

GenZ: From last weekend's celebrations, you would have thought the new cabinet had a portfolio for minister of Arsenal affairs!

Mzee: I agree it was big, with police giving permission while warning about crowding and Ebola, knowing that that bit was going to be ignored. But the country has had several more emotional events than what you saw last Sunday.

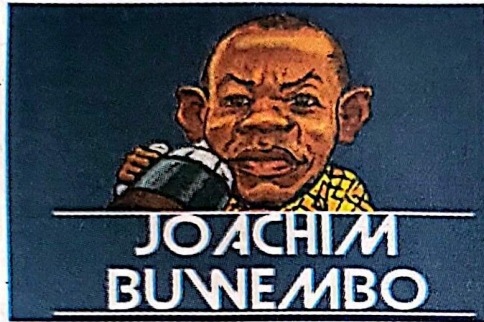
GenZ: Hard to believe. Give me just five of them.

Mzee: The first one was before independence, I think before even my parents met. But they told me several times that they never saw anything like the 1955 return of Kabaka Edward Mutesa from exile, not before and not after. Two years earlier he had been deposed and deported to England by the colonial government, which told the Lukiiko to appoint another Kabaka. Instead the Lukiiko mounted a legal battle challenging the deportation, with diplomatic and media manoeuvres as well. They won and Mutesa returned home. The welcome his subjects accorded him sounded like some mythical legend, from the way my parents narrated.

GenZ: And after independence?

Mzee: There was the first visit by a modern pope to Africa in 1969. A brand new passenger plane was bought by East African Airways to fly Pope Paul IV to Uganda. The then common Luganda saying about calling the Pope to mean an impossibility, died there and then. Several African presidents came to

Before Arsenal's victory, what did Ugandans celebrate that big?



Uganda to see the Pope! People came from all over the country to line the road from Entebbe to Kampala to see the Pope!

GenZ: And the third?

Mzee: Happened one-and-a-half years later in January 1971. The army overthrew the government that had failed to hold elections for four years. It was simply euphoric. Hundreds of prominent personalities who had been rotting in prison without trial were released. It was sheer joy.

GenZ: And the fourth?

Mzee: Irony. The fall of the same military Government they had welcomed ecstatically eight years earlier, this time overthrown by an outfit called UNLF with help by Tanzania. Army stores, full of then rare commodities that had disappeared because of economic collapse were broken, with the contents being shared freely for weeks. A young commander among the liberators called Yoweri Museveni became the defence minister.

GenZ: And fifth?

Mzee: Came six years later and was not a one-day affair; a honeymoon lasting several years. The National Resistance Army took over on January 26, 1986. The new sense of freedom that marked the end of state-inspired violence was manifested in many ways, including grassroots elections, free military training to demystify the gun, opening up the economy – ending things you cannot imagine today, like everyone who needed to import something or travel outside filing applications at Bank of Uganda to be allowed to buy foreign exchange. Then Ugandans wrote their own constitution.

GenZ: Eh! And when did the party end?

Mzee: It was gradual and the celebration became a choice, a state of mind. Three quarters of the Ugandans alive today were born and they were not alive then, so see nothing special about the freedoms and choices that have. But more specifically, the Movement system under which positions were accessed on individual merit was ended by referendum and partisan political parties happened. Today the celebration is by choice – take the example of young people from the under-privileged Kapchorwa areas who focus on athletics and go out to beat the world. Hundreds of millionaires who have taken up farming seriously and without knowing a big relative in Government have built their own fortunes, while some agriculture graduates are begging for jobs as others get trafficked to become cannon fodder in Russia's war with Ukraine. When rain falls, some complain of getting wet while others celebrate and go out to plant.

GenZ: And then?

Mzee: And then here we are.