

“AFRICAN- AMERICAN GIRLS ARE BETTER TAUGHT TO REACH STARS”:
SUBVERTING GENDER AND RACIAL STEREOTYPES
IN LORRAINE HANSBERRY’S “A RAISIN IN THE SUN”

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Abstract. Hansberry raises racial and gender issues by putting on stage an African family whose female members have gone through an alienating experience because of gender inequality and racial denigration. This article studies the double marginalization of women within a community of white Americans. The play encompasses three generations of African American characters who, although do not share the same mindscape, have the same goal of debunking stereotypes. The first generation is represented by Mama Lina, who strives to achieve her dream of racial integration. She debunks the traditional image of black mammies who used to be servants. The second generation is embodied by Ruth, who goes out of the domestic sphere and helps her husband in achieving the American dream of financial success. The third female voice has a more revolutionary spirit. Beneatha is the paragon of female intellectual talents. She is constantly looking for self-definition and has a fervent wish to become a philanthropic doctor. She celebrates her African roots after she meets her Nigerian lover. She wears traditional African cloths, uses the Yoruba dialect, learns about the glorious history of the ancient continent “Mama Africa”, and loves her nappy hair.

In order to study the subtle review of the masculine discourse of power, as made by the playwright, this paper will be divided into two parts. The first discusses the historical background of the condition of African American women in the aftermath of the Second World War, and the policies of the Truman administration regarding black women. Then, a thematic study will be conducted. I will analyse the way in which each of the three women dismantles the racial fetters.

Keywords: assimilation, protest, the discourse of power, integration, female identity, the American dream

Before analysing the way in which female identity is staged by the African American playwright, it is pertinent to outline the situation

of black women after the Second World War, and the physical abuses they were subjected. Vincent Harding delineates their continuous struggle by stating: they are “flowing like a river, sometimes powerful, tumultuous, and rolling with life; some other times meandering and turgid” (qtd. in Armstrong 2002, 9). The common point between the river and the African American citizens is the oscillation between protests and defeats. The image of the river adds optimistic beats and alludes to the winds of change during the second half of the 20th century. There was a change from using violence to resorting to a civil movement. For example, they moved from reacting to violence with violence to raising their voices of dissatisfaction in journals and condemning white rapists. In this context, *New Folk Journal and Guide* blamed society for not punishing the white rapists who “got the foundation from their homes, churches and schools. Here of all places, they were taught that the proper place for their foot is on a Negro’s neck. (...) They probably have never on their lives been punished for anything they had done against a Negro” (qtd. in Dorr 2004, 22). It is obvious that racism has been engraved within the American community for centuries and the exploitation of African women raised during the 1950s when six men were set free for raping a young black lady. The long path of black resistance to thralldom will be presented by Mama Lena, who is nostalgic for the five previous generations. The conflict between Lena and her offspring embodies the relationship between Mama Africa and her citizens, who are swinging between assimilation or preserving their native roots.

Physical violence triggered a sense of resentment in the African women who participated in the outburst of the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968). This movement witnessed the appearance of black female activists, who called for a better representation of African women within the American social fabric. In this respect, Rosa Parks declared: “racism is still with us. But it is up to us to prepare our children for what they have to meet, and, hopefully, we shall overcome” (qtd. in Webster 2010, 189). The tone of eagerness

evokes the firmness of the female activist and reflects her desire to change the position of African women from submission to independence and resistance. Rosa Parks managed to become an African American icon and made her voice of protest audible. She proved to be a decision maker when she refused to give up her seat to a white citizen. She was congratulated by the members of her African community, who were impressed by her audacious attitude. She was respected and “so famous that people would come by her office to meet her, not [her boss]” (qtd. in Hanston 129). Her brave act remains a remarkable turning point in African American history. In the 1950s a change in terms of female activism was produced, along with the presence of intellectual ladies who used to have a voice of their own.

What is specific about African American women after the Second World War is their support by the members of the mainstream culture. President Truman, for instance, was known for the support he gave to African American female activists and for opposing to racism. In one of his speeches, he declared: “I created the civil rights committee because racial and religious intolerance began to appear after the Second World War. They threatened the very freedom we had fought to save” (qtd. in Grander 2002, 139). The inclusive “we” mirrors his dedication to abolishing slavery in public institutions. His sympathy for the marginalized is further manifested through his disapproval of the discrimination of blacks within the military service. “It is hereby declared to the policy of the president that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, colour, religion or national origin” (Executive Order 2014, 9981). Truman was obviously trying to capture the attention of his voters by promoting equality and promising to guarantee well-being for all citizens regardless of race and gender. His belief in equality shall be noticed in the following statement: “African American women [with] the opportunity of reaching the highest levels in all fields of human endeavour” (qtd. in Hanson 2001, 125). The use of the

superlative form highlights the firm promise to improve the situation of African women and help them get considered in different fields of activity. In this respect, the president used to admire the rebellious mindset of some African women and he accepted to be accompanied by a black journalist. Alice Allison Dunningan was the first African female journalist to assist the president. The lady confessed: “My ego was inflated by the thought that the president of the United States would show interest in an insignificant newspaperwoman, and would take time out to express his concern. This, to me, was an indication of a great man” (qtd. in Grander 2002, 130). The lady was impressed by the humble attitude of the president and appreciated his continuous support. Besides Dunningan, Charlotta Bass is another female journalist who “is thought to be the first woman to won and publish a newspaper in this country. (...) Bass was the Progressive Party’s Vice Presidential candidate in 1952, another first for a black woman” (Smith 2013, 143).

African women were pioneers in the field of journalism in America, as they resorted to writing as a tool for resisting both gender and female stereotypes. In this context, Bass affirmed: “win or lose, we win by raising our issues” (qtd. in Moore 2001, 229). The female activist was keen on raising her voice of revolt in national newspapers. In short, the 1950s were good years for blacks because many African American women succeeded to acquire a better educational level and intellectual development.

They did also resort to the stage to deconstruct both gender and racist stereotypes that were attributed to them. Indeed, “[they] discovered in the theatre a powerful device for analysing and presenting their anxieties in a public arena, for placing at the centre of dramatic attention those formerly relegated to the margin, economically, socially, politically and theatrically” (Bigsby 2000, 317). Choosing drama as a vehicle to externalize the inner plight was not a random choice. Female playwrights aimed at targeting a larger audience. They invited theatregoers and readers to rethink their

position in society and perceive black women as fully developed creatures. What is specific about them is that they have gone through a process of double marginalization related to skin colour and gender. Accordingly, black women used to be marginalized and to be excluded from the world of theatre, which was considered as a male space. Not only did black women suffer from racial discrimination by the members of the white Western society but they were also segregated by the members of the black patriarchal community, especially during the Black Liberation Movement. The misogynist attitudes can be exemplified through the following statement of Amiri Baraka: “we do not believe in the equality of men and women. We cannot understand what the devils and the devilishly influenced mean when they say equality for women. We could never be equals. (...) Nature has not provided thus” (Baraka 1970, 8). Black women were frustrated because of this sexist ideology and they formed a new movement to rage against sexist and racist oppression. Black Women Feminist movement was an attempt to open new horizons for them. It was led by artists like Lorraine Hansberry, whose play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) is one of the first plays written by a black female and performed on Broadway. “[It] is also the first play featuring black characters and their concerns to be embraced not only by black audiences but by predominantly white Broadway audiences” (Kolin 2007, 83). During the play, Hansberry raises issues such as housing discrimination, the American dream of racial integration, abortion and the female ambition to gain independence. The eldest male in the play has affinities with Hansberry’s father, who fought in court for the right of his family to move to a white neighbourhood in Chicago. “The supreme court of Illinois upheld a lower court injunction that supported the restrictive covenant, and Hansberry, with the assistance of the NAACP, appealed the case in the US supreme court” (Williams 2011, 349). She was clearly an ambitious woman who did not limit herself to the world of art, but she was also politically engaged. In addition to writing plays to stage female

identity, she wrote articles for a political magazine entitled *Freedom* and called for female political freedom. “In 1951, Hansberry joined the staff of freedom and quickly rose to a position of authority” (Effong 2006, 32). The female playwright and political activist attempted to verbalize the social exploitation of black women, voice their needs and challenge the gender and racial prejudices.

The title of her play alludes to the long path of oppression. The metaphor of a raisin that has been exposed to the sun for a long period suggests the bitter situation of black citizens, who have gone through many hindrances.

The playwright borrows this visual image from Langston Hughes’ *Harlem*, where he asks a critical question: “What happens to a dream deferred?” The speaker of the poem answers this question by raising another one: “Does [a deferred dream] explode?”. He is implicitly foreshadowing the explosion or future social discontent of the African American generation in the wake of the Second World War. Hughes is a precursor because his augury came true during the civil rights movement. The poem has a universal scope because it encompasses the dreams of African American citizens without mentioning gender or age. The revolutionary aspect of the poem has inspired Hansberry to borrow the metaphor of *a raisin*. She explores this image to stage the long journey of women towards independence. The three women in the play are oscillating between complicity and resistance. Though different, the three generations share the same fatigue and condition of being victimized by gender stereotypes, which are excluding them from social activism. The idea of exhaustion is made explicit through the opening stage directions and the furnishings that “have clearly had to accommodate the living of too many people for too many years and they are tired” (Act 1, 7). Like the worn-out furniture, the female characters are life-weary because they have been denied the possibility to develop. This denial is noticed through the interplay between light and darkness (and the prevalence of the latter). The opening scene takes place in “a dusky

morning light” (Act 1, 7). The dark morning gives hints at the dismal reality of segregation and may reflect the disturbed inner *psyche* of the African American characters (in particular, of the three female characters). However, light denotes that the young ones share the hope of improving their situation. This attitude will be traced through the characterization of the mother and the motif of the plant which adds positive vibes. The mother is different from the rebellious Beneatha and the submissive daughter-in-law in the sense that she sticks to her dream of racial integration. The next analytical part will be devoted to the way in which each female character reacts to gender and racial stereotypes.

“BEING A COLOURED WOMAN, I GUESS I CAN’T HELP MYSELF NONE”

Female plight can be investigated through the character of Ruth and her dangling between the traditional rules of Mama Lena and the liberated mind of Beneatha. Ruth is set in between and she accepts female stereotypes in order to debunk them at the end of the play. She embodies the image of the traditional wife who is engrossed in domestic activities and in looking after her husband and child. In the first scenes, Ruth is introduced as a passive woman who is prevented from having a voice of her own, especially when “[she] yawns, in a slightly muffled voice” (Scene 1, 9). Yawning suggests the life-weariness of Ruth and her inability to exteriorize her inner frustration. She is frustrated as she is going through a process of double marginalization. Not only is she the subject of female stereotypes but she is also vilified because of her colour. In the vein of double marginalization, Ruth is humiliated by her husband, who uses the following discriminatory terms: “the first thing a man ought to learn in life is not to make love to no coloured woman first thing in the morning. You all some evil people at night o’clock in the morning” (Scene 1, 11). The husband is irritated because Ruth invites him to be more pragmatic whenever he tries to imitate the

white dream of financial gain. His misogynist behaviour incorporates the denigration of Ruth because of her sex and race. Walter seems to internalize the mainstream ideology of excluding the other. He is obviously going through moments of self-denigration: instead of glorifying the African woman, he keeps belittling her. Indeed, “white women are seen as submissive, docile and feminine. The message black women often receive is that they cannot be feminine in the right way like white women. Internalizing this message may lead to a sense of self-hatred and inferiority” (Gaertner 2004, 119). The same ideology is adopted by Walter, who gives little interest to his wife. Self-denigration triggers continuous conflicts between Ruth and Walter. The higher walls of disharmony are also made evident through verbal battles. Walter minimizes his wife when he tells her “who’s fighting you? Who even cares about you” (Act 2, 71). The black woman is denied freedom of speech and is ignored by her husband, who displays a haughty attitude. His indifference comes from his belief that women of colour are “silly” and they lack the intellectual depth of white women. Accordingly, they do not deserve to be treated equally. The wife rages against her husband by reminding him of their dismal reality and the dysfunctionality of their family: “there ain’t so much between us, Walter. Not you when you come to me and try to talk to me. Try to be with me a little even” (Act 2, 72). We infer through her supplication that she is calling her husband for self-revision and she is inviting him to support her in her journey for self-improvement. Ruth is realistic in the sense that she makes an effort to survive instead of being immersed in delusions. She debunks his stereotype of considering black women as poor in terms of communication when she blames him for his irresponsibility and for not having steady steps in the ground of reality.

Ruth challenges the stereotypes against women of colour when she proves to be an independent and responsible woman who does not rely on her husband as the breadwinner of the family. In this respect, she teaches her son the values of self-reliance and instructs

him: “I want you to stop asking your grandmother for money, you hear me?” (Scene 1, 12). She is implicitly asking her son not to imitate his father and to be responsible instead of waiting for the check to improve the miserable situation. The check may stand for the passivity and for dreaming without making any effort. It is the case of Walter, who believes in the existence of miracles. On the other hand, Ruth is among the active black women who have significant roles inside and outside the domestic sphere. In reality, “the traditional housewife model has never fit most African American women. (...) African American women have worked higher rates than white women because their family are burdened by family income inequality and two incomes are necessary for familial economic survival” (Simen 2006, 26). What is specific about Ruth is that she subverts traditional gender roles when she quits the domestic sphere and bears to provide her son and husband with the basic financial needs. Unlike the husband, who is characterized by his lethargy, Ruth works even when she has health problems: “I got to go in. We need money” (Scene 1, 27). She feels that working outside the domestic space is an obligation and she strives to be financially independent.

Ruth is the subject of female stereotypes at home and the victim of racial stereotypes outside. She is looked down by her white manager, who treats her as a working machine without paying attention to her needs. She murmurs to her mother in law: “I can’t stay home. She’d be calling up the agency and screaming at them, ‘My girl didn’t come in today. Send me somebody! My girl didn’t come in’” (Scene 1, 27). The use of the possessive pronoun “my” foregrounds the dehumanization of members and the African American community, as well as their treatment as sheer properties. The master is described as a stone-hearted lady, as she is indifferent about the health of her black workers. On the other hand, Ruth internalizes the Manichean discourse and considers herself as a minor creature compared to her white boss. Her awareness about racial inferiority is the outcome of the “separate but not equal”

culture, which stands as a hurdle for socio-economic mobility. The myth of racial integration is criticized by Jesse Jackson, a prominent civil rights movement leader, who declares: “I hear that melting pot stuff a lot, and all I can say is that we haven’t melted” (*Melting Pot* 2007). It is the case of Ruth, who feels embarrassed when Mama informs her about the decision of moving to a white neighbourhood. She comments in a tone of stupor: “Clybourne Park? Mama, there ain’t no coloured people living in Clybourne Park” (77). Her reaction underlines the deception at the choice of the house’s location and further indicates the dislocation of the African American family in Washington’s white neighbourhood. Ruth can be criticized for her limited enthusiasm and the lack of determination compared to her sister-in-law, who displays a firm protest against female and racial stereotypes. Although Ruth succeeds at giving a bright image concerning the African American woman who becomes the breadwinner of the family and challenges the appalling socio-economic conditions, she fails at reviving the African glory. The idea of celebrating the African roots will be examined through Beneatha’s quest for resistance.

BENEATHA AND THE QUEST FOR SELF- EXPRESSION:

“MR. ASAGAI, I WANT VERY MUCH TO TALK WITH YOU. ABOUT AFRICA. YOU SEE, MR. ASAGAI, I’M LOOKING FOR MY IDENTITY”

Unlike Ruth, who gives the audience an insight into the struggle of domestic women, Beneatha presents another category as she is ambitious and seeks for pursuing her medical studies. Her independence is noticed when she criticizes her brother for relying on his mother’s fortune and does not yield to the principles of hard work and perseverance. She addresses Walter: “that money belongs to Mama, Walter, and it’s for her to decide how she wants to use it. (...) I don’t care if she wants to buy a house or a rocket ship or just nail it up somewhere and look at it. It’s her. Not ours. Hers” (Scene 1, 21). Through the use of the possessive pronoun “hers”, Beneatha

insists on achieving female financial independence. Verbal irony also shows Beneatha's self-reliance and her indifference about the Mama's money. She is implicitly challenging her brother, who is plunged into slumber and dreams without making any effort. Walter has a patriarchal vision as he perceives that women have to be submissive and he reminds his sister that marriage is the destiny of any female creature: "go to be a nurse like other women or just get married and be quiet" (Scene 1, 22). Beneatha goes beyond the stereotype of reducing women into housewives when she participates in some artistic activities and experiments into different fields. She utters with enthusiasm: "I don't flit! I will experiment with different forms of expression" (Scene 1, 32). Self-expression is meant to debunk stereotypes and reconstruct female identity. Beneatha reshapes female identity when she declares that the female self should be freed from social confinements and that the destiny of a woman should not reside in constructing a family and getting married. Accordingly, she is keen in becoming a doctor and in being engaged in philanthropic activities. The interest of Beneatha in medicine shows that African American women started to have access to better educational chances. In fact, "after the Second World War, the more lucrative sectors of speciality medicine became available as training opportunities began to be open up for African Americans" ("African American Physicians"). The intellectual side of Beneatha makes her a socially distinguished woman who is not intimidated by the patriarchal or racial agenda. She informs her misogynist brother: "I'm going to be a doctor. I'm not worried about who I'm going to marry yet if I ever get married" (Scene 2, 34). Beneatha is different from the other female characters of the play in the sense that she does not consider marriage as a social institution. She succeeds at deconstructing the stereotypes against women of race. Not only does she rebel against the traditional mindset, which is based on restricting female freedom, but she will also revise African identity by celebrating Africaness and giving a positive image about African glory.

Reviving the African roots will be examined by focusing on the relationship between Beneatha and Asagai. Indeed, “Beneatha expresses Hansberry’s knowledge of and pride in her African heritage. Beneatha’s Afrocentric spirit is nurtured by her relationship with the African Asagai” (James 32). Beneatha’s lover invites her to find out the components of African glory and grasp the African history, values and customs. She is impressed by Asagai as he “does not care how houses look. (...) He’s an intellectual” (Scene 2, 40). He does not pay attention to appearances (or skin colour), and he is rather interested in cultural development. In this respect, he instructs Beneatha that Africaness should not be linked to backwardness and barbarity. The future doctor is convinced by his message and she informs her mother: “It’s just that people ask such crazy things. All anyone seems to know about when it comes to Africa is ‘Tarzan’” (Scene 2, 41). It is obvious that Beneatha starts learning from Asagai that the African American Adam is a civilized creature who seeks for continuous progress. Instead of being a symbol of savagery, Beneatha invites the audience to think twice about the image of Tarzan and to recognize that the African continent is the cradle of all the other civilizations. She also renovates African glory when she puts a colourful Nigerian robe and Asagai flirts with her: “This is not so much a profile of a Hollywood queen as perhaps a queen of the Nile” (Scene 2, 46). The royal imagery is meant to highlight the supremacy of Beneatha and her attractive African style, which makes her a distinguished lady. This style is not accepted by the assimilationist George, who loathes the African self and disdains Beneatha when she opts for the African style. She reacts “angrily Yuk, Yuk, Yuk!” (Scene 2, 48). Her reaction shows that she mocks the assimilationists who abandon their roots and embrace the values of the mainstream society. This ironic attitude is directed against some assimilationists who accept to be dominated by the whites and are ashamed of family pride. Accordingly, Beneatha beckons George to admire African women dress styles: “you are looking at what a well-dressed Nigerian

woman wears. (...) Enough of this assimilationist junk!” (Act 2, 60). In this way, Beneatha re-examines George’s denigrating speech and informs him that he misses the honourable chance of understanding his African origin and considering Africa as a barren land where sterility reigns supreme. Beneatha counters his view by arguing that Africa is the source of cultural richness, especially when she foregrounds the good manners of some Nigerian citizens. She appreciates the generous way of welcoming others and respecting guests when she imitates the African folk dance: “It’s from Nigeria. It’s a dance of welcome” (Act 2, 61). Beneatha can thus be considered as a culture vulture since she is ambitious and eager to learn about her origins. Her ambition is reflected through her language and her eagerness to decipher the meaning of some African words and familiarize the hearer with the Yoruba African dialect. For example, she insists on knowing the meaning of the word “Aliayo”, and Asagai explains: “It means... it means One for Whom Bread-Food-Is Not Enough.” (Scene 2, 49). Asagai describes Beneatha as an “Aliyio” because she contributes to consolidate African cultural heritage and to represent black identity as a source of empowerment. Beneatha can be criticized for her fervent wish to go back to Africa because returning back to the past will lead to the negation of the present. Hansberry seems to be opposed to the idea of going back to Africa. That is why Beneatha is left undecided at the final scene and she hesitates whether to go back to Africa or not. The aim of the playwright is to show that cultural identity should be hybrid as it does not necessitate the existence of a pure African self or a fully assimilated self. The idea of integration is better understood by Mama Lena, who strives to achieve the dream of racial incorporation.

MAMA LENA: “THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING LEFT TO LOVE. AND IF YOU AIN’T LEARNED THAT, YOU AIN’T LEARNED NOTHING”

Though the Youngers are introduced as a powerless family enclosed in a ragged space, Mama Lena enlightens flames of hope through

her plant. In the opening scene, Mama confesses that her plant needs to “[get] more sun than it’s been getting” (Act 1, 24). The image of the sun confers an optimistic mood and helps the audience comprehend that the plant stands for hope. Indeed, Mama Lena takes care of it and seeks for its vividness. She keeps the plant alive the same way she sticks to the dream of moving from the slum to Chicago white neighbourhood. In fact, the Youngers have been squeezed in ghettos for three generations and they feel they are entrapped in a “rat trap” (Act 1, 28). Accordingly, Mama Lena indulges in a quest for upward mobility and struggles to improve the social status of her family, despite the pressure exercised by Linder. Linder is in charge of convincing the Youngers to drop the idea of moving to a white neighbourhood and to be satisfied with their position in the unsanitary ghettos, to which they belong. He argues: “For the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities” (101-102). His biased demand shows his racial attitude and that he tends to humiliate blacks because he feels that whites have a higher rank. Linder is thus the paragon of the snobbish whites who “want to preserve their authority and purity by making their argument seemingly reasonable through moral lessons” (*A New Born Identity*, 65). His lesson is not accepted by Mama Lena, who keeps being obsessed with the dream of racial equality and preserving African American identity. She is the strongest female character in the play for she is gifted with a sense of patience and sedulity. Her strength lies in her didactic role, especially when she asks Walter to instil in his son the germs of African pride and human dignity. Thus, she confesses:

Son, I come from five generations who was slaves and sharecroppers but ain’t no body 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 (127).

She declares that African American citizens should be proud of their ancestors, who are known for their harmony and cultural richness.

The five generations have been going through the same conditions of exploitation and they have not given up the mission of attaining freedom. Family pride and the assertion of black unity are the major features of black identity. The mother deconstructs the image of the submissive mammies whose major concern is the upbringing of white children. What is specific about the black mammy is that “[she] was not a protector or defender of black children or communities. She represented a maternal ideal, but not in caring for her own children. Her love, doting, advice, correction, and supervision were reserved exclusively for white women and children” (Barnes 88). It is not the case of Mama Lena, who challenges the stereotype of black mammies and who is obsessed with the education of her children rather than the nurture of the white offspring. For example, she asks Walter to instil in his child the principles of self-reliance and confidence: “why don’t you let the child explain himself” (Act 2, 74). She believes that independence starts from within and recommends self-expression as the tool for reaching racial freedom. Not only does Mama call for a better treatment of her children but she does also invite Walter to reconsider his attitude regarding women. She orders Walter: “you still in my house and my presence. And as long as you are, you’ll talk to your wife civil. Now sit down” (Scene 2, 55). She invites her son and the audience to ponder over the position of African American women and respect them. Mama Lena is respected by the members of her family because she succeeds to fulfil her dream and to pave the way for cultural exchanges after moving to the white neighbourhood and creating a synthesis between two diametrically cultural poles.

CONCLUSION: “WHEN THE WORLD GETS UGLY ENOUGH, A WOMAN WILL DO ANYTHING FOR HER FAMILY. THE PART THAT’S ALREADY LIVING”

This paper has studied how the three generations of African American women face the same process of marginalization and their

different reactions to female stereotypes. They give a bright image of the African lady who wants to have a special place inside and outside her family. The thematic analysis has shown that racial stereotypes are cultural and they need to be revised. This shows that the playwright intends to celebrate female independence and racial freedom and to transform the tragic moments of marginalization into sweeter moments of national pride and female freedom. The three female characters do not belong to the same generation and do not share the same intellectual level. Ruth gives the image of a self-reliant wife who overturns the traditional roles by choosing to be the breadwinner of her small family. Despite her struggle, she is naïve compared to the other female characters because she remains (in some instances) dominated by her husband. She supports him when he imitates the white dream of accumulating wealth. On the other hand, Beneatha is a rebellious doctor who tries to give a positive image of African women by embracing the African style. Dreaming to go back to her motherland, she fails to recognize that African American identity cannot be shaped without creating a close link between the African and the American selves. Ruth, Beneatha and Mama succeed at reviving Africaness, but Mama remains the paragon of female African pride since she imposes the existence of African citizens within a white neighbourhood and recommends the importance of designing a subtle compromise between the African and the American entities. By the end of the play, Mama moves from the margin to occupy a central social position and breaks free with gender and racial structures.

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