



Study of Black Consciousness in *A Raisin in The Sun*

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Abstract

This work explores Black Consciousness in *A Raisin in the Sun* by Hansberry. Black Consciousness elaborates an awareness of and pride in one's identity as a black person. It analyzes *A Raisin in the Sun* by applying the theory of Black Consciousness under the perspective of Fanon. This study analysis the drama at three levels: sense of pride on black culture and identity, struggle against Apartheid and Blacks' resolution to accept the challenges of White Community.

Keywords: Black Consciousness, Apartheid, Identity, Culture, *A Raisin in the Sun*, cross – cultural studies, diasporic, African Literature

1. Introduction

Black Consciousness concerns with colonization and effects of colonization especially related to the people of Africa who have transferred, made slaves and diasporic by slavery or colonialism. The initiators of this movement are slaves or descendant of slaves. These intellectuals supported an exploration of the distinctive cultural elements of Africa in Caribbean and Black American societies.

A Raisin in the Sun deals with the biased attitude of White people in employment opportunity and accommodation towards Black population. It is also shown with the effects of this discrimination through the experiences of two generations of Younger family. First *Raisin in the Sun* deals with the distinct effects of job discrimination in the life of big Walter Dee, who is Mama's late husband, second the play depicts the disappointment that is a hindrance towards the Younger family's dreams of success and entrance into rivulet American society of fifties.

2. Methodology

This study is qualitative. It focuses on the black – consciousness study in *A Raisin in the Sun*. It analyzes the drama at three levels

1. Sense of pride on blacks' identity and culture
2. Struggle against Apartheid
3. Blacks' resolution to accept the challenges of White community.

It focuses only on Hansberry's play "A Raisin in the Sun". It is based upon the close reading of the text, after that chunks are marked, interpreted and analyzed.

3. Review of Literature

Black Consciousness deals with malignant effects as well as deleterious effects of apartheid both mental and material. The Black people want to arise a voice in order to restore diminishing political, historical and intellectual resources in their communities they write the script as they went along as Merleau Ponty says: "there are times when the black man is lacked into his body. Now for a being who has acquired consciousness of himself and of his body; who has attained to the dialectic of subject and object. The body is no longer a cause of the structure of consciousness; it has become an object consciousness". (Ponty 1995, p. 277)

Black Consciousness is not a new perspective to analyze a literary text. It is a voice that black people raise against the exploitation of White people and for the assertion of their identity. It gained voice when Fanon gave the theory of "The Fact of blackness" in which Fanon asks the White people to pay no attention on his color or else he wants them be informed of it. (Fanon 2003, p. 325)

Fanon further says that in order to abort this neurotic situation, in which he is forced to select an detrimental, contradictory solution, thrived on fantasies, pugnacious, inhuman in short, he has only one remedy: to reject this

ridiculous drama that White community have staged around him to discard the terms of unacceptable and the universal through one term that is human being. (ibid)

Describing the historical significance and timeliness of Black Consciousness Nelson Mandela says: “Repression had swept the country clear of all visible organizations of the people. But it was also a time when the tide of Africa’s valiant struggle and her liberation, lapping at our own borders, was consolidating black pride across the world and firing the determination of all those who were oppressed to take their destiny into their own hands”. (Mandela 1989, p. 323)

About the pride towards native Culture Michael Dash says: “the end of exile, the triumph over the estranging sea, it is only possible when the subject feels his or her breads with the body of native land” (Dash 1989, p. 332). Nelson Mandela says about Black Consciousness: “The African renaissance calls for and is situated in exactly such a fundamental change of consciousness of ourselves, our place in the world, our capacity to shape history and our relationship with each other and the rest of humanity”. (Mandela 1989, p. 159)

About the struggle of black people Cesaire narrates the whole story of exploitation in African lands. The White have anchored the needed power through the terms of education and civilization and made the Afro – Americans as their slaves and use these slaves according to their will. Africa is fertile land but the African people cannot be benefited the fruits of their own land. They are slaves on their own land of which they should be masters, now they want themselves to free from the shackles of slavery. Achebe also describes the same situation of exploitation in his novel *Things Fall apart*.

Amari Baraka asserts that many people thought her as conservative and assimilationist. He says that years later, he thought the play *A Raisin in The Sun* was a phase of passive resistances in the movement of Black Consciousness. Hansberry had depicted a family on cutting edge of same class and exhibit his ideological struggle as prevailed in the movement itself and among the people, The accurate telling and stunning vision of the real struggle. (Baraka 1986, p. 19)

Harold Bloom says about Lorraine Hansberry: “the play examines the deferred dreams of black America, the struggle for identity and the meanings of family, home and freedom”. (Bloom 1996, p. 19) On the Black Literary Representations Nicole King says: “Saw and Promoted groups solidarity against the diverse manifestations of White racism and discrimination as important, viable and as cemented by a working class ideology”. (King 2002, p. 124)

4. Study of Black consciousness in the Text

4.1 Sense of pride on Black Identity and Culture

This study analyzes ‘A Raisin in the Sun’ at three levels. First level is blacks’ sense of pride on their identity and culture. Black Consciousness movement gives black people the confidence that they should not feel ashamed on their appearance. They are also as beautiful as white as Ruth says about her sister – in – law:

“Ruth: Fresh – just as fresh as salt this girl!”

Asagi feels pride on his African heritage. He gives African robes and records to Beneatha.

And Beneatha says,

“How beautiful and records too”

Asagi praises her beauty in his African Traditional words of African exclamation.

When Ruth sees Beneatha in Nigerian dress she says:

“A well-dressed Nigerian woman wears”.

And Beneatha feels proud, fans herself with a beautiful fan coquettishly and like a butterfly she says:

“Isn’t it beautiful?”

Lorraine Hansberry shows the sense of pride through the Nigerian dress and Nigerian music. Young African generation hates assimilationist culture at that time. They want to maintain the distinctiveness of their own culture, they look at African culture and history in order to claim and establish their identity. Harold Bloom says: “Hansberry deliberately sets out to subvert common erroneous belief about Africa and uses Beneatha as her mouthpiece” (Bloom 1996 p. 29).

Asagi playfully teases Beneatha for her “mutilated hair” and says:

“Assimilation is so popular in your country”.

And Beneatha says:

“I am not an assimilationist”

And justify her claim by cutting her hair in African style and assures her bond with roots of African land and culture.

And George says about her hair style,

“You look eccentric”.

And Beneatha replies,

“How can something that’s natural be eccentric?”

Walter mocks at George’s assimilationist identity of wearing foggoty looking English shoe but he is a Black Negro and says:

“Well, they look crazy as hell – white shoes cold as it is”.

And mocks at her sister that she got burnt legs or something!

African melody provides them satisfaction, consolation, inspiration to feel honor on being Negro. Ruth with an arrogant flourish turns off radio and says:

“Enough of this assimilationist junk”.

She plays the music of her own land by saying this:

“This music comes up a lovely Nigerian melody, OCOMOGOSIAY”

They come into their natural spirit when they hear the music of their own land. Walter dances in African ceremonial style,

“He pulls his shirt open and leaps up on the table and gestures with his spear”.

Their imitation of Yourba (dance of welcome) is magical and therapeutic. A fierce argument between Beneatha and George about the importance of African heritage can be seen in the play, which represents a large battle about assimilation within African – American community. George is smug and snobbish and scorns any connection to Africa.

“Let’s face it, baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy – assed spirituals and some grass huts”,

George belittles Beneatha’s idea of history and the heritage of black people, thus play shows African versus American based black identities. George argument shows lack of general knowledge about ancient African Kingdom. But Beneatha defends her African heritage by saying this to George:

“See there you are standing there in your splendid ignorance talking about people who were the first to smelt iron on the face of earth. The Ashanti were performing surgical operations when the English – were still tattooing themselves with blue dragon”.

In African culture mother is at the spiritual heart of family. As in the play mother is the eldest person of family, backbone of the clan and its source of wisdom. Beneatha proclaims of her disbelief in God, mama slaps her in anger and adjures her to say,

“In my mother’s house there is still a god”.

She is the matriarch of the family. Nobody can question or challenge her authority. As she says,

“There are some ideas we aren’t going to have in this house. Not as long as I am at the head of this family”.

She is a representative of traditional Afro – American culture who acquires personal satisfaction , as well as musters up the courage to take socio _ political action, and also firms religious faith.

The theme of construction of masculinity and the concept of being a man also shows African culture. Walter often calls himself as “the Lion”, “Warrior” and “Volcano”. Beneatha has so much pride on her culture that she wants to marry with man who also shares same pride on being African rather than an assimilationist.

“I hate assimilationist Negro”.

4.2 *Struggle against Apartheid*

Black Consciousness movement is against Apartheid Act. According to Apartheid Act separate designated territories are assigned to both black and white community. Non-whites are restricted to enter in the white areas unless work permission is given to them.

Mama’s struggle for accommodation in the North is undermined by the vehement segregation that her family confronts in being impelled not to purchase a house from the black restricted area of the Clay Bourne Park Improvement Association. As Linder explain the motive of his visit is to induce Youngers not to migrate the Clay Bourne Park:

“It is a matter of the people of Clay Bourne 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 community.

4.3 *Blacks’ resolution to accept the challenges of White community*

In spite so many threats they decide to move Clay Bourne Park it shows their determination to accept the challenges of White Community as Walter says,

“And we’ve decided to move into our house because my Father – my Father – he earns it for us brick by brick”.

Beneatha makes a resolution to become a doctor to improve the economic condition of her family and wants to prove that black women can also become professional. She also wants to serve the people of her own country.

“To go to Africa, Mama – be a doctor in Africa”.

5. Conclusion

By analyzing black community’s pride on their identity and culture, their struggle against Apartheid and their resolution to accept the challenges of white people, this study shows that there is black consciousness in the play by Hansberry. Nelson Mandela says that a person feels a bond to her/his land only when he has no estrangement or exile to suffer on her/his land.

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