



## Belated Trauma and Collective Memory in Scholastique Mukasonga's *Cockroaches*

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### Abstract

This study examines the transformation of personal trauma into collective cultural memory in *Cockroaches* (2016) by Scholastique Mukasonga. The memoir emerges from the historical context of the Rwandan Genocide and reflects the profound psychological and cultural consequences experienced by the Tutsi community. It explores the ways in which Mukasonga narrates traumatic experiences through fragmented recollections and retrospective narration, revealing the belated and disruptive nature of trauma. The study further investigates how the memoir transforms individual memories of suffering, exile, and loss into a form of collective remembrance that preserves the cultural identity and historical memory of the Tutsi people. Particular attention is given to the narrative strategies employed in the text, including the naming of the dead, the recollection of everyday communal life before displacement, and the documentation of the gradual escalation of ethnic violence. The research addresses the question of how the memoir transforms personal trauma into a collective memory that sustains cultural identity after genocide. To explore this question, the study adopts a qualitative textual analysis grounded in an interpretive literary approach. Close reading and thematic analysis are used to examine narrative structure, testimonial elements, and recurring patterns of memory within the text. The analysis is supported by an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates trauma theory and collective memory studies. Concepts developed by Dominick LaCapra help explain the delayed and fragmented nature of traumatic recollection, while theories of collective memory proposed by Maurice Halbwachs and expanded by Aleida Assmann illuminate how individual memories become embedded within broader cultural narratives. The study demonstrates that Mukasonga's memoir functions not only as a personal testimony but also as a literary archive that reconstructs communal memory and affirms cultural identity in post-genocide Rwanda.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of mass violence, testimony becomes both a moral responsibility and a crucial form of historical preservation. The 1994 Rwandan Genocide, in which more than 800,000 people were killed within a few months, continues to shape the cultural memory of Rwanda and its diaspora (Cody & Stover, 2023). Among the writers who bear witness to this traumatic history is Scholastique Mukasonga, whose memoir *Cockroaches* (2016) reconstructs the experiences of persecution, exile, and loss that preceded the genocide. Exiled to Burundi in the 1970s, Mukasonga survived the violence but lost thirty-seven members of her family during the genocide, a loss that profoundly shapes the narrative perspective of the memoir. Writing from the position of exile, Mukasonga transforms personal recollection into an act of testimony that preserves the voices and memories of those erased by violence.

Scholarly discussions of trauma and memory emphasize that narratives of survival often function as sites where personal testimony intersects with collective remembrance. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth conceptualizes trauma as a belated experience in which the impact of violence emerges indirectly through fragmented memories and repeated narrative return (Caruth, 2016). Similarly, memory studies highlight how individual experiences are embedded within broader social frameworks of remembrance, where storytelling becomes central to the construction of cultural memory (Balsemão Pires, Carvalho, & Ricarte, 2024). In the context of Rwanda, literary narratives have played a crucial role in renegotiating genocide memory and sustaining dialogue about the past (Fryer-Davis, 2024). Such testimonies not only document trauma but also contribute to what scholars describe as “memory communities,” in which shared narratives enable societies to understand and transmit collective experiences of violence (Martell, 2024). As Susannah Radstone (2011) notes, memory is not confined to individual recollection but circulates across cultural and transnational spaces, shaping how traumatic histories are remembered and interpreted.

Within this theoretical framework, this study examines how *Cockroaches* represents belated trauma while reconstructing collective memory through narrative testimony. The memoir illustrates how storytelling functions as both a personal act of mourning and a cultural practice of remembrance in post-genocide Rwanda. As scholars of Rwandan memory culture observe, storytelling and testimony are essential mechanisms through which survivors transform traumatic experiences into narratives that resist silence and historical erasure (de Beer, 2024). Accordingly, this paper is guided by the following research objectives. First, it aims to examine how *Cockroaches* by Scholastique Mukasonga represents the belated nature of trauma through fragmented recollections and retrospective narration. Second, the study seeks to analyze how the memoir transforms individual experiences of suffering into collective memory, thereby preserving the cultural identity of the Tutsi community in the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide. Third, it explores the narrative strategies through which Mukasonga reconstructs communal memory such as naming the dead, recalling everyday life before exile, and documenting the gradual escalation of ethnic violence. Through these narrative practices, the memoir functions simultaneously as a personal archive of grief and a literary memorial for a displaced community. Ultimately, this study argues that Mukasonga’s writing transforms testimonial narration into an act of cultural resistance, ensuring that the memories of genocide remain present within both literary discourse and collective historical memory.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Scholarly discussions of genocide literature frequently emphasize the interrelationship between trauma, narrative representation, and collective memory. Trauma theorists argue that extreme violence disrupts the ability of survivors to narrate experiences coherently. According

to Dominick LaCapra, traumatic events often produce a sense of absence and loss that resists straightforward representation, leading survivors to revisit these experiences repeatedly in attempts to interpret them historically (LaCapra, 1999). Later, LaCapra (2016) further argues that trauma narratives mediate between memory, identity, and historical consciousness, revealing how individuals attempt to work through traumatic experiences while simultaneously confronting unresolved loss. Similarly, Irene Visser suggests that trauma theory has become an important framework in postcolonial literary studies because it enables scholars to examine how historical violence and colonial oppression shape narrative representation and cultural identity (Visser, 2011). While trauma theory explains the psychological dynamics of remembering violence, scholars also highlight the crucial role of narrative in reconstructing traumatic experience. Research on trauma narratives demonstrates that storytelling allows individuals to organize fragmented memories into meaningful accounts of the past. For instance, Robert O'Kearney and Katherine Perrott argue that trauma narratives in post-traumatic stress disorder provide a framework through which survivors reinterpret and process distressing experiences (O'Kearney & Perrott, 2006). Likewise, Laurence J. Kirmayer emphasizes that trauma narratives are shaped by cultural and social contexts, suggesting that memory is constructed through narrative forms that connect individual experiences with broader cultural meanings (Kirmayer, 2016). These perspectives indicate that narratives of trauma are not merely personal recollections but processes through which individuals reconstruct identity and meaning after catastrophic events.

Beyond individual narration, scholars have emphasized the importance of collective memory in understanding how societies remember traumatic pasts. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs argues that memory operates within social frameworks, meaning that individual memories are shaped and sustained by the collective structures of society (Halbwachs, 2020). Expanding on this concept, Aleida Assmann highlights the interaction between personal memory and collective cultural narratives in shaping historical understanding, suggesting that memory is constantly reframed through cultural practices and narratives that connect individual experiences to communal identities (Assmann, 2025). Similarly, research on mourning and memory by Robert A. Neimeyer and colleagues emphasizes that grief and remembrance are constructed through shared narratives that enable communities to interpret collective loss and trauma (Neimeyer et al., 2014). Within genocide studies, scholars further examine how narrative forms contribute to the preservation of historical memory. Historian Dan Stone argues that memory plays a critical role in shaping how societies understand genocide, influencing the ethical and historical frameworks through which past violence is interpreted (Stone, 2013). Similarly, sociological studies on genocide narratives by Hollie Nyseth Brehm and Nicholas Fox demonstrate that narratives of genocide construct temporal frameworks that influence how blame, responsibility, and historical meaning are assigned (Nyseth Brehm & Fox, 2017). These studies highlight the role of narrative in shaping collective interpretations of violence and historical memory.

In the specific context of the Rwandan Genocide, scholars have examined how testimonies and cultural representations preserve memories of genocide and contribute to ethical witnessing. For example, Simone Gigliotti argues that memoirs and testimonial narratives about Rwanda function as forms of ethical witnessing that confront readers with the moral implications of genocide (Gigliotti, 2007). Similarly, research on cultural heritage and memory in Rwanda by Anne Bolin explores how material and narrative forms of remembrance contribute to preserving genocide memory and shaping post-genocide identity (Bolin, 2020).

These studies suggest that narratives emerging from Rwanda serve not only as personal testimonies but also as cultural archives that preserve collective experiences of violence and survival. Despite the significant contributions of trauma theory, narrative studies, and genocide memory research, existing scholarship often examines these frameworks separately. Much of the literature focuses either on the psychological dimensions of trauma or the sociological aspects of collective memory. Consequently, relatively little attention has been given to how literary narratives themselves mediate between personal trauma and collective cultural memory. The autobiographical work *Cockroaches* by Scholastique Mukasonga offers a particularly compelling example of this intersection. While critics frequently interpret Mukasonga's writing as testimony of exile and persecution, fewer studies analyze how her narrative transforms fragmented personal memories into a broader collective archive that preserves the cultural identity of the Tutsi community.

This gap highlights the need to examine how trauma narratives in *Cockroaches* operate at the intersection of belated trauma and collective memory. Rather than functioning solely as an autobiographical account, Mukasonga's narrative reconstructs memories of displacement, discrimination, and cultural traditions in ways that preserve communal identity and historical consciousness. Therefore, this study addresses the following research question: How does *Cockroaches* transform personal trauma into a form of collective memory that preserves cultural identity after genocide?

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis to examine how trauma and memory are represented in *Cockroaches* by Scholastique Mukasonga. The research employs an interpretive literary approach that focuses on narrative structure, thematic patterns, and testimonial elements within the memoir in order to understand how personal trauma is transformed into collective cultural memory. By closely analyzing selected passages from the text, the study investigates the narrative strategies through which Mukasonga reconstructs memories of exile, violence, and cultural life surrounding the Rwandan Genocide. The research is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates trauma theory and collective memory studies. Concepts from trauma theory, particularly those developed by Dominick LaCapra, are used to interpret the belated and fragmented nature of traumatic recollection in the memoir. This perspective helps explain how traumatic experiences reappear through retrospective narration, repetition, and emotional disruption within the text. At the same time, the study draws on theories of collective memory proposed by Maurice Halbwachs and further expanded by Aleida Assmann to analyze how individual memories are embedded within broader social and cultural frameworks. These theoretical perspectives allow the research to examine how Mukasonga's narrative transforms personal recollections into shared historical memory.

The methodology involves close reading and thematic analysis of key narrative elements in the memoir. Particular attention is given to passages that illustrate the recollection of pre-genocide cultural life, the experience of displacement and exile, and the remembrance of victims and lost communities. These narrative moments are analyzed to identify patterns of fragmented memory, testimonial narration, and cultural reconstruction. By examining these patterns, the study identifies how Mukasonga's memoir functions not only as a personal narrative of trauma but also as a literary archive that preserves communal memory. In addition, the research situates the text within the broader context of genocide literature and memory studies. Secondary scholarly sources on trauma, narrative testimony, and genocide

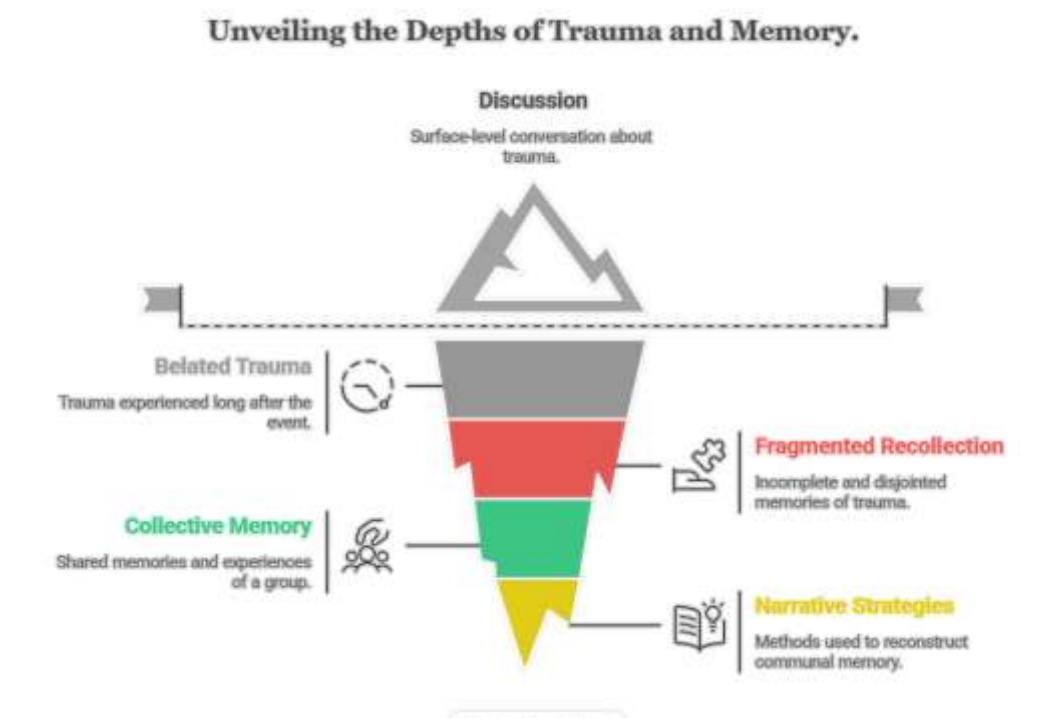
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memory are used to support the interpretive analysis and to position Mukasonga's work within existing academic debates. This contextual approach allows the study to evaluate how *Cockroaches* contributes to discussions on trauma representation and cultural remembrance in post-genocide literature.

Overall, this qualitative and interpretive methodology enables a detailed examination of how Mukasonga's memoir transforms fragmented personal trauma into a narrative form that sustains collective memory and cultural identity.

## 4. DISCUSSION

**Figure 1: Unveiling the Depths of Trauma and Memory**



**Figure 1: Unveiling the Depths of Trauma and Memory**

Figure 1 visually represents the layered nature of trauma and memory through an iceberg metaphor. The visible surface symbolizes the initial or surface-level discussions of trauma, which often remain limited and incomplete. Beneath this surface lie deeper psychological and narrative dimensions. The first layer highlights belated trauma, referring to the delayed experience and recognition of traumatic events that often emerge long after the original occurrence. The next layer illustrates fragmented recollection, emphasizing how traumatic memories appear in incomplete, disjointed, and non-linear forms. Further below, collective memory represents the shared remembrance of trauma within a community, where personal experiences become part of a broader cultural narrative. At the deepest level, narrative strategies signify the literary techniques used to reconstruct, articulate, and transmit these memories. Together, these layers demonstrate how individual trauma gradually transforms into collective cultural memory through narrative reconstruction.

### 4.1 Belated Trauma and Fragmented Recollection

The first objective of this study is to examine how *Cockroaches* represents the belated nature of trauma through fragmented recollections and retrospective narration. In the memoir, Scholastique Mukasonga reconstructs memories of childhood and displacement from the perspective of exile, reflecting on experiences that only acquire full meaning after the violence of the Rwandan Genocide. Rather than following a linear chronology, the narrative unfolds through discontinuous recollections — moments of childhood joy, episodes of humiliation, and memories of violence that gradually reveal the pervasive presence of ethnic persecution. This fragmented structure reflects the way traumatic memory emerges belatedly, resurfacing through acts of remembrance rather than immediate narration. The memoir opens with an intimate scene that illustrates the persistence of traumatic memory. Writing from her kitchen in France, Mukasonga reflects on the task of remembering those she has lost:

*“Over and over, I write and rewrite their names in the blue-covered notebook, trying to prove to myself that they existed... I speak their names one by one, in the dark and the silence... I have so many dead to sit up with” (Mukasonga, 2016, p. 10).*

This passage demonstrates how remembrance becomes a ritual act through which the narrator attempts to reconstruct lives erased by genocide. The repetitive act of writing the names of the dead reflects what Dominick LaCapra describes as the persistence of trauma within memory, where survivors continually revisit the past in an effort to interpret and process its meaning (LaCapra, 2016). Trauma, in this sense, is not confined to the moment of violence but continues to shape identity and historical consciousness through acts of remembrance. The memoir also illustrates how traumatic memories appear in fragmented and sensory forms rather than coherent narratives. Mukasonga recalls a horrifying scene following an attack on her community:

*“Many of the boys were posted along the shoreline... When we walked into the water to fill our calabashes, we saw what they were guarding: the tied-up bodies of victims slowly dying in the shallows of the lake... For a long time, we found little pieces of skin and rotting body parts in our calabashes when we fetched water” (Mukasonga, 2016, p. 69).*

This disturbing recollection reveals how traumatic memory often persists through vivid sensory fragments rather than structured storytelling. The memory is composed of scattered visual and tactile impressions — bodies in the water, fragments of flesh, the silent presence of guards — that evoke the overwhelming nature of the event. Such fragmented recollections correspond with psychological theories of trauma that emphasize the disrupted temporality of traumatic memory.

Scholars of trauma have long argued that traumatic events resist immediate comprehension and instead return belatedly through memory. For instance, Werner Bohleber suggests that traumatic experiences are often preserved in collective memory through fragmentary narratives that struggle to represent the full magnitude of violence (Bohleber, 2007). Similarly, Roger Lippin emphasizes that trauma disrupts conventional perceptions of time, creating a sense in which past events intrude repeatedly into the present (Lippin, 2019). Mukasonga’s memoir reflects this temporal disruption by shifting between past and present, allowing memories of childhood to resurface within the narrator’s contemporary reflections. The spatial dimension of trauma is also evident in Mukasonga’s narrative. The memoir repeatedly returns to places associated with displacement and violence, transforming them into sites of haunting memory. This phenomenon corresponds with the work of Dylan Trigg, who argues that traumatic memory often becomes embedded within physical landscapes, producing what he

describes as the “haunting temporality” of ruins (Trigg, 2009). In *Cockroaches*, places such as Gitwe and Gitagata are remembered not merely as geographical locations but as spaces marked by the lingering presence of violence and loss. At the same time, Mukasonga’s narrative juxtaposes traumatic memories with recollections of everyday life before genocide. She remembers evenings in the village when families gathered together, children played in the road, and neighbors shared food and conversation. One particularly evocative passage describes this remembered scene:

*“The murderers tried to erase everything they were, even any memory of their existence, but, in the schoolchild’s notebook that I am now never without, I write down their names. I have nothing left of my family and all the others who died in Nyamata but that paper grave.” (Mukasonga, 2016, p. 165).*

This memory illustrates how the narrator reconstructs fragments of a world that has been destroyed. The scene does not simply evoke nostalgia; rather, it functions as a counter-memory that preserves the cultural life erased by genocide. Through these recollections, Mukasonga transforms fragmented memories into a form of narrative testimony that preserves both trauma and the memory of communal life. Taken together, these narrative strategies demonstrate that trauma in *Cockroaches* is experienced as a belated and fragmented process of remembrance. By juxtaposing scenes of everyday life with moments of violence and loss, Mukasonga reveals how traumatic memory continues to shape personal and historical understanding long after the events themselves have occurred. The memoir therefore exemplifies how narrative testimony can transform scattered recollections into a meaningful account of collective suffering and survival.

#### **4.2 Transforming Personal Trauma into Collective Memory**

The second objective of this research is to examine how *Cockroaches* by Scholastique Mukasonga transforms personal experiences of suffering into collective memory, thereby preserving the cultural identity of the Tutsi community in the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide. Although the memoir initially presents itself as a personal narrative of childhood and exile, the text gradually expands into a broader testimony that reflects the historical experiences of the Tutsi community as a whole. Mukasonga’s narrative voice frequently moves from the individual “I” to the collective “we,” emphasizing that her personal memories are inseparable from the shared experiences of her community. This shift becomes particularly visible in Mukasonga’s recollection of forced displacement and life in exile. She describes how Tutsi families were relocated to unfamiliar and hostile regions where they were treated as outsiders within their own country:

*“The authorities and the priests were pressuring us to go off and settle into villages that they claimed had been built specially for us. No one would move. Leaving our temporary camp meant accepting our terrible fate, giving up on going back to Rwanda, on-going home, and no one wanted any part of that. But soon there was no choice: in hopes of forcing us out, they cancelled the daily rations - the only food we had.” (Mukasonga, 2016, p. 26).*

This passage illustrates how Mukasonga’s recollection extends beyond personal memory to represent the broader experiences of an entire community subjected to systemic persecution. The narrative does not merely document an individual childhood trauma; rather, it reconstructs the historical reality of collective displacement that shaped the lives of many Tutsi families during this period. The memoir therefore transforms individual recollection into a narrative that reflects the shared trauma of a community whose identity was systematically

marginalized. Another significant moment occurs when Mukasonga reflects on the normalization of ethnic discrimination in everyday life. The memoir reveals how the dehumanizing label “cockroach” became a common term used to degrade Tutsi people:

*“Those peaceful days were a rare thing in Nyamata. The soldiers of Gako camp were always there to remind us what we were: snakes, Inyezi, cockroaches. Nothing human about us. One day, we’d have to be got rid of...”* (Mukasonga, 2016, p. 63).

Through this recollection, Mukasonga exposes the ideological mechanisms that enabled ethnic hatred to become embedded within social life. The passage reveals how language functioned as a tool of dehumanization, preparing the cultural and political ground for genocide. By documenting these experiences, the memoir transforms individual memories of humiliation into a collective historical testimony that records the lived reality of systemic discrimination. This transformation reflects the theoretical insights of Maurice Halbwachs, who argues that personal memories are always shaped by the social frameworks in which individuals exist (Halbwachs, 2020). Mukasonga’s narrative demonstrates this principle by embedding her personal recollections within the broader cultural and historical experiences of the Tutsi community. In doing so, the memoir becomes a medium through which collective memory is preserved and transmitted.

The concept of collective trauma further clarifies how personal narratives can evolve into shared historical memory. Scholars argue that traumatic events affecting entire communities reshape social identity and the ways groups construct meaning about their past. Hirschberger explains that collective trauma functions as a cultural process through which societies reinterpret catastrophic events and construct shared narratives of suffering and survival (Hirschberger, 2018). Similarly, Chaitin and Steinberg emphasize that memories of large-scale violence often exist in a dynamic space between individual recollection and communal historical consciousness (Chaitin & Steinberg, 2014). Mukasonga’s memoir exemplifies this dynamic by linking her personal memories of childhood discrimination and exile to the broader historical experiences of the Tutsi people. Scholars of memory politics further note that societies negotiate traumatic histories through narratives that shape collective responsibility and remembrance. Nytagodien and Neal argue that collective trauma often becomes embedded in public memory through narratives that address injustice, apology, and historical accountability (Nytagodien & Neal, 2004). In literary contexts, such narratives function as symbolic spaces where communities confront historical violence and preserve the memory of marginalized groups. Likewise, Audergon describes collective trauma as a recurring “nightmare of history” that continues to influence social and political consciousness long after the original events have passed (Audergon, 2004). Mukasonga’s narrative reflects this idea by revisiting memories of persecution that foreshadow the later violence of genocide. Furthermore, trauma scholars emphasize that storytelling plays a crucial role in the process of healing and reconciliation after mass violence. Droždek suggests that communities affected by historical trauma often engage in narrative reconstruction in order to reinterpret painful pasts and rebuild cultural identity (Droždek, 2010). Within this framework, Mukasonga’s memoir can be understood as a literary act of remembrance that transforms individual testimony into a collective narrative of resilience and survival. Scholars of genocide memory similarly emphasize the significance of narrative testimony in shaping historical understanding. Dan Stone argues that narratives of genocide play a crucial role in constructing collective interpretations of mass violence (Stone, 2013). Mukasonga’s memoir exemplifies this process by transforming individual recollection into a broader historical narrative that

documents the lived experiences of a marginalized community. Likewise, sociological studies by Hollie Nyseth Brehm and Nicholas Fox demonstrate that storytelling about genocide shapes collective understandings of responsibility and historical trauma (Nyseth Brehm & Fox, 2017). Mukasonga's narrative contributes to this process by preserving memories of displacement, discrimination, and survival that might otherwise disappear from historical discourse. Furthermore, the memoir functions as a literary archive that reconstructs the cultural life of the Tutsi community before the genocide. By recalling family traditions, everyday interactions, and communal relationships, Mukasonga ensures that the narrative preserves not only the suffering of her community but also the cultural identity that genocide attempted to erase. In this way, *Cockroaches* transforms personal testimony into an act of collective remembrance and cultural resistance.

### **4.3 Narrative Strategies for Reconstructing Communal Memory**

The third objective of this study is to explore the narrative strategies through which *Cockroaches* reconstructs communal memory, particularly through acts of naming the dead, recalling everyday life before exile, and documenting the gradual escalation of ethnic violence. In the memoir, Scholastique Mukasonga transforms personal recollection into a narrative space where memory functions simultaneously as testimony and cultural preservation. Through these strategies, the memoir not only recounts personal experiences but also preserves the collective history of the Tutsi community affected by the Rwandan Genocide.

One of the most significant narrative techniques in the memoir is the act of naming the dead, which transforms remembrance into an ethical and cultural responsibility. Mukasonga repeatedly records the names of relatives, neighbours, and community members who were later killed during the genocide, thereby restoring individuality to victims who might otherwise remain anonymous within historical narratives of mass violence. In one passage, the narrator reflects on the importance of remembering those who were lost:

*"Where are they now? In the memorial crypt of the church in Nyamata, nameless skulls among all the other bones? In the bush, beneath the brambles, in some mass grave that has to be yet to be found? Over and over I rewrite their names in the blue-covered notebook, trying to prove to myself that they existed; I speak their names one by one, in the dark and silence... I close my eyes."* (Mukasonga, 2016, p. 10)

This narrative act transforms the memoir into a textual memorial that resists the erasure of victims. Scholars of collective memory emphasize that such practices play a crucial role in shaping communal identity after violence. For example, Kølvråa argues that collective memory often relies on narrative reconstruction to connect past trauma with the formation of communal identity (Kølvråa, 2015). Similarly, DeGloma suggests that autobiographical narratives frequently become sites of "mnemonic struggle," where personal memories align with broader collective interpretations of the past (DeGloma, 2015). Mukasonga's narrative exemplifies this process by transforming individual recollections into a shared memorial narrative that preserves the memory of a community destroyed by genocide.

Another crucial narrative strategy involves the reconstruction of everyday life before displacement and exile. Mukasonga frequently pauses to describe village life, family rituals, and social relationships that shaped her early experiences. These recollections restore the cultural and social context that existed before the violence. In one evocative passage, she recalls scenes of communal life:

*“And yet my family once lived there. Humiliated afraid, waiting day after day what was to come, what we didn’t have a word for; genocide. And I alone preserve the memory of it. That’s why I’m writing this.” (Mukasonga, 2016, p. 48)*

These descriptions function as acts of cultural preservation rather than nostalgic reminiscence. By documenting the rhythms of everyday life, Mukasonga ensures that the identity of the Tutsi community is remembered not only through narratives of violence but also through the cultural traditions that preceded it. Scholars studying memory in post-conflict societies emphasize the importance of such narratives in preserving communal identity. For instance, Jansen argues that local narratives of the past often function as tools through which communities reconstruct meaning and identity after collective trauma (Jansen, 2002). Likewise, Eltringham and Maclean highlight that remembering genocide involves reconstructing social memory in ways that connect personal experiences to broader historical understanding (Eltringham & Maclean, 2014). Mukasonga’s recollections therefore act as a form of cultural documentation that preserves the lived experiences of a community threatened with erasure.

The memoir also traces the gradual escalation of ethnic hostility, revealing how discrimination and marginalization intensified over time. Rather than presenting genocide as an abrupt rupture, Mukasonga carefully documents the incremental normalization of ethnic hatred. In one passage, she recalls the profound absence left by genocide:

*“It was a long time before I could bring myself to go back to Rwanda after the genocide. A very long time. I couldn’t find the strength... There was no father, no mother, no brother, no sister. Andre couldn’t find so much as a trace of their houses... Where should I go to reflect and remember?” (Mukasonga, 2016, pp. 134–135)*

By documenting these experiences, Mukasonga demonstrates how everyday acts of humiliation and exclusion contributed to the broader structures of violence that culminated in genocide. This narrative approach reflects broader scholarly arguments about the politics of memory in post-genocide Rwanda. For example, Mwambari explains that memory narratives in Rwanda often serve as sites where historical trauma is interpreted and negotiated within contemporary political and cultural frameworks (Mwambari, 2021). Similarly, Whigham argues that public memory plays a preventive role by preserving historical awareness and ensuring that the causes of violence remain visible within collective consciousness (Whigham, 2017).

Through these narrative strategies — naming the dead, reconstructing everyday cultural life, and documenting the escalation of ethnic hostility — *Cockroaches* transforms autobiographical testimony into a literary archive of communal memory. Mukasonga’s memoir therefore performs a dual function: it preserves personal experiences of trauma while simultaneously reconstructing the cultural history of a displaced community. By integrating individual recollection with collective remembrance, the narrative ensures that the experiences of the Tutsi community remain present within both literary discourse and historical memory.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study has explored how *Cockroaches* by Scholastique Mukasonga transforms deeply personal experiences of suffering into a narrative of collective remembrance within the historical context of the Rwandan Genocide. Guided by the research objectives, the analysis demonstrates that Mukasonga’s memoir is not merely a personal testimony of survival but a deliberate literary act that reconstructs communal memory and safeguards the cultural identity

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of the Tutsi community. At the core of this study's argument is the idea that trauma in *Cockroaches* is represented as belated and fragmented. Mukasonga's retrospective narration, discontinuous memories, and reflective voice mirror the psychological structure of traumatic recall, where past events return in fragments rather than in a linear narrative. Through these narrative patterns, the memoir reveals how trauma persists across time, shaping both personal identity and historical understanding. The fragmented recollections therefore become a narrative strategy through which the author communicates the enduring presence of violence in memory.

A second key argument of this research is that Mukasonga transforms individual suffering into collective memory. The memoir extends beyond personal grief to document the shared experiences of displacement, fear, and loss endured by the Tutsi community. By recounting the lives of family members, neighbours, and fellow exiles, Mukasonga reconstructs a communal history that genocide attempted to erase. In this way, the text functions as a cultural archive that preserves the memory of a community whose voices were systematically silenced. The study also highlights the narrative strategies through which Mukasonga rebuilds communal memory. Acts such as naming the dead, recalling everyday cultural practices before exile, and documenting the gradual intensification of ethnic discrimination serve as forms of narrative resistance. These strategies restore individuality and dignity to the victims while simultaneously reconstructing the social and cultural world that existed before violence dismantled it. Through such acts of remembrance, the memoir challenges historical erasure and affirms the resilience of cultural identity.

In answering the research question, the analysis shows that *Cockroaches* transforms personal trauma into collective memory by merging autobiographical testimony with communal remembrance. Mukasonga's narrative voice becomes a medium through which the experiences of an entire community are preserved and communicated. The memoir thus demonstrates how literature can function as a space where trauma is articulated, history is reconstructed, and cultural identity is reaffirmed. Beyond its literary and analytical significance, this study also highlights the societal contribution of Mukasonga's work. By preserving the memories of those who perished and documenting the lived realities of the Tutsi community, *Cockroaches* contributes to broader processes of historical awareness, cultural preservation, and ethical remembrance. The memoir encourages readers to confront the consequences of ethnic violence and to recognize the importance of memory in preventing historical amnesia. In this sense, Mukasonga's narrative serves not only as a record of past suffering but also as a moral and cultural intervention that promotes empathy, justice, and collective responsibility. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that *Cockroaches* stands as a powerful testament to the role of literature in transforming trauma into memory and memory into cultural survival. Through the reconstruction of communal history and the preservation of marginalized voices, Mukasonga's memoir affirms that storytelling itself becomes an act of resistance one that ensures the memories of the past continue to inform the ethical consciousness of the present and future.

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