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HumAnimal Coexistence in *The White Bone* and *Dog Days*

 In the words of American author and activist Shirley MacLaine, “We humans should never forget our capacity to connect with the collective spirit of animals. Their energy is essential to our future growth” (*Dancing in The Light*, Ch 17). But do we truly understand their value, or do we just take advantage of the fact that they are “essential to our growth” and begin asserting dominance? Both Barbara Gowdy and Patrice Nganang present similar questions about humankind: their priorities, actions, and the treatment of animals in their novels. Specifically, they consider the superiority complex humankind tends to have when interacting with animals: deeply-rooted selfishness, destructive motives, and ignorance. They demonstrate animal abuse at the hands of humans and discuss the likelihood of the two entities peacefully existing. This doctrine will be the basis of my paper as I unravel the novels’ critique and reminiscence of alternate human behavior. I will argue that most of Patrice Ngnanang’s *Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle* (2006) and Barbara Gowdy’s *The White Bone* (1999) serve as critiques of ethical human behavior and suggest that harmonious coexistence between humans and animals is possible to some extent but only under certain conditions.

Patrice Nganang’s *Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle* serves as a political allegory by discussing the Cameroonian government’s dictatorship[[1]](#footnote-1), the human vice of deception, pet-master dynamics, the subordination of animals, and abuse they experience. The first-person narrator in the novel is Mboudjak, a dog. Through his experiences, he portrays prejudice and violence exercised upon himself and others in Cameroon. He begins his narrative by saying,

I am a dog. Who else but me could admit it with such humility? Since I see no reproach in this confession, ‘dog’ becomes nothing more than a word, a noun: the noun men use to refer to me. But there you have it; in the end I’ve gotten used to it. I’ve assumed the destiny it places on my shoulders. From here on out, ‘dog’ is part of my universe, since I’ve made men’s words my own. I’ve digested the structures of their sentences and the intonations of their speech. I’ve learned their language and I flirt with their ways of thinking. I’ve even gotten used to the arrogance of their orders (Nganang 1).

Mboudjak expresses humility about his dog nature and the disappointment he feels because of the ways people speak to him, despite claiming to accept him as something or someone valuable. Additionally, although Mboudjak understands human language, his master does not understand his barks and continues to treat him as just a “dog” rather than as “Mboudjak.” This form of interaction makes him feel tyrannized and experience a sense of fractional identity. In other words, he feels devalued and incomplete.

 Meanwhile, Barbara Gowdy’s *The White Bone* depicts the abuse and violence towards animals that humans actively participate in for their own benefit. The novel is narrated from the perspective of various elephant characters in Africa with anthropomorphized personalities, ranging from experiencing human emotions, embodying human psychological tendencies, and having a variety of human abilities such as speaking. Gowdy’s specific focus on African elephants, the innumerable ways humans have mistreated them, and how humankind’s actions have played significant roles in their deaths allows her to touch base on flawed human behaviors. This in turn raises awareness, and advocates for the abolishment of toxic habits which result in endangered species, extinction, violence, division, etc.

 The protagonist in this novel is a young female elephant or “cow” named Mud. She was born into the She-M family but was abandoned and orphaned by them and later adopted by the She-S family. Mud has a unique talent and is known as a visionary. She can see visions of current and future events occurring at different locations. This talent informs her of imminent danger. Many other members in these elephant clans also have such distinct skills. Strategically utilizing anthropomorphism in this manner furthers Gowdy’s motive of making humans reflect on their perceptions of animals. Onno Oerlemans touches upon this in the article, “A Defense of Anthropomorphism: Comparing Coetzee and Gowdy,” when he states,

Gowdy’s omniscient narrator fully enters the minds of these animals. Her elephants have thoughts, desires, personalities, and extraordinary memories. More fabulous still, their complex communications (including telepathy) are rendered in English. They sing and pray, have visions, and produce art. They read minds, have second sight, give voice to complex religious beliefs, and even, some of them, shine green light out of their eyes. The novel displays an extraordinary range of representations of elephant life, from the plausible to the fantastic (190).

Gowdy is able to humanize and empathize with the elephants at a deeper level by making them speak to the readers (humans) as human-like beings.

Animal Abuse in *Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle*

Animal abuse is a central topic in both novels. First, let’s discuss its relevance in Nganang’s *Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle.* In the first part, "First Barks," Nganang depicts Mboudjak's degeneration and change of status. Initially, he was pampered by his owner, received proper nutrition, was taken out on walks, etc. But, later, he started being seen as a despicable dog and was severely neglected. For example, Mboudjak says,

He didn’t even call me; my name had died in his mouth. I hate to say it, but if he still occasionally bought cans of dog food at Score, it was for him and his family…I adapted to my devaluation. I didn’t act out rabies anymore as a way of forcing his hand because I understood his problems. Despite my silence, Massa Yo soon got in the habit of insulting me: ‘Parasit!’ he’d say when I came to rub up against his feet. ‘Get out!’ Then, he’d pick up one of his shoes and throw it at me. ‘Get out of here you *njou njou Calaba*!’ he sometimes added (Nganang 10).

To clarify, *njou njou Calaba* refers to a “masked figure from the west of Cameroon and Nigeria (the Calabar); by extension an evil spirit” (Nganang 209). The fact that Mboudjak is addressed as an evil spirit epitomizes the hostility of his environment and the challenges of his situation. Forget about being treated as an invaluable asset; he is associated with corruption and wickedness instead. Likewise, the detailed narration shows the ways his owner verbally and physically abused Mboudjak despite having no-fault. His infestation with wounds and other ailments resulting in rabies is used to illustrate this shift in their relationship and allude to the trauma of Cameroonian society and its residents.

 Of the many traumas Mboudjak experiences, one includes being hanged. After eating a plate of Koki [[2]](#footnote-2)that was made for Soumi (his master’s son), Mboudjak is overtaken with guilt. The following day, Mboudjak rectifies his mistake, agreeing to play games with his master’s son. Soumi invents a game where he puts a leash around Mboudjak’s neck and tells him to gallop. They play for a bit, and eventually, Soumi holds the leash, climbs up a tree, perches on a branch, and hops off on the other side. To describe his experience, Mboudjak says,

I thought I saw him dancing around my suspended body. I was blinded by the pain. My eyes bulged out of their sockets. My tongue hung down to the ground. I couldn’t even bark out my suffering. Overcome by a coma, I couldn’t even voice my soul’s distress. I was doomed to silence by that razor-sharp rope cutting into my throat, breaking my neck, slowly killing me. I struggled wildly. A mortal chill was gripping my body. My spirit sunk into darkness (Nganang 19).

Despite Mboudjak’s efforts to make amends, Soumi resorted to violence, torture, and abuse. Why is it that the dog understood his mistake and attempted to resolve the issue by taking cordial measures, but the human willfully enforced bloodshed? Aren’t humans supposed to embody superior perception, intellect, and wisdom? It is precisely this gruesome image that incites the conflict of animal exploitation at the behest of humans, which are seen as perverse.

The novel’s second part, "The Turbulent Streets," focuses more on introducing the streets and lifestyle of Cameroonians through Mboudjak and his interactions with locals such as pushcart men, cigarette vendors, and garbage pickers to the readers in a detailed manner. Some popular places mentioned throughout the novel include the marketplace and The Customer Is King bar. Many interactions between residents take place in those areas. The chaos and the events are intently emphasized to reveal the harshness and violence of the day-to-day experience of Cameroonians. One particular moment that demonstrates the extent of abuse Mboudjak experienced is on page 177 when he says, “Massa Yo was an animal and I just couldn’t bark anymore. Honestly, I was a little afraid. Yes, I was shaking with fear… I plastered myself to the wall of the bar and tried to find a way out. My master’s hand held me back… I struggled. He shoved me. I backed up. He pulled me by the ears. I pulled my head back”. Here we can see Massa Yo, a human, being referred to as an animal by an animal, Mboudjak. What does this mean? Mboudjak has internalized the abuse and discrimination inflicted upon him so intensely that when he sees his master’s outbursts; he thinks it is akin to animalistic behavior. Ironically, however, he stayed calm while Massa Yo was asserting force in the situation.

In the article ​​“The infrapolitics of subordination in Patrice Nganang’s *Dog Days*,” Moradewun Adejunmobi discusses the novel’s social subordination, resistance to that subordination, and the problematic power relations. He states,

Mboudjak remains psychologically attached to the world of servanthood even when Massa Yo loses his job and begins to treat the dog badly. Mboudjak initially attempts to live on the streets in the company of stray dogs…but he soon returns home to a life of subordination. Even after Massa Yo’s son, Soumi attempts to lynch Mboudjak in an isolated stretch of forest, Mboudjak limps back home with his bruised neck once he is rescued from certain death by a passing stranger (441).

This depiction of Mboudjak’s toxic relationship with his master and other humans confirms his subordinate status in the community. Despite Mboudjak’s loyalty to his owner and his family, he is not valued or treated with justified respect simply due to being a dog. This instance also considers the interactions between the powerful and the weak, or in this case, between humans and animals. Inherently, humans are considered superior and more worthy of life because of the things they can do and provide to others. For example, they can speak, work to make money, get an education, etc. But, dogs or animals, in general, are incapable of doing all that, thus constantly being looked down upon. What does this say about humankind[[3]](#footnote-3) and how distinctly they view themselves and others?

The superiority complex of masters is further assessed in Kenneth W. Harrow’s article “Patrice Nganang's *L'invention du beau regard* and *Dog Days*: Three Phases of Capitalism with Two Dogs and One Devouring Pig.” During Mboudjak’s interaction with Soumi, Massa Yo’s son,

Soumi, his master’s son and former companion, doesn’t recognize him as he prepares to throw a stone at him. ‘With an evil glint in his eye, he kept tossing the rock up in the air and catching it mid-flight. He didn’t recognize me. He thought I was just the garbage picker’s dog. Doesn’t every dog look like the man he follows?’ (Nganang 125). In the master-slave allegory, Nganang has established, the master’s blindness and selfish nature emerges—something the dog-servant is capable of perceiving, but which is invisible to the master (Harrow 67).

In other words, humans cannot recognize their mistreatment of animals and the selfishness that consumes them. Still, those that are affected by their actions are able to perceive it clearly, like Mboudjak. This proves that not only are humans ignorant, but deceptive as well. This goes for animals too. For example, when Mbdoujak first left to stay with the stray dogs, a “stony-faced dog” offered him friendship in exchange for him explaining why he had decided to stay with those dogs. Mboudjak agreed but only if the stony-faced dog promised not to tell anyone. The dog chose to accept Mboudjak’s condition; however, he then betrayed him by revealing his story to the other dogs in order to humiliate him. The dog proved his dishonesty and betrayal towards his very own species by doing this. This action, attributed to humankind, explains the depths of their deceptions and the extent of their hypocrisy. Can there ever be any amicable coexistence between entities in which the superior one constantly betrays and takes advantage of the inferior one? If the two dogs cannot live honestly with one another, how can they expect to do so with humans?

 Finally, along with Mboudjak’s violation, there are also several moments of prejudice and violence asserted upon others throughout the novel. Residents of the neighborhood of Madagascar engage in various protests to voice their concerns and rejection of the ongoing injustice. For example, taxi drivers go on strike to protest the killing of a fellow taxi driver who refused to bribe the police. Another protest is conducted following the unjustified killing of Docta’s son, Takou, who the Commissioner shot. Docta places his son’s corpse in a wheelbarrow during the protest and pushes it to the Mokolo Police Station. Many enraged citizens and animals, including Mboudjak, join him as they march along the streets and chant songs against the authoritarian Paul Biya. Mboudjak offers a vivid description of the chaos of the protest: “Then, as if possessed by some maniacal force, I rushed at the hen, broke her wings, grabbed her neck between my teeth, and bit down hard. She struggled like crazy and almost scratched my eyes out with her hard, bony feet. I soon felt her body go limp and die between my teeth…” (Nganang 190). This violent interaction between the animals exposes the brutality in Madagascar and the bitterness between one another. Although Mboudjak and the hen are both animals, they hate and deceive each other. Ironically, however, despite all the bitterness, anger, and resentment that an animal can have towards another animal, according to Mboudjak, it will never be as bad as being considered a man. For example, he states, “I guess after all I’ve witnessed, all I’ve lived through, all I’ve seen men do, maybe I no longer have the wolf’s reflexes or the hyena’s wicked wit. As a result of observing men and doing nothing else but, maybe I don’t even have my canine attributes anymore. Yet, to be taken for a man is the worst insult of all” (Nganang 30). This is an explicit rejection of being a part of humankind. In consideration of others, their defiled, corrupted, and debased spirits are the worst of all. Can we expect Mboudjak to live alongside humans if he feels this way about them? We’ll explore this in the latter part of the paper.

Animal Abuse in *The White Bone*

The She-S family reaches a crisis point amid a prolonged drought[[4]](#footnote-4) and a considerable increase in local poachers[[5]](#footnote-5). Many of the other families surrounding them have been killed by humans or, as Gowdy says, “hindleggers” for their personal benefits. Using this, Gowdy conveys human attributes of greed, selfishness, and indulgence:

From the minds of humans came a silence so absolute and menacing that many of those who heard it forswore mind talking altogether. What provoked that terrible silence? It was the darkness… the darkness had entered the humans and was corrupting their already corrupt spirits. Soon they were slaughtering whole families. After devouring the flesh of their kills, they were burning the hides and pulverizing the bones and tusks. They seemed bent on annihilation… (43).

In other words, humans began to kill entire families, disintegrate their bones and tusks for food and money. It was no longer about need; rather, desire and gluttony. This is where poachers come in. According to the article, “Poaching drives surge of tuskless elephants: 3 stories you may have missed” by Kiley Price, approximately 35,000 elephants are killed in Africa every year for their ivory tusks. This affects their present population and creates long-term implications for the species' survival. Although the genetic mutation of being tuskless is only viable in females, male elephants do not survive it. When it is passed to them, they die in the womb. As an ecologist, Fannie Pelletier states, “Not only do animals die due to poaching, but there is also additional decline because half of the male offspring from the surviving tuskless mothers do not survive” (Kiley 1). With the increasing poaching rates and male fatality rates, population decline is indisputable. What does this say about the future of elephants and human nature? Considering humans as entities with “already corrupt spirits” that just got more corrupt further depicts the cynicism of humankind and the lack of faith in it. There is no hope for them to get better because they will only worsen over time with no concern or regard for others. Hence, no chance for peaceful coexistence.

Connection to Misanthropy

To understand the critique of human behavior in both novels, it is helpful to consider the philosophical traditions of misanthropy and whether the vision of both novels is misanthropic. Misanthropists engage in the general hatred, distrust, and contempt of human nature, human species, and human behaviors. In his book *Animals and Misanthropy*, David E. cooper questions the presumption that misanthropes hate humanity:

In clarifying misanthropy, it is important to ask who or what is the target - the constituency, one might say - of misanthropic judgments. To whom or to what do the moral and other failings that support these judgments belong? The obvious answer, it might seem, is human beings, individual men and women. This is too simple, however. All human beings? Most? Only some? (9).

Referring to Schopenhauer, Cooper suggests that misanthrope’s contempt of humankind and their way of life is closely related to their treatment of animals. He encourages us to reflect on how we behave with animals, how we perceive them, how and what we value them for, and the ways we establish their importance in our lives. Cooper believes that “Reflection on differences between humans and animals helps to confirm the misanthropic verdict, while reflection on the moral and other failings manifest in our treatment of animals illuminates what is wrong with this treatment” (1). In other words, misanthropic sentiments towards humankind are justified when in regards to humans’ relationship with and treatment of animals.

Along with such misanthropic beliefs, there are a few popular misanthropic stances. A popular one is Activist. Activist misanthropes are motivated by hope. Although they recognize the moral failings of humankind, they are hopeful and committed to changing the world through activism. They may advocate this through moral teachings, religious preachings, and socio-political activism. An example of an activist is Confucius (c. 551-479 BC). To repair the moral infrastructure of his society, he formed a community grounded on discipline and rule through collective teaching and preaching. However, as Ian James Kidd mentions in the article “Philosophical Misanthropy,” “We shouldn’t rush to embrace it uncritically” (4). Many critics believe that activist misanthropes may be overly enthusiastic about changing the world. They become so indulged that they begin to change matters that cannot be altered by social and political actions instead of through ethical and spiritual transformations.

It is essential to note that misanthropy is closely related to pessimism, which involves a negative attitude towards life as a whole, not just humankind. Through this philosophical lens, every component of life appears destructive, leading to the creation of a distressful life. Although pessimists negatively judge human nature, like misanthropists, they concentrate on different aspects. As David Cooper mentions in his book “Animals and Misanthropy,” “The pessimist’s focus is on aspects of this condition – suffering, frustration, absurdity – that are destructive of the possibility of happiness and fulfillment. The misanthrope’s concern, by contrast, is with human failings, ingredients of life misanthropy for which humankind is answerable and rightly held to account” (5). In other words, pessimists focus on the internal and external aspects of life, limiting people’s happiness and gratification. Meanwhile, misanthropes believe that humans are inherently immoral and evil, resulting in their aberrations for which they must be held fully accountable. Together, the aspects of pessimism act as ingredients to build the hate in misanthropy.

This association of pessimism with misanthropy suggests that they serve to reinforce one another. In the words of David Cooper, “The vices exposed by the misanthrope help to explain the scale of the miseries attended to by the pessimist” (5) because people’s unhappiness and frustrations fuel their moral depravity. So, pessimism and misanthropy typically endorse one another, creating misanthropic pessimism. As Georges Palante says in the article “Misanthropic Pessimism”,

As for the misanthropic pessimist, he makes no complaints. He doesn’t take the human condition as tragic, he doesn’t rise up against destiny. He observes his contemporaries with curiosity, pitilessly analyzes their sentiments and thoughts, and is amused by their presumption, their vanity, their hypocrisy, or their unconscious villainy, by their intellectual and moral weakness. It is no longer human pain, it is no longer the sickness of living that forms the theme of this pessimism, but rather human villainy and stupidity. One of the preferred leitmotivs of this pessimism could be this well-known verse: ‘The most foolish animal is man’ (1).

To clarify, a misanthropic pessimist does not dwell on the failings of humankind instead remains analytical.

How does misanthropy/pessimism function in both novels?

Both *The White Bone* and *Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle* have a dim, misanthropic, and pessimistic vision of humanity in many ways. They touch base on the various forms of animal abuse continuously enforced by humankind and the negative attributes that make them and life intolerable: narcissism, avarice, homicide, and much more. Misanthropists use humankind’s treatment of animals to justify their hatred for them. In contrast, pessimists analyze the factors that make humans behave in this manner to critique life entirely. Yet both novels have an element of hope for human/animal coexistence as well. They present the distinct circumstances under which humans and animals can possibly live alongside each other without life-threatening violence and chaos. In her novel, Gowdy accomplishes this by discussing how peaceful life previously was before humankind became so corrupt. And Nganang achieves this by showcasing various events in which both entities come together with the same positive intentions and causes. I will discuss this in more detail in the following sections.

Peaceful coexistence in *Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle*

Although Mboudjak’s experiences and perception of humans with misanthropic and pessimistic sentiments are clearly outlined in the novel, so is his solidarity with humans. For example, in the final scene, during the protest for Docta’s son, he says, “Man had begun to march once more. I tore myself from my seclusion and marched along with him, ran on ahead of him. United we were, Man and me, in the spasmodic rush of our language; our barks. We marched, not only to bring somebody else’s child back to life, but above all and foremost to chase out the crazed lion” (Nganang 206). This shows that when in agreement and in support of justice, humans and animals can coexist peacefully. They can dismember the “seclusion” and become a united force. They won’t be fighting against each other; instead, they will rise up and advocate for the well-being of one another. This perspective is further discussed in the book *Reading Cats and Dogs: Companion Animals in World Literature,* edited by Zelia M. Bora*.* Chapter 10, “Of Dogs, Horses, and Buffalos in Cameroon '' by Kenneth Toah Nsah, explicitly discusses the novel’s ending in regards to Mboudjak’s restored faith in humanity and the power of humans’ and animals’ joint forces:

Instead of the reversal of values, the novel thus ends with a newfound companionship between human and dog. Mboudjak seems to own the inactive people and succeeds, with the Crow, to tame them into revolutionaries eager to liberate themselves from the dictatorship. Some other animal species — for example, the street dogs… the street cats… and the fowls… seemingly reject Mboudjak’s call for a trans-species brotherhood and friendship. But Mboudjak bonds well with some humans… By affording voice to other animal species (besides humans and Mboudjak the dog) throughout his novel and to dogs and humans in their quest for freedom and justice at the end, Nganang suggests trans-species companionships (Nsah 174-5).

In other words, because humans and animals have united and stood alongside one another in their pursuit of liberation, they can coexist on terms. Although some people may not agree with this solidarity and oneness, others will, and that will motivate the rest to join. It is also important to note that *Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle* shows a brighter future for Cameroon by portraying political demonstrations affirmatively. It advocates against inaction and reveals Nganang as an Activist misanthrope. Despite Cameroon's prejudice, violence, and disorder, Nganang remains hopeful that things can change positively with unity and action. He does not overlook the issue or begin to detest humankind instead anticipates amendments. This perspective also closely aligns with pessimists because they believe that if the components which make life whole are altered in positive ways, there will be positive results; in this case, the peaceful coexistence of humans and animals.

Peaceful coexistence in *The White Bone*

 As previously mentioned, to escape the poachers and save themselves, the She-S family decides that the only option for their survival is to find the "Safe Place," a land untouched by drought and with no known poachers present. But, to find the Safe Place, the elephants must first find the White Bone, the bone of a newborn elephant that points in the direction of the Safe Place. In the process of finding this bone, they come across a female cheetah named Me-Me. She claims to know the way to the Safe Place and says she will guide the She-S family if they accept her conditions. In return for showing them the way, Me-Me demands that both Mud and She-Snorts give up their unborn calves to her. Mind you, baby calves are prey to cheetahs. Due to the desperation and more significant need to save the majority, She-Snorts reluctantly agrees to the condition. Upon this, she is also given the position of the family matriarch.

Unfortunately, despite the sacrifice, most of the She-S family gets slaughtered and murdered by poachers during the journey. Date Bed is one among many victims. She survives but is separated from the rest of the family and is nowhere to be found. In response to this, Mud insists that the family searches for Date Bed along the way. But over time, even Mud abandons hope that Date Bed is still alive and continues to focus on her survival and those that are still with her. This moment in the novel is a central turning point as the despair and hopelessness of ever finding the Safe Place dominates the hope of survival. Everyone becomes desperate but continues the journey. This pessimism and desolation are evident throughout the rest of the novel to its very ending. Although it isn’t explicitly said, it is assumed that the elephants never reach the Safe Place, for which there can be many implications. One of which is the hopelessness endangered species face, like the African elephants, and the lack of control they possess in their own survival. Because of inconsiderate and selfish actions taken by humans, animals have to pay for their lives. You would think that with uncertainty like this, Gowdy upholds the belief that humans and animals cannot peacefully coexist. Ironically, however, with this ending, the novel also suggests that despite all of that, animals can survive and possess control over their lives if humans can control their cynicism and exploitation. For example, Gowdy states,

The emergence of humans did not, as is widely assumed, initiate a time of darkness. On the contrary, in the first generation following the Descent, the Domain was a glorious place, and this is partly because humans back then were nothing like today's breed. They ate flesh, yes, and they were unrepentant and wrathful, but they killed only to eat, and very few of them had a taste for the she-ones (42).

This recollection of the peaceful existence between humans and the elephants earlier in history suggests that humans and animals did live with one another and can continue to do so if they know their boundaries. If humans don’t continue to slaughter entire families and destroy all existence of said animals in the future, they can and will exist alongside one another. This part of the novel demonstrates the possible coexistence under certain circumstances and also upholds characteristics of an Activist misanthrope. Like an Activist misanthrope, Gowdy remains optimistic that animal lives will be spared with proper change and effort, and their mistreatment will eventually come to an end. This creates a hopeful ambiance for the readers as they are presented with the idea that possibly humans and animals can peacefully coexist. It also allows pessimists to share their beliefs with the Activist misanthrope. In the initial parts of the novel, indulgence, selfishness, and greed are critiqued. However, towards the end, it is shown that if those elements are removed within humankind or controlled, life will be better and easier to live/tolerate. In this, misanthropy and pessimism reinforce one another.

Concluding Remarks

 Both novels, as previously discussed, express pessimism and dismay towards human superiority. These novels use anthropomorphic means to convey the brutal behaviors of the human species that are often praised and glossed over. Poaching, for example, is seen as a prize or game, yet Gowdy’s novel highlights the complete destruction of animals’ lives and habitats. It is an inherent critique of this human practice. In Ngang’s *Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle*, we as readers are privy to the horrors of apartheid, segregation, and systematic racism within Cameroon. This discussion is made possible through a protagonist that speaks the human language and has a human-like mindset: Mboudjak.

Using the concept of animal brutality at the hands of humans, they suggest that there can never be any peaceful coexistence between the two entities unless a balance is attained. The idea seems to be that there will always be a problematic situation between the two entities because they harm one for the benefit of the other. Usually, humans prioritize their needs over the needs of animals, creating a troublesome and hostile environment. For example, in the *White Bone,* humans' need for money and excess food encouraged them to kill elephants for their skin and tusks. Meanwhile, in *Dog Days: An Animal Chronicle,* humankind’s desire for dominance and supremacy resulted in them mistreating animals and physically abusing them, whether by beating them or lynching them. However, when a balance is attained between the two species, and they learn how to view and treat one another with respect and value, they can transform this “zero-sum game” and create a united front. They can live amongst one another without murder, threat, or power struggle. This possibility was effectively portrayed in both novels establishing both authors as Activist misanthropes and pessimists. Gowdy discussed the stability and peaceful coexistence between humans and animals before their greed and selfishness began to dominate in order to suggest that humans can live with animals without maltreating them. Meanwhile, Nganang demonstrated how powerful a united front could be in establishing political change to prove that when humans and animals come together to fight for the right thing, it will double their power and influence, and they will serve as one team.

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1. A unitary presidential republic, where the President is both chief of state and head of armed forces. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A traditional Cameroon dish; a steamed bean cake usually made with peeled honey beans or black-eyed peas. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jacques Derrida’s “l’animal que donc je suis” or “The animal that therefore I am. The animal that therefore I follow” is a great text to refer to when assessing the ways humans establish differentiations between themselves and animals. Derrida suggests that unlike humans, animals have no consciousness of shame. According to him, our shame of being nude is what helps us compensate for human nature and differentiate ourselves from animals. Because we are ashamed of our nudity, we create an apparatus of superiority from the animal. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A possible result of human-caused climate change. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. People who illegally capture and kill wildlife for food, pleasure, ivory, fur, etc. This is also known as poaching. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)