



Alan Tacca On the Mark

Can President Museveni still positively inspire his country?

Even if you are completely at peace with yourself, you will probably feel the presence of something much larger (than yourself) that seems to surround you and at the same time keep you at a distance.

Call it a county, your country. Whenever you are motionless, it appears to increase its dynamic agitation and mischievous seduction.

This thing called a country is not bonded to you by the flesh, so you must cling to it like an act of faith, or fall off like a bad fruit.

This thing called a country has a history inscribed in the hearts of people who were not there when the things in this history happened.

This thing called a country can be good, evil, tender and murderous all at the same time.

This thing called a country can do things with great passion and competence, or it can linger between indifference and dispirited effort.

When Field Marshal Idi Amin was overthrown in 1979, Uganda witnessed something of that great passion in many hearts; a surge of positive energy and the desire to do good deeds by our fellow citizens. It was not universal. Evil, too, was in the air.

But perhaps the desire to be good was stronger, albeit married to limited competence and

experience: traders who slashed retail prices but could not figure out how they would restock their shops; waves of self-employed citizens who vowed, "No Lule, no work", but did not have the stomach to live through the length of the sacrifice required.

It was a brief experience of intense national excitement, and there was nothing like it until Mr Yoweri Museveni's NRA guerrillas seized power in 1986.

'Museveni was my hero'

Euphoria again swept our people in a wave of positive thoughts; the desire to do good deeds; to dream beautiful dreams; the return of the exhilarating feeling of being Ugandans.

In the Luweero Triangle, our people returned to the lush wild green bushes shooting through the ruined buildings they called their homes but had abandoned during the war.

With their bare hands, they toiled to make a new beginning and to feed the nation.

Museveni was their hero. Museveni was our hero. Museveni was my hero.

Museveni did not say the problem of Africa was lack of experienced leaders, but of leaders who held onto power for too long.

Indeed, he himself had little experience.

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He apparently did not even yet fully grasp that you could not hope to develop a modern country by bartering beans with crude Cuban

manufactured goods.

If you are old enough, you will remember the programmed vision of Museveni that went like: Pacification, or ending the war in the north; either followed by or running concurrently with Minimum Recovery, and so on; until you came to a country making machines which make machines. That is not an error. "A country making machines that make machines". Those were Museveni's exact words.

I sometimes feel genuinely sorry for Mr Museveni. Our fate as humans is that most of us will live and die lagging behind our best dreams. Museveni desperately wants to be ahead of his dreams, but the world will not permit him. And great literature teaches us that this is a tragic condition.

Primitive country

What Museveni has instead is a primitive country. Walking about town nowadays, you hear and see on video screens religious comment trying to market new political messiahs.

As for his great machines, he has university professors selling him the lie that you can manufacture modern electric cars the way blacksmiths beat charcoal stoves into shape in our Kisenyi mango tree "factories".

He talks of taking Uganda "where it should be", the most elusive moving target a mortal can think of. And... surprise... surprise, I recently read that he had gone full circle and was talking of just getting over the minimum recovery!

After 30 years in power, voters and vote manipulators could give the general another term in office, but he can no longer inspire his people to build a great nation.

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