**THE FLOODS – SYNOPSIS By John Ruganda (Prepared by Ozombo Abdallah)**

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 through its agents (the media and military men) used its power abusively. Of particular interest is the insensitivity of the state and the massive killings that characterized Amin’s regime and how bodies of common men were improperly disposed of by either being dumped in the lake of left in the forests to rot as compared with the magnificent send of accorded the Queen Mothers’ death and funeral given that she was an esteemed person in the society.

The Floods is divided into three parts called ‘waves’. The ‘floods’ symbolize 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 enormous. The playwright’s metaphorical allusion of Idi Amin’s rule to moments of floods conveniently captures the level and height of violence and bloodshed that was witnessed at that time. 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 to psychological violence. 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 realized 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 as the person in charge of relocating the people 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’ own experiences.

The second wave is marked by several instances of physical and verbal abuse 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 which is in other words an explanation of how violence is conceptualized as a form of rape and violation of the populace. 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 floods’ is a drama divided into three parts, defined as waves. The first wave is an introductory part, where we get to know the characters. The play starts with an announcement over the radio that there will be floods soon enough, so the people were being advised to run to the rescue boat to be safe. The headman who is in charge of the island and the rescue operation play a role of an abusive leader. He roughs up people and forbids them from carrying along their properties and he also snatches away some of their goods. Bwogo who is the protagonist uses his position to dupe the inhabitants of the island. In this wave we also meet Kyeyune, a farmer, fisherman and survivor of the violent regime who dismisses the allegation made about the impending floods and warns that the rescue boat is actually posed 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 committed against them. Kyeyune and Nankya narrate their experience of violence against them by the state. Kyeyune through flashback recounts how while fishing in the lake ended fishing the body of the Major General who was murdered and dumped in the lake.Nankya also narrates how her mother was roughed up and raped by four military men. The central focus of this wave is the violence of the state against the citizens recounted through the characters’ experience. There are instances of physical and verbal violence where Bwogo uses his position to intimidate Nankya and Kyeyune.

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In every piece of writing, there is usually a message that the writer tries to put across. Writers do write to pass across messages to warn, teach, and educate, to sensitize or even just to entertain. These are better known as themes. Just like any other prolific writer, Ruganda tries to inform us of the atrocities that befell Uganda under one Idi Amin Dada, and warns leaders’ of such inhumane and barbaric styles of leadership, that one day time will catch up with them:  
**CHARACTERS**

**Analyze the characters:**

Bwogo

Headman

Nankya

Kyeyune

Fiasher man

The two boys

Journalists (Imaginary)

The floods (Imaginary) –Floods of attrition and floods of retribution.

Soldiers

**THEMES**

**DICTATORSHIP/ OPPRESSION/CRUELTY**Oppression is a very conspicuous theme in this book. The citizens are severely oppressed by the government. They are underfed, unclothed, abused, whipped, raped and even killed. Through the dialogue between Bwogo and Nankya, we are meant to know that men have been deprived of the land that they fought for and the mercenaries are being used to terrorize the populace. Bwogo, who is the agent of the oppressive government, gives orders to the state research bureau to kill the citizens in large numbers. If anybody dared to cross the path of the government, they are then silenced and thrown into the lake.  
Nankya says that the island is barricaded with blood, the lake is bubbling with blood like cauldron and the main land is choking of it. All these are signs of the killings that were going on in Uganda, at an alarming rate for that matter. Another instance occurs at the international hotel where an innocent man’s life is taken away through Bwogo’s orders. Reasons: the man was dancing with Nankya, whom Bwogo was interested in. The newspapers reported that it was a case of the most wanted criminal. This shows the heightened oppression that the people of the land. They were slaves in their own motherland, even after fighting for ‘uhuru’

Kyambade is innocently killed. What do the papers have to report? He is an agitator paid by the guerillas to incite the masses against the government. Nowhere was safe. Men are carelessly arrested of false charges, as was the case with Ssalongo, a humble Christian who is brutally arrested on allegations that he was carrying on dubious trade with dangerous men. He is later on shot dead, why? He was accused of trying to escape. The inhumane nature of this government had no boundaries.

Killing people was a joke to the government. They killed for their own conveniences. They cared less for the human life of the ‘insignificants’. African masters are manner less and they end up mistreating their employees. Nankya’s mother is forced to resign as an ayah for the simple reason that she could not tolerate her boss who through her inner cloths which were dirty and her menstrual gear all over the house for her( Nankya’s mother) to clean the mess. Bwogo’s father underpays her (seventy shillings a month), though is a very hard working woman on her job. This meager salary can hardly sustain her, let alone the two of them together. Bwogo father knows this but instead chooses not to care in the simplest way, by adding her some few coins on top. He acts as if he does not have feelings. When Nankya’s granny passes on, it is natural that the poor rings, Nankya will mourn her. We expect Bwogo’s father to understand this. On the contrary, he insists that he does not want noise, forcing Nankya’s mother to slap Nankya whenever she mourned her grandmother.

**PROPAGANDA**

The government uses the radio to lie to the people about the impeding floods. They are lured into getting in to the rescue boats which are to take them to a safer place. Given the position of the government, they are supposed to know that the masses look up to them for guidance and leadership and that they will do as told. The government then takes advantage of this fact and lies to them. The sole purpose was for Nankya and her mother to die in the rescue boat. Since they survive, the rest of the people are unlucky and get sprayed on with bullets from the S. R.B boys. This is a very callous act on the side of the government, and only proves the heights of the oppression and brutality that had rocked Uganda under Id Amin’s regime.

**DEATH AND SUFFERING**To the government, killing people was as easily as doing any other simple errand. Men were viciously killed for no apparent reason. The fisherman found a head and three nails on it, with its genitals mutilated. It is apparent that the victim suffered much before he breathed his last. It was like the government was on a killing spree, killing all and sundry. If you posed any kind of threat to the people in office, you were as good as dead, regardless of the deeds committed. There is no one who could have illustrated this point clearly and drove the point home to all the doubting Thomases, than the poor guy Rutaro who posed as a stumbling block between Bwogo and his love for Nankya, for he did not last long before being arrested for being ‘the most wanted criminal’ Less than three months later he is killed.The reasons for killing are various though political.  
The climax of this vice comes knocking when then government under Bwogo decides to kill people, with the intentions of killing Nankya. He organizes the rescue boats that would take the people to safety, but it takes them to their fate. It surpasses human mind as to how far one can go to assert his/her superiority. If Bwogo wanted to get rid of Nankya, was it necessary for him to take down the whole lot, and ironically the target still escapes the untimely death. This shows how evil man has become to the extent of killing others for the sake of leadership gains.  
The land is said to have been barricaded with human blood. Through this hyperbole, we get to know just how much killings and sufferings have taken place in Uganda. Examples of the people killed are Rutaro, the brigadier, Ssalongo, the islanders who are killed in the boat, the headmaster on the orders of the illiterate government official, the TP tycoon).The bodies are dumped in Lake Victoria

**FEAR AND ANXIETY**Fear is clearly depicted when Kyeyune fishes out a dead body of a brigadier with three nails in his skull and genitals in his mouth. This leads to lots of anxiety and fear in Kyeyune as he swears never to go back fishing again.Kyeyune again discovers a human finger while eating fish. This scares the hell out of him as he again swears never to eat fish again. He refuses the headman’s offer of fish brought to him by a fisherman.Kyeyune freezes with fear when he witnesses a massacre of the islanders in the rescue boat.-he saw a dead brigadier rise from the water, claiming to be a fisher of men. Bwogo also had own share of fears. In one occasion, he sees floods of people coming who claimed to have come for revenge against his for his acts of injustices upon them. The radio announcement about the impending floods causes a lot of fear and anxiety in both Nankya and Kyeyune. He prays to god to avert the misfortune.Bwogo is restless and guilty and always fearing public scrutiny and fear because he is conscious of the negativities of the military regime. The widows in the island whose husbands have been killed live in perpetual fear.

**VIOLENCE**

There is a lot of violence exuded on the citizenry and as wee individuals .This is seen in the wails of the islanders, the wrath of the head man on the islanders, Bwogo on Nankya as well as Kyeyune in the island, Bwogo when young on Nankya, state inspired violence such as on those killed .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 publicized, unlike the many deaths of the common people which the state tries to cover. The authoritarian leaders justify the use of violence to demonstrate power over the citizenry. (Read text)

**CORRUPTION/ NEPOTISM**

Boss is extremely corrupt. He uses his position to employ his relatives. Bwogo, boss first cousin, is the chairman of the building board and the head of the state research bureau. Although Bwogo had been flopping during his years as a student he easily gets employed and even gets accelerated promotions. Nankya says that Bwogo’s father had been mean and money minded, a man they had always seen in the village with no particular merit or integrity, yet in unclear circumstances, he is a master. All this he achieves due to the strong connections that he has. Bwogo confesses that his father was not very educated as such. The judicial system perpetuates injustices. Cases are not fully dealt with rather they were terminated on the basis that ‘the bodies were not found.’ the corridors of justice have been tainted with the evil minded people who are keen to satisfy their own interests at the expense of the people. Nankya is equally elevated in social status because of connections with Bwogo   
The vice continues to manifest itself later on when Nankya says that if she and her mother were to die in the boat, then innocent people would have been arrested and charged with treason and they would be promised presidential pardon if they agreed to appear on television and confess crimes which they had not committed.

**POVERTY**

The government controlled virtually every sector of the economy leaving the citizenry very poor, they are desperate , underfed and unclothed, .Poverty is wide spread in the country side .There is a dividing line between the rich and the poor as symbolized in the relationship of Boss and Nankya’s mother.

**TRADITION**

This theme is hinted in Kyeyune who is a strong believer in the traditional values .All explanations about the suffering of the people under the dictatorial regime,Kyeyune see it through the traditional lens (Read his beliefs about Nalubaale ,Nyamugondo ,the patron of the lake ,Lord Kagoro who has been disrespected ,belief I n lightening ,supplication to the traditional forces as a sources of redemption)

**EXPLOITATION**

There are classes in the play; the rich versus the poor .The rich are close to the source of power and have resources, education and have amassed property (Bwogo-chairman building board etc, Bwogo’s father).That counts for exploitation at national level but equally there is exploitation at individual level where we see the head man exploiting the poor islanders of their property and also having influence on a fair share of the widows. Nankya’s mother is exploited, she does too much work and is paid little. The big shots in government keep money in accounts out of the country such as Switzerland, Bengal (Bwogo) and Boss (has many concubines).They have amassed wealth at the expense of the nation.

**VENGEANCE**

That comes at the end of the play. The perpetrators of violence and dictatorship are arrested at the end of the play when the regime falls. They have to pay for their crimes (Floods of retribution)

**PESSIMISM AND HOPE**

Pessimism is the order of the day in the a country with a military regime that is fool of chaos, death, fear, uncertainty of life as people keep disappearing on a daily basis (Explain with examples) .However with the removal of the regime at the end there is hope that the citizenry will settle and trust in a new government that may cater for the interests of the citizens.

**RELIGIO-POLITICAL CONFLICT**

There is an ideological conflict based on religious grounds. The dictatorial regime is perpetrated by the Muslim believers who are leaders and others like Bwogo taking on names like Bashir for survival. There is a lot of mention on how the two sides are antagonistic; the Muslim leaders are apprehensive because they feel the crusaders who are the Christian front from the South is having a guerrilla warfare to oust the dictatorial regime .Ruganda uses this theme to hint on the inevitable overthrow of Idi Ami by the Tanzanian troops

**OPPORTUNISM /MATERIALISM**

This theme is developed through Nankya who rises to political and social class, in fact to an intellectual (Pseudo –intellectual) through favoritism. She is a university lecturer with shoddy publications not worth reading in a lavatory and she is made professor at the expense of internationally recognized colleagues .She rises because of connections with Bwowo who owns a lot of wealth within and without the country, SRB chief, chairman building board and through Boss who rises from nothing to dignity. This all hints on how political expediency is used to amass wealth or uplift status of incompetent people .Ruganda warns on how power corrupts.

**DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES**

The following are used in the play for conveying the message;

Dialogues –The play is presented through dialogue (Examine the importance of dialogue)

Contrast-poor and rich, oppressed and oppressor

Play within play /dramatization/reverie or fantasy projection (a state of being pleasantly lost in one's thoughts; a daydream)

Flashback-most of the things are revealed through flashback, love between Bwogo and Nankya, Nankya’s background, the headman, Bwogo’s background, and Bwogo’s father

Irony (Examine the military rule .Has it helped the citizens? What is the role of the government over the citizens? Is it to oppress? To killed? Etc.etc. Although Bwogo plans to exterminate Nankya and her mother in the pretext of the floods, Nakya knows it and survives.

Symbolism –The floods are symbolically used –Floods of attrition and floods of retribution),Bwogo’d piercing the orange peels with his umbrella ,the resistance of the anthill soldiers/termites ,the wall between Nankya’s mother’s place and boss .etc

The title –Examine the symbolic importance of the floods.

Biblical allusions (Read)

Suspense –What happens next to the dictators?

**NOTE: READ AND DISCOVER MORE**