

A Ugandan Poet Remembers the Rwanda Genocide on Facebook in Canada: The Transnational Aesthetics of Juliane Okot Bitek's *100 Days* (2016)¹

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100 Days' First Life on Facebook and other Social Media Sites

The first life of *100 Days* was on Facebook as a series of posts aimed at revisiting the Rwanda Genocide. In her Author's Note at the end of the book, Bitek explains how this idea came to her:

At the beginning of April 2014, Wangechi Mutu, a Kenyan American artist, posted daily photographs tagged #Kwibuka20#100Days on Facebook and Twitter. I knew immediately that they presented an opportunity for me to engage with the 1994 Rwanda Genocide, a period that I've thought about for the last twenty years. I contacted her and we began a collaboration of sorts; I wrote a poem and she posted a photograph for all the hundred days that has come to symbolize the worst days of the genocide in Rwanda. One hundred days of killing, one hundred days of witnessing, one hundred days of everything else that seemed to matter and then it didn't, it couldn't. And just like that, twenty years had passed and there was a need to remember. (Bitek 107)

This quotation makes at least three points that I am interested in in this paper. The first one is that the genesis of the book lies in Facebook posts and tweets – Mutu's photographs that Bitek saw and appreciated to the extent that they inspired her to undertake a similar project, with poetry as her chosen medium. Without these photographs, it is possible that Bitek would not have written the poems at all, at least at the time she did. The second point is that her decision to use Facebook to disseminate her poems, moreover on a daily basis, was informed by how she had come about the idea to write – Mutu's photographs, each numbered from 1 onwards. Finally, the book is a result of a collaboration, that is to say, from the outset it was dialogic in nature as it was oriented to another discourse (Bakhtin 280).

When the poems were posted, they were read by the people who followed Bitek on Facebook, some of whom she mentions (Omer Aijazi, Chrissie Arnold, Erin Baines, Wangechi Mutu and Alexander Best). But

they were also read by people she did not know – those “[r]eaders on social media [who] supported and shared these poems, sending them off to a myriad of spaces beyond the places they first landed on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram” (111). While Bitek only acknowledges one form of support she received from her readers – they helped her disseminate the poems beyond Facebook – I suggest that the other was that they offered instant feedback to her work since the act of sharing a Facebook post is an acknowledgement that it has been read and found worthy of attention, that is to say, it is a form of recommendation of the work to other readers. Irrespective of whether this feedback was appreciative or critical, it was nonetheless a big boost to the writing project since Bitek knew that there were people who were reading her work and looking forward to more posts from her. Besides, the readers provided a community of listeners, so to speak: every time Bitek ‘spoke’ out through her page, there was someone on the other end of the net ‘listening’ to her. In other words, we can conceive each of the poems she posted as a performance. Once her readers had read the poems, they waited for another that would be posted the following day, the way ardent viewers of a show wait for the next scene of a play.

Unfortunately, the poems in *100 Days* are no longer available on the social media sites where they were originally published. I spent days searching the author’s Facebook and Twitter pages, but I did not get any of the poems. When I contacted her for help, she suggested that I use the hashtag #kwibuka20#100Days that she and Wangechi Mutu had used in their loose collaboration. I did this, but I got nothing still. When I contacted her again, she confirmed that the links to the poems and to the hashtag had been broken, and indeed the poems were no longer available. I felt sad about this because it made it impossible for me to do what this paper had initially aimed to do – exploring the interactivity between the author and the readers that social media publishing makes possible. At the heart of this interactivity was the number of likes that each post had received, the number of times each poem had been shared by the readers, the comments that the readers had made to the poems, and how the author had responded to these poems both in verbatim and in revising some of the poems, if not all. Except for one comment to one poem on the author’s website, there was no other I accessed. This points to a number of problems that come with social media publishing. First, it can be said to be ephemeral in the sense that the post or tweet could be erased any time or it could be rendered invisible in the absence of a clear filing/archiving system. Secondly, when work from social media is published by traditional presses, it risks losing its original identity. Perhaps this is because some authors are still fascinated by the allure of the printed book. It is my guess that if the 100 poems that Bitek wrote had not come out in

book form, she would have worked harder to ensure that they are still available online. The ephemeral nature of social media publishing is rather sad for it is evidence that there is a lot of brilliant work published on social media sites that we are no longer able to access, particularly that which was not turned into print books.

The Major issues Juliane Okot Bitek Raises in *100 Days* and How They Are Raised

The hashtag #Kwibuka20#100Days locates *100 Days* in the literature of commemoration for the poet's objective was to remember ('kwibuka' is a Bantu/Kinyarwanda word meaning 'to remember') what had happened twenty years ago, between March and July 1994, when the genocide happened in Rwanda.

In an essay entitled "Fiction as a Mediator in National Remembrance," Ann Rigney underlines the role art plays in memorializing historical events. She observes that "[t]he past can only be invested with meaning for groups of people through observable acts of remembrance in the form of stories, rituals, monuments, images, poems, epitaphs, and so on" (80) which serve "as [a] heuristic tool in opening up other worlds to contemporary readers and enabling them to imagine themselves in unfamiliar social frames" (87). For her, these acts of remembrance bring "into circulation the memory of certain experiences, hitherto left out of official histories" (88). Literature does this better than other disciplines, she avers, because "in providing a space for experimenting with ways of representing the world, [it] also gravitates towards engaging us in critical reflection on the nature of remembrance itself" (87).² *100 Days* is an example of the art that Rigney talks about, for by revisiting the Rwanda genocide of 1994, it raises issues that make us reflect not only on what happened in that country but also on how we remember/commemorate it.

For Andrew H. Armstrong, revisiting what happened in the past using the resources of language not only records "the chaotic events experienced during the years" that a writer is revisiting through fiction but also "recode[s], through the tropes of language (symbol, imagery, and metaphor), the devastating effects of those years on the literary landscape" of the country in question (127). Armstrong makes this observation when discussing Moses Isegawa's novels *The Abyssinian Chronicles* (2000) and *Snakepit* (2004) – texts which depict the nightmarish times Uganda went through during Milton Obote's and Idi Amin's misrule of the nation. But it also serves as a plea to fellow human beings to learn from the past as a way of building or imagining a good future. Revisiting the events of the

past helps us to acknowledge the fact that we have not told all the stories that we have to tell about what happened, that is to say, that there is something new to say or a new angle to bring to the debate.

As a commemorative work, *100 Days* attempts to revisit the one hundred days of the ‘slaughter’ – a word I borrow from the title of Marie Beatrice Umutesi’s book, *Surviving the Slaughter: The Ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire* (2000, 2004) – using verse to capture the horror of these days, to understand how such days came to be and what they mean for us as a human community. The book is therefore not just about what happened in Rwanda; it is also about the horrors that have happened elsewhere, for instance in northern Uganda and Bosnia, or even genocides committed against indigenous peoples, for instance in north America, as Cecily Nicholson writes in the Foreword to the book. I will turn to this point in the next section.

100 Days is a text that is heavily invested in critiquing a number of social, socio-economic and political issues. These include the unsuitability of the vocabulary we use when we talk about what happened in Rwanda; the opportunism surrounding the commemoration of the genocide; the failure of the Church to avert the genocide; the baseness of human beings in light of the massacre of innocent people; and the tendency to apportion blame in times of misfortunes, instead of acknowledging that in one way or another, every person irrespective of nationality is implicated in what happened in the country in 1994.

100 Days is concerned with critiquing the vocabulary people use to talk about what happened in Rwanda. To those who emphasize the fact that the Hutu and the Tutsi massacred each other despite the fact that they speak the same language and have the same culture, the persona asks: “so what if we were all Christian / would the media brand it / Christian-on-Christian violence[?]” (“Day 52,” 51). This rhetorical question underlines the simplicity of the commentaries on the genocide – commentaries that in the author’s view infuriate instead of helping us understand what happened. Related to this is the discomfort the persona feels with the careless use of the word ‘genocide.’ She wonders whether “one less death [would] have disqualified those hundred days / from being called a genocide” (“Day 34,” 71). In other words, she is uncomfortable with the way people seem concerned with the scale of killing but “not our lives not our losses” (“Day 34,” 71). I understand the poet to be challenging the reader to look at every life lost as a unique individual loss, rather than consider the dead as a faceless crowd.

She revisits this issue of the way we talk about the tragedy in poem “Day 23” which is just five lines:

Some of us fell between words

& some of us onto the sharp edges
at the end of sentences

& if we were not impaled
we're still falling through stories that don't make sense. (83)

We usually associate falling with dying, for instance falling in battle upon being shot or speared or macheted. The poem suggests that words can be lethal weapons as well – they too can cause as much damage as guns and machetes do, if not more. In an earlier Ugandan text, *Song of Lawino*, the author's father, Okot p'Bitek, makes this point when his main character, Lawino, observes that “words cut more than sticks” (35), as she recounts the kinds of insults her educated and alienated husband, Ocol, heaps upon her and her relatives. In describing Ocol's insults, Lawino uses images that underline the destructive power of words/phrases: she describes her husband's tongue as “bitter like the roots of the *lyonno* lily,” “hot like the penis of the bee,” “fierce like the arrow of the scorpion,” “deadly like the spear of the buffalo-hornet,” “ferocious like the poison of a barren woman,” and “corrosive like the juice of the gourd” (35). By imagining some victims of the genocide as falling between words and onto the sharp edges at the end of sentence, Bitek metaphorically refers to the role language played in the build-up to and during the one hundred days of untold violence. The reference by Hutus to Tutsis as *inyenzi* or cockroaches (Mamdani 129, 212) is one such instance of words becoming lethal weapons, for once the Tutsis were seen as insects, moreover those that spread diseases, it was easier for the Hutu to kill them in hundreds of thousands as a way of saving themselves from contagion. It is no wonder that some commentators on the genocide, like Mahmood Mamdani, relate what happened just before and during the one hundred days to what had happened during colonial wars of conquest, for instance in present-day Namibia where colonial Germany exterminated the Herero upon constructing them as sub-human to the extent that in an official publication, *Der Kampf*, there is an entry where the Herero are compared to “a half-dead animal ... hunted from water-hole to water-hole” (Mamdani 11).

100 Days is also critical of people who turn the massive losses that happened in 1994 to their advantage, for instance those who receive medals and commendations during ceremonies performed to remember the one hundred days. To the persona, these people (she imagines herself as one of them) act “like frauds” because “all we did was stay alive / while many many others died” (“Day 49,” 54). This poem invites us to beware the fact that well-meaning gestures like commemorating the departed can with time become meaningless or even sadistic if they are not handled well. The use of the word “we” underlines the fact that although the

persona is a critical voice, she is also one of those people who are using the genocide to their advantage for she too receives a medal she does not turn down. This explains why the poet suggests that nobody is innocent; somehow, everybody is implicated in what happened, because everybody knew the circumstances that exploded to lead to the terrible losses of 1994, but they did not do anything about it. This point – that people should have known what was to come in future – is captured in the first stanza of “Day 39” when the persona boldly states:

If we were to go back
to the time before these hundred days
we couldn't return without knowing
what was to come (65).

So the people who plead innocence are not telling the truth, the persona suggests, because they are marked by the fact that they know that the pre-a-hundred-days period was not a happy one for all the people living in the country. Perhaps the author is talking about previous genocides that had taken place in the region, for instance that of the Hutu by the Tutsi in Burundi (1972) (Songolo 10). The poem concludes:

& so we know
that we can no longer absorb innocence

& innocence will not shield anyone from these days
& innocence does not cleanse
& innocence will not save us
from what we now know (65)

The use of the collective pronoun “we” refers to the community of Rwandans; but it can also refer to members of the human family who cannot claim to be innocent either, for they looked on and did nothing to stop the massacres as the one hundred days unfolded. That Michaëlle Jean, the Governor General of Canada, can formally apologize to the people of Rwanda “for Canada’s role as part of the International community that had failed to act soon enough to prevent the 1994 genocide” (Nicholson ix) and Bill Clinton on behalf of the United States of America (Songolo 109) succinctly captures this point.

“Day 22” handles a related issue: the vulgarity of turning the tragedy into a money-making industry – tourism. In this poem, the persona – a “we” again – welcomes people to Rwanda twenty years after the one hundred days to

come & see
how we live
how we get over everything

how we exhibit skulls
how we caress skeletons
& tell stories about who these bones were (84)

The sarcastic tone employed in the poem becomes very evident in the last three lines of the poem:

come & see how easy we are with things
come visit

our country is now open for tourism (84)

The poem is in the form of an advertisement, perhaps one placed in the newspapers by the Tourism Board. For the persona, the tragedy of 100 days has become a resource, a great opportunity to attract tourists with their foreign currency. The line “we exhibit skulls” shows how morbid and horrid these conflict-entrepreneurs are: they do not care about the people who perished in the one hundred days. Instead, they use these people as an exhibition to satisfy tourists’ curiosity. This horridness is emphasized in the next line: the personae “caress skeletons,” not because they loved the departed people, but because – it is suggested – they are performing to an audience, a paying audience, telling “stories about who these bones were.” The use of the word “now” in the last line is curious: it implies that the tourists are morbid as well in the sense that they are attracted to the macabre. It is as if the persona is saying that if there had been no tragedy of such a huge magnitude, the tourists would not have found the country inviting enough. The use of satire in this poem is incisive: through irony, sarcasm, exaggeration and grim humor, the poet shows how materialism can make us turn into callous people who betray the memory of our departed brothers and sisters in the name of foreign exchange.

The poet also suggests that the genocide presented human beings as being worse than animals: “even animals don’t commit slaughter,” one of her personae states (“Day 70”, 31). This line reminds us of Susan Kiguli’s poem entitled “Why Vultures Laugh At Us” where vultures consider themselves more successful than human beings who stand at the well of independence, but are frustrated for they cannot draw any water, while they, the vultures, harvest “[c]hunks of stinking slippery flesh / Which sail gently / Down welcoming throats (7).³ The idea of Kiguli’s poem – that independence in Africa did not bring what it was expected to and that post-independence Africa has not harvested anything beautiful or life-sustaining from independence – is similar to that of Bitek’s poem: rather than love each other as human beings are meant to, people instead slaughter one another. The similarity between Bitek’s poem and Kiguli’s lies in the fact that while Kiguli’s vultures do not kill each other for food

but look for carcasses elsewhere to give them “chunks of stinking slippery flesh” (7), Bitek’s post-independence human beings massacre each other. The fact that human beings do to each other what animals do not do to their own shows that they have dehumanized themselves so terribly that they are worse than beasts.

In *100 Days*, water bodies are portrayed as a key witness to the horrors of the genocide. The persona says that before the one hundred days, she used to enjoy watching fish glide and jump in water. That time, the river was “a happy home to life,” but with the genocide, the situation has changed: the river has become a cemetery – “a happy home to death” (“Day 60,” 42). John Ruganda’s play, *The Floods* and Susan Kiguli’s poem “Fishers of Men,” depict similar happenings during Idi Amin’s regime, where people were murdered and dumped into water bodies like rivers (such as the Nile at Karuma, Jinja, and other places) and lakes (such as Victoria, George, Albert, and Kioga, Wamala.)⁴ Indeed, in “Day 20,” Bitek refers to the genocide as a “harvest of death” by “a fisher net / a fisher net cast by a man / a fisher of men.” The use of the phrase “Fisher of Men” in this poem and in Kiguli’s is an allusion to the Gospels where Jesus asks Peter and other disciples to abandon their trade as fishermen and become his disciples so that they may evangelize men and women into God’s Kingdom. Bitek ends her poem irreverently by asking if the fisher of men that cast the net to harvest the dead was Christ (86).

This irreverence is heightened in “Day 37” and “Day 27.” In the former poem, the persona presents Jesus as either having “no idea of these one hundred days” or as having “lost his voice in the first few moments,” perhaps upon being overwhelmed by what was going on, that is to say, by the rate at which people were dying (67). This presents Jesus (whom we conventionally consider omnipotent) as a defeated fellow who “might have hung his head / completely powerless” (67). The poem concludes with a piece of tongue-in-cheek advice: “Christ / look to your mother / ask her to pray for your intercession” (68). In other words, Christ is like ordinary people who depend on his mother, Mary, for their intercession. The use of apostrophe in this poem shows that the persona is daring and irreverent: she looks at Christ in the face and tells him that he too needs prayers, instead of being the answerer of prayers. This irreverence is born from the frustration with Christ: to the persona, he did not use his omnipotence to stop the genocide. For this reason, he deserves to be ridiculed.

In “Day 27,” the persona has difficulty understanding the idea of divine will and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who died for the sins of all men and women. The tone used in this poem is derisive – the so many deaths that occur during the one hundred days are said to be God’s will, so we need to sing His glory all the time. Besides, Jesus is said to “claim” to

“have died for the sins of all men” (79). The persona seems to be asking: if horrors like those which happened in Rwanda or northern Uganda are part of God’s will, how providential and beneficial and sensible is this will? How can the death of so many people be part of God’s will? What kind of God wills such tragedies? How can such a God be said to be loving and caring and worthy of praise all the time? How meaningful is Jesus’ sacrificial death if it does not have the power to avert such a tragedy like the Rwanda genocide? What does the whole idea of the Trinity mean to people who believe in it, in terrible times like those during the one hundred days?

The last two lines of the poem contain an oxymoron that needs to be reflected upon: “nothing will ever change except by faith / so nothing will change” (79). If “nothing will ever change except by faith,” it means that faith is central to the idea of change, so faith is good, faith is necessary, faith is something that human beings need. But the line that follows, which also concludes the poem, contradicts this by stating point-blankly “so nothing will change,” in other words, faith is not enough to change things, however good or necessary or well-meaning it is. I read this oxymoron to mean that faith is a necessary ‘good’ to have, but it is not enough: it needs to be actualized through real, hands-on actions. In other words, faith without action is dead, as St. James the apostle succinctly put it more than 2000 years ago. It follows therefore that the Trinity is not to blame for the one-hundred-days event, but rather the human beings who did not match their faith (that God would save His people during the massacres) with action (being the instrument that God uses to effect change). Of course, a Christian can make a different argument to counter what the persona says. He/she can say that the fact that the mayhem ended in one hundred days was an act of divine intervention without which the situation could have been worse, going on for hundreds of weeks, not just days. Such a staunch believer in the Trinity would therefore not find the idea of the Trinity elusive, nor would he/she deride the idea of faith as being inconsequential in effecting change. This poem, and many others like it, reminds us clearly that as speech/voice, a poem is inherently dialogic in the sense that it espouses a particular worldview, which the reader/listener may not necessarily agree with.

100 Days also depicts the vulnerability of people during times of war. The image of someone being alive this moment and dead the next one (“Day 55”) shows human beings as dying like flies, as Nikolai Gogol would say in his play, *The Government Inspector*. This precarity is emphasized by the vulnerability of human life which is metaphorically represented using the image of a moth moving towards the fire (“Day 33,” 72). It is also elaborated in “Day 24” which depicts a people fleeing from danger to safety. Unfortunately, only one person survives to tell the story.

The use of the verb “hobbled on” shows the difficulty with which the people fled to safety. By opening the poem with the ampersand “&,” the poet communicates at least two issues. First, that there were many people who tried to escape but did not make it. The experience is too painful and sorrowful to be told in full, so the poem starts *in media res*. Second, that the persona is too exhausted to tell the story from the beginning, so she starts somewhere in the middle so that she may be through with it as soon as she can. But it is also a technique that achieves immediacy: we imagine someone who is too shocked to narrate in detail what happened, someone who is gasping for breath, someone who is overcome with grief. For we know that grief can cause silence since as Elaine Scarry observes, “intense pain is . . . language-destroying: as the content of one’s world disintegrates, so the content of one’s language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject” (35). Indeed, this brief poem can be seen as an instance of semi-silence since the persona is not able to narrate all that happened. Yet the poem shows a people who are determined to live, people who walk through fire (literally and metaphorically) in order to survive.

Unfortunately, they keep falling so much that only one person, the persona, remains to tell the story. Despite this pathos, however, the poem brings to mind the words of Albert Camus’s character, Dr Bernard Roux: “There is more to admire in human beings than to despise,” for while the slaughterers are at their dirty deed, those fleeing try to keep together, celebrating love and a sense of community. They stand by each other in adversity, so much that the persona remembers: “Your arm around my shoulder / mine around your waist” (82). Here, we see people who practice the Christian virtue of love and care. The poem seems to be implying that if all people had practiced this virtue, certainly there would have been no one hundred days to bemoan. This shows that the tragedy that was caused by people’s failure to live by the Christian principles that they professed, not Christ’s indifference or powerlessness as “Day 27” suggests.

Apart from ridiculing Christ, some of the poems rile against nature for betraying the victims and the survivors of the genocide. In poem “Day 100” which opens the collection, for instance, the persona says, “It was the earth that betrayed us / it was the earth that held onto its beauty / compelling us to return” (1). Perhaps this return from hiding places exposed these personae to attack, hence the charge that nature betrayed them. The persona wonders why the earth held on to its beauty as thousands and thousands died. Why did the sun rise and fall every day of those 100 days as it had done before “as if there were nothing different / as if nothing changed”? (1) she asks. “Day 99” says more or less the same thing: “it was sunrise every morning / the same land / same sky / same

rivers / hills & valleys,” (2) the persona states, ending with the same words used in “Day 100”: “it was the earth that betrayed us first / in those one hundred days that would never end” (2). In “Day 75,” the persona defines the betrayal in definite terms: “a conspiracy of silence” (26). How come, the persona wonders, the grass remained green, the full moon luminous, the rushing river continued to roar and the hills continued to look beautiful? For the persona

if this was an unnatural state of being
if this was a never ever situation
why didn't the world turn upside down? (26)

The persona soon reaches a point when she doubts that there is a sky. Perhaps the sky is something she is making up, she muses, for “if there was a sky / how could it witness what it did / & still maintain that calm hue (?)” (35). These questions come from a hurting soul in search of answers. By blaming the elements for failing to recognize the genocide by remaining dazzling in their beauty, she reminds us of our unreasonableness: upon failing to treat ourselves with love, sympathy and empathy, we expect it from the elements. Rather than blame ourselves for the mess that was created, we pass on the blame to another party. In any case, it is not true that the elements did not care about what was happening. “Day 83” shows that the elements perhaps did care, but human beings did not read their message. In this poem, the persona declares:

we failed to read the clouds
as we had been taught to in high school
cumulonimbus chasing cotton balls
cumulonimbus with or without rain (18).

She concludes the poem with the observation: “Perhaps cumulonimbus was a script in the sky / a kind of writing that was not familiar / not then & definitely not now” (18).

The Transnational Aspects of *100 Days*

100 Days is a transnational book in many aspects. In the first place, the issues the author raises (for instance, human brutality towards fellow humans) are not limited to Rwanda but are evident in other countries as well. “Day 53” mentions more than thirty countries where there has been violence – places that the one hundred days in Rwanda echo. The poem concludes with the words: “ours wasn’t the first or the only one / it was merely our most painful” (50). This connection between what happens in Rwanda and what happens elsewhere plays a number of roles. For

instance, it shows that genocides are not limited to the African continent; other continents – America (Hawaii, for instance), Europe (Germany, Poland and Bosnia, for instance), and Asia (Japan, China and India) have all suffered the same horror. This serves to challenge racist explanations of the Rwanda Genocide that usually emphasize its African setting.

As a Ugandan Canadian poet, Bitek saw close affinities between what happened in Rwanda in 1994 and what had happened elsewhere – in northern Uganda, for example, during Joseph Kony’s rebellion against President Yoweri Museveni’s regime between 1986 and 2007. Besides, the realities that some of her poems depict – for instance corpses floating in Lake Victoria – had happened in Uganda during Idi Amin’s regime, as Susan Kiguli and John Ruganda show in their works.

Secondly, the medium through which the poems were first disseminated to the world – Facebook – allowed people in different countries across the globe to read the work the moment it was posted, thereby collapsing the boundaries between Canada (where the posting was done) and the rest of the world. Facebook also allowed Bitek, who is based in Canada, to loosely collaborate with US-based Kenyan Wangechi Mutu, whose paintings she was in dialogic relation to.

Finally, the author’s transnational life (she is a Ugandan poet born in exile in Kenya, but now she lives in Canada) informs the way she remembers and re-members the genocide in a number of ways, for instance, by seeing the relationship between the promises made after the genocide (never again should this happen, as former US President Bill Clinton said on his visit to Rwanda in the 1990s) and similar promises made in the past (‘never again’ being the “dramatic utterance after WWII at the Nuremberg trials after the second world war,” Bitek to Rob). That Bitek worked with a transnational idea in mind is shown by her reflection entitled “100 Days, 50 Days In: A Poet’s Journey” mid-way her project:

Twenty years after the genocide in Rwanda is twenty years after the ANC won elections in South Africa; there is mourning and celebration at the same time. And gratitude for having come through – how can there not be? But what do we do with the persistent heartbroken-ness? How do you remember the worst time of your life after twenty years? War persists. A powerful undercurrent of apathy buoys others who understand that war “over there” has nothing to do with life “over here”. Some things get done through obligation and sometimes pity, without any acknowledgement of the connectedness that binds us all.

That a Ugandan poet living in Canada can take it upon herself to commemorate an event that took place in a country she has never been to is one of the positionings that shows the connectedness she is talking about. The mourning of the dead that happens in *100 Days* is a celebration of our shared humanity irrespective of race, ethnicity, nationality, creed or circumstance.

Conclusion

The discussion above shows that *100 Days* is a very important text for apart from raising very important issues about a very troubling historical event, it is the first Ugandan book – to my knowledge – to be published on social media sites (Facebook and Twitter) before appearing in print. It is also the first Ugandan book I have read that is two in one: the first being the poems as read from the first page to the last (from Day 100 to Day 1); the second being the poems as read from the last page to the first (from Day 1 to Day 100). The collection portrays the pathos that the genocide occasions, but it also shows a people who resiliently clings to life even as they see thousands of their family members and friends falling. If remembering is “a painful re-remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” as Homi K. Bhabha observes (123), *100 Days* suggests that remembering can also be an empowering act that reminds us of the nobility of soul that the human-animal is capable of possessing. For even in the one hundred days of carnage, we find tenderness surviving here and there amidst the so many frustrations it encounters, to invoke Dennis Brutus’s poem “Somehow We Survive”(4).⁵

Notes

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2. I first explored this issue of remembrance in my doctoral thesis entitled “Negotiating (Trans)national Identities in Ugandan Fiction” (2014), pp. 95-96.

3. This poem is discussed in detail in Kahyana (2014) and Kahyana 2015 (7-8).

4. For a detailed analysis of these works, see Kahyana (2014) and Kahyana 2015 (9-10).

5. See Brutus, Dennis. "Somehow We Survive." In *A Simple Lust*. Heinemann, 1973, for the opening line: "Somehow we survive and tenderness, frustrated, does not wither."

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