



## "Dancing as if Language no Longer Existed": Politics of Songs and Dance in Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*

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### Abstract

One of the most notable African American playwrights in contemporary drama is the well-known American writer, Lynn Nottage. Her play *Ruined* earned her the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. After her play was published, she gained a solid reputation as one of Africa's leading advocates for women's rights. This paper aims to explore how music and dance continue to contribute new and intricate levels of meaning to Nottage's Pulitzer *Ruined* (2008). This quality still distinguishes her as a playwright. *Ruined* is no exception because music is a recurring theme in Nottage's plays. Most frequently, they advance the plot, elaborate emotional interiority, strengthen bonds, promote the formation of bonds or their destruction, or speed up or emphasize plot elements. In other words, Nottage's *Ruined* might be understood as an effort to transcend language through dance, songs, and music, in which many of the broken women search for a place where they can exist honestly. This paper contends that Nottage allows us to consider the intricacy of writing and documenting acts of survival in ways that can capture the process of recognition and healing by offering songs to the women to communicate their grief and aspirations. Embodiment in dance and music provides us with new ways to process our emotions and transforms a drama that might otherwise be sad, harsh, and violent into a tale of hope, resiliency, and, to some level, sorority. In a manner that words cannot, songs and dance in *Ruined* provide a chance to comprehend the characters' identities better.

**Keywords:** Lynn Nottage, songs, dance, *Ruined*, sexual assault, war.



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. . . the notion of music came very early in the process. I don't know that anyone who has been to the [African] continent, leaves without having been touched by all of the delicious, wonderful music. I thought, 'If I'm going to write about Africa, then music is absolutely part of that tapestry. (Nottage, "Interview" 2012)

### **A Brief Word on Lynn Nottage's *Ruined***

The masterwork by Nottage *Ruined* introduces to the stage a complex theme involving the immense suffering of African women, particularly during warfare. According to Lynn Nottage, human brutality in conflict is one of the most severe issues, and it has serious repercussions like rape, sex slavery, and social exclusion. Nottage declares a deep affinity to her African ancestry through her literary works, much like many other African writers who concentrate on explaining a vital task connected to the sense of belonging. Nottage reveals that her true motivation for authoring *Ruined* was to expose the horrific fear of war crimes committed against women and humanity after visiting the refugee camps in Uganda. She declared, "I'm African American." I experienced a sense of sisterhood when seated among the women, and I realized that I shared a common experience. Yes, this is currently specific to the Congo, but I think it could happen elsewhere at any time". In the civil war-torn Democratic Republic of the Congo, a group of women's predicaments is the subject of *Ruined* (Buckner 198).

The action takes place in Mama Nadi's bar, a refuge for miners, government soldiers, and rebel militia where they go to ignore the devastation of war, drink, dance, and satiate their needs. The drama is mainly about the lives of the ladies who work in the bar and their determination to endure despite the horrors they have witnessed. At Mama Nadi's bar, two new girls show up who were both recently attacked by a militia. Mama grudgingly decides to accept them and employs them. The women keep the male patrons amused while the fighting surrounding the bar gets worse. However, Mama's attempts to protect the ladies from the dangers outside threaten their lives, as well as Mama's company, as allegiances become fractured as the fight intensifies. Mama Nadi is the matron of a bar and brothel that is segregated in a mining village in the heart of a rainforest where rebels and government soldiers roam and go back. Caught in the middle of the conflict between the sexes, Mama Nadi and her girls make a living by taking advantage of the men's loneliness and desire. They do this by luring them in with

seductive dance moves, sitting on their laps, and teasing and coaxing them into joining the women in the bar's back rooms, where more expensive and intimate encounters can be had.

Mama Nadi serves interchangeable batteries of men who arrive from the same forest; their chests adorned with weapons and their foreheads swathed in bandannas, with their only distinguishing features being the color and cut of their uniforms, music, food, drink (however watered down her whiskey), and the comforts of female flesh. In fact, the same male actors play both sides of the conflict in *Ruined*, suggesting that despite their moral posturing, their cruelty and crimes against humanity are the same and indistinguishable. But Mama Nadi's is not a quiet haven. Only her strong will and the sexual delights she trades with the troops prevent them from raping her and her girls and plundering the meagre stores they depend on for survival. The social contract is entirely in jeopardy in this scene; even though the back half of the set is made up of rows of dense rainforest trees, they are illuminated menacingly, almost as if they are hiding the perpetrators of the women's terrible deaths.

The unstable operation is both a haven and a torment, with mercurial safety and comfort. Nottage painstakingly fills in the blanks of her characters' pasts, present, and futures to reveal information about the setting and the current political climate while gradually inducing fear and tension in her characters. When Christian shows up at the bar, he gives Mama Nadi two additional items for the price of one in addition to the trinkets and supplies he has brought to sell to her. We do not know he has been talking about individuals until he takes into the bar two filthy, obviously abused young ladies named Sophie and Salima; the haggling between him and Mama seems insensitive and uncaring. Like a slave auctioneer, Mama looks over the two women. Christian adds that despite being attractive, Sophie will not be helpful to Mama's enterprise because she has been "ruined" by rebels who stabbed her and dismembered her genitalia. In every step Sophie takes, the memories of her assault can be felt in her uneven, unsteady gait.

Mama unwillingly agrees to take in Salima, the younger lady who is less physically damaged, and Sophie, even though she places little value on Mama's economy. Nottage shows that Mama has more heart and shrewder politics than it first looks in between Mama's tentative embrace of the two broken women and their eventual losses and redemptions. Even though she is strict with her daughters, she acts out of fierce love for them. Salima was forcibly removed from

her husband and daughter after being raped by rebels. Salima's story is told throughout the play's two acts by Nottage until her pregnancy as a result of rape and her husband's arrival combine to drive her to commit an awful crime that serves as one of the play's many climaxes.

As she attempts to establish some semblance of everyday life between the tense encounters with the men, whose brutality and arrogance are interchangeable, Nottage modulates the play's level of tension by cutting between visits from rebels and government soldiers with more familial scenes of Mama and her girls. Mama and the girls bear their presence because it gives them food, but the acts they must perform in return for it serves their souls. On the other hand, Sophie makes a living through Mama's employment by singing. She is backed by a guitarist and a drummer who play for the bar's theatregoers and characters. She sings with a golden, bell-like voice that beams joy over her face. In a location of such spiritual and material need, the sound's richness is a luscious and heartbreaking contradiction. The musical performances also provide a Brechtian element that allows viewers and characters to break from the action's brutality. This allows us to take a deep breath, stop and think, and wonder how a sound so lovely could emerge from a situation so precarious. The women concentrate on Nottage's antiwar protest.

Mama Nadi is a force to be reckoned with. She stuffs the wads of money she receives from the troops into her bra, patting her breasts as they fill up with cash. The money seems to go straight to sustaining her, as though it were hidden from the labor it is being paid, nestled close to her flesh and heart. Even though the money is filthy, Mama Nadi rechristens it as it is tucked between her breasts before giving it to Christian in exchange for food (and the occasional piece of chocolate she is enamored with). Nottage highlights that women who are used as props in conflicts between men suffer the consequences of war on their bodies. Late in the play, Salima launches her terrible protest and cries, "Don't fight your wars on my body!" Despite having been assaulted, these women find courage and dignity.

Christian is informed by Mama Nadi, the imposing and cunning matriarch of this colony, that "I didn't come as Mama Nadi; I discovered her here." She assumes the heroine role and rises to a challenge that is not hers. The guys have let these women down. Salima was an arbitrary victim in a conflict without rules, but her body now pays the price. Salima's husband was purchasing a new pot

when the rebel forces overran their community and attacked her. She wails that she is carrying the "baby offspring of a monster" while pregnant. Her husband clutches the new pot in his fist, a pathetic representation of the restitution he cannot pay, while he begs Mama to let him see Salima.

Women who have been sexually assaulted are viewed as broken in the play's world and in the real world of violence in the Congo that Nottage alludes to. The women are trapped by such absurd paradoxes and are at a loss. Mama and other women profit from their ruined flesh. Mama, however, gets her compassion from somewhere else. Christian and the women are captured as prospective victims during a crucial encounter between the rebels and the army, and then life returns to its uneasy rhythms. Christian, who has been struggling with alcoholism and has been perceived throughout the play as being slightly less than a man due to his occupation as a merchant, finally expresses his love for Mama. The play abruptly changes into a heterosexual romance in which the love of a lovely man redeems Mama and her daughters. The formerly unflappable Mama breaks down in tears and reveals to Christian the truth that connects her to the women under her control before she can accept his adoration. The play's one false note, which undermines the otherwise rigorous and objective account *Ruined* conveys, is the eleventh-hour confession Christian takes to reunite the nuclear family. Would that Nottage had not given in to realism's demand that stories conclude with a heterosexual marriage that resolves everything but instead stayed true to her unique, Brechtian image of the effects of war on women until a more painful finale. This pleasant conservative ending compromises the gender dynamics of the Congo that *Ruined* so powerfully depicts.

### ***Ruined and Brecht's Mother Courage and Her Children:***

*Ruined*, which began as an adaption of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother and Her Children*, gives women in a conflict zone a chance to speak up by updating the plot and setting it in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The location doubles as a brothel that serves both the government's and the rebels' military, as well as a form of shelter for young ladies who suffered greatly due to the ongoing civil war. Mama Nadi, the bar's matron in a mining village, takes in two girls, Salima and Sophie, in the play's opening scene. Mama Nadi is keen on maintaining her impartiality, so the two parties' leaders visit each other alternately and are expected to abide by the house rules. Even though the matron agrees to help her, Sophie is unable to flee to the city in the climactic scene, and Salima's final words,

"You will not fight your battles on my body anymore," echo with a haunting aspect.

Nottage once asserted that *Mother Courage* by Bertolt Brecht was the primary inspiration for *Ruined*. However, Nottage comments that it becomes a "big divergence" because she rejected a "Western theatrical construct". After all, it is "completely the antithesis" of her concept for *Ruined* in an interview with Randy Gener for American Theatre (Gener 119). According to Gener, "*Ruined* neither duplicates the gestural interruptions of action in *Mother Courage* nor apes the conceptual issues in that film" (Nottage 119). Brecht and Nottage highlight a feisty female character who refuses to choose a side in a war and is worried about the price of war. Both "are told in episodes; the action is broken by a succession of songs" (Poll 191). Mama Nadi from Nottage, on the other hand, succeeds in a different goal and escapes the war with no material losses. Even though Mama Nadi insists that her business comes first after *Ruined*, she eventually forms a strong bond with the women under her care.

Moreover, neither Mama Nadi nor the prostitutes in her brothel fall victim to the "totality and finality of defeat" that defines Brecht's monumental play. *Ruined* is also "written from a woman's point of view. Thus, there is much more compassion, there is much more optimism than in *Mother Courage*," as Nottage notes (Gener 119). Finally, if Brecht's play is a "socialist epic about commerce during a period of war," as Gener said, then Nottage's piece sheds light on the physical damage caused by the war on women's bodies (Gener 119). Additionally, Nottage avoids the distancing effect crucial to Brecht's epic theatre. Nottage instead draws viewers into the dangers faced by Congolese women throughout the war by fusing social politics with an uncommon love tale.

What makes each of those plays effective in its contexts is one of the critical distinctions between *Mother Courage* and *Ruined*. In many ways, Brecht's "*epic theatre*" and its reliance on a distancing effect that prevents viewers from developing an emotional connection to the characters and the play are the antithesis of *Ruined*. *Ruined* hardly ever breaks the fourth wall, although Brecht's characters frequently do so to highlight the play's artificiality and alienate the audience. Nottage's play encourages viewers to empathize with and identify with the characters, which makes it emotionally and politically potent (much as Brecht's work did in a different context). Additionally, *Ruined* has a more

sympathetic and upbeat tone than Brecht's play, which is a method of audience engagement that is just as important and beneficial as Brecht's.

While *Mother Courage* and *Ruined* both use the perspectives of strong female protagonists to analyze seismic, war-torn environments, their apparent parallels must also be considered in distinct ways. Through a play that is set in 17th-century Europe during the Thirty Years War, Brecht explores the authoritarian horrors of fascism that led to the start of World War II in 1939. Comparing a piece she sets a little more than ten years earlier, in 1996, when the Democratic Republic of Congo was wracked by civil conflict, Nottage investigates the global economic and political instability that is punctuated by violent ethnic and sexual violence on the continent of Africa. In other words, Brecht cuts into the heart of hegemony and the financial transaction that fuels it at the price of "humanity" In *Ruined*, sexual assault is depicted as the perversion of dictatorial authority in a place where much of the globe has rejected the notion of "humanity." As a result, the latter must be analyzed differently than by "universalizing" analysis because Africa, specifically sub-Saharan Africa, has long been seen as the fungible abyss of the globe. Beyond words, the aggressive Congolese committed violence against Congolese women and girls.

The phrase "the physical trauma experienced by the women, as well as how society views them" could be included in the title (Fox 7). But it also functions on a variety of other levels. Sophie is one of the girls in the bar who has been ruined or raped by the militia (Fox 13). The individual delivering Sophie to Mama Nadi informs us that the militia "did ungodly things to the child, took her with a bayonet and left her for the dead (Fox 13). In addition, Sophie's moral character has been destroyed in the eyes of her family, town, and society, who will not accept her back, and in the war economy, where women are valued for contributions, they can no longer make. Finally, due to a war sparked by our addiction to electronic products and the world's reliance on coltan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo lies in ruins. The piece compels viewers to consider their possible personal involvement in a country's economic and political collapse and the exploitation and violence directed at women, whose wrecked bodies war is frequently waged.

*Ruined* fundamentally refers to cultural conceptions of Congolese women whose bodies have been utilized in combat by local rebel militias and military personnel from the government. It also refers explicitly to traumatic fistula in



Nottage's play, which happens when vaginal tissues are ripped due to violent sexual assault. Some critics have asserted that *Ruined* overemphasizes the physical harm and mental suffering caused by individual transgression in contrast to the economic procedures and frameworks that promote global inequity.

### **Dramatic Functions of Songs and Dance in *Ruined*:**

In her plays and creative process, Nottage heavily incorporates music. She frequently mentions listening to music while she writes, constructing a playlist for a play that influences and reflects the mood and rhythm of the world she imagines on the page. Like many of Nottage's plays, *Ruined* is filled with songs, dance, and music to set the mood of a scene, highlight the tension of the events onstage, and elicit a critical reaction from the audience. In terms of structure, songs turn into almost Brechtian interludes that disrupt the play and allow Nottage to challenge the audience to confront their own psychological and physical dissonance, admit their role in the violence being depicted onstage, and become inspired to act against the suffering they are seeing. Sophie, a young woman who has escaped a horrible rape and has been brought to Mama Nadi's for safekeeping by her uncle, a travelling salesman, sings the play's original songs. In addition to reflecting on the agony and terror that the conflict had brought to the DRC; Sophie's lovely voice also reflects the DRC's brightness and beauty. The soldiers engaged in combat in the forest, and the miners and businesspeople who benefit from the area frequent Mama Nadi's pub.

Sophie was "ruined," "damaged," and "taken by rebel forces . . . spent five months in the bush as their concubine," according to my analysis of songs beginning with that word (Nottage 9). According to the report, the militia "did unspeakable things to the child, snatched her with a bayonet and then left her for dead". Even for her friends Salima and Josephine, Sophie exposes her anguish and wrath in her songs. Nottage contends in one of her interviews that, for Sophie, "The music provided solace. In a manner she couldn't get in her regular life, it was the one area where she could rediscover herself and appreciate the beauty of her voice" (Nottage 212). Sophie is a broken lady when she arrives at Mama Nadi's. Therefore, she cannot "earn her keep" by pleasing the brothel's male customers due to her physical limitations.

Sophie can sing, despite her experience leaving her with physical and mental wounds that she may never fully heal from. Her music offers a haven from the war and exposes the psychological damage it has done to individuals still

living with its effects daily. Her lovely voice takes her and any listeners away from the atrocities of the war and the brothel, giving them a brief respite from the hardships of daily life in a musical utopia free from suffering. She expresses her sentiments of imprisonment in her songs, which are a balm for the spirit, lifting weary soldiers and consoling their victims simultaneously. Nottage has given Sophie a voice through singing. She is a rare bird that "still cries out to be heard," giving voice to the many war victims and demanding an end to the conflict. For example, she sings "You Come Here to Forget":

You come here to forget,  
You say drive away all regret.  
And dance like it's the ending  
The ending of the war.  
Have another beer, my friend,  
Douse the fire of your fears, my friend,  
Get drunk and foolish in the moment  
Brush aside the day's heavy judgment. (Nottage 14)

The theme of this song is the predicament of Sophie and the other girls. In it, Sophie implores the brothel patrons to "take another beer, my buddy" and put their problems behind them. The song's cheery melody belies an undercurrent of desperation stemming from difficult circumstances and the will to live. The play's music represents a dual form of escape: it both represents the women's yearning to be free from the traumas they have experienced and serves as a distraction for the males who frequent the brothel and seek to escape from their horrifying wartime memories. This song represents the hope, suffering, and pain that she has experienced; it is a kind of self-motivation and warning to militias and soldiers who come to the brothel to enjoy with girls that they can enjoy as much as they want. Still, one day the time of suffering will be over, and the war will also end.

While wars rage and atrocities against women like Sophie, whose songs are a desperate call to be heard, continue, "You Come Here to Forget" can also be seen as an indictment of the escapism of theatre itself and the possibility that viewers watching *Ruined* may have come to the theater as a leisure activity, and

an elitist one at that. Have another drink, my friend/wipe away the angry tears, my friend/get drunk and foolish on the moment/Brush off the day's weighty judgment" (Nottage 20). Sophie had come to console Salima on another occasion when she is harmed by one of the rebel "filth" troops who "bit me" (Nottage 20). Sophie informs Salima about the meaning of her music.

Is that what you think? While singing, I'm praying the pain will be gone, but what those men did to me lives inside my body. Every step I take, I feel them in me. Punishing me. And it will be that way for the rest of my life. (23)

The third song sung by Sophie is "rare bird" in Act 1 Scene 4. The song says:

A Rare bird on a limb  
Sings a song heard by a few,  
A sound that haunts the forest,  
A cry that tells a story, harmonious,  
To be seen is to be doomed  
It must evade, evade capture,  
And yet the bird  
Still cries out to be heard.  
Hey, monsieur, come play, monsieur,  
The Congo sky rages electric  
As bullets fly like hell's rain  
Wildflowers wilt, and the forest decays,  
But here we're pouring champagne. (26)

The metaphor used in "Rare Bird" is not particularly nuanced; it riffs on a long tradition of depicting women as imprisoned birds, particularly when they are caught in some confinement, no matter how seemingly forgiving (such as the home environment). Sophie is the "rare bird" singing that song, which is "heard by a few, a few patient and distant listeners," not the typical patrons at the bar who do not typically pay attention to music and songs as they drink and fight. Sophie was rescued but also "trapped" by Mama Nadi and by the war outside the bar's walls.

The only way Sophie could connect with and communicate with people would be by singing, which is why she is "still crying to be heard," even though Sophie's immediate surroundings never really "hear" her songs. Songs in the play

work by having Sophie establish a connection with the audience, if not necessarily with the actors on stage, which makes songs in the play work by asking the audience to be those "patient and distant listeners" who pay attention to the song as an integral part of the play's meaning. Or perhaps the audience connection is made precisely because the other characters largely disregard Sophie's music. The audience is forced to take on the burden of caring for Sophie and the other ladies and paying attention to them when no one else is.

When it comes to dancing, we first see Josephine performing for the brothel patrons. Josephine is one of the prostitutes who alternately hopes and despairs that maybe one day a man will save her when speaking to the other girls. She is loud and forceful, proud to be the daughter of "a chief," "the most prominent man in the village," and one of the prostitutes. She has a noticeable, disfiguring scar across her stomach (Nottage 23) from a rape, evident when she dances. She can dance in ways that range from delightfully alluring to quite hazardous, as shown in Act 2, Scene 1, where she loses control to the point where Sophie must help her offstage. Act 1 scene, where she dirty dances for Mr. Harari, who she names as one of the guys who would take her "to a high-rise apartment," demonstrates her ability to use her sexuality as a weapon while refusing to compromise to win over the patrons (Nottage 24). All those affected by the atrocities of the conflict can find some solace in the final dance.

Christian has also experienced horrible hardship. He has not experienced the same brutality as the ladies. Still, to survive, he has had to make several compromises, such as trafficking in commodities and girls and drinking alcohol, which he knew was poison for him. Nevertheless, he keeps attempting to connect with Nadi and seek whatever small pleasures he can, given the circumstances provide or find. At the same time, the final action may be interpreted as directed explicitly at Mama because it represents a significant emotional shift for her to trust him enough to confide in him and share a small amount of intimacy with him, if not her entire heart. She has been protecting herself and "her daughters" throughout the play. She typically does this by having zero trust in anyone. Mama has discovered that she cannot ultimately ensure everyone's safety. She also appears to understand that she is human, not an island.

Despite Sophie's slight transgression of taking some money, she trusts her and is now choosing to trust Christian. Although it does not imply that they will have a happy marriage, we can sense optimism that she is developing some tenderness and trust with the clan she has established at the bar. In contrast, Mama

Nadi and Christian's flirtatious banter changes as their relationship does in the play. At first, Mama Nadi flirts with maintaining Christian as a customer and keeping him coming back with whatever he has to offer from the "outside" world. The play depicts Christian's masculinity as different from other men's because others view him as less of a "genuine" man because he is a trader rather than a warrior. Mama Nadi believes that flirting with Christian is less risky than flirting with soldiers, which may help to explain why the play is mainly kept in a flirty manner.

In the final act, where a possible home fantasy for Mama Nadi and Christian is alluded to, it also sets the stage. Based on their charming and seductive dialogue in earlier acts, the audience would have believed they were possibly falling in love while trying to keep it a secret from each other and themselves. Christian counters Mama Nadi's assertion that she is "ruined" by saying they "can do better" (Nottage 67). He tries to soothe her, but she pushes him away until he has to grasp her, according to the stage directions. Christian says these lines when the drama comes to an end:

CHRISTIAN. (*Recites.*) I swear to you, this is the last time I'll ask.  
A branch list to and fro,  
An answer to the insurgent wind,  
A circle dance, grace nearly broken,  
But it ends peacefully, stillness welcome.

Christian then "holds his hand out to Mama; she takes it, and he pulls her into his embrace." They start dancing. She initially shows some stiffness and resistance before gradually giving in. In the guitar song "Rare Bird", Sophie drags Josephine through the doorway. They look on in disbelief as the couple dances. This last dance is a dance of opportunity and hope. The play's pivotal moment comes right after the dance when Mama Nadi finally admits to being destroyed. Although the play concludes with the couple dancing and we are not shown any signs of marital bliss, these changes in both characters and the joyful nature of the dance offer us reason to believe that there may be hope for wrecked women for the cessation of violence. In this setting, a happy ending is not to be expected, but rather a radical reinvention of Black love and joy in the middle of and despite the pain and loss of being destroyed, not merely as a means of survival.

Nottage envisions a fresh start and a future built on love. What risk is more significant than love in a destroyed, broken world? The play's concluding image of the dance has drawn a lot of criticism for what some have called a tacked-on

happy ending and the play's seeming ease with which it does it. Others have called it melodramatic; where a "fallen" woman is "rescued" by a good man's love. It can be interpreted as having an upbeat but ambiguous ending because we are unsure of what will happen to them and the women who work at Mama Nadi's. According to Nottage, who developed the piece, she was motivated by the Congolese women who endured and occasionally found reason to smile despite their suffering and anguish because these times offered a "glimpse beyond the wounds into the future" (Gener 119).

Jennifer-Scott Mobley examines the play as a melodrama in her contribution to *A Critical Companion to Lynn Nottage*, citing all the elements that support this interpretation. While they enjoy the momentary pleasures of this dance, which is an expression of humanity and love, their futures are yet uncertain. Additionally, because both individuals have experienced disability, their dance is a redemptive performance that points to the unrealized promise in black drama and shows how to see past limitations. The brilliant note allows the characters to imagine a life after the war and grasp the future, no matter how complicated and challenging it may be. Even though they try to do so, Soumya Jose argues that "the harsh and inhumane event that has plunged their lives into darkness" has caused emotional trauma. They also have the right to consider hope and take advantage of human connection (83).

Nottage made a wise decision. The reviewer writes of the resolution, "Ruined finishes with a typical dénouement in which there is a restoration of heteronormative social order, and the society is "safe," if only from evil, for a while" (Nottage 130-131). It is interesting to note that the critic describes how the play's use of a well-known (melodramatic) framework encourages the audience to accept the text's desire for societal change. Salima enters the scene at the play's conclusion and declares, "you won't fight your fights on my body anymore". In her final statement, Salima expressed her resistance toward the capitalist, patriarchal, and militaristic forces that abuse and exploit women for political, military, and commercial advantage. Salima has experienced both infanticide and rape during this war, and soldiers routinely employ these methods to humiliate and destroy women and the society they aim to subjugate.

Women's bodies can be destroyed, causing death or infertility and the dissolution of families and entire communities. Salima puts an end to her current suffering. She avoids the possibility of future torment for both her and the kid by

taking control of her mortality and refusing to bear the child of one of her rapists. Salima breaks the cycle of abuse she has endured and challenges the powers that have oppressed women for so long by taking control back from those who have wronged her. The last dance "is a gesture of continuity rather than just pleasure: life can be temporarily suspended but not stopped" (Hilton 72). The women are acting out of necessity to survive. The women dance, flirt, and communicate with the patrons of Mama Nadi's brothel, maintaining a fragile peace that protects their relative safety within and keeps the violence outside the brothel doors at bay. As a businesswoman in need of supplies to satiate her clientele and guarantee the success of her operation, Mama Nadi interacts with Christian. The flirty tone of Mama Nadi and Christian's transactional exchanges reflects their shared admiration and love for one another, which develops into a romantic possibility towards the play's conclusion.

### **The "Rare Bird" Song:**

Nottage has strategically included songs in the play to remind her sisters of African descent about the healing power of music. Sophie uses songs as a powerful tool to heal herself and forget the traumatic incidents in her life. She tells Salima that she is praying that the pain will be gone while singing. This song is all about Sophie. Sophie has a gifted voice, and when she sings, the customers in Mama's bar cum brothel enjoy only the sound of the music. They fail to understand the meaning embedded in the song. On the other hand, Sophie hopes that the story embedded in the song might open the eyes of the brutal men who rape and mutilate the helpless women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This song also reminds the perpetrators that they can never silence an African woman and that she is indomitable.

### **The "You come here to Forget" Song:**

"You come here to Forget" is about the lives of soldiers and the women whom they have brutally raped. The soldiers visit Mama Nandi's bar cum brothel to relax and forget the tensions on the war front. Even at Mama's place, they brood on war and never get completely relaxed. On the other hand, Mama's girls relive their traumatic past every time they see the representatives of the ones who ruined them. Though Sophie tries to forget the horrific rape and mutilation through her songs, they can never heal the wear and tear of her body. Sophie knows well that she should forget her sorrows and move on with her life, but she is not confident

that songs can drown her sorrows. This song unravels the very stature of African women who face life boldly despite their lacerating physical and psychic wounds. This song reasserts African women's resilience. Nottage fully exploits the transformative power of theatre to give confidence to her sisters of African descent, and *Ruined* is a testimony to her sincere efforts.

Through her piece, Nottage draws the audience's attention to a crucial moral lesson: Civil war has terrible effects on the nation and women. Women in the Congo are suffering from traumatizing psycho-social illnesses that will live in their memories due to the war against them and the participation of their armies. The government and the militias are mostly to blame for these women's misery. The focus of the play is on how war has negatively impacted women's lives. Whoriskey (2009) affirms that this contemporary play undoubtedly has a social and political message at its core. This play investigates a true remark on the terrifying realities of soldiers and the devastating effects of war on women. Nottage states that she was interested in uncovering the darker sides of women with intricate and significant links to the war.

Sometimes moral ambiguity forces women to make unpopular decisions to live, such as seducing these men in their mothers' homes. These ladies have been praying to the appetites of those guys because of the looming civil war, which is causing them to suffer greatly from social destruction. Using rape as a weapon in battle is still seen as having a negligible and uncontrolled impact, even though macho wars also affect women's bodies. According to Levett (2008), rape and violence against women, particularly during wartime, have recently come to be seen as a stain. As a result, raped women are shunned by their society and families. Nottage adds that these men do not physically conflict with other males or fight just for political causes. However, these soldiers engage in rape to state their sadistic appetites, making prisoners' wives and girls in concentration camps prizes of war.

## **Conclusion:**

The core commitment of *Ruined* is to celebrate and examine the spectrum of human life in all its complexities: the sacred with the profane, the transcendent with the lethal, the flaws with the beauty, and selfishness with generosity. (Whoriskey xii)



The use of rape as a weapon in conflict has also practically become standard among armies simply because it is a military tactic employed by the fighting parties to impose their dominance and degrade the other party (Puechguirbal 2003). These crushed ladies are considered a curse and are expelled from any human contact. Ironically, because these dehumanized women have no clear future, this brothel house ends up being their sole refuge and the only location where they may find relief from the misery brought on by competing forces. In *Ruined*, songs have a clear dramaturgical purpose on several levels. They start by giving a sense of location.

On a phenomenological level, we know that music has a profound emotional impact and physically affects us rhythmically in a way that language does not. As a result, the African-inspired rhythms of Dominic Kanza's music infiltrate our bodies and immerse us more fully and emotionally in the play's world. In a way, the music breaks down the fourth wall of what would otherwise be a realistically based, climactically constructed representational performance. When a play's climax is reached, audiences may be able to experience catharsis in the Aristotelian sense, which allows viewers to maintain an emotional distance from the work while still feeling "pity and fear" and being satisfied with the emotional journey as it continues onstage as the characters experience it.

The songs function structurally in terms of how they advance the plot and occasionally heighten suspense. Every piece features an escalating stressful beat, and lyrics allude to Mama and the girls' every day "powder-keg" existence. One gets the impression that the political tides could change at any time, that angry words or misinterpretations could be made, and that their lives might be in danger. Shakespearean metaphor is another level at which Nottage's songs operate. For instance, Sophie sings like a bird in a cage and is the troubled, Rare Bird she sings about. Later, Mama and Sophie perform the song "Warrior Knows No Peace," which might appear to be a lullaby for the weary soldiers in the bar. Throughout the play, singing and dancing recreate the ambience of a small-town tavern in the Congo.

Mama Nadi and her daughters manage to smile and amuse their guests despite having witnessed the horrors of war firsthand. The performers do not merely fulfil the audience's expectations; they feel empowered to express their pain, joy, and optimism via song and dance. Even under challenging circumstances, the human drive to survive triumphs. The drama unmistakably

implies that women should not be relegated to the stereotype of pathetic war victims. Additionally, in a way, the music in the play softens the harsh facts it exposes. In conclusion, the music in *Ruined* accomplish more than just enhancing the performance's mood. Instead, Nottage's songs expand on the individuals' mental landscapes and the intricate dynamics of the injured, broken Congolese women. The audience can understand the characters' feelings through these songs and dancing. In a manner that words cannot, songs and dance in *Ruined* provide a chance to comprehend the characters' identities better.

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## "الرقص و كأن اللغة لم تعد موجودة: تسييس الأغاني والرقص في مسرحية لين نوتيج "المحطات"

أخذت الدراسة على عاتقها بيان الوظيفة الدرامية للأغاني والرقص في مسرحية المحطات (٢٠٠٨) للكاتبة الأفروأمريكية لين نوتيج. وقد أتاح لنا التجسيد في الرقص والأغاني والموسيقى أخذة بعضها بأعناق بعض طرقا جديدة ضافية الذبول لمعالجة عواطفنا وتحويل الدراما التي قد تكون حزينة وقاسية وعنيفة إلى قصة أمل للشخصيات النسائية في المسرحية بطريقة تعجز الكلمات عن التعبير بها. ثم كانت النتائج التي خطتها الخاتمة، ومنها: أن الأغاني والرقص ذات علاقة وثيقة بالتعليق على معاناة النساء في الحرب في الكونغو. وهي فرصة لسبر أغوار الشخصيات بشكل أفضل.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** لين نوتيج - الأغاني - الرقص - المحطات - العنف الجنسي - الحرب