

The ideological degeneration of Yoweri Museveni: __ from anti-imperialism to agent of imperialism

On Tuesday, August 28th, 2018, the newspaper, The East African published an article, "If the Museveni of today met Yoweri the revolutionary, they'd shoot each other" by Generali Ulimwengu. The article says: "Many of those who knew Yoweri as a revolutionary student leader at the University of Dar es Salaam look at the man he has become and wonder what would happen if the two Yoweris were ever to meet. "They would shoot each other," quipped an acquaintance from the 1960s and 70s. The flip-flops of politicians that we are witnessing today are nothing compared with the greatest flip-flops of all time in our region. As he continues to bash the heads of those who dare challenge him, even he may begin to read the writing on the wall that says, simply, Go! You are no longer wanted, and if you do not go voluntarily we shall find a way to rid ourselves of you. It is ironic that the crystallizing moment for this sentiment should be the incarceration of musician-cum-legislator known as Bobi Wine, who has reportedly been badly tortured because he is accused of having committed "treason," which I suppose means he said Yoweri must go." (Ulimwengu 2018) Ulimwengu is telling us Museveni has ideologically degenerated from the politically progressive and anti-imperialist individual that he knew when he and Museveni were students at the University of Dar es Salaam in the late 60s to an arch-reactionary.

This view that Museveni was revolutionary was not held by Ulimwengu alone. When Museveni stumbled into power in 1986, he was hailed by the left as a revolutionary. At his swearing in as President, Museveni himself actually said he had carried out a revolution. (Museveni page 172) Professor Mamdani, for instance, also called the NRM ascendancy to power "...an agricultural revolution." (Mamdani, 1986: 41) The left-wing law professor, Issa Shiviji of Tanzania also embraced a flowery view of Museveni: " When Obote declared his 'Move to the Left', among the first places outside Uganda that his intellectual supporters visited was the Dar Campus. I remember Professor Yash Tandon fervently defending Obote's 'Move to the Left' before a very cynical, but well-grounded and articulate, USARF militants. The then Chairman of USARF, Museveni, sardonically snubbed Tandon arguing that the 'Move to the Left' was not a traffic question!" (Shiviji 2005) However, the most colorful description of Museveni was from Abdul Rahman Babu. He wrote: "The Ugandan Revolution is ...politically and morally the most significant event that has happened to Africa since Ghana's victory; and there is no doubt that in the next few years it will establish itself as having had a much more profound impact on Africa's history than even Ghana's. Ghana was the first phase, and Uganda the second in the long March to genuine freed Africa." (Ondoga ori Amaza: 1998:1) However, Museveni has since degenerated to a point where the country he leads has been described as an outpost of imperialism in Sub-Saharan Africa much like Israel is in the Middle East. It is the object of this article to explain what happened to cause Museveni to so ideologically degenerate.

We shall begin by delineating the outlook of Museveni when he was anti-imperialist. Museveni himself gave us his anti-imperialist stance as he was leaving the University of Dar es salaam in 1970. He wrote in an article published in Che Che, the magazine then being published at the University:

" Having spent three years in Tanzania, one of the few African countries that are struggling against imperialism, it is probably necessary to lay down a resume of the activities we have been engaged in throughout the period.

I will most of the time talk of my personal experiences and use them to illuminate the general struggle in which we, at the college, were engaged in. Let me start by saying that before I came to Tanzania, I expected a lot, probably, of the Tanzanian Revolution. At a distance, one gets an exaggerated image of Tanzania's anti-imperialists' stance. You get the image of clear headedness regarding Socialism, anti-imperialism, Pan-Africanism etc.

You got the impression that most of the government leaders, ministers, top civil servants etc., are devoted cadres with a level of political consciousness. You get the impression that this and that situation would never arise in Tanzania where so much is supposed to be happening. All such impressions, I have since discovered, are exaggerated.

But how does one get them in the first instance? Tanzania's foreign policy is what creates these impressions. The violent reactions towards German arrogance, the breaking of diplomatic relations with movement in the South are all the sources of pride and inspirations to African nationalists in other parts of Africa. Remember this African nationalist is starved of any dignity; he is the heir of oppressed, degraded, dehumanized ancestors. He is a relative of slaves both on the continent and abroad. Hence any act of defense by an African state vis-à-vis the century old enemies of our people has got high marginal utility-sometimes it is exaggerated.

It is against such background that we must understand the impressions of non-Tanzanian African nationalists who almost invariably over-evaluated Tanzania's militant anti-imperialist stand. This is, however, a dangerous attitude on our part because it can lead to disillusionment.

It was mainly because of this over-evaluation of Tanzania's achievement that while away home in Uganda, I was determined to come to Tanzania at any cost. I was so determined that I put University College, Dar es Salaam, almost as my only choice on the university entrance forms.

In fact, if for any reason I had failed to gain admission to University College, Dar es Salaam, I would not have gone to university at all. This is because I was not so much interested in going to a college as in coming from Dar es Salaam (maybe he meant Kampala) to Tanzania. It is Dar es Salaam's atmosphere of freedom fighters, socialists, nationalizations, anti-imperialism that attracted me rather than the so called "academicians" of the University College, Dar es salaam.

I considered my stay in the college as a means of staying in Dar es Salaam. While in Uganda, I had looked at Tanzania and President Nyerere's leadership as sources of inspirations to all the struggling people of Africa. Tanzania's militant anti-colonialist policy and President Nyerere's commitment to the formation of an East African Federation made his leadership exemplary. I looked on Tanzania as Africa's Prussia and President Nyerere as our Bismarck. This was in the

days when my political views had not coagulated into an ideological outlook. I did not know, at the time, that unity itself does not mean much; and that what mattered was whether the purpose of any political unit was to serve the people or imperialism.

Thus, expecting all this from Tanzania, I arrived at the College in July 1967. I was, almost immediately, disappointed on arrival at the college. I found that the students were lacking in militancy and were all hostile, not only to socialism, but even, at least some of them, to the whole questions of African Liberation.

At any rate there was no clear, militant commitment on the part of the broad sections of the student body. Instead, most of our extra-curricular time was taken up by frivolous activities: drinking, dancing and watching decadent western films. I remember one occasion when I was really most unhappy. This was the time when Chief Albert Luthuli died. A service in his honour was organised at the Arnatoglou Hall. Transport was provided to all students who wished to go and attend the service. Alas!! Only a handful of us turned up, the majority being students from Southern Africa. Apathy towards, and ignorance of many vital questions regarding the interests of the African people were the rules of the day.

Teachers - sorry! - lecturers and professors were particularly hopeless in as far (far) as the interests of our people went. I remember one eminent American "scholar" - whose mannerisms were particularly obnoxious-once declared that "the Arusha declaration" was "against national integration". To my surprise I saw some of the students taking down notes.

Against such background, a group of us decided to form a revolutionary students' organization. We first formed the Socialist Club. But this tended to be just a study group rather than being an action front as well. Tanu youth league was at the time most ineffective and was very unpopular among students.

Of course unpopularity, by itself, does not mean much; in fact it could be commendable if the unpopularity is due to correct revolutionary stance taken by any concerned organisation to the detriment of reactionary forces. But in this instance, TYL's unpopularity was due, mostly likely, to the lack of commitment on the part of especially, the leaders. Many students felt, I do not know with how much justification, that TYL was a vehicle of opportunism.

Around November 1967, we formed the University Students African Revolutionary Front (USARF). Our aim was to encourage revolutionary activities in the college, and to transform the college from being a centre of reaction-where Mazrui's "two concepts of nationalisation" could be hailed as a mark of great scholarship- to being a hot bed of revolutionary cadres. Cadres that would dedicate themselves, unto death, to the cause of the African Revolution. After we had just formed USARF, Strokely Carmichael paid a visit to Tanzania. He made a great impression on

the students, having spoken several times under our auspices. We with the international anti-imperialist struggle.

People like Rodney, Williams, Jagan, Mondlane spoke to the students on our platform and they made quite an impression on a number of students so much that we started posing a problem to the revolutionary authorities in the College.

I remember once when the authorities tried to prevent us from showing films on the struggle of the Korean people. But we resolutely frustrated their intentions and before long not the Koreans, but Cubans, Vietnamese, and Chinese comrades found their way to our forums. We waged a resolute struggle against the interest of imperialism to the extent that reactionaries thought we were mad.

The imperialists were exasperated by our tenacity in frustrating their designs on the college. For instance, on one occasion we foiled the plan of the American Imperialists whereby they had planned to bring to the College the arch-uncle Tom, Edward Book, whose intention was to dull our vigilance.

The formation of USARF was an important landmark in the anti-imperialist struggle on the campus, in Tanzania and indeed the whole of East Africa. The Campuses of East Africa had hitherto been strong holds of reaction. With USARF, the strongholds of reaction were infected with germs of revolutionary thought. And it is for this reason that the reactionaries on the campus, especially the authorities, were particularly hostile. Sister Revolutionary fronts were formed in Nairobi and Makerere.

If our militants to the liberated areas of Mozambique raised our morale and dampened the morale of the reactionaries. We were generally on the offensive while the reactionaries were on the defensive as was, again, shown by our victory in the Law Faculty. It was because of this in the latter part of 1969 and early '70, that the reactionaries conceived of a master-plan.

I am one of those who believed in President Nyerere's wise leadership. It had always been our view that the president could be got to go further than the Arusha Declaration if he felt popular pressure demanded it. Indeed, he has, on many occasions, said that, "the youth should always be on his left"-i.e. the youth, the army etc, should drag him onto action rather than himself dragging the country.

With the birth and flourishing of youth groups, like USARF, the possibility of further radicalisation of the youth, and hence the satisfaction of the president's wish, existed to the irritation of the reactionaries.

The reactionaries felt comfortable with the 1966 situation where most of the undergraduates appeared hostile to progressive measures. A situation where the youth, at least a group of them, were urging the president to move further to the left, to turn Tanu into a Vanguard party, to arm the peasants etc.

The fears of the reactionaries were further heightened when we started holding ideological classes every Sunday, publishing a paper and generally solidifying our revolutionary theory.

To the reactionaries this was fraught with danger. Hence they conceived a master plan: To create confusion between us and the president and portray us as a danger to the present Tanzanian government. The rumour of communists, who wanted to form a communist party to oppose Tanu, started spreading in town with snowballing effect leading to further distortions and amplifications. All sorts of slander was aimed at us. And then came the president's visit to the college.

The ground had been prepared. The questions from among us were arranged in such a way that the president had no alternative but to regard us as spoilt children who did not understand elementary facts about life.

The president supported the Karadha scheme which we had opposed: The reactionaries were elated-we had been according to them crushed. But only one thing saved us-the presidents had not specifically denounced us which was the only thing the reactionaries wanted. During the second visit, they further pressed for this but to their bitter disappointment, the president began to realise that he was being used by other enemies of socialism to denounce his supporters.

And towards the end of my stay, USARF and TYL were as determined as ever before to continue playing their part in the struggle for the materialisation of socialism that the Tanzanians were waging, which I think is the only hope for the world's oppressed mass." (Daily Monitor)

Among the authors Museveni read at the University of Dar es salaam, two (Regis Debray and Franz Fanon) had the greatest influence on his politics. We need to point out that most of what Fanon wrote dealt with the anti-colonial struggles. There is therefore not much in Fanon to guide us in the post-colonial situation. Notwithstanding that, Museveni was so impressed by Fanon that he wrote his undergraduate thesis on him: "Fanon's theory of violence and its verification in Mozambique" (Museveni,). It was in this thesis that he revised Lenin's definition of a situation ripe for revolution in a self-serving manner. Contrary to Lenin's definition, Museveni wrote: "The objective conditions obtain in almost the whole of Africa. It is an objective fact that the Africans live in the most appalling conditions, that in certain places like Southern Africa, the exploiters assume a fascist stance. These factors are there and they are undeniable; hence the correctness of Chou En-lai's state- ment that 'Africa is ripe for a revolution' which alarmed many quislings. But the subjective conditions are usually lacking. It is the work of the most conscious activists to arouse the masses, raise their political consciousness and give them a vision of a better future and the knowledge and will to oppose the existing exploitation by all possible means. It is incumbent on the activists to make the oppressed people realise the latent capacity in them to smash the centuries-old exploitation and become masters and beneficiaries of their labour. It is only through raising the consciousness of the masses that the subjective conditions for a revolution will be created. This needs patient work by the most conscientious cadres.

The process of creating the subjective conditions is as hard as the organising of revolution itself. However, it can be accelerated by various devices. The most important thing is to win the confidence of the masses. It is necessary for all the local cadres or "terrainers", as they are

sometimes called, indeed for all activists that seek to enlist the support of the masses, to lead a pure, exemplary and, most preferably, ascetic life". (Museveni 1971/72: 7) The ideas of Fanon on violence were also to influence his war in Luwero. Further, upon getting to power he caused his followers to read Fanon. This is why one would find quotations of Fanon all over the place among the NRM youths.

With regards to Regis Debray, Museveni read the pamphlet "Revolution in Revolution". We need to realise that by the time Museveni was reading Regis Debray for the first time, the ideas of Regis Debray had already been discredited. () The event which most discredited Guevarra's foco theory was the death of Che Guevarra in Bolivia. Che Guevarra had gone to Bolivia embracing the assumption that like all other Latin American countries, Bolivia was ripe for revolution. All that was necessary was to foment focos and launch the armed struggle for revolution.

Then in 1968 The Monthly Review journal published a biting collection of articles criticising the revolutionary theories of Regis Debray in a booklet. (Huberman, L & Sweezy, Paul M.) These articles have been summarised in a book review published in 1969. The review made the following points:

Debray offers no convincing evidence to prove his thesis that all of Latin America, or a considerable number of the Latin American countries, are ripe for revolution. His book particularly fails to present any meaningful economic, political, or social analysis of Latin America.

Debray's analysis of the forces and events leading up to the Cuban Revolution is faulty. His account is a distortion of Cuban revolutionary experience, and he shows no understanding of the social forces which enabled the Cuban Revolution to succeed.

Debray fails to understand that armed struggle is not enough to forge revolutionary consciousness and that only a strong base of urban support (from both the military-logistical and the political points of view) can progress and triumph.

Debray fails to grasp the fact that after the Cuban Revolution the United States determined not to be taken by surprise again, and that the revolutionary struggle elsewhere in Latin America will be more difficult than it was in Cuba.

By advocating the same revolutionary tactics for all Latin American countries, Debray ignores the varying possibilities of revolutionary action within each individual country.

Debray fails to understand or underestimates the role of the ideological and political struggles, and he does not understand that there can be no separation between the political and military cadres.

Debray commits a fundamental error in attempting to define a sole form of struggle—i.e., guerrilla warfare—since the experience of successful revolutions indicates that all forms of struggle must be utilized and combined.

Debray fails to understand that to succeed the revolutionary movement must build and organize a politically conscious mass base along with an armed force. It is essential that political cadres function as part of the guerrilla movement. Debray's position that a guerrilla foco is the "small motor" of the masses is rejected by the majority of the contributors.

Debray errs in condemning all alliances and pacts between classes and political organizations and errs doubly in citing the Cuban experience to prove the validity of his thesis. The point is not to condemn all alliances but only certain forms of unity that lead to betrayal of fundamental principles." (Fonor 1969)

Unfortunately, it is from Regis Debray that Museveni got the war theoretical framework he used in Luwero. Attempts have been made to present the Luwero war as fought following the script left by Chairman Mao and called protracted war. This is not true. The truth is the Luwero war followed the foco theory developed by Che Guevarra and refined and publicised by Regis Debray. (Mamdani) (1) The foco theory can be encapsulated as follows: "A strategy for revolution associated with Ernesto Che Guevara, and formalised by the radical French writer, Regis Debray. According to this theory it is not necessary until conditions are right to launch either an insurrection or else a people's war (depending on the nature of the country). Instead, at least in oppressed Third World countries, a dedicated band of reactionaries can launch small-scale, roving semi-guerrilla warfare at any time, which will supposedly serve as a focus (Spanish foco) and inspiration for the rapid growth of more guerrillas warfare and?or at some relatively early time a general uprising capable of seizing political power. The theory is that these paramilitary roving bands can themselves create the necessary conditions for revolution through their vanguard actions and moral example. Unlike genuine people's war, the foco theory is based on the assumption that a band of heroes can create a revolution, and that the mere existence of the foco makes it a vanguard without any necessity to merge deeply with the masses, forge close ties with them, participate seriously in their own struggles, and actually lead the masses in their own struggles. Foco theory, or focoism, is therefore a strongly elitist theory of revolution". () The foco theory seemed to have worked in Cuba because a lot of work had been done to prepare the situation for revolution before the intervention of Fidel Castro and his comrades.

As already explained above, the foco theory was the brainchild of Che Guevarra. Regis Debray only formulated it. Regis Debray got his briefing on the revolution in Cuba from Che Gevarra. The problem is Che Guevarra's account of the revolution was distorted. He, for instance, had had run-ins with the group called Illanos and because of that, he always downplaid their role in the struggle. This was so despite the fact that the Illanos had made great contributions to the struggle before Fidel Castro and his group arrived from Mexico. They had prepared the ground. As a result of this, Regis Debray's writings on the revolutions were skewed. Regis Debray argued, like Che, that there was no need to wait for the objective conditions for revolution to mature before launching the revolution. Similarly there was no need to nurture the subjective conditions in Uganda as Lenin had said in "The Collapse of the Second International.) All that was necessary was to raise focos.

Museveni picked up these erroneous theories of Regis Debray and thought he could also simply assemble a foco and begin his armed struggle for revolution. We have his account of the first attempt at assembling such a foco at Mount Elgon:

"In August 1971, we brought some boys into Uganda and positioned them on Mt Elgon without any arms, in the hope of buying some later; but the boys were not sufficiently disciplined and soon gave themselves away. A boy called Wafula went to the market in Bumbo where he was arrested and made to talk about his activities. Amin's soldiers then arrested the rest of the group, including Raiti Omongin, and took them to Makindye Maximum Security Prison in Kampala. Without knowing that the Omongin group had been arrested, I came to join them in the camp. I went through Mbale to Bumbo with Magode Ikuya and Abwooli Malibo. We were, however, stopped and questioned by a Special Branch man who suspected us of wrongdoing. We told him that we were students carrying out some research on the mountain. He believed our story and it was he who told us that some suspicious people had been arrested in the area a few days previously. Then we knew we were in trouble. We went up and spent the night at the forest camp in order to complete our deception and came back the following day to report to the Special Branch man. Fortunately, he was not there and we proceeded to Nabumali, where we separated. I left for Kampala, and Ikuya and Malibo headed for Mbale.

We knew on this occasion that, apart from the indiscipline of the boys caused by inadequate ideological and military preparation, the implementation of the plan was all wrong. We had introduced them hurriedly into the mountain forests without preparing the people in the area to act as a cover for them. This had come about because of pressure from some Tanzanian ministers." (Museveni, 1997: 55)

.It is clear in the quote above that Museveni was imitating in a copycat fashion the move Fidel Castro and his comrades made at the Sierra Maestra Mountains. At this point, it is necessary for us to give a brief account of what happened at the Sierra Maestra mountains Museveni was imitating. Fidel Castro and his comrades who had been in exile in Mexico landed in Cuba on 2nd December 1956. Upon arrival, they were attacked by Batista's air force. They also ran into an ambush, many of them were killed and they got scattered. However, the 12 who survived eventually regrouped at the Sierra Maestra range and began waging war. This is what Museveni imitated when he took some of his comrades to Mt Elgon. However, unlike Museveni's move to Mount Elgon, the move of Fidel Castro and his group to the Sierra Maestra was like the proverbial seed that fell on fertile ground. The situation in Cuba had been prepared and was ripe for revolution. The move of the Castros acted like a spark that started a prairie fire. From Museveni's own account above, we can see how this adventure at Mt Elgon was easily flushed off by Idi Amin.

The next attempt at waging what Museveni thought was a Cuban-type of revolutionary war began with the attack on Kabamba barracks. On 6th February 1981 Museveni and his 27 men launched what they thought was a revolution by attacking Kabamba barracks. The 27 men were thought to be the foco. While it is true that people were drawn to these groups (focos) as had been expected; however, they did not come out of revolutionary motivation. They came out of extremely reactionary sentiments. The situation in the former Kingdom of Buganda as a whole,

including the so-called Luwero triangle which constituted the war theatre, was pregnant with social banditry. Eric Hobsbawm argued: "...social banditry is usually prevalent at two moments in historical evolution: that at which primitive and communally organised society gives way to class-and-state society, and that at which the traditional rural peasant society gives way to the modern economy. At such times, the desire to defend the old and stable society against subversion of its values, the urge to restore its old, threatened, disintegrating norms becomes usually strong." (Hobsbawm, 1969: 13) It was this social banditry that Museveni rode to get to power in January 1986.

About his speech at his swearing in as President on 29th January 1986, Museveni wrote: "In my address to the nation, I made three major points. First, I explained that this change of government was a fundamental revolution and not a mere change of guard: our thinking was radically different from previous regimes which had been sectarian and neo-colonial, presiding over an economy which was not integrated." (Museveni 172) It did not take long for Museveni to realise that no revolution had occurred in 1986. The event that got him to this realisation was his experience with the IMF and World Bank. Prior to accession to power, Museveni and his comrades had severely criticised the UPC government for working with the IMF and World Bank. It was part of what Museveni once called failure on the part of Obote to understand imperialism. (QUOTE Mustard Seed) The reality is it was Museveni and his group who never understood imperialism and were adventurist. This is how Mutebile (1) described the situation:

"Born in 1944, Yoweri Museveni had been politically active since secondary school. He studied at the University of Dar es Salaam, where he majored in political science but also took courses in law and economics. His reading of Marx, Lenin, Mao, Fanon, and Rodney, shaped his intellectual and political outlook. He was also influenced by President Nyerere's attempt to build his brand of socialism and central economic planning in Tanzania. So it is fair to say that when he became President of Uganda, his instincts were not for developing a market economy.

Indeed, several months after he came to power, when a Cabinet Memorandum recommended the continuation of some of the IMF/World Bank supported economic stabilization measures initiated under Obote II, President Museveni was furious. He said that he could not