



The Image of Mammy in Lynn Nottage's *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*

Snoor Ismael Mahmood/Department of English, College of Education, Garmian University-Kalar

Saman Hussein Omer/Department of English, College of Languages, Salahaddin University-Erbil, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq.



CORRESPONDENCE

Snoor Ismael Mahmood

snoor.ismael@garmian.edu.krd

Reiceved 23/07/2023

Accepted 24/08/2023

Published 15/08/2024

Keywords:

By the Way,
Meet Vera Stark,
Controlling image,
Lynn Nottage, Mammy,
Stereotype.

Abstract

Certain dominant images are created and disseminated through various modes of communication to define black women in the United States. The purpose of this research is to examine the Mammy image in Lynn Nottage's play, *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*. It tends to analyze the constructed image of black womanhood in America's mainstream culture by examining the stereotypical depiction of the central character, Vera, and her role in the Hollywood film. The image is analyzed from the perspective of black feminist theories. Through contextual clues and context-based analysis, the systematic construction of the image in a white-dominated culture is revealed. The study's findings conclude that racist images are created to determine and justify black women's subordinate status in society. The author defies the image as an inhumane misrepresentation of black womanhood and hopes for radical illumination of the distorted image of black women and its ideological legacy that black women can only be servants.

About the Journal

ZANCO Journal of Humanity Sciences (ZJHS) is an international, multi-disciplinary, peer-reviewed, double-blind and open-access journal that enhances research in all fields of basic and applied sciences through the publication of high-quality articles that describe significant and novel works; and advance knowledge in a diversity of scientific fields.

<https://zancojournal.su.edu.krd/index.php/JAHS/about>



1.Introduction

Lynn Nottage is an accomplished and critically acclaimed African American playwright who was born in 1964 and grew up in a middle-class family. She transformed the experience of middle-class people, the struggle of less noticed individuals, and the plight of unfortunate people into a notable art that awarded her the Pulitzer Prize for Drama twice. Her writing has earned her a playwright's name with many voices (Wilmeth 2007 486). Each play stands out for being unique in such a way that all of the plays taken together represent a wealth of totally distinct situations. However, Lynn generally focuses on, race multiculturalism, and retrieving lost or forgotten history, especially the history of African American women, giving the role to the voiceless, struggle of black women to define themselves. As it is pointed out by Shannon (2007,187) "Nottage performs the work of an archivist, painstakingly researching and resurrecting little known, forgotten, or ignored moments in history in order to give a voice to those women who have been marginalized." Based on her observation of women's issues she brilliantly tackles the suffering and mistreatment of women with the aim of redemption. As Shannon (2016, p.2) remarks, Nottage incites audiences to consider shared humanity through staging "extreme passion and global awareness of women's issues" that completely disregards boundary lines and disparities. She has altered the stage to a platform for exposing the inhumane treatment of black people, particularly women. Accordingly, Knowles (2016, p.10) asserts that Nottage was engrossed in social activism from her early childhood. This activism has been reflected in her works that are concerned with social injustice, silenced voices, and the forgotten stories of those who are considered unworthy of remembrance, therefore her characters are mostly forgotten people who attempt to fit in. This study focuses on her comedic play *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* which is inspired by little-known black actresses who were cast in servile roles in classic films. More specifically, it deals with the image of a Mammy in the play which is embodied in Vera Strak's role in a Hollywood movie. The archetypal representation of black womanhood in movies is questioned in the light of black feminist theories. Lynn Nottage grapples with how black women are portrayed in a white-supremacy culture by incorporating bits and stories of past black actresses. She exposes more individualized portraits of African American womanhood and deconstructs stereotypical depictions of women of color.

2. The Image of Mammy

The portrayal of African American women is deeply rooted in the racial attitude toward black women. It results from how African Americans were initially perceived by the general public as being different from other people. As it is remarked by Lemons (1977, p.102-105) various stereotypic images were common in popular culture, including the depiction of the Negro as a servant or maid such as the old Mammy and Aunt Jemima. He further states they became popular more specifically when race relations were a crucial political issue during the 1840s. Also, sometimes around the Reconstruction era and in the 1880s and 1890s when racial prejudice grew increasingly more intense and violent, comic depictions of the black man became more prevalent. They even draw pictures of blacks in a monkey-like shape to denote those blacks were less than humans. African American stereotypes were articulated to promote whites' ethnic superiority in the social hierarchy and to reinforce the idea that Africans, whether slaves or freed from servitude, were not equal to Whites and were incapable of coexisting in the same social structures. As a result, these stereotypes were used to justify racial discrimination and inequalities. These stereotypes were additionally utilized to sustain Blacks' century-long servitude. That's why most of the stereotypic images were created in a time of racial tension.

Similarly, Patricia Morton (1991, p.xv) describes the creation of these images as the outgrowth of racial discrimination and sexism which can be traced back to the antebellum period. African womanhood is embodied in four main figures: the "inept domestic servant"

(the Mammy), the domineering matriarch, the sex object (the Jezebel), and the tragic mulatto. Each is depicted to reinforce a particular purpose; more specifically to dominate the African woman. Reinforcing these arguments, Patricia Hill Collins (2000, p 70) believes that different controlling images are attributed to African American women to justify their oppression by the dominant group. They are depicted to justify racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of discrimination and oppression. They are controlling images in the sense that these images will imprint the idea that African women slaves are inherently sensual, aggressive, and immoral and the kind of life they have is just the consequence of their nature and it is inevitable and quite normal. She further clarifies those certain ideological justifications are used to describe African American women as *other*. One of the ideologies is binary opposition according to which the meaning is acquired in relation to its opposite. For example, each work in the binary opposition of white/black, male/female, reason/emotion, culture/nature, fact/ opinion, mind/body, and subject/object gains meaning in relation to each other. The meaning of one part of the binary opposition is clarified because it is inherently opposite to the other part. In this sense, white and black, males and females are fundamentally different creatures; they are almost completely opposite to each other.

Additionally, Patricia Morton (1991, p.36) points out that, based on binary ideologies, black womanhood is characterized as opposite to white womanhood. Black women were assigned all of the negative characteristics of disgrace, whereas White women were assigned all of the idealized characteristics of "true womanhood," such as "piety, deference, domesticity, passionlessness, chastity, cleanness, and fragility". Black women, on the other hand, were portrayed as primitive, lustful, seductive, physically strong, domineering, unwomanly, and filthy. There was a wide range of stereotypical perceptions of Black women that excluded them from the enclaves of delicacy, femininity, respectability, and virtue. Hence in this system of analysis, one element is objectified as the Other. The other is exploited as an object and manipulated for the benefit of the other powerful part that controls it. Since the slave era, the powerful group reinforced the emergence of socially created images of women that facilitated their domination and supported their interests.

The maid or Mammy is one of those categories in which African American women were depicted. The image of Mammy is the oldest images and most pervasive image of African American women. Certain negative traits based on stereotypic views are attributed to the image of Mammy to symbolize black womanhood. It is a socially constructed image that is incorporated into American culture and perpetuated by mass media in a way it can be found in different visual forms such as printed images (Jewell 1993, p.37). Different other items were created with images of Mammy on them, including ashtrays, souvenirs, postcards, fishing lures, detergent, artistic prints, toys, candles, and kitchenware. Some of them are still kept in The *Jim Crow Museum of Racist Imagery* at Ferris State University (Pligim, 2012).

Mammy was a loyal, obedient domestic servant. The image was made to justify the economic exploitation of African American women. The appearance of this image can be traced back to the slavery era, particularly in the southern areas where blacks were slaves and served white people. She is constructed as a loyal caretaker of a white family. She lives in a white household and tries to protect the white family from other blacks. In essence, she is loyal to the white family and aggressive for others who want to harm the white family. More specifically, she is aggressive with black men (Jordan-Zachery 2009, p.37-38). She is also characterized as "cold and callous, even neglectful of her own children and family while being overly solicitous toward Whites" (Ladson-Billings 2009, p. 89). As far as physical appearance is concerned Mammy is depicted as "obese, dark-complexioned, with extremely large breasts and buttocks and shiny white teeth visibly displayed in a grin". (Jewell 1993, p. 39) Their attire and types of dresses displayed their social position and occupation as they

mostly appeared wearing clothes of domestic work such as drab calico dresses. It was a type of dress that was worn by slaves. It is also known as Negro Clothes which were plain and cheap clothes made of rough material that caused prickly sensation for many slaves. They were also wearing headscarves that were known as a head rags. They were provided with such a sort of clothes, first to spend a minimal amount of money for their needs, and secondly so as not to appear attractive to their masters (Jewell 1993, p. 39). Additionally, at that time, physical strength and size were regarded as a sign to be a hard worker and nurturer. Her size was considered a good sign to be committed to her work, it was also used to justify slavery and her role as a nurturer. However, the role ascribed to her does not denote her as a valuable mother for her own children, even while she was taking care of the children of white family she was continuously monitored by the white family. She is not regarded as a skillful mother to take care of her children but rather as an incompetent that lacks the traits of standard womanhood (Jordan-Zachery 2009, p.39). Her physical shape of being overweight is considered as comedic and humorous trait of a character since obesity was devalued in American culture as far as standards of beauty and femininity are concerned. The exaggerated shape of her breast and buttock devalued the shape of Mammy and defined her as undesirable by men. Therefore, when slave owners abused their female slaves sexually, the perception was like that it was the consequence of fulfilling the slave's sexual desire rather than the master or the slave owner (Jewell 1993, p.40).

Another distinctive feature of the image of Mammy is her smiling face and her white shining teeth that appeared continuously. The teeth of Mammy showed the healthy condition of the slaves and her smiling face suggested that they were happy and satisfied with their occupation at the households of the slave owners. The image of the smiling face reinforces the ideology that the slaves were content and happy with their social position, and likewise, the institution of slavery was harmless and useful at the same time since it provided shelter and jobs for those who otherwise remained uncivilized. It also indicates that the slave owners were innocent hence the powerful group kept their domination over the working group. Furthermore, the appearance of the teeth all the time denotes the silliness of the character; it looks as though they lacked intelligence and they were funny and naïve, hence ridiculous (Jewell 1993, p.41-42).

However, the crucial truth to know about Mammy is that she was nothing more than an imaginary caricature of black womanhood. According to the research of historians like Patricia Turner (1994, p.44), enslaved people were occasionally trusted with the care of white children in the antebellum US South, but these house servants were typically young girls with light skin. Due to their inadequate food allocation, they were unlikely to be fat and happy, and the majority of them passed away before turning fifty. The image of true womanhood is sketched by possessing virtues such as piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. The first controlling image that was created was the image of Mammy. She is designed as a "faithful, obedient domestic servant". It was created to exploit black women for the economic benefit of white families as house slaves. It also justified the position of women that is confined to housework. It affirms the idea that Mammy is created to take care of children and do house works. The ideal black woman is evaluated in accordance with this image hence she accepts her position and subordination.

Internalizing Mammy images perpetuates oppression based on gender, race, and class. They are forced to behave according to the standards of the white family which supports white supremacy. It also promotes the racial attitude in the mentality of the white families that they are from the high class and superior to the blacks. Moreover, the white family expects to see the black woman as different from them, they dislike those blacks who are not like the mammy. In other words, they want the black woman to behave like mammies.

The Mammy image also, for feminist critics, symbolizes others. It perpetuates gender oppression. They are seen as opposed to the white and described as being an object of bodily pleasure and sexuality. As it is remarked by Barbara Christian “all the functions of the mammy are magnificently physical. They involve the body as sensuous, as funky, the part of the woman that white southern America was profoundly afraid of. Mammy, then harmless in her position of a slave, unable because of her all giving nature to do harm, is needed as an image, a surrogate to contain all those fears of the physical female”. (Cited in Brown 2012, p.38). The image of Mammy reinforces the ideology that good woman is pure and deny their female sexuality. It also reinforces the true cult of womanhood of being obedient, loyal, and committed to the space allotted to them.

Mammy, no matter how hard she is working and how she is committed to their jobs, remains poor because she is manipulated economically and confined to space that obstructs her economic advancement. “Historically, many White families in both middle class and working class were able to maintain their class position because they used black women domestic workers as a source of cheap labor”. (Collins 2000, p.74) The Mammy image was designed to mask this economic exploitation of the social class. While Mammy internalized the rules of white families and behaved in accordance with those rules, at home within African American families they encouraged their children to stand against discrimination based on their race and they encouraged their children to avoid domestic work.

3. The Archetypal Depiction of Vera Stark

Across the ages, black women were frequently subject to misrepresentation and dehumanization in different mediums of discourse such as science, history, literature, popular culture, and mundane activities. The distorted images of women of color are constructed and embodied in diverse popular cultural depictions. In movies, black women are represented in the same racist stereotypical images. *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*, a satirical play by Lynn Nottage, highlights how black women are inaccurately portrayed in Hollywood films. She mocks the negative stereotypes of black women and their detrimental impact on popular culture. The play stages the life of an uncredited black actress, Vera Stark, within two acts. In Act One, Vera is assigned the role of Tilly, a maid for Gloria Mitchel, America's starlet, in the 1933 movie by Hollywood *The Belle of New Orleans*, demonstrating black actresses' casting in Hollywood movies. Act two starts with the film footage being screened and is followed by a colloquium set in 2003 about the role of Vera Stark in the movie, her personal life, and her disappearance after her last interviews in 1973. Intermittently, movie and interview footage are displayed on the screen as the panelists discuss the film and its legacy. Vera is a stereotypical character or archetypal character that shows African American women as unintelligent, indolent, inferior humorously dressed and speaking. All these stereotypic traits are attributed to Mammy's figure and brought to life in Hollywood films. The characterization of Vera highlights the degrading portrayal of black women in several Hollywood movies as she is given the demeaning role of the Mammy archetype. The first scene of the play establishes the position and identity of Vera as a loyal servant, and slave girl, with a Southern accent as she hesitantly informs Gloria about the uninvited guest.

“Gloria Mitchell, twenty-eight, “White” Starlet, in a dressing gown, lies across the couch nursing a healthy glass of gin.

Vera Stark, twenty-eight an African-American beauty wearing a maid's uniform, tentatively enters. She pauses, then she ventures to speak

Vera (With Southern accent): Mis', Mr. Lafayette here to see ya. (*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* 2013, p.1)¹

¹ Nottage, Lynn (2013) *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*. New York: Theatre Communication Group. References to the play are made to this source hereafter in the paper.

The reluctant voice of Vera and her hesitant turn to leave, then waiting for her mistress's order, asking "Whatcha want me to tell him?" (*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* 2013, p.2), reveals that Vera is a devoted maid who sincerely wishes to protect her mistress. The portrayal of Vera is based on a racist Mammy caricature. She plays the role of Mammy in the film, called Tilly. She takes care of Marie (the mistress of the movie played by Gloria) and performs different household duties such as cooking, cleaning, and managing the personal needs of her white mistress. Furthermore, she offers spiritual and emotional support whenever necessary. Their relationship is that of Missy and Mammy or mistress and servant as it is described by Afua in the colloquium scene (*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* 2013, p.74). Similarly, Herb in the definition of her role "ultimately she still was just another shucking, jiving, fumbling, mumbling, laughing shuffling, pancake-making mammy in the kitchen." (*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* 2013, p. 79)

Vera is cast in the role of the dehumanized stereotypical image. Her role reflects the roles of various black actresses who were cast in stereotypical maid roles. In fact, the play is based on the life of black actress Teresa Harris, who was dubbed "the Maid of Hollywood" on the front page of *Jet Magazine* in 1952. Vera's role additionally depicts the careers of other black actresses in Hollywood, such as Hattie McDaniel, Butterfly McQueen, and Louise Beavers, who were hired to play stereotypically servile roles. Their career ceased with their vanishing from Hollywood, leaving them destitute and nearly forgotten (Sheppard 2022, p.14) For instance, in Act Two, Scene three, a picture of Vera Stark as Mammy in the Film with her mistress is shown. Vera is struggling with tightening Gloria's corset, during the television interview with Vera Stark and Gloria Mitchell (*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* 2013, p.71). This is a widespread image of Mammy in the classic movie *Gone with the Wind* (1939) performed by Hattie McDaniel. The constructed image of Mammy was shown in films that seemed authentic or natural to be internalized in real life. In the sense that people forget that these are mythical representations of black womanhood and ignore that they are socially created to keep the racially-segregated social order. As it is remarked by Behnken and Smithers, racial representation obtained naturalization to the extent of being unnoticeable.

Similarly, Clyde Taylor, notes that racial stereotyping in film production was popular to the point critics were blind to the "institutionalized nature of discriminatory images". He further states, critics of Hollywood movies simply defined those images as "unconscious or product of their time or an innovative piece of the film industry" (cited in Behnken 2015, p. x) Besides, movie production was under the creative authority of white producers, directors, and studios. Maximillian Von Oster and Mr. Slasvick partake the role of the white director and producer of the movie, *The Belle of New Orleans*. Maximillian Von Oster, the director of the movie as he discusses the production of their movie with the producer states:

it is time for cinema to take bold new leap. It is time to capture the truth. For instance, I want the Negroes to be real, to be Negroes of the earth, I want to feel their struggle, the rhythm of their language, I want actors that ..., no I don't want actors, I want people.

(Vera and Lottie slowly shift their posture, auditioning for the roles of slaves.)

Negroes who have felt the burden of hard unmerciful labor.

(Vera and Lottie continue to morph into slave women.)

I want to see hundreds of years of oppression in the hunch of their shoulders.

He addresses his coworker Mr. Slasvick Fredrick "this is what we need on the screen... the story of the South."

People want the truth. They want real life, like this woman here. What is your name?

Vera: Vera (By the Way, Meet Vera Stark 2013, p. 38-41)

Lynn Nottage comingles their conversation with a comic stage direction in which Vera and Lottie play the funny role of slaves as the director speaks. It implies that the author wants to mock such a kind of association of Blackness with slavery as Vera and Lotte perform the role of a slave to secure that role in the movie. She remarks that such an identity is performative. It is not the real nature of black women. It is not true as Maximilian says: “people want the truth” (*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* 2013, p. 41). The word truth indirectly suggests that the true identity of black women is that of a slave. As Soyica Diggs Colbert (2016, p.417) remarks, “although the play calls forth the recognized association of blackness with slavery, the layering of history to comedic effect undermines the easy conclusion that equates black with slave”.

Movies, which are crucial platforms for exposing cultural images, entertain audiences while exposing them to ideas that influence the public's perception, values, and belief systems. It is one of the social institutions that reinforce the ideology of the powerful group and shapes power relations. As it has been argued by Brian D. Behnken and Gregory D. Smithers institution is an entity that implements certain ideologies with the tendency to modulate people's mindsets and manners. Hollywood during the 1930s as a racially embedded institution helped to perpetuate social order and the norm of marginalizing non-white ethnic groups and keep the dominance of white culture. Although she was beautiful and a skillful actress as described by Leroy in the play, but she was given the role of a maid.

She was a beautiful and damn good actress. A lot of folks don't know that.... And of course, Vera was playing a maid. The costume designer has dressed her up in this ridiculous maid's uniform, made her look like a pickaninny for ole Virginy.... I loved that woman, but Hollywood—it didn't treat her right. You want the truth? Ask Vera about Gloria Mitchel, if you really want to know about the Hollywood game? (*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* 2013, p.64-65).

Forty years after the film's release, Golira admits that Vera was a more talented and better actress than her. As it is clear in this conversation:

Gloria: I mean it, Vera. I've always envied her talent and drive.

Vera: My talent? What has all my enviable talent given me? Mammy Jane, Josie Bitsy, Petunia and Addie, forty years of characters who they did not even bother to give last names. That is something to celebrate honey! (*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* 2013, p.76)

She deserved the leading role, but yet because of race relations, she is mischaracterized in the public gaze as someone who lacks the standard of feminine beauty, is lazy, naïve, irrational, indolent lacks intelligence, hence not suitable to perform other tasks rather than household work. The best position for her is domestic space, more specifically she is born to be a servant for her white mistress who is in comparison to her beautiful, civilized, educated, moral. All these traits are embedded in the controlling image of Mammy. It has been regularized in the perception of the public the marginalization of black women is justified in a way the public identifies the black woman as inferior to white women. In the films, the same definition and role is given to black women. As Bell Hook (2015, p.181) states: “to stare at the television, or mainstream movies, to engage its images, was to engage its negation of black representation.” They are displayed as extremely inferior to whites based on images that originate from black enslavement. They appeared on screen performing the role of Mammy. Footage from the movie demonstrates her role repeatedly in the play in which her mistress is sick bedridden and about to die. She weeps.

Vera: Don't worry, Mis', Tilly gonna take good care of ya. Sho'nuff is. You Gonna Get through dis ans soon you be back out dere. Madame Grace nearly finish wit' ya

gwon, and come Friday ya's gonna put it on, and be de prettiest thing dat eve dun danced the quadrille at de Mgnolia Ball. (*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* 2013, p.50)

Vera: Mis' Marie. Mis' Marie! Talk to me. Mis' Marie. Oh Lawdy, Mis', please don't die on me, you can't leave me. What Tilly do without her Mis'?... Well, you dat bird, and I ain't gonna let you go without a fight. Fight!

Gloria: I have no more fight, Tilly.

Vera: I ain't gonna let you go. Don't die Mis', don't die. You the only thing I's got, mis's Marie.

Gloria: I am free, Tilly. I'm free.

Vera: Stay awake, and together we'll face a new day. (*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* 2013, p.51-52)

Black actress's role, like Vera, was limited to narrow stereotypic images that correspond to white's perception. Mary Young has remarked that the stereotypes of women of color are recycled and reconstructed yet repeated by the mass media, an example is the recurring depiction of black women as hypersexual that lacks purity, and in stereotyped images as a contented corpulent maid, Mammy on television (Cited in St. Jean and Feagin 1998, p.8). The stereotypical depiction of African Americans was displayed to White perspective on Black personality traits who, informally speaking, 'knew their place' in American culture. Based on their social position and the assumption of having inferior intellectual capacities, they were cast in subsidiary roles as maids, mammies, domestics and sidekicks' dancers, and singers, to entertain white audiences (Wilson, Gutierrez and Chao 2013, p.73-74). They were included in the movies by the white directors not to humanize them but rather to confirm their ascribed position in the white-dominant society. The mythical image of Mammy is recurring and appears on screen to be consumed as real in the collective memory. St Jean and Feagin (1998, p.100) have reached the point that the difference between myth and fact becomes seriously blurred when people recognize racial images as real. "Some white myths about African Americans are deadly when they are transferred into the collective white memory as reality and are transmitted to younger generations of whites as fact." Black women are usually associated with subservient roles in the films, eventually in the white collective memory they are their servants. The role of a loyal servant in the movie affirmed the ideology that the ideal position of black women in society is that of a devoted servant to her white mistress to preserve the social order. Therefore, many films showed the idealized image of South America where African Americans were at the service of the whites. People were interested in such a kind of depiction as Mr. Slasvick states people like to see their heroic past, their history that seemed heroic. "If you are gonna give' em slaves, give'em happy ones. (*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* 2013, p.42) People need to be happy. It indirectly conveyed the message that such a social order is the appropriate social hierarchy in which blacks and whites can coexist happily.

Lynn Nottage in the play examines the framework of the culture that has constructed archetypes of African American women to justify their oppression. As Herb, the mouthpiece of the author in the introductory speech of the colloquium entitled: "Rediscovering Vera Stark, the Legacy of *The Belle of New Orleans*," Why? Why? WHY are WE still intrigued by this damn movie! Why are WE still talking about it! Well, it's because Vera Stark's subversive and nuanced performance bears further examination" (*By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* 2013, p.53). She exposes the cultural stereotypes of black womanhood to make cultural and ideological reforms in public perception of black womanhood. The core of the play is a conversation with the culture. As she states in her interview with *Signature Theatre*:

At this moment of time when the play takes place, which is the early 1930s, the moment when many of the stereotypes that stick with us today were invented. And when I wrote this play, I was really interested in how those stereotypes were formed

and also, personally, in how we as African American aided and abetted those stereotypes. And those stereotypes continue to this day, and I think that this is the conversation that continues to this day and I am just excited to have. (Nottage 2022,p.3)

The play lasts for almost 70 years from the 1930s to 2003 to highlight the long history of stereotypical representation of women of color and the continuity of the ideology behind the formation of those images. In an interview on Slate Website (Nottage, 2019) “I do think that the conversation that the play is having with culture is still relevant... Around the time Vera Stark was being produced, there was a casting call for *Straight Outta Compton*. It was just an excellent example of cultural stereotyping.” Based on skin tone, they were looking for casting members for various roles. They were looking for a good-looking attractive woman that should have a light complexion, hoochie mamas should have cinnamon skin color, whores and crackheads should be dark-skinned. The casting call essentially pointed to archetypes that were developed in 1933 movies. The women in the play are “the archetypes that 70 years later are still being perpetuated in cinema”. She criticizes Hollywood movies that perpetuate the mythic racial images of black women. They systematically incorporate inaccurate and demeaning stereotypes about black womanhood to naturalize their marginalized position in America’s white mainstream culture.

4. Conclusions

Through Vera’s personal life and her subservient role in the movie, the study concludes that the Mammy image is a fictional character articulated based on power relations. The white with the monopoly of power and control over different social institutions have portrayed black womanhood according to their own ideology. The filming industry is used as a platform to naturalize and regulate the Mammy archetype so that it could be accepted as true by the general public. The writer through the characterization of Vera, the black actress in the movie as a Mammy that demonstrates this image does not represent black women, but the racist ideology of powerful groups seeking to keep their dominance and naturalize African American inferiority. She demonstrates how blackness has been represented in stereotypically dehumanizing images. She mocks and defies the demeaning image of black women, expressing hope for a people-oriented culture rather than a race-oriented culture.

5. References

- Behnken, Brian D. & Gergory D. Smithers (2015). *Racism in American Popular Media: From Aunt Jemima to the Frito Bandito*. Praeger, Santa Barbara.
- Brown, Caroline A. (2012) *Black Female Body in American Literature and Art: Performing Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Colbert, S.D. (2016). Playing the Help, Playing the Slave: Disrupting Racial Fantasies in Lynn Nottage’s *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*. *Modern Drama*, 59(4), pp.399–421.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. (2000) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed., New York: Routledge.
- Jewell, K.S. (1993). *From Mammy to Miss America and beyond: Cultural images and the shaping of U.S. social policy*. New York, NY: Routledge
- Jordan- Zachery, Julia S. (2009) *Black Women, Cultural Images and Social Policy*. New York: Routledge.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). ‘Who you callin’ nappy’ headed?’ A critical race theory looks at the construction of Black women. *Race Ethnicity and Education* Vol 12 (1), 87-99.
- Lemons, J. Staley, “Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920” *American Quarterly*. Vol.29, No. 1 (spring,1977), pp. 102-116.

- Morton, Patricia. (1991) *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Nottage, L. (2019) Lynn Nottage introduces *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3Gg_XF1nWk&ab_channel=SignatureTheatre (accessed 12 September 2022).
- Nottage, Lynn (2013) *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc.
- Nottage, L. (2019) “‘I can be Very, Very Funny’: An interview with two-time Pulitzer winner Lynn Nottage about her screwball comedy”. Interviewed by Isaac Butler. Slate Website. 19 February. Available at <https://slate.com/culture/2019/02/lynn-nottage-interview-comedy-vera-stark.html> (accessed 14 November 2022).
- Pligim, David (2012) *The Mammy Caricature* Available at: <https://jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu/mammies/> (Accessed: 11 September 2022).
- Shannon, Sandra G. (2016) Forward: Freedom is Debt to Repay; a legacy to uphold, In: Buckner, Jocelyn L.(ed.) *A Critical Companion to Lynn Nottage*. New York: Routledge, pp.1-5.
- Shannon, Sandra G. (2007) An intimate look at the plays of Lynn Nottage, In: Kollin, Philip C.(ed.) *Contemporary African American Women Playwrights: A Casebook*. New York: Routledge, pp.185-193.
- Sheppard, Samantha N. (2022) “Changing the Subject Lynn Nottage’s *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* and the Making of Black Women’s Film History.” *Feminist Media Histories* 8 (2): 14–42.
- St Jean, Yanick and Feagin, J.R. (1998). *Double Burden: Black Women and Everyday Racism*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.
- Turner, Patricia A. (1994) *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Wilmeth, Don B., ed. (2007). "Nottage, Lynn". *The Cambridge Guide to American Theatre* (2nd hardcover ed.). Cambridge University Press. p. 486.
- Wilson, C.C., Gutiérrez, Félix & Chao, L.M. (2013). *Racism, Sexism, and the Media: Multicultural Issues Into the New Communications Age*. 4th edn. Los Angeles: Sage, Cop.

وینەى مامى له شانۆگەرى "بەبوونەیهوه، فیرا ستارک بناسه" ی لین نۆتج**سامان حسین عمر**

بەشى زمانى ئینگلیزى، کۆلیژی زمان، زانکۆى سهلاحهددین-
ههولێر، ههولێر، ههريمی کوردستان، عێراق
saman.omar@su.edu.krd

سنور اسماعیل محمود

بەشى ئینگلیزى، کۆلیژی پهروهردە، زانکۆى گەرمیان-که‌لار
snoor.ismael@garmian.edu.krd

پوخته

هەندیک وینایى جۆراوجۆر بۆ پیناسەکردنى ژنانى پەشپەست دروست کراوه و له رینگەى ناوه‌ندى جیاجاید گەتگۆکردنەوه بلاوکراونەتەوه. مەبەست لەم لیکۆلینەوه بە بریتییه له لیکۆلینەوه له وینەى مامى له شانۆنامەى لین نۆتاج بە ناوى "بەبوونەیهوه، فیرا ستارک بناسه". ئامانجى توێژینەوه‌که شیکردنەوهى وینەى بنیاتنراوى ژنبوونى پەشپەست له کۆلتورى سەرەكى ئەمریکادا. توێژەر بە لیکۆلینەوه له ویناکردنى کۆنەپەرستانەى کارهکتەرى سەرەكى فیرا و پۆلى له فیلمى هۆلیووددا وینەى مامى له شانۆگەریه‌که‌دا شیدەکاتهوه. وینە‌که له ژێر پۆشنایى تیۆریه فیمینیسته پەشپەستەکاندا وه له رینگەى ئامازەى کۆنتیکست و شیکارى بنەمادار به کۆنتیکستەوه شیکراوه‌تەوه، وه بنیاتنانى سیستematیکى وینە‌که له کۆلتورى بالادەستى سپینپەستەکاندا ئاشکرا دەپیت. دۆزینەوه‌کانى توێژینەوه‌که ئامازە به‌وه دە‌کەن که وینەى پەگەزپەرستانە بۆ دیاریکردن و پەوابە‌تیدان به پتنگەى ژێردەستەى ژنانى پەشپەست له کۆمه‌نگادا دروست دە‌کرین. نووسەر ئەو جۆره ویناکردنەوهى ژنه رمشپەستەکان پەتدە‌کاتهوه و پیناسەى دە‌کانت به ویناکردنیکى نامرۆقانهى ژنى پەش پتست و هیوا خوازه وینە‌که‌وه ئەو ئایدۆلۆژیایه‌ى که ژنى ره‌شپەست ته‌نها ده‌توانێت بپیت به‌ خزمه‌تکار به‌ شێوه‌یه‌کیریشه‌یى بسپرته‌وه

ووشه سه‌ره‌کیه‌کان: مامى، لین نۆتاج، بەبوونەیهوه، فیرا ستارک بناسه، وینەى کۆنترۆلکردن، چەشنه‌چه‌قه‌ستوه‌کان

صورة مامى في المسرحية بالمانسبة، قابل فیرا ستارک ل لین نۆتج**سامان حسین عمر**

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية اللغات، جامعة صلاح الدين -
أربيل، أربيل، إقليم كوردستان، العراق
saman.omar@su.edu.krd

سنور اسماعیل محمود

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية، جامعة كرميان - كلار
snoor.ismael@garmian.edu.krd

ملخص

يتم إنشاء صور معينة ونشرها من خلال طرق اتصال مختلفة لتعريف المرأة السوداء. الغرض من هذا البحث هو فحص صورة الأم في مسرحية Lynn Nottage، بالمناسبة، ترف فیرا ستاك. إنه يميل إلى تحليل الصورة المركبة للأثوية السوداء في الثقافة السائدة في أمريكا من خلال فحص الصورة النمطية للشخصية المركزية، فیرا، ودورها في فيلم هوليوود. يتم تحليل الصورة في ضوء النظريات النسوية السوداء، ومن خلال القرائن السياقية والتحليل القائم على السياق، يتم الكشف عن البناء المنهجي للصورة في الثقافة البيضاء المهيمنة. تشير نتائج الدراسة إلى أن الصور العنصرية يتم إنشاؤها لتحديد وتبرير حالة التبعية للمرأة السوداء في المجتمع. تتحدى الكاتبة الصورة باعتبارها تحريفاً غير إنساني للأثوية السوداء وتأمل في إضاعة جذرية للصورة المشوهة للمرأة السوداء وإرثها الأيديولوجي القاتل بأن النساء السود لا يمكن إلا أن يكن خادماً.

الكلمات الدالة: مامى، لین نۆتاج، بالمناسبة، قابل فیرا ستارک، التحكم في الصورة، الصورة النمطية