Enough - Wambui Mwangi

Now look what we've done, we Kenyans. Just look at us. It is a bloody disgrace—no, I'm not swearing, I am offering a precise description of the situation on the ground. Bloody and Disgraceful. We are now calling for our International mummies and daddies to come and save us, because we cannot understand how it is that we are laying waste to all we hold dear, and we are still tut-tutting and clucking and wringing our hands while our country burns. Much worse, we have decided that the only two people who can save us are the precise two men whose overweening ambition and horror of unemployment has led us to this despicable pass.

Let us at least have the courage of our venality; let us look at ourselves squarely in the face and say "we screwed up big time, and we knew it all along, we did it knowingly and now we have to suck it up and deal with the results of our mistakes." Let's get a grip, guys. We really cannot go on much longer with these protestations of horrified incomprehension when all along bloggers, intellectuals, human rights activists and my next-door-neighbour's little girl have all been warning us of the dangers of ethnic fundamentalism. The warning signs have been there—we have allowed our own dialogues to become replete with snide sub-texts and codes: we have become expert at fingering Luos, Kambas and Kikuyus with phrases and allusions calculated to inflame. It really doesn't help us at all at this time to resort to coy references to violence "against members of a certain community" when we all know for a fact – take a deep breath and say it out loud – that Kikuyus are being killed and attempts being made to ethnically cleanse them out of areas across the country because of the perception that they are responsible for election results which in charitable moments can only be called exceedingly dodgy. Let's just say it right out.

Kikuyus are being killed and are facing danger of yet more violence, because the rest of the country thinks that the people of Central Province will not only not vote for anyone who isn't one of 'them,' but will also under no circumstances respect the rights of others to so vote for someone else. Young people are incensed and have been rendered violently irrational by the failure of their leaders and elders to consider the collective good as opposed to their bank balances. These young people are enraged, and so am I, that the people of this country count for so little that the greed of a few can negate the desire of the many. We have interethnic face-offs in Nairobi and bullet-ridden bodies in Kisumu; churches have been burned out with people in them in Eldoret.

I am travelling across the country with a driver whose name begins with an "O" and because we are deep in PNU country, I am systematically torturing myself with thoughts of what would happen to him if 'my' people decided to retaliate for acts of violence against them in the rest of the country. How is it that there is such a space in my imagination, in my country, after I saw with my own two sceptical eyes last Thursday the enormous patience and trust that the people of Kenya were willing to invest in the democratic process? I was there myself, going from polling station to polling station, to record this moment, this ridiculously awesome expression of the popular will. I saw them: the grandmothers and the dreadlocked young men, the mothers with children

strapped to their backs, the guy in the wheelchair, the wide-eyes schoolkids watching their elder brothers and sisters exercise their constitutional rights. I saw them, and rejoiced. I was crafting judiciously preening sentences about our organic democratic traditions when the Electoral Commission of Kenya stumbled, slid and fell all the way into its own private Idaho—and left us with a hydra-headed mess.

In the past ten days, I have passed through Nakuru and Naivasha and Eldoret and Eldama Ravine, I have been to El Molo and Burguret and Chavakali; I've probably travelled in five of our eight provinces, and experienced a good 25% of the road surface of Kenya—isn't it strange how certain numbers take on a potency known only to Kenyans? I have been watching the television and listening to an interesting cross-section of our leaders and opinion makers: we all seem to think that unless Raila and Kibaki get together and make nice, the rest of us are doomed to go on senselessly butchering each other without fear or favour, no scratch that: with ultimate fear and delicately nuanced favour. Somewhere along the lines of: you-must-have-voted-for-the-person-I-did-not-want-to-win-so-die.

It bears repeating that biased preference is the essence of democratic right—you can vote for whoever you want to vote for, even if the cumulative effect of this democratic right in Central Province looked somewhat like the hypnotised members of a cult were voting for their messiah; nevertheless, you should be allowed to do that and live to regret it at leisure. This is democracy: we're allowed to be myopic and fearful like that, as long as we do it democratically and peacefully. What is of more immediate concern here are the numbers of extremely angry and disenfranchised young men who are even now desperately foreshortening their own futures and possibilities by plunging themselves into bloodletting and unspeakable criminality.

How have we produced this population of Kenyans so estranged, so alienated from a sense of collective hope and a progressive trajectory that they are willing to burn to the ground this national edifice we call our home? I begin to suspect that it might have something to do with the ways in which we treat our people as if they are disposable nappies....first we crap all over them and then we throw them away. Or, first we work them up with visions and dreams of a utopia denied them only by the holding of office by the 'the other side' then we slyly make insinuations of how much easier life would be without 'them' and then we give them a little nudge and say "oh look, there goes one of them now. And who left this panga lying about in the open like that, all nice and shiny and sharp?"

And then we exclaim in shocked horror: oh goodness, me! However could this have happened? Oh please, please, well, gracious me, whatever shall we do?

On the other hand, whatever can Kikuyus think we are about, saying complacently that "we" won the election when even Europeans who can count are quite able to figure out the implications of votes which add up to fifty thousand and are transmuted into seventy thousand by some mysterious Kikuyu alchemy? It boggles the mind, the sheer bare-faced effrontery of fraud meant to thwart the popular will and carried out in naked defiance of

international observers and Kenyan media. We may not have universal education yet, but a good number of Kenyans can count for themselves with a fair degree of confidence in their own tallies. What on earth do the people of Central Province mean, dancing about in the streets like that with joy, when it is evident to anyone who believes in this country that uchawi numbers are self-evidently not a cause for celebration? There's hubris, and then there's Central Province. I am fairly sure that it didn't help matters. No one has won here, folks. We are all our own victims and our own oppressors—and some of us are guiltier than others.

The drunken man in a bar in a PNU stronghold who leeringly raised his glass to me in celebration of the government being "ours as usual" should, as he nurses the inevitable (and I hope excruciating) hang-over, ingest with his Panadol the human costs of maintaining the feudal principality of Kikuyustan--especially when other people would rather live in Kenya. Where does he think he will flee to, when the flames of discontent spread, as they inevitably will unless we come to our senses? Amongst the many things that should stop the down-swing of that upraised panga is the fact that our neighbours in the region are deeply inconvenienced by our violent naval-gazing proclivities. It will probably serve us right to be in the position of receiving humanitarian assistance from countries we have regarded with pitying superiority up to now. Perhaps we will then understand that refugees are not lazy people on the dole; they are innocents trying to save their own lives. The measure of our neighbourliness is about to be put to the test as Kenyans attempt to escape our home-grown stupidity by running across the Ugandan border. It is to be hoped that our generosity towards our neighbours has in the past been of an order sufficient to compel them to look compassionately on our compatriots. Perish the thought—Kenyan refugees and internally displaced persons of a magnitude sufficient to necessitate Red Cross concerns of a humanitarian crisis in the unfolding.

Enough. If we are to sink with the ship, let us at least not pretend that all along we thought it was only a spring shower that was brewing, and not a furious tempest. Self-truth is a good platform to stand on and from which to survey this mess and decide what to do next. Enough pretence.We cannot bleat on endlessly about the wonders of our economic growth when most Kenyans have yet to see the evidence of such growth. We cannot leave people out in the cold whilst we luxuriate in the warmth of our riches and then, to add further insult, disingenuously ask them why they don't come into the light of the fire when we know we've barred all the possible means of access beforehand. We cannot solicit and accept people's trust and their goodwill and then expend this capital in ways unworthy of ourselves. We, above all, cannot disclaim responsibility for our own careless rhetoric and propensity for exploiting base fears and misperceptions by our current shocked protestations of incredulity. We did this—let us fix it. All of us: not just those two job-seekers who seem to care much more for their careers than for the people of their country. Let us fix this mess—each of us, with whatever means of communication, persuasion and rationality that we can muster. Let us stop this senseless tragedy now. Speak out and say: Enough.