



ALSO FROM
SCHOLASTIQUE MUKASONGA



Born in Rwanda in 1956, **SCHOLASTIQUE MUKASONGA** experienced from childhood the violence and humiliation of the ethnic conflicts that shook her country. In the aftermath of the brutal genocide of the Tutsi, Mukasonga learned that 37 of her family members had been massacred. Her first novel, *Our Lady of the Nile*, was adapted into a film by Atiq Rahimi in 2019. *The New York Times* named her memoir *Cockroaches* one of the “50 Best Memoirs of the Past 50 Years.” In 2019, *The Barefoot Woman* was a finalist for the National Book Award for Translation.

Igifu by Scholastique Mukasonga
Translated from the French by Jordan Stump
US \$18 / CAN \$24 paperback original • 110 pages
ISBN: 9781939810786 • EBOOK ISBN: 9781939810793
Distributed to the trade worldwide
by Penguin Random House Publisher Services:
www.penguinrandomhouse.com



www.archipelagobooks.org

Igifu

A DISCUSSION GUIDE



In sentences of great beauty and restraint, Mukasonga rescues a million souls from the collective noun ‘genocide’... An essential and powerful read.

— Zadie Smith (on *The Barefoot Woman*)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- I. The book begins by addressing a “you”: “You were a displaced little girl like me, sent off to Nyamata for being a Tutsi...” Who is the “you” in this collection? Is it the same “you” throughout, or does it change story to story? Generally speaking, what is the impact of the “you” in this text?
2. Throughout the collection, Mukasonga takes concepts – such as Igifu/Hunger, Fear, and Beauty – and turns them into symbols that take on a psychological significance beyond their immediate consequences. Discuss the significance of these symbols in terms of characters, culture, and the project of the book as a whole.
3. What is the role of memory – collective or personal – in these stories?
4. In “The Glorious Cow,” the narrator observes: “that churn shone far brighter than the *abapadris*’ monstrosity on a procession day.” How is this allusion to the Catholic vessel emblematic of Catholicism’s presence in the story? Discuss the relationship of both the

characters and the narrator to Catholic rituals and traditions. Why might the narrator evoke religion in this way, rather than stating its role in the lives of the characters outright?

5. Throughout “The Glorious Cow,” the narrator speaks to the mixing of home culture and the culture of the colonizers, speaking about the father making “a prayer for the cows mixed with prayer for the Virgin Mary” or discussing how “the French words the teacher wanted me to learn... were now mingled with the exalted, familiar praise of the long-lost cows.” Discuss the power dynamics at play. What is the relationship between education and colonization in the text?
6. “No one batted an eye... when they discovered he didn’t have a Christian name and so hadn’t been baptized. No one minded – on the contrary, we all admired the heroic names he’d given his strapping sons, names that our poems give to the great warriors of old: Impangazamurego, He-who-is-armed-with-a-powerful-bow...” Broadly speaking, what is at stake with regard to names in this text? More specifically, why might the author have chosen to provide a translation of the names in this specific passage for the reader? How would the experience of a reader be different if the names were left untranslated?

7. “Fear,” rather than displaying the feared violence itself, instead investigates the experience of fear, the anticipation. Why do you think the author chose to do this?
8. At times, as in the beginning of “Igifu” and “Fear,” Mukasonga writes in a poetic, abstract register, evoking prose poetry. At other moments, as in the majority of “The Glorious Cow,” the prose is much more straightforward and narrative. What is the effect of these different registers, and why might Mukasonga decide to employ them at different points in the book?
9. The narrator is writing from a future of which the characters have no knowledge. How does time operate in this text, and how does the narrator’s position (and our position, as readers with any understanding of Rwandan history) influence our understanding of the narratives in the text?
10. At what points does the narrator shift from the past, in which the stories are placed, to a more direct register located in the present? How do these pivots affect our experience as readers?
- II. How do these stories relate to each other? Why do you think they are presented together as a unified whole rather than as individual stories?