



## INTERSECTIONALITY IN LYNN NOTTAG'S *RUINED AND BY THE WAY, MEET VERA STARK*

**Azzah Ibrahim Khalil\***

Lecturer - Department of English - Faculty of Al-Alsun - Suez Canal University

[azzah.esp.alsun@suez.edu.eg](mailto:azzah.esp.alsun@suez.edu.eg)

### **Abstract:**

This research explores the notion of intersectionality as a contemporary term in the field of sociology and political science, derived from feminist and racist studies. The failure of those approaches to tackle multilayered women difficulties comprehensively is due to their monistic perspective, ignoring the multidimensional situations of black and colored women, women of other ethnicities, in addition to illiterate or less educated women as well as immigrant and disabled ones. The inclusiveness of the term makes it applicable to other epistemological domains. The present study examines the concept of intersectionality in relation to the dramatic works of Lynn Nottage, an Afro-American writer involved in the depiction of black women troubles. Although many dramatists have tackled the cause before, the manipulation of Nottage is unique and unpredictable. Moreover, she introduces miscellaneous characters from different categories to foster her viewpoint. The research investigates her two plays, *Ruined and By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* to prove that not only black women of lower classes in colonized countries or in countries of civil wars suffer from interlocking oppressions, but also women of middle classes and from imperial atmosphere witness numerous kinds of intersectionality.

### **Key Words**

Intersectionality, interlocking oppression, feminism, Lynn Nottage, *Ruined, By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*.

Received: 7/2/2022  
Revised: 7/2/2022  
Accepted: 28/2/2022  
Available online: 30/9/2022

The term intersectionality has emerged from African American Women studies, especially those associated with feminism and Critical Race Theory. Both movements address various forms of inequality. However, there is much confusion and scruples about the term. Each theorist introduces his/her statements which sometimes coincide and some other times diverge largely from the earlier trajectory. Kathy Davis, for example, emphasizes the existence of the interrelationship among miscellaneous factors as the main principle determining discrimination. The most significant elements among those factors are gender, race and class. The result of this interaction can be measured in terms of power relations. However, there is a discrepancy between scholars on the concept of intersectionality whether to regard it as an ideological framework or as "heuristic device" ("Buzzword" 68). Some other critics think that intersectionality is an interdisciplinary concept shared among many theoretical fields such as sociology, psychology, economics, political science and legal scholarship. Moreover, some practical fields like medical studies have availed much of the term because "social determinants of health disparities are increasingly approached from intersectional perspectives" (Collins and Chepp).

Kimberle Crenshaw, on the other hand, spotlights the case of black women's persecution in order to illustrate "the multidimensionality" of their experiences in contrast with the "single-axis analysis" that minimizes their marginalization. Her comparison between the two similar criteria proves that the black women's claims are steadily eliminated due to the restrictions demolishing any endeavors to encompass feminism and antiracism simultaneously. She advances that one is determined to realize the subordination of black women in a particular way overlooking many other dimensions indispensable in their situations. In many cases, the concentration on "the most privileged group" is a stance charged with an oblivious attitude towards complex cases in which there are mixed factors engendering the discrimination. Crenshaw explains how black women are excluded from feminist theory as well as antiracist politics due to their limited perspectives. Henceforth there exists the necessity for the emergence of a contemporary inclusive theory, offering comprehensive and just solutions ("Demarginalizing" 139-140).

One of the feminist basic objectives is to destabilize conventional values concerning social relations which have habitually been reflected in gender studies. These norms are criticized for denying the interconnectedness of the experiences of oppressed women. Their inconsistencies lie in their isolating strategies which disconnect inequity based on gender from other forms of inequality. Therefore, the inadequacy of this critique stems from their preoccupation with the oppression faced by women belonging to the middle class, especially those of white skin, ignoring other women of convoluted categories. The theoretical concept of the term was formed several decades ago by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) when she attacked antidiscrimination law in USA for its deficiency, especially in covering the case of black women's discrimination which was based on gender and race concurrently and separately (Sigle-Rushton). Therefore, intersectionality as an interdisciplinary social term is frequently associated with "cosmopolitanism," "multiculturalism," "anti-racism," "hybridity," "identity" and "nationalism." By virtue of the proposition of gender theories, the association among disparate social groups and among conflicting structures concerning the examination of the relationships between those groups is conceptually established (Walby et al 225).

Some scholars consider intersectionality as medication for the inexplicable problem of the exclusion of contemporary feminism from the domain of human rights. Along with the field of international human rights discourse, many other organizations such as the United Nations' Beijing Platform for Action (2000), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2000) and the UN Commission on Human Rights have broadly availed of the concept in their effort to analyze the case of women's subordination by stressing the interlocking relations determining it. The most noticeable element increasing the ambiguity of the term is its exploitation by "women studies" and "feminist theory" whose doctrines deliberately exclude black women (Carastathis 304). Some critics advocate that black feminist struggle during the 21<sup>st</sup> century aims at abolishing the taken-for-granted ideology concerning black women and their mental abilities. The task undertaken by black feminism is viewed as challenging and coarse since they intend to improve black womanhood and protect it from dissension. However, the incessant endeavors of black feminist scholars have resulted in many contributions which are exceptional in the sense of contradicting the acceptable social feminist standards. Above all, these endeavors can only be described as unclassifiable and uneven. Henceforth, there arises the need for a theoretical device that is related to the "aesthetic and political concerns regarding the 'place' and 'position' of Black women writers" (Cherie Ann Turpin).

It is argued that the use of the term intersectionality as a social theory has lately become indeterminate and thought-provoking since it has still been at a critical juncture. "Yet as intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and praxis has matured, and continued to be discovered by even more people, its advocates must become more self-reflective about intersectionality's objectives, analyses, and practices" (Collins, *Intersectionality: as Critical* 4). Assuming a systematic analysis, Crenshaw introduces three main types for discussing intersectionality. The first category is "structural intersectionality" which means that women of color encounter perilous problems such as at-home aggression and sexual violation which are incomparable with those of white women because they are located at a crossroads of race and gender; therefore, their situation gets worse and the type of solution provided for white women are inapplicable to theirs. The second category is "political intersectionality" in which feminism and anti-racist theories unintentionally aggravate the oppression of women of color by incompatibly marginalizing them. The third one is "representational intersectionality" which is associated with cultural heritage and identity politics since it accentuates the debatable issues regarding the depiction of women of color in common cultural discourses, which unexpectedly ignore their particular complex situation ("Mapping the Margin" 1245).

In "Ain't I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality" Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix postulate that the question of womanhood is expansively controversial during changeable chronological conditions. Above all, the notion of "global sisterhood" rising during the 1970's and 1980's was imprecise and needed many adjustments because of its inadequacy in dealing with the "power relations" responsible for the recurrent disagreements among feminist scholars. Similarly, there was a certain opposition among feminists concerning women's enslavement and their right to vote. However, the overlap between feminist criteria such as social rank, femininity, sexual orientation and racialism was echoing and unquestionable. The title of the article is derived from the famous political expression prevailing during the 19<sup>th</sup> century "Ain't I a Woman?" which "was first introduced [...] by an enslaved woman Sojourner Truth" since it reflects the opposing attitudes towards the identity politics of womanhood, and by doing so it reveals the idea of intersectionality within a remarkable perspective. The authors

define intersectionality as an intricate term which can be described as irregular, irrecoverable, and with diverse impacts due to the abundant factors overriding it. These factors can be categorized as "economic, political, cultural, subjective and experiential" which variably interlock with each other to produce unyielding oppression. The ideas of interconnectedness and inseparable nature of these elements are wittingly spotlighted (76). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of "double enslavement" of certain women of African origins was introduced by Anna Julia Cooper whose life and career was radically improved from the humiliation of enslavement into the reverence of a distinguished social position. At such a phase, the persecution according to sex and race was common and orderly, but later the two elements have been accompanied by class oppression, which has transformed the tyranny into a more complex and harsher stage. "In the mid-nineteenth century, Sojourner Truth, an antislavery activist and women's rights advocate, repeatedly pronounced the strength and perseverance of Black women" (King 42-43).

It seems that during the second-wave feminism both women of color and white women unify against white superiority and colonialism as the main factors causing women's predicament. Henceforth, they think that instructive education leading to gradual revolution and strategic militant assaults are the only possible solutions for alleviating women struggle. The second-wave feminists discard the use of the term feminism due to its connection with unquestionable hegemony. According to the second-wave feminists, both women of color and white women encounter unfailing sexism in their systematic establishments as well as in their daily lives (Thompson 341). The most important criterion concerning sexism is related to familial customs, especially those of US families: familial principles underpinning the traditional family standards are molded to "naturalize U.S. hierarchies of gender, age, and sexuality." The social norm dominating US families proposes that domestic leadership can only be ascribed to masculine members of a family then to feminine ones of old age. Likewise, parenthood authority within US families emphasizes the supremacy of patriarchal authority and oldness reverence as the main standards for dominance in the minimized social unit. In addition, there are mutual relationships between gender and age as factors of hegemonic hierarchy. Habitually the dominance is for elder masculine members then for elder women successively. Consequently, the idea of heterosexism is visible in the hierarchal order of families and society as cultural norms reject the values of gay, lesbian and bisexual sexualities (Collins, *It's All in the Family* 65).

Wendy Hulko conducts research in which there are attentive theorizing and conceptualization of the terms intersectionality and interlocking oppressions. The two terms are used in the context of women discrimination but with diverse categorizations such as "*paradigm, framework, theory, lens and perspective.*" She decides on the label "*paradigm*" as an approved label in addressing theorizing contexts or methodological analysis and cultural principles. "*Lens*" and "*perspective*" are usually implemented in contexts of identity politics "that embraces multiplicity and is neither additive nor reductive as in an *intersectional perspective*". She states that the main goal of her research is to analyze the complex nature of persecution by shedding light on intersectionality and interlocking oppression. She equates two terms as the most important ones—social location and intersectionality. Despite the notable similarity between the terms, intersectionality is efficient and more significant in theoretical texts for denoting the interrelationships between the various levels of identity. On the other hand, "social location" denotes the output of these relations; moreover, the term is used frequently in daily usage referring to the merits and demerits of one's social placement (44-45).

Although Sirma Bilge attributes the importance of the circulation of the term intersectionality to Patricia Hill Collins, she relates its actual origins to Ange-Marie Hancock who works in the field of political science. It is by virtue of Ange-Marie Hancock's unremitting efforts that the employment of the term with its multiple dimensions has become pervasive. In addition, she gives the concept of intersectionality its operational and functional qualities to be compatible with the investigation of the interiorities of the marginalized women, especially black ones persecuted frequently within several domains. She introduces the case of black women as a paradigm because of the plentiful theories and successive research made on it. Henceforth, she introduces six main assumptions which should be taken into consideration in the interrogation. First, numerous factors are responsible for political crises and the methods of their manipulations. Second, all types of discrimination should be examined; however, the relationships between these types have still been an unanswerable inquiry. Third, levels of discrimination are defined as unfixed constructions of private and public aspects usually interacting with each other. Fourth, classes of differentiation can be determined by disparities within each group. Fifth, research discussing intersectionality studies classes of discrimination with their numerous planes and their intricately overlapping relationships. Six, studying intersectionality "as a normative and empirical paradigm" entails recognizing the hypothetical and experimental features of the concept (59-60).

It is notable that the concept of intersectionality is closely related to identity politics. Professor Jose Medina heightens that "identity is relative." That is, people belonging to the same categories of gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation are different despite their similar affiliations. Therefore studying several cases under the same influences does not necessitate reaching the same results (Garcia 839). Next to the bond between intersectionality and identity politics is its link with familial ideology. Family is a part and parcel in social stratifications. Examining a family as a social construct enables researchers to be acquainted with normative principles determining discrimination generally and specifically. Therefore, a family presents an example of different connections. It is supposed that family as an independent unit, biologically and geographically recognized, is isolated from its neighbors by racial classification, "to so-called racial families codified in science and law; and to the U.S. nation-state conceptualized as a national family" (Collins, *It's All In the Family* 63).

It is worth exploring this influential metaphor of 'family resemblance' a little further. For family resemblance (in the sense on which Wittgenstein's discussion builds) to make sense, the family cannot be construed simply or chiefly as a social construction, contrary to what Professor Medina thinks. It is silly to talk of a family resemblance holding between an adult and her adopted children, while it plainly can hold between biological relatives despite the fact their society does not regard them as belonging to the same family. (Garcia 840)

Lynn Nottage (1964- ) is a remarkable African-American playwright. Born in Brooklyn, she graduated from Brown University where she received an MFA in drama. Almost all her life, she resides in Brooklyn with her husband, the director Tony Gerber, and their daughter Ruby (Greene, *Women Who* 336). She was the first woman to win Pulitzer Prize twice. It seems that she is mainly interested in depicting the affliction and miserable conditions of black and colored women in the United States, not to mention other parts of the world. Her two plays *Ruined* and *By the Way Meet Vera Stark* are mainly concerned with the experiences of black women but in dissimilar ways. *Ruined*, for example, explores the crisis of black women during the atrocities of civil war in the Democratic

Republic of Congo. In spite of the fact that all the incidents of the play take place at the bar of Mama Nadi where soldiers come, not to combat, but to find their pleasures, almost all the incidents are appalling and reflect the distress of the Congo citizens, especially the marginalized women. The play begins with Mama Nadi's opposition to accept two homeless girls, Sophie and Salima, brought to her by her friend Christian. Afterwards, Christian persuades Mama Nadi to take them both and to treat them merely like one. Miser as she is, Mama Nadi is not so completely wicked as she seems. She manages to shelter the two deprived girls and provide them with poor amount of food. Moreover, she is also able to distance soldiers of the two conflicting sides—government soldiers and rebel soldiers—in her libertine inn. Above all, she manages to offer a refuge for women exposed to horrible kinds of violence during the civil war. This unspeakable air of terror and mutilation is contrasted with lurid music and dance in the background which may reflect the Brechtian technique of the author and the continuity of life in Congo despite all upsetting deaths. Even the end of the play gives optimism by the scene of Mama Nadi's dancing with Christian, showing the possibility of another prospective peaceful life.

*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* is another satiric play revolving around the African-American actress Vera who is imprisoned by her black skin in the roles of servants or maids during the mid-twentieth century. Sarcasm in the play exaggerates to the degree of competing for such a minimized role by other black and colored female actors. Unlike *Ruined* which revolves around the agonized lives of black unprivileged women in Congo, *Vera Stark* tells the humorous stories of black middle-class actresses in the United States. Although the settings of the two plays seem opposite, both plays exhibit the several layers of discrimination to which black women are exposed, primarily for their femininity, class or merely for their color. *Vera Stark* occurs in two acts; the first takes place in 1930's Hollywood where Vera and her mistress Gloria prepare for a screen rehearsal of a Southern epic movie called "The Belle of New Orleans." Gloria is described as the most spectacular actress in America, despite her unassertive talent and humble performance. In fact, Vera is the reliable assistant of Gloria during her daily routine but their intrinsic relationship is blurring to the end of the play. Colbert, for example, refers to "their shared history" (400): when Vera implores Gloria that she should help her play the role of Tilly, Gloria tries to evade the subject, claiming that she has many things to worry about other than such an unimportant problem. The response of Vera is very annoying as she says, "And you might remember there's a lot I could say about your daddy, my mother's" (Nottage, *Vera* 11). Her uttermost ambition is to play the role in the movie. In order to win this reduced role Vera has to help Gloria memorize the lines of the script. However, she has to criticize her some other times because of her arrogance and triviality. Vera, on the other hand, is equipped with her talent to win the contest with her other black colleagues. In Act 2, it seems that seventy years have passed and a panel meeting is held to discuss Vera's constrained roles in American Movies and the reasons for her disappearance afterwards. The play terminates with an open-ended question on the withdrawal of Vera after her vanishing successful roles in Hollywood.

In spite of the fact that the most obviously tortured female figures in *Ruined* are Sophie and Salima, the incidents prove that all other female characters in the play are evenly persecuted but at divergent levels and for remarkable reasons. Ann M Fox relates the idea of persecution and torment of such feeble women to the concept of "disability" pointing out that disabled characters are prominent throughout the play even in the promising closing scene: "The play's representation of disability

functions significantly as part of its political project, resisting the easy narrative closure of the ending" ("Battles" 2). From the very beginning, Christian introduces the two impoverished girls to Mama Nadi as underprivileged and disabled. Salima is a poor girl from a small village caught by the militia who ruthlessly humiliated her to the degree that she stayed "nearly five months in the bush as their concubine" (Nottage, *Ruined* 9). She is an undemanding rural girl who is ashamed of the troubles she has witnessed. Less educated and powerless, she is defenseless and needs a refuge. The most striking element worsening her story is that her husband and her relatives refuse to retrieve her since there is a belief in their culture that women who are raped should be regarded as a bad omen and dismissed from their houses. The other female character is Sophie who is introduced to Mama Nadi as being "ruined" (Nottage, *Ruined* 9). Mama Nadi's response on knowing that Sophie is ruined is more dreadful than Sophie's shattering self as she gets irritated, confessing that she has numerous girls like Sophie who are burdensome and useless because of their disability (Nottage, *Ruined* 10).

Mama Nadi apparently provides these agonized girls with humble accommodation at the expense of exploiting them by enforcing prostitution on them. The plight of those girls is unanswerably complex: they are women, black and of lower classes. Therefore, they are the most vulnerable to utilization. Their disability emanates from the intricate despondent conditions they have gone through. Critics assume that intersectionality introduces solutions to the inappropriateness between feminism and post-feminism theories concerning gender, race and class. It can do so by "employing methodologies compatible with post-structuralist project of deconstructing categories, unmasking universalism, and exploring the dynamic and contradictory workings of power" (Davis, "Buzzword" 74). The persecutions to which the two poor girls are exposed seem parallel to the more privileged one, Josephine, who is the oldest daughter of the village leader. Being one of the higher classes in her society does not protect her from transgression. She is violated by the opposite soldiers at her home village where no one of village dwellers volunteers to rescue her. Like the other damaged girls in her village, the family dismisses her and she resorts to whoring for surviving. However, Josephine is more audacious and treats the other girls haughtily, believing that she is superior to them. Josephine thinks that she is more gorgeous and advantageous than the other girls at the bar because of her higher origin. In addition, Mr. Harari's courteous phrases and glorious presents amplify her self-confidence. He, moreover, promises to take her with him when departing; therefore, she is used to telling him whatever happens at the brothel in his absence. However, Mr. Harari attributes the violent inconsistency of the incidents at the bar to the civil war and the resultant rotten capitalist search for minerals. When Mama Nadi informs him of the difficulty of keeping an inn during such an upsetting era, he completely agrees with her, arguing: "I could tell you, but I can't even hold onto a fucking pair of shoes" (Nottage, *Ruined* 19). His response exposes the declining circumstances of the country enveloped by poverty and hostility.

By the way, *Meet Vera Stark* shows another type of oppression which seems less disgraceful but more concealed and uneasy to cure. Such an underlying conflict is between black and colored actresses, on the one hand, and white actress, on the other. The other underlying conflict is between black and colored actresses themselves. The racism faced by black actresses seems more innate and uncontrollable as the community of film industry inherently imposes on them, however gifted, the roles of housekeeper and inferior citizens. From the outset of the play, it seems that Vera, the black actress, is the backbone of Gloria, who is a movie star known as "America's Little Sweetie Pie"

(Nottage, *Vera* 10). Despite her inferiority and blackness, Vera seems self-possessed: "she [Vera] functions as domestic, protector, confidante, and rehearsal partner" (Colbert 400). Vera, irrespective of her flair and ambition, aspires to win the role of a maid in such a Southern epic "The Belle of New Orleans" since the role has lines and suits her. When she implores Vera to help her win the role of Telly, the maid, Gloria seems nervous of her nauseating repeated phrases and there erupts a mischievous conversation between them, ending in a mocking reconciliation (Nottage, *Vera* 11). The relation between Vera and Gloria is intentionally left indefinite and distorting. They seem to be two mutual friends who belong to the same occupation in spite of the difference in color, race and class. If they are both wronged by their community, Vera's oppression are more profound and unquestionable. In the case of Vera's subordination, Intersectional perspective is the most appropriate as feminist perspective disregards her gradual anguish which ends in her disappearance and addiction. Feminist perspective is concerned mostly with white women of upper or middle class and its main objective is to achieve equal rights with men rather than to dispense justice in society. Therefore, it is described as "hegemonic feminism" which undervalues class and race factors in their analysis (Thompson 337).

Although *Ruined* foregrounds disability as its main theme, it is the output of an African-American playwright who comes from an opposite culture—a culture discouraging all types of disability, manifesting the endless abilities of women whether white or black. In essence, the play is issued from the playwright's communication with some Congolese women who have been violated and mutilated during the civil war. It seems that Nottage broadens the investigation of corporeal traumas, such as sexual violation, physical abuse, bodily aggression and collective rape (Fox, "Battles" 3). In Act 1, scene 2, for example, when Sophie utters a wistful song with her charming voice among the rebel soldiers, she gets obviously exhausted. Unexpectedly, the soldiers stimulate her to give another song, but she neglects their raucous applauds. Recovered, Sophie gives another lyric on the hopeful possibility of approaching an end to such a fierce fight over wealth and power. The song begins with "*Have another beer, my friend, / Douse the fire of your fears, my friend,*" (Nottage, *Ruined* 17). It is paradoxical that the soldiers who are supposed to protect those fragile girls like Sophie and Salima are the central culprit for damaging them. *Ruined* is, therefore, one of the significant plays belonging to "the theater of genocide." There are two distinctive characteristics which differentiate it from the other plays of the same canon. First, it is written in realistic style, which makes it easy to criticize its script regardless of its performance. Second, unlike most genocide plays in which the conflict is between invading soldiers and unarmed citizens, the conflict in *Ruined* is between indigenous women and men. That is, the idea of colonialism or Eastern-Western animosity is excluded. Irrespective of the fluctuating prospect of terminating such a dreadful massacre, the concept of the universality of genocide is fostered and generalized in the play (Skloot 115).

It is maintained that black women's experiences are not thoroughly explored because of the usual duality of sex/race investigation. In other words, black women's discrimination is usually explained either in terms of black men's or white women's affliction which are both incongruous. The results, therefore, are pointless and irrelevant (King, "Multiple" 45). The problem with Vera seems unusual and inexplicable. She seems the one who suppresses her talent either by peacefully accepting the wronging norms, or by shunning the possibility of a future change. In Act 2, it is said that Vera won the role of a maid which became closely inseparable from her because of her color and gender. However, the setting of Act 2 is an academic colloquium in 2003, which is described as "the



discovering Vera Stark, the Legacy of The Belle of New Orleans." During the early years of the twentieth century, notable playwrights such as Eugene O'Neill, Paul Green, Marc Connelly involuntarily contributed to the widespread representation of the stereotyped African-American characters which were taken for granted and popularized a certain image for them—neither realistic, nor antagonistic. Leslie Catherine Sanders, for example, underscores the decadent attitude towards characters of black origin on American stage during the 1920's since they were generally portrayed as the actual source of profligacy. On the contrary, the white audience was Puritan, usually depicted as above suspicion and cheerful, refusing tragic endings which were typically given to black characters. Therefore, black characters during those years symbolized human suffering in general. However, there is a development in the portrayal of black characters in the 1930's. Owing to the Great Depression, playwrights tended to depict African-American characters as an epitome of social inequality in the United States, emphasizing social injustice during such an era. The Negro's frustration, henceforth, stood for the frustration of the whole citizens in the United States (Fox, "A Different Integration" 153).

Carastathis prefers intersectionality as a theoretical background because of the four main reasons distinguishing it—"simultaneity, complexity, irreducibility, and inclusivity" (307). Those features can be viewed when interrogating the women in *Ruined*. The experiences of oppression of black women in *Ruined* are so intricate that they cannot be tackled by any monistic approach. Part of their persecution stems from being helpless, black and of lower classes. The other side of their plight stems from their being surrounded by men of power and capitalistic appetite. For example, Christian in Act 1, though kind-hearted and pacifist, seems a dynamic trader in the mid-forties whose business depends mainly on trading in women and other forms of commodities like chocolates, wines and cigarettes. To him, women and other merchandises are alike. Jerome Kisémbé appears in scene 2 of the same act, functioning as the leader of the revolution against the government soldiers. However, like most men of his country, he is used to enjoying his time at the bar by discussing political issues and making use of feeble women. Mr. Harari is another dominant businessman who exploits Josephine and other black women. Similarly, he works in the field of illegal diamond exchange. He is a Lebanese merchant whose power and authority stem from his gender and money. One of the visiting soldiers tries to seduce Mama Nadi by showing her a lump of colten he manages to steal from the miner. Commander Osembenga is an army leader who is responsible for ending the conflict in the country, but his raids with his soldiers lead to more damages and deaths. In spite of his noble objective, he seems as fierce as the other vehement soldiers in the play. His mere presence gets Mama Nadi so disturbing that she can ask him to respect the regulations of her inn and bring all the bullets out of his gun. The response of Osembenga is satiric as he mockingly asks, "And who said I don't respect the rule of law?" (Nottage, *Ruined* 29) Even Mama Nadi seems, likewise, a capitalistic businesswoman whose main goal in life is to gain much money and maintain authority at the expense of other girls' lives and happiness. When she finds Sophie absorbed in reading a romance for Salima and Josephine, she shouts at them, reminding that they have to prepare the house for the visitors instead. When Josephine asks her about her idea on romances, she retorts that they are obviously unbelievable. The scene in which she puts the lockbox in front of Sophie asking her for counting the money shows her greediness. Besides, she utters a phrase showing her carelessness about the atrocities of war as far as it adds to her wealth: "I don't know where all these men are coming from, but I'm happy for it" (Nottage, *Ruined* 35). All those characters representing power and finance make the stance of the poor helpless girls worse and

irreversible. Nottage's insistence on depicting those girls' abuse is reinforced by her belief in the infinite capabilities of the theatre. This attitude seems to a great extent Brechtian: "Nottage and Hartman share this view, strongly believing in the power of the theatre to create a change and raise a kind of public awareness as well as 'bring an end to the scourge' [...]" (Muhi 92).

Intersectional studies have been recently thriving mainly for their assertion and concentration on the disparities between women—an idea incessantly supporting the feminist dogma and protecting it from dissension (Davis, "Buzzword" 72). The term begins with feminism's investigation of the influence of hierarchical structures and overlapping discrimination on women's empowerment (Fisher et al 53). For example, women's empowerment in *Vera Stark* is sharply contrasted with their enslavement. It seems that all colored and black women in the play yearn for the role of a slave, since they are not able to envision themselves emancipated. In spite of the fact that the notion of "social identities" is at heart social construct, "the notion of group identities is not so venerable, well-established, or long entrenched" (Garcia 845). Act 2 explores the reasons that Vera, representing black women, was determined to voluntarily choose the role of a maid. Some academic scholars organized a seminar in 2011 for investigating Vera legacy. Herb Forrester, for example, is a director who comes from California. He is interested in music and business, but the case of Vera allured him. Germen Levy Green is a good-looking scholar whose main concern is relevant to feminism and media, therefore the character of Vera appeals much to her. Afua Assata Ejobo, on the other hand, is a poet and journalist who attends to explore the case of Vera. Brad Donovan is another panelist who interrogated Vera in 1973, evading the issue of racism. All those figures find the character of Vera very captivating and questionable.

Some critics assume that the idea of intersectionality transcends the discrimination of black, colored women or women of different ethnicities. It is therefore essential to feminist theoretical and practical studies. This universality of the term gives it a political dimension: "the question of whether to interpret the intersectionality of social division as an additive or as a constitutive process is still central" (Yuval-Davis 194-195). The political aspects of intersectionality can best be defined in war theatre. War theatre, especially the one written by women playwrights, is designated for depicting the struggle of the most wronged women—usually black or colored of minor ethnicities and lower classes. The persecution of those women does not only encompass color-consciousness, but also it contains other sorts of suppression, such as sexual violation, brutal mutilation, merciless humiliation, erotic abuse and many other types of harassment. The goal of such a theatre is not to terrify the audience but to interrogate the problems of women under the pressure of battlefield. Traditionally theatre of war is predominantly concerned with male soldiers, their weapons, their diverse forces, and perhaps their unstated political strife, but the feminist war theatre underlines the agonized experiences of women—whether militant or civilized.

One aim [of war theatre] has been to make visible women's war stories: the militarization of women and "femininity" in support of the war effort, the dangers confronted by women in areas where there is little distinction between militarized and nonmilitarized zones, and the sexualized dynamics of armed conflict in which women's bodies become weapons of war. Another aim in dramatizing these war stories has been to foreground ideologies of gender inscribed on bodies and transformed into brutal practices in communities engaged in violent conflict, as well as in the structure and culture of the military and its protocols (Friedman 594-595).

Unlike her other expressionistic plays, Lynn Nottage makes use of naturalistic technique in *Ruined*—maybe for the gravity and realistic incidents of the topic discussed. The type of war theatre introduced in *Ruined* connects the political conditions of war which seem an external aspect with internal elements such as women bodies and land degradation: "commenting on what the feminine experience of life in the margins of society in those abject, not merely public, but not necessarily private (and therefore not completely safe) spaces" (Mendez-Garcia 131). What attracts Nottage most to write a play about those distraught women is the media's negligence of revealing their stories other than their social dismissal. The overwhelming silence enveloping their wretched stories reflects the acceptable nature of their accomplice societies. Therefore, the war theatre introduced by Nottage is inimitable in its ability to make the speechless thoughts of those women telling and moving. It gives voice to the suppressed women intentionally neglected by their communities, which regard them merely as outcasts (Muhi 92). In Act 1, scene 3, Salima and Sophie discuss the disgusting circumstances in which they live at the brothel. Salima tries to convince Sophie to take things as easy as possible since the customers are mainly soldiers and miners who are heartless and cruel to both men and women. Salima recalls the dreadful account she heard from the soldiers, which show their barbarity. The soldier sleeping with Salima brags of his slaughtering Hema men—the tribe she originally belongs to. He expects that she may admire his savage acts and hug him proudly, yet she cannot do so, justifying to Sophie that one of those men may be her sibling. Sophie again warns her of revealing her actual descent lest she may be exposed to more brutalities. At this moment, Salima seems heart-broken as she remembers her family and her baby (Nottage, *Ruined* 22).

In fact, Salima and Sophie are exemplified figures of two women distorted by intersectional kinds of oppression in an upsetting environment. When Salima, terrified and distorted, reveals the fact that she is pregnant to Sophie, Sophie appeases her by showing her a sum of money she manages to steal from the bar's savings, promising that they would be able to flee and start another life. However, Josephine comes to disturb their conversation by referring to Salima's root and Sophie's disfigured body (Nottage, *Ruined* 24-25). Crenshaw provides not only sufficient criticism on the lack of concentration on the intersectional discriminations suffered by black women because of their sex, race, and ethnicity, but also she introduces "a critique of identity politics, for its over-stabilization and discrete groups and categories" (Walby et al 226). The difficulties of these women seem inescapable, especially to every women living in similar circumstances—dehumanization and degradation by their families and enemies as well. Their identities are thus deformed immediately when they are exposed to sexual aggressions. Henceforth, they are regarded merely as inferior creatures, possessions, not proper human beings. Despite the ugliness of Mama Nadi's prostitute house, it is the only peaceful place where those fragmented women can live and be protected (Muhi 93).

The need for intersectional approach to feminist, racist and class troubles issues as a reaction against essentialized approaches, which separate the integrated components of oppression from identity components. The results of essentialism are, therefore, mixed accounts of identity politics: "such narratives often reflect hegemonic discourses of identity politics that render invisible experiences of the more marginal members of that specific social category and construct an homogenized 'right way' to be its member" (Yuval-Davis 195). Garcia advances that a social construct is a reduced representative for one's identity since it is external, conditional, changeable, unspecified and comparative with other things (842). Despite the fact that intersectionality is an American-oriented

term, its application is worldwide. Salem proposes that the element of international geopolitics is insufficient in current intersectionality. He maintains that intersectionality must be included in global investigations, especially those relating to the formulation and theorization of nationality, racism, sexism and classism (Fisher et al 56).

In contrast with the essentialized approaches to identity politics is the intersectional approach which postulates that every single identity category has minor subdivisions and infinite suppression perspectives. While essentialism tends to generalize, intersectionality emphasizes the particular characteristics of each stance. For example, Anna Mae in *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* is a colored actress, but, unlike the humiliated girls in *Ruined* who are obliged to prostitute, she employs her body sexually for seducing the director to give her a role in the movie. All of them are exploited whether voluntarily or involuntarily to survive. Although Anna Mae belongs to the same race and class, she, like Josephine, treats her colleagues arrogantly, infuriating them by rudely exposing her alluring abilities to win any role she aspires. Meanwhile she goes on arguing with them to borrow items from their clothes and food. Lottie, another black actress, refuses, while Vera reluctantly accepts to lend her her evening coat provided that she has to keep it clean (Nottage, *Ruined* 14-15). Impoverished as she is, Vera seems helpful to each body—from the white glorious heroine who could not memorize the lines and needs Vera's assistance to the very poor actresses who need some pieces of clothes and accessories. Nottage's depiction of the two characters, Vera and Gloria, stresses racism inherent in American film industry; however, it is supposed to be the most significant domain fostering human rights in the USA. The satiric moment occurs when Vera and Gloria forget the lines and regain their southern accent. The relationship between them as employee and employer is then emphasized. Colbert suggests that the elements of setting and props in *Vera Stark* are meant to accentuate the reciprocal roles they may play. "In the case of Vera's role, stations trump historicity. The racial designations become intertwined with the professional roles" (401).

It seems that the only person who is able to encounter Vera with her conventionality and lack of ambition is the one called Leroy Barksdale. Leroy is another African-American character who studies music and works for Maximilian Von Oster, the Russian director of the film *The Belle of New Orleans*. He seems fond of Vera and discusses with her many serious issues. Leroy begins his conversation with Vera as if trying to court her, and she warns him against telling Gloria where she is lest Gloria may be enraged. Gloria and Vera seem very anxious about the audition, but Leroy comes to have fun with Vera. He introduces himself to Vera as having the name of the king—in French. She abruptly tells him that her parents gave her the name of her grandmother since they were not innovative. Actually, the portrayal of Leroy as a character opposite to Vera, in spite of the fact that both of them are of the same origin is meant to indicate that Vera may have a different future if she exerts some efforts. Despite her acceptance of the stereotypical image of the Negro in her life and occupation, She and Leroy lead a miserable life. Regardless of Leroy's attempts to be showy with his dress in front of Vera, she mocks him, claiming that he looks like a sportsman and Negroes are not allowed to exercise nearby. He persuades her that he works as Von Oster's assistance and studies music at night school to improve his career. Henceforth, she implores him to give her the role she aspires and asks him about the kind of instruments which he plays. He replies that he studies musical theory in order to be a composer—not a teacher as she thinks. He likens her to his father who was a farmer whose whole dreams revolved

around growing more plants by traditional irrigation. The narrow-mindedness of his father led him to become "penniless"(Nottage, *Vera* 23)—a sign of what happen to Vera afterwards.

While Vera, as an African American character, imposes on herself a kind of dwindling career which ends in deprivation and alcoholism, many other women in the States and other parts of the world are vigorously exposed to miscellaneous sorts of subordination and maltreatment. Crenshaw advances that when she commissions a study on "battered women" in an accommodation assigned for dealing with such cases in Los Angeles, she puts emphasis on the corporeal violence as the most prominent symptom of their degradation. Moreover, she discovers that most of them are workless. She thinks that those women need not merely an asylum, but also a sort of fortification against violence and sufficient financial support ("Mapping the Margin" 1245). Some women experience domestic violence which debases them, while some others experience political violence which traumatizes them. The women in *Ruined*, for example, are all under the subordination of war combatants and political struggle. "In oppressive national regimes or conflicts between indigenous groups, women are often targeted and misogyny is employed to extract information, prevent treason, and to shame, intimidate, and unsettle communities" (Friedman 596). By the end of Act 1, scene 3, Josephine exasperates Salima and Sophie, describing Sophie as "something worth than a whore" since she is ruined by pitiless soldiers and becomes valueless. When Sophie is silenced and dismayed by the harshness of Josephine's description, Josephine tries to relieve her pain by recounting the story of her sexual assault when the soldiers recognize that she is the chief's daughter. The most agonizing part of her story is that everyone shuns protecting her or even covering her fragmented body (Nottage, *Ruined* 26).

In her interview with Alexis Greene, Nottage confesses that when she had graduated from the university she discovered that theatre was inappropriate and depraving; therefore, she worked at Amnesty International as a human rights activist. Unfortunately, she did not find working as a civil rights advocate satisfying, as she had no audience immediately when the Cold War ended. Some of the topics discussed in the organization are "Genital mutilation, bride burning, sex trafficking, etc." Meanwhile Nottage was attending a theater workshop since she aimed at having a larger audience to deliver her ideological message. Afterwards, she managed to write *Crumbs from the table of Joy* (1996)—her first play (*Women Who* 343). Actually, the victims of these brutalities are usually women like those found in *Ruined*. The question of sexual abuse confronted by women at warfare was raised from 1992 by the cruel incidents of regular physical infringements in Bosnia to the 1994 Rwanda genocide in which women were mainly subject to forced rape, erotic aggression and various deformations. The most critical problem faced by those victims was to confess the criminal occurrences of these violations to their societies. These confessions might bring them more assaulting disgrace and additional castigation. Next to women's withdrawal from confronting the societies with their sexual crises was their militarization by either one of the two opposing poles of the conflict (Friedman 596).

In Act 1, scene 6 of *Ruined*, Christian is terrified by the ruthless assassination of the pastor by Osembenga's fighters who believe that the pastor helps the rebellious soldiers. Not only do the soldiers murder the pastor, but also they disfigure him. The reference to the brutalities of the soldiers and the passiveness of the citizens is repeatedly suggestive. Christian says, "He was butchered, and no one knows anything" (Nottage, *Ruined* 38). When Christian refers to the executing of the pastor who is a pious white man, he, in fact, warns Mama Nadi against involving in either side of the mortal conflict

lest the soldiers may destroy her and her bar. Observing Mama Nadi frightened, Christian tries to persuade her of eloping with him to the West where there are no hostilities and where they will be able to run another brothel—far away from the battle and its casualties. While they discuss the topic, Fortune and Simon wordlessly come in, exhausted and in tatters. The problem with Fortune is that he ceaselessly searches for his wife, Salima, believing that he may find her. They asked for a meal and beer and Mama asks them for showing her their money and promises to fetch the man his wife. Christian, however, gets infuriated when they admit that they are warriors who belong to Osembenga's party. Fortune's quest for his wife continues to the next act. When Salima knows that her husband chases her, she is scared, stating that she does not like to meet him again. While Sophie thinks that Fortune still loves Salima and urges her to quit the place to join him, Mama Nadi has another realistic scenario emphasizing that Fortune will express his excessive love to Salima merely for a while, then he will immediately ask her a series of embarrassing and unanswerable questions. The target of Mama Nadi's account is that the actual Salima whom Fortune searches for is manifestly absent. She tries to convince her of remaining at the bar and forget her family (44).

Nottage's impression of the despondent stories she heard from the real Congolese victimized women is filled with painful, terrorizing and moving emotions; however, they are told with a degree of unexpected dignity regardless of their traumatized bodies. The courageous endeavor of her trip to Congo to discover those women and their mute suffering is described as challenging. Despite Nottage's acknowledgment of the Brechtian effect, the focal point in the play is not to exhibit dialectical vision of the moral code of these areas, but rather to draw the attention to the paralyzing impact of violence during wartime on guiltless citizens such as women and young girls (Mendez-Garcia 131). In fact, the violence experienced by those victimized women result in their disability and muteness. Fox conducts a study on the theater of disability before 1940 to find that the concept of disability which was employed by African-American feminist playwrights had two significant connotations. First, disability is largely used only as a "metaphor for hardship." The use of disability in such plays was meant to give evidence to the harsh experiences through which African-American citizens went, either by means of "slavery" or "institutional racism." Consequently, the first employment of the term was associated with systematic aggression. Second, the other type of disability was intended to draw the attention of the audience to disability as a social construct of identity. Those playwrights aim at equating racism with "ableism" as the main factors of discrimination. On the other hand, they show that the physical disparity among people can be a stimulus to their affinity and reverence, rather than their antagonism ("A Different Integration" 156). It is argued that disability can integrate different sorts of hegemony and discrimination into a unified theoretical background, although it is still absent in the most updated sociological studies related to intersectionality (Naples et al 10).

Salima sets an example of a woman at intersectionality of disability, race and economic difficulties. She is disabled by the sexual assault she has gone through when her husband leaves for buying a cooking container from the town. Salima recalls the terrible incidents of her raping by a group of soldiers who are ruthless to the degree that they kill her baby mercilessly in front of her. Their masculine power, weapons and abrupt ferocious attack paralyze her power. When Sophie tries to persuade her to meet her husband who has marched long miles to bring her back, she warns her against defending him and reminds her of his intolerable offenses immediately after his acquaintance with the incident. What tortured her deeply is his description of her as a seductive women, disgraceful and

"filthy dog" (Nottage, *Ruined* 45). Salima prays to God that those days would be reversed and she would tell Fortune not to quit; henceforth, she would not come out to bring the ripe tomatoes from the field. She hopes to regain the purity of the weather and the ability and chastity of her body. Afterwards, Fortune seems regretful at his maltreatment of his wronged wife and remains standing by the brothel trying to see her. Simon, his friend, attempts to change his mind by making fun of him since he still loves an impure wife, yet he insists on fetching her. Salima, meanwhile, informs Sophie that Fortune will never forgive her since the baby inside her is not his: "it's the child of a monster" (Nottage, *Ruined* 46). "In *Ruined*, disability intersects with female, African identity, and works to counter colonialist, sexist, and ableist assumptions" (Fox, "Battles" 4).

Brah maintains that nowadays numerous women all over the world are "marginalized". They receive mistreatment from their societies and families as well—because of bankruptcy, disability, draught, shortage of health care, etc. The families of those women who suffer from ethical fright beside their worldly problems are therefore exposed to fragmentation, migration, exploitation by employers and therefore in bad need of proper accommodations and support (77). In Act 2 of *Vera Stark* the audiences are informed that Vera, like other black actresses, suffered from vagabondage, poverty and addiction at several stages of her life. Act 2 is composed of a contemporary panel discussion investigating Vera life and career by means of displaying footages of her movies and parts of her interview with Gloria in 1973, approving their shared works and spotlighting her unrecognized suffering. On discussing her career and disappearance, the panelists have dialectical views concerning her life and behavior as well. Unlike the other members of the colloquium, Afua proposes that Vera was a vigorous character who had a resistant attitude towards racism and sexism: "She's a volcano on the verge of erupting, ready to release the pressure of years of battling patriarchal hegemony" (Nottage, *Vera* 48). Carmen, a professor of media and gender studies, spotlights the underlying meanings of Vera's utterances during the interview, referring to her uneasiness as a sign of internal struggle. The panelists discuss her two failed marriages as an indispensable part of her suffering. Leroy was her first husband who was involved in some mischievous deeds because of his irrationality and strength. He was accused of murdering a man and spent the rest of his life in prison. Afua accentuates Vera's phrase "the dark side of historic rage" as a direct reference to racism causing Leroy imprisonment (Nottage, *Vera* 48). Carmen illustrates that Leroy Barksdale was a rebellious character as well who used to fight racism in Hollywood and therefore Vera's career declined because she robustly supported him throughout his struggle (Nottage, *Vera* 49).

Patricia Elise Nelson finds something moving in the panelists' profound discussion. The idea of investigating black women through history by means of sarcastic performance is recurrent in Nottage plays, but in *Vera Stark* it is the subtlest and paradoxically the most significant (414). It is through the performance of Vera's character identity politics of African-American women are thoroughly examined. Judith Butler, a performance theorist, analyzes the interaction between performance and performativity in relation to identity politics and social rank. She explains that performance frequently supports normative identities which denote "modes of presentation that reinforce social expectations based on race, gender, class and sexual hierarchies (white, cisgender, heterosexual)" (Colbert 401-402). However, it is maintained that the relationship between performance and performativity is transferable; that is, they can be used interchangeably. The most important point concerning *Vera Stark* is that it demonstrates the inadequacy of theories of black performativity. That is, the performativity of black

women can be considered responsible for the incompatibly stereotyped image of blackness. The dialogue running between Brad, Gloria and Vera reveals much about the performativity of blackness.

BRAD. Gloria Mitchell, Vera Stark! Wonderful! Many of our great performers got their feet wet on the vaudeville stage. Bunny Briggons, the Carlson Brothers. It's fascinating, I didn't realize the circuit was integrated back when you two were performing as children. (*A moment. Vera glances to Gloria for a response.*)

GLORIA. Who can remember?! That was ancient history. We were performers first and foremost. Show people.

VERA. Yes, but there was something called the TOBA circuit, don't remember what it stands for, but we used to joke it meant Tough on Black Asses. (Nottage, *Vera* 53)

What is peculiar to *Vera Stark* is Nottage's shifting concern from tragedy to comedy and from global issues to particular ones (Nelson 412). The most significant element in the play, in addition to its overt sarcasm, is its inconsequent incidents— its loosely-knit plot which is deliberately manipulated. The Brechtian setting consisting of actual past incidents shown in Act 1 and an abrupt change of sequence in Act 2 to the present-day colloquium displaying pictures and footages of her movies and interviews is skillfully employed. The setting of the play is therefore not linear, but circular. Retrospective technique is meaningfully employed to mingle scenes from past and present mainly for stirring the audience's intellectual responses (Colbert 402). For example, when the audience is given footage of Leroy interview, one is acquainted deeply with Vera's flair and torment. Leroy describes her as a talented as well as alluring actress. He is sorrowful for the kind of life imposed on her by Hollywood directors. He maintains that he used to upset her by likening her to "cheese cake served in a brown paper bag" (Nottage, *Vera* 50). Herb expresses his fascination that although the film *The Belle of New Orleans* is produced mainly to interrogate the problem of slavery, it obviously overlooks such a crisis. "Slavery is merely the exotic backdrop" (Nottage, *Vera* 42). In Act 2, scene 2, Vera Stark is described as unparalleled actress. The setting summons her 1973 interview with Brad Donovan in which she was elegantly dressed. When Brad flatteringly described her dress as "very colorful", she expressed her displeasure with the word "colorful," relating it to the flowery environment, not splendid attire. She manifested that her dress was original designed mainly for her by "a fabulous young Negro" artist, Alexander Wynn. However, Brad drew her attention to the inappropriate use of the word "Negro" in a TV interview. She ironically apologized, correcting that she had to use the word "Afro-American," but she described the word as "cumbersome." In her meeting, she revealed that she was a spokeswoman of the civil rights movement in the 1950s. When Peter Rhys-Davies uttered his admiration of *The Belle of New Orleans* asking her to recite some of the lines, Vera got infuriated because of Peter's focusing on the film in which she merely had a minor role as a maid, eliminating all other major successes (Nottage, *Vera* 45-46). Her anger reflects her regret at the passing years.

Like Vera who began her life innocently as a pacifist citizen accepting her minor roles in Hollywood films but ended up as a rebellious character, especially when her husband is imprisoned, the women in *Ruined* began their life as apolitical individuals and ended as harshly devastated by political struggle. Alexis Greene in her essay "Women and War" explains that the previous concept that war theatre is beyond the scope of feminist playwrights has been proved invalid. There are frequent factors fostering women playwrights to be engaged in war theatre. The most important of



these factors are nuclear weapons and their mortal destruction, the fatal losses in Vietnam arena, some pacifist activists calling for war elimination, and the feminist movements denying the victimization of women by politicians and military men. All these elements contribute to stimulating women to write plays about other women involved in warfare. Those feminist playwrights side against war in general and violence committed against women during wartime in particular. Their concentration is on associating aggression at home with the irrational brutalities of warriors, therefore they emphasize the connection between "war and sex" (Friedman 597). In Act 2, scene 4 of *Ruined* Jerome Kisémbé, the militia leader, tells Mama Nadi that the war between him and Commander Osembenga grows inextinguishable as Commander burns the rebel soldiers' villages and properties. Kisémbé gives a long speech justifying his rebellious act, referring to the violence, hunger, destitution they encounter by the government. The most unbearable defeat according to Kisémbé is that the government seizes their land, divides it into small plots for several investing companies and exploits it for the sake of other ethnicities. He terminates his speech by denoting the mutual relationship between Congolese citizens with their land: "It's our land. Ask Mbuti, they can describe every inch of the forest as if were their own flesh. Am I telling the truth?" (Nottage, *Ruined* 52)

The idea that the prostitute house is a neutral haven, unbiased to either side of the military domains, is spotlighted. People at Mama Nadi's bar want to live a comfortable life free from political concerns. Christian gives a satiric dance mocking the soldiers and their military life immediately after Kisémbé's departure. Paradoxically, the brothel gives sexual services to the two opposing sides of the combat simultaneously. Despite the bar's neutrality and derision, the armed forces of both sides forcefully intrude it. Immediately after Kisémbé has quitted the brothel, Commander Osembenga enters and sees Christian dancing. Christian, stunned, wants to end his satiric dance all at once but he is embarrassed by Commander's applaud. Enraged by the war hardships, Commander recounts several stories of the militia's violation claiming that he and his men are responsible for retaining peace to the country. Sophie is appalled by the intolerable affliction of the stories told by Commander, but she serves him beer and peanuts. He notices her fragility and horror and tries to harass her. Sophie shrinks and withdraws, trying to resist him, but he insists on pursuing her. He orders her to come back and makes fun of her fear of his uniform. When Christian and Mama attempt to free Sophie from the Commander's grasp, he is irritated and asks Lauret to bring her back. He threatens her saying: "my [his] men will teach her a lesson" (Nottage, *Ruined* 55). The direct connection between violence and sex is clearly established here. When Lauret brings Sophie back to Osembenga, she spits on his feet, recalling her previous plight. Osembenga is shocked by her rude behavior, thinking that she is haunted. However, she goes on screaming, claiming that she is soulless and valueless to anybody. Violence connected with sex is now associated with accommodation as Mama slaps Sophie and threatens to dispel her from the house: "Next time I will put you out for the vultures" (Nottage, *Ruined* 56).

Not only is Sophie abused sexually and threatened to lose her life and home, but also Salima and Josephine are similarly subject to the most terrible degrees of aggression. In Act 2, scene 6, the stage is turned upside down because of a raid launched by Osembenga and his men who are informed that Kisémbé is hidden inside the disorderly house by Fortune who wants to regain his wife. Fortune intrudes the brothel with the help of Osembenga and his men for finding Kisémbé and Salima. After Mama has had a little conversation with Mr. Harari for assisting Sophie having the surgical operation she needs by selling her the precious diamond for having the fees required, she denies any connection

with the rebel soldiers as Mr. Harari departs. After thorough search, Osembenge points to one of his men to violate Josephine in front of their eyes for threatening Mama Nadi to give information. There arise penetrating screams and chaotic behavior denying the sexual assault. While Josephine implores Mama Nadi to confess to rescue her, Salima comes pleading since the soldier's violation causes her miscarriage. While she dies, she utters her famous closing speech in which she connects women's body with native land: "You will not fight your battles on my body anymore" (Nottage, *Ruined* 63). Muhi comments on Salima's death as a symbolic and impressive as she delivers the message intended in the play. "Salima denounces the ugly fact that she and other women in Congo are caught between the war and the men who claim rights to their bodies and their lands" (95). Fox accentuates that in *Ruined* earth is interchangeably linked with female bodies. Both of them are metaphorically used to connote the infringement of men involved in war. Land is looted for its resources, and women bodies are invaded for sensual pleasure, defeating the enemies and bringing them shame and disgrace. Both at the end of the battle are devastated ("Battles" 9).

Like Gurira, Nottage deploys the theatrical device of "a group (collective) protagonist" which is widespread in the early feminist writings for referring to the shared circumstances in which these women live irrespective of their different past. Moreover, these women through their discussions and their daily troubles, one can be acquainted with much of their affiliations. However, Janet Brown favors that device for its ability to form "merged ego" (Friedman 600). Despite the different kinds of violence to which each woman in *Ruined* is exposed, they share the same gloomy life and discouraging future. Like land which gets barren when it is frequently dug for minerals or for agricultural purposes, their bodies fade away gradually once they have been raped and mutilated. Theirs are invalid and ineffective either in farming, commerce or even prostitution (Mendez-Gracia 134). They are completely ruined internally and externally. Each one of them has a kind of disability that distorts her life and hinders her from working and surviving; however, each one tries to conceal her impediment for dreaming of a better life. Josephine, for example, hides her injury, hoping that Mr. Harrari would rescue her from the brothel and live happily with her somewhere else. Sophie robs mama Nadi for having a sum of money sufficient for her surgical operation. Salima lives with her illegal pregnancy hoping that she may regain her motherhood and peace of mind. Salima's helplessness and further death have another connotation which entails the urgent necessity of hailing those injuries otherwise these women may lose their lives (Fox, "Battles" 10). Despite all their frustration, they retain a gleam of hope: "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" (Friedman 559).

Katrak declares that the reaction of the audience to the performance of *Ruined* is revealed in the intensive emotional outbreak erupted when they witness the female characters telling the stories of their rape and disfigurement by army men. Despite the play's obvious influence by Brechtian tradition which favors intellectual responses, the pathetic response to the play may also result in "transformative possibilities." The happy ending of *Ruined* gives some optimism to the heartbroken audience. Mama Nadi's confession of her amputation at the end of scene 7 is alarming and evocative. Nonetheless her stoutness and independence are melted by Christian's love and proposal. Christian, on the other hand, admires her despite her previous genital damage. He sides against other men who reject ruined women, believing in the savageness of their acts. "He embraces Mama' 'ruined' body; this hopeful conclusion

uplifts the spectators as they exist the theatre" (35). In fact, Nottage does not defend whoring; however, in warfare it seems the only possible solution for survival. For all the characters involved, the outside bar is worse than the inside. "The body of the entire country has been ruined. War has turned the Congo's men into murderers and rapists who consider women subhuman" (Greene, "*Ruined* by Lynn Nottage"). In the last scene, however, one can hear the sound of rain symbolizing the anticipation of approaching chastity, and the soft singing of the bird denoting hope. Likewise, Sophie's sweeping the floor is another metaphor standing for the possibility of regaining purification. She herself repeats her wistful optimistic song. When Christian comes back, he epitomizes a promising kind of future for both women. He brings Sophie a book and a letter from her mother, and asks her not to expect much from her. He, moreover, recurrently expresses his love to Mama Nadi when she tells him that her business is approximately broke. Christian insists on marrying her regardless of her damaged body and worsening financial conditions. Above all, He undertakes to assist her in a recovering a respectful life in which he will help her keep legal business, reform what has been broken, and shelter her against any further mischief. He says, "You know everything, don't you? And if I said, I'd stay, help you run things. Make a legitimate business. A shop. Fix the door. Hang the mirror. Protect you. Make love to you" (Nottage, *Ruined* 66).

Although the wretched women in Congo wait for a renewal and peaceful life, Vera in the United States ends her life abruptly in a disrespectful way. In the interview with Leroy, he hints to the mistreatment she receives from Hollywood during her career (Nottage, *Vera* 50). Gloria confesses that Vera supports her before she becomes a celebrity. However, Vera sees that Gloria, as a white actress, is more privileged and has numerous opportunities for fame and success. When she is asked by Brad that whether Gloria is her friend or not, Vera insists that she is rather her maid. She recalls the days of the Depression when Gloria worked gracefully, while she as one of the black actors had to search attentively for any suitable work and had to accept any role offered to her at last. She says; "And we ... were troopers, we did what we had to do" (Nottage, *Vera* 52). However, Herb suggests later that Vera and Gloria are "lesbian lovers" (Nottage, *Vera* 57). Despite their strong bond, there is a sort of envious feeling between them. Gloria admits her jealousy of Vera's talent. In their TV program, Gloria acknowledges Vera's favor, but Vera is very harsh with her, accusing her of theatricality and mischief. Vera retorts: "My talent? What has all of my enviable talent given me?" (Nottage, *Vera* 58) When Carmen meets her before her death, she is fragmented, recounting muddled stories that she may die unrecognized (Nottage, *Vera* 56). Carmen admits earlier that Vera died in a Reno hotel, and she was misrecognized as whore called Shirley (Nottage, *Vera* 55). Nelson comments that Act 2 is suggestive in combining past and contemporary footages of Vera and Gloria. The character of Vera revealed through documentary scenes is very unpredictable from the character of Vera in films or theatre. This revelation is informative in understanding Vera's legacy (413). Colbert's comment on the play stresses the difference between the theories of black identity in performance and the theories of white identity.

*By the way Meet Vera Stark* shows how text films and theatrical productions correlate black femaleness with racial fantasies rather than discrete acts of black individuals. The play reveals how theories of blackness in performance must account for racial fantasies, which disrupt linear time (Vera appears as a slave in a scene set in the 1930s) and therefore revise theories of performing racial identity in general. (402)

Intersectionality can be viewed as a theoretical framework investigating the problems of those people under the influence of overlapping oppression. In the case of the present study, intersectionality is mainly concerned with black women who undergo the experiences of discrimination and extreme degree of aggression because of their gender, race and class. Such a persecution may be caused by either men or women—whether belonging to their native land or race or by other outer assailants. That is, the multiple layers of discrimination of black and colored women are cultural construct—a concept taken for granted in different communities which resist change. Although the term has been unspecified until now owing to the conflicting views of theoreticians; moreover, it has caused much controversial exploration, it is the most appropriate for the present-day research for its inclusion and precision. The multidimensionality of black women crises, those of lower class who suffer from hunger, poverty, ignorance and above all disability, can never be investigated by an enclosed approach. In *Ruined*, Nottage accentuates the plight of black women under the influence of civil war and its atrocities. Their persecution is undeniable and ineradicable not only because of the combat atmosphere, but also because of their gender and color. It seems that the blacker a woman seems, the more vulnerable she becomes. Therefore inequality as a cause seems gradable according to the complex level of race, class and sex's interaction. The suffering of wronged women is again presented in *Vera Stark* where Vera belongs to the film industry, a community calling for justice and condemning all types of maltreatment. However, she encounters undistinguishable tyranny of a different sort. Hers can be described as systematic, penetrating and unrevealed. Although she seems deeply repressed, she pretends to be comfortable with her dwindling life to the degree that she does not fully realize its mortality till the later stage of her life when she has abandoned her husband, health and even her career. In brief, the problems of black women and women of diverse ethnicities cannot be analyzed within feminist or racist theories as far as these approaches neglect their complex circumstances and their distinctive cases. Above all, intersectional approaches are valid for other people, whether men or women, especially those who belong to dissimilar categories such as disabled, immigrant, deprived, homeless, handicapped, etc.

## المستخلص

النسوية التقاطعية في مسرحيات لين نوتاج محطات، وبالمناسبة قابل فيرا ستارك  
عزة إبراهيم خليل

يتناول هذا البحث مفهوم التداخل (تشابك عناصر الاضطهاد) كمفهوم معاصر في مجال علم الاجتماع والسياسة حيث اشتق هذا المفهوم من الدراسات النسوية والعنصرية المعاصرة. إن فشل هذه المناظير في تناول مشكلات النساء المتداخلة الجوانب بشكل شامل يرجع إلى المنظور الأحادي الذي يتجاهل العلاقات متعددة الجوانب للنساء من الزوج والملونين، النساء من عرقيات مغايرة، بالإضافة إلى الأميات وغير المتققات، المهاجرات والنساء من ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة. ساهم عنصر الشمولية لهذا المصطلح في استخدامه في كثير من التطبيقات المعرفية الحديثة. تبحث هذه الدراسة في العلاقة ما بين مصطلح التداخل و الأعمال الدرامية للكاتبة الأمريكية لين نوتاج التي أولت مشكلات النساء الأمريكيات من أصل أفريقي اهتماما بالغا. تقدم لين نوتاج أنماطا مختلفة لنساء من فئات متباينة لتوضح وجهة نظرها. تهتم الدراسة بمسرحيتي محطات، وبالمناسبة، قابل فيرا ستارك، حيث يكون الهدف من الدراسة ايضاح الأنماط المختلفة من الاضطهاد التي تعاني منها النساء ليس فقط الزوج والطبقات الدنيا في الدول المستعمرة أو التي تنشب بها حروب أهلية، ولكن أيضا النساء والرجال من الذين ينتمون إلى الطبقات الوسطى وإلى الدول الاستعمارية يواجهون مشكلات مشابهة.

## الكلمات المفتاحية

النسوية التقاطعية، التداخل (تشابك عناصر الاضطهاد)، لين نوتاج، محطات، وبالمناسبة، قابل فيرا ستارك

## WORKS CITED

- Bilge, Sirma. "Recent Feminist Outlooks on Intersectionality." *Diogenes*, vol. 57, no. 1, Oct. 2010, pp. 58-72.
- Brah, Avtar, and Ann Phoenix. "Ain't I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3 *Feminist Challenges: Crossing Boundaries*, 2004, pp. 75-86. <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol5/iss3/8>.
- Carastathis, Ann. "The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory." *Philosophy Compass*, vol. 9, no. 5, May 2014, pp. 304-314, doi: 10.1111/phc3.12129.
- Colbert, Soyica Diggs. "Playing the Help, Playing the Slave: Disrupting Racial Fantasies in Lynn Nottage's *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*." *Modern Drama*, vol. 59, no. 4, winter 2016, pp. 399-421.
- Collins, Patricia Hill and Valerie Chepp. "Intersectionality." *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*. Georgina Waylen, Karen Celis, Johanna Kantola and S. Laurel Waldon (eds.), Oxford Handbook Online, Mar 2013, doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199751457.013.0002.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. "Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination." *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp. 221-238.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Intersectionality: as Critical Social Theory*. London: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. "It's All In the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation." *Hypatia*, vol. 13, no. 3, summer 1998, pp. 62-82.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, no. N/A, pp. 139-167.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 13, no. 6 (Jul., 1991), pp. 1241-1299.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race and Class*. Vintage Books: A Division of Random House, 1983.
- Davis, Kathy. "Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes Feminist Theory Successful." *Feminist Theory*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2008, pp. 67-85, doi: 10.1177/1464700108086364.
- Fisher, Alyssa, Kaitlyn Wauthier, and Radhika Gajjala. "Intersectionality." *The SAGE Handbook of Media and Migration*, edited by, Kevin Smets, Koen Leurs, Myria Georgiou, and Saskia Witteborn. SAGE Publication LTD, 2019, pp. 53-63.
- Fox, Ann M. "Battles on the Body: Disability, Interpreting Dramatic Literature and the Case of Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*." *A Journal Literary & Cultural Disabilities Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2001, pp. 1-15.

- Fox, Ann M. "A Different Integration: Race and Disability in Early-Twentieth-Century African American Drama by Women." *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2013, pp. 151-171.
- Friedman, Sharon. "The Gendered Terrain in Contemporary Theatre of War by Women." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 62, no. 4, Contemporary Women Playwrights, Dec. 2010, pp. 593-610.
- Garcia, J.L.A. "Identity Confusions." *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 32, no. 7, Nov. 2006, pp. 839-862.
- Greene, Alexis, "'Ruined' by Lynn Nottage Links War, Horror and Prostitution." <https://www.ontheissuemagazine.com/july2008/theater.php>. Accessed 8/27/2020.
- Greene, Alexis, ed. *Women Who Write Plays: Interview with American Dramatists*. Smith and Kraus, Inc., 2001.
- Hulko, Wendy. "The Time-and Context-Contingent Nature of Intersectionality and Interlocking Oppressions." *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, vol. 24, no. 1, Feb. 2009, pp. 44-55.
- Katak, Ketu H. " 'Stripping Women of their Wombs': Active Witnessing of Performances of Violence." *Theatre Research International*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2014, pp. 31-46, doi: 10.1017/S0307883313000539.
- King, Deborah K. "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousnesses: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology." The University of Chicago Press. *Open Dartmouth: Faculty Open Access Articles*, vol. 14, no. 1, autumn, 1988, pp. 42-72. [www.jstor.org/stable/3174661](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174661). Accessed: 9/13/2009.
- McGee, Celia. "Approaching Brecht, by Way of Africa." <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/theater/25McGee.html>. Accessed 8/22/2020.
- Mendez-Garcia, Carmen M. " 'This is my Place, Mama Nadi's': Feminine Spaces and Identity in Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*." *Investigaciones Feministas*, vol. 3, Jan. 2012, pp. 129-139.
- Muhi, Maysoun Taher. "Unspeakable Suffering: Women's Experience of Trauma in Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*." *Journal of University of Human Development*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2019, pp. 91-96, doi: 10.21928/juhd.v5n3y2019.pp91-96.
- Naples, Nancy A., Laura Mauldin, and Heather Dillaway. "Gender, Disability and Intersectionality." *Gender & Society*, vol. 33, no. 1, Feb. 2019, pp. 5-18, doi: 10.1177/0891243218813309.
- Nelson, Patricia Elise. "By the Way, Meet Vera Stark by Lynn Nottage (Review)." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 65, no. 3, Oct. 2013, pp. 412-414, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2013.0100>.
- Nottage, Lynn. *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*. Dramatists Play Service Inc., 2013.
- Nottage, Lynn. *Ruined*. Dramatists Play Service Inc., 2010.
- Sigle-Rushton, Wendy. "Intersectionality." *Gender: The Key Concepts*, by Mary Evans and Carolyn Williams (eds.) Routledge Key Guides. LSE Research Online: Jan 2018. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/86427/> Accessed 7/20/2020.
- Skloot, Robert. "Old concerns and New Plays in the Theater of Genocide." *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, vol. 5, no. 1, spring 2010, pp. 114-120.
- Thompson, Becky. "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2, summer 2002, pp. 337-360.
- Thompson, Becky. "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 28, no.2, summer 2002, pp. 336-360.
- Turpin, Cherie Ann. "Strategic Disruptions: Black Feminism, Intersectionality, and Afrofuturism." <https://www.coursehero.com/file/26823988/strategic-disruptions-black-feminism-intdoc/> Accessed 7/20/2020.
- Walby, Sylvia, Jo Armstrong and Sofia Strid. "Intersectionality: Multiple Inequalities in Social Theory." *Sociology*, vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 224-240. DOI: 10.1177/0038038511416164.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics." *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2006, pp. 193-209, doi: 10.1177/1350506806065752.