On May 13, 2009, a select group of human rights activists spoke before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee at a special hearing concerning violence against women in conflict zones, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sudan. The guest speakers were Niemat Ahmadi, a women’s rights activist and Save Darfur liaison from Sudan; Chouchou Namegabe Nabintu, a Congolese journalist who runs the South Kivu Women’s Media Association; Robert Warwick, Executive Director of the Baltimore Office of the International Rescue Committee; John Prendergast, former member of Clinton’s National Security Council and co-founder of the Enough Project; and feminist performance artist Eve Ensler. Ensler in fact set the stage for the other witnesses by opening the “outside expert” portion of the hearing with a graphic testimony of the atrocities inflicted on women in the DRC: “What I have witnessed in the DRC, frankly, has shattered and changed me forever. I will never be the same. I hope none of us will ever be the same. I think of Beatrice, who was shot in the vagina and now has tubes instead of organs; Honorata, who was raped by gangs as she was tied upside down on a wheel; Sowadi, who was raped and raped, and forced to eat dead babies.” The playwright here uses her voice to force
participants and spectators to call to mind the absent bodies whose experiences are, presumably, the *raison d'être* of the hearing. This strategy was repeated at the close of the hearing, curiously by another performance artist, when attendees were invited to a special reception featuring African American playwright Lynn Nottage and actress Quincy Tyler Bernstine. At this reception, Bernstine performed a monologue about the experience of rape from Nottage’s play *Ruined* (prem. 2008/ pub. 2009).

There is much that could be said about the hearing as a whole, or even the small snippet of Ensler’s testimony that I have reproduced here. As a site of convergence of aesthetics and activism, of testimony, spectatorship, and legislation, the hearing speaks to the inherently theatrical nature of human rights and humanitarian advocacy campaigns—even, and perhaps especially importantly, at the moment that advocacy is being translated into policy. This theatricality has recently become an object of sustained study in the work of performance scholars. However, before reading this hearing as performance, a task I will return to briefly at the end of this chapter, it seems necessary to ask what these playwrights are doing at a Congressional hearing to begin with. Individuals such as Nabintu, a Congolese human rights activist and first-hand witness to the abuses, as well as representatives from established NGOs such as the International Rescue Committee, are expected in the cast of characters. But how did Ensler and Nottage become central figures in the campaign to stop sexual violence against women in the DRC? Since the answer to this question lies largely in the success of specific plays that these artists devised, it also raises the issue of the relation between more traditional theater, human rights, and humanitarianism. This is the issue that I will focus on below.

In this chapter, I will examine how Ensler and Nottage use specific plays, and the publicity surrounding them, to intervene in and configure North American debates about the conflict in the DRC. Both Ensler and Nottage aim to raise awareness about the situation of women in the war in particular and to inspire activism to stop gender-based violence. While they are not exactly representative of the Broadway invoked in my title, their work has achieved a popularity that allows them to reach wide and varied audiences. I am interested in tracing how Ensler and Nottage diverge in their approaches to these audiences, and what the effects of these divergences might be. I am also interested in interrogating the meaning of the sites of convergence of their work. As we will see, Ensler opts to foreground the spectacular physical suffering of the women of the DRC, in an effort to shame or shock Western spectators into action, while Nottage focuses on building affective and empathetic connections between audience members and rape survivors. Where they overlap is in structuring their performances around the specific medical condition of traumatic fistula—a condition that results when the wall between the vagina and the urinal or fecal tract is broken by mass rape or other forms of wounding (with sticks, broken bottles, guns, etc.). Why this would be the case, and what the implications of this choice might be, are among the puzzles that I hope to unravel.