

# The NRM ritualistic democracy: what happened to my father?



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their children in. It is sad that we in the education sector have commodified education, yet seldom stop to ask about the elephant in the room; what are learners in these schools actually learning? Last year, I urged the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) to show courage and scrap national exams starting

policemen.

assessments should reflect... To support this, Uneb must evolve. I have said this before and I repeat; let's transform it into a Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Development (READ) body. Its new role would be to support District Evaluation Boards in creating frameworks that measure true learning

scrap the archaic exam... system that truly prepares learners... The future is waiting and it is... with an invigilator escorted by...

The author is Vice-Chancellor...

I was born in a family that was so patriotic that my father had the Uganda national anthem pinned in one of our sitting rooms. On the walls nearby hung calendars of the cabinet, featuring ministers and, of course, President Museveni.

I grew up a proud Ugandan. I didn't sing the anthem simply because I knew the lyrics, but because there was a profound respect and seriousness that people portrayed while singing it. I didn't know then that I would spend the next years of my life loving Uganda so extremely. Whenever the anthem was sung at school, I stood formally, singing even when the words sometimes carried no immediate meaning to a child's ears.

But I had reflected deeply on the statement, "Oh Uganda, the land that feeds us," and whenever I prayed to God, I would include our leaders, because that is what my father taught me.

In his youth, my father was a great goalkeeper. He had magic in his hands, according to his friends, but he never made it to the national team. He had moved in with my mother at a young age, and his football career faltered under the weight of early responsibility.

My mother, born into the wealthy family of a minister in the Buganda Kingdom, chose to go with him despite the difference in their status. I often wonder what he might have become if there had been a system to support

such youthful talent back then.

Last month, as I went back to vote, I realized that the man who was once the darling of the Ugandan anthem and President Museveni had changed his trajectory in his aging years. Living in Luwero; the historic heartland of the NRA struggle, he now keeps a heavy silence about the ongoing atrocities in our country.

The most painful moment came when Justice Simon Byabakama began declaring the first results at the Tally Centre. I have never seen my father look so broken and vulnerable.

He walked slowly from the sitting room toward his bedroom; his brown eyes filled with a grief I couldn't name.

What happened to the man who could spend hours telling us how good the NRA was?

What happened to his darling Museveni, whom he praised throughout our youth as we waved "Bye Museveni" to every helicopter and airplane that passed overhead? What happened to my father?

We have come to learn a new meaning of democracy. It is not the one Abraham Lincoln spoke of in 1863; "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." Instead, we are living the version described by Joseph Stalin (as recounted by his former secretary Boris Bazhanov):

"The people who cast the votes decide nothing. The people who count the votes decide everything."

In a ritualistic democracy, the act of

voting is preserved as a performance to maintain the appearance of legitimacy while the actual power remains with those who control the tallying process. To the Ugandan people: will you acknowledge that you are not living under a broken system? You are living inside something that is operating as designed.

Do not tell yourselves that it is a deviation from democracy; it is your Movement democracy speaking in its native tongue.

The badge, the gun, the bureaucratic language that will attempt to justify killing under Article 43, none of it is an exception. It is the system, your system.

What is different now is visibility. The violence, DR forms theft, arrests, and cruelty harassments of women long exported to the rest of the East Africa Community are becoming harder to hide at home.

Many across the country have known this face of Uganda for generations, some met their kismet untimely for wanting to challenge it. You are only now being forced to see it.

Do not comfort yourselves with the lie that this is the work of "a few bad apples." This is testimony. This is revelation.

Seeing my father's spirit break was the final realization that the patriotism he planted in me was based on a dream that the "counters" have since rewritten. For God and my Country.

The writer is a youth leader

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