

Ruined Study Guide

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Plot Summary

On one of her usually busy days running her bar / brothel, Mama Nadi is visited by Christian, a regular customer who also serves as a go-between for Mama and merchants who supply her with cigarettes, rare luxuries like lipstick and chocolate, and one of the tools of Mama's trade – girls who, for various reasons, are forced to enter a life of prostitution. As Christian flirts with Mama, continuing an ongoing conversation about starting a new life with her, he convinces her to accept two new girls: the sturdy Salima and the more ethereally beautiful Sophie, both of whom, Christian says, were assaulted by men. He also confesses that Sophie is his niece, and that she has been “ruined” (i.e. her reproductive organs have essentially been destroyed as the result of having suffered frequent, extreme sexual violence). In spite of her reluctance to take on another girl that she has to take care of, Mama accepts Sophie into her home.

As time passes, Mama's bar is visited by leaders of both the government army and the rebels. She makes sure to keep them both happy so that she can retain their business and also prevent them from attacking her. She is also visited by Mr. Harari, a diamond trader who tells her that a stone she is keeping for a rebel fighter is, in fact, a raw diamond worth a significant amount of money. Mama Nadi keeps it in her lockbox, along with a document she took from Sophie that outlines the details of an operation that can restore her fertility. There are also further visits from Christian, from Fortune (a soldier from the government and Salima's husband), and from a succession of drunken, sexually aggressive soldiers from both armies.

When they're not being forced by Mama to entertain soldiers, Sophie and Salima develop a friendly rivalry (or a rivalrous friendship) with Josephine, another of Mama's “girls”. Salima reveals that she's expecting the baby of one of the soldiers that raped her, and begs the others to not tell Mama. She also refuses to see Fortune. Meanwhile, Josephine tries to decide whether to set up a home with Mr. Harari in the city; and Sophie refuses, more than Mama thinks she should, to entertain the men that come into the bar.

As the conflict comes closer and closer to Mama's bar, Christian's alcoholism resurfaces; Sophie's rebelliousness gets her in more trouble with Mama; and the leaders of the two rival factions come closer and closer to actually meeting. At one point, fed up with waiting for Mama to let him see Salima, Fortune tells the leader of the government army that the leader of the rebels was recently seen in Mama's bar. When the government leader confronts her, Mama convinces him to not do anything, handing the violently protesting Sophie over to him.

With the conflict within hours of arriving at Mama's door, Mr. Harari makes plans to leave. Mama tells him to take Sophie with him, giving him her raw diamond to pay for the operation to restore Sophie's fertility. The truck taking Harari away leaves before Sophie can join him, and she is still there as Mama's bar gets caught in the crossfire between the rival factions. The battle is stopped when Salima appears, apparently



having killed the baby she is carrying and telling the combatants that they will not use her body as their battleground anymore. She dies in the arms of her husband.

In the aftermath of the battle and of Salima's death, Mama is rebuilding her business when she is once again visited by Christian, once again sober and once again trying to convince her to share a life with him. Mama again tries to resist, eventually confessing that she too is ruined. Christian comforts her as she cries, telling her he wants to settle down and help her run the bar. While she doesn't exactly agree to his suggestion, she doesn't say no ... and, as the play closes, dances with him.



Act 1, Scene 1

Summary

Pages 5 through 10 – Hard-nosed and practical Mama Nadi bickers with traveling salesman Christian, sometimes berating him for not doing his job well and sometimes flirting with him. While explaining / complaining about how difficult it is to transport the goods he brings her through all the combat going on around them, he also teases her into good humor with jokes, some flirting himself, and the lipstick that he brought her. Conversation also refers to an aged, caged grey parrot (that Mama Nadi can't stand) that was left behind by a local elder (Old Papa) when he died, an elder who, Mama Nadi adds, had some strange ideas about history and legend in the area. Conversation then turns to the last of the items Christian brought. He and Mama negotiate about how many she will take, with her insisting, particularly after she sees what's on offer, that she can only do business with one. The protesting Christian eventually agrees, but actually brings in two of what Mama Nadi agreed to take: young women, seemingly being brought into Mama Nadi's to engage in prostitution.

Pages 10 through 12 – As the beautiful, defiant Sophie and the more sturdy and world weary Salima come in, Mama Nadi reacts angrily, saying she can only make use of Sophie. Christian pleads with her to take both, and eventually Mama Nadi agrees, shouting for one of the women who work for her (Josephine) to come and get the women cleaned up. Before Josephine leads the women away, however, Mama Nadi inspects them both, revealing herself to be unhappy with the rough-handed, defiant Salima but more happy with the pretty Sophie, whom she coaxes / bullies into a smile.

Pages 12 through 15 – After the women have gone, Christian tells Mama Nadi their stories. First, he reveals that Salima was captured, taken into the bush, used by soldiers as a concubine (sex slave), let go, and can't return to her village because she's been shamed. He then reveals the truth about Sophie: that she has been "ruined", her genitals mutilated after she was sexually assaulted by a bayonet. Mama Nadi becomes angry, shouting for Sophie to be brought back and saying she can't afford to have a ruined girl in her household: she (the girl) won't be able to bring in any money. She badgers Christian into revealing that the beautiful Sophie is his "sister's only daughter", and that he promised his family she'd be safe.

Pages 15 through 19 - Sophie returns, shown back in by Josephine. In conversation with the firm but softening Mama Nadi, Sophie reveals that she's eighteen; that she was to study for entrance into the university; that she can sing; and that she understands some of what goes on in Mama Nadi's house. Mama Nadi puts lipstick on her, says she can stay, gives her some instructions (including to call her Mama), and then tells Christian that she will keep Sophie in exchange for a box of chocolates. She adds, in words that Sophie cannot hear, that this is the last time she will take a ruined girl. Christian agrees, and fetches the chocolates. Mama Nadi gives one to Sophie, refuses to give one to Christian, and then has one herself, the taste of it triggering recollection in



her of how her mother used to give her and her brothers candies to keep them quiet about the many “uncles” she visited. She finally sends Christian away. As he goes, he tells Sophie to be a good girl and not make Mama Nadi angry. Sophie agrees.

Analysis

The most important element of this first scene of the play is the introduction and vivid portrait of protagonist Mama Nadi, a powerful and charismatic character whose values, intentions, and secrets drive the narrative. Other characters play significant roles in motivating / defining the action throughout the play, but it’s important to note that they do so in relation to Mama Nadi, and what seems to be her overwhelming, and at times ruthlessly pursued desire: to keep her business going at all costs, and as a result, survive the war raging around her.

All that said, and even within the context of the vivid portrayal here of Mama’s hard-nosed practicality, there are hints that there are more layers to her. Mama’s agreeing to let Sophie stay, for example, goes beyond the possibility of making money off her beauty and her singing: it’s clear there is something else going on in Mama, the nature of that something eventually being revealed in the play’s final moments. Further to that point, there is the moment around Mama putting lipstick on Sophie. Mama’s actions can, on initial consideration, be seen as a simple gesture of comfort, encouragement, or generosity. They could also be seen as manipulation. On another level, however, and when considered in context of the play / their relationship as a whole, the gesture takes on another level of meaning (i.e. foreshadowing) when Mama Nadi reveals in Act 2, Scene 7 that she and Sophie have something in common. Here they share lipstick: later in the play, it’s revealed they share something else.

Other important elements in this opening scene include the introduction of / hints at a relationship between Mama Nadi and Christian that goes beyond business (hints that develop throughout the play and reach their climax in its final scene) and the way in which Sophie and Salima are introduced to both Mama and to the audience. The latter is a particularly interesting piece of writing, in that the audience is led to believe that Mama is simply buying another kind of merchandise from Christian, when in fact what she’s buying is people. It’s important to note that at this point in the play, for Mama Nadi Sophie and Salima ARE merchandise, products to be sold and profited from. This is, in a way, a manifestation of some of the play’s key themes: ensuring survival (in that Mama Nadi’s actions in “merchandising” the women ensure both her survival and theirs – if they’re with Mama, they’re in less danger of being raped to death); violence against women (i.e. violence of a moral, spiritual sort); and the power of money (i.e. Mama Nadi’s seemingly never-ending need to keep the money flowing in).



Discussion Question 1

Consider the setting as described in Quote 1. How does this sense of place add definition and information to the play's overall context? To the situation of the characters?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways is the name Christian ironic? In what ways is it an accurate reflection of the character's personality and actions?

Discussion Question 3

Consider Mama Nadi's comments about the former owner of the parrot in Quote 2. What relationship (literal and/or metaphorical) do those comments have to the situation as initially developed in this scene?

Vocabulary

makeshift, conspicuous, arrogant, majestic, perpetual, flirtatious, Kalashnikov, tariff, supersede, appreciation, predictable, dismissive, taunt, hewn, fluctuation, asunder, lieu, pygmy, victorious, tentative, luminous, defiance, disdain, gesture, concubine, defensive, genital, militia, bayonet, hyena, resentment, haughty, bureaucrat, envious, dependent, posture



Act 1, Scene 2

Summary

Pages 19 through 24 - "A month later", a rowdy group of drunken soldiers fills Mama Nadi's bar with shouts and catcalls as Sophie sings, Josephine and Salima dance, Mama Nadi serves drinks, and a Lebanese businessman named Mr. Harari watches. One of the soldiers pursues Sophie with increasing aggression, but Mama Nadi heads him off by first saying his money (gold ore called coltan) is no good because there's too much around, and then by offering him Salima who, she says, is the better dancer. The soldier is at first reluctant, but then takes what he is given and goes off with Salima. Sophie continues to sing. Mr. Harari tips her in spite of Josephine telling him that Sophie is damaged and that all the other girls think she is bad luck. Mama, after putting the soldier's coltan into her lockbox, joins Mr. Harari.

Pages 24 through 28 – Conversation with the affable, chatty Mr. Harari reveals that the ore offered by the Soldier is far more valuable than the Soldier knows, and that Mama Nadi knows it; and that he (Harari) is a diamond merchant, whose opinion Mama Nadi is seeking about a particular stone. While he is examining it, and while she keeps the secret of where it came from, Mama Nadi expresses the hope that it will bring her a lot of money, explaining that she dreams of owning a plot of land that no one can take from her the same way that her father's land was taken from him. Mr. Harari tells Mama Nadi that he can give her a reasonable sum for the stone, which turns out to be a raw, unprocessed diamond, and then tells her to be careful with it and with herself. Mama Nadi tells him not to worry, saying "everything is beautiful."

Pages 28 through 30 – Their conversation is interrupted by Josephine, who returns wearing a dress bought for her by Mr. Harari. As Mama Nadi goes back to serving her customers, conversation between Josephine and Harari reveals that one of the soldiers is Jerome Kitembe, a powerful rebel leader who, Josephine says, has been magically gifted with the ability to repel bullets. Meanwhile, Salima slaps the overly aggressive Soldier and starts to leave, but Mama Nadi insists she go back to him. Sophie intercepts Salima, who refuses to go back to the Soldier but gives in as the result of Sophie's insistence and encouragement. Sophie sings again, the lyrics to her song including the verse "Brush aside the day's heavy judgment / Cuz you come here to forget / You say drive away all regret / And dance like it's the ending." Mama Nadi watches Salima closely.

Analysis

The first point to note about this section is how it vividly portrays Mama Nadi's attitude towards the women who work for her – specifically, how she treats them and offers them in the same way as she offers beer or cigarettes. For her at this point in the play they seem to be commodities and very little more. As always with Mama Nadi, however, the



question is whether she truly has this attitude or whether it's part of the tough mask that she wears in order to survive.

The second point to note is the introduction of Mr. Harari, one of the few non-Africans in the play and a character who plays a significant role in the play's climax (Act 2, Scene 6). A third key point is the introduction of two important symbols: Mama Nadi's lock-box (where she keeps every precious object that comes into her possession, including her money) and the raw diamond. This latter is particularly important, in that it symbolizes a safety net for Mama Nadi's future, and as such is a concrete manifestation of two key themes, ensuring survival and the power of money. Meanwhile, its appearance here foreshadows its reappearance later in the play at which point, like Mr. Harari, it plays an important role in the climax.

Other important foreshadowings include the reference to Kisembe (who turns out to be an important character and influence later in the narrative), and the reference to a possible relationship between Josephine and Mr. Harari (which foreshadows future developments in that relationship and also the relationship between Mama Nadi and Christian).

Additional key points include the reference to Mama Nadi's backstory, or personal history – specifically, the reference to how her father's land was taken away and how that shaped her perspective on her own land and business. This functions on two levels: the first is to at least partially explain how she got as obsessed with her business as she did, while the second is to add a layer of humanity (i.e. a sense of wounded-ness) to a character who, up to this point, had seemed so harsh and hard as to be almost inhumane. While the play very clearly portrays this latter aspect of her character, this scene suggests that this is in fact a kind of armor she wears to protect the vulnerable sides of herself. This sense of armor and vulnerability shows up several times throughout the play. Then there are the manifestations of both assertiveness and compassion in the three women working for Mama Nadi (Sophie, Salima, and Josephine), all of which add dimension to their characters; and the metaphoric and ironic words of Sophie's song.

A final noteworthy element in this section is the reference to gold ore as a source of the conflict within which Mama Nadi runs her business, and within which she and the other characters struggle to survive. This dispute over control of natural resources anchors the story of the play in the real world: such conflict is very much a part of the actual war between government and rebel forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo and other parts of Africa. Here it's important to note that the stories of Mama Nadi and the other women are, according to notes included with the play, similarly grounded in real-world events and circumstances. Gold, like most natural resources and arguably more so than almost all of them, is a powerful source of status.



Discussion Question 1

What do you think is the metaphoric / symbolic relationship between the words of Sophie's song and the story of the play / the actions of its characters to this point?

Discussion Question 2

In what way does Sophie's intervention with Salima evoke the play's various themes?

Discussion Question 3

How is the play's thematic consideration of the power of money developed in this scene?

Vocabulary

festive, periodically, raucous, midriff, lustful, leer, tipsy, pristine, catcall, scavenger, prospector, belligerent, relinquish, seductive, douse, disdain, abundance, meticulous, famine, militia



Act 1, Scene 3

Summary

Pages 30 through 33 – In their living quarters in the back of Mama Nadi’s bar, Sophie paints Salima’s fingernails with some of Mama Nadi’s illicitly borrowed nail polish. Conversation reveals Salima’s homesickness for her family, including her little daughter (Beatrice); how she (Salima) was raped by a rebel soldier who, she says, quite possibly killed her brother; and how jealous she (Salima) is of Sophie’s apparent peace when she is singing. For her part, Sophie reveals that even while she’s singing, she still feels the pain of what was done to her, and that she believes that she and Salima are safer with Mama Nadi than in their home villages, even with what Mama Nadi asks them to do. A tearful Salima then reveals that she is pregnant, and begs Sophie to keep the secret. Sophie then reveals that she has been quietly taking money from Mama Nadi, and promises Salima that one day the two of them will get away.

Pages 33 through 36 – Josephine comes in, looking for food that she says has probably been taken by the young son of one of Mama Nadi’s other “girls” and saying that if she finds out Salima (whom Josephine says has been getting noticeably fatter) has been taking it, she’ll be in trouble. She also says that Mr. Harari is going to take her into the city and set her up in her own apartment. She and Salima then argue about Salima reading Josephine’s fashion magazine without permission, an argument that Sophie tries to defuse but which escalates into Josephine making nasty comments about Salima’s family. The angry Salima goes out in a huff.

Pages 36 through 37 – After Salima goes out, Josephine turns her anger onto Sophie, who she says thinks that she’s better than everyone else but is, in fact worse (i.e. because she’s been “ruined”). A tearful Sophie goes out. Josephine shouts after her that she (Josephine) was the daughter of her village’s chief, and that that didn’t save her from the attacks of soldiers.

Analysis

This is one of only two scenes in the play (and the only scene to this point) in which the women who work for Mama Nadi are seen without her around. There is a sense of illicit, dangerous freedom about the scene and the actions of the characters, evident in the use of the nail polish and the eruptions of temper, that might not come into being in other circumstances. Meanwhile, an important result of the women being alone with each other is the sense that secrets are revealed that otherwise would not become known if Mama Nadi was around. An obvious example is Sophie’s confession that she is stealing (which foreshadows an important conversation between Sophie and Mama Nadi later in the play), but also Salima’s vulnerability as she reveals that she is pregnant and tells the story of what happened to her (or rather, as the play eventually reveals, the first part of that story). Here there are two related points: the sense that her story is



another manifestation of the book's thematic interest in violence perpetrated on women in a time of war; and the fact that it, along with the revelation that she is pregnant, foreshadows both further details of the story and her violently conclusive, or conclusively violent, actions at the play's climax. Meanwhile, Josephine's hints of what happened to her in spite of being the daughter of a tribal chief also echo the play's themes regarding the violence of war in general and violence against women during wartime in particular.

Other foreshadowing includes Sophie's reference to getting away (which foreshadows events in the narrative which almost make escape for her into a reality) and the reference to Salima's daughter, which foreshadows Salima's revelation later in the play of what exactly happened to her.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Sophie say that she and the other women are safer with Mama Nadi than they would be otherwise?

Discussion Question 2

Do you agree with Sophie that she and Salima are safer with Mama Nadi? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What is the relationship between Josephine's comment about Salima getting fatter and other information about Salima revealed in this scene?

Vocabulary

peruse, agitate, disfiguring, circumvent, portable



Act 1, Scene 4

Summary

Pages 38 through 41 – On a busy night at the bar, Christian comes in for a cold drink. After he says hello to Sophie (who sings a song about a wounded bird escaping capture but desperate to be heard), he gets into conversation with Mama Nadi. First, she gives him a list of all the things he forgot to bring her; then he tells her that the white preacher at a nearby mission has disappeared; and then he tells the increasingly nervous Mama Nadi that combat between the rebels and the soldiers is getting closer and more violent. “It’s been ugly,” he says, “but never like this. Not here.” Mama Nadi tries to reassure both him and herself by saying there will always be arguments and that all she’s trying to do is “keep everyone happy.” Christian flirts with her affectionately, hinting that he could take her away. Mama Nadi gruffly refuses his charm, urging him to have a drink. He refuses, saying (as he has previously) that he gets into trouble when he drinks.

Pages 41 through 46 – Conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Osembenga, whom Mama Nadi recognizes as a person of authority without knowing who he actually is. She shows him to a good table and insists that he hand over his bullets, commenting that it’s her house and she makes the rules. Osembenga, with what is described as a careful, chosen demonstration of good humor, does as she asks and then introduces himself as a commander of the government military. As Christian watches with increasing anger and resentment, Mama Nadi becomes quiet and extremely agreeable towards Osembenga, who in turn lectures her and everyone else in the bar on the potential dangers of associating with rebel leader Jerome Kitembe. Mama Nadi makes a show of agreeing with everything he says, assuring Osembenga of safety and comfort whenever he comes by, offering him Josephine and Salima, and making sure he has a clean glass for what she says is her best whiskey.

Pages 46 through 50 – As Mama Nadi returns her attention to the rest of her customers, a Government Soldier (who came in with Osembenga) demands service from Sophie, whom he grabs. She, however, gets herself out of this potentially uncomfortable situation. Meanwhile, Christian urges Mama Nadi to be particularly careful around Osembenga, but she insists it’s good to have connections with the government. Meanwhile, Sophie secretly takes for herself some money meant as payment for a drink, but doesn’t see that Mama Nadi has noticed what she did. Her watchfulness is interrupted by Osembenga, who calls her over and asks who Christian is. She explains that he’s a salesman and that he’s fully trustworthy, but Osembenga says he doesn’t trust anyone unless they’ve had a drink together. He buys Christian some whisky, and Mama Nadi pours it. Christian reminds her that he doesn’t drink, but Mama Nadi insists, telling him that doing so will help her out with Osembenga. Christian eventually drinks the first drink, as well as a second one offered by Osembenga. The scene concludes with Christian defiantly raising a third glass of whisky to Osembenga.



Analysis

While the previous short scene was primarily focused on character and relationship development and had relatively few plot elements, this relatively lengthy scene has exactly the opposite proportion of both: there is far more plot than character here. This is not to say that there are no significant character / relationship elements: Mama Nadi's seductiveness towards Osembenga contrasts vividly and importantly with her bullying behavior towards Christian; clearly shows her character's priorities; and is itself a plot element, in that her efforts to "make everyone happy" (including Osembenga) play an important, defining role in later events. Other important plot points include the references to the white preacher and to the conflict coming closer; the appearance of Osembenga, a character whose later appearances have what seems to be an inevitable, inescapable effect on the plot; and everything Osembenga says about Kisembe, whose appearance in future scenes reveals just how true / false Osembenga's claims are, how alike the two men and their respective factions are, and how close the conflict between the two sides is indeed coming to Mama Nadi. All are also foreshadowing of important events.

One other plot-related development in this section includes Mama Nadi catching sight of Sophie's theft, which foreshadows later events in what might be described as the play's primary sub-plot (i.e. secondary plot) – that is, Sophie's struggle to escape. This incident can also be seen as a secondary manifestation of the play's entwined thematic interests in the power of money and ensuring survival, in that the theft is an example of exactly what Sophie said in a previous scene she was doing: hoarding money so that she could eventually get away. Meanwhile, the theft foreshadows events in future scenes in which Mama Nadi confronts Sophie over what she (Mama) has seen here, and in which Sophie explains why she did what she did. One last piece of foreshadowing: Christian's return to the idea of starting a new life with Mama Nadi which, aside from being a little more urgent because of the circumstances of the encroaching war, also foreshadows moments later in the narrative at which their relationship takes a definitive turn.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think is the relationship between the subject matter of Sophie's song, her experiences, and those of other characters?

Discussion Question 2

What does Mama Nadi's insistence that Christian have Osembenga's drink say about her priorities? How do her actions reflect the play's thematic interest in ensuring survival?



Discussion Question 3

What events in this section manifest, perhaps subtly, the play's thematic interest in two sorts of violence – the general violence of war, and more specific violence against women?

Vocabulary

pompous, deferential, tenacity, robust, edify, scrutiny, forthright, diabolical, obsequious



Act 1, Scene 5

Summary

Pages 50 through 52 – Sophie reads a romance novel to the eager Salima and Josephine, but is interrupted by the busy Mama Nadi, who sends Josephine and Salima out to do work around the bar. Before she gets started, however, Salima reports that Mr. Harari is coming up the road. She and Sophie tease Josephine about her plans to go away with him. In her turn, Josephine taunts Sophie about being “ruined” and brags again about who her own father was. Mama Nadi sends her out with a forceful reminder that her own father “was whoever put money in my mama’s pocket” and that it doesn’t matter who anyone’s father is.

Pages 52 through 54 – After Josephine and Salima have gone, Mama Nadi gives Sophie the lockbox and tells her to count the money. Sophie discovers the stone in the lockbox, and Mama tells her that it’s a raw diamond that some miner gave to her for safekeeping: he planned, she says, to use it to buy something special and/or precious for his wife adding that she, almost in spite of herself, is keeping it for “that stupid woman”. Sophie tells her all the things she could do to improve her business if she sold it, and Mama Nadi compliments her on her intelligence. She then searches Sophie for the money that she (Mama Nadi) saw her take last night. She accuses Sophie of stealing from her and threatens to throw her out. Sophie pleads to be allowed to stay, saying that she is saving for an operation to restore her genitals to what they should be. She shows Mama Nadi a letter describing the operation. Mama Nadi allows her to stay: “I know you better than you think,” Mama Nadi says.

Analysis

This short scene is primarily notable for what it reveals about both Mama Nadi and Sophie. In terms of the former, there are glimpses of both her compassion (in her story about keeping the stone safe for the miner and in yet again allowing Sophie to stay) and her anger (in her initial confrontation of Sophie) – in other words, the vulnerability / armor motif, as related to the character of Mama Nadi. In terms of Sophie, the important element is the revelation that she is saving money for an operation to restore her genitalia – in other words, her ability to have children. This last is particularly notable, in that it reveals a positive side to the narrative’s thematic interest in the power of money: up to this point, the getting and keeping of money had primarily been associated with greed, or simple survival. Meanwhile, the references to both the stone and the operation foreshadow important events in the climax of the play’s sub-plot, or secondary storyline which, as previously discussed, is defined by Sophie’s determination to reclaim her life.

It’s also important to note the simultaneous parallels and contrasts in Mama’s and Sophie’s actions. In the same way as Mama Nadi makes what appears to be immoral choices to fuel her need, Sophie makes similarly immoral choices (i.e. stealing from



Mama Nadi, who is, after all, giving her shelter when she doesn't have to) in order to fuel HER need: the operation that she believes will restore her full femininity. In the same way as Mama Nadi makes what appears to be immoral choices to fuel her need, Sophie makes similarly immoral choices (i.e. stealing from Mama Nadi, who is, after all, giving her shelter when she doesn't have to) in order to fuel HER need: the operation that she believes will restore her full femininity. Meanwhile, the deeper truth behind Mama's enigmatic statement about knowing Sophie better than she thinks is revealed later in the play.

Discussion Question 1

Consider the implications of Quote 7. What action or event earlier in the play might this quote be seen as referring to? What character? What choice of Mama Nadi's?

Discussion Question 2

At this point in the play, what do you think Mama Nadi might mean when she says that she knows Sophie better than she (Sophie) thinks?

Discussion Question 3

At this point in the story, is Sophie's story about the operation entirely credible? Or does it seem like she's desperately clinging to a possibility that's remote at best, a lie at worst?

Vocabulary

residue



Act 1, Scene 6

Summary

Pages 54 through 57 – As Josephine is getting rid of a hungover miner and Salima is sneaking some food, Christian rushes in and demands to see Mama Nadi. Salima goes out and, after a moment, Mama Nadi hurries in. The anxious Christian tells her that the white missionary (last referred to in Act 1, Scene 4) has been killed and mutilated by Osembenga's soldiers who, Christian adds, believed that the missionary was aiding Kitembe. As he tells his story, Christian asks for whiskey, which the reluctant Mama Nadi gives him. Christian warns her that the killing of a white man and the nearness of the incident means that the soldiers are getting closer and that they are all in danger. Mama Nadi attempts to reassure him, but can't: she is "overwhelmed". "A dead pastor," she says, "is just another dead man, and people see that every day. I can't think about it right now. I have ten girls to feed, and a business to run." Christian urges her to leave with him and start a new life together. Mama Nadi "isn't convinced".

Pages 57 through 61 – A pair of soldiers (Simon and Fortune) come in, asking for food and a chance to clean up. When they reveal that they are allied with Osembenga, Christian watches them closely, and when Sophie comes in to serve them, he warns her with a gesture. Mama Nadi, meanwhile, gives them careful, polite service, but doesn't fail to ask them to disarm themselves. Fortune reveals that he is looking for Salima, and when Mama asks why, explains that he is her husband. Mama Nadi goes out, saying she is going to "ask inside". Conversation between the soldiers reveals that Fortune has been searching for Salima for a long time, and that they've been told a woman answering her description works at Mama Nadi's. Mama Nadi returns, saying there is no Salima there. Fortune erupts into anger, and Mama Nadi grabs a machete to defend herself. Christian holds a whiskey bottle as a weapon. Mama Nadi insists that the soldiers leave, and they reluctantly do so. "The parrot raises hell. Christian scolds Mama with his eyes. Blackout."

Analysis

The action of the first act reaches its climax (i.e. point of peak emotional / narrative intensity) in this scene. It's important to note that this is not the play's overall climax: that happens several scenes into the second half. The action of this scene marks the pre-intermission climax of the first half, the moment of peak intensity up to now.

There are two key facets of this climax. The first is Christian's announcement of the white missionary's death (foreshadowed in Act 1, Scene 4) and the subsequent / entwined revelation that the conflict is getting both closer and more violent. The importance of the missionary being white cannot be understated: even in contemporary post-apartheid Africa, there is still a powerful sense of tension between whites and blacks, meaning that the killing of a white man has much greater impact than the killing



of a black man. There is thematic value in this climax as well, in that it reveals just how indiscriminate and brutal the violence of war can be. The second aspect of the first act climax comes in the person of Fortune, who appears for the first time in this scene and who brings with him a pair of important pieces of information / circumstance: that he is Salima's husband, and that he is allied with Osembenga. Both points play important roles in the play's overall climax later in the second act, meaning that aside from being climactically intense, they are also foreshadowing of further intensity.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it important to Mama Nadi that the soldiers on either side of the battle always disarm themselves when they come into her bar?

Discussion Question 2

At this point in the play, what do you think is behind Mama Nadi telling Fortune that Salima doesn't want to see him? Is she telling the truth, or is she lying in order to keep one of her money-making girls in her employ? Which might be truer to the character, personality, and intentions she had revealed to this point?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it ironic that Christian grabs a whiskey bottle and threatens to use it as a weapon?

Vocabulary

recognition, hesitant, quiver (v.), machete, brandish



Act 2, Scenes 1, 2, and 3

Summary

Scene 1, pages 63 through 65 – In this scene, music and dance tell the story as Sophie and Mama sing a seductively playful song about how good it feels to visit Mama's house. Fortune stands guard outside; Mr. Harari watches; and a drunken Christian tries to remain standing. Josephine dances, beginning "playfully, seductively, then slowly becom[ing] increasingly frenzied. She releases her anger, her pain – everything. She desperately grabs at the air as if trying to hold on to something. She abruptly stops, overwhelmed."

Scene 2, pages 65 through 67 – In the living quarters behind the bar, after the fatigued Josephine is sent out to keep entertaining the customers, the nervous Salima tries to keep her pregnancy hidden from Mama Nadi as Mama Nadi tells her to forget about reuniting with Fortune, saying that neither her husband nor her village will be able to love or accept her now, and that her (Salima's) home is now with Mama and the rest of the girls. Sophie pleads with Mama to let Fortune stay and to see Salima, but Mama goes out to tell him to leave, taking a suspicious look at Salima's belly as she goes.

Pages 67 through 70 – After Mama goes, Sophie tries to get Salima to see Fortune, if for no other reason than to tell him in person that she (Salima) doesn't want to see him. In response, Salima tells the story of how she came to be captured by rebel soldiers: on a beautiful day while she was working in her productive garden with her baby at her side, four of them attacked her and raped her, at one point stomping on the crying baby's head to make her stay quiet. The rebels then took her into the village and then used her as a slave, both sexually and in terms of cooking, cleaning, and tending wounds. She was kept prisoner like an animal, she says, for five months, and when she finally got away and returned to her village, she was shunned by everyone, including Fortune – who, she says, was away getting a long-needed cooking pot on the day she was taken. Salima then reveals that the baby she is carrying is the child of one of the rebel rapists; that she can't help thinking it will be born some kind of monster; that she doubts that Fortune will be able to accept either the child or her; and then says that he can sit outside for as long as he wants – she isn't going to see him.

Scene 3, pages 70 through 72 – Fortune continues to wait outside the bar in the rain. Mama attempts to seduce him into spending time with her, but he refuses, insisting that he wants to see Salima. Mama tells him that "the woman that [he's] looking for" isn't there, her tone becoming harsher as she insists that he leave. He produces an iron pot and asks Mama to give it to Salima. Mama ridicules the gift, but as drunken government soldiers stagger out of her bar, goes inside.

Pages 72 through 75 – Josephine follows the drunken soldiers out, trying to seduce them into coming back into the bar and spending more time with / money on her. Meanwhile, Simon hurries over and tells Fortune that they have to move on: the militia



is moving on to the next village. Fortune insists that he needs to stay and see Salima. Simon struggles to convince Fortune to leave, saying they've been looking for a month and that it's time to let go. He adds that the best way to honor both Salima and his memory of her is for Fortune to fight and kill the rebels who attacked her and ruined both their lives. Fortune tells Simon that all he wants to do is go home; that if he continues to fight he will end up further and further from home. Simon tells him that he (Simon) has been given orders to kill all deserters. Fortune asks if he (Simon) is going to kill him. Simon responds by telling Fortune that Salima is gone. Simon then goes off. Fortune remains. There is the sound of a gun battle.

Analysis

The first thing to note about this section is that its primary line of action is based in a third plotline: if the primary plot relates to Mama Nadi's struggle to keep her business, and the Sophie / Mama Nadi story is the first subplot, then the Salima / Fortune story can be considered a second subplot. Like the Sophie / Mama Nadi subplot, it has its own chain of events / structure, which is, in turn, defined by the actions and needs of secondary characters: also like the Sophie / Mama Nadi subplot, it explores an aspect of one or more of the play's major themes. There are elements of the ensuring survival theme in Mama's actions in relation to Fortune and Salima, but by far the most significant thematic development in this particular subplot is the exploration of violence against women.

Here it must be noted that while Salima's story of kidnapping and sexual torture is the most graphically and specifically developed example of such violence described in the play, it is also a similarly graphic portrayal of moral violence, such as that practiced on her by her village and, at least initially, by her husband. It's also worth noting that, according to comments included in a preface to the published version of the play, experiencing such physical, sexual, and emotional violence is common among real-world women during the actual Congolese civil war. Finally, it's also worth noting the irony in the description of Josephine's actions as she seeks attention from the drunken soldiers: yes it's her job, but there's also a hint of a need for affirmation from them that she is attractive and desirable ... a deeply ironic moment when placed next to Salima's repulsion at having received similar sorts of attention without desiring them.

Other noteworthy elements in this section include Fortune's bringing the pot to Salima (which might be seen as an inept, but well intentioned, kind of peace offering) and Simon's references to the intensifying battle. These references are significant for a number of reasons: they follow up on previous foreshadowings in Act 1; are themselves foreshadowing of the violence ahead; and entwine actions in this second subplot with actions / events / circumstances that affect the main plot, which is one of the primary purposes of effective sub-plots in general.



Discussion Question 1

What can be inferred about the story from the descriptions of the three men in Scene 1? What about them, their identities and situations, that was revealed in Act 1 develops here?

Discussion Question 2

Throughout the story of how she was kidnapped, Salima refers to a beautiful male peacock that “visited” her in her garden the day the soldiers took her. Why do you think the author chose to juxtapose the images of the peacock and the soldiers? What metaphoric point is being made?

Discussion Question 3

Why might the quality and tone of Sophie’s song in Scene 1 be described as ironic? Relate the content of the song to the descriptions of the male characters and of Josephine’s dance.

Vocabulary

centurion, frenzy, disheveled, mango, frangipani, splendid, sorghum



Act 2, Scene 4

Summary

Pages 72 through 76 – Mama Nadi, Mr. Harari, and Sophie listen as a drunken, frightened Christian tells them about a battle between the rebels and the soldiers. He describes how one young boy hacked off the head of a soldier and shouted about how strong, proud, and free he is. Christian also talks about the evils and monstrosity of Osembenga; of how Osembenga and other authorities are lying every time they say something about a battle, a medicine, a book, a law that will make life better. Mama Nadi shuts him up, telling him that everyone – soldier, rebel, traveler – is welcome in her bar: that's the only way, she says, she can keep it going. When Christian tells her that one day trouble will be at her door, she says that that's the day she will close her door and leave.

Pages 76 through 79 – Rebel leader Kitembe and several rebel soldiers come in, accompanied by Josephine. Everyone in the bar watches Kitembe, whose energy is violent and volatile, angry and aggressive. Mama actively keeps the peace as Kitembe roams about speaking furiously about how he and the other rebels are driven to extreme action by Osembenga and the government; challenges both Christian and Mr. Harari; and then demands that Josephine rejoin him. When Josephine refuses, choosing to stay with Mr. Harari, Kitembe and the rebels “collect their guns and leave.” The rest of the people in the bar (including Sophie, who has said nothing) are relieved.

Pages 79 through 84 – Christian erupts into a viciously accurate, mocking impersonation of Kitembe, his arrogance and attitude. Sophie joins in. Osembenga and another government soldier enter, and watch for a while, unnoticed at first by Christian and Sophie. When they do notice the new arrivals, they attempt to stop, but Osembenga urges them to continue. They do, but the fun has gone out of the room. Eventually Osembenga allows them to stop and asks for drinks and cigarettes. As Mama and Sophie hurry to serve him, Osembenga asks who it was who just left the bar. Christian lies and says it was an aid worker. Osembenga then announces that he is pursuing Kitembe and the rebels who, he says, recently attacked a hospital and performed atrocities on the workers there. At his descriptions, Sophie and the others react with disgust and nausea. Osembenga then demands that Sophie come and sit with him. She resists with increasing intensity and, much to the concern of the others in the bar, first tells him that she is “dead”, and that if he had her, he would be “fuck[ing] a corpse.” She then spits on his feet. Osembenga reacts with anger as Christian tries to defend Sophie, but Mama calms him, offering herself in Sophie's place. Osembenga accepts the offer, and goes out with Mama.

Pages 84 through 87 – Mr. Harari urges everyone to be calm as Josephine comforts the distraught Sophie. Mama angrily returns and slaps Sophie, telling her to do as she is told. “You go in there,” she says, “and you make sure that his cock is clean.” She pushes Sophie out of the room and pours herself a drink. Christian begs with Mama to



change her mind, but Mama angrily reminds him that she has a business to run and, to make sure it continues, she has to now lose money. Christian then slaps down some money on the bar. “You understand THAT, don’t you?” he says. “You like that? There’s your fucking money.” Mama takes the money and gives him a beer, telling him how furious she is at being judged by the men who come in and use her establishment; how her girls are happier and safer; and how she made her own life by herself. The place is hers, she says, and she doesn’t give a damn what anybody thinks. Christian starts to leave, then stops, quoting poetry that suggests how hopeless Mama’s struggle to survive is. Mama tells him that poetry is just wind. Christian leaves. Mama says he’ll be back. Christian says he doubts it, and goes. The others also leave the room, leaving Mama alone “to contemplate her actions.”

Analysis

In the first part of this scene, Christian’s story about the attack on the soldier adds another layer of meaning to the play’s thematic exploration of the violence of war: the use of child soldiers on both sides in the real-world Congolese conflict (and in other conflicts, not just those in Africa) is a particularly repulsive and painful violation of humanity given a vivid and deeply frightening representation here. Meanwhile, Mama Nadi’s continued insistence that she has to keep her business alive has more of a feeling of desperation here than it has when it previously manifested. This is partly because the obstacles to her goal (i.e. the nearing presence of the conflict making it more difficult for her to do what she needs to do) are becoming more intense, but also because her sense of self and identity is becoming increasingly challenged, meaning that it’s becoming more important for her to hold onto that as long and as tightly as she can. The first part of the scene concludes with a foreshadowing of events both later in the scene and later in the play: Christian’s warning that trouble is coming foreshadows the entrances of Kisémbé and Osembénga a page or two later, and the climactic conflicts approaching in upcoming scenes.

Also in relation to the characters of Kisémbé and Osembénga, it’s important to note that the characters, and arguably the play itself, define no real moral and/or military differences between the two. They are both portrayed as self-righteous, extremely violent, and determined to win the battle at any cost: both, it seems, are entirely unaware of how their actions are viewed and/or affect the lives of those they both have set themselves up to be defending. What’s particularly intriguing about this section is that it here becomes possible to see parallels between the attitudes and actions of both Kisémbé and Osembénga and those of Mama Nadi, whose verbal violence towards Sophie, her extreme determination to keep her business afloat, and her treatment of Christian are the harshest she has been to this point in the play.

Other important points to note about this scene including the heightening of dramatic and/or narrative tension as the play nears its climax (specifically: the sense that the military conflict around Mama Nadi’s bar is intensifying); the eruption of self-preserving anger and rage from Sophie (which, in turn, triggers a parallel rage in Mama Nadi); and Christian’s use of poetry as a tactic in influencing Mama Nadi, which is important for two



reasons: it foreshadows important moments in their relationship at the end of the play, and it is a significant contrast in tone and language to the verbal violence in the rest of the scene – and indeed in the rest of the play.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the parallels and contrasts between the attitudes and actions of, on the one hand, Kisémbé and Osembénga, and Mama Nadi on the other. In what ways are the perspectives of all three similar? In what ways are they different?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Osembénga allow the imitation of Kisémbé to continue?

Discussion Question 3

What is ironic or unexpected about Josephine offering comfort to Sophie in the aftermath of the confrontation with Osembénga?

Vocabulary

haggard, bandy (v.), frigid, erratic, rhetoric, renegade, interject, formidable, sullen, beret, verve, imbecile, morphine, sadistic, ceremonious



Act 2, Scenes 5 and 6

Summary

Scene 5, pages 87 through 88 – Osumbenga and his assistant stumble out of Mama's bar, commenting on how good a time they had with "something new". Fortune comes up to them, tells them he is a member of Osumbenga's brigade; that he saw Kisémbé coming out of Mama's bar, and that he knows the direction in which Kisémbé drove away; and that he (Fortune) just wants his wife back. Osumbenga rushes off, calling for the brigade to be prepared and to follow him.

Scene 6, pages 88 through 92 – Amidst the sounds of approaching gunfire, Mr. Harari has one last drink with Mama before he moves on, speaking at length about how unpredictable the situation is with the rebels and the government and urging Mama to leave. She tells him that her bar is the only thing of hers that she really can call her own, and that she will survive. Harari asks her to think about what might happen to her girls, particularly Sophie. Mama then hurries off, and Mr. Harari reacts nervously to more gunfire. Mama returns with the stone from her lockbox and Sophie's note, telling him to leave with Sophie, to take the diamond and trade it for cash, and use the cash to get Sophie the operation and to set her up in a new life. Mr. Harari questions whether Mama is doing the right thing with the stone but she insists. Mr. Harari eventually agrees, and Mama hurries out to fetch Sophie. The sound of gunfire gets even closer. An Aid Worker rushes in to tell Mr. Harari that the truck he is to be on is leaving right away and can't wait. Mr. Harari tries to get the worker to wait for Sophie, but the worker won't, and rushes out. Mr. Harari seems torn ... then he makes a decision and leaves. More gunfire. A moment later, Mama hurries in with Sophie, giving her the address of a relative and telling her about the plans with Mr. Harari. When Sophie asks why Mama is doing this, Mama harshly tells her to not ask stupid questions and to send word when everything is sorted out. Sophie runs out. Mama pours herself a drink to celebrate. Sophie returns with the news that Harari is gone. There is a stage effect, and suddenly Mama and Sophie are surrounded by Osembenga, Fortune, and other soldiers.

Pages 92 through 94 – Osembenga demands that Mama tell him where Kisémbé has gone. Mama denies that he was ever there. Fortune insists that he was. Mama insists that Fortune is lying. Osembenga insists that Mama tell him the truth. Another soldier brings in Josephine. The soldiers are about to rape her. Josephine shouts for Mama to tell the truth about Kisémbé. Mama refuses. Osumbenga insists. Salima enters with blood on her dress and dripping down from between her legs. She screams for the soldiers to stop. Fortune rushes to her. So does Mama, telling her to keep her eyes on Mama. Salima takes Fortune's hand, and tells Osembenga and all the others "You will not fight your battles on my body anymore." She collapses and dies in Fortune's arms.



Analysis

The very short Scene 5 is packed with important elements: the implication of what Osembenga and his assistant have been doing (i.e. having relations of some kind with one of Mama Nadi's women); the lack of female presence (which evokes the way men in this situation seem to use and discard women without thought or care – a clear evocation of the play's thematic interest in violence against women); and the actions of Fortune. These last are particularly important: they suggest to Osembenga that he was lied to when Christian told him that the person whom Osembenga saw leaving the bar was an aid worker; and as such they propel the narrative into the climactic confrontations of Scene 6.

In the first part of Scene Six, there is a powerful and noteworthy contrast. First there are Harari's accusations that Mama is being selfish and irresponsible when it comes to her decision to hold onto her business at any cost, comments that echo those made by Christian throughout the play to this point. More importantly, though, there are Mama's contrastingly unselfish actions in giving Harari the raw diamond and trying to make arrangements for Sophie's freedom. There are several important aspects to this decision: Mama Nadi seems to want to prove both Harari and Christian wrong; she again reveals a compassionate side that is likely to be as surprising to audiences as it is to the other characters; and it foreshadows revelations in the following, final scene about why that compassion manifests so specifically and in such an unlikely way for Sophie. Here again, the narrative portrays both the compassion in Mama Nadi and the fiercely independent armor she uses to protect it.

What's important to note about the events following Mama's sacrifice (but before Salima's) is that Mama, in spite of her compassionate actions of a moment before, continues to desperately hold on to what is hers: she lies about Kitembe and appears to be willing to sacrifice Josephine to Osembenga all in the name of keeping the latter's goodwill which, as has been demonstrated previously, she wants to do in order to keep her business going. In this moment she remains defiantly selfish, even though she has, moments before, been defiantly UN-selfish. It's a contradiction that makes her a fascinating, powerful, uncomfortably human character.

Mama Nadi's actions here and the actions of Salima that shortly follow are the primary manifestations of one of the play's key themes, and arguably the only manifestations: the power of sacrifice. Both Mama and Salima make powerful, wrenching sacrifices in the name of what they both seem to see as a greater good (although it must be noted that the exact nature of Salima's sacrifice is only implied, never directly stated). Both also manifest / relate to several of the play's other themes. Mama Nadi makes her choice out of a compassion-based determination to ensure Sophie's survival (the fact that it doesn't work is deeply ironic); and while Mama Nadi's sacrifice is a positive rebuttal to both the violence of war in general and the violence of war perpetrated on women in particular, Salima's is a searing example of negative violence against women, and in particular of how women have violence done on them by themselves and by others in times of conflict.



Salima's death is the specific moment of climax in the play. All its themes and its narrative elements / plots reach their point of highest intensity here, as her actions and death simultaneously embody all the layers of suffering, of humanity in general and of women in particular, brought to bear as the result of ideologically obsessive military conflict.

Discussion Question 1

What is implied by the circumstances of Salima's entrance? What is the answer to Mama's question about what she has done?

Discussion Question 2

What is the implied parallel between Mr. Harari's decision to leave and Mama's actions throughout the play to this point? How do Mama's actions in this scene contrast that implied parallel?

Discussion Question 3

What are the implications of the stage effect as described in Quote 13? What is the suggested situation?

Vocabulary

artillery, vendetta, whim, defiant



Act 2, Scene 7

Summary

Pages 95 through 96 – The parrot chatters as Sophie and Josephine clean up the bar under Mama’s watchful eye. Sophie quietly sings as Mama’s attention is drawn to a distant truck coming down the road. She tries to attract the truck and its inhabitants into the bar, but the truck drives by. Sophie and Josephine go out to get some fresh water. Mama collapses in despair.

Pages 96 through – Christian comes in wearing a new suit. He explains to Mama that he knows what happened at her bar; that he debated about coming back, but found that his feelings for her were too strong; and that he feels it’s time for them to be together as a couple. Further conversation is temporarily interrupted by Sophie, coming back in to finish work. She embraces her uncle with happy surprise, becoming even happier when he gives her a book, some magazines, and a letter from her mother. Paying no attention to his warning to not expect too much from it, she hurries out to read it. After she’s gone, Christian continues to try to get the increasingly angry Mama to agree to be with him, saying that he would be prepared to settle down and help her run the bar, and ultimately that he loves her. At that Mama erupts, talking about how pointless anger is, how it would ultimately mean nothing as they got tired of each other, and that she knows he would be too interested in other things, other ways of living, to truly stay. Upset by her response, Christian starts to leave. Mama panics and asks him to stay. Christian asks to know “why not us”? A long moment, then Mama confesses that she is “ruined”. Christian says he’s sorry, and promises that he, speaking as a man, can’t do better. He tries to embrace her. At first she resists, but then accepts the embrace and breaks down in tears. Sophie comes back in ... sees what’s going on ... and then goes out. Christian speaks a short verse of poetry and asks Mama to dance. She accepts, and they dance slowly together, Mama awkwardly at first but then with increasing ease. Sophie brings Josephine in, and they watch the dancing. The parrot shouts for a beer.

Analysis

On a technical level, this scene might best be defined as denouement, or falling action: the point in a narrative after the intensity of the climax in which the characters deal with the aftermath of its events, their realizations about, and reactions to, how they and the world have changed as a result of those events, and how they discover / enact ways of moving forward.

The scene begins with a clear but subtle evocation of what Mama has lost: the passing truck, which offers a similarly clear but somewhat less subtle evocation of how things have changed for Christian. This last situation is particularly important, in that it fuels his desire and intention to build a new life with Mama Nadi: he acts on that desire / intention with a persistence and a wider variety of methods of persuasion than he has previously



employed. Mama Nadi resists those tactics with increasing vehemence, and then in one vulnerable moment, one confession, reveals a truth that offers explanations for several things about the play that has preceded it.

Mama's revelation that she, like Sophie, has been "ruined" explains several things. On a more apparent level, it explains why she acted the way she did towards Sophie in first accepting her into the business and later attempting to help her escape: she identifies with Sophie, and while she (Mama) may think it's too late to start a new life, she sees it as not being too late for Sophie. On another, deeper level, the revelation offers an additional layer of explanation as to why Mama defended her business to such an extreme, often ruthless degree: as is reiterated several times throughout the play, the implication of a woman being "ruined" suggests they have no value, as women or as people. Mama has found a way to compensate for such suggestions by being determined to make her business a success. In many ways, her business replaces the biological child she can never have. On yet another level, it explains her harshness and hardness: she clearly feels deeply vulnerable as a result of being "ruined", so she has constructed a kind of verbal and emotional armor around herself ... an armor that Christian's persistent compassion has broken through from the outside, and an armor that Mama Nadi's own compassion (albeit reluctant) has broken through from the inside.

Meanwhile, the fact that Sophie and Josephine witness the result of that breaking through offers hope to them and to the audience, while the shouting of the parrot which, throughout the narrative, has represented freedom denied, now shouts to celebrate freedom and joy regained – or at least the possibility of that regaining.

Discussion Question 1

In way does the passing truck suggest ways in which the world has changed for Mama Nadi? In what way does it reflect her attitudes and actions throughout the play to this point?

Discussion Question 2

What does Christian's new suit suggest about how things have changed for him? What do you think has happened to trigger his sudden, and more apparent, insistence that he and Mama Nadi make a new life together? How is his new perspective reflected in the poetry he quotes in Quote 15?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think happens to the characters after the play concludes? What are their lives like? Where do they end up? How do they live?

Vocabulary

predictable, succumb, insurgent



Characters

Mama Nadi

Mama is the play's central character and protagonist. She is in her early forties, a hard-edged and angrily practical black African woman determined to survive the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo at all costs. Several times throughout the play, she refers to her family's land being taken away from her when she was a child: this, she implies, is the main reason that she is so determined to hold on to what is hers (i.e. the bar). She is intelligent, experienced, and knows how to read both a situation and the people within that situation, a skill that she uses not so much to take advantage of it but instead to work out a way to make sure that the situation in question resolves without affecting her ability to do business.

It often seems like money and keeping her business / land are Mama's main focus and priority, but there are also several occasions throughout the play when her actions come across as surprisingly compassionate. Perhaps the most notable of these is her decision early on to accept the "ruined" Sophie into her household even knowing that the damage that has been done to her (Sophie) is likely to make her a less than popular choice for the men who frequent the bar. Late in the narrative, the reason for this and other compassionate choices Mama has made is revealed: she tells Christian, in an effort to get him to stop asking her to be with him, that she too has been "ruined". In other words, she empathizes with Sophie and the other women and, in addition to using her business to survive and hold onto her property, she also uses it to give women a better life than that they would face as a slave to the government / rebel soldiers.

Mama Nadi is a complex character. She is, by turns, dominating and submissive, watchful and aggressive, angry and compassionate. Her actions, what the play reveals to be the motivations for those actions, and what the story shows to be the social, political, and military context for those motivations, are all part of the work's thematic exploration of the human need to survive.

Christian

Christian is a black African in his early forties. He is a trader and merchant, dealing in everything from lipstick to liquor to girls. Charming and sensitive, he has an interest in developing a relationship with Mama Nadi, but she continually refuses, saying that her business is too important for her to give it up just to be with a man.

At one point, Mama Nadi's desperation to keep her business going leads her to bully Christian, who has repeatedly said that he doesn't drink, into having some whiskey: while it is never stated outright, there is the sense that he is an alcoholic, and knows that if he does have a drink, there will be serious consequences. And consequences



there are, when his lack of inhibition comes close to triggering exactly the sort of confrontation that Mama Nadi wants to keep out of her bar.

Christian eventually sobers up, and at the play's conclusion, makes one more effort to engage Mama Nadi in a closer relationship, an effort that, at last, she seems prepared / willing to accept.

All in all, Christian is a generally good, if troubled man, whose vulnerability and good-heartedness brings a significant degree of humanity into a world where being humane to others seems to be in short supply.

Sophie

Sophie is one of two black African women brought by Christian to work for Mama Nadi. Sophie is Christian's niece. She is young, ethereally pretty, and a good singer: she is also "ruined", in that her female sexual organs have been destroyed as a result of being sexually abused by too many men. As a result, she has been disowned by her family - by everyone, that is, except her uncle.

Quietly spirited and independent, she is determined to build a better life for herself, and steals money from Mama Nadi to help pay for an operation that will restore her femininity. She is compassionate towards the other women at Mama Nadi's; feisty and determined to do what Mama Nadi asks of her only on her own terms; educated and, at the same time, something of an idealist and romantic.

Salima

Salima is the second of the two black African women brought by Christian to work for Mama Nadi. Salima is older and physically more sturdy than Sophie, but emotionally more fragile. She was kept as a slave (sexual and otherwise) by soldiers and became pregnant after being repeatedly raped. When she returned home, she was sent away by her family (including her husband, Fortune - see below) who felt / believed that what happened to her brought shame upon them. Hurt and depressed by their betrayal, Salima is moody and easily upset, refusing to see Fortune when he comes looking for her and trying to make amends.

At the play's climax, Salima interrupts the erupting conflict between the soldiers and the rebels moments after having sacrificed her baby's life: she tells both sides that her body will no longer be the battlefield on which they fight, and dies soon afterwards.

Josephine

As the play begins, Josephine has already been with Mama Nadi for some time. Selfish, spiteful, ambitious, and greedy, Josephine does whatever she can to find and eventually gain advantage and income over the men who come into Mama Nadi's bar, and over the



women (particularly Sophie and Salima) with whom she (Josephine) works. At times viciously vindictive, at other times tenderly compassionate, Josephine is unpredictable and intriguing, a hardened, pragmatic, and edgy contrast to the more vulnerable newcomers to Mama Nadi's business.

Mr. Harari

Mr. Harari is a Lebanese diamond merchant and trader in his mid-forties. He struggles to sustain a living while trying to conduct business in the middle of the civil war raging throughout the Democratic Republic of Congo. There is the sense that while he is crafty and manipulative in his dealings with most people, he is more honest with Mama Nadi: there is also the sense that she has to be, given how sharply and negatively she responds to those who try to take advantage of her.

Mr. Harari has a degree of sensitivity and compassion: his feelings for Josephine, for example, lead him to make plans to start a new life with her in the city. He also agrees to Mama Nadi's plan for him to take Sophie away and to help her get the long dreamed-of operation that will restore her femininity. However, when Mr. Harari is forced to choose between saving his own life and waiting for Sophie, he chooses the former. Also, he never really follows through on his ideas for a future with Josephine. These last two situations suggest that Mr. Harari is, in his own way, similar to the soldiers who make their way through Mama's bar: out for himself and whatever he can get.

Jerome Kisémbé

Kisémbé is the black African leader of the rebels in the area of the Congo where Mama Nadi has her business. Unpredictable and volatile, emotional and vicious, the other characters are very wary of him: it's never easy to determine / understand what he is going to do next. He is a dangerous, frightening presence both in the play and in the lives of the characters.

Commander Osembenga

Osembenga is the black African leader of the government armed forces in the region of the Congo where Mama Nadi has her bar. Corrupt and manipulative, selfish and vicious, Osembenga embodies and manifests both the moral and physical destructiveness of the desperate, violent Congolese authorities.

Fortune

Fortune is a black African soldier in the government army under the command of Osembenga. He is also Salima's husband, and is desperate to have both her forgiveness (i.e. for shunning her) and her affection (i.e. he wants her back). When both Salima and Mama Nadi refuse to let him see her, he becomes increasingly desperate



and reckless: his telling Osembenga that rebel leader Kisembe has been seen leaving Mama Nadi's can be seen as taking revenge on not being allowed to see his wife.

Simon

Simon is a black African friend and comrade of Fortune's, and has been traveling with him in search of Salima. Patient and long-suffering, but nevertheless practical and relatively realistic, Simon urges Fortune to give up his quest, but Fortune refuses to listen.

Soldiers

Black African soldiers on both sides of the government / rebel conflict stream in and out of Mama Nadi's bar, mostly anonymously, desperate for the escapes from combat she offers: cigarettes, alcohol, liquor, and girls. Most of them are not well individualized, but their presence is nevertheless important, in that they suggest the idea of women as property, a key component of the play's thematic exploration of the violence perpetrated on women in a time of war.



Symbols and Symbolism

Mama Nadi's Lipstick

Early in the play, Mama Nadi puts bright lipstick (recently brought to her by Christian) on her mouth. It's one of the few points in the play where she does something that might be described as frivolous for herself. Shortly afterwards, she puts some of that same lipstick on Sophie in an effort to cheer her up.

Mama Nadi's Lockbox

Mama Nadi keeps her money and other precious possessions in a secure, carefully guarded lock-box. Among those possessions: a raw, uncut diamond.

Mama Nadi's Diamond

Among the valuables that Mama Nadi keeps in her lock-box is a raw, uncut and unpolished diamond, given to her for safekeeping by a rebel. She eventually chooses to give it to diamond merchant Mr. Harari so that he can sell it and use the proceeds to help Sophie get the operation that will restore her reproductive organs. Circumstances lead Harari to disappear with the diamond, leaving both Mama Nadi and Sophie without funds.

Sophie's Letter

Shortly after her arrival, Sophie is caught stealing. She explains to the angry Mama Nadi that a man told her she (Sophie) could get an operation to restore her "ruined" reproductive organs, and produces a letter outlining the operation. Mama Nadi keeps the letter in her lock-box.

Coltan

"Coltan" is the name given to the gold ore mined in the Democratic Republic of Congo, an ore that both sides in that country's civil war (government and rebel) are fighting to control.

The Parrot

A frequently screeching, sometimes verbal parrot lives in Mama Nadi's bar after she took responsibility for it following the death of its elderly owner. Moody and noisy, its presence represents Mama Nadi's capacity for compassion, which is well hidden most



of the time, but surfaces in unexpected ways / places - i.e. when it comes to Mama Nadi agreeing to take care of Sophie.

Sophie's Romance Novel

At one point in the play, Sophie reads excerpts of a romance novel to Salima and Josephine, and is overheard by Mama Nadi. The younger women are engaged by the novel's story of love, but the cynical Mama Nadi tells them that all love will bring them is heartache and suffering.

Fortune's Pot

When he comes to try and see Salima, Fortune (Salima's husband) brings with him an iron pot. The action of the play never makes it entirely, explicitly clear why he has brought it, but at one point, when Salima tells the story of how she was kidnapped and enslaved, she refers to Fortune being away in another village buying her a cooking pot. It may be that Fortune bringing the pot is a symbol of his renewed commitment to her. At the very least, it seems to be a peace offering of sorts.

Christian's Clothes

When Christian is introduced, he is described as wearing a very old, somewhat worn-out suit. This can be seen as representing the somewhat shabby way he lives his life, and is treated by Mama Nadi. Later in the play, when he returns to ask Mama one last time to take their relationship to another level, he wears a new suit, representative of his desire to live a new life.

Alcohol

Throughout the play, alcohol plays an important role - serving as a fundamental, essential element of Mama Nadi's income, and also as a trigger for a breakdown in politeness, good behavior, and obeying the rules - in particular, Mama Nadi's rules of how to behave in her establishment. The effects of alcohol become most noteworthy in the alcoholic Christian, who is bullied by Mama Nadi into taking a drink he doesn't want, and whose alcohol-triggered random behavior creates complications for her and for the other characters.



Settings

Mama Nadi's Bar

The business run by protagonist Mama Nadi is part bar, part brothel. The action of the play is set almost entirely in the part of the ramshackle structure where business is done, with some key scenes playing out in the business's living quarters, established as being behind the main building.

The Mining Town

Mama Nadi's business is in a small mining town - a cluster of living quarters for miners and small businesses that market supplies to them. Given that the military conflict surrounding the bar and the characters that inhabit it is based in issues of control over natural resources (i.e. what emerges from the local mine), this particular aspect of the play's setting is perhaps more directly related to its plot (i.e. events that are triggered to some degree by that military conflict) than other elements.

The Jungle

Stage directions describe the mining town where Mama Nadi has her business as being in the middle of the jungle. This gives the piece a sense of taking place in the midst of wildness, surrounded by untamed, uncontrolled chaos.

The Democratic Republic of Congo

This country in the heart of Africa is the play's broad-strokes main setting. A military conflict between the government and localized rebel groups over the allocation of, and profit from, natural resources raged in the Congo for years, and is the socio-political-economic context for the play's action and story.

Contemporary Africa

The Democratic Republic of Congo is one of several countries in contemporary Africa struggling with acts of rebellion, extreme economic disparity, and violence resulting from both. This means that in many ways, aspects of the story of "Ruined" are aspects of life in much of what was once known as "The Dark Continent".



Themes and Motifs

Ensuring Survival

Much, if not most, of the action of the play is grounded in the work's primary thematic interest – an exploration of what people in a time of war are prepared to do in order to survive. This exploration plays out in the experiences and actions of virtually all the principal characters, but perhaps most notably in the experiences and actions of the play's protagonist, Mama Nadi.

From the beginning, the play seems designed to portray Mama Nadi as doing, or being prepared to do, almost anything in order to not only stay alive, but to preserve what is most important to her: her business, which she indicates several times throughout the action is the one earthly possession she has managed to obtain and hold onto. In spite of several well-reasoned arguments against doing so, she maintains friendly relationships with individuals on both sides of the government / rebel war so that neither side will view her as playing favorites. She maintains similarly friendly relationships with merchants and/or traders with whom she does business (i.e. Christian, Mr. Harari) while, at the same time, insisting that they give her exactly what she wants on her terms. At the same time, she manipulates and sustains controlling relationships with the women who work for her (i.e. Sophie, Salima, Josephine), knowing that if they please the men on either side of the battle who come into the bar, and do so on her terms, all of them will continue to live. In short, Mama Nadi is driven by extreme circumstances, and an extreme determination, to extreme actions to ensure that she, and the people who give her what she needs, all survive.

At the same time, it's important to note that while Mama Nadi has a relatively realistic (albeit harsh and uncompromising) view of what she has to do to survive, the actions of several other characters have extreme ideas about what they THINK they have to do to survive. This is true of the leaders of the opposing sides in the war raging around Mama Nadi and her business: both Osembenga (on the government side) and Kitembe (on the rebel side) seem to take extreme actions not just to survive, but to destroy the opposing side so that their own survival is ensured, or at least more likely. The need to survive is arguably a prime motivator / trigger for much, if not all, the violence that manifests throughout the play, aspects of said violence defining two of the play's secondary themes.

The Violence of War

Because the two sides of the civil war within which the action of the play unfolds are both desperate to survive and desperate to dominate the country both politically and socially, and because that desperation increases over the course of the story, the characters and factions for which they fight become increasingly violent. That, in turn, leads other characters to engage in different types of violence: Mama Nadi, in fact, is



one of the most violent characters in the play, but her violence deploys emotional weaponry, rather than guns or other, more physically destructive artillery. She doesn't wage political war, but she wages personal war, on the emotional, ideological, and moral resistance of those who, unlike her, seem less willing to look the reality of war in the face. The portrayal of this cascade of violence as it crashes down from government to soldier, from rebel leader to deluded guerilla, and from both on to the people that each side professes to protect, is one of the play's strongest narrative and thematic elements: the violence of war, the play suggests, destroys bodies and spirits, innocence and courage, faith and reason.

Here it's important to note that the violence portrayed throughout the play is not only physical. There is a great deal of emotional violence as well: people are attacked with anger, bitterness, sarcasm, and hatred. The most vividly portrayed user of such violence is protagonist Mama Nadi: her verbal, emotionally-defined attacks on Christian, Fortune, and the women in her employ are among the hardest hitting manifestations of violence in the play.

There are several important manifestations of this theme throughout the play: the stories told about the violent atrocities perpetrated by both sides of the conflict (i.e. the attack on the hospital made by the rebels; the attack on the missionary by the government), as well as the threats and confrontations actually shown in the play (i.e. by both Osembenga, on behalf of the government, and Kitembe, on behalf of the rebels). Perhaps most vividly, most personally, and most intimately, there is the story told by Salima about the violence perpetrated on her, which in turn evokes one of the play's more specific thematic references to violence: the violence that war, and those that fight it, do to women.

Violence against Women

In many ways, the various types of violence perpetrated on the play's women is its most vividly developed sub-theme. Each of the play's more significant female characters – Mama Nadi, Sophie, Salima, even Josephine – is a survivor of war-related violence ... assault, kidnapping, rape, and mutilation. This particular theme is perhaps the clearest representation in the play of the author's apparent overall intention – to bring the world's attention to how women, both in the real-world conflict depicted in the play and throughout history, are often the most vulnerable, and the most unheard, of war's potential victims.

Here it's important to note, however, that the violence perpetrated on women in war, at least in the particular war as portrayed in the play, is not only physical, although that physical violence (which is, the playwright notes, emerged from stories of actual female survivors of the Congolese civil war) is appalling, portrayed as it is with unflinching clarity and specificity. There is also a great deal of emotional violence towards women, much of which is perpetrated by men: specifically, the soldiers on both sides of the conflict who come into the bar and, with a casualness that's almost as horrifying as the physical attacks the play depicts, act as though they have the automatic right to do to



the women's bodies whatever they want. But there is also the emotional violence perpetrated by Mama Nadi on Sophie, Salima, and Josephine. While there is the sense that Mama Nadi's emotional violence is ultimately grounded in both compassion for the women and the recognition of the harsh realities in which they are all ensnared, there is also the sense that she is harsher than she needs to be – that she, as referenced above and not unlike the men who practice violence of some sort on women, is cascading the violence around her down onto those with even less power and/or status than she has herself.

In perhaps the most intense and/or heartbreaking incident of woman-on-woman violence in the play, there is the violence that Salima does to herself (and, by implication, to her unborn child) at the play's climax in Act 2, Scene 6. In a darkly ironic, rather twisted way, this violence is similar in intention to the play's other forms of violence, and in particular the violence of women on women: to lessen, perhaps even completely defuse, the potential power / impact of more violence ... violence to stop a conflict, rather than perpetuate it.

The Power of Money

A key component of the primary theme of ensuring survival is the need for money – specifically, Mama Nadi's seemingly endless need for the money necessary to keep her business going. She makes decision after decision, choice after choice, that clearly reflects not only her determination to survive, but her need for money to do so: she engages in what appears to be a hypocritical bartering with both sides of the battle surrounding her; she bullies the women that she employs into providing sexual services to warriors, again on both sides and again insisting that the money they bring in primarily goes to her and her business; and she engages in bartering with men that think she is their friend (i.e. Christian, Mr. Harari) in order to get the absolute most that she can for the money she gives them.

There is, however, a deeper level to the play's thematic exploration of the power of money, a level that manifests when Mama Nadi's need for cash is considered in relation to another character's similarly driven need for money – Sophie's need for money to pay for the operation that will restore her womanhood. When these two needs are placed next to each other, and when the motivations beneath those two needs are similarly juxtaposed (Mama Nadi's desperation to hold on to what is hers, Sophie's desperation to get back what was HERS), the power of money becomes something different – less a means of control, less a means of survival, and more a means of fulfilling dreams.

Development of this theme reaches its climax when Mama gives Mr. Harari the raw diamond that she had been saving for herself so that he can buy Sophie the operation she longs for. Aside from revealing the previously unseen depths of Mama's compassion, it also reveals just how much she values dreams and the power to make them come true: there is the sense here that Mama, in intending to fund the fulfillment of Sophie's dreams, is vicariously fulfilling her own – since Mama has herself been “ruined”, an investment in the un-ruining of another woman (for lack of a better term)



becomes a more important, less selfish, more compassionate use of money. As Mama herself suggests, there will always be soldiers willing to pay for what she and her establishment have to offer: there will always be money for HER dreams. There will not always be money for Sophie's.

The Power of Sacrifice

Mama Nadi's choice to give Mr. Harari the diamond to pay for Sophie's operation is one of several examples of how the power of sacrifice manifests throughout the play. Mama Nadi would never call it that, and would probably hurt anyone who suggested that that's what it in fact is. But the bottom line is that her choice is an act of selfless compassion, of making a personal sacrifice so that someone else can have a better life.

There are several other such acts in the play, some of which are similarly motivated by compassion. These include Christian's sacrifice of his sobriety (so that Mama Nadi can keep her bar) while in the latter stages of the narrative he also sacrifices his safety, at least to some degree, in order to make one last pleading visit to Mama Nadi. On the other hand, there are other, less personal sorts of sacrifice also in play, some directly revealed (i.e. the way both sides in the rebel/government conflict sacrifice innocent lives to make their political and military points) and some less so (i.e. the way the families of Sophie and Sophia sacrifice their relationships with them in the name of preserving their family's and community's honor).

But by far, the most vivid example of the power of sacrifice comes at the play's climax, when Salima sacrifices the future life of her unborn child and (unwittingly?) her own life in the name of stopping the war that has arrived on her doorstep (it should be noted that the narrative explicitly states clear that that is what she has done, but the implication is very clear indeed). The conflict in Mama Nadi's bar comes to an end as the result of Salima's sacrifice, which on one level can be seen as echoing one more form of sacrifice in the play: how the soldiers, rebels, and to some extent many of the other characters (including Mama Nadi) have sacrificed their humanity in the name of fighting for a belief that eventually, turns out to be corrupt, false, and profoundly destructive.

Styles

Point of View

Because this is a play, there is no narrative point of view as there would be in a work of prose, or of poetry: there is no first or second person, no omniscient or limited narrator. There is a central character (Mama Nadi), but the story is not necessarily portrayed solely from her point of view. Several key scenes (i.e. Salima's narrative of her kidnapping and imprisonment) are recounted from the perspective of other characters. In that sense, it could be argued that the narrative point of view is of a sort that is often described as "shifting", or moving from that of one character to another.

If there is a central point of view to the work, it is thematic rather than narrative, having to do with the issues, ideas, and concerns raised by the story as opposed to the telling of that story. The question then becomes whether there is a central theme to the work. While a case could be made that there is, and that it has to do with violence against women in a time of war, it could also be argued that the play's exploration of the effect of wartime violence goes beyond what happens to women and into the effect of violence in general. The point is not made to suggest that the exploration of different types of warrior-on-woman violence, and the effects of that violence, are unimportant or downplayed: on the contrary, women and children are arguably among the most unheard-from victims of military conflict, and the play's thematic intent (to reveal the nature and scope of that violence) is important and necessary. But it is important to note that the author's apparent intent seems to extend to an exploration of how violence affects everyone caught up in military conflict, particularly one with a cultural or ethnic element such as the conflict portrayed here. There are several examples of how the author realizes this intent. Two are in Act 2, Scene 4: Christian's story of the young boy beheading the government soldier, and Osembenga's story of the rebels' treatment of the staff at the hospital (which, it must be remembered, might be government propaganda). One last example: the story of the government's treatment of the white missionary.

Language and Meaning

The main point about this work's use of language is that, for the most part, meaning and story emerge as a result of dialogue rather than narration. There are several prose stage directions throughout the work, some of which define setting, some of which indicate action, and some of which offer information.

Those pieces of prose aside, the story unfolds almost entirely as a result of what characters say; the implications of what they say; and the way in which both word and implication indicate choice, as well as the reasons for action and choice. Dialogue becomes action, reveals action, and manifests action; it exists because of character, reveals character, and manifests character (i.e. characters say what they say, and in the



way they say it, as a result of who they are as people and what they're trying to accomplish); and, through the interaction of action and character, also reveals theme.

If, as noted above, the play's primary thematic interest has to do with the effects of violence in a time of war, then it follows that because the work is a play, those effects are revealed through dialogue. In addition to the various narrations of violence referred to in "Point of View" above, there is also Salima's story of her kidnapping and imprisonment in Act 2, Scene 3 which, in dialogue (i.e. storytelling) reveals one of the most wrenching effects of violence in the play. By contrast, there is the final attempt by Christian to win over Mama Nadi, in which his longing for her, his love for her, and the logic of his proposal are revealed in what he says, in language that contrasts powerfully with the harsher language of the more violence-oriented stories and, in doing so, provides a vivid, affecting example of how language in the form of dialogue reveal very different meanings.

Structure

The play's essential structure is linear – that is, events follow a clear, progressive movement forward through time. Cause leads to effect, action leads to reaction, incident A leads to incident B, and so on. There are no flashbacks or flash forwards, no imagined or re-enacted incidents to take the narrative into the past or the future. Some events are re-lived by some of the characters (most notably, by Salima as she recalls how she became a prisoner and a slave), but the stories told are within a present-day timeline, a consistent through-line of action that builds to the play's climax: the moment of confrontation between Osembenga and Mama Nadi over what the former believes is the latter's sheltering of rebels, and particularly rebel leader Jerome Kitembe.

That said, it's worth noting that within that forward movement, there are occasional gaps. Specifically, time passes between the play's various scenes – sometimes days, sometimes weeks, sometimes months. The action of the scenes often contains information about what has passed between the scenes, but the significant point to take away from this comment is that in this piece, as in most plays, scenes are focused around events that are the most significant in the lives and experiences of the characters. There is nothing here, again as in most plays, that could be described as "day to day": drama, by definition, is all about exceptional days.

Because this piece is a play, the above referenced events / incidents are all defined by a character's drives and motivations – more specifically, by their particular scene-by-scene goals (i.e. what they want to accomplish), whether they accomplish them, and what needs are met or not met when they ARE accomplished ... or not. As the narrative moves forward, as goals are met and/or not met, needs of the characters intensify, driving the story further and further forward with greater and greater speed and emotional power, building first to a secondary climax at the end of the first act (the confrontation between Mama Nadi and Fortune about Salima), and from there to the primary climax in the second act (as noted, the confrontation between Osembenga and

Mama Nadi. In other words, and in this play like many others, structure is in effect defined and shaped by character, and by action grounded in character.



Quotes

A small mining town. The sounds of the tropical Ituri rain forest. The Democratic Republic of Congo. / A bar, makeshift furniture and a rundown pool table. A lot of effort has gone into making the worn bar cheerful. A stack of plastic washtubs rests in the corner. An old car battery powers the audio system, a covered birdcage sits conspicuously in the corner of the room.

-- Stage Directions (Act 1, Scene 1)

Importance: The stage directions quoted here create a concise, vivid sense of setting and context for the play's action. Note the attention to both the contents of the room and the sense of the nearby world outside.

He believed as long as the words of the forest people were spoken, the spirits would stay alive.

-- Mama Nada (Act 1, Scene 1)

Importance: In this quote that describes the recently deceased owner of the cranky parrot that lives in her shop, Mama Nadi metaphorically refers to the lives and stories not just of the forest people, but of all the Congolese whose lives have been changed / damaged by the civil war in their country. There is an implication of hope here, an experience that Mama Nadi doesn't really have, since she is so focused on simply surviving and on holding on to what she sees as hers.

I open my doors, and tomorrow I'm a refugee camp overrun with suffering. Everyone has their hand open since this damned war began. I can't do it. I keep food in the mouths of eight women when half the country's starving, so don't give me shit about taking on one more girl.

-- Mama Nada (Act One, Scene 1)

Importance: In this quote, Mama Nadi reveals the simultaneous difficulty and complicated, conditional charity of her business situation.

I want a powerful slip of paper that says I can cut down forests and dig holes and build to the moon if I choose. I don't want someone to turn up at my door, and take my life from me. Not ever again. But tell, how does a woman like me get a piece of land, without having to pick up a fucking gun?

-- Mama Nadi (Act 1, Scene 2)

Importance: Here Mama Nadi reveals her ultimate dream to Mr. Harari, at the same time revealing to him and to the audience the coarse-mouthed courage and determination with which she is pursuing it.

Salima: "...this night, I look over at you singing, and you seem almost happy like a sunbird that can fly away if you reach out to touch it." Sophie: "Is that what you think? While I'm singing, I'm praying the pain will be gone, but what those men did to me lives



inside my body. Every step I take I feel them in me. Punishing me. And it will be that way for the rest of my life.

-- Salima / Sophie (Act 1, Scene 3)

Importance: This brief exchange shows a key difference in how Sophie and Salima perceive the "work" Sophie does, and perhaps a difference in how they experience the "work" they both do for Mama Nadi.

This Jerome Kisémbé is a dangerous man. You hide him and his band of renegades in your villages. Give them food, and say you're protecting your liberator. What liberator? What will he give the people? That is what I want to know? What has he given you Mama? Hm? A new roof? Food? Peace?

-- Osembenga (Act 1, Scene 4)

Importance: Here, government official Osembenga warns Mama Nadi and the rest of the people in her bar of the dangers of associating with rebel leader Kisémbé, who in many ways turns out to be both as dangerous as Osembenga says and as dangerous as Osembenga himself.

There must always be a part of you that this war can't touch.

-- Mama Nadi (Act 1, Scene 5)

Importance: With this brief statement, Mama Nadi reveals the philosophical, emotional sensitivity that continues to exist beneath her tough, practical exterior.

He'll see you, love will flood into his eyes, he'll tell you everything you want to hear, and then one morning ... he will begin to ask ugly questions, but he won't be able to hear the answers. ... will you be able to tell him the truth? Huh? We know, don't we? The woman he loved is dead.

-- Mama Nadi (Act 2, Scene 2)

Importance: Here Mama tells Salima some harsh truths about what awaits her if she reunites with her husband, Fortune.

She is for everyone, soup to be had before dinner' that is what someone said. They tied me to a tree by my foot, and the men came whenever they wanted soup. I make fires, I cook food, I listen to their stupid songs, I carry bullets, I clean wounds, I was blood from their clothing and, and and - I lay there as they tore me to pieces until I was raw - five months. Five months. Chained like a goat. These men fighting - fighting for our liberation.

-- Salima (Act 2, Scene 2)

Importance: Salima vividly and harshly sums up the situation of slavery into which she was kidnapped by rebel soldiers.

If you are angry, then be angry at the men who took her. Think about how they did you, they reached right into your pocket and stole from you. I know Salima since we were



children. I love her the same as you. She'd want you to avenge her honor. That is the only way to heal your soul.

-- Simon (Act 2, Scene 3)

Importance: With this quote, Simon attempts to get Fortune to forget Salima and to have one last night of pleasure and forgetting before they go off and resume the battle with the rebels.

They say we are the renegades. We don't respect the rule of law - but how else do we protect ourselves against their aggression? Huh? How do we feed our families? They bring soldiers from Uganda, drive us from our land and make us refugees - and then turn us into criminals or try to protect ourselves ... it's our land. Ask the Mbuti, they can describe every inch of the forest as if it were their own flesh.

-- Kitembe (Act 2, Scene 4)

Importance: Rebel leader Jerome Kitembe justifies his actions and those of his allies and followers as they struggle with government forces to defend land, territory, and history.

[This war] keeps fracturing and redefining itself. Militias form overnight, and suddenly a drunken foot soldier with a tribal vendetta is a rebel leader ... but you can't reason with him because he's only thinking as far as his next drink. The man I shake hands with in the morning is my enemy by sundown. And why? His whims. Because his witch doctor says I'm the enemy. I don't know whose hand to grease other than the one directly in front of me.

-- Mr. Harari (Act 2, Scene 6)

Importance: Here, diamond merchant Mr. Harari complains and reveals information about the unpredictable, unstable nature of the war between the government and the rebels, summing up how impossible it is for people like him (and Mama Nadi) to survive, let alone do business.

The stage is flooded with intense light. The sound of chaos, shouting, gunfire, grows with intensity. Government soldiers pour in. A siege. A white hot flash. The generator blows! Streams of natural light pour into the bar.

-- Stage Directions (Act 2, Scene 6)

Importance: This stage direction summarizes the violent visual action that defines an important component of the play's climax.

How long has it been, Mama, since you allowed a man to touch you? Huh? A man like me, who isn't looking through you for a way home."

-- Christian (Act 2, Scene 7)

Importance: With this quote, Christian attempts to convince Mama that his way of paying attention to her is better than the ways of the other men whose attention she has been striving so hard for.



A branch lists to and fro / An answer to the insurgent wind / A circle dance / Grace
nearly broken / But it ends peacefully / Stillness welcome.
-- Christian (Act 2, Scene 7)

Importance: This quote from an unknown poet is the final piece of Christian's argument that he and Mama should unite their lives - the piece that brings her into his arms for a dance.