

BOOK REVIEW

Chigbo Arthur Anyaduba. *The Postcolonial African Genocide Novel: Quests for Meaningfulness*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021. vii + 280 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$44.97. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781800856875. Hardcover

In *The Postcolonial African Genocide Novel: Quests for Meaningfulness*, Chigbo Anyaduba examines the framing of genocide in selected novels on the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) and the Rwandan Civil War (1990–1994) that culminated in the massacre of the Tutsis, which has been legally affirmed as genocide by the United Nations and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Anyaduba demonstrates that in engaging the memory of these wars, the quest for justice should supersede the ultimately futile quest for meaningfulness, as genocide inherently defies meaning. The epistemic basis of Anyaduba's analysis is the highly contestable argument that the Nigerian Civil War, like the Rwandan Civil War, was genocidal, despite robust counterarguments such as Robert Melson's claim that although undeniable grand-scale mass atrocities were committed against the Igbo, the Nigerian government did not aim to exterminate the Biafrans but hoped to "coerce and alter" the group's identity and status. Melson argues that the postwar reintegration of the Igbo is a major argument against genocidal intent.

The book is divided into two sections. In the first, Anyaduba contends that the quest to seek legal affirmation for postcolonial genocide is enmeshed in colonial legacies, highlighting a dehistoricizing and depoliticizing reductionism based on the legacies of colonialism and the Holocaust. He makes the case for a different conceptual framework for postcolonial genocide, while mediating the arguments between the intentionalist and structuralist schools of thought. Anyaduba also ponders whether postcolonial genocide arises from structural flaws induced by colonialism and European modernity. Following Raphael Lemkin, he concludes that the Nigerian Civil War was genocidal, arguing that it was a concerted attempt to destroy the Igbo for stereotypical perceptions that erode their individuality.

In the second section, Anyaduba proceeds to examine the artistic quest for meaningfulness in four novels portraying the Rwandan and Biafran Civil Wars: namely, Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomie*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Boubacar Diop's *Murambi: The Book of Bones*, and Gil Courtemanche's *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*. Anyaduba examines the novelists as heroes confronting the hell of genocide vicariously through their protagonists to illumine the challenges of extricating contextualized meaning from postcolonial genocide. Three major tropes are identified in the selected novels: the descent to hell, the


portrayal of genocide victims as unblemished sacrifices, and the moral imperative of witnessing borne by the writers and their surrogates in the narratives.

Anyaduba considers racialization, genderization, and gratuitous representation as major impediments to the quest of genocide survivors for justice, condemning Adichie and Soyinka's racialized portrayal of genocide victims. To Anyaduba, Soyinka's framing of the victims as unblemished sacrifice and Adichie's portrayal of the Igbo man as hubristic and hapless, bears fundamental similarities to the genocidal impulse, thus unwittingly ascribing meaning to the essentially meaningless genocide. Anyaduba criticizes Courtemanche's colonialist gaze that violates the tenuous line between representation and gratuitous objectification. Anyaduba establishes that *Sunday*, like the other novels studied, engenders and entrenches racialized perspectives that prevent a raw engagement with the suffering occasioned by the genocide.

Anyaduba proceeds to examine how the genderized visions of Soyinka, Diop, and Courtemanche lead to a valorization of male protagonists while equating femaleness with abjection, even as Adichie's feminist vision is an overcorrection that merely inverts the sexist failings of the male novelists. This leads to a failure to engage the political and material tangibility that are important precursors to the quest for justice for the victims of genocide. Beyond gender-based biases, political biases, as Anyaduba argues, sometimes compromise crucial political tangibility. He avers that Diop, in his overwhelming preoccupation with decolonization, fails to rigorously engage the political context that engendered the Rwandan genocide.

The novelists examined, according to Anyaduba, struggle at depicting African genocide constructively owing to ideologies and agendas that stifle the possibility of underscoring the necessity of justice for the victims of genocide by affirming the meaninglessness and unrepresentability of genocide. Anyaduba's contention is that although postcolonial genocide impels a quest for meaning, in the preoccupation with finding a grand reason for genocide, novelists sacrifice history, context, and engagement with tangible materiality towards forestalling a reoccurrence. Therefore, Anyaduba appears to consider fiction a problematic medium for translating the horrors of genocide.

However, the precariousness of the premise of the book, the contestable insistent framing of the Nigerian Civil War as genocide, raises questions about how such framing affects the quest for justice for survivors of mass atrocities. Nevertheless, Anyaduba's book expands the discourse on genocide by affirming the necessity of epistemic decolonization in the field, inviting a reappraisal of modern genocide studies.

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