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.

HAKUNA MATATA - Yvonne A. Owuor

Nchi yetu ya Kenya, hakuna matata. For the average roaming human being, there is no place quite like Kenya. It has tolerated its paradoxes, proudly humble, humbly proud, blasé about its multicultural, multiethnic texture that ensured that the average roaming human being landing here, felt immediately at home. Seven or is it eight distinct eco-systems in a complacent piece of land with a distinctive shape, delightful climate, diverse cultures that would make Margaret Mead and Stuart Hall howl in ecstasy.

We never felt the need to call ourselves The Anything of Africa, or the Something Nation (not for us Pearl of Africa, the Real Heart of Africa, Where Africa Meets, or even Rainbow Nation). We were all these things and more. It was all so apparent, like all our nonchalant expectations:

Yes. It is natural that our wildebeest would make it to the global miracle books

And we would produce an African woman Nobel peace prize winner

And we are the most optimistic country in the world.

And we are on our way to being the best.

Yes, there were probably more nationalities per capita here than anywhere else on three continents.

Yes there were some months of 2007 when there were more foreigners applying for Kenya passports than Kenyans were.

Yes, humankind was born here and we are custodians of that space.

That where world athletics is concerned, we ask, which of the Kenyans have taken first, second and third place? While glancing at our watches to time the 7 O'clock news that would confirm the listings.

We are Kenya. We didn't trumpet it. We were Kenya and therefore we were special. Being Kenyan we did not need to proclaim it. Sometimes, though the specialness became a song;

Jambo, Jambo Bwana, habari gain, mzuri sana. Wageni wakaribishwa, Kenya yetu, hakuna matata.

Like God, Kenyan specialness was a self-evident truth. Its own thing, the oasis of reasonableness when all nations around it were impaling themselves on the politics of fat cats and broad egos. Kenya citizens and its residents were smug and impatient while accommodating other nations' fugitives:

"They must get their act together."

"What's so hard about democracy."

"They should learn from Kenya."

And they did, many set up study institutes to imitate the successful template of a model African nation speeding on its way to economic lion hood. We sent military gentlemen to trouble-spots all over the world so that with their Kenya reasonableness, they would help them Sort Their Problems Out.

Before December 30, 2007.

I am now hovering between two paths, one heading homeward, the other pointing to the cordoned off park. Furious and frustrated by a still-born march for my country.

Craving banal things;

I want our smugness and shopping trips back. The loud, loud laughter of Aggie who is at Burma market fish. Dashing bodaboda bicycle men. I want our struggling aspirations and the certainty of God's favour. I want our multinational hopes, the sense of being alchemists capable of transforming rubble into gold.

"We are a blessed nation." We used to say. I want my country back so I can wear the look of pious haughtiness. I want to freeze the feeling of Kenyaness, when we jumped up and down and sang badly in kitourist kiswahili, Nchji yetu ya Kenya, hakuna matata.

You know the time; it was that moment before December 30, 2007.