self-reliance in the postcolonial context. Furthermore, he extends the scope and reach of freedom as non-domination to the international level. In this way, Nyerere remakes the ideal of non-domination in the postcolonial context and challenges the assumption that republican ideals, practices, and institutions can be modularly transmitted to postcolonial democracies, which establish their independence after centuries of colonial rule and must navigate a context of international hierarchy to pursue their collective national commitments.

Nyerere also repeatedly emphasized the need for African unity, or the importance of regional and continent-wide coordination of practices of vigilance in order to effectively build power and confront political and economic domination from external actors in the international realm (Lal 2015, 7, 32–3). For instance, a central Cold War battle in East Africa was over the tenuous sovereignty of Zanzibar after indigenous Africans organized a revolution in 1964 to overthrow the Arab-led government. The revolution in Zanzibar created regional instability as Eastern and Western Bloc countries scrambled to establish influence in the region. The leadership of the Zanzibari revolution made their sympathies with communism transparent and were particularly keen to forge stronger connections with communist China. This provoked the British to make preliminary plans for an intervention, with the United States prepared to support such a move (Bjerk 2015, 210). The Soviet Bloc was also concerned about China gaining a foothold on the African continent and became invested in staging their own intervention in Zanzibar. Ultimately, the aftermath of the Zanzibari revolution created a volatile context in East Africa with threats of intervention, espionage, and conflict between Cold War powers. Nyerere was determined that the ideological allegiance of Zanzibar not become the basis for Cold War battles in the region. He, along with other members of his political party Tanganyika African

National Union (TANU), put forward a proposal to unify Tanganyika and Zanzibar as the United Republic of Tanzania. The union successfully placated Cold War powers as Zanzibar embraced Nyerere's national ethic of non-alignment under the Union treaty (Bjerk 2017, 74–5). When questioned about the political unification of the two regions, Nyerere denied that the proposal was a tactic of balancing Cold War divisions and presented the union as a natural outcome of his vision for East African integration and Pan-African unity (Smith 1973, 127). Thus, in situations that demanded external vigilance toward foreign actors, Nyerere often emphasized vigilance and unity together, and put forward strategic proposals that would preserve the sovereignty of East African nations through regional and continental unity of action and cooperation.

Consider also the battle for independence in Zimbabwe between 1964 and 1979, where Nyerere pleads for vigilance and unity toward the multiple external actors from the West and East that became involved in the conflict as Africa became a battleground for Cold War politics. In a speech to a large delegation at the Zambian United National Independence Party Conference, he warns,

They will provoke our anger in hope that in the heat of emotion we shall do things we afterwards regret.... Their agents will try to act as if our countries belong to them instead of to us; they will do this in the hope that this will make us adopt their racialism and thus give them the justification they seek. And they will do all these things in addition to their spying, and possible attempts to sabotage our efforts for development. Yet every one of these things we can defeat by vigilant unity. (Nyerere 1968, 334)

In this instance, Nyerere appeals to a larger group of national actors within Africa to exercise vigilance toward tactics that are designed to sow discord and produce division. He makes this appeal in order to bolster the unity of African organizations and nation-states who advocate for Black self-determination in Africa. Doing so, he brings together the political concepts of "vigilance" and "unity" in ways that are new and unusual to draw lines of contestation between the nation-states in Africa who advocate for majority Black rule and those which oppose it actively or covertly. Thus, in the context of Zimbabwe's war for independence, practices of vigilance are directed externally toward foreign actors but also internally toward oneself to cultivate a form of discipline that allows one to respond well "in the heat of emotion." Specifically, citizens are urged to mollify anger so that this emotion does not deepen internal ethnic conflicts between tribes and nations within Africa. Consequently, Nyerere gives us a clear sense of how practices of vigilance work toward different ends in postcolonial republicanism when they are activated for establishing independence, rather than when they are activated to hold the state accountable within an established republic. Namely, mass practices of vigilance cannot simply counter domination within a state by contesting its public policies

and initiatives. Instead, Nyerere suggests that the practice of vigilance in postcolonial republicanism must be multidirectional. They must be directed outward to monitor and resist the activities of aggression and infiltration from foreign powers, and inward to produce forms of political comportment that can be a bulwark against discord and division between African peoples in order to foster continental unity. Thus, Nyerere recasts the practice of vigilance within specific socio-historical coordinates to undercut the assumption that a modular form of this republican political practice could be reproduced or is sufficient in the postcolonial context.

Ultimately, Nyerere suggests that practices of vigilance in the colonial and postcolonial context are more demanding and require multiple levels of oversight and watchfulness. On the one hand, they must prevent external domination from foreign powers. On the other hand, practices of vigilance must prevent interpersonal domination between citizens in a volatile postcolonial context where religious, ethnic, tribal, and racial identity can be easily politicized to produce national, regional, and continental instability. Although more demanding, the multidirectional orientation of practices of vigilance that Nyerere describes responds more effectively to the context of international inequality in which postcolonial democracies are established and sustained. For Nyerere, the independence of Tanzania cannot be sustained if other parts of Africa are under colonial domination. This makes African unity a central tenet of his arguments for national self-determination. As he makes clear to the Presidents of Somalia and Kenya on their visit to Tanzania in 1966,

We need each other. Each of our separate countries could be a small plaything of big and powerful nations of the world. Together we are too big even for the giants to pick up and use. Separately we are shaken by political or economic disasters even when they happen on the other side of the continent; together we could pool our resources to maintain stability and achieve progress at the same time. (Nyerere 1968, 218–9)

In this speech, Nyerere stresses the importance of pooling together the strength of different African nations in order to maintain the independence of each African nation from outside intervention and aggression. Thus, he stresses unity as an integral part of the practices of vigilance articulated in postcolonial republicanism. However, this unity between African nation-states also requires internal vigilance so as to not fall prey to interethnic and interstate conflicts.

Importantly, internal vigilance is not only expressed as a form of citizen comportment that works to extinguish interethnic and interstate conflicts. It is also expressed as the more recognizable republican practices of vigilance directed at the national government. In his 1971 report on the first 10 years of independence in Tanzania, Nyerere takes stock of the achievements of the Arusha Declaration. He declares,

And in fact the spirit underlying the Arusha Declaration already permeates a good deal of our national life. Further,

although the battle against corruption is not won – for continued vigilance is always necessary – we have in a large measure avoided this disgrace. (Nyerere 1974, 283)

Here, Nyerere celebrates the civic and political culture established through a firm commitment to the core principles of the Arusha Declaration and contends that the Declaration has produced a political environment that diminished instances of corruption and improved governance in Tanzania. Yet, he underscores the need for continued vigilance against the domestic regime, and reminds citizens to remain vigilant against abuse of power. This more familiar articulation of republican vigilance from the Euro-American tradition calls for the Tanzanian people's active participation in, and collective control over, their national government. This suggests a durability to the modular form of vigilance as a political practice even while postcolonial statesmen reconstitute the practice to address the specific conditions of domination that they faced as leaders of newly independent nations.

In sum, Nyerere articulates postcolonial republicanism as the exercise of multidirectional vigilance at three levels: (1) toward predatory external actors who seek to abrogate the sovereignty of individual African states; (2) toward internal tendencies to dissension and conflict; and (3) toward actors in the domestic regime who sabotage the progress and development of the national community. In that sense, Nyerere imagines a more expansive political community of citizens to be engaged in practices of vigilance than the Euro-American republican framework, which circumscribes vigilance to a contestatory relationship between the government and its citizens within a nation-state. Consequently, Nyerere's rearticulation of vigilance in this African, postcolonial account of republicanism is more demanding as it must maintain a critical orientation toward overlapping political communities at the national, continental, and international scales. Yet, it is also clear that this more demanding practice of postcolonial vigilance, which mobilizes a national and continental political community, is less likely to solely target the state as the locus of resistance and transformation. In other words, when Nyerere articulates a multidirectional practice of postcolonial vigilance, he implicitly contextualizes the problem of internal domestic deficits in state capacity within a broader international framework. He calls for transformative political practices to be pitched at this international level, while also being critically oriented and watchful toward the operations of the state.

Despite the strength of Nyerere's account of multidirectional vigilance, the emphasis of vigilance and unity as interconnected political concepts is thorny and paradoxical. Civic vigilance, as conceptualized in Euro-American republican political thought, fosters an inherently contestatory relationship between the state and its citizens such that the latter acts as a check on the tendencies toward political domination. Nyerere's invocation of the republican maxim "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance" in many ways retains fidelity to this contestatory relationship between state and society.

Yet his persistent emphasis on unity undercuts the power of practices of vigilance to curb domination from leaders and political institutions at the national level. In his account of postcolonial republicanism, there is a dual tendency to both uplift mass practices of vigilance toward the domestic regime and call for unity in the same breath. For instance, at an opening ceremony of a new campus of the Dar es Salaam University College, Nyerere gave a speech in which he attempts to temper the intensity and vigor of core political freedoms necessary to sustain practices of vigilance toward the national government. He says,

We have to somehow reconcile desires which conflict in the short term. We want to maintain and expand the individual liberty which we now have, and to ensure for our nation the safeguards which are provided by freedom for criticism and open opposition to established policies..... At the same time we in the United Republic have to be more forceful than older countries in the deliberate safe-guarding of our national and community life. Only then shall we be able to ensure that we can put our united strength into battle for economic freedom. (Nyerere 1967, 313)

Here, Nyerere attempts to balance and temper the freedoms needed for “criticism and open opposition to established policies” of the government by evoking unity in the battle for economic freedom. He attempts to reconcile the national objectives to promote political freedom and secure economic development. However, by doing so, he constrains the full expression of political freedoms necessary to sustain mass practices of vigilance toward the national government.

Thus, while the strength of Nyerere’s account of postcolonial republicanism comes from its multidirectional orientation, its weakness arises from the call for vigilant unity in order to make progress on economic development. The appeals for unity can diminish the strength of a critical and watchful orientation toward the abuse of power that he calls for at the national level. In other words, a critical and vigilant orientation is often inconsistently practiced toward the domestic regime because the messages of vigilance and unity often contradict and undermine one another. In that sense, Nyerere’s works exemplify very well the challenges of cultivating and mobilizing mass democratic practices that can hold power accountable in a post-colonial state that forges its sovereignty under conditions of international inequality.

VIGILANCE, UNITY, AND SELF-CRITICISM

When Thomas Sankara assumed power as the president of Burkina Faso on August 4, 1983, it was 23 years after the nation had achieved independence from French colonialism. During the post-independence period, a series of presidents took power, but none could retain power as a result of popular dissatisfaction. Thus, the context in which Sankara calls for a politics of vigilance in the 1980s is markedly different from the

post-independence era of the 1960s in which Nyerere was writing. As the first president of Tanzania, Nyerere articulated his ideas of postcolonial vigilance in the early days of a republic that sought to establish its coherence and identity as a nation-state within Africa and the world. In many ways, Sankara also sought to establish the identity of his nation by beginning anew—he changed the name of Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, which meant “Land of the Upright People”; he wrote a new national anthem; and he adopted a new flag, which utilized Pan-African colors to symbolize the nation’s break with colonialism and unity with African ex-colonies. However, Sankara sought to establish a new republic after four decades of colonial rule, and two decades of postcolonial rule, during which period power was wielded by an indigenous elite. This context produced a markedly different form of postcolonial republicanism. Practices of vigilance were more acutely attentive to internal and external dangers to national sovereignty than that which was articulated by Nyerere, whose call for internal vigilance was often blunted by the simultaneous appeal to foster national and continental unity.

In order to begin to provide an account of Sankara’s distinctive account of postcolonial republicanism, it is necessary to first establish that Sankara, like Nyerere, conceived of the political practice of vigilance to be multidirectional in scope. Sankara first deploys “vigilance” in his inaugural speech as president of the Upper Volta. He declares,

People of Upper Volta, the National Council of the Revolution calls on all Voltaics – men and women, young and old – to mobilize and remain vigilant, in order to give the CNR their active support. The National Council of the Revolution invites the Voltaic people to form Committees for the Defense of the Revolution everywhere, in order to participate in the CNR’s great patriotic struggle and to prevent our enemies here and abroad from doing our people harm. (Sankara 2007, 67)

Sankara calls on the citizens of Burkina Faso “to mobilize and remain vigilant” by forming Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. The CDRs were a network of neighborhood committees that were established predominantly in workplaces in Burkina Faso. Sankara sought to model the CDRs on those which were established after the Cuban revolution to increase awareness of activities that sought to undermine the goals of the revolution. Importantly, he indicates in this passage that the CDRs were to exercise multidirectional vigilance toward internal and external enemies of the revolution. For instance, Sankara calls on the CDRs to remain vigilant toward “our enemies here and abroad...doing our people harm.” Thus, like Nyerere, Sankara makes a case for vigilance to be targeted externally toward more powerful nation-states and international institutions who worked to weaken the sovereignty of Burkina Faso, and internally toward the tendencies that sought to undermine the goals of the revolution.

Sankara was concerned with external threats to the Burkinabè revolution because he faced challenges in

cultivating strong relationships within Francophone West Africa, particularly neighboring countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Niger. Sankara was seen as an inexperienced and idealistic young leader who needed to be groomed by the elder statesmen of the region (Peterson 2018, 37). However, he was determined to pave his own path and remained uninterested in demonstrating his deference and loyalty to his fellow African heads of state. Sankara enjoyed tremendous popularity among the African youth for his commitment to fight corruption and his ability to articulate a message of confidence and defiance as the leader of a small African nation. Despite this popular support, Sankara posed a serious threat to the established political order of Francophone West Africa and he was soon understood as a problem that needed to be addressed. President Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire in particular took active steps to undermine Sankara by fostering close relations with Sankara's most trusted associate, Blaise Compaoré. Many leaders in the region soon began to view Compaoré as a moderate leader who they could work with and actively helped Compaoré orchestrate the coup d'état that would bring down Sankara's government and result in his assassination (Peterson 2021, 223–4). Thus, at the regional level, Sankara found himself isolated and without many allies, despite being buoyed by popular support among the African youth. This meant the Pan-African solidarity that Sankara sought to foster among the masses had to be tempered by a sense of watchfulness and vigilance toward external threats from African leaders and nations who sought to undermine the goals of the Burkinabè revolution. For this reason, Sankara's articulation of Pan-Africanism was always laced with criticism of the corruption and enrichment of African leaders because he sought to cultivate in the masses a critical orientation toward African political leadership.

Similarly, Sankara was particularly concerned with external threats from international actors. Sankara rose to power during the late Cold War era of the 1980s. During this decade, civil wars on the African continent often turned to proxy wars between the United States and the Soviet Union, and a triumphalist West began to aggressively promote neoliberal reforms liberalizing trade and cutting public expenditure in many developing nations like Burkina Faso as a condition for obtaining loans from the IMF and World Bank. When Sankara came to power in 1983 and instituted the military-led government of the National Council of the Revolution (CNR), it was unclear to the international community how Burkina Faso would position itself in relation to Cold War conflicts. Initially Sankara cultivated relations with Libya, which raised fears in the United States and France that Sankara would collaborate closely with the Libyan leader Muammar al Qaddafi. Sankara also forged close ties with the governments of Cuba and Nicaragua, indicating that Sankara would be leading a Left-leaning government in Burkina Faso. However, Sankara embraced the non-aligned position during the late Cold War era, and sought to forge an independent path for Burkina Faso that was outside the ideological and military battles

between Soviet and NATO-led nations. Although he was influenced by Marxist Leninism, he ultimately embraced limited forms of capitalist modernization to develop the economy of Burkina Faso (Zeilig 2018, 56). Embracing a non-aligned position in the 1980s left Sankara's government with few friends and more enemies. The Soviet Union offered no military or economic aid to the CNR government, and, in fact, the Soviets criticized the CNR government for alienating trade unions in Burkina Faso (Harsch 2018, 149). This left the CNR dependent on aid from the United States and France, although this aid remained tenuous and was often restricted when Sankara escalated his criticism of the imperial and racial rule of the United States and France domestically and internationally. With only Cuba, Nicaragua, and Ghana as true allies, Sankara often navigated an international sphere that was hostile and unfavorable toward achieving his goals of agricultural self-sufficiency, infrastructure improvements, and the expansion of healthcare and education. Thus, Sankara often characterized the international realm as comprised of leaders, diplomats, nations, and institutions who worked to undermine the sovereignty of Burkina Faso, and urged citizens to remain vigilant toward unlawful and meddlesome intervention from international actors.

Finally, Sankara remained equally concerned about internal threats to his government. His approach to social transformation alienated key sectors of the Burkinabè population, particularly the urban middle class who had historically organized themselves through trade unions. Sankara's determination that Burkina Faso become food self-sufficient meant that he prioritized rural development instead of urban growth. He mobilized peasants around local irrigation projects; sought to resolve land disputes; nationalized land so that peasants could have greater access for use, management, and cultivation; and diminished the power of local chiefs by abolishing the head tax that all peasants were forced to pay since the colonial era (Peterson 2021, 185–6). Through these initiatives, Sankara sought to empower the rural masses. However, in doing so he curtailed the social position of the urban petty bourgeoisie and the power of chiefs. The petty bourgeoisie, composed of teachers, academics, and civil servants, were forced to downsize their salaries and privileges so that more resources could be diverted to rural development (191). In the same way, the status and privileges of chiefs were eradicated. This approach to development meant that Sankara alienated powerful groups and struggled to forge political unity within Burkina Faso. Thus, the domestic terrain remained as treacherous for Sankara as the international and regional terrain. He found himself vulnerable to internal attacks from members within his own party, trade unions, and traditional chiefs. Thus, despite Sankara's popular support, there was growing opposition from all political classes toward Sankara's revolutionary project, instigating him to call on the masses to practice multidirectional vigilance toward external and internal actors within the domestic regime who sought to undermine the goals of the Burkinabè revolution.

Despite the fact that both Sankara and Nyerere call for multidirectional vigilance toward internal and external threats to the domestic regime, they diverge significantly on the meaning of internal vigilance. For Nyerere, the exercise of internal vigilance is a form of self-discipline that tempers emotions and ultimately works to foster internal unity within a nation-state such as Tanzania, and also within the continent of Africa, so that ethnic and tribal conflicts do not produce deep rifts that make collective action and solidarity difficult to initiate and sustain. Whereas, Sankara emphasizes the importance of self-criticism as a necessary supplement to the successful practice of mass vigilance. Instead of vigilance working to foster unity, Sankara argues that vigilance should be sustained alongside criticism of the policies undertaken by the CDRs. For example, in the opening remarks at the First National Conference of the CDRs in 1986, he declares,

Here we are after some hard work. Here we are after a special kind of test, the first of its kind, in the course of which the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution voluntarily and consciously agreed to take a critical look at themselves. They have been in session nonstop day and night, in the spirit of criticism and self-criticism, in order to examine the work they've done over the two and a half years of revolution in Burkina Faso. (Sankara 2007, 270–1)

In these remarks, Sankara makes clear that the CDRs—the local institutions that were assigned the task of maintaining vigilance in order to safeguard the achievements of the revolution—must also be committed to self-criticism, so that they look at their own practices and assess whether they were becoming instruments for corruption and oppression. For this reason, Sankara understands vigilance and self-criticism as concomitant principles in postcolonial republicanism, such that one principle cannot be effective without the other. Vigilance without self-criticism could transform the CDRs into instruments that inflict extrajudicial violence and punishment toward other citizens, consequently degenerating revolutionary vigilance into forms of vigilantism that are well documented in the empirical work on contemporary African politics (Abrahams 1987; Adinkrah 2005; Anderson 2002; Buur and Jensen 2004; Heald 2006; Oomen 2004; Pratten 2006; Smith 2019; Tankebe 2009). Self-criticism without vigilance is likely to spiral into internecine wars that stray from protecting the goals of the revolution. As will be argued in the final section of this article, for Sankara, the practice of vigilance in postcolonial republicanism was not simply a negative political practice of contestation and struggle against domination. It was also a set of positive and generative political practices that guard and protect the ideals of the democratic and popular revolution of 1983, providing the Burkinabè people a political compass through which to assess their victories and defeats. In short, excessive self-criticism without a vigilant orientation can orphan citizens to doubt and passive resignation, leaving them without a foundation through which to

understand and reconnect to their shared purpose and commitments necessary to fend off internecine conflict.

Thus, although Sankara modeled the CDRs on those that were established after the Cuban revolution in 1960, he also sought to build on the Cuban model. He did this by reconceptualizing the CDRs as the shared institutional foundation for a new society and a platform for popular mobilization that was grounded in decentralized governance. As he writes,

The CDRs are the authentic organization of the people for wielding revolutionary power. This is the instrument the people have forged in order to take genuine command of their destiny and thereby extend their control into all areas of society. The people's arms, the people's power, the people's wealth – it will be the people who manage these. The CDRs exist for that purpose. (Sankara 2007, 94)

In other words, Sankara reimagined the function of the CDRs as doing more than reporting on counter-revolutionary activity. He understood the CDRs as a local organizational form that could involve ordinary people in villages, urban neighborhoods, and workplaces to articulate their needs and voice their criticism of the local and central government. As a result, Sankara expanded the meaning and significance of revolutionary vigilance so that it could be a mass democratic practice exercised by citizens toward their representatives who strayed from the goals of the Burkinabè revolution or failed to adequately respond to their needs. Sankara rarely emphasized unity in the CDRs. Instead, he called for vigilance and self-criticism to be concomitant principles so that the CDRs could be an organization for popular empowerment as well as one which could protect the goals of the revolution from internal and external sabotage. Thus, Nyerere and Sankara articulate two distinct accounts of the practice of vigilance in postcolonial republicanism. Whereas vigilance and unity function together for Nyerere because of his fears of internal conflict and disintegration, Sankara articulates vigilance, self-criticism, and local decentralized governance as the antidote to decades of failed postcolonial leadership and governance.

Having said that, like many postcolonial African leaders, Sankara did elaborate on the question of African unity in several speeches and interviews. However, even on these occasions where he did comment on the importance of African unity, he emphasized the importance of vigilance and self-criticism as associated political principles. Instead of vigilance working to foster national and continental unity as with Nyerere, Sankara argues that vigilance should be sustained alongside criticism of the policies undertaken by other African states. In an interview with the Swiss journalist Jean-Philippe Rapp in 1985, he was asked about the importance of African unity and how to tackle the problem of foreign debt that divided African nations, to which he replies,

The pressure to pay the debt does not come from the isolated usury of a single banker. It comes from an entire organized system, so that in the event of nonpayment,

they can detain your planes at an airport or refuse to send you an absolutely indispensable spare part. So deciding not to pay the debt requires we form a united front. All the countries should act together – on the condition, of course, that each one of us is open to looking critically at the way we ourselves manage these funds. People who have contracted huge debts because of their own lavish personal expenses don't deserve our support. (Sankara 2007, 205)

In this interview, Sankara emphasizes the importance of cultivating a politics of African unity that can produce effective forms of collective action, such as refusing to pay the debt accrued for economic development. Doing so, African unity is also the ground upon which vigilance is exercised toward external actors that attempt to impede the progress and development of African states by shackling them with debt. Yet, for Sankara, African unity and vigilance toward external actors are most effective in protecting the sovereignty of African nation-states when two conditions are met. First, there must be a willingness from African states to engage in self-criticism about how they manage their national economy. Second, there must be a collective commitment to the shared goals of peace between nations and equality in development by means of the distribution and organization of resources (Sankara 1988, 129). Given this, political unity and vigilance are important tenets of Sankara's account of postcolonial republicanism, but unlike Nyerere, he articulates unity and vigilance as closely associated with self-criticism so that internal unity and external vigilance do not result in the unwavering support of corrupt leaders and governments. Thus, Sankara's speeches demonstrate the ways in which a modular transplantation of vigilance was not possible from the Euro-American to African context, nor within the African context itself. The form of vigilance articulated in Tanzania during the 1960s and 1970s had to be reformulated to meet the challenges of the 1980s Cold War context in Burkina Faso.

By articulating unity, vigilance, and self-criticism as closely associated political principles, Sankara also seeks to reimagine the Non-aligned Movement in the 1980s. At the Eighth Summit of the Conference for the Movement of Non-aligned Countries in Harare, Zimbabwe, he speaks directly to the relevance of the Non-aligned Movement in the late era of the Cold War. He asks,

What is the Nonaligned Movement doing? All these questions should lead us to ask ourselves what strength the Nonaligned Movement has today, now that the Titos, Nehrus, Nassers, and Kwame Nkrumahs are gone.

I will not make the list long by citing the fratricidal conflicts between member states of the Nonaligned movement that we still have not been able to resolve;the drought that is ruining the weak economies of some among us;.... Then there are the cyclones every year that inevitably devastate the coastal regions of some countries present here.

For all this, we are tempted to call on the founding fathers for help. Yet that is not a solution. First, because I want to drop messianism. Yes, there is neither a prophet nor a messiah to wait for. This must be faced. (Sankara 2007, 309)

In this passionate speech, Sankara seeks to rebuild and reorient the goals of the Non-aligned Movement on terms that speak to the problems that formerly colonized nations faced in the 1980s. However, he is clear that uncritical support toward a single individual who is expected to have all the solutions to postcolonial government and economic development cannot forge the way forward. This call to dethrone founding fathers and tackle the concrete problems at hand of fratricidal conflict, drought, and severe weather is in fact grounded in his constant emphasis of the importance of vigilance, unity, and self-criticism. He calls for vigilance toward the actions of national leaders so that they are responding to the concrete problems faced by the masses. At the same time, Sankara's calls for vigilance are always grounded in a form of self-criticism so that internal vigilance does not descend into political instability. Vigilance and self-criticism are further buttressed by the importance of national, continental, and intercontinental unity to foster political action. In other words, Sankara sought to reenergize the Non-aligned Movement with three of these principles of postcolonial republicanism in mind. Doing so, he appealed to the members present to step into the present and "dare to invent the future" (189) without being shackled by the "romanticism and lyricism of the founding fathers" (310).

In spite of Sankara's efforts to persistently articulate the fundamental political principles of the CDRs as vigilance, self-criticism, and unity in order to sustain the strength of the CDRs, these local committees nevertheless produced political instability and internal conflicts between ethnic and tribal groups. By 1985–1986, the CDRs became extensions of state power that repressed opposition and dissent and had strayed from their vision of being exemplars of what a genuinely transformed society might look like (Phelan 2018). Whether or not the disintegration of the CDRs was inevitable because of the challenges of sustaining mass practices of vigilance in postcolonial states that attempt to forge their sovereignty within an international context of political and economic domination is an open question. However, it is clear that the practice of vigilance in postcolonial accounts of republicanism is always a complicated and fragile endeavor because of the unequal international context in which civic practices such as vigilance are cultivated and exercised.

VIGILANCE AND A NATIONAL ETHIC

Despite the challenges of cultivating republican civic practices within a context of international hierarchy, both Nyerere and Sankara offer a distinct model through which to think about vigilance in the post-

independence era and thus conceptualize state–society relations in the postcolonial state.

Vigilance must be multidirectional for both thinkers and needs to be undergirded by a conception of national and continental unity with regard to questions of self-determination, foreign policy, and economic development. In order to not erode a vigilant orientation toward power, Sankara offers a better model through which to co-articulate vigilance and unity by centering the need for a sustained practice of self-criticism by leaders and citizens alike. Importantly, it is clear from investigating Euro-American and postcolonial accounts of republican vigilance that the political practice is not sustainable on its own, but must be supplemented by attendant political practices, civic virtues, and political ideals. For instance, theorizing and writing from the context of Western democratic societies, Pettit contends that practices of vigilance are stabilized in a political context where there is confidence in political institutions (Pettit 1997, 276). In other words, practices of vigilance must be cultivated on a bedrock of political trust, which many scholars consider to be fundamental for a healthy and functional democracy (Dunn 1988; Hardin 2002; Hetherington 2006; Inglehart 1999). However, in the postcolonial context of Tanzania and Burkina Faso, it is not political trust or the confidence reliance on political institutions that are emphasized as the foundation for cultivating political vigilance. Rather, Nyerere and Sankara articulate a shared political vision in the form of a national ethic to be crucial for generating and guiding mass practices of vigilance. In other words, the key question for these two statesmen was not how to balance vigilance with confidence and trust in institutions, but rather how to generate and guide nascent democratic practices toward a shared vision of an independent and self-governing African nation.

For instance, Nyerere was asked to comment on different proposals of the republic's constitution during the early years of Tanzania's independence. Notably, he remarks that it is not possible to create a foolproof constitution and emphasizes the importance of fostering a robust national ethic as the most durable protection against tyranny (Nyerere 1967, 174). Rather than expending tremendous effort on carefully enumerating the specific powers and roles of institutions and political actors, Nyerere speaks to the importance of a guiding national ethic as the central bulwark against the abuse of power. He declares,

The point must be made that ultimately the safeguard of a people's right, the people's freedom and those things which they value, ultimately the safeguard is the ethic of the nation. When the nation does not have the ethic which will enable the Government to say: 'We cannot do this, this is un-Tanganyikan.' Or the people to say 'That we cannot tolerate, that is un-Tanganyikan.' If the people do not have that kind of ethic, it does not matter what kind of constitution you frame. They can always be victims of tyranny. (Nyerere 1967, 174)

Here, Nyerere advances the argument that a national ethic that imbues citizens and leaders with a deeply ingrained sense of what the nation stands for is ultimately the most efficacious protection against tyranny. In other words, mass practices of vigilance that work as democratic safeguards against tyranny need to be supplemented by a national ethic that guides the masses to remain committed to the founding ideals and tenets of the republic. It is the national ethic, rather than institutional design through the constitution, that Nyerere prioritizes as supportive of mass democratic practices in the early years of the Tanganyikan republic. This is a remarkable contrast to republican arguments where proper institutional design that produces a "demanding pattern of expectations" (Pettit 1997, 277) toward authority furnishes the political context in which practices of vigilance can flourish.

It is not that well-designed institutions that build public confidence in the formal exercise of authority are not important for Nyerere, but rather he contends that national political development for Tanzania must come in distinct phases. For instance, in his 1971 report on the first 10 years of independence, he remarks,

We shall celebrate on 9 December 1971...But just as the celebration on 9 December 1961 was only a beginning, so will be the celebration this year. It is the beginning of our third phase. We have achieved our uhuru; we have defined and accepted the kind of Tanzania we want to build and live in; now we must seriously build and protect such a Tanzania. (Nyerere 1974, 334)

Here, Nyerere defines the importance of articulating a shared vision of Tanzania as the primary goal of the first years of independence and subsequently moving to protect and fortify this vision in the third phase through the institutionalization of that vision. A shared vision of an independent, self-reliant, and socialist Tanzania was articulated mostly clearly in the Arusha Declaration of 1967, in which three central principles of the national ethic are expounded: "equality and respect for human dignity; sharing of the resources which are produced by our efforts; work by everyone and exploitation by none" (Nyerere 1968, 272). For Nyerere, mass practices of vigilance must be directed to protect this national ethic, which forms the basis of a shared vision of a socialist Tanzania. When the masses have a clear and unshakeable commitment to a shared vision of the nation, their critical and watchful orientation toward the abuse of power will be guided by a persistent assessment of whether the collective vision of the nation is protected or sacrificed. For Nyerere, it is ultimately a vigilant citizenship founded on the basis of a shared vision of Tanzania that can be a safeguard against tyranny. In the third phase, he speaks to the institutionalization of this shared vision, which is unfortunately open and undefined. Yet we can surmise that the third phase would involve a more concerted effort to design and construct institutions that foster trust, security, and confidence among citizens.

Similarly, in October 1983, a few months after coming to power, Sankara gave an address known as the “Political Orientation Speech” over the radio and television. It became the programmatic document of the Burkinabè revolution that Sankara frequently referred to throughout his time in power. Like Nyerere, Sankara defines a national ethic in his 1983 political orientation speech. He describes a national economy that is “independent, self-sufficient, and planned at the service of a democratic and popular society” (Sankara 2007, 104). Sankara persistently underscores the ways in which this national ethic must give birth to a new collective consciousness among the masses, rather than remain as “mere slogans ...proclaimed so often without conviction” (104). This point is amplified in one of his final 1987 speeches delivered in the Houet province on the occasion of the fourth-anniversary celebration of the Burkinabè revolution. He asserts,

For a new society, we must have a new people, a people that has its own identity, knows what it wants and how to assert itself, and understands what will be necessary to reach goals it has set for itself... Comrades of Houet province, through your enthusiastic work and your mobilization you have made this fourth anniversary of our revolution an important stepping stone...I congratulate you and encourage you to redouble your vigilance and fighting vigor so as to register even more spectacular successes. (Sankara 1988, 235, 240)

In this speech celebrating the fourth anniversary of the revolution, Sankara makes a concerted effort to demonstrate how the national ethic of an independent, self-sufficient, and planned democratic society must produce a new collective subjectivity that is assertive and resolute about the actions needed to reach the central goals of the revolution. The national ethic must transform the character of the people rather than remain an ossified set of ideals consecrated in a manifesto. For this reason, Sankara lauds the citizens of the Houet province for their successes in realizing the goals of the revolution through local mobilization and calls on them to “redouble their vigilance.” Thus, for Sankara, practices of vigilance are closely associated with realizing the national ethic, not merely at the objective level of realizing the goals of political and economic development but also at a subjective level of transforming the character of the people. Vigilance in this instance is not merely about watching over those in power to ensure that they do not stray from the national ethic of building an independent, self-sufficient, and democratically planned society. It is also a practice of self-cultivation to ensure that citizens vigilantly uphold the national ethic on an individual level and at the collective level of the local and national community. As Sankara writes, praising the work of the CDRs, “We must make every effort to see that our actions live up to our words and be vigilant with regard to our social behavior” (45). Here, Sankara calls on the citizens of Burkina Faso to vigilantly instill the values of the revolution in their character.

Thus, there are considerable differences in how republican vigilance is articulated by Western and African statesmen writing during the first few decades of independence. Importantly, both Western and African thinkers suggest that practices of republican vigilance cannot be sustained on their own, but rather must be guided and stabilized by associated ideals, practices, and virtues. For Western thinkers and statesmen, vigilance is a practice that works to curb the overreach of power, and functions most successfully where there is a foundation of citizen trust and confidence in political institutions. Without this foundation, vigilance can easily degenerate into a relationship of distrust between citizens and their representatives, undermining the legitimacy of a regime. For Nyerere and Sankara, the question of trust and institutional legitimacy is not unimportant. However, in the early decades of Tanzania and Burkina Faso’s independence, they emphasize that practices of republican vigilance need to be guided by a national ethic. To state it differently, for these two African statesmen, vigilant citizenship cannot merely be a negative political practice that watches for and curbs the overreach of political power. It must also be a positive and generative political practice that is nourished and supported by a national ethic. Thus, there are a number of new registers through which vigilance is articulated as a mass democratic practice in postcolonial republicanism. The modular conceptualization of vigilance does not allow us to consider the specificities of the postcolonial context. It does not capture the way in which African statesmen subjected this political practice to dynamic reconfiguration as they faced a new set of social and political challenges in the postwar era.

CONCLUSION

Democratic practices that oversee the ability of political representatives to remain committed to the public good are vital for a healthy and thriving democracy. The Euro-American tradition of republicanism has conceptualized these democratic practices as a vigilant orientation toward political power that works to preserve freedom as non-domination as the organizing ideal of a polity. It is clear that republicanism and its attendant practices for preserving democratic freedoms were attractive for African statesmen such as Julius Nyerere since he picks up on the key themes and questions that concerned republican statesmen in the United States and Europe. However, in the postcolonial context, democratic practices of vigilance take on different expressions given the broader structure of international hierarchy in which such practices are mobilized and stabilized, and the structure of colonialism that was integral to postcolonial state formation in Africa. The Western model of republican citizenship is not capacious enough to adequately conceptualize the array of practices that emerge in the African postcolonial context when the state and its institutions are disempowered in the international realm or have not yet gained sufficient legitimacy in the national realm. A modular conception of vigilance to theorize and understand state–society relations in postcolonial Africa will

leave us with an impoverished understanding of democratic governance in Africa. Nyerere and Sankara offer compelling accounts of African postcolonial republicanism that conceptualizes contestatory democratic practices of vigilance in postcolonial states. They contend that vigilance must be multidirectional and grounded in a national ethic. Moreover, Sankara is more attuned to the problems of co-articulating vigilance and African unity, and offers a formulation that better yokes vigilance and unity through an emphasis on self-criticism.

Ultimately, Nyerere and Sankara articulate a radical postcolonial republicanism that poses a fundamental challenge to the structure of international hierarchy. Democratic practices are not circumscribed to the national domain but rather work to contest domination and inequality at the national, regional, and international levels. When the republican language of vigilance is taken up by African statesmen, it is embraced with the intent of challenging the imperialist foundations of the international system. For this reason, the language of vigilance reemerges persistently in the twentieth-century writings of anti-colonial leaders and statesmen in Africa who sought to challenge imperialism and articulate a non-aligned position during the Cold War. In the writings of Frantz Fanon, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Touré, Amílcar Cabral, and Thomas Sankara, vigilance is extolled as a practice that emerges organically among the masses during and after the anti-colonial struggle. Yet these works also emphasize very clearly that the conditions under which vigilance is activated in colonial and post-colonial states are unlike those of modern democratic nation-states of the West, making this republican practice of democratic contestation more demanding in states that occupy a weak structural position in the international sphere. The postcolonial republicanism of African leaders is radical in its challenge to domination, but also ultimately grounded in democratic practices that are more fragile and difficult to sustain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the reviewers and editor for their invaluable feedback. I also extend my gratitude to Inés Valdez, Jared Anthony Loggins, and Kamran Moshref for important suggestions and redirections on early drafts. Finally, I thank the discussants at the political theory workshops where I presented this article: Hana Nasser, Matthew Mautarelli, and Archana Kaku.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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