

ARENA'S PAGE

STUDY GUIDE

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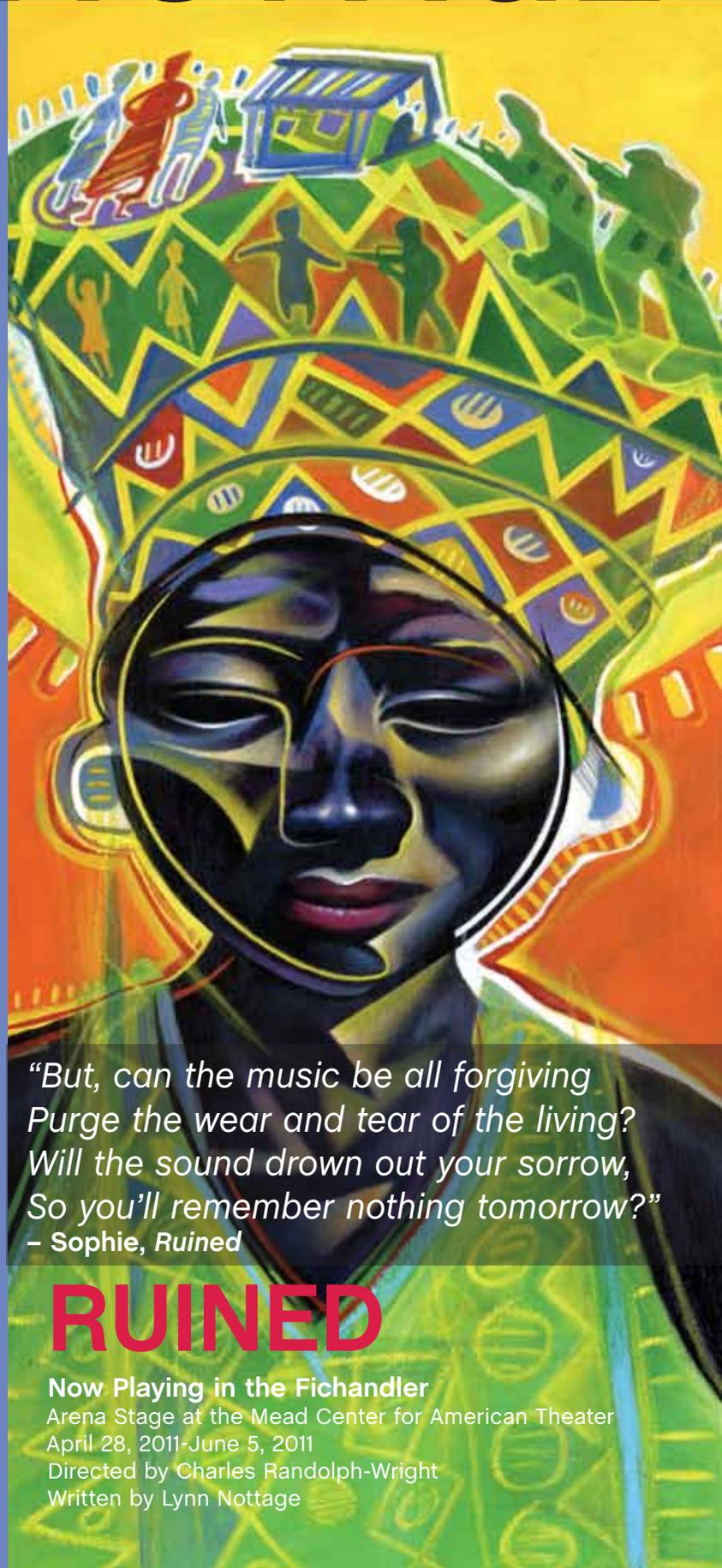
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THE PLAY

The Democratic Republic of Congo: war rages as people fight for control over its government, its people and its valuable minerals. Mama Nadi's bar is in the middle of the carnage and chaos.

Rebel and government soldiers alike come to Mama Nadi's, demanding beer, cigarettes, women and escape. A shrewd businesswoman, Mama Nadi plays a dangerous game of serving both sides to protect herself, her business and the women who work there.

A salesman, Christian, brings two women, Sophie and Salima, to Mama Nadi. There they are sold into both prostitution and sanctuary for \$20. These women have been brutally raped, discarded and abandoned. Working at Mama Nadi's offers some protection, but for how long? How long can Mama Nadi keep war outside her walls? How long can women keep hope alive – survive when a war is being waged on their bodies?



*"But, can the music be all forgiving
Purge the wear and tear of the living?
Will the sound drown out your sorrow,
So you'll remember nothing tomorrow?"*
– Sophie, *Ruined*

RUINED

Now Playing in the Fichandler

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater

April 28, 2011-June 5, 2011

Directed by Charles Randolph-Wright

Written by Lynn Nottage

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT



“African-American women have effectively been locked out of writing for film and television, and thankfully the theater has been more open to embracing our stories.”

— Lynn Nottage, Playwright

Lynn Nottage was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1964. Inspired by the women in her family and neighborhood, she wrote her first play when she was just 8 years old.

After attending Brown University as an undergraduate, Nottage went on to earn a degree in playwriting from Yale School of Drama. Nottage spent four years at Amnesty International (an international human rights organization) as the national press officer.

Nottage has received numerous awards, including the **Pulitzer Prize** for *Ruined* in 2009. She recently spoke at a public reception in Washington, D.C., about rape and violence against women in the Congo.

Pulitzer Prize – a prestigious U.S. award for achievements in newspaper and online journalism, literature and musical composition

FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT’S PERSPECTIVE

“They [students] respond to the play because the characters by and large are teenagers – they are 18-year-old girls and 18-year-old boys who are in the midst of a struggle that is probably no so distant from what they are going through in their own lives, but the context is profoundly different.

“I also think it’s important for young students to think more globally. One of the things that I learned throughout my travels is that folks overseas engage with the world much more readily than we do in the United States. You’d be hard-pressed to ask an American student to name all the countries in Africa. They would be hard-pressed to answer who are the presidents of certain countries and what are the natures of their conflicts. It is extremely important, if we want to continue as a culture that values education and learning, to understand that we don’t live in isolation and that what happens overseas impacts us.” – Lynn Nottage

MAKING THE GLOBAL PERSONAL

When war, conflict or human rights violations happen in another country it can be tempting to think of the people involved as being very different from you, to make the conflict more distant. Here are faces of other young people affected by the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. ●



Activity

A country is more than its conflicts. Research the human and natural resource potential of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Find pictures of the country and Congolese people. Listen to Congolese music. What do Congolese thinkers, artists and citizens have to say about their country? Based on your research, what is a more complete view of the DRC?

ITURI CONFLICT



The Ituri region is located in northeastern DRC. It is the site of the Ituri Conflict, a longstanding clash between two ethnic groups: the Hema and Lendu. Historically, part of the conflict exists because one group farms and the other herds, leading to fights over land use. The conflict worsened with the Second Congo War of 1998, when ethnic tensions were stoked by neighboring countries who invaded the Congo, which escalated fights over natural resources.



In the play, Salima is Hema and was assaulted by Lendu men. ●

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

“You’re in the Congo. Things slip from our fingers like butter.”

— Mama Nadi, *Ruined*

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a country located in central Africa. A mineral-rich country, it is part of the second-largest rainforest in the world. Of its population of 65 million, half are under age 18. The DRC was once colonized by Belgium and has been exploited for its natural resources for centuries.

Although the country gained independence from Belgium in 1960, the DRC has erupted in multiple civil wars. Prime ministers have been assassinated, a dictator installed and overthrown, and neighboring countries have invaded. All these have resulted in the deaths of millions of Congolese people.

Although a peace agreement was signed in 2003, fighting between rebel and government groups still rages in eastern Congo. It is estimated that 45,000 people in the DRC die every month, and nearly 6 million have died since 1996 as a result of the conflict. ●



Activity

Locate the Democratic Republic of Congo on a map of Africa. Notice the countries that surround it. How does its geographical location partly explain why it has been the center of so much conflict?

TO CONTROL MINERALS: THE EXAMPLE OF COLTAN

“Six months ago it was just more black dirt. I don’t get why everyone’s crawling over each other for it.”

— Mama Nadi, *Ruined*



Coltan is short for columbite-tantalite, a tarlike mineral found in the DRC. The Congo has approximately 64 percent of the world’s reserves of coltan. When refined into a powder, coltan is used to regulate the flow of electric currents in cell phones, computers and other electronic devices. It is widely used in countries like the United States.

A recent report by the United Nations says that all parties involved in the conflict have been involved in the mining and sale of coltan. The money rebels and militias receive from these sales helps them buy more weapons and supplies for the war. According

to four studies by the United Nations, local militias, neighboring countries, government soldiers, and multinational corporations all benefit from Congo’s minerals and contribute to the fueling of the conflict. This includes the United States.

Because mining and selling minerals such as coltan is an important source of income for the local population in the war-torn country, there is much competition and fighting over mineral sites.

In this way, coltan and other minerals pay for the continuation of violence and conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. ●

MODERN USES OF COLTAN

How many of these items do you own or use?

Laptops

Cell phones

Jet engines

X-ray film

Hearing aids

Digital cameras

Game consoles



Activity

Often we use goods and services and don’t consider their sources.

Make a list of your five favorite items (ex. your sneakers, your favorite fast food, etc.). Research where the materials for these items come from and where they are made. What surprised you about your findings?

RAPE AS A WEAPON

Since fighting broke out in DRC in 1996, hundreds of thousands of women have been victims of sexual violence. Sexual violence is often called a weapon of war and is not unique to this conflict; it has been used throughout history and the world. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has declared it a weapon of mass destruction. It is not only a byproduct of war but can be systematic and strategic.

Rape is not about sex. Instead, it is a way to:

- terrorize and divide a community. These brutal acts are sometimes performed in front of family members and other witnesses.
- show power and strengthen control. A woman can be raped by one man or many, repeatedly, over a long period of time. She is helpless to stop this.
- carry out “ethnic cleansing.” Men purposely impregnate women of a different ethnic group to slowly but surely genetically eliminate that group. This use of rape cannot be verified in the case of the Congo, but is documented in other conflicts such as the Bosnian War in the 1990s in Europe.

During war, men can commit these crimes with little fear of punishment. Their victims cannot or will not identify them and, even if they could, who will punish them when a country is at war? ●

WHAT IS “RUINED?”

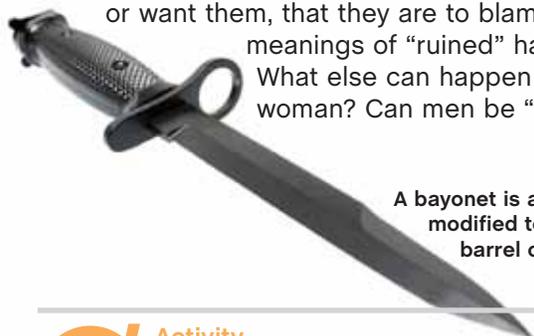
Sophie has been raped with a bayonet (see picture). Her sexual organs are permanently damaged. She doesn't have money for medical treatment. She is “ruined.” This is the specific definition of “ruined” within Lynn Nottage’s play. However, in more general usage, “ruined” has also been applied to rape victims.

“I was made poison by their fingers, that is what he said. He had no choice but to turn away from me, because I dishonored him.”

– Salima, *Ruined*

“Ruined” goes beyond physical abuse. Women must also deal with the psychological pain of the abuse. In the DRC victims can range from 3 to over 75 years old.

“Ruined” women can be shunned by their families and communities. They can be treated as dirty and worthless. They can be told that no one could love them or want them, that they are to blame. What other meanings of “ruined” have you heard? What else can happen to a “ruined” woman? Can men be “ruined?” ●



A bayonet is a knife modified to fit on the barrel of a gun



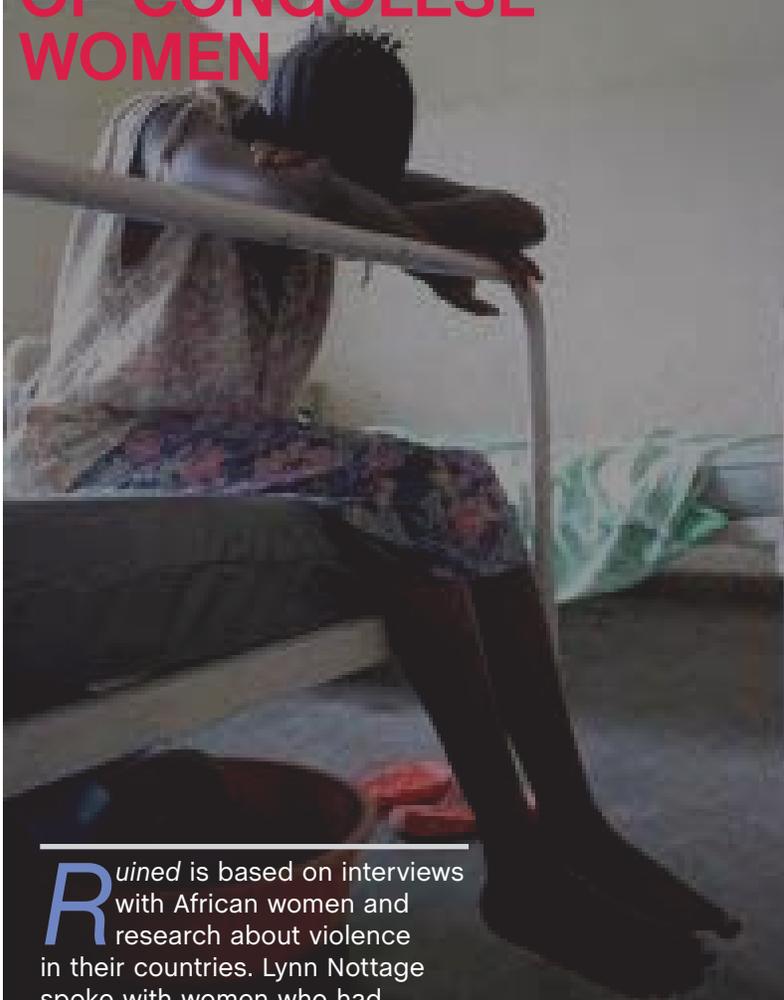
Activity

Major media outlets have covered violence against women in the DRC. Human rights organizations have made information and personal accounts easily accessible. Research this tragedy online. Find one thing you can do to help end the violence.

FISTULA: PHYSICAL DAMAGE

Fistula is torn and damaged tissue in the vagina and anus. In rape cases, this damage sometimes can be caused by bayonets, glass bottles, branches, guns and bullets. After a group has finished raping a woman, they may permanently damage her by one of these means to send her back to her home with as much damage and shame as possible. In some cases, the physical damage can be treated with surgery. ●

REAL-LIFE ACCOUNTS OF CONGOLESE WOMEN



Ruined is based on interviews with African women and research about violence in their countries. Lynn Nottage spoke with women who had stories similar to the following.

“We were accompanied by bodyguards for everything, even when we went to the toilet. ... We had to be at the disposition of the man who raped us all day. It was always the same man. Even if I did not want to, I had to be his concubine (sex slave). He always had his gun pointed at me and threatened to kill me if I resisted him.”

– Therese

“One of the men hit me demanding that I lay down. I refused. He continued to hit me ripping off my clothes until I was subdued. While this was happening, two men held my husband. My children were present and in front of everyone, they raped me.”

– Maman Nsimire



ACTIVITY:

Here is the Fichandler Stage, a theater-in-the-round with the audience on all sides. How would you transform the space into the setting for *Ruined*? Keep in mind that you must not block views from the audience!

How can the stage be the bar, the bedroom and the outside?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

No Mercy: A Journey into the Heart of the Congo by Redmond O'Hanlon
King Leopold's Ghost by Adam Hochschild
The War Within the War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo by Joanne Csete, Juliane Kippenberg, Human Rights Watch
The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History by Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja

On the Web

Friends of the Congo: www.friendsofthecongo.org
Women for Women International: www.womenforwomen.org
Women in War Zones: www.womeninwarzones.org

On DVD

Pushing the Elephant – documentary by Chicken & Egg Pictures
NIGHTLINE: Heart of Darkness – five-part series with Ted Koppel
Congo: White King, Red Rubber, Black Death – movie by Peter Bate
Lumo – a feature-length documentary about a young Congolese woman on an uncertain path to recovery at a unique hospital for rape survivors
The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo – documentary by Lisa F. Jackson

For other research and articles pertaining to *Ruined*, visit Arena Stage's Sub/Text: Your Virtual Dramaturg at www.arenastage.org/shows-tickets/sub-text/.

Research and accounts generously provided by Friends of the Congo and Women for Women. Arena Stage's study guide for *Ruined* is part of its partnership with the DC Arts and Humanities Council's Live to Read program.

Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.
- Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.
- Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.
- Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.
- Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.
- Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.

Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.

Enjoy the show!



the mead center
for american theater

1101 Sixth Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024
Phone: (202) 554-9066
Fax: (202) 488-4056

Written by Julia DePalma
Edited by Rebecca Campana
Illustration by Rudy Gutierrez

Visit www.arenastage.org for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.