THE UGANDAN TALES

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VICTOR RUMANYIKA

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DEDICATION

So far in post-independence Ugandan history, hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives, or been wounded in the pursuit of democracy and freedom. This book is respectfully dedicated to each and every one of them.

INTRODUCTION

From the advent of independence, Africans have written and published poetry about political struggles, social issues, female empowerment and freedom. They wrote about prevailing issues at the time their nations achieved independence, and the cultural struggles emerging from clashes between a traditional society and a new modern society.

As Kevin Young observes in his introduction to "African American poetry:250 years of struggle and song", the very act of composing poetry proves a form of protest.

Indeed, poetry is deeply steeped within traditional African culture in the form of incantations, recitals and songs.

This collection is drawn from the struggles and betrayals of a people that had hoped for a change for the better, but are encumbered by a regime that has reigned for thirty six continuous years and is determined to hold on.

Their struggles are no longer against colonial powers but against new colonialists that look just like them.

18th and 19th November 2020

Dear ruling party and security officials,
You claim to champion peace and freedom,
But were caught off guard,
When spontaneous protests erupted,
Across towns and municipalities,
Within the central region.

The chief says,
He deployed commandos,
Recalled from battling al- Shabaab militants,
To stop the street protests,
By unarmed youth,
Setting fires on the worn dirt roads.

You say,
Idi Amin was a butcher,
That craved the spilling of innocent blood,
By indulging in extra-judicial killings.

You say,
Milton Obote and his henchmen,
Were mass murderers,
That wreaked havoc,
On innocent countrymen.

On these two days,
You stood in for them,
And accomplished everything,
You accused them of,
As dozens of innocent and unarmed countrymen,
Were killed by your battle hardened commandos.

A DAY IN A TROUBLED LAND

A dark cloud descends upon,
A despondent nation,
As a looming lockdown casts a dark shadow,
Over a tumultuous nation,
Ravaged by a pandemic,
With despairing souls pondering,
Their very existence.

Many count their losses,
Tend to ailing kith and kin,
Bury departed loved ones,
And prepare to endure,
Another painful lockdown.

General Gutti sends more youth,
On remand to Kitalya prison,
And refuses to entertain,
Bail applications listed today,
Of those he earlier committed.

Civilian courts are shut,
In an effort to curtail the pandemic,
With all court business prescribed for forty-two days,
While General Gutti,
Commits more souls on remand.

The aged chief,
Makes new cabinet appointments,
Expanded to eighty ministers,
As joyful friends and relatives,
Celebrate the appointments,
Primed to enjoy the perks,
Associated with being called Honourable minister.
Yet like garden gnomes,
Their presence of no value to the inconsequential cabinet,
With real decisions made elsewhere.

Another day in a troubled land goes by!

A NEW VISION

I have a new vision,
Of a nation,
Where both male and female,
Young and old,
Irrespective of circumstances of birth,
Or language spoken,
All are equal.

I have a new vision,
Of a nation holding free and fair elections,
And a non-partisan Electoral Commission Chairman,
Not appointed by one of the candidates.

I have a new vision,
Of a nation,
With a functioning health system,
Where health facilities are for all,
And VIP hospitals do not exist.
A vision of patients treated,
And not charged unaffordable hospital fees.

I have a new vision,
Of a nation,
With hospitals treating all according to need
And not status,
Where all have access to the best available care
Because their circumstances demand it.

I have a new vision,
Of a nation,
Without homeless children
Living on the streets.
Where the authorities,
Do not turn a blind eye to a child,
Living in a cardboard box at a construction site.

I have a new vision,
Of a nation,
Where greed is not celebrated but frowned upon.
Of wealth acquired through hard work,
And not access to public funds,
Or proximity to the "royal" family.

I have a new vision,
Of a nation,
Where the military is not patrolling the streets,
And harassing the civilian population,
But carrying out its constitutional duties
Of protecting the nation.

I have a new vision,
Of a nation,
With courts stamping their authority,
And prevailing over a court martial
That continues to charge youth yearning for change
Or supporting their preferred candidate.

I have a new vision,
Of a nation,
With regular transition of leadership.
A nation that does not permit a ruler,
To rule for forty long uninterrupted years,
Until he is infirm or called by death.

I have a vision,
Of a beautiful nation,
Full of peace and love,
That is the envy of all.

ACTIVISTS, ENTHUSIASTS AND FOOT SOLDIERS

Your day on the campaign trail,
Is a lone sombre walk,
Like a funeral procession,
In the eyes of those that claim ownership of the nation.
Though a labour of love and conviction,
When you majestically hold processions,
Amongst exuberant chanting crowds of supporters.
You arrive at the next campaign venue,
But your adversaries seal it off,
And order your dispersal.
You are considered a nuisance,
By the invisible powers,
Sat in their air-conditioned offices,
Issuing the dispersal orders.
In the evening, they board their SUV's,
And are ferried to their gated homes,
By submissive drivers and bodyguards.
Welcomed by pampered family members and house helps,
Matooke, Eshabwe, Pilao rice, Ekyivuguto and ground nuts,
Laid out on the vast mahogany table.

The chaos arising from their disjointed orders,
Is broadcast on their sixty-four-inch flat screen,
Which they gleefully watch.
Oh, ASP in charge of the dispersal is a son of the soil,
They observe.
Other activists and foot soldiers are injured,
And taken to the local health centres,
With broken limbs and breathing problems,
From inhaling tear gas.
When the bills pile up,
You appeal to diaspora supporters on your live feed,
For financial support.

Activists, enthusiasts and foot soldiers,
Your struggle is a damned one.
You abstain and they enslave you further,
You speak out and they oppress you more.

APATHY

We are resigned to fate,
To be ruled forever,
By a life presidency.
Those that speak up,
Looked upon as insane.

We are cowards and fools,
Accepting over familiarity.
When Idi Amin declared himself,
A president for life,
He was considered a pathetic buffoon.

We look on as the regime,
Hands over power to itself,
Through holding sham elections.
First term, second term, third term,
Fourth term, fifth term, sixth term
And now a seventh term.
We are a pathetic lot!

AT THE END OF IT ALL

You continue to abduct and force activists,
Into the notorious "Drone" vehicles,
Placing dark hoods over their bowed heads and,
Forcing their heads down against their laps.

They come cowed,
With fear and apprehension,
As you take them,
To your unsafe houses,
That you call safe houses.

And yet,
You can't finish them,
Or subdue all dissent!
You can't eradicate everyone,
When you take one,
Another takes their place.

Like the melting glaciers,
Atop Mountain Ruwenzori,
That flow into river Nyamwamba
That busts its banks,
When it floods.

The day of reckoning will come.
The concealed anguish,
Will be let out,
Like a mighty flood.

Then, it will be too late to stop,
The unleashing of the concealed anguish,
That is gasping to be let out.

It is then,
That you will understand the pain,
That you have inflicted upon the nation!

BABY CHEEKS

(After "Daddy" by Sylvia Plath)

You sit tight, you sit tight
And refuse to leave,
Our necks now your footstool,
Upon which to rest,
Your heavy boot.

Thirty-six long years,
Our forsaken lot,
Carry your heavy burden
As you stumble on.

Baby cheeks, I gave up on you
Your unfulfilled promises,
An illusion to all.
Barefaced, a brazen liar
With an uneven gait,
And lazy left arm,
Folded like an envelope.

An impressionable child in the tropical nation,
Full of beautiful scenery,
Amazing landscapes and,
The source of the River Nile,
Like many others,
I adored you.

In the hygienist's chair,
A scaler scrapes away the opaque plaque.
Plaque, plaque, plaque everywhere,
All over the sore gums,
Bringing a sour taste and odour.

Different faces, leave us confused,
Unable to know,
Who speaks to us.

Peacemaker today, tyrant tomorrow
I will crush you,
Am a freedom fighter, you say
Who are you?

The sore gums bleed,
As the hardened plaque is scraped away.
A suction clears the debris,
But the pain is intense.

Commandos, commandos,
Picking us off like the plaque,
That's been scraped away,
And sucked into the suction,
To be discarded.
Maybe, we are the plaque.

With brute force,
You rule us,
Tear gas, Special Forces, CMI
Your array of tools.

A camouflage uniform,
Pointy, shiny head and stumpy walk
Dictator, dictator, let us breath
We cry out.

Your movement party,
Blossoming on public funds.
Vultures love a dictator,
That gives them spilled crumbs,
As he tightens his grip,
On the cowed lot.

You attend prayers, baby cheeks
And proclaim divine providence,
Your acquiescing wife by your side,
A co-conspirator to your excesses,
That carries a bible,
As a veil.

Eleven, when you came,
Twenty-five when I left,
Now forty-seven,
But you still tightly cling on,
Addicted to the trappings of power,
And believing you're destined,
To hold on forever.

The young ones, born much later,
Now despise you,
And refuse to accept you.
There is nothing more,
You can offer them.
Dictator, the untamed call you,
As you fill up your prisons,
With the unwashed grandchildren,
And you retreat,
To your equally cruel coterie.

The hygienist's scaler, carefully
Scrapes away the stubborn plaque,
From the swollen and bleeding gums,
A fresh breath restored,
To the infected gums.

Dictator, dictator - you narcissist,
Your interlude nearly over,
Being scrapped away,
By the hygienist's curette.

BAIL DECLINED

They stood and looked,
At the dark and chubby face,
Of the heavy set ebony man,
Sitting in the chairman's chair.
General Gutti with his General's insignia,
Was going to decide,
Their bail application.
Instantly, they knew they were headed,
Back to Kitalya prison.
Unbothered, unflinching, unempathetic and,
Heavy set like Field Marshal Idi Amin,
He did not disappoint!
Declined, declined is all they heard,
Echo in the silent courtroom.
Adjourned to a date to be fixed,
The words reverberated,
Not for the first time.
With a glint in his profound eyes,
He carried his profound frame,
Out of the sham courtroom.

BAIL GRANTED

In the midst of a pandemic,
When many have fled the city,
While others grieve the loss of loved ones,
The prisoners of conscience are released.
With everyone distracted by other news,
The appointment of the simple Robinah Nabanja as prime minister,
The replacement of the parliamentary speaker,
Curtailment of inter district travel,
Launch of a new road network in Congo,
While the thin potholed Kampala roads remain neglected.
From his court martial,
General Gutti grants them bail,
Thinking no one will notice.

For six months, held on trumped up charges
Underage children held with adults,
Musicians held with convicted hard core criminals,
Barbers, Hawkers, carpenters, butchers,
Detained for supporting their preferred candidate,
Their rights trampled upon,
By a belligerent regime,
That renewed General Gutti's tenure,
A week before he bailed the prisoners of conscience.
They think we are all dumb!

BALLARD OF THE CHIEF

(The chief appearing before the 2030 commission of
inquiry into malpractices by previous regimes)

The Chief stands upright before the bewigged chair,
That tells him,
He will be cross examined.

The chief,
Who loves being in charge and the centre of attention,
Objects to this and,
Addressing the chair,
Requests not to stand,
During the cross examination.

An usher prompts him,
To take an oath,
As that is the procedure,
Which he does but responds that,
He doesn't respect the procedures
As he is the fountain of honour,
And paramount chief.

The questioning begins
As the prosecutor asks,
"What happened to the ekyanzi?"
The big milk pot,
You were required,
To take to the in-laws
As condolences?

With a wry smile running across
His chubby cheeks and babyish face,
The chief responds,
"I don't recall it all."
Did you drink the milk?
The prosecutor asks,
As the chief, maintains his silence.

The prosecutor turns,
To the chiefs' attire,
"Why do you dress shabbily?
Always wearing unmatched attire and hunting boots?"

The chief replies,
"But am always clean and hygienic."
Who is Qasim? Who is Musa Maziga?
The unrelenting prosecution continues.
Why do you dress as a Muslim?

The irritated chief interjects,
That is none of your business.
Do you condone that sort of behaviour? Asks the prosecutor,
The barrister objects to the tone of questioning.

The chair would like,
To adjourn this session.
Both, the defence and prosecutor
Don't object to this suggestion.

The prosecutor warns
At the next session,
He will inquire,
Into the privatisation of the commercial bank,
And the pension that was held for those,
That did not receive their pension.

The chair stands and with a mock hammer,
Slams the table,
While he muffles and mumbles
"Session adjourned," under his breath
Before sloppily making his exit.

BALLARD OF THE LAST WORD

He went there and found,
The men and women,
Adorned in wigs,
Chest thumping,
Because they have the last word.

He expected fairness,
But found sarcasm,
And was told, he could leave
If he wanted,
Because,
They did not invite him.

He cried out to the public,
"Don't let them feather their nests
By shunning us,
In order to have their budgets passed".

The people understood,
And preferred who they believed,
Had the final say.
"Withdraw the petition"
They chorused,
"And let us decide".

He now understood,
Why the others, had refused to take their petitions
To the men and women,
Adorned In wigs.

BALLARD OF THE PRINCIPAL

The principal said,
You must go out and vote
But remember,
To register for your identity cards,
So that, you aren't turned away
From the polling station.

The youth shunned the previous elections,
Due to apathy and complacency.

The principal said,
This time, head to the polls and make your vote count.
Cast it,
So that,
They are overwhelmed,
And not able to rig the results.

The principal said,
We are non-violent,
Remain peaceful and make your vote count.
On the day,
Stand in the queue until it's counted.
Don't leave until,
The declaration forms are signed.

The chairman said,
You cannot remain there after casting your vote,
Because there is a pandemic.

The principal said,
We don't trust you to announce,
The correct results.
We are peaceful and non-violent.

The chairman said,
You are being reckless and spreading infection
Which I shall not permit.

The principal said,
We know you are biased,
And hiding behind the infection rates,
To interfere with the results.

The chairman replied,
There is a curfew and no one is allowed out past 8pm.
We shall disperse or arrest anyone,
That stays out.

On the final day of campaigning,
The principal was detained and returned to his home.
His team were taken to gaol,
For committing acts likely to spread infection.

The principal had taken a stand and aroused,
The complacent youths to have an interest,
In their destiny.

BE ON YOUR GUARD

In the full glare of pedestrians and passengers,
A security vehicle runs over Frank.
Activists, enthusiasts and foot soldiers,
Be on your guard!

In the full glare of cameras,
Their vehicle has run over,
His well-built chest,
And yet they disperse the first responders,
The regime only cares,
About its own!

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Stunningly beautiful, with a pretty face,
Her enchanting smile draws you in.
She is engaging, conversational and
Makes a good hostess,
Such that,
Many sing praises to her hospitality.

And yet,
Beneath all this beauty,
Lies raging turmoil,
That makes her prone
To acts of self-harm.

Destructive thoughts lead her
To make cuts to her face,
But her beautiful face,
Masks the upheaval beneath.

Her children live in terror
Of her numerous tantrums.
She is unafraid to
Abuse and harm them,
When they dare voice their opinions.

She attributes her behaviour,
To a spirit that took control of her in 1986
And has refused to leave since.

Despite trying to exorcize herself
Every five years,
The pearl of Africa has failed,
To tame the turmoil within.

BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

You call this freedom,
And say you brought peace and stability,
But a chosen few attest to this.

I'd rather live in uncertainty,
That affects all,
Then we all are on the same page!

You call this democracy,
But for the chosen few.
The rest live in terror,
Afraid of curfews, blacked out vehicles and intelligence squads.
I'd rather live under the patriotic brute Idi Amin,
Or the incorruptible Milton Obote,
Than a sectarian Kleptocracy!

BROWN ENVELOPES

Brown envelopes,
Stashed with money taken from the treasury,
Are handed out to dirt-poor village women,
Lacking medical facilities from which to give birth.

Brown envelopes,
Stashed with money diverted from health budgets,
Are handed out as bribes,
To hungry youth as rent for their support.

Brown envelopes,
Stashed with money taken from road construction budgets,
Are handed out as bribes,
To religious leaders as a purchase for their silence.

Brown envelopes,
Have ruined the nation.

BOBI WINE

Growing up in the Kamwokya slum,
He watched as an entitled middle-aged man,
Declared himself president,
Every five years,
After holding flowed elections,
Marred by ballot stuffing and intimidation.
Distraught, he sang about the prevailing inequalities.
Like everyone else,
He watched fat cat parliamentarians,
Raise their wages and per diems,
As oppressed voters,
Sunk deeper into poverty.
With disillusionment and unease,
Like others,
He watched the militarisation of politics,
Take centre stage,
With courts raided and bailed suspects,
Rearrested by shadowy armed men.
When the dysfunctional regime,
Sought to remove age limits,
From the paper constitution,
That would permit a life presidency,
He and others,
Caused a raucous,
Never seen before in the parliamentary chambers.

CADRE

You call yourself a cadre,
And walk with your head held high,
The chief trusts you,
And employs you in sensitive dockets,
While the rest of us,
Untrusted and ignored.
You are handsomely rewarded,
And for a rental fee,
House us in your completed rentals.
You sit in government meetings,
With other cadres,
Discussing white papers, budget allocations and security reports,
But let a poorly dressed robotic spokesman,
Address the gathered press.
You own fancy malls,
And resort like homes,
While your children study,
In expensive boarding schools abroad.
You wear expensive colognes,
And drink high end liquors,
In exclusive private clubs.
Not too long ago,
You trod these streets,
And knew all the corners of Kikuubo,
But now ask,
Kikuubo, where is that?
Wandegeya, how does one get there?
Even though you studied,
At the nearby university!
You are privy to government procurements,
And disbursements,
Earning a commission,
From introducing shoddy contractors.
You are NOT a cadre!
You are a BUSINESSMAN trading in politics!

CAMPAIGN STORM

At the campaign rallies,
Downtrodden and despondent voters,
Pitch their markers.
The outcasts with hungry faces,
The downtrodden,
The hawkers, carpenters and butchers,
The youth wearing red berets,
With nothing but a pitiful existence,
Their stomachs and pockets empty.

The jackals come out too,
Out of their gated homes,
In their crisp suits,
Baring their allegiance,
To an aging chief,
That has outlived his welcome.
Their eyes on the prize,
The campaign war chest.

The aging chief,
A master at exploiting their greed.
The campaign trail,
A contest between shameless opportunists,
And a resolute, neglected underclass,
Eager to assert itself.

CHANTS

Defiant voices of determined youth,
Spread panic among the entitled regime officials.
Arrogant, pampered descendants of ruling party elders,
Scornfully mock the passionate youth.
Ayi bambe! reeba ka Bobi kangye, they tweet,
He is disorderly due to his background; they submit in court.
We shall wear the victor's crown: defiant voices raise on the campaign trail.
Bantu mwe kyarenga, Ekyana kyarenga, loud speakers' belt out,
Before an opposition speaker's address.
A'jya kugenda, Ajya kugenda, they shout at security officers,
Bosiko, Bosiko ogenda, they chant,
As the presidential convoy hurtles past.

Chief's New Lover

Amari, from Land of Odii,
Spurned by previous lovers,
Is the chief's new lover,
On whom he bestows all his affections.

Chief loves Amari,
From the Land of Odii,
More than anyone else,
And bestows upon her magnificent titles and favours.

Chief Justice, Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Inspector General of Police,
He calls her,
As his spurned ex-lovers look on with envy.

Everyone knows why,
Chief's lustful affections are drawn to Amari,
From Land of Odii.
Amari keeps chief in power with her powerful votes.

COLLEGE DAYS

We trekked the scenic route
Of narrow paths contouring
Through the forest
On the journey from
College to the lake.

The thick forest juxtaposed
With tall guava trees
In which apes
Playfully swung
As they bit
Into the sweet guavas.

We threw stones
At the entitled imps
That playfully threw back
Half-eaten fruit
At us.

Occasionally, the brave
Among us,
Climbed the trees
And collected the fruit
Which was shared
Amongst us all.

Continuing past
The tranquil seminary
That quietly perched
On top of the hill,
We arrived at the
Shores of the vast lake.

Vibrant and exuberant students
Elated at the
Freedom to leave
The restricted environment
For the first time
In weeks.

We stripped into boxers
And happily dipped
Into the water.
Those that couldn't swim
Held onto empty jerry cans
And lazily floated
On top of the lake.

At dusk,
We merrily made our way
Back to the restricted regime.

CORRUPTION IS MURDER

In the long quiet night,
Interrupted by beeping and flat lining machines,
Thirty more patients die,
When oxygen supply machines malfunction.
Distraught families take their dead away,
From the stacked-up mortuary.
Who supplied the dysfunctional machines?
Many ask,
The police are mute.
Anti-corruption agencies are mute.
Attorney General is mute.
All aware that,
CORPORATE MANSLAUGHTER on a grand scale,
Has been committed,
By UNTOUCHABLES above the law!

COVID QUAGMIRE

Students return to the reopened schools,
To resume their disrupted studies,
With struggling parents made to pay fees,
For the new school term and semester.
A month later, inept authorities shut them down,
With a fresh outbreak of Covid-19,
Spreading like an uncontrolled bush fire.

Worn out parents pick up their children,
Many admitted in school healthcare units,
Infected with the contagious virus,
And return home spreading it further.
Hospitals at full capacity,
Turning away new patients,
While oxygen stocks,
Supplied by the chief's in laws run low.

Overnight, thirty patients pass away,
At the national referral hospital,
After a breakdown of the uninspected oxygen supply equipment.
Mortuaries, oxygen suppliers, hospitals and funeral companies,
Hike their prices,
Taking advantage of the unfolding catastrophe,
To reap maximum profits.

CRY OF ALPHONSE

(Alphonse after crossing over from the
opposition and trying to return)

"They don't like us," he cries out
"They want to finish us," he continues
"Am Alphonse, you are Kyagulanyi, we are brothers," he laments
"They are users," he wails
As if he has made a recent discovery.

Alphonse seeks forgiveness
While apologising for
The insults and diversion
He has caused the struggle.

Startled into self-discovery
By their duplicity.
His Facebook account shut down
Support from his benefactors abroad
No longer forthcoming,
Alphonse is broken.

Painful reality smiles at Alphonse but
Will he be forgiven?

DARK CLOUDS

With elections over, we thought the violence was over
Instead, dark clouds hover,
As we face more trauma.
You continue to abduct foot soldiers,
Who led the charge,
Against your sham elections.
Not through violence,
But by supporting candidates of their preferred choice.
Your "drone" and "super custom" vehicles,
Hunt them down,
Like wild animals to be slaughtered.
Caged in your overcrowded jails,
Your high handedness and terror,
Cemented my beliefs,
That our choices were the correct ones.
You neither forgive, nor forget,
As you inflict more pain,
On all of us.
A scourge on our conscience,
All because we do not support,
Your sham elections and long rule.

DAWN OF DARKNESS

(Journalist Ashraf Kasirye injured during campaign trail)

We all saw the grim pictures,
As you were hoisted into the air,
Your immobile body carried away from,
Where you fell,
When darkness dawned,
With a gushing wound,
To the temple, above your left eye.
Your eyes still,
Drained of any signs of life,
Into another vehicle,
That sped away,
For you to receive medical treatment,
From a government hospital.

Targeted by overzealous operatives,
Intent on bringing an end,
To your budding life.
Your only crime,
Carrying out your duties,
As a journalist,
Covering an opposition leader's campaign trail.

It wasn't yet your time,
To transition over to the other side.
Months later, you gradually regain your faculties,
To the chagrin,
Of the overzealous operatives,
That caused so many tears to flow.

DAYS OF 1984

After school, we played football
In the grounds of the sports club,
That was only a stone throw away,
From our primary school.

We kicked a ball about,
As we waited to return home.
Occasionally, the ball flew over conifers,
Into a bushy patch that occupied,
A disused car park at the rear of the grounds.

This is where we often found,
The bound and abandoned piles of bodies.

"Rebels" or "collaborators" whose lives had been,
Snuffed out by a state,
That should have protected them.

The "rebels" then,
Are today's rulers.
Urbane and educated,
They despise the regime
That they overthrew.

Today, the same vices flourish,
Enforced disappearances, abductions and remains
Of murdered victims proliferate the swamps
And forests in which they are disposed.

1984 has come full circle.

DAYS OF "PANDA GARI" - 1984

Heavy boots menacingly stomp the tiled floor,
Above the dark cellar,
In which we are hurdled,
Away from the dark, angry men,
Searching the room.

Speaking in hash Kiswahili tones,
The military language of instruction,
Cupboards and drawers are opened and slammed,
As their aggressive footsteps,
Approach the ceramic toilet,
Before opening the cistern,
And replacing the cover.

We remain quietly hurdled,
In the chamber,
Hidden below
The floor of the bathroom,
As they pace about with their muddy boots.

Our breathing muffled,
In the dark abyss,
We remain silent, lest we are discovered.
Though only ten years old,
Am now acclimatized to this routine.

After what seems like ages,
I can tell the angry men are leaving,
As their footsteps move further away.
Still frozen in total submission,
None of us speaks.

"Panda gari",
Swahili for "get onto the vehicle",
Usually an old TATA truck, parked nearby,
Are routine operations,
By regime soldiers during which,
Men and young boys are herded onto the trucks
And driven away to army detachments for "screening".

On many occasions,
It is those that cannot afford
To bribe the soldiers,
That are branded and retained,
As "rebels" or "rebel collaborators",
Never to be seen again.

Forty years later,
I watch with horror and dismay,
As police trucks covered in tarpaulin,
Park outside opposition offices,
And all present are forced onto the trucks
And driven away for "screening".

DEMOCRACY AND COFFINS

Democracy, democracy,
On display to the expectant world.
Absolute, emerging, pseudo and empty,
Availed by carefully crafted constitutions and elections,
Conducted by partisan, nonpartisan, elected and unelected electoral commissions,
For the benefit of buttressed people,
And buttressing leaders.

Coffins, coffins,
On display to passing trade.
Mahogany, muvule, teak, oak and pine,
Crafted by skilled artisans.
Long, short, wide, and small,
All sizes available.
Filled with carefully woven lining and cushions,
Intricately laid out for the comfort of the deceased,
To be drawn on a hearse.

Dimmed Hopes

(Two-year-old Julian Nalwanga killed by 2 stray bullets fired by Security Forces- 21st April 2011)

You are now complete
And a bouncing bundle of joy
That started out as a little seed
But now made full term.

Beginning a new destiny,
Excited by everything around you.
Filled with leaps of joy,
As you explore,
Your new surroundings.

Through no fault of your own,
Still too young,
Without many memories,
You return.

Oblivious to your surroundings,
You lay asleep in bed,
Left to rest,
And find some sleep.

Your loving mother,
Proud of you,
Having fed you,
Also hopes to find some rest.

Commotion reigns outside,
As the brutal forces,
Disperse assembled and chanting opposition youth.

When you found some rest,
Stray objectiles from the brutal forces
Send you into permanent slumber.

In shock and disbelief,
From the heartless and reckless actions,
Of the out-of-control forces,
Loving mother is distraught.

Your pilgrimage now over,
The tender and affectionate care,
Only a mother could give,
Now a tragic memory.

DUST

Dust to dust,
All shall return.
Harlot and princess,
Beggar and General,
Ghetto youth and Honourable minister,
Suspect and Judge,
Convict and president.

The dust may be,
In the valleys of Kasese,
In the mass graves of Luwero,
In the memorial mass grave at Mukura
In the internally displaced camps in Acholi,
In the wilderness of Kashari,
In the ranches of Sembabule,
But to dust all shall return.

Someone tell
The brutes in CMI and counter-terrorism police,
The beasts in the super custom and drone vehicles,
The trigger happy LDU's,
The security and political leaders,
That everyone is a pilgrim to this world,
And to dust, all shall return!

END IN SIGHT

Activists continue prodding the chief,
By singing hymns of freedom,
That he has banned from the airwaves.

Activists continue pinching the chief,
By composing poems of protest and defiance,
That irritate his sensitive skin.

Activists continue punishing the chief,
By whipping his effigy,
In the middle of Kampala Road.

Activists continue scaring the chief,
By dreaming of his departure,
And seeing the panic that engulfs him,
When they talk about his departure.

Activists continue exposing the chief,
By sharing images of his misdeeds,
To the rest of the world.
That he deceives,
By calling himself a freedom fighter.

Even though,
He arrests and charges activists,
With disturbing his peace and being public nuisances,
The chief's end is in sight.

EXPIRED

You have nothing more to offer,
To the restless society anymore.
You razed schools located in prime locations,
And replaced them with fancy malls,
Built by dodgy investors,
Whom you allocated the land for free.

You have nothing more to offer,
To the restless society anymore.
You expelled them from customary land,
And seek to abolish the Mailo tenure System.
You grieve clans and elders.

You have nothing more to offer,
To the restless society anymore.
You create segregation,
Within a restless society,
With discriminatory policies,
That alienate you from society.

FALLACY OF IDEOLOGY

They preach tales of correct ideology,
To rally disenchanted kinsmen.
Firebrand ideologues and their militant followers,
On a crafted mission of deception.

In Luwero triangle,
Adui or the enemy was Milton Obote and his regime,
They told the gullible peasants,
Caught up in a war,
That was imposed on their land,
By the ideologues and their militant followers.

At Kyankwanzi,
They teach Siasa or correct political orientation,
To gullible and jobless cadres,
Attending the National Leadership Institute,
As a means of finding employment.
Lack of patriotism and corruption are the enemy,
They tell the gullible and jobless cadres.

Half-baked political commissars,
Bait regime cadres with,
Mchaka Mchaka, the ten-point programme and socialist ideology,
While the regime implements capitalist ideals,
A free-market economy and privatisation of public bodies.
They teach the hazards of multi-party democracy,
And how it ruined the nation,
While the regime conducts multi-party elections,
With a cross party parliament.

FAREWELL TO JUSTICE

Justice Doll says,
He will not be intimidated by anyone,
While refusing to recuse himself,
From the bench.

Justice Doll chairs,
The final court an aggrieved candidate,
Rejecting electoral results,
Petitions for justice.

Justice Doll raises,
Issues that have not been brought,
Before the court by any of the parties.

Justice Doll was,
A personal attorney to one of the parties,
In the current proceedings before him.

Justice Doll was,
Fast tracked through the ranks.
Like others before him,
By the "Fountain of honour".

Justice Doll is,
Going through the motions,
With a worthy performance!

FIDDLERS

We hoped for a fresh start,
Our hearts, minds and souls,
Open and accepting,
The liberators, freedom fighters and human sacrifices,
But what we received,
Was the same old false start.
Untrustworthy, cunning and deceitful,
Skilful at shifting goalposts,
Tinkering with the constitution,
Gerrymandering constituencies,
And entrenching a life presidency.
Uganda, Ugandans, beautiful and naïve,
Played like a musician's fiddle!

FLAWED ELECTIONS

(After "The Broken English Dream", by Pedro Pietri)

On this day,
The final day of campaigns,
Everyone is ordered to sit on the ground.
Subdued, humiliated, downcast and betrayed,
Trying to make sense,
Of the unjust treatment by the regime.
Armoured vehicles, police, and Jie Fang trucks,
Encircle the unarmed activists.
An army helicopter on standby,
In the lush plains of Kalangala islands,
Ready to ferry the opposition politician,
Back to his home,
Away from the scheduled rally.
The aging ruling presidential candidate,
With his security forces,
Choosing this place and time,
To assert their authority over the electoral process.
He had already warned his audience,
In a previous campaign rally,
To watch as he crushes this group.
For the following six months,
The overcrowded wards,
With plenty of itchy lice and no running water,
Home to the unarmed activists.
Their lives now at a standstill,
As helpless families look on,
Reliant on compassionate donors and well-wishers,
For their survival.
Regime apologists eager to please their master,
And opportunists positioning themselves,
For positions in the regime,
Welcome, the misery,
Heaped onto the activists.

So, this is Uganda,
The pearl of Africa,
For those with wealth and money,
But the scourge of Africa,
For the impoverished and downtrodden.

So, this is Uganda,
Where you work to etch a living,
Hoping to take care of loved ones,
But fail to return in the evening,
Having been picked up,
By a numberless drone vehicle,
And carted off to an ungazetted safe house.

So, this is Uganda,
Ruled by pseudo revolutionaries,
Since 1986,
Where you keep hoping for change,
But the revolutionaries remind you,
Ffe Twalwana, twalwana, tukateera embundu…
We fought, we fought…

FOLIE A DEUX

Security minister says,
He is not desperate to travel abroad,
And is not concerned about sanctions.
Foreigners will be banned from the nation,
Should sanctions be placed on the nation, he continues.
Security minister lived abroad,
Received his eye treatment abroad,
But is not desperate to travel abroad, he says.

Security forces clobber assembled journalists,
Covering an opposition event,
In broad day light,
Under the glare of cameras clicking away.
Security chiefs play a game of football,
With the clobbered journalists,
And notify the courts,
That reconciliation took place,
Through the football game.

Elections are organised by the regime,
Despite objections from everyone else
And the regime detains,
Peaceful youth supporting the opposition
Before charging them in the court martial,
And holding them in jail.

A shared psychosis afflicts the nation.

FOOT SOLDIERS

Fervent youth, they joined the campaign trail,
Believing in the cause,
For change and,
The birth of a new nation.
Driven on by conviction,
They faced the regime's wrath.

Sprayed with pepper spray, arbitrarily detained,
Many injured and others killed,
All for the clarion call.

Emboldened men and women, they emerge
From the riddled campaign trail,
Hardened by incarceration and losses,
Faces now aged,
Moulded by campaign trail trials.

Consciousness now raised,
Beyond sloganeering horizons,
Driven on by fervent energy.

They were sloganeering youth then,
But conscience adults now.

FORTY-TWO DAYS

Stay home, stay home,
You lazy miserable beggars,
Expecting hand outs from the dysfunctional regime,
Do not travel,
And spread the virus.

Stay home, stay home,
You non-essential people,
Not important enough to hold stickers,
Permitting essential travel.

What happens to the homeless,
And neglected street children,
Should they too, stay at home?
We are living in unusual times, you say
But do not provide any solutions,
Apart from saying,
Stay home for forty-two days.

FREEDOM IS IN SIGHT

Peaceful activists irritate the chief,
By singing hymns of freedom,
That he has banned,
From the airwaves.

Peaceful activists unsettle the chief,
By composing poems,
Of protest and defiance.

Peaceful activists annoy the chief,
By whipping his effigy,
In the middle of Kampala Road.

Peaceful activists scare the chief,
By dreaming of his departure,
And seeing panic engulf him,
As they march to the city square.

Peaceful activists expose the chief,
By sharing images of his misdeeds,
To the rest of the world.

Even though,
He arrests and charges peaceful youth,
With disturbing his peace and being public nuisances,
Freedom is in sight.

GRAND CITY ENTRY

Making several brief stop-overs,
And interacting with hordes,
Of rented supporters,
That cheer and salute him.
The cunning dictator,
Makes his grandiose entry,
Into the subdued city.

With his babyish face,
Covered with a face mask,
And signature white hat,
He smiles broadly whilst addressing
The rented crowd,
Through a microphone.

Consisting of both old and young,
Many in the crowd,
Do not wear face masks.

His young rival confined,
To his besieged home,
Not allowed visitors,
Or to even walk outside his home.

Throughout the campaigns,
He accused his young rival
Of being insensitive,
And spreading Covid-19,
By addressing gathered crowds.

The victory parade is a charade.
Only the dictator believes,
That he won the elections.

Happy Birthday

Congregating in a spacious glitzy tent,
Decadent and exuberant club of relatives,
Sing and dance,
To Fifty Cent's "In da club".
Go, go, go, go, go, go
Go shorty, it's your birthday
We gon' party like it's your birthday
And we gon' sip Bacardi like it's your
Birthday
And you know we don't give a xxxx,
It's not your birthday,
The speakers belt out.

Exotic brands of sweet chardonnays, Moet and Chandons, Rothschild collections,
And other expensive wines,
Litter the arranged tables,
As the extravagant, detached club
Cheer an excited high commissioner,
Drunkenly dancing away,
To the loud music.

At a private garden in a plush residence,
That could pass for,
An all-inclusive five-star holiday resort,
In Barbados, St Bartholomew's or the Canaries,
The merry making at its zenith.

A coterie of the “who is who”,
In the foreign affairs’ ministry,
And a retired army General present.
Current lockdown restrictions and
SOP’s not applicable,
To this privileged club,
Enjoying their fruits of the liberation war,
Their emancipation complete.

In the real world,
Outside the gigantic tent,
Menacing army trucks patrol the subdued streets and,
Intimidate the cowed mortals,
Ahead of the presidential swearing in ceremony,
A few days away.

Sodom and Gomorrah, the club of relatives
With stone cold hearts forged
In a furnace of avarice,
Have turned the broken nation into.

A nation where a single glass of the expensive wines
Littering their tables,
Can feed an orphaned child,
For a complete month.
A child that has never celebrated a birthday and for whom,
Every daylight is a victory.

Head Count

They arrive at the forecourt,
Are taken off the covered Jie fang truck and forced to squat,
On the hard soil,
Under the blistering sun,
For what is called "Fall in" or a head count.

Taken to their wards,
Where they are stripped of their clothes,
And forced to wear flimsy yellow shorts and shirts.

The poor soul's only crime was supporting the opposition.
Charged with unlawful assembly,
And quickly remanded by a court martial
To the newly built distant facility.

Their ordeal is far from over.
Their heads are shaved bare and,
Dreadlocks that have taken eons to grow,
Quickly snipped off.
Their stylish long beards are not spared.
The physical humiliation is meant to,
Break their revolutionary spirits.

Honourable Sir/Madam

You are in things!
You are a regime official,
At the apex of society,
Pulling strings like a puppet master,
For the regime clog to run.
You live atop Kololo Hill, Muyenga, Luzira or Munyonyo,
In the big fancy house,
While the downtrodden live in the ghettos,
And abandoned farmlands.
You own the big malls, tourist resorts and
Sit on boards of government parastatals and quangos,
In your bespoke tailor-made suits.
You hire unhinged bloggers and faded musicians,
As your praise singers.
You sit in parliament,
As a member of parliament,
Aware that your victory is tainted,
With stuffed ballots.
Honourable sir, Honourable madam, they call you,
As you chuckle inertly,
Knowing the truth,
That you are anything but honourable!
But a fraudster, imposter, and charlatan,
Keeping up appearances!

IMAGINE

Imagine,
As you sweat and shuffle past busy crowds,
In this psychotic city,
A future, without fickle soulless leaders,
But a serene future,
With leaders we all marvel at.

Imagine,
Not too far away,
A future, without ghastly pot holed roads,
But a dazzling future,
Of brightly lit neon streets and paved walkways.

Imagine,
A not-too-distant future,
Of smooth and wide roads,
With walkways provided for cyclists,
The blind and disabled,
To safely manoeuvre about as equals.

Imagine,
A future, where this mayhem will not exist,
Because, there will be order,
And the inept authorities,
Will have the traffic lights working,
While collecting and recycling disposed garbage.

Imagine,
A future, where this abused city,
Will be filled,
With landscaped green spaces,
And cobbled walkways.

Imagine,
A future, where you safely walk the streets,
Day or night,
Without enforcement officials hassling you.

Inside a Safe House

A heavy door and high walls,
Conceal the entrance,
To the overcrowded dark room without windows.
You can't tell,
Whether it is day or night.

Filled with hooded faces,
Emitting soft ruffled noises,
And the occasional clang,
Of the heavy door being flung open,
As new arrivals are thrust in.

The safe house is anything,
But a safe house!

IRON LADY

(Patricia Ssewungu, the lady that led a protest outside the Uganda embassy by Trafalgar square in April 2021)

In the withering cold spring and gushing winds
She forlornly lays on the cobbled walkway
With her raised miniscule hand
Supporting her bowed head.
Her fixed gaze,
Staring intently ahead.

Wrapped with a patterned blue duvet in a sleeping bag,
She cuts a desolate lone figure.
Dressed in a black leather jacket
With a pair of earphones
Dangling out of her zipped jacket,
Posters of various people
In different postures are carefully strewn
Across the cobbled walkway.

Some are casually dressed,
Whilst another is smartly clad
In a three-piece suit and red necktie
He could pass for a male model,
If not for the assault rifle that he carries.
In another, a heavy set, bald headed, aging man
Has a pistol tucked into his trousers.

The scarred back of a youthful man
Filled with white patches and black scabbing
Presumably from molten plastic
That has been allowed to drip onto his ebony skin
Is displayed on yet another poster.

Behind the lone but defiant lady,
Is an enclosed glass showroom
Displaying beautiful crested cranes,
"Ekyanzi" or a traditional gourd
And a mural on the wall
With the words,
"Birding YOUR UGANDA
THE PEARL OF AFRICA".

A poster of a seemingly at peace woman,
Asleep and wrapped in a shroud
With her still eyes wide open
Is strewn across the quiet walkway.

Next to the slain woman's poster,
Is a portrait of Nelson Mandela
With a crouched youngish man wearing a red shirt, red beret
And a raised clenched fist,
Facing Nelson Mandela.

A pair of casual blue shoes flimsily cast aside,
Next to iron lady's sleeping bag.
Iron lady unflinchingly looks straight ahead,
In deep thought,
Seemingly perturbed by the pictures before her.

The mural inside the glass showroom
Continues to promote
"Birding YOUR UGANDA
THE PEARL OF AFRICA"
As oblivious pedestrians walk past.

IS THIS FREEDOM?

Released with nothing,
But unshaken resolve,
From the rigid clutches,
Of General Gutti's court.

Ushered into a directionless maze,
Of a nation stumbling into a second lockdown.
Barred from leaving,
The confines of Kampala and Wakiso districts,
Now having to provide for themselves.
They have been released into,
One big open prison!!

IT'S NOT OVER

Elections are over,
And so is the violence,
With muted victory celebrations,
Because the people believe,
Their victory was subverted,
By the might of the gun.

It's not over though,
For those confined,
At the dictator's whims,
Unable to exercise their freedoms,
Or spend time with loved ones.

It's not over yet,
For those with broken limbs,
And scarred bodies,
Healing from torture,
With medical bills to foot,
And ailing in dilapidated hospitals.

It's not over yet,
For those with missing friends and relatives,
Who are the bread winners,
Held in the array of dungeons,
Of the numerous security outfits,
Unable to provide emotional and practical support,
Or pay their children's school fees,
Leaving their families struggling to cope.

It's not over yet,
For those who believed,
In the false promises made,
Promising a return to the rule of law,
Regular free and fair elections,
And an end to state tyranny.

It's not over yet,
For the haves and have not's,
Divided by wealth inequalities,
With the divisions more entrenched,
And animosity running deeper than ever before,
Leaving a sore and wounded nation.

It's now over,
For those unfortunate,
To have lost their precious lives,
Never to see a better nation,
Due to one man's insatiable greed for power,
And belief in the might of the gun,
Their precious blood,
Watering the seeds of a new nation.

JUDGE, JURY, AND EXECUTIONER

Police has a right to shoot you,
MURDEROUS.

If you reach a certain level of violence,
IRRATIONAL.

And you die for nothing,
DISPOSABLE.

Do it at your own risk,
UNACCOUNTABLE.

Warns, the snarling security minister.
We are all now aware,
Who the almighty,
Giver and taker of life is!

KAMPALA

Like a sea,
Accommodating a variety of sea animals,
Impoverished and wealthy residents,
Live side by side,
Like distressed bumblebees.

Kampala,
A city where the hustle is real,
In downtown Owino, Kiyembe, old taxi park,
And the bustling activity in thriving arcades and malls.

Kampala,
A divided city where the wealthy congregate,
In the upscale Kololo, Muyenga, and Nakasero areas,
Away from the downtown cacophony,
Of a human haze.

Kampala,
A city of seven hills,
Where different sects,
Perch onto different hills.

The Muslim Supreme Council,
In the imposing Gaddafi Mosque on Old Kampala hill.
The Kibuli Muslim Sect perching on Kibuli hill.
The Catholic Cathedral sitting atop Rubaga hill.
The Protestant Cathedral dominating Namirembe hill.

Kampala,
Where the wealthy are treated in the private Nakasero hospital.
While the struggling underclass are referred to the rundown
Kiruddu and Kawempe hospitals.

Kampala,
A melting pot of different cultures,
Indigenous and imported,
Spiced with a colonial and Asian marinade.

Kampala,
Where tradition is retained,
At the ancient king's burial grounds in the historic Kasubi tombs,
And the expansive king's palace at Lubiri.

Kampala,
A city where slay queens and socialites flock upscale clubs,
While ordinary patrons are content,
To patronise local Kafundas.

And yet,
This eclectic mix is what makes it,
The heartbeat of the nation.

KINGDOM WOES

Beneath the misty Ruwenzori mountains,
Lies the historical king's palace,
Of the Bakonjo people.
A proud and determined people,
Straddling the porous border,
Across two neighbouring countries.

An opposition stronghold,
With a reigning king on the throne,
Inherited from his ancestors.
A thorn in the flesh,
To the ruling party.

Led by the eccentric General Elweru,
With active body reflexes,
Like a teenager with Tourette's and ADHD,
Assembled forces ransack,
The king's palace,
Killing his subjects in cold blood,
And living the palace in ruins.

KITALYA MINI-MAX

In the midst of a distant flat land,
Lies the footstool of despair.
Released activists recount,
Tales of utter disillusionment.
Food deprivation, overcrowded wards,
Obese lice feasting on sweaty bodies,
Abusive OCs on a mission to humiliate,
And outbreaks of strange ailments.

Released activists remember,
The footstool of despair,
With hardened men breaking into,
Deep tears of heartache,
Scared by their arbitrary incarcerations.

Lament of Alphonse

Alphonse says,
One day at Pakalast in Makindye, a Boda boda rider told me
Alphonse, do you know that you entertain us?
We want to open our hearts to you
So that you know what's there.
Everything has it's time
But you mislead us.

Alphonse says,
I asked them, what should I do?

They replied,
You, Alphonse, are the one that can't see that these people
Are oppressing us using the gun
Are you the one that can't see that they want to tax us even more?
Are you the one that can't see that they are abducting our children?
Because you are building houses and driving nice cars
Because you have money,
You think that you will go with that money?

Alphonse says,
These questions hit me really hard
I made a video recording and wanted to cry
I was very emotional
I have done a lot to sabotage the opposition
I have done a lot to sabotage the struggle and
Prevent the change they want from happening.

Alphonse says,
When I sleep and search my heart, am troubled
I question, why am I doing all this
I look at Amin's regime, Obote's regime
Regimes come and go
This regime relies heavily on the gun
It has refused to solve the pressing issues
It is bribing people around the opposition leader
It is telling people that he is the problem, when that's not true.

Alphonse says,
Instead of changing the system and
Accepting that people are poor
Children are not going to school
The roads are in a poor state,
They are busy fighting the leader instead of solving people's problems.

Alphonse says,
I can't be happy when people see me as enjoying their money
I can't deny receiving money from them
It was for work that I did
But people in hospitals without medicine see me as stealing their money
Their anger is a curse
Whenever you drive by in a nice car,
They say, "Look at what they are doing with our money."

Alphonse says,
They don't know that you have worked,
They don't know that the government has its owners,
They don't know that you cannot come shouting,
They don't know that you are also looking for food,
We also have our own reasons why we go to them.

Alphonse says,
We are the most oppressed,
No one cares,
I remember our cooperatives which they destroyed
Yet they kept theirs
I want people to forgive me, so that my conscience is clear
They should deliver on service delivery.

My people say,
When you have quarrels in the market place,
On your way back, do not go arguing with strangers by the roadside.

LAMENT OF FERDINAND LUTA

(Police in Uganda on Monday arrested a man who flogged an effigy of the President on a busy road in the capital, Kampala. The man, Luta Ferdinand Male described himself to the police as an activist of a social movement - 16/02/2021)

Dragging a heavy dummy,
The nonchalant man with a leather-like whip,
Flogs the life size effigy.

He raises his hand and,
With all the muscular energy,
That he can muster,
Brings the whip down heavily,
On the immobile artefact,
Denouncing it for willingly,
Committing several transgressions.

"You rigged the elections,"
He bellows through a loud speaker.
"Stop kidnapping Ugandans,"
He rants at the unresponsive caricature,
That is lying in the middle of the busy Kampala thorough fare.

Onlookers cheer and shout,
In support of the bold man.
Many would pay to view,
For a real enactment of these scenes.

Would the dictator cry and scream,
In terror like his victims?
Would his skin tear and
Leave open wounds gushing with blood and lesions?

The protesting man is,
Swiftly arrested and carted off,
To the colonial era police station,
Straddling the capital city of,
The besieged republic and charged,
With creating a public nuisance of himself.

LAZARUS

(22-year-old Ronald Segawa left for dead in
the Mortuary at Mulago Hospital)

Motionless, his lifeless body lies,
On the cold slab,
In the grim mortuary.

Missing skin and deep wounds,
Pepper the wounded body,
Abandoned in the eerie room.

Plucked out finger nails,
And thick pus oozing out of his nose,
Expose the inhumane treatment,
That he faced.

Patchy face scarred by scabbing,
Above his right eye,
Indicate recent skin rupture,
Inflicted by heartless goons.

Supporting the opposition,
Was the crime that led to his abduction and torture,
By rogue enforcers.

That though unresponsive, busy attendants notice
Rigor mortis and lividity,
Haven't set in and move him to the ward for treatment.

A cannula is attached to a weak vein,
In his left arm and an intravenous drip,
Inserted into his nose.

He is alive after all,
Having survived the torture
Inflicted upon him by heartless security operatives.

LEGACY

In the not-too-distant future,
You will be looked at,
As the vanguard for the,
Peace, freedom and human rights,
Enjoyed by the nascent population.

Like the original twenty-seven soldiers,
That launched the struggle,
Against the prevailing anarchy,
And were welcomed as heroes,
Thrusting repetitive tales of their sacrifices,
Down our sore throats.

You will be invited,
To schools, colleges and universities,
Where you will,
Recount uncomfortable tales to awed audiences,
And narrate your ordeals,
Carrying them like badges of honour.

Like the vanquished liberators,
The chief, security minister and cadres,
That take every opportunity, state of the nation address,
Budget reading and swearing in ceremony,
To remind us of their skewed heroics,
In Luwero triangle and siege at river Katonga.

Brimming with confidence,
You will look the enthusiastic audience in the eye,
Narrate your ordeals at Kitalya prison,
Of feeding on strange posho,
"Fall in" parades in a squatting position and,
Your shenanigans with General Gutti.

You will be looked at,
As heroes and freedom fighters,
When you remain steadfast,
And not cave in,
To the crumbs dished out by the failing regime,
To tempt you away from the struggle.

Letter to General Gutti

Your hawkish face and glaring eyes,
Send shivers down my spine!
You sow pain and suffering,
To innocent, hounded and wounded youth.
Your court martial is a den of despair.
All rise, all rise,
As you enter, adorned with
Colourful gold stars and blood red lapels.
Obedient orderlies open doors for you.
You glare at the despairing faces
Stacked before you,
In the caged dock.
Your blazing wide eyes,
Devoid of empathy.
Adjourned, adjourned, you declare
To a date to be fixed,
Before shuffling your heavy frame,
Puffy cheeks and oversized jacket,
Out of the sham sitting.
Some of the haunted youth,
Clasp onto the thick Misbahas,
Hanging around their surly necks,
As their fingers gently straddle,
The next fat bead in prayer.
Faraway, from your sham court,
Raiders make away,
With one hundred and thirty heads of cattle,
From your expansive dairy farm in Napak.
Your orange farm is set ablaze.
The unexpected occurrences,
Perhaps a reminder,
That your gold stars and red lapels,
Are meaningless flowery decorations!

LOCKDOWN

Remember, the days before lockdown,
When you were free,
To travel and party,
As you pleased.

Remember the days before lockdown,
When you were free,
To attend college,
And complete your errands,
As you pleased.

With the lockdown,
The chief is confused,
And will return your freedom,
When he decides to!

LOCKDOWN BLUES

Chief, do you feel our pain?
Chief, do you feel our tears?
And yet, you plunge us into another lockdown,
Without providing any support.
No food parcels, no financial bailout, nothing at all!
You order us to stay at home,
But don't tell us how we shall survive.

Chief, do you feel our grief?
Chief, do you feel our agony?
You restrict movement of all vehicles,
Except for medical emergencies,
But don't tell us,
To which hospitals we shall go to,
Because, they are all full up.

Chief, what happened to the donations,
From well-wishers and foreign donors?
Remind us, why is there a shortage of oxygen supply?
We are numb,
Numb with pain,
From bereavements and anxiety.

Chief, where did it all go wrong?

LOST INNOCENCE

(Christopher Lubega, the face of child soldiers 1986)

Desperate, teary eyes glimpse straight ahead,
Hollow cheeks contour the developing face,
Thin lips curl together,
An oversized cap,
Engulfs the feeble head,
Completing the haunted look.

Clad in old camouflage fatigues,
That somehow fit,
The small developing frame.
Skinny fingers straddle a heavy assault rifle,
Wrapped around his young shoulders by a leather strap.

Not more than eleven years of age,
"Kadogo" or child soldier,
Is part of the charismatic rebel leader's escort.

Standing upright in the tall, dry elephant grass,
Under clear blue skies,
"Kadogo" has lived through experiences,
Many adults will not endure in a lifetime.

Comforting family hugs a faraway dream,
Childhood games alien,
And school attendance a fairy tale,
His innocence taken,
Through scourged battles,
That his developing brain doesn't comprehend.

His childhood shackled by the theatre of war.

"Lover's" Reply to Alphonse

She says,
Do you think he is normal?
He has a problem
Some people were born prematurely.
He was buried but his head stayed outside,
That's why you see that he is damaged.
His brain is messed up.

She says,
Alphonse is not okay because a person can't behave like that!
He is not civilised and is very uncouth,
Even when angry, a Muslim cannot eat pork!
Why is he apologising?
What has he done?
He has a problem
He is absent minded.

Lover says,
He got money and bought properties!
Why is he talking?
What job does he do?
What does he promote?
Has he ever promoted you?
He used to promote his other women.
He is a conman.

Lover says,
He thinks by hurling insults, the chief shall call him
The chief isn't interested in such issues
The chief is interested in developing the kingdom
Alphonse is not principled
Why is he apologising?

Lover says,
He should keep quiet
Time until politics is finished
He should do other things
He has become a problem.

Lover's Response to Alphonse

Lover says,
Alphonse is foolish
He is too negative
He cannot see anything good.
We are going to be like Dubai
Can't he see how it has developed,
Because of oil?

Lover says,
Even our children, go there to work
As maids for Arab families.
They earn money which they send back home.

Lover says,
What was Dubai thirty years ago?
It was just a desert!
But Alphonse can't see this,
He is just idle and likes criticizing everything.

Lover says,
We shall build skyscrapers,
Like they did in Dubai.
Imagine they are in a desert,
But our people leave this beautiful country,
To go and work in a desert.
It is because,
Where there is oil, there is money.

Lover says,
He talks of Nigeria,
But their leaders are selfish
Their minds are upside down.
The people are everywhere,
Even here in Kampala,
You see them in every business
I don't know why they have itchy feet!

Madness

An entire nation is mad,
Ruled by a madman.
Mad people sit and watch,
A mad parliament vetting,
Mad ministers to positions,
In a mad cabinet.

A madman appoints mad opposition politicians,
As ministers in his mad cabinet,
That promise to serve and protect,
The mad nation,
As a mad parliamentary speaker,
Dressed in black robes and a white wig,
Like a mad undertaker,
Chairs the mad session.

A mad Army General,
Ignores pleas for bail,
From remanded suspects,
And sends more unrepresented youth,
On remand to a mad prison,
As a mad Attorney General and mad Chief Justice,
Look on, like lambs in an abattoir!

It takes a mad person,
To try and make sense,
Of a mad nation.

Marching to State House

We are marching to state house,
The seat of power, they chant.

Like an endless nightmare,
Wolves in black,
Lie in wait,
Picking them off like grasshoppers,
In the dead of the night,
Or brazenly off the streets during daylight,
Loading them into,
White drone people carriers or super custom vehicles,
Before blindfolding them,
And dumping them at CMI offices in Mbuya,
Where they are tortured,
Forced to wear red berets on their heads,
And raise clenched fists,
Their symbols of defiance.
Their pictures are then taken as evidence of subversion,
Before they are paraded,
Before the court martial,
Charged with being in possession of military stores,
And indefinitely remanded to Kitalya prison.

Mr Security Minister

Security Minister says,
He does not understand why people are demonstrating,
For one person that has been arrested and,
That person isn't the first to be arrested.
"I have no apologies for anyone killed in the protests," says Mr Security Minister

Security Minister says,
Internet and Boda boda services are luxuries,
We can live without.
They are innovations initiated 'just yesterday',
That are becoming a threat to the public.
"We have previously lived without them and stayed safe," he says

Security Minister says,
Wrong elements are taking advantage of the internet.
It poses a threat to national security
They are taking advantage of it to incite the public.

The members of the e-trade association remain mute,
Listening as,
Mr Minister waffles on.
Their businesses have stalled.
They are reliant on ecommerce and,
Boda bodas to deliver their orders.

Security Minister has a history of shutting things down
He closed the road to his home to the public and,
Is the only one permitted access to the road.

Security Minister says,
"Don't abuse our forces,
We all have wrangles but we don't use force
We have worked hard to build the image of the force."
The humiliated fellow officer looks aghast.

Security Minister loves dancing and singing
But is always out of step with the rhythm
He swings his hands aimlessly
Flinging them from left to right,
High and low
Bumping into others before
Suddenly walking off the dance floor

Security Minister is a law onto himself
He controls his ministry
The same way
He dances to the music rhythm.

Nightmares of a dictator

Sweating and trembling,
He wakes from the deep slumber.
Rattled, he sits up on the wide mahogany bed,
As heavy beads of sweat,
Trickle down his soft cheeks,
Pouring onto the expensive silk linen.
A strange dream tormented him in his sleep.
"They cannot assemble at city square," he had shouted
"Afande, they are tens of thousands," SFC commander had replied.
"Are they chanting people power slogans?" he had asked
"Yes, they are," commander had responded
"And the bishops are walking with bibles in front of them," commander had continued.
He gets off the bed and checks underneath it,
Looking for his freshly oiled AK47 rifle.
"I will shoot them all," he murmurs to himself.

Disturbing visions had appeared in another dream.
Visions of a small democratically elected parliament,
Debating issues of national importance,
Without his interference.
This had sent tremors down his spine.

In another vision,
The people were joyful and content,
Construction of the new hospital at Lubowa was complete,
And delivering free healthcare to all.
The city was orderly,
Without traffic congestion,
While the encroachers on the wetlands,
Had been relocated,
And flooding had stopped in the city.
"How did they achieve this?" he had screamed in his sleep.
The soldiers were no longer patrolling the streets,
The LDU's had stopped whipping people,
And been disbanded.

This had made him gasp,
Nearly choking him in his sleep.

In another vision,
After elections, a former leader hands over
To a newly elected leader.
This had really struck at his heart,
Almost giving him a heart attack.
"Chairman, chairman," he had screamed at the electoral commission chief
"Who declared the results?
Why was the swearing in ceremony allowed to take place?
Who had tallied the results?
Couldn't the boxes have been stuffed with pre-ticked ballots?"
These questions had disturbed his sleep.
"Idiots," he screamed,
"Who hands over power?"
"Shush, shush, you are shouting mzee,
Are you okay?" Maama sleeping next to him had asked.

Fully awake now,
He collects his AK47 rifle from underneath his bed,
And rests it by his pillow,
Before returning to his sleep.

No Bail for Daring to Hope

There is no peace,
For those who are non-violent,
And hope for peaceful transition.

The prisons fill up,
With those yearning for transition,
Because they dare,
And look towards the dawn of a new era.

Committed to prison by a partisan court martial,
That hears civil cases,
The court martial refuses to grant them bail,
And commits them to prison indefinitely.

No Closure in Death

After holding prayers in the upscale church,
Pall bearers carry his body,
Towards the exit.

Before they can place it inside the waiting hearse,
Energetic young men snatch and place it
Onto a waiting vehicle,
That scurries away.

Grieving mother argues,
Her son cannot be buried at his in laws,
Insisting traditional culture dictates that he must be interred with his ancestors.

Grieving wife disagrees,
"And a man will leave his father and mother and,
the two shall become one".
She arranges for his internment in her home village.

The impasse carries on.
A generational clash of tradition and emancipation.
The vehicle with the spirited remains is intercepted,
And the spirited remains returned to the funeral company.

Even in death,
Closure is elusive.

"No comment"

"No comment," responds the sneering man,
When asked about enforced disappearances.
"No comment," answers the old man,
When asked about the rampant murders.
"You are a refugee from a neighbouring country," he derides a commission official,
As he calmly sips from a cold glass of water.
The stubborn aging man,
Was a central figure in the deposed regime.
Completing his fall from grace,
The interrogation is broadcast on the lone television station.
Set up to delve into past violations by the new order,
The commission's terms conveniently,
Exclude violations by rebel groups that conflicted with those in power.
After his appearance before the commission,
The proud and entitled man is ferried to the notorious Luzira prison.
Though deeply divisive and unpopular,
The disgraced old man did not personally participate,
In the rampant atrocities that took place.
Broken by his spell in prison,
The fallen old man passes on,
Shortly after his release.

NO PEACE

For those that are non-violent,
And hope for peaceful transition,
There is no peace.

Prisons fill up with those,
Yearning for transition because,
They dared to look towards the dawn of a new era.

Committed to prison by a court martial,
That continues hearing trumped up cases
That belong to civil courts.

The court martial commits them to prisons,
That continue to hold them indefinitely.

Not My Voice

(After "Not My Bones" by Marilyn Nelson)
(In January 2021, Musician Nubian Li was imprisoned for
his opposition to prevailing injustices by the regime)

This voice wasn't mine.
His songs are music to my ears.
Dark mahogany like a Nubian,
His mellow voice transcends,
The harsh beats of his music,
An epoch to prevailing injustices.

His voice now silenced,
By the walls of the grim prison walls,
A vessel for emancipation,
Is how the oppressed,
Receive his songs.
He carries the burden of the oppressed,
While he sings as a prophet.
This voice wasn't mine.

You can take a man's body,
But you can't silence his voice.
That's like taking away the microphone,
While the speakers continue playing.
One thing that you will learn,
The walls of the grim prison wards,
A testament to your impunity.
This voice wasn't mine.

You can take a man's body,
But his music plays on.
It broadcasts on the internet,
On the airwaves and in social gatherings.
You can evoke pain,
You can hurt his family,
But like seasons come and go,
This too shall pass.
This voice wasn't mine.

They fret and stay awake,
Plotting abductions and incarcerations,
Without realising that,
They, too, are behind grim prison walls.
This voice wasn't mine!

Nouveau Riche Children

Nouveau riche children,
Take their anointed seats at the high table.
Sprang from the efforts of duped peasants,
Their quasi-liberator parents,
Self-anointed heroes of the civil wars,
That plagued the edgy nation,
Quick to remind all of,
Kabamba, where the war was launched,
Luwero triangle, where they survived ferocious attacks,
River Kabamba, where they fought scourged battles,
Bibia, where they repulsed attacks from across the border,
Corner Kilak, where they subdued an insurgency,
Lukoola, where they concealed their presence.

Nouveau riche children,
Strategically placed in sensitive positions,
To entrench the rule of selected heroes,
Masquerading as patriots,
That love the nation,
More than anyone else.

Nouveau riche children,
Now tax collectors at the dreaded Revenue Authority,
Judges and Attorneys in the Judiciary,
Commanders in the Armed Forces,
Ambassadors in the Foreign Affairs Ministry,
Administrators in the Road's Authority.

Nouveau riche children,
Entitled, democracy averse and out of touch,
Chauffeur driven in gas guzzling four-wheel SUV's,
On tiny potholed dirt roads,
From their high walled compounds,
As they plan for the muzzled,
Unwashed, beggars, peasants and downtrodden.

OH DEAR, PASTOR

Oh dear, Pastor
You were adored in your day
But that's gone now.
You lost it
With your utterances
And distortions of the Bible
Which had made
Your respect blown away
All for what?

Women, bras and money
Now your motivation.
To your sheep,
The limelight more worthy
Even to the ruling powers
Your influence now waned
Worthless now.

Oh dear, Pastor
You abandoned your rib
And offspring
Took another partner
And her child
Without completing
The desired religious sacraments.
Society now judges you.

Oh dear, Pastor
Your sermons now astray
About rides and houses
That belong to others
And yet,
You too own
Expensive rides.
Pious pastor,
What would the Lord say?

Oh, dear Pastor,
On the pulpit, your words get in the way
Of the message.
To all and sundry,
You proclaim her failings and health condition
While forgetting about taming the tongue,
And not passing judgement.

Oh, dear Pastor,
Your sheep from whom you collect tithes
Worship in a leaking shack,
That you call a church.
When it rains, it pours on them
While you shack up in a glitzy mansion
With your new catch.

Oh, dear Pastor,
Envy is wickedness.
Take a pause and look at
Your sheep's desires.
Your loyalty to earthly rulers
Shouldn't blind you,
To your people's desires.
Let the people be.

Oh, Uganda, Land of Grief

(After Oh, Uganda, Land of Beauty)

I

Oh, Uganda! May the scourge leave thee,
We drink our chalice of pain from thy hand;
Disunited, mired in conflict,
We've always been.

II

Oh, Uganda! The land of upheaval,
Mockery and trauma, we receive,
And with poverty,
Our people's hand,
In grief and turmoil,
We live.

III

Oh, Uganda! The land that grates us,
By duplicity and mire.
For our fraught lives,
We've always been,
The shame of Africa's depth.

"OIL PIPELINE"

(The oil pipeline is nearly complete covering thousands of miles
From Kabaale in Uganda to Tanga port in Tanzania)

Alphonse is curious,
Why does it have to cover that distance
And yet Mombasa port is nearer?
Mombasa is nearly half the distance
And most of our imports and exports go through there anyway,
Wouldn't it have cost less to build?
I understand it is taking a longer route through Bukoba
And yet it would even have been a shorter distance
Had it been built through Lake Victoria.
I think someone is taking a commission,
Like they always do.

Alphonse says,
It is going to cause us more problems,
I hear the problems in Nigeria are because of oil.
Isn't that why there was war in Biafra?
The Igbos are not happy,
Because the oil has not benefitted their area.
They are ignored and yet the oil comes from their area.

Alphonse says,
I am worried about the Banyoro and Acholi,
From whose area the oil is going to be drilled.
They might feel like the Igbos and this will cause problems.
I don't think the Acholi will keep quiet
While they see other areas developing from the oil revenue,
I'm scared for this kingdom.

Alphonse says,
When Ken Saro- Wiwa spoke up in Nigeria,
They killed him.
I'm worried this oil is going to bring us problems.
We have many problems already,
But no one cares.

Alphonse says,
I don't think we can benefit anything.
In 1998, when the national debt was abolished,
What did our leaders do?
They borrowed more money.
Now our debt repayments exceed fifty percent
Of the national budget.

Alphonse says,
We have the same issues with electricity.
Nalubaale, Bujagaali, Karuma, Ayago
All these power stations have been built
And what have we benefitted? Nothing!
The electricity is still very expensive
And yet it's exported to neighbouring states
That pay less for the same electricity!!

Alphonse says,
They destroyed all the falls to build the power stations
All the beauty is gone.
They were even going to build a power station in the National Park
And yet most of the people
Still don't have electricity
While those that have it,
Are still load shaded.

Alphonse says,
We are looked at as cash cows
To be milked by paying these high prices.
They don't value us.

Alphonse says,
In the villages, the people still cook with firewood
Because they can't afford
To pay for electricity.
They even charge them,
To connect to the power grid
Yet they are very poor,
And live off the food grown in their gardens.
How shall they afford electricity?

Alphonse says,
I understand others are turning away from oil
And turning to clear fuel
What is clear fuel?
I think they are late,
Because they have always known
That the oil is there.
Isn't that why the area was made a game park?

Alphonse says,
What will happen to the animals now?
Won't the flames and traffic frighten them?
Or when the oil leaks,
Won't it poison their food?
If the pipeline catches fires,
How shall they stop the fire?
The fire brigade still has Bedford trucks built in the fifties.
They couldn't even put out a fire at the university.

Alphonse says,
I think the oil will finish off tourism
No one will come to look at a pipeline
Or refinery spewing fire.

Alphonse says,
This kingdom frightens me
I hear many things,
But find everything confusing.
Am frightened,
I don't know what to do.

OLD GUARD

They despise us,
Because we remind them,
Of their ten-point programme,
From which they deviated.
They call us traitors,
Up to no good,
Still clasping onto their lofty premises.
They don't like us,
Because we do not agree,
With their ways.
Dissenters, they call us,
Out to subvert the revolution,
For which they paid a heavy price in blood.
When we tell them to retire,
Or arrange for a peaceful transition,
They say,
Revolutionaries do not retire.
They call us biological substances,
That should be exterminated,
For the sake of the revolution.
Have you read,
"Sowing the mustard seed," they ask,
No longer keen on,
The ten-point programme, their liberation bible.

Now aging and greying men,
In their evening years,
With weak bones, potbellies and old people illnesses,
They are accustomed to being worshipped,
As idols by greedy praise singers.
When we tell them to retire,
They enter a state of panic,
Like the ones before them,
Whom they replaced!

OLD TRICKS

The chief's ways are archaic.
By charging activists before the court martial,
And holding them at Kitalya, Kigo and other prisons,
He believes that he will curtail,
Their cries for freedom!

The chief's ways are archaic.
By bribing opportunists,
And rewarding schemers,
He believes that he will stop,
The craving for liberty!

The chief's ways are archaic.
By acting with an iron fist,
And relying on his myriad of armed forces,
He believes that he will suppress,
The hungry and determined youth!

The chief's ways are archaic.
By manipulating the spread of the pandemic,
And hiding behind lockdowns and SOP's,
He believes that the passion,
For human rights and good governance,
Will fizzle out!

Civil defiance and peaceful protests,
Ridicule his intransigence.
A constant reminder,
His ways are archaic!

ORDER! ORDER! MR. SPEAKER

Endorsed by the Central Executive Committee,
As the sole candidate,
For the position of Speaker of Parliament,
You posture as a loyal cadre.

With suspect credentials,
Sleazy politicians are no longer a surprise.
Grovelling before new members of parliament,
And gyrating the Bwola dance,
To the rhythm of the chief's bul ker drumbeat,
Whom you call a promise keeper,
As you heap imaginary praises to him,
And leave him cringing at your incantations.

Lies, lies!
Everyone knows,
Including your pompous self.
Where is the democracy you allude to?
You nearly lost your life during student protests,
To the chief's bullets,
But now forget those turbulent times!

Weren't you an activist then?
Or those memories are too traumatic to recall,
Since you now sit at the high table,
Eating kwon cal, opegu, gwana, and dek-ngo!

Even your kinsmen say,
You lost the previous elections in your home county,
Because they saw through you,
Only for you to be declared the winner!

When I came to Kampala,
People were walking to work,
But walking to work now is a form of demonstration, you say.
Spare us your drivel!

Scrounger, scrounger!
Living off our taxes,
And yet, you mock us,
With your skewed memories.

Tough biker,
You call yourself,
Riding a big fancy bike we bought for you.
You are not ashamed to bend over and hold the handles,
Exposing your humongous rear end,
That looks like a horse's behind!

Your kinsmen are troubled,
And yet you pay scant regard to their trauma.
Dealt a heavy hand by fate,
You remain unempathetic.
Instead, you continue eating Lapena and Malakwang,
As you fatten your shiny cheeks and fat bums,
That you display in those tight fitting jeans you wear,
As you ride your big fancy bike.

Ladit,
There is no doubt you are very intelligent,
But you galling hypocrisy ruins a brilliant mind!

PAIN OF A MOTHER

(Unnamed woman cries for her missing son)

Government,
Will you rule over trees?
When our children are in prison?
And yet,
We have searched the prisons,
And cannot find our children?

Our children are missing.
Mr. President, when you are sworn in,
Will you ask Christians to pray for you?
Should they pray for you?
When our children are missing?

Don't you have a merciful heart?
A heart that has compassion for our children,
And yet you are a parent?

PARTING SHOTS

At the handover ceremony,
In the stuffy boardroom,
Security Minister tells assembled journalists,
It is time the chief prepares for a smooth transition.
It is our duty to save him from being a dictator,
As his amazed replacement looks on.
The one who does not take good advice brews bad beer,
Teetotaller Security Minister continues.
We should save him from that problem.
It is our duty to save him from hubris syndrome,
Teetotaller Security Minister states.
Delivering the coup de grace,
Before breaking into a nostalgic war song,
And handing over office,
To his bewildered replacement.

PATRONS OF THE LAND

Lakes, lakes everywhere,
The great lakes region, they call it.
A nation formed around lakes,
Lakes form the nation's borders.
Lake Victoria - the eastern and southern border with Kenya and Tanzania.
Lake Albert - the western border with Congo.
Lake Kyoga - straddling the central and northern region.

Mountains, mountains, everywhere,
The Great Rift Valley, they call it,
Formed by tectonic plate movements within the earth's crust.
Mount Ruwenzori – the western border with Congo.
Mount Elgon – the eastern border with Kenya.
Muhavura ranges – the south western border with Rwanda and Congo.
Mount Moroto – the north eastern border with Kenya and Sudan.

Lakes and mountains,
Places of sanctuary, adventure, and hostility.
When the then rebel chief sought to flee the country,
He crossed over to Kenya through Lake Victoria.
When rebels seek to destabilise the country,
They cross over from Congo through Lake Albert.
When Speke the explorer sought the source of the River Nile,
He tracked it to Lake Victoria.
When tribes fled hostile warrior neighbours,
They settled along the lake shores.

Lakes and mountains,
Tourist attractions and spiritual guardians.
Long before the advent of new religions,
Natives revered the lakes.
Mukasa – the lake guardian with a shrine on Lake Victoria.
Nature seeking tourists throng lakes and mountains,
Tracking gorillas, chimpanzees and ascending the mountain tops.

Lakes and mountains,
With wide flowing rivers,
Patrons of the lands for which,
We come as pilgrims,
To pay homage during our lifetimes.

PEELING THE ONION

In the thin outer layer, lies an amiable, chatty parent,
Hobnobbing with bishops and pastors.
As he preaches peace, unity and Pan-Africanism,
To entranced followers.

Within the next layer, lies a democratic leader,
Reliant on the three arms of government,
And holding consultations with other party leaders.

Peel deeper, and within this layer,
Lies a cunning and wily operator,
Reliant on subterfuge and not hesitating to bribe adversaries,
Or make late night phone calls,
Behind colleagues backs to advance his interests.

Near the core, lies a wayward and threatening layer,
That threatens to crush adversaries,
When a sense of insecurity creeps in.
Like a leopard toying with its prey,
He makes it clear there are repercussions for dissent.

In the inner most layer is his core,
Within which anger and lawlessness lie.
Ready to humiliate or murder adversaries.
Steeped in violence,
Meted out by his security outfits that abduct and torture dissidents.

PERKS

You are a member of the ruling party,
And drive along Bombo road,
On the way to your countryside residence.

You look through the window,
And see hungry opposition supporters in Kawempe,
Dejectedly walking by the roadside,
To their menial and petty jobs.

You are a member of the ruling party,
Chauffer driven in a wide, air-conditioned SUV,
Flanked by an armed bodyguard,
Rushing to attend a party meeting.
You see miserable opposition supporters,
Sweating in the sweltering heat,
Displaying their crafted bedframes by the roadside,
To passing trade.

You are a member of the ruling party,
Socialising with other party members,
At the exclusive golf club,
Dressed in your whites,
Like a Covid-19 undertaker,
As the opposition supporting waiters,
Expectantly attend to your every whim,
Hoping to receive tips,
To supplement their meagre earnings.

You are a member of the ruling party,
Taking your wife and daughters to the airport,
To catch their flight,
To Europe, South Africa or USA,
Where the daughters attend college,
As the opposition supporting road sweepers,
Are busy at work,
Sweeping the newly completed dusty express way.

You are a member of the ruling party,
Watching news on the wide sixty-four inch flat screen at home,
As Eddie Mutwe, Nubian Li, Bobi Young, Sky soldier, Kampala Lookman,
And other activists,
Flash across the news,
Handcuffed to each other,
Are unloaded from the covered donated Jie fang truck,
Like secret cargo,
To appear before the military court martial.

You enjoy being a member of the ruling party,
And don't understand,
Why others are opposed to it.
Life is sweet,
As a member of the ruling party,
But you are sitting on a time bomb!

PIRITON

Piriton,
Treatment for allergic reactions,
And skin rashes,
That develop as a side effect,
To chloroquine treatment for malaria
And other ailments.

Piriton,
Renders the patient,
Lethargic and sleepy.

Piriton,
The label given to,
Dull teachers and students,
Engaging in boring conversations
At school by other students.

Piriton,
The memories come alive,
When he rumbles on,
In his addresses and press conferences
About "My army", "My oil", "9th battalion",
"Commandos", and threatens to
"Crush them".

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

Activists imprisoned by the aging dictator,
Are made to face spirit crushing conditions,
A medieval tyrant,
Would approve of.

Denied basic amenities,
Their rights are violated,
In unimaginable ways,
Away from prying eyes.

The human warehouse,
Storing the dictator's prey,
Cramps the hundreds in bare rooms,
In which they are forced to sleep on the hard floor.

Taking turns to use the single toilet to ease themselves,
In which flushing water is a luxury,
Many succumb to the diarrhoea outbreak.

Forced to adorn,
Flimsy yellow shorts and shirts
That have been worn by others before them,
A strange rash afflicts their wilting bodies,
Though their spirits remain firm.

Bites from unforgiving bugs and mites,
Irritate and keep them awake throughout the cold night.
They experience the dictator's bite.

At the dictator's human warehouse,
Ailing captives are issued only painkillers,
And routine antibiotics by a shambolic sick bay.

The incarcerated hundreds haven't committed any crimes,
But are prisoners of conscience,
Held at the whims of a dictator.

Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah,
Patrick Lumumba, the vindictive tyrant isn't.

PROMISE KEEPER

You promised us,
An end to election rigging,
And you delivered!

You promised us,
An end to state inspired murders,
And you delivered!

You promised us,
A return of democracy,
And you delivered!

You promised us,
An end to corruption,
And you delivered!

You promised us,
Regular change of leadership,
And you delivered!

You promised us,
A middle income status,
And you delivered!

You promised us,
An end to nepotism,
And you delivered!

You promised us,
A united East Africa,
And you delivered!

You promised us,
Prosperity for all,
And you delivered!

You promised Jacob,
The position of Honourable speaker,
And this time,
YOU DELIVERED!

That is why,
He calls you a promise keeper!

QUELLING PROTESTS

They are in panic and act irrationally,
By not respecting the sanctity of life.
To pause and think,
Is a hard labour sentence.
They react impulsively,
Relying on their guns,
Their brains frozen like blocks of ice.
Quicker and easier,
To pull the trigger,
Killing and maiming,
Protesters and bystanders without distinguishing.

RAPE OF A NATION

They cheered,
As they named a road after him
Mackinnon Road they called it
Where senior civil servants' plush residences are located
Though many lately turned into upscale offices.
William Mackinnon and his IBEA Company
Recipients of an imperial royal charter
To develop "African" trade
By raising taxes from locals
In areas controlled by the empire.

And then,
Arriving with the fabled Maxim gun,
Before mapping the area for exploitation,
Frederick Lugard, pioneer of indirect rule
And use of conscripted labour,
To complete the construction of the railway,
Assist with the plundering of resources from the interior
And establishment of a "Protectorate" over the nascent territory.

They cheered,
Seventy years later,
Receiving independence from imperial rule,
And control of the economy, or so they thought.
An economy dominated by the savvy Asian community,
Whose forbears had been gang pressed into constructing the railway
While the locals traded in the shanty outskirts such as Katwe.
Attempting to even the imbalances,
Milton Obote mulled with socialist ideas,
Leading to instability and his ouster.

They cheered even more,
Xenophobic though posturing as a nationalist,
The rise of Idi Amin,
Who believed it was time for the locals
To take control of the economy.

With ninety days' notice, he expelled an entire community
Blaming it for-
"Milking the cow without feeding it",
Whilst killing locals opposed to his brutal rule.

Again, they cheered,
The inconsequential return of Milton Obote,
Whose reign was marred with violent conflict,
"Magendo" or smuggling flourishing,
As "Kibanda boys" controlled the illegal trade in foreign exchange,
With Milton Obote wallowing in glasses of red label whisky.
Five years later, he again was ousted.

Promising a return of properties to the expelled community,
And to restore order,
The new regime soon turned corruption into an art form.
"Ghost soldiers", "Ghost valley dams", "junk helicopters",
The scandals mushroomed,
With the rape of the nation continuing unabated.
Decadent officials gleefully watched as prime properties
Were distributed to their acolytes and "Ghost" returnees.

Oil, the new victim of this rape
With its production set to begin,
A pipeline constructed and,
Companies whose shareholding remains a mystery granted exclusive rights,
To the construction and drilling.
The victim now ready to be plundered.

The ordinary person remains
An oblivious bystander,
Mired in excruciating poverty
While the nation bleeds.

RICH TO FIGHT CORRUPTION

Children descended from movement cadres and the rich,
Will be hired to fight corruption,
Because children of the poor are greedy,
And under a lot of pressure, says the village chief.
That is a son of a simple nomad,
Raised by a benevolent family,
Now forgetting his humble origins.

From looting state coffers,
The rich have accumulated their wealth,
But he believes,
Their children do not know the source of their wealth.

How will their parents' wealth be confirmed?
Will the children submit their parents' bank statements at interview?
The village is bleeding,
And yet it is run by the wealthy,
That were once impoverished.

Umeme, Umeme, the chief laments,
Deceived me because the prices of electricity,
Remain high despite surplus electricity production.
Who manages Umeme?
It is wealthy crooks,
Whose children he would like to employ.
Ministry of Finance, is a den of thieves,
He moans,
Managed by wealthy crooks,
Whose children he would like to employ.

We remember their haughty, haunted skinny looks,
In 1986 when they arrived,
But they now champion wealth over talent!

Listening to the chief speak,
You will understand,
The state of this village!

Sanctity of Hair

Hair is beauty,
That defines one's view of themselves.
Some like it short, others prefer it long,
Some braid their hair,
While others go bold.

Hair is power,
Like the mane of a lion,
That is gentle but fearless.
Emperor Selassie kept manned lions as pets.

Hair is strength,
Rastafarians believe,
And weakness when shaved off.
Like Samson that lost his power,
When Delilah shaved his hair off.

Hair is also mourning,
Cut off during a period of bereavement,
A symbol of loss,
And new beginnings without loved ones.

The young activists' hair,
Long stylish beards,
And dreadlocks that have taken ages to grow,
Are shaved off by the regime,
Intent on humiliating its captives.

A state of mourning and loss prevails,
Mourning lost freedoms,
Mourning rigged elections,
Mourning the regime's loss of popularity.

SCARRED NATION

We stood and watched in awe,
An endless sea of exuberant faces,
With a bible in your raised right arm,
You took oath before Justice Sir Peter Allen,
On the steps of the parliamentary building.
Addressing the swaying surging crowd,
"This is not a mere change of guards,
But a fundamental change," you said
"Uganda's problem is leaders,
Who want to overstay in power," you said
The shootings stopped too,
With a ragtag disciplined army by your side.
The civil servant's houses in Kololo,
Were occupied by your officials.
Barter trade you preached,
As you exchanged coffee for Nissan laurels.
You devalued the currency,
And everyone surrendered their thirty percent to you.
Life continued as normal.
After all, you were the liberators and could think for us all.
Privatisation, you preached
As essential government entities,
Were placed in private hands for profit.
This should have been a warning for things to come,
But we all were entranced by your charisma.

The world pandered to you.
A new breed of African leader, they called you.
Even with this adoration,
You were never at ease,
Worried, power could slip away.
Northern region in your sight,
With unfinished business, as people from the north
Dominated the defeated army.
The Baganda's incessant demands,
Also worried you.
For the ordinary person,
Life remained the usual run of the mill existence,
With conditions toughening,
As you broadened the tax base.

With increased resentment to your rule,
You did not hesitate to crack hard on dissent.
Reminding all naysayers,
They could now sleep in peace,
Because of your efforts.
We watched the news,
As the newsreader announced that,
Over a thousand rebels had been massacred at corner Kilak.
Which seemed too far away,
To concern most of us.
Who gloats over killing his kinsmen?
You launched a security lockdown,
Placing the entire northern region under martial law,
Cutting it off from the rest of the country.

Thousands displaced from their lands as a result,
And placed in camps where starvation and death were ripe.
Am fighting a rebellion, you told us
But it didn't take long,
For news of the massacres to filter out.
Hundreds locked in a wagon and suffocated to death in Mukura.
Wayward commanders were responsible, you told us.
Though you never punished them.

You moved away from the movement system,
And embraced multi-party democracy.
Organising elections that were a charade.
Stuffed ballot boxes and a partial electoral commission,
Guaranteeing your victory.
Six elections later,
You still hold a bible and swear yourself in.
Your wide eyes, now turned to the youth,
Especially from the central region.
How dare they not support you?
So, you abduct them,
And try them in the court martial,
Before holding them indefinitely in your jails.

We stand by and watch again,
Powerless to do anything,
Yet our silence,
Has bred a monster.

SCOURGE OF CORRUPTION

You will not understand corruption,
Until you reach pensionable age
And try to collect your pension.
You fail to receive it because
It's being received on your behalf
By a stranger.

You will not understand corruption,
Until you try to process
Your passport and fail
Having queued up all day
Because the officials
Ignore you,
Expecting a bribe from you.

You will not understand corruption,
Until you turn up at court
Expecting justice,
But find your file missing
Because the officials
Have shelved it,
Expecting a bribe from you.

You will not understand corruption,
Until the police stop you
For a traffic violation,
Remove your number plate
From the vehicle,
Before requesting you
To make a money transfer
Onto their mobile money accounts
For them to return the plate.

You will not understand corruption,
Until you are pregnant,
Attend the hospital to give birth,
Only to be turned away,
Because you have not
Brought a "mama kit" with you
Of gloves, gauze and sheets
Needed for the delivery.

You will not understand corruption,
Until you arrive at the airport,
Are prevented from boarding the flight,
Because you haven't
Brought a yellow fever card,
But a request for $50 dollars is made,
For you to proceed.

You will not understand corruption,
Until you see,
The massive convoy,
That includes a mobile toilet and ambulance,
Speed past stunted children,
Carrying heavy jerry cans on their heads,
Filled with unsafe water,
Collected from muddy springs.

You will not understand corruption,
Until you see expensive fighter jets
Perform cartwheels in the sky,
While cancer patients
Are turned away from hospital,
Because the only radiotherapy machine broke down,
And was never repaired.

Corruption is a tumour,
That slowly consumes an entire society,
That remains oblivious,
To its destructive ability.

SHADOW

Though from poor nomadic stock,
The chief looks down on impoverished ghetto youth,
And yet,
They are both veterans of a similar struggle,
To escape the fringes of societies,
And reach the Promised Land.

Filled with self-empowerment ideals,
Despondent communities are emboldened,
With their rhetoric,
To believe in themselves,
With conviction that,
One day,
They too will reach the Promised Land.

He taunts and torments,
Oppressed activists locked in a struggle for survival,
Similar to the one,
From which he escaped,
Only that the time and setting are different!

Like a predator,
Hunting prey for food,
He relentlessly hunts them down,
Before parading them before sham courts.

If he could turn back the clock,
Or look himself in the mirror,
Perhaps,
He would realise that,
He is chasing his own shadow.

SOLDIER, SOLDIER

Soldier, Soldier,
They lie to you with titles and ranks
Corporal, sergeant, and captain they call you
When these titles do not mean anything
They only love you
When you are alive and doing their bidding
Please don't listen to them.

Soldier, Soldier,
They will use you to fight their wars
While they send you to the battlefield,
They remain at home
Sipping tea and coffee,
As the enemy takes aim at you.

Soldier, Soldier,
Don't follow their orders
Because the orders are illegal
Only made to keep them drunk with power
They will use you
To oppress and harass your brothers
While they watch from their air-conditioned offices.

Soldier, Soldier,
Please don't go to the frontline
Like a rat,
You will sleep in a hole in the ground
While they sleep
In mansions that look like holiday resorts.

Soldier, Soldier,
"Commando", they will call you
You belong to the "Special Forces" they say
Military Intelligence is the special unit you are attached to
Special coy is your platoon
Please don't believe them,
There is nothing "special" about abducting your brothers.

Soldier, Soldier,
They issue you with an AK47 rifle
A green camouflage uniform heightens your sense of self importance
And send you to war
In Somalia, Ituri forest and other places
No one else will go to.
You are not immortal
You are only a human being.

Soldier, Soldier,
They turn you into a mindless being
Conditioned to follow their orders
They say turn left, you turn left
Turn right, you turn right
Jump up and you jump up
You can no longer think for yourself.

Soldier, Soldier,
Please don't fight their wars
You will die in war and remain just a number
You will return in a casket
And they will send a few shillings for your burial.
If you are lucky,
They may fire a few shots in the air in your honour
As they lower your remains into the ground.

Soldier, Soldier,
Think of your family
Your mother and father
That looked after you
Think of the life ahead
That you could have lived,
Instead, you left behind tears and weeping
Because you took a shot
For strangers that did not know you.

Soldier, Soldier,
Don't fight their battles
They are not your battles to fight
Think of your family if you have one
Find other things to do
Beating your brother with a weapon
Is not something to be proud of.

Dear Soldier,
Listen to your mother's cry
There are no dead heroes.
A living dog
Is better than a dead lion

Please, Soldier,
The battle is not yours
You are not invited to the table to eat
But to sit outside the entrance
And stop others from having a bite at the meal.

SONG OF ALIONE

Alione, you now dine with our dictator
Who fills his jails with the innocent.
Son of Senegal,
You pretend to be blind to our plight
The plight of those subdued
By the might of our dictator.

You dance on the graves
Of those our dictator has sent
To an early death.
You claim to champion the interests
Of your people,
But your actions are those
Of one championing his own interests.

Together with your short brown wife,
Or is it one of your four wives,
You come to our country
And swan about,
Like everything is alright.

You carry your pompous self
To our dictator's home
Where the oppression is cooked
And dine with our dictator and his wife
Whom everyone else has shunned.

Listen, Alione, you are a musician
Leave greedy actions
To the lowlife bankers, lawyers and the like
That covet money.
Our dictator has jailed other musicians like you
Not for committing any crimes
You do not visit them or raise their plight.

Listen, Alione, you come to see our dictator
In search of business opportunities
For whose benefit are these opportunities?
When our dictator oppresses us
While your voice is silent.

Alione or is it Akon, your stage name
You sit stony faced at Rwakitura
Unaware of the emotional trauma
That you inflict upon us.
Like a lamb to the slaughter,
You are oblivious to the vandalism
You subject your brand to.

Alione, we despair
When you take us for fools
You and Negosi, your short wife
Visit the safari parks wearing bathrobes
You think we are too backward to notice.
Do they publicly dress like that in Senegal and America?
The joke is on you, my brother.

Our dictator, abuses us
He calls us his "Bazukulu" or grandchildren
Then does whatever he wants to us.
You know in our culture,
An elder was permitted to "correct" or "punish" a child
Even if the child was not his.

His babyish face is misleading
The supple chubby cheeks deceptive
He broadens his wide eyes,
Promising to "crush" us.

Alione or Akon as you call yourself,
You call yourself an entrepreneur and philanthropist
Though many believe you were paid to come here.
You say that you are wise
That you cannot live in America
Because it wasn't meant for the black man
But you cannot discern what is right or wrong.

You look down on us and
Think we are enemies to development.
You forget how we cheered you
When you released your music
And celebrated your achievements.

We played your songs
"Lonely", "locked up" as we cheered,
Not because we did not know
That you were "lonely" because you were "locked" up
In American prisons for stealing cars.
You may look down on us,
But we despair with you.

SONNET OF THE DOCTOR

To remote arid Karamoja, you shall go
Unless you seize from inciting the people
With your calls for civil disobedience
And non-compliance with the law.

In his defiant and hoarse voice, he said,
Am not afraid of Karamoja,
Any of your jails, or anything you throw at me
I will continue to defy your illegal orders.

Am ready for anything and will continue
With the campaign of civil disobedience
Without seizing or bowing to your demands.
And so, they did as they intended to.

They charged him with treason and rape
Before exiling him to Karamoja.

SPECTACLE IN NAJEERA

Wounded General wails by the roadside,
His well ironed shirt drenched in spilt blood,
From the assassin's bullets,
That have claimed his daughter's life.
A gathered crowd looks on,
Unmoved by the tragedy,
That has befallen the General,
His life changed forever.

The assembled crowds record and take pictures,
On their cheap Chinese techno phones,
As they position themselves,
For the perfect shots,
Of the unfolding tragedy.

Four-wheel SUVs drive past,
The embattled General,
Without betraying any interest,
In his unfolding agony,
The driver's eyes set on their errands.

How did we get to this?
Our consciences dulled to another's pain and loss,
How did we get to this?

Unmoved by the suffering of others?
What did I do?
Bleeding General asks.

"STOCKHOLM SYNDROME"

They still support him,
Even though he devastated their farms,
When his soldiers took away their cows,
During the wars,
That he waged.

They still support him,
Even though his policies,
Led to the closure of their businesses.

They still support him,
Even though he implemented,
The flawed privatisation policy,
Through which his cronies and himself,
Took over profitable gov't entities,
Without paying a cent.

They still support him,
Even though he raised,
Their rents tenfold,
Having allocated their rented,
Prime properties reclaimed from,
The departed Asians Custodian Board
To shadowy returnees.

They still support him,
Even though he liberalised
The health sector, forcing patients,
To make a contribution to their treatment.

They still support him,
Even though,
Medical treatment of connected officials,
Is state funded in foreign hospitals,
Through secretive approvals,
By an equally secretive Medical Board.

They still support him,
Even though their children,
Remain unemployed after completing their studies,
Because, he issues chits directing the hiring,
Of a select few.

They still support him,
Even though their grandchildren,
Are flogged and abducted,
For opposing his long rule.

They still support him,
In their old age,
While they depend on their children,
Grafting away in far flung countries,
For financial support,
While he ignores their ruined lives.

They are entranced by a captor,
That continues to hold them hostage.

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGETS

At the completion of budget allocations,
Through his complicit ministers,
The chief requests approval for supplementary budgets,
For classified expenditure,
At statehouse.

Supplementary budgets are allocated to state house,
While patients perish in poorly equipped hospitals,
From a lack of oxygen,
While others drop dead on the streets,
As we helplessly look on.

Supplementary budgets and classified expenditures,
Are avenues for plunder!

TEN TO EIGHT

It's ten to eight
I should be home
By eight
Otherwise, the officers
Will say am late
For being out
When it's past eight.

Its ten to eight
I should be home
Before they prevent me
From getting home
Because I breach their rules
That require me to be home.

Its ten to eight
I hope that
I can make it
It's not that
I want to breach their rules
But I may get hurt
By their ruthlessness.

Its ten to eight
May be
I shall make it
May be
They shall not stop me
May be
They shall not make me take off my shirt
May be
I will not sit on the dusty road.

Its ten to eight
I should be home
If am not,
My home
Shall be under their seats
On the jaunt
To the station.

"THE DISAPPEARANCES"

Without any shame or fear,
They brazenly enforce,
Disappearances of those,
That are not sympathetic
To their continued rule.

Previously,
It was people living in the northern region
That faced their wrath
As they were picked up,
On suspicion of being sympathetic,
To the warlords roaming the area.

And then,
It was Muslims,
Especially those that wore their trousers above their ankles,
That were picked up,
On suspicion of not being sympathetic to their continued rule.

And now,
It is the loud, defiant youth in the central region,
That wear red berets and overalls,
Always chanting,
"People power, our power" facing their wrath
That are grimly picked up,
Often in the middle of the night and taken to unknown places.

Injustice, pain and sorrow
Pervade the tense atmosphere
Like a wandering evil spirit.

THE STATUE

Standing "at ease",
He clasps onto the army issue belt.
Both palms stiff and unbending.

Donning an insigniered beret,
Smart army fatigues,
With a belt draped over a jacket,
The trousers tuck into military style boots.

Like a visionary in deep thought,
He stares straight ahead.
Moulded out of iron and clay,
He imposes at the entrance.

Do they salute or form a parade,
In front of this object of vanity,
That would make a roman emperor proud?

To his opponents,
Does this large, enormous
Dazzling and awesome object,
Give them sleepless nights?

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Anxious crowds converge,
In the busy main bus park,
Eager to escape away,
From the pandemic hit city.
Children dressed in their school uniforms,
Despairingly look on,
As muscular adults force their way,
Onto the expensive old buses.
Pandemonium reigns as the assembled crowds,
Gather more in hope than certainty.

A seismic migration,
From the city to the countryside,
Now in motion,
In a vain attempt to beat the lockdown,
Announced by the overwhelmed regime,
To control the spread of the pandemic.

Overcrowded vehicles,
Form long convoys,
That sit tight in the frozen traffic,
As dawn approaches,
The onset of a curfew looming.

Astute and profiteering bus owners,
Treble the fares,
Charging desperate passengers,
Hiked fares to ferry them,
Away from the chaotic city.

Impoverished students that can't afford,
The hiked fares,
Remain abandoned outside their schools,
While university students,
Due to sit their exams,
Triumphantly form a dance train,
And sing praises to the inept authorities.

"The Maternity Ward"

(To the young mother in Kitgum that braved the
journey to find a hospital or health centre but delivered
on the roadside before reaching her destination)

Dark, youthful and energetic,
She kneels down by the road side with,
Her legs astride,
On the Kitenge or patterned cloth,
That has been carefully laid onto the short grass.

On another piece of cloth,
Lies a light skinned newly delivered child,
Barely a few minutes old.

Surrounded by women,
That are helping with the delivery.
One snipes the umbilical cord with a sharp blade,
While holding onto the shorter bit,
That's adjoined to the child's navel.

One of the women makes a tight knot,
With a piece of thread,
While smiling broadly-
Satisfied with her work.

Another shines a bright torch to assist the "midwife",
As she goes about her duties of applying,
Some herbs to the child.

The atmosphere is eerie,
As the new mother calmly remains,
Stooped on her knees wearing bewildered expression.

Elders often told of such deliveries,
And the children that were
Named after their place of birth.
Such as,
“Kanyeihamba” from the forest,
“Komuhanda” on the roadside.

Those deliveries were in days gone by
And not in the 21st century!

THE USEFUL IDIOT

(A member from the opposition that joined the campaign team of the ruling party but was ostracised when the elections ended)

In chains of self-loath is his mind,
His esteem at rock bottom craving the approval of those,
That control his mind like a game's console.

Scornful of everything,
That reminds him of who he is.
Uncomfortable with his ilk,
But grovelling around those exploiting his desperation.

Declaring himself one of them,
Believing that he will be accepted.
Yet, knowing that his use to them is scripted,
To last the campaign period,
That will be halted when the results are declared.

As part of the convoy,
He traverses the country,
Campaigning for their continued stay,
Knowing that it is a show,
To dupe the world,
That they are without flaw.

Not afraid to humiliate him,
They shamelessly and cunningly,
Make promises to him,
Knowing that the,
Desperation faced by him,
Will blind him to their deception.

Reality finally sets in as they,
Accuse him of worshiping idols,
Mock him as useless and,
Shun him and his ilk as idlers.

VOTERS' AGONY

With bemusement, we look at them
As they claim,
The recent elections where the most peaceful ever held.

With amazement, we look at them
As they claim to have won the elections,
With a landslide victory.

With exasperation, we look at them
And wonder why,
They switched off the internet,
If they were certain of their victory.

With disdain, we look at them
As they deploy soldiers on the streets,
And claim to have majority support.

We ponder these issues
Because for once, we ought to experience
Orderly transition in our lifetime.

THEN AND NOW

I brought the peace and security,
You are enjoying today.
You made me rich and powerful,
Allowing me to live an emperor's life.

I came barefoot and,
Wearing torn and patched clothes,
Yet you welcomed my pitiful sight.
You surrendered your rights and lands,
Allowing me to treat you as unwelcomed guests.

I now sit on the throne,
Like a pharaoh,
While you groan in pain,
Like the Israelites in Egypt.

THIRTY-SEVEN YEAR MARRIAGE

(For Uganda)

You found me young, beautiful, and easy going,
But scarred me.
Though I loved you then,
You still grabbed me,
And controlled me,
With your endless threats.

When I tried to speak up,
You reminded me,
Of previous brutal lovers,
For whom you,
Were always jealous of.

I ignored your taunts and abuses,
But this wasn't enough!
You took me by force,
And when I spoke up,
You abused me some more.

Your welcome is now over,
I don't love you anymore,
But you still refuse,
To leave me alone!

THIS TOO, IS OUR HOME

Graced with social values,
Steeped in tradition and skilled in trade,
Co-opted by the colonialists to assist with their rule.

Famed for our "Luwombo" meal,
And "Nankasa" dance,
This too, is our home.

Athletic, elegant and tall,
Conscripted for our height and physicality,
Into the martial services,
By the colonialists.

Famed for our "Malakwang" dish
And "Larakaraka" dance,
This too, is our home.

Weary and nomadic by nature,
With a strong bond to long horned cows,
Which we on occasion talk to,
As we make recitals and incantations.

Famed for our "Eshabwe" meal
And "Ekitaguriro" dance,
This too, is our home.

Practicing male circumcision,
The rite of passage,
For young men into adulthood,
That is accompanied with,
Celebrations of singing and dancing,
As joyful crowds escort the young man smeared in burnt ash.

Famed for our “Malewa” meal,
And “Kadodi” dance,
This too, is our home.

Agile and slender,
Renowned for our prowess in long distance running,
Honed in the rugged hills spread across,
The eastern border in the “Land of Champions”
This too, is our home.

Our diverse cultures and unity in diversity make us,
Who we are.

TOO PRETENTIOUS TO CARE

(To the 29-year-old motorbike taxi rider in Uganda that died after setting fire to himself inside a police station. Hussein Walugembe's bike was seized in the southwestern district of Masaka).

He walked into the station,
And set himself ablaze,
Because they took the,
Loaned Boda boda away,
Which is all he had,
To provide for his family anyway.

Taken by officers,
No longer performing
Their sworn duties of,
Serving and protecting,
Having discarded their humanity.

He carried the petrol,
In a can before dousing
It over himself
And setting
It alight with a matchstick
Resulting in a flaming
Inferno that engulfed the entire station.

This should have been
A lightening spark for all
Like the street vendor in Tunisia
That sparked it all
By setting himself alight
And igniting the revolution in all
The Arab countries.

But alas, we all were too conceited
To take notice
Of another's pain
Because we only pay notice
To our own pretentious comfort.

TOWER OF BABEL

Before I came into office, the oxygen suppliers were the minister's children,
Says Mrs. Permanent Secretary.
I will only employ rich descendants of party officials, says the chief.
Newly appointed Prime Minister is from a humble background.
Anti-corruption Colonel storms the bus park,
Arresting private operators charging exorbitant fares.
Police Head is mute,
Health Minister blames citizens for not observing SOP's,
Thirty patients die overnight,
When oxygen supply machines malfunction.
They claim to be managing a nation,
But like the biblical tower of Babel,
No one speaks to the other,
Or they don't understand each other!

Unapologetic Prostitutes

In the dark alleys,
She haggles with punters,
For her time and services,
Resigned to her fate,
Her haunted thoughts with her hungry children,
And greedy landlord demanding rent payment.

At your country farm,
You ignore your neighbour's lamentations,
About his abducted son,
As you harvest ripe coffee beans for sell to traders.

In your air-conditioned office,
You turn a blind eye,
To the dodgy financial transaction,
Of government funds diverted by the chief's relatives and hangers on,
Seeking to protect your job,
Your thoughts with your new rentals under construction.

In your dull court room,
Young men are produced on charges you know to be false,
But you remand them to prison,
Seeking to appease your employers,
As you remember you were appointed solely because of your loyalty to the chief.

In the army barracks,
Hooded young men are delivered by pumped up harsh operatives,
In the notorious drone vehicles,
Aware of their innocence,
You look on and do not intervene,
Your eyes fixed firmly on that promotion to the next rank.

Prostitutes!
You have sold your souls!

Unspoken Covenants

We are hemmed in by tacit covenants,
With tentacles spreading all the way,
To the top echelons.
When they abduct an activist,
He is held by CMI,
In one of their dungeons,
Away from prying eyes.
Days or months later,
He is handed over to C.I.D,
And made to record a statement,
Without legal representation,
Before being returned to CMI,
Who place a red beret on his head,
Take his pictures,
And produce him before the court martial,
On charges of possessing military hardware.

Unwelcome Guest

You were welcomed by many,
Now shunned like a leper,
Abhorred massively,
Because of your long overstay.

You were received as a liberator,
Now perceived as a tormentor,
Determined to rule forever,
Your sacrifices now derided.

Dear Mr. Liberator,
You found a divided nation,
And kept it divided,
With your support base,
During election periods,
Shifting from one region to another,
Like shifting sand.

A divided nation,
You will leave!

Veneer of normality

Forlorn and bruised,
The hive of activity intensifies as,
Work resumes at businesses in the arcades and malls.

Boda bodas continue to plough their trade,
Ferrying forlorn passengers,
As the military patrol the streets.
All remain mute and inert like,
Their presence is not noticed,
As a veneer of normality is maintained.

With baited breath,
No one dares to draw attention to themselves.
No one will foot the bills,
Owed for school fees and rents.

All emerge from a calamitous lockdown,
And divisive elections that have left,
A sense of despair.

No one dares to discuss the outcome
Of the elections,
Lest attention is drawn to themselves!

VETERANS

You were idealistic and revolutionary,
Like the activists and foot soldiers today.
Filled with liberation fervour,
And idolised the charismatic chief.
Ecstatic when the war ended,
You believed the onset of a new era,
Had begun.

Discarded because you were surplus,
To the requirements of the new order,
The younger ones went back to school,
Because donors took a dim view,
Of a new regime reliant on child soldiers.

You were abandoned in the lower ranks,
Because the regime now desired,
An educated and professional force,
And fast-tracked university graduates through the ranks,
To achieve this goal.

Others were shunted into the reserve forces,
Created to dupe them,
And make them feel part of the new era,
Until the outbreak of conflicts,
In Somalia, Congo and South Sudan,
When they were recalled to active duty.

Aging, bolding and overweight men now,
Rushed through formal training,
And despatched like disposable items,
To war theatres,
Mercenaries for hire.

Veterans, veterans,
Presented as props during heroes' day celebrations,
Marching in plain green uniforms,
And saluting sitting officers,
That joined at the end of the struggle.

The lucky ones are remembered,
And awarded circular pieces of cheap metal.
Katonga, Nalubaale, or Kabamba medal,
That cannot be exchanged for a chapati!

VIGIL

Death is a sad and dark time,
With "okwabya olumbe" or last funeral rites,
Traditionally an elaborate ceremony,
Held when one passes on.

In recent times,
The ceremony has mutated.
Often a local "drunk" is binged on traditional brew and cigarettes
And allowed to speak unspeakable words about,
The deceased or other family members.

After elections,
The nation's atmosphere is subdued,
Like that at last funeral rites or "lumbe".
Previously, a victorious candidate held joyous victory processions.

Now, the celebrations are muted.
Radio and television stations censured,
With social media turned off,
Curfews in place,
And menacing security forces on patrol,
Ready to stop any demonstrations.

With the elections rigged,
And aware that he lacks popular support,
He hires the local "drunks" or media influencers
To pour scorn on his rivals,
Whose victory, he snatched.

"Lazy", "tribalists", and "troublemakers",
That don't wish the nation well,
The "local drunks" label everyone else.

He issues the “local drunks”,
With state-of-the-art vehicles,
And from the public purse constructs houses for them.

Traditionally,
Last funeral rites continued for a night,
Or a week, if an heir was being installed.

The vigil,
Has continued for several years in the sombre nation.

Village Chief

(Inspired by "My husband's House is a Dark Forest of Books", by Okot p'Bitek)

Dear kinsmen,
We mourn our village chief,
That has been transformed,
Like the transfiguration.
Power has got to his head,
Honourable sir, your Excellency, Commander in Chief,
Fountain of honour, they call him.
The trappings of power,
Have clouded his vision.

When our village chief,
Was still a rebel leader,
He listened to advice,
And consulted his comrades.
His revolutionary rhetoric was contagious.
He had not become addicted to power,
The village chief was a true revolutionary!

He had not yet become obstinate,
He was still a freedom fighter,
And believed in consultations.

Our village chief was respected,
He was idolised as a hero.
The son of a humble herdsman,
Was a people's person,
A rebel with a cause.

II

Our village chief has achieved a lot,
He has invaded and conquered,
Has lived among peasants and pastoralists,
And is cunning like a rebel fighter.

The trappings of power,
Have hardened our chief's heart,
To the suffering of his people.
He has become hardnosed.

III

He despises today's youth,
He says,
Today's youth are lazy and undisciplined,
Because they do not respect him,
So, he orders his soldiers,
To whip and arrest them.
Our chief's village,
Is an armoury of weapons.
Some are large rectangular metal boxes,
Heavy and menacing,
With a turret,
And move about like they are,
Repulsing an enemy ambush.

Some are like pawpaws,
With a primed switch,
Emitting burning gas,
That scotches the eyes,
When lobbed at protesting subjects.

Some are big mobile water tanks,
Carrying coloured water,
Usually yellow or pink in colour,
That is sprayed from a muzzle,
Like a mountain emitting lava.

Some are small weapons,
With a thin hollow pipe attached to a piece of wood,
Carried by angry men and women.
Some of the pipes are long,
Others are short,
Some are tucked into their waists,
And emit a small hot metal,
That can kill an elephant!

IV

If you live,
In our chief's village,
You will lament his long rule!
The absence of oxygen in hospitals,
The rigging of elections,
The corruption tearing the village apart,
The impunity within his government,
Will tear at your heart,
Like a hungry beast devouring its prey.
You will despair!

Our chief has lost his vision,
Everywhere he looks, he sees enemies,
He no longer trusts his own frail shadow.
He is only at peace,
When discussing war and terror.
We shall crush them,
Sixth battalion, Commander this, General that…
His usual refrains.
He cannot see,
The cries of his kinsmen,
Who tell him,
We need medical facilities,
And not fighter planes!

V

O, my kinsmen,
Let us strengthen each other!
Listen,
Let us pay our last respects,
To the transformation of our chief,
The shrivelling of a fallen hero.
A revolution that never was!
O, this village is now a wasteland,
A victim of a chief beset by hubris syndrome.
Remember his colleagues,
Who helped him during his ascent to the throne,
That sat with him,
In high command and political bureau meetings,
Now estranged and disillusioned,
Their youthful years laid to waste!

Our village is subdued and in disarray,
Filled with beggars and slaves!
Others have fled,
To faraway villages!
A few speak up,
But at a very high cost.

Please pray for the chief and the village,
That is all we can do!

Wanderers

We have been rendered,
Stateless, in our own country.
Landless, in our ancestral lands.
Powerless, in our kingdoms and chiefdoms.

Stripped of our dignity by the,
Lawless, we welcomed to our country.
Landless, we welcomed to our ancestral lands.
Powerless, we welcomed to our kingdoms and chiefdoms.

Weevils in the Granary

Brought up in a life of splendour,
With no expenses spared on exotic foreign travels.
Educated in the most privileged foreign schools,
That money can pay for,
A cushioned luxurious life, they live.

Saddled by a wealthy opulent father,
With deep wealth steeped in corruption.
Brittle adults, they return home.

Married off into more money,
They tire of idling in the vast wealth.
Though longing to busy themselves,
The cushioned lifestyle curtails their initiative.

Relying on the long silver spoon,
To drip feed them more opportunities,
In the foreign affairs ministry,
Personalised by their parachute father,
Opportunities come knocking.

Honorary consul to Oman,
Honorary consul to Israel,
Honourable Member of Parliament.
The brazen entitled brats swan about,
Having completed their inheritance.

Weevils in the granary, bemoans the two-faced dictator
Blind to his entitled in laws' transgressions,
As he vows to root out the weevils,
Sucking the fickle economy.

If only he was true to his word,
His leeching family and in laws,
Would be residents on the wards,
Of the newly completed Kitalya prison,
That he has filled with his political opponents.

Withered Spirits

Activists in the cramped wards,
Dream of General Gutti,
From Napak in Karamoja.
The uncaring, remorseless and unflinching,
Chairman of the court martial.

Sweltering heat, and the searing sun,
Scorch their tired bodies,
As they lie their sloped shoulders,
On the straw mats provided,
Laid on the bare, and hard cement floor,
Inches away from each other.

The remanded enthusiasts,
Fill up the congested wards,
Committed to their confinement,
By General Gutti.

"Why would anyone want to travel abroad?"

Turnham Green, England is where his wedding was held.
Kensington Hilton, is where the wedding reception was held
London is where the blissful week of honeymoon was spent
England, is where his daughter was born.

Yet he says,
He doesn't want to travel abroad
And doesn't understand
Why anyone would want to travel abroad.

Dar-es-salaam, is where he completed his university studies.
Upanga, Tanzania is where he lived in an apartment.
Moshi, is where he worked at a cooperative college
As an Economics teacher.

Yet he says,
He doesn't want to travel abroad
And doesn't understand
Why anyone would want to travel abroad.

Ngong Hills, Kenya is where his family lived in a maisonette.
Gothenburg, Sweden is where the family lived in exile.
Himler, is his sister's husband with whom she lived in Germany.
Kenya, is where his children began their education.

Yet he says,
He doesn't want to travel abroad
And doesn't understand
Why anyone would want to travel abroad.

OPEN LETTER FROM SSERUNKUUMA JOHN BOSCO

(Verbatim)

Hello friends,

I am called Sserunkuuma John Bosco who was abducted from Nansana Parish, Nansana Division, Nansana Municipality in Wakiso district on 02/12/2020.

I am 27 years old, a student at Makerere Institute of Technology East Africa where I am/was pursuing a diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication, and where before Covid-19, I served as Guild President even during the time of my abduction.

I am as well LC5 Councellor – elect Nansana West ward to Wakiso District, which in my absence, the people of Nansana still trusted me with under National Unity Platform (for the year 2021- 2026). I have a family to look after and all the above responsibilities are attached to me.

On the date of 02/12/2020 around 10:00 in the late evening, a group of people knocked my door at my place. As a norm, I first asked to confirm who was knocking at such hour. "We don't have time for you," they responded. After like a period of five minutes, I started hearing a sound of them using machines and in no time, they were all inside forcing themselves into my place.

They started beating me, using guns stepping me down their military styled shoes. I could hardly bear the pain of a certain man, who was dressed up with military attire, stepping my son of three years.

But as innocent as I was, I could do nothing to save my son and myself from these determined and armed men.

After sometime of torture inside my place, they managed to tie me with ropes on my two hands and pulled me out of my house, not minding the tears of my wife and son. On reaching outside the house, I

saw a vehicle, of double cabin kind, with registration number of H4DF, which is one of the vehicles/numbers used by some departments of the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF).

Inside this vehicle, I found 4 other guys tied on ropes, and I was immediately covered with a black mask on my face which disabled me from accessing/seeing anything and I could not observe even a feature right from there. They all boarded this vehicle and the vehicle started moving. They drove to a place which I could not realize that particular night. Some guy in the vehicle kept using a lot of abusing tribal language and actually accusing us for considering ourselves in the struggle, adding that we were by that time moving to a "serious struggle" which we shall even tell our grandchildren. This arrogant gentleman, who sat on the front seat of that cabin vehicle, killed our souls with his provoking, abusing and tribal words. His words killed our souls and we started counting ourselves dead and waiting for that particular time.

In forty minutes, we reached a certain place and they pulled us out of the vehicle together with the four guys I found in the vehicle during the time of the abduction while they were loading me inside the vehicle. We were all tied in ropes and how they unloaded us, friends, I mean how we were offloaded, it was enough a sign of what we were going to face that night if we were to remain alive.

These heartless men started dragging us while on the floor of pavers for a distance that took them at least four minutes. Immediately after reaching the floor of terrazzo, we heard voices of different guys talking with anger and seemingly waiting to torture us, that very moment at least ten jerry cans of water were poured on us and they made sure that we get wet like seriously wet. As we lay in like a dam of water, these guys started beating us and accusing us of considering ourselves "in the struggle" and that we should never in life think of Kyagulanyi Ssentamu Robert being a President of Uganda.

Friends, at least two days were spent on fire! All unspeakable things were done to us but we thank God for saving us from the hands of deadly humans. For those two days, in this place I found another group of people who according to them were tortured for some previous days and nothing was yet communicated to them.

On our third day in this place and while in dark mask, and on handcuffs still, we were early in the morning taken to different rooms for interrogation, and to me, the issue was about the demonstrations which occurred on 18/11/2020 in different areas of Uganda which followed arrest of Hon Robert Kyagulanyi in Luuka district.

After like thirty minutes to an hour of interrogation, we were picked one by one to a certain room, some guys unmasked us and pulled a certain luggage which contained People Power attires and some with logos of NUP (the National Unity Platform) like those of berets and many others. These guys made us sit on certain chairs and gave us each a People Power red beret with the logo of People Power, and forced each one to put it on and a certain guy with his phone was taking pictures of everyone putting on the red beret.

After assembling us in a group of twelve people, together with those we found in their torture chambers, in the evening of this third day in this place, and after doing all the above on us, we were unmasked and it is to this point that I got to realise that we were in areas of Mbuya at the hill top.

These people started returning all our belongings like phones, money, shoes, which they had taken from us on arrival.

They prepared us like they were taking us in the court in a very short distance. We were offloaded from a very old numberless taxi-kind vehicle which they used, and in the short distance, I read on some of their properties the words of "Chief Military Intelligence" and I noticed that all this was being done by the operatives of CMI on political grounds according to the language which was used by our tormentors and the kind of interrogations that we went through.

Now, before the Chairman of the Unit Disciplinary Court Martial (U.D.C.M) who identified himself as Kabuye, charges of "wearing a red beret which resembles the one of the army/military" were read to each one of us but on a serious note, none of us was abducted with such an attire. I was remanded together with other twelve torture victims to Makindye Military prison with lots of insults from members of this court. The same old numberless taxi-kind vehicle carried us in a very tight security to Makindye barracks where they had remanded us.

A group of UPDF doctors attended to us early in the morning of our second day in this military prison. They started nursing wounds of torture on every one of us, taking samples of blood and this medical activity continued for ten days until when our shape was stabilised.

We were told to re-appear in UDCM on 18/12/2020 but on 14/12/2020 very early in the morning, our names were read, the twelve victims of abduction and torture and we were loaded in a lorry of the Uganda Peoples Defence Force (which drove us) to the premises of the General Court Martial (GCM).

In the absence of our lawyers and our relatives, we were produced before this court which was chaired by the one General Andrew Gutti who read the charges of wearing a beret of People Power which resembles being one of the militaries.

NOTE: According to these two courts, all of us, the twelve who attended the court that day, according to the prosecution, we were found on the same date of 18/11/2020, the day Hon. Kyagulanyi Ssentamu Robert was arrested in Luuka, and the same day demonstrations sparked across the country. But surprisingly, none of us was caught on the said date.

Their operations started in late November and early December 2020. According to other abducted victims who we met at Kitalya Mini-max prison, where we were all remanded by this (GCM) Court. This court remanded us in a group of twelve people from different places, some from Kireka, Mulago and two of us who were abducted from Nansana to Kitalya Mini – Max prison on 14/12/2020 until 04/01/2021.

You can imagine its approaching six months on this black remand, we have never gone back to the court either for hearing or for bail application process. We have not been helped by any human rights body of this country, and they are very much aware of our abductions. At least one hundred people are stranded here in Kitalya. They don't know when to be free, and they are so much disappointed. Most of these people are below the age of forty.

We have families to look after. Our businesses are at stake, we can no longer afford our rent fees. Some of us who had academic duties can no longer sustain them.

Our people are already losing hope in us. Our children are not attending school because of academic fees. Our rights are highly violated and no one seems to care among the tormentors.

We are calling upon ALL human rights defenders, political activists, parliament, the Human Rights Commission, and all peace-loving Ugandans not to be silent when all these actions are going on against Ugandans.

Please, it's us today, but tomorrow it maybe you or your child if we don't fight together when we still have a chance of togetherness. Let's raise our voices together, at least we shall be free from this captivity and from all forms of Human rights violations.

For God and my Country.

SIGNED: Sserunkuuma John Bosco on behalf of remandees in Kitalya Mini-Max Prison.

OPEN LETTER FROM MUBIRU JAMES

(Verbertim)

Greetings,

To all comrades in the struggle and thanks for all endeavours you contribute to front Justice and Freedom in the land.

I call upon everyone to intervene and do the possible legal means to appeal to the General Court Martial to avail me court bail. In case this is not achieved, I pray to be remanded to a civilian prison from military prison where I was remanded on 23rd March 2021 and they isolated me in a special room for twenty-four hours since then to date.

This happened after the CMI had kidnapped me on 12/03/2021 and I was taken to its headquarters in Mbuya where they beat and tortured me to almost death.

By God's grace after the CMI experienced POLITICAL pressure from the public demanding me alive or dead, I was presented to the General Court Martial which remanded me to Makindye Military barracks prison over charges of wearing military uniform.

My prayer for court bail or remand to a civilian prison comes due to denial of access and communication to my family, lawyers and personal doctors. Each day, my body experiences weakness and illness from complicated diseases that were caused by beatings and torture while at CMI.

I call upon everyone who can help me in the above and I shall be glad for your positive response towards it.

Yours in the struggle,
Mubiru James
Elected LC5 councillor.

GLOSSARY

ASP – Assistant Superintendent of Police

CID – Criminal Investigations Department

CMI – Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence

Idi Amin – Former President of Uganda

Ladit – Mister/Sir

LC – Local Council

LDU – Local Defence Unit

Misbaha – Muslim prayer beads

Milton Obote – Former President of Uganda

Odii – Traditional simsism and groundnut paste

SFC – Special Forces Command

SOP's – Standard Operating Procedures

UPDF – Uganda Peoples Defence Forces