

# Corrosion of NRM 'revolution'

**W**as 1986 the onset of a popular revolution? Critics of President Museveni and his National Resistance Army/Movement (NRM/A) were never sold on the idea. And they have refused to entertain any suggestion that there was such a thing as a revolution when the NRA captured power via military victory.

For one, Yoga Adhola, an ideologue of Uganda Peoples Congress, has argued that Museveni rummaged through a power grab mistaken for a revolution, based on a misreading of the revolutionary thinker Rgis Debray and his work on the Cuban revolution. It is not a very good use of this column's inherently limited space to detour into the abstruse world of revolutionary ideas and arcane thought, but if, for a moment, we set aside his reductionist arguments, which almost always begin and end with what happened in Cuba, Adhola is not entirely off in dismissing the revolutionary claims of the 1986 takeover.

Guerrilla movements like the NRA can, in one sense, be construed to have pursued State power for power's sake and to serve the material desires of an elite group, much less a truly rugged mission of transforming society politically and economically. The guerrillas grabbed power for power's sake even as they wore a revolutionary garb, purporting to represent a grandiose mission of fundamental social and political change.

In another sense, however, aspirations for a true revolution can be one thing; the realities of executing revolutionary change, on the other hand, can present an entirely complex situation.

In the case of Uganda, as with a great many puzzling questions, the reality of the NRA's purported revolution arguably lies somewhere in the middle of a selfish power grab, from the onset, and a failure to successfully pull off revolutionary change despite

**The NRA's purported revolution arguably lies somewhere in the middle of a selfish power grab.**

**Moses Khisa**  
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the best of intentions.

Undoubtedly, some among the NRA commanders and fighters may have genuinely believed they would use the gun to engineer sociopolitical transformation. They risked their young lives in pursuit of a higher societal goal, and for long many believed the 'revolution' was on course even as the train had long derailed.

There has been an official narrative of liberation sardonically preached for decades by Mr Museveni himself and an army of regime apparatchiks. In its most lopsided version, it tells a story of Uganda that started in 1986, supposedly set against the backdrop of utter collapse and hopelessness. It is a story of the victors.

It is not entirely a false narrative to the extent that there was a modest attempt to remake Uganda and place it on a path of social progress and political transformation.

Yet, taking a close and critical evaluation of the 1986 promise, it is in the realm of the economy where our hallowed liberators and revolutionaries fared the best over the past decades, but with a record of economic performance that is nowhere as extraordinary as it is presented. Uganda's economic scorecard is, in fact, quite comparable to peer countries around the region, including

those that did not necessarily experience a 'revolution' of guns.

In the realm of politics, and in the social sphere of values, norms and national ethos, Uganda today is a far cry from any promise of revolutionary change by any means. The erosion, particularly of the last two decades, has been simply astounding.

From the hollowness of democracy and elections to the hollowing out of whole institutions of State, the decay and decline are squarely matched by the social erosion of a country whose collective national identity is, at best, in disarray. A recurring question in making sense of Uganda's current plight is what exactly went wrong and at what juncture did the purported revolutionaries and the revolutionary wagon take the wrong turn on the road to today's disastrous situation? It is hard to say.

But if one takes seriously the notion that there were genuine intentions and a true idealism of youth that drove many to fight for revolutionary change, it is tempting to place the blame at the doorsteps of the corrupting influence of State power.

Much of the ills and evil ways we see in the way Uganda is run today have a lot to do with longevity of rule that inevitably breeds decay and dysfunction as coteries of actors dig in to maintain the status quo that serves their selfish interests.

For the rulers at the top, tightening a grip on power for the most part becomes an end in itself. There is no regard for reflection and no room for changing course to redirect the train. The arrogance of power, especially the allure of military might, provides handy fuel to press on even if the warning signs of a potential deadly crash are very clear. This is Uganda today, and unfortunately, if tragically, the Uganda of many years ahead unless, of course, a true revolution comes in town!

[moses.khisa@gmail.com](mailto:moses.khisa@gmail.com)