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**Trauma and Resilience of Congolese Women in Lynn Nottage's *Ruined***

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### Abstract

*This research paper aims to explore the lasting impact of trauma in Lynn Nottage's Ruined. This paper depicts the reality that sexual violence during the war has a severe impact on Congolese women. The women in the play who have been assaulted carry a heavy burden of emotional pain. Although the violence itself is in the past, it has a lasting impact on the survivor's life and psyche. The trauma the female characters have experienced continues to haunt their daily lives. Yet, they have the power of resilience, which helps them to continue their lives despite all the atrocities. This research paper studies the traumatic condition of the female characters and their resilience to continue their lives. This research paper shows their affirmation of life despite being ruined mentally and physically, and they are able to bring hope amid hopelessness. They start feeling safe, aware, hopeful, and loved through female bonding and with the help of working through the process, reading novels, music, and songs. They also prove they are not merely victims but survivors who survive the atrocities of brutal war played on their bodies. This paper, in connection with gender trauma, attempts to explore the reality that sexual violence continues its assault throughout a person's life. However, this research paper focuses on the female characters in the play who are not only locked up within this gender trauma but rather try to cope with it in their own possible way and try to escape from it. They accept the fact that they are ruined, although, in the beginning, they accuse themselves of the tragic incident that happened to them. The present research paper aims to set new ground through the analysis of this drama in light of gender trauma.*

**Key Words:** Gender Trauma, Lasting Impact, Rape, Ruined, Resilience

*Ruined* was originally directed by and released its world premiere at the

Goodman Theatre in Chicago in November 2008. For writing the play, Lynn Nottage traveled to Congo by taking her director Kate Whorisky to interview women who had directly experienced sexual violence. Her other plays, like *Sweat*, *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*, and other plays often deal with the lives of African Americans and the struggles of women. All the female characters in the play are ruined in different ways. They are emotionally and physically damaged and considered damaged goods, but they manage to live and continue their lives. Mama Nadi, who is one of the main characters of the play, gives shelter to ruined and rejected women; she herself is ruined. She is running a bar where women have to serve physically. Mama Nadi neither takes the side of rebel soldiers nor government soldiers providing food and shelter to women. All four major characters in the play are rejected by society and family, and they, too, have different experiences of being sexually harassed. Sophie, a beautiful girl aged eighteen, was a brilliant student and was preparing for the University entrance exam. However, she has been ruined, genitally mutilated. Salima, aged 18, has been attacked by militiamen, who raped her. Her husband refused to take her back and has been exiled from the village. Another character Josephine is a prostitute at Mama Nadi's bar. She was attacked by soldiers at her home, but none of the villagers came to rescue her. Mama Nadi runs the bar and provides food to "ruined" women; she herself is ruined.

*Ruined* is about the adversities of women in the Civil War-torn Democratic Republic of Congo. The play is set in Mama Nadi's Bar, which is a place for government soldiers and rebel soldiers to forget the ruins of war, where they dance, eat, and drink with women and fulfill their desires. The play revolves around the lives of the women working in the bar, which continues their lives despite the brutalities they have experienced. Christian brings two new girls, Sophie and Salima, to Mama's

bar. Mama takes advantage of the women, but at the same time, they are safe with her. She provides food and shelter to them.

The Democratic Republic of Congo has a history of a long civil war. The country is a center for mining valuable minerals, including coltan, used in manufacturing mobile phones and technology. The rape of women has become a main tool of war. Before the war, all four of these women had happy life filled with contentment, but in the heat of the war, all of them are psychologically and physically disturbed. This is the context in which the play is written.

Nottage listened to the stories of brutal acts that happened to Congolese women. For over twenty years, Congo had a brutal civil war between the rebel groups and the government military in which the civilians suffered the most from unstable conditions.

Lynn Nottage narrated parts of Congolese women's stories in her play *Ruined*, as it has been supposed that the theatre was a powerful medium to raise awareness of women's issues. Different critics and reviewers have their interpretations regarding *Ruined*. Jeffery Gettleman in, "The sexual violence in Congo is the worst in the world. The sheer numbers, the wholesale brutality, the culture of impunity. It's appalling" (1).

African American writer Lynn Nottage tried to identify the situation of Congolese women, as Fatimah Saleh Ali Al-Humoud in "Violence Against Women: A Feminist Study of Women's Situation during the Civil War of the Democratic Republic of Congo in Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*," argues, "She was able to transcend this world to find the art in the noble struggles of the voiceless, nameless, and less fortunate"(9). Nottage herself had worked as the press officer of Amnesty International. During that time, she observed and understood the women's issues in

Africa, for instance, the suppression of women, patriarchy, gender inequality, and rape. She further argues that in *Ruined*, Nottage projects the “inner past thoughts of marginal characters whose voices remain muted and whose stories have been deemed irrelevant by those around them who wield more power” (9). Nottage became a voice for the voiceless through the characters of the play.

Moreover, Carmen Mendez Garcia, in “This is my place, Mama Nadi’s *Feminine Spaces and Identity in Lynn Nottage’s Ruined*” discusses the dualistic representation of brothel in *Ruined*. She states:

The brothel, the main location of the play, is thus a dualistic space that changes constantly: sometimes it looks much like a domestic space, described in the stage directions as “a refuge,” while in some other moments, it is clearly opposed to the sleeping quarters or resembles a cheerful business that contrasts with the bleak public space outside of the front door, the other two locations in the play. Often, however, the bar takes on a menacing hue when men from both factions and miners enter it. Liminal, dual, and complicated as this space is, it is one that Mama Nadi protects vehemently, thus turning it, ironically, into a neuter space, i.e., one where the unchecked aggressiveness of the outside world is not allowed and women can, if not thrive, at least survive.

(4)

In the beginning, it seems Mama focuses on making profits from these young ruined women, and she is running a business without having pity and mercy, gradually people know that she has also provided shelter, warmth, food, and many more basic necessities which are not available outside the bar.

Moreover, Nottage has brought the African style of narration to *Ruined*. In this regard, Fatimah Saleh Ali Al-Humoud opines in the article “War’s Terrors, Through a

Brothel Window," claims "The music in *Ruined* becomes a means of the excavating character of uncovering scars" (12). Nottage contained this technique to highlight that through the help of song, traumatized female characters, especially Sophie, expresses the feeling of the possibility of getting rid of all obstacles one day. Nottage applied music to emphasize the plot and theme. Fatimah Saleh Ali Al-Humoud further argues the African narrative techniques by stating, "This technique has its own alienation effect in the sense that the universality of surviving war turns this play into a referendum on gender violence in the times of war. Indeed, the bodies of women are once again the source of violence" (12). It depicts that women's bodies are considered a matter of pride; therefore, both militias and government soldiers target women to make opponents' families and communities weak.

However, numerous studies have assumed *Ruined* is an adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Fatimah Saleh Ali Al-Humoud claims that the play is actually a rewriting of Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, dealing with the results aftermath of the civil war in Congo. Fatimah Saleh Ali Al-Humoud states, "Nottage has structured her play with a conscious acknowledge to Bertolt Brecht" (82). She further brings up the fact that "Democratic Republic of Congo estimates of rape among women aged 15 to 49 years ... 1150 women raped every day, 48 women raped every hour, and four women raped every 5 minutes" (7). This data clearly portrays that no woman or girl is safe in Congo. Women of all age groups are at risk in Congo. Similarly, in the play, Nottage portrayed all female characters as rape survivors. Whether it's Salima and Sophie, aged eighteen, or Mama Nadi, who is forty, they are sexually assaulted.

Moreover, Ketu H Katrak in "Striping Women of their wombs': Active Witnessing of Performance of Violence" explains, "In *Ruined* Lynn Nottage creates a

mother Courage type of central character named Mama Nadi, but Mama Nadi's attitude toward the women she hires is completely benign a mixture of greed, control, and her own kindness (1). Mama's character somehow resembles Brecht's Mother Courage, who values making money. Lives principles and human emotions are far less important and do not interfere with her commitment to profit. Nevertheless, Mama Nadi cares for, protects, and loves her girls besides profiting from them.

Different studies present the idea that the brothel in the *Ruined* is safer than in the country outside it. In this regard, Garcia Moreno, in "Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women: Initial Results on Prevalence, Health Outcomes, and Women's Responses," states about the role of Mama Nadi in the play who plays a major role that she is "exploiting women but in a twisted way, she's able to nurture them and keep them alive" (21). Gener writes that Mama plays the dualistic role; she is protecting the girls, and at the same time, she is profiting from the same girls. However, Garcia also argues Mama Nadi's place also offers security and "some kind of dignity that is not available outside" (133). Garcia tries to say that if these ruined women go and live outside, undoubtedly they would be prey to soldiers and rebels who would brutally rape them, murder, and mutilate them. Garcia opines, "A brothel is a place of sexual exploitation... the girls working there are much more respected and safe than they would be outside where they would be constantly in danger of being raped or ruined or even murdered." (33). The brothel is a haven for these women; they consciously chose to work there because, except brothel, they have no place to go. This shows their willingness to live life.

Moreover, Helen Clarkson considers violent rapes as intended vulgar actions to destroy communities. "As a weapon of war, sexual violence is highly effective. The outcome is traumatized impoverished population" (17). Clarkson comments that

different tribal groups believe that raped woman or girl is regarded as a curse whereby the whole family is deeply affected by it. However, these stigma or false belief systems have no genuine concern or kindness for women's feelings and shattered souls.

Similarly, Sharon Friedman in "The Gender Terrain in Contemporary Theatre of War" observes, "Although both exploited and protected by Mama Nadi, the women find moments in which they imagine finding sustenance in each other to rebuild their lives on the little capital Mama Nadi is able to save... share secrets and confer about how they will negotiate their survival". Furthermore, Friedman argues that the women in *Ruined* are "doubly victimized sexually assaulted and impregnated or left unable to reproduce... they must endure shaming by male members of their families and communities, who perceive the violation of 'their' women as another form of defeat" (597).

Moreover, Patricia Hynes, in "On the Battlefield of Women's Bodies: An Overview of the Harm of War to Women," opines that the female body in war becomes the main target for both groups to achieve their goals. Hynes states:

Of all who suffer the trauma of war, women and girls pay the highest price for the military culture and war environment that prepares and inures men to kill and exploit humans. No matter the age, gender, and civilian status and that cordons off a zone of tolerance for sexual exploitation of women and girls around military bases, during armed conflict, and in post-conflict peacekeeping and occupation sites. (4)

During wartime, women pay the highest cost for its devastating result. They not only lose their lives and their loved ones but also become the battleground for rape to defeat opponent groups.

Different critics have different viewpoints; they reflect on traumatized and ruined women of the play. Besides, the above insights of critics regarding the play *Ruined* deal with the traumatic experience of female characters and also highlights the resilient spirit of the women in the play amid chaotic and dreadful scenario. Therefore, this research paper approaches the conceptual literary theory of trauma, specifically gender trauma, by using key ideas from Kali Tal that deals with gender trauma, violation of the female body, and aftermath conflict.

Gender trauma deals with the trauma faced by women due to the discriminating nature of patriarchy. It includes the extreme torture caused by exploitation, harassment, and rape of women in male dominant society as the cause of traumatic experiences. The term 'trauma' provides a method of interpretation of disorder, distress, and destruction caused by psychological repression. In the most general definition by Cathy Caruth, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of "sudden catastrophic events, in which the responses to the event occurs the after the delayed and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (181). Gender trauma deals with the trauma faced by women due to the discriminating nature of patriarchy. It includes the extreme torture caused by exploitation, harassment, and rape of women in male-dominant societies as the cause of traumatic experiences.

Gender Trauma theorist Kali Tal in her book *Worlds of Hurt*, reveals, "Rape victims are aware that the legal system does not work in their favor, and they fear the social, psychological, and personal consequences of prosecuting rapist (19). Kali Tal opines "sexual abuse increases the risk of objectifying women as a commodity of man's leisure, irrespective of their will" (29). Women are traditionally limited to the domestic sphere. Gender violence against women in Congo is both inevitable and

unavoidable as Congo society itself is deeply rooted in patriarchal norms and male supremacy that shape its social-cultural structures. Ketu H Katrak in “Striping Women of their wombs’: Active Witnessing of Performance of Violence” views:

A politics of the body involves socialization involving layers and levels of ideological influences, socio-cultural and religious, that impose knowledge or ignorance of female bodies and construct women as gendered subjects or objects. Women writers present the struggles of protagonists to resist patriarchal objectification and definition as daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, and mother-in-law. Socio-cultural parameters of womanhood—wifhood, mothers of sons valued more than mothers of daughters, infertility, and widowhood are grounded within economic, political, and cultural norms that consciously and unconsciously constitute an ideological framework that controls women’s bodies. (10)

Moreover, victimized women were harshly rejected and disgraced by their own families and societies and didn't offer any safety or help. They were ruthlessly rejected and let alone to deal with their fragile fate. Within their own unhealed trauma, physical bodily damage, also social and economic atrocities, they helplessly survived. It directly points out the politics of patriarchy made upon the sexuality and body of women. Kali Tal further argues:

Women have difficulty talking about rape and sexual abuse because there is no name that represents the trauma of being taken by force. . . . When an act cannot be accurately named, it cannot be readily verified, to oneself, or to others. . . . Unable accurately to symbolize the event, rape victims can be victimized still further by the dominant reality, which may lead them to believe that they are responsible for this terrible act which they themselves do

not perform. (214)

Women start feeling guilty, and they blame themselves for the cruel incident that happened to them in the play also, Sophie recalls her past and starts blaming. Salima doesn't reveal her pregnancy to anyone in the beginning as she fears being rejected even from the brothel and considers herself guilty for this.

Survivors of rape victims often get pregnant, and they get very little access to options on how to handle this unwanted situation. Many women are targeted by horrible violence and genital mutilation. Kali Tal, in this connection, states, "An individual is traumatized by a life-threatening event that displaces his or her preconceived notions about the world." (15). Furthermore, the physical power exercised by males upon the female as if the female body is for exploitation, subordination, and control through masculine violence. Regarding the violence against women Kali Tal mentions, "Women are threatened with violence, regardless of their race or class" (20). Thus, violence against women exists in all classes and races.

Trauma studies show that those who get through the trauma have different psychological and physical perspectives toward life as they change their perceptions of self, reality, beliefs, and feelings. The psychologist Judith Lewis Herman observes that traumatic people can harm themselves, "Traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror and evoke the responses of catastrophe"(44).

Kali Tal defines trauma as a threat to life or bodily integrity or a personal encounter with death and violence. She puts her notion beyond the psychological aspect. She talks about gender and sexual exploitation as a source of trauma where marginal

groups are always prone to be a victim.

Nevertheless, Herman and other prominent figures in the field of trauma, such as Cathy Caruth, Dominick Lacapra, and Dori Laub focused on the significance of expressing the experience of suffering as being a very crucial step in the healthy process. Herman advises that verbalization “remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible” (259). Pioneering in the field of trauma, Cathy Caruth argues that we can increase the understanding of literature through an analysis of traumatic experience by stating that “literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the relationship between knowing and not knowing” (3). Cathy Caruth provides a general definition of trauma as “the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena.” (91). Caruth also suggests that all traumatic events have a “moving and sorrowful voice that cries out a voice that is released through the wound” (2). This voice “witnesses a truth that (the survivors) cannot fully know” (3). When survivors are unable to fully understand traumatic causes and consequences and unable to express themselves loudly feeling, the writers like Nottage play as their represented voice and critically present the unknown to be known by the world. In her play *Ruined*, Nottage focuses on the crises of women in a marginalized region (Congo) where the only information provided about that country is the crimes committed by militias on civilians, which are mentioned by just numbers in media. Therefore, human beings in that country are merely seen as a number with no actual significance or identity. Caruth is concerned with the past traumatic experience in the literary text that plays the role of proving the traumatic representation and reference. It concerns how it becomes text and how a wound becomes voice.

With this regard, Dominick Lacapra also advocates trauma in her book *Writing History, Writing trauma*, which concerns the perspective of historical traumas such as the Holocaust and the effects of unimagined, unspeakable trauma. Lacapra also distinguishes two forms of remembering traumatic events "acting out" and "working through." The writer explores his concept of trauma and argues, "Trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence; it has belated effects that are controlled only with difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered" (41). Likewise, *Ruined* is an example of trauma narration that invokes the unspeakable experiences of rape survivors in Congo. Most people cannot speak about their experiences in front of others; rather, they hide their feelings within themselves. But expressing the horrible traumatic experience of loss and mourning in the narrative form of literary work, according to Dominick defines it as the post-traumatic act of "Working Through" in which the victim adopts the free articulators' practice to the extent that one works through the intensive traumatic pain. Illustrating the main features of working through, the post-traumatic process, Lacapra defines:

Working through is an articulatory practice to the extent works trauma, one distinguishes between past and present and recalls in memory something that happened to one back then, including mourning and modes of critical thought and practice, involve the possibility of making distinctions or developing articulation that is recognized as problematic. (22)

Here, Lacapra explores the practice of articulation of a person's memories so that the traumatic person is able to understand the issue of traumatic incidents and able to settle his/her problem. It makes traumatized people mature and gives them the courage to defend themselves. The 'working through' is only possible in the post-traumatic phase, while the survival tries to contextualize the past in the present. LaCapra writes,

"I see working through as a desirable process. In working through, the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present and future" (30). It is her beginning phase for critical examination of the past, present, and future, as told by LaCapra. When LaCapra talks about the process of 'working through, he also mentions how 'acting out' comes together. He says, "Acting out is a process but a repetitive one. It is a process whereby the past, or the experience of the other, is repeated as if it were fully enacted, fully internalized" (148). Unlike in the process of working through, in acting out, the victim repetitively remembers his past. There is no critical distance from the past. A complete trauma narrative as a means of coping with it goes through a good bend of 'working through' and 'acting out.' For LaCapra, trauma narration goes through two processes 'acting out' and 'working through.' His description of acting out and working through are two processes by which persons and societies deal with traumatic historical pasts. La Capra says, "Acting out is related to repetition, and even the repetition compulsion . . ." (142) and "working through is the ability to undertake it . . ." (144). LaCapra associates acting out with a repetition compulsion, repeating the trauma and healing power to wound, and working through with the generation of alternate relations between people that counter those destroyed by trauma and that continue to be threatened by acting out. Acting out is a process where traumatized victims commit actions that somehow repeat negative emotions/actions associated with trauma, and working-through counters this process. "The trauma survivor must find empathic listeners in order to carry on. Piecing together a shattered self requires a process of remembering and working through in which speech and affect converge in a trauma narrative" (20). The process of remembering the past and working goes together. Lacapra puts forward the notion that acting out is a melancholic stage, a process of returning to trauma in the

past. It doesn't come immediately. Working through is a way of coming out of trauma.

However, Kali Tal explains how flashbacks work when someone is traumatized, flashbacks are common phenomena in women who have suffered sexual abuse, just as they are in combat veterans, Holocaust survivors, and other PTSD sufferers. Kali Tal explains:

Both flashbacks and intrusive dreams occur in women who are in the forgetting or minimizing phase, perhaps functioning as an internal reminder that there is something important the woman needs to resolve. These flashbacks may occur often. Sometimes they are uncontrollable, and at other times they can be summoned by a woman who is attempting to work through her abuse by remembering suppressed events. (64)

Past memories frequently haunt when traumatized women are in the process of healing by forgetting and forgiving, which assists in dealing with reality by coping with it.

Psychologist and art therapist David Read Johnson describes the three-stage process for treating Posttraumatic Stress Disorder opines:

First, the patient needs to gain access in a safe and controlled way to the traumatic memories, to overcome denial or amnesia for the events. Second, the patient needs to engage in a lengthy working-through process in which the trauma can be acknowledged, re-examined, and conceptualized, resulting in a modification of its intensity. The trauma is transformed from an intrusive reliving of the event into a memory that can be recalled when one wishes. Third, the patient needs to re-join the world of others through interaction with other trauma victims. This is about power on every level to find forgiveness

from others for what happened and to be able to go on with one's life. (202-03)

David argues that it is very significant to have control over haunting traumatic memories first of all, and trauma victims need to accept the fact, and they must indulge in working through the process. And at last, sharing traumatic experiences with other trauma victims helps to heal from it, and it provides the power to forgive people, and eventually, they navigate the way forward for a better life. In the play, Nottage carefully portrays all female characters together in the brothel, where they share their horrific incident and feel relief. Kali Tal observes:

Patriarchy denies the value of women and children, and capitalism works in tandem with patriarchy in a white, male, upper, and middle-class conspiracy to oppress. Power, Randall suggests in an argument that bears great similarity to Cynthia Enloe's proposition, is primarily divided along gender lines and then complicated by issues of class and race: "Feminist theory reminds us that even as we deal with individual acts of sexual and physical violence committed by men, it is the power concentrated in the hands of one gender that is the fundamental social problem." (228)

Kali Tal raises the voice of cognitive psychology and feminist politics that identifies strongly with the testimonies of rape and incest survivors. Tal opines a different view from Lacapra and Caruth. Tal argues literature on trauma consists only of the writing of the victims and survivors of trauma, which quite differs emphatically from psychologically oriented writers like Caruth and Lacapra. Trauma is a life-threatening event that displays one's preconceived notion about the world. Mainly, Taal deals with recent critical approaches to testimonies. Her study is based on the systematic violence against women and a sense of how traumatic literature might change society. When survivors' voices belong to a marginal group, they are suppressed and denied to

be heard. Kali Tal argues that after being sexually abused, it is really hard for women to gain the same respect as before in the patriarchal society, although the crime is done by the male. She further insists it is women who take the burden of that traumatic incident for the rest of their life, and they are not even considered human rather, they are taken as damaged or ruined commodities.

In a patriarchal society, men consider women's bodies as their private property, and they can use them according to their wishes. They also use them as a weapon during wartime in the form of rape, violence, abuse, and mutilation to weaken the opponent's group's male ego.

Ms. Whorisky goes with Nottage to Africa for an interview and conversation with women who survived the cruel war. After the interview, they were not even able to express or cry their stories because their tragedy is greater than all that might be uttered. Kali Tal states, "The journey of the survivor is from fragmentation to wholeness, but the whole is marked by the struggle. The survivor works to integrate her experiences and her beliefs, to create a space in the world where her truths can be heard, to see rather than to merely look" (222). Nottage has done this task responsibly in her play to make the world hear and feel the cries of Congolese women.

Furthermore, music and song play a significant role for trauma victims to heal from the traumatic incident and articulate unspeakable sufferings through songs. Martin J. Daughtry illustrates that music and songs are used as healing agents where the survivors can regain their agency. Through music, singing, and dancing, survivors of war trauma can "extract valuable information from the ambient soundscape while struggling with the deleterious effects that it produced in their ears, throughout their bodies, and in their psyches" (2). Thus songs and music become strong voices and provide them with relief and safety as they release their feelings, emotions, fears,

pain, and anxiety. In the play, Nottage uses music and songs as an instrument to express unexpressed feelings of traumatized and ruined women. Moreover, Kali Tal observes:

Literature of trauma is written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it "real" both to the victim and to the community. Such writing serves as a validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author. Des Pres reminds us, "Displacement is the goal of any story, in degree; all fiction aims to usurp the real world with a world that is imagined." Desires for affirmation and release cross subgenre lines, manifesting themselves in writings by combat veterans, Holocaust survivors, and rape and incest survivors. They are also manifested in the work of many feminist writers who are not specifically identified (either by themselves or others) as trauma survivors. (21-22)

Kali Tal explains literature on trauma, wishes for affirmation, and insists on healing power by retelling the traumatic experience. Randy Gener, in the article "On Lynn Nottage's Ruined," writes Nottage's view, "As painful as was, I felt this urgency for them to recount every comment... At times I wanted to close my ears and stop listening. But I think they really wanted to go on record. They wanted the world to hear their stories" (2). Most of the women were incredibly traumatized, and yet they still found the strength to tell their stories.

Bell Hooks, in "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women," urges for solidarity among women. She opines that:

Male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men. We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We

are taught that women are 'natural' enemies and that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well. We must learn to live and work in solidarity. (129)

Bell Hooks insists on having a female bond to achieve the same goal, which is to get rid of all patriarchal dominations. Rather than being an enemy of each other, women must unite to live and work in solidarity. In the play, *Ruined*, Nottage succeeds in showing the bonding and love among women who are ruined differently to move from the trauma. Women share love and compassion and provide warmth for each other.

The play begins with Christian's entry into Mama's bar. Christian is a traveling salesman. He traffics stuff across the border for business in war-torn areas of the DRC. He has come there with some provisions for her, which she has requested. Christian flirts playfully with her, and it is clear that they are old friends.

Christian: (Reciting) What is this love?

An unexpected wind,

A fluctuation,

Fronting the coming of a storm.

Resolve, a thorny bush

Blown asunder and swept away.

There, Cherie, I give you a poem in lieu of the kiss you won't allow me. (2)

Christian expresses his love for Mama, but Mama hesitates to embrace his love openly. She considers herself unworthy of his love; therefore, she often ignores him. Christian tells her he has brought something for Mama, and he asks her for guessing. Mama knows that he has brought girls for her.

Christian (sitting back down): Go on, take a peek in the truck. And don't say I don't think about you.

Mama (smiling): 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 all the offerings, unimpressed.)

Mama: I don't know; they look used. Worn. (4)

This conversation between them shows they are bargaining for the price, and here women are taken as a commodity. Christian urges and convinces Mama to buy these women Sophie and Salima and allow them to stay and do work for Mama in her bar, as the latter is the only option for their survival. These women are dehumanized and degraded by being sold as commodities, with no concern for their dignity and pain. In the brothel, the abused women who are presented as men's entertainment give access to strange men by selling their bodies and sexuality. Ironically, the bar/brothel becomes a more and more safe zone and becomes the only place for their survival as a comparison to the frightening and miserable life outside it, where they are left highly unsafe and weak.

Moving forward, Salima and Sophie get shelter in Mama's Bar. Mama asks Christian whether they know their job or not. Christian replies, "Yes, they know, and they came willingly" (5). This shows how helpless these women are that they know they have to serve physically in the bar, yet they get ready to do that because they have no place to go. This is evidence that they are willing to survive at any cost; therefore, the play is not just about victims but survivors. The survivors in this play

are based on real survivors. This play portrays characters who continue their lives. People who can find hope and friendship in the most horrific of circumstances. In an article by Randy Gener, "On Lynn Nottage's Ruined," which writes Nottage's view, "I wanted to paint a three-dimensional portrait of the women caught in the middle of armed conflicts; I wanted to understand who they were beyond their status as victims. My play is not about victims but survivors" (1). Women portrayed in the play are survivors; they do all the possible things to survive the atrocities, and they don't give up.

Moreover, when Mama Nadi, the owner of the bar, denies taking ruined (raped) women to work in the bar, Christian requests Mama Nadi how important it is for them to get shelter there, and he explains Salima's past to Mama.

Christian: Salima is from a tiny village, no place, really. She was captured by rebel soldiers Mayi Mayi, and 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.

Mama: And the other?

Christian: Sophie, Sophie is.....

Mama: Is what?

Christian: Is... ruined. (5)

Both women were sexually attacked by militias and soldiers. Salima's husband left her after being raped. And Sophie has been 'ruined' she was genitally mutilated. They are rejected by their families. Dunia Prince Zangwe, in *The New Sexual Violence Legislation in the Congo: Dressing Indelible Scars on Human Dignity* claims, "Sexual

violence in the Congo as many countries doesn't stem from war and conflict but from prior social, economic, and cultural discrimination that nurture sexual violence when conflict breaks out" (18). Generally, we think that war is the cause of violence, but in the play, women are traumatized not just because of civil war but it is because their society is guided by patriarchal ideologies, as mentioned by Zangwe; otherwise, these women were not left to be dead by their own husbands, families, and societies.

Democratic Republic of Congo is very prosperous in natural resources of precious minerals, such as coltan, diamond, and gold are the reason for war, which resulted in the killings of the villagers by different militias. The Militias' force and aggression to rule over the mineral resources welcomed the door for the global marketplace and miserably covered with the violation of human rights. Rape is used as a targeted plan to defeat the opposition and to control through fear and intimidation. Nonetheless, when assaulters rape individual women or girls, they not only attack individuals but also attack the whole community. In the play, Salima looks very frustrated all the time she repeatedly remembers her past,

Sophie: What's your problem?

Salima: Nothing. Nothing. I'm fine.

(Salima, frustrated, stands up and walks away.)

Sophie: You've been short with me all morning? Don't turn away. I'm talking to you.

Salima: "Smile, Salima. Talk pretty." The soldiers don't respect nothing.

Them miners, they easy, they want drink, company, and it's over. But the soldiers, they want more of you, and- you know what he say? He say fifteen Hema men were shot dead and buried in their own mining pit, in mud so thick it swallow them right into the ground without mercy. He says, one man stuffs

the coltan into his mouth to keep the soldiers from stealing,” he say, bragging like I should be congratulating him. And then he fucked me, when he was finished he sat on the floor and wept. He wanted me to hold him. Comfort him. (16)

Here when Sophie notices Salima’s behavior, she speaks to Salima to behave properly in the bar. But frustrated, Salima explains how selfish these men are. Although Salima knows very well that it is her duty to please men who visit the bar, she cannot behave nicely due to her disturbed psyche. However, men who visit Mama’s bar are from both the militia and government sides; they come there to forget the outside chaos. The irony is these are the same men who are seeking comfort from the women after ruining them outside the bar.

Moving forward, Salima’s husband Fortune comes to the brothel in search of his wife, but Mama tells a lie to him that his wife isn't there. Fortune accuses Mama of lying and stands outside the bar waiting for Salima. Inside the bar, Mama clarifies Salima and Sophie when Sophie insists Salima meet Fortune.

Mama: Tst! Both of you are so stupid. He'll see you, love will flood into his eyes, he'll tell you everything you want to hear, and then one morning, I know how it happens; he will begin to ask ugly questions, but he won't be able to hear the answers. And no matter what you say, he won't be satisfied... But if you want to go back out there, go, but they, your village, your people, they won't understand. Oh, they'll say they will, but they won't. Because, you know, underneath everything, they will be thinking, 'She's damaged. She's been had by too many men. She let them, those dirty men, touch her. She's a whore.' And Salima, are you strong enough to stomach their hate? It will be worse than anything you've felt yet.

Sophie: That's not true. He-

Mama (To Salima): He left her for dead. See, this is your home now. Mama takes care of you. (Mama takes Salima in her arms.) (38)

This scene clearly portrays Mama not just getting profit out of ruined women; rather, she protects them from the cruel and brutal world. Mama reminds them that their society will never accept them at any cost. They will again bear the pain of being abandoned.

Salima, in a conversation with Sophie, recalls her past events and blames herself for the cruel incident that happened to her.

Salima: A peacock wandered into my garden, and the tomatoes were ripe beyond belief. Our fields of red sorghum were so perfect, and it was going to be a fine season. Fortune thought so, too, and we could finally think about planning a trip on the ferry to visit his brother. Oh God, please give me back that morning. "Forget the pot, Fortune. Stay..." "stay," that's what I would tell him. What did I do, Sophie? I must have done something. How did I get in the middle of their fight?

Sophie: You were picking sweet tomatoes. That's all. You didn't do anything wrong.

(Sophie kisses Salima on the cheek.). (40)

Salima accuses herself of this tragic moment. She is unable to heal from the past haunting memories, but at that very moment, she trusts Sophie and shares her devastating feelings, which helps her to feel relief. Salima repeatedly remembers her past and constantly accuses herself of her cruel fate. However, Sophie consoles her and makes her feel that she has done nothing wrong. This female bonding has helped to go through a working-through process, where they listen to each other, share their

feelings, and provide a sense of acceptance, love, and security.

In the play, Sophie is genitally mutilated, and Salima is pregnant after being brutally raped, and she says she can't forgive even the innocent child growing up in her womb. She tells Sophie, "It's the child of a monster, and there's no telling what it will be. Now, he's willing to forgive me, and is it that simple, Sophie? But what happens when the baby is born? Will he be willing to forgive the child, will I? And ...and even if I do, I don't think I will be able to forgive him (40). It is patriarchy that blames the female for any sort of worse incident that happened to them, whether it's rape or domestic violence, which is the major cause of gender trauma. Salima finally reveals the secret she has kept. It shows that she is able to speak out.

Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse makes women suffer and traumatized. In this sense, the female characters go through gender-traumatic experiences. Diverse studies in the field of trauma explore the lasting impact of traumatic experience that leaves people helpless and in a continuous struggle to bring back their memories in a bearable form. In the play, Salima frequently remembers the past she lives in memory.

Salima: I... I...miss my family. My husband. My baby-

Sophie: Stop it! We said we wouldn't talk about it.

Salima: This morning, I was thinking about Beatrice and how much she liked bananas. I feed her like this. I squeezed banana between my fingers and let her suck them, and she'd make a funny little face. Such delight. (Emotionally)

Delight! Delight! (16)

Salima remembers her daughter Beatrice who was killed by rebel soldiers. In the bar, she is haunted by her past memories; though Sophie tries to console her, she relives her past memories again and again. Salima goes through a working-through process as she is able to recall those traumatic incidents whenever she wants. She became aware

of the fact that it was not her fault. She is not guilty of this tragedy that happened to her. Nottage is concerned with various issues, such as the oppression of human rights violations and patriarchy. Relating their pain, Nottage decides to assist the women in that area. Nottage believes that listening to their painful stories and portraying them in the literature can help to grasp attention to this issue. Geoffrey Hartman, in "Trauma Writing the Limits of Literature," argues for the power of literature to represent the unspeakable: "As a specific literacy endeavor, trauma study in the arts explores the relation of words and wounds that its main focus is on words that wound and presumably can be healed, if at all by further words" (259). Therefore, Nottage uses songs as well to speak out about their pain in the play. And how desperately they want civil peace. Sophie sings a song in the bar to entertain the visitors, but she also wishes for a war-free Congo:

Have another beer, my friend,  
Wipe away the angry tears, my friend,  
Get drunk and foolish at the moment,  
Brush aside the day's heavy judgment.  
Cuz you come here to forget,  
You say drive away all regret  
And dance like it's the ending. (15)

She sang this song frequently in the play. She narrates the unbearable suffering of being ruined. There are miseries in her eyes, yet she has the desire to be free from the war, and she imagines a war-free world. Hartman shares this opinion highly believing in the strength of theatre to bring a change and raise a kind of public awareness by confirming that:

The power of the theatre is that it can peel back layers of emotion to reveal

human truths that often get lost in clinical human rights reports and detached news stories. In many societies, you will find that theatre is at the vanguard of change. The communal nature of the medium allows us to explore difficult and troubling subject matters that ultimately lead to some form of collective catharsis for the audience. (24)

Nottage's play *Ruined* has stories that don't often find their way into the mainstream media. These stories are narrated above the cruel data of wartime violent rape. The play addresses Congolese women who are terribly suffering from sexual violence and dehumanization but manage to live their life. Indeed, the play exposes awareness of their plight. Nottage depicts the results of war from a woman's perspective. She offers a voice for the African women living in the shadow of war by outcasting a story of war through the eyes of women who completely found themselves in the middle of armed conflicts and left damaged and mutilated by their abusers and by their own families.

Mama Nadi is running business money matters to her; she doesn't concern with loyalty to any group. Mama, time and again, provides safety to the women of her bar. In the bar, when a rebel soldier gives Sophie a catcall and wants Sophie, Mama intervenes and takes his coltan, offering him Salima. Mama knows well that Sophie is mutilated; therefore, she orders her to sing only. "Rebel Soldier: What about her? (gestures to Sophie) Mama: Salima is a better dancer. (Salima dances, seductively) I promise" (11). She saves Sophie because she knows that Sophie is physically mutilated. Moreover, Mama worries about all girls living in her bar. In the second last scene, Mr. Harari, who is a trader from Lebanon in the Congo on business and is a gentleman, offers Mama advice and his wisdom as an outsider. He informs Mama that Government Soldier Commander Osembenga knows that the leader of the rebel

militia Jerome Kisémbé is in her bar, and they are approaching there. He further alerts Mama that something wrong is going to happen, and he suggests she go with him, but Mama says, "I have ten girls here. What will I do with them? Is there enough room for all of us in the car?" (53). This shows her concerns about other girls. She doesn't run away from there; rather, she requests him to take Sophie and gives the raw diamond to Mr. Harari for Sophie's oppression. Mama says to Mr. Harari, "Take this. It has the name of a man in Bunia, a doctor. He won't trouble you with questions. Use my name" (52). Mr. Harari gets confused and thinks she is talking about Josephine, but she clarifies, "Listen... I'm talking about Sophie. This will raise enough money for an operation and whatever she needs to get settled" (52). This shows her generosity towards her girls. Throughout the play, she doesn't appear as a totally unethical character. Rather, she has conflicting features such as being caring, affectionate and ferocious, and aggressive at the same time. She clearly announces that her place is not for charity: "I'm sorry, but I'm running a business, not a mission" (14). In this regard, Nosheen Iqbal claims, "Mama Nadi is deliberately morally ambiguous. She does the thing that shocks the audience. But in the end, they understand her, and that she has to do what she does to survive" (1).

Mama Nadi's bar is the only place where rejected and desperate women survive. If these ruined women go and live outside, undoubtedly, they would be prey to soldiers and rebels who would brutally rape them, murder them, and mutilate them. Christian argues with Mama that she is only concerned about business, but Mama Nadi claims:

You men kill me. You come in here, drink your beer, take your pleasure, and then wanna judge the way I run my "business" My girls, ask them, Emilene, Mazima, Josephine ask them, they'd rather be here, any day than back out

there in their villages where they are taken without regard. They're safer with me than in their own homes. (51)

Sophie enters on a journey of healing and self-discovery with the help of reading a romance novel. Sophie reads the novel, and Josephine and Salima listen to it.

Sophie: "The others had left the party; they were alone. She was now painfully aware that there was only the kiss left between them. She felt herself stiffen as she leaned into her. The hairs on her forearms stood on end, and the room suddenly grew several degrees warmer\_."

Josephine: Oh, kiss her!

Salima: Shh! (26)

They forget their pain for a while and get lost in the romance novel. Similarly, they have the willingness to live life and carry big hope amid hopelessness. All the female characters are traumatized, but they are self-aware of it. Josephine, Salima, and Sophie together read and imagine a beautiful and happy world just like in the novel. Though she is genitally mutilated, she desires to be cured. She carries a big dream that she doesn't want to be in this situation forever. She was stealing money from Mama, but Mama caught it, "So tell me what you're planning to do with my money." (29) Mama scolds Sophie, then Sophie reveals why she is stealing money from her, "A man that came here said he can help me. He said there is an operation for girls... Listen, listen, please listen, they can repair the damage" (30). This shows Sophie's dream to be cured. Moving forward, Josephine dreams of being settled with Mr. Harari. In a conversation with Sophie and Salima, Josephine discloses her affair with Mr. Harari as she says, "Hey. Hey. Guess what? Guess what? I'm going to Kisangani next month"(18). In a surprised voice, Sophie asks, "What?" (18). And she further says, "Mr. Harari is going to take me. Watch out, Cherie, he's promised to set me up

in a high-rise apartment" (18). Sophie, Salima, and Josephine find hope and affirmation in their lives. Salima cries in front of Sophie and reveals that she is pregnant, "I'm pregnant. I can't tell Mama" (17). Tears fill her eyes, and Sophie hugs Salima. Sophie consoles, listens, promises, and supports Salima throughout the play. She promises Salima that she will take her out of that bar. "Sophie pulls money from between the pages of the book and empties the bill onto the bed. "This is for us. We won't be here forever, okay" (17).

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. (12)

The traumatic experience, disgrace, and embarrassment she feels haunt her, along with the cries of her baby girl, who is killed by the rebels. She painfully and unwillingly recalls her traumatic sexual experience caused by the rebels who abducted and frequently raped her. They have ruined and dishonored her body and treated her body as their own property. Salima shares this experience with Sophie as she says:

Salima: But they still took me from my home. They took me through the bush-raiding thieves. Fucking demons! "She is for everyone's 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 men be this way? (46)

Salima tells her agony to Sophie and how brutally they tore her and ruined her. Her past haunts her every single day. She then ran away and returned to her village. But she is rejected and abandoned by the villagers, even by her own family and husband. Salima is guilty of a crime she has not committed. Her community's moral values, rituals, and traditions become stronger than all human considerations. She cries at the lack of understanding and not acceptance from her own community and her own family.

Salima: I walked into the family compound expecting wide open arms. An embrace. Five months, of 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 shame... but not proud enough to protect me from it. (46-47)

In Salima's case, she experiences both controlled and uncontrolled flashbacks. The latter terrifies her. In a conversation with Sophie Salima remembers the moment which turned into horrors and recollections haunting her and bringing her to this brothel.

It was such a clear and open sky. This splendid bird, a peacock, had come into the garden to taunt me and was showing off its feathers. I stopped down and called to the bird. "Wssht, Wssht." And I felt a shadow cut across my back, and when I stood four men were there over me, smiling wicked schoolboy smiles. "Yes?" I said. And

the tall soldier slammed the butt of his gun into my cheek. Just like that. It was so quick I didn't even know I'd fallen to the ground. Where did they come from? How could I not have heard them?... One of the soldiers held me down with his foot. ... 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? (45-46)

Salima's agony is so intolerable and unsharable. She has no home and no clear-cut future. This condition is explicable as the Psychologist Dauri Laub argues that "The traumatic event, although real, takes place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality, such as casualty, sequence, place and time." The trauma thus leads Salima to feel that the event "has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and after" (69). Salima is in a position where she has very few or no options. Salima forcefully surrenders to become a prostitute at Mama's brothel. In return, she is getting some basic life necessities like food, clothes, shelter, also a possible safe place to live in.

This moral conflict and dilemma of having abused, raped, violated, and mutilated women working as prostitutes in *Ruined* is completely forcing the audiences and readers to focus on the worse realities of their lives. Working as prostitutes, they serve both the soldiers and rebels in Mama's brothel; every day, they relive the violence and torture that has damaged them. The women in the bar live in an unforgettable traumatic plight with a painful present and unsure future. In Mama Nadi's brothel, Josephine is another girl. Despite being a girl from a high-class

society, she faces the same painful circumstances as the poor women. All these women are facing equal brutality. They all share the same fate in Congo.

Josephine, in conversation with Sophie, explains how she had been assaulted mercilessly in front of other villagers and family who didn't offer her any assistance. Josephine says:

My father was chief! The most important man in the villages, and when the soldiers raided us, who was kind to me? Huh? Not his second wife. 'There she is, the chief's daughter!' Or the cowards who pretended not to know me, and did any of them bring a blanket to cover me, did anyone move to help me?

(26)

Therefore, Josephine behaves rudely and angrily most of the time because she is frustrated. Nottage revealed the painful fact that even a father's powerful position in society would not save him from being the prey of this outrageous crime against humanity. She suffers from unforgettable double trauma from her family and militia.

Besides Salima, Sophie is also taken as a "damaged" good. In the beginning scene, Christian tells Mama that Sophie is his niece and she has been "ruined."

Militants did an ungodly thing to the child, took her with..... a bayonet, and then left her dead" (10). Furthermore, he tells her that Sophie is also expelled by her family as other raped victims. Christian moreover adds, "And as you know, the village isn't a place for a girl who has been ruined. It brings shame and dishonor to the families."

(11)

Mama Nadi, after knowing all this understands and feels the inequality, sexual violence, and the way society disrespects and abandons the ruined women. Mama Nadi sympathizes with Sophie and gives her shelter in the brothel, although Sophie is more "ruined" than the other women. Sophie works as a singer at the bar and also

helps Mama Nadi with accounting. She expresses her aches through songs at the bar; her songs are more expressive than just talking about war pains. Thus, songs and music become their strong voices and provide them with a sense of relief and safety as they release their feelings, emotions, fears, pain, and anxiety. Sophie sings a song about the bird where if seen, she will be caught and caged; it symbolically reflects the deeper personal implication of her unspeakable suffering. Song and music in the play are means of self-expression and relief.

Sophie, (Sings.)

A rare bird on a limb

sings a song heard by a few.

A few patient and distant listeners,

Hear, its sweet call,

A sound that haunts the forest

A cry that tells a story,

Harmonious, but time forgotten.

To be seen, is to be doomed

It must evade capture,

And yet the bird still cries out to be heard. (38)

Sophie talks about her singing reflects and unfolds the unthinkable suffering of being ruined. "While I'm singing, I'm praying the pain will be gone, but what those men did to me lives inside of 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). This shows the lasting impact of trauma; no matter how hard they are trying, this pain is attached to them for the rest of their life.

Amid the intense mutilation of the body, soul, and humanity, Sophie shows a

glance of hope by deciding to have surgery to fix it; she has only one option, which is stealing money from Mama Nadi. Mama knows it later and forgives her when Sophie tells her that the money she wants is for her genital surgery. Mama Nadi provides precious diamonds to Mr. Harrari, a Lebanese merchant, to take Sophie to the capital city and have the surgery. Though in the beginning scenes, it seems Mama Nadi is profiting out of ruined women, in the final scene, we come to know that she is a soft-hearted woman actually, and she is sympathetic towards Sophie's situation.

Moreover, Salima's pain comes to an end after a fight between Osembenga, who is a leader in the government army, and Mama Nadi in the brothel. When soldiers try to rape Josephine, Salima comes on stage with blood, blood seeping through her dress and below her legs, and she shouts at them.

Salima. (screams.) STOP! Stop it!

Fortune. Salima!

Salima. (screams.) for the love of God, stop this! Haven't you done enough to us? Enough! Enough! (The soldiers stop abruptly, shocked by Salima's defiant voice.) (63)

Salima dies, and she leaves a world that is no less than the empire of trauma. Salima's death gives a message to the men who are involved in the war and the women of Congo who are brutally ruined due to the war as she says, "you'll not fight your battles on my body anymore" (63). Salima eventually gets this bold decision that there is only her right to her body; other men can't play war on her body; therefore, she consciously chooses this decision and gains agency. Salima slammed the ugly side that she and other women in Congo are caught between the war and the men who hold rights to their bodies and their lands. Lynn Nottage shows her audience the harsh and horrific realities facing Congolese women believing that this cruelty against women

must be stopped. Because it takes away from them their respected life. Kali Tal, in this regard, argues, "It is Bettelheim's notion of autonomy that Des Pres most vehemently opposes, for in the circumstances of the camps, the pursuit of that autonomy could only result in death: Heroism, for him [Bettelheim], is an isolated act of defiance through which the individual as an individual confronts death. . . . The act he celebrates is suicide" (33). Therefore, Salima consciously chooses suicide as she doesn't want to let her body on the battlefield anymore. She shouts, claiming that her body has only her rights. In this regard, Kali Tal argues:

It is not the trauma itself that is the source of illness but the unconscious, repressed, hopeless despair over not being allowed to give expression to what one has suffered and the fact that one is not allowed to show and is unable to experience feelings of rage, anger, humiliation, despair, helplessness, and sadness. This causes many people to commit suicide because life no longer seems worth living if they are totally unable to live out all these strong feelings that are part of their true self. (215)

This means when traumatized people do not find a way forward to navigate a happy journey, they see the only solution is quitting life. Although suicide is Salima's choice, the truth is that she no longer wants to continue her life being a victim. She had lost everything, and still, those soldiers wanted to fight for her body. Therefore, before soldiers and militia groups attack her again, she comes on the stage full of blood to tell them they can no longer fight on her body.

Furthermore, the bonding between Salima, Sophie, and Josephine shows the necessity of female bonding to overcome traumatic experiences. Kali Tal focuses on "the work of building a community of women, of making changes in the world, is inseparable from the work of healing the individual" (221). Sophie listens to all the past memories

of Salima, Josephine gets excited to tell every new thing to Sophie and Salima, and the most remarkable role of Mama Nadi, who helps her girls to keep them safe and survive the atrocities of war. This bonding really helps them to heal from their aches. In the play, Nottage makes bonding among females for identity formation and to help each other in surviving. Sophie consoles Salima time and again to forget her traumatic past. Similarly, Mama reminds them of the brutality of war going on outside, and they are left to die there, but they are safe with her.

In the play, Nottage seems to be on the path of female solidarity to survive the brutal war, their solidarity helps them to live with a little dignity and safety, and they get rays of hope amid chaos. Mama Nadi doesn't allow men to interfere in her business; rather, she makes her own decisions in the bar. In Act I Scene IV, Mama orders Osembenga, the leader of the government army. She orders, "I must ask you to leave your bullets at the bar; otherwise, you don't come in...Once you step through my door, then you're in my house. And I make the rules here" (22). and Osembenga replies "All right Mama forgive me" (22).

Salima gets self-reliance, freedom, and self-direction, and she has complete control over her life. She herself chooses to end it because only she has the right over her body. In life, she couldn't be able to stop men or others from damaging and exploiting her, and they all used her body as their battleground. Mainly the trauma studies show that in many cases, the traumatized person who is continuously living traumatic events and experiences tries to commit suicide. In the last scene, Salima commits suicide because she is pregnant, and for her, it is intolerable carrying the shame inside her womb. The play ends with Salima's death. Christian returns, and he offers his love and support to Mama Nadi. Ultimately Mama Nadi accepts him.

(A moment, Mama says nothing. Christian starts to leave, but her words catch

him.)

Mama: (With surprising vulnerability) I'm ruined. (Louder) I'm Ruined.

(He absorbs her words.)

Christian: God, I don't know what those men did to you, but I'm sorry for it. I may be an idiot for saying so, but I think we, I speak as a man, can do better.

(He goes to comfort her. She pulls away until he's forced to hold her in a tight embrace.) (62)

In the final scene, there is a romantic dance between Mama and Christian. Whether those two will ever find ultimate peace together, we do not truly know, but Nottage offers a promise of life: Yes, the war will perhaps continue to roll on, but Nottage proves that there are men like Christian who embrace women, support, shows compassion and love and even ready to live beautiful life ahead with women like Mama Nadi and it arises hope for the brothel's women that they too will experience the happiness which Mama Nadi finally embraces. In the play *Ruined*, except for Christian rest of the male characters are portrayed as cruel and violent figures, and they are the reason for the torture of women. Men, like Christian, understand beyond everything and change the perspective of women in society, who are taken as damaged goods. The romantic scene is a journey to a therapeutic process for all violated women. This provides a glimpse of hope for them. They must be strong enough to face physical and psychological pain.

Mama Nadi offers shelter, but the women are required to pull their weight. So the 18-year-old Sophie, a prostitute, also becomes the bookkeeper. Sophie's only hope lies in surgery, the money and facilities for which are not accessible. The other girl, Salima, is a young wife and mother whose monologue describing the horrendous but "bright and beautiful" day when she was abducted from her home by rebel soldiers is

heartbreaking. Salima, transferred into Mama's care along with Sophie, considers herself lucky by comparison: Abducted and repeatedly raped by soldiers, rejected afterward by her family and her village for humiliating them, Salima still hopes to reconcile with her husband. The daughter of a village chief, Josephine dreams of the big-city high life. *Ruined* calls for global attention to the brutal way that sexual violence is done to Congolese women, and it is often indescribable. Children and women are victims of this violence, being abused and raped by multiple men, often in public and before their families and community. After the rape, the perpetrator sometimes fires his gun into the woman's vagina. The purpose behind this violence is to defeat the opposition group's community. It is not just to abuse women. It is not just to abuse women, traumatize and humiliate people. Militias use rape to force civilians to leave mining areas so they can make a profit by exploiting them. The Democratic Republic of Congo is rich in minerals, but it's armed groups, not the ordinary Congolese people, who benefit from this wealth. The word "ruined" carries with it the implication of being spoiled and useless, depicting these victims as the objects of shame and rejection by their villages and families alike. This process both literalizes and culturally favors the idea of blaming the victim.

To wrap up, *Ruined* explores the reality that sexual violence continues its assault throughout a person's life. The women in the play who have been abused and attacked carry a heavy burden of emotional pain. Although the violence itself is in the past, it has a long-lasting impact on the survivors' psyches. Sophie lives with both physical mutilation and inner agony. Josephine bears a damaging scar on her body, and her memory of being raped and offered no aid by her neighbors lead her to angrily ridicule others, Sophie in particular. Salima is heartbroken by memories of the home and family she lost when rebel soldiers attacked, and she ultimately takes her

own life after acknowledging that men have used her body as a battlefield. Mama Nadi rejects Christian's love. She isn't able to accept the possibility of love until the end of the play, believing herself to be unworthily ruined. Recurring traumatic past made them feel unworthy of everything; however, in the end, they have full faith in themselves, and they believe that it was not their fault. They also try to navigate the way forward toward recovery, happiness, and a beautiful future. All these women are connected by love, compassion, sympathy, humanity, and hope that they struggle to live their life. It's hope and love that keeps them alive. The play also includes good dialogue, shouting, dancing, tears, and physical violence. The depth of the display of love and humanity is shown by all the main characters in different forms and in different constellations. After all, even amid the most dehumanizing conditions, people remember, interpret history, remake themselves, survive, dream, hope, show tenderness, and do their best. Josephine, Salima, Sophie, and Mama Nadi ultimately emphasize each woman's strength and determination to reclaim their life from the violence inflicted upon them by men. Mama's hesitant dance with Christian in the final scene offers a glimpse of hope. Ruined but life-loving Congolese women who are not victims but survivors and fighters for their rights. *Ruined* made the dramatist and her audience both act as a witness to the traumatized women. Nottage's play is a heartfelt cry for global attention, respect, and support to save Congolese women from a long struggle. It clearly provides an exact picture of the real-life obstacles and challenges of this war in Congo which uses female bodies as a battleground. Although the play is full of miseries and human sufferings of victims of Civil war, revealing massive loss and trauma, still finding hope shows the resilience of Congolese women. A new morning always brings hope and a new way to live up and survive. To sum up, the play ends with a glimpse of hope which is necessary for those women who are

healing from their trauma and moving forward.

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