If the nation is a car, carrying a nation of people, their hopes and aspirations, it's design and movement purposeful and appropriate, the vehicle that is Kenya has just swerved off the road, bits and pieces cluttering to the ground, flying through bush and dust, to nowhere.

We voted on 27th December. It was the largest turnout in any election in our history. The most peaceful voting day in our history. 8 million odd Kenyans voted. More youth voted than at any time in our history. More marginalized people voted than at any time in our history. More Kenyans voted passionately *for* something, some national arrangement they felt strongly about: If you were PNU, under Mwani Kibaki, it was for a narrow centralized government, the way it has always been. If you were ODM, under Raila Odinga, it was for a highly devolved political and economic system.

In order to pull this off, both sides built coalitions based on ethnicity.

This has always happened in Kenya, but mostly we have been able to trust that whatever one's ethnicity and politics, most people vote to rise above it: we find we have ethnic allegiances, but we are all always looking for a higher national arrangement, for our economies are tangled, our loyalties are tangled. We have even believed that we can, when temperatures are high, get rude and personal with each other, insult each other – the nation can hold all this, we thought. When asked, we would say. But, there is rule of law? But, don't we all understand that we have another place where we can meet as Kenyans speaking Kiswahili to each other, and being best friends in multi-cultural boarding schools, workplaces and many other situations?

One thing has never happened though.

We have never had a moment when several things collide: high election temperatures; a raging debate, 15 years old, about how to restructure our nation; the cost of basic foodstuffs rising as the price of oil remains high; an election without a common foe.

The sheer weight and heat and purpose of our vote overwhelmed the frail electoral commission; the legal structures of redress, the power of government and law, and most importantly our faith in the State as a place where we are all represented.

In a matter of hours, our hopes fell from a very high place, to a very low place.

On the 31st of December, when we saw what seemed to be a naked hijacking of the (very narrow) election by one side, all the lubrication of our common nation vanished, and we were left naked, carrying only our ethnic relationships, which are incoherent, unrecognized, uncertain and paranoid. It is not became we have any "atavistic hatreds" as one New York Times reporter put it. The problem is complex, but most of it comes from the fact that our ethnic nations remain undefined – as organizations they are forgotten until a crisis arrives.

This thing called Kenya is a strange animal. Nowhere in our constitution are our various nations named and validated meaningfully. They exist and do not. You cannot study your languages and national philosophies in any university in Kenya. According to Kenya, ethnicity remains in the sewers, and rises out when the sleaze overwhelms it, as an angry political force, it is blind, and deaf and confused. This is not because there is anything wrong with our various internal nations and cultures. It is because there is something wrong with the overarching structure that manages and manipulates them.

In times of trouble, there are no existing mechanisms for the elders of the Agikuyu to visit the Luo Council of Elders and talk. It was assumed, in the 60s, that Kenyan nations would be beaten into shape and we would become Kenyan people, and all that old nonsense would be forgotten. It could not grow, and evolve, and be coherent and useful. And so, right now, we find ourselves wanting to reach across somewhere and reassure, and we lack the mechanisms to do so.

The feeling now is so strong that we are all hoping that the two leaders and parties that got us to this standoff, and who have spent the last few months stupidifying their constituencies in the usual political way ("they are out to get you!") will be the ones to speak to their nations and tell them it is okay. But they aren't really ethnic leaders. Kibaki is the president of Kenya and a Gikuyu. He is not the leader of the Gikuyu. Nobody is. He has no place in any legal Gikuyu system that is functional. But his primary constituency are the Gikuyu. He is just a politician needing the support of the Gikuyu to become president. But, to the Gikuyu, at this moment, he is the defender of their rights to live in the Rift Valley.

This is a terrible situation to be in. For Raila Odinga, the leader of the opposition Orange Democratic Movement is clearly now using the threat of violence as a kind of bargaining chip for the presidency.

Kibaki, recently sworn in as president, is hoping to invalidate ODM by using all State apparatus: courts, the security forces to claim to "win peace" – or at best to be a kind of Israel: where land and business owning Gikuyus, Merus and others are safe and secure, and if necessary everybody else is curfewed and ID-ed and kept in their place.

My suspicion is that Odinga wants to sell to Kenyans and the world, a sort of Ukranian "people's revolution" – where people take to the streets and change the order of things, and are seen to be throwing happy pink petals on television, so America can say, ah, the people have spoken.

This cannot work – right now sentiments are so frayed that the only possible result from this is an escalation of retaliations, and a descent to that special machete place that Nations do not come back from.

Kibaki has made it clear he will force " the rule of law" on all. He has said he will make sure that all property is secured, all roads open. If Raila attempts anything he will be crushed. So far the violence continues. The police are exhausted. He cannot sustain this position for long because 50 percent or more of Kenya believe he rigged his way in. We have a very disciplined army, probably the most disciplined army in Africa. Our police forces have improved dramatically over the past few years. But they are Kenyans too, and the present split will stretch their allegiances.

There is the strong sense of a vacuum where the state and government used to be. When orders are issued, it is not clear of the state is speaking, or if an illegitimate government, which represents mostly the interests of Gikuyus under attack is issuing these orders.

Five years ago, Kenyans voted for a broad and nationally representative government. Various leaders came together to remove President Daniel Arap Moi's party. They signed a memorandum of agreement. They immediately became to most popular party in Kenya – NARC. Inside this vehicle, were the Luo, the Luhya, the Gikuyu, many Kalenjin – all the people presently killing each other. We wanted this sort of arrangement, because it was clear to everybody that some sort of broad government

would quickly introduce a new and more inclusive constitution, deal firmly with grand corruption and start to walk us through a process of defining the nation is terms that include everybody in a plan for the future. Kibaki failed to honour the Memorandum. He opted for a narrow government that pushed for high economic growth while maintaining the same constitution. This was the beginning of the polarization. Meanwhile Raila built his popular movement on the idea that a decentralized government is the only way to the future. But the election was held under the same old constitution: with its imperial presidency. So, the presidency became a special prize – and as it stood, no trust was really possible. Which president will agree to reduce his own powers? As Raila's continued to threaten, the rhetoric became more and more xenophobic as the election drew near. Many Gikuyu I know said they were quite happy to see Kibaki rig himself in; they felt under siege, and were sure that there would be severe repercussions if Raila came to power. Meanwhile Kibaki quite cynically weakened the electoral commission by bringing in inexperienced and partisan commissioners.

We are where we are. At this point, a recount or retallying of votes is not useful. If Kibaki remains in power, the standoff in Kenya continues. There are reports from the Electoral commission, that the signed sheets by the returning officers are being changed even now, to sanitise the rigging.

Nations are built on crises like this. If there is such a thing as a possible Kenya, it should be gathering energy right now. In this sort of temperature, people of goodwill can have a constitution passed in months. In this sort of temperature, two leaders can sit down, form a power-sharing agreement, and put together a more muscular system to handle elections and transition. Right now, all Kenyans agree that a winner takes all democracy cannot work in this new Kenya under any circumstances. A broad representative government is the only way. A constitution that names and recognizes the nations within nations; that decentralizes some power, that includes us all in the process is possible.

This could be the triumphant scenario that unfolds in the world's media over the next six months.

For the past forty years we have been dancing around each other, a gaseous nation circling and tightening. The moment is now, to make a solid thing called Kenya. To do

so, both Raila and Kibaki must admit that they do not have the mandate to do what is necessary.

They must rise above this election, and deliver to us a better car to ride in. This one is broken.