

Opinions

Nasser Road and the revolution in fake

The ghost of Gamal Abdel Nasser sometimes walks through the noise of Kampala. He pauses amid the roar of industrial printers and the weave of motorcycles, wondering how his name came to define this strain of Ugandan chaos.

History plays a neat trick. Nasser, Egypt's president, the great Pan-Africanist and Pan-Arabist, embodied state power, military strength, and post-colonial dignity. Yet the street that bears his name now hosts the daily dismantling and rebuilding of that very state. On Nasser Road, you can buy a convincing fake university degree, an impeccably forged land title, or a poster of Iraq's former dictator, Saddam Hussein, riding a robotic panther.

Thus, I was recently introduced to the book *Nasser Road: Political Posters in Uganda*, not in Kampala's ink-heavy air, but over coffee with its editor, Kristof Titeca, in Nairobi, as we discussed how a single street became one of the world's most efficient factories for alternative realities. Titeca has spent nearly two decades studying this ecosystem, using the lenses of Katumba Badru Sultan and Zahara Abdul to pin its frantic energy to the page. Yusuf Serunkuma provides the intellectual soundtrack for some of the underlying politics.

Nasser Road is a raw 24-hour economy that erupted to meet the immediate, desperate, and often absurd needs of a people with no time for the slow grind of officialdom. To understand Nasser Road is to see how Ugandans stare back at power from the periphery. The real Nasser challenged global empires from a podium and through the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. Kampala's Nasser Road printers bring that same contest to the shopfront by glorifying figures the West brands as monsters.

They take Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, or Muammar Gaddafi and recast them as digital action heroes, slapping their faces onto the bodies of RoboCop, Rambo, or

Nasser Road may be Uganda's most honest street ...



Charles Onyango-Obbo
Ear to the Ground

Darth Vader from Star Wars.

These are not overcoloured decorations for a village hair salon or a city kiosk; they reflect a deep, grassroots distrust of the stories the Global North tells the rest of the world. On this street, the underdog finds a hero's cape, and the enemy of the West becomes a familiar, almost friendly brother-in-arms for anyone squeezed by the big world order. It is unashamedly egalitarian, the only place in Uganda where Kizza Besigye, Bobi Wine, and President Yoweri Museveni get equal treatment as warriors in Superman suits.

Nasser's Egypt served as one of Africa's early laboratories for independence, refusing orders from colonial masters. In its own chaotic way, Nasser Road acts as a laboratory for daily survival. When the official state fails because it is too slow or too corrupt, Kampala's people print their own solutions.

If a government office demands a stamp you cannot get on an application, a printer on Nasser Road carves you one by lunch. If the global media unfairly brands a leader a monster, the street prints a calendar that makes him a symbol of justice.

Katumba Badru Sultan and Zahara Abdul capture this energy vividly with their lenses. Their photos show young men struggling under piles of paper and designers turning blurry, low-quality internet thumbnails in-

to bold, defiant murals that will hang in a taxi park.

Nasser Road's spirit is also global and pan-African. You see the same commentary on Kenya's matatus and outrageously coloured buses, celebrating Bin Laden, Gaddafi, and old heroes like Patrice Lumumba. It also pops up in the famous movie posters of Accra and Lagos.

If you drove from Nairobi to Kampala, photographing the slogans, and social commentary about everything from political corruption to unfaithful husbands and wives printed on the mud flaps of long-distance trucks and lorry tailgates, you would fill 500 pages with the most insightful chronicles of our times. Some of this makes it into social media memes and into the language and iconography of street protests by young Africans, as we witnessed in the 2024 and 2025 Kenya Gen Z protests and in October 2025 in Madagascar, where President Andry Rajoelina was ousted.

Nasser Road reminds us that for many Ugandans, society's front gates remain firmly closed. Instead of waiting for a benefactor to find the key, the people print their own, creating a kind of visual democracy where frustration is expressed through bright ink. It is a stubborn refusal to accept limits set by both outsiders and our own leaders. Therefore, if the path is blocked by an unfair official requirement you cannot meet, you print a map that leads you around the hurdle and back into the race.

Nasser Road may be Uganda's most honest street because it admits that life here is often a performance staged for survival. And so, on this strip, Nasser's ghost might finally recognise a brand of independence he would have approved of, where the street decides who a hero is.

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