Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor is a story teller who lives in Nairobi. She has contributed numerous short stories to different publications worldwide. Her story about the consequences of regional civil strife, Weight of Whispers, won the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2003. She has at last finalised work on her first novel, working title Red Rain. A contributor to Kwani, and a traveller, she is suddenly rabidly possessive about her country, Kenya.

Once we were voters - Yvonne A. Owuor

December 2002 we clung to trees and one another at Uhuru Park. Most of our faces painted red, black, white and green. There were at least a million of us sharing a small acerage, laughing as regiments tried to march past thick crowds chanting, 'Jeshi letu, jeshi letu." Our army.

We admired the mitre of the tall, military bishop who presided over the swearing in of The Executive Symbol of all our Restored Hopes. "Bishop yetu, bishop yetu," we sang in the park.

The elderly man, a perennially losing presidential candidate who would now be president beamed from his wheelchair. He had survived a road accident. Close to him was a man who had traversed the country campaigning for him and then helped settle his hospital bill.

The replaced president next to him was pensive. Mud had been hurled in his direction. When he had turned up, a million and more men and women and children had sang, Yote yawezekana bila Moi. All things are possible without you, man!

Who can bwogo me, Who can bwogo me.

That was our special song and we reserved it for the man in the wheelchair who would lead us to the promised land. We liked to see our leaders together, citizens like children feeling that our parents did not know that divorce existed. In 2002, when we were an unbwogable—our magical vote had cast a spell of change and the wicked ogre had gone—when we were unbwogable, nothing could have fazed us.

December 2007.

The elderly man is declared winner of another presidential race. A second term. He is not beaming.

No songs have been sang.

The edifice is crumbling and a cliché comes to life. What is the sound of straw breaking a camel's back?

No one seems to have seen that the camel back was straining.

A lie.

The straining groans of the camel were interpreted as song.

Yote Yawezekana...

It was assumed that the camel's silent gaze was blind to recognising that some roads were better than others, and if roads leading to one province was smooth enough to skate on and wide enough to do back flips across.
It was thought the camel had forgotten the riddles: Who killed Pio Gama Pinto, Tom Mboya, J.M. Kariuki, Robert Ouko, Justus Mbai? Who authorised Goldenberg, Anglo Leasing? Who made the malevolent Artur Brothers Deputy Commissioners of Police in Kenya?

It was thought the camel had not heard that the common language had shrunk so that at the end of five years, 90% of Government jobs would be occupied by those who shared roots in the Central Province of an eight province nation.

Mere camel-speak, it was said when the camel only groaned after it was informed that the grand national redesign plan would be left in the imagination of Constitutional lawyers. And if the camel's thoughts even tried to decode the judiciary, nobody would have noticed. Justice delayed, justice denied was the operational motto. The camel refrained from comment anyway. It knew about those who have been in remand for over fifteen years without being charged for any offence, about random arrests where a man might appear in court two months later and discovers that he is being charged with sodomy. He has to say guilty because if he says not guilty he might be in remand for fifteen years.

The camel had been unable to meet its member of parliament who was far too busy buffing up his allowances and salary so that the legislative arm of the state would in a year, be notes as among the best paying parliaments in the history of the world. Before reading this, the camel would have by then completed its returns to the Kenya Revenue Authority and said nothing as three quarters of its earnings went to sustain the good life of its representatives.

It would have to dash home before dark because of the marauding gangs who flashing political patronage and pangas would be abroad. Just in case, it would make sure it had at least a thousand shillings to donate if cornered. The camel was, anyway, already walking on tenterhooks, afraid that he might find itself drugged, bound, gagged and wearing an orange suit in Guantanamo Bay having been extraodinarily renditioned.

To allay its terror of ambling into its twilight years with the knowledge that its grandchildren may have to walk the same road it had walked, it cast its vote on December 27, 2007.

The outcome, to the surprise of many, broke the camel's back and made the animal roar through the land in a frothing rage, an unmanageable beast hurling itself, throwing itself in the ground of, cursing the nation's and dragging the nation to the edge of a precipice. The renewed President is trying a hands-off approach to deal with the camel. The approach created a 6% economic growth. It might even make the camel's rabies go away.

Yote yawezikana... when you are unbwogable.