Between Genocide and Theriocide: Zootherapeutics in Mukasonga's "Cattle Praise Songs" and *Cockroaches*

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When the Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin coined the term genocide in his 1944 paper "Axis Rule in Occupied Europe," he simply defined it as "the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group" (79). The significance of Lemkin's pioneering text, however, is not restricted to its introduction of the term genocide to the scholarship on human rights or to the instrumental role this text would play in ratifying the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1951 by the United Nations. The true import of the text emerges in Lemkin's autobiography where he provides an account of the political and rhetorical context in which he drafted the text. In his autobiography, *Totally Unofficial*, Lemkin describes the circumstances in which he wrote the paper and reveals that the people of America were its immediate audience when his attempt to speak directly to the politicians in Washington DC failed. Lemkin recalled in his autobiography that when he tried to discuss Hitler's atrocities in Europe with the President and Vice President of America, his desperate attempts fell on deaf ears. Vice President Henry Wallace was more interested in corn and agriculture in Iowa, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt merely urged patience, which Lemkin found insulting. The

apathy of these two American leaders led Lemkin to make this astounding remark:

> The impression of a tremendous conspiracy of silence poisoned the air. There was no escape from this feeling. No explanation of such a conspiracy was morally possible. A double murder was taking place. Were the Allies refusing to make it known that the execution of nations and races had already begun? Since time immemorial it had been customary that the fact of murder be denounced by the community. Even the most obscure and savage tribe would take immediate notice of a homicide. The red symbol of blood would make a savage tell his indignations to his fellows or to the stars. The ban of silence, if any, was placed on the lips of the condemned man. (Lemkin 2013, 117).

The tremendous conspiracy of silence in Washington DC and Europe was suffocating for Lemkin. He compared this silence to the murder of millions of Jewish citizens in Europe by Hitler, and called the situation "double murder." For Lemkin, remaining silent in the face of "the execution of nations and races" was also genocide. However, he added one more layer to this double murder by juxtaposing the refusal by the Allies to acknowledge the murder to "the most obscure and savage tribes" that would invariably denounce homicide. Lemkin's remarkable reprimand of Western civilization thus implies a triple murder: Hitler's persecution of the Jews; silence of the Allies, abetting the murder; and the moral debasement of Western civilization below savagery. After all, in Lemkin analysis, "both perpetrators and the targets of genocide are susceptible to demoralization" (Morrow 2020, 46).

We must note that the world has come a long way from the immoral and suffocating silence that Lemkin describes with regard to the Holocaust. And yet Lemkin's intertwining of genocide and silence still resonates when atrocities and mass murders across the globe are not

just brushed aside with indifference or tolerated in silence but any attempt to acknowledge them is effectively censored. The near universal avowal of the Holocaust now does not automatically guarantee open acknowledgement of all subsequent atrocities. This cyclical spiraling of history brings back the same complicitous entanglement of silence, censorship, and genocide at times in the name of the Holocaust itself. Such an ironic volte-face has led a contemporary thinker to famously ask: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives. . . What *makes for a grievable life*?" (Butler 2004, 20).

We must also note that Lemkin's conceptualization of genocide is itself riddled with holes and silences some of which have already been outlined by his critics. A. Dirk Moses, one of Lemkin's sympathetic readers, sees no traces of Zionism in Lemkin's works and portrays him as a believer of multiethnic states and cosmopolitanism (Moses 2010, 24). Others, however, believe that he pandered to both Zionist and Muslim sensibilities (Giladi 2021, 178), so much so that in the U.S. "White Supremacists invoke Lemkin as an authoritative source in their quest for racial purity" (Loeffler 2017, 341).

While these critics expose Lemkin's association with exclusionary cultural nationalism, and his moral ambivalence and silence on Palestine, they leave untouched a crucial restrictive trait: his anthropocentric understanding of genocide. He defined genocide as "the criminal intent to destroy or cripple permanently a human group" (Lemkin 1947, 147). Lemkin's discussion of genocide (in fact, genocide studies in general), is limited to atrocities against human animals. In other words, for genocide studies, destruction or crippling of non-human animals is neither criminal nor violent. Since only humans can form a group and are organized as nations, only their collective destruction counts as mass-murder. Even a wholesale butchering of non-human animals fails to amount to murder because their alienated and isolated existence does not form a community. There is no crime against animality so long as genocide is understood to be crime against humanity.

This is where the new concept of theriocide makes its entrance. Introducing the term, Piers Beirne notes that "Theriocide is the killing of animal by a human. It combines the ancient Greek *θηρίον* (an animal other than human) and the Latin *caedere*" which denotes cutting, felling or killing (2018, 24). Theriocide refers to "those diverse human actions that cause the deaths of animals. Like the killing of one human by another (e.g. homicide, infanticide and femicide), a theriocide may be socially acceptable or unacceptable, legal or illegal. It may be intentional or unintentional. It may involve active maltreatment or passive neglect. Theriocides may occur one-on-one, in small groups or in large-scale social institutions. The numerous sites of theriocide include one-on-one acts of cruelty and neglect, state theriocide, factory farming, hunting and blood sports, the lethal trade in wildlife, vivisection, militarism and war, pollution, and human induced climate change" (Beirne 2018, 23-24).

While Piers is right in introducing this term "theriocide" to describe a range of human activities harmful and destructive for animals, thereby rendering these activities liable for criminal prosecution; however, his juxtaposition of genocide and theriocide implies a clear binary opposition between them. If Lemkin confined genocide to human beings, Piers restricts theriocide to non-human animals. What both models miss is an account of that zone of indistinction invariably present in almost all events of mass-destruction in which the boundaries that separate humans and non-human animals blur and intersect.

This blurring of the boundaries between humans and non-human is poignantly and emphatically described by Emmanuel Levinas in his intriguing essay titled "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights" from the book *Difficult Freedom*. In this essay, Levinas recalls a dog who visited the unit where Jewish prisoners of war were kept in Nazi Germany. Levinas recounts how the prisoners were treated, and how anti-

Semitism, "the archetype of all internment" worked (1990, 153). Racism, Levinas says, "shuts people away in a class, deprives them of expression and condemns them to being 'signifiers without a signified,'" rendering them incapable of delivering the message "about our humanity" for their pleas were ignored as "monkey talk" (1990, 153). Levinas adds that "about halfway through our long captivity, for a few short weeks, a wandering dog entered our lives. . . He survived in some wild patch in the region of the camp. But we called him Bobby, an exotic name, as one does with a cherished dog. He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men" (1990, 153). Levinas describes the genocidal regime of Nazism as a zone of indistinction in which humans are repeatedly dehumanized and non-human animals are evoked by the victims as figures capable of granting Kantian recognition of human dignity.

The Rwandan Genocide:

In the same spirit as Lemkin's discussion of genocide as double murder, some historians describe the Rwandan Genocide as "double genocide." For these historians, what is known as the Rwanda Genocide is "only one aspect of the "war's" [the October war of 1990] massacres; RPF [Rwandan Patriotic Front, a refugee organization based in Uganda dedicated to the repatriation of Tutsi refugee from Uganda and other African nations] killed many . . . so many as to qualify as another genocide, one that had been kept secret" (Chretien 2003, 337). The Rwandan genocide occurred in 1994 over roughly 100 days, when extremist leaders within Rwanda's Hutu-led government organized and encouraged the mass killing of the Tutsi minority and moderate Hutus. In his *One Hundred Days of Silence*, Jared Cohen accuses the U.S. government of inaction and silence for 100 days from April 6, 1994, and notes that more than 800, 000 Tutsis were slaughtered during those 100 days. The number of deaths was 11% of Rwanda's total population and 84% of the Tutsis in Rwanda (2006, 1).

Triggered by the assassination of President Juvénal Habyarimana, the violence was the culmination of decades of ethnic division rooted in colonial policies, propaganda, and political manipulation. The government blamed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) for the assassination, even though the missiles fired at Habyarimana's plane seemed to originate not from Kigali (a Tutsi stronghold), but from the Kanombe military camp, a highly fortified location of Rwanda's Presidential Guard, probably launched by "extremists within the Hutu power movement" to turn the majority Hutu public against minority Tutsis (Miller 2020, 24). State authorities, militias, and local officials mobilized civilians through fear and hate messaging, turning everyday spaces into sites of mass murder. The whimsical nature of killings during this period led one historian to compare it to the "hurricane of death" in which "the daily killing rate was at least five times that of the Nazi death camps" (Prunier 1995, 261).

Mahmood Mamdani argues that the Rwandan geocide must be "thought through within the logic of colonialism," which for him represents double genocide: the genocide of the native by the settler and the anticolonial impulse of the native to eliminate the settler (Mamdani 2001, 9-10). For others, Rwanda's postcolonial condition is instrumental in precipitating violence. According to this position, the founding narrative of postcolonial Rwanda was grounded on the division between us vs them. This narrative "held that as the overwhelming numeric and once-persecuted majority, Hutus should rule and should organize themselves to prevent a return of Tutsi power and oppression of Hutus. That orientation became a center of gravity among military and political elites across more than thirty years of postcolonial rule" (Strauss 215, 275-76). The aftermath reshaped Rwanda and global conversations about genocide prevention, accountability, and the responsibility of the international community to act in the face of mass atrocities.

Scholastique Mukasonga and her works

Scholastique Mukasonga (b 1956) is a writer from Rwanda who has resided in Normandy, France since 1992. Like many Tutsis in Rwanda during the 1960s, her family was compelled to abandon their village and move to the polluted and arid region of Bugesera. As tensions between the Tutsi and Hutu communities intensified, Mukasonga left her education behind and fled to Burundi. Ultimately, she reached France in 1992, merely two years before the tragic genocide of the Tutsi that ravaged Rwanda. One of the most traumatic experiences Mukasonga faced was learning that 37 of her family members had perished during the genocide.

Mukasonga's autobiographical work, *Inyenzi ou les Cafards* (2006) marked her debut in literature. This was succeeded by the publication of *La femme aux pieds nus* (2008), which was followed by *L'Iguifou* (2010). Her first novel, *Our Lady Of The Nile*, won several literary prizes and awards including Ahamadou Kourouma prize and the Renaudot prize (2012), the Océans France Ô prize (2013) and the French Voices Award (2014). It was also adapted into a film by Atiq Rahimi. To her list of books, Mukasonga has recently added two novels: *Sister Deborah* (2024) and *The Edge of the Lake* (2025).

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.

Western philosophy seems to have taken no less than a quantum leap from Martin Heidegger's high-handed and potentially violent anthropocentric statement: "[o]nly man dies. The animal perishes" (1971, 178) to Jacques Derrida's parenthetical but profound assertation that "there are also animal genocides":

> [M]en do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty or to hide it from themselves; in order to organize on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence, which some would compare to the worst cases of genocide (there are also animal genocides: the number of species endangered because of man takes one's breath away). One should neither abuse the figure of genocide nor too quickly consider it explained away. It gets more complicated: the annihilation of certain species is indeed in process, but it is occurring through the organization and exploitation of an artificial, infernal, virtually interminable survival, in conditions that previous generations would have judged monstrous, outside of every presumed norm of a life proper to animals that are thus exterminated by means of the continued existence or even their overpopulation. As if, for example, instead of throwing a people into ovens and gas chambers (let's say Nazi) doctors and geneticists had decided to organize the

> overproduction and overgeneration of Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals by means of artificial insemination, so that, being continually more numerous and better fed, they could be destined in always increasing numbers for the same hell, that of the imposition of genetic experimentation, or extermination by gas or by fire. (2008, 26).

Heidegger's humanist view here espouses the so-called principle of non-relationality of death that reinforces the value of one's death over the death of the other, especially that of an animal. This shift undoubtedly reorients Western approach to animality and its discourses on being, death, difference and otherness. However, the questions still remain: can this transition accommodate non-western histories and lived experiences? Is a non-Western person counted as fully human? Whose death counts and whose does not? Should we define and delimit genocide in terms of race, ethnicity and technology only or should it be extended to other species? Even Derrida's otherwise radical admission of animal genocide is primarily limited to factory farming, which by implications excludes discussions of animal genocide that occurred during the Rwandan genocide.

In the domain of global history and politics, this radical shift from perishing animals to animal genocide manifests itself by way of a very cynical and cruel mirror image. Both Rwandan and Western denials of the genocide are well documented. Linda Melvern's *Intent to Deceive* clearly lays the blame for the denial on the propaganda that the Hutu were able to spread in the name of Hutu Power and their characterization of the killings as mutual violence or inter-ethnic war (2020, 4). Writing while the genocide was still underway in Rwanda, Douglas Jehl recounts how US officials were instructed to not refer to Rwanda killings as "genocide" (Jehl 1994). In *Waiting for First Light*, a characteristically candid account of Western attitude towards Rwanda, UNAMIR's commander, Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire asks this rhetorical question: "Are all humans human? Or are some humans

more human than others," adding, if "some idiotic outfit decided it was going to wipe-out the 320-odd mountain gorillas. . . the international community would react a lot more rapidly" (Dallaire 2016, 49-50)

A conceptual chiasmus, thus, ties these responses to the Rwanda genocide. Hutu power disavows the genocide because they think they have merely exterminated the pests; Western powers deny it because they are more concerned about the animals being shot or killed. Both display the Heideggerian ploy of the exclusivity or exceptionalism of human finitude – my death counts, the death of the other does not.

A different picture of the genocide emerges when we read the autobiographical and fictional works by Tutsi writers such as Scholastique Mukasonga, who was born in Rwanda in 1956; and, in 1960, together with her family, was banished to the hot and desert-like district of Bugesera near the border of Burundi. Her education takes her to Butare; however, as the violence against the Tutsi intensifies, she was forced to flee to Burundi, and then in 1992 to France, where she lives now. Her 2006 memoir *Inyenzi ou les Cafards* describes how her family was banished from Rwanda to Nyamata, and how Tutsi were persecuted by Hutu militias and soldiers, which resulted in the killing of 37 of her family members. The publication of this autobiographical account of the genocide was followed by two collections of short stories, *La femme aux pieds nus* in 2008 and *L'Iguifou* in 2010, and her first novel, *Notre-Dame du Nil* (2012), which was adapted into a film in 2019.

Mukasonga's works would not only challenge attempts to disavow the Rwandan genocide, they also present a powerful testimony to the atrocities committed by the Hutu nationalists against the Tutsi, moderate Hutu, and other non-human animals. Her narratives help us critique Heidegger's anthropocentric understanding of death, and help us extend Derrida's assertion that "there are also animal genocides" by showing us how animal genocides are inextricably connected to human genocides. In this sense, a close analysis of Mukasonga's work helps us

revise UN's definition of genocide as "killing or harming members of a racial or ethnic group." As we will see, the Rwanda genocide involves multi-species victims and the concept of ethnicity and race applied to the events are either Hutu nationalist distortions or a result of colonial policies to divide and conquer the natives.

Though difficult to come up with an accurate count, historians generally agree that about 800,000 Rwandans were killed first during the so-called Hutu Revolution of 1959 which resulted in the ousting of the Tutsi Mwami or King, Rwanda's Independence and the Tutsi attempts at reclaiming power; and then during the 100 days Civil War between April 6, 1994 (when Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana was assassinated) to July 4, 1994 (when Tutsi led RPF or the Rwandan Patriotic Front soldiers marched into the capital city of Kigali). The majority of the victims were the Tutsi but the figure also included some moderate Hutu, who either refused to kill their Tutsi neighbors and, in some cases, their relatives, or were accused of giving shelter to the Tutsi. The Hutu hardliners organized a militia called Interahamwe – meaning those who attack together – and recruited the members by using the Radio Television Libre des Milles Collines as their propaganda machine to mobilize ordinary Hutu by calling for the extermination of the Tutsi Inyenzi or cockroaches. This opens the multi-species dimension of the genocide.

While the account of the Interahamwe crushing the Tutsi Inyenzi with their machetes was now a more or less recognized aspect of the Rwandan genocide, its other side has not been highlighted as much: the destruction of cattle and wild animals during the Civil War. For the Tutsi were herders (as opposed to the horticulturalist Hutu), exterminating them would also require destroying their cattle. According to some accounts 90% of cattle got destroyed during the genocide including the cows that Tutsi herders owned and the animals in the parks and swamps where the Tutsi hid themselves before being hunted down by the Hutu ("Rwanda").

Between Genocide and Theriocide:

The notion of triple murder, which we initially discussed in relation to Lemkin's interpretation of genocide, requires a reevaluation when analyzing the genocide in Rwanda as depicted in the writings of Scholastique Mukasonga. Three primary characteristics can be discerned in Mukasonga's narratives concerning genocide: i) rather than being an abrupt and short event lasting only 100 days, it is a phenomenon that has developed over decades, tracing back to the 1950s and 1960s in Rwandan history; ii) emphasizing the human casualties alone does not adequately address the complexities of the Rwandan genocide - non-human victims also played a significant role; iii) any path forward in the journey to heal from this trauma must include these non-human animals as well. More specifically, Mukasonga's autobiographical narrative Cockroaches and her short story "Cattle Praise Song" focuses on what this article referred to as the zone of indistinction by recounting a triple murder: 1) murder of the Tutsi as cockroaches, rats and snakes; 2) Hutu murderers as beasts of prey; 3) destruction of livestock and killing of cattle to undermine Tutsi identity and agency.

Early on in *Cockroaches*, Mukasonga vividly describes all three phenomena. She recalls moving to Magi in the foothills of Mount Makwaza in the late 1950s:

> Mount Makwaza was the homeland of a great Hutu chief, an *igihinza* [soothsayer?]. We were terribly afraid of him. My mother described him as a giant, always dressed in a leopard skin. When threatening clouds shrouded the mountaintop, she would tell us, "Someone must have angered the *igihinza*, be good now." In our childhood terror, we believed the *igihinza*'s enormous shadow was darkening the whole mountainside. No one dared venture out at the foot of

> Mount Makwaza after dark, for fear of disturbing the *igihinza*'s nighttime doings. (Mukasonga 2006, 13)

This scene sets the tone of Mukasonga's narrative in which the Hutu occupy the position of power in the socio-political hierarchy and the Tutsi are at the "foothill" of the mountaintop occupied by a Hutu chief. Moreover, the chief seems to possess supernatural powers (a perception held by the Tutsi in general, not just by children like Mukasonga) to control the clouds and his attire of leopard skin converts him into a beast of prey whose name itself is enough to invoke terror. This mythical intersection of the human and the non-human materializes into reality when only a couple of pages after this description, Mukasonga's house in Magi was attacked:

> But then a crowd appeared, bellowing, with machetes in their hands, and spears, bows, clubs, torches. We hurried to hide in the banana grove. Still roaring, the men burst into our house. They set fire to the straw-roofed hut, the stables full of calves. They slashed the stores of beans and sorghum. They launched a frenzied attack on the brick house we would never live in. They didn't take anything, they only wanted to destroy, to wipe out all signs of us, annihilate us. (Mukasonga 2006, 15-16).

By using the term progrom to describe this event on All Saints' Day 1959, Mukasonga challenge the established narrative that genocide in Rwanda lasted for 100 days from April to July 1994. The Rwandan genocide not only spans across multiple geographical and temporal sites and segments in the sense Lemkin defined the term as multiple murders but it also involves multiple species of perpetrators and victims. The fact that Mukasonga's family lost their cows and calves before they would love their human relatives reveal the movement of extermination through the zone of indistinction stretching between genocide and theriocide. Unlike Levinas who characterized himself as a

sign without a signifier, Mukasonga sees in this geno-theriocide a strategy of wiping out all signs referencing and constitutive of Tutsi identity.

In her autobiography, Mukasonga argues that there was nothing spontaneous about the genocide the wheels of which were set in motion as early as 1959 with the overthrow of Monarchy and the expulsion of the Tutsi from Rwanda. She describes a refugee camp in Gitwa where the refugees would be visited frequently by lions, leopards and buffalos. In order to keep her from panicking, her mother would ask her to stay still because moving would make the lion "think you are showing a lack of respect" (2006, 34). Mukasonga contrasts this encounter to her being face to face with Hutu soldiers patrolling the area with their helmet down but their "implacable hatred" would be clearly visible through the visor. "They called us Inyenzi, cockroaches" (2006, 44).

Mukasonga again recounts two similar encounters that take place in Nyamata, their new refugee settlement. Here she would see an elephant on her way to school, and her mom's advice again would be to "stay behind the elephant, never pass him" (2006, 50), but Mukasonga knew that "elephants were not the greatest danger school children could meet" (2006, 51). "Cruelty of men" would be far more dangerous, especially men like Kayibanda, "who'd vowed to exterminate us." Mukasonga adds: "The soldiers of Goko camp were always there to remind us what we were: sakes, Inyenzi, cockroaches. Nothing human about us. One day we would have to be got rid of" (2006, 63). The word that the soldiers used for getting rid of was "gutsembatsemba," which according to Mukasonga was "formerly used to talk about eradicating rabid dogs and destructive animals" (2006, 120). And the Hutu soldiers and militias acted with "a cruelty and ferocity so inhuman" that they got rid of 37 members of Mukasonga's family including her 8 months pregnant sister, who was beaten to death using as club her own baby that was sliced out her womb.

The Hutu attribution of cockroaches and snakes to the Tutsi and Mukasonga's depiction of the perpetrators as inhuman and ferocious (derived from Latin ferox – wild looking – and PIE root *ghwer* meaning wild beast) illustrate that the genocide not only blurred the lines between humans and non-humans, but it also refortified the distinctions between beasts and pests, and between beasts and wild creatures. These distinctions between ferocious beasts, snakes, cockroaches, lions and elephants differ from the binary Gorgio Agamben builds his zone of indistinction from, a zone bare life is pushed into by sovereignty during the state of exception (Agamben 2017, 20, 92).

The difference between Mukasonga's and Agamben's zone of indistinction is clearly illustrated in Mukasonga's short story "Cattle Praise Song." As we know this short story depicts the relationship between the Tutsi people and their cows as deeply spiritual, cultural, and identity-forming rather than merely economic. Cows in this story are praised with poetic language and are elevated as symbols of harmony and dignity. Through this praise, Mukasonga shows that cattle and Tutsi identity are indivisible as the rituals of their interaction shape daily routines, social values, and ways of seeing the world. The song-like structure itself mirrors oral traditions, emphasizing how the bond with cows is passed down through generations.

Zootherapeutics: Healing, Home and Sovereignty

As saw in *Cockroaches*, cows were among the initial casualties of the Rwandan genocide. In Mukasonga's short story, "Cattle Praise Song," their poignant absence is prominently highlighted. This story was published first in *The New Yorker* in 2018 and then included in Igifu (2020) with the title "The Glorious Cow." The main character, Karekezi, finds himself in exile in Nyamata, accompanied by his father Kalisa, his mother (Maman), and his siblings, yet devoid of any cows, whose loss is deeply mourned by the entire clan. The narrative unfolds in three distinct phases: life prior to exile, the experience of exile, and the state of

Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide. Mukasonga reflects on the period preceding the expulsion of the Tutsi by illustrating the interdependent bond they shared with their cattle. Each cow was given a name and was called by name; they were well-nourished, milk was plentiful, and food for them was abundant, allowing Karekezi's parents to live without fear. This pastoralist nostalgia is followed by the realities of exile in Nyamata:

> On days when I didn't go to school, when Kalisa, my father returned from Mass, which he attended every morning, he would say, "Karekezi, you're a man now. Come, it is high time for you to learn how to look after the cows." Of course, there were no cows in Nyamata – not among the Tutsi who had been resettled there, at least – but my father spent his days steering his ghost cows through meadows of memory of regret. (Mukasonga 2018).

Again, Mukasonga takes us back to the late 1950s and early 1960s when she believes the progrom started, ensuring that the Tutsi persecution from this segment of history is not buried under the so-called 100 days of genocide. But instead of just observing an absence, an erasure where the signs and symbols of cows used to be that were effectively wiped out by the Hutu, she traces in exile ghost cows so that the speech-lessness or silence around the text of Tutsi survival could be again filled with the sounds of herding, milking, and eulogizing cows. Mukasonga places Tutsi displacement and destruction between genocide and theriocide and uses the traces of ghost cows as zootherapeutic to cope with Hutu atrocities.

Mukasonga's zootherapeutics is not confined to the instrumentalist view in which cows serve as a mere coping mechanism. They as signs represent the possibility of return and restitution:

> When the cows come back, that will be the sign that it's time to head home to Rwanda . . . The men reminisced about the

> cow that had been o ered as a gift by this or that chief, or even by the king himself, why not! They described her coat, her horns, her temperament, and the calves she'd birthed; they recited the poems they'd composed in her honor. And their glorious and familiar praise song for our beloved lost cows mingled with the French words the schoolmaster had given me to learn—a strange litany that I recited out loud. (Mukasonga 2020, 35-36).

By celebrating cows so vividly, Mukasonga preserves a cultural identity that has been threatened and disrupted not just by violence internally within Rwanda but also through global indifference, complicity and silence about the geno-theriocide in Rwanda. The cows are not just symbols of a vanished or endangered way of life, they are also the signs in the Tutsi song of cultural revival and resurgence.

"Cattle Praise Song/The Glorious Cow" ends with Karekezi, a lone survivor in his large family, returning to Rwanda and by his own admission without a single cow:

> I returned to Rwanda without a single cow. I hope that my father was not angered by this in the land of the dead. I live in Kigali, in the Nyamirambo neighborhood, and I teach at a private University. I married a widow, who lost her husband in the genocide. Our first son already has a sister and a brother – her two children who survived. I drink beer with my Hutu neighbor: he is my neighbor and that's all I want to know about him. I often dream about King Gihanga: according to legends he was our first king, and he introduced cows to Rwanda. And in my dreams King Gihanga always asks the same question: "So it was you, the Tutsi, who chose to herd cows?" But I turn my head and pretend not to hear him. (Mukasonga 2018)

This is a powerful denouement to an intriguing story – not just because a survivor of the Rwandan genocide finally returns home, and builds a blended and reconstituted family in Kigali with a woman and her two children who are survivors themselves. The ending of the story is also impactful because here we see the protagonist trying to reconcile with his Hutu neighbor over a draft of beer. The ending gets more captivating with Karekezi divulging his dream about King Gihanga. As we know, *Cockroaches* starts with a nightmare: "Every night the same nightmare interrupts my sleep" (2006, 9). Mukasonga's story ends with an apparently more peaceful dream of King praising him for his devotion to cows: "So it was you, the Tutsi, who chose to herd cows?"

And yet, this praise sounds odd and out of place for a story which is a cattle praise song. Is this Mukasonga's way of foregrounding survivor's guilt that he could not fulfil his father's dream of herding a cow? Perhaps. Is this Mukasonga's way of reminding Rwandans that the only path forward in post-genocide Rwanda is rejecting the ancient sovereignty of Tutsi kings and building a reconciliatory sovereignty divided equally between the Tutsi and the Hutu? Perhaps.

Even more unsettling about the ending is the fact that on the one hand this is the most anthropocentric scene in the story where a family and neighborhood are imagined entirely populated by humans and the cattle are reduced to being creatures of dreams only; on the other hand, Karekezi, the protagonist not only refuses to *know* about his neighbor, he also pretends to not hear King Gihanga. Perhaps through Karekezi's refusal to listen to his Hutu neighbor and to a legendary Tutusi king, Mukasonga is symptomatically exposing her own diasporic hesitation and even cynicism about Rwanda's attempts to undo through "One Cow per Poor Family" program the feudal policy of *buhake* according to which the Hutu can use a cow without owning her in exchange for labor and services to a Tutsi lord.

Whatever the case may be, the ending of Mukasonga's short story reinstitutes silence as an integral element within a narrative of genocide.

She reminds us of Lemkin's connection between silence and violence in the double murder that for Lemkin defines genocide, yet she extends this intersection beyond Lemkin's critique of European and North American silence. Mukasonga suggests that irrespective of how deftly, intricately, effectively we deploy or interpret the signs, still much remains unspoken, untraceable and unknown in our discourses of violence and genocide.

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