



★ **Igifu**

Scholastique Mukasonga

Jordan Stump, Translator

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In the short stories of Scholastique Mukasonga's *Igifu*, exiled Tutsis struggle to survive and thrive in the aftermath of the Rwandan revolution.

Tutsis, Rwanda's long-oppressed ethnic group, have often suffered harassment, exclusion, and worse at the hands of the Hutus and the Belgians. The consequences of this persecution spread across multiple generations in Mukasonga's stories of strength, suffering, and endurance.

Each standalone chapter in *Igifu*—"hunger"—is narrated by a different character. Their stories are replete with sadness and loss: a boy's father yearns for his massacred cows, a town beauty meets her downfall when her only option is to become a call girl, and a university student returns to Rwanda for closure after losing her family in the 1994 genocide. Most of the speakers are very young, and their innocence underscores the horror of their situations.

Even now, with their old ways of life gone forever, the adults in the book are proud of their pasts and their culture. They hold tight to traditions, adapting them where necessary but refusing to stop believing in a future that looks just like the beloved past. Those who break from the old ways are regarded with disdain, fascination, or both. Everyone copes in their own ways, and children in particular often risk losing their connection to a heritage they never got a chance to know.

These stories are intimate portraits of young people with no choice but to carry on. The heartbreaking realities of their plights are balanced by absorbing glimpses into Tutsi culture and the characters' unquenchable senses of hope. Their resilience is inspiring, while their need to be resilient is a tragic reminder of the consequences of prejudice and unthinking hatred.

Igifu is a poignant collection about the effects of trauma on tradition, community, and individuals.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2020)

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