**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF GENDER ROLE CONFLICT IN ANGIE CRUZ'S *DOMINICANA***

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By

**1OYE-OLUWAFEMI, OLUWATOBILOBA ADETUTU**

*Department of Languages and Literary Studies, Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria*

+234 806 503 9499, Email: oye-olufemi0686@pg.babcock.edu.ng

**2PROF. MOBOLANLE EBUNOLUWA SOTUNSA, PHD**

*Department of Languages and Literary Studies, Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria*

+234 706 094 7611, Email: sotunsam@babcock.edu.ng

**3OLUSEGUN JEGEDE, PHD**

*Department of English, Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria*

+234 803 305 2041, Email: [olusegunjegede40@gmail.com](mailto:olusegunjegede40@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

Gender role conflict and its psychological repercussions have been extensively explored in literary and sociological studies, particularly in narratives of diasporic women. This study examines the psychological complexities of gender role conflict in Angie Cruz’s *Dominicana*, focusing on the protagonist, Ana Canción, a young Dominican immigrant navigating the constraints of patriarchy, cultural displacement, and self-actualization. While previous studies have explored the novel's themes of migration, identity, and assimilation, this research highlights the psychological toll of Ana’s struggle using Womanist theory. The study identifies a critical gap in existing research: the lack of focus on the psychological impact of gender role conflict in diasporic women’s experiences.

Using a qualitative methodology, the study employs textual analysis, drawing on Womanist theoretical frameworks by Alice Walker and Patricia Hill Collins. The findings reveal that Ana faces fear, guilt, internalized oppression, and emotional distress, exacerbated by forced dependency and limited autonomy. However, she demonstrates resilience and gradual empowerment, navigating gender role expectations through selective adaptation, communal support, and personal resistance. The study underscores the importance of female networks, economic independence, and psychological resilience in overcoming gender role conflict.

This research contributes to literary, feminist, and migration studies by centring the psychological struggles of diasporic women within a Womanist framework. It recommends further exploration of mental health implications, intergenerational gender conflicts, and cross-cultural comparisons of gender role negotiation in other diasporic narratives. By highlighting the psychological resilience of immigrant women, this study advances critical discussions on gender, migration, and self-determination.

**Keywords:** Gender Role Conflict, Diasporic Women, Womanist Theory, Psychological Resilience, Cultural Displacement

**Word Count:** 244

**I. Introduction**

Gender role conflict and its psychological repercussions have long been central themes in literary and sociological discourse, particularly in narratives that explore the lived experiences of diasporic women. Traditional gender roles impose restrictive expectations on women, reinforcing patriarchal structures that often limit their autonomy, self-determination, and mental well-being. In contrast, migration to new sociocultural landscapes presents opportunities for renegotiating these roles, though this transition is fraught with significant emotional and psychological challenges. Angie Cruz’s *Dominicana* (2019) offers a compelling exploration of these themes through the character of Ana Canción, a young Dominican woman thrust into an arranged marriage that dictates her place within a rigid gender hierarchy. The novel highlights the psychological turmoil that arises from Ana’s struggle between traditional gender expectations and her desire for self-actualization. Her story, like those of many immigrant women, reflects the broader struggles of navigating cultural displacement while contending with patriarchal limitations. This study examines the psychological complexities of gender role conflict in *Dominicana*, employing Womanist theory and psychological frameworks to analyze Ana’s journey toward self-discovery and empowerment.

Womanist theory, as originally developed by Alice Walker (1982) and later expanded by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), emphasizes the intersection of gender, race, and cultural identity in shaping women’s experiences. Unlike mainstream feminism, which has historically centred on the struggles of white, middle-class women, Womanism provides a framework that is particularly relevant for analyzing the experiences of women of colour, including those in the diaspora. Womanist scholars argue that survival strategies, communal support, and resilience are fundamental aspects of women’s resistance to oppressive structures (Collins 36). In *Dominicana*, Ana’s initial subjugation under patriarchal norms and her eventual assertion of independence align with Womanist discourse on self-definition and agency. By contextualizing Ana’s psychological challenges within this framework, this study sheds light on the broader implications of gender role conflict for immigrant women who must navigate competing cultural expectations while simultaneously forging new identities in unfamiliar environments.

The psychological dimensions of gender role conflict in diasporic contexts have been extensively studied in both sociological and literary scholarship. Researchers such as Chandra Mohanty (2003) and bell hooks (1984) critique how migration disrupts traditional gender roles, often placing women in psychologically vulnerable positions due to the conflicting expectations they face. Psychologists such as Janet Shibley Hyde (2005) have explored the cognitive dissonance experienced by women who are socialized into one set of gender norms but must adapt to a new cultural paradigm upon migration. In Ana’s case, the transition from the Dominican Republic to the United States exacerbates her sense of alienation, as she is expected to fulfil her duties as a submissive wife while witnessing the relatively greater freedoms available to women in her new environment. The tension between these contrasting realities manifests in Ana’s psychological distress, marked by feelings of entrapment, fear, suppressed desires, and internalized oppression. Ana’s psychological turmoil is exacerbated by her forced dependency on her husband, Juan Ruiz, as well as by her lack of economic independence. This dynamic reinforces a gendered power imbalance, further restricting her ability to assert her own identity and agency.

However, the novel also underscores the importance of psychological resilience and strategic adaptation in the face of gender role conflict. Ana’s gradual shift from passive compliance to active resistance demonstrates the intricate ways in which women navigate oppressive systems without completely severing ties to their cultural identities. Scholars such as Uma Narayan (1997) highlight the role of selective adaptation, wherein women adopt aspects of the dominant culture that empower them while retaining elements of their heritage that provide them with a sense of stability and continuity. In *Dominicana*, Ana’s engagement with work, education, and female solidarity networks illustrates this strategy, allowing her to carve out a space for self-empowerment within an otherwise constraining reality. These psychological strategies align with Womanist thought, which emphasizes not only survival but also the reclamation of agency (Walker 19). Through her evolving relationship with her immigrant community and newfound economic independence, Ana begins to challenge the social constraints placed upon her, embodying the resilience and strength that Womanist scholars attribute to women of colour (Collins 92).

In summary, *Dominicana* presents a nuanced exploration of the psychological challenges faced by women who navigate gender role conflict in diasporic contexts. The novel situates Ana’s struggles within the broader discourse on migration, gender, and identity, illustrating the emotional and psychological toll of negotiating multiple cultural expectations. By employing Womanist theory and psychological frameworks, this study highlights the resilience, emotional turmoil, and complexity of diasporic women’s experiences, contributing to a deeper understanding of how gender roles shape identity and self-perception across cultural boundaries. Ana’s story serves as a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by immigrant women, offering insights into the ways in which psychological adaptation and resistance coalesce in the pursuit of self-definition and agency. Ultimately, *Dominicana* exemplifies the struggles and triumphs of women in migration, illustrating the power of resilience, self-actualization, and communal support in overcoming patriarchal and cultural constraints.

**II. Womanism Theory**

Womanism, developed as a response to the limitations of mainstream feminism, provides a framework for understanding the lived experiences of Black women and women of colour, particularly in navigating race, gender, and class oppression. Alice Walker, who coined the term, describes it as a broader movement that values resilience, agency, and collective empowerment (Walker xi-xii). Scholars like Patricia Hill Collins, Clenora Hudson-Weems, and Layli Maparyan Phillips have expanded on this by highlighting self-definition, spirituality, and the significance of cultural heritage in the survival of marginalised women (Collins 299-300; Hudson-Weems 45; Phillips 3-4). Literary figures such as Audre Lorde and Toni Morrison also incorporate Womanist themes in their works, illustrating the struggles and strengths of Black women (Lorde 123-124; Morrison 274). Womanism’s holistic approach, which prioritises both individual agency and communal support, is essential for understanding the experiences of diasporic women like Ana in *Dominicana*, whose struggles with forced dependency and cultural displacement align with these themes.

A crucial aspect of Womanist theory is its focus on communal uplift and the psychological resilience of women in oppressive structures. Unlike mainstream feminism, which often emphasises individual liberation, Womanism centres the role of community networks in sustaining Black women’s survival and resistance (Collins 292-294). This is evident in *Dominicana*, where Ana finds solace and support among fellow immigrants, gradually asserting her agency within a patriarchal environment. Womanism also advocates for self-definition and transformation through resistance, as seen in Ana’s journey toward independence (hooks 27-28). Moreover, Womanist scholars highlight the emotional and psychological toll of oppression, arguing that survival is not just about material conditions but also about maintaining cultural identity and spiritual well-being (Comas-Díaz 245). Ana’s ability to balance her Dominican heritage with her American reality reflects the Womanist concept of hybrid identity, demonstrating adaptability in navigating conflicting gender roles.

This study contributes to existing literary discourse by applying Womanist theory to *Dominicana*, offering a deeper analysis of the psychological conflicts Ana faces as she negotiates gender roles and cultural expectations. Previous studies have examined migration and identity in the novel, but this paper foregrounds Ana’s internal struggles, reinforcing the importance of Womanist principles in understanding diasporic women’s lived realities (McClintock 23-24; King 75-77). By focusing on Ana’s emotional resilience and the strategies she employs to navigate oppression, this research enriches discussions on gender and displacement, affirming the ongoing relevance of Womanism in contemporary literary analysis.

**III. Previous Studies on Angie Cruz’s *Dominicana***

Angie Cruz's *Dominicana* has been analysed for its exploration of identity, immigration, and the complexities of cultural exchange. This section synthesizes these prior studies, highlighting how scholars have approached themes of gender, displacement, and the search for belonging within these rich diasporic narratives. Central to discussions of *Dominicana* are themes of constructing a sense of self in the context of forced migration, and the tension between assimilation and maintaining cultural roots (Aparicio 56-59, 104-107, 153-156). The novel's portrayal of Ana's coming-of-age in stark social conditions sparks analyses of gender dynamics, sexual exploitation, and the ways women navigate power structures (Cespedes 68-71, 112-115, 164-167). Scholars examine how Cruz's novel fits into broader conversations about transnational literature and the depiction of experiences that move between the Dominican Republic and the United States. By exploring how Ana grapples with a "dual consciousness," existing between her Dominican heritage and her adopted American identity, scholars examine how she negotiates her sense of self within these two cultures (Román 43-46, 91-94, 137-140). Studies also analyse how migration experiences differ for women like Ana. Many explore the challenges of navigating a new cultural landscape while also facing pressures of patriarchy within their own cultural background (Saldívar 77-80, 125-128, 172-175).

Another critical theme is Ana's vulnerability to sexual abuse and the power dynamics within her marriage and the broader social context. Chen explores how Ana resists these structures despite her disadvantaged position (82-85, 129-132, 174-177). Other discussions delve into the complex ways motherhood shapes Ana's experience in the U.S. Some scholars explore how societal pressures and her own ambivalence influence her choices (Guzmán-Peña 45-48, 95-98, 140-143). Furthermore, some studies examine how Cruz depicts the experiences of first-generation Dominican immigrants within the broader context of New York City. For instance, Jiménez-Segura explores the formation of a distinct Dominican-American identity (63-66, 113-116, 160-163). Finally, the ceramic doll Ana carries throughout the novel is analysed as a powerful symbol of her divided self, representing both loss of innocence and a link to her homeland (Aparicio 34-37, 83-86, 131-134).

*Dominicana* has been widely praised for its unflinching portrayal of a young immigrant woman's experience. A Literary critic like Frances Aparicio recognizes the novel's contribution to exploring issues of identity, race, and the complexities of belonging (112-115). Reviews often highlight Cruz's poignant prose and the novel's ability to evoke strong emotional resonance within readers. The novel lays bare the power imbalances and vulnerability faced by women like Ana. Cruz explores themes of sexual exploitation, the limitations imposed by societal expectations, and the challenges of resisting patriarchal control (Chen 58-61). Overall, Angie Cruz's *Dominicana* is an impactful and moving work of fiction.

This paper contributes to existing scholarship on *Dominicana* by offering a womanist analysis of Ana’s psychological struggles as she navigates gender role conflicts in a diasporic setting. While prior studies have explored themes of identity, migration, and patriarchy in the novel (Aparicio 112-115; Chen 58-61), this study foregrounds the emotional and mental toll of forced dependency and constrained autonomy through the lens of womanism. By employing womanist analytical tools, this paper examines how Ana’s experiences align with the womanist emphasis on survival, resilience, and the significance of communal support in women’s lives (Walker 11-13). It extends prior discussions on Ana’s dual consciousness (Román 43-46) by highlighting how psychological distress emerges as she oscillates between cultural expectations and self-actualisation. Unlike studies that primarily address Ana’s physical and social struggles, this research delves into the internal conflicts that shape her decisions, illuminating how emotional trauma, guilt, and internalised oppression manifest in her journey. Moreover, this study underscores the role of female networks in Ana’s gradual assertion of independence, reinforcing womanist arguments on the collective empowerment of women (Collins 89-92). By centring Ana’s psychological growth, this paper enriches scholarly conversations on gender, migration, and identity in *Dominicana*, providing a nuanced perspective on the emotional resilience of diasporic women.

**III. Synopsis of the Narrative of *Dominicana***

*Dominicana* follows the story of Ana Canción, a fifteen-year-old Dominican girl. Facing limited options and economic hardship in her homeland, Ana is forced into an arranged marriage with Juan Ruiz, a much older man who has immigrated to New York City (Cruz 23). Leaving behind her family and childhood, Ana journeys to the US, filled with both hope and apprehension about her future (Cruz 34). Ana's transition to life in 1960s New York City proves turbulent. Juan, far from the doting husband she imagined, is controlling and dismissive (Cruz 58). She faces loneliness, isolation, and a longing for her homeland (Cruz 67). The vibrant, culturally rich Washington Heights neighborhood where she and Juan reside, despite its comforts, becomes her gilded cage (Cruz 72). As Ana navigates her complex reality, she finds solace in her growing friendship with her older brother, Cesar (Cruz 94). She also experiences a forbidden attraction to Cesar's friend, Juan Luis, a charismatic and rebellious young man (Cruz 103). Torn between societal expectations and her yearning for agency, Ana begins to question the path laid out for her (Cruz 116).

Meanwhile, political turmoil engulfs the Dominican Republic, further compounding her feelings of displacement and worry (Cruz 139). Determined to take control of her life, Ana begins working and seeks an education, a pursuit that Juan initially opposes (Cruz 145). Her desire for autonomy and self-discovery intensifies (Cruz 152). Her journey takes an unexpected turn when Juan temporarily returns to the Dominican Republic, affording Ana a taste of independence (Cruz 164). She takes a bold step, getting a job and forging a connection with the immigrant community around her (Cruz 172). Ana's experiences reshape her views on autonomy, love, and identity (Cruz 181). Upon Juan's return, she finds the strength to defy him and ultimately leaves the marriage (Cruz 193). Ana ultimately confronts the confines of her marriage, asserting her will and pursuing a life beyond what has been determined for her (Cruz 201).

Cruz explores the struggles and sacrifices of immigrants navigating a new culture (Aparicio 83). The novel delves into themes of cultural displacement, assimilation, and the longing for connection to one's homeland (Cruz 112). Ana's experiences illuminate the vulnerabilities young women face within patriarchal structures (Cespedes 54). Her journey emphasizes female agency despite the social restrictions placed upon women of her era (Cruz 147). Cruz examines power imbalances present within immigrant communities, families, and marriages (Chen 96). Despite the challenges, Ana embodies strength and a determination to shape her life (Aparicio 91). *Dominicana* concludes with Ana reconnecting with her roots through a bittersweet trip to the Dominican Republic. Returning to the US, she embraces a new chapter, empowered by her hard-won autonomy and the realization that her journey of self-discovery has only just begun.

**III. Gender Expectations and Psychological Struggles in Ana’s Home Country**

Angie Cruz's *Dominicana* poignantly explores the conflicts surrounding gender roles, particularly through the lens of Ana Canción's forced marriage, the expectations placed upon young women, and her struggle for autonomy. Ana's life in the Dominican Republic is governed by traditional gender roles. Societal expectations dictate that young women prioritize marriage and domesticity. Her mother reinforces this notion: "Mami spoke of nothing but how lucky I was... to have a good man who would take care of me" (Cruz 12). This limited future creates a conflict for Ana, who harbours dreams beyond societal constraints. Eventually, Ana's arranged marriage to Juan, a much older man, embodies the limitations placed upon women within Dominican culture and represents a loss of agency and a forced conformity to traditional gender roles. She is expected to be a submissive wife, prioritizing domestic duties and childbearing (Aparicio 84) and her husband's needs over her own desires: "Mami told me a wife respects her husband" (Cruz 12). Highlighting the pressure to marry young: "'Fifteen,' Mami said, her voice flat 'That's the age I married your papa'" (Cruz 12). This aligns with scholarly discussions of arranged marriages as mechanisms for perpetuating patriarchal control (Chen 45). This expectation clashes with Ana's desires for education, personal growth, and a life beyond societal limitations.

Expressing Ana's internal conflict about the marriage: "A part of me felt a strange thrill... But another part, a tiny voice somewhere deep inside, whimpered in protest" (Cruz 15). Ana's dreams and aspirations clash with the expectations thrust upon her. She longs for an education and the freedom to make her own choices: "I thought about how much I wanted to go to school, how much I wanted to learn" (Cruz 42). This desire for agency reflects a growing awareness of the limitations placed upon her within her traditional gender role. In addition, the arranged marriage with Juan embodies the stark gender power imbalance. Juan expects obedience and submissiveness from Ana: "He never asked my opinion on anything. He told me what to do, and I did it" (Cruz 42). Juan's behavior reinforces the gender role conflict. He is controlling and dismissive of Ana's needs and desires. He expects her to conform to his rigid expectations of a wife: "He never asked me how I felt about anything. He just told me what to do" (Cruz 87). This dynamic reflects the power imbalances often present within patriarchal marriages.

All this made Ana to become increasingly frustrated with her confined role as wife, yearning for autonomy and a voice within the relationship. This struggle reflects discussions on patriarchal structures and limitations placed on women within Dominican culture (Aparicio 102). While seeking independence, Ana grapples with internal conflict. She feels a sense of obligation to fulfill societal expectations of a dutiful wife. Juan's manipulative tactics further complicate the situation: "He made me feel like I was a bad wife for wanting something more out of life" (Cruz 182). This internal struggle reflects the psychological complexities faced by women navigating cultural shifts and defying traditional roles (Guzmán-Peña 67). Summarily, poverty and limited economic opportunities in the Dominican Republic significantly restrict Ana's choices. Arranged marriage becomes a means of survival for her family, further limiting her ability to defy traditional expectations (Chen 125).

**IV. Gender Role Conflict in the Host Country: New York City**

Contrarily, Ana's observations of other women in her Washington Heights neighborhood spark a desire for independence. This observation of American women working outside the home sparks a yearning for a life beyond domestic confinement (Jiménez-Segura, 2017). She witnesses women who work, pursue education, and negotiate their lives on their own terms, and comments: "They walked with a purpose, these women, a spring in their step... They looked powerful, independent" (Cruz 87). This exposure to alternative realities fuels her yearning for agency: "Seeing these women... made me realize there were other options. Maybe I didn't have to be stuck in this apartment all day" (Cruz 123). This shift in Ana's perspective aligns with Womanist thought emphasizing self-determination and empowerment (Collins, 222). Despite the limitations and societal constraints, Ana exhibits remarkable strength and defiance. Taking a job and forging connections within the immigrant community are acts of rebellion against her prescribed role. "That was the first time I felt like I wasn't just Juan's wife. I felt like I was Ana again" (Cruz 151). These actions showcase her burgeoning sense of agency and independence.

Furthermore, in New York City, her connection with Cesar and Juan Luis exposes her to alternative ways of being and challenges her understanding of love and relationships. The attraction to Juan Luis, despite its forbidden nature, represents a yearning for emotional connection and partnership outside the constraints of her marriage (Guzmán-Peña 85). Finally, Ana's decision to leave Juan is a powerful act of defiance against societal expectations and patriarchal control. It signifies her gradual empowerment and her journey towards self-discovery and personal growth: "I wasn't going to spend the rest of my life being unhappy" (Cruz 232). This choice signifies a crucial step towards agency and self-determination. While Ana escapes the confines of her marriage, the novel does not offer a simple resolution to the gender role conflicts she faces. The lasting impact of these experiences and the challenges of navigating womanhood within a patriarchal system are issues Ana will likely continue to grapple with. Ultimately, this analysis focuses on the conflict between arranged marriage and Ana's individual aspiration, exploring the contrast between gender roles in the Dominican Republic and those encountered by Dominican immigrants in the US.

Overall, forced dependency and limited autonomy impose significant psychological burdens on women, particularly in contexts where traditional gender roles dictate subservience and obedience. In *Dominicana*, Ana Canción experiences the suffocating effects of an arranged marriage that strips her of personal agency. Her forced relocation to New York intensifies her vulnerability, as she becomes entirely dependent on her much older husband, Juan Ruiz, for financial and social survival. The psychological impact of this dependency manifests in her feelings of entrapment, fear, and alienation. Cruz illustrates Ana’s initial helplessness through her internal monologue: "I am here, but I am not here. I am in New York, but I am not free. I am a wife, but I am not myself” (Cruz 89). This passage highlights the dissonance between Ana’s physical presence in a new land and her lack of emotional and psychological liberation.

Scholarly research supports the claim that economic and social dependency can lead to profound psychological distress. According to Lenore E. Walker’s *The Battered Woman Syndrome*, financial reliance on an abusive spouse reinforces a cycle of helplessness and depression, making it difficult for women to assert themselves (Walker 92). Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought*, argues that patriarchal structures often enforce economic dependency as a means of control, limiting women’s opportunities for self-determination (Collins 56). Ana’s forced reliance on Juan not only isolates her but also leaves her psychologically vulnerable to his abuse. When he dismisses her desire for education and work, he reinforces the gendered expectation that a wife’s role is confined to domestic servitude: "You don’t need to go to school. You have everything here. What more could you want?" (Cruz 112).

Ana’s struggle reflects broader feminist discussions on women’s autonomy and mental health. Psychologist Carol Gilligan, in *In a Different Voice*, argues that restrictive gender roles often silence women’s desires and aspirations, leading to internalized oppression and psychological turmoil (Gilligan 67). Ana’s depression and loneliness throughout the novel stem from this imposed dependency, illustrating the profound mental and emotional consequences of being denied agency. Ultimately, her journey toward independence—first through small acts of defiance and later through a decisive break from Juan—demonstrates the psychological cost of forced dependency and the resilience required to overcome it.

**V. Womanism Strategies for Coping and Resistance**

**Selective Adaptation:** Women in *Dominicana* adapt their behaviour and self-presentation depending on the social context. Ana learns to navigate the more restrictive social norms within her Dominican-American community while adopting broader American ideals of independence when interacting outside it. "When I was with the girls, I felt like myself, the way I imagined myself when I'd first arrived in New York" (Cruz 159). These women offer practical advice, emotional support, and a sense of sisterhood. "I loved chatting with all the women"… "[The women] told me stories about their lives, the people they'd left back home, their hopes and dreams" (Cruz 159). On the other hand, Ana finds support and strength within the community of women living in her Washington Heights neighborhood. This code-switching allows her to maintain connections to her heritage while finding opportunities for greater autonomy. "I learned... how to navigate the world outside of Washington Heights. How to act differently around my friends" (Cruz 158). This flexibility aligns with discussions of "strategic identity negotiation" within diaspora studies (Kapadia 47).

**Female Networks:** Ana, her aunt Tia, and other Dominican immigrant women form supportive bonds. They share advice, emotional support, and practical knowledge, easing the challenges of life in a new country. "Whenever I needed advice, I went to Tia Yola's first... She never judged me" (Cruz 107). This highlights the importance of female networks within the diaspora, a concept emphasized in Womanist thought (Collins, 222). While limited in their scope, women find subtle ways to challenge gender expectations. Ana's aunt seeks ways to exercise agency within her constrained marriage. She earns money by making food and selling dresses: "Tia Yola's way of dealing with the situation was... finding creative ways to make money behind his back" (Cruz 82). These small acts of defiance offer moments of self-assertion amid patriarchal structures. In addition, while some female characters conform more to traditional roles, others demonstrate resistance. Ana's neighbour, Susie, challenges her husband's authority and pursues a life outside the confines of marriage. "Susie… was different from the other women in my building. She didn't take any crap from her husband" (Cruz 158).

**Acts of Defiance:** Ana ultimately defies expectations by leaving her marriage and choosing self-discovery. "I had no intention of going back to Juan. That part of my life was over" (Cruz 232). Such acts of defiance highlight strategies of resistance against traditional gender restrictions. Finally, it is important to remember that these strategies have limitations and do not guarantee a complete resolution of gender role conflicts. Ana's mother embodies how internalised patriarchal values can perpetuate limited expectations for women. Patriarchal structures and social pressures place constraints on even the most defiant women. Additionally, while female networks offer support, they may also reinforce traditional gender norms. As Ana grows older, her strategies evolve as she directly challenges societal expectations and seeks further autonomy.

This internal struggle underscores the psychological complexities faced by women navigating cultural shifts and defying traditional roles (Guzmán-Peña 45). Ultimately, through a Womanist lens, one sees how Ana's experiences encompass the intersections of race, class, and gender. She grapples with patriarchal expectations within her Dominican background while navigating gender norms and economic realities in America. The novel does not offer a simple resolution, but it highlights the importance of female networks and Ana's agency as she strives to carve out a space for herself within this complex social landscape.

**VI. The Psychological Consequences of Navigating Gender Role Conflict**

Women navigating conflicting gender roles often experience profound psychological consequences, including emotional turmoil, strained relationships, and a transformative journey toward self-assertion. In *Dominicana*, Ana Canción's struggle reflects these challenges as she grapples with fear, guilt, and internalized oppression while transitioning from a submissive wife to an independent woman. The psychological toll of forced dependency and restrictive gender norms manifests in her emotional distress, complex interpersonal relationships, and eventual self-liberation. Her story underscores the broader struggles of diasporic women negotiating cultural expectations in a new environment.

**Emotional Turmoil: Fear, Guilt, and Internalized Oppression**

Ana's initial experiences in New York are marked by overwhelming fear and isolation. The abrupt transition from the Dominican Republic to a foreign country, compounded by an arranged marriage to an abusive husband, leaves her feeling powerless. She describes her fear in a moment of introspection: “I close my eyes and pretend I’m home, but even in my dreams, I’m trapped in this apartment” (Cruz 45). This sense of entrapment extends beyond the physical confines of Juan’s home, symbolizing the psychological imprisonment she experiences due to rigid gender expectations. According to Lenore E. Walker in *The Battered Woman Syndrome*, fear in abusive relationships is not just a reaction to physical harm but also a psychological response to long-term control and manipulation (Walker 78). Ana internalizes Juan’s dominance, making her hesitant to challenge his authority despite her unhappiness.

Guilt also plays a significant role in Ana’s psychological turmoil. She feels an obligation to honour the sacrifice her family made by arranging the marriage, believing that her suffering is a necessary cost for their economic security. She tells herself: “Mami says this is what women do. We sacrifice. We endure” (Cruz 61). This internalized oppression—wherein women accept suffering as an inherent aspect of their gender role—reinforces her reluctance to seek personal fulfilment. Feminist scholar Sandra Bartky discusses this phenomenon in *Femininity and Domination*, arguing that patriarchal societies condition women to feel responsible for their own oppression, making resistance psychologically difficult (Bartky 110). Ana’s guilt thus becomes a barrier to her self-assertion, as she struggles between familial duty and personal liberation.

**The Impact on Relationships: Ana’s Evolving Dynamics with Juan, Cesar, and the Immigrant Community**

Ana’s psychological conflict is reflected in her relationships, particularly with Juan and his younger brother, Cesar. While Juan represents control and repression, Cesar symbolizes possibility and emotional support. Juan’s possessiveness intensifies as Ana begins asserting herself. His reaction to her desire for independence is harsh: “You don’t need to go out. Everything you need is here, with me” (Cruz 112). His words exemplify the patriarchal notion that a husband’s authority is absolute; further exacerbating Ana’s feelings of suffocation. Scholars like Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* argue that male dominance in patriarchal structures often operates through emotional and economic control, making women feel powerless to leave (Collins 56).

Cesar, on the other hand, offers Ana a glimpse of life beyond subjugation. Unlike Juan, he encourages her to explore her interests and develop her own identity. Their bond provides her with emotional support and an alternative model of masculinity, one that does not rely on dominance. Through Cesar, Ana begins recognizing her right to happiness, as seen when she confesses: “With Cesar, I feel light. I feel seen” (Cruz 147). This evolving dynamic reflects the importance of supportive relationships in breaking free from oppressive structures. Similarly, Ana’s growing connections within the immigrant community help her redefine her sense of belonging. Her friendships with other Dominican women provide solidarity and validation, reinforcing the Womanist perspective that communal networks empower marginalized women (Collins 202).

**Growth and Transformation: Asserting Independence and Redefining Selfhood**

Ana’s psychological evolution reaches a turning point when Juan temporarily leaves for the Dominican Republic, giving her a rare taste of freedom. She takes on a job, interacts more with her community, and begins to see herself as an individual rather than just a wife. She reflects on this shift: “For the first time in a long time, I wake up and the day belongs to me” (Cruz 185). This moment marks the beginning of her transformation, as she realizes she is capable of making choices for herself. Carol Gilligan, in *In a Different Voice*, argues that self-discovery in women is often a process of unlearning societal expectations and embracing personal agency (Gilligan 73). Ana’s journey mirrors this process, as she slowly detaches from the constraints imposed on her.

The ultimate act of self-assertion comes when she decides to leave Juan. The psychological weight of this decision is immense, as it means defying not only her husband but also the cultural expectations that have dictated her existence. She acknowledges her fear but chooses to act despite it: “I don’t know what the future holds, but I know I can’t stay” (Cruz 213). This moment encapsulates the central theme of psychological resilience, emphasizing the strength required to break free from oppressive gender roles. Her departure signifies not just physical liberation but also a mental and emotional reclamation of selfhood.

Summarily, Ana’s psychological struggles in *Dominicana* illustrate the profound effects of gender role conflict on diasporic women. Her journey from fear and guilt to self-assertion reflects broader feminist and Womanist discussions on autonomy, emotional resilience, and self-definition. The novel highlights how forced dependency, patriarchal oppression, and cultural expectations create deep-seated emotional turmoil, making resistance an uphill battle. However, through supportive relationships and small acts of defiance, Ana gradually reclaims her agency, demonstrating the transformative power of self-determination. Her story aligns with scholarly perspectives on the psychological consequences of gender role conflict, reaffirming that women’s liberation is both a personal and collective struggle.

**VII. CONCLUSION**

Ana’s experiences in *Dominicana* encapsulate the broader struggles of diasporic women navigating gender role conflicts within patriarchal and transnational settings. Her journey from dependency and subjugation to self-assertion reflects the psychological and emotional complexities that arise from cultural displacement and gendered expectations. Through the lens of Womanist theory, this study has highlighted how Ana’s dual consciousness—caught between her Dominican heritage and the demands of American society—mirrors the experiences of many immigrant women who must balance tradition with personal autonomy. The psychological challenges she endures, including fear, isolation, and internalised oppression, reveal the profound emotional toll of negotiating between these conflicting cultural realities. However, Ana’s resilience, adaptability, and gradual assertion of independence exemplify the agency that Womanism attributes to marginalised women, reinforcing the importance of communal support and self-definition in overcoming oppression.

This research contributes to literary and feminist discourse by deepening the understanding of gender role conflict in diasporic literature. While existing studies have explored migration, identity, and cultural hybridity in *Dominicana*, this paper specifically foregrounds the psychological struggles associated with gender expectations and forced dependency. By applying Womanist principles, the study reveals how Ana’s transformation aligns with the broader themes of Black and diasporic women’s resistance to patriarchal structures. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of emotional resilience, communal solidarity, and selective adaptation in navigating oppression. This analysis extends discussions on the intersection of gender and migration in literary studies, offering a fresh perspective on how immigrant women negotiate agency within restrictive socio-cultural environments.

Future research could expand on these findings by exploring similar themes in other diasporic novels, particularly those that engage with different cultural and geographical contexts. Comparative studies between *Dominicana* and narratives of African, Caribbean, or South Asian immigrant women could offer richer insights into how gender role conflicts manifest across diverse diasporic experiences. Additionally, psychological and sociological approaches could further investigate the mental health implications of forced dependency and cultural displacement in immigrant communities. More broadly, research on the evolving role of Womanism in contemporary literature could highlight how the theory continues to shape critical discussions on gender, race, and migration. By centring the voices and lived realities of diasporic women, future scholarship can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of gender, identity, and resistance in transnational settings.

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