**BBI: FACT, FICTION AND FALLACY**

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

**A MOMENT OF NATIONHOOD**

There comes a time when the right combination of circumstances and people unite to create a moment whose significance balloons beyond expectations, and give rise to a chain of events that end up changing the course of history, inspire the rise of new ideologies, signals the restructuring of society and heralds the birth of a new era. The domineering forces of status quo conspire to make sure such moments are few and rare, but every once in a while, the winds of change blow with such mighty defiance as to guarantee that history is graced with brief instances when the status quo is halted, if only for a moment, and the angelic guardians of reforms get a window to rewrite history. Such moments occupy a special place in the annals of history, command a religious reverence in the hearts of contemporaries and provide a never-ending stream of inspiration to future generations who trace their identity back to them. Such moments codify the story of a people, providing meaning to their pain, trials and travails of the past, and embody the dreams and destiny of a future they strive towards. They provide a fecund womb in which to conceive a nation and a sacred tomb in which to encrust the spirit of nationhood. Such a moment is a moment of nationhood.

Before delving into the subject matter of this essay and anchor our vessel on our very own shores so that we can disembark and traverse our motherland, perhaps we should, by way of illustrating just how momentous a moment of nationhood can be, we take a tour into the depths of time and the vastness of the seas and lands to marvel at examples of such moments of nationhood. Such was the moment when on the 4th of July 1776, the thirteen colonies ratified the Declaration of Independence to conceive the nation that would become the United States of America, holding such truths to be self-evident, as that all men are born equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Such was the moment when on the 20th of June 1789 the Third Estate took the Tennis Court Oath voting "not to separate and to reassemble wherever necessary, until the Constitution of the kingdom is established”, signaling the birth of a new France which proclaimed to uphold Liberty, Equality and Fraternity as the founding ideals. Such was the moment when in Aril 1917 Vladmir Ilych Ulyanov (Lenin) disembarked from the train in Petrograd, alongside 29 of his compatriots, breathing life and vitality into the revolution and promising the masses the three essentials, “peace, bread, land”. Such was the moment when on the 29th October 1923 Mustafa Kamal proclaimed the birth of modern turkey. Such was the moment in many other nations, and such, I dare say, was the moment, on the 9th of March 2018, on the steps of Harambee House, when the President and the former Prime Minister embraced each other in the iconic “handshake” and announced they were ready and willing to rethink the foundations of our nation, redesign the pillars of our society and re-tailor the fabric of our identity. Yes, it was a moment of nationhood. Or was it?

I have cited the above examples for the purpose of conjuring up an image of the mood that permeates a moment of nationhood, the emotions that prevail, the aspirations sour and the course the succeeding events follow. We will thus, in the subsequent lines of this essay, call into aid illustrations from the four historical settings, as we try to contextualize our own setting. To be sure, 9th of March isn’t the only moment of nationhood to have occasioned our country, quite the contrary. There have been numerous such moments. But as we will endeavor to reveal, the significance of the moment lies not in the instance of culmination itself, but in the preparation that leads to this moment and more importantly in the events immediately following such moments. Be that as it may, 9th of March is the most recent example, the memory of which is still fresh in our imagination, the impact of which is still felt to date, the implications of which have shaped the politics of the country hence. But before we get into the details, let’s first define, for our present context, what a moment of nationhood really is.

As will be easily inferred from the examples cited above, there are three key ingredients which combine in a complex recipe involving long histories, foundational ideologies and ebb and flow of prevailing events, that give birth to what we will call a moment of nationhood. A moment of nationhood is a climactic event that combines in one pot, both the past and future of a nation; an event that captures both the pain and potentialities of a people; an event that embodies both the soul and spirit of the people and yet still reflects the raging realities of a country. It is during such an event that the story of a nation is written, its identity forged, its journey commissioned and its position on the global geopolitical food chain established. So what exactly constitutes a moment of nationhood?

The first ingredient is a story of struggle shared by the members of the given society. It is this story which does give meaning to existence and lend the nation its legitimacy. The second ingredient is the availability of statesmen of towering vision. Their guidance provides a map with which to navigate the endless maze of nation-building. The third ingredient is a stake to be won. This provides the motivation that makes the journey a worthy endeavor. Story, statesman and stake. We will examine these in turn to see the role each play in the creation of a moment of nationhood. More importantly, we will look at each in relation to the events of 9th March, in a bid to render the “handshake” and the events that followed it, in their proper context.

**THE MAKING OF THE MOMENT**

The declaration of independence by the thirteen colonies is significant because of the oppression the colonies were subjected to by British suzerainty. And thus the moment tells the story of an end to the oppression and a beginning of a new era of freedom, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The statesmen, prominent among them Thomas Jefferson provided the towering vision with which to forge the identity and define the character of the new nation. The stakes at hand were the collective destinies of the millions of Americans, the security of their business enterprises and livelihoods, the liberty of their culture and customs and the freedom to shape their institutions. In this story of struggle, the British Empire was the oppressor from whose clutches the American nation was determined to seek liberation. The sacrifices endured during the American revolutionary wars, the burdens of imperial exploitation through what was popularly phrased as taxation without representation and the alienation and over-lordship they had to endure at the hands of the masters in London, all went to render the story with penetrating realism. The statesmen who were to be immortalized as the Founding Fathers of the new nation were faced with the task of contextualizing a national discourse to create a philosophy that would illuminate the ruling institutions. Their task was to model a new path, and contrast it distinctly with the former systems. The colonies had suffered enough and it was time to chart a new beginning. "Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States,” the Declaration aptly stated. Such a bold move demanded the resole to endure all sacrifices in order to create the new nation. “And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." That was indeed a moment of nationhood.

A little over a decade later, the institutional decay in France *Ancien Régime*, was reaching unbearably suffocating proportions, and the Third Estate, who comprised the majority and bore the brunt of it all, had just about had it. It was their struggle against the oppression meted out to them by their betters that was to form the material of the story in this case. Gaping social and economic inequalities, ballooning unemployment, ever-encroaching poverty, sky-rocketing food prices, a crushing and regressive tax system and the overall wretchedness of life, all went to punctuate every line in the story and fermenting the anger of the Third Estate. Made infinitely worse by the fact that the regime refused all attempts at reforms and instead went ahead to alienate the third estate, thus effectively creating a siege situation with itself as the besieged party. The summoning of the Estates-General of 1789 therefore was but a call to bear witness to the collapse of the *Ancien Régime* and usher in a new era of constitutional monarchy, midwifed by a bloody revolution. The statesmen who gave this moment meaning include a long list of intellectuals of the “Enlightenment” such as Voltaire and Rousseau, through whose works and ideas the conceptualization of a new nation under a different system was made possible.

The Russian revolution led by Lenin and the Turkish revolution led by Mustafa Kamal both mirror the structure of the American and French revolutions though not in clearly defined parallels. As for the Russian revolution, it was a struggle against the decaying institutions much like the French Revolution. The Turkish revolution was both a struggle against foreign domination as well as against the stench of the decaying social structures.

The above illustrations assist us to define the roles each of the three ingredients play in creating a moment of nationhood. The story of struggle is essential because it contains the collective suffering of the population, or at least the segment of the population driving the reforms. They culminate in a moment of meaning by offering an opportunity to eclipse history and write a new chapter. The visionary zeal of the statesmen and intellectuals determine the shape the new society will take, and articulate the identity of the new nation. The stake offers a motivating force by which to make the sacrifices endurable. It is the coalition of these three ingredients that give rise to a moment of nationhood and provide the window through which to conceive a nation. The birth of every nation can be traced to a particular moment of nationhood around which the constellation of the national paraphernalia revolves.

The 9th of March 2018 offered us such a moment of nationhood for the simple reason that the three ingredients came together, whether by chance of deliberate attempt, and even if just for a brief moment. A story of struggle had been sufficiently scripted in the lead-up to the event. Human lives had been lost without discrimination as a result of frothing ethnic hatred and general distrust. Elections had been ceremonies for human sacrifice. The economy was teetering towards a total collapse. Unemployment was the chorus of this heart-wrenching sad poem. Rather than pulling together as the founding philosophy urged us to, we were pulling apart with much vigor and vengeance. Collapse was only imminent. But the statesmen of our land, in the persons of the President and the former Prime minister stood to the occasion, and if we are to give them the benefit of doubt, despite their personal interests and ambitions, they put the country first. They opened a window for the wind of healing to breeze across our beautiful land. It is in this that a moment of nationhood was created. But only just. For, hardly had the healing started when even more painful wounds were opened. The moment came abruptly and it was gone just as quickly. For a moment of nationhood to count as such, it needs to be capitalized upon; for the window to be widened to create a path; the path to be well demarcated to create a roadmap; the roadmap to be worked on to create a shared destiny; the destiny to be believed to create an identity; the identity to be fertilized to conceive a nation.

Such however wasn’t the pattern of events as it unraveled. The moment wasn’t capitalized with much intellectual rigor as would have been expected, a condition necessary to maintain the momentum and lead to the creation of a constructive national discourse. The window was shut quickly as parties on both sides of the divide suspected mischief in the whole affair, thus, instead of creating trust, cracks of distrust leading to divergence painted the entirety of the national crust. Rather than roadmap only rifts and ridges appeared. The more the effort to pull together was fronted, the greater the drift that formed. Suffice to say no shared destiny, no identity no conceiving of a nation. Clearly we missed the moment. But the bare admission is not enough. How did we miss it? How differently could we have contextualized events? How different could it all have been? More importantly, how many such moments have we missed in the past? Why is it that, after five solid decades since the attainment of political independence, we are still battling with such basic questions as the very identity of the nation? Is there even a nation to speak of?

**LOSING THE MOMENT**

That we lost the moment of nationhood occasioned by the “Handshake” is not in question. That in deed we have lost many such moments in the past throughout our long and winding history is also not up to much debate. Compounded with the fact that we lack a robust national discourse to address these concerns, warrants a strong inquiry into the very architecture of this project called “Kenya”. But before we dig into that, a little context is in order. As I am writing this essay, I can distinctly hear, from the adjacent room, a conversation between a senior party official of the ruling party and a former leader of the same ruling party in the House, arguing about the politics of the day, in a tone that leaves no one in doubt that there is no love lost between them. Earlier, I heard the President daring his deputy to resign and the said deputy rebutting he was there to stay. “hustler nation” is now very much a thing, as well it should, and it laments on the social inequalities prevalent in our society. Members of county assemblies are making superfluous demands, which would be amusing were they not terribly painful to consider, in order to pass the BBI Bill and it can only be expected that Members of Parliament will make even more ridiculous demands, all at the crushing cost of the general citizenry. There’s also something about a sky-rocketing debt. Unemployment still forms the same sad chorus as ever. And I can’t help but make out the soul-crushing rhythm of history reverberating across our lands; the very same ravaging rhythms that have always heralded the collapse of societies. I hear nothing of the questions of national identity. I hear nothing about our collective destiny. I hear nothing about conceiving a nation. All I hear is a deafening noise from the drums of the ongoing contest of supremacy. All I hear are the cheerleaders cheering as we tear the nation. This doesn’t point to a nation pulling together. In fact, it doesn’t describe a nation at all, but a group of people unable to agree on the appropriate formula with which to share the resources abounding within the borders of this land we just so happen to inhabit. And all this at the backdrop of a debate about a document tailored to do just that; create a nation. Clearly we missed the moment. Big time!

During the momentous event of 9th of March, which will remain our reference point throughout this essay, the two statesmen highlighted nine issues, which in subsequent entries we will explore in turn, which it was supposed would provide the answer of why, after over five decades, we were still not a nation. To remain true to the source material, throughout the course of this and the subsequent essays on this subject, I will restrict myself to the exposition of the nine issues in an effort to reveal the essence of each issue through the aid of rigorous philosophical methods. Having revealed their essences thus, I will endeavor to render them in their appropriate context to enable the creation of models for their addressing. I concede, though with much pity, that we already lost this moment. But I remain hopeful that we can still reclaim it. Or, at the very least, another moment will come, and it will find us ready. But for present purposes, let’s spare no effort in coming to grips with why we lost the moment this time. When the occasion permits, we should turn our kaleidoscope into the past and see why we lost such moments when they came.

Before digging into the reasons why we lost the moment, a crucial point warrants special mention at this point. Prior to the coming of the colonialists, Kenya as a political entity did not exist. It did not exist as any entity at all for that matter. Granted, the tribes existed in their own formations, sometimes trading with each other; at other times raiding each other for livestock and God knows what else. Each tribe had its own social institutions and customs and hierarchies of leadership. But there was not, and neither had there been any framework to provide tangents for an integrated single State mirroring the present State of Kenya. There had not existed any cultural markers that could encompass the over forty tribes into a single entity. The tribes did not share a common language, did not share a common religion, and did not share a common history. There had not been any widespread conquests by a warring warrior-prince to try and subjugate the tribes and forge a united State, at least not that we know of. Such ambitions don’t seem to have simmered outside tribal lands and boundaries. As such, there was not any precedent for nation-building. While the coastal strip tells a different story and indeed was under the governance of the Sultanate of Zanzibar, those waves of a Swahili nation only swept the shore and ebbed before they could make it to the interior. Why is this important? The story of a Kenyan nation has at its core a nagging colonial thread through whose haphazard weaving, out came an entity called Kenya, whose identity it’s our task to unravel, and if it comes down to it, create.

And so it came to be, through the seven decades of European colonization, a nation was forged, not out of a shared identity but as an expedient entity to facilitate the proper and optimal exploitation of the colony. The common language was the language of exploitation that united all the native tribes in the back-breaking slaving in plantations and mines and factories to enrich the colonizers. The common religion was the absolute worship of anything white and denigration of anything black; a religion of alienation. The common history was to be the collective suffering at the hands of the colonizer. And so it was that exploitation, alienation and collective suffering formed the underlying ideology of the colonial State, a State which we inherited intact and incorporated its institutions wholesale when we attained political independence. As days turned into years and years into decades, it became increasingly difficult to alter or even tinker with this ideology. Rather, we became more preoccupied with the task of “development”. Partly because it was so much easier to “develop” than to re-conceive the nation, partly because we did not know how to go about the task of re-conceiving the nation, and partly because the very class of elites who would be expected to lead in this task became primary beneficiaries of the material goodies the colonial State could offer and thus got trapped by the sweetness of the loot, we have perpetuated the very same founding ideology of exploitation, alienation and suffering to the present day. And alive to that reality, it is no wonder we are constantly pulling apart rather pulling together. Because deep down, we all know too well that Kenya belongs to the powerful, just as it did in the colonial days. We recognize the fact that the only God worth our worship is a foreign God; only foreign institutions warrant our reverence; only foreign ideas command our respect; we worship now, as we worshiped then, a foreign ideal. We have learnt to alienate ourselves. We have remained true to the founding ideology.

A sincere effort at re-thinking our nationhood must thus first start with a sober analysis of the uncomfortable truths whispered above. That every time we have tried to conceive a nation we have been stymied, calls into question a critical examination at how we have been going about the exercise. And what better way that to start than with the most recent attempt. An attempt which, some would have us believe is still ongoing. An attempt which, some are hopeful will deliver us a utopia; an attempt which has so far caused as many casualties as it sought to save; an attempt whose echoes reverberate all across the country. An attempt the examination of which we now delve into.

**WHY WE LOST THE MOMENT**

I will address this question from three fronts or lenses, taking each in turn. The three are: essence, platform and method. The first will probe into what the essence of a moment of nationhood is and more importantly what it’s not. Given the reception the events of 9th of March received, and the ripples they have caused, a question can be raised on whether we understand the essence of such a moment. Without a full appreciation of its significance, it’s not hard to see why we could have missed it. The second covers the appropriate platform with which to advance the agenda that surrounds the moment of nationhood. As pointed out earlier, the significance lies not in the moment itself but in the events leading up to it and even more crucially, the chain of events following and the course such a chain will adopt; To adopt the right platform upon which to anchor the agenda is a paramount matter; a platform that can sustain the weight of the matters at hand. The third front concerns the method to be adopted towards the creation of a national discourse. A moment of nationhood conceives a nation. But it’s the ensuing national discourse that actually builds the nation. The discourse defines the shape and color of the nation. Its robustness directly determines the strength of the nation; its integrity will go a long way to affect the longevity of the nation. The choice of method for such a discourse is thus of paramount importance to the nation.

Before proceeding to the examination of the three fronts in detail, a crucial caveat begs attention. The processes and events that led to the formation of Kenya as a State are not unique to Kenya. Indeed many African states share in that story, even if not in exact structure, at least in the general plot. And indeed many such States have had to deal with similar issues of identity and nation-building as we. The exposition that follows will thus apply to many African states. And it is for this reason that I believe the events of 9th March shouldn’t just be left to the whims of politics. A keen study thereof will reveal important details that will help other statesmen from across the continent also examine their own affairs. Done properly, a national discourse always provides a blueprint for other nations alike, and it is my firm conviction that, had we adopted the right method and approach, we would have reawakened the spirit of African nationalism and reignited the embers of pan-Africanism. The American moment of nationhood shaped a nation that was to produce institutions that would become the models of the world we live in. the French moment of nationhood reverberated across Europe changing the course of Europe and giving it distinct color and shape. The Russian moment of history produced waves that washed far and wide. While we lament incessantly at the imposition of western institutions in the management of our affairs, its more astute to learn how develop our own. It’s more beneficial to learn how to interpret events and use them to structure models that mirror our set of circumstances and hence models that can work for us. It is the hallmark of our maturity to capitalize of such moments of nationhood to create a movement. The Kenyan moment of nationhood might just be the spark that will light the torch of hope and usher in a new era in Africa. For that to happen however, we need to get it right.

**Essence**

Earlier we defined a moment of nationhood as a union of contrasts, a pairing of contradictions, a coalition of opposites, the yin and yang. It is this holy union of opposites that produces the potency via which conceiving a nation is made possible. Just like the conception of any living organism needs the fertilization of the male and female gametes, two opposites that fuse to unlock the energy of life, so too does a body of people, a community, need the alliance of its opposing forces to bind together the bonds of unity and communion. At the moment of nationhood, the collective suffering of the past is infused with meaning and becomes a struggle. The journey becomes a cause. The dead become martyrs. The fighters become heroes. The statesmen become founding fathers. And a group of people become a nation. So what exactly is the actual essence of a moment of nationhood? If we were to distill to the one thing that makes the moment truly significant, then it would be the meaning that is gifted to the story of a people. Without such meaning, the suffering remains just that; a painful memory on the wretchedness of life. The dead become just that; a remainder on the vanity of our existence. The fighters become just that; brave men who sacrifice their lives for naught. Meaning is the philosopher’s stone that transforms the past suffering into a glorious struggle and the bloody slaughter into a glorious revolution.

But meaning is created through the art of narration. The story has to be told with masterful art for it to penetrate the heart and soul of the nation. A failure of narration will neuter the potency of the story and hence hinder the moment of nationhood from conceiving a nation. Without giving meaning to the story, the moment of nationhood will indeed be meaningless.

Going back to the “Handshake” moment, while the gesture was admirable, the manner in which it was unveiled, with the secrecy that went into the meeting of the two leaders, the evident exclusion of everybody else including close confidants, and the general suddenness of it all, ensured that the immediate reaction was one of shock as opposed to relief; one of doubt as opposed to confidence in a bright future; one of cynicism as opposed to jubilation; and most crucial, one of perceived betrayal as opposed to trust. Under such circumstances, it became very difficult to tell a story in such a manner as to infuse it with meaning. And without meaning, the potency of conceiving a nation from that moment of nationhood became neutered at the very steps of Harambee House. In deed with each retelling, while the shock abated, the cynicism only grew.

And so one direct answer to the question of why the “Handshake” failed to unite the country is that the story of the “Handshake” wasn’t infused with enough meaning. Therefore, the past suffering remained just that if not more bitter given that there was now a sense of betrayal in the story. It’s only through meaning that that past suffering could be turned into a glorious struggle culminating in that moment. Make no mistake, the moment did bring peace; but peace, especially if it’s temporary peace, is not unity. The United States and Russia are not actively trying to destroy each other with Armageddon weaponry as they tried to during the Cold war. It can thus be delicately stated that there’s peace between the two countries. But not even the most optimistic amongst us can say there’s unity between them. And therefore, while the “handshake” should be rightly credited for cooling political temperature and allowing a sense of normalcy to return, to allude to a unity that was created by the event would be superfluous delusion bordering on madness. Only the players changed sides. But the game is very much on; A game the end of which will tear the country into irreconcilable and irreparable pieces.

On the first test therefore, if we are honest with ourselves, the test of essence, we scored naught. The solution; give the story meaning.

**Platform**

The momentum created during the moment of nationhood should be sustained by creating a national discourse. A national discourse refers, in the present context, both to the space within which creative work of nation-building is allowed, and the process of going about with this creativity. A nation is built with ideas. Whatever other ways you elect to conceive a nation, you can only build it with ideas. And ideas need the space for accommodation. More technically, the object of a national discourse is to frame a ruling philosophy, through which the structures of governance will be given shape and morphology.

It is at this point that the intellectual establishment really features prominently, or ideally it ought to. But this wasn’t going to be the case because of reasons I will highlight briefly. Since independence, the intellectual community has been, largely, in conflict with the State, and at times in open warfare. And this is a feature the prevalence of which is not unique to Kenya, but one that is shared by almost all post-independence African States. While the actual anatomy of this relationship is too complex to be fully covered in the space of the present entry, it should suffice to note that each generation of scholars and intellectuals has always had a very different view regarding how the State should conduct the business of ruling the society. The traditions upon which these scholars were educated have always been in conflict with the traditions upon which the politicians chose to ground the philosophy of the country. This has resulted in a bitter conflict with the intellectuals always on the losing end, with most choosing exile and others succumbing to the evil machinations of State power.

At crucial moments when the State needs her intellectuals, very few answer to the call, and those that do have been trained by past experience to toe the line. They are thus denied of the academic freedom which is a prerequisite for knowledge production. And when this knowledge involves the development of proper system for the management of State, a lot of experimentation is called for. An environment that accommodates dissent is a necessary requirement in the creation of a platform for knowledge production. Such production entails a lot of philosophizing. Philosophy, by nature demands a through questioning and deconstruction of reality to its barest elements. This is so as to reveal the essence. But experience has taught both the intellectual and the politician that questioning may involve opposition. This has resulted in the alienation of the intellectual by the politician, and sometimes self-alienation by the intellectual themselves.

Lack of a free space for intellection of and philosophizing has resulted in a restricted platform for knowledge production. And without such a platform, the creation of a national discourse becomes a mirage. The solution to this is the nurturing of an environment that supports intellectual growth and especially philosophy. To question is not to oppose; and to oppose following sufficient philosophical justification is the engine that propels any society forward. How many books were published on how capitalize on the “Handshake” and create a national discourse? How many provided details on how to go about this process? How many treatises were written to awaken the nation to the significance of the moment? How many philosophical dissertations were published touching on the nine issues highlighted by the two leaders? How many public debates were organized for the same end?

The “handshake” failed to evoke philosophical interest, a failure which belongs to both the politician and the intellectual. It is worth noticing that the three fronts are connected. A failure in infusing meaning to the story led to alienation. Many politicians and almost all intellectuals distanced themselves from the affair, terming it nothing but “a gentleman’s agreement” between two leaders. And this alienation made it difficult to conjure the appropriate platform for the initialization of a national discourse. And this failure to provide the platform, made the next stage, that of method, very problematic indeed.

**Method**

We come now to the method of carrying out a national discourse.it will be remembered that the method is tied to the platform which is in turn tied to the essence of the moment of nationhood. As we have already poked holes in the other two fronts, the arguments and conclusions of this section can easily be anticipated. I will, in future entries of this series got into a deeper exposition on the mechanisms and appropriateness of a method of national discourse. For present purposes, I will only highlight few fundamental issues concerning the choice of method.

It can easily be deduced that the choice of method is anchored on the kinds of issues that form the crux of the discourse. In this case, our task is made easy by the highlighting of the nine-point agenda by the two leaders on the steps of Harambee House. That ought to have set the tone of the discourse and informed the method to use to conduct this discourse. I wish not to get into the issues now as that will form the main body of future entries, but for the sake of illustrating my point, allow me to sample the “how” questions on the list. “How to end ethnic divisions”, “how to solve polarizing elections”, “how to deal with corruption” and “how to deal with a lack of national ethos”. These four problems are simple and straightforward in their phrasing and direct in the issues they touch and the solution anticipated.

On the matter of ending ethnic divisions, the phrasing already presupposes the existence of said ethnic divisions and passes judgment on the undesirability of the impact of said divisions. To end them thus would entail an examination of how they came to be in the first place, and whether the real issue is with their existence or just the negativity that arises from their existence. The two are different conditions and they each call for a different approach. To end the ethnic lines entirely would call for cutting all tribal lines, a complete refusal to segment our society along tribal lines. This is possible as has been demonstrated by Rwanda. To end all tribal affiliations is to restructure society to make tribes non-existent, dispensing with vernaculars and promoting a national identity that supersedes and indeed eliminates tribal cultural markers. If the question is on the tensions that exist and how to diffuse them while keeping the tribes intact, then the solution has to come not from the elimination of tribes but in removing the barriers that entrench hostility and distrust. The question becomes one of fostering trust between one tribe and another. Either way, the point am illustrating is that the ensuing exercise is deeply philosophical in nature. The choice of method must thus be informed by the intellectual energy that will be required in the process of getting to an answer and in the eventual transformation of this answer into a working model.

On the matter of ending polarizing elections, it will be noted that the phrasing is problematic, given that elections are by nature polarizing. It is a contest between two sides or among several factions. Made more problematic by the fact that the nature of our politics goes to extreme lengths to make sure elections are about survival not just policies and propositions. Being a contest of survival thus, the stakes become that much more valuable and the voter is forced to make a survival choice rather than a rational one. At the heart of the matter, it will be found the endemic distrust among the tribes and factions plays a large part to contribute to this sorry state of affairs. Since if tribe A doesn’t trust B to have its best interest at heart, it will feel threatened by the harrowing prospects of having tribe B in power, and so the contest will not be one of ideas but primal survival, and in such a contest, one feels pushed into a corner to employ all means at ones disposal, including violence. At this point in the exposition of the matter, it will be found that the phrasing of the question needs alteration to provide a realistic problem statement. It’s not a question of ending polarizing elections but the creation of a robust underlying national cohesive infrastructure that can withstand the shocks and turmoil or a polarizing election. In other words, the question is one on how to have elections, polarizing though they might be, without tearing the nation in the process. That is if we want to retain the system of choosing representatives through popular elections. To have one is to have the other. It’s a package deal. Again, like the first matter on ethnic division, this too is a very technical issue the examination of which will call for extensive intellectual resources and philosophical prowess. The choice of method of getting a solution must thus take these considerations into account.

I could go on to comment on all nine issues but the space doesn’t allow. So let the illustration of the two issues illustrate the point that the agenda for the national discourse set forth by the two leaders anticipated if not directly demanded that we choose a method that would collect the necessary intellectual bandwidth to address the issues. With this in mind, it needs no further demonstration to opine that the method adopted left a lot to be desired. While collecting the opinions of Kenyans is in order as is the case in every democracy, there’s a gaping disconnect between the intensity of the issues raised and the method selected to seek their solutions. Popular views and opinions, while they represent the voice of the people, still do not provide the appropriate method to address as deep and fundamental issues as how to restructure society and design a robust system that can withstand the brunt of polarizing elections and all the other issues that formed the agenda of the national discourse. A popular exercise, yes; a democratic one, definitely; but definitely not an academic one.

To sum, I have taken great pains to demonstrate why, at least on this very occasion, we missed the moment of nationhood. I have done this with two genuine objects in mind. First, to raise awareness into the underlying structure of our politics that has blinded us in the past and blinded us on the fateful occasion of 9th of march, when a moment of nationhood presented itself but we were unable to recognize it, or unwilling to take the appropriate steps to capitalize on it. Secondly, having thus laid the matter open, that we may embark on a search to reclaim the moment. And it’s to the matter of a possible reclamation of the moment of nationhood that we now turn.

**RECLAIMING THE MOMENT**

A national discourse needs to be anchored on a moment of nationhood for it to have life, vitality and momentum. If we are in agreement that we need to engage in a national discourse then it behooves us to make an attempt in reclaiming the lost moment of nationhood. And having thus far outlined how such a loss occurred, the reclamation is but a conscious exercise to retrace our steps and effect the necessary corrections and adjustments. But to give this discussion validity, I feel obliged to demonstrate the need and indeed urgency for such reclamation.

We are barely eighteen months to another general election and the political situation alone is very disturbing to say the least. As already pointed out, the last attempt at a moment of nationhood achieved little by way of unity. If you will pardon the repetition, peace is not unity. To confuse the two is to set oneself for disaster. A significant portion of the political class felt alienated, and with good reasons. The ruling party is fractured beyond repair and the political marriage between the president and his deputy is undergoing a messy and noisy divorce, one that’s guaranteed to claim considerable casualties. But all these are petty concerns compared to the elephant in the room.

To alienate a tribe is one thing. But to alienate the youths of the country and where these youths make up the largest proportion of the population is a guarantee for a very bloody revolution simmering, awaiting the opportune time to erupt. Here’s where matters get complicated. The BBI debate has now been staged in direct opposition to the Hustler nation narrative. The anatomy of the Hustle nation warrants of series of essays of its own, one I hope to embark on before it’s too late to breathe sense into the political dialectics. To be sure, the Hustler nation exists and it represents a more relevant conversation to the multitudes of youths. Remember the chorus of unemployment we have been singing for decades? That’s the natural outcome. Our failure at reforms has inadvertently birthed a population determined to make it on their own. Graduates who have lacked meaningful jobs have resolved to hustle their way through the travails of 21st century Kenya. This resolve is motivated and fed by a residual anger at the system and indeed establishment to keep the one promise it repeated throughout the child’s development. “Go to school, get good grades, and get a good job”. The disappointment and despondency resulting from the failure of society at large to keep this promise is the energy that animates the “Hustler Nation”. While the politicians riding with this narrative are mainly doing so for political expediency, it doesn’t negate the actual danger that exists. You are poking a sleeping dragon. If and when it awakens it will know no master. It will spray fire to everything within its sight. It will lay waste to both land and sea.

The danger of staging a contest between the BBI and the Hustler nation is that it’s a strategy without an endgame. If the BBI side wins, that will in effect mean the alienation of the “Hustler nation”, or at least that’s how it will be phrased. Alienating the hustler nation is akin to weaponizing them. And that will very much awaken the dragon. If the “Hustler nation” wins the contest, that will awaken the dragon anyway. Hence in the end, the dragon master and his perceived enemies will both perish at the hands of the dragon. There’s no winner in this context. But in the hope that it’s not too late, we can begin work on the intellectual framing of a constructive discourse. I call the reader’s attention to the events of the French and by extension the Russian revolution. The third estate and the workers, who were still effectively serfs, had been alienated by the establishment; this despite the fact that they constituted the majority. To alienate the majority of our population is to create a siege situation with you as the besieged party.

It is these tremors signifying an imminent volcanic eruption that make the reclamation of the moment of nationhood a matter of national urgency. The task of reclamation involves three stages the antitheses of which have already been sufficiently covered for present purposes. Step one: tell a story that actually has meaning. Without meaning our suffering turn into hopelessness and that hopelessness makes life appear with little value. And when people see no value in life they make a mess on their way out. A real and total mess. Step two: provide a platform for intellectual fruition. A nation is built on ideas and ideas need space and freedom to grow and fly. Step three: adopt the appropriate method. We are confronted with deep and fundamental issues. To address them we need to choose a rigorous approach that will yield desirable results. A national discourse is not a political contest. It is the one time to put differences aside to weave together a nation that will survive for centuries. Longevity is what signals to the strength and fortitude of the foundations of nations.

Having reclaimed the moment, we can now move to create an actual national discourse.

**TOWARDS THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL DISCOURSE**

As this will form the subject matter of subsequent entries in this series within the context of the nine issues highlighted by the two leaders, I need not get into too much detail here. I need only make a solemn proposition, in light of the lengthy discussion we’ve had; that such a national discourse will make sense only when anchored on the nine issues as the subject matter but viewed within the context of a nation, a significant majority of which identify themselves as hustler nation. And it just so happens that this hustler nation is also the inheritor of the nation we are forging together. We must approach the discourse with sincere intentions and create an atmosphere of accommodation.

Before we can develop our nation we must first build it. Before we can build it we must conceive it. To conceive it, we must appreciate the value inherent in a moment of nationhood. Let us thus come together to provide the much needed womb in which to conceive the nation. And let us in the end betroth it to our progeny with the satisfaction that we each did our best.

If they ask how I spent my youth,

Tell them the nation called,

And I heeded the call.

Upon which I found a great truth,

With a mixture of joy and sorrow,

That I was the nation,

And the nation was i.

Joyful that I did my best,

Sorrowful that I wished I had done more.

Long were the years I waited and yearned

For a savior to come and open the gates.

Vast were the lands I traveled and searched

For a guardian to descend and make my path.

I wish I knew before ‘twas too late,

That I was the nation,

And the nation was i.

And now I stand and the edge of time

Staring blindly at the starry sky.

Listen child, for you are next in line

Heed the call and you too will understand why

I am the nation

And the nation is i.