

**From the Postcolonial to the Global: The Testament of Julius Nyerere**

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## **From the Postcolonial to the Global: The Testament of Julius Nyerere**

“Conscience is not only memory but promise.”

“The era of globalization of the economy is also the era of localization of polity.”

Let me begin by thanking the Global Partners Project for the extraordinary generosity that has made it possible for us all to gather this morning in the halls of the University of Nairobi. While I have been the beneficiary of a number of acts of academic grace, the opportunity opened up by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to make this, my first, trip to Africa has been quite simply the most astonishing and the most beautiful example that I have witnessed of the cooperation among academic institutions, charitable foundations, and nations. It is with great humility and with a rather terrifying sense of responsibility, of answerability, that I stand here this morning.

I come to you today as a philosopher and as a philosopher in a Eurocentric tradition of philosophy that has come to be known as hermeneutics: my central professional concern is with the questions and the guiding hypotheses, the conceptual successes and failures, of a more-or-less canonical series of texts that are widely taken to define the properly “philosophical.” I do not come to you today as an Africanist, although I did write a dissertation many years ago on the Egyptian philosopher of late antiquity, Plotinus, and I have spent a significant portion of my teaching and research energies over the past decade dealing with philosophical traditions of Africa and the African diaspora.<sup>1</sup> I do not come to you today as either a political scientist or an economist or a sociologist, although what I have to say will trench on each of these disciplines. Finally, I do not come to you today as a prophet of the future: indeed, I have always suspected that Hegel was right in his famous remark that “the owl of Minerva

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Fred Lee Hord and Jonathan Scott Lee (eds.), I Am Because We Are: Readings in Black Philosophy (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).

begins its flight only with the onset of dusk,”<sup>2</sup> and I remain deeply skeptical of any theorist who tries to envision a future world or give the future a particular shape by having recourse to his/her preferred vision of the past or present. Nevertheless, I will make a step or two into that terrain “where angels fear to tread,” hoping that my tentative steps will not be interpreted as a “rush.”

### **Nostalgia for the Postcolonial**

When I first heard the news this past October that Julius K. Nyerere, the founding president of independent Tanzania and perhaps the most articulate spokesperson for “African socialism,” had died, I found myself overwhelmed by a wave of nostalgia. I first read Nyerere’s Uhuru na Ujamaa/Freedom and Socialism<sup>3</sup> as an undergraduate student in 1970 and remembered vividly the impression that the profound directness of his postcolonial, political vision had made upon me. Eager at the very least to ride this wave of nostalgia for a little while, I returned to Nyerere’s texts of the 1960s, going back in mind and in spirit to what now seems that impossibly long time ago when the idealism of the concepts of freedom, democracy, and socialism seemed genuinely embodied and fresh.

I would like to share a little of what I found, hoping that my own nostalgic pleasure might be just a bit contagious. As early as 1961, writing of the notion of freedom, Nyerere argues that “in his own traditional society the African has always been a free individual, very much a member of his community, but seeing no conflict between his own interests and those of his community.”<sup>4</sup> A year later, taking up this point to mount a critique of capitalism, he notes that “in our traditional African society we were individuals within a community. We took care of the community, and the community took care of us. We neither needed nor wished to exploit our fellow men” (FU 166). I

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<sup>2</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, Elements of the Philosophy of Right, edited by Allen W. Wood, translated by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23.

<sup>3</sup> Julius K. Nyerere, Uhuru na Ujamaa/Freedom and Socialism: A Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1965-1967 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968). Hereafter abbreviated FS.

<sup>4</sup> Julius K. Nyerere, Uhuru na Umoja/Freedom and Unity: A Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1952-65 (Dar Es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1966), 105. Hereafter abbreviated FU.

am not here to defend or dispute the veracity of Nyerere's analysis of traditional African society; rather, I would simply like to celebrate the way that he manages to give a kind of empirical content to Immanuel Kant's famously abstract formulation of the fundamental moral law as a matter of acting as a law-making member of a Kingdom of Ends.<sup>5</sup> Nyerere's invocation of a possibly mythic African past makes one feel that freedom is something that can be concretely achieved and thereby satisfies a longing for a lived experience of freedom that might have seemed simply impossible. In this sense, his controversial description of precolonial African society constitutes a prescription for the postcolonial society that Tanzania was attempting to build.<sup>6</sup>

Turning from the concept of freedom to the much-abused concept of democracy, I return to Nyerere's earliest writings, where he defines democracy in terms of "discussion, equality, and freedom" (FU 103). Arguing that both traditional African and ancient Greek societies were committed to the centrality of discussion as a key component of the democratic ideal, Nyerere goes on to suggest with almost visible glee that the crucial difference between Africa and Europe is that only Africa traditionally recognized the inherent equality of all individuals (FU 104). Thus, he concludes that "the traditional African society. . . was a society of equals and it conducted its business through discussion . . . . 'They talk till they agree.' That gives you the very essence of traditional African democracy. It is rather a clumsy way of conducting affairs, especially in a world as impatient for results as this of the twentieth century, but discussion is one essential factor of any democracy; and the African is expert at it" (FU 103-104). In an effort to realize this democratic ideal in the twentieth century, Nyerere promoted a return to a conception of society as an extended family, a conception that lay at the heart of his government's central project of creating ujamaa villages across Tanzania. Writing in 1968, Nyerere describes the ujamaa village as "a democracy at work,"<sup>7</sup> as "a voluntary

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<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, translated by James W. Ellington, 3d ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), 39-40.

<sup>6</sup> On the undecidability of the descriptive and the prescriptive, between the constative and the performative, see Jacques Derrida, "Declarations of Independence," translated by Tom Keenan and Tom Pepper, New Political Science 15 (1986):7-15.

<sup>7</sup> Julius K. Nyerere, Uhuru na Maendeleo/Freedom and Development: A Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1968-1973 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 69. Hereafter abbreviated FD.

association of people who decide of their own free will to live together and work together for their common good” (FD 67). “They, and no one else,” Nyerere insists, “will make all the decisions about their working and living arrangements” (FD 67). Moreover, these people will join together in an ujamaa village “because they have understood that only through this method can they live and develop in dignity and freedom, receiving the full benefits of their co-operative endeavour” (FD 67-68). Again, we can see how Nyerere takes a description of traditional African society and transforms it into a prescription for a genuine and functional postcolonial democracy. At the same time—at least from the perspective of my 1960s’ nostalgia—Nyerere’s vision carries with it a certain charge precisely because he manages to make an apparently impossible form of radical democracy seem possible once again.

With the notion of the ujamaa village, we are at the controversial core of Nyerere’s concrete vision of socialism, and I think it is worth dwelling a little on this vision today since the very idea of socialism seems to have lost virtually all of its appeal for many of us. Speaking in Cairo in 1967, Nyerere claims: “For socialism the basic purpose is the well-being of the people, and the basic assumption is an acceptance of human equality” (FS 303). He goes on to argue, however, that there is nothing utopian about this. “On the contrary,” he insists, “[socialism] is based on the facts of human nature. It is a doctrine which accepts mankind as it is, and demands such an organization of society that man’s inequalities are put to the service of his equality” (FS 303). Such claims as these always leave my students non-plussed; it is, after all, difficult for even the most determined cynic to reject such shameless idealism. It is less difficult, however, to question Nyerere’s vision of leadership in his idealized democratic socialism. In the same Cairo speech, he maintains that “there must be, among the leadership, a desire and a determination to serve alongside of, and in complete identification with, the masses. The people must be, and must know themselves to be, sovereign. Socialism cannot be imposed upon people; they can be guided; they can be led. But ultimately they must be involved” (FS 309) It does not take a sophisticated, deconstructionist reading of this passage to suggest that Nyerere’s own vision of leadership inescapably separates the leadership from what he calls “the masses”: if a leader must desire and be determined to serve alongside his/her people, it would seem to follow that s/he is not, in fact, one of

them. Nevertheless, Nyerere seems to answer this objection at the very end of his remarks, when he stresses that the function of leadership is “to propose, to explain, and to persuade. For our education does not give us rights over the people. It does not justify arrogance, nor attitudes of superiority” (FS 310). No doubt, my own nostalgia in reading Nyerere today is tied to a longing that public service might seem so essentially unselfish, a longing for leaders who act as Nyerere characterizes his own actions, and, thus, a longing for leaders who are genuine exemplars, leaders who are what they ought to be.

Such was what I will call the philosophical content of my nostalgia last fall, and I will be the first to admit that Julius Nyerere’s testament left me wallowing those days in a longing for the impossible. Yet, in his contribution to the extraordinary volume, For Nelson Mandela, Jacques Derrida suggests that there are always at least two ways “to receive a testament.”<sup>8</sup> “One can inflect it,” Derrida argues, “toward what bears witness only to a past and knows itself condemned to reflecting on what will not return . . . . But, another inflection, if the testament is always made in front of witnesses, a witness in front of witnesses, it is also to open and enjoin, it is to confide in others the responsibility of a future. To bear witness, to test, to attest, to contest, to present oneself before witnesses.”<sup>9</sup> There can be no question that Nyerere himself sees his philosophical legacy in this second sense of opening up a vision of the future and asking others to be answerable for this future. The question, however, that I cannot help but ask is whether or not Nyerere’s testament opens up a viable future for us, a future for which we might be willing to accept responsibility.

### **The “Vanishing Present”**

At about the same time as I learned of the death of Nyerere, I received a copy of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s latest book, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason, subtitled Toward a History of the Vanishing Present.<sup>10</sup> As is typical of Spivak’s work, the book is

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Laws of Reflection: Nelson Mandela, In Admiration,” translated by Mary Ann Caws and Isabelle Lorenz, in Jacques Derrida and Mustapha Tlili (eds.), For Nelson Mandela (New York: Seaver Books, 1987), 13-42, 37.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

brilliant and yet agonizingly difficult to read. What makes the book difficult, however, is not a willful obscurity of style but the manner in which Spivak tries to reveal in writing the multidimensional ways in which her own views of the postcolonial situation have changed over the past decade and, in fact, remain currently in flux. At the risk of simplifying a subtle and complex argument, I would suggest that Spivak's Critique is essentially trying to show that her own approach to postcolonial theory during the past twenty-five years—and she has almost single-handedly defined the character of postcolonial theory for many people in the humanities and the social sciences--has been rendered profoundly suspect by the economic and political consequences of multinational corporate globalization in the latter 1990s. What had seemed the “present” of postcolonial economies, states, and cultures has almost instantaneously “vanished” in the wake of the various trends of globalization. What remains “today” and what will be “present” “tomorrow” of the “postcolonial” seem at this point absolutely uncertain and even undecidable. Hence, Spivak's own responses to many of the grand issues of recent postcolonial theory now appear somewhat muted and uncertain, and she uses her formidable skills as a deconstructionist primarily to encourage the suspension of all easy judgment.

A similar insight—that the complex forces of globalization at the end of the twentieth century have transformed societies, economies and cultures across the globe—is pursued in a rather different direction by Spanish sociologist, Manuel Castells, in his three volume work, The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture.<sup>11</sup> I cannot begin to sketch Castells' argument in any detail here, but it seems to me that he has made the first significant attempt to understand the impact of the information revolution that has come to the fore in the past decade. His detailed analysis of what he calls informational capitalism is particularly striking in that he shows how and why the development of digital computing and of resources such as the internet inevitably generated the trends towards globalization of economies and cultures that are so visible today. However, where Spivak sees in these trends reasons for theoretical caution, Castells takes the opportunity he sees to create a staggering, over-arching theoretical

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<sup>11</sup> Manuel Castells, The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture, 3 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996-1998).

account of structural transformations in what he calls “the network society.” The society in which we find ourselves today “is made up,” Castells argues, “of networks of production, power, and experience, which construct a culture of virtuality in the global flows that transcend time and space. Not all dimensions and institutions of society follow the logic of the network society, in the same way that industrial societies included for a long time many pre-industrial forms of human existence. But all societies in the Information Age are indeed penetrated, with different intensity, by the pervasive logic of the network society, whose dynamic expansion gradually absorbs and subdues pre-existing social forms” (III.370).

There are two far-reaching consequences of Castells’ theoretical vision which seem to me of critical importance for us today, here in Nairobi. The first consequence deals with what happens to those parts of the world which have been, for a variety of historical and economic reasons, essentially excluded from the global flows of capital and information that effectively constitute the contemporary global economy. These parts of the world—which according to Castells include most of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as large pockets of the inner cities in the United States and Western Europe—constitute an entity he calls “the fourth world,” a world defined by the “simultaneous economic development and underdevelopment, social inclusion and social exclusion” characteristic of informational, global capitalism (III:82). Writing of Africa, in particular, Castells warns that “technological dependency and technological underdevelopment, in a period of accelerated technological change in the rest of the world, make it literally impossible for Africa to compete internationally either in manufacturing or in advanced services.” Caught in “a downward spiral of competitiveness,” Africa according to Castells’ analysis, “becomes increasingly marginalized in the informational/global economy by each leap forward in technological change” (III:95)

The second consequence of Castells’ theory that strikes me as valuable for us today grows out of his account of the current state of personal experience for those included within the web of informational capitalism. Arguing that power “becomes inscribed, at a fundamental level, in the cultural codes through which people and institutions represent life and make decisions, including political decisions” (III:367), Castells goes on to offer his own conception of the “vanishing present.” The present is,

he maintains, essentially timeless and without space, because “all expressions from all times and from all spaces are mixed in the same hypertext, constantly rearranged, and communicated at any time, anywhere, depending on the interests of senders and the moods of receivers. This virtuality is our reality because it is within the framework of these timeless, placeless, symbolic systems that we construct the categories, and evoke the images, that shape behavior, induce politics, nurture dreams, and trigger nightmares” (III:370).<sup>12</sup> While this vision may or may not seem appealing, Castells celebrates its implications for human personality. Because what he calls “real virtuality” is constantly in flux, human beings caught up in the culture of the information age are necessarily in constant flux as well. Castells argues at some length that the very nature of the human personality is in the process of being transformed, that we are rapidly becoming “flexible personalities, able to engage endlessly in the reconstruction of the self, rather than to define the self through adaptation to what were once conventional social roles, which are no longer viable and which have thus ceased to make sense.” “Nowadays,” Castells maintains, “people produce forms of sociability, rather than follow models of behavior” (III:369).

If the present has effectively vanished and we live and act in a virtual timelessness, I cannot help but come back to my original question, in a slightly reformulated version: does the philosophical testament of Julius Nyerere open up a viable path for us to follow now, a path for which we might be willing to accept responsibility? To put the question another way: is Derrida right in the statement that appears as my first epigraph? Is it true that “conscience is not only memory but promise”?<sup>13</sup>

### **Beyond Nostalgia: The Global Ujamaa Village**

Nyerere opens his most important general statement of political philosophy, the little pamphlet from 1962, “Ujamaa—The Basis of African Socialism,” with the striking claim that “socialism, like democracy is an attitude of mind. In a socialist society,” he

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<sup>12</sup> Castells elaborates this claim at I:429-468.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, For Nelson Mandela, 38.

maintains, “it is the socialist attitude of mind, and not the rigid adherence to a standard political pattern, which is needed to ensure that the people care for each other’s welfare” (FU 162). The fundamental features of this attitude of mind are the notions of freedom, democracy, and socialism understood as the “familyhood” enshrined in the term ujamaa that I have already discussed from the perspective of my own nostalgic longings. Now Nyerere insists that, although the socialist attitude of mind has its roots in African tradition, the legacy of colonialism demands that the Tanzanian people reawaken this attitude of mind: “Our first step, therefore, must be to re-educate ourselves; to regain our former attitude of mind” (FU 166). It is to this task of re-education that the leadership of the state must fundamentally devote itself.

In practice, the bureaucracy of the Tanzanian leadership pursued this goal of re-education largely through the highly controversial, and ultimately ecologically and economically disastrous, resettling of nearly seventy percent of the population in ujamaa villages planned by government officials and foreign “experts.”<sup>14</sup> James Scott has argued that this was a stunning example of authoritarian, if well-meaning, “high modernism,”<sup>15</sup> and that Nyerere’s rhetoric of a return to traditional African ways of living was effectively undermined in practice. Scott concludes, for example, that “what is significant, however, is that the modern planned village in Tanzania was essentially a point-by-point negation of existing rural practice.”<sup>16</sup> I think Scott’s critique of the implementation of Nyerere’s vision of ujamaa is largely compelling and unanswerable. What I would suggest, however, is that we conclude from this that Nyerere’s government in the end failed to live up to Nyerere’s insistence that socialism is essentially “an attitude of mind.”

If the testament of Nyerere remains a promise for us today, and not simply an occasion for nostalgic reverie, this is because his call for the transformation of attitudes of mind has a new relevance in the cultural context of informational capitalism. It is at

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<sup>14</sup> For this statistic, see Nyerere’s obituary in the New York Times, Friday, October 15, 1999, C20.

<sup>15</sup> James C. Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 224.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

this point that I will invoke my second epigraph, Castells' claim that "The era of globalization of the economy is also the era of localization of polity" (III:377-378). Castells elaborates this statement as follows: "What local and regional governments lack in power and resources, they make up in flexibility and networking. They are the only match, if any, to the dynamism of global networks of wealth and information" (III:378. Cf., II:349-353). The optimism apparent in this passage is grounded in Castells' earlier argument that the dominant form of employment in the developing world, as well as in many of the labor markets of advanced economies, is characterized by the "individualization of labor," "the process by which labor contribution to production is defined specifically for each worker, and for each of his/her contributions, either under the form of self-employment or under individually contracted, largely unregulated, salaried labor" (III:72). What this means, I suggest, is that the special "flexibility and networking" capacities to be found in governments at the local and regional level are themselves the products of individuals working within those institutions. Given Castells' analysis of the human personality in the information age as engaged in endless reconstruction of the self, it follows that localized institutions will share—perhaps in complex and unpredictable ways—in these infinitely flexible, improvisatory processes of redefinition and reconstruction. In this way, then, Nyerere's call for careful attention to "attitudes of mind" in the postcolonial situation finds new life in the interpenetrating structures of individual personalities and localized social and political institutions in the context of global informational capitalism.

Of course, this emphasis on the power of local institutions presupposes that those institutions are fully included within the web of capital and information flows that define the new globalization. As I have already noted, Castells sees as perhaps the greatest problem currently afflicting sub-Saharan Africa and the fourth world generally the fact that technological dependency and underdevelopment have effectively excluded these parts of the world from the flows of capital and information. Nevertheless, the stunning example of the burgeoning software industry in India suggests that becoming connected to the flows of informational capitalism is a good deal easier to accomplish than was the task of becoming a successful competitor in the world of industrial capitalism. If Castells is right in his overall analysis, a fundamental priority for the development of the fourth

world is that it quickly become fully connected into the information networks that currently facilitate the international economy.

If I have managed to breathe new life into Nyerere's testament of ujamaa, I think a similar argument can be used to revive another dimension of his legacy, his emphasis on "self-reliance" in development. Beginning with the "Arusha Declaration" of 1967 (FS 231-250), Nyerere began to stress the theme that Tanzanian and African development must proceed in a fundamentally "self-reliant" way. From his perspective in the mid to late 1960s, this meant that the path towards successful development needed to focus largely on agriculture, since any form of industrial development would be dependent upon significant monetary investment on the part of individuals and institutions outside Tanzania. Such economic dependency would, in Nyerere's view, unacceptably interfere with the freedom of the Tanzanian people (FS 318-319). Thus, self-reliance means, Nyerere claims, "that we must make maximum use of the resources which we have" (FS 386), resorting to foreign expertise only where absolutely necessary. From Nyerere's perspective as from that of the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is clear that the greatest resource of the fourth world is a population eager for education. That the Nyerere government was able to raise the literacy rate in Tanzania to some eighty-three percent<sup>17</sup> is yet another key element of his legacy, and I think this suggests that the goal of integrating the fourth world into the information flows of global capitalism is not utterly utopian. Castells' celebration of the flexibility and networking capacities of localized social and political institutions strikes me as a variation on the theme of self-reliance, particularly to the extent that this institutional flexibility is grounded in the creative, improvisatory processes of self-reconstruction in which educated individuals of the information age endlessly engage. Moreover, James Scott's indictment of the Tanzanian policy of massive population dislocation and resettlement also suggests the kind of local wisdom that might constitute the informational capital of the fourth world. Ignored by the planners of the ujamaa villages was Tanzania's "existing rural practice, which included shifting cultivation and pastoralism; polycropping; living well off the

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<sup>17</sup> New York Times, Friday, October 15, 1999, C20.

main roads; kinship and lineage authority; small, scattered settlements with houses built higgledy-piggledy; and production that was dispersed and opaque to the state.”<sup>18</sup>

As a final stage in my attempt to recover the promise of Nyerere’s testament in this post-postcolonial epoch and to rediscover the core of his legacy in a reading of his work that moves beyond simple nostalgia, I would like to look again at the notion that socialism is properly understood as an “attitude of mind.” Nyerere’s own elaboration of this idea focuses, as I have already indicated, on the concept of freedom, on the process of democracy as grounded in free discussion amongst equals, and on the socialist commitment to the fundamental value of “such an organization of society that man’s inequalities are put to the service of his equality” (FS 303). I must now beg your indulgence as I try to give some philosophical flesh to these ideals by turning to what can best be described, I believe, as the reinvigoration of the spirit of democracy in the writing of Jacques Derrida.

To suggest that democracy has a spirit, that democracy may even touch upon questions of the spiritual, might seem a curious manner of speaking. Yet in this matter, I take my bearings from the recent work of Derrida, who has spent the 1990s engaged in a series of projects, each of which thematizes some aspect of what he has called “a democracy to come.” Writing in his book, Specters of Marx of “the gap between fact and ideal essence,” Derrida insists that “this failure and this gap also characterize, a priori and by definition, all democracies, including the oldest and most stable of so-called Western democracies. At stake here is the very concept of democracy as concept of a promise that can only arise in such a diastema (failure, inadequation, disjunction, disadjustment, being ‘out of joint’).”<sup>19</sup> Elaborating the character of this gap, Derrida argues that the very idea of a democracy to come “is the opening of this gap between an infinite promise (always untenable at least for the reason that it calls for the infinite respect of the singularity and infinite alterity of the other as much as for the respect of the countable, calculable, subjectal equality between anonymous singularities) and the determined, necessary, but also necessarily inadequate forms of what has to be measured against this promise. To

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<sup>18</sup> Scott, Seeing Like a State, 238.

this extent, the effectivity or actuality of the democratic promise, like that of the communist promise, will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come of an event and of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated.”<sup>20</sup>

The spirit of democracy, then, is to be found in the promise of an encounter with the unique and absolute otherness of the other. To do justice to this spirit, I suggest, would be to nurture a cultural imagination in which it will be possible for the infinite alterity of others to be recognized as such and, thus, to be fully encountered.

Paradoxically enough, Castells’ vision of the informational culture as a medium within which the endless play of self-reconstruction can be carried out without the constraints of time or place would seem to offer a context for Derrida’s notion of the encounter with the infinite otherness of the other.

That we are now, in some important sense, in the terrain of the spiritual is perhaps all-too-clear from Derrida’s insistence on the infinity of the other’s alterity. However, the specific contours of the spirituality at stake here are made more explicit in Derrida’s regular invocation of the Neoplatonism of Plotinus—on whom, you will remember, I wrote my dissertation some years ago—in which the highest notion of the divine, what Plotinus calls the Good, is described quite precisely as that which gives what it does not have.<sup>21</sup> The moral for democracy is clear: for the spirit of democracy to be realized, we each must develop and nourish the paradoxical ability to give what we do not have. In particular, we must, in some sense, give the other the other’s infinite alterity. That is, we must imagine and try to construct a society in which the other’s alterity can be fully recognized and realized, not reduced to some finite set of characteristics already found in ourselves.

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<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International, translated by Peggy Kamuf, with an introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (New York: Routledge, 1994), 64.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27. This Plotinian theme—found most explicitly in Plotinus, Ennead VI.7, chapters 15-17—surfaces, among other places, in Jacques Derrida, The Gift of Death, translated by David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 29-30, and in Jacques Derrida, On the Name, edited by Thomas Dutoit, translated by David Wood,

A key implication of this is that, if the spirit of democracy demands that we give what we do not have, it also asks that the other receive from us this gift which the other already has: namely, the other's infinite alterity. Curiously enough, Plotinus anticipates this paradox as well in his metaphysical doctrine of "reception according to the capacity of the recipient," a doctrine which inevitably suggests that the material world always already possesses the essences and the attributes, the characteristics and the qualities, which the Platonic theory of forms presumably explains in terms of some notion of metaphysical participation.<sup>22</sup> Both the giving and the receiving characteristic of the spirit of democracy are inherently paradoxical, then, and the paradoxes here outline the structure of what I will call "democratic imagination."

I call this structure of giving and receiving "democratic imagination," because I believe that the spirit of democracy is best manifested in the imaginative creations of human beings, whether these creations take the form of social and political institutions, works of art, or bodies of knowledge. My own focus on creation here complements Castells' emphasis on reconstruction of the self (and the consequent reconstruction of localized institutions), but I take this focus to entail that a contemporary examination of Nyerere's postcolonial politics ultimately will steer its course away from politics proper to find its destination in something like aesthetics. To reach this harbor which seems most safe to me, I want to allude to the argument that structures the final chapter of Derrida's Politics of Friendship. Here Derrida suggests that competing models of friendship ultimately appeal to some "third thing" to mediate, to interrupt, the jealous narcissism of friendship between two friends, and this "third thing" is generally conceived as the law. Derrida asks, "Does not my relation to the singularity of the other qua other, in effect, involve the law?"<sup>23</sup> The difficulty with such an analysis, however, is that the law always presupposes some sort of "countable, calculable, subjectal equality"

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John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 70, 84-85.

<sup>22</sup> The classical source for this doctrine is Ennead VI.4-5. For my earlier thoughts about this notion, thoughts that seem at this distance to represent at best a one-sided reading of Plotinus, see Jonathan Scott Lee, "The Doctrine of Reception According to the Capacity of the Recipient in Ennead VI.4-5," Dionysius III (1979):79-97.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, Politics of Friendship, translated by George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 277.

(to repeat the formulation in Specters of Marx) between one person and another, thereby glossing over, if not repressing, the infinite alterity of the other as a singular subject. At the very end of Politics of Friendship, Derrida holds open the promise of a democracy to come which will not perpetually interpose the law between one person, one friend, and another. He asks, “When will we be ready for an experience of freedom and equality that is capable of respectfully experiencing that friendship, which would at last be just, just beyond the law, and measured up against its measurelessness?”<sup>24</sup>

I take it to be profoundly significant that Derrida’s discussion of democracy here tries to give a sense to the experiences of freedom and of equality that are precisely the prerequisites of Nyerere’s vision of democracy. Moreover, Derrida’s call for a kind of human relationship that might exemplify a form of justice “beyond the law” resonates with Nyerere’s own attempt to distinguish between the “spontaneous and therefore free” democracy of traditional Africa and the “organized and therefore automatic” democracy characteristic, he suggests, of the Anglo-Saxon tradition (FU 105).

In any event, I suggest that we will only be ready for such an experience of freedom and equality when the spirit of democracy is enlivened by democratic imagination. This, in turn, will most effectively happen when it is the creative products of culture—institutions, works of art, bodies of knowledge—that serve as the “third thing” mediating between one person and another, one community and another, when it is works of cultural production that facilitate our giving what we do not have to those who already have it, thereby instantiating a mode of exchange that goes “beyond the law.” We can sense the importance of this Derridian linking of the spirit of democracy to the manifestation of democratic imagination in the creative products of culture by noticing how far this rather simple argument has already taken us from the debate between liberalism and communitarianism that has so dominated recent discussions of democratic theory in the United States.<sup>25</sup> What the liberal seems unable to grasp fully is that liberal democratic institutions can only function in ways that their citizens will find meaningful

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>25</sup> For two very different approaches to this debate, see Michael J. Sandel, Democracy’s Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), and Seyla Benhabib (ed.), Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

when those who people them remain open to the concrete ways in which every individual other is singular and different from every other individual other. The continuing ways in which the liberal conception of racial and/or ethnic “integration” in the United States runs the risk of collapsing into “assimilation” are testament to a genuine failure in this regard. Similarly, what the communitarian seems unable to realize is that the kinds of communities that can give meaning to the life of democracy must be communities open to the promise implicit in the singularity and alterity of others. The proliferation of various kinds of hate crimes in the United States would seem to reflect stunning instances of failure in this regard.

The stage is set, then, for us to welcome and work with the philosophical testament of Julius Nyerere. If it is true that we have now effectively gone beyond the postcolonial era into a new era of globalization, I think it is also true that we can now move beyond a merely nostalgic response to the extraordinary philosophical accomplishments of our postcolonial forebears. Let us work to make ourselves fully responsible heirs both to the endlessly challenging flux of the contemporary and to the deepest promptings of the postcolonial.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This paper owes a great deal to stimulating conversations with John Riker and Donovan Tracy.