

MASCULINITY AND THE DIASPORIC PLACE OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN IN *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*.

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Summary: The African American subject, in literatures in the English language, embodies one of the most diasporic identities. As a result of being taken away from their culture and homeland to be enslaved in the Americas, especially in the United States, African descendants' identity, the African Americans, continue to be in transit, occupying an *in-between* position in relation to Africa, America and Europe. Part of the African American identity construct, the development of masculinity is a singular focus of this *in-between* place, of this hybridism, – terms discussed by Silviano Santiago (1978) and Homi Bhabha (1989) respectively – resulted from colonial enslavement and exploitation. According to scholars such as bell hooks (2004), the masculinity ideal of the African American man, at first, in the plantations, was supplanted by the patriarchal model of masculinity of the white American man, which was impossible to be reached by the black slave, since he filled in the position of commodity, not one of social subject. Still today, this model of masculinity is unattainable for the black man in regard to a series of ordeals: finding good jobs, providing for his family, maintaining a healthy relationship with his wife, and being a role model for his children. Besides facing external obstacles, the consequences of black men's reaction toward such barriers also become a problem to reach his model of manhood. To heal the wounds caused by such ordeals, bell hooks (2004) proposes that black men and women should work together to best build black men's masculinities, which not only involves the patterns enforced by the white men, but also African ancestors' models. I intent, thus, to use the play *A Raisin in the Sun*, by Lorraine Hansberry, as evidence of this hybrid, *in-between* construction of African American masculine identity, which is only reached when it combines elements from the colonizer and from African ancestors.

Keywords: diaspora; African American Literature; masculinity.

Post-colonial studies, in an attempt to deal with literatures emerging from the margins of newly-independent, Third World, former European colonies, proposes a theory that analyzes the Other and its relations to the white colonizer. Coping with literature from countries like India and Africa, scholars such as Bhabha and Rushdie scrutinize the canon from the perspective of the oppressed.

Although not the main focus of post-colonial studies, African Americans are located within a diasporical space which can be understood utilizing post-colonial studies concepts. Relying on its unique role in American society, a mix of mainstream white American assumptions and African traditions, African American identity is a hybrid construct that is reflected in literature. None of this can be understood without first looking back at the historical insertion of black people in the Americas.

The African slave workforce was key in the relations established in the New World in view of its economical impact among the three axis of the triangle: Americas – Europe – Africa. Consequently, the relations that followed such process had a unique influence in the

construction of colonial figures' identity, especially in the African American community.

Identity, understood in view of Stuart Hall's "Who Needs Identity?" (2004), is centered in the opposition between power and exclusion. One only builds his/her identity by differing from the Other. Consequently, middle class white (European ancestry) heterosexual male is the model; identity is mainly constructed when subjects embody characteristics opposing the ones considered standard, taken for granted as characterizing "human being's" features. It is from this standpoint that African Americans look for their identity, especially as a consequence of the racial Segregation period, in which racial culture was highly emphasized.

The idea of African Americans as subjects of the diaspora has been criticized because African slaves did not come to America from the same religious/ethnic group, making it impossible to classify them as a unified group sharing the same cultural memory. However, they pass on their heritage and culture through generations, thereby keeping alive their tradition (CHALIAND, 1995, p. xv). Although slaves did not share the same cultural tradition in Africa, once they set foot in the U.S. they created their own communal cultural environment within plantations to fight and endure white subjugation, and pass on their legacy to their descendants. This shared past of slavery and historical heritage are responsible for shaping African Americans as a diasporic group.

As mentioned previously, identity is the result of differing oneself, or a communal identity, from the hegemonic pattern. Thus, it is tendentious to assert that one is African American for not embodying white American characteristics. This is actually controversial to assert in light of the fact that one is neither just African nor just American, but African American, the hybrid of both identities, the "in-between" figure. According to Homi Bhabha (2004), the hybrid subject is not a third subject resulting from the encounter of two cultures and identities, but it is in fact the presence of the dominant culture "tainted" by the oppressed one. The hybrid identity is constructed, therefore, as a result of the influence and resistance of an oppressed culture upon its hegemonic counterpart.

The function of perpetuating cultural knowledge plays an important role in the construction of African Americans' hybrid subject, since this traditional awareness is the African part of their African American persona. This African part lives side by side with the American share of black identity, indeed affirming one position as not entirely American. It is not only in one's color that identity and difference exists, but in the cultural duality s/he stands. Consequently, being African American is above all being American, but pursuing identity in differentiation, in peculiarities.

In post colonial studies, the construction of identity given within the dual struggle between oppressor and oppressed happens toward "a vision of the world divided between the white man and the Other" (BOEHMER, 2005, p. 235). The Other, namely, the one who is oppressed, tries to cope with the standards imposed by the oppressor as a model to be followed. Fighting to pursue values which will never be attained, but which nevertheless base their desires, turns African American men into a character similar to the idea discussed by Bhabha and Salman Rushdie of the translated man, the one who is never equal to the oppressor but not quite different (RUSHDIE, 1991, p. 17). As Rushdie proceeds, when trying to cope with the oppressor's culture something is always left behind, but not all the background is lost (RUSHDIE, 1991, p. 17).

The struggle an African American subject lives, I would say, results from the positioning of oneself "in-between" cultures, similarly to Silviano Santiago (2000) understanding of the Latin American discourse. According to him, the "in-between" discourse happens when the oppressed are able to write and place themselves in a position of submission but at the same time of insurrection and rebellion. Signifying, in Henry Gates

(2001) terms, plays the double meaning game inserted in everyday African American discourse. According to him, signifying, being brought from African traditions of storytelling, is based on the idea of tricksters, normally represented by the symbol of a monkey, who, in order to fulfill its desires, tricks the other animals in the jungle. The image of the monkey is often a portrait of the mystical being *Esu*, who is recurrently “translated” in the African American imaginary across the three Americas – especially in the Caribbean, South America, and Louisiana – as the image of “*Exu* in Brazil, *Echu-Elegua* in Cuba, *Papa Legba* in the pantheon of the *loa* of *Vaudou* in Haiti, and *Papa La Bas* in the *loa* of *Hoodoo* the United States” (2001, p. 904). This mythological god is the African counterpart of the Greek god *Hermes*, who connects the world of the gods to the human world. Similarly, *Esu*, as a connection between worlds and the figure of the trickster, plays with the double-contentiousness of African discourse. Transplanted to America, this discourse filled with double meanings can be seen in African American street culture, such as in oral games as *playing the dozen*; musical culture, such as in rap; and especially in plantation oral tradition, such as in the *spirituals*, which were sang in order to mask hidden messages to trick white slave owners (MARTINS, 1991, p. 57).

Among the several cultural traditions that inherited the African signifying system (MARTINS, 1991, p. 57), drama better portrays the several levels of cognition within African American discourse, mainly in view of its performance and theatricality, key figures in black tradition and culture (MARTINS, 1991, p. 47). The black drama, and its “in-between” space and doubleness (MARTNS, 1991, p. 91-92), was brought up as a way to fight African American's mocking stereotypes in white mainstream drama (MARTINS, 1991, p. 37). It was and is a powerful tool to fight oppression by signifying and recreating the black image and identity, without stereotyping the African American social figure as white people tended to do. Leda Martins (1991), in her doctoral dissertation *A cena em sombras: expressões do Teatro Negro no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos*, discusses yet the role of the audience in raising identity awareness by its interaction with the performance of the play. As African American culture is highly theatrical, the revolutionary theater of the 60s was able to fight mainstream repression and state African American culture in its place as valid as white mainstream culture by changing the *status quo*.

Black duality is seem in different shares of African American identity, but none of them is so complex as masculinity. Black men's masculinity is not only constructed in view of white American models, but it also respects African distinctiveness. To pursue the analysis of the construction of African American masculine identity, it is vital to first shape what is understood as universal masculinity. Yet, there is no more viable tool to exemplify and mirror social patterns and behavior than literature, especially drama, for its vital role in African American culture as previously stated.

For this matter, I will analyze the play *A Raisin in the Sun* written by Lorraine Hansberry. Produced in 1959 and debuting the revolutionary theater scenery of the 60s, this play was praised for its irreverence of portraying the American dream as also possible of achievement by African American citizens. Thus, I will attain myself on the issue of manhood construction specially based on the character of Walter Jr., but not exclusively. This play, written by a black female writer, was praised by black male writers such as Amiri Baraka, who, being an African American civil activist, surprisingly saw in the play a good reflection of black American's issues in modern society (LUTER, 2007, p. 23).

To pursue the investigation of *A Raisin in the Sun*, I will first present the understanding of masculinities in their hegemonic model, moving then to the understanding of African American masculinity, to finally approach such elements in the play.

1) Hegemonic Masculinities

The terms masculinity and manhood are often applied interchangeably in gender literature; however, for this research purposes, it is first imperial to define both terms and their differences. The line between both terms is fine, and most of the authors with whom I will be dealing in this paper, such as bell hooks, tend to use the term masculinity rather than manhood, or in fact both interchangeably. For this matter, the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines manhood as “1 [U] qualities such as strength, courage, and sexual power, that people think a man should have ... 2 [U] the state of being a man and no longer a boy” (SUMMERS, 2006, p. 1000). The first definition resembles the concept of masculinity itself. Masculinity is defined according to Butler, Davies, Delphy, Gregg, hooks, Jackson, Scott, Liggins Rowland, Uskalis, Reynaud, Stanley, West and Zimmerman as a social construct that assembles the process and negotiation of pursuing and achieving different behavioral characteristics related to how to be a man. The concept is also entangled with gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and class. The second definition of manhood goes along with what Jackson and Scot (2002) discuss in “Becoming Gendered,” which defines manhood as the passage from boyhood to adulthood when a man embodies masculine qualities. Therefore, for this study, masculinity will be considered the gather of the social behavioral characteristics a man should embody to be a full developed grown “man,” while manhood will be the condition one reaches when he encompasses such masculine features.

Now focusing masculinity closely, Antony Rowland, Emma Liggins and Eriks Uskalis (1998) review that the study of masculinities is fairly recent as a result from being obscured by Feminist studies. Taken for granted for most part of 20th century, masculine aspects can be found in literature from Renaissance until today. This shadowed situation is a result from the common belief that by being dominant, men were not worth studying, since they were already the majority of writers, cultural models, and social power. Consequently, masculinity, as it is studied today, is given mostly within the binary opposition femininity/masculinity. Manhood was historically seen as the difference from boyhood and femininity (NYE, 2005, p. 1944); also, in “Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony,” Mimi Schippers (2007) discusses R. W. Connell's concept that masculinity is a constant balance between men and women's daily internal and external influences that causes gender formation, the same way Carrie Paechter (2006) says in “Masculine Femininities/Feminine Masculinities: Power, Identities and Gender” that masculine is the gender relation men and women undergo. However, I endorse Robert Nye's (2005) opinion that the binary masculine/feminine is a problem, and masculinity is much more likely to be established from oppositions among other masculinities, as understanding the different forms one can be a man is straightly linked to the concept of masculinities rather than femininities.

The former idea that masculinity opposing to femininity, as man opposing to woman, comes from the mainstream belief instilled by hegemonic masculinity. Hegemony is the power that pressures society to affirm a certain imposed model (CONNELL, B., 2002; MCLEOD, 1998), hence hegemonic masculinity “function[s] to legitimate the dominant social position of men and women's resultant subordination” (MCLEOD, 1998, p. 222). Although our social values tend to enforce, celebrate and embrace hegemonic masculinity beliefs (DAVIED, 2002, p. 283), this masculine ideal is not embodied by the most part of the population but rather imposed by them (CONNELL, B., 2002, p. 61). Consequently, subordinate masculinities, namely, those which do not conform to the majority's rules, are confined to peripheral spaces. It is vital to remark that “we should always talk about plural

masculinities rather than a singular, uniform masculinity” (MCLEOD, 1998, p. 221), therefore, common beliefs are according to the hegemonic pattern which supports white heterosexual patriarchal values and subjugate any value that does not enframe within this category.

Comprehending the existence of plural masculinities, it is now attainable to list the traits most likely to be correlate to hegemonic masculinities, and then connect these to the concept of African American peripheral masculinities. Based on R. W. Connell, Mimi Shippers defines that:

masculinity is an identifiable set of practices that occur across space and over time and are taken up and enacted collectively by groups, communities, and societies. Through their recurring enactment over time and space, these practices structure the production and distribution of resources, the distribution of power in the form of authority, cathexis, by which Connell means the social arena of desire and sexuality, and symbolism or the production of meaning and values. (2007, p. 86)

Among these social practices, eating habits portray one of the issues that build masculinity. Stephen Gregg (1998) in “‘Strange Longing’ and ‘Horror’ in *Robinson Crusoe*” affirms that appetite for food affirms man role as dominant; likewise, in “Men, Meat, and Marriage Models of Masculinity,” Jeffery Sobal (2005) suggests that “[d]oing masculinity’ means eating like a man” (2005, p. 139); the act of opting to ingest meat rather than vegetables goes back to men's past routine of hunting and butchering, both virile activities. Other characteristics involved in performing masculinities, in its hegemonic perception, range from “bodies, dress, patterns of consumption, sexual orientation and vigor, speech and discourse, work, fatherhood, relations with women, and many more besides” (NYE, 2005, p. 1944), also requiring “men [to] be emotionally stoic, take risks, seek status, and avoid anything that might be deemed either feminine or homosexual” (SMILER, 2006, p. 585). Two of the most important prerequisites to be a “man” thus involve subjugating women – and femininity traits for this matter – and homosexuality, which is often related to embodiment of feminine attributes (ROWLAND; LIGGINS; USKALIS, 1998, p. 22).

Furthermore, in *Genders*, David Glover and Cora Kaplan (2000) remount the historical view of masculinity related to its connection to warfare and the grotesque; as a matter of fact, being a “man” has been connected to both physical violence and war, for acting irrationally distances men for being emotional, a feminine trait (ROWLAND; LIGGINS; USKALIS, 1998, p. 28; REYNAUD, 2002, p. 411). Men are supposed to be “reasonable, more clearly identified with rational activities, and . . . less emotional” (REYNAUD, 2002, p. 408). Nevertheless, the grotesque is accepted as a manly behavior but not regarding the way men display their bodies. It is a consequence of the fact that the male body can neither become attractive to the audience gaze (ROWLAND; LIGGINS; USKALIS, 1998, p. 9-11) nor lack the classical balance and control (REYNAUD, 2002, p. 416-17). The male body should not be desired nor turned into a commodity, it is not for the public dominant and subjugating gaze. Male bodies should be “concerned with hardness, aggression and heterosexual performance” (REYNAUD, 2002, p. 407).

Last but not least, men who incarnate hegemonic masculinity models are recurrently associated with integrity, work and power (ROWLAND; LIGGINS; USKALIS, 1998, p. 24), they are the man in the house, the provider, the one who controls the money, the head of the household and all the members in his family (HARTMANN, 2002, p. 97-101). This masculine need for power, especially over money, brings back the connection among the study of masculinities, Materialist Feminism, and Marxism, for establishing as a dominant social unity, men need to subjugate others especially by using class and economic power.

As social construct and performance processes, masculinity is a concept that

challenges social traditional perception. Presenting hegemonic models to fulfill hierarchal values, masculinity does not stand alone, but is built under connection to culture, behavior, society, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and social practices. In a sum, masculinity is a controversial concept that only fairly recently could stand by itself apart from femininity, even though much of its construction is given by the binary differentiation, and subjugation, of feminine traits. Easily recognized, hegemonic masculinities impose their own set of traits desired by men to be part of the dominant strand of society. Although not all men who place themselves as dominants embody such traits, they still endorse patriarchal hegemonic values and subjugate those who cannot achieve them in order to maintain their hierarchical position. Fighting for their independence and better place in the hierarchical system, those who place within subjugated masculinities also end up supporting hegemonic values, which in their turn pressure them back even tougher because subordinate men are repressed from achieving hegemonic standards.

2) African American Manhood: The Subjugated Cousin

R. W. Connell proposes the existence of three major types of non-hegemonic masculinities, which are: the subordinate, complicit and marginalized (MCLEOD, 198, p. 221-222); these three models are always placed in inferiority and subjugation in relation to hegemonic patterns. The traits that are part of non-hegemonic masculinities are often the opposite of the ones that compose the hegemonic model. These subjugated masculinities create an infinity number of possible manhood constructs due to combinations of race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, and other characteristics mentioned previously.

Representing the dominant community, European Americans (white society) carry most of the traits, established previously, desired by masculine models of how to be a “real man.” Opposing white dominant forces, African Americans face a weakening situation for often occupying low working-class positions, lacking social status, having trouble providing for their families, and being subjugated in regard of their cultural upbringing and behavior.

African American men endure one of the most castrating situation in America. As discussed by bell hooks (2004) in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, deprived from the ideal of manhood African men had back in their Africa, African slaves were imposed with European-American values which were impossible for them to be successfully achieved. Contrasting to the standards for men to provide for their family, look for good jobs and protect their families, black men face problems to find good jobs because of economical sanctions, and consequently to provide for their family. (JANEY, 2003, p. 20-21) Since in America “[m]en of color are seldom viewed or portrayed worth of respect, trust or admiration in the media and society at large” (JANEY, 2003, p. 24), African Americans end up having distorted perception of what it is to be a man and to embody masculine traits (JANEY, 2003, p. 22). The fact that black men face economic issues leads their wives to be the providers for the household. Therefore, black men tend to abandon their homes, resulting in single parented split families, with mothers as the head of household. Also, as a result, hooks (2004) presents that African American men react to castration by acting over sexually, aggressive, and criminally. However, unlike white men, black men's sexuality turns them into commodity, castrating them; their violence is looked down the same way their crimes are, and powerful punishments are inflicted upon them.

Even struggling to stand for themselves, African American men also endorse the role of the man as provider, the importance of earning money and being successful – economic and class importance –, women submission and subservience to men, as well as men standing for

the role model for their children. Therefore, even being strands differing from the hegemonic model, black masculinities look up to hegemonic patterns and incorporate similar characteristics as their basis.

3) Masculinity in *A Raisin in the Sun*

A Raisin in the Sun presents a handful of obstacles recognized as commonly opposing African American men in the process of performing and achieving their manhood. In this play, the focus of manhood is centered mostly at the family level and, as in Hughes's poem on which it is inspired, on "dreams deferred." Likewise, the play develops the frustration of the black man for not being able to achieve white Americans' standards. The main character, Walter Lee Younger, who is a black man, works as a driver, and as such, does not make enough money to provide for his family. According to Hunter and Davis (1994) "the meaning of manhood has been treated as largely unidimensional and universal – man as economic provider and as head of the family. Further, what Black men are and what they should be is measured against the status and privilege of White males" (1994, p. 20). Throughout the play, Walter Younger undergoes situations which emphasize his different position in society from the one of a white man, mainly in fields considered to be mandatory for achieving manhood, such as the business world. Walter Jr. thus comes to the realization that "[b]eing black and male in American society places one at risk for unemployment" (WILSON, 1987; U.S. Department of Labor, 1991 apud HUNTER; DAVIS, 1994, p. 21). Having his mother, Lena Younger, as the family head and only being able to provide for his family with his mother and wife's help, Walter Jr. feels symbolically castrated and emasculated. This emasculation is clearly stated when he compares himself to white people of his age, and realizes that some opportunities are denied to him: "Mama – sometimes when I'm downtown and I pass them cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking 'bout things . . . sitting there turning deals worth millions of dollars . . . sometimes I see guys don't look much older than me –" (HANSBERRY, 2004, p. 1795). Also, his frustration as a provider comes from the fact that his family follows a twentieth century African American family trend "of black women working and therefore exercising power in the home" (HOOKS, 2004, p. 9), that wouldn't be a problem as "[n]ot all black families cared about black women earning more as long as black males controlled their earnings. . . . If black man controls the money . . . the evidence suggests that he will not feel emasculated" (HOOKS, 2004, p. 9). However, as it is recurrently shown throughout all the women's statements during the play "the insurance money belongs to Mama" (HANSBERRY, 2004, p. 1779) and Mama seems as she will not "give it to you [Walter] to invest in any liquor store" (HANSBERRY, 2004, p. 1779). This money represents Walter's possibility to take control over his family and reach what he conceives as manhood, as well as fulfilling his dream. The role of the black female as the provider and the head of the family is also made clear as Walter gets more and more frustrated for not achieving his ideal manhood. As a solution for this issue, his mother Lena ends up giving him the money, though resulting in his friend betrayal, by stealing all the money Walter tries to invest in his dream. This situation actually shows that Walter is unprepared to deal with financial responsibilities. From the beginning to the climax, *A Raisin in the Sun* displays the experience of America's beliefs of what manhood is: possession of money, enforcement of patriarchal values and providing for the household.

As a result of the obstacles Walter should overcome, his reactions are recurrently considered standard African American behavior. Although common responses, they normally cause black men to distance themselves from achieving manhood rather than approaching its

construction. This can be exemplified through Walter's obsession with his father's insurance money as well as his lack of control upon it, which results in his feeling of emasculation. The latter leads him to do what most black men do when they feel powerless: they drink and becomes oblivious. Walter's struggles represent the black male effort to cope with white Americans standards of manhood, but which in most of the cases are not achieved. Such destructive behavior is also noticeable when the same character, seeing himself without the insurance money, tries blackmailing and exploring – back – white people. Walter tries to get bribery money from a community leader who wants him and his family out of their neighborhood by offering Walter and his family a reasonable amount of money to fulfill his purposes. At this point, Walter is the farthest he could be from manhood, as his mother states:

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. [*Raising her eyes and looking at him.*] We ain't never been that dead inside. (HANSBERRY, 2004, p. 1826)

Earning that money, in Walter's eyes, symbolizes that he will be earning his manhood back, as he enforces by saying that he will feel “[f]ine! . . . Going to feel fine . . . a *man* [*my emphasis*]...” (HANSBERRY, 2004, p. 1826), despite all of his family's concerns and implied judgment that classify him as unmanly. His sister even mentions that by behaving in such way he “is not a man. That is nothing but a toothless rat” (HANSBERRY, 2004, p. 1827).

Subsequently to coming to terms with the arduous obstacles African American men face in the process of constructing their masculinity, and the troublesome sanctions they endure for responding to them, it is predictable that achieving manhood is not easy for those who place themselves outside hegemonic standards. *A Raisin in the Sun* presents ways in which Walter can cope with such pressures and still achieve manhood successfully. Hooks observes that only the black woman is able to help black men to heal their wounds and finding their manhood. In the play, despite all of Ruth's efforts to show Walter the true meaning of manhood, Lena, his mother, is the one who is able to show him that “as the saying goes, 'hurt people hurt people’” (HOOKS, 2004, p. 126). To raise a son who will make the right decisions, Walter needs to be the role model for his child, Travis, by making himself the right decisions. This epiphany takes place when he is about to take bribery money from the white community leader, and his mother places him in a role model position by saying to her grandson: “No. Travis, you stay right here. And you make him understand what you doing, Walter Lee. You teach him good. Like Willy Harris taught you. You show where our five generations done come to” (HANSBERRY, 2004, p. 1828). At this point, Walter finally acts like a “real” man and makes the right decision calling the community leader, Lindner, to tell him that:

we [*Walter and his family*] are very proud and that this is – this is my son, who makes the sixth generation of our family in this country, and that we have all thought about your offer and we have decided to move into our house because my father . . . he earned it. (HANSBERRY, 2004, p. 1829)

This event portrays the so expected healing of the African American man and his possibility to “finally come into his manhood” (HANSBERRY, 2004, p. 1830), in Walter Jr.'s own mother's words.

A Raisin in the Sun stands out for conveying the importance of the black woman in the creation of a bond not only between the black woman and the black man, but also between the black man and himself. This bond is what allows the black man to reconnect with himself and thus with his manhood. The strong female characters in the play, Lena, Ruth and Beneatha, not only portray the black female role in black families as a role model and provider, but also

as the healer and psychological supporter for the black man. Ruth once mentions in the play that “he [Walter] needs something – something I [Ruth] can't give him any more” (HANSBERRY, 2004, p. 1780). Addressing Walter's dream as this lost “something,” she is actually addressing his manhood. What she completely misses is that she, and the other female members of the family, are the only ones capable of providing Walter with the tools to find peace with himself and achieve his manhood. In addition, Walter has in his sister Beneatha an important mechanism for understanding the meaning of manhood. She does not see it in her boyfriend-to-be George, whom she repeatedly calls assimilationist. In this respect, she indeed prefers to get emotionally involved with Asagai, a truly African man. She also helps Walter to construct his own identity as a “real” man by setting herself the model of man his brother should follow and try to pursue.

This play serves as the basis for a social cultural analysis of black manhood, and how it has been developing along African American diaspora in the U.S. In addition, the play provides us with data to discuss the role of gender, class, ethnicity and race, among other factors, in the construction of manhood and masculinities. Therefore, the possibility of a conclusion about how much African American masculinity models are drawn together to hegemonic masculinity, set apart from it, as well as resist its pressure, is observed by analyzing the data from the established corpus.

4) Conclusion

Written in prelude to a revolutionary period, *A Raisin in the Sun* portrays the “in-between” space occupied by the African American man in the United States. Reaching out for his manhood, the black man tries to cope with white standards while dealing with his own set of beliefs of what manhood encompasses. This struggle between traditional values and hegemonic assumptions fills in African American lives to the point of outburst or healing. In Hansberry's play both moments are explored; in the beginning, self destruction through alcohol and bribery; in the closure, reconciliation and bonding. Only by understanding African traditional values and sewing it together with white American beliefs, black man will be able to create his own identity; not as the oppressor – European, – nor as the Other – African, – but as both, as African American, the “in-between” hybrid space which entangles both cultures.

The problem in constructing and seeking manhood for the African American community comes from the fact that they seem to repress their heritage in praise to the oppressor's culture. African American men will only bond and heal when their traditional values could also play a role in their masculinity universe. One cannot fully construct identity if neglecting who their ancestors were.

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