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Much of what is written about Africa is seldom spoken by an African voice or illustrated from the mind of one. But in *Cockroaches*, Scholastique Mukasonga, details a horrifying account of the suffering Rwandans endured because of European colonial terrorism. As Mukasonga's mother says "Digidigi came along, and everyone died."¹ Prosperity didn't follow Europe to Africa; rather, it came to take it and stake its claim. After all, Europeans saw Africa as a "faceless, blank and empty place on the map waiting to be explored."² **Thus, the Rwanda Mukasonga grew up in and the 1994 genocide were results of the control acquired by colonial powers through acts of the terrorism and evangelism.** Both would ensure that generations of Africans would grow up in disarray and despair.

Our first encounter of the juxtaposition between terrorism and evangelism is illustrated by Mukasonga, when she and her family move to Gitagata. She describes how the Hutu-dominated government required that all Tutsi households have a picture of President Kayibanda. At the same time, the missionaries required the Virgin Mary be placed beside it. Mukasonga, vividly captures and describes the imagery of the two photos when she says, "We lived our lives under the twin portraits of the President who'd vowed to exterminate us and Mary who was waiting for

¹ Mukasonga, Scholastique. "Gitagata: The Fields, the School, the Parish." Essay. In *Cockroaches*, translated by Jordan Stump, 59–59. Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2016.

² Hochschild, Adam, and Barbara Kingsolver. "The Traders Are Kidnapping Our People." Essay. In *King Leopold's Ghost: a Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, 18–18. Boston, MA: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998.

us in heaven.”³ What an utterly terrifying success of teamwork by the church and the state to instill fear in the Tutsi population. Fear mongering at its finest.

As Hochschild and Kingsolver astutely observe in ‘*Where There Aren’t No Ten Commandments*,’ terrorizing people has historically been intertwined with conquest. “Just as terrorizing people is part of conquest, so is forcing someone else to administer the terror.”⁴ And this is exactly what was achieved by the Belgians and Germans who established the hardline distinctions between the Hutu agriculturalists and the royal Tutsi pastoralists. This introduction of identity politics in Rwanda only exacerbated preexisting tensions between these two groups which were formerly classes and now codified ethnic identities. The European creation of a minority, Tutsi, monarchy served as a way of intimidating the majority, Hutu ⁵. It was a way of displaying who was favored and who wasn’t at the time. This only added to the Hutus’ animosity that would fuel the genocide in Rwanda.

Even worse, as much as Europeans portrayed missionaries to be an evangelical effort, it was just another form of gaining control. With their weaponized religion, fear and guilt were used as manipulation tactics against Africans. For example, Mukasonga became so frightened about Hell and sinning from school lessons by the missionaries that she repeatedly visited the priest until she was banned from seeing him ⁶. Ultimately, these tactics served as a way to make

³Mukasonga, Scholastique. “Gitagata: The Fields, the School, the Parish.” Essay. In *Cockroaches*, translated by Jordan Stump, 55-55. Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2016.

⁴ Hochschild, Adam, and Barbara Kingsolver. “‘Where There Aren’t No Ten Commandments.’” Essay. In *King Leopold’s Ghost: a Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, 123-123 Boston, MA: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998.

⁵ Reid, Richard J. “Hard Times: Protest, Identity, and Depression.” Essay. In *A History of Modern Africa: 1800 to the Present*, 233–33. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Limited, 2020.

⁶ Mukasonga, Scholastique. “Gitagata: The Fields, the School, the Parish.” Essay. In *Cockroaches*, translated by Jordan Stump, 55-55. Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2016.

sure that Africans stayed obedient to the church, and in return, they wouldn't be punished. But that's far from the truth. Especially, when you ban a child from receiving the relief of atoning for their sins. That alone is punishment. A silent suffering.

Just like children, the uneducated can be made to believe anything. The missionaries didn't only use religion to control but also by providing a menial education. For instance, Mukasonga's mother was never taught to read or write but only to pray⁷. Yet, she knew and spoke one English word: meeting⁸. Of the vast things Mukasonga's mother knew about her homeland and the little she knew of the "Digidigi" she was well aware of the repercussions of having a meeting. This acknowledgment of not having meetings meant that missionaries were successful in neutralizing any unnecessary rebellions to the MDR-Parmehutu dictatorship that was established by the Catholic Church and Belgian government⁹. See, there's something more to that quiet exclusion of 'meetings' than meets the eye. It's like a knot that ties together the whole twisted tapestry of Rwanda's turmoil. It might seem like just words, innocent enough, but it's a hidden code, a signal that echoed louder than a scream. Those cunning missionaries, the sly Catholic Church, and the puppeteer Belgian government, they knew what they were doing. They weren't just stopping gatherings; they were choking their unity, constricting the very breath of resistance. Mukasonga's journey takes us through this maze, revealing how the church's religion, infused with fear and guilt, was used like shackles, chaining them to blind obedience. And right there, in the hush around 'meetings,' we hear the echoes of the MDR-Parmehutu dictatorship. A dictatorship sired from an unholy alliance between the church and Belgium, a sinister marriage that

⁷ Ibid., 60

⁸ Ibid., 68

⁹Ibid., 39

sealed Rwanda's fate. The silence imposed on 'meetings' mirrored the silenced cries of a nation, trapped in the clutches of colonial stratagems. Peel back the layers, and you find the veins that pumped manipulation, oppression, and division. A calculated move to disband their collective strength, to smother the flames of unity that could have sparked rebellion against their orchestrated puppet show. Mukasonga's tale becomes a mirror, reflecting the scars left by the twisted dance of terror and evangelism, a dance that choreographed their nation's agony and resilience.

The juxtaposition between European colonial terrorism and evangelism is a classic example of one hand washing the other. The European government needed resources and labor to fuel its economy, and the gospel was meant to be spread. And thus, what better way than to seize control of Africa by forcing them to assimilate to European values? Government and commercial companies exploited all who got in their way of retrieving resources, even empowering some Africans above the rest to make sure they could focus on their excavating. Because one thing Europeans wanted to keep buried is how they turned Africans into marionettes through identity politics to wreak havoc on their own people. This is the story sadly recounted through the tragic memories of Mukasonga.