

BOOK REVIEW

Sakiru Adebayo, *Continuous Past: Frictions of Memory in Postcolonial Africa*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2023. 196 pp. \$34.95. Paperback. ISBN: 9780472056231.

Continuous Past: Frictions of Memory in Postcolonial Africa refers to how survivors of traumatic pasts express or relieve such memories in the timescapes and environments in which they find themselves. In his book, comprising five chapters, Sakiru Adebayo situates the postcolonial upheavals that rocked some African countries in the present as the lingering footprints of a past that refuses to be forgotten. His study focuses on Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, and Rwanda, arguing that the past has remained coeval with the present and continues to affect the continent's future (2). He analyses this phenomenon within the domain of memory studies, where post-memory denotes subsequent generations inheriting collective trauma through familial structures (26). The author contends that owning a violent history not experienced firsthand is haunting, echoing Marianne Hirsch's concept of post-memory (27).

The end of the Nigeria-Biafra war was punctuated with silences only expressible within the safety of home. In her fictional novel, *Half of A Yellow Sun*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, provided alternative sites of Biafra memorialization for her generation and future generations. Social media is also another site of memorialization of that past following government-enforced amnesia and prolonged structural imbalances in the country. Neo-Biafran movements align with Adebayo, who posits that “the past survives and lives on” (4)—injustices lingering from the past fuel narratives of postconflict memory in Africa, portending a future under siege. Adichie has done a great duty not only to her ancestors who were consumed during that inferno but also to her generation and those to come, after which Adebayo opined that her work has cemented “Biafra as a heritage” (41).

Adebayo's exploration of the Sierra Leone civil war, an 11-year-long conflict, illustrated through Aminatta Forna's novel, *The Memory of Love*, unveils how victors in armed conflicts shape the collective memory, emphasizing the interaction of remembering and forgetting. The society in Sierra Leone remains veiled in silence, with victims and perpetrators coexisting in a shared yet unspoken reality (49). Survivors navigate their war memories through muted tones and huddled whispers, concealed in metaphors and euphemisms, seeking refuge in silence (51). Adebayo contends that survivors' silence in Sierra Leone stems from fear, where speaking up risks awakening suppressed memories, perpetuating the cycle of violence (56). While providing temporary solace, this cultural acceptance

of silence poses a latent threat—a potential time bomb for future generations (55). Adebayo posits that the amalgamation of past pain, present anguish, and uncertain futures creates a temporal landscape wherein closure remains elusive, posing a looming threat of implosion if genuine reconciliation and appropriate restitution are not addressed (69). The silent trauma of Sierra Leone thus underscores the urgent need for meaningful reconciliation efforts to prevent a future eruption of unresolved grievances.

In Chapter Three, Adebayo shows how Africans in exile relieved their tragic past that orchestrated their diasporic status. Unfortunately, America, home of expected freedom and equality, was more rhetoric than reality. The protagonist of Dinaw Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution*, despite his extended stay in America, was not immune from the memories of his father's cruel torture at the hands of communist soldiers in Ethiopia. This image haunts him in his country of sojourn; for him, the past continues even in America (77). To negotiate their placelessness, the Ethiopians in America use their cultural memory in weddings, funerals, and dressings to contribute to forming a diasporic community of Ethiopians in America. In this way, they were able to navigate their vulnerable condition while surviving their traumatic past in Africa and a traumatizing present in America (88).

Rwanda's ethnic conflict in 1993 was as horrific as its memories remain indelible in the psyche of both primary and secondary witnesses alike. In Chapter Four, Adebayo uses the novel *The Shadow of Imana* to demonstrate how Véronique Tadjo, the author as a secondary witness, shares Rwanda's traumatic past. He argues that Tadjo's encounter with Rwandan genocidal sites demonstrates how remembering or misremembering the past is always at stake in the production of the future (115). Accordingly, Adebayo demonstrates that it is possible to open oneself to be affected by other people's traumatic memories, and by so doing, one can become connected with the victims (115).

Although Adebayo argues that there is a pressing need for a postcolonial African approach to memory studies that is not reliant on Western frames of reference (5), he also committed the same infraction by not using a decolonial approach to the study of memory peculiar to an African context. Africa's diverse memory sites include songs and names. Adebayo introduces ancestral memory, framing it as "memories embodied in objects familiar to us, carrying the imprints of our ancestors, transferred from distant progenitors to the living" (46). This theorization of ancestral memory by Adebayo would have been his most significant contribution to the decoloniality of memory studies, which would have been the stake to guide the tendrils of this beautiful study.

Ngozika Anthonia Obi-Ani 

African Studies Centre, ASCL

University of Leiden, The Netherlands and University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

ngoziika.obi-ani@unn.edu.ng

doi:10.1017/asr.2024.50