

Lynn Nottage's "Ruined" :
Women , the Battleground of Wars

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تاريخ نشر البحث : ٢٠١٧ / ٧ / ١٠

تاريخ استلام البحث : ٢٠١٧ / ٥ / ١٨

Abstract

Wars in general, and civil wars in particular ravage countries and tear people and the world apart into pieces. In wars soldiers use sexual violence against young girls and women and leave thousands of them as ruined aftermath of wars. After the end of war its brutality continues with damaged women and victimizes them once again through the society that refuses to accept ruined women as victims, on the contrary it pushes them to brothels as prostitutes. Raped women are enslaved and used as damaged goods by their societies which oblige them to trade their bodies and sell sex.

In 2004, Lynn Nottage traveled to Africa to meet Congolese women in the refugee camps of Uganda to write about the damage, brutalities and the atrocities of the barbaric government and the equally cruel rebel militants that women have suffered during the never-ending civil conflict (1993 –2007) in their country DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo) . The massacre in Eastern Congo inspired Nottage to explore the unimaginable suffering and nightmarish acts of violence and multiple rape Congolese women victims experienced. According to Nottage, all of the women she interviewed were raped. Most were raped by multiple men. Some of the women helplessly watched as their children were murdered in front of them. Nottage realized that she would create her own play; one that would include the heart-wrenching narratives of the women she met in Africa, whom the female characters of *Ruined* will be based upon their real experiences. Nottage said.

“I believe in engaging people emotionally, because I think they react more out of emotion ‘ than when they are’ preached to, told how to feel. It was important that this not become a documentary, or agitprop.” The result was a tragic, yet beautiful drama about pain, survival and holding onto hope while living through hell, inspired by the true accounts of women who survived such cruelty. (Emily Wilson, The Power of “Ruined ”, 2011)

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Lynn Nottage : Biography and Literary Background :

Lynn Nottage was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1964. She got her high school diploma in 1982 and received her B.A. degree from Brown University in 1986. She continued her studies and received her M.F.A. degree in playwriting at Yale School of Drama in 1989. Nottage is an associate professor of theater at Columbia University and a lecturer in playwriting at Yale University.

In 1993, her short play, *Poof!* won the Heideman Award. In 2003, her drama *Intimate Apparel*, won major awards including the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, the Francesca Primus Prize and the Steinberg Award.

She won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2009 for *Ruined*. Nottage's plays are being produced the world wide. Her works often deal with the lives of women of African descent . Her inspiration came from the women in her family; her grandmother, mother, and other women were the nurses, teachers, activists and artists in the Brooklyn neighborhood where she grew up.

(www.thehistorymakers.com)

Brutality of War ; Rape as a Terroristic Weapon Against Women :

During decades of chaos and conflict in the world, sexual violence against women has been a sad and discouraging fact, especially during wars which makes the consequences of war more bitter for women. *Ruined* raises consciousness and attracts attention to a world where women's bodies have become the battle ground in which rape and other disastrous and horrible abuses are the weapon used to destroy families and entire communities.

A living example is the suffering of women in the Congolese war, "Sexual violence against tens of thousands of women has been a chilling constant during the decade of chaos and conflict in Eastern Congo—so much so that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton last July declared rape a weapon of mass destruction." (Dayo Olopade, interview,2010, www.theroot.com)

The DRC has undergone an unending civil war which has catastrophic results . Five million people have died as a result of the war, Anneke Van Woudenberg, from the Africa Division of Human Rights Watch, said :

It's the deadliest one in the world, more deadly than Iraq or Afghanistan, yet we rarely hear about it, and I think that's partly because of our presuppositions about the Congo, that it's the heart of darkness," she said. "It's horrible, but it happens." (Wilson, 2011)

More than 200,000 women and girls have been raped in Congo. "It's one of the worst places in the world to be a women or a girl," Van Woudenberg said, adding that a large percentage of the rapes are of teenage girls between 12 and 17 years old. (Wilson, 2011)

Madeleine Oldham, the theater's literary manager, in a conversation on women's rights in Africa, agreed that a powerful play like Nottage's can perform an important role in bringing to life the human truth behind grim statistics of wartime sexual violence. (Wilson, 2011)

Ruined: Analysis

This play is dealing with contemporary issues. The events that occur in it are currently going on in country sides of Congo, in other African countries, in the Middle East and other places of the world. Congo is a place of territorial violence and immeasurable suffering between two sides of civil war: the government soldiers and the rebel - militias.

The entire play of two acts takes place in a bar and brothel isolated in a small mining town in the middle of the tropical Ituri rainforest in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo,

where war and poverty combine together to create a toxic mixture in a hellish environment. The bar provides its guests drinks and food, but it also functions as a comfort brothel attended by rival groups of different militias of rebels and government soldiers other than miners and traveling salesmen. Mama Nadi Zabibu, the main female protagonist in the play is described as an attractive woman in her early forties with "an arrogant stride and majestic air" (Nottage, Act1, Scene 1). She is the shrewd owner of the bar and about ten young women work for her. They have ended up there after being driven from their homes, communities, marriages and families by the rape, mutilation, torture and other forms of violence employed as weapons in a senseless war. They have chosen a life of prostitution because it seems to be their only chance of survival.

Damaged Women from Rape to Brothels :

Caught in the crossfire of war and among rival fighters whose brutality and crimes against humanity are equivalent and indistinguishable. Mama Nadi and her girls survive by profiting from the men's loneliness and their desires, appealing to them with music, songs and seductive dance moves, teasing them out of their money, and encouraging them to join the women in the bar's back rooms, where higher prices can be charged for more intimate encounters. The brothel, however, is not a peaceful refuge. Mama and the girls suffer the presence of the men with their brutality and arrogance, though the girls gain their living from them, yet the acts required of them in exchange torture and tear their souls apart.

At the beginning of the play Mama Nadi appears as a part of a modern day slave trade. She buys girls from a traveling salesman named Christian, an alcoholic, whose status as a merchant shows him as somewhat less than a man throughout the play. When he arrives at the bar with supplies he brings to sell to Mama Nadi, Christian offers her three other pieces of merchandise:

MAMA. (*Impatiently.*) Don't be a crybaby, what did you bring me? Well? ... Are you going to keep me guessing?

CHRISTIAN. Go on. Take a peek in the truck. And don't say I don't think about you. (*Mama smiles.*)

MAMA. How many?

CHRISTIAN. Three.

MAMA. Three? But, I can't use three right now. You know that.

CHRISTIAN. Of course you can. And I'll give you a good price if you take all of them. (*Mama goes to the doorway, and peers out at the offerings, unimpressed.*) (Nottage, act1;scene 1)

Mama surveys the offerings unsympathetically like a hard-hearted slave auctioneer:

MAMA. I don't know. They look used. Worn.

CHRISTIAN. C'mon, Mama. Take another look. A full look. You've said it yourself business is good. (*Mama considers, then finally.*)

MAMA. Okay, one. That one in front. (*Points into the distance.*)

CHRISTIAN. Three. C'mon, don't make me travel back with them.

MAMA. Just one. How much?

CHRISTIAN. Do you know how difficult it was getting here? The

road was completely washed out —

MAMA. All right, all right. I don't need the whole damn saga. Just tell me, how much for the one?

CHRISTIAN. The same as usual plus twenty-five, because ...

because ... You understand it wasn't easy to get here with the —

MAMA. I'll give you fifteen.

CHRISTIAN. Ahh! Fifteen? No. That's nothing. Twenty-two.

C'mon.

MAMA. Twenty. My best offer. (*Christian mulls it over. He's reluctant.*)

CHRISTIAN. Aye. Okay. Okay. Damn it. Yes. Yes.....

(*A moment later two women in ragged clothing step*

tentatively into the bar: Sophie, a luminous beauty with an air of defiance,

and Salima, a sturdy peasant woman whose face betrays a world

weariness. They hold hands. Mama studies the women,) (Nottage,act1;scene1)

Not until he pulls into the bar two dirty, clearly abused young women; Sophie and Salima, do the audience realize that he has been talking about people, so insensitive and indifferent appear the bartering and transaction between Christian and Mama ; she argues about buying two for the price of one:

MAMA. I said one. That one. (*She points to Sophie.*)

CHRISTIAN. It's been a good week, and I'll tell you what, I'll give you two for the price of one. Why not?

MAMA. Are you deaf? No. Tst! I don't need two more mouths to feed and pester me. (*Mama continues to examine each woman.*)

CHRISTIAN. Take both. Feed them as one. Please, Mama, I'll throw in the cigarettes for cost.

MAMA. But, I'll only pay for one.

CHRISTIAN. Of course. We agree, why are we arguing? (Act1;scene1)

Sophie walks with the ragged, uneven steps of someone who feels pain in every move she makes. Though quiet and beautiful, Sophie is not good to Mama's business because she's been "ruined"; rebels have raped her with a bayonet and destroyed her genitals :

(*Mama gestures toward her genitals.*)

MAMA. But damaged, am I right?

CHRISTIAN. ... Yes ... Look, militia did ungodly things to the child, took her with ... a bayonet and then left her for dead. And she was — (Act1;scene1)

Sophie is a victim not just of rape but mutilation, which gives her the bad luck status of a damaged girl. Sophie's internal sexual organs and herself have been "ruined.":

CHRISTIAN. (*Pleads.*) The girl cooks, cleans, and she sings like an angel. And you ... you haven't had nice music here since that one, that beauty Camille got the AIDS. (Act1;scene1)

The Society and Its Reaction Towards Damaged Women Men have failed these women; the communities become devastated by the soldiers who take away the “honor” of the woman by:

the use of the most society shattering crime: rape as a weapon. The raping of the woman by both factions of the conflict, and even by children, disambiguates the society to its very core. The raped woman not only suffer from the most hideous of crimes but are also expelled by the communities they live with, for they have become dishonored and thus keeping them dishonors the community itself. The lust for power, the power of survivability drove both faction of the DRC to war, and the battleground is the woman’s womb.

(Calderon, Discussion Comment on Ruined,2012)

Both girls; Sophie and Salima have been rejected by their families as damaged good. Sophie has been raped and assaulted in such a brutal manner that she can no longer have children. And according to the local belief systems, men would no longer be interested in her as a wife. In the real world of violence in Congo, raped women are considered damaged, as though the violence inflicted on their bodies is somehow their own fault:

CHRISTIAN. She’s my sister’s only daughter. Okay? I told my family I’d find a place for her ... And here at least I know she’ll be safe. Fed. (*He stops himself and gulps down his soda.*) And as you know the village isn’t a place for a girl who has been ... ruined. It brings shame, dishonor to the family. (Act1; scene1)

Mama Nadi , realizes the injustice, violence and sexual abuse, and the way society rejects women who are "ruined," so she does not refuse them. She agrees even to take Sophie in though she is damaged more than the other women and limps with obvious pain:

MAMA. Are you a student?

SOPHIE. Yes, I was to sit for the university exam.

MAMA. I bet you were good at your studies. Am I right?

SOPHIE. Yes.

MAMA. A *petit* bureaucrat in the making. (*Sophie shifts with discomfort. Her body aches, tears escape her eyes. Mama uses the cloth from her skirt to wipe Sophie’s eyes.*) Did they hurt you badly?

SOPHIE. (*Whispered.*) ... Yes.

MAMA. I bet they did. (*Mama studies Sophie. Considers, and then decides.*)

Christian, go get me the chocolate. (Act1; Scene 1)

Along with Sophie , Salima was brought to Mama's brothel when there was nowhere else for them to go. Salima is representative of all the women that fall victim to the war through rape:

CHRISTIAN. Salima is from a tiny village. No place really. She was captured by rebel soldiers, Mayi-mayi; the poor thing spent nearly five months in the bush as their concubine.

MAMA. And what of her people?

CHRISTIAN. She says her husband is a farmer, and from what I

understand, her village won't have her back. Because ... But she's a simple girl, she doesn't have much learning, I wouldn't worry about her.

Left for dead in the Bush, Salima could free herself and managed to get back to her village only to be discarded by her husband for dishonoring him and the villagers didn't allow her into it:

SALIMA. I walked into the family compound expecting wide open arms. An embrace. Five months, suffering. I suffered every single second of it. And my family gave me the back of their heads. And he, the man I loved since I was fourteen, chased me away with a green switch. He beat my ankles raw. And I dishonored him? I dishonored him?! Where was he? Buying a pot? He was too proud to bear my shame ... but not proud enough to protect me from it. (*Act Two: Scene 2*)

Simon, a friend to Salima's husband, Fortune, says to him :“Look here, Fortune, they're making a joke of you. The men are saying “Why won't the man just take another woman.” “Why is he chasing a damaged girl?” (Act Two; Scene 3). Nottage emphasizes that the wages of war are paid for on the bodies of women who are pawns or hostages in battles between men. "*Ruined*" proves that one can never get used to the unspeakable things that are happening and the awful things men do to women in war time .

The play embodies the moral contradiction implicit in having abused women work as whores, forcing our focus on the realities of their lives; Nottage says, “Mama Nadi is morally ambiguous, that you're constantly shifting in your response to her.” (Caldwell, *The European origion ...*,2015) Ms. Whoriskey, who accompanied Nottage to Uganda, says :

The way the crisis was presented in the telling by these Congolese women was very different than we expected. They don't have the emotional energy to cry, or to express the tragedy of what happened except through a quieter story that is very specific, and even more terrible.”

([www.unomaha.edu/plays.about.com](http://www.unomaha.edu/plays/about.com))

Sacrificed to the abusive neglect of her husband and the society, Salima has to work as a prostitute to the soldiers of both armies in the brothel, a living part of her own torture every single day. She doesn't have the time to heal her wounds, physically and emotionally. “We were expecting horror stories, but we weren't prepared for this extent of brutality,” Nottage said. (www.stagemagazine.org.) Salima's story is related with disbelief and shock, it reveals the horror of war and the misery and sorrow of her situation. Salima's husband was buying a new pot when the rebel soldiers ravished their village and attacked her; she was an arbitrary victim in a war without rules, but her body bears the price. One day, she says, she was picking sweet tomatoes in her own garden, the next minute she was attacked and has been raped by rebels:

SALIMA. One of the soldiers held me down with his foot. He was so heavy, thick like an ox and his boot was cracked and weathered like it had been left out in the rain for weeks. His boot was

pressing my chest and the cracks in the leather had the look of drying sorghum. His foot was so heavy and it was all I could see, as the others ... “took” me. My baby was crying. She was a good baby. She never cried, but she was crying, screaming. “Shhh,” I said. “Shhh.” And right then (*Salima closes her eyes.*) A soldier stomped on her head with his boot. And she was quiet. (*A moment. Salima releases.*) Where was everybody? WHERE WAS EVERYBODY? (*Sophie hugs Salima.*) (*Act Two: Scene 2*)

Salima was kidnapped from her own home, tortured, used as a sex slave and gang-raped for five months until her pregnancy as a result of rape. She cries that she’s carrying the “baby child of a monster.” She experienced unimaginable suffering and nightmarish acts of violence and rape:

SALIMA. But they still took me from my home. They took me through the bush, raiding thieves. Fucking demons! “She is for everyone, soup to be had before dinner,” that is what someone said. They tied me to a tree by my foot, and the men came whenever they wanted soup. I make fires, I cook food, I listen to their stupid songs, I carry bullets, I clean wounds, I wash blood from their clothing, and, and, and ... I lay there as they tore me to pieces, until I was raw ... five months. Five months. Chained like a goat. These men fighting ... fighting for our liberation. Still I close my eyes and I see such terrible things. Things, I cannot stand to have in my head. How can men be this way? (*Act Two: Scene 2*)

With all the disregard those involved in the rape and abuse have for women, they killed her little daughter in front of her eyes, unable to believe her death, Salima, the most enormously ruined woman continues to mourn over her loss. The baby haunts her throughout the play and makes her life hellish. She consistently utters her baby’s name; Beatrice and does the gestures the baby used to do while eating. She cries and continuously whimpers very hard while narrating to Sophie about her abduction and the departure of her baby:

SALIMA. Just then I was thinking about Beatrice and how much she liked banana. I feed her like this. I squeeze banana between my fingers and let her suck them, and she’d make a funny little face. Such delight. Delight. (*Emotionally.*) Delight! Delight!

SOPHIE. Shhh! Lower your voice.

SALIMA. Please, let me say my baby’s name, Beatrice.

SOPHIE. Shhh! (*Act1; scene 3*)

Salima cries and continuously whimpers very hard while narrating to Sophie about her abduction and the departure of her baby. She, like Sophie, misses her family :

SALIMA. I ... I ... miss my family. My husband. My baby —

SOPHIE. Stop it! We said we wouldn’t talk about it.

.....

SALIMA. I wanna go home!

SOPHIE. Now, look at me. Look here, if you leave, where will you go? Huh? Sleep in the bush? Scrounge for food in a stinking refugee camp. (*Act1; scene 3*)

SALIMA. But I wanna — !

SOPHIE. What? Be thrown back out there? Where will you go? Huh?

Your husband? Your village? How much goodness did they show you?

Caught in such impossible contradictions, the women have now only this brothel to turn to. A true survivor -victim of assault herself, Mama Nadi, who has experienced the same brutality, takes in damaged women, gives them shelter, and in return, they satisfy the fighters and people who stop by for drink and debauchery. Mama Nadi capitalizes on their spoiled flesh as profitable investment. Sadly, this is the world which Mama Nadi and the other characters of “*Ruined*” have known and experienced. Mama Nadi is both the exploiter and protector of the young women in her brothel. Her relationship with them, as well as with everyone else, is alternately hard and tender. She makes her own rules to be followed, and treats the girls sternly. Yet her tough exterior provides a wall that protects her and her girls from the men that come to her bar. Her rough behavior more often hides her feelings, thinking and her practical actions. The civil war there is one of the cruelest forms of conflict in which the most horrifying war crimes ever existed are executed. And Mama Nadi's bar is visited by leaders and aggressive soldiers of both sides. She is all business and has learned duplicity. She makes sure to keep them both happy so that she can retain her business and also prevent them from hurting her or her girls. She plays both sides to make sure she and the girls survive. When the rebels arrive, she is devoted to the revolution :

MR. HARARI. Who's that?

JOSEPHINE. Him? Jerome Kisembe, leader of the rebel militia.

He's very powerful. He have sorcerer that give him a charm so he can't be touched by bullet. He's fearless. He is the boss man, the government and the church and anything else he wants to be.

(Harari studies Kisembe.) Don't look so hard at a man like that.

(Josephine grabs Mr. Harari's face and kisses him. Mama clears the beer bottles from Kisembe's table. The rebel soldier gropes at Salima, then he nips her on the neck.)

SALIMA. Ow! You jackass. *(Salima pulls away from the rebel soldier and heads for the door. Mama races after her, catching her arm forcefully.)*

MAMA. What's your problem?

SALIMA. Did you see what he did?

MAMA. You selfish girl. Now get back to him. *(Mama shoves Salima toward the rebel soldier.)*
(Act I/ Scene 2)

The following day, when the military enters the bar, Mama Nadi is loyal to the government. She has survived by being charming, accommodating, and serving anyone, whether honorable or evil:

OSEMBENGA. Then hear my name, Commander Prestige de Bembe Osembenga, *Banga Liwa*. [Fear death.] *(A moment. Mama absorbs the news, she seems genuinely humbled. Christian retreats to the bar.)* You will hear my name quite a bit from now on.

MAMA. Commander Osembenga, forgive me for not knowing your name. *Karibu*. [Welcome.] It's a pleasure to have such an

important man in our company. Allow me to pour you a glass of our very best whiskey. From the U.S of A.

OSEMBENGA. Thank you. A clean glass.

.....
MAMA. He can help us, or he can cause us many problems. It's your decision. Remember, if you don't step on the dog's tail, he won't bite you.

(Act1; Scene 4)

Mama Nadi discovers that Sophie has been stealing from her. Rather than being angry, she is impressed by the girl's boldness and nerves. Sophie explains that she was hoping to pay for an operation that would mend her "ruined" condition. Sophie's speech obviously touches her:

SOPHIE. A woman that come in here said she can help me. She said there is an operation for girls.

MAMA. Don't you lie to me.

SOPHIE. Listen, listen, please listen, they can repair the damage.

(A moment. Mama releases Sophie.)

MAMA. An operation?

SOPHIE. Yes, he give me this pamphlet. Look, look.

MAMA. And it can make it better?

SOPHIE. Yes.

(Act1; Scene 5)

Unwilling to accept his wife's declaration of independence, Salima's husband, Fortune, arrives holding the new pot in his hand, a pitiful symbol of apology, reconciliation and making amend, which he's unable to make. He asks Mama earnestly to allow him to see Salima, but she refuses to see him ; although Salima pines for her family and husband but when her husband comes she refuses to go back with him because she is aware that she would not be accepted and with a baby :

Salima:, Now, he's willing to forgive me, and is it that simple, Sophie? But what happens when the baby is born, will he be able to forgive the child, will I? And, and ... and even if I do, I don't think I'll be able to forgive him..... Let him sit in the rain.

(Act Two: Scene 2)

Fortune decides not to leave until he sees his wife whom he had earlier turned his back on, calling her damaged goods. Tired with waiting to see Salima, Fortune tells the leader of the government army that the chief of the rebels was recently seen in Mama's bar. The government leader confronts her and Mama is got in more trouble.

A dangerous confrontation between the rebels and the soldiers begins. The conflict arriving at Mama's door, Mr. Harari makes plans to leave. Among her other things Mama Nadi possesses a small precious stone, a raw diamond. She gives it to Mr. Harari asking him to take Sophie with him, sell the diamond, pay for Sophie's operation and make sure she restores her health and fertility. Thus she gives up all of her wealth in order to give Sophie a new beginning :

MAMA. No, listen ... I'm talking about Sophie. This will raise enough money for an operation, and whatever she needs to get settled.

(Act Two; Scene 6)

As the gunfire and explosions come closer and closer to Mama's bar, the truck taking Harari away leaves before Sophie can join him .

Salima's death at the end indirectly reflects all her freedom. The battle is stopped when Salima appears, apparently having killed the baby she is carrying. Her unspeakable act of abortion makes one of the play's several climaxes. Salima's climatic event is when she says calling out to the combatants: "You will not fight your battles on my body anymore"(Act2;Scene 6) .With the tragic protest to use her body as their battleground, she dies in the arms of her husband .

Nottage ends Salima's story, despite all her struggles and suffering, somewhat in a more cruel way. Yet the lack of sorrow and of a funeral for Salima doesn't mean that she is unimportant. Her death reflects the naturalism of the play. Salima dies after complete transformation and passes the message on behalf of all ruined women all over the world. She is reflecting the entire women who, like her, were raped, ruined by war and the endless conflict for power. That kind of action is a bridge to link Salima with every other woman that has suffered and still suffering her own fate, it works as a continuity that is ever present to this day. It means that she is ever present in the story and that there is no end to her. Her final shouting is not only referring to herself, it reflects all the horrific events happening right now in many countries all over the world, in neighboring countries so close to us and even in the middle of our own countries and societies .

Conclusion

Nottage traveled to Africa because she worked with Amnesty International in Kampala and Uganda, and wanted to investigate the fact that rape is such an integral part of war and that women have been always the victims of systematic rape and murder. She found out that War's Traumatic Stress is mainly imposed on women and children. Men prepare for the order of war; women suffer from its disorder. Men sexually abuse women in a way that surprises even them in the moment of execution. The result is insensitive: when a woman is ruined, she is in constant pain and unable to have normal sexual relations. Nottage found that the physical damage from the rapes was so great that many women were left without the ability to have children. She tells us a horrible truth and makes us witnesses to the unbearable and unwatchable atrocities of wars. Her brave play is an honest journey through the loss, despair and destruction that are universally part and parcel of war- torn places. The play illustrates and gives a new awareness about the brutality of rape which tears lives of women into irreparable pieces. It also reveals the unspeakable violence of men and the boys who grow up to retain and withhold such crimes. All are left psychologically injured and traumatized; ugliness will surround them through indulging in the sexual violence that Nottage documents in her play, what happens to women in wars, stays with them long after and leaves them ruined. "Ruined" is the story of women who have been expelled from their families as well as from their societies but the play still creates hope that enables them to make something fruitful out of nothing so that they can reflect a positive attitude towards life and survival. Cleverly written, the play is effective in presenting the major characters. It is all about beautiful, vulnerable, but energetic and strong women. The women in the play are fully developed characters, they communicate the uncertainty and fear with which they live, but

they also have the courage and determination of which ordinary people are capable. They are women who fight for survival in the middle of all the hate, violence and distrust.

They are silent sufferers but with the absolute belief in the vitality and durability of the human spirit that make it possible for them to transcend the abhorrence, disgust and intense loathing to embrace life once again.

“Ruined” explores the possibilities of how to bring beauty to the hell of the war’s aftermath, and how to bring strength to women-victims so they become able to continue their lives in peace after. The concern of *“Ruined”* is a noble one: Nottage wants to render a new hope to ruined women that there is always a reason to survive, whatever the circumstances may be. The play is full of human sufferings and disasters, but still gives an affirmation of life and makes us feel optimistic about it. It is a campaign to end sexual violence and exploitation of women in Eastern Congo and in all the other regions of the world.

Sophie continues her habit of reading and singing. Being a ruined one she never gives-up, she always compromises with herself and seeks hope to survive. She reflects a positive attitude and celebrates life rather than a pessimistic approach to it. She believes that she is endowed with endless talents which she can utilize to sustain her life. She sings and sings nice as she hopes to make it a way out to possess something for her better future. Working in a bar for the women characters in the play, acts as preparation to exercise their power of choice which would enable them to drag themselves out of the mud of frustration and render a new meaning to their lives as well as the universe. This philosophical concept is confirming that a woman may become increasingly aware of herself and the energy derived from this awareness will enable her drag herself out of any passive situation and begin to exist. By exercising this power to choose she can give meaning to existence and the universe. The characters in the play, especially Mama Nadi, Sophie and even Salima, do the same.

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