

Journal of Public Policy & Governance



ISSN Online: 2616-8413

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Peer Reviewed Journals & books

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ISSN: 2616-8413

The Mutaghallib's Paradox: Charisma, Assabiyya, and the Cycles of Solidarity in Raila Odinga's Political Career

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How to cite this article: Kogada, J. O. & Ondiek, S. O. (2025). The Mutaghallib's Paradox: Charisma, Assabiyya, and the Cycles of Solidarity in Raila Odinga's Political Career, Journal of Public Policy & Governance, 9(3), 34-48. <https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t4366>

Abstract

This paper analyzes the political career of Raila Amolo Odinga, one of Kenya's most enduring and polarizing figures through the dual sociological lenses of Ibn Khaldun's theory of Assabiyya (social cohesion) and Max Weber's concept of Charismatic Authority. The paper argues that Odinga's political longevity and influence derived from his repeated ability to construct, fracture, and regenerate three interlinked solidarities: Pristine Assabiyya (anchored in his Luo ethnic base and historical grievance), Coalitionary Assabiyya (temporary alliances such as NARC, ODM, and NASA formed around shared political grievances), and Ideological Assabiyya (cross-ethnic mobilization grounded in reformist and populist ideals). Drawing on Khaldun's cyclical theory of dynastic rise and decay, the paper demonstrates how each of Odinga's major coalitions followed a predictable pattern, rising through moral unity and shared struggle, then decaying under the pressures of patronage, elite compromise, and bureaucratic "sedentarism." The paper further employs Weber's framework to show that Odinga's charisma rooted in personal sacrifice and the mythos of moral resistance has repeatedly revitalized opposition politics yet remains perennially threatened by the routinization of charisma through institutionalization and elite accommodation. Finally, by examining the Ford–Kenya succession crisis of 1994 and extrapolating to Odinga's eventual political exit in death, the paper predicts a profound crisis of Assabiyya routinization in Kenya's opposition politics, likely triggering fragmentation, dynastic contestation, and the hopeful emergence of a new populist Assabiyya from the political periphery. Overall, this study situates Odinga's career within broader theories of charisma, solidarity, and state formation, offering a Khaldunian-Weberian framework for understanding how personal leadership and collective grievance interact to shape the cyclical dynamics of power and protest in postcolonial Africa.

Keywords: *Assabiyya, Charismatic Authority, Coalition Politics, Patron-Clientelism, Political Sociology, Dynastic Succession,*

<https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t4366>

1.0 Introduction

In modern Kenyan Politics, Raila Amolo Odinga remains arguably the most influential figure, a position that defies conventional political logic. Despite his five attempts at the presidency with at least two perceived as stolen victories, his power base, popular appeal, and ability to mobilize mass action consistently held the nation's center stage (Kagwanja, 2007), leading to his popular title, "The Enigma" or 'Agwambo', the mysterious one. Raila's many names were not merely nicknames; they were a testament to his giant stature in Kenyan politics. His genius presented in his sheer valor, tact and unpredictability that until his demise defined his legendary career. The person that Odinga defined was not rooted purely in policy or political structure, but in a formidable, personalized, and persistent political mythology.

As the son of Kenya's first Vice-President Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, many viewed Raila to have been born in a privileged political aristocracy, yet his path deviated from this elite privilege through his undiluted advocacy for multi-party democracy in the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in years of detention and torture. This suffering solemnized his identity as a martyr, a figure of profound moral authority, earning him the affectionate title "Baba" (Father). While the Odinga family began as Kenya's political aristocracy and elite due to Jaramogi's role in independence, that status became one of a persecuted opposition dynasty under the one-party state. Raila's political journey was much shaped not by inherited privilege but rather by inherited struggle, ideological resilience and the transformation of an elite dissent into populist resistance.

Raila Amolo Odinga's political career presents a compelling paradox in African democratic studies. His sustained capacity to mobilize millions, destabilize governments, and force constitutional accommodation places him at the nexus of power and protest in Kenya (Lynch, 2011). His political longevity is not a matter of institutional strength but of persistent political mythology, built upon a rare synthesis of powerful personal charisma and deeply entrenched group solidarity.

This paper employs two core sociological theories to explore this phenomenon. Firstly, Max Weber's theory of Charismatic Authority (Weber, 1978). Weber defines leadership based on the perceived exceptional qualities or heroism of an individual, inspiring intense personal devotion. He postulates that charismatic authority is inherently revolutionary and unstable, constantly facing the existential threat of routinization, the decay of personal devotion as the leader attempts to convert their power into a stable, bureaucratic form (Weber, 1978). Odinga's cyclical transitions between rebellion and co-optation, challenging the state, entering into power-sharing, and then returning to the opposition, perfectly embodies this Weberian tension.

The second, theoretical framework is Ibn Khaldun's theory of Assabiyya, or "social cohesion" (Khaldun, 1967). Khaldun posits that Assabiyya is the non-material precondition necessary for collective action and political conquest (taghallub). This solidarity is strongest when forged by kinship, shared purpose, or common grievance, but it inevitably decays when a ruling group succumbs to the "sedentary" comforts and patronage of established power.

The gravitational nature of Odinga's support, just like that of his father, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, was forged in this crucible of political exclusion. Soon after independence, Jaramogi's fallout with President Jomo Kenyatta (in 1966), was followed by a pattern of state's consolidation of power through ethnic patronage which fractured the initial, national liberation Assabiyya (Branch & Cheeseman, 2009) that had won Kenya its independence. This political exclusion forced the Odingas to establish a resilient, enduring form of grievance-based Assabiyya rooted in their

Nyanza base. This provided them with the necessary "pristine" foundation, a core, unyielding solidarity, from which Raila would later launch his own charismatic, revolutionary challenge against the authoritarian regime of Moi.

Applying these frameworks to his political life, we argue that Raila Amolo Odinga acted as a political Mutaghallib (conqueror) whose career was a continuous cycle of building, fracturing, and renewing three distinct solidarities: the Pristine Assabiyya (the core base), the Coalitionary Assabiyya (temporary alliances like NARC and NASA), and the Ideological Assabiyya (the cross-ethnic da'wa for reform). His ability to leverage personal suffering (charisma) to re-ignite the collective grievance (Assabiyya) after every political compromise allowed him to repeatedly stave off the collapse of his movement and remain the enduring central figure in Kenyan politics.

1.1 The Pristine Assabiyya: The Core Base

Raila's most sturdy and resilient form of Assabiyya in his political career was rooted in his Nyanza/Luo community support base. This is the closest modern equivalent to Khaldun's original concept, a solidarity forged through common ancestry, a shared political history of opposition, and perceived marginalization by the central state since the 1960s and a true reflection following his father, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga's, political path.

The remarkable unrestrained strength of this Assabiyya lie in its extraordinary resilience and unity of the Luo community. It remained virtually unbreakable, consistently manifesting in near-unanimous voting blocs across successive elections and no political setbacks, compromises, temptations or privileges impacts its cohesion. This mirrors Ibn Khaldun's assertion that the earliest forms of group solidarity are often the most potent, forged in adversity and sustained by a shared sense of purpose and collective consciousness.

The driving force at the center of this lasting cohesion was Raila Amollo Odinga. The man who naturally assumed the role of the Mutaghallib, the conqueror and symbolic undisputed leader of his people. At the national level, he personified Kenya's collective aspirations, grievances, and hope. His political history that of torture and imprisonment coupled with his charisma, transformed him into more than a political figure. He became a living embodiment of the struggle itself. Through his experiences and continued defiance, Odinga continually revitalized this Assabiyya, ensuring that the group's unity remains as firm and fervent as ever.

1.2 The Coalitionary Assabiyya: The Cycle of Rise and Decay

Odinga's quest for national power required him to transcend his core base by forging broader, temporary Assabiyya with other communities and political figures. These coalitions are classic examples of political solidarity driven by shared grievance, and their eventual collapse mirrors Khaldun's cyclical theory.

The first ever momentous and most misunderstood coalition was with President Daniel arap Moi when KANU and NDP entered a merger. For Raila, the merger was more than a calculated move to gain strategic influence and position within the ruling party. His stated reason to dine with a party that was viewed by many as his tormentors party was to push for constitutional reforms and, to 'break KANU from within'. With the decay of the merger, Raila elevated his political profile from a regional opposition leader to one of the most transformative and influential national figures. This merger's coalitionary assabiyya did not last and failed almost as soon as it was established after Moi nominated Uhuru Kenyatta as Kanu's presidential candidate.

This was followed by the immediate formation of National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) that saw Mwai Kibaki ascend to the presidency. Kibaki administration (2002-2007) provides the clearest illustration of the rapid decay phase in coalitionary assabiyya. With Kibaki taken ill, Odinga tirelessly campaigned for the coalition, contributing significantly to the NARC victory. Kibaki had risen to the presidency through a massive wave of goodwill but his subsequent renegeing on the pre-election Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and settling for politically expedient, ethnically skewed appointments were the Khaldunian moment of rupture. This shift signaled a betrayal of the victorious movement leading to its sudden decline from ascetic solidarity (the promised democratic revolution) to the "sedentary" politics of ethnic patronage, transforming the movement's revolutionary leader (Odinga) back into the necessary Charismatic Challenger against a state he helped create.

NARC embodied the peak of high Assabiyya that was born out of widespread resentment toward President Daniel arap Moi's attempt to impose his chosen successor, Uhuru Kenyatta, and from a deep public yearning for democratic transformation after decades of one-party rule (Murunga & Nasong'o, 2007). This coalition's solidarity consolidated votes across regions giving it a resounding electoral victory, ending KANU's 39-year dominance and ushering in a historic change of government (Cheeseman, 2008). The victory and the celebrations did not last. Mistrust and disputes driven by unfulfilled pact agreements, emerging tribalism, greed and unmet promises of power-sharing fractured the alliance, transforming initial unity into mutual suspicion and betrayal (The Star, 2022).

In 2007, a reenergized ODM did not only emerge as a force, but it epitomized another powerful wave of collective energy. The party drew its renewed energy from shared widespread sense of betrayal and unfulfilled promises from the ruling coalition Party of National Unity (PNU) and accusations of electoral manipulation (Kadima, 2014). This strategic solidarity carried ODM to the brink of victory in an election that was mired with widespread irregularities leading to intensified and escalated violence across the country soon after the results were declared in favour of Mwai Kibaki. This resulted in the formation of the Grand Coalition Government after the fiercely disputed elections, brokered through Kofi Annan's mediation (Annan, 2012). However, once in power, just as with the NARC Coalition, the movement's revolutionary spirit was gradually dulled and decayed out of betrayal, mistrust, and competing ambitions among leaders. In the end, the coalition's unity crashed, with several notable allies like William Ruto (EISA, 2014) eventually exiting to forge new alliances.

A decade later in 2017, the birth of National Super Alliance (NASA) reignited a familiar sense of collective grievance. Its strength stemmed from a unified opposition to the Jubilee administration, anchored in calls for institutional reform and electoral justice (Oloo, 2019). Like the previous coalitions, the alliance maintained strong momentum, leading to another stolen victory. When the results were pronounced by IEBC, the NASA alliance denounced the results and subsequently proceeded to self "swear-in" Raila Odinga as the "People's President." And even with the rewriting of Kenya's history, unity proved fragile forcing the NASA allies to seek out other alternatives. And in 2018, Raila and Uhuru Kenyatta shocked the world again when they entered into the famous "Handshake". This handshake presented a gesture of national reconciliation but with a paradoxical effect that saw to the dissolution of NASA's adversarial Assabiyya (The Star, 2018; Nyabola, 2018). What had once been a powerful movement of resistance was undone by perceptions of betrayal, as constituent parties felt sidelined or disillusioned (Registrar of Political Parties, 2021).

Kenya's political history intensely exemplifies the cyclical nature of Assabiyya, the rise and decay of collective solidarity within political coalitions. Each major alliance has emerged from a moment of shared grievance and moral unity, only to later fragment under the weight of power struggles and shifting loyalties and betrayals (Ibn Khaldun, 1967; Branch & Cheeseman, 2009). Across these cycles, the pattern remains consistent: high Assabiyya born from shared struggle produces political ascendancy, but once power is attained, comfort, bureaucracy, and divergent interests inevitably corrode the solidarity that first fueled victory (Branch & Cheeseman, 2009; Ibn Khaldun, 1967).

1.3 Historical Drivers of Cross-Ethnic Assabiyya

Raila Odinga's transformation from a regional Luo leader into a national political force was not a matter of happenstance but the product of a series of defining historical moments that expanded his symbolic and political reach across ethnic boundaries. Each phase of his career reinforced a collective sense of purpose, what Ibn Khaldun (1967) described as Assabiyya that transcended identity politics and redefined opposition leadership in Kenya's post-authoritarian era.

1.3.1 The Iconography of the 'Second Liberation'

Odinga's rise in the Kenyan political landscape was sedimented during Kenya's struggle for second liberation through his unyielding agitation and resistance against the oppressive one-party regime in the 1980s and early 1990s. This coupled with his extended episodes of detention, between 1982 and 1988 and again in 1990, turned him into a living symbol of political resistance (Murunga & Nasong'o, 2007; Throup & Hornsby, 1998). With aggressive persecution of political dissidents by the authoritarian Moi's government and tightened controls, Odinga's endurance and suffering under incarceration was reinterpreted as acts of sacrifice for democratic renewal (Branch, 2011). This narrative resonated deeply across ethnic and class lines, particularly among students, clergy, and pro-democracy activists and elevated Odinga's political value as an emerging Weberian charismatic leader. He was seen as the moral foil to Kenya's deep-rooted elite embodying both the personal cost and collective aspirations of the struggle for pluralism (Weber, 1978; Githongo, 2006). His role during this period helped cultivate an ideological Assabiyya, a solidarity rooted not in ethnicity but in a shared desire for political freedom and justice.

1.3.2 The 2005 Referendum and the Rise of the 'Orange' Symbol

The 2005 constitutional referendum marked the climax for the clamor for change in Kenya and further affirmed Odinga's cross-ethnic political appeal. Mobilizing strategic masses against the proposed draft constitution favored and supported by the ruling party under President Mwai Kibaki. The faction led by Odinga adopted the Orange as its campaign symbol signifying resistance to a document perceived as betraying the reform promises of 2002 (Kadima, 2014). The "Orange" movement mobilized a nationwide cross ethnic, coalition that united Kenyans under a reformist vision transcending tribal boundaries (Cheeseman, 2008). The resounding victory beyond ending any remnant hopes for the possible survival of NARC, positioned Raila as the uncontested figurehead of a new national opposition, one that redefined political loyalty in ideological rather than ethnic terms (Murunga, 2011). In this moment, Assabiyya was reborn, not as a regional impulse, but as a collective crusade (da'wa) for a just and democratic constitutional order.

1.3.3 The 2007 Election and Forced National Recognition

The tragic and highly contested 2007 general election and the ensuing post-election violence, served to validate Odinga's stature as a national political principal. The magnitude of the crisis

revealed the breadth of ODM's reach and its capacity to challenge the state's legitimacy (Branch & Cheeseman, 2009; Mueller, 2008). ODM with a dense grassroots and national support saw Odinga's Assabiyya evolve into a force equal to that of the incumbent state apparatus. To restore order and sanity, a negotiated peace agreement was brokered by Kofi Annan under international mediation that established the Grand Coalition Government and formally recognized Odinga as Prime Minister. This institutionalized his influence at the apex of Kenyan politics (Annan, 2012). This moment symbolized the peak of his cross-ethnic solidarity: Assabiyya so potent that it demanded constitutional accommodation to restore national stability.

Odinga's transformative political journey grown out of his personal sacrifice, ideological symbolism, and collective grievance demonstrates his political rise beyond ethnic politics. His evolving Assabiyya anchored first in resistance, then reform, and finally national recognition will continue to shape the moral and emotional foundations of opposition politics in Kenya.

1.4 The Ideological Assabiyya: Reform and Class Mobilization

The most revolutionary form of solidarity that Raila Odinga consistently mobilized was the Ideological Assabiyya. This is a form of collective unity that transcends ethnic and regional identities. Ibn Khaldun (1967) observed that Assabiyya attains its highest vitality when fortified by a da'wa, a unifying moral or ideological mission that transcends kinship and binds communities through shared purpose. In Kenya's context, Odinga's da'wa has long revolved around the pursuit of constitutionalism, institutional reform, and the fight against corruption. These principles have positioned him not merely as an ethnic leader but as a national reformist symbol (Branch, 2011; Cheeseman, 2008).

1.4.1 Constitutionalism as Da'wa

In understanding Odinga's political career, one must equally study Kenya's protracted constitutional reform journey from the early 1990s, through to the promulgation of the 2010 Constitution. Throughout this epoch Odinga framed his movements as vehicles for a moral and civic crusade rather than ethnic patronage networks (Murunga & Nasong'o, 2007; Kadima, 2014). His rhetorical emphasis on *katiba* (constitution) and *haki* (justice) transformed political mobilization into a form of civic religion, a national da'wa for good governance, accountability, and institutional transformation.

This framing draws legitimacy from Kenya's long history of state excesses, centralization and executive dominance (Cheeseman, 2011). Odinga modeled his politics as the face of Kenya's reform agenda and by presenting himself as the custodian of reformist ideals, he positioned his movement as the moral antithesis of entrenched authoritarianism and corruption (Githongo, 2006). These tireless efforts drew a diverse pool of supporters to rally around his reformist cause, momentarily transcending ethnic polarization. The constitutional victory of 2010, widely regarded as a culmination of decades of civic struggle (Branch, 2011), represented the true reflection of this ideological Assabiyya: a collective belief in the possibility of reconstituting the Kenyan state along just and democratic lines.

1.4.2 The Class Dimension of Ideological Assabiyya

Odinga's Assabiyya transcended mere ideology and often acquired a pronounced class dimension. Through populist rhetoric and political symbolism, Odinga consistently modeled himself as the defender of the *wananchi*, the ordinary citizen against the entrenched political aristocracy, often caricatured as dynasties or cartels (Oloo, 2019; Nyabola, 2018). This class-based framing

reinterprets political struggle as a confrontation between the marginalized and the privileged, a narrative that resonates deeply in a society marked by stark socioeconomic inequalities (Branch & Cheeseman, 2009).

Class based Assabiyya remains critical in generating the revolutionary commitment necessary to challenge ruling elites. This reflects Ibn Khaldun's affirmation that solidarity at its strongest is born from shared deprivation and moral conviction rather than privilege (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). However, the same ideological purity that animated Odinga's illustrious efforts also made it fragile. A case in point is the disillusionment that followed the 2018 "Handshake" between Odinga and President Uhuru Kenyatta. A compromise gesture to restore national unity was, to some of Odinga's supporters, a symbolic collapse of his reformist Assabiyya into the transactional logic of elite accommodation (The Star, 2018; Oloo, 2019). Thus, while Odinga's ideological Assabiyya repeatedly ignited waves of reformist energy and cross-class mobilization, it remained inherently cyclical rising in moments of moral crisis and dissipating when faced with the pragmatic demands of coalition politics.

2.0 Complementary Sociological Lenses

While Ibn Khaldun's concept of Assabiyya provides a foundational lens for understanding the collective cohesion that sustains Raila Odinga's political movement, two additional sociological frameworks, Max Weber's theory of Charismatic Authority and the African model of Patron-Clientelism offer crucial insights into the form, function, and fragility of Odinga's enduring political appeal.

2.1 Max Weber's Charismatic Authority

According to Max Weber (1978) charismatic authority is power grounded in the exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual qualities that inspire extraordinary devotion and obedience from followers. Weber views charisma as a revolutionary force that arises in times of social crisis, offering new moral orders that challenge traditional or bureaucratic forms of domination. Odinga's political persona exemplifies this Weberian archetype.

2.1.1 The Heroic Narrative

Odinga's authority was neither derived from legal-rational institutions which he often challenged nor from inherited traditional legitimacy. Instead, it was rooted in a narrative of personal sacrifice and moral courage. His long history of political incarceration under the Moi regime (Branch, 2011), his resilience in the struggle for multiparty democracy, and his vocal defense of the marginalized conferred on him a quasi-messianic image (Cheeseman, 2008; Klopp, 2009). This heroic narrative positioned him as a living embodiment of resistance, bestowing on him a command of loyalty across ethnic and regional boundaries, especially during reformist or coalitionary phases.

2.1.2 The Revolutionary Force and the Problem of Routinization

Weber saw charisma as "anti-economic and anti-traditional," a disruptive form of power that undermines established norms and institutions (Weber, 1978, p. 246). Odinga's politics consistently embodied this quality. For decades, Odinga challenged Kenya's entrenched elite consensus from the one-party state in the 1980s, to his mobilization against constitutional authoritarianism in 2005, and his critiques of state capture and corruption in the 2010s (Murunga & Nasong'o, 2007; Branch & Cheeseman, 2009). His politics tended to create new rules of political engagement, redefining legitimacy and accountability in Kenya's political culture.

<https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t4366>

Conversely, Weber also warned that charismatic authority is inherently unstable. It must eventually undergo “routinization”. This is the process by which personal devotion becomes institutionalized within bureaucratic or legal structures (Weber, 1978, p. 1121). For Odinga, this had been his most enduring dilemma. Each attempt to translate charisma into stable power whether through party institutionalization or elite accommodation diluted his revolutionary image for some (Oloo, 2019). These moments of normalization to some extent normally fractured the emotional core of his movement. Some of his followers interpreted his political compromises as betrayal of the moral mission. Notably, Raila still arose and aroused passion among his supporters defying all odds. He always rebuilt his *assabiyya* and regained his image.

2.2 Patron-Clientelism

Where charisma explains the emotional and symbolic dimension of Odinga’s authority, patron-clientelism illustrates its material and structural foundations. African political systems, as Chabal and Daloz (1999) and van de Walle (2007) observe, often function through neo-patrimonial networks in which personal relationships, rather than impersonal institutions, mediate the distribution of state power and resources.

2.2.1 The Brokerage Role & the Big Man Politics

Odinga like most Kenyan political elites operated as a central broker of resources and loyalty. His enduring base in Nyanza and among reformist coalitions was partly sustained by expectations of reciprocal benefit, and the belief that capturing the presidency would enable him to redistribute national resources toward historically marginalized regions (Barkan, 2011; Throup & Hornsby, 1998). This moralized patronage links his *Assabiyya* to a redemptive vision of economic justice.

Odinga’s influence at the grassroots level was mediated through a network of local patrons, and regional “Big Men” who acted as intermediaries between him and the electorate. These brokers were expected to deliver votes in exchange for political protection, campaign financing, or access to state-linked opportunities (Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis, 2016). This dynamic reflects the deeply personalistic nature of Kenyan politics, where legitimacy flows as much from personal access as from ideological conviction.

2.2.2 The Transactional Imperative

According to Chabal (2009), Kenyan coalition politics is driven by what he refers to as the “instrumental logic of patronage”. He posits that alliances are less about shared ideology than about anticipated access to state resources. Therefore, Odinga’s repeated coalition-building efforts reflect an informed appreciation of this transactional reality. However, as Odinga’s experience reveals, such alliances are inherently fragile, for the *Assabiyya* of his partners is often an investment in future material gain rather than enduring ideological solidarity (Lynch, 2018).

3.0 The Consequence of Leadership Death: Fragmentation and the Succession Crisis

The Weberian and Khaldunian theoretical frameworks demonstrate how the durability of Odinga’s movement hinged on his personal charisma, moral authority, and robust loyalty networks. These elements created a potent, albeit inherently unstable, political environment that relied heavily on Odinga’s ongoing involvement. The departure of such a significant leader such as Raila Odinga, whether through death or permanent exit, challenges the theoretical principles of *Assabiyya* and charisma against the backdrop of institutional weakness. In Kenya, the death of Raila Amolo Odinga highlights this conflict, demonstrating how fundamentally opposition politics have depended on the symbolic, emotional, and transactional connections that he personally nurtured.

Ibn Khaldun theorizes (1967) that in political movements built around a singular, commanding leader, the Mutaghallib, the death or permanent withdrawal of that leader represents not merely the end of a political career but the collapse of an entire moral and organizational order. The leader personifies the collective will, grievance, and hope of the movement. His death dissolves the glue that binds personal loyalty, ideological coherence, and patronage-based networks. According to the Khaldunian understanding, this might present the disintegration of a once-pristine Assabiyya, the internal solidarity that enabled group survival and conquest. In Kenya, no figure exemplifies this dynamic more profoundly than Raila Amolo Odinga, whose long political career has straddled both rebellion and establishment, populism and institutional politics.

Odinga's death symbolizes a historic turning point in Kenya's political progression. It marks the end of an era defined by resistance, reform, and moral leadership. Odinga personified Kenya's struggle for democracy in the last four decades. His charisma, born of suffering and sacrifice, made him both a political leader and a moral symbol of national redemption (Murunga & Nasong'o, 2007; Branch, 2011). Through movements such as FORD, NDP, ODM, and NASA, he cultivated what Ibn Khaldun (1967) would describe as a Pristine Assabiyya, a unifying solidarity rooted in shared grievance, loyalty, and hope.

His death creates a new order, dismantling the symbolic and emotional order that had long anchored Kenya's opposition politics. Odinga's presence served as the moral and organizational core of Kenya's political resistance. Each time balancing rivalries and personifying the civic duty of opposing state excess (Lynch, 2018; Githongo, 2006). Without him, the opposition faces fragmentation and a crisis of identity, intensified by the increasingly transactional nature of Kenyan politics, reminiscent of the post-Jaramogi era, but on a far greater scale. In Khaldunian terms, Odinga's death marks the collapse of a mature Assabiyya. Setting the stage for the decline of charisma and reformist unity and consequently ushering in an uncertain new phase in Kenya's political and moral renewal.

3.1 The End of Charismatic Authority

Max Weber (1978) posits that charisma is intrinsically personal and non-transferable. Charisma derives its legitimacy not from institutional rules or traditional inheritance, but from the collective belief in a leader's exceptional qualities like those of Raila Amollo Odinga "the enigma". Its longevity is dependent on the follower's continued perception of the leader as still embodying a higher moral, revolutionary, or spiritual mission. If that leader departs through death, or political irrelevance the very source of legitimacy disintegrates. This marks the onset of what Weber termed the routinization of charisma. This is the process by which a movement attempts to preserve and institutionalize the leader's authority within bureaucratic or traditional structures (Weber, 1978, pp. 1121–1132).

In the case of Raila Amolo Odinga, charisma was not simply a political trait it was a sociological force, an emotional contract between leader and followers forged in struggle, sacrifice, and symbolic suffering. His persecution through repeated detentions and his unrivaled defiance in Kenya's liberations easily earned him a reputation as a martyr of Kenya's democratization, endowing him with a quasi-messianic authority (Murunga & Nasong'o, 2007; Branch, 2011). In the Kenyan political landscape Odinga was more than a politician, he was the moral conscience of opposition politics, and the personification of what Githongo (2006) calls "ethical dissent" in a system steeped in corruption and clientelism. His appeal cut across generations and classes, uniting

reformists, activists, and marginalized citizens around a collective belief in resistance as a civic duty (Cheeseman, 2008; Lynch, 2018).

Kenya's political history is a testament to the fragility of Charisma as perceived by Weberian school of thought. For instance, the death of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga in 1994 revealed how dependent Kenya's opposition was on personal charisma rather than institutional continuity. Upon Jaramogi's death, Ford–Kenya, the party he founded, quickly fractured along factional and ethnic lines as successors struggled to inherit his moral and political mantle (Throup & Hornsby, 1998; Murunga & Nasong'o, 2007). Under Michael Kijana Wamalwa, though respected, he lacked the symbolic authority of Jaramogi that would have stirred the party to stability. Under his leadership the party's cohesion eroded under internal competition and elite maneuvering and remained a shell of its former self. Raila Odinga's subsequent attempt to reclaim and re-channel his father's charisma within Ford–Kenya underscores Weber's contention that charisma cannot simply be transferred, it must be reborn through new struggle and re-legitimation (Oloo, 2019).

Odinga seen as a rube rouser within the Ford Kenya ranks eventually vacated the party and created the National Development Party (NDP). He resigned as a member of parliament under Ford Kenya as an act of political principle and contested his seat on an NDP ticket. He won with a resounding margin and went back to parliament with the NDP ticket establishing the party as a significant political force. In the preceding general elections in 1997, NDP fielded candidates in the previously perceived Ford Kenya strongholds and unseated most Ford Kenya aspirants, winning at least 21 seats against Ford Kenya's 17. Odinga by and large exemplified a regenerative ability to reestablish himself. Each time larger and better than the last. He crafted new institutional vehicles to house his personal legitimacy, infusing them with the reformist zeal that had defined his earlier movements. But even then, these parties remained deeply tied to his personal presence and symbolic authority. ODM, in particular, operated less as a bureaucratic party than as an extension of Odinga's charisma, its moral, rhetorical, and emotional coherence radiated from his persona (Lynch, 2018).

Odinga's death presents the Weberian succession dilemma for Kenya: how to translate a charismatic, emotive following into stable institutional continuity. Without his living presence to animate its ideological vision, ODM must attempt to routinize what was once spontaneous, passionate, and personalized. This requires transforming emotional loyalty into legal-rational structures of authority with clear hierarchies, policy platforms, and collective decision-making mechanisms (Weber, 1978; Arriola, 2012). This transition is fraught with peril. As seen in the aftermath of Jaramogi's death, routinization often fails when successors lack both the symbolic legitimacy and the moral capital to sustain the movement's founding vision (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2002; Branch & Cheeseman, 2009).

Two possibilities present for the ODM party. The first is the routinization failure that would see ODM disintegrate into rival factions led by feuding aspirant groups each competing to claim the Odinga legacy. Such a scenario would mirror the post-Ford–Kenya collapse, fragmenting the Luo political base and weakening the opposition's national coherence (Murunga, 2011; Cheeseman, Lynch, & Willis, 2016). The second is dynastic routinization, where Odinga's symbolic capital is preserved through a successor, potentially his daughter, Winnie Odinga, or another family figure. This too would depend on the heir's own ability to construct an independent Assabiyya grounded in generational legitimacy rather than filial inheritance (Branch, 2011; Nyabola, 2018).

Ultimately, Weber's framework underscores that charisma, by its nature, resists institutionalization. A good case study is in the Ford Kenya case. It thrives on crisis, defiance, and transformation, core traits that defined the person Raila Amollo Odinga. His death therefore represents not only the physical loss of a leader but the disintegration of a charismatic moral economy that defined Kenya's opposition politics for decades. Whether his movement endures as an institutionalized party or dissolves into factional memory, will depend on whether his followers can convert faith in the man into faith in an idea, a transformation that has eluded most charismatic movements in African political history (Chabal & Daloz, 1999; van de Walle, 2007).

3.2 The Collapse of Coalitionary and Patron-Client Assabiyya

Even in the early weeks of Raila's death, Kenya's coalitionary and patron-client networks, which have for decades revolved around his symbolic capital and negotiation capacity have been unsettled. As Chabal and Daloz (1999) and van de Walle (2007) note, African political systems are fundamentally neo-patrimonial, meaning they depend on personalized networks of loyalty and resource exchange. Raila's enduring relevance has hinged not only on ideological solidarity but also on his role as a broker of access, a figure capable of mobilizing ethnic blocs, negotiating elite coalitions, and distributing patronage within opposition structures.

His death has severed these transactional chains, producing what Chabal and Daloz (1999) describe as the reopening of the political marketplace, a moment when alliances are renegotiated, loyalties redefined, and new patrons sought. ODM's senior figures such as governors, MPs, and long-serving lieutenants, will face immediate recalibration of their loyalties, either competing for influence or seeking alignment with new centers of power. Without the gravitational pull of Raila's charisma, the Orange Democratic Movement could fragment rapidly, its component parties reverting to their ethnic or regional Assabiyya.

3.2.1 Fracturing of the Core Base and Dissolution of Coalitions

Within Raila's ethnic base, the Luo community, his death has ignited an intense struggle for symbolic and political succession. As Atieno-Odhiambo (2002) observed after Jaramogi's death, Luo politics operated as both an ethnic identity and a moral narrative of resistance. The contest to inherit this legacy between family members, veteran politicians like James Orengo, and emergent technocrats would divide the once-unified "Luo vote" into factions, each claiming to be the true custodian of the Odinga ethos.

Nationally, the Coalitionary Assabiyya that Raila built would likely dissolve. His former allies and other regional elites, whose loyalty was mediated through Raila's personal authority, would renegotiate their positions within Kenya's volatile political economy (Cheeseman, Lynch, & Willis, 2016). In the absence of Raila's symbolic glue, these figures may either align with the ruling administration or construct new coalitions rooted in their own localized Assabiyya, initiating a period of intense political volatility.

3.2.2 The Power Vacuum and Cyclical Renewal

Ibn Khaldun (1967) posits that when a dynasty or political solidarity decays, a new, more vigorous Assabiyya inevitably rises from the periphery to replace it. Raila's death will thus not end the politics of resistance; it will transform it. Just as the decline of the Odinga-Kenyatta duopoly gave rise to Ruto's Hustler Nation, so too might new populist movements emerge from Kenya's economic or generational peripheries, mobilized by class, inequality, or digital populism and less tethered to liberation-era narratives (Lynch, 2023).

The death of Raila Odinga, is not simply a personal or partisan loss. It signifies the end of an era of charismatic, oppositional politics and the beginning of a transitional phase in which Kenya's political imagination reconstitutes itself. In the Khaldunian sense, his passing will hopefully release the latent energies of political renewal and the disintegration of the old Assabiyya would create space for the emergence of a purer, ascetic solidarity capable of defining the next political generation.

4.0 Conclusion

Raila Amolo Odinga's life and death sum up the enduring paradox of African politics, the tension between charismatic leadership and institutional fragility. Reformist movements in post-colonial African states undergo a cyclical rhythm of rise, unity, and decay. A phenomenon reflecting in the political life of Raila Odinga interpreted through Ibn Khaldun's theory of Assabiyya and Max Weber's concept of Charismatic Authority. Raila through years of sacrifice and struggle unified diverse solidarities, ethnic, coalitionary, and ideological that transcended his charisma and transformed him into both a political force and a moral symbol of resistance.

Yet, as Khaldun observed, solidarity born in struggle inevitably weakens in comfort. The very charisma that sustained Odinga's movement also prevented its institutionalization, leaving behind a vacuum upon his death that Kenya's political structures now struggle to fill. The Orange Democratic Movement faces the immense challenge of translating faith in a man into enduring systems of belief and governance, a test that few African movements have survived.

Odinga's demise does not mark an end but a turning point and a defining moment in the Kenyan political space. In true Khaldunian fashion, decline becomes the seed of renewal. Perhaps his death opens a new chapter in Kenya's history in reinvigorating new solidarities that will redefine the contours of opposition and power. Odinga's ultimate legacy, therefore, lies not in institutional permanence but in the moral imagination of resistance he inspired a spirit that will continue to shape Kenya's next political epoch.

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