

Between Genocide and Theriocide: Zootherapeutics in Mukasonga’s “Cattle Praise Songs” and *Cockroaches*

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Abstract

The paper revisits the Rwandan genocide through an analysis of Scholastique Mukasonga’s memoir, *Cockroaches*, and her short story, “Cattle Praise Song.” Although genocide is often associated with the act or process of dehumanization, it is uncommon for authors of creative or critical works to consider animals as subjects of genocide. Beginning with an exploration of genocide as dehumanization, the paper will reference Heidegger’s notorious assertion that “animals don’t die,” Levinas’s portrayal of a humanizing dog, and Derrida’s examination of these conflicting viewpoints by highlighting how the annihilation of certain species is indeed ongoing. Mukasonga illustrates a dual identification process: animals as victims and animals as saviors, symbolizing the elusive sovereignty of Rwandan exiles. This concept of zootherapeutics enables Mukasonga to emphasize the dehumanizing aspects of the violence inflicted upon the Tutsis; conversely, she employs animals to engage with and reflect on that history, facilitating a safe and bearable passage to both the past and the future. Mukasonga’s approach to zootherapeutics not only reveals the inhumanity of the Rwandan genocide but also introduces an element of unpredictability by evaluating both loss and potential restitution in terms of animal suffering and destruction, thus prompting readers to envision, if possible, the unspeakable trauma inflicted by the violence and devastation.

Keywords: Genocide, violence, dehumanization, zootherapeutics, trauma, restitution