

n
as held
ousands
arly
cause or
me the
years in
rs. Her
ten's
ting, is
ing
al the
nt



The Uganda Police Force has launched a probe after uncovering massive fraud involving several army officers

John Kiggundu, Entrepreneur

Mugabe's Zimbabwe: A post-mortem

Ensconced within the narrow restrictive confines of a cell in the city jail of Birmingham, Alabama, during April of 1963, was the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He was under incarceration on the orders of Bull Connor — Birmingham's equivalent of Kale Kayihura — ostensibly for creating disharmony in what was otherwise a peaceful city. The reality, however, was that Dr. King, a youthful minister in the Ebenezer Baptist Church of Atlanta, Georgia, had been incarcerated for daring to give a breath of hope to a city whose air was so engulfed in hatred against its African-American residents, that they had all, but abandoned the idea that they would ever exalt, one day, in the freedom that America had promised to all her citizens.

Along the margins of newspaper clippings that had been smuggled into his cell, Dr. King began to write his now famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" in response to the leaders of the clergy who had called on him to slow down his nationwide campaigns against racial prejudice in America. In his Letter, Dr. King introduced the concept of the neutrality of time, by arguing that "time, itself, was neutral; that it could be used either destructively or constructively," that "human progress never rolled in on wheels of inevitability," that many people had "a strangely irrational notion that there was something in the very flow of time that could inevitably cure all ills."

On the crisp autumn evening of April 19, 1980, in Rufaro Stadium, in the newly rechristened city of Harare, unbridled optimism was in the air as a massive crowd gathered to listen to Robert Nesta Marley perform the hit single "Zimbabwe," where Marley, together with the Wailers, affirmed the right of every man to decide his own destiny. Among the eager listeners on that festive evening was Robert Gabriel Mugabe, the newly elected Prime Minister, who was charming, charismatic and full of exuberance and whom most believed was exactly the leader that Zimbabwe needed to decide her destiny as an independent country.

But rather than shepherding Zimbabwe to a future that would mirror the hope that had radiated in Rufaro Stadium during her independence festivities, Mugabe would instead burrow his country into a nadir the depths from which many believe she will not be able to extricate herself. What is now evident is that though Mugabe was moderately successful at commandeering a group of guerrilla insurrectionists

to topple an oppressive government, he was simply incapable, despite his vast repertoire of competencies, of commandeering the economy of what had already become a middle-income country in 1980.

It would be superficial to make the claim that Zimbabwe's misadventures were the bane of Mugabe's lengthy tenure in office. Time, you see, is neutral.

The tenure of Sir Ketumile Masire was quite long, and, barring any unforeseen circumstances, that of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum promises to be even longer. What is beyond question is that in each successive election, the Zimbabwean voter became an ostrich in the sand and chose to reward failure rather than face the cruel reality that Mugabe's failed policies had metastasized like a cancer, spreading its malignancies to every sector of the Zimbabwe economy and bringing the country on the precipice of a catastrophe.

Nor would it be altogether convincing, as many have attempted to suggest, that Zimbabwe's

misfortunes went into a tailspin the moment Mugabe became a self-absorbed authoritarian, who stifled all forms of political dissent. The persuasive appearances of this biopsy notwithstanding, when we compare the authoritarian antics of Mugabe to those of Park Chung-hee, those of the former pale in comparison.

Without question, the last nail that sealed Zimbabwe's coffin was the emergence of all three malignant tumors at once, namely: Mugabe's maladroit economic policies, his lengthy tenure, and his authoritarian antics. Much of their damage could have been forestalled, if Zimbabwe had had a mechanism for asking Mugabe to leave after he had overstayed his welcome. Presidential elections, we now know, were not the solution.

Presidential term limits, though no panacea, would have been a strong countermeasure against his ill-advised policies and an effective palliative against

his lengthy tenure and authoritarian antics.

What Mugabe was oblivious to, or perhaps failed to adequately appreciate, was that entrepreneurs are what drives the engine of an economy, not elected politicians. Zimbabwe was thus beholden not to Robert Mugabe the individual, but to the continuity of the economic policies that Mugabe's government had inherited at independence.

The writer is a Ugandan living in the US

The persuasive appearances of this biopsy notwithstanding, when we compare the authoritarian antics of Mugabe to those of Park Chung-hee, those of the former pale in comparison