H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Evan Maina Mwangi.** *The Postcolonial Animal: African Literature and Posthuman Ethics.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019. 286 pp. $34.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-472-05419-0.

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**Published on** H-Africa (November, 2020)

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*[T]he colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal.* —Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*

Mũigai wa Njoroge's single, "Mbarĩ ya Kĩmeenderũ" (2018), invokes the Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction event, more commonly known as the Dinosaur Extinction, in its first line. While acknowledging that this megafauna lived and died eons ago, Njoroge relies on the dinosaurs' perceived gluttony to make a case for why the Creator chose to eliminate them. Ngai, God, was supposedly angered by dinosaur greed and cannibalism. In response, he eliminated them, and Njoroge claims that the descendants are today's lizards. Regardless of the scientific exactitude of linking dinosaurs to lizard evolution, Njoroge is particularly interested in the size disparity. The calamity that befell supersized dinosaurs is akin to that which awaits Mbarĩ ya Kĩmeenderũ (The Society of Oppressors), Njoroge's moniker for the corrupt ruling class that has amassed and monopolized both power and privilege in postindependence Kenya.

As it turns out, Njoroge's animal-based metaphors are also common in literary art forms from the African continent. Evan Maina Mwangi's *The Postcolonial Animal: African Literature and Posthuman Ethics* explores the aesthetic and poetic functions of nonhuman life in African literatures. *The Postcolonial Animal* is a critical text in the next generation of Africanist literary criticism, not least for Mwangi's ability to tie contemporary discussions regarding climate change and ecological destruction to cultural representation.

In the texts Mwangi examines—by Bessie Head, Yuda Komora, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Henry ole Kulet, Patrice Nganang, Charles Mungoshi, Zakes Mda, Witi Ihimaera, and Jan Carew—he repeatedly underlines that the global South does not comprise "ecologically noble savages" (p. 178). Animal-human relationships are complex. They can no more be reduced to the one-dimensional image of a carnivorous Africa than they can be mischaracterized as Africans embodying animal essences.

*The Postcolonial Animal* is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 lays out how Mwangi's own perception of animal motifs in texts has evolved from reading animals as symbols for interpersonal human relationships to approaching animals as "representing their own need for recognition and rights as sentient beings" (p. 1). This is a crucial distinction. The utilitarian approach toward animals and other nonhuman life forms prioritizes humanity over plants, animals, and the ecology at large. In his analysis of Franz Fanon's and Albert Memmi's anticolonial writing, Mwangi fore-

grounds an "affirmative response" to African literature; this he defines as a laudatory reaction to liberationist writing, while simultaneously critiquing implicit or even explicit prejudice against the oppressed (p. 7). Such a comprehensive reading might mean, for instance, acknowledging the emancipatory thrust of texts in the African literary canon even as we point out how those same writers marginalize women, endorse homophobia, and ignore animal cruelty.

In my opening example, Njoroge is not interested in dinosaurs and lizards in their own right, but rather as manifestations of greed and punishment, respectively. It is this kind of shallow paradigm that Mwangi aims to transcend. He demonstrates the correlation between "treatment by humans of nonhuman others and the way colonialists view the colonized natives. Similar parallels exist between the way humans treat animals and the manner they treat human minorities" (p. 2). Mwangi builds on Aimé Césaire's argument that with time, the colonizer "gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal."

What Mwangi sets out to do is dispel the "tendency to see animal and environmental concerns as the preserve of white writers and activists" (p. vii). He does so successfully. ***The Postcolonial Animal*** argues that the "animal/human divide found in western societies is much more porous" in African cultures (p. 12). Consequently, an aesthetic viewpoint arises whereby African literature broadly views human and animal destinies as interlinked. For one, this manifests in texts as the use of animal figures for "resistance and alternative social formations" (p. 7). On the other hand, animal narrators —such as in Patrice Nganang's ***Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle*** (2006)—demonstrate "strong support for the belief that animals and humans are incarnations of each other" (p. 97). Apart from the creative realm, Mwangi demonstrates how this philosophical belief influenced political action in the first half of the twentieth century: one strategy "that the colonized use[d] to restore their humanity … [was] to use animals as allies against the violence of colonialism without animalizing the colonizer to justify causing harm to the animals used as avatars of the colonizer" (p. 6). What all these means, ultimately, is that Africanist scholarship must reposition "postcolonial studies at the interface of ecology, globalism, ethics, and representation" (p. 3).

Mwangi's second chapter performs a comparative critique of precolonial ideas regarding animals and humans. The chapter begins by revisiting Leopold Sedar Senghor's Negritude and distilling an often-ignored grasp at relating human and nonhuman lives. Beyond that, the chapter examines other Africanist philosophies including Ubuntu, Ukama (Shona), and the consciencism championed by President Kwame Nkrumah. Mwangi concludes that "African indigenous practices need as much reform as western institutions" (p. 27). This inference shores up my previous point that within ***The Postcolonial Animal*** Africans are not ecologically innocuous. That, however, is most definitely not an invitation for foreign tutelage in conservationism. As Mwangi convincingly attests, efforts to "impose radical changes on African societies are likely to flop, especially if they are enforced from outside or by the elites. [Instead,] African literary texts suggest that the changes need to be gradual and carefully negotiated" (p. 14).

"Not Yet Happily Ever After," chapter 3, examines how animals are depicted in oral and children's literature. Mwangi explores the refashioning of orature's styles and aesthetics by postcolonial writers who castigate the manner in which we relate to our animal kin. For one, the stereotypical "happy endings" that consistently conclude fables are missing in modern renditions. Another important departure that Mwangi outlines is that "animals and nature are allies of women in the fight for gender equality" (p. 54). That is, literature by Grace Ogot, Henry ole Kulet, Patrice Nganang, and others repurposes "oral literature to draw parallels

between the plight of animals and the condition of powerless individuals and communities" (p. 55). The author's reading of Yuda Komora's Kiswahili fable is particularly poignant. In Komora's work, carnivorous behavior as well as ticks' pestilence are both emblematic of the neocolonial oppression witnessed in postindependent African nations. This allegorical use of animals to represent human behavior undercuts the aesthetic potential for animals to represent themselves. Often, animal characters "allegorize human predicaments but do not address animal rights;" in other words, representation of nonhuman life in African postcolonial texts may offer "visibility," without any attendant agency for the animals themselves (pp. 84-85).

As Mwangi demonstrates in the next chapter, "Winds of Change and the God of Small Animals," the aesthetic conventions of representing nonhuman life apply equally to megafauna as to insects. To advance this argument, Mwangi marshals an expansive corpus of texts that transcend genre, time, and space. The section opens by invoking the insect figure in Zuhura Swaleh's *taarab*—the Kiswahili melodies from East Africa's coastal regions that are infused with Arabic, Bantu, and Indian flavors. The scholar further chronicles the depiction of spiders, moths, and scorpions in a global array of writing: the epic of Gilgamesh, Plato, Ovid, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* (1955), James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939) and *Ulysses* (1922), and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). I found this selection particularly productive. Mwangi demonstrates the extent to which contemporary animal studies, postcolonial or otherwise, reorient literary criticism toward nonhuman lives featured in canonical and popular writing. In fact, the very ubiquity of animals and plants may render us blind to the varied aesthetic uses that writers make of flora and fauna. Within African literatures, Mwangi's *The Postcolonial Animal* traces snake depictions as totemic figures in Camara Laye's *The African Child* (1977), Senghor's "Le Totem" (1945), and Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964).

This investigation is underpinned by a deft mix of close readings and pattern making. Mwangi catalogues an extensive list of cultural artifacts, taking special interest in locating noncanonical East African poetry within his scholarship. While David Rubadiri's work is familiar, poetry by Haji Gora Haji and Mwinyihatibu Mohamed—both in Kiswahili—is not. *The Postcolonial Animal* expands the scope of Africa's literary canon—not only through use of translation to cross linguistic boundaries but also by engaging the homophobia embedded in Mohamed's verse and the anti-insect poetics constructed in this endeavor. And while I found the thematic connection between hurricane weather patterns, insects, and worms not fully ex-

plicit, the connection Mwangi makes between an 1872 Zanzibari hurricane and the 1964 Afro-Shirazi Revolution is well articulated. Academically, Mwangi pursues the call to arms issued by Mukoma wa Ngugi's ***The Rise of the African Novel: Politics of Language, Identity, and Ownership*** (2018), which urges deeper examination of pre-1960s African writing. Mwangi models an important way of engaging with the wider field of African literary criticism, one anchored not only by fiction in European languages but also by close attention to the literary corpus available in African languages. I find the approach potentially groundbreaking in linking scholarly pursuits in North America and western Europe to the theorizing and cultural production on the African continent. Sustained engagement with African literatures in Kiswahili, Twi, Fulani, Xhosa, Kinyarwanda, and so on brings us closer to the use of African languages for the production of knowledge about the African continent.

"Interspecies Sexual Intimacies," the fifth chapter, engages the fraught allusions of sexual relations between humans and animals. As Mwangi points out, such depictions are not uncommon in postcolonial literature, only they are "usually mentioned cursorily in dark jokes" (p. 135). This part of the argument relies on a wide array of texts: Kenyan political satire by Godfrey Mwampembwa, art by South Africa's Jane Alexander, fiction by Somalian Nuruddin Farah, Kenyan Yvonne Owuor, South African Zakes Mda, New Zealander Witi Ihimaera, and Ghanaian Nana N. Boateng. Mwangi reads a global animal rights and queer studies canon, centering conversations about African literatures and posthuman ethics by exploring connections across texts and geographies. Ultimately, animal-human sex complicates and undermines the process of liberation. Interspecies sex is problematic; Mwangi compares it to the efforts of an "empire accumulating its wealth at the expense of the nations it occupies. Only citizens of a privileged empire would fail to see the injustice" (p. 174). Mwangi concludes using a coda focused on Jan Carew's ***Black Midas*** (1958) to discuss the use of "animal-inspired coincidences to push the plot forward and resolve conflicts" (p. 175). That is, animals are present in narrative as motifs with aesthetic value. Mwangi argues that postcolonial African writing offers its readers animal figures that are "sensitive, compassionate, and intelligent" (p. 178).

***The Postcolonial Animal: African Literature and Posthuman Ethics*** convincingly argues that posthumanism must include humans, nonhuman life, and the entire planet. Ultimately, this is an important challenge to a humanism that "materially, discursively, and institutionally regards the human species as unique, distinct, and exceptional, [and which] can no longer serve as an ethical model for the way we relate to nonhuman others" (p. 16). The text concludes with a call to question the manner in which "animals have been given agency in literary texts, yet continue to be exploited in the actual world" (p. 186). This demonstrates a large gap between aesthetics, politics, and praxis. In the postcolonial world, both imagined and real, there exists but a "thin line between the human and nonhuman;" suggesting that an ideological reorienting which deeply considers nonhuman lives is quite possible and indeed close at hand (p. 186). As the Mũigai wa Njoroge track discussed at the beginning of this review demonstrates, animal and plant metaphors proliferate in artistic production on the African continent. ***The Postcolonial Animal: African Literature and Posthuman Ethics*** is an exceptional addition to ongoing scholarship on the presence of the nonhuman in African letters.

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**Citation:** Nganga Wahu-Mũchiri. Review of Mwangi, Evan Maina. *The Postcolonial Animal: African Literature and Posthuman Ethics.* H-Africa, H-Net Reviews. November, 2020.

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