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Commentary

Let Museveni know that true patriotism hates injustice

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One of the National Resistance Movement's governance innovations in 2009 was initiating the programme to impart the behaviour of patriotism to Ugandans. To achieve this feat the government has already passed the budget for implementing the programme. The reader will agree with me that imparting knowledge or values to the learner is achieved through two main transmission channels.

One, by teaching and another by invitation. Teaching may be clear to everybody but behaviour modification by imitation may not be clear. Learning by imitation for example is like when President Museveni has shaped the behaviour of some Ugandans not by teaching but by his example. This is because as a leader he has the national profile and media attention and as such people tend to imitate his dress styles or mannerisms.

Take for example some politicians that have taken to wearing bowler hats and yet others walk while touching their big tummies with their left hand in the manner of Mr Museveni.

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So you can see that through this example, the power of imitation in influencing and modifying behaviour is real and great. And if used constructively it has the potential to build the nation.

Back to patriotism, I think what the NRM leadership should do is to both transmit patriotism through teaching as well as through setting examples.

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Patriotism is about many aspects but let me point out three. These are; sacrificing one's life or comfort for his country, hating injustice or inequality and love for one's country. On sacrifice, what is the political leadership of Uganda doing that other Ugandans can imitate? Take the example of the official cars! These leaders are driving 'monsters' that drain the national treasury by way of maintenance.

Look at the MPs. They now earn more than Shs10 million per month notwithstanding the fact that they mainly work half a day.

Lack of sacrifice is demonstrated by many NRM leaders, who refuse to travel upcountry to attend to state functions until their allowances are guaranteed. Indeed if an NGO, invites them to officiate at their functions some demand for allowances.

During the insurgency in the North some state officials would not go there. During the NRM delegates conference, we heard of NRM delegates complaining about allowances. Where then is patriotism that is manifested through sacrifice?

Patriotism hates injustice and inequality as one scholar stated. The political leadership in this country tolerates injustice in its midst. Uganda today is one of the countries with the widest gap between the rich and the poor. NRM leaders have amassed a lot of land and wealth and yet other Ugandans are landless.

Some children from relatively well-to-do families access State House scholarships for university studies whereas those from poor families have dropped out. Some public employees in this country earn in excess of over Shs30 million as salary per month (Shs1 million a day) whereas the least paid government employee earns less than Shs1 million per year. You have heard of leaders who abuse public funds.

How then will other Ugandans learn patriotism by imitation? As the Banyankore saying goes, when you steal while carrying the baby on your back, then you are teaching the baby how to steal when it grows. Teaching changes or modifies behaviour and we would like to see young ones grow up patriotic. However, this teaching must not be by way of indoctrination. Socialisation into patriotism must not be by way of behavioural engineering. There should be a known curriculum and syllabus spelling out the content, objectives and teaching methods.

If it turns out to be indoctrination or ideological engineering, then we shall be breeding fanatics in this country. Patriotic education is a double-edged sword. It can promote good citizenship or can breed intolerance, xenophobia, secular fundamentalisms etc. In fact fascism in Italy and German grew out of patriotic clubs and education. The ideology of genocide in our living memory in Rwanda grew out of the patriotic clubs known as "interahamwe clubs" hence the name. A model for constructive patriotic teaching is the Tanzania's "army to build the nation (Jeshi la Kujenga Taifa (JKT)" The programme of JKT helped Tanzania cultivate a national ethic.

The difference between the Interahamwe of Rwanda and JKT is that the former programme was reduced to supporting the regime in power and the then incumbent Juvenal Habyarimana. It was also constructed on hatred for any alternative forces and view points. The JKT was defined by the love for Tanzania, grounded in a spirit/philosophy of love for everybody (Ujaama) or familyhood and every Tanzanian was presumed to be a member of the family.

As Chinua Achebe said, patriotism of some government officials in Africa is only mouth deep, it does not exist in their heads nor in their hearts and certainly not in the work of their hands.

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