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VIOLENCE AND MEMORY IN JOHN RUGANDA'S *THE BURDENS* AND *THE FLOODS*.

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg, 2008.

ABSTRACT

This research report is an investigation of the theme of violence and the use of memory in John Ruganda's two plays: *The Floods* and *The Burdens*. This study examines the representation of a historic period in Uganda's history as represented in Ruganda's two plays. The study focuses on the reign of Idi Amin, Uganda's former dictator. It gives a detailed examination of the use of violence by the state as a tool for achieving and maintaining power. I argue that the totalitarian state uses violence to assert its power and to eliminate its enemies. I also examine how Ruganda represents Idi Amin's regime in *The Floods*, focusing on various forms of violence and how he uses the setting of the play, characterization and dialogue to highlight the extent of violence in the regime. The first chapter gives the background of the study focusing on the social and political contexts in which the plays were set. The second chapter deals with violence both by the state and violence in the private space in *The Burdens* which deploys the space of the family to critique violence by the state. In this chapter, I also discuss the politics of dead bodies. Here I argue that the desire of the state to stay in power does not end at controlling the people while they are alive but that it includes how dead bodies are (mis) treated. In the final chapter I discuss the role of memory in the two plays. I argue that in *The Burdens*, memory is an escape zone where characters hide from their unpleasant present. In *The Floods*, I try to show how memory forms part of the narrative of the play in that characters retell their experiences for purposes of unfolding 'facts' about the regime.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Name of Candidate

Sambai C. Carolyn.

_____day of_____2008.

DEDICATION

To the Late Professor John Ruganda whose two plays this work covers. Rest in Peace.

To the great teachers; the Late Mrs. Eunice Keino and the Late *Mwalimu* Lawrence Lelmengit both of whom died in February 2008. Your demise is such a painful loss but we hope to lift the banner high…Teachers, you will be remembered for your great service. Rest in Peace.

And to my parents Jane and Hosea Sambai and for this great sacrifice. Thank you.

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support and pleas that I hang on….it got better by the day… that is how I have this! May you live to inspire others. I also wish to thank Jennifer for all we shared, for being that special and supportive friend. *Tulilia pamoja*…it's time we smiled. Girl, *asante sana* and for that inspirational work on '*wafu*'.

My sincere gratitude goes to my classmates Violet, Nomsa, Jendele, and Mkhize for all the inspirational class discussions we had. Thank you and may you live to handle more of such in future. I am also grateful to Mekusi, Mutonya, Senayon, Chris, George, Florence and other students and friends whose names I have not been able to mention here, but whose ideas and words were very useful in various ways. Thank you for your willingness to help. Lastly, to my family, Mum, Dad, Paul, Wamboi, Zipporah and the boys: Rogers, Franklin, Kevin and Gideon, I am honestly grateful for your prayers, patience and all manner of support. *Paranjeska* is now here!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Ruganda the playwright

Until his death, John Rugyendo Ruganda was one of the leading and established playwrights in East Africa.[1] He was described as a literary giant in the region. He was one of the fathers of Uganda's literature as well as a supporter and mentor of many in this field. Ruganda studied English at Makerere University where he was also the editor of two student journals –'*The Makererean'* and *'Penpoint*'. Ruganda graduated in 1967 and worked as an editor with the Oxford University Press and co-edited the literary journal '*Zuka*' with the late Jonathan Kaariara. In 1972, because of the volatile situation in his homeland attributed to the political instability in Uganda, Ruganda went to Kenya where he first worked as an editor at the Oxford University Press in Nairobi.[2] Ruganda eventually joined the University of Nairobi as a lecturer in the department of Literature where he specialised in teaching drama. Until his death in December 2007, Ruganda was teaching at the University of the North (now called the University of Limpopo) in South Africa. Having taught literature at several universities, the playwright had a long and rich experience in theatre and drama. This is evident in his works. Ruganda featured on the East African literary scene not only as a director and teacher of drama but also as a poet. His poetry has been greatly anthologised in collections of poems from East Africa. Ruganda also founded theatre groups, acted and directed many plays. He was one of the founding members of the Makerere Free Travelling Theatre and was elected as its chief organiser in 1966. In 1970, Ruganda was the secretary of Kampala Writers Club and founder member of the Ngoma players, a theatre group in Kampala. In the early 70s, Ruganda served as the chairman of the Uganda Authors and Linguists Association. In

[1]John Ruganda died of throat cancer on the 8th Dec 2007 at the Kampala International Hospital Mulago in Uganda. He was diagnosed with the cancer in July 2006 and had since been undergoing chemotherapy. Visit: http://www.eastafricanpublishers.com/News/John%20Ruganda.htm.

[2] Many other Ugandan writers who fled their country to Kenya due to the political instability in the country included Okot p'Bitek, Austin Bukenya, Henry Kimbungwe and Richard Ntiru who later worked with the East African Educational Publishers. Visit: http://www.eastandard.net/news/?id=1143979985&cid=291.

1971, Ruganda was instrumental in the establishment of the Makonde Group, an amateur theater company that performed plays in local languages all over Uganda.[3]

John Ruganda has written eleven plays some of which are unpublished. His published plays include: *The Burdens* (1972), *Black Mamba* and *Covenant with Death* (1973), *Music without Tears* (1982), *Echoes of Silence* (1986), *The Floods* (1988) and *Shreds of Tenderness* (2001). His unpublished plays include: *The State Zombie, The Glutton, Pyrrhic Victory,* and *End of the Endless*. Among his published plays, *The Burdens* (1972) and *The Floods* (1980) have been used regularly as prescribed texts in the ordinary and advanced level syllabi of the Literature in English courses in Kenya and Uganda. Most of his plays are studied in universities and other institutions of higher learning in East and Central Africa.Three of his major plays have won major literary awards. *Covenant with Death* won the East African Creative Writing competition in 1966. *The Burdens* won the second prize of the 1972 Jomo Kenyatta Foundation Prize for Literature and in the same year *Black Mamba* was awarded an excellence certificate during the Makerere Golden Jubilee Celebration. *Pyrrhic Victory* won the Makerere University inter-hall Competition in 1965 and *End of the Endless* won the Uganda Theatre Guild Competition in 1966. In 1979 *The Floods* received international acclaim when it was presented at the festival of Small and Experimental Scenes in Yugoslavia.

A general examination of his plays shows that Ruganda's concern is the plight of the African man. His plays, which are largely inspired by a keen observation of the activities in his country soon after independence, expose political oppression. Ruganda's major aim of writing as echoed by a literary critic, Chris Wanjala, is to improve his society which he (Ruganda) felt had gone wrong and he needed to do something about it.[4] Generally, Ruganda's plays attempt to condemn the ills in the society or try to correct the situation. *Shreds of Tenderness* for instance focuses on a military coup, its effects on the political,

[3] John Ruganda is regarded as a pioneer playwright, a theatre director and a dramatist in the region. He featured as an actor, a stage director and a teacher of drama at various institutions. See Waliaula (2003) and Imbuga (1997) for an account of Ruganda's career background.

[4] In an article entitled 'The Death of East Africa's Literary Giant', ChrisWanjala commends Ruganda for his commitment to the betterment of the society and that the literary world has lost a great artist. This information is available at: http://www.eastafricanpublishers.com/News/John%20Ruganda.htm.

social and economic well being of specific individuals and the nation as a whole. The play makes use of three characters (Stella, Wak and Odie), siblings who were all affected in different ways during the coup depicted in the play. Stella is raped by the military men, Wak is forced to flee to a neighbouring country for safety (assumed to be one of the East African countries: Kenya or Tanzania) and Odie who remains in the country during the coup is physically roughed up by the police and escapes with a dent in his head. Odie consequently loses his memory and starts to behave like a demented man. The play shows how a military government tears the nation and destabilises it in all senses. This play is a reworking of his earlier published play *Music without Tears* (1982).

Black Mamba (1973) deals with the social and intellectual hypocrisy of an intellectual, Professor Coarx. The professor who teaches in one of the universities has specialised in speaking against immorality yet as the play unfolds, he is seen to be engaging in the very acts he is condemning. With the assistance of his house-help, Berewa, who brings in women to the professor's house, the professor, engages in secret sexual relationships with several women including Berewa's wife. It is his student, Odiambo, who uncovers the professor's other life when he runs into a woman in the don's house while he is submitting his assignment. The play is an amusing social satire which exposes the professor's double standards. At a broader level, the play dramatises the plight of African states under white expatriates who could be said to preach water and drink wine.

Covenant with Death (1973) dramatises the social and psychological problems brought about by human alienation. It deals with the myth of Kaikara, the goddess of fruition, who gives a girl child to an old couple that was childless but cautions that the girl should not get married. In a society where women who do not get married are scorned, and treated with contempt, Mutama finds it very difficult to continue living in that society. She decides to run away from home to get married to a white man in the city and to hide from her society. Unfortunately, Mutama cannot conceive in her marriage because the goddess has cursed her for having defied its orders. Mutama comes back home and dies of a mysterious disease which the villagers believe is a curse that is a result of her disobedience to the goddess of fruition.

Ruganda's plays cover a range of social concerns that are of great relevance to developing African nations. Furthermore, his plays deal with some aspect of contemporary reality in East Africa. Ruganda's plays question the current leadership patterns in Africa, where the leaders have created oppressive classes within the society. The plays

deal with social and economic inequality, the lack of moral values within the society and the deteriorating state of the common man who in most cases is represented as being innocent thus paving way for his/her manipulation by the elite members of the society. Francis Imbuga (1999) notes that,

> For all their diversity, Ruganda's plays have tended to gather around central themes which are of immediate relevance not only to Uganda or the African region from which he comes, but also to the rest of Africa nations of the world which have undergone similar historical experiences. (Imbuga 1999: 277)

Imbuga (1999) continues to note that, 'the overriding contemporary reality in the region, as in many parts of Africa, has been one of political restlessness' (*Ibid:* 277). Practically in all his plays, Ruganda exposes some aspects of corruption, betrayal and exploitation and subtly hints at possible ways of alleviating the problems. Ruganda attributes most of the chaos and upheavals which have characterised post-independence African states to the destruction of traditional institutions like monarchies, which in many countries have been replaced with regimes of selfish politicians who have no respect for the sanctity of human life (*Ibid).* Ruganda as a playwright may be disillusioned by the shattered dreams that were ushered in immediately after independence but he has not yet given into despair. His plays end on a positive note signalling a sense of hope. His concern is to bring order to the chaotic existence that he perceives in his midst.

Ruganda's plays depict his willingness to speak for the voiceless in the society. He dramatises the common man's struggle for survival in a politically, economically and socially hostile environment where the rich minority exploit the poor majority. Ruganda crafted plays that dealt with the big question of man and his relationship with the environment. Most of his plays deal with the absurd and weave humour and satire to hit

hard at the powers that flourish in corruption and opportunism. Ruganda's aim was to bring the society to an awareness of the source of their problems and point out make possible solutions.

Concerning his style of writing, Ruganda's plays deploy a variety of structures, ranging from three act-plays in *The Burdens*, to a two act structure in *Black Mamba* to a one act play in *Covenant with Death*. This kind of structure allows the playwright to economise and use a small number of characters. In most cases, his cast consists of a maximum of four characters and a minimum of three. Most of the details of the plot are filled in through flashbacks, reminiscences and role-play. Solomon Waliaula (2003) notes that as a seasoned director Ruganda has most likely 'scripted his plays with their theatricality in mind. He disabuses of the simple dichotomy we rush to make on who are the heroes and the villains whenever conflict arises' (Waliaula 2003: 2).

This study is a discussion of the representation of violence and the use of memory as a writing or narrative strategy in *The Burdens* (1972) and *The Floods* (1988). The study deals broadly with the theme of violence and particularly violence as a tool for performing power by a totalitarian state. It further examines how violence in the private space is linked to violence by the state but in a very subtle way. Violence in *The Burdens* is seen to be making a commentary on violence by the state later represented in *The Floods*. This is because, at the time of the publication of *The Burdens*, criticism against the inhuman government was a dangerous thing to do.[5] For this reason, Ruganda in this play decries violence using the family space. He only manages to openly write about the violence of Idi Amin's regime in *The Floods* after his fall from power in the 1980s. The study examines Ruganda's use of memories of violence to narrate the experiences of violence for purposes of pointing out the grave effects of 'absolute power'. The study also examines how memories of a past lead to a violent present. Since the study is based on plays, the study investigates how Ruganda uses aspects like characterisation, the

[5] Kawadwa who was a leading playwright in Uganda in the 1970s was killed for using his plays to criticize Idi Amin's regime. See Mwazemba John. 'Ruganda's Contribution will be Missed'. *The Standard*. Published on 6th January 2008. Available at: http://www.eastandard.net/archives/index.php.

setting and dialogue as the major strategies for exploring the theme of violence in the plays.

The following are the major questions that this study attempts to answer: what is the role of violence in an authoritarian state? What are some of the strategies that Ruganda deploys in representing violence in his plays? Is there any relationship between violence in the private space and violence in the state? What is the role of memory in a violent and or 'blissful' past? What are some of the strategies of memory that Ruganda uses to write violence?

Idi Amin's regime was marked by the deaths of thousands of people, all of which were committed by the state, displacement of many Ugandan nationals and expulsion of Asians from Uganda, which led to social and economic instability.[6] Attempts by writers to represent this moment deserve analysis considering the challenges of writing or representing violence. This study therefore examines Ruganda's effort of speaking about the extreme violence that characterised Idi Amin's leadership in Uganda. It is Ruganda's ability to clearly address violence and its effects not only on the individuals but also on the society as a whole that partly forms the interest of this study. I argue that Ruganda, writing in a very hostile social and political environment, manages to make a commentary on the political situation in Uganda with the hope of awakening the people to their own predicament by pointing out the major causes of their problems.

The two plays address a very important theme in the social and political concerns however very few studies have been done on Ruganda and particularly on his representation of violence. The two plays, which belong to the genre of drama, have received very little critical attention when compared to other literary genres such as the novel. It is pointed out that even the more influential literary critics do not discuss drama. In the introduction to his book, *Mazungumuzo: Interviews With East African Writers,*

[6] Amin's regime has been widely recorded in fictional and non fictional books. There are stories of his brutality, cannibalism, of feeding the corpses of his victims to crocodiles, of keeping severed heads in a freezer at his home and bringing them out on occasions for "talks" - most or all of which are unsubstantiated, but not necessarily untrue. See for instance, Sidiqqi (2006) and Isegewa (2000). See also Mamdani (1984) Kasozi (1992) Mutimbwa (1994) and Jorgensen (1981).

Publisher, Editors, and Scholars, Prof. Bernth Lindfors reflected that playwrights such as Robert Serumaga and John Ruganda were not discussed. In Kenya, for example, the art of criticizing drama and theatre is less developed. Doctoral theses on drama are meager, compared to those on the novel and oral literature.[7] Drama then seems to have been neglected in literary scholarships. Rotimi (1989) argues that drama is 'the best artistic medium in Africa because it is not alien in form as is with the novel yet most postcolonial criticism overlooks drama' (Quoted in Gilbert and Tompkins 1996:8). Critics, he goes on to add 'tend to analyse artists' prose projects than their drama' (*Ibid*). Plays are still written and published for the aesthetic roles that they perform while little critical attention is given to them. Drama, as an art form, according to Joe de Graft 'is closer to life as men actually live it than any other form of artistic expression' (quoted in Gikandi 2004:438) yet little criticism is given to this rich field in terms of analysis.

Ruganda is categorised as an African writer whose writing is marked by the expression of post independence disillusionment and the transference of anger and blame from foreign to indigenous leaders, yet he has received very little critical attention as an artist. The rationale for this study gestures to the need to study two of Ruganda's dramatic texts as representative of a historical trajectory through the less studied body of drama. The main area of interest in this study is how Ruganda, through the genre of drama, attempts a representation of Uganda's history during Amin's regime. This study is also important in that the existing studies that have been done on Ruganda's plays mainly deal with the analysis of the theme of gender and the representation of women in the society. The most recent study on Ruganda's plays done by Waliaula (2003) focuses on 'Gender Relations in Ruganda's plays'. Waliaula examines how Ruganda uses characterisation to discuss issues related to gender in the plays. Ciarunji Chesaina (1987) also analyses women characters in East African drama. Chesaina portrays men as violent and abusive characters who solve problems through openly dismissing or fighting women. In these two studies based on Ruganda's drama, the female characters are read as inferior to their male counterparts. These scholars use the skill of character analysis to study the theme of violence as represented in the plays.

[7] This information is available at http://www.individual.com/story.php?story=75560044.

In terms of style, scholars have examined how Ruganda uses symbolism in the exploration of his thematic concerns. Obi Obyerodhiambo (1990) in 'Symbolism and Meaning in Ruganda's' play notes that Ruganda deploys symbols to put across his thematic concerns. Characters in the plays do not only speak for themselves but represent and symbolise real characters that we can make reference to in real life. Ruganda uses the old weak characters to represent the oppressed masses while characters that represent power are presented as strong and soldier like to speak about how violence operates within situations of power imbalances. The use of symbols in the plays is useful in this study and is evident particularly in *The Floods* where the characters and the setting are very symbolic. Imbuga (1999) makes a general study of Ruganda's style of writing. In what he calls 'trends and circumstance in Ruganda's drama', Imbuga identifies Ruganda's major target of criticism as the politicians whom he blames for the exploitation of the poor. The politicians are read as a group of selfish individuals who pursue their further embourgeoisment at the expense of the welfare of the poor majority. A number of studies on East African playwrights acknowledge writers efforts to represent the masses and speak on their behalf. Peter Nazareth (1980), for instance, regards Ruganda as 'an invisible teacher who uses drama to comment on disintegration and corruption in the post independent societies' (95). It is important to also note that a number of studies done on Ruganda and his plays make general analysis of the playwright's major areas of concern like exploitation, disintegration of moral values, social and political instability, conflicts at domestic and political levels.

This study pays keen attention to how Ruganda imagines and represents history in the fictitive world. I am particularly interested in the political and social landscape of Uganda in the early seventies, when Idi Amin ruled the country. The study's focus on the theme of violence in Ruganda's plays is an area that has not been explored with regard to his plays. Apart from exploring a totally different theme from what has been explored, by focusing on violence and the representation of violence in two of his plays, this study is an addition to the existing criticisms not only on Ruganda's works and on East African literature, particularly drama, but it is also an addition to the studies done on the theme of violence as a major area of concern.

Violence in the study will be discussed based on two major areas that the plays attempt to address differently. The first approach is on violence and the state while the other is on violence in the private space.[8] To situate the study, I examine various views on violence and its use in a totalitarian state. Scholars like Hannah Arendt, (1969) argue that powerful states use force and violence not only to control but to perform power. This study benefits from a reading of Michel Foucault (2004) and Arendt (1969), the modern theorists on power and violence whose studies indicate that there is a relationship between power and violence. Power according to Foucault (2004) is a relationship between two entities. Within this relationship, the entities struggle for position and advantage. It is this struggle to have an advantage over others that at a point leads to the use of violence. In an article 'The right of death and power over life' by Foucault (2004) questions why power exercises its highest prerogatives by using violence. He argues that one way of exercising direct power over others is through inflicting pain which in my understanding results in violence. Here Foucault's conception of power entails control through disciplinary measures. Conclusively, violence is used by the powerful over the less powerful for the reason of reinforcing that power. Power denotes a sense of using force to make others obey or even to control.

Violence often enhances obedience. Arendt (1969: 35) argues that 'violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power and that the ultimate kind of power is violence'. For Arendt, violence reinforces state power. Arendt's argument is that governments resort to violence when they feel that they are losing control and that violence compensates for their powerlessness. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy (*Ibid*: 56) and that where genuine power exists there is no need for violence. Violence is aimed at gaining and maintaining power and control over the victim. The argument being put forth tries to answer the question of why the state uses violence. While it is true that the desire to gain and maintain control or power results in violence, it is also possible to argue that the abundance of power also leads to violence. As it will be

[8] The term 'private space' is used in this study to refer to the domestic or family space where violence occurs in *The Burdens*. In this space, Ruganda not only offers an alternative in which violence can be enacted but also looks at this space as a microcosm of the state.

discussed in the next chapter, excessive violence, in the texts under study, is attributed to the state's urgency to gain control and display power.

Ruganda explores the destructive power of the state using the horrifying sight of dead bodies. In my discussion of the theme of violence, I argue that violence in *The Floods* is used by those in power as a tool for doing away with the enemy. The state uses various forms of violence to assert its power over those who seek to challenge it. The power of the state is not only seen in how it controls the people while they are still alive but it also includes the state's desire to have control over the dead. Dead bodies in the play signify extreme violence.

In commenting on the writing of violence, Richard Priebe argues that, 'violence has become an inseparable part of our shared humanity…' (Priebe 2007:91). He also notes that writers strive to write about violence since literature is a reflection of the society and that writers get preoccupied with narrating what is happening in the society. This study therefore adopts this view and argues that Ruganda, as a writer in the post colony adopts distinctive ways (for example the use of fragmented narratives and mentally affected characters) of presenting the social ills prevalent in the society in ways that can appropriately capture the post colonial condition of the people whom he writes about. I argue that in using an old man who is nearly mad, Ruganda presents the details of injury and pain as consequences of the abuse of power. Since violence is hard to speak about, focusing on its effects, whether physical or psychological, serves as spaces for confronting violence. The power of the plays lies not so much in the description of events as they unfold but in the memories of victims and witnesses of violence. Apart from the physical scars that the characters bear, the characters' fragmented speech and confused narratives show an element of disturbed minds which are results of violence.

The study also makes use of ideas from scholars like Richard Werbner (1998) and Wole Soyinka (1999) who explore the role of memory after a violent past. Memory plays a key role in the discussion of violence in the two plays. Memory is structured by experience. It not only includes remembering but it also includes selective amnesia where people forget

certain unpleasant experiences that they encountered either individually or as a social group. Certain recollections are given priority while others are viewed as being less significant. Memory is not only actively involved in unearthing a truthful past and by so doing inscribing events of the past therefore serving as an archival documentation of history but that it also aids in what Soyinka calls 'reconciliation and reparation' (Soyinka 1999:19). He points out that memory is very important in healing from a violent past which would otherwise result in 'trauma in memory' to use Werbner's words, (Werbner 1998:67). Soyinka discusses how past wrongs can be righted. The memory of a painful past has a cathartic value that comes with 'speaking out' which aids healing Memory is the 'healing balm' to use Soyinka's words, (Soyinka 1999:19) that Ruganda advocates for victims and witnesses of violence

Memory here is understood in two senses. One is the memory of a past that is not blissful but is much better than the present. For the Ugandans life before the Idi Amin regime could be said to have been better than what they experienced under Amin's regime. This is the kind of life that characters in *The Burdens* look back to before Amin's brutality. The other sense of memory achieved has to do with remembering and forgetting. This memory specifically deals with violent experiences and how characters deal with the trauma and pain that comes as a result of violence. Memory thus becomes handy in that one either chooses to forget or to remember. In *The Floods,* the characters experiences form the narrative of the play. Characters narrate their experiences in order to heal from the ordeals that they suffered under an authoritative state. My reading of memory in *The Floods* not only refers to the violent historical past that the play makes reference to but it also looks at the life characters in *The Floods* look back to. Remembering in this case means that the characters relive and talk about how violence by the state and its agents was actualised. Memory in this discussion will include characters' attempts to relate what happened before Idi Amin took over power. This in my reading, is linked to the way characters in *The Burdens* nostalgically remember and constantly reflect back on their past in order to deal with their present predicament. I will thus extend my reference of the past to include life before the brutal regime of Idi Amin.

The following section aims at situating the study of violence and memory in the two plays. Given the fact that Ruganda is dealing with violence at two different levels in the two plays, it is imperative that I highlight the social and the historical contexts within which Ruganda wrote *The Burdens* and *The Floods*.

The Burdens (1972) is set in Uganda in the early 70s. It was published a year after Idi Amin took over power from Uganda's former president, Milton Obote, through a military coup.[9] Obote's regime is accused of corruption, dictatorship and financial scandals.[10] Amin successfully overthrew Obote's government with the hope of bringing better leadership. The coup was initially welcomed because Amin promised to introduce economic reforms and a better life for the people. *The Burdens* examines the state of Uganda before Amin's brutal regime while *The Floods* represents the violence that characterised Amin's regime.

The Burdens highlights the state of affairs in Uganda after independence. It underscores the disillusionment of the people whose unfulfilled hopes are blamed on the political instability in the country. Poverty seems to be on the increase, with many people living in squalid conditions. The people, on the one hand, do not have access to health facilities, good food and clothing. On the other hand, the politicians are seen to be getting wealthier through money acquired unlawfully. The social, economic and political status of the country is seen to be controlled by power hungry leaders. Just when the people are expecting salvation from a change of leadership, they are further plunged into poverty and fear by Amin's dictatorial regime.

Uganda which was once referred to as the 'Pearl of Africa' was a society based on equality for all. The country's stability and pride was plunged into problems by its selfish leaders. Analysis of Ugandan politics show that Uganda's first presidents led the country

[9]In April 1962 Milton Obote became prime minister of Uganda under the leadership of King Sir Edward Mutesa. In October, 1962, Obote led the country into independence. Idi Amin took over power through a military coup in January 25th 1971 when Uganda's then president, Milton Obote was away attending a commonwealth conference in Singapore. See Nabudere (1980) and Mutimbwa (1992).

[10] See http://www.moreorless.au.com/killers/amin.html for more information on Amin's and Milton Obote's regimes.

into anarchy with Obote focusing on eliminating particular ethnic groups. Phares Mutimbwa notes that the systematic killings by Amin's soldiers were aimed at the *Langi* and the *Acholi* who dominated the security force during Obote's regime. These people were to be Amin's enemies because they were loyal to Obote (Mutimbwa 1992:88). This practice of wiping out others was later perfected by Obote who destroyed almost all of Idi Amin's supporters. When Obote seized power from Amin to lead Uganda for the second time, more killings (of specific groups) were witnessed, this time round focusing on *Kakwa* and the Nubians who perpetrated the killings during Amin's rule *(Ibid*: 79). Mutimbwa (1992) further notes that the 'controversy was rooted in power politics between Amin and Obote. Mutimbwa continues to assert that, 'Amin burst into presidency through the barrel of the gun stumbling onto the pages of history through massive killings and amassing wealth and resources' (Mutimbwa 1992:76). Amin ruled by decree. He expelled Asian residents and launched a reign of terror against his opponents, torturing and killing tens of thousands. In1976, he had himself proclaimed "President for Life." In 1977, Amnesty International estimated that 300,000 people may have died under his rule, including church leaders and recalcitrant cabinet ministers.[11] Violence in Uganda was institutionalised under Amin, managed by the state and directed against unarmed and largely innocent civilians. The extent of violence saw the enemies of the state and organised groups opposing the coup liquidated in massacres.

The new regime, as Amin's regime was described after Amin seized power from Obote, engaged in ruthless efforts to eliminate real or potential enemies. Opponents usually disappeared or were summarily killed rather than arrested. In the name of order, the agents of the state promoted violence and disorder (Jorgensen 1981:296). The groups targeted included Obote's supporters. Jorgensen further notes that 'murders and disappearances were the most feared forms of violence under Amin's regime. The regime denied involvement in the killings yet for a fee, agents of the state could often direct relatives to the locations of the bodies of disappeared' (Jorgensen 1981:313), an indication that the state was aware of and even behind the killings.

[11] This information is available at: http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0108066.html.

There are about 18 reasons why Idi Amin thought a coup was necessary in Uganda. Ironically, one of the key reasons that Amin gave is that the people of Uganda wanted a better leader. It is no doubt that the people of Uganda anticipated a better government after Amin seized power. Large sections of the people in Uganda welcomed the 'new' regime favorably because they were disenchanted with Obote's regime.[12] Amin was regarded as a savoir. But Amin's rule was 'a new era born in repression and bloodshed' (Mamdani 1984: 38). It turned out to be not any better than Obote's regime. Within a few months of his rule, murders and public executions became normality in Uganda.

In cases where coups occur, the military governments have always promised better governance but end up being more brutal and incompetent than the former civilian governments.[13] Obote's regime was later preferred to Amin's because of Amin's brutality and failure as a leader. According to Wadada Nabudere (1980) 'violence in Idi Amin's era increasingly became the method of solving petty contradictions among the people where the civilian regime resolved the disagreements with detentions and imprisonment' (Nabudere 1980:290). The army was given excessive powers to arrest and to punish offenders.

In an attempt to justify the coup, Amin and his government stated among other reasons that 'we all want unity in Uganda, we do not want bloodshed' (Nabudere 1980:290) yet that is exactly what he did. The fact that Amin's regime did not want bloodshed was obviously forgotten as soon as it was pronounced. Instead of ushering in peace and order, the regime promoted violence. Nabudere (1980:281) asserts that 'the coup slowly took away most of the democratic rights acquired by the people in their struggle for self determination and national independence'. Jorgensen further points out that 'the regime engaged in ruthless efforts to eliminate real or potential enemies' (Jorgensen 1981: 296). He continues to add that murders and disappearance were the most common forms of

[12] See Mamdani (1984:37).
[13] What comes to mind is the Nigerian case where the military governments are presented as being more corrupt, inhuman and inefficient than the civilian governments that they overthrow.

violence where most of the killings were perpetrated by the state security apparatus with Amin claiming complete innocence in the murders.[14]

According to Mutimbwa (1994:120) 'violence was institutionalized under Amin, managed by the state and directed against unarmed and innocent civilians'. The value of human life came to mean little during this time. People ceased to fear death for they saw violence committed against others as something normal. The citizens, filled with fear were left hopeless and without protection from humiliation, molestation and dispossession by Amin's supporters. The army constituted the rich stratum that not only physically violated innocent people but also looted from the victims of violence. Such is the background from which *The Burdens* and *The Floods* stem. The atrocities that characterized this regime inspired many writers to write about this period's events.[15]

According to Imbuga (1999) the inspiration for Ruganda's concern with corruption and exploitation of humanity in his plays comes from his critical observation of the activities of the government and its agents in Uganda soon after the country's political independence. Imbuga believes that 'Ruganda attributes most of the chaos and upheavals which have characterized his country's history to callous and selfish political leaders who have no respect for humanity' (Imbuga 1999: 275). Given this contextual basis, Ruganda in the two plays presents what appears to be an account of this regime's activities through two different accounts: through the state in *The Floods* and the family in *The Burdens*.

The Burdens forms the background for the study and analysis of violence in *The Floods* (1988) which speaks about the violence of Idi Amin's rule. *The Burdens* does not focus on the violence of the state as such or on the coup itself but it strongly highlights violence in the private space. The family not only serves to criticize the state but provides an alternative in which violence in the state is espoused. Violence in *The Burdens* anticipates

[14] Jorgensen (1981:314) provides a statistical record of the estimates of innocent people who were murdered during Amin's reign as 80,000 within the first two years and between 300,000 and 500,000 by the end of the regime. Ironically the killings were executed by the State Research Bureau and Public Security Unit which was supposed to offer security.

[15] It is imperative to note that it is not only in the literary world e.g. the novel, drama, poems etc that Amin's regime has been recorded. The era marking his rule has also been represented in various forms including the films: *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* and *The Last King of Scotland*.

and pre-empts violence in *The Floods*. Violence in *The Burdens* serves as a mirror to the violence yet to come in *The Floods*. Violence in *The Burdens* is read as an allegory of violence in the state which is the centre of the discussion in *The Floods*.

Given the fact that *The Burdens* was published just after Amin assumed power, basing the play on the family space was Ruganda's safest way of making a commentary on the state of affairs in Uganda and her failing leaders. This is attributed to the fact that Idi Amin's brutality would not let anyone speak about his inhumanity openly. At that time, the people who overtly commented on the brutality of the regime were executed through calculated firing squads or killed in other brutal ways which ranged from hacking to death or having the 'culprits' hammer one another till they died.[16] Amin's brutality instilled fear in the people who opted not to talk about their predicament openly. I find the level of violence in *The Floods* as making a clear commentary about Amin's brutal regime. The play's publication after the fall of Idi Amin attests to the fact that it was dangerous at that time to make any engagements with Amin's brutality without the risk of being executed. It is in *The Floods* that Ruganda openly condemns violence.

The action of the play in *The Burdens* (1972) is centered on the fall of a prominent cabinet minister who unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow the government. The major theme being addressed in the play is disillusionment. After the fall from power, the former cabinet minister has to grapple with life in deplorable conditions. The play takes note of life before and after the fall of the cabinet minister from power focusing on how he deals with disillusionment as a common man.

The attempted coup in the play alludes to the real coup that took place in Uganda led by General Idi Amin leading to a transition from a civilian to a military government. My reading of the attempted coup in the play by a government official is informed by the fact that Idi Amin was the Major General of Uganda's armed forces at the time when he

[16] The execution of the Catholic Archbishop Janani Luwum for condemning Amin's inhumanity is a case in point. Also, most writers who viewed Amin's regime as being corrupt and inhuman and wished to make commentaries on the same chose to write from exile. John Ruganda, Peter Nazareth, among others, fled Uganda to other countries where they could speak about Amin's brutality without the fear of being executed. See Mutimbwa (1992) and Kasozi (1994) for instance.

seized power from Milton Obote. The play thus sets the ground for the discussion of what happened after Idi Amin assumed power as the president of Uganda.

The contextual setting of *The Floods* is Uganda, in the 1970s, the period of the brutal and dictatorial leadership of Idi Amin. The play which was published in 1988, almost a decade after Idi Amin's brutal regime, is an imaginative representation of Amin's tyrannical regime in Uganda. Activities in the play span the period in which Amin ruled Uganda ruthlessly. The play further mirrors how the Ugandan state used its power abusively. The massive killings that characterized Amin's regime are represented in the play through scenes of violence memorized and enacted by the characters in the play.

Using the above given information and tools of analysis, I engage in the reading of *The Burdens* and The *Floods* focusing on violence, the representation of violence, forms of violence and the use of memory in the two plays.

In the next chapter I discuss the theme of violence in the two plays, the representation of violence in *The Floods* focusing on the use of violence by the state to perform power. In *The Burdens*, violence is limited to the private space, but, I argue that Ruganda is using that private space to talk about violence in the state.

CHAPTER TWO

‘DESIGNING A PEOPLE’S DESTINY’: [17] VIOLENCE AS THE LANGUAGE OF THE STATE

This chapter investigates the theme of violence in John Ruganda’s *The Floods* and *The Burdens*. It makes an analysis of the representation of violence while also looking at the various forms of violence in the two plays. The main focus of the chapter is on the use of violence by the state to assert its power in *The Floods*. In addition, the chapter investigates Ruganda’s emphasis *on the horrific* in the play to highlight the destructive power of an authoritarian state. Finally, the chapter also examines violence in the domestic space in *The Burdens* which is a metaphorical exploration of violence in the state.

The study examines the brutality and repression that characterised Idi Amin’s regime as represented in *The Floods*. The play is replete with violence which reflects the ruthlessness and inhumanity of that regime. At the centre of the discussion is the fact that violence was used by the state as a powerful tool to demonstrate power. This violence was directed towards imagined or real enemies who dared contest the state’s power. The state that should protect its citizens is portrayed as having exposed its people to violence in order to show its power. The study will therefore pay keen attention to the representation of violence and forms of violence in the two plays which are concerned with violence.

In order to contextualise the concept of violence in *The Floods*, it is imperative that we consider various scholars’ views on power and violence. Eugene Walter (1969:4) defines violence as ‘destructive harm, hence destructive kind of force’. Max Weber (1958:359) notes that violence is a means specific to the state and that the right to physical violence

[17] This phrase is borrowed from Ruganda’s *The Floods* (1988). Repressed characters make constant reference to the autocratic leader as a designer of their destinies. Kyeyune for instance asks for divine protection from ‘the self proclaimed designer of people’s destinies’ Ruganda (1988: 37, 57).

is assigned to all other associations and individuals only to the extent permitted by the state. Bulhan Hussein (1985) defines violence as 'any relation, process or condition by which a group violates the physical, social and/or psychological integrity of another person or group' (cited in Simatei 2005:93). Kawalya Kasozi defines violence as 'the use of force whether overt or covert in order to wrest from individuals or group something they do not want to do/give of their own free will' (Kasozi 1994:11-12). The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines violence as an injurious, hurtful conduct, as a lawful or unlawful exercise of physical force and as intimidation by exhibition of physical force. In other words, violence refers to an act of using force for the purpose of violating, damaging or abusing someone's life.

Although violence differs widely in meaning depending on the user and the context, violence is bound to power and its ability to successfully force others to do something against their will. Violence encompasses the inflicting of suffering upon another human being by violating his body. For the purposes of this discussion then, violence is defined as the act of abuse, of inflicting pain and treating others inhumanly through the use of force. Violence includes intimidation, imprisonment, torture and the killing of innocent people. It basically entails direct or indirect injury to persons.

By and large, social scientists have stressed that power is the capacity to control activities and resistance to it by others with the threat of physical coercion (Russell 1938). Arendt (1969:35) asserts that power, force and violence are similar yet very distinct terms. In cases where those in power seek to demonstrate their power and authority, violence is the most useful tool for displaying that authority. Authoritarian states exercise political power through force and violence. All state systems consider violence as a normal element in the maintenance of tranquillity. The state's distinctive characteristic is the monopoly of physical coercion. The possession and use of force by the state is an explicit means of supporting the authority of the system. Margaret Wetherell maintains that 'power is guaranteed by violence and the capacity to use force successfully against another even if the force is potential rather than actual' (Wetherell 1996:299). Power can be described as a possession, by virtue of one's position in the society. This position

allows one to impose his/her will and wishes against another. This power affords one the capacity to influence others, to command resources and have his/her wishes respected and enacted.

Richard Harland notes that 'power is directly related to bodies' (Harland 1987:156). Power relations have an immediate hold upon the body; 'they invest it, mask it, train it, torture it, and force it to carry out tasks …' (Foucault 1975:25). For power to be performed through the use of violence there is need for human bodies, which then serve as the objects of the performance of power. Foucault continues to add that, 'bodies are involved in the conception of politics' (Foucault 1980:162). He further argues that, these bodies are transformed from their natural bodies to cultural bodies. They become sites where violence is performed. The body is the site where relations of power and domination are exhibited and that 'this subjection (of the body) is not only obtained by the instruments of violence or ideology, it can also be direct, physical…' (Foucault 1975:26). The body then becomes an essential tool for writing and exhibiting power.

Similarly, in a historical study of the social origins of violence in Uganda, Kasozi (1994:12) notes that 'the application of violence by the state's leader appeared to be a demonstration of his desire to show and stay in power'. For Kasozi, political violence, violence connected with the struggle to attain and maintain power was aimed at achieving the ability to control. He notes that, the brutal leader's aim while in power is merely to have power and reap its benefits and not to better the lives of its citizens (Kasozi 1994:104). It is for the purpose of the pleasure of being in charge and to make others instruments of their will that those in power often mete out violence on the less powerful. Generally, in such states as Idi Amin's regime in Uganda, the mode of domination involves the use of force and violence to control. Williams-Zack (2004:24) further notes that 'the modern African state has the monopoly or control over the means of the violence…mostly marked by the utilization of coercive force'.

I argue that, excessive violence in *The Floods* is a signifier of state power and also the language of the state. The use of force against its own people in order to assert its policies

and interests constitutes state violence. The state, in the play engages in violent activities to eliminate all the people who are likely to be against the regime. Force is implemented by the state's military agencies which include the security forces. The principal justification of the state is to offer security to its people but it ironically uses force against its citizens.

In most independent African states, violence has become synonymous with leadership. Most leaders are motivated by an excessive desire to demonstrate power through violence. The leaders in the independent African states have thus become a source of disillusionment to the masses. Independence has become a source of disappointment marred by contradictions and frustrations (Bayart 1993:249). Independent Africa or rather the post-colony, as used in Mbembe's[18] sense, is exposed as a state that has an affinity for violence and excesses. In 'The Politics of the Belly'[19], Bayart notes that 'the state in Africa …is a foreign body which is moreover overweight, inefficient and a source of violence' (Bayart 1999:8).

The Floods is divided into three parts called 'waves'. The 'floods' symbolise the blood let out from the mass killings committed by the state. Floods imply an overflow or spillage of something. The metaphorical sense alluded to in the play is that the amount of blood that was shed was a lot. The playwright's choice of 'floods' conveniently captures the level of violence by the state, which led to massive bloodshed. Waves refer to a swell or a ridge on a large body of water. The waves also denote a rising trend involving large numbers of people. In the literal sense, waves in a large mass of water rise and fall when there is lack of calmness. Waves denote a sense of disturbance. The waves are figuratively used in the play to represent the lack of peace and harmony in the country. In the play, waves represent different forms of violence at different levels ranging from physical, structural and psychological violence. The waves also represent the displacement of people from their homes. This is seen in the way people fled their homes

[18] In Mbembe's discussion, the 'postcolony' is defined as societies recently emerging from the experience of colonialism. See Mbembe (1992:3).
[19] Bayart portrays African leaders as a people who are obsessed with food and have an appetite for material wealth. Violence is arguably the result of these excesses.

to other places for safety. Waves stand for the massive deaths, harassment of innocent people by the security forces and death threats which instilled fear in the people. Due to this, there is instability and lack of peace which has left the people living with fear and uncertainty. Generally, the structural setting of the play, represented through the use of 'floods' and 'waves' enhances the understanding of the various forms of violence in the play.

The Floods has four major characters who through the use of the play-within- a- play strategy enact various scenes. Most of the activities in the plays are realised through role-play, where characters assume different roles at different times. The play begins with an announcement on the radio that there will be floods which will ravage the island. All the islanders are asked to flee the island using a rescue boat that would ferry them to safety at the other side of the lake. Bwogo, who is the protagonist in the play, uses his position to dupe the inhabitants of the island. Also in this first wave, the Headman, who is in charge of the island and the rescue operation, plays the role of an abusive leader. We also meet Kyeyune, a former fisherman and a survivor of the violent regime, who dismisses the allegations made about the impending floods and warns that the rescue boat is actually fated to sink.

In the second wave, we meet Bwogo, a powerful man who participated in Amin's violent regime and Nankya who is also a survivor of this violence. In this wave, Kyeyune and Nankya narrate their experiences of violence committed against them and others, by the state. Kyeyune, through flashbacks, recounts how while he was fishing in the lake ended up fishing out the body of 'the Major General' who was murdered and dumped in the lake. The central focus of this wave is the violence of the state against the citizens, recounted through the characters' experiences. The second wave is marked by several instances of physical and verbal violence where Bwogo uses his position to intimidate and abuse Nankya and Kyeyune.

In the final wave, Kyeyune provides an explanation to the cause and the reason for the violence meted out against the people. He attributes it to a myth where a sea goddess,

Nalubale was violated and raped by a greedy man, Nyamgondoh. The killings and disappearance of the people, according to Kyeyune, is because of the goddess's anger and desire to revenge. The play comes to a close with the demonstration of justice through the arrest of Bwogo by the police.

The narrative of the play is achieved mainly through dialogue. Following Brian Crow's (1983) analysis of drama as a literary text, my examination of the play involves 'seeing' the characters and 'hearing' them speak words without actually witnessing their physical embodiments. Ezekiel Alembi notes that in drama, 'characters are created so that they can bring action to life through movement and direct speech' (Alembi 2000: 2). For Alembi, dialogue is the most important aspect of drama. It helps define character and aids the inner eye by supplying and extending the images which capture the attention of the reader. Dialogue in all plays allows for the analysis and explication of the theme of violence.

In *The Floods* for instance, characters narrate their personal experiences and encounters of violence. Nankya and Kyeyune who are the major characters in the play are victims and witnesses of violence by the state. Through dialogue the characters delve into their memories to narrate what each of them witnessed. Kyeyune for example narrates how he fished out a dead body from the lake and later on found a human finger in the belly of a fish that he was eating.

Kyeyune: Once upon a time young fellow, I used to catch *empuuta* twice your size …yes I was the best fisherman in these parts until something strange happened to me... A military man. Dead. Three long nails in his head, his genitals sticking out in his mouth. A big stone round his neck. His belly ripped open and the intestines oozing out. I looked at that body, son, and froze with fright. Here was a man, a military man, who probably had a wife and children…what had he done to come to such an unmourned for end? Had he perhaps in a moment of enthusiasm uttered an unwelcome word to his masters? (The Floods Pg. 9-10)

Kyeyune: Fireside prattles he calls them. Am I a prattler now because I found a human finger in the bowels of a fish? A human finger! I went out and threw up... (The Floods Pg.10)

Kyeyune's experience with the dead body captures the extent to which violence was used by the state to destroy its real or imagined enemies. The Major General is reported by Kyeyune to have been a threat to the reigning government and was thus brutally murdered and dumped in the lake to avoid his body being discovered. Hundreds of other people were similarly killed and dumped in the lake. The killings by the government were aimed at retaining power and the elimination of potential rivals.

To further show how the powerful leader misused his position through the security personnel, Nankya relates how her mother was roughed up by the police and raped several times by the military men.

> Nankya: ...One night guns are heard booming and rattling a mile from home…more shots are heard advancing. Mother begins to panic. There is …BANG! Mother's door is burst open. Four figures turn the house upside down…they look at her and burst out with laughter. Mother freezes with fright…one of them rips her bra open. Horrible laughter. He commands her to lower her school skirt. Her trembling hands manage to do so. Horrifying bursts of laughter. Soon four men are on top of mother, one after the other, before she passes out… But that's how I was born.
>
> Bwogo: (*Gripped by her story*) Good God…And they got away scot free? (The Floods Pg. 98)

Nankya also recalls how she lost a friend to the military men who shoved him down the stairs and shot him dead.

> Nankya: An innocent man. Killed for no reason. At that international. His cries for help unheeded by one and all…pushed him down the staircase all the way from the fifteenth floor …kicked and shovelled him down the staircase with their military boots. Your boys did. His brains splotched over the staircase. (The Floods Pg.31-2)

It is clear then that the state used excessive violence not only to eliminate its enemies but also to frustrate innocent people. The military men were used by the state to carry out ruthless abuses against the populace. Why the state used this kind of force is explained by the fact that it not only needed to eliminate all the people who were likely to challenge its

authority and power but that it also aimed at demonstrating its might. The killings thus included the elimination of rivals, for instance the Major General and the ordinary people.

Apart from according us the chance to have a grasp of the nature of the atrocities committed by the state, narrating and re-telling their violent experiences helps in the character's healing process. When abuses occur, they affect the life or rather the physical and psychological integrity of the abused. As an event outside the ordinary realm of experience, 'the traumatic effects of violence *and violent* manifestations are bound to re-surface', (Mckendrick and Hoffmann 1990: 26 my emphasis). The physical and psychological scars do not vanish quickly. They become part of the abused person's life and keep re-surfacing. In order to deal with the resurfacing of the traumatic experiences, victims speak out and create narratives from their experiences for the sake of 'getting over'. The dialogue and narration that Nankya and Kyeyune have as victims and witnesses of violence helps them to forget the painful past. Speech is the avenue through which they let out their feelings.

The other avenue through which the play achieves the narration of violence is by characterization. Characters assume specific roles in the play. Ruganda deploys different types of characters to represent the brutality of the tyrannical leader alluded to in the play. There are stronger personalities who are bullies because of their positions while we have the weaker characters who are the subjects and get constantly harassed. The characters that signify the brutality of the state act inhumanly. Violence in the play includes the way in which characters in power use their positions to subjugate others. Characters in *The Floods* are easily identified by what they stand for. Ruganda presents a situation where the powerful characters exploit and abuse the powerless. Through a-play-within-the-play format, characters act out roles that demonstrate the extent of violence at various levels. The characters conveniently expose how the misuse of power by the leaders led to physical, verbal and psychological abuse of the powerless. Bwogo for instance acts the role of a brutal soldier who physically molests and verbally abuses Nankya and Kyeyune in one of the plays within the play. Nankya has to obey all the orders given to her by

Bwogo. Also, the Headman, who is in charge of the island, uses his position to humiliate the islanders who are his subjects.

The Headman in the first wave is in charge of the rescue boat and is also the leader of the islanders. Vested with the responsibility of ensuring that the islanders board the boat, he orders them around while hurling insults at them. The Headman dictates the kind of luggage that the islanders carry to the boat while at the same time he physically and verbally abuses the islanders as they come to board the boat. At one point he confiscates a basket of fish from a fisherman and keeps it for himself.

> Headman: (*Relieved by his entrance*) where do you think you're taking all those?
> Fisherman: But, but…
> Headman: No 'buts'…leave the fishnets here and proceed to the boat….the basket too. Put it down. (*The fisherman walks away wounded. The Headman eyes the basket hungrily, empties the contents into his bigger basket and pulls out a smoked fish.)* (The Floods Pg.5-6)

The Headman is portrayed as an abusive and exploitative leader who, like all the leaders, ironically declares that:

> Headman: …But what I hate is exploiting other people… (The Floods Pg.7).

Through the character of the Headman, it is evident that power allows one to do as he or she wills. A position of influence becomes the position where, instead of serving, those in power expect to be served. Those in power are seen to be greedy and irresponsible people who use force and violence to assert themselves. Through the above scene, Ruganda exposes the inefficient character of leaders who capitalise on other people's misfortunes. Ruganda further uses irony to criticise leaders who are selfish and opportunistic but would again, want to be seen as detesting evil. Irony for him serves to unfold the real character of the people who own power and position in the society. These leaders proclaim to be at the people's service yet they are presented as a people who are interested in selfishly guarding their own interests.

The other character who (mis)uses his position in the play is Bwogo. By virtue of the fact that Bwogo is a military man and a former leader of the State Research Bureau (SRB), he is presented as a powerful and violent man who physically and verbally abuses Kyeyune and Nankya who represent the repressed masses. Physical violence in the play is represented through the abusive character of Bwogo. First, in a metaphorical reference to how Idi Amin murdered the people senselessly, Bwogo who served in the tyrannical regime is presented as a murderer who killed even bedbugs. In a flashback, Nankya recalls how Bwogo mercilessly killed the bedbugs while she pleaded with him not to.

> Bwogo: you said, 'don't thumb them…the blood will stink' and I replied, 'there's water, Nankya. Sometimes water washes blood away'. So I squashed the bugs with the thumb and washed it afterwards…'Murderer!' you snarled at me! (The Floods Pg.18)

Negligible as the bedbugs are seen to be in relation to Bwogo's thinking in the play, Ruganda uses this to refer to how the common people were regarded by those in power. To Bwogo, the thumbing of the bugs means nothing to him since he has power over them; they cannot speak or act against him, just like the common man. If anything, once murdered, their blood would simply be washed away with water and forgotten. The washing away of the bedbug's blood by Bwogo is a clear reference to the state's involvement in killing the innocent people and dumping them away. In the play, water only covers up the evidence of the atrocities committed by the state but it does not completely wash it away. This is because Nankya and Kyeyune, who were witnesses, remember the violent experiences. Water symbolises the state's will to institute forced amnesia but as has been pointed out, the memories of violent experiences hardly go away.

Water is used by the playwright to address the fact that it not only became a dumping ground for the people who were murdered by the state but that it also became a place where the state hid its inhuman activities. This is supported by the ability of water to wash away blood. Washing away here represents the desire by the state to exonerate itself from blame. Water ironically covers the ills committed by state and saves it from being

accused of mass murders but it, at the same time, holds the people who later return to protest against the murderous state therefore nullifying Bwogo's consolation that water washes blood away. Thus, water is at the same time a site for repression and revolt because later in the play the dead who were dumped in the lake rise from the water to seek justice.

To confirm how the people were killed and thrown in to the lake, Nankya says:

> Nankya…this lake can't complain, though. It has been the dumping tomb of many men…lorryfuls of wailing civilians, driven to their deaths, over the cliff at the point of bayonets. The crocodiles have never been more thankful… (The Floods Pg.19)

Nankya criticizes the state in dumping the bodies by ironically pointing out that:

> Nankya: …let us dump the bloody bodies in the lake. Minimal pollution…And everybody applauded and agreed you deserved the annual anti-pollution award. That's distinguished service for you. (The Floods Pg.35)

Ruganda again here uses irony to condemn the state. A state that sees violence as a normalcy and an act worth praising is absurd. While killing in itself is an abhorrable act, it is very interesting that the world, as noted in the above scene, applauded the dumping of bodies in the lake. In this case, murder is regarded as a normal activity that even deserves an award. Ruganda is clearly rebuking the extent to which the society has lost its value for human life where, instead of criticising violence, the people celebrate. Irony here serves to awaken the society into detesting violence and acts of inhumanity.

Bwogo is further presented as a tyrant through his romantic/abusive relationship with Nankya. Though they are purported to be lovers, Bwogo's rescue plan to 'save' the islanders from the coming floods was to ensure that Nankya dies in the ill fated boat. This is because Nankya is said to know so much about Bwogo's involvement with the state killings.

Nankya: Nankya and her mother had to be on the boat. Then the pre-planned accident. The massacre in the boat…your hands and conscience would appear clean. (The Floods Pg.67)

To further portray his brutality, Bwogo actually roughs up Kyeyune and fights Nankya many times in the play. He pushes and shoots at Kyeyune when Kyeyune seeks refuge at Nankya's house. Bwogo who is a symbol of power in the play has the authority to do as he wills. Bwogo expects to be treated as the boss. Kyeyune even calls him 'master' indicating that he must be obeyed yet Bwogo uses this position abusively. Through dialogue, where Nankya is reminding Bwogo of his past, Bwogo turns to the use of physical assault.

Bwogo: Stop it damn you! (*He pounces on her. There is a struggle during which Kyeyune enters excitedly. Bwogo who is startled by this unexpected intrusion draws a pistol from his jacket and fires. He misses. Kyeyune has collapsed to the ground….)*
Nankya: Bwogo! You have killed him. (*Tries to move towards Kyeyune: Bwogo pulls her back)*
Bwogo: Don't. (*His pistol at the ready*)
Nankya: You've killed an innocent man-again. (The Floods Pg.36)

Bwogo physically assaults Nankya for having exposed him. The uncovering of Bwogo's violent past leads him to 'fresh' violence. Bwogo gets constantly unnerved and even goes to the extent of shooting. Nankya risks losing her life by attempting to expose the ill nature of the state and its agents against the people. In such a violent situation, attempts are made to silence the subjects even when the state should be rebuked.

Bwogo: (*Slaps her hard*) STOP IT!
Nankya: You slapped me because I told the truth. *(*The Floods Pg.33)

This not only elaborates the state's ability to destroy life at will but it also shows how power works to the detriment of the powerless. Those who speak against the state risk being killed. Similarly, in a-play-within-a-play, Bwogo acts the role of an army officer. Ruganda here enacts a scene that portrays the violent and abusive nature of the military

men. This scene reflects how the security forces were used by the repressive state to abuse and kill.

> Bwogo: I'm hereby warning you that unless you cooperate fully with the law enforcing officers, you will face…
> Nankya: Firing squad. Is that it?
> Bwogo: …Place of birth?
> Nankya: General ward…National hospital. Floor mucked with faeces and vomit. The walls with blood stains. Every patient choking with the stench.
> Bwogo: *(His patience has run out. He grabs her and twists her hand behind the back)* Bloody bastard. What do you think you are? We have tried to be civil with you… *(forces her into a squatting position…gets out his pistol and points at her temple.)* (The Floods Pg.42)

Ruganda paints the violent situation in the state through the use of a violent officer who represents the oppressive state. Bwogo's ruthless language further characterises him as a brutal leader who disregards life. Nankya, who is a representation of the oppressed, is forced to give information which would determine whether she lives or dies. The powerful state designs by all means the people's destinies. The people's fate lies in the hands of their leaders whose only language is violence.

Focusing on the characterization of the oppressed in the play, Ruganda uses Kyeyune and Nankya to speak about the predicament of the violated subject. The feebleness of Kyeyune lends him to physical harassment first, by the Headman and later by Bwogo. Bwogo shouts and hurls insults at him. 'Oh! This infernal moron, what are you good for? Wouldn't even be worth the worms' (The Floods Pg. 65). Nankya is also later raped by Bwogo. Thinking of the figure of Nankya and her mother as repressed women who were both raped by military men serving the state, Ruganda uses them to make metaphorical reference to the state that uses its machinery to violate its people's rights and to abuse the powerless. Though speaking of a form of violence that most women and girls suffered during the tyrannical regime, the raping is a symbolic reference to how the masses have been raped by their leaders and are denied security and the good governance that they expect from the state.

In the above scene also, it is noted that Ruganda uses language and a careful choice of words to not only point out to the height of violence but also to speak about the sick condition of state. The mention of the general ward, hospital, walls with blood stains and patients denote a seriously ill and dying nation. The country is represented as being sick and in dire need of an urgent remedy. Violence is the cause of the sickness that the nation has been driven into. The sickness has not only affected the people as individuals but the nation as a whole. The playwright is by extension pointing to the cause of the sickness affecting the nation as being attributed to bad leadership.

Through his language, Ruganda forces one to pay keen attention to the nature of violence in the play. The play is filled with an 'overabundance of violent scenes' as would be put by Perraudin (2005:72). An example of a grisly scene that depicts destruction, loss of lives as a result of violence is captured thus:

> Bwogo: No wonder the damned place stinks: flood victim, mutilated bodies of army deserters, unidentified corpses of the enemies of the system, suicide cases…God! The list is endless. (The Floods Pg.34)
>
> Nankya: God I'm tired of meeting blood everywhere I go. The main land is choking with it, the lake bubbling with it like a cauldron and the island is barricaded with blood. (The Floods Pg.36)
>
> Nankya: …floor mucked with faeces and vomit. The walls with blood stains. Every patient chocking with the stench. *(*The Floods Pg.42)
>
> Bwogo: Maximum security. Hell of a place. I'm telling you-and I know. Pailfuls of shit and floods of piss and vomit. Blotches of clotted blood on the floor, graffitoes written out in blood on the walls… (The Floods Pg.43)

Ruganda centers on violence, depicting in vivid terms the torture the victims experienced 'confronting us with the utter destruction and dislocation of the society' (Odile 2005:63). Ruganda seems to be highlighting and bringing to our attention to how power drunk leaders have no sense of morality and have driven the nation into destruction. These extreme forms of violence are 'metaphors for the utter destruction of the society and the

nation in general' (Priebe 2005: 66). The representations of violence 'are detailed in showing graphic, deadly human agency…only to shock the reader and to dehumanize the individuals presented to us' (Priebe 2005:50-51). Priebe goes on to add that 'images of violence in art (verbal or visual) are potentially so potent that they may serve only to demonize and dehumanize the perpetrators of the violence…' (*Ibid:* 48). It is possible to argue that the reason why Ruganda goes to the extent of painting violent images in the play is because:

> The unthinkable, the unimaginable, the unspeakable can be thought, imagined and spoken in literature with an impunity not granted to us in real life, yielding an understanding we find hard to abstract from real events. (Priebe 2005:50)

Concerning the representation of unpleasant real life experiences in art, Sony Labou Tansi in his foreword to *The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez* comments that 'art is the strength to make reality say what it would not have been able to say by itself or at least, what it might easily have left unsaid' Labou Tansi (1995:Foreword). Art has the ability of confronting and presenting situations in a manner that may not be possible otherwise. This way, Ruganda treats us to how Idi Amin and his army mutilated people, leading to the destruction of most of the institutions within that society. Lives were not only lost but also property was destroyed and most people were displaced. There is access to this information through the way Ruganda uses his artistic skills to represent that horrendous moment.

In discussing violence and the state in *The Floods*, it is imperative to discuss the role of the radio in disguising and protecting the evil deeds of the state. In an interesting way, Ruganda unfolds the role of media in the state during that violent moment. Studies done on the role of the media in repressive states show that the media has been used to blackmail the people. Apart from partnering with the state in silencing the people, the media in such cases violates the people's right to truthful information. It is thus clear that for an authoritative state to assert its power, the nature of violence ranges from inflicting direct pain on the body to 'psychological brainwashing' by providing improper

information to the people. Achille Mbembe notes that, 'the post-colony is made up of a series of corporate institutions and political machinery which once they are in place constitute a distinct regime of violence' (Mbembe 1992: 14). These institutions are key in designing the people's destinies for they are the instruments of violence used by the state. The radio has been perceived by political leaders as a powerful kind of "political megaphone" in their service (Bourgault 1995:80). Notably, the media has been identified as a powerful tool that can be used to promote the interests of the dictatorial state (Nyamjoh 2005). This role of the radio was evident in the case of the 1994 Rwandan genocide where it was used to precipitate factional violence (Richards 2000:216). In *The Floods*, the radio is seen to have been used by the state in spreading lies and dispensing doctored information.

In the play, the radio failed to report on sensitive issues and atrocities committed by the state but instead concentrated in spreading propaganda (The Floods Pg. 35). Most of the people who disappeared or were killed by the military men were later reported to have been the most wanted criminals or were planning something dangerous against the state. The radio, with the help of the government, came up with reasons to protect the state and set up people against each other in a bid to paint an innocent face of the murderous state. Given the fact that a majority of the populace trust the state's radio and newspapers, and assume that what they say is the gospel truth, the state capitalised on this opportunity to fool the unsuspecting masses into believing that the state did not have a hand in the disappearance of the people.

The announcement by the radio about the impeding floods turned out to be a plan to destroy all the islanders. This happens at the beginning of the play and the people are fooled into boarding a boat that would later sink. The reason behind this conspiracy by the state against the islanders is because Nankya, who happens to be an islander and knows much about the murders by the state, is the target. Through killing her, Bwogo hopes to eliminate all evidence against him and his involvement with the state in killing innocent people. Unfortunately, Nankya does not board the boat in which all the islanders perished through shootings by soldiers who were directed by Bwogo. From this analysis,

the state is seen as having the authority to deploy all means and mechanisms available to assert its power. The security forces which are supposed to protect the populace, are used by the leaders to torture and kill while the media and, in this case the radio, works for the benefit of the state by misrepresenting the face of the state.

The Politics of Dead Bodies in *The Floods*

Violence in *The Floods* takes the form of mass murders of innocent people. The inscription of violence ranges from blood marks on the walls and floors to the brimming of blood in the lake. Death and the dead bodies in the play are a significant representation of the extent of violence by the state. Although the deaths of the common men, is highlighted in the play, currency is also given to the unexpected death of a prominent person whose death and funeral arrangements are highly publicised, unlike the many deaths of the common people which the state tries to cover. It is the differential treatment of these two different deaths that forms the basis of this discussion.

It is imperative to note that in the play, the authoritarian leader's desire to subjugate and demonstrate power does not end at torturing and inflicting pain on a living body. The performance of state power is further demonstrated through the disparate ways in which the dead bodies are treated. The analysis of the (mis)treatment of dead bodies for instance, the proper disposal or lack of it highlights issues of control and offers an insight into power relations. Vanessa Harding (2000:171) notes that generally, in situations where the totalitarian state seek to perform power over the dead, those who in life occupied less influential positions tend to be treated indifferently while those who tended to have power are treated more carefully. Those who are favoured by the state are accorded decent burials and send offs. The different attitudes and behaviour towards the dead represent an important theme with regard to leadership and the perception of both the esteemed and the common man.

In his discussion of 'Necropolitics' Mbembe asserts that 'to kill or to allow to live constitute the limits of sovereignty' (Mbembe 2003:11) whereby, the right to kill is perceived as being a constitutive element of the state's power. In his presentation, the major question that Mbembe asks is; what does the implementation of the right to decide who lives and who does not tell us about the person who is put to death and the relationship between the dead and the murderer? Mbembe's major focus is on what he termed as the 'state of exception' whose central project is '…the destruction of human bodies and populations' (*Ibid*: 14). In Mbembe's article, the state's sovereignty has control over the people and is defiant of the value of human life. Following Mbembe's argument, the destructive power of the state is not only portrayed through how it treats the living but also the dead bodies. The inhumanity of the state in *The Floods* is captured in the way that the ordinary people are mercilessly killed and further dumped carelessly either in the forests or in the lake while treating the death of Mother Queen in an honourable manner. My reading of the improper disposal of the common men and the proper send of accorded the Mother Queen is one of the ways in which the state violates and betrays its citizens.

Katherine Verdery (1999) in *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* examines the various ways in which political upheavals are often accompanied by incidents involving the corpses of former leaders or rather heroes. In her discussion, Verdery's central question is; what exactly is particularly important about a corpse. Verdery posits that 'dead bodies have properties that make them particularly effective political symbols. They are thus excellent means of accumulating something essential' (Verdery 1999:26). Bodies are potent vehicles not only for political meaning but also aid in the understanding of how people relate at different levels in the society.[20]

Although Verdery's discussion is based on the exhumation and reburial of the dead bodies of political leaders and national heroes, for purposes of this discussion, I am particularly interested in Verdery's postulation that the dead body has symbolic

[20] Bankston Carl III (1999) 'Lively corpses' at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1252/is_11_126/ai/55707744.

meanings. The major question to be asked is how do dead bodies offer themselves to the public for reading and what possible meanings can be read from these bodies. This discussion seeks to examine how Ruganda presents issues of the misuse of power and further subjugation of the subject through the improper disposal of the bodies of the common men while juxtaposing that, with how the body of a distinguished person is 'properly' sent off. Though we do not expect all bodies to be disposed in the same manner, the situation in *The Floods* forces one to read the contrast as being satirical of the state through the meanings derived from the differential treatment of the dead bodies. In his criticism of the state's 'biopower',[21] where the state is presented as having the authority to rule the body not only in life but also in death, Ruganda hopes to unfold the absurdity of power seen in the way the improperly disposed bodies return.

Before the tyrannical state can commit its ultimate show of power, the body of the subject is tortured, subjected to shooting and ultimately murdered by hanging, firing squad or hacked to death and then left to decompose or is carelessly dumped. After the killing, the bodies were then left to rot in the forests or dumped in the lake. One interesting thing that merits mention is how Ruganda presents the state at its most absurd level. The bodies of the people killed by the agents of the state are seen to be littered all over the place. This is also expressed through Kyeyune's encounter with a dead body while he was fishing. Kyeyune in a distressed mood notes that: '…the world around me is falling into pieces, corpses upon corpses along the streets, in the jungle, and in the lake, but no one takes heed of the squeals of terror in the homesteads being deserted' (The Floods Pg.50).

The use of the grotesquery and strange images of dead bodies depict a senseless and brutal world that is deeply tragic presented in all its grimness and despair. Martin Esslin notes that these images 'castigate, satirically, the absurdity of life' (Esslin 1964: 390) with an intention of making man aware of his precarious condition. The tragic scenes confront the audience with grotesquely heightened and distorted images of a world that has gone mad. In the play, the absurd images represent a world that is out of tune with

[21] Michel Foucault defines biopower as 'that domain of life over which power has taken control' (cited in Mbembe 2003:11).

reality. These images lead the reader to the recognition of the fundamental absurdity of the society under 'powerful' and destructive leaders.

The spectacle of the dead bodies of the common people littered all over the streets and in the lake is contrasted with the distinguished treatment of the body of the Queen Mother. In presenting the contradiction and unfair treatment of the common people in the nation state, it is revealed that the death of Queen Mother 'unleashed a motley of banal absurdities' (The Floods Pg.61). While the death of the masses should have caused an alarm due to the fact that they were mercilessly killed and in large numbers, the death of a single person receives more attention. This 'spectacular' event that marks her death and funeral demanded the use of government resources to 'compensate' and appease the family of the deceased. It is noted that 'the beneficiaries of the Mother Queen were *seen booking* emergency flights abroad.

Ruganda here uses ironic humour to satirise the power of the state considering how the common people are led into 'celebrating' the Queens death while their own, who were secretly dumped, were not given such a treatment. They were instead left for the crocodiles in the lake and to rot out in the forests. In joining the state to celebrate the prominent person's death, Ruganda further presents the common people as a group that has been zombified[22] by the state to the extent of being blind to their predicament. The special significance to the state, characterised the Queens funeral is Ruganda's way of criticising the leaders who capitalise on the helplessness of the masses. Apart from criticising the state for its inhumanity and brutality, Ruganda also calls our attention to the way the common people have been zombified to the extent that they cannot see that the state is blinding them into believing that it is saddened by the death of its people. The death of the Queen Mother sent ripples of joy among the manual workers who were ironically excited about the unexpected holiday for a directive was given that there would be a four week mourning period.[23]

[22] Mbembe in 'On the Postcolony' defines the post-colony as a place of madness where neither the dominated nor the rulers are sober. Mbembe (1992:9)
[23] See Ruganda (1988:60).

What the common men have become blinded to is the fact that the massive killing of the common people goes unmentioned. The state does not even care to mention the many deaths it has committed, let alone according them a decent burial. But in the case of the death of the Queen Mother, newspaper editors created spaces for full page advertisements of condolences (The Floods Pg. 61) due to her position or status in the society. Like is often the case with the death of prominent people in the nation state, the death of Queen Mother as recounted by Nankya, a witness of the state's atrocities, is a spectacular celebrative event. Mbembe (1992:4) asserts that the tyrannical rulers use rituals to bind the populace, even those who are not willing whereby in this case the whole nation goes into a celebrative moment in honour of the distinguished dead. In the play, Nankya notes that;

> Nankya: Condolences to the bereaved family. We are one with you in this hour of national catastrophe. Death hath untimely ripped the beloved one from our midst…there will be state mourning for four weeks, a military burial for the occasion and a statue erected in the city square…beneficiaries of the deceased booking emergency fights abroad… (The Floods Pg.60-1)

This dramatic event is best explained as the state's obsession with the exhibition of power with reference to popular political figures. Clifford Geertz's idea of the 'theater state' is relevant in the discussion of the state's involvement with excessive violence and the desire to show off, creating a 'spectacle' or a theatre of sorts. The concept of the theater state is informed by the post-colonial state's ability to dramatize its magnificence[24] through violence in this case. Geertz (1980) argues that the state 'puts on a drama that serves as a symbolic expression of what greatness is' (Geertz 1980:102). Although Geertz's discussion of Negara reveals a state that is governed by rituals rather than by force, the 'drama' that accompanies the celebrative events in Bali causing a big scene in the nation state is what we are likening to the state's absurdity in *The Floods*. The excessive violence presented through the exposure of dead bodies littered all over the streets with others dumped in the lake causing 'fouling of the air' is a dramatic experience worth noting. Contrarily, the exquisite treatment of the death of Queen

[24] Mbembe (1992) argues that in order to demonstrate its powers, the leaders invent ways of staying in power. This includes elimination of enemies, disempowering them just to show its magnificence. (Mbembe 1992:9).

Mother by the state presents a context in which the reading of the dead bodies portrays an absurd and selfish state that flourishes on oppressing the masses.

Going by the above extract, the common man is seen to contribute to his predicament. The common man is presented as having come to believe that he is less important whether he is alive or dead but when prominent people die, they need to be respected. This partly explains why the common people do not question the discriminatory treatment of the dead people/bodies based on their respective stations in life. The state though expects the common people not to question.

How then does the state commemorate the death of prominent people? Apart from according the dead a distinguished send off, Verdery argues that there is a relationship between spacio-temporal reconstruction and the politics of the dead body. Verdery (1999) maintains that: 'among the most common ways in which political regimes 'remember' is through marking spaces by placing particular statutes in particular places' (Verdery 1999:26). Verdery continues to argue that these 'provide contours to landscapes, socializing them and saturating them with specific political values' thus signifying space in specific ways (*Ibid).* The death of Queen Mother is valued by the state and must be commemorated in special ways like erecting a statue in her honour and even naming a street after her. It is noted that: '…there will be state mourning for four weeks, a military burial for the occasion and a statute erected in the city square' (The Floods Pg. 60).

The grand moment that marks the death of Queen Mother is dedicated to the display of power and status. It speaks of a state that selfishly guards the interests of a few elite. Her funeral is set to be attended by many state guests, dignitaries and VIPs (The Floods Pg.60). To mark this event, government dignitaries use this opportunity to incriminate imaginary adversaries. It becomes a platform in which leaders ironically disclaim atrocities that they had a hand in. Leaders use this opportunity to paint an innocent face for themselves. Nankya notes that these leaders will be:

Nankya: Proclaiming their avowed brotherhood and castigating the prophets of doom.
Nankya: Counterfeiting Judas, disclaiming their atrocities of yester-years.
(The Floods Pg.61)

In presenting the hypocritical nature of leaders, a feature common to most leaders in independent African states, Ruganda brings to the fore the inefficiency, excesses, and the selfish interests that the leaders are driven by. The two contrasting treatments that the corpses of the common people and the Queen Mother receive is a commentary on the leader's desires to build names for themselves instead of improving the lives of the people.

Apart from using the dead bodies to speak about the senselessness and the absurdity of the human condition, Ruganda uses the horrific image to satirise the state. This is reflected in the manner in which the Major General who was murdered by the state 'refuses' to die. Ordinarily, leaders who chose to kill or murder intend to ultimately silence the individual. But ironically, the Major General, who was murdered by the state 'refuses to die'. The General's refusal to die is a symbol of protest against the murderous state for it is only in death that the body can revolt freely. By refusing to die, the dead challenges the state's power over life. Ruganda textually subverts the power of the state through the General's body which transcends this power to kill. The constant re-appearance of the Major General's dead body denotes his intent of challenging the powers of those who killed him. The reason for his return is to torment the agents of the state.

In a similar case Labou Tansi's *La vie et Demie* (1979) novel speaks of a Martial, who was brutally killed by the ruler, the Providential Guide for allegations of attempting to rival the ruler. The Martial refuses to die after being cut into pieces of meat. Violence inflicted on the body leads to resistance and transformation. Labou Tansi uses the revolting body to comment on the absurdity of power drunk and inhuman leaders. Tansi notes in the preface of the novel that: 'I who am talking to you about the absurdity of the absurd, I who am inaugurating the absurdity of despair, where would you want me to be

speaking from…at a time when man is determined to kill life more than ever? Labou Tansi (1979: vi).

Martin Esslin (1964: 337) asserts that in plays that are categorised as belonging to the 'theatre of the absurd', 'the human condition is presented as a concrete poetic image that is at the same time broadly comic and deeply tragic'. *The Floods* could be regarded as absurdist because of the presence of the horrific and the severely mutilated bodies that are presented in a comical nature to express the ugly reality. Of great importance is the fact that the absurd is 'designed to shock [the] audience into a full awareness of the horror of the human condition (Esslin 1965: 17). Esslin in the introduction to 'Absurd Drama' maintains that the absurd in general present a 'disillusioned, harsh and stark picture of the world' (Esslin 1964:22). Ruganda uses ironical humour and grotesque images in the narration of state related violence and absurdity. The figures of the dead bodies and the absurd have thus become common features for the explication of violence by the state. Such scenes seemingly explain the reality in a better way. Speaking of better ways of presenting reality, Marechera notes that 'writers search for new modes of expressing the grotesque irrationality of power, thus develop devices that conveniently capture the state for if one is living in an abnormal society, then only abnormal expressions can express that society' (Marechera qtd.in Veit Wild 2006: 89). Gikandi (1992: 380) notes that 'our new [global] situation demands narratives which face up to the task of representing the ambivalences of the post-colonial situation'. The resolution to use dead bodies makes a better presentation of the sorry state of affairs of Uganda under Amin's regime.

The spectacle of the dead body that Kyeyune fished out of the lake psychologically affects him. The image keeps returning to him signalling the 'return of the repressed'. Kyeyune even confesses that, 'that man still haunts me…I should have brought him to the land but I was afraid' (The Floods Pg. 10). The return of the dead body is a way in which the tortured and the murdered 'come back' to haunt those who participated in the killing of innocent people. In the theory of repression, it has been argued that traumatic events leave some sort of indelible fixation in the mind. Terr (1988:130) comments that 'traumatic events create lasting visual images …burned in visual impressions'. The

painful memories of violence are brought to the fore through nightmares, dreams or hallucinations.

Kyeyune experiences the return of the dead body notably because after fishing it out, the image has become part of his memory. Major General's target is Bwogo. The return of the tortured is signalled by a whistle, twisting and scratching of toes (*The Floods* Pg.55-6). These characteristics portend danger and death. Whenever a whistle heard, Kyeyune warns about the 'call of the beckon' (*Ibid*: 106) which means death.

> Kyeyune: *(Some kind of whistling can be heard…*)
> Kyeyune: Did you hear anything?
> Nankya: Anything like what?
> Kyeyune: The whistling, you did not hear anything?
> Nankya: What of it?
> Kyeyune: the itch, do your feet have an itch? (*She doesn't understand*) Then we are doomed. On our way into the lake. Certain as death: the whistle, the beckon… (The Floods Pg.55-56)

The physical features of the Major General draw attention to his grotesque image. The major question to be asked is, of what use is the ugly image of the dead body in the play? Through the use of the absurd to represent the ugliness of the situation, Ruganda is expressing assent to the idea that 'black writers should deploy the grotesque to portray the undesirable, the corrupting and the destructive' (Ogude 1996: 82). It is through the ugly that a reading of the nature of violence and the atrocities that mark the period which Ruganda is pre-occupied with in the play is made more explicable.

In an authoritarian state, there is a desire of the subject to challenge the oppressive power and its inhumanity. Due to the existing nature of the relationship between the leader and the subject, revolt is often not possible without the fear of death. In this case, Ruganda uses the body of the Major General to challenge authority. In situations where violence is used as a tool for subversion and control, the dead bodies are bound to 'speak' messages of revolt. The body of the Major General is presented as laughing. The laughing dead body becomes revolutionist, something that is sometimes only possible in death because one cannot afford to revolt against a totalitarian regime and still live.

> Kyeyune…almost immediately the man with three nails in his skull shot up like an agitated dolphin and started singing '*I am the fisher of men'*. He let out one menacing laughter then disappeared back into the lake. (The Floods Pg.38)

The dead body has the powers and freedom to revolt. Mashishi (1999:46) notes that ugliness and laughter have a subversive potential. By laughing, the Major General is involved in challenging the repressive authority which hopes that the only way of silencing enemies is by killing, yet as is seen with the Major General, he is seen to be alive. This element of absurd drama often has an element of humour which works as an affirmative energy, a refusal to submit to disillusionment. This is seen in the way that the General is seen to be 'alive'.

The dead body is not only involved in presenting the reality but also in satirising the state and condemning violence. Ngugi (1972:58) specifies the object of satire to be 'a society's failings'. He points out that its function is to criticise the society when it departs from the norms. The aim of satire in his view is to correct and the means to achieve it is through painful and sometimes malicious laughter. Jonathan Ngate (1988) notes that a writer who uses satire attempts through laughter-not so much to tear down (through criticism) -as to inspire a re-modelling. Tyranny is the enemy that satire seeks to attack.

Violence in *The Burdens*

The Burdens is the story of the family of a fallen cabinet minister. Wamala is a former cabinet minister who was detained for allegedly attempting to overthrow the government. Characters in the play comprise Wamala, Tinka his wife, Kaija their teenage son and a young daughter Nyakake who is suffering from tuberculosis. Having been a popular and wealthy man in the society, Wamala and his family have been reduced to poverty after he lost his job. They have to learn to live in the slums. Wamala cannot get a job because the society's perception of him yet he needs a job to support his family. Tinka resorts to selling illegal beer, (*enguli)* and weaving mats to raise money for the upkeep of the

family. Wamala, who seemingly is more frustrated than Tinka, turns to excessive drinking in which he hopes to hide his incapacity to accept the situation. Wamala confesses that 'I drink and drug myself against depression and frustration' (The Burdens Pg.25). The family is in an economic crisis which leads to social disputes between Wamala and Tinka. Kaija is a school goer and needs to have his uniform replaced while Nyakake needs urgent treatment yet the family cannot even afford a proper meal. The family can even barely afford paraffin:

> Tinka: '…You don't seem to realize that that paraffin in this house is as hard to come by as everything else'. (The Burdens Pg.2)

Looking back to their blissful past, Tinka and Wamala cannot help blaming each other for their present predicament. Tinka is blamed for being a millstone around Wamala's neck and of pulling him down, 'she dragged me down' (The Burdens Pg.6). Wamala complains that the only thing that Tinka is good at is undermining his efforts (*Ibid*: 31). Tinka blames Wamala for being recklessly ambitious. The family's fall from fame to poverty is blamed on Wamala. Their lives in the slum, where they cannot afford a decent meal, or even proper health services cannot be compared to how they lived when Wamala was a minister. Their wealthy past is starkly contrasted with the present.

> Tinka: Shopping at the supermarket over the phone.
> Wamala: Business deals done at the intercontinental
> Tinka: The hair dresser coming home. (The Burdens Pg.41)

The couple's inability to come to terms with their current situation is the source of conflict. Tinka and Wamala both agree that coping with the present is difficult, especially after such a wealthy past (The Burdens Pg.37). Their problems and misunderstandings are solved through violence. Tinka verbally abuses and constantly fights Wamala because of his inability to provide for the family and his drunkenness which makes him come home late in the night. The family faces a lot of problems which in Tinka's own thinking will be solved through the murder of Wamala. It is possible to argue that at the end of the play, Tinka achieves some relief from her burdens when she kills Wamala and her children are taken to the orphanage while she is taken to jail. Having taken over the

economic providence of the family, Tinka roughs up Wamala who has now been reduced to a dependant. Tinka's current state worries Kaija for he has noticed that Tinka has grown bad tempered (The Burdens Pg.14). Wamala has to learn to live in a hostile environment.

> Tinka: I'm sick to *here (indicating her neck)* with your ideas. Small ideas, big ideas, creative ideas…it's all rubbish. Not interested…I am not interested, do you hear? Who is she this time? (The Burdens Pg.21)
> Tinka: Your mind is as tattered as your jacket, you should be ashamed of your self. (The Burdens Pg.28)

Tinka is presented as deploying vulgar language to address Wamala because of her position in the family. Because she is the breadwinner of the family, she views herself as being more superior to Wamala and can therefore use her position to do what pleases her. This situation is similar to what we experience in the totalitarian state where those in power use their positions to abuse others just because they are subject to them.

Violence in the play ranges from verbal abuses to physical fights. It becomes the best way for solving problems. The internal problems facing Wamala's family speak to the problems facing the society and so does the violence. Mckendrick and Hoffman (1999) point out that violence is recognised as a manifestation of unequal power relations. I argue that violence in the public is reproduced in the private space. The prevalence of violence in a society has a direct effect on the prevalence of intimate violence. There seems to be a close correlation between the level of violence in the society as a whole and that occurring in the family situation according to Martin (1978:347). Mckendrick and Hoffman argue that 'because the family is a microcosm of the society, the prevalence of violence in a particular society is invariably linked to high levels of domestic violence' (Mckendrick and Hoffman 1999: 164).

Foucault (1975) asserts that 'the relations that thrive on the basis of the use of violence to perform power go right down into the depths of the society…' (Foucault 1975: 27). Issues of domination and power problems are bound to occur in the family as it does in the larger family or the nation. Violence in the family could also be read as an allegory of

violence in the state. Harland comments that 'politics is no longer restricted to the level of the general class relations, but percolates down into domestic relations' (Harland 1987: 161).

Tinka's violence towards Wamala can be explained by the fact that she has taken a role traditionally reserved for men. Gender analysts like Horrocks (1994:56) assert that the society has certain expectations from men one of which should be to provide materially for the family. Having lost his job, Tinka is forced to look for ways of maintaining the family. Tinka feels overwhelmed by the burden of solely providing for the family while Wamala spends time at the Republic bar with other women (The Burdens Pg. 26). Tinka's fury is captured thus: 'I am going to kill that bitch of yours, I warn you. I'll pluck her squinty eyes' (*Ibid*: 26). Her only way of dealing with the problem of having fallen from power to poverty is through threatening Wamala with the use of violence. Her allegations that Wamala is having extra-marital affairs are read as her way of venting her unhappiness towards a husband who in Tinka's words has become 'another child'. Tinka's unhappiness translates to violence meted out on Wamala whom she thinks is the cause of the family's downfall. Violence in *The Burdens* is seen as a primary method of conflict resolution.

Throughout the play, Tinka adopts the role of a violent and abusive character. In a-play-within-a -play, Tinka plays the role of a rich and powerful man who exploits the common man. Wamala, who represents the ordinary man, is threatened when he goes to sell his ideas to the rich man (Tinka). Wamala thinks this will be a way of earning money to support his family which is now being threatened by disintegration.

> Tinka: (Pointing the 'pistol') now leave before I shoot. Before I call the police. Leave or I shoot.
> Wamala: Shoot? Shoot me? (*Abrupt laughter*.)Why don't you go ahead….shoot! shoot! (*Loud and fast*) Afraid of a pauper? (The Burdens Pg.61)

The above dialogue presents Tinka as being powerful and oppressive. Just like the leaders in the state who take advantage of their subjects, Tinka disregards Wamala's ideas because of his position. Seemingly, the only language that the powerful speak is that of

violence. What is evident here is the fact that those who are in positions of power, both in the public and private spaces use their positions to oppress others who are less powerful.

It is instructive to note that Ruganda in *The Burdens* positions Tinka, a woman at an influential position and Wamala at a subordinate position for the very reason pointed out earlier that open condemnation of the state was a dangerous route to travel for the playwright. Positioning Wamala as the abusive head of the family would be easily interpreted that Ruganda is attacking the head of the state. It is Tinka who is very abusive in the relationship, yet again she is the one who is economically empowered. Contrarily, we expect the roles she is performing to be performed by Wamala. As a writer, it was important for Ruganda to highlight what he perceived to be the problems of the independent African society (at that time) without the fear of running into a confrontation with the state, which at that time could not condone any criticism. This for me is Ruganda's way of engaging with the issues of poor leadership and misuse of power but in a very subtle way.

My reading of violence in *The Burdens* as an allegory of the state is informed by the fact that the family as a social space deals with the problems of power and authority just as it happens with the state. Wamala's role as the bread winner in the family is threatened because he cannot secure himself a job. Because Tinka has ventured into other means of acquiring money to support the family, Wamala's position in the family is reduced to that of a dependant. This puts his pride at stake which leads him to anger and frustration and eventually violence. The tension that exists between Wamala, Tinka and their son Kaija is representative of the kind of tension that exists in the society where leaders manipulate their subjects in an oppressive manner.

This chapter examined the theme of violence and the state. It argued that violence in the state is the language of demonstrating power and authority and that violence plays an instrumental role in subjugating others, thus participating in designing the people's destinies. The chapter also examined various forms of violence and how Ruganda represents violence in *The Floods* through the setting of the plays, characterisation,

dialogue and language. I argued that dead bodies in *The Floods* demonstrate the ultimate power of the state over people's lives and even the dead bodies. The careless disposal of the common men contrasted with the decent burial accorded to prominent people demonstrates the violent nature and language of the state which is actively involved in designing the people's destinies. The chapter further established the idea that violence in the domestic space reflects the level of violence in the state. The disorganization and violence prevalent in *The Burdens* could be read as making an allegorical reference to violence in *The Floods*.

In the following chapter I examine how characters deal with the memories of violence in *The Floods* and how memories of the past lead to violence in *The Burdens.*

CHAPTER THREE

THE MEMORY OF VIOLENCE IN *THE FLOODS* AND THE VIOLENCE OF MEMORIES IN *THE BURDENS*

This chapter examines the memory of violence in *The Floods*. It deals with how characters try to remember their experiences of violence. *The Floods* is a representation of Idi Amin's brutal regime in Uganda's history. Also, the chapter investigates Ruganda's use of memory to narrate the violence of that particular period. The play deals with characters who experienced the violence of the regime in different ways and now have the chance to re-tell their experiences. The chapter further looks at how the 'past' determines the course of events in the present in *The Burdens*. Violence in *The Burdens* is attributed to the inability of characters to come to terms with their present state of poverty after a wealthy past. This chapter then concludes with an investigation of how memories of the past lead to a violent present in *The Burdens* and memories of violence in *The Floods*

In the analysis, I noted that memory is a very instrumental strategy for the writing of violence, particularly in *The Floods.* Memory here not only includes the acts of remembering but it also encompasses the ways in which the state and its agents attempt to force people to forget the acts of violence committed against them. Memory in *The Floods* thus includes remembering and forgetting. Memory in the play forms the narrative of the play where characters speak out about the kinds of violence that they experienced. In the discussion of *The Burdens*, memory is limited to the way characters bring their pasts into the present. Characters actively remember the past in order to deal with the present. It serves as a safety haven where the characters' hide from their present state of poverty. However, going back to the past leads to violence. The chapter thus seeks to investigate the significance of memory and how Ruganda uses memory in different ways to address the theme of violence in the two plays.

The Floods is filled with violent scenes as has been discussed in the previous chapter. Violence in the play includes forms of political violence, psychological and structural violence. Political violence is presented in the way that the state attempted to wipe out its political opponents which resulted in the deaths of many people. This kind of violence left many survivors with memories which constitute psychological violence. As a writer speaking for the society, Ruganda uses a victim (Nankya) and a witness (Kyeyune) to narrate the kind of injustices committed by the state against the populace.

Ruganda in *The Floods* has offered an analysis of the internal processes through which the oppressed and the violated cope with their experiences of violence. As such, Ruganda shifts from what we would call the 'spectacle' of violence. This allows for the exploration of the psychological dimension of violence, trauma and the victims' personal responses which constitutes a large part of the experience of violence. To achieve this, Ruganda explores the theme of violence through strategies such as memory and fantasy, allowing the reader to connect with what Chan (2005: 372) describes as the 'interior of disproportion, dislocation and terror'. Ruganda in the play takes a further step by investigating the effects of violence on the life of the victim.

Of particular importance in the discussion is the fact that violence in *The Floods* is relayed by psychologically affected characters. This discussion is centred on how characters re-live their violent pasts in *The Floods*. Nankya and Kyeyune are the victims of violence in *The Floods*. Nankya herself suffered rape, lost her mother while Kyeyune suffers psychological trauma as an aftermath of violence. These two characters' experiences and memories are key in the discussion. Their memories are seen to be violent because both Nankya and Kyeyune are presented as traumatised and disturbed characters whose minds keep reflecting on their respective violent experiences. What should be noted is the fact that it is not only the physical experience of violence that they suffered that is affecting both Nankya and Kyeyune, but that these memories of violence seem to be a present reality that is constantly haunting them.

The major question that this chapter seeks to answer include finding out how people relate or remember past injustices. Do the victims of violence choose what to remember and what to forget? What role does memory play in the case of a violent past?

Generally speaking, violence affects the lives of the people either directly or indirectly. Torture, maiming, and deaths are characteristic of any violent moment. The people who escape death end up with psychological traumas. The survivors of violence live with physical and mental scars which end up as indelible marks in the victims' lives. The scars from past violent experiences do not leave the victims even as they try to move on. According to Freud, 'unless individuals have sincerely come to terms with the past, they exhibit a marked incapacity to live in the present' (Sharpe 1961: 243-4). Considering this fact then, in general terms, victims of violence try to remember certain experiences that have had impact on their lives for purposes of trying to heal. In the play, such experiences include Nankya's story of how her mother was raped by the military under a directive from the state and how she herself was later raped by Bwogo. Nankya also remembers how she lost her friend Rutaro whom Bwogo was jealous of because of his intelligence. The inability to overcome such memories that keep returning means that the affected people will keep on living their present in the shadow of their past injustices. It is thus imperative that in order for victims of violence to manage a more peaceful present, they should break away from the past and this entails speaking out.

In analyzing the intensity and the severity of violence, Ruganda pays attention to how individuals' mental wellness was affected by violence. This is revealed in different ways. The use of day dreaming, hallucinations, dreams and madness for instance are the key ways in which the theme of violence is addressed in *The Floods*. Freud's analysis on dreams in 'The Interpretation of Dreams' is essential to this study. According to Freud, dreams are a means of exploring the pre-conscious. He posits that 'dreams are an invaluable clue to a repressed major traumatic situation' (Sharpe 1961: 71). Dreams are disguised expressions of repressed fears and worries and present a strategy for interpreting events. According to Sharpe (1961:69), dreams have meanings to be decoded and analysed through a re-telling of the events which constitute past events. Dreams

follow ideas present in our consciousness. Freud notes that dreams have the psychological function of helping our minds to process and eliminate trivial or threatening material. He argues that dreams have functions and meanings. For him, every dream is a meaningful psychical formation which can be given an identifiable place in what goes on in waking life. Dreams and instances of hallucinations are interpreted as displaying repressed feelings and bottled up pains that need to be purged out.

In *The Floods*, Nankya and Kyeyune drift into their pasts in day dreams, nightmares and hallucinations. Kyeyune sees the military men bundling innocent people and hacking them to death before leading them to the lake for dumping. Nankya also clearly remembers how most of her friends were shot at and killed by the security men. Following Freud's argument these dreams and hallucinations represent the fears of the people who witnessed violence. Apart from serving to document the violent period, such memories show the pains most people have had to live with as an aftermath of a violent regime. Through hallucinations and day dreaming, Ruganda attempts to explain the effects and extent of violence in the play. Violence is portrayed as having a numbing and a paralysing effect on the lives of the victims such that a normal life is not possible anymore after the encounters with violence.

The effects of violence are also depicted through the fragmentary nature of the characters' lives and their minds. Kyeyune for instance suffers several hallucinations calling us to question his mental state. Kyeyune exhibits a demented mind presented in the way that he sees what other people do not see. The violence also led to disjointed families. Scheper Hughes notes that 'violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality; force, assault or the infliction of pain alone. Focusing exclusively on the physical aspects of torture, terror, violence is missing the point' (Scheper 2004: 1). Following Hughes's argument, it is evident in the plays that violence affected more than the physical. Nankya for instance bears the psychological scars borne from the rape by Bwogo while Kyeyune has had to live with the images of dead bodies in the lake which have imprinted themselves in his mind.

According to Sabatini (1999), victims of torture do not have memories but have hallucinatory representations of the violent pasts because experiences of horror disable the psyche and alter the work of memory. The violent moment gets frozen around the traumatic events and hurtful memories. [25] Violent experiences fix the mind to the violent event so that the victim hallucinates and sees that violent event recurring. Seemingly, the memory of the violence, which one has been a victim and or a witness to, becomes fixated around the brutality of those experiences.

In the regime represented in the play, Nankya and Kyeyune remember how the people who were thought to be against the state were sought after by the State Research Bureau (SRB) and later murdered by the security agents. Kyeyune who witnessed these agents of the state picking people keeps hallucinating about being tracked by the 'security agents'. At one point he sees them coming for him and he asks to be protected from them.

> Kyeyune: They will. They will. The ambassadors of darkness. I saw them. Tell them to leave me alone. (The Floods Pg.37)

This underscores the fact that victims have horrible memories that keep returning. In as much as Bwogo tries to use violence (for instance shooting at Kyeyune) in order to prevent him from speaking, most of the time, Kyeyune drifts into these memories unconsciously. The use of violence to suppress memory is because memory works as a threat for the agents of violence by exposing them and their activities. Another situation where the people's memories are further repressed in the play is when the violent regime chooses to conspicuously memorialize the death of Mother Queen. Her funeral arrangements are given more currency than all the deaths of the common people. In the end, the people get pre-occupied with the death of the Mother Queen and forget about the injustices committed against them.

It is also evident in the play that traumatic events leave some indelible impression in the victim's mind. Such memory imprints are not erasable. Crick and Robertson (1999:126) note that, nothing stays secret forever. One cannot bury anything permanently. Memories

[25] This information is available at: http://psychomedia.it/pm/grpind/social/sabatining.htm.

do not go away nor are they lost. Repressed memories always return. Though they may be suppressed for sometime, they end up returning. Memories about traumatic experiences do not come at once but mostly through series of flashbacks that are disjointed and fragmented.

Though Kyeyune did not suffer direct physical abuse, the constant return of the dead body not only disturbs his peace but it also instils fear in him. This highlights the effects of violence on the victim's psychology. Kyeyune is termed mad because it is noted that after the experience of fishing out the body of the Major General, Kyeyune has become scatter brained and goes about talking to himself, sometimes to trees and buildings (The Floods Pg.35). Kyeyune keeps seeing the image of the dead body re-appearing to him even when others do not see it. In this hallucinatory state, it is the image of a dead body that is fixed in his mind underscoring the fact that repressed memories always return.

> Kyeyune: Three stabs. Three nails. The man with three nails, his limp body in my net…
> Kyeyune: The man with the irresistible beckon. Three nails stuck in his skull. (*He looks for reassurance. His fright is abating*.) (The Floods Pg.37)

It is in this state of fear that Kyeyune recounts how the rescue boat sunk killing all the islanders on board. Just after the boat had left, Kyeyune remembers seeing the man with three nails shooting up like an agitated dolphin as he gathered the bodies into his net and disappeared into the lake. Also, before the boat sunk, Kyeyune reports that he saw soldiers shoot at everyone in the boat while others jumped into the water. The image of the dead man that Kyeyune fished out of the lake is presented as having affected Kyeyune's mind and disturbed his peace. The image of the dead man returns to Kyeyune, instilling fear in him.

> Kyeyune: But the man with the three nails in his head never discriminates between the indispensables and the disposables. He comes in many guises. Sometimes a fisher of men, lonely and subdued. (The Floods Pg.12)

Most of the questions that Kyeyune is asked are answered through references to 'the man with three nails'. In a conversation in which Nankya and Kyeyune are in two different worlds, Kyeyune responds to Nankya this way;

> Nankya: What do they think they are? Will my daughter not grow up to be one of them?
> Kyeyune: (*taken by surprise*) Go? Go where? Are you alright madam?...I knew it. I knew the moment would come….Can't you see we can't go anywhere? Trapped by the floods and ambushed by the one with three nails. (The Floods Pg.55)

The image of Major General's dead body returns to Kyeyune and imposes itself on him, forming a major part of his speech. The return of the dead signals the painful memories that the victims of violence still suffer even after the end of the violent moment. The end of the violent era does not mean the end of violence because victims still live with the scars and memories that keep haunting them.

Nankya's speech is also dominated by memories of violence. Nankya remembers how, on government orders, innocent people were whisked from their homes never to return again. The family of Nnalongo (she and her twins) is said to have been bundled into a lorry that emptied people into the lake (The Floods Pg.40). Similarly, Ssalongo who was whisked from his shop in a government vehicle was later reported as having been shot while he tried to escape. Nankya further remembers how Bwogo directed the murder of Rutaro among other innocent people. Rutaro for instance was killed by the security men on Bwogo's orders for having danced with Nankya (The Floods Pg.31). This partly explains why Nankya treats Bwogo with indifference. It is Bwogo's callous and abusive past deeds that make Nankya resent him. Clearly the memories of violence for Nankya have become part of her.

In a nightmare, Nankya sees 'floods' rising in search for Bwogo who represents the repressive state in the play. The dead bodies, returning in the form of floods come back to seek revenge and to haunt the authorities that perpetuated violence. Bwogo tries to escape from the surging floods but he finally ends up drowning in the 'flood'.

Nankya: The flood is descending upon you, Bwogo. In its determined pursuit, it has swallowed up all your henchmen, one by one. You are all alone now… (*Bwogo dodges an imaginary wave and retreats…)*
Nankya: The dead are no longer dead, Bwogo. They are up in arms to right their wrongs. They have risen from their deep slumber at the bottom of the lake and are carrying shrouds of vengeance towards you … (*The floods rise up higher to engulf Bwogo. In the meantime like a man about to drown, he clutches at anything in sight…he tries to ring out again and again, each time more desperately; no luck). (*The Floods Pg.46-7*)*

In this example, 'the floods' have been used by the playwright. Water which was used by the violent state as the dumping ground for the people that it had killed now turns out be the source of fear for Bwogo who represents the state in the play. The people who had been disposed into the lake by the state now return as living people. Water metaphorically symbolises both danger and safety for the state. The lake is a place in which the state hides its evil deeds and at the same time it represents a point of revolt by the violated masses.

In the above scene, the repressed return to seek justice and to torment their assaulters. Having been killed and dumped in the lake, the dead, who are said to have been waiting for Bwogo to join them in vain, have returned to punish Bwogo (The Floods Pg.46). It is a representation of the uprising of the repressed against their oppressor. The fact that the dead rise to seek revenge denotes an aspect of a people that were unfairly murdered seeking justice. The point that is being put forth is that repressed characters like Nankya have memories about the inhumanity of the state, memories that constantly force them to denounce violence while hoping that justice will be effected.

Undoubtedly violence shapes the history and memory of a people who suffered brutality either physically or psychologically. Priebe (2007) notes that violence is 'an inseparable part of our shared humanity…the wrongs of the past reverberate in the present' (2007:91). For most victims, the pain of the past is not just history. It is a living present

that is difficult to re-tell. According to Connerton (1989) we live our present differently depending on the different pasts that we experienced. There is an important connection between what happens in the present and what happened in the past. We experience the present as connected to the past. Violence makes permanent imprints that keep recurring in people's minds. For instance, Soyinka notes that the 'crimes that the African continent commits against her kind are of a dimension and unfortunately of a nature that appears to constantly provoke memories of the historic wrongs inflicted on the continent by others' (Soyinka 1999: 19).

According to Hirsch (1995) memory is the ability to recollect and remember past events.[26] Memories are produced out of experiences. The victims of violence who do not wish to remember their experiences of violence because of the intensity of the pain suffered choose to willfully forget or censor their memories of violence. In other cases, victims choose to remember the violent moment. Remembering entails recounting and speaking about the nature of violence one suffered in order to facilitate healing or in order for the victims to get over. Remembering for such victims is a way of dealing with the traumas that come with experiences of violence. Speaking out contributes to the healing of the traumatized individual.

Nankya's memory of violence is not limited to remembering what she suffered physically, but it also includes, structural violence, another way in which the society propagated violence. Whitelaw (1985: 24) notes that structural violence 'is embedded in unjust or grossly unequal social systems …and it involves economic, social and political deprivation and discrimination.' It is a kind of violence inherent in structures which do not allow the citizens equal life chances. Structural violence is centered on the unequal distribution of wealth and power. We only get to learn about this kind of violence through Nankya's painful memories of her childhood. Having come from a poor family that suffered oppression from the rich in the society, Nankya, who represents the common people in the society, paints a picture of a state that employs certain strategies to subjugate others.

[26] See Tuvling and Craik (2000: xi).

Nankya further delves into her memory to speak about class stratification as a form of violence in her society. The society is presented as having set up structures that oppress others highlighting how the society is divided along economic lines. The poor are required to work for their masters for a little pay. They are denied the chance to live happily because of the restrictions that their masters impose while expecting them to serve them well. Nankya's mother, for instance, served as a house servant to Bwogo's family under very exploitative circumstances. She remembers that ten people lived in a twelve square feet house. (The Floods Pg.70)

> Nankya: …and for all that fuss and fanfare, she got seventy shillings a month, two pounds of meat at Christmas and seven of sugar at Easter. Master hates this; Master hates that and seventy shillings a month… *(*The Floods Pg.72)

In another painful memory that validates how structural violence operates in the play, Nankya recounts how when her grandmother died, the family could not wail or cry out aloud because their master hated noise.

> Nankya: Only the constant sniffling and the streaming of tears down distraught faces. Because the premises were not ours and Master hates noise. (*Goaded by the memory, she is trembling all over. She is breaking down and tears rolling down her cheeks*…) *(*The Floods Pg.74)

The society is presented as divided into levels which favored others while it oppressed others. The experience her family went through as the servants of the family of Bwogo seems to have left an indelible mark in her mind, that is why she can talk about it some years later. Nankya's memories of the violence meted out against her family and others do not seem to fade. These past memories shape and order her present. This further buttresses my argument that victims live with the scars of violence. Asked to forget the past, Nankya comments that:

> Nankya: Am I supposed to forget about it? Create a rosy picture of my past?

‘isn’t it only natural to look back in bitterness? (The Floods Pg.71)

I argue that memory, for Kyeyune and Nankya, who are the victims of violence in the play, serves a great role in helping them heal from their experiences of violence. By virtue of the fact that they are ready and willing to confront Bwogo who was an agent of the violent regime, it is clear that these two characters want to break away from their violent history or rather past. Though Kyeyune and Nankya delve into their different experiences of violence through speech, what is apparent is that they both speak the same language of victimhood which not only highlights the extent of violence that the people of Uganda suffered, but it also helps in their (victims’) healing processes. At the end of the play, we sympathise with their helplessness but justice is done because Bwogo, a symbol of the violent regime and who has all along been trying to repress their speech, is finally arrested and taken to jail by the police.

In an article ‘Violence and Memory: The Politics of Denial’, Barstow’s major thesis is on speech. Concerning the representation of violent memories, she insists that the artist (who seeks to write on violence) should find a style and create a landscape for atrocities in order to compel the reader into believing what he or she does not want to believe. She is against forgetting. Barstow (2000:600) notes that ‘memory implies a certain act of redemption. What is remembered has been saved from nothingness. Either we find some redeeming quality in a particular history or we will abandon it’.

In this article Barstow does an analysis of the violent experiences of women in Chiapas, Mexico, and asks what makes remembering all-important. Notably, remembering exposes one to pain, so why remember? Barstow (2000:592) maintains that though remembering violent experiences is painful, ‘the first step towards transcending violence is the act of remembering, refusing to forget it, no matter how painful that may be’. Barstow goes on to add that failing to ‘remember’ or speak about violence means censoring that historical moment (*Ibid*). For victims of violence, she says that the greatest fear in forgetting or choosing not to speak about violence is that the same heinous acts might end up being repeated. For Barstow, speaking out helps prevent its recurrence.

Naturally, memories of some happenings melt and eventually get lost while some end up being narrated into historical processes. In an analysis of the Hutu refugee experience in Tanzania, Malkki (1995:105) notes that the genocide victims' past was evident in their present and the only way of dealing with such traumatic memories is to speak them out. Malkki (1995:106) argues that speaking out helped the victims to come to terms with the present. Having witnessed the murder of their family members and friends, the painful memories and narrative accounts of violence helped in the integration of the victims into the Tanzanian community. Malkki sees memory as a way of working through issues evoked by a time of violent trauma.

Speaking out entails talking openly about the violent incidents that the victims of violence experienced. In *The Floods* for instance, Nankya who was raped by Bwogo, engages in a talk with him to remind Bwogo of his past injustices against her and other innocent people. Bwogo who feels condemned becomes unnerved by the talk and turns violent and slaps Nankya.

> Bwogo: (slaps her hard) Stop it!
> Nankya: You slapped me very hard. (The Floods Pg.38)

Violence in the play does not only mean the hacking of people to death but that there are several women who were raped and violated by the military men while others were displaced. In using Nankya's experience above as an example, Ruganda hopes to map the level of injustices that the state committed against its people.

In most cases where the oppressors are guilty of committing violence, there is always an attempt to institute forced amnesia as is even evident in the play. Bwogo, the symbol of power in the play attempts to erase the memories that Nankya and Kyeyune have about the violent past and his involvement in the state killings. To achieve this, Bwogo resorts to the use of physical or verbal abuse in order to silence them whenever they remember the past. Hirsch (1995: 23) notes that the ability to control and manipulate a people's memory is a form of political power. Connerton (1989:13) notes that one of the ways in

which a totalitarian government attempts to mentally enslave its subjects is by taking away their memories. Bwogo insists that:

> Bwogo: Things of the past are best unraked. What would happen if we relived our past? Would we have time for our present? We must forget the things of the past.
> Nankya: Some things?
> Bwogo: All things… (The Floods Pg.34)

The killing of the islanders is explained by the desire of the state to eliminate all witnesses of violence. The idea of the rescue boat was to wipe away witnesses of the state violence. In his analysis of how societies remember, Paul Connerton (1989) asserts that, 'what is horrifying in totalitarian regimes is not only the violation of human dignity but also the fear that there might remain nobody who could ever again properly bear witness to the past' (Connerton 1989:15).

In the play, Nankya and Kyeyune whose memories speak of the violence by the state represent the will to remember against Bwogo's wish to destroy them and thus erase these memories. Bwogo notes that, after a violent moment, there is a 'future to think about and nasty memories to forget' (The Floods Pg.69). While it is easy for the inhuman state to forget all forms of violence that it committed on its minority groups and move on, for the victims the violence never ends.

Kyeyune's discourse in the play is preoccupied with images of 'the man with three nails in his skull' to the extent that Bwogo thinks that Kyeyune is mad.

> Bwogo: Is he alright? Or is he gone mad? (The Floods Pg.39)

Why does Bwogo regard Kyeyune as being mad? This is because 'a mad person is someone whose voice society does not want to listen to, whose behaviour is intolerable, and who ought to be suppressed' (Veit Wild 2007: 2). In an attempt to dismiss the truth about Bwogo's murderous character, Bwogo terms Kyeyune mad in order to silence him.

Moreover, Bwogo regards Kyeyune as being mad because Kyeyune has the courage to speak the unspeakable in a situation where speaking out is risking one's life. Violence by the state has led to the silencing of the people so that witnesses and victims of violence opt not to speak about their experiences of violence in order to save themselves from the wrath of the state. Ruganda through Kyeyune, who chooses speech over silence, is criticising witnesses of violence who have allowed the state to continually trample on their rights. Ruganda's message is that unless the heinous activities by the state are condemned violence and repression will not end.

Madness in the play is also used to speak about the situation of Kyeyune's society. The level of inhumanity represented in the play defies any attempts to regard all the events and the perpetrators of violence as normal. In fact, it is Bwogo himself and others like him who should be regarded as mad considering the murders he and the state committed against the masses.

Notably, 'the political situation in Africa is so full of absurdities, monstrosities and grotesque aberrations that it demands a literary response reflecting the innermost madness of this very situation and the structures ruling it' (Veit Wild 2007:2). In her discussion on the perspective of 'writing madness' in African literature, Veit Wild notes that 'listening to the speech of madness in literary texts means seeing that literature from a different angle. It means looking at it through the lenses of writers who have ruffled up the surface of realist representation and have explored issues and styles that represent a trespassing of borders…' (*Ibid*: 2). The absurdity of such situations, as of depicting the madness in the society, demands a technique that adequately captures the situation in order to represent the reality. The deployment of mentally disturbed characters speaks of the level of inhumanity in the society represented in *The Floods*.

Memories of violence for Nankya and Kyeyune are emblems of victimised identities. The characters are presented as having suffered forms of violence which left indelible and severe imprints and images of violence in their minds. These effects are presented in the play through the nightmares and hallucinations that they both suffer on different

occasions. Ruganda's mission in *The Floods* is to allow his characters remember by refusing to forget the past injustices committed against them. Memory also serves as a historical source. In this case, *The Floods* gives access to the history of Uganda during the Idi Amin's regime.

This section discussed the memories of violence and how violent events become a lived experience for victims and witnesses of violence. It examined the effects of violence on the lives of victims focusing on how violent experiences imprint themselves on the lives of the characters thus, becoming near permanent memories that do not go away. The next section discusses the violence of memories in *The Burdens* paying particular attention to how memories of the past lead to violence in the present.

The Violence of Memories in *The Burdens*

This section attempts to understand how characters deal with the 'burdens' of their past which in the discussion is considered to be the primary cause of violence in the present lives of these characters. The memories of a luxurious past are seen to have barred the characters from accepting their current state of poverty leading them to violence. There is a lot of blaming of one another and dissatisfaction, attributable to the kind of a past that the family had. The literal remembrance of this past is a traumatising experience for the whole family. This leads them to live in denial. My understanding of the violence of memories is literal in that memories in this play simply lead to violence within the family. For me, memories in *The Burdens* are the causes of violence and are by extension violent.

The Burdens is a play in which characters view themselves as 'burdens' that have caused the family's 'downfall' from riches to poverty. The members of the family perceive each other as hindering the other from moving on. Wamala and Kaija blame Tinka's pride as the cause of their poverty while Tinka blames Wamala for being over ambitious. What the family has failed to achieve is a reconciliation of the past with the present. It is clear

that characters have some baggage that they have brought from their past into their present lives. It is therefore rather difficult for them to move on because they keep glancing back into their pasts for reasons to explain their present state. In their poverty stricken state, Tinka nostalgically remembers her life as a chief's daughter while Wamala broods over his lost ministerial post. Their past is now a heavy burden that they have to live with. Both of them are faced with the task of trying to trace 'where the rain begun beating them'. Their failure to provide themselves with the reason and cause of their poverty results in the blame game which, as has been pointed out before, leads Wamala and Tinka to the use of force and violence against each other.

Tinka is blamed for having dragged Wamala into poverty while Tinka herself accuses Wamala of not making basic provisions for the family. The children also view themselves as burdens to their parents. That is why Kaija devises ways of acquiring money to buy what he needs. Wamala is seen as a big failure to his family but he was also burdened by the past which he could not escape. In addition, his wife sought to drag him down and turn the children against him. It is Tinka who finds herself free from all her 'burdens'- husband, son and daughter- in the end.

Violence in *The Burdens* is rooted in the characters' inability to cope with their present state of poverty after a wealthy past. Tinka who was the daughter of a prominent chief and later got married to a cabinet minister finds it difficult to live in the slum. Wamala and Tinka deal with the present situation of poverty by summoning the past to use Hirsch's word (Hirsch 1995:35). The past is a safety haven in which Wamala escapes the present reality. The past is experienced through fantasies, dreams and illusions. Wamala for instance dreams of his luxurious life while he was a cabinet minister. In one of his many illusions, Wamala sees himself addressing a political crowd that once respected him. The constant re-enactments of their blissful past speak of Wamala's and Tinka's desire to escape the present reality and sometimes their inability to cope. Most important in the discussion is the fact that 'looking back' serves as an escape zone for characters and the reason for conflicts in the play. This is because 'movement towards the future is

often impeded by fixating on the past, in particular, by creating a romanticized past…which leads to a form of disappointment or disillusionment' (Hirsch 1995: 35).

Connerton (1989) identifies two ways of bringing the past into the present. One is acting out and the other remembering. Connerton (1989) points out that 'acting out consists of a type of action in which the subject, in the grip of unconscious wishes and fantasies, relives the present with an impression of immediacy which is heightened by the refusal or inability to acknowledge their origin' (Connerton 1989: 25). He continues to add that acting out takes the form of 'aggressive behaviors which may be directed against others or against the self' (*Ibid*). Connerton's concept of acting out is important in our analysis of memory and violence in *The Burdens*. My reading of violence in *The Burdens* is informed by the fact that the aggressive behavior displayed by Tinka and Wamala is because they have not accepted their state of poverty. They insist on holding on to the memories of their luxurious past life.

Connerton's major argument is that the inability to come to terms with the present reflects the inability to let go of the past. The major point being made here is that, those who cannot come to terms with their present (poor) situations end up in distressing and violent situations that are attributed to the inability to break away from the (wealthy) past. This is useful in the discussion of the past in the present, but it must be emphasised that in the case of a wealthy past, a poverty stricken present invokes feelings of regrets when one looks back. After spending the evening drinking, Wamala comes home late to meet a furious Tinka who demands to know where he has been. Wamala evades Tinka's question and drowns himself in a world where he sees a happy and luxurious future. It is important to note that the wealthy lifestyle that Wamala is dreaming about is what characterised his life before he lost his job as a cabinet minister. This is a memory that he has not managed to break away from.

Wamala's inability to come to terms with the life of poverty is represented through the perpetual backward glances that he makes in order to make the present tolerable and the future worth waiting for. Kaija notes that Wamala dreams of 'a big ranch, cars, many

servants, and a free mansion' (The Burdens Pg.11). In one of his conversations with Tinka, Wamala drifts into a dream which represents his wishes. He dreams of a happy life.

> Wamala: (*excited at what he thinks is fantastic news*) I have got it, Tinka, at long last. No more starving for us, tear up the tatters, pull down this hovel. A big mansion awaits us. A limousine is beckoning.
> Tinka: Are you mad…or drunk? (The Burdens Pg.20)

In another illusion where he sees himself as a minister addressing a big crowd, Wamala drowns himself in memories of how as a prominent politician he used to meet great men and command the attention of large audiences.

> Wamala: Mistake me? Me being mistaken for a minister? But I was one, once, Tinka. Remember? The makings of an executive minister are still there. Intact. *(Carried away by the memory, he demonstrates. Left arm carrying an imaginary walking stick, right hand humoring imaginary dignitaries, face smiling blankly. He walks down stage and 'speaks' to a VIP)* (The Burdens Pg.47)

This scene displays Wamala's inability to break from away from his wealthy past. The past for Wamala is a memory that he delves into in order to forget his present situation. This is so because, every time Tinka talks about their bad state, Wamala goes back to how blissful their lives were.

> Tinka: We suffer Wamala. It is difficult for us especially after such a past.
> Wamala: (*dreamily*) Oh that past… (The Burdens Pg.37)

It is clear that the family cannot afford to live the kind of life they were living before, but Tinka still wants to hold on to the status of being the daughter of a chief and a wife to a former minister. Even when Kaija is willing to sell nuts to buy himself a bed because Tinka cannot afford, she insists that:

> Tinka: How can it be said…oh no. Not as long as I have these two hands. It's the mothers pride son. Stalking a mothers pride…
> Tinka: How can I bear the derisive laughter of the slum women? …don't put you

mother's pride at stake. (The Burdens Pg.8)

For her Kaija's willingness to look for extra funds to supplement his needs is a source of shame when the fact is that she cannot afford to buy Kaija a bed. Kaija has to wait for Tinka to weave her mat and sell before he can get a bed. Later on when Wamala brings in a second hand safari bed for Kaija, Tinka puts Wamala off. She says:

Tinka: (*not looking from her weaving*) We are fed up with second hand things…you should be ashamed of second hand… (The Burdens Pg.18)

Given the fact that Wamala lost his job and has no source of income, it is expected of Tinka to be grateful to Wamala for having managed to come home with a second hand bed. But she becomes indifferent to Wamala's excitement. Instead of embracing Kaija's present, Tinka still demands of Wamala a better life. Tinka's problem is rooted in her desire to continue living in the past. This is portrayed by how she laments that 'who'd have known we would come to this?' (The Burdens Pg.37). She is clearly unhappy. Kaija confirms that Tinka has grown bad tempered of late.

Kaija: …and besides, you have become bad-tempered …of late. Your smiles used to embrace me, where have they gone? (The Burdens Pg.9)

Tinka's unhappiness is the major source of conflict in the play. She keeps hurling insults at Wamala for 'never being really up' (The Burdens Pg.6). According to Tinka, Wamala is irresponsible since he cannot provide the family's basic needs. Wamala's helplessness gives Tinka the mandate to physically and verbally abuse him. Tinka is constantly fighting Wamala for this reason. It must be noted that Wamala is eager to provide for his family. Kitonga (1977: 34) notes that 'Wamala does not resent having a family to support. Indeed he feels guilty of not having provided for it'. This is what Tinka fails to appreciate. But Wamala reminds Tinka that:

Wamala: …when a man comes home from this hell, this crowd of power hungry bastards, a man wants sympathy and sweetness. Not silent curses, not poisonous whispers and despising stares. He is looking for something to lean against and take in a little breath to enable him continue the

struggle… (The Burdens Pg.36)

Tinka's unappreciative spirit coupled with the fact that Wamala lives with the anger and bitterness of hopes that are unrealised leads him to the use of violence.

> Wamala: you are a very subversive woman, Tinka. You are a big burden.
> Wamala: (*precipitating a quarrel*) Look here, Tinka. I'm running out of patience. I have pleaded with you, persuaded you…you are still stubborn. (*All tricks having failed, Wamala decides to use force. She catches up with him. A scuffle. She is hurling insults at him and administering feeble blows.) (*The Burdens Pg.32-3*)*

Tinka is accused of being unsupportive even when Wamala, who has now resorted to drinking in order to steel himself against depression and frustration, is seen to be making great efforts to provide for the family. Ironically though, Tinka seems to have embraced reality by resorting to brewing liquor and weaving mats to sell in order to provide for the family. Tinka's unhappiness is explained by her rootedness in the past, expecting a comfortable living even when situations do not allow. This forms the basis of the argument that past factors tend to influence or distort experiences of the present. Ruganda in the introduction to the play notes that, 'the feel of power is now an irritating memory for Wamala and his family' (The Burdens Pg. v). This memory stubbornly lingers in their minds. It is an irritating memory for them because it is the source of fights, quarrels and the eventual murder of Wamala by Tinka.

Concerning the presence of the past in the present, Malkki (1995: 105) notes that 'the past not only explains aspects of the present, it contributes to the structuring of social actions in the present'. For her, the activities of the present are determined by the past. As has been discussed, the burdens of lost status and having to live in squalid conditions pins Wamala and his family down leading to constant disputes and disagreements. There has to be a language which Tinka and Wamala use to communicate their resentments, the language is the use of violence.

In the play, slight disagreements lead to verbal abuses which with time progress to physical fights and then the eventual murder of Wamala. Ruganda uses shifts in time and

place through role-play to show how the characters move between past memories and the present. The ultimate murder of Wamala, for instance, happens after a role play. In a play-within-a-play, Tinka acts the role of an exploitative rich man in the society. Wamala is seeking the partnership of the rich man in order to set up an income generating firm. Wamala and Tinka fantasise about how life would be if they got all the money that they are dreaming of in order to forget their troubles. But again, running away from reality and escaping into fantasy turns out to be another view of reality where hard feelings are settled. After some disagreements in which both characters seem to be settling their pent up feelings and disappointments, they end up in a fight. Tinka threatens to shoot Wamala who fights back by destroying her brewing apparatus.

> Wamala: I'll tell you one thing though…one thing before you shoot and call the police (*he pounces on her, grabs her hand and throws down the 'pistol'. He then reaches for her throat and there is a terrifying struggle…his grip tightens. The woman's eyes bulge out.)* (The Burdens Pg. 61-2)

Though enacted while the characters are in dreamy states, this scene is a pointer to the deeper hostilities that have become part of Tinka's life. The feelings of anger and betrayal for Tinka are only settled through the elimination of Wamala who is blamed for the down fall of the family. Though we actually do not see Tinka murdering Wamala, Kaija's dream gives an insight into how she actually stabbed him to death. Kaija unfolds the truth through a series of recollections. Through him, it is discovered that his parents fought publicly the night before and that he fled in shame and took his anger on the neighbors who had witnessed the humiliating scene.

> Kaija: … I saw you and father tearing at each other like mad…in that pool. Your faces twisted, your mouths wide open, letting out blood. I screamed, 'Help! Help! Help!'…blood is trickling- tiny drops absorbed in the dust. More drops. So a rivulet, a river and finally the flood…then out of nowhere, a groan – like a bull resisting the butchers knife. (The Burdens Pg. 72-3)

The dream that Kaija has in *The Burdens* reveals how Tinka actually killed Wamala. Kaija saw his parents quarrel as passers-by cheered them to go on fighting (Ruganda

1972:68). Kaija is an onlooker of violence in his dream. In this case, there is a subjective experience of witnessing the murder that he later recounts to Tinka at the end of the play. It is plausible to argue that, dreams are highly condensed symbols of hidden preoccupations. The dream serves as an narrative that reveals psychic complexities and conflicts within Wamala's family as a whole. Violence in his dream is related to the violent activities that he has been witnessing through out the play.

It is worth noting that in the above scene, violence seems to have become the normal way in which the common people settle their scores. This is evident in the fact that passers-by helplessly watched as Wamala and Tinka tore at each other. Violence is thus seen as the approved way of expressing disillusionment. Ruganda's caution though is that unless a better solution is reached, violence due to unfulfilled dreams would cost the lives of helpless people. Instead of directing their disappointments to the respective authorities, the common man deals with the immediate member leading to intimate violence.

Violence in *The Burdens* is linked to the characters memories of a better past and their inability to break away from that past. The deplorable state in which they are living in forces them to look back into their pasts. This act of looking back for Tinka is very annoying. It gives her the energy and strength to act violently against Wamala. Summoning the past is a traumatic experience both for Tinka and Wamala. This is seen in the way they sort of lose their minds, assume their past selves and eventually fight each other as has been shown in the discussion. The characters lives are filled with dreams and fantasies about the past expressing inabilities to cope with the poverty in the present. The past is a safety haven in which they try to deal with their problems in the present, unfortunately leading to violence.

In this chapter, I attempted to give an explanation of how violence in *The Burdens* is linked to the characters' living in the past and how memories of violence are represented in *The Floods*. The study focused on how violence affects witnesses and victims of violence and how memories of violence keep haunting them forcing them to talk about their experiences. By focusing on the psychological and physical scars that victims of

violence live with, Ruganda is denouncing all forms of violence by the state against its people.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

This study was based on two plays, John Ruganda's *The Floods* and *The Burdens*, which attempt to make comments on the social and political situation in Uganda just after its independence. It is very interesting to note that just like the other forms of art, drama, has the potential of satirising and criticising the society. In an essay in *East African Writers* Gurr and Calder (1974:34) note that drama has the ability to make people think seriously about conflicts with a view to solving them personally and socially. Notably, drama has its unique ways of putting its message across. Esslin (1976:96) believes that drama 'is an instrument of knowledge, of perception, thought and insight about the society'. He also notes that '… all drama can be seen as a mirror in which society looks at itself' (*Ibid:* 103). Drama is the most concrete form in which art can recreate situations. This concreteness is derived from the fact that whereas any narrative form of communication will tend to relate events that have happened in the past, and are now finished, the concreteness of drama is happening in an eternal present tense, not here and then but here and now' (*Ibid*: 18). Furthermore, it is addressed to a group mind, 'is collaborative art which relies on action for its actualization and appeals to a combination of senses when performed' (Amuta 1989:156). As a collaborative art, it explodes the barrier of literacy that shackles other forms in their written expression. There is thus a fundamental distinction between drama and other forms of literature. The latter no matter whether enjoyed individually appeals wholly to the imagination. For Esslin, what makes drama drama is precisely the element which lies outside and beyond the words written down and encompasses that which has to be seen as action or acted out or what Pfister (1988:6) calls 'scenically enacted texts'.

This study attempted to show that Ruganda's plays cover a range of social concerns that are of great relevance to Uganda just after its independence and more precisely before and after Idi Amin's regime. The force behind the imaginative writings of the playwright just like other artists is in the desire to voice out ills in the society and to champion for the

betterment of the lives of the common people. This study was based on the examination of two plays which are pre-occupied with the theme of violence in Uganda. The argument that I tried to put forth in this study is that violence by the authoritative state is for the sake of showing power contrary to the view by Arendt (1969) that where there is violence there is a lack of power. According to the study, violence is a means which the state uses to eliminate imagined or real enemies and to control the populace. Ruganda captures this theme in his play *The Floods* where he depicts the leader alluded to in the play as having used the state machinery ranging from the use of security forces to the radio to control and subjugate the people.

The other argument presented in the study is that in cases of instability and insecurity, the common people are seen to be vulnerable. This is attributed to the fear instilled in them by the brutal state and the fact that the common man lacks a representative. The leaders who ought to protect the people expose them to violence. This complicity is seen in the way that the common man blindly obeys without asking questions which means they are a party to their destruction though we do not rule out the fact that the common man dares not speak against the inhuman state because of fear. In this analysis, it was evident that the massive deaths of the ordinary man do not matter to the state yet the death of a single prominent person brings the affairs of the state to a stand still. I argued that in treating the dead differently, the state further demonstrates that it not only attempts to show its control over the people's lives but also the dead bodies by designing how and where they will be disposed. By underscoring the discriminative treatment of the dead bodies, Ruganda highlights in a satirical way the hypocrisy of the state which seems to be moved by the death of one prominent person while it is unmoved by its own killing of many innocent people.

In trying to make an analysis of how Ruganda represents the theme of violence in the two plays, I focused on characterisation, use of dialogue and the setting of the plays. Through characterisation, Ruganda critiques the abuse of power through the use of powerful characters who bully and even physically abuse the less powerful. The presence of powerful and subjugated characters in the plays depict the reality of the situation that the

playwright hopes to unfold, where the powerful people wielded power against the others. I also tried to establish the fact that the narrative of *The Floods* is achieved through dialogue. Characters re-tell their experiences as witnesses and victims. This narration also is a way in which the characters heal from their violent past. Nankya and Kyeyune speak out their memories of violence highlighting the various ways in which the state betrayed and abused the common man. In *The Burdens,* a glimpse of Wamala's life before he lost his job as a cabinet minister is achieved through flashbacks and dialogue.

This study further established that there is a link between violence in the private and public spaces. My reading of *The Burdens* shows that the playwright used the domestic space to comment on violence in the state. Having noted that the play was published a year after Idi Amin took over leadership, it is possible to argue that in this play, Ruganda uses the family, as a microcosm of the state to criticise the state while at the same avoiding confrontation with the state. I also argued that violence in *The Burdens* stems from a blissful past that Wamala and his family are not willing to break away from. This inability to cope with the undesirable present forces Wamala and Tinka to make perpetual backward glances that not only leads them to blaming each other and viewing the other as 'burdens' but that it also leads to violence.

The past is revisited through pleasant and unpleasant memories. Memory in the plays is accessed through flashbacks, dreams, illusions and day dreaming. I argued that memory is Ruganda's way of accessing the past and that remembering aids in forgetting in the case of painful pasts as it is in the plays. Here, speaking out facilitates the healing process. It was apparent that despite the state's desire to institute amnesia, characters in *The Floods* try to remember the past injustices committed against them by speaking out. While Kyeyune and Nankya try to remember the violent moments, Bwogo who participated in the mass killings uses force to silence them as has been discussed. Bwogo thus represents the state's desire to force people into forgetting what it (the state) did to them.

On the whole, this study made an attempt to examine Ruganda's plays, focusing on violence as a theme that the playwright is pre-occupied with in the two plays. The first chapter gave the background on the playwright and the historical and political setting of the plays for purposes of contextualising the study. The second chapter dealt with violence at two different levels; violence by the state and violence in the private space where I argued that violence in the domestic space makes reference to violence in the state where I further argued that violence is the state's tool that it uses to control life and death thus designing the people's destinies. The final chapter looked at Ruganda's deployment of memory in the plays and how his characters deal with the burdens of a violent past in one case and a blissful past in the other.

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