

Can we get along?

Over a week ago, I wrote about President Museveni's charm.

After congratulating myself on what I perceived to be a decently written article, I received a distress call, as it were. The person who called is immaterial; his standing is not. He's a senior researcher at Makerere University.

"That article was extremely shallow," he charged. "You didn't have anything to say. Number One has zero charm. He has no redeeming qualities at all."

He painted the President as something of an accidental leader, who unexpectedly attained high office due to sudden political shifts, rather than through designed succession or direct election.

providing a moral framework for our politics.

It could also be a consequence of an international political system being dominated by two, and only two, states or coalitions (superpowers) that possess the majority of economic, military, and cultural power.

These two "poles" influence global affairs, often creating opposing blocs, such as the USA-USSR division during the Cold War. This system certainly saw many African nations taking sides, aligning with either the Soviet Union or the United States, often driven by liberation struggles, economic aid, or military support. Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia, for instance, adopted Marxist-Leninist ideologies with Soviet/Cuban backing; other African polities chose to maintain ties with Western powers for support.

Our religio-political contexts are primarily responsible for how we view our political adversaries. So "good" and "evil" are presiding themes in our outlooks, usually leading to our inability to see anything but evil in those we oppose.

This bias has coloured our discourse with words like "stupid", "useless" and other epithets which don't belong in polite society. That's why we need to unlearn how we interact verbally.

I always found former prime minister Ruhakana Rugunda and Gen James Mugira as competent guides in this unlearning. They are articulate, calm and authentic representatives of their persuasions by communicating clear, consistent messages while remaining composed under pressure. This proves that they deeply understand their audience, using simple (and sometimes ringing) language to build trust.

Their tendency to only say what requires to be said can be maddening, Gen Mugira's correspondences in particular. However, through a lack of insult or acrimony, they present a middle ground which could be occupied by anyone interested in hearing both sides of the Ugandan story without judgment.

Dubbing the President "hopeless" does not do good for dialogue; it polarises us further. In turn, Mr Museveni also sets us back by using extravagant language priced out of the marketplace of ideas.

To be clear, Uganda has more than 56 recognised indigenous tribes and communities, totalling more than 46 million souls. It would be odd if our diversity allowed only for a duality of positions.

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Philip Matogo
Politics

I disagree. Nobody rises to such power by being a stuffed shirt or empty suit. If they did, an overwhelming number of Ugandans would occupy the seat with Mr Museveni. True, the Peter Principle does apply.

This principle, coined by Dr Laurence J. Peter in 1969, states that individuals in a hierarchy tend to be promoted based on their performance in current roles rather than competence for new ones, eventually rising to their "level of incompetence".

However, this principle is not specific to Mr Museveni. It applies to us all, even that Makerere don who criticised me. A little self-awareness bears this out. Sadly, very few of us have any self-awareness.

We tend to view ourselves as paragons of political conduct, while designating our adversaries as the precise opposite. This bipolarity might be a product of our incurable religiosity.

Religious convictions are foundational in defining, shaping, and pointing to concepts of good and evil, often

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