

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES OF EXILE IN EAST AFRICAN DRAMA: AN ANALYSIS OF THREE PLAYS BY JOHN RUGANDA

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Abstract

*East Africa has undoubtedly been scarred by upheavals of various kinds, ranging from terrorism, tribal wars and political violence. The conflicts have often been between individuals, clans, tribes or systems, but there have also been conflicts within the individual which often lead to alienation or physical removal from the society. This paper critically examines John Ruganda's representation of exile and a search for restoration in three of his plays. The texts selected for this analysis are *Covenant with Death*, (1973), *The Floods* (1980) and *Shreds of Tenderness* (2000). Each of these texts represents a decade of Uganda's history as well as Ruganda's personal experiences in his writing career spanning three decades. This paper argues that the life of an author is intricately related to literary outputs, and consequently, the texts under analysis can be read as one story the same way the dramatist lived one continuous life. The central focus is the playwright's addiction with the theme of exile which is also a personal experience. The various dimensions of exile are explored through constituents of alienation, political causations and physical dislocation. The paper adopts a structural analytical approach proposed by Anne Gagiano, complemented by the linear model of Isaac Yetiv.*

Introduction

Joe De Graft links the origins of African drama to horror. He traces its origins to rituals performed by ancient people in apprehension, propitiation and purification against threats to humanity such as floods, lightning and acts of evil men. This represents the pre-colonial conception of African drama. During and after colonization, drama continued to address threats of deculturization with a call for cultural emancipation, and a substantial section of post-independence literature focussed on related themes. One of the most notable productions of the English expression in East Africa was Okot P'Bitek's satirical piece, *Song of Lawino*. The song is a hilarious critique of African apemanship and a defense of the integrity of indigenous culture.

In the 1970s, political dictatorships began to take root in East Africa. Political drama transformed in line with social dynamics. The dominant themes usually told of man's inhumanity to man, human pettiness,

duplicity and greed. It also recalled the African man's heroic tradition, notably his altruism, his willingness to sacrifice for his society, acclaimed hospitality, warmth and devotion to ideals.

This is the period Ruganda made his debut in playwriting. Since then, themes of socio-political dislocation have served to underscore the fragility of African civilization, especially when subjected to the kind of irreversible devastation wrought by both cultural and political brutality. Dislocation refers to that process of destructive forces of an individual's world that range from forced expulsion from one's home due to uprootedness from one's society, outbreak of wars or separation of man from nature and the rest of his community. This state of affairs may result from a devastating upheaval of one destructive weight or another, which puts the individual in a tragic situation which he neither understands nor controls. This leads to a depersonalization that shatters his emotional harmony with himself, his experience and his society.

In dislocation the people are either pummeled into oblivion by forces too powerful to withstand, or else try heroically to resist the cataclysmic dehumanization resulting from the cruelty of man against men. In resisting, a struggle ensues, a struggle that has nothing to do with man against man, but rather a war between good and evil.

In analyzing dislocation, various approaches may be adapted. The texts may be examined in relation to other texts, or they may be studied against the backdrop of the times, traditions and circumstances. Bearing in mind the rapid dynamism of society especially after the colonial invasion, the latter approach is preferred in this article. This is because it demands recalling the sub-text which, as we have said, influences creative material. The sub-text alludes to the socio-political background that facilitates understanding of the texts. Ruganda was born in the British colony of Uganda in 1941, and lived through pre-independence, independence and the notable post colonial era characterized by political dictatorship. Ruganda's plays could be described as 'restive' as was his epoch. The political event that came to have the greatest influence on him was the 1971 coup de'tat in which army General Idi Amin toppled the government of Milton Obote, who by this time had lost the popular goodwill of the people. Amin's ascendancy was thus ushered with a hilarious frenzy. However, by the end of 1978 when Amin was toppled, the country was left bleeding, with thousands dead and others in exile. Ruganda personally ran to Kenya to escape the reprisals targeted at perceived critics of the state particularly the academia.

For Ruganda, exile provided an opportunity to attack the dictatorship in Uganda even more viciously. In 1980, he wrote *The Floods* to inscribe the plight of those who lived through the dictatorship. The post-dictatorship regime embarked on restoration, calling on Uganda's exiled intellectuals to return home and aid in reconstruction. For Ruganda, return is presented as being as painful as forceful banishment; through his hero Wak in *Shreds of Tenderness*.

In their introduction to *Exile and African Literature*, Jones D and Jones M observe that "the mass displacement of peoples resulting from *internal feuds*¹ which have plagued the African continent in the last twenty five years or so have yet to produce a significant body of literature" (i). They further recognize that an ephemeral refugee culture that has often emerged from exiled communities has only produced patriotic songs, skits and reflections which might lead to a more abiding culture, but such material is yet to be

¹ Although the Jones might have been referring to physical conflict arising from among other things armed wars and ethnic cleansing, the phrase is used here to refer to both the physical conflicts within the human society, as well as the psychological conflicts within an individual.

subjected to systematic literary analysis. I concur with the Jones' in that Ruganda's drama has received similar treatment, which is rather unfortunate in an environment where violence, alienation and exile are regular experiences.

Analytical approach

The analyses of this paper have been guided by Anne Gagiano's structural approach to the study of exile experiences, as well as Isaac Yetiv's linear model. Gagiano provides a relatively comprehensive framework for analyzing dislocation experiences which she categorizes as either autobiographical (narrator's own) or anecdotal (those of his acquaintances). She isolates 'dimensions' through which exile may be analyzed.

In the first dimension, *the ontological*, escape from one's home is attributable to man's curiosity which compels him to explore the universe in search of the meaning of existence. Man is thus presented as inquisitive in nature, an attribute that contributes to his restlessness. Critically examined, the individual is actually *pushed out* of his habitual environment by a dream of a better life presently lacking.

In the second dimension, *the colonial/political*, exile has a dual face. First, it is the deculturization originating from the colonial experience which left the African man psychically and socially disemboweled after his language and cultural practices that sustained him for centuries were taken away from him by the colonial experience, leaving him with a strong negative image of his way of doing and imagining. Secondly, it is seen as a formation of re-colonization. This is where the political class, armed with the imperialist's tools of coercion exploits and disillusions the masses under the pretence of leadership.

The third dimension is *the social*. Exile is attributed to social rejection and disapproval. This too has two faces as well; the individual either finds fault with the society, or society finds fault with the individual. The individual may find the confines of his society limiting his growth, or a mere feeling that it needs to change for him to satisfactorily belong to it. This is exemplified in Henrik Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People*, where the protagonist Dr. Thomas Stockmann makes up his mind to escape into what he calls 'New World' where the foolish majority who make up his society will not manage to set foot. It is here he hopes to bring up a new generation of young people unpolluted by the mediocrity and hypocrisy he finds with his society. On the other hand, the society may reject the individual for non-conformity to social norms, especially those who commit rape, murder or incest.

The fourth dimension is called *the autobiographical*. Here links are sought between the text and the sub-text. This involves drawing parallels between the work, the life of the artist and the social environment informing on the work. The work is thus seen as an expression of the writer's attitude to life arising from personal and epochal experiences.

In the fifth dimension, *the mythical* Gagiano delves into the philosophy of the content. The message of the text is seen as a collective expression of people's values and inner intuitions; the writer merely taking his role as a messenger. Dathorne (53) refers to this as the 'group concept' of the African man's way of existence in which the African people are seen to share, in a basic way, a collective attitude to life and consequently to literature.

In the last dimension, *the psychological*, dislocation refers to those anxieties and mental upheavals occurring from physical dislocation. Gagiano observes that abrupt, indefinite introduction of an individual into a new

environment 'others' the individual from himself, causing trauma. This state of affairs, she notes, is 'a spiritual journey equivalent to thousands of physical miles' (2).

Yetiv's continuums

Gagiano's model is inadequate because it presupposes that each of the dimensions identified may subsist in isolation. While this may be true, in the present study we need to establish a continuum that captures the thread that Ruganda consciously weaves from *Covenant* to *Shreds*.

Yetiv sees dislocation as a process with a beginning and end. The first stage in this process is what he calls *discovery*. An individual destined for dislocation enthusiastically 'discovers' a new world which he esteems for its glamour. The next thing he does is to seek *identification*. This is characterized by an urge to identify with the discovery, integrate and assimilate its values. Here the individual selects those aspects of the new culture that are deemed superior to his own, and consciously or unconsciously ignores the destructive ones.

In the third stage, which he calls *rejection*, the individual develops a negative image of his own culture and everything it urges. He feels that it must change to resemble the new if he is to continue belonging to it. He is further fascinated by the warmth and understanding of the 'other' which receives him with open arms.

In the next stage called *rediscovery*, one begins to discover the weaknesses of the new. He is elevated to a tower of enlightenment from which he can look back and see the beauty of his own culture. Nostalgia and disillusionment set in, invoking a desire to return home. Finally, the individual embarks on a journey home in what Yetiv calls *return*. The individual vows to acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of his people, and learn to live with them. He also hopes to 'locate' his lost steps and carry on with life as before. However, it occurs to him that not only has the wheel of life turned, but also that society has formed an attitude against him. Re-integration becomes a nightmare, leaving him physically in society but psychologically and emotionally alone.

These two approaches provide a more comprehensive framework upon which we can effectively attempt to establish how Ruganda imagines dislocation. Each of the texts is being analyzed in relation to a specific aspect: *Covenant* is being studied in line with the concept of alienation, *The Floods* in relation to political causations of dislocation while *Shreds* is being analyzed in relation to exile.

Dislocation as Alienation in *Covenant With Death*

In this play, the playwright introduces Matama, a twenty three year old girl being escorted to her rural home by Motomoto, also a young man, after a five year stint in the city. She is terminally ill and her destiny being allegorized by an owl-cry at curtain rise.

Five years ago, Matama allegedly leaves the village after it is established that she is barren. Her community treats her with contempt before one Bwana Duncan, a visiting tourist comes by and to her amazement, the white man does not find fault in her condition. Together they flee into the city. After his tour, Duncan leaves Matama infected by an incurable disease, and of course a few coins to Motomoto to escort her to the village where he originally fished her.

Matama's birth is given a mythical dimension. Her parents, Bamyia and Kabooga, are re-enacted contracting a bond with Kaikara the goddess of fruition so that they may have an heir they have desperately sought for

over thirty years. The parents promise to enchant the beautiful girl with her roles as the priestess of the goddess' shrine. They are to make sure that she knows no man all her life. At sixteen, Matama breaks this code leading to sterility.

Ruganda constructs her protagonist in the scheme advocated for by Yetiv. The contempt shown to her by the village men characterizes her adversity, which in turn leads to 'discovery' of Bwana Duncan and the city, both of which represent destructive foreign forces. She says of the village men;

...they believed it was useless to own a barren shamba. The shamba was there you see, ready for any farmer, young or old. People sowed and sowed. But there was no harvest. So they left the shamba fallow permanently (86).

The 'shamba' motif allegorizes herself, while the 'farmer' represents male adults who would give her children. In addition, she reveals that the society treated her to epithets after the famed herbs failed to cure her. The men would say that "a barren shamba is best left to children to turn into a playground" (86), or tell her on the face that she was "worse than elephant dung" (86). Duncan's arrival thus provides her with a new lease of life, distant from the village incivility. She explains;

My renewal came when Bwana Duncan called at my father's house...I felt life crawling back into my veins. I felt victorious over petty village ideas. I flew away like an eagle determined never to cast my eyes homewards again, and never to wallow in the mud (93).

Her integration into the new culture is seen in her way of speech, dress and make up, all pointers to alienation. The Traveller', also a seer, describes her in language reminiscent of Lawino's in Okot's *Song of Lawino*. He refers to her as a "Mimisabu²...with red lips and trousers and glasses" (78).

Disillusionment sets in when Matama learns that Duncan was merely having a nice time with her on his holiday. She regrets;

But as Bwana approached his time of departure, somehow or other I learnt that I had served his purpose very well; and that's why he had liked me so much. I was the kind of woman he needed in a foreign land...I wonder whether he will remember the few years, the few good years, we spent together (93-94).

Ruganda affirms that the new culture provides temporary happiness, and leaves behind it great destruction. He also presents this kind of escape as an arena for enlightenment the reason Matama develops a spontaneous desire to return home. She says, "I have learnt to live with reality, with my past" (95).

Ruganda reinforces Matama's alienation through juxtaposing her with Banura, a village girl of her age, less exposed and far less beautiful, yet highly regarded by society for her ability to give birth. On seeing her, Motomoto observes that "she is not as beautiful as you are, my lady, despite your ill-health. She looks *monstrously* ugly" (emphasis mine) (88). Society would rather have her ugliness than a 'barren shamba'.

² This word was used by servants of a colonial master to refer to female members of his family. Here it may be used to insinuate an individual's attempt at copying the white man's culture.

Mindblasts of Cultural Rejection

Other than physical dislocation, there are instances of psychological festering arising from physical removal. Matama personally compares her barren nature to “a full-grown calabash, shimmering on the outside and rotting on the inside” (96). The calabash image reinforces the density of trauma from the social discord society accords her.

Secondly, the psychic imbalance manifests in nostalgia and daydreaming. Often Matama recalls her mother’s love and nurture, compares herself to the Biblical prodigal and hopes for similar treatment upon arriving home. She recalls her mother having to do all household chores in love, and making her a meal of white ants. She encourages Motomoto to cover the remaining hills with her saying;

“We should be feeling triumphant, because we’ve got only seven hills to cover, just seven hills, before I arrive home. Moments from now mother will be grinding millet for her prodigal daughter. ‘Matama, my hands may be frail, my back tired, but they know what to do when my daughter has returned. No, no, no, child, you are not going to fetch water, I’ll do it. (72).

Daydreaming is revealed by Motomoto in his threat to abandon the sick girl on the roadside and run back for fear that her clan might blame him for her illness. He says, “...with this speed of ours, this snailing over inches, and your ill-health, and your daydreaming” (73). This enhances the melancholic mood set off at the beginning of the play by the owl-cry.

The social force of disapproval and rejection has led to contemplation of suicide. Upon realizing that physical flight will only gratify his physical absence, Motomoto, also sterile, opts for suicide. Death becomes man’s choice in the face of the social threat. He explains; “I resorted to the knife. And you can see the indelible mark on my neck up to this time. But some man intervened before I did myself in” (88).

In this play, dislocation is not merely a physical removal from home. It involves conflict within characters that eventually overwhelm them. It involves a search for identity, which, more often than not, overpowers and renders derelict.

Exile from the perspective of Political Causations in *The Floods*

The Floods is Ruganda’s exposition of political forces at play during Amin’s reign. The terrific mood that pervades the play is introduced by the angry weather. The sky is dark with clouds of rain; there are shouts and cries from the stampede caused by fleeing masses after the state meteorological department announces that water levels of Lake Victoria have risen, and that floods will ravage the island in just ten minutes. *The Floods* is thus given the seriousness accorded the Biblical floods of Noah’s time. The government takes the role of Noah to avail a rescue boat to lift the islanders to drier grounds.

Kyeyune, a man of slightly over sixty, appears defiant to the floods warning. First, he casts doubt on the honesty of the radio. To him this is not the kind of weather that causes floods. He asks, “Do you think I have lived this long not to know the wind that carries floods...You think the radio that was brought only yesterday knows any better? (8). Secondly, his distrust is informed by the fact that despite the angry lightening flashes, someone has tied a red cloth on his back. It is a popular

belief in almost all African communities that lightening strikes in areas with colour red. He therefore interprets this to mean that someone intends to expose him to the anger of Kagoro, the god of lightening. Thirdly, he observes that the Headman who serves as the state spokesman has grabbed the Fisherman's basketful of fish in the pretext that that the food is not necessary in the boat. He then empties the contents of the Fisherman's basket into his own. It is this stolen fortune that he hopes to use to dupe Kyeyune to get into the boat, an offer Kyeyune bitterly rejects.

Another source of Kyeyune's skepticism is his painful experience in the island where he has been a reputed fisherman. He recounts how he once fished out a dead military man, with a big stone tied around his neck, belly ripped open, three long nails drilled in his head and his own genitals stuffed in his mouth. On yet another occasion, he came by a human finger in the bowels of fish. From then he quit fishing or eating fish. Through Kyeyune, Ruganda unearths the gruesome panorama associated with the military government.

In the second part, here called 'Second Wave', Bwogo, who heads the State Research Bureau (SRB), entreats his concubine Nankya, a pseudo intellectual, into boarding the boat. Nankya, just like Kyeyune, is indifferent. The weather report from her transistor radio stirs up anger in her, eventually banging it against the wall.

Finally Kyeyune makes an unexpected entry to reveal that the rescue boat, full of innocent men, women and children has been overturned in mid sea by military soldiers. The Headman, he says, was among those who perished in the boat 'tragedy'.

The 'Third Wave' ushers us into the minds of the characters. Bwogo is obsessed with the images of the deaths he has caused on the island. He admits seeing nightmares of the dead. Kyeyune on the other hand appears in supplication. He recalls the exploitation of Nyamgodho by Nalubale in a popular narrative of the lakeside regions. In this story, a poor fisherman called Nyamgodho once fished out a beautiful girl from the lake who brought him a lot of wealth. On attaining material prosperity, he forgets his misery and starts abusing and assaulting her. In the end Nalubale goes back into the lake, taking with her all the wealth she had bequeathed the ungrateful Nyamgodho.

As Nankya and Bwogo take a romantic posture, the door is pushed open and liberation soldiers who have already toppled the dictatorship lead Kyeyune, Bwogo and Nankya out.

Politics and Dislocation

The play may be examined in line with Gagliano's second dimension in which human flight is attributed to political violence that has permeated Eastern Africa since the days of colonization. Deceptively, the state appears to the unkeen reader too kind. It also emerges that availing a rescue boat and giving the necessity of flight religious urgency is a most cruel gesture. From Kyeyune, we learn that the government has developed a habit of murder, the reason he is skeptical. He asks the Headman; "What did they say about Makanga? That he was ran over by a tractor. And didn't all of us see them dragging him from his hut? (8). The regime's callousness could be seen from the perspective of materialism. This is evidenced by the Headman's act of taking advantage of the ensuing confusion to dispossess the Fisherman.

The density of the catastrophe is seen in the large number of corpses that litter the island. Bwogo regrets that the SRB has overstretched its obligations. He sees that his cousin Boss³ has made him do things previously unimagined. He regrets; “The air here is absolutely unbreathable. It’s stale and stinks of rotten fish and human corpses” (17). In an obvious dilemma he says;

“This lake can’t complain, though. It has been 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” (19).

It is from this admission by Bwogo that we see the text’s title as allegorical, pointing to floods of human blood rather than of waters.

Psychic wounds

Gagiano’s psychological dimension situates dislocation from the trauma occurring from physical aspects. In *The Floods* physical escape leads to death orchestrated by the excessive regime. It is however evident that even those who have resisted physical removal like Kyeyune, Nankya and Bwogo, have otherwise taken a psychological flight.

Kyeyune is preoccupied with the ghost of the military man he once fished from the lake as evidenced in his monologueic supplication. His decision to quit fishing must be difficult; for the activity provides both his meal and means of livelihood. His mental disturbance is captured by Bwogo who recalls meeting Kyeyune in delirium. He says;

One caught a corpse of an army brigadier in his fish net. I met him. Scatterbrained. Poor fellow. He never recovered from the experience. Goes about talking to himself all the time. Sometimes talks to trees and buildings (35).

Kyeyune’s psychological flight is symbolic of that of the masses that lived to witness the exploits of the military. On another plane, Ruganda uses Bwogo to confirm a maxim that those who live by the sword die by it. He is as much of a victim as, say, Kyeyune. The SRB boss regrets; “Do you know that ghosts of the departed prowl this island at nightfall?”. Despite being at the helm, Bwogo appears as traumatized as everyone else.

Tradition of Pigeon-holes and Agoromania corruption

Ruganda looks at political violence that continues to plague the region as a continuation of colonization. Nankya reveals that her mother, now dead in the boat tragedy, was a servant for Bwogo’s parents soon after independence. Bwogo’s mother was thus like the ‘Mimisabu’ referred to in *Covenant*. Each of the families was supposed to take their rightful place in the independent country. The children of these families were thus brought up in what Nankya calls different “pigeon holes” (72). A concrete wall separates the two worlds, and any attempts at dissolving it results to retaliatory violence from the ruling class. Nankya’s mother often warned her to learn to take her

³ Most of the atrocities committed in Ruganda’s works, including some of those not analyzed here such as *Echoes of Silence* (1986), are in the name of this character. It has often been interpreted in literary circles to refer to the military ruler, Idi Amin. It also points to the technique of alibis used by the dictator.

proper position. She would tell her; “keep your distance, my child. We shouldn’t annoy master. Never get between the hammer and the anvil” (72).

Ruganda also exposes a form of corruption that continues to cause abrasion between the two worlds. This he calls ‘agoramania’, the greed for space. Bwogo, on account of his association with Boss, is alleged to own virtually everything in the country. Nankya enumerates them thus;

...the Bwogo estate everywhere in the country. The Mitchell mansions. The Aphrodite Apartments. The bay of Bachelors. The Camasutra Hostels and the Rainbow Tourist hotels: you name it...always on the look out for open space. To leave your imprint on it (76).

In *The Floods* Ruganda exposes to critical re-evaluation the western conception of democracy, which is idealistic, against the African man’s interpretation as material. He however delivers his moral that either way, the violence destroys both the perpetrators and the subjects, either physically emotionally.

Dislocation and the Pitfalls of Exile in *Shreds if Tenderness*

Shreds of Tenderness deals with the problem of returning refugees after the overthrow of the repressive regime that made them flee their homeland in the first place (Imbuga:10) It is a retrogressive diagnosis of society created by Ruganda in *The Floods*, exploring the effects of state brutality on both the leaders and their subjects (Kyalo:66). These scholars confirm Ruganda’s attempt at establishing a sequel in his artistic journey started in *Covenant*.

When the play opens, Odie the play’s villain is seen performing an experiment to test his hypothesis which reads: ‘What makes a murderer tick?’. An insect is caged in a glass jar, and his tools of testing the theory are a pesticide can, ice cubes a Bunsen burner and an unspoken hatred. His sister Stella reveals that this behaviour is new, informed by news that Wak, formerly a University lecturer and their step-brother who has been living in exile for the last ten years, is finally returning home. Wak is allegedly betrayed by Odie for assumed treason, but manages to escape the SRB dragnet into exile. Unsure of how to deal with the news of Wak’s return whose death he has published in the dailies and the radio for all the ten years, Odie begins to accuse him of cowardice for running into exile, deserting the family to face the military reprisals. He claims that Wak preferred to run into the pleasures of exile when he should have stayed with the family at their hour of need.

Wak listens to Odie and notices a vacuum in his perception of exile. He therefore takes it upon himself to educate Odie on the horrors of exile. In the end it emerges that Wak has managed to peruse files left behind by the now fallen SRB and has established that Odie has all along been an SRB spy, and that it is him who betrayed both Wak and their father, now executed. He also breaks the news to Odie: Forces of the liberation movement are out looking for all SRB spies. In guilt, Odie admits readiness to pay his penance.

Autobiographical retrospect

A most interesting aspect of this play is the emergence of the autobiographical dimension explicated by Gagiano. In this dimension, the text is seen as a reflection of the author's own life. It calls for our reminiscence that Ruganda lived as an émigré in Kenya during the period of Amin. Being an exile, he came face to face with the dreadful realities of exile and its widespread misapprehension. He recalls, through Wak, how he was unable to find peace of belonging in a country then reputed for its tranquility.

The play recalls the "ten years of genocide" (10) which were characterized by "the music, death at dawn. Death at noon. Death at dark. Shroud of darkness not needed nowadays"(7). This manslaughter was, as recalled in *The Floods*, precipitated by treachery of real or perceived adversaries, all in the name of Boss. Odie recalls;

I've got a curious case on my hands. One Wak witu...he is becoming a bit of a nuisance. Threatening to give a talk on democracy and all that...They must be hirelings of foreign forces...externally dangerous. Will arouse the public against the government...he says Boss is ignoramus, that he is a village pumpkin...that he is dragging the economy to the doldrums, to utter chaos and ruin (123).

The treacherous pettiness of the government is reminisced in the way Wak's father gets executed. It is discovered that Odie lied that he had "spat on the president's portrait in a public bar" (119). Daudi, another citizen is allegedly executed because his dog yapped at the president's motorcade!

Other than the physical violence recounted in *The Floods*, Ruganda delves into the structural violence which has to do with deprivation of basic commodities like food, healthcare and moral astuteness. Stella recounts the structural violence thus;

Queuing for milk and sugar. Dodging the countless roadblocks. Rape and forced marriages and the once-a-day meager meals, if any...empty markets and broken down stalls and shops. With hospitals screaming for doctors and emergency vaccines (14-15)

Her mother dies of an inexplicable miscarriage, and on another occasion soldiers invade her school where they rape both the students and the nuns, leaving the school sheathing under the weight of indignity.

Re-defining exile

Ruganda dresses in robes of didacticism to negate popular misconceptions about dislocation. Through Wak, he bangs into the ignorance of those who merely imagine exile. After listening to Odie's warped conclusions he poses;

...cant think beyond the obvious, can you? If you Odie, my brother, are so suspicious, God knows what the ordinary man on the street thinks and feels about us. The hatred he harbours in his heart must be incredible. The bitterness insurmountable (75).

Among the fallacies Ruganda sets to deconstruct through Wak is the lie that 'refugeeism' is synonymous to 'migration'. Whereas migration is controlled by somewhat regular social and

economic forces that are amenable to theoretical analysis and control, refugee flows are unruly, singular and unpredictable. Wak explains that “self-exile is another matter. One has made up his mind to take chances. And besides, he or she can always go back home without being asked questions. But a refugee, God! It’s hell, man” (80).

Secondly Ruganda deconstructs the myth that a refugee returns with a lot of currency after ‘a pleasurable stay abroad’. Odie accuses Wak of opting for “easy life in exile. Secure job, free education for his kids and maybe expatriate allowances while we, here, suffered” (15). This prompts Wak to reply that “People who have never lived through a coup have romantic ideas about it” (116). He presents exile as diabolic, asserting that;

There is nothing as abominable as being a refugee...from the sweeper to the highest official they subtly remind you that you don’t belong...a third rate citizen, always associated with hunger and deprivation and cheap labour (80).

Wak further castigates the cruel treatment of people fleeing from the dangers associated with political turmoil at the borders. He regards it an irony for immigration officers to accuse refugees of trafficking drugs and small arms, a notion he laughs off. He also expresses bitterness at the behaviour of the officers for not only treating them to a variety of verbal tirades, but also infecting them with HIV/AIDS. One of their most important duties is to take female victims for a ‘quickie’, a euphemism for ‘cheap sex’. He exemplifies this by telling of one Dr. Rugendarutakaliretiganuka, a female PhD holder who the officers take advantage of as she seeks to cross the border into personal safety.

The Shock of Return

Yetiv provides a good model for analysis of ‘return’ from exile which fits in the exegesis of *Shreds*. He has elaborated that return is informed by reflection, and serves an avenue for enlightenment and self discovery. For Matama in *Covenant*, self discovery is a catharsis actualized in death for disobedience of Kaikara the goddess. Wak’s return is Ruganda’s attempt at restoring the tranquility of the island before the ‘ogre’ invaded to maul its kindred, and of course to deliver a moral.

Wak notices that Odie has transferred all the family wealth to his name. And painfully, he tells him to keep them. For Ruganda, there is an outbreak of the agoromania disease that has infected Bwogo in *The Floods* and which has been transmitted from colonization. Through Wak, he foregrounds the vanity of materialism by asserting that he has no need for what he rightfully deserves. He says; “And this house, Odie, this house, the Nile Apartments and whatever other property father owned, keep them. I have no need for them” (118). This inhuman search for material things gives him a shriek of nerves. He further learns that Katalikawe, a high school classmate who was always at the bottom of his class, has emerged a millionaire from the dictatorship. Ruganda therefore finds it an irony for the collaborators to turn around and accuse those who fled to save their lives for every evil inflicting the post-dictatorship society.

On trauma, Ruganda introduces a different dimension from that in both *Covenant* and *Floods*. In *Covenant* the returnee was the subject while in *Floods* it was presented as a double edged sword, cutting on both the perpetrators and the masses. In *Shreds* Ruganda frees the masses. The

perpetrator becomes the sole subject of trauma. Wak's return is a source of trauma for Odie. His experiment with the insect at the beginning of the play qualifies for insanity. His sister Stella also informs that lately he has been in and out of the mental

In line with the tradition he has established in the sequel, Ruganda takes us into the minds of evil men, the corrupt, the unpatriotic and the collaborators with vice. He freely lets them break under the weight of guilt, for in *Shreds*, they have to re-integrate the same friends and relatives they wished death during the dictatorship. For Odie, the psychological distress he suffers is comparable to that of Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* where Raskolnikov commits a murder on purpose and manages to hide from the law, only to torment himself with the knowledge of his wrong doing.

Conclusion

It is evident from these analyses that Ruganda has committed his playwriting career spanning over three decades to the theme of exile and dislocation. As shown from text to text, his is a cohesive narrative on the East African man's predicament in an environment he neither understands nor controls, which may be related in terms of beginning, middle and end.

The action he creates is closely bound with the East African man's social philosophy, practice and historical crises during the playwright's era. He manages to gorge powerfully into the social ills of his epoch, so that the catharsis he aspires for brings with it a therapeutic effect on the ills inflicted on society by self-seeking men in the process of living.

The theme of exile is undoubtedly multifaceted and sensitive, but his sensitivity in handling it is commendable. His writing exposes the working of a mind both incisive and subtle, a socially responsible sensitivity, for there is no difficulty on his part in profiling the complex, intertwined concepts that constitute exile. This, in my view, could only arise from what I called in the beginning 'commitment'.

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