

Becoming-Animal: Negotiating Insider/Outsider Politics in Leah Chishugi's *A Long Way from Paradise* by Maureen Amimo

Abstract

Mobility practices in the postmodern world have enhanced free circulation of people, objects, ideas, and services. In the same vein, surveillance and boundary policing has also emerged. Narratives of forced flight exemplify this surveillance in detail. In this paper I explore the complexities of becoming-animal inherent in political crises that exploit insider/outside trajectories. I employ Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal to tease out the nodes of becoming-animal in Leah Chishugi's *A Long Walk from Paradise*. To do this I focus on how the image of the 'inyenzi' (cockroach) is conceptualised by the different entities within the 'war machine' of Rwanda genocide to validate insider/outside surveillance and status. This study furthers the conception of becoming-animal by teasing out the affective connections emergent from becoming-cockroach and what this form of becoming allows the narrator to negotiate. This paper concludes that while becoming-animal is a tactic of extermination employed by the war machine, embracing-animal allows for a troubling of the insider/outside relations at the centre of such logic as well as understanding of human and animal relations.

Narratives of mass killing in forms such as genocide, force readers to explore the conception of becoming-animal in its many variants. While it is easy to explore this from the perspective of the perpetrators losing their humanity, becoming-animal as conceptualised by Deleuze and Guattari encompasses much more than such literal meanings. It does not hinge on the idea of humans resembling animals in behaviour nor does it hinge on the idea of humans imitating animals. The fact of becoming is a complex multiplicity as this paper will explore.

A Long Way from Paradise by Leah Chishugi documents the escape of the narrator (Leah), her son Jean-Luc, and her maid Donata from Rwanda. In the moments preceding the genocide, the narrative points to the pervasiveness of tribal slurs aimed at Tutsis, but the

presence of a peace accord signed by the leaders of both the Hutus and Tutsis and the United Nations, makes people not expect the genocide when it begins (40). During the genocide, the narrator points to the Interahamwe manning roadblocks and invading villages in search of the Tutsis. The Tutsis are condemned as ‘inyenzi’ and hacked to death. The narrative explores how due to the brainwashing, “Hutu fathers murdered their Tutsi wives and children” (57). Those who could not do it are killed after their families are murdered. In such instances, the “killers stopped being human, they had become animals” (57). The narrator struggles to camouflage her Tutsi nature in several ways. She transforms herself and is seen in several sections sharing an affinity with the cockroaches. Her reflection on the genocide even after the end of the war when she visits Rwanda, demonstrate her compelling identity with the ‘inyenzi’ that she and others like her are shunned to be.

This narrative fits within narratives of war that utilize de-humanisation as strategy to segregate people. The state and society have always employed animal characteristics to classify people (Deleuze and Guattari 239). This is through the spread of ideologies that propagate de-humanisation. Common cases include the imperial mission’s use of the Darwinian and Linnaeus system of classification to justify the de-humanisation of the Other². The Jewish Holocaust

¹ In subsequent mentions, ‘inyenzi’ and cockroach will be used interchangeably to refer to the same thing.

² See Anna McClintock’s *Imperial Leather* for exploration of how the ‘Tree of Man’ propagates racism through categorization of the racial purity of the Aryans versus the rest. The black man is at the bottom of the tier. This segregation assumes the closeness of the black man to the animal. McClintock extends her argument to demonstrate how becoming-animal thus extends to becoming-woman (McClintock 21–75). See also Mary Pratt’s examination of the imperial mission’s logic of ‘planetary consciousness’ where she explains that the Linnaeus system of naming was instrumental in determining that the other was the antithesis of the white man. While the white man was civilised, the other resembled animal- was animal (Pratt 15–36).

is an exposé on how the ‘war machine’ rationalised the extermination of the ‘impure’ race. The marking of the Jews as impure and the belief in purity of the Aryan race is used to justify the massive killing of Jews in concentration camps. Ideologies that propagate racial impurity are also at play in the Rwandan genocide and the historical space of Rwanda. While imperialism is seen as a big contributor to such ideologies, to assume that such machinery of war owes their beginnings in imperialism and colonialism is to miss the historical realities of Rwanda. In their case, traces of such categorization of Other as animal are prevalent even in the period before colonialism as Mahmood Mamdani’s exploration shows³. Mamdani suggests that the imperial mission in Rwanda only enhanced existing separatist ideologies to champion the colonial mission. At independence, the buck fell onto the new governments, which instead of dealing with the historical realities of seeing Tutsi as alien turned a blind eye hence the continuation of the propaganda that represented one tribe as foreign. It is such continuation that fuelled the civil war of the 60s hinted at in the beginning of the narrative—the narrator and her parents are living in Zaire due to being attacked during the civil war of 1959-62 in Rwanda—and the genocide of 1994 which is the focus of the narrative.

The prevalence of such propaganda is explored in the narrative when the narrator points out that at a young age, one of her sisters kept trying to “widen and flatten” (14) her nose because she did not enjoy being bullied in school for being Tutsi⁴. At this point the connection of Tutsi to aliens is visible but not yet explosive. The Interahamwe – “those who attack together” (41) as the narrator translates, work in packs. They brainwashed their members to believe that the Tutsis were cockroaches. This propaganda gained

³See Mahmood Mamdani’s *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*

⁴ The bullying is pegged on the fact that the physical features of the Tutsis is different from that of the other tribes. When the narrator’s sister attempts to change her nose, she is trying to come to terms with the bullying in her own way.

appeal among the pack due to the contagion simulated within pack mentality. Such packs act as 'war machine' where even though utilised by the state, their becoming appropriates a reality beyond the state. They have the capacity to transform into an epidemic that forcibly extends borders and spread this mentality (Deleuze and Guattari 242-243). In the narrative, the Interahamwe is seen in all aspects of society. The media as a central element in this contagion is represented by a presenter called Cantono, who on the radio is seen repeatedly stirring hatred for Tutsis (58). The connection of Tutsis to *inyenzi* is not accidental. The narrator asserts that in Rwanda it was necessary to keep the home clean. She cites that cases of cockroach invasions were a menace that forced the occupants of a house to invite fumigation teams to exterminate the pests. The reference to Tutsis as cockroaches plays into the narratives about purity of race and outsider politics that have been experienced elsewhere such as Germany. It positions Tutsis as outsiders in Rwanda. When the Interahamwe talk of Tutsis as cockroaches, the idea invites thoughts of disinfecting the masses.

The way the killing of the Tutsis was done furthers this view of them being animal. In one instance, the narrator points out, "after the Interahamwe killed people they ground them into the earth by putting their foot on the dead person's stomach, in exactly the way you would crush a cockroach underfoot. They genuinely believed that we Tutsis had no human qualities at all and were vermin that needed to be destroyed" (78). In the mind of the Interahamwe, Tutsis were not like cockroaches, they had become-cockroaches. One perpetrator tells the narrator, "the terrible thing about killing is that once you start it's hard to stop. I was in a trance and it actually felt good at the time to see the blood spurt and have the power over life and death. Things got to the point where I genuinely believed that you were all giant cockroaches. As you know, it is easy to kill cockroaches by stamping on them" (269). The concept of becoming-animal is ingrained in the war machine to the point that perpetrators cannot differentiate human-animals from other animals – they merge as one.

In the Rwandan genocide, this happens as the narrative points out that even though the civil war of 60s had ended in 1994, it is the same mentality and propaganda that sustains the war. This is also

extended to 1998 when the narrator's brother is killed as well as in the post 2000 period when the genocide effects are still felt in eastern Congo. The pack simply morphed and advanced different multiplicities for the different periods and spaces they find themselves in. In the current dispensation, while Rwanda thrives, the effect of the Interahamwe is still wreaking havoc in eastern Congo⁵. Such realities demonstrate the need to understand the rhizomatic interconnections and possibilities of understanding the 'war machine'. Since many post war nations do not explore these rhizomatic contagions, a stop to such ripple effects is a mirage and the constant wars become an everyday reality. While this is an important element to tease out regarding the concept of becoming-animal, this paper centres its argument on the victims and perpetrators of such segregated politics and how they negotiate positioning as well as their becoming-animal.

The first face-to-face interaction with the label '*inyenzi*' for the narrator is monumental. This happens when together with friends, she is followed by an Interahamwe leader on their way from visiting the Congrès National de Développement, a site where the RFP soldiers were stationed. When the Interahamwe leader calls her '*inyenzi*', the narrative describes her reaction thus, "My legs started to shake uncontrollably and I tried desperately to keep them still. I was breathing very fast and opened my mouth to speak but no words came out" (43). When the initial shock subsides, the narrator is angry at being compared to a cockroach and reacts by comparing her attacker to "a big, fat mosquito heavy with human blood" (44). This instance entails "projection and introjection" (Punter, 146) which the narrator simply extends from the Interahamwe. In this instance, the reality of the becoming is not necessarily felt as both the perpetrator and victim are projecting their hatred out through animalisms.

⁵ See Mahmood Mamdani's exploration of the Banyamulenge war in eastern Congo. Mamdani asserts that the same mentality of reducing people to animals applied in Congo where the Banyamulenge who are ethnic Tutsis are alien. Chishugi also explores this ripple effect of the genocide when she traces the presence of Hutu militia in eastern Congo propagating the civil war in the region.

Although the narrator assumes she is justified, in borrowing the dominator's language of de-humanisation, she propagates the continuous reference to becoming-animal hence is colluding with the war machine's ideology.

In reflection of being named as animal, the narrator later indicates that such views sickened her (45). The narrator thus sees that becoming-animal is a negative thing. She assumes that being animal is being lesser than human. This instance was a marker of awareness and the reality of the war. While hiding in Hotel Mille Collines, the narrator hears the Interahamwe arguing with the UN peace keepers about the presence of *'inyenzi'* and she points out that "the word *'inyenzi'* was no longer hurtful to me. It had become a word that meant 'my people'. If I see a cockroach scuttling across the ground now I cannot kill it because I feel like I'm killing a member of my own family" (69). At this point the "block of becoming" is real. The reality here is that the narrator does not imitate the cockroach, neither does she become a cockroach. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, "a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also, that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block with the first" (238). The block of becoming is a multiplicity, a heterogeneity through "involution". It is a creative in-between from the human and the cockroach. We should not read the narrator's statement as a point of finding affiliation with the cockroach. To do that would be to reduce the process to resemblance or imitation; in this narrative strain, becoming is a multiplicity formed out of contagion with the cockroach.

Such an understanding allows the narrator to negotiate positioning. In her escape from Rwanda, in many of the roadblocks she manipulates her becoming-animal to cross over. In one instance she laments about the *'inyenzi'* causing trouble for the Zaireans in need of crossing over to their homes. She doubly acquires performance of disdain and admiration to make the Interahamwe to clear the way for her. At the border at Gisenyi, the narrator gets her stomach cut open by the Interahamwe as she is seen as the damned cockroach. The perpetrators indicate that they know cockroaches do not die easily and as such they must stamp them again and again to compete the process. Another form of becoming emerges at this point. The

narrative points out, “I knew with certainty that I had many dead bodies above me and even more below me. I was some sort of *macabre sandwich filling, a crumpled-up bit of breathing* tangled into the dead” (100, *emphasis added*). This transformation is what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as becoming-animal transforming into becoming-molecular (248). Science fiction captures these forms of becoming-molecular well in several texts such as, Isserley’s end in Michel Farber’s *Under my Skin* (Dillon) and becoming animal extending to becoming -music in Coetzee’s *Disgrace* through David’s opera for the dogs (Herron).

In Chishugi’s case, the becoming extends to both molecular and things imperceptible. The bodies around her mark the one end of becoming through death. However, the rise of the narrator after being hacked, opens a threshold into zombification and vampirism (101). The reaction of the Interahamwe left to deal with the undying confirms this. The narrator’s rise from the rubble of dead bodies makes the Interahamwe to see her as some form of undead. He says, “you who can be found alive after all this: if you can’t die with all these bodies I don’t want your blood on me” (101). The narrative points to the fear the Interahamwe showed and his belief that the narrator possessed some strange power that could curse him on the spot. While this alludes to the becoming that Deleuze and Guattari conceptualise as supernatural (totemism), it is real. The rhizomatic nature of such becoming is explored well when Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* point out that this is an “ensemble of states, each distinct from the other, grafted onto the man insofar as he is searching for a way out. It is a creative line of escape that says nothing other than what it is” (Qtd in Dillon 149). When the Interahamwe sees the narrator as possessing some strange power, her becoming echoes a becoming-woman that is which is seen as proceeding from sorcery (Deleuze and Guattari 248). The transformed becoming is important here as it acts as a means of escape for the narrator. It allows the Interahamwe to leave her alone and necessitates her escape into Zaire. The connotation with her being possessed allows her to be seen not just as alien but also a dangerous alien who embodies powers beyond their machete. In this case, her becoming serve as her escape.

In the rest of the narrative, the obsession with cleanliness echo the narrator's need to purge certain ingrained connotations about becoming-animal. At one point the narrator says, "during our journey out of Rwanda getting clean was the last thing on my mind, but ever since I'd fled I had developed an obsession with getting clean and staying that way" (163). The constant connection with cockroaches indicate a change in perspective about animals. Furthering her stand on animals is her decision to stop eating meat once she gets to safety. Is it respect for animals or is it a consequence of the open machete killings that demonstrated to her the lack of mercy humans have? Having been equated to animal by the war machine and its attendants as well as experiencing the careless flow of blood of those seen as animals make her question her humanity and the ideas of specialness from other animals. This is a conscious decision reached at after an understanding of the relations humans and animals share was exposed to her through the de-humanisation in the war.

This study has explored the different forms of becoming in war literature and the effect on the relationship between man and animals. In such scenarios, the role of literature becomes paramount not only to expose the way politics is ingrained in the 'war machine' but also to interrogate the versions of becoming and the transformations they allow for a rethinking of human-animal relations. In this case, writing is an act of testimony as well as a form of becoming. When Deleuze and Guattari conceptualise the literary writer as a sorcerer they envision writing as a form of 'involution' as well as a becoming that delves into the heterogeneities of becoming. By centring the victim's embracing of becoming, avenues for negotiation of belonging and survival are teased out.

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