



BBI and the Politics of Betrayal in the Lakeside Counties

By Dauti Kahura and Akoko Akech



On the second anniversary of the “handshake” – the political *détente* and agreement between President Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga that birthed the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) – a cautious hope and fear lurks in the hearts of Kisumu County residents, who are increasingly coming to believe that BBI is a technocratic process of political mobilisation that will lead to constitutional reforms. Mixed feelings, which suggest that Raila Odinga’s political stronghold is ill at ease with itself.

In the eyes of many residents of the counties of Homa Bay, Kisumu, Migori and Siaya, BBI is shaping an embarrassing theatrical show, starring inarticulate and clownish Orange Democratic Movement’s (ODM) governors. BBI does not resonate with Raila Odinga’s core political constituency, whose desire is for a competent, incorruptible, accountable and transparent leadership.

Last week, to gauge the mood of the typical Kisumu resident, we took a reality check around town and chanced on a roadside “Bunge la Mwananchi” discussion taking place off Kisumu’s Oginga Odinga Street. A boda boda (motor cycle) rider with a slight physical built, who was taking a break from his trade, was weighing in on the current debate on the BBI process, and the Deputy President William Ruto’s latest tribulations. But his thoughts were haunted by unspoken heartbreaks, heartaches and the memories of past broken elite pacts. *“Jo moko wacho ni jogi biro luoko oke go*

Oneya.” Some people are saying Raila Odinga, (Oneya’s nephew), will be short-changed, he observed. “*Onge. Wangni, oke go Oneya ema luoko jii.*” No, Raila won’t be short-changed this time round...he’s the one short-changing the others, said the rider cheekily, as he assured a passive Friday evening audience. *Ruto ne ni e State House, sani een kanye?* Ruto was ensconced in the State House, he added, expressing a widely felt feeling of *schadenfreude*, the perverse feeling of pleasure in the suffering of others, which many in this particular Bunge felt every time Ruto’s tribulations were mentioned.

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“The Luos are treating the BBI and the possible outcomes with cautious optimism given the nature of the politics of betrayal and subterfuge,” said a senior and long-term political commentator and strategist who hails from Homa Bay County and who requested anonymity. “The political betrayal of the Luo people goes back to the 1960s. For Jomo Kenyatta to turn his back on his most trusted comrade and political confidante in 1966 was a painful gesture that struck at the very heart of the Luo people.” The political strategist said the Luo people never quite recovered from that betrayal and treacherous behaviour of Kenyatta [I]. “As if that wasn’t enough, the Kiambu Mafia orchestrated the assassination of one of the Luo’s most illustrious political sons, Thomas Joseph Mboya, in July 1969.”

The death of Mboya (popularly known as TJ), a trusted cabinet minister in Jomo Kenyatta’s government, proved to all the Luo people that a pact with the Kikuyu political barons was a risky, treacherous and thankless affair that could cost one’s life, said the student of Luo politics. “With the onset of plural politics in 1992, Jaramogi, now in the sunset of his chequered political life, sought once again to team up with a Kikuyu political baron – Ken Matiba – and what happened? Persuaded that he could capture the presidency from the dictator Daniel Toroitich arap Moi, Matiba, riding on a crest of a pampered popular political wave, walked out of a pact that was to see the aging Jaramogi lead a united front against the intractable Moi.”

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But truth be told, Jaramogi was not only betrayed by Kikuyu political mandarins: After Jomo Kenyatta died in August 1978, his loyal Vice President took over the State House reins. As Daniel arap Moi sought to patch up all the existing discordant political divisions, he too brought Jaramogi on board in 1980 and made him the chairman of the Cotton Lint Board of Kenya. But no sooner had he appointed him the chairman, he shooed him out again.

“Jaramogi’s false rapprochement with Moi showed that political handshakes are perpetually a gamble and could go either way”, said the strategist. “Raila’s first political rapprochement was with Moi in 1998, after Moi had defeated the divided and fledgling opposition, whose vote put together was popular, but easy to manipulate and rig. When Moi lived up to his reputation as a classic backstabber, Raila quickly jumped ship and that’s how he saved his political career, as he sunk the KANU ship with his destroyer – the National Development Party (NDP) tractor.”

But that was only a temporarily reprieve: “When Raila made a pact with Mwai Kibaki in 2002, little did he know that he would, yet again, be betrayed by a cabal of Kikuyu elites, who having helped

them capture power from Moi's project and protégé, Uhuru Kenyatta, and firmly ensconced in State House, told him to go jump in Lake Victoria."

With these betrayals fresh in the Luo people's psyche, the BBI endgame and Uhuru's roadmap is unclear to them, said the political commentator. "There are so many actors and loose ends that the people are not sure that when Uhuru gets into the lame duck phase of his presidency, whether he will still be firmly in control. Who will be steering the Jubilee ship?"

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The strategist said the experience of Kibaki losing grip of his transition is a vital lesson that could not be ignored. It is believed that Kibaki preferred Musalia Mudavadi to succeed him, but the Kikuyu power barons would hear none of that. "The question the Luo people are asking themselves is this? Will Uhuru also lose grip of his transition? Has Uhuru secretly made other covenants with other politico honchos to rival BBI? Could there be other political debts that needs to repaid? Has Uhuru made a covenant with Gideon Moi, for example? As all these questions play mind games with the Luo people, the 60-million question they are asking themselves, albeit quietly is: Is Raila waiting to be used and dumped?"

At a taxi shed in Kondele, we met a bored cab driver. (That is how bad business was on a Saturday afternoon, said one of the drivers, who told us we wouldn't even have found anyone lounging at the shed had business been booming like in yesteryears). The cab driver was clearly unhappy with the BBI's power-sharing agreement proposition, in which Raila Odinga becomes a titular head of state. He warily observed: *"Ka obiro, ok wa tamre goyo kura. En Rais ma onge' power? Wan ang'o ma omiyo emiyo wa leftovers? En mana nying' kende e ma wadwaro? Ndalo Kibaki ne omiwa leftovers. If we get to the election, we'll vote. Is it a ceremonial president? Why do we always get leftovers? Are we looking for a name only? Even [Mwai] Kibaki gave us leftovers.*

At the boda boda shed in Nyalenda's Kilo Junction, a rider we talked to decried the high cost of political violence, pointing out the losses Kimwa Hotels incurred in the post-election violence of 2007/2008. Before the post-election violence, Kimwa Hotels, owned by a GEMA restaurateur, were some of the most popular eating joints in the city. Quipped the rider: *"Tangu Uhuru na Raila waungane, kuna amani. Miaka miwili, ni amani. Hata Kibra election ilikua tulivu. Ninani alirusha mawe? Kiongozi, sio mwananchi."* Since Uhuru and Raila shook hands, there has been peace. These two years, we've had peace, even the Kibra by-election was peaceful. Was there anyone who threw stones? The leader is not an ordinary man. *"Lakini tangu tupate uhuru, ni makabila mawili tu ndio wamekua na Rais. Itakua furaha yetu tusikie Mijikenda, au Mkisii ni President. Natuko wengi."* Yet, since independence presidential politics have been dominated by two ethnic communities only. It would be our joy if a Mijikenda or a Kisii is president. We're many ethnic tribes.

But the high cost of living, the economic downturn, and the fin-tech debt trap dampened the optimism of both the taxi drivers and the boda boda riders. *"Tunaishi kwa madeni za Apps. Unakuwa blocked kila mahali,"* We are living at the mercy of the social media loan apps, said one of the boda boda riders ruefully. In Kondele, the taxi men chorused: *"Wan e CRB te. Edonjo kata ka en gi gowi mar sling 50, wouk en chulo sling 3000. Ka aeto e dhi Huduma Centre, National Bank of Kenya, to*

pay. Ka gi nyalo, gigoInwa gop Apps.” We’ve all been blacklisted by the Credit Reference Bureau for defaulting on loan repayments. It’s easy to get into the list, but very hard to get out. You get in, even if you have a Sh50 debt, but to you have to pay a fee Sh3,000 to get out, go to Huduma Centre, and National Bank.”

“Ok wa pinge, ok wasire, waduaro mana freedom.” But no one hires the cars, we are not supporting him or opposing him [Raila], what we want is freedom,” said a Kondele roundabout taxi man, who bemoaned the economic downturn, which has robbed him of business opportunities. “I thought it was Building Bridges Initiative for all, but why are others being ejected out of the BBI meetings?” he wondered aloud. “Before the handshake, there was economic boycott...boycott of Brookside (Milk) and Safaricom. But now no mandate, no consulting the people, we hear that Kenya is bigger than me...but what about the mama who lost a child to the bullet and the shops that were looted? These people are pursuing their own interests. As citizens, we celebrate peace, but the economy is bad...BBI is a waste of money. If Uhuru is incompetent, he should resign,” said the anguished taxi man.

“Wan wandiko ne polis pesa, NTSA pesa, KRA pesa”. We don’t know if this is the Canaan Raila keeps talking about - we must remit money to the police officers, the NTSA, KRA,” lamented the cab driver. Like many of his fellow drivers, the taxi man is caught in the trap of unforgiving formal and informal tax regimes, for which he toils every day. *“Jokondele ok dwar dhi Canaan, kata ka osegolo Nyang’ e aora. Oduokwa kamane wantiere. Wan waol ma ka unyalo manyonwa Queen Elizabeth wabed Kingdom, to manynwa uru”* We the people of Kondele don’t want to go to Canaan, even if there no more crocodiles in the river. We are tired. If you can, get us Queen Elizabeth, we become a kingdom.

The cab drivers and the boda boda riders felt that yet another Raila Odinga-generated political tidal wave could easily flood them with arrogant, callous, and unresponsive leadership. The perceived hostility of the Kisumu County government towards small-trader enterprises only compounded this widely expressed feeling. Kiosks and roadside eateries around the city’s highway, the CBD and on railway land have been destroyed by various agencies in the recent city clean up, destroying many people’s livelihoods, and their dense social networks, which increasingly have been playing even a bigger role in urban lives, especially among those that have been caught up in the fin-tech web and have been listed by CRB. Some of the street lights at Kilo Junction, like those at Nyalenda roundabout, no longer function, leaving hoodlums and muggers to have a field day.

“Professor riek kendo osomo ndi, to oonge rieko mar rito piny,” Professor is very brilliant and well read, but he lacks wisdom, noted two boda boda riders separately on different occasions. Many residents of Kisumu County are angry with Governor Anyang’ Nyongo’s leadership. “Peter pass by, [Kisumu County], Peter Ma’ndege,” or Vasco da Gama are some of the new nicknames for him doing the rounds in various social media platforms.

It seems Governor Nyong’o of Kisumu County’s Prosperity House is not the same person as the Professor Nyong’o of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), who once championed *“basic needs as basic rights”*. Today, many Kisumu residents detest and resent Governor Nyong’o, he of the blue economy, the BBI, and the Afrocities conference rhetoric. In the eyes of many Kisumu residents, Governor Nyong’o seems to be more at home at international conferences than he is in Kisumu County’s town hall meetings. And more at home in the company of experts than *mama mbogas*. He is seen as an arrogant, unaccountable and callous leader who has abdicated his responsibilities, and under whose watch Kisumu’s healthcare system is going to seed.

Kisumu County's ailing healthcare system

The Kisumu County health system is ailing. "We don't have a functional temporal thermometer at the Kisumu County Hospital emergency wing of the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Teaching and Referral Hospital," said a Kisumu doctor, just a day before Kenya reported its first confirmed COVID-19 case. Yet, all the newspapers only reported the row between the governor's office and the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) over the governor's \$190,000 luxury car. "The thermo-gun at Kisumu County Referral Hospital is defective - it picks the room's, not the patient's, temperature," observed a clinical officer as Kenya was preparing for a COVID-19 lockdown.

Kisumu's County's public healthcare system can barely provide a decent basic service, let alone contain a pandemic of any kind, according to the medical workers. It is beset by several woes: lack of vital equipment, laboratory reagents, reliable supply of oxygen, and blood for transfusion, poor management, over-worked and demotivated health workers, bedbugs and mosquito-infested wards.

Morale is also low among health workers. By March 15, 2020, they had not yet received their February salary, and had previously been paid their January salary only in the third week of February, lamented Kisumu public hospital doctors.

The county government has not only delayed salary payments, it has also failed to remit statutory deductions it makes from its employees' gross salaries, such as Pay As You Earn (P.A.Y.E), insurance premiums, National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF), and loan check-offs from to the relevant institutions. The medics had to go on strike for the county government to remit these deductions.

"At least Governor Jack Ranguma paid our salaries on time, gave us an audience whenever we had issues, and upgraded a few health facilities," observed a doctor at Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Hospital. "Nyong'o is asphyxiating the Kisumu County healthcare system. He has a history of mistreating health workers. As the Minister for Health he insulted doctors and nurses. Is it any wonder he has a condescending attitude toward doctors?" posed the doctor.

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According to the health workers, the only language Governor Nyong'o understands is that of a strike action or parades (go slows). Labour strikes have become chronic. Last week, Justice Nduma Nderi of the Kisumu-based Labour and Employment Court issued yet another court order against the County Government of Kisumu, seeking to compel it to honour a Collective Bargain Agreement (CBA) on long overdue health workers' promotion and remuneration. The result of the testy labour relations between the medics and the county government is that many interns from medical schools are now avoiding Kisumu County, lest the frequent strikes delay their graduation. According to one doctor, "Patients are today poorly clerked and managed," due to a high work load. "From 8.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m., we attend to up to between 180 and 200 patients, contrary to the recommended 30 to 40 patients. We are so overworked, you don't even look forward to work," bemoaned a clinical officer. Those recently employed on a one-year contract basis haven't eased the work load.

"Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Teaching and Referral Hospital's main laboratory is understaffed, it doesn't work at night. You can't carry out any specialised test at night," observed a doctor. "In other words, you can't carry out tests such as full blood, kidney, urea and liver function tests, at JOORTH at night."

The regional blood transfusion bank has nearly run dry following the withdrawal of donors from

funding its activities. Oxygen supply is intermittent at best. Given the triple disease burden of malaria, sickle cell anaemia, and HIV-AIDS, diseases which need blood and blood products, the counties of Siaya, Kisumu, Homa Bay and Migori, should have led the smooth transition from a donor dependent blood bank to a national and county government managed regional blood bank. But both the national and county government didn't. "What's available in the blood bank is barely sufficient for the medical, children's, and maternity ward."

Obama Children's Hospital was supposed to be a hospital within a hospital, having its own laboratory, kitchen and pharmacy, but its laboratory has only one laboratory technician, and it doesn't work at night. The pharmacy is also closed at night. Some Kisumu residents are now seeking public healthcare in the neighbouring counties of Vihiga, Kakamega, and even Siaya's new born unit, especially when the doctors are on strike.

Kisumu residents resent their governor for championing the lopsided Cuba-Kenya agreement on healthcare, which pays Cuban doctors high salaries and perks, at the expense of the Kenyan doctors. He failed to listen to Prof Ali Mazrui's admonition: "There is a crying need in Kenya for a collective healthcare self-reliance. The presence of Cuban doctors to do Kenya's dirty work, for example, is a humiliating confession of medicare impotence. Why were the Cuban doctors necessary?"

Obsession with national politics

Until the various elected leaders in Raila Odinga's strongholds assuage the fears of the cautiously hopeful supporters of BBI, BBI politics will only excite the top echelons of the political leadership. Those who see no good coming out of the BBI process, and those who fear that the BBI's political tidal wave will flood the citizens with more unaccountable, corrupt or incompetent leaders, will remain pessimistic and unenthusiastic about the BBI's proposed constitutional reforms. They believe that Kisumu County's healthcare sector woes, under the leadership of Governor Anyang' Nyong'o, is only symptomatic of what's wrong with the BBI politics: Raila Odinga's obsession with national politics at the expense of the ODM-governed counties' politics.

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"Luos will be in BBI as long as Raila is there," summed up the political strategist. "If he left tomorrow, they would all leave. Luos are interested in Baba, not in parties or BBI. If it's the route to the presidency, so be it, they will follow him and the BBI."

The strategist told us that the late Joshua Orwa Ojode, the former Ndhiwa MP and Assistant Minister for Internal Security, used to say this of the Luo and Raila: "*Raila en tam tam raia*". Raila is the [Luo] people's sweetener. "Seven years after Ojode died in a helicopter crash, seven minutes after he was airborne with his boss at the ministry, George Saitoti, in June 2012, his statement remains as true to today as when he made it in 2003," said the strategist.

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