I was caught by shock and consternation after reading President Museveni’s letter to Beatrice Wabudeya concerning the ‘Bafuruki’s’ participation in Bunyoro leadership. All of us to begin with are immigrants. There are different accounts in relation to the Bantu and Luo migrations, all of which suggest that the different communities we have in Uganda migrated from somewhere. The crux of this article is not to give the varying accounts concerning migrations but to raise the bar of debate and to analyse whether that was a letter that should have been authored by a person we call ‘a fountain of honour’. I think a president must first think before he talks or writes, for his words have grave implications on our society and can heal or destroy depending on how they are phrased. Unfortunately, he has chosen to use his words to destroy and not heal, to disunite and not unite. Ultimately, Ugandans must begin to debate whether or not President Museveni is still relevant on our political scene.

Mennelik once said that all human beings are descended from Adam and Eve and that therefore discrimination results from ignorance. Accordingly, it is an irony that the person who has been praising himself for introducing democracy is the very same person disenfranchising Ugandans on account of where they are staying and where they migrated from. I am sure if we were to trace Museveni’s origins, it may be difficult for him to stand for any position. Hon Tinkasimire told us that his father migrated to Bunyoro in the aftermath of the Second World War in the 1940s. Accordingly, Tinkasimire is a Munyoro by environment. My grandparents migrated to Ankole in 1948. Both my father and mother were born in Ankole. Wouldn’t it sound strange to say, ‘Vincent Nuwagaba, since your grandfather was born in Rubanda, Kabaale, you should reserve certain political positions for the indigenous Banyankole.’? I am sure Museveni is not an indigenous Munyankole and I can swallow my shoe over this matter (I hope I will not be charged with sedition).

The president should be contrite and apologise and withdraw the statements he has already put in black and white, although it is very difficult if not impossible to erase that in the minds of many Ugandans, especially those whose ancestry is Kigezi for they are known to tolerate no nonsense. Otherwise, Ugandans have a right to impeach him for he has not conducted himself in a manner befitting of a president. We are not ready to accept a leader who is hell bent on sowing the seeds of discord, moreover based on utter and stark ignorance and heartlessness.

In Bunyoro, the president has turned his guns against the Ugandans whose ancestry is Kigezi. But as a leader who for years has claimed that he is the only person with a vision, he should work to actualise point three of his 10-point programme, which is the consolidation of national unity and the elimination of all forms of sectarianism. As such, the president should dedicate his efforts to making sure that he teaches the Bunyoro communities the benefit of living together harmoniously.

All of us are in a way immigrants in this country and those who purport to be indigenous citizens in their localities are also potential immigrants to other areas. History tells us that both the Bantu and Luo communities migrated from somewhere at least. Personally, I have told everyone that I cannot deny being Rwandan since Kigezi only became part of Uganda in 1910. Accordingly, I cannot denigrate, discriminate and be pejorative or derogatory against any person of Rwandan origin or indeed Kenyan, Tanzanian, Sudanese or Congolese, you name it. As a Christian and pan-Africanist I also treat every member of the human race as my brother or sister. We must be guided by the golden rule of morality in the Bible which says ‘do to others as you would want them do to you’. The
same Bible says that the measurement you use against others is the same measurement that should be used against you. As such, since the president has shown that he is against every non-indigenous community in Uganda, these communities should pay him in the same currency come 2011.

The ethnic groups we are associated with are unnatural. They are social constructs; I need to elaborate. You would never have Batooro if there was no such area as Tooro. You wouldn’t have Banyankore if there was no such place as Ankole. You wouldn’t have Baganda if there wasn’t Buganda. Likewise, nationality is socially constructed. We are Ugandans because we live in Uganda or were born in Uganda. There’s no such person as a Ugandan by blood. I have stated that we descended from Kigezi but I am a Munyankole because I was born in Ankole, my mother and father were born in Ankole so they are Banyankole, but also my grandfather, who migrated from Kigezi, is a Munyankole by virtue of his residence. The only identities one can say are natural are our clans, but also our clans cut across different groups, the point being that all Bantu are related. For example, all the Bamugiri of Kigezi ancestry - who include the Bagiri from Bufumbira (Kisoro), Bahimba, Bajingwe and Bajaara of Kigezi, Ankole, Toro, Bunyoro, Buganda and other areas - are related to the Bakimbiri in Ankole and I am sure have other relatives in other Bantu ethnic groups. Actually, all the Banyakigezi clans have their equivalents among the Banyankore. The sooner Ugandans and Africans generally understand the stark truth that we are all related and none should be relegated as a Mufuruki the better for Uganda and Africa at large.

The president claims to be a pan-Africanist. Pan-Africanism cherishes free movement and settlement, even across borders. Pan-Africanism cherishes brotherhood and sisterhood as opposed to sectarianism. Pan-Africanism cherishes issues and ideas as opposed to tribal or ethnic chauvinism.

The Bafuruki (a derogatory term meaning immigrants) are not more in numbers than the indigenous communities in Bunyoro. That means that people who are voted are voted by both the so-called Bafuruki and the indigenous Banyoro. Accordingly, votes are cast on the basis of issues presented by the candidates to the electorate and I must commend and applaud the Bunyoro communities for being politically mature and casting their votes on the basis of issues and not petty sectarian sentiments. Those who peddle the contents of the president’s letter are naïve and immature politicians who cannot genuinely win a seat on their own. Sadly, they have chosen to use the president to impose undemocratic tendencies and practices. Denial of the Bafuruki from participating in leadership is not only anti-democratic, but a grave human rights abuse. Accordingly, the president has shown that he is the leading notorious human rights abuser. Nonetheless, personally I am not surprised because I don’t expect too much from Mr Museveni and that is why I have never voted for him. But also this could be a pointer of the oil curse that many people have prophesied.

As a pan-Africanist, human rights defender and a victim of the president’s unholy letter since I have my roots in Kigezi, I am prepared to take this matter to the Uganda Human Rights Commission tribunal and if nothing fruitful is done, I will drag the author of the letter to the Constitutional Court. Finally, because of the dearth of substance, Museveni’s letter and his leadership should be dismissed with costs by all Ugandans. For God and my country!

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Article-Summary:
Concerned by President Yoweri Museveni’s comments on the ‘Bafuruki’ (‘immigrants’), Vincent
Nuwagaba questions the assumptions around identity held by Uganda's premier, calling for greater solidarity and mutual respect between the country’s groups, regardless of origin.

Category: Governance
Country: Uganda

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