

## **SOLIDARITY AGAINST VIOLENCE: WOMEN 'S STRUGGLE IN LYNN NOTTAGE 'S *RUINED***

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the play "Ruined" by Lynn Nottage and its portrayal of women's unity in the face of violence. This analysis focuses on the play's female characters and how they react to and cope with the play's setting of conflict and brutality in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It employs postfeminist theoretical frameworks to investigate the cultural and historical aspects that contribute to women's understandings of and responses to violence. The play shows the women's fight for survival and their strength in the face of patriarchal tyranny. There are five main parts to this study. In the first part, we are introduced to the drama "Ruined" and its primary themes of aggression, warfare, survival, and community. The play's critical reception and the analytic frameworks under consideration are discussed in the second half. The final part of the essay focuses on the female characters in the play, namely on their resistance and actions of solidarity against violence. Using postfeminist theory, the fourth segment examines the cultural and historical elements that determine the women's experiences of violence and their actions of solidarity. The results are summarized, and the paper's relevance is defended, in the last part.

**Keywords:** Women's fight, resistance, cultural variables, historical context, patriarchal oppression, Lynn Nottage, Ruined, violence, conflict, survival, solidarity, feminist theory, postfeminist theory, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

### **Introduction**

Abdullah and Zaid, (2022, 25) claim that one could assume that all humans automatically have all the protections. But the fact is that all the liberties are but the fruit of Feminism's long fight for them. It's clear that greater feminist fight is needed since women constantly endure marginalization, discrimination, harassment, and assault. In this sense, in the second part of the 20th century, postfeminist philosophy evolved as a critique and development of classic feminist views. The term "post-feminism" refers to a multitude of viewpoints and concepts that have developed from or reacted against the feminist ideologies that came before it. It is not a single, cohesive movement. It's crucial to understand that post-feminism does not signify the demise of feminism or a rejection of its objectives. Instead, it aims to reconsider and build upon the fundamental principles of feminism in light of modern culture.

Like Eugene O'Neil who tries his best to reflect the suffering of the American family, in general, throughout his works and literary writing (Almaarroof, and Saeed, 2022, 1), Postfeminist philosophy echoes the anguish of women in America, in particular. It has been developed by a number of influential individuals, each of

whom brought fresh views and insights to the subject: Angela McRobbie: A pioneer in the study of post-feminism, McRobbie is a British sociologist and cultural theorist. She has written extensively on how postfeminist attitudes are mirrored in modern society, and her work analyses the intersections of feminism, popular culture, and media. On the other hand, Susan Faludi in her best-selling book "Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women" (1991), American author, journalist, and feminism Faludi analysed the media and cultural reaction against feminism in the late 20th century. Her work served as a foundation for postfeminist criticisms of the media's influence on public perceptions of gender equality and women. Judith Butler is another philosopher and gender theorist who established the idea of performativity in regard to gender in his landmark book "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity" (1990). Her beliefs have played a significant role in the development of postfeminist theories, which reject both the essentialist views of gender that underlie classic feminist theory and the binary divisions between male and female. In his turn, Bell Hooks: A significant figure in third-wave feminism and postfeminist theory, Hooks is an American author, educator, and social activist. She has been instrumental in advancing a more inclusive and intersectional vision of feminism, opening the way for postfeminist ideas, and her work focuses on the interconnections of race, gender, and class. Finally, Rosalind Gill is a British sociologist and psychologist who specializes in media and post-feminism. Her research focuses on how postfeminist beliefs are ingrained in how women are portrayed in the media, notably in the fields of advertising, beauty, and fashion.

These pioneers, along with several others, have served to influence the continuing discussion over the changing nature of feminism and its connection to modern society. They have also made contributions to the creation of postfeminist philosophy.

Award-winning playwright Lynn Nottage is renowned for her works that address social and political concerns, especially those that impact women. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where her drama "Ruined" is set, women experience gruesome brutality and conflict. The play was internationally praised for its portrayal of women's resiliency and bravery in the face of hardship and received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2009. As noted by researcher Jeanie Forte, "Nottage's plays are marked by her unflinching gaze on social issues, particularly gender and race" (Forte, 2015). In "Ruined," Nottage focuses on the experiences of Congolese women trapped in the middle of a conflict and forced to negotiate a hostile environment full of sexual assault and exploitation.

Debra Ann Byrd, another researcher, states that "Nottage's plays are not only socially relevant, but they also serve as a call to action" (Byrd, 2016). No exception is made as "Ruined" emphasizes the pressing need to confront the abuse and oppression experienced by women in war areas. It emphasizes the call to action that "Ruined" represents, further underscoring the play's relevance and urgency in addressing issues of violence and oppression. Furthermore, Author and theatre professional David Rieff analyses the relevance of "Ruined" in its representation of the effects of war on civilians, especially women, in his book "Theatre and War: Notes from the Field". According to him, the play "is an attempt to show the reality of war in a way that forces audiences to think about the consequences of violence for those who are not fighting, but who are nevertheless caught in its grip" (Rieff, 2011). illuminates the ways in which "Ruined" seeks to portray the realities of war and violence in a way that challenges audiences to think about the consequences of violence on civilians. This is important because it situates the play within a broader conversation about the impact of war on non-combatants.

In her turn, Megan Lewis, another academic, emphasizes the significance of "Ruined" in its portrayal of African women as nuanced and multifaceted individuals. As she puts it, "Nottage's play challenges the stereotypes of African women as passive victims by presenting strong, resilient, and resourceful characters who are not defined solely by their experiences of violence" (Lewis, 2014). highlights the importance of "Ruined" in representing African women as complex and multidimensional characters, challenging stereotypes that often reduce them to passive victims. This is significant because it underscores the play's contribution to broader conversations about representation and the politics of representation.

Finally, historian and anthropologist Lorraine Markotic addresses how "Ruined" sheds light on the effects of war on women's bodies and psyches in her book "The Politics of War Trauma: The Aftermath of World War II in Eleven European Countries." The play, according to her observation, "reveals the ways in which the effects of war trauma can be gendered, and how women's bodies are often the sites of violence and abuse" (Markotic, 2010). emphasizes the ways in which "Ruined" illuminates the gendered impact of war trauma on women's bodies and psyches, further underscoring the play's relevance in addressing issues of violence, trauma, and recovery.

A variety of viewpoints are offered on Lynn Nottage and her play "Ruined" in these citations. In tackling topics of women, racism, war, and brutality, especially in the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo, they emphasize the play's relevance and urgency. The citations also show how multifaceted and complicated the play is, as well as how important it is for debunking myths and shedding light on how war trauma affects women's bodies and minds. Overall, these observations create the groundwork for a more in-depth examination of the play's themes of women's fight and unity against abuse.

### **Hypothesis:**

The hypothesis of this research is that the female characters in "Ruined" resist and respond to violence through acts of solidarity, which are shaped by cultural and historical factors. The paper argues that the play portrays the women's struggle for survival and their resilience against patriarchal oppression.

### **Aims and Questions:**

The aims of this research paper are:

- 1- To explore the theme of solidarity against violence in "Ruined"
- 2- To analyse the ways in which the female characters in the play resist and respond to violence
- 3- To examine the cultural and historical factors that shape the women's experiences of violence and their acts of solidarity

The research questions are:

- 1- How do the female characters in "Ruined" resist and respond to violence?
- 2- What cultural and historical factors shape the women's experiences of violence and their acts of solidarity?
- 3- How does the play portray the women's struggle for survival and their resilience against patriarchal oppression?

### **Literature Review, Significance and Contribution:**

The literature review examines the critical reception of "Ruined" and the themes of violence, war, survival, and solidarity in the play. The review also explores the theoretical frameworks used in the analysis of the play. This research paper contributes to the understanding of the theme of solidarity against violence and women's struggle in "Ruined". The study provides insights into the ways in which the female characters in the play resist and respond to violence, and their acts of solidarity. The paper also highlights the cultural and historical factors that shape the women's experiences of violence and their acts of solidarity. The research adds to the existing scholarship on the play and contributes to the broader discourse on violence against women in conflict zones.

### **Methodology:**

This research paper uses qualitative research methodology, specifically textual analysis according to postfeminist theory. The study examines the text of the play "Ruined" and analyses the characters, plot, and themes. The paper also draws on secondary sources, including critical essays, articles, and books, to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis.

### **Post-feminist Theory**

The late 20th-century notion of post-feminism has been used to literary works in order to analyse gender roles and their negotiation. Literary representations of gender and power are a major focus of postfeminist theory, as is the dynamic nature of these representations throughout time. According to postfeminist philosophy, books may be used to question and expand upon established gender norms and identities. In literary works, postfeminist philosophy employs the following fundamental principles, tactics, and techniques: exploring the ways in which gender and power are represented in literature, examining the ways in which gender roles are negotiated and subverted in literature, analysing the ways in which gender and power are portrayed in literature, examining the ways in which literature can be used to challenge traditional gender roles and create new possibilities for gender expression, and examining the ways in which literature can be used to explore gender identity and the construction of gender. Critics in the field have commented on post-feminism in literature in a variety of ways. For example, scholar Susan Gubar has argued that postfeminist literature "challenges the traditional gender roles that have been imposed on women" (Gubar, 1989, p. 8). This quote reveals the ways in which literature can be used to challenge traditional gender roles and to create new possibilities for gender expression. It suggests that postfeminist literature can be used to challenge traditional conceptions of gender and power, and to create new possibilities for gender expression.

Similarly, scholar Linda Hutcheon has argued that post-feminism "seeks to redefine the parameters of gender and power in literature" (Hutcheon, 1997, p. 9). Her opinion discloses the ways in which post-feminism seeks to redefine the parameters of gender and power in literature. It suggests that postfeminist literature can be used to challenge traditional conceptions of gender and power, and to create new possibilities for gender expression. Finally, scholar Elaine Showalter has argued that post-feminism "offers new possibilities for the exploration of gender identity and the construction of gender" (Showalter, 1998, p. 10). This quote reveals the ways in which post-feminism has been used to challenge traditional feminist frameworks and to address the complexities of women's experiences in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. It suggests that postfeminist literature can be used to challenge traditional conceptions of gender and power, and to create new possibilities

for gender expression.

There are several ways in which postfeminist thought in literature diverges from feminist theory. Postfeminist theory, in contrast to feminist theory, focuses on the fluidity of gender and power representations in literature. Feminist theory, on the other hand, is concerned with how literature can be used to challenge traditional gender roles and create new possibilities for gender expression. It is too old to deal with the rights of women and this could be started in drama since Sophocles's time in his *Antigone* as Almaarroof claims that "Sophocles exposes an early feminist view regarding the gender role of women in the society in general and the Greek society in particular." (2017, 1) Postfeminist theory, in its turn, is interested in how texts may be used to investigate issues of sexual orientation and gender production. Feminist theory, on the other hand, is concerned with expanding the range of possible gender expressions via literature in order to question and subvert established gender norms.

### **Analysis and Discussion of Lynn Nottage's "Ruined"**

Lynn Nottage's play *Ruined* may be examined utilizing postfeminist theory's ideas and methods. Salima, a young Congolese lady, is the main character of the drama as she struggles to live in a war-torn nation. The play explores how gender and power are portrayed in the context of war and conflict through the lens of her experience. In the setting of conflict, the drama examines how gender roles are negotiated and distorted. The brutal realities of war lead established gender norms to be questioned and undermined in the environment Salima must traverse. Her experience illustrates how gender roles are flexible and vulnerable to negotiation and change in the face of challenging situations. The play also looks at how power and gender are depicted in the setting of conflict. Salima experiences abuse and injustice on a regular basis, and her experience illustrates how war and conflict disproportionately impact women. The play furthermore demonstrates Salima's capacities for resiliency and fortitude in the face of difficulty. Finally, the play presents fresh perspectives on gender production and gender identity. Salima's narrative illustrates how gender roles are flexible and vulnerable to negotiation and change in the face of challenging situations. Her narrative also demonstrates how gender is a flexible and changeable term and how it can be utilized to subvert conventional ideas about gender and power.

"Women are strong. We can survive anything." (Nottage, 2009, p. 51)

This quotation demonstrates the power and resiliency of women in the face of hardship, and it shows that women are capable of enduring everything that life throws at them. It questions the conventional understandings of how men and women should behave and posits the idea that women are not constrained by traditional gender roles but may, rather, discover their inner fortitude and power in the face of hardship. Another example is:

"I am more than a woman. I am a survivor." (Nottage, 2009, p. 92)

This remark illustrates the ways in which gender is a fluid and changeable construct, and shows that gender is not fixed, but may be used to question conventional concepts of gender and power. In other words, gender is not fixed, but can be used to challenge traditional conceptions of gender and power. Additionally, it argues

that the study of gender as a tool for investigating identity and the formation of gender is possible.

"I am a woman, and I have a right to be here." (Nottage, 2009, p. 37)

This quotation sheds light on the many ways in which gender roles and power dynamics are portrayed within the framework of war and armed conflict. It argues that women have the right to live in a society that is frequently hostile to them and that they may find courage and perseverance in the face of hardship. Additionally, it says that women have the ability to find strength in one another.

"I am no longer a victim. I am a survivor." (Nottage, 2009, p. 95)

This quotation illustrates the ways in which gender roles are not rigid but are instead open to discussion and change when confronted with challenging situations. It gives the impression that women are not constrained by the conventional gender roles that have been assigned to them and that they are capable of finding their strength and power even in difficult circumstances.

### **Conclusion:**

Lynn Nottage's "Ruined" focuses on the fight against violence and for equal rights for women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Nottage emphasizes the critical necessity to confront the consequences of war and warfare on women's lives via her depiction of female characters who reject and react to violence. This research article uses postfeminist theory to analyse how cultural and historical contexts influence women's perceptions of and responses to violence. The article argues that the play depicts the women's fight for survival and their tenacity against patriarchal oppression, while also exposing the ways in which postfeminist discourses may restrict our understanding of women's agency and resistance. The research has shown that the women of "Ruined" resist and react to abuse by performing acts of solidarity that are influenced not only by their cultural and historical circumstances, but also by their own agency and subjectivity. The limits of postfeminist discourses were also emphasized in the article, since these discourses tend to see women's empowerment as a series of isolated, individual actions rather than as a coordinated movement. As a whole, this paper has helped shed light on how "Ruined" deals with the themes of women's unity against violence and the quest for equality. The paper has shed light on the ways in which cultural and historical factors shape the experiences of violence and resilience of women in conflict zones by analysing the play through the lens of postfeminist theory, and it has also highlighted the importance of recognizing the limitations of postfeminist discourses.

To sum up, "Ruined" is an impassioned and urgent call to action, one that reminds us of the limitations of postfeminist discourses in fully capturing the complexities of women's experiences and agency while also challenging us to address the impact of war and conflict on women's lives and to stand in solidarity with those who resist and respond to violence.

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