



Why Makerere has become a tragic irony of history

HAROLD ACEMAH > MIGHT OF IDEAS

Looking down memory lane, I remember with pride and pleasure schools and institutions of higher learning which groomed me and contributed intellectually, spiritually and morally towards what I am and what I have achieved in my lifetime. Among them are, Sir Samuel Baker School, Gulu, Busoga College Mwiri and Makerere College of the University of East Africa (UEA), which became Makerere University Kampala (MUK) in 1970 with president Milton Obote as its first chancellor.

I was in the Class of 1970, the last class of UEA, after which our regional university was disbanded. President Julius Nyerere, an alumnus of Makerere College, was our chancellor. One of Mwalimu Nyerere's successors as president of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, was also an alumnus of Makerere. When he was a student in the 1950s, Mkapa lived in Nkrumah Hall, the same Hall I lived in from 1967-1970. The warden of Nkrumah Hall during my time was Apolo Nsubambi (RIP) who was prime minister of Uganda for 12 years.

Makerere of 1960s was geographi-

cally and physically located in the same place where MUK is today, but academically, culturally and emotionally the two institutions are miles apart; a classic tale of two universities, to paraphrase the title of one Charles Dickens' classic books.

Against this background, what has been happening at Makerere since 1986, and getting worse by the day, is for all men and women of goodwill, a painful and shameful tragedy of monumental proportions! During three years I lived and studied at Makerere, not once did I witness a brazen, gross and violent invasion of the campus by the military or police. Makerere was, on the contrary, an island of peace and tranquillity which was ideal for the pursuit of academic excellence.

The untold and unnecessary humiliation and violence which the corrupt and decadent NRM regime has visited upon innocent, law-abiding and unarmed students of Makerere is a disgrace, offensive, outrageous and unacceptable in a civilised society.

I am glad the gallant students of Makerere have refused to take the outrage committed an unpopular



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regime lying down. The struggle for justice and fair play for all students, irrespective of the region, tribe and political party they belong to, must continue until victory is achieved. Let me remind the youth of Uganda that the secret of liberty is courage.

I am glad Uganda's youth are finally waking up and playing peacefully their historic role as agents of positive change.

Makerere deserves better

The motto of Makerere College of my time was in Latin, *Pro futuro aedificamus* (We build for the future). Makerere has true to its motto built for the future of Uganda, East Africa, Africa and the world. It's those who don't care about the future of Uganda who seek to humiliate and destroy Makerere. We must not allow the enemies of Makerere to desecrate the university and succeed in their evil plot to ruin the jewel of Uganda's academic crown which is due to celebrate its centenary in 2022.

When I was a visiting fellow at Oxford University in 1987, and a graduate student at the University of Toronto, Canada, in 1990s, I not only met many former lecturers and students of Makerere, but the university was highly respected by scholars as one of the premier institutions of higher learning in Africa. Makerere deserves a lot better.

Way forward for Makerere

I concur entirely with my fellow

political scientist and columnist, Dr Moses Khisa, who argued in an opinion published in *Saturday Monitor* of November 2 that, "The struggle at Makerere is the fight for the soul of the premier institution of higher education, and by extension, a struggle for the soul of the nation. How matters turn out at Makerere mirrors the present and in all likelihood presages the future ahead for the country."

By coincidence, the headline of the lead story in *Saturday Monitor* of November 2 speaks volumes about the mindset of a key player in the tragedy unfolding at Makerere.

It reads, "Museveni's fight for the soul of the ghetto" and as Dr Khisa aptly writes: "The ruler wants the university under his control because it potentially can breed trouble for him, which is precisely what a national university campus should do."

The immediate solution to the ongoing tragedy is for Parliament to urgently allocate Shs5 billion to Makerere so that the proposal to increase tuition is abandoned.

Parliament should, in addition, vote adequate funds to pay the university's arrears. The amounts involved are far less than what Parliament appropriates annually to State House as donations to buy support for you know who.

May the Lord have mercy!

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