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Julius Nyerere's Understanding of African Socialism, Human Rights and Equality

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Abstract

Julius Kambarage Nyerere, African philosopher, anti-colonial leader, first president of the United Republic of Tanzania, and respected international statesman, served as president of the newly independent Tanzania from 1964 through 1985., after which he remained politically active in Tanzania and on the global stage. Trying to steer a post-colonial course of self-reliance, he developed and implemented African Socialism in Tanzania, articulated in the Arusha Declaration in 1967. As an anti-colonial leader, Nyerere referred to international human rights standards such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and maintained a commitment to human rights as president and afterwards. In this essay we look at Nyerere's program of African Socialism, and his understanding of the interrelated concepts of socialism, human rights, and equality. We close with a discussion of Nyerere's controversial human rights violations as president, and a reflection on his legacy.

Introduction

Julius Kambarage Nyerere, African philosopher, anti-colonial leader, first president of Tanzania, and globally respected international statesman, was born on April 13, 1922 in Butiama village, in Musoma Region, Tanganyika. He was born into royalty in the Zanaki ethnic community; his father was Chief Burito Nyerere. His ancestral home is located in Butiama in a place known as Mwitongo. His initial name of birth was Mugendi, meaning "Walker" in the Zanaki language (Molony, 2014; Nyerere Centre for Peace Research, 2010).

Nyerere began his formal education in February, 1934 at Mwisenge Primary School, in Musoma before joining Tabora Secondary School on government scholarship in 1937. The school was by then exclusively reserved for boys from the "royal" families of Tanganyika. At Tabora School, at an early stage of his life, Nyerere manifested his leadership qualities. In 1943 at age 20, he converted to Roman Catholicism and was baptized in 1943, assuming the name of Julius. He was an excellent student in various subjects, and was admired by his classmates for his behavior and academic efforts. By September 1943, Nyerere joined Makerere University where he was introduced to a new world of the strongest students from the best secondary schools in East Africa. The academic competition between many gifted and ambitious young Africans appears to have been fierce. It was an opportunity for Nyerere to prove his superior intellectual and reading capacity (Molony, 2014; Nyerere Centre for Peace Research, 2010). In October 1949, Nyerere,

received an official admission at the University of Edinburgh's Faculty of Arts for the Master of Arts Degree, which according to Molony, could either be completed as Master of Arts with honors, which took four years or as an ordinary degree of Master of Arts, which took three years. Nyerere, opted for the latter with a purpose. His choice of this degree, at this point, was to make him useful to his country after his studies. He thought he could be more useful if he took an arts rather than a science degree. He was, thus, very keen with the future application of his Edinburgh studies and its possible impact on Tanganyika. More importantly Edinburgh University built in Nyerere the philosophical foundation which made him to become a prominent African philosopher. He seemed to have enjoyed Edinburgh (Molony, 2014; Nyerere Centre for Peace Research, 2010). He read widely and keenly all the prescribed texts of the courses. Nyerere's selection of courses in political philosophy, moral philosophy, social anthropology, economic history and constitutional law had an important influence on his ideas about politics, economics and human rights.

Nyerere became involved in politics when he joined the Tanganyika African Association (TAA) in 1954. In late 1954, the TAA was renamed the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) and Nyerere was elected to be its first president. As president of TANU, he traveled throughout the country speaking in favor of independence in the face of opposition from the British colonial government. When on December 9, 1961 Tanganyika became independent, Nyerere became prime minister. In 1962, Nyerere was elected the first president of the Republic of Tanganyika, and in 1964, when Zanzibar joined Tanganyika to become the United Republic of Tanzania, Nyerere was elected its first president. He was "reelected president of Tanzania in 1965 and was returned to serve three more successive five-year terms before he resigned as president in 1985 and handed over his office to his successor, Ali Hassan Mwini. From independence on Nyerere also headed Tanzania's only political party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM)" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020; see also Bjerk, 2017). Nyerere continued to be politically active in Tanzania and internationally until his death on October 14, 1999 (Molony, 2014; Nyerere Centre or Peace Research, 2010; Bjerk, 2017).

In this essay we will explore various aspects of Nyerere's understanding of African Socialism (*Ujamaa*), human rights, and equality, and how they are interrelated. Nyerere was an important African thinker, and our exploration takes us through a number of important issues in thinking about human rights and equality in the African context and generally.

African Socialism: Freedom, Unity, Equality, Human Dignity & Human Rights

Nyerere's political and ethical agenda for Tanzania was African Socialism, or *Ujamaa* in Kiswahili. The essential components of *Ujamaa* were freedom, unity, equality, respect for human dignity and human rights. Equality and human dignity were for Nyerere important foundations for human rights. As Bonny Ibhawoh wrote: "...Nyerere referred frequently to the repression and injustices of colonial rule as derogations from basic human dignity and fundamental human rights. 'Our struggle,' he stated, will always be a struggle for human rights...Our position is based on the

belief in the equality of human beings, in their rights and duties as citizens” (Ibhawoh, 2018, p. 151). Nyerere’s language reflects the language of the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), approved by the UN’s General Assembly in 1948. The UDHR included two categories of rights, civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights, and noted the importance of rights and responsibilities, all of which we find in Nyerere’s understanding of human rights. We also note that Nyerere was a devout Catholic, familiar with Catholic social teaching (Mesaki and Malipula 2011; Nyerere Centre for Peace Research, 2010). In 1963 Pope John XXIII wrote the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, in which the pope discussed the need to respect both civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights, a consistently-held position in Catholic social teaching (Pagnucco and Ensalaco, 2014; Pagnucco and Gichure, 2014). According to Mesaki and Malipula (2011), in a magazine interview in 1972, Nyerere said that his African Socialism program was an attempt to implement the teachings of Jesus Christ. Nyerere engaged the Catholic Church in Tanzania, encouraging it to work for social justice. As Mesaka and Malipula (2011, p 97) wrote, Nyerere persuasively argued to the Tanzanian Catholic church leadership that “Ujamaa seems to be in complete conformity with the principles of natural law as applied to society and...it is in complete conformity with the social teaching of the church’...In fact, the [Tanzanian] Roman Catholic bishops...in a 1968 statement on the Church and Development endorsed ujamaa socialism as being consistent with Christian notions of justice and equality...” Because of his faith, spirituality and integrity, the Vatican proclaimed Nyerere a “Servant of God,” the first necessary step in the process of being declared a saint. It must be noted here that Nyerere was inclusive: he was a devout Catholic, and a strong advocate of religious tolerance and pluralism, and developed ties with other religious leaders, especially Muslim leaders (approximately 50% of the Tanzanian population is Muslim).

Nyerere referred to universal human rights in his struggle against colonialism; not all African anti-colonial leaders did so (Ibhawoh, 2018). For Nyerere, the fight for human rights was a result of the past frustrations coming from the colonial rule. As he wrote: “From now on the duty of protecting human rights--those human rights which we have been struggling, those rights for which we are ready even to die--the duty now for the protection of those rights is ours. It is the duty of the members of the majority community in this country” (Nyerere, 1968a, p. 79).

Nyerere wrote:

Many schemes have been put forward for the solution of racial problem in Africa... But I must say from the outset that any scheme which leave unimpaired the European’s monopoly of political control will not solve the problem of racial strife... As long as one community has a monopoly of political power and uses that power not only to prevent the other communities from having any share in political power, but also to keep those other communities in a state of social and economic inferiority, any talk of social and economic advancement of the other communities as a solution of racial conflict is hypocritical and stupid. The solution of the problem of racial conflict must depend upon the acceptance by

all the communities concerned of the principle of social, economic, and above all political equality.... (Nyerere, 1968a, p. 24).

Nyerere and educated Africans were not satisfied that in some countries wealth or education was used as a basis of determining the rights of citizenship. They were opposed to this and swore as a matter of principle to see to it that it was removed from Africa. Nyerere wrote:

We do not see why wealth and education should be singled out as qualifications for either human rights or rights of citizenship. The educated are not necessarily more honest, more patriotic, or more selfless than the uneducated.... They are not necessarily [wiser]. They don't necessarily have a greater love for their fellow men. They don't always cause less mischief. The chances are that a great deal of the mischief in the world is caused by the more educated. One cannot say that the educated are responsible for a smaller share of the miseries of mankind than the uneducated. History has not proved that... (1968a, p. 77).

In the face of these challenges, Nyerere sought a more acceptable and justifiable way of looking at human rights. As indicated above, the theme of human rights was treated by him as one of the paramount essentials of African socialism; the others being freedom, unity and equality.

In his address to the 35th Session of the Legislative Council on December 16, 1959, Nyerere affirmed his promotion of human rights in these words: "Our struggle has been, still is, and always will be, a struggle for human rights" (Nyerere, 1968a, p. 76). Earlier on in September 1959, in an address at the opening of the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa Conference, he had an opportunity of creating awareness on *individual human rights* (see Nyerere, 1968a, pp. 69-71). Referring to the incidents of boycotts of South African goods, and the testing of atom bombs in Africa, he spoke strongly against the acts of humiliation and distortion of human dignity vis-a-vis human rights in Africa. He cited a relevant incident of Europeans holding meetings in Europe and making decisions on what Africa should do. He wrote:

[a] government can sit in Paris and decide which piece of Africa they are going to use for testing their hydrogen bomb! 'They do not ask anybody; they just choose a piece of our continent of Africa. And the Africans can complain and they can protest, but their complaints will be ignored. We can no longer tolerate such indignities, and we can hope the outside world will understand us when we say that the time has come when Africa must govern herself (Nyerere, 1968a, p. 69).

For Nyerere, this was unacceptable; it is an obvious sign that Africans are denied of their own rights to decide for their own affairs. He argued:

This is another thing I would like to make very clear to the members of the press. What do some of these people think we are? Here we are, building up the sympathy of the outside world on the theme of human rights. We are telling the world that we are fighting for our rights as human beings. We gain the sympathy of friends all over the world -- in Asia, in Europe, in America -- people who recognize the justice or our demand for human rights. Does anybody really believe that we ourselves will trample on human rights? (Nyerere, 1968a, p. 70).

On this ground, Nyerere called for African minds to know their own human rights. And he insisted that Africa was able to govern itself and had a great sense of human values (Nyerere, 1968a).

Nyerere urged that humanity, being one, should initiate a movement to fight for human rights and be sympathetic to those Africans who were persecuted and denied their human rights. He called upon everyone to reflect on the humiliation of human dignity wherever it was in the world and to join in the struggle to liberate human dignity from colonial domination. He observed: "Human nature is sometimes depraved I know, but I don't believe it is depraved to that extent. I don't believe that the leaders of a people are going to behave as hypocrites to gain their ends, and then turn around and do exactly the things which they have been fighting against" (Nyerere, 1968a, p. 70).

Nyerere believed that every individual has rights regardless of their color, race, or tribe, As he asserted; "The rights we recognize are the rights of individuals, and I am appealing to my friends the non- Africans to believe that we are sincere in this" (Nyerere, 1968a, p. 71).

African Socialism (Ujamaa) and Human Rights

As we saw earlier, Nyerere's understanding of human rights was influenced by the UDHR and Catholic social teaching. A very important influence was the lectures on moral philosophy taken at Edinburgh University. As an open-minded thinker, Nyerere seems to have borrowed some good ideas from Edinburgh and intertwined them with African societal values. This is clearly noticeable when Nyerere talked about the origins of human rights. There is an intermarriage between the beliefs of western philosophers and what he understood to be the African concept of human rights. *First* of all, Nyerere was totally convinced that human rights are basic rights that are inherent in human beings. He saw each individual as truly a person; endowed by nature with intelligence and free will. As such, the individual is endowed with rights and duties, which together flow from their nature. *Second*, human rights, and by extension human dignity, requires that a person be free to choose. *Third*, Nyerere considers these rights and duties as universal and inviolable and therefore altogether inalienable (Nyerere, 1968a; 2011). Like the western philosophers, Nyerere perceived human rights as flowing from human nature, which was created by God, the Creator. Hence, he concludes that human rights originated from God (Nyerere, 2011; Mesaki & Malipula, 2011)

It should be noted that traditional African socialism is based predominantly on the extended family in which the land is always recognized as belonging to the community and where the basic goods are held in common and shared among all members of the community (Erumevba, 1981). It is on this basis that Benezet Bujo (2001) is in line with Nyerere in recognizing communal rights as distinguished from individual rights. This view of human rights is grounded in communal rights, which centers on an African ethics based on a 'We'-ethics,' which does not rest content with supplying norms to the individual without accompanying them on the path of praxis (Bujo, 2001; Rwiza, 2012). Nyerere's Ujamaa policy emphasizes collective human rights rather than individual human rights.

Nyerere saw the concept of human rights in terms of the "We" relationship. The African view of the human person was more "relational" than "individual" (Nyerere, 1968a). Because of the interaction between the community and the individual, the individual lived through the life force of the whole and vice versa; no member of any African society could develop outside the community. An individual is an incomplete being outside the community. On the other hand, the community dissolves without the individual. Consequently, for Nyerere, a human person is looked at and seen as a member of the family, community or society; or we could say, an individual is a child of the society (Sanga, 2015). The individual ceases to exist as a being for himself or herself, so as to become a 'being' existing for the community. The individual is no longer an "I-for-myself" but has to become an "I-in-the community-for others." Only in this way can others assist the individual to become a better and more complete "I" (a personality) (Bujo, 2001; Rwiza, 2012).

Human Rights in the Arusha Declaration

The best expression of Nyerere on human rights is found in the *Arusha Declaration*, which was written by Nyerere for the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) in 1967 and which was approved by TANU as national policy (see Tanganyika African National Union, 1967). The Declaration holds a central position in the practical framework of Nyerere's vision (Magesa, 1987; Bjerk, 2017). As Ibhawoh (2018, p. 34) wrote, the Arusha Declaration "made even more explicit links between Ujamaa as a political philosophy inspired by the 'African way of life' and modern human rights. Referencing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Arusha Declaration affirms the equality of all human beings and the inherent dignity of all individuals..." Nyerere's concern with human rights is found in part one of the Declaration. It is put down in the form of a creed of moral and ethical principles that should direct human interaction. The principles require personal conviction or assent tantamount to a belief or personal attitude, not primarily legislation (Magesa, 1987). It is a summary of human rights in the context of African socialism. It can also be seen as Nyerere's integration of western philosophical ideas with the traditional African understanding.

Generally, it can be argued that according to the Arusha Declaration human rights flow from Ujamaa's commitment to the equal dignity of persons (Magesa, 1987). It is founded on the strong

“belief in the equality of human beings, in their rights and their duties as human beings, and in the equality of citizens, in their rights and duties as citizens” (Nyerere, 1968a, p. 76). The Arusha Declaration states:

a) That all human beings are equal; b) That every individual has a right to dignity and respect; c) That every citizen is an integral part in Government at local, regional and national level; d) That every citizen has the right to freedom of expression, of movement, of religious belief and of association within the context of the law; e) That every individual has the right to receive from society protection of his life and of property held according to law; f) That every individual has the right to receive a just return for his labour” (quoted in Nyerere, 1968d, pp. 13-14; see also Organization of African Unity, 1981, pp. 1-2).

Equality was the basis upon which Nyerere’s commitment to and respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights would be judged (Nyerere, 1968c). The rights of every person to work and be rewarded for one’s labor, to exercise freedom within just laws, and have an equitable share in the country’s resources as stipulated by Arusha Declaration-went hand in hand with the duty to act as a responsible citizen (Nyerere, 1974). Some scholars have considered these principles as the foundation of the ethics of Ujamaa. (Rwezaura, 2010). The principle of human rights directly flows from the principle of equality. This principle of human rights recognizes first of all every person’s right to dignity and respect.

As noted above, the principle of human rights (and the Arusha Declaration) endorses the right of every citizen to equal participation in government affairs. Nyerere maintains that individual and communal rights also impose a duty on the government as a protector and provider of productive means, such as land, for the realization of basic human rights (Nyerere, 1968a). The purpose of human rights and duties is the promotion of everyone’s well-being. Since persons live in society and promote their dignity within community; the primary role of the state must be to create conditions for the fulfilment of these rights and duties for the common good (Nyerere, 1968a). We note here that Nyerere’s highlighting of the African communal dimension of human rights was a view articulated by other important post-independence African leaders, such as Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia), and Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana). Ibhawoh, (2018, pp. 217-218) noted that the Organization of African Unity’s 1981 *African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights* (ACHPR) uses “language that harks back” to the ideas of Nyerere, Kaunda and Nkrumah in that it “affirms the ‘virtues’ of African historical tradition and the ‘values of African civilization,’ which should characterize African reflection on the concept of human and people’s rights...” As Ibhawoh goes on to note, the ACHPR tries to strike “the right balance between individual rights and collective rights in ways that reflect African norms and values...” (2018, p. 218); see also Organization of Africa Unity, 1981).

Human Rights versus Peace

As Laurent Magesa (1987b) wrote, Nyerere was driven by the spirit of making human life in society as equitable as possible. Any person, institution, attitude, behavior and act which destroys the person and the human spirit is violent. He unequivocally classified structures of slavery, colonialism, discrimination, exploitation as structures of violence. Nyerere situated his perspective on violence in the context of the demands for basic human rights and dignity. Specifically, he focused on the questions of colonialism and racial discrimination in Africa. These constituted the main acts of violence in the continent's most recent and contemporary history. He argued that anyone who cares about the human person cannot welcome violence. He was very concerned that in any protracted struggle the innocent suffer with the guilty. In the process, fear and hate are generated, which can endanger the very goal the struggle is supposed to achieve and which can make reconciliation between the opposing groups or individuals in the struggle very difficult to achieve. Moreover, the goals for which violent revolutions usually are fought -- freedom, equality, dignity, justice, socialism -- are not born complete "out of the womb of violence" To think that this is the case is naïve and extremely dangerous. History has demonstrated that fact beyond doubt and Nyerere is unambiguous about it. Nyerere warned:

Even the most successful and popular revolution inevitably leaves behind it a legacy of bitterness, suspicion and utility between members of the society. These are not conducive to the institutions of equality, and co-operation between the whole people. In particular there is always a fear that those who suffered during the revolution may be looking for an opportunity of revenge; there is the memory of injury and bereavement deliberately inflicted, which poisons the relations between men within the society (1968a, p. 23).

Magesa (1987b) is in agreement that Nyerere was clearly aware of the fact that the most prominent characteristic of violent acts and movements is their destructiveness. Magesa notes that as Nyerere pointed out, revolutionary violence is quite capable of eliminating institutions and structures of oppression and exploitation in a very short time. It may thus create an environment for introducing more just and equitable social structures and institutions (Nyerere, 1968a). But, Nyerere warned, the process from the first step to the second step is not automatic. In a sense, it is fraught with dangers just as sinister as those which usually obstruct changes towards justice. For revolution does not change attitudes born and nurtured during the old order (Nyerere, 1968a). And it is attitudes which are the fountain of justice, equality, human dignity and cooperation. Therefore, in relation to the socialist social order, Nyerere said: "A violent revolution may make the introduction of socialist institutions easier: it makes more difficult the development of the socialist attitudes which give life to these institutions" (Nyerere, 1968b, p. 23).

Rwiza (2012) wrote that Nyerere had tension on whether peace and human dignity could be acquired through violence. He points out that for Nyerere virtue in violence depends on the intention of that violence. However, Nyerere argues that one should be very careful in applying

violence; for example, acquiring freedom through violence can cause immense suffering to innocent people. Usually, the most innocent would be the main victims and the hatred and fear generated by war are dangerous to human dignity (Nyerere, 1968a; see also Rwiza, 2012; and Magesa, 1987b). For Nyerere, there is no virtue in violence as such. But a controversial link between claims for human rights and the aspirations for peace remained in his mind. In this case, human rights and peace are seen as interlinked (Rwiza, 2012). Nyerere notes that peace amidst terrible inhuman conditions is neither secure nor justifiable. He states that, “we have no right to be patient with the wrongs suffered by others. Peace on earth is no longer a matter of academic or human interest only; we are all involved in one another for us to be indifferent to its breakdown, even thousands of miles from our borders” (Nyerere, 1974, p. 1).

Nyerere seems to share the view with Walter Rodney, who wrote: “Violence aimed at the recovery of human dignity ... cannot be judged by the same yardstick as violence aimed at maintenance of discrimination and oppression” (Rodney, 2001, p. 22). Like Rodney, Nyerere believes violence can be justifiable: “If the persecuted and the oppressed have really been denied their human rights, and if there really are no peaceful means of progress available to them, then they have the right to demand of the rest of us that we should support their struggle and not join their oppressors on the grounds of maintaining peace” (Nyerere, 1974, p. 4). According to Nyerere’s conviction, the right of people to freedom from exploitation comes before questions of the kind of the society he would create once he had that right (Magesa, 1987b).

In short, for Nyerere, violence should be the last resort in the process of fighting for human rights and peace; that means it should be used when the peaceful means have completely failed. Magesa observed: “Nyerere does not, in principle condone violence. Nyerere accepts violence, as a regrettable necessity, and always to be used as a calculated risk, only when the human spirit reaches the point of saturation with degrading; and when no other road to freedom is still available” (Magesa, 1991, p. 86). As Nyerere put it “if the doors have refused to turn the key or pull the bolts, the choice is very straightforward. Either you accept the lack of freedom or you break the door down” (1974, p. 51).

Human Equality

Nyerere does not just fight for human rights, freedom and unity but also for equality, which he sees as their foundation. He cannot as a matter of fact separate these concepts from one another. He writes: “our position is based on the belief in the equality of human beings, in their rights and their duties as human beings, and in the equality of citizens, in their rights and duties as citizens” (Nyerere, 1968a, p. 76). For Nyerere, the yearning for human equality is driven by the difficulties faced in the past in the distribution of wealth:

One of our difficulties in the past was the distribution of wealth. The division of any society in the 'haves' and 'have nots' is ... dynamite. Here it is aggravated by its identification with the racial division also. The 'haves' here are generally the immigrant minorities; the 'have nots' are the indigenous majorities. This ... is dangerous. This puts a stumbling block in our way. We must remedy this one, and we must remedy this as quickly as is humanly possible (1968a, p. 80).

Equality in African Socialism (Ujamaa)

According to Cranford Pratt (1976, p. 42), Nyerere's understanding of equality is quite distinct from "an equality of opportunity for essentially autonomous individuals"; it is "rather the equality enjoyed in closely integrated and caring societies." For Nyerere, human equality is "the basic assumption" of Ujamaa: "there must be a belief that every individual man and woman, whatever color, shape, race, creed, religion or sex, is an equal member of society, with equal rights in the society and equal duties to it" (Nyerere 1968d, p. 78). For Nyerere "human dignity involves equality and freedom, and relations of mutual respect among people" (1974, pp. 88-89).

In simple terms, Ujamaa is the application of the principle of human equality to the social, economic, and political organization of society. It admits inequalities in human intellectual and physical capacities, yet advocates that these be "put to the service of human equality" (Nyerere 1968d, p. 79). Human equality then, is the state of being equal in terms of opportunities, rights and status, and access to health and social care services and employment opportunities (Nyerere, 2011).

Human Equality and Uniformity

For Nyerere human equality should not be equated with human uniformity -- equality and uniformity are quite different. Equality is

... [the] right to have an opportunity to develop to the full one's natural abilities, and to put those to the service of man, [which] belongs to all human beings equally. Domination over others cannot be a condition of one man's development, or a reward for exercising his natural abilities. On the contrary it militates against the development and use of an individual ability, because it cuts him off from society. And it means that other people who may be able to make an equal, although different, contribution to man's progress may be precluded by their subordination to another's desire, from the development or use of their own gifts (Nyerere, 2011, p. 25).

Nyerere stresses that opportunity should be given to individuals so that they can exercise their capabilities in the society without being dominated and undermined by a few individuals. By creating such opportunities, the individuals will be able to produce to the maximum and give a contribution to the respective society. For Nyerere, this is an essential element for the whole process of enhancing human equality:

Every human being is unique, from his fingerprints to his personality. To abolish these differences between the individuals would be to abolish the human race {God's given gift] ... To have individuals who have no differences between them, would be to have one human being reproduced, or duplicated, in billions and billions of persons. No believer in human equality believes in such nonsense (2011, p. 25).

For Nyerere, human equality does not imply that all human beings have equal abilities, potentialities, equal power of creativity, physical, or intellectual strength. The differences between human beings do exist naturally, as God-given gifts to the human race. They are given for special purpose: to serve humanity (Nyerere, 2011).

Nyerere rejects totally the claim that some people have the right to dominate others. The unity of humankind dictates the principle of fundamental equality, fundamental rights to life and human dignity. He fully rallies behind the United Nations Charter's universal declaration of recognition of these principles of human equality. Due to this declaration Nyerere argues that awareness of the oneness of human race has been improved: "We are beginning to realize that we are lined together economically, socially, and politically, despite the diversities of nationality, character, culture, productive capacity of organization of diversities which are frequently as great within nations as between nations" (2011, p. 23).

Equality and the Economic System

Nyerere was convinced that the goal of economic development was not the accumulation of wealth or economic growth for its own sake, but to develop good relationship among people (development of the people) and the satisfaction of the basic material needs of the families (Nyaki 2015). He created a philosophy of economic equality by the name of Ujamaa or African Socialism which is a society where the majority of people are in the middle class and have few rich and few poor people. Because all human beings are equal Nyerere believed economic equality would imply both equal possessions and the reduction of inequalities in the society thereby avoiding extreme inequalities in society (1968a). This vision of economic equality has to take into account social justice, equality of opportunity, equality of professions, equality of social status or social equality, and equality of voice. Casmir Nyaki (2015) provides an in-depth critical analysis of all these aspects of Nyerere's vision of economic equality. For our purpose here a brief summary of Nyaki's exposition is imperative.

Lessening Inequality and Equality of Possession

Nyerere's vision of equality of possession was based on the belief that it is possible to have a structure which can provide all members of the society with what is considered as necessary to live a decent human life. This structure would not give room for any individual in the society to have more than others, before making sure that others have sufficiently met their needs. As Nyaki (2015) wrote, for Nyerere, it was essential to create this structure for the following reasons: *First,*

to lessen or control economic inequalities so as not to create an imbalance in the economy of the people; and *second*, to take away from some individuals or groups who have 'extra' and give to those who have none (see Nyerere, 1968a). Nyaki (2015) points out that this is what Nyerere means by nationalization of the goods and properties from the hands of the few for the common good. Nyerere argued that it was the duty of the government to: *first*, reduce economic inequalities in such a way that the gap between the rich and poor is narrowed; and *second*, equalize wealth and income so that all people may have more or less the same possession. Nyerere's economic equality implied the ability for each individual or family to have access to the basic needs that are necessary to live a decent human life; that is, to have food, shelter, clothing, medicine and necessary social services. By the time he became president, Nyerere found the already rotten structure of economic inequalities; there were two groups of people: the "haves" and "have-nots." He struggled to seek the ways on how to bridge these gaps (Nyerere 1968a). Nyerere saw two possible ways; the first way was to allow the "haves" to continue to exist in the society with the hope that they could assist the "have-nots." Unfortunately, this alternative could not produce fruits. The second way was to stop the economic inequalities from increasing by all means (Nyerere, 1968d). Nyerere chose the latter way. He used different economic strategies, such as invoking norms of justice, and applying strict policies that would discourage the rich from investing and making more profit, among others. For Nyerere, the economic inequalities give room to a number of enemies of human beings, such as poverty, illiteracy or ignorance, illnesses or diseases and corruption (Nyaki, 2015; Bjerck, 2017). Only the defeat of these enemies would ensure meeting basic economic needs and the reduction of corruption. According to Nyerere, political equality did not make sense unless economic equality is achieved (Nyaki, 2015; Bjerck, 2017).

Social Justice

Nyerere was posthumously awarded the title of "World Hero of Social Justice" by the UN General Assembly in October 2009 (Mesaki & Malipula, 2011). It is interesting that Nyerere does not define social justice but rather takes for granted that it was self-explanatory. According to Nyerere the major goal was to build a just society whereby individuals are politically free and have their basic needs met (1968d). Nyerere wanted to distribute equally the wealth and benefits which society produced. This is called distributive justice or social justice. Nyerere asked what criterion should be used in bringing about social justice? For Nyerere, there is no single acceptable criterion (Nyaki, 2015). Nyerere (1968a) has a perception of traditional society where wealth was a basic right for each individual. The elders of the traditional society made sure that individual rights were highly respected and valued. Each individual had a right to which he or she was entitled. In Nyerere's eyes, the traditional values are almost a self-contained economic and social unit, in the sense that an individual was assured of the basic necessities of birth, life, and death. Nyerere struggled to retrieve these traditional values through Ujamaa and self-reliance (Nyerere, 2068a; Nyaki, 2015). When Nyerere spoke of economic needs he meant individuals' basic needs; food, clothing, medicine and shelter (Nyerere, 1968a). To address these needs Nyerere implemented the policy of 'nationalization,' taking some wealth or property from individuals who have the right of

ownership, and giving it to the have nots (Nyaki, 2015; Bjerk, 2017). Nyerere tried to implant the spirit of sacrificing for the sake of those who are most in need, such as poor people, elderly people, sick and widows. Even in the case in which one has a right to what is his or hers, Nyerere would insist on the spirit of sacrifice for the sake of those who are in most need, like poor peasants who cannot afford medicine (see Nyerere, 1968a; Nyaki, 2015; and Pagnucco & Gichure, 2014 who note that the sacrifice of a right for the sake of a common good is advocated in Catholic social thought).

Equality of Opportunity

Nyerere (1968a) defines the term ‘equality of opportunity’ as giving every citizen the same chance for having access to whatever is provided by the society, be it education, medicine, and employment, among others, regardless of one’s gender, race, color, religion, or nationality. This explanation differs from social justice in the sense of equal possession, which focuses primarily on ‘distribution’ of what has been produced: equal opportunity focusses on giving people chances and means to be productive in terms of actualizing and utilizing their talents and abilities to develop their lives and to contribute to the society in which they live. For example, in the colonial period inequalities in education existed in Tanganyika that Nyerere wanted to overcome but could not. As president of independent Tanzania, Nyerere implemented the policy of nationalization whereby private schools, industries, and other institutions were nationalized, giving equal opportunities to all citizens. Nyerere offered free education from primary to university level in all governmental schools. According to Nyaki (2015, p. 27), no child in Tanzania could say, “I did not go to school because my parents were poor, I wish I was born in a rich family.” When Nyerere resigned from the presidency in 1985, “Tanzania had one of the highest literacy rates in Africa” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020; see also Bjerk, 2017).

Equality of Profession

By equality of profession Nyerere meant being skillful or competent at one’s job or career. In his address to the students and staff of the East African Railways Training School in Nairobi, Kenya, on June 29, 1963, he said:

When we say that we want the freedom to take our position as equals with other countries in the world, we must realize what this means. It means that our teachers, our doctors, our engineers, and our technicians, as well as our sweepers and laborers, must aim at being as good as those found anywhere else. That is true equality. Anything else is sentiment (Nyerere 1968a, p. 222).

Nyaki (2015) notes that Nyerere contends that professional competency is very important in bringing about economic equality in a country like Tanzania, which adopted a policy of ‘self-reliance’ in economic development. Nyerere’s wish was to reach the point of using Tanzanian experts, who are acquainted with people’s culture, the climate of the country, the policies of the

country and the laws of the country. He contended that Tanzania could not afford to pay expatriates their just salaries and even if it could afford to pay some, this would not mean that the expatriates could have eliminated the economic inequality in the country (Nyaki 2015).

Social Equality

Another aspect of economic equality is social equality. According to Nyerere social equality has to take into consideration two major aspects, status and individual freedom (Nyerere 1968a). By status Nyerere meant that in society there are people with different positions. African traditional society had chiefs, kings, seers and prophets. However, these people are not superior to other people in the society, they were equals among equals. Those in positions of 'power' or 'leadership' positions, received respect from their subjects and, in return, they too gave respect to their subjects. Nyerere wants to establish a just and equal society in which no one could claim a title of being a 'boss.' For Nyerere, the title 'boss' was a colonial brand (1968b). The idea was not very practical, simply because most of the leaders could not accept the concept. Nyerere could not push them, but could give them more training. For him, in exercising authority one is not intimidating anyone, but does his/her duty according to the regulations of work and according to the ethics of leadership. He is convinced that human beings have brains; they do not have to be pushed around (Nyaki, 2015).

Nyerere (1974) understands social equality in another sense where it meant freedom of choice and also freedom of speech. Freedom of choice and speech are very important for they give a person social status. Thus, the act of making decisions is a free act. However, there is no point in making decisions without implementing those decisions. When a person puts into action what he or she has decided, that person is developing himself. Nyaki argues that, when it comes to making policies for the economic development, it is very important to involve the people in decision making (Nyaki, 2015; Bjerck, 2017).

Apart from freedom of choice, Nyerere identifies other aspects of freedom; *first*, there is a national freedom, which is the ability of the citizens of a country like Tanzania to determine its own future and to govern itself without interference from outside countries (Nyerere 2011). *Second*, there is freedom from all that affects human development: hunger, disease and poverty. Thus, one cannot claim that they are free while they are suffering from hunger, sickness and cannot afford medical treatment, as Nyaki (2015) puts it. In this sense, freedom is an aspect of social equality linked to economic equality. *Third*, there is personal freedom, which is the individual's right to live in dignity and equality with all others. Such rights include one's freedom of speech, freedom to participate in making decisions that affect one's life, and freedom from arbitrary arrest (Nyerere, 1968a). Thus, genuine social equality sounds complex for it takes into account various factors such as knowledge, freedom of choice, development and enhancing one's social status (Nyaki, 2015). Nyerere seems to believe that by offering training, social equality in the modern society could be obtained. For example, equality could be obtained by promoting the concept of leaders as

‘servants’ and not ‘masters,’ and by promoting social interaction among civilians and the army, allowing the two groups to share social services. He appealed to all Tanzanians to live as brothers and sisters of one nation regardless of social differences (Nyerere, 2011).

Equality of Voice

Nyerere’s concept of equality of voice originates from African traditional society. In traditional society, there was no voting in meetings or mass gatherings. People met and discussed their views until they reached an agreement (1968d). It is from this ground Nyerere argues that democracy is a natural element of African traditional society; there is no need of teaching them how to discuss issues pertaining to their democracy. Nyerere wrote:

The traditional African society, whether it had a chief or not and many ... did not, was a society of equals and it conducted its business through discussion. Recently, I was reading a delightful little book on Nyasaland by Mr. Clutton-Brock; in one passage he describes the life of traditional Nyasa, and when he comes to the elders, he uses a very significant phrase: ‘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 (1968a, pp.103-104).

Equality of voice was very practical: whenever there was a meeting everyone could get an opportunity to give their own contribution. Everyone had to speak in a meeting, though one might have nothing to contribute, but just to say “I concur,” which was expressed in Kiswahili by the phrase, “*ninaunga mkono*” (Nyerere, 1968a). If one is elected without being opposed in Kiswahili, they say “*amepita bila kupingwa*,” that is, he was accepted by all (Nyaki, 2015). However, political, social, economic inequalities are not God-given but have been created by man himself. Nyerere said: “Everywhere in the world there are people who suffer from the disease of believing themselves to be inherently superior to those of another color or another race ... it is as much to the interest of other white people that this disease should be overcome as it is to the interest of those of us who are black, brown or yellow” (1968, p. 330).

Conclusion

We would like to conclude this exploration of Nyerere’s concepts of African socialism, human rights and equality by discussing the controversial topic of Nyerere’s human rights violations.

Nyerere set out to build a country in which all the people, not just individuals, would enjoy the basic human rights. Nyerere’s concept of Ujamaa “emphasized the blend of economic cooperation, racial and tribal harmony, and moralistic self-sacrifice” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020; see also Bjerk, 2017). His understanding of human rights was very influenced by the African tradition of emphasis on community, though he blended that emphasis with the European understanding of individual rights. He accepted collective and individual rights, but placed more emphasis on the

former, given the cultural context and the economic and political situation in Tanzania. Nyerere believed capitalists would restrict some of the rights of the community members. He said that any apparent deviation from the articles of the UDHR would be “an honest attempt on our part to balance ‘conflicting interests’ while preserving the major principle itself” (1968a, p. 146). Nyerere notes that Tanzania did not have the long tradition of freedom compared to countries like the United States. Nyerere certainly violated human rights on certain occasions and offered justifications of violations, as discussed in detail by Kijo-Bisimba and Maina Peter (2009), Ibahwoh (2018) and Bjerk (2017). Nyerere’s justification for the restriction of the freedom of some in Tanzania was that this was necessary for the development of actual freedom for the overwhelmingly vast majority. The reason for restricting some rights at times was the government’s desire to maintain a balance between various viewpoints on the direction of the country lest the whole society collapse (Nyerere 1968a). Nyerere puts emphasis on the responsibilities of the person, particularly on the duty to work to build up the society. As Kijo-Bisimba & Maina Peter (2009) wrote:

At times, [Nyerere] agonised to explain [his human rights violations]. For instance, trying to justify the existence of detention without trial through the Preventive Detention Act, 1962, [he] said: Take the question of detention without trial. This is a desperately serious matter. It means that you are imprisoning a man when he has not broken any written law, or when you cannot be sure of proving beyond reasonable doubt that he has done so. You are restricting his liberty, making him suffer materially and spiritually, for what you believe he intends to do, or is trying to do, or for what you believe he has done. Few things are more dangerous to the freedom of a society than that. For freedom is indivisible, and with such opportunity open to the Government of the day, the freedom of every citizen is reduced. To suspend the Rule of Law under any circumstances is to leave open the possibility of the grossest injustices being perpetrated (quoted in Kijo-Bisimba & Maina Peter 2009; see Nyerere 1968a, p. 312).

We must note that agonised explanations of human rights violations is not typical of rights-violating leaders and regimes (see Kijo-Bisimba & Maina Peter, 2009; Ibahwoh, 2018, Bjerk, 2017). Nyerere did not violate rights like a power-hungry self-interested ruler. As Kijo-Bisimba and Maina Peter wrote: “Whatever [Nyerere] did that could be interpreted as violating human rights can always be explained in wider benefits to the community” (2009). They also noted that later in his life, Nyerere was “honest to concede and acknowledge mistakes and make good of them” (2009); Nyerere made a major admission of failure when he acknowledged that socialism failed in Tanzania in terms of economics (Mesaki & Malipula, 2011). Kijo-Bisimba and Maina Peter also note that unlike the case with authoritarian rulers, “it is almost impossible to indicate any personal gain or interest in anything which [Nyerere] did. It is the interests of the wider community which guided [Nyerere]....” (2009; see also Ibahwoh, 2018; Bjerk, 2017; and Mesaki & Malipula, 2011). Whatever one might think of Nyerere’s human rights violations, we should

acknowledge that he took human rights seriously. And we note that even though Tanzania was a one-party state, “certain democratic opportunities were permitted within that framework” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020; see also Bjerk, 2017).

In reflecting on the legacy of Nyerere, we need to remember that under Nyerere economic inequalities were seriously reduced, that unlike some of its neighbors Tanzania was politically stable and largely free of ethnic conflicts, and that it had one of the highest literacy rates in all of Africa (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020; Bjerk 2017) We close our essay with a brief reflection on the life and work of Julius Nyerere by the internationally acclaimed African political scientist, Ali Mazrui, a friend of Nyerere (2005):

Nyerere’s policies of ujamaa amounted to a case of heroic failure. They were heroic because Tanzania was one of the few African countries which attempted to find its own route to development instead of borrowing the ideologies of the West. But it was a failure because the economic experiment did not deliver the goods of development. On the other hand, Nyerere’s policies of nation-building amount to a case of unsung heroism. With wise and strong leadership, and with brilliant policies of cultural integration, he took one of the poorest countries in the world and made it a proud leader in African affairs and an active member of the global community.

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