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STREOTYPING “STRONG” BLACK WOMEN IN LORRAINE HANSBERRY’S *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*

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Abstract

This work examines *A Raisin in the Sun* that tells the story of the Younger family and their struggle to fulfill their ideals in the segregated and racist world of 1950s America. The play exposes how racism in the housing industry and government organizations oppressed blacks and the average white Americans supported the quarantined housing environment of Chicago. In challenging this social structure, a stereotypical ‘strong-willed’ black woman emerges through the character of Mama. This establishes the first phase of black women’s drama which focus only on racial issues ignoring the ‘self’ of African American women.

Keywords: Motherhood, Family Dynamics, Gender Equality, Social oppression

Hansberry started writing *A Raisin in the Sun*, entitled *The Crystal Stair* and the play was staged on the stage on 11th march, 1959. It created a landmark in the history of African American drama. It was the first drama by a black woman to be staged on Broadway, hub of American theatre. Hansberry was the first black woman playwright youngest African American to win the New York Drama. Consequently the play opened the doors wide for many black actress and women playwrights who followed Hansberry’s footsteps for they were powered and motivated by her writing.

A fortnight before the initial opening of *A Raisin in the sun* on the stage, Hansberry reflected her views and goals of her new drama in an article entitled “The Negro Writer and His Roots: Towards a New Romanticism” at the National Conference of Negro writers sponsored by American society of Africans. At the outset, she expressed her life experiences referring to the life of austerity she observed in which she considered sadness, war, sickness, communal decay and racial violence as the most detrimental practices of human society. She also wrote in a letter to her mother on 19th January in 1959 before *A Raisin in the Sun* was first presented on stage,

Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people, Negroes and life and I think it will help a lot of people to understand how we are just as complicated as they are - and just as mixed-up but above all, that we have among our miserable and downtrodden 304 ranks- people who are they very essence of human dignity. That is what, after all the laughter and tears, the play is supposed to say. (Perry)

The above statement clearly emphasize the fact that Hansberry was more focused on racist discrimination and tried her best to prove the pride of blacks as a community and their bondage in family life. This clearly reflects the first stage of black feminism which focused only on racism.

A Raisin in the Sun, is considered as a semi- autobiographical play in which Hansberry recollected the important incident in her life, particularly the mishap of *Hansberry vs Lee* in which

the Hansberry family were the victims of racial prejudice when they struggled to settle in a white neighborhood. The play also illustrated the role played by powerful black leaders such as Carl Hansberry, Leo Hansberry, Du Bois and Robeson. The playwright also highlighted the importance of family rather than individuals.

The play depicted a profound link between its events and the Civil Rights Movement of that period. At the starting of the play, Hansberry affirms this, “The action of the play is set in Chicago’s Southside sometime between World War II and the present” (RS 24). This period refers to the years from 1945-1959, which is important in the growth of Civil Rights Movement. Theatre-historian C.W.E. Bigsby wrote about his view of *A Raisin in the Sun* that the play dramatises the character's many evasive tactics, perfectly capturing the atmosphere of the civil rights movement at the time.

The play was also made into a motion picture in 1961. In this way, Hansberry's adaptation of the play into a screenplay increased the visibility of international critique by explaining the links between racial and class oppression and challenging popular depictions of white people in movies. Thus, the play has come to stay here despite its dealing with a black American family in the Southside of Chicago at the time of 1950s. For example, she demonstrated that the blacks are common human beings when she was told by an interviewer that: “This is not really a Negro play; why, this could be about anybody? It’s a play about people! What is your reaction? What do you say?” In answer, Hansberry replied that:

“Well I hadn’t noticed the contradictions because I’d because I’d always been under the impression that Negroes are people... In other words, I have told people that not only is this a Negro family, specifically and definitely culturally, but it’s not even a New York family or a Southern Negro family. It is specifically Southside Chicago... So I would say it is definitely a Negro play before it is anything else.” (qtd. in Zingale 27-28)

This shows Hansberry’s aim to project racial discrimination as the foremost theme. On the other hand, she also classified to those who understand the play as only as “Negro Drama” that the play can be to anyone compromising that so as to be inclusive, must focus intensely on the details. Clearly, such reply depicted that any black author compulsorily segregate him/herself from community but dually represent both as a author of his individual race and citizen.

It is well-known that *A Raisin in the Sun* is misunderstood as an ‘ethnic drama’ with a joyful conclusion to all issues comprising racism. These comments made Hansberry desperate because the inhuman nature of racism reflected in the play gets neglected. Therefore, she warded off such criticism when she announced that the dynamics of the negro personality as represented by white authors are something to which we have grown used. The critical appreciation of *A Raisin in the Sun*, by Hansberry’s former husband and literary executor, Robert Nemiroff, added an in depth criticism to the play. Nemiroff portrayed the play in his preface to its 25th anniversary edition as the revolution in black and women’s consciousness. His observations and appreciations of the play showcased it as a whole communal, financial and cultural study of African Americans. This clearly tells us that the play gained a general universal approach though Nemiroff mentions “Women’s consciousness”.

Critic Nan Robertson remembered that *A Raisin in the Sun* “is the first drama by a Negro woman ever to reach the aptly titled Great White Way” (qtd. in Zingale 9). The play also brought to its writer the 1959’s Drama Critics’ Circle Award, the first ever to be honored to an African

American author. Drama critic Ted Poston, in his article “We Have So Much to Say” (March 22, 1959) that was published in *New York Post*, gave a biographical account of Hansberry, calling her “Broadway’s latest Cinderella Girl” (qtd. in Gavin 89). On the 25th anniversary of *A Raisin in the Sun*, critic Frank Rich’s article ‘A Raisin in the Sun’, Anniversary in Chicago (October 5, 1983) that was published in *New York Times*, wrote that the play has completely altered the American theatre forever.

T. H. Wenning also scrutinized the cause by which the play was selected as the excellent drama of the year and wrote “one of the most stirring and revealing productions of the year is a first play by Lorraine Hansberry, a 28 – year - old Negro who combines honesty, humor, and understanding with an instinctive knowledge of how to write the soaring scene” (qtd. in Zingale 21).

On the other hand, some white authors considered the play as “universal” in ways that barred its comments on racism and classicism. It was portrayed by them as “honest drama” that makes human beings proud. Lipari notes this shift to “universalize” the African American cultural forms to obscure the unique nature of the black culture. But, Doris E. Abramson in *Negro playwrights in the American Theatre, 1925 - 1959* proclaimed that despite Hansberry’s statement to the contrary, this play “is a Negro play” (qtd. in Gavin 89). It is evident that most of the critics were trying to find a common ground for the play subsuming crucial race /gender issues.

Commenting about the language of the play, A. Alvarez proclaimed that the author’s “rhetoric is not just colorful; it has a natural dignity, which presumably has something to do with the fact that the rhythms and diction of passionate Negro speech come straight from the Bible” (qtd. in Gavin, 89- 90). Likewise, Steven R. Carter affirms that what Hansberry attains with the characters’ use of language is an authentic image of African American life. As Hansberry called on the Africans and Americans to develop a sense of belonging to one cultural unity, Elizabeth Brown-Guillory praised this and specified that the playwright succeeded in using the African ancestral spirits to serve as a slender beacon of strength and hope for the black family’s survival in America.

Harold Isaacs in “Five Writers and their African Ancestors” journal also demonstrated the characteristic aspects of Hansberry as an author that varied from those who preceded her and of those of her time. In this observation the critic asserted that:

Hansberry...completes a circle begun by Hughes. In a new and much more realistic setting, she too has had a vision of a romantic reunion between Negro American and black African. But her vision is shaped by new times, new outlooks...In Lorraine Hansberry’s time it has become a matter of choice between new freedoms now in the grasp of black men, both African and American. (317)

The prominent black writers also had a great role in evaluating the play. This can be obviously exemplified in the words of James Baldwin who gave the most corrected explanation for the play:

What is relevant here is that I had never in my life seen so many black people in the theatre. And the reason was that never in the history of the American theatre had so much of the truth of black people’s been seen on the stage. Black people ignored the theatre because the theatre had always ignored them...But, in *Raisin*, black people recognized that house and all the people in it...and supplied the play with an interpretive elements which could not be presented in the minds of white people. (xviii)

Amiri Baraka also celebrated the play's immortality when he affirmed that "Raisin lives because...Hansberry has done more than document, which was the excellent limited form of realism. She was a critical realist, in the way that Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and Margaret Walker are" (10). Baraka, in addition, asserted that Hansberry created in *A Raisin in the Sun* a family that faced the conflicts of class and ideology that was present in the civil rights movement and amidst the individuals. Those middle class problems as he kept on reflect the will of the blacks to combat and defeat separation, discrimination, and oppression. Critical appreciations by black writers and artists especially men, clearly specifies that the play tries to create a society free of racial discrimination and not much about gender.

The above- mentioned criticisms included here helped to reduce racial tensions between the blacks and the whites. Being a typical product of the 1950s/60s rooted in the Black liberationist movements the play concentrated more on racial discrimination and reinforced equal rights for Whites and Blacks. The play pointed the starting of a more provoking epoch in the black theatre because before the time of the play's production, the African American plays were mainly modeled on European realism. But, *A Raisin in the Sun* was correctly the first to replicate and to give a genuine depiction of black family and life. The play showed that African American culture was rich with art, music and literature. This brings out the cultural and civilizational greatness of Africans in particular.

The drama examined a variety of subjects, including family relationships, generational differences, individual identities, assimilation and integration with American culture, financial exploitation, and women's rights. It depicted how each member has dreams and thus made it impossible for the American stage to neglect the African American realities of their everyday life, their dreams, ambition and concerns. Gray observes the way Hansberry handled issues like the Civil Rights issues, the generational struggle, social divides, and feminism in the years since her passing suggests that the drama was maybe prescient.

These general criticisms failed to analyze the role of black woman characters in the play. It is argued that the women characters, especially Lena Younger and of course Ruth and Beneatha were stereotypes of 'Strong' black women characters. The reason for this lies in the way the black liberation movement was fought. In her Introduction to *Ain't I a woman* Bell Hooks clearly indicates "Black male activists publicly acknowledged that they expected black women involved in the movement to conform to a sexist role pattern. They demanded that blackwomen assume a subservient position" (AIW 5). Hooks further opines that they should be household caretakers and breed warriors for the revolution. This required a strong willed stoic women who can withstand any amount of suffering. This can be seen evidently in the character of Mama and Ruth who work very hard despite the failure of the son/ husband Walter. Of course Walter is not a Civil Rights warrior, but he is tolerated with utmost freedom to fritter away money and remain an irresponsible alcoholic.

This type of toleration leads to their strong will within the 'domestic' space and in the 'public space' Mama challenges racism to make her family get accommodated in a White neighbourhood. This stoicism and passive resistance forms the core of the stereotyped strong

willed women. In her path breaking essay “on the issue of Roles” Tonicade finds this notion of womanhood emerging from the very way the Movement was organized where men drafted policies and women were fixing coffee and operating telephones. She writes “Invariably I hear from some dude that Black women must be supportive and patient so that Black men can regain their manhood. The notion of womanhood they argue... is dependent on his defining his manhood” (Cade 131-132). If this is the prevalent mindset within a Rights Movement one can understand the subservient role Mama, Ruth and Beneatha play within the family structure.

Frantz Fanon’s discussion about Algerian family is specifically discussed by Tonicade in this essay. According Fanon’s idea “...it demonstrates both the possibility and the necessity for creating new values and new persons” (Cade 132). These ‘new persons’ are “born when he finds a value to define an actional self when he can assure autonomy for that self” (Cade 133). It is very obvious that this autonomous ‘Self’ especially of a women is yet to emerge in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Because the “family” that Fanon visualize is no longer a socially institutionalized nuclear unit but an extended kinship of a liberated society (ibid). The lack of this autonomous ‘self’ is evident in Mama’s burden to treat her children as equals provide them financially despite their weakness and fulfil ‘their’ dreams sacrificing her personal needs. This burden is proudly borne by that strong-willed woman to establish the essentials of a joint family with the ‘Son’ as their head in the absence of the father but the mother in reality runs the show.

There is a two way perception of looking at black women’s role by the feminists according to Bell hooks. The feminists acknowledge that black women are victimized and in the same breath emphasize their strength (AIW 6). This perception of ‘Strength’ actually refers to the way in which they cope up with oppression. This oppression operates both in the public and private space of the family. But more importance is given to the ‘public’ space and therefore it refers only to the ‘racial’. The oppression in the private space within a family is glorified and their suffering is Valonized. Hooks clearly points out that “They ignore the reality that to be strong in the face of oppression, that endurance is not to be confused with transformation” (ibid). One can easily recognize this endurance in the character of Mama and Ruth. This endurance leads to the creation of Strong-willed stereotyped women. They were celebrated and glorified in the unique task of mothering and their “innate” ability to bear tremendous burdens;” (AIW 7).

This clichéd representation is obviously visible in the play. Further the idea of women’s liberation was not available to the black women. The term ‘feminism’ universally represented western/ white feminism. According to Hooks “Black women were told that we should find out dignity not in liberation from sexist oppression but in how well we could adjust, adapt and cope. (AIW 7). The various challenges thrown by Walter are handled by his wife and mother in a very capable manner. His dreams or the means he adopt to achieve his dreams stand justified. He is just let off despite his failure on many fronts both in his work and within the family. For eg. If we analyze Mama confronting /allowing Walter to tackle the white negotiator rejecting money, it is just another racial problem which a ‘black man (woman)’ handled in a great way. Further, one can realize a sense of tokenism in the African nativity and assimilationism which Beneatha tries to practice. This failed to generate an in depth critical analysis of black female experience.

Almost all the roles are assigned for females under patriarchy, whether it is Mama and Ruth under Walter or Beneatha under Joseph Asagai.

The female roles assigned under patriarchy sometimes doesn't assume a passive subordinate role which irritates the black men. According to Hooks "conflict prevails in the black male Walter Lee's relationship to his mother and wife" (AIW 178). This happens whenever they oppose his irresponsible ideas. Walter replies to his wife Ruth who rejects his idea of utilizing the insurance money "we one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds" (RS 35). He also considers his strong willed mother as "a tyrant who forcibly bends him to her will" (AIW 179). Lena Younger doesn't accept his ideas and also feels that he cannot assert his manhood and that his behaviour is naïve. "However, at the end of the play when he acts in a responsible manner, the mother automatically assumes a subordinate position" (ibid).

The self-sacrificing single mother is contrasted with the new generation of man and wife, i.e., Walter and Ruth. This contrast again make the man assume a "patriarchal role, the role of decision maker, protector and upholder of family pride and honor" (AIW 179) according to hooks. This play also fortells future conflicts between black women and men over the issue of sex-role patterns comments hooks (ibid). This sacrificing strong-willed stereotype is thus relegated to the margins as black patriarchy gains dominance. A critical analysis of the play show how the process of stereotyping leads to the relegation of the women character.

The episode of the three acts of the play took place in the apartment of the Youngers in Chicago spread over few weeks of this family life. Chicago was believed as one of the most racially discriminated areas of the early 1950s. The critic Richard Gray observes that the setting of *A Raisin in the Sun* looks like "a silent character" that exposes the place where family lives. Infact, the family lives in a closed- in, cockroach - infested and rat trap (10). Similarly the introduction to each character portrays their desperation and poor financial condition. Ruth, the wife of Walter Lee is dedicated to her daily chores. Walter Lee, her husband in his mid-thirties, working as a chauffeur of a white family.

While Beneatha his sister an ambitious twenty year old wanting to complete her medical studies and become a doctor. Her brother told this idea was too costly and refers to the future check. In return, the sister affirms that she has no claim on the money of the check, saying: "That money belongs to Mama... and it's for her to decide how she wants to use it... It's hers" (RS 36-37). In response, Walter accuses her of hypocrisy, arguing that although she never requested financial support from anyone, she always readily accepted when it was offered. "I don't want nothing but for you to stop acting holy' round here", Walter told and keeps on: "Me and Ruth done made some sacrifices for you- why can't you do something for the family" (RS 37). Turning to Ruth who requests to keep her out of this argument. Walter continues that Ruth has been working as a cook "in somebody else's kitchen of the last three years to help put clothes on her [Beneatha's] back?" (RS 37). He also asserts that Beneatha has to settle down for being a nurse or just getting married. Furiously, the sister retorts that her brother wishes her to quit her college or die. She also criticizes him for his idea of opening a liquor store by counting on the

supposed insurance money. Obviously, each of the siblings has a dream to achieve to prove their identity in the American community, and they solely rely on the insurance amount.

Lena Younger, called “Mama” by her children is portrayed as “a woman in her early sixties, full-bodied and strong. She is one of those women of a certain grace and beauty...Her bearing is perhaps most like the noble bearing of the women of the Heroes of Southwest Africa” (RS 39). Her very appearance is heroic, courageous and graceful required for any stereotyped strong-willed woman. Hansberry also proclaims that the strength and identity of the blacks lie in heritage and to place “family” as the cornerstone of the black racial identity. Mama needs to manage her family members under her wing and inflict her cultural values on them, she was also interested in plants and has one near the window, considering it as one of her family. In her appearance on the stage, Mama quietly guess that the argument between Walter and Beneatha was over the check. She also utters her anger about Walter’s scheme to open a liquor store, saying: “We just plain working folks” (RS 42). Transmitting Walter’s speech, his wife retorts that “colored people ain’t never going start getting ahead till they start gambling on some different kinds of things in the world...investments and things” (ibid) in her attempt to prepare the way for her husband to be given an opportunity. She moreover, asserts that he was in want of only a chance. Nevertheless, Mama never liked the thought of making money from liquor.

Ruth as an individual had realized that the money belongs to Mama. She is forced to support her husband. Mama cares for Ruth and doesn’t want her to work as a maid once the money comes. This shows their deep understanding for each other but Mama too has a dream of having a house better than their apartment as well as providing better education for her daughters saying:

I ain’t rightly decided... Some of it [money] got to be put away for Beneatha and her schoolin’... Been thinking...with a yard where Travis could play in the summertime, if we use part of the insurance for a down payment and everybody kind of pitch in. I could maybe take on a little day work again, few days a week. (RS 44)

Apparently, Mama mentions that she is also working in the service of white families and will continue to do this to fulfill her dream if she needs. By revealing her dream she reflects the values of the old generation of the blacks. When Ruth taunts her, Mama painfully states how she and her husband came to this place for the first time; how the late Mr. Younger worked till death for the sake of his children; how he “loved his children...Always wanted them to have something... be something” (RS 45).

Sequentially, Mama and Ruth begin to tease Beneatha about her friend and supposed suitor, George Murchison, a wealthy Chicagoan, who was praised by them simply because he was affluent. But, Beneatha becomes angry, portraying him as mere fool and shallow person, she also contends that George’s family could not endorse her anyway, and for that reason, any further relationship was pointless. Clearly, Hansberry uses the character of Beneatha as her mouthpiece to offer a satire for rich black families. This can be felt in Beneatha’s opinion about Murchison’s family: “The Murchisons are...rich colored people, and the only people in the world who are

more snobbish than rich white people or rich colored people... I thought everybody knew that. I've met Mrs. Murchison. She's a scene!" (RS 50).

In this discussion, the old woman expresses to her daughter-in-law the generation gap between her and her children's thoughts, saying:

there's something come down between me and them that don't let us understand each other and I don't know what it is. One done almost lost his mind thinking 'bout money all the time and the other done commence to talk about things I can't seem to understand in no form or fashion What is it that's changing. (RS-52)

Mama's speech depicts that her offspring's generation of the blacks chase the material features of the American Dream, like a house and job, which could probably give an equal status with the whites. The old express her distaste of the attitude of the young black generation.

It is very obvious that the overall representation of the character of Mama is that of a 'strong' mother who carries the burden of the family. This stereotyping shows that the play is more rooted in racial discrimination rather than raising her consciousness as a woman who is doubly marginalized within her own community. Further one can understand Mama's total indifference to her roots, that is, Africa. Effiong observes that through the character of Joseph Asagai, the representation of black racial identity is mentioned by Hansberry. Mama presents as a woman of African descent who is unaware of her African heritage. She also believed that Africans lacked civilised behaviour. The idea that Africa was only regressing up until it was enslaved by European colonisers is one that Beneatha finds objectionable. She blames her mother's lack of knowledge about Africa and the Africans. In fact, Mama believes that the African wants religious salvation from "heathenism" and money to missionaries in Africa to support the locals.

While Beneatha believed they are in greater want for political and civil salvation from French and British colonizers. She also adds that African- Americans being diaspora never understand that they function in cooperation with the European colonial powers. Hansberry presents, through this character, the caution to the younger generation of blacks about forgetting and ignoring their African heritage. Asagai and Beneatha also discuss a very significant problem in relation to African Americans, i.e., "Assimilationism", which according to Beneatha defines "someone who is willing to give up his own culture and submerge himself completely in the dominant, and in this case *oppressive* culture!" (RS 81). In fact Asagai thinks that Beneatha looks more American referring to her "mutilated hair" implying that her hairstyle was too American and unnatural and supporting her to resume her natural hairstyle.

The character Beneatha experiences an identity dilemma because she wants to be true to her African heritage while living in America. She ultimately finds a solution in Asagai where she may cherish the past of her people while embracing the present. Her traditional consciousness gets broadened by his instructions on Africa clothing, music and songs as well as by his gift. The play attempts to proclaim the racial identity within the American national identity by absorbing African heritage and its historical aspects, again validates its passivity on race/ gender consideration.

The arrival of the cheque creates a lot of heart burns within the family. Mama asks her daughter-in-law not to go around with her abortion while Walter wants to open a liquor shop totally opposed to Mama's convictions. He is even ready to leave the house. The old woman kindly reflects that he was her trust in life. He paradoxically presents his wants for money, comparing himself with those who are too rich to get what they need. He was upset by and ashamed of his poverty and his work as a chauffeur. The old woman, then miserably and calmly depicts that conflict of values between old and young generations of black. Mama, keeps on saying:

something has changed... You something new, boy. In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North... Now here come you and Beneatha talking 'bout things we ain't never even thought about hardly, me and your daddy. You ain't satisfied or proud of nothing we done. I mean that you had a home... You my children--- but how different we done become. (RS 74)

In general, Walter views money as a means to achieve and goes so far as to connect it with life. Beneatha also never considered about what being a doctor may cost her family. The conflict between the old and new generation is portrayed. Hansberry Comments that he sought to illustrate the different gradations even within a single Negro family, the collision of the ancient and new, but most importantly, the tremendous courage of the Negro people. They are unified, in one thing - heroic defiance of white hostility and threats announces the dramatist. Therefore, the dramatist proposed to educate the whites that the African Americans are human beings and a huge section of the American population with lives jobs, families and dreams. This shows the play's rootedness in opposing racial discrimination and portraying the power of motherhood.

The important scene that depicts strong expressions of the black's racial identity; can be seen when Beneatha appears, wearing the Nigerian clothes the gift Asagai has brought to her. She, at this moment, turns off the radio, calling its music, assimilationist junk" and playing Nigerian music on a phonograph instead. She also dances around the apartment to her playing tribal dance music while shouting "ocomogosiay" and singing. In reaction, Ruth found Beneatha's uniform too silly. She is joined by the fully drunk Walter imagining himself as a "great chief, descendant of Chaka", struggling alongside "Jomo Kenyatta" (RS 78). He charts warring statement laced with floral and faunal symbols to which Beneatha responds "OWIMOWEH" or "OCOMOGOSIAY". Through most of the previous events Beneatha has been infuriated by her brother, she was happy to see her brother embrace his ancestral heritage.

When Beneatha removes her headdress to expose that she has cut off most of her hair but few curls, everyone was shocked, amazed and slightly disappointed with the attempt. It becomes a sign for her anti-"assimilationist" faith as well as her desire to shape her identity by looking back to her roots in Africa. Her friend George Murchison declares that she is eccentric. To her persistence on portraying George as an "assimilationist Negro" (RS 81), he paradoxically says:

"oh, dear, dear, dear! Here we go! A lecture on the African past! On our Great West African Heritage! In one second we will hear all about the great Ashanti empires; the

great Songhay civilizations; and the great sculpture of Benin ...and then some poetry in the Bantu...and the whole monologue will end with the word *heritage!* (*Nastily*) Let's face it, baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of ragged- assed spirituals and some grass huts! (RS 81)

In response to such cruel irresistible speech, Beneatha immediately refutes and list some of the glorious things of Africa, saying:

“GRASS HUTS!... See there... you are standing there in your splendid ignorance talking about people who were the first to smelt iron on the face of the earth!...The Ashanti were performing surgical operations when the English...were still tattooing themselves with blue dragons! (RS 81)

Once more, the dramatist uses the character of Beneatha as her mouthpiece. Hansberry, proposed to depict from such scenes about Africa, that black People had a glorious African background. The critic also stated that the dramatist believed that both black and white Americans wanted to learn about the contributions and significance of Africans. This compares and contradicts George Murchison and Joseph Asagai to show the dissimilar mindset in which the former signifies a black person assimilating into the white universe, while the latter symbolized a new cultural revival of Africans who is against assimilation. For Beneatha, George and Asagai exemplify two contradictory identities available among blacks: the identity that seeks white assimilationist trend and the other refusing it. George cares very little for gender equality and wants Beneatha as his “little woman”. Consequently, the battle of Beneatha for her identity as a black and for her independence as a woman is more rooted in racial pride than seeking to eliminate gender discrimination.

In Act II When Mama declares that she had planned to purchase a decent house, Walter is furious. Ruth and Travis were thrilled to hear the news. But the surprise was as Mama states that the house is located in “four o six Clybourne Street, Clybourne Park” (RS 93). In fact, this place was reserved for whites and colored people were denied entry. The Youngers became anxious but Mama with faith, expects perhaps there will be some blacks to dwell in the future. Though Walter becomes very bitter Ruth was overjoyed. She felt some nervousness about shifting into a white neighborhood. One can witness the stereotyping of “strong” and sacrificing black woman as Mama depicts the reason of her choice of buying an estate, saying:

Son- you--- you understand what I done, don't' you?...I just seen my family falling apart today... We couldn't of gone on like we was today. We was going backwards' stead of forwards ...talking 'bout killing babies and wishing each other was dead...When it gets like that in life you just got to do something different. (RS 94)

Mama's down payment on a house shows her faith that to be a happy family the Younger's need to acquire their individuals house. The racial problems between the blacks and whites that is widespread in the American community during that period is forgotten by her.

Walter was obviously opposed to his mother. He felt let down as his dream was shattered. He made his mother feel guilty telling that she has crushed his dream:

What you need me to say you done right for? You the head of this family. You run our lives like you want to. It was your money and you did what you wanted with it...So you butchered up a dream of mine... you...who always talking 'bout your children's dreams.(RS 95)

This shows how Mama the 'strong mother' decides for everyone in the family. The authority she wields over her family members is shown through this major decision. Yet another 'strong' women posturing emerge through the character of Mama who parts with two thirds of the amount received to her son and daughter and the balance she invests in her new house. Walter's desperation and shown through his over-drinking and not attending his Chauffeur's job worries her. After taking this decision she concludes that he should be the 'head' of the family. This move is typical of sacrificing 'strong' woman who privileges passive and indifferent 'men' with the headship of the family. The black women struggle both physically and mentally to retain family values by destroying their own identity. Their negation of 'self' and celebrating collective identity such as 'race' and 'family' make them emerge as strong willed woman.

This move by Mama makes Walter more self-assured and energized. He proves himself as a father to his son telling that he was going to "make a transaction...a business transaction that's going to change...[their] lives" (RS 108). Walter's explanation to Travis of his materialistic fantasy about the future forgetting his sister's aim to become a doctor proclaims him as a black man who thinks money as the symbol of black identity. In fact in a light-hearted moment he teased that his sister spoke about nothing but race, addressing her: "Girl, I believe you are the first person in the history of the entire human race successfully brainwash yourself" (RS 113). This shows the self-centered male approach in contrast with the 'self' less female approach.

The rift between Beneatha and George widens as the idealistic racial identity quest of Beneatha doesn't go well with George's intentions. He confesses that he needs to marry a "nice...simple...sophisticated girl...not a poet" (RS 96). Further Beneatha considers education as a means of realizing the 'self' while George sees it as a process of getting a degree. After his conversation Beneatha portrays George as a 'fool' to her mother who advises her not to waste her time with fools. This relationship shows how educated Black men undermine knowledgeable black women. But Beneatha's search is for her 'racial' identity and not raising her own consciousness. She doesn't realize the double oppression and the race gender issue. Her struggle is more towards upholding the greatness of her past 'African' identity. This is yet another stereotyping of black woman who celebrate their past and condemning the assimilationist approach of people like George.

The entry of Karl Lindner the chairman of the welcoming committee of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association jolts the family to reality. In an iniquitous diplomatic way, he points out the common aim of his visit to them saying:

That we don't try hard enough in this world to understand the other fellow's

problem...that's the way we feel out in Clybourne Park. And that's why I was elected to come here...Anybody can see that you are a nice family of folks, hard working and honest I'm sure... Today everybody knows what it means to be on the outside of something. And of course, there is always somebody who is out to take advantage of people who don't always understand (RS 117).

The Younger's began to realize the white man's ulterior motive which exposed that he and the neighborhood coalition believed that the Younger's presence in Clybourne Park would affect the community there. The present residents are all working-class white people who could not entertain any intrusions that threaten the dreams that they have for their society.

Mr. Lindner also proposes that it was better for the Younger's to live amidst people of their own race:

I want you to believe me when I tell you that race prejudice simply doesn't enter into it. It is a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, ...that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities (RS 118).

Getting to the exact point of his visit, Mr. Lindner, then, told the Younger's that the association has arranged to provide them more money than they paid for the house instead of not shifting to Clybourne Park.

Though the Younger's become very upset, they manage to control their temper. Walter, in general decisively told Mr. Lindner about their refusal to accept his money and advises him to leave quickly. However, the white man's racist banter continued,

I don't understand why you people are reaching this way. What do you think you are going to gain by moving into a neighborhood where you just aren't wanted and where some elements ...well... people can get awful worked up and when they feel that their whole way of life and everything they've worked for is threatened...(Almost sadly regarding WALTER) You just can't force people to change their hearts, son. (RS 119).

The Younger's reject this idea and usher Lindner out. In response, the white man leaves his card behind. Clearly, the visit paid by Lindner to the Younger's is very significant for it depicts racism in the play. The soft speech of the white man himself, as critic Richard Gray perceives, appears to provide little threat than the larger society and strength behind him. The man is seen as a calm racist who symbolizes the prejudice of the whole white society.

The stiff resistance shown by the Youngers' proves that they will not let racism get in their path, rather, they would face it. It also exposes that the white chairman and his community can only see the color of the Younger's skins rather than their position or education. Thus, color becomes the main scale for assessing people in the American community. Furthermore, the bribe the visitor suggests to keep away the Younger's from shifting to the white society exposes the corruption such Associations follow to establish discrimination. In addition, the Younger's response to this discrimination proclaims that the blacks are human beings full of pride and dignity in spite of all financial crisis they face. Hence, *A Raisin in the Sun* strongly depicts that

the way to deal with discrimination was to stand up to and reassert one's identity and self-respect.

When Mama was told about Mr. Lindner's visit, the condition first shocks and worries her; but she stands firm by her family's choice and also rejecting the corrupt bargain to sing "No Ways Tired" as the song always elevates her up. The rest of the family surprise Mama with gifts of gardening equipment from the grown-up and a large gardening hat from Travis, Mama, indeed, has not received gifts other than at Christmas. She was for the first time touched by her family kindness. The gifts specify that Mama had always been that 'strong' woman and hard-worker.

This happiness is short-lived as Walter learns that Willy Harris had ran away with all the money is invested in the deal to open a liquor shop. Mama had infact entrusted two thirds of the money to Walter including the share of Beneatha. It appears that Walter had clandestinely put the entire amount his mother gave him into this deal. The family members are shocked when Walter admits that he gave Willy the entire sum Mama gave him including Beneatha's money for education. Clearly, the above incident reflects the lack of honesty and solidarity among the black men. It paradoxically depicts them as normal human beings, exemplifying good and evil (Gray 12). This can be seen in the absent character. Willy Harris who functions as a faceless sign for Walter's careless handling of money. But Hansberry highlights only the suffering the family face as a result of him. This sets in a tragic sense from which women characters rise again stereotyping their 'strong' will.

Ruth and Beneatha reach a high degree of sadness and pessimism. While Mama hits Walter in the face as emotions over whelm her. The money symbolize the sweat and blood of her husband. This makes her feel distressed and vexed. Inconsolable and disheartened Beneatha shares about her shattered dream of becoming a doctor to Asagai. He reacts very positively and asks her not to lose faith. Instead he talks about the independence of Africa to which she reacts as follows:

I know that's what you think... You with all your talk and dreams about Africa! You still think you can patch up the world. Cure the Great Sore of colonialism (*Loftily, mocking it*) with the Penicillin of Independence...! (RS 133).

Beneatha, and so in response to Asagai's aspiration for independence, Hansberry portrays racial concerns in most independent African countries and predicts the coming of neo-colonial African regimes. To her life was only "one large circle" and the future was purely a far off spot of the small mirage in front of its audiences. Asagai, dismisses her thought and demonstrates that she failed to differentiate between the person who is an "idealist: and the one who saw themselves as "realist", telling:

What you just said... about the circle. It isn't circle... it is simply a long line... as in geometry...one that reaches into infinity. And because we cannot see the end... we also cannot see how it changes. And it is very odd but those who see the changes... who dream, who will not give up... are called idealists...and those who see only the circle...we call them the "realists! (RS 134).

Asagai, the dreamer, refuses to accept the practical approach of Beneatha who doubts the independent African nation governed by corrupt and dishonest Black people. This shows her westernized thinking about 'blacks' who are considered to be inferior. Asagai, in turn reprimands Beneatha for her lack of idealism and for attachment to the insurance money of her father. Furthermore, he advises her to "stop moaning and groaning" (RS 136) and to build her ideas for the future with determination and confidence. He further proposes to her for marriage and to settle down in their homeland Nigeria. Beneatha announces that this is not the appropriate moment to think in such a significant situation, telling, "I must sit down and think. I don't feel about anything right this minute" (RS 137).

Asagai, then leaves her alone to think about his marriage proposal. But, as we shall see later, this matter remains unresolved, i.e., the option between her ancestral homeland, Africa, and her residential homeland. In the light of further struggles she needs to prove herself as a black individual within the American community. According to critic Philip Effiong, Beneatha's hesitancy suggests that she may not be particularly keen to travel to Nigeria. She, like many African Americans, had a great desire for African beliefs, but she was constrained by how well she could adapt. After all, America was where she truly belonged. Susan Abbotson, a theatrical scholar, adds that Beneatha is from America and that country needs her energetic input. Although we are never told if she declines Asagai's invitation to travel to Africa, we should hope that she does. Abbotson also added that she would suffer the duality in Africa between her twin identities.

Dressing in African cultural clothes and presenting interest in African music and dance does not mean that she has an idea of what being a Nigerian means, for it takes more than mere accessories. Beneatha was correct in her idea that the black wanted a better understanding of Africa as a significant part of their ancestral heritage, and that she cannot neglect the reality that they live in America and this had become their heritage too. This argument also focuses on the argument of the thesis that the women characters of the first phase African American drama is more oriented towards race rather than race/gender discourse. Beneatha also represents the clichéd 'strong' black women character who lacks consciousness about her 'self' and fail to acknowledge marginalization within her community whether in the form of her brother Walter or her fiancé Asagai.

Bearing a deaf ear to Beneatha's ironic epithets such as "Symbols of the Rising Class" and "Titan of the System" (RS 138). Walter picks up the visiting card of Lindner and leaves. He, in fact, thinks in accepting Mr. Lindner's proposal is the only solution to attain his family's now deferred dreams. Mama looks physically weak and declares that they are not going to shift to their new house. She tries to postpone their shifting at this time and told Beneatha and Ruth to unpack and cancel the packers who are scheduled to reach shortly. She also spoke on how people in the past always told her that her thoughts were too high comparing her status. She even felt that the unlucky loss of the insurance money is a punishment or having such high expectations. Hence, she now plans how they can recreate their present apartment in a more pleasant women by painting it and renovating its furniture, stating that "sometimes you just got to know when to

give up some things... and hold on to what you got" (RS 140). But Ruth asserts that the family should continue with the shifting. She also disagrees with Lena and announces that it is possible for them to getting the money they want,

no! We gotta... We got four grown people in this house--- we can work... Lena... I'll work... I'll work twenty hours a day in all the kitchens in Chicago... I'll strap my baby on my back if I have to and scrub all the floors... and wash all the streets in America if I have to---but we got to MOVE... We got to get OUT OF HERE!! (RS 140).

Ruth's words specifies her strong desire to achieve her dream. She told that she will work like machine day and night "in all the kitchens in Chicago" to move to their new home and create the move possible. She, of course, was the only person of the Youngers who was not ready to give up her dream so easily. Ruth also emerges as a typical 'strong' women willing to physically sacrifice herself while Mama emerges as a mentally 'strong' woman bearing any loss.

In yet another dramatic anti- climax one can witness Mama upholding the decision of Walter 'the man of the house' to sell the house to the whites. While Ruth and Beneatha coldly rejects his behavior, Mama supports him and endorses his behaviour as a 'black man'. Mama reclaims the racial pride in him by emotionally pointing out to his racial subservience. In a strong response, Mama, the African American woman of the old generation argues with him that they are from a race with too much pride to accept such corrupt money.

Son- I come from five generations of people who was slaves and Sharecroppers... but ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn't fit to walk the earth. We ain't never been that poor... We ain't never been that... dead inside. (RS 143)

Walter's manliness, infact, is rekindled, but he paradoxically and devastatingly keeps telling,

And...and I am going to say---... And you---you people just put the money in my hand and you won't have to live next to this bunch of stinking niggers!...may be--- may be I'll just get down on my black knees... Captain, Mistuh, Bossman... Father, just gi' ussen demoney, fo' God's sake, and we's we's ain't gwine come out deh and dirty up yo' white folks neighborhood... (RS 144)

When Walter lastly goes to his room, Beneatha announces that he was in the process of losing manhood' and she declares that he is no longer her brother.

Mama also asserts that she has died inside, but she insists her daughter to love her brother particularly when his life had gone awry. She told Beneatha:

What you tell him a minute ago? That he wasn't a man...? You done wrote his epitaph too--- like the rest of the world?... But... I taught you to love him... There is always something left to love. And if you ain't learned that, you ain't learned nothing... Have you cried for that boy today? I don't mean for yourself and for the family 'cause we lost the money. I mean for him: what he been through and what it done to him. (RS 145)

Mama is bound by black patriarchy which expects a woman to be towing and tolerant.

The tension builds up as both the packers and Mr. Lindner arrive together. In fact, all the women leave the choice to Walter, the ‘man’ who must decide either to accept Mr. Lindner’s money or not. Walter had undergone a transformation. The black man states the “pride” of his family acknowledges that he came from a long line of hard-working straight forward people and told that his family members are going to proceed with their plan to shift into their new house:

Well--- we are plain people... Well what I mean is that we come from people who had a lot of pride... we are proud people... And that’s my sister... she’s going to be a doctor and we are very proud... This is my son, and he makes the sixth generation our family in this country... And we have decided to move into our house... We don’t want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes, and we will try to be good neighbors. That’s all we got to say... We don’t want your money (RS 147-148).

The black woman proudly admits that Walter is a true ‘man’ and showers praises on him. Hansberry herself a few years later after the first beginning of the plays, specified her decision about the argument between Walter and Lindner.

This observation clearly shows that Hansberry’s emotions as a dramatist/ woman was more towards challenging racial discrimination rather than focusing on the consciousness raising of the black women within her community and outside. Critic Richard Gray’s examination of Mama’s character further adds to the endorsement of black patriarchy. He opines that Mama permits Walter authentic control, not when she gave him money, but when she lets him choose what to do about the house. Yet another critic Lena Younger is not the accommodating Mammy who takes the easy, safe route; rather, she is the folk hero, the brave spirit who gives the militant struggle legitimacy and strength. She gives birth to revolutionaries in her own resolute way and is a force for progress herself. These observations clearly show how the black woman’s ‘self’ gets subsumed under the overarching power of patriarchy.

In fact, Mama neutralizes the “non-manliness” approach of Ruth and Beneatha towards Walter and inspires them to celebrate Walter. This is a clear sign proclaiming racial pride rather than honestly accepting Walter’s initial irresponsible behavior losing the money in the liquor deal. In her bid to challenge racial discrimination and proclaim racial pride Hansberry too makes it a cake walk for Walter, the ‘black man’. In this process the women characters assume a subordinate position with a strong will and stoic nature.

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