Beyond Nyamiranga
By Matunda Nyanchama
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A few years ago, I listened to a fellow Nyamiran speak about the unfolding of his world as a child. In a well-received speech to a graduation ceremony in Minneapolis, Minnesota (USA) Professor Justus Ogembo spoke about growing up around the hills of Nyamiranga. As a little boy his world view, he said, was confined by the hills of Nyamiranga, the horizon of his being.

Over time, however, he came to realize how much more existed beyond the hills, an epiphany that unfolded as he travelled to the tea-growing estates in the Kericho region. Here, he ‘discovered’ another world, of people that spoke other languages; men and women that offered their labour in exchange of wages and others from foreign lands, with a difference skin – Europeans that ran the tea estates and factories.

Just traveling beyond the hills of Nyamiranga had opened a new world and extended the horizon of his being, he confessed. And indeed, the more he traveled the further this horizon extended.

Had remained confined by the hills of Nyamiranga, he would probably have never become the professor he is, even when his horizon keeps extending as he walks new paths and discovers new worlds.

I want to use the metaphor of Nyamiranga to illustrate the concept of leadership in our community (Gusii) and country (Kenya).

One famed person is quoted as saying that a leader is a person that takes people where they ought to be rather than where they want to go. People will know where they ought to go only if they are well-informed and understand what lies beyond Nyamiranga, the equivalent of Canaan for the Israelites. Being informed means having a horizon beyond Nyamiranga. A leader who knows where his/her people ought to be must be one with a wider horizon, stretching beyond Nyamiranga! Canaan.

For a long time our leadership in Gusii and Kenya has confined us to concepts of clan, tribe and negative discrimination. Little have they capitalized on our diversity as a basis for our strength. Little have we challenged them to offer us an agenda of development. We have left them to lord over us, instead of us demanding they play the servant leadership role they are supposed to.

Take the concept of clan in Gusii and its application to political decisions. Often we pick people because they are “ours”; proclaiming ekebe n’eki’omonyene. We even add that ‘monyene tana gweitera!

In this respect we elect men and women from our clan/tribe regardless of their ability to meet the mandate we have charged them with.

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1 Versions of this speech were given on diverse dates in March 2012 to students of Egerton University, Kisii and Egerton campuses.
In schools we protect non-performing teachers because they are “ours”; in elected politics we protect non-performing MPs, councillors and the like because they are “ours”.

My question is this: what of those that are hurt by poor leadership? Aren’t they “ours”?

Take the example of schools. Here our non-performing principals and teachers may, year in year out, obtain poor results. And over time, we end up with hundreds of students that fail. Question: aren’t these students “ours” too? And if they are ours like the principals and the teachers are “ours”, why protect one (or the few) at the expense of many?

In elected politics we would elect “our own”, and end up with a non-performing elected official. In the process the person fails to deliver, hurting all of us, including many of “our own”.

Is it right then to protect such a person just because s/he is our own even when s/he is causing a lot of suffering to hundreds of us?

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Now take the flip side of the coin. And to do this, I will illustrate with the tenure of the late George Morara, a man that came from Bonyamatuta and one who served for only nine months! And this is a revered man with many, many people named after him across Gusii. And if naming is an indication of how revered he was, then George Morara was a man loved by many. And he was thus loved because he succeeded as a leader, bringing rapid development in a very short time while protecting the interests of the people he represented.

Among his accomplishments are the District Headquarters in Nyamira (now our County Headquarters) and one can rightly call him the architect and father of Nyamira County. As well, he is credited with the establishment of the Nyamira District Hospital, the plan that resulted in the Kisii-Chemosit road and the Nyamira Water Project that a lot of people depend on.

Today, we enjoy the benefits of his vision (seeing beyond Nyamiranga) as we ride on the road he fought for, as we get services at the government offices he architected and as we get health services in the hospital he put in the development plan; and indeed, as we enjoy the water from the water project he sought for our people.

Yet, I keep wondering whether those of his clan get priority when it comes to travelling on the road from Chemosit to Kisii? I ask whether government officials must confirm that one is Omonyamatuta so that one can jump the queue as one seeks to be served in the government offices and hospital. Indeed, I ask whether Abanyamatuta are prioritized when we see k water from the Morara-initiated water project!

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The fact is that when you hit that road, you travel like anyone else using the road; when you go for government services you are treated like any other Kenyan seeking these services; and indeed, when you seek to drink water from the supply, you drink like any thirsty person seeking water from the water supply.
Friends, a good leader brings benefits to all; a bad one inconveniences us all. A good leader promotes the good of all; a bad leader, confined by narrow vision of clanism/tribalism/corruption, retrogresses all, including “his/her own”; this is one that cannot see beyond Nyamiranga.

Consider our own West Mugirango where there have been issues with Constituency Development Fund (CDF). As you know because of these issues, more than Kshs 70 million may end up being sent back to the exchequer because of problems with the management of the fund in the constituency.

Question: so who will gain? Perhaps none? Who will lose? Perhaps all of us, including those that claim the leader to be “their own”!

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I want to challenge you, as people that have been exposed to higher learning, to extend your horizons beyond Nyamiranga. I would like you to see the necessity of good leadership and why you should fight for that good leadership with every ounce of energy so that the leadership can bring development for all. I want you to challenge conventional wisdom and fight corruption and practices that result in the election of poor leadership.

Leadership is NOT a function of what clan one belongs to. Rather it is the power of the person’s ideas, the means to convert the ideas into actionable plans and the capacity to implement the plans. So it may be that my clanisman/woman is NOT the best person for the job s/he seeks. However, someone from a neighbouring clan may offer better leadership. It should be no brainer to pick the latter.

Clans, I must implore you, need to be understood in the context they are supposed to be used. As a group of related people, our ancestors were smart enough to put boundaries on interaction, especially with respect to marriage. Thus inter-clan marriage was forbidden so as to avoid genetic decline. (I am sure those of you who have studied biology and genetics will understand that recessive traits find expression when there is repeated intermarriage between people with similar genetic make-up.) Such decline would result in undesirable (including being retarded, being disease prone, etc.) traits in the offspring.

Clans MUST NOT be used as a basis for leadership selection. And yes, omonyene nabo agweitera if the proposed leader would be retrogressive; one that could bury many, including his own.

As with clanism, leadership is NOT a function of how much money one has. If the moneyed individual cannot offer and implement plans that benefit the people then we would have realized nought!

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As the elite of our society, you need to fight the vice of ogosera where contestants buy votes for as little as Kshs 50. In the process, our people give up their right to pick the right leader, and we end up with someone whose only interest is his/hers. In any case, the person would have bought the vote; and you have no right to demand services as the person would be busy recouping expenses spent buying the vote.

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And there is a reason to do things differently this time around. We have tried these ways (clanism, ogosera and the like) and we have the results such as coming last nationally (anyone remember Nyakemincha?) in education performance; coming first in the corruption index, and ranking very high in the national poverty index.
The truth is that we have a choice: do things the way we have done in the past and end up (with 100% chance) with the same results we have had. Choose differently and we have at least 50% chance that we will do better.

Our forefathers were wise enough when the counseled that: *gakiaborire ‘nchera maate, kerigerie ‘nchera rogoro*. The time has come for change of tact. And that foresight is seeing beyond Nyamiranga.

I would like you to challenge contestants to identify their plans, how those plans can benefit our people and how they intend to implement those plans.

Ask them what they would do differently to avert the declining land holdings as our population grows. Ask them about job creation possibilities (say) in agriculture, e.g. agro-processing, branding, etc. Ask them about education and how we can radically change the face of Gusii and Kenya to better outcomes. Ask about how they could help us glow once again in the sports arena so that our gifted sportsmen and women can earn a living out of their talent. Ask them what they would do to promote our culture as a means of income generation? Ask them how they would enhance entrepreneurship in the region. Ask how they can help reshape training programs (e.g. with village polytechnics and polytechnics) so that many that don’t advance to university have a means of livelihood.

If and when you start asking those questions, you would have extended our horizon, and moved beyond Nyamiranga. We would have started painting the picture of the possible Canaan we can attain.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a duty to ourselves, those of fellow men/women and future generations. That duty includes electing the right people to lead us to our Canaan. We have a duty to educate our peers, fellow men and women and all others to head for the Canaan we seek.

And that is extending our horizon; and overreaching Nyamiranga.

*NB: Dr Matunda Nyanchama is an information security professional and a possible candidate for political office in the coming elections.*