

... at a very challenging time and led it to success: toppling the Habyarimana government and stopping the genocide.

that a section of the Rwandan population would face an existential threat? No. For I am not stupid to bet the existence of a com-

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Reflections on the life of the mind in tragic times

work in academia, for which I earn a decent wage for my services as a teacher and researcher. My core duties are to impart knowledge through teaching and to contribute to knowledge production through research and scholarly inquiry.

Working in the iron walls of the ivory tower comes with invaluable privileges and perks, without a doubt. But it also can make for a distressful and dispiriting life. Fidelity to the life of the mind confers a special social status. It places the scholar in an elite class category.

Yet, there is a cost, too. Academic life has a way of taking a toll, often insidious, on one's physical and emotional well-being. In the Western academe, the pressures for performance and to show tangible outputs placed on especially junior members of the guild can have debilitating effects, even trigger long-term health complications.

But the professional demands and occupational hazards that attend academia are by no means unique; other professions and work engagements have their own share of everyday pangs that individuals must navigate.

The working classes, broadly conceived, everywhere in the world, including in the so-called developed countries, struggle to make ends meet, doing so with a paltry wage while the wealthy and powerful live wastefully big. Worse, of course, is the fate of the masses of peasants in so-called underdeveloped countries and the destitute persons in the urban social spaces of megacities.

The glaring, in fact ugly, disparities in material and living conditions in our world today is the biggest moral tragedy of our times. It just gets worse. Ironically, happening in an era of extraordinary advances in the human capacity to innovate, invent, and produce enormous amounts of goods and services that should make life better for everyone, or at least for a greater share of the world's pop-

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Moses Khisa
Majority Report



ulation.

For a public-spirited academic, fidelity to the life of the mind and the singular focus on imparting or producing knowledge as a vocation is hard to sustain, to remain firmly committed to, in a world of utter depravity, of insane riches alongside appalling material poverty.

Worse, the never-ending cruelty of war and brutal armed conflict, from Sudan to the Sahel, in Mali and Myanmar, the unconscionable bombing of Palestinians and trading of deadly missiles between war-mongering Russia and a European proxy all make for a world riven by despicable evil and unspeakable horrors.

At home, in our otherwise incomparably beautiful and richly endowed 'Pearl,' it is not just the rulers' brazen power excesses, now reflected in the normalisation of rampant arrests and denial of basic freedoms, recasting our supposed dark past in quite stark terms, it is also the callous ways of many an ordinary citizen.

All week we effortlessly indulge in all manner of wrongdoing, but then go to the Mosque on Friday and the Church on Saturday and Sunday to hypocritically proclaim our Faith

and profess our religious convictions, we then quickly pick up from where we left off in committing acts that run contrary to the teachings of our Faiths.

The more religious Uganda has become, the more evil and morally deformed the totality of the populace appears to get. Religious clerics are supposed to be the torchbearers of public morality and fierce advocates of social justice. But they do more to kiss up to the rulers in exchange for patronage crumbs than speak truth to power with moral clarity.

This same social abdication holds true for members of the academic guild who, for the most part, are complicit in much of the moral decay and the deepening injustices that are so pervasive.

Much like the men and women of the collar, with a calling in matters of the soul and the spirituality of society, those occupying the knowledge space and who trade in the life of ideas owe a specific duty to society.

At a minimum, there is an unwritten and unofficial contractual obligation to stand on the side of the oppressed, to denounce the excesses of the powerful, and to defend the common good for all. The role of the academic, of the intellectual in the public square is critical to societal progress and vitality.

But as I underscored here a few weeks ago, the intellectual decline in Uganda today is best reflected in the moral abdication that defines the Ugandan academic. Both the priest and the professor sing from the same hymn book that refracts moral emptiness, unable to summon the courage to stand up for what is right, fearful of rocking the boat bearing their personal privileges.

To all my lamentations, the Dean (Head) of my university college would tersely say: just do your job! In this warped world, I must wonder if doing my job, which is essentially to pursue the life of the mind, is morally defensible.

Without a presence of some form or frame, in the rough and tumble of the social and political world, the job of an academic, regardless of its excellence and professional plaudits, is in my view, morally impoverished.

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