



MAKERERE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

In the Rwenzoris
**MISR Community
Tours the
Rwenzori Region**

A Travel Journal







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Ms. Lillian Nankinga (in the middle) as the supportive staff with the MISR team at the Uganda Equator.



Kazinga Channel.

Putting the Trip Together

TRIBIO BYAMUKAMA

Between 25th-28th September 2025, the MISR community - including staff, faculty and students - toured the Rwenzori region in southwestern Uganda. The tour started on Thursday and was to last the entire weekend. We had planned to focus on four major sites including the Mountains of the Moon University Archive, Tooro Royal Palace, Queen Elizabeth National Park, and Kazinga Channel. However, some more sites became of interest in the course of the tour. These included Lukaya Market, Mt. Rwenzori ranges, Fort Portal town, and the Uganda Equator. We would be sleeping at Nyaika Hotel in Fort Portal City, which became the base. We had special meal arrangements and often returned to base in the course of the day.

Many hands played a key role in making this tour happen ensuring that it was a success.

Dr. Joseph Kasule organized and headed the team with the assistance of three other colleagues, Dr. Yosef S. Jemberie, Dr. Muhamed Lunyago, and Dr. Anitah Atwijuka. There was more assistance from the MISR departmental admin, Ms. Lilian Nankinga who travelled with the group and as expected, together with her team, they were in charge of the group's welfare. More assistance came from the students' body including especially Hafitha Issa and Tribio Byamukama. Claire Zerida Balungi was on the camera and took some really amazing photographs.

The travel itinerary was as follows:

Thursday, 25th September

6-7am: Arrival at and departure from MISR

9-11am: Health Break

2-3pm: Arrival at Fort Portal; lunch and check-in at Nyaika Hotel

Friday, 26th September

7-9am: Breakfast at Nyaika Hotel

10am: Departure to Mountains of the Moon University Archive

1pm: Lunch at Nyaika Hotel

4pm: A visit to Tooro Royal Palace

6pm: Dinner at Nyaika Hotel

Saturday, 27th September

7-9am: Breakfast at Nyaika Hotel

10am: Departure to Queen Elizabeth National Park

1pm: Lunch at Queen Elizabeth National Park

3pm: A visit to Kazinga Channel

6pm: Dinner at Nyaika Hotel

Sunday, 28th September

7-9am: Breakfast and checkout from Nyaika Hotel

11am: Sightseeing in Fort Portal town

1pm: Lunch at Nyaika Hotel

2:30pm: Departure back to Kampala



In the short essays that follow in this travel journal – some are slightly longish – written in the texture of travel writing, the tourists capture their experiences of the trip. While these writers focus on different aspects of the trip, highlighting different memorable experiences, and encounters, some of the details are repeated. Despite these occasional repetitions, each writer narrates of an event in their own way, which makes the entire reading entirely enjoyable.

From my point of view, I felt there were many remarkable moments on this trip. The topography of Fort Portal and Kasese hit us with both fear and excitement as we drove through. The sceneries were breathtaking, but the potholes were scary. While at Queen Elizabeth National Park, we were greeted by that specific elephant that is famed for chasing tourists' vehicles. This became a topic of unending narration



The travelers at the Equator

throughout the rest of the tour. Also, there was an unresolved debate about whether we had actually sighted a leopard in the tree or not while at Queen Elizabeth National Park.

One other memorable event was the heated debate between Robert Birungi on one side and Sulaiman Kakaire, Derrick Kiyonga, and Baker Batte on the other about the current regime in Uganda. Sulaiman, Derick and Baker who

are seasoned journalists in Kampala are also known for being critical of the Museveni government. Another event was the banter from MISR sports gallery as the Premier League was being played and there was a usual debate between supporters of Arsenal, Liverpool, and Manchester United.

I should not pre-empt your experience, dear reader. Please enjoy this journey with us.



The beauty of Nyaika Hotel with the traditional sculpture and the green environment.

From Bus Moving like a Snail to Cryptic Leopards

BAKER BATTE

S ometime in August 2025, my friend, Hafitha Issa, the student representative, put out a call for students interested in a tour being organized by our institute. My first instinct was not going. For a fourth-year student, I'm expected to be in the field collecting data. But before I would confirm my decision, another friend, Fahad Muganga, who is in his first year asked that I join the trip to make the trip more enjoyable. That it might be boring without me. I've known both Hafitha and Fahad before they became members of the MISR community. They are both wonderful friends of mine. I started thinking about the call more seriously. But I had to wait to see some of my classmates on the list for me to make up my mind. I couldn't go alone. I monitored the list closely. In the midst of other demanding issues, the list got off my radar temporary.

A day before the list would be closed, I looked at it again and I saw that a classmate, Sulaiman Kakaire, had registered. He, too, is a long-time friend I've known since 2008 when we first met as first year students of mass communication. This was the final push I was looking for. I would become the last student to register. I made number 40. When the list was complete, Hafitha asked us to make suggestions to the itinerary: the places to visit, the places to eat from, etcetera. I was quick to say, "We need to relax and not to carry MISR with us." For a moment, we should forget about the worries and lonely lives of postgraduate studies. A PhD is, without a doubt, a lonely journey but doing this at MISR is three times lonelier. Indeed, someone needed to relax and for a moment, unwind. That was my mind to include my name on the list.



The main building of Karuziika Palace of Tooro Kingdom where the Omukama of Tooro resides.

When the program was out, it was as I had thought. I didn't like the aspect of going to the Archives of Mountains of the Moon University. I could not stop asking how a university which only opened yesterday have an archive bigger than Makerere University or even MISR or the National Archive Centre. These three archival places that had become my home in the last few months as I collected data. But I was told by the amiable Dr. Joseph Kasule that removing that particular aspect of the trip would be akin to unravelling the entire trip. This was

not wholly a relaxation tour but was an academic tour as well.

On 25th September, we all converged at MISR parking lot ready to take the trip to Southwestern Uganda. The indefatigable Ms. Lilian Nankinga was in the bus issuing out our per diems (many students relish this moment). She also spelled out the house keeping rules emphasising that "this trip is for relaxing." She cheekily added: "We don't expect these things of problematizing. I hear according to Mamdani... or in his book on Secularism, Dr. Cassatella said. We are leaving them here. You people, relax."



Unfortunately for Lilian, the trip happened just days after Prof. Mahmood Mamdani had just released his latest book, *Slow Poison: Yoweri Museveni, Idi Amin and the Creation of the Ugandan State*. No sooner had the bus started moving than the conversation gravitated towards this ‘poison’ the good professor was talking about. Kakaire fired the first shot, “Baker, what do you make of Prof. Mamdani’s book?”

“I must say, I enjoyed reading the book. Museveni has come full circle, he is worse than Amin, the man he has spent all his political life castigating. This is a very important writing especially coming from

Prof. Mamdani who is arguably the biggest critic of Amin’s policies,” I responded.

“Derrick [there a third-year student, called Derrick Kiyonga] do you agree with Baker on that?” The loquacious Kakaire asked.

“Absolutely, I think the regime is going to go nuts when they read this book,” Derrick noted. Immediately, Lilian interrupted to break this academic conversation since she had earlier on insisted on relaxing: “You guys, you will have all the time to discuss the book. You can actually write a review. But for now, loosen up,” she reminded us.

Her interjection was if to tell Julius Kiggundu – our library assistant – to instantly become a Disco Jockey of the day. He immediately turned up the music on his phone. Unfortunate for him, instead of playing slow and soft music that is actually relaxing, his playlist came off like Senior Six End of Year Party Loud danceable bits. There were immediate and resounding objections.

“Reduce the volume,” the first objective was fired.

“We can’t even talk to our neighbours so please turn it off,” another shouted out.

“If you can’t change the songs, please turn it off,” another said.

Confused on whose position to adopt, Kiggundu surrendered the job to Kakaire. But the objections didn’t stop and eventually the music was turned off for people to have quiet conversations with their neighbours. Occasionally, these



From left to right is Samuel Nyende, Okoth Okidi, Sulaiman Kakaire, Ruth Kitamirike, Nelson Lwanga, Stanley Elias, and Robert Birungi walking on the road inside Nyaika Hotel.

conversations would solicit a third neighbour, then a fourth neighbour, then a fifth sometimes taking a quarter of the bus. One of such conversations was the issue of the then ongoing televised genocide in Palestine. It was surprising that some MISR students—who have been schooled in questions relating to minority groups, subalterns, colonialism and the people on the margins—would somehow support and justify what Israel, a settler colonial state, was doing. Seeing that most of the people were not appalled by what Israel was doing despite their knowledge on the subject was disturbing. Cornered in argumentation, these Israel-genocide supporters would summon the usual scapegoats, “This issue is complicated.” But these are PhD students at a prestigious university,

and department committed to questions of decolonisation and subalternity.

Despite these time-passing and often heated conversations, they couldn’t make up for the slow pace at which the bus was moving. Setting off at 7:30am from Makerere University, we were only in Masaka at 2:30pm, a whopping seven hours to cover a stretch of less than 100 kms. Ordinarily, a normal journey to Masaka takes slightly less than two hours. When we would stop for health breaks and then engage the driver on the snail’s pace at which we were moving, the good old driver’s answer would be one, “This bus has a speed governor. It can’t go beyond 80km/h.” Granted, nobody wanted to be driven to their grave, but unfortunately, when I engaged google maps that also give the

speed at which the vehicle moves, the driver was doing an average speed of 45km/h. More annoyingly, we drove through Mbarara city, not Mubende-Kabarole. This adds an extra 100km on the 310km journey. The driver claimed Mubende-Kabarole route had more gullies than tarmac.

In the end, we arrived in Fort Portal city at 6pm and we were happily ushered in at Nyaika Hotel. I must say, this was the highlight of the journey. The hotel not only had good spacious rooms and very nice attendants but also its food was not anywhere near what we have come to know at MISR. We had been booked for lunch but not even our late arrival would short-circuit that. But again, dinner would be served just two hours later after we had had our 6.00 O'clock lunch. Obviously, there were many who didn't want MISR resources to go unutilized and could not miss their dinner. In a period of just two hours, they had two full meals. Maybe because they had also found time in-between for the gym, and swimming pool, which had allowed them more extra space in their stomachs.

The following day after breakfast, we were ready to go to Mountains of the Moon University to check on their famed archives. Although we found interesting people there including MISR alumni, this was the duller of the whole activities on the program. I couldn't wait to see it in the rear. We then returned to Nyaika Hotel and were greeted with the aroma of nice food. Whereafter, we

went out to discover the traditions of Tooro Kingdom at Karuziika Palace, the main palace of the Omukama of Tooro. In the evening, we returned to our beautiful Nyaika Hotel, again to nice food.

Those who liked working out in the gym, did so to their heart's pleasures as they geared towards the third day. We would be heading to Queen Elizabeth National Park in Kasese district on day three. Of the ten parks in Uganda, this park is the most visited. It is very popular for its climbing lions. I had been to this park before since during my time in journalism time, I also cover tourism and travel in addition to hardcore politics. As such, I have been to all these parks including the game reserves. So, unlike many of my colleagues, the trip to the park felt like normal routine. Indeed, somehow, I became their tour-guide, "That is Lake Edward, the other is Lake George and the link between there, there, is Kazinga Channel" I would tell a mesmerized Fahad Muganga with whom I was seated in our tourist vehicle. The day of our visit was among the three days Uganda Wildlife had opened up the parks for free to all Ugandans. The idea was to encourage local tourism. As a result, there were more people than usual.

We moved and moved about. First, we met, a lone elephant that made us abandon the track we had taken. Then we were told of a leopard that had taken shelter in a canopy of a tree.

It is there, there, look properly, it is there... Can't you see it? Are

you not seeing the black thing with white? Don't you see the tail? Have a binoculars... Can't you see it again? Eeeei, yiyi, nga you can't see!" Wama Fahad, have you seen it?

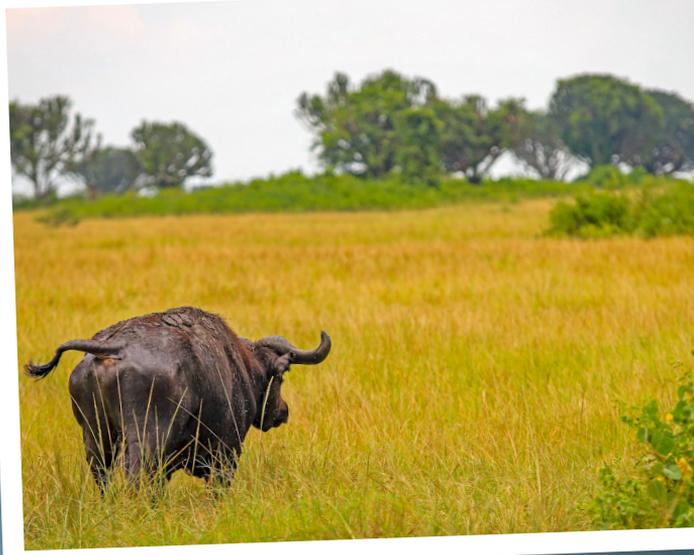
That was the talk throughout the leopard adventure. In the end, some claimed they saw it and others like me did not. Eventually, we moved on. Then, occasionally, we would see lonely buffaloes—those chased from the herd rolling in dirty water. Then warthogs. That was it: an elephant, a leopard that many struggled to see, lonely buffaloes, and then two warthogs. The biggest offer of the park, the climbing lions which are some of the rarest in the world, were never cited anywhere. I have seen them before in my earlier visits.

But it might be harder to convince the new visitors that they actually live in this park. The following day, news broke that lions in Queen Elizabeth National Park had invaded a neighbouring village of the park and ate the villagers' cows. But we had missed them.

We returned to our beloved Nyaika Hotel for another sumptuous dinner and for the music lovers, a live band. The following day, we toured Fort Portal, the famed "tourism city", and after lunch, we made our way back to Kampala. Differently, we decided not to take the extra 100km on the return journey and thus used to Mubende route. The gullies and potholes beat our expectations. The bus

The elephant chasing the tourist vehicles in Queen Elizabeth National Park.

driver who loves driving slowly hated these potholes, too. We set off at 1.00pm and only reached Makerere University after 11.00pm. Tired but pleased to take this time off. I'm looking forward to another relaxing trip to another place.



The lonely buffalo which has been chased from the herd.





The MISR team on the road inside Nyaika Hotel.

First Stop There: Food, Flavour and Lukaya

ITAH PATIENCE MBETHKI

The fresh aroma from the smoking charcoal stoves meets the anticipating looks of those waiting to be served. Those waiting dart from one stove to another unsure whether the thickness of a piece of chicken is proof of its tenderness. Sometimes, it is just fat smoking on the hot coal. The eyes catch *gonja* (plantain) goat's meat, beef and chicken simmer and burn, ever so slowly on fires that seem never to get out. All around the centre of this activity, women, men and children run about with baskets of food, chasing

after buses, vans and private cars that have forewarned their fully suspecting drivers, "you will first stop there, at Lukaya."

You, the observer is left more amused than shocked as skewers of chicken thighs and wings are thrust at the intending customers. The braver the seller, the more likely the sales. But this will often mean that they will bring their goods to the noses of uninterested travelers. Such is the draw of Lukaya, where chicken thighs and wings are as legendary as the determined hawkers.

“Aunt nkuuwe kisambi oba kiwawatilo?”

“Uncle, toguzze ku gonja?”

“Boss, iyi, boss wange, gulayo wakili ka liver.”

The language of selling at Lukaya is combined with the language of flattery. Like all things connected to food, the ability of the buyer to tell the difference between today’s and yesterday’s roast. But how does one know that the gonja they are eating at Lukaya was indeed fresh. Those who have *lugezigezi* will walk to the stoves in order to check with their eyes if indeed the meat is being freshly prepared.

Many of our fellow travellers went out of the bus decidedly to get the best of the freshest meats and gonja. One by one, heads turned and then disappeared beyond the road, crossing over to the heart of roadside snacking. I looked at ourselves left in the bus and wondered if were the “sensitive stomachs” that look down on roadside food complaining about not knowing where it was prepared.”

I was wrong. Those who had left the bus were bringing for all of us.

They returned with mountains of all tribes of meat: white delicate envelopes of chicken, goat and beef were passed around the bus until almost everyone had got. Mouths moved and teeth tore into tender chicken wings. I chewed on a piece of grilled chicken liver that tasted like a marriage



Dr. Muhamed Lunyago with Derrick Kiyonga, Fred Niringiye, Sulaiman Kakaire, and Itah Patience Mbethki walking on the road inside Tooro Palace.

between mutton and fish. But I spat it out for fear that it could cause me more stomach troubles. Lukaya was fun. If they had been any quietness, the snacks broke the ice on the bus. No one is indifferent to food. For some on the bus had heard about Lukaya but had never seen it. For others, Lukaya had been on some sort of bucket list. For me, Lukaya was a memory of all my childhoods, when the village was dreaded but the promise of “we will stop at Lukaya and buy you chicken” eased my reluctance.

For many of us on the bus, Lukaya eased tensions and allowed us to commune even more. Food was not just the delicacy we enjoyed, but the community it enabled us to achieve. Far away from the delicate cleanliness of our food preparation, Lukaya’s food culture is different; a fusion of fun and flaming fires where more meat is grilled every passing day.

Walking the Mountains of the Moon

ADRIAN KAYEMBA

Rwenzori mountain ranges as seen from Kasese district.



The mood on the bus departing Makerere University was lively. Unlike the usual academic environment, with both students and staff engaged in deep, effusive, and reciprocal exchange of ideas, perspectives, and stories, this was different. This was the much-anticipated end-of-semester field trip: an expedition to the Mountains of the Moon. We looked forward to visiting Fort Portal city, home to the peoples of Tooro (also considered

the gateway to the Rwenzori Mountains), and several national parks in the region including Kibale National Park.

As one could have anticipated, the conversation on the bus is largely compartmentalized, sometimes, intermittently interconnected. All topics were up for discussion: philosophy and politics; occasional football among others. Sometimes, travelers complained about the speed governor, especially owing to the snail's speed at which this bus was moving, Sulaiman Kakaire's music selection, etc. The journey was long and tiresome. We arrived at Nyaika Hotel just in time for dinner, which turned out to be a celebratory feast amongst friends, comrades, and, in true MISR fashion, occasional ideological adversaries. Good food, great company, immersive conversation: all is well on the voyage to the Mountains of the Moon.

The drive to the Mountains of the Moon University - to attend a specialized lecture on the benefits and challenges of preserving archival records - was through Fort Portal city and colored by spectacular scenery, vibrant peoples, endless fields of green, flanked by the sublime mountain ranges of Rwenzori and the fabled Mountains of the Moon. Stretching approximately 120 kilometers across western Uganda, with its highest peak standing at over 5000 meters, the Rwenzori Mountain ranges provide a towering backdrop for the radiant social ecology of Fort Portal.





Dr. Anitah Atwijuka with Hamdan Senoga

At MMU, we found Dr. Evaristo Ngabirano, a MISR alumni, who, together with his colleagues delivered an engaging lecture concerning the value of archival records. They also spoke to the challenges intrinsic to preservation of decades-old archival documents for posterity. Of particular interest are the forestry records, which, Dr. Ngabirano maintained, hold the key to understanding age-old methods of environmental protection and stewardship that have historically shaped the ecological culture of Fort Portal. Our daily itinerary ends with a visit to Karuzika Palace, the official residence of *Omukama* (king) and a symbol of Tooro's history and culture, which sits atop Karuzika Hill, overlooking a luminous, lively Fort Portal city. On our way back to the hotel, as we drive along the city's main street, one of the students,

Okoth Okidi, points out the rather disagreeable statue of Gerald Portal, the intrepid colonizer after whom the city was named.

The group gathers for breakfast on the morning of day three, excitement is in the air as we contemplate the day's activities. On the agenda? A proper safari to Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP). Situated on the floor of the Albertine Rift Valley, QENP is the second-largest national park in Uganda, and is renowned for its exceptional biodiversity, diverse ecosystems, and varied animal populations (including mammal, primate, and bird species). As such, the drive through QENP does not disappoint: the beautiful impalas, the restful hippos, that frantic (but not so frantic) elephant chase, and, of course, the infamous leopard scandal, during which Lomol Rhainer





A group of Uganda kobs in Queen Elizabeth National Park.

Koryang and Tribio Byamukama find themselves on opposite ends of the debate. In the midst of intense parley over whether or not there was indeed a leopard perched in a cactus tree, our visit to the park ends with broad agreement to have lunch in Kasese town, but not before a short visit to Kazinga Channel, a 32-kilometer waterway connecting Lake Edward and Lake George via QENP.

Day four finds the group in a sentimental mood, good breakfast, memorable lunch, as we prepare to say goodbye to Fort Portal – a beautiful city with warm and hospitable peoples and majestic

landscapes. Following a long, tiresome drive, we arrive in Kampala after nightfall, the bus gradually falls silent, as erstwhile traveling companions disembark one after another. All things considered, the journey to the Mountains of the Moon University is an arguable success. It had intended to reinvigorate minds, bodies, and relations after a challenging academic year.



Annet Nanungi and Olivia Komuhangi looking at the archives in Mountains of the Moon University Archive.

Inside the Archive

TRIBIO BYAMUKAMA

On the early morning of Friday, September 26th, we drove by bus to Mountains of the Moon University Archive. We had arrived in Fort Portal a day before and had spent the night at the very beautiful Nyaika Hotel. From Nyaika to Mountains of the Moon University, it is a short but tough distance. It might not be tough for those used to it but basing on the atmosphere around my fellow travelers, it was tough for them. The road from Fort Portal city

to Mountains of the Moon University is a marram road full of potholes, which is typical to most Ugandan roads in the countryside. I wasn't surprised myself having been born in Western Uganda and throughout childhood I experienced these roads. Some of my fellow travelers that had never experienced such roads always screamed every time we hit one of the potholes. There was a deep valley and the bus was often scarily balancing. However, it became such a spectacle when we

reached Mountains of the Moon hill where one could see a high hill one side and a green deep valley the other side. Whenever one tried to look at the depth of the valley, you cringed at the thought of falling off and rolling down all the way.

Despite the rough ride, Mountains of the Moon University was a cool environment and we got a great reception from Dr. Evaristo Ngabirano. He guided us to the library meeting room where we were introduced to the history of Mountains of the Moon University Archive and we got to ask questions. Some of the intriguing questions were around Prof. Derek Peterson's project in digitalizing the Ugandan archive, and also on the virtual archive versus the physical archive. Mountains of the Moon University Archive has various archival documents ranging from state files, forestry files, government reports among others. It also boasts with a digitalization programme where eligible members can access files when given permission. There is a bureaucratic process for access which was introduced to us by Dr. Ngabirano. To understand Mountains of the Moon University Archive, one has to understand the history of the archive in Uganda which reveals to us so many situations.

Archives are one of the essential materials for research students since they offer primary sources. Many researchers in Uganda struggle to access archives because of the poor management of public records. The British colonial administration in the 1950s protected the colonial archives

not to go to Ugandan academic sector for fear of exposing the violence of colonialism. Such control moved into the Obote regime of the 60s in which government records were securitized for fear of giving away government secrets. The Amin Government had a large production of these archives and kept in a safe government protection to show the public that the government was doing a great job in production of its information. However much there was a large production, still the public wouldn't get access to that information. In late 80s and 90s during the Museveni regime, the ideology has been to concentrate on moving in the future rather than looking at the past. As such, under Museveni, the state left the archives in a state of decay.

In the 2000s, Derek Peterson, a researcher from the University of Michigan, set to do various archival projects in Uganda by collecting them and digitalizing them. Mountains of the Moon University Archive was his first project. He visited the then Kabarole District (and the now Fort Portal District) in 2005 where he found the archives of local government kept in the roof space of an old building and the archive boxes were occupied by wasps. Such is the decay that the Museveni regime had caused the archives. Derek Peterson then cleared the roof space from the wasps and in 2009, this wasp-infested archive in the roof space was moved to Mountains of the Moon University. Later, the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago



The instructor from Mountains of the Moon University teaching staff in the meeting room of Mountains of the Moon University library talking to the MISR team about Mountains of the Moon University Archive. On his left, seated, is Dr. Evaristo Ngabirano and on his right, seated, is Dr. Joseph Kasule.

convened a consortium of university libraries using the financial endeavor of Cooperative African Materials Project. It was through this that desks, shelves, file folders, brushes, and acid-free file boxes were gathered from various places inside and outside the country including India. In those months, files were put into new file folders followed by re-boxing and re-cataloguing the collection. That's how Mountains of the Moon University Archive was set that in 2011, scanners and computers were purchased hence its digitalization beginning from 2012.

While Mountains of the Moon University Archive was in its process of being digitalized, it continued to welcome various archives from the decay that the Museveni-led government had subjected

them to. First was the archive of Tooro Kingdom that was found in the basement below the local government council chamber of the then Kabarole district. Then followed the archives of Hoima district that were found stacked high in shelves behind the local government headquarters of Hoima district. Much more of the archival records followed that Mountains of the Moon University Archive became perhaps one of the largest digital archival collections in Africa. I came to see this Mountains of the Moon University Archive as a symbol of archival struggle that Uganda has faced throughout history due to politicization of the archive.



The MISR team at the entrance of Karuzika palace of Tooro Kingdom.



The MISR team at Karuzika palace surrounding the Omukoona wo'mukama wa'Tooro or the page to the king of Tooro kingdom as he tells them Tooro kingdom's history.



The entrance of Karuzika palace's main building where the Omukama of Tooro kingdom lives.

Karuzika-Tooro kingdom palace

NYAKAHUMA CHARLES

Karuzika,
When seen from a far, it is a majestic
building.
Once close, it ceases to appear
simply a building of magnificence,
Reverence and royal grandeur
But a concealment of time, ideas and
systems
Of Tooro's history and transitions.

Karuzika,
A past in the present.
A living memory of Tooro's past.
A reminder of the trials and
tribulations of the great Bunyoro
Kitara empire
That still embodies Bunyoro culture,
history and power structure.
A symbol of past family feuds that
challenged God's gift of long-life
Which he had bestowed on
Omukama Nyamutukura,
Father of the breakaway prince,
Kaboyo, founding king of Tooro
kingdom.

Karuzika,
A symbol of defiance and Tooro
identity
Looking beyond its predecessors
and ancestry.
A scar that hides British colonization.
A beauty that masks state cruelty,
favor and patronage.

A reflection of a people at the
cross roads of colonialism and
independence.
A past of colonial modernity that
hides the memories of post-colonial
scars
Of the brutality of the modern state
that came with the abolition of
kingdoms.
A past reminder that Col. Muammar
Gaddafi, the president of Libya,
Once lived, rebuilt and loved as a
generous defender, *Omujiwara kondo*,
Of Tooro kingdom and her people.

Karuzika,
A playground of the spirits.
A must see in the pearl of Africa.
A center piece of Fort Portal Tourism
city.
A view point of the king, the great
provider, *Mwebingwa*.
A ground that protect and multiply
native Tooro cattle.
A central point of sight that gives all
the vintage of natural observation
Which only royalty beholds.

Karuzika,
A statement of power, greatness and
living memory of Tooro royalty.
A living hope for a strong future,
identity and prosperity in Tooro
kingdom.



Sinthia Atata, Lomol Rhainer Koryang and Theresia Kado August in the tourist vehicle being driven through Queen Elizabeth National Park.

The Human Affinity for Rare

SINTHIA ATATA JOECH

Trip to Queen Elizabeth Park—green, vast, and lush. Our tour vehicles trailed in synchrony, gracing the road with a cloud of dust. The forest teemed with warthogs (Kasongo), mud-bathing buffaloes,

jumping gazelles, colorful birds, and the gigantic elephants.

As our eyes scanned the wild, a colleague remarked: “I’ve seen it all. Jungle, surprise me with—the ‘tall-necked’ one, the ‘coat-spotted’ one, or the mighty ‘roarer’.” Another



Warthog or wild pig or what social media has branded 'Kasongo' in Queen Elizabeth National Park.

► The elephant that chased the MISR team in Queen Elizabeth National Park.



whispered, “Let’s manifest the ‘roarer.’ Faith—steady Faith.”

Halfway down the trip, a tired voice groaned, “Another family of warthogs! Driver, don’t stop for the buffaloes, the gazelles, or the warthogs again!”

Then a mild voice sighed, “It’s apparent that if we want to see the rare ‘roarers’, then we must come every day!” Suddenly, hope greased the atmosphere. Someone had spotted an ‘invisible’ leopard. Dare buddies glided down the tour vehicles for a better look, swearing they saw it hidden in the tree branches. The rest tried using binoculars, while others vigorously wiped their seemingly misty glasses, but still saw nothing. My poor natural lenses did no better. Anyway,

whether there was a hidden leopard or not, only the jungle knows better.

As the tour vehicles raced out of the park at sunset, disappointed voices groaned, “Was that it?”

It got me thinking that our human affinity for the rare, we treat abundance with less care.

Whether life moments, objects, or love—hearts ache for the untainted white dove.

Yet rare is rare, only glanced by chance, and in our fixation with it, we always miss the wider stance.

The Leopard That Wasn't There

LOMOL RHAINER KORYANG

Adrian Kayemba, AbduYimer Abegaz and I had started the day with the optimism of explorers - with the expectations to behold 'abundant wildlife'. After we arrived at Queen Elizabeth National Park, we all jumped on different tourist vehicles for the game drive. The expectation to see 'abundant'

wildlife did not work because it had been reduced to distant smudges of brown and black moving vaguely against the savannah. A few impalas flickered in the distance, a handful of zebras who seemed too busy ignoring us to give us a proper safari moment, hippos, buffalos and, of



course, the warthogs whom social media has christened ‘Kasongo’.

My hope was not yet extinct. Our guide who doubled as the driver of the lead car, a man of many words, had declared, “We shall find something bigger.” His voice was assuring that one thought he had personally negotiated with the animal kingdom for an exclusive appearance. Moments later, we spotted an elephant—a single bull, magnificent, solitary—and, as it turned out, *very* irritated.

Now, everyone should know that lone elephants and buffalos are not to be trifled with. But our driver, perhaps moved by cinematic instinct, thought it wise to get closer and the bull disagreed. It swung its

head, flared its ears, trumpeted its anger and made a mock charge that sent every one of us into a panic. Cameras dropped except Claire Zerida Balungi’s. We retreated in chaos, when there was safe distance between the animal and us. Someone muttered something about “testing the spirit of the wild”. We drove for another five minutes.

Then came *the spot*.

Several vehicles had gathered, engines off, lenses out, all eyes fixed on the candelabra euphorbia tree, invested by some other climbing plants. I asked what was going on.

“There,” someone whispered reverently, “a leopard.” I squinted. I saw a tree—perfectly innocent, somewhat lumpy, leafy tree...



Dr. Anita Atwijuka with Robiel Bayene and Okoth Okidi among others in the tourist vehicle in Queen Elizabeth National Park.



“I can see the tail”, Derrick Kiyonga whispered. I laughed out loud.

I helped myself out of the vehicle and asked, “Where is it?”

“Use the binoculars,” Tribio Byamukama volunteered, with the enthusiasm of a man who had personally seen the leopard. “Look at the branch to the left, the Leopard even has a collar, a black one!” I obeyed. I looked. I strained. I adjusted the focus. Still, nothing. No leopard. Just a mass of leaves twisting around branches.

“Where?” I asked again.

“There”, shouted another.

I looked again, determined this time. A shadow moved, or perhaps the wind blew a leaf.

“Ah yes,” someone gasped dramatically, “It’s wagging!” Wagging? Since when do leopards wag tails like happy dogs?

My skepticism was growing claws. The entire scene had started to feel like an elaborate social experiment—a kind of mass hypnosis in the wild. I began to wonder whether this leopard was a myth designed by the park authorities to maintain tourist morale. After all, when you’ve paid good money to ‘see the Big Five’, someone must make sure you at least believe you’ve seen them. After nearly thirty minutes of worshipping the invisible leopard, we had seen enough.

When we got to the bus, the debates stayed. The *leopardists* (those who had



Helmeted Guineafowl, one of the many bird species in Queen Elizabeth National Park. Queen Elizabeth National Park is known to have the highest number of bird species.

◀ The Buffalos in Queen Elizabeth National Park.

seen it) began to cite their own 'dogmas of leopardic manifestation'. According to this school of thought, only those with the 'eyes of faith' could discern the spotted glory amidst the camouflage.

"You must not look too hard," said one believer.

"The leopard reveals itself only when your heart is ready," another continued, "If you cannot see it, it means you must surrender your ego."

I wanted to tell them that my ego was doing just fine and that, I simply couldn't see the cat on the tree but, to preserve the peace, I pretended to see something.

"Ah yes," I said weakly, "now I see the collar." This satisfied the *leopardists*. I was even congratulated

for finally being able to see. But deep down, I remained an atheist in 'the Church of the Leopard'.

The debates were always philosophical. Someone claimed that the leopard represented the unseen beauty of nature that even if we could not see it, knowing it was there was enough. Another said it symbolized faith and the limits of reason that some truths exist beyond evidence. I said nothing. I was too busy trying to remember if I had ever actually seen a leopard.

Even at dinner, the leopard story dominated every table. Each person had their own version: some swore they saw its eyes gleam, others insisted they saw the tail twitch, and yet another claimed to have seen it *yawn*. It became clear that the



Lomol Rhainer Koryang who wrote this story, using the binoculars to spot the leopard in a tree in Queen Elizabeth National Park.

leopard had multiplied in memory, and become bigger and more dramatic. And I thought that maybe this is how legends are born.

When I finally retired to my room, I wrote somewhere: *Day Three: We saw a tree. Some saw a leopard. I saw the power of belief.*

Because, in truth (my truth), there was no leopard on that tree. The only thing real that day was our need to make meaning out of uncertainty—to believe that behind the leaves, something rare and magnificent must have been hiding, watching us, and validating our

journey. Perhaps the leopard we ‘saw’ is not an animal at all. Perhaps it is an idea—elusive, mysterious, half-seen, and wholly desired. In that sense, maybe the believers were right. The leopard did exist just not on the tree. It lived in our imaginations.

Was it a Debate, Argument or an Altercation?

ROBERT BIRUNGI

In whatever way I was perceived or judged, I was ready to argue to the very end that the current president, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni Tibuhaburwa (now aged 81) was the best candidate to lead Uganda after 2026. This was in light of the looming 2026 general elections. Armed with facts, I defended my position with vigor, weaving argument after argument that the incumbent was a realist, fully grounded in Uganda's problems, a Fanonian (a critical disciple of Frantz Fanon), and a political economist. Little did I know that this would provide the backbone of my case throughout the journey. In opposition stood city lawyer and journalist, Suleiman Kakaire (a sworn Marxist), with an army of radical progressives who strongly, cleverly, and

furiously weaved theoretical/academic perspectives. Their strongest weapon by far, was Professor Mahmood Mamdani's recent publication *Slow Poison: Idi Amin, Yoweri Museveni and the Making of the Ugandan State*. They cited practical cases, and sometimes fictitious claims into arguments that totally disregarded Uganda's contextual reality. As the Makerere University-branded bus waved goodbye to the gates of the Ivory Tower, this debate rocked the bus all the way with one side trying to convince the other with minimal success.

At Lukaya, the bus made a stopover, and all kinds of foods and steaks were bought. Against this, I even argued that food security under Museveni's regime was guaranteed. Sensing defeat, one of Kakaire's lieutenants,



Baker Batte, who colluded with Sulaiman Kakaire against Robert Birungi's position on the current Ugandan regime.

Baker Batte, tactfully switched debate, but largely drawing from the theoretical underpinnings of the earlier debate; he wondered how a Musevenist like me stood for the Palestinian cause in contrast to Israel? My response was simple, "I will always stand for justice and the oppressed just as my leader, Yoweri Museveni, did in 1973 and 1978-9 (against President Idi Amin) and 1981-6 (against the oppressive regimes of Dr. Milton Obote II and General Tito Okello Lutwa)". By 1986, Museveni's CV overwhelmingly presented a freedom fighter.

Additionally, I pointed to the motive expressed by the incumbent in responding to the plight of the lowly as evidenced in championing *Entandikwa*, UPE & USE, NAADS, SAGE, OWC, *Emyooga* as well as the overwhelming successes registered by the Parish Development Model (PDM) initiative, where the government of Uganda acts like a credit facility and delivers cash to nationals. Didn't the same gentleman ally his struggle with the peasants? In contrast however, they strongly pointed at the glaring corruption, nepotism, overstay of the regime etc. They additionally argued that all these programs are never initiated with the motive of empowering Ugandans. To reinforce their arguments, they pointed to China, Singapore

and Dubai (given their thriving economies). To me, this still negated the contextual reality of Uganda whose history was extensively beleaguered by structural issues that the current regime has tried to handle with great success. Nevertheless, I also acknowledged the various weaknesses of the regime but equally pointed out the need for another political term to resolve a number, if not all of them.

Later, over lunch and dinner in the tourism city of Fort Portal, the discussion broadened to Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Alexander Chayanov, Leon Trotsky, Michel Foucault and Rosa Luxemburg as we struggled to define our classes. This was relief to the other members of the contingent who had earlier shied away from the highly emotive

political debate. Whereas I defined myself as a petty bourgeoisie, Kakaire insisted I was a peasant. Whereas I theorized myself as a college student whose sustenance was derived from a scholarship stipend, employed considerable labor from which I extracted surplus value, and my status conveniently fit within Zedong Mao's definition, Kakaire reasoned that my level of argumentation was akin to that of a peasant. I reminded him that this kind of characterization and classification defied the limits of defining a peasant. Mamdani gives us a very nice explanation, "A peasant is deeply rooted to his land, just as his crops are rooted to the soil", which in some way does not apply to me, since I'm based

In the white jumper is Omukoona wa'Tooro or the page to Tooro Kingdom's King. Walking with him is Dr. Joseph Kasule, Ms. Lilian Nankinga, Charles Nyakahuma, and Bridgette Ankunda.



in Kampala with minimal access to land I can claim to be mine.

With the theorization done, the following morning, the bus turned towards Kasese, and throughout this journey, I couldn't help but marvel at the beautiful sights of the grasslands, the Equator, the towering Rwenzori Mountains, and many other marvels of the region. A 1-hour dosage of psychology from the Kenyan intellectual guru, Sinthia Atata, spiced the 1-hour journey. Coming from a Kenyan Gen Z background, she persistently faulted me for speaking from the vantage point of power and privilege. Having listened to my arguments all day, she had wondered why an educated, highly travelled young man like me still believed in a regime like Museveni's? Drawing from Ted

Gurr's theory of violence, Atata had comparatively drawn examples from the Kenyan experience to argue that Ugandans (especially the youths) were right to get annoyed with the prevailing circumstances of deprivation under the current regime. She thus wondered why I wasn't equally annoyed and aggrieved like the rest. In the quest to find an answer to my position, Atata had concluded that perhaps I was either drunk on power or among the privileged.

In response, I explained that I was neither among the powerful nor the privileged, but that I had instead taken time to understand the mission and vision of the incumbent all the way from 1981 - which is about 45 years ago. Museveni's Ten Point Program had

Rwenzori Mountain ranges
as seen from the Fort
Portal route to Kasese.

listed “Building an independent, integrated and self-sustaining national independent economy” as a top priority. However, this failed once the regime embraced neoliberalism after May 1987, after endless trials at sustaining the economy through other means. Neoliberalism and its short-sighted vision/gains were to blame for our problems. Nevertheless, the president had consistently kept in touch with the local ordinary person through other initiatives such as *Emyooga*, PDM etc. Our discussion with Atata was soon cut short the moment the bus came to a stop at Katunguru. At this moment, Kakaire went for another idea—a highly powered train from Kampala to Kasese could have done this journey in a few hours. Whereas it seems compelling at face value, it equally has its flaws (the

unresolved historical land question, Article 26 of the 1995 Uganda Constitution, etc.). On our way back from the trip, we used the Kyenjojo-Kyegegwa-Mubende-Kampala route, and frankly, this highly potholed road didn’t do much justice to my argument. I could not sustain my argument on the success registered by the NRM in infrastructural development.

All in all, the discussion emphasized a clear point: MISR transcends its geographical home; its core principle/spirit of academic dialogue/debate can be expressed freely anywhere. In other words, it’s more or less a rule that wherever MISR students converge, an academic parliament is automatically constituted.

NB: This piece does not fully capture my wholesome experience of the trip. I equally benefited from the tour of the Archives at the Mountains of the Moon University, the historical lecture about the Tooro Kingdom presented by the **Omukoona ow’a Tooro** (Official page of the Tooro King), the tour of the magnificent Tooro Kingdom palace (Karuziika), the tour of Queen Elizabeth National Park and Kazinga Channel, ‘the Elephant experience’, as well as the serene environment of Fort Portal tourism city.

When MISR Students Travelled

HAFITHA ISSA

What is travel, and when does it start? These questions popped into my mind when I decided to write this travel piece after the MISR tour to the Rwenzori region. Our travel started with the conceptualisations of the idea that, after an intense semester of study, which all MISR semesters are, the students would ward off the exhaustion with a tour of a different environment, away from the MISR library, seminar rooms, and residential flats, whose lights rest but for a few hours. But like all travelers, for several students, participation was “peer-influenced.” If a close friend was going, you had to join! Gen Zs call this FOMO – the fear of missing out! No wonder many of us kept the same company. We travelled while, seated on neighbouring seats with

our friends. It is not that friends spoke to each other throughout the journey, the comfort of moving with friends seemed to be the sole expectation.

Beyond the friends they maintained, these travelers carried with them the MISR culture of debate. Debate is the heartbeat of MISR—for what is a decolonial institute without debate! Not surprisingly, the debates continued on the bus, at bus stops, at Nyaika Hotel and at the different historical sites visited. Much of the debates concerned subjects that preoccupy MISR: the minority question, ethnicization and colonial legacy manifest in the current modern state like Uganda. The students had not taken leave of the MISR baggage, just the deadlines and other expectations that come with submitting response

Government farms of Fort Portal district near Mountains of the Moon University. These farms are prepared by prisoners who can be seen in the photo.

papers, term papers, proposals or a dissertation chapter. (But even these, I bet, numerous students couldn't help but think about. Several defied faculty guidance to leave their laptops. Four days of total play would make a MISR student dull). Their bodies were stationed in western Uganda, but their souls seemed to travel continuously, oscillating between MISR and the tour sites. The students embodied MISR. If we judged travel based on the presence of a state of mind or the soul, we may end up with only a small number of students who indeed travelled much of the time.

Be as it may, the tour was worthwhile. The Baganda say, "*Okutambula kulaba okudda kunyumya*". The debates, jokes, food, sightseeing and visit to Queen Elizabeth National Park were all thoroughly illuminating. The majestic elephant that was intolerant of our advancement into its territory scared us straight. Flipping its large ears, and charging against us, steadily accelerating speed with each step, the elephant was ready for a holy war to protect its territory from invaders. "Once it charges towards you, you should leave immediately." Our tour guide explained the mammals' behaviour while driving away with a bit of ease that offended some colleagues who feared the elephant would overturn our truck, whose size it more than doubled. The meals at the hotel were just as delicious as the *nyama choma* at Lukaya.

Our encounter with unscrupulous sellers wasn't pleasant. I should have trusted my friend, Fahad Muganda,



Hafitha Issa at Karuzika palace of Tooro kingdom.

when he said that the chicken *choma* vendor would still give us "yesterday" chicken despite warning him against such a plot. When we returned from another stall a few meters away, the vendor packed the chicken we had rejected. My other friend, the often-cocky Baker Batte, decided we should let the vendor have our money if he declined to give it back. We would not take anything from him. An older lady who seemed to possess some power over the vendors instructed them to give back our money, which they did. Such is life's little ironies: the good and the bad may occupy the same space. So, however we think about travel, the MISR tour was mostly fun. WAIT, edit out the slow-moving bus and food we ate in Kasese on our way from Kazinga Channel. And, welcome back from the break, the MISR program continues.

Please, MISR, we want some more!

NELSON LWANGA

S ometime in September last year, we received an email proposing a study trip to the Rwenzori region of southwestern Uganda. This was not a mere invitation to take a break from the big weekly readings that we hate but love at the same time: a break from the violence of Franz Fanon; the exploitation of Marx, the colonialism of Mamdani, and the bifurcations and multifurcations of African societies and the questions as to whether we shall ever disengage, disentangle and dismantle colonial exploitation. I was optimistic for the first time in months. And like Charles Dicken's *Oliver Twist*, I whispered to myself, "Please, sir, I want some more," of these. These trips should be coming more often.

Very early on the day of the journey, MISR slept on people's heads since many could not sleep at MISR flats. Like early birds seeking to eat insects before the other birds arrive, the invitees had already invited themselves to the huge bus

that started mooing and buzzing through the noisy and crowded roads of Kampala right after everyone had sat. From the onset of the journey, the atmosphere in the bus promised an exciting experience that everyone only awaited to witness. All I could read on people's faces was "Please, sir, I want some more."

It was not long before we reached Lukaya, the place of meats and bites. All you could hear in the twirling and swirling noises of sellers and buyers was "Please, sir, I want some more." In a minute, people were satisfied and classified between the awake and the asleep. Stomachs were competing with the buzzing engine of the bus. Between Masaka and Kabarole, the faces of those that had travelled to the land of milk and mountains for the first time had grown pale. The journey was admirably and satisfactorily exhausting. But at long last, the pale faces started glowing lighter and brighter as sleeping ears heard that we had reached Sir Gerald Portal's

The Makerere University bus in which the MISR team travelled in on its way to Fort Portal.





Nelson Lwanga and Theresia Kado August arrival at Nyaika Hotel.

◀ Nelson Lwanga engaging in a conversation in the bus.

city of Fort Portal. This marked the start of a three-day experience of lunches away from the MISR pavilion, a peaceful city away from the noises of Kampala, mountains away from the hills of Makerere, and above all, a rest away from the colonial violence and the spectres of reading that torment the humans and insects and birds and trees and walls of MISR. At Nyaika Hotel, breakfasts and lunches and dinners, all I could hear were whispers of “Please, sir, I want some more.”

And at Queen Elizabeth National Park, and at Kazinga Channel, and at Tooro Palace, all I could hear was “Please, sir, I want some more.” And on that Sunday, when we returned from the tourism city of

Uganda, the land of the mountains, climbing lions, invisible leopards, and *Kasongo* and his relatives, people with hands crossed akimbo were appreciating God’s might in moulding the Rwenzori region and MISR for loving them so dearly. All I could hear them whisper, all I could read on their faces, and all I could sense in their feeling was “Please, sir, I want some more.”

Please, MISR, we want some more!





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