Billy Kahora

Since Kenya conflagrated on the 29th December 2007 after going to the polls, calls for peace have drowned the politicians. One radio station has completely blacked out politicians to avoid the inflammatory rhetoric. This, in the short term at least, is a good thing – hopefully some lives will be saved. However, let us not fail to scrutinize the fact that our politicians, even during such dire times, use a different textbook from us all.

Across the land, politicians have been asked to be bigger than themselves, think leadership rather than power, respect ordinary lives by removing their snouts from the political pork barrel for a day or two. Yes, let us ignore them for now, but not forget in the future that politicians in their power mongering occupy a different universe. That as Africans we go on so much about tribes but fail to recognize the most dangerous one of all – the politician.

As they call for different things i.e marches, observance of rule of law - we might need to have a march that excludes all the 210 MPs that we voted in a week ago. We might have to go to a higher law so that we can force them to a table where they can talk. For the sake of life, we might even have to follow suggestions that we should boycott the next elections just to show *them* that we value life more than politics.

In Kenya, like most of the sub Sahara, the problem is that many conversations within professional, media and civil society spaces are held on leadership rather than *power*. After last week when Kenya was burning, it should become immediately clear to most Kenyans that the two are very different. Before last week, power in Kenya manifested itself in *shambas*, Benzes and big stomachs, and the Big Men in our midst. Leadership was kept within discourses of accountability, vision, and responsibility. In these earnest conversations the twain, power and leadership never met. Last week, leadership failed and power showed its real hand. Lose your life for me power said. We have now realised how dangerous that power we give people who cannot show leadership can be.

Now we've learnt that at the helm of our society where power lies, in the upper political class nobody really cares about leadership in a normative sense. Or life, for that matter. Every 5 years we have had a lottery we call the elections with power as the prize given to those who 'lead' us. Now we've learnt it has nothing to do with the latter, it is just about amassing power at any cost.

Over the years between these 5-year lotteries the 'Leader' has held all the power and we've tried to get him to give us some of it. And it has been pretty innocent, or rather bloodless, up to now. Because of that leadership and power have been two separate entities. Leadership has been normative. Power has been real but has never really affected us like now. It has never been: 'one strange carnival in which a pervasive atmosphere of macabre conviviality binds the potentate and the dominated in a drawn out orgy of violence and death' as described by Camerounian political theorist and academic, Achille Mbembe.

In our earnest conversations we have rightly praise Nelson Mandela for being the only President who has left willingly but we forget he is the exception not the rule. We never talk about Namibia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe and never try to approach the rule rather than the exception on its own terms. Now, as Kenyans, we have to talk about our own country.