



Bodily Matters: The Female Dominican Diaspora in Angie Cruz's *Dominicana*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyze Angie Cruz's novel *Dominicana* from a multicultural and gender perspective focusing on how Cruz introduces the female body as a metaphor for the immigrant experience lived by Dominican Women during the 1960s in the United States. Also, this paper studies how the female body becomes a metaphorical border in the diasporic experience for the central character as a way to depict an essentially female in-between-space. Thus, Cruz rewrites and recreates from the female body the diasporic experience of Dominican women immigrants in New York from an intersectional perspective.

KEYWORDS

Dominican American Literature; Gender Studies; Border Studies; Diaspora; Intersectionality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Angie Cruz's last novel *Dominicana* (2019) starts with the following confession: "The first time Juan Ruiz proposes, I'm eleven years old, skinny and flat-chested" (3). The narrator of these words is Ana Canción, a Dominican teenage girl who is forced by her family to marry a Dominican man older than her and move to New York as a way to give her family, and herself, a better life. As Donette Francis explains in relation to Cruz's novel *Soledad* and

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female-lead migration, “many women and girls sacrifice their bodies in an attempt to make a better life for themselves and their families” (2010: 116). In this novel, the body of the protagonist becomes essential in relation to her transition from girl to woman and the affective links she creates with her new environment as an immigrant girl in New York. In her fiction, Cruz deals with diaspora and the female experience through emotions. Francis asserts that Cruz’s fiction “offers a window into the affective terrain and access to character’s interiority—the motivations and feelings behind their actions” (2010: 118), a perspective that considers the body as the essential materialization of a feminist Dominican diaspora. The critic Danny Méndez understands the affective life of the diasporic individual fundamental in the construction of a hybrid identity. In this sense, he discusses the emotional implications the whole diasporic experience involves in the negotiation of a hybrid identity, what he calls the *emotional creolization* (2012: 6). Méndez asserts that “the diasporic subject-in-the-making acknowledges the intricacies of cultural, racial, and ethnic multiplicities that have historically defined the Dominican Republic in transferring and transmitting these factors into the diaspora in the United States” (2012: 6). In the case of *Dominicana*, Cruz elaborates a Dominican female diasporic experience narrated from and in the female body as a metaphor for the different “questions of gender, racial and class U.S/ Dominican borders” (Heredia, 2009: 11) the protagonist faces throughout the novel. The intention of this article is to analyze how Angie Cruz’s *Dominicana* illustrates a Dominican diasporic experience through the female body. In order to do that, the affective dimension of immigration becomes essential to understand the protagonist’s body as a metaphorical border that reformulates the female body and becomes a space of resistance and contestation to the Dominican heteropatriarchal culture.

1.1. Homeland: Los Guayacanes versus New York City

Even though the title of the novel mainly refers to a Dominican little doll Ana keeps as the only souvenir she brings with her from the Dominican Republic, it also has certain geographical and ethnic connotations in relation to the Dominican Republic as her homeland and her identity as a “Dominicana.” Méndez asserts that in certain examples of Dominican literature, geography turns into an “affective category, attached to home” where “home is also the homeland, the national home that serves as the first site of social and cultural formation in the lives of its members” (2012: 166). In this context, the novel shows an evolution from the Dominican Republic as a homeland and home to Ana’s domestic space in New York, which becomes symbolically an extension of her female body. Ana’s body is from the beginning of the novel a site of physical and sexual abuse. Her family’s transaction with the Ruiz brothers exchanges Ana and part of her family’s land in Los Guayacanes for a future life in the United States. Ana’s responsibility in this agreement makes her lose any

control of her body that becomes a target for sexual abuse, maternity and violence. From an affective perspective, spaces are linked to certain masculine and feminine figures in their interaction with Ana. Ana's teenage years in Los Guayacanes are marked by the arrival of Juan Ruiz and his brothers as "they travel to and from New York, running with pockets full of dollars" (Cruz, 2019: 4). Ana becomes part of the deal the Ruiz brothers make with her family to buy their land, as Juan believes that "a good country girl is what a man needs to keep him out of trouble" (10). Francis explains in relation to Cruz's fiction that "by casting a Dominican man living in New York as the predator who goes to the Dominican Republic in search of a vulnerable young girl, Cruz makes it less a nationalist impulse to blame an imperial or neoimperial power but instead relocates violence as an everyday experience to which Dominican women are subjected" (2010: 121).

In her representation of the masculine characters, Cruz recuperates in Juan the Dominican macho stereotype based on the image of Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo. The novel, settled after Trujillo's death and during the second occupation of the Dominican Republic by American troops in 1965, perpetuates in the figure of Juan the Trujillo's "style of *hombria* or manliness forged through personal risk taking, bravado and sexual aggression" (Derby, 2009: 174) that eventually installed a concrete type of Dominican masculinity in Dominican society. Through this stereotype, Cruz's intention is to create a masculine type in Juan defined by alcoholism, violence and sexual abuse. Juan becomes a threat for Ana's life integrity and an omen for her future life: "when Juan proposes, he's drunk. Slurs, Marry me. I'll take you to America. He trips over himself and pushes me against the wooden fence. Tell me yes, he insists with his lit breath and his thick sweat dripping over my face" (Cruz, 2019: 4). In this sense, Cruz reproduces in Juan the role of the "patriarch, supreme macho and virile savior" (Horn, 2014: 34) who exercises "patriarchal control of women" (Horn, 2014: 27) based on Trujillo's masculine role.

The influence of Ana's mother in her life becomes fundamental in the novel to understand her future life in New York. Indeed, Ana's mother and brothers, participate in Ana's future of domestic violence by forcing her to marry Juan. The critic Simone Alexander distinguishes between two terms: "mother's land" (2001: 7) to make reference to the Caribbean and "mother country" (2001: 7), which refers to the colonizing country, in this particular case the term can be used to refer to the US imperialism in the Dominican Republic. Both terms associate the land with the mother and according to Alexander the mother "is symbolic of the land, the body, the connecting bridge" (2001: 7) a metaphor expressed by Ana in the following fragment: "for a long while, we're alone on the narrow road, miles of cane fields on each side. I hug my mother, press my head against her sweaty back and taste the ocean on her skin. You would think we're close" (Cruz, 2019: 22). Her mother tastes of Los Guayacanes, she is sweet and recomforting. However, she expresses the

affective distance that exists between them. Her mother's body becomes a boundary she is unable to cross and connect with at this point of the novel.

In a clear inversion of gender roles in which Ana's father is a docile and practically invisible presence, Ana's mother takes control of the situation in relation to Ana's future: "Think of your Tía Clara—her daughter married a man who works in New York, and every month he sends the family money. He never fails. They have a cement floor and a new bathroom" (Cruz, 2019: 26). Even though Ana's marriage to Juan Ruiz means the way out from poverty for the family, her mother's attitude contributes to the heteropatriarchal system that entraps Ana. This relationship changes at the end of the novel with Ana's maternity and her mother witnessing her daughter's hell of domestic violence. Before her motherhood, Ana's immaturity and vulnerability make her invisible for her family and unable to act for herself.

In her affective rejection and patriarchal oppression, her mother's body becomes one of the boundaries Ana has to cross in the first place. As Ahmed concludes, "It is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made [...] the surfaces of bodies 'surface' as an effect of the impressions left by others" (2004: 10). This is part of the role Ana's mother has to perform in the patriarchal Dominican system that excludes any kind of affective interaction with her daughter as a way to push her to the American Dream:

I promise nothing bad will happen to you. You go to New York and you clean his house and cook him the kind of food that will make him return home every night. Never let him walk out of the house with a wrinkled shirt. Remind him to shave and cut his hair. Clip his nails so women know he's well taken care of. Demand he send us money. Demand he take care of you. Make sure you sneak some money for yourself on the side. Women have necessities. (Cruz, 2019: 25-26)

Ana's mother, as a good Dominican woman, teaches her the sexist lesson she has to accomplish as a good wife. Ana's mother educates her to become a "good" woman according to the Dominican patriarchal parameters, to become a good wife. In relation to this, Cruz's intention is to project in Ana's mother the Dominican woman stereotype of the time that according to Horn "were enlisted into a patriarchal state project of controlling and denouncing 'disorderly' women and thereby dividing women amongst themselves into 'orderly' and 'disorderly' or 'good' and 'bad' women" (2014: 26). Ana's mother educates her to become a "good" woman according to the Dominican patriarchal parameters, to become a good wife. However, in her patriarchal instructions of becoming a good wife, paradoxically the mother also instructs Ana to demand certain rights from her husband such as sending money or taking care of her. Moreover, she encourages Ana to save some money for her and

therefore have access to an alternative independence from her husband. This episode which seems contradictory at this early point in the novel, becomes fundamental to understand Ana's mother's change of behavior at the end of the novel when she turns against Juan when she sees how he physically abuses her daughter. Ana's mother becomes crucial in Ana's understanding of her femininity and the metaphorical construction of her body as a border.

In order to understand the importance of Ana's body in the construction of her femaleness and its emotional implications, it is fundamental to analyze how Cruz links it with certain geographical spaces. Cruz's intention is to show how Ana is free in Los Guayacanes and free in her own body. However, she is also victim of "social processes" and "cultural norms" that will make her lose all control and possession of her body to be in the hands first of her family and later of her husband. In relation to this, Judith Butler discusses the autonomy of the body and gender identity and concludes that "it is through the body that gender and sexuality become exposed to others, implicated in social processes, inscribed by cultural norms, and apprehended in their social meanings. In a sense, to a body is to be given over to others even as a body is, emphatically, 'one's own'" (2004: 20). Cruz expresses this through Ana's first experience of physical love with her schoolmate Gabriel just a few days before getting married. This memory will become recurrent in her first days in New York when she is alone, scared and sad. Firstly, Ana describes Gabriel in comparison with Juan: "Gabriel stands at arm's distance, shy and gentlemanly, unlike brutish Juan, who pokes and pinches as if I'm some animal" (Cruz, 2019: 29). Gabriel's tenderness contrasts with Juan's brutality, which predicts Ana's violent future. Her feelings for Gabriel provoke in her a physical transformation: "I kiss him, right on the mouth, covering my breasts with my hands. Our full lips closed tight like our eyes, they press against each other like soft pillows. My insides spin around as if I'm still in the water. A thread pulls up between my legs, through my heart and up my throat" (Cruz, 2019: 30-31). Ana's emotional reaction to her first kiss denotes a bodily freedom she loses in her marriage. Remarkably, it is this and not her marriage what makes her feel a woman for the first time: "I rush over to my room to look in the mirror to see if Gabriel's kiss left a mark. I stare at my reflection and pucker my lips. They look swollen, transformed" (Cruz, 2019: 31). This is Ana's first acknowledgement of her body as a woman and the first time she experiences sexual desire. The first time Ana realizes her female body is in Los Guayacanes and this transformation is linked to love and happy emotions.

2. HOMEBODY: WASHINGTON HEIGHTS, NEW YORK

In this novel, Cruz combines notions of race, class, gender and migration in order to create a feminist discourse that discusses "gender relations across the borderland divide" (Heredia, 2009: 7). Spaces and bodies symbolize the different borders Ana is prevented from or forced

to cross. Her new apartment in Washington Heights is attached to Ana and her body. The domestic space plays a fundamental role in Ana's new life as a cage where she is locked up in, in contrast with the freedom she had in the Dominican Republic. In the same way, Ana does not own her body anymore, she does not have any independence since she arrives to Washington Heights, New York. The apartment becomes Ana's jail:

Don't open the door for anyone. Don't leave the apartment until I explain how things work around here. Keep the door locked.

Why? Do people break in?

Sometimes. But this is a good building. The people here keep to themselves and out of trouble. But don't be fooled, New York is dangerous. People here aren't like they are back home. They care only about themselves.

I must look scared and pathetic to him because he softens his eyes and picks up my chin.

Don't worry. I won't let anything bad happen to you. You're my pajarita. (Cruz, 2019: 56)

The metaphor of Ana locked up in a cage is reinforced by Juan calling her "pajarita" (little bird). There is certain irony in Juan's promise to protect her as the apartment soon becomes a hell of physical abuse. The metaphor of a caged bird to represent women's oppression has been recurrent in women's literature since the seventeenth century having its most popular exponent in Mary Wollstonecraft's work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* published in 1772. In it, Wollstonecraft asserts that women "confined then in cages, like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock-majesty from perch to perch" (2010: 100-101). This metaphor explains the social oppression suffered by women who were relegated to live a lockdown and silenced life in the domestic space. Cruz recuperates this metaphor which has its main referent in Maya Angelou's autobiographical work *I Know why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) in which she describes the difficult life of a teenage black girl in a racist society that has to overcome different situations of violence and sexual abuse. As Ana, Angelou explains how "at fifteen life had taught me undeniably that surrender, in its place, was as honorable as resistance, especially if one had no choice" (2007: 266-67). Ana's surrender and resignation in her cage, the apartment, teaches her how to resist and break for her freedom.

Ana's only company is a little Dominicana doll Juan buys for her at the airport, her only possession as she travels without anything, not even clothes. This object will become fundamental for her survival in the apartment and New York: "I place the ceramic doll Juan bought me at the airport in Santo Domingo on the table. She wears a blue dress and a yellow sash around her waist. My sweet, hollow Dominicana will keep all my secrets: she has no eyes, no lips, no mouth" (Cruz, 2019: 58). In her solitude, Ana develops an emotional attachment to this doll that reminds her of her country and family. Ahmed explains that "the word "emotion" comes from the Latin, *emovere*, referring to "to move, to move out"" (2004:

11), and concludes that “emotions are not only about movement, they are also about attachments or what connects us to this or that” (2004: 11). Thus, Cruz reinforces the emotional aspect of immigration by showing Ana’s attachment to certain people and objects. Ahmed states that “movement does not cut the body off from the “where” of its inhabitation but connects bodies to other bodies: attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others” (2004: 11) and this is what happens with characters such as César or Marisela, people who become emotional support for Ana. Apart from this, Ahmed concludes that “feelings” become “fetishes”, qualities that seem to reside in objects, only through an erasure of the history of their production and circulation” (2004: 11) and this explains Ana’s emotional attachment to the Dominicana, the witness of Ana’s suffering and the keeper of her secrets. The symbolism of the doll, that refers to the title of the novel, is the object that hides the truth of Ana’s life in New York, Ana’s innocence and her identity as a Dominican girl. At the same time, the doll is a projection of Ana’s oppression and alienation in that apartment, as, like the doll, Ana does not have a voice of her own and is supposed to ignore everything that happens there. Like Ana, the doll is overshadowed.

In the article “Adolescent Latina Bodyspaces: Making Homegirls, Homebodies and Homeplaces”, Melissa Hyams discusses the interaction of young Latinas with the spaces and their bodies. She understands spaces as gender divided since the outside is masculine and the interior domestic space feminine (2003: 536). In their roles as inside carers, young Latinas like Ana are expected to remain inside to accomplish their roles as wives, housewives and mothers: “The home is constructed as a space worked in by women in the service of others and constituted through a discourse of sexual restraint and female responsibility for orderliness. [...] This is accomplished by confining young woman to domestic spaces, relegating schoolwork as secondary to domestic work, and rejecting claims to other subjectivities” (2003: 547). In her confinement, Ana loses any autonomy in her life and control of her body. Certainly, her femaleness is attached to the domestic space and duties. Hyams explains it in the following terms: “the practice and discourses of heteropatriarchal power constitutive of “home” as female, ordered and safe are mutually productive of domesticated young female bodies” (2003: 548). Thus, Ana’s body becomes a domesticated one, a home-body that is constantly transgressed and abused like a country border. However, she lives trapped in the dividing line.

This introduces Ana’s body into a power relations dynamic reflection of the heteropatriarchal Latino structure. In Butler’s words “power is that which forms, maintains, sustains, and regulates bodies as its distinct objects” (2011: 9) and recuperates Foucault’s idea of “the materiality of the body of the prisoner” and “the materiality of the body of the prison” (2011: 9) to conclude that “the prison comes to be only within the field of power relations, but more specifically, only to the extent that it is invested or saturated with such

relations [...] Here the body is not an independent materiality that is invested by power relations external to it, but it is that for which materialization and investiture are coextensive” (2011: 9). Ana’s body is a prison under her husband’s domination whose control is exercised through violence. The first episode related to pain takes place in Ana’s honeymoon. Once she is married to Juan, she is taken to a hotel the night before leaving the country to New York. In Juan’s first attempt to have sexual intercourse, Ana breaks in desperation and fear:

He presses his bulge against my back. I cry. He turns me around so I face him.

I want to go home. Please.

This is your home. Me and you are a family now. Don’t you see?

The crying comes faster and harder. It can’t be true. I have a family. I have a home.

I want to go home, I repeat, my voice smaller, broken.

Your parents were the ones who called me so I could take you away.

I’ll never love you, I say. I throw myself on the bed and curl up as small as possible. I no longer feel my body. I am no longer in the room.

I’m sorry, Ana. But we’ll have to make this work. (Cruz, 2019: 46-47)

In this scene, Ana suffers the first sexual abuse of many others to come. Her body predicts the suffering that waits for her in this marriage: “The explosive mating song of frogs. The pain, short and sharp” (Cruz, 2019: 48). Here, Ana’s body suffers an irreversible transformation through a traumatic experience that gives her husband all the power over her body and her life. Indeed, Francis understands this kind of incident as “the bodily trade for the visa” (2010: 128) and concludes that these type of rape scenes in girlhood, “becomes the central moment of subject formation and crucial to understanding [...] subsequent domestic violence and rape in the novel” (2010: 128).

This is the first time in the novel that Ana’s body materializes as a metaphor of the borderland. If, as Ahmed states, “Pain involves the violation or transgression of the border between inside and outside, and it is through this transgression that I feel the border in the first place” (2004: 31), by violently usurping Ana’s body, Juan unavoidably hurts and transforms Ana’s emotional space whose material marks reside in her body. Ana materializes in her body the emotional implications of inhabiting the border, thus living constantly with violence, sexual abuse and pain. According to Anzaldúa, “Pain makes us acutely anxious to avoid more of it, so we hone that radar. It’s a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate. It is latent in all of us” (2012: 60). Ana’s body symbolizes the pain of those “caught between the worlds”, the violence, fear, denial and frustration of those living in the border and how those feelings reshape and reorganize Ana’s body and world. Also, Ana’s Dominican body illustrates the United States usurpation and occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1965. However, Ana’s experience, as a vulnerable girl, turns even more radical in her condition as a Dominican immigrant woman. Juan crosses

Ana's body as she crosses the American border: "The room is cold, so cold. I pulled the starched white sheets over me. Move away from the wet spot on the bed. The airplane will be cold. New York will be cold too" (Cruz, 2019: 48).

Apart from sexual abuse, Ana experiences domestic violence since her arrival in New York. As a projection of Trujillo's image of Dominican masculinity, Juan exercises his power over Ana through violence, a means to control his wife and create a secure environment for him. Indeed, Juan responds to the "tíguere" image created during the Trujillo regime. Méndez explains that "*Un tíguere*" refers to the kind of cunning working-class urban male who, through his wits and *cojones* (testicles), understands the art of social mobility. This was the image of Trujillo that was projected by his propagandists, who in this way made even his vices—his corruption, his brutality, his lechery and sexism—into virtues" (2012: 127). These features became essential to define the Dominican macho who used violence as a common practice to experience his virility. Méndez concludes: "In this regime of direct violence as the monitor of order, violence becomes cathectized and compulsive" (2012: 170). Thus, violence is part of Juan's *dominicanidad*, of his Dominican masculinity, that structures Ana's diasporic experience and domestic life: "When Juan gets mad, it's as if my dependence on him fuels the transformation in his body from concern, to anger, to fury. The veins in his neck swell, his eyes bulge, and he yells. You want trouble for us? [...] Juan slaps me across the face so hard, blood pools between my teeth" (Cruz, 2019: 69). Every time Juan batters Ana, he perpetuates the cycle of fear and violence he experienced in the Dominican Republic and essentially reaffirms his Dominican masculinity (Méndez, 2012: 171). In this context, Juan believes that order works through fear and violence and that it is necessary to continue with this strategy in order to survive in New York (Méndez, 2012: 172). This explains Méndez's idea of "affective alienation" when he argues that it "is a matter not only of the coordinates defining the shift from the familiar to the unfamiliar but also of the terms in which the dynamics of a creolized Dominican culture has mediated the Dominican subject" (2012: 5) and therefore how the "identity processes" started in the Dominican Republic condition the "communities in the diaspora" (Méndez, 2012: 5). Juan, through his "tíguere" image and behavior, instils and perpetuates "a long-standing Hispanic Caribbean cultural pattern to which members of the diaspora gravitate as they (re)create it in their respective diaspora communities" (2012: 5). Evidently, this fact complicates Ana's identity negotiation in the diaspora concretely as a woman trapped in the Dominican heteropatriarchal culture.

The violence perpetuated in the intimacy of the apartment marks Ana's body and therefore her existence. In her process of *emotional creolization* (Méndez, 2012: 6), in her suspension "in the global feeling of selfhood between the island and the powerful empire," Ana's emotional creolization carries a strong legacy of racial, ethnic and gender relations (Méndez, 2012: 7) that deeply affect her female body. Juan's violence reshapes Ana's body

through fear and pain in an attempt to create the perfect wife and future mother according to the Dominican heteropatriarchal gender roles. This implies a whole process of dehumanization that becomes part of a gender and cultural legacy that starts in the Dominican Republic and extends in the United States. From a gender perspective, Butler explains how violence is “a way in which the human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over, without control, to the will of another, the way in which life itself can be expunged by the willful action of another” (2004: 22). Violence controls Ana’s body and rewrites it as the construction of a hostile and dehumanized diasporic space that projects in the domestic space and in which Ana, from her vulnerability, will progressively develop resistance as a way of survival.

The narrative and the interaction of characters show how there are “multilayered and routinized forms of domination” (Crenshaw, 1991: 1245) in the power relations that sustain the patriarchal system. Ana’s diasporic experience is affected and radicalized by the fact that she is a woman, and this condition makes her more vulnerable to the structure of power relations. Ana’s lack of autonomy is based on her impossibility to go out of the apartment not only because she is afraid of the city but also, because she cannot speak English. These facts make her completely dependent on Juan, who exercises his domination over her. Crenshaw explains how “cultural barriers often further discourage immigrant women from reporting or escaping battering situations. [...] Many immigrant women are wholly dependent on their husbands as their link to the world outside their homes” (1991: 1248). After one of the battering, Ana decides that the best for her is to escape: “I don’t want him to touch my hand, or my shoulder. Right then, I decide I will leave him. If I stay he’ll kill me. Tomorrow, Juan won’t find me sitting at the table like a caged bird” (Cruz, 2019: 98). However, Juan is not the only obstacle to come back home. Her mother, as a supporter of the Latino heteropatriarchal structure, becomes another barrier. The alternative of going back home becomes impossible when Ana figures out what could happen if she comes back:

If I leave Juan and return home, this is the way Mamá will prepare for my arrival. On the table she’ll have laid out a plastic slipper, my father’s leather belt, a sack of uncooked rice, a ream from a tree, the fly swatter, and a wire hanger. Two buckets filled with water and a brand-new bar of soap. Everyone will attend my judgement. She’ll make me choose from instruments and I will refuse. She’ll spread the rice on the floor and say, Kneel. (Cruz, 2019: 100)

As Alexander explains, in the formative nature of the mother and daughter relationship (2001: 19), “it can be classified as a colonized relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in which the (powerful) mother fits the profile of a colonizer and the (powerless) daughter is the colonized” (2001: 19). Both Juan and her mother contribute to Ana’s vulnerability as a colonized body from different powerful subjects. Even though Ana

tries to escape, she realizes there is no way out for her in her condition as an immigrant vulnerable woman.

Ana's fear provoked by her husband's violence pushes her to create certain emotional links with other proximate people in her life concretely with Juan's brother, César. This affective union makes Ana discover new emotions in her body. According to Ahmed, the individual turns to an object of love as a hopeful response towards fear and as a way of survival: "the turning away from the object of fear also involves *turning towards* the object of love, who becomes a defence against the death that is apparently threatened by the object of fear. In this way, we can see that fear "*is that which keeps alive the fantasy of love as the preservation of life*, but paradoxically only by announcing the possibility of death" (2004: 68). César is in charge of Ana while his brother is abroad, and he allows Ana to go out. The protection César shows for Ana changes Ana's life completely to such an extent that she falls in love with him. Also, this is part of what Anzaldúa calls the internalization of the borderland conflict (2012: 85) as she concludes that 'sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy*' (2012: 85). Juan's attempt to overshadow Ana is part of the borderland experience however, this episode makes her stronger as she acknowledges a new way of inhabiting her body. Juan's departure and César's mild surveillance allows Ana to go out to take English lessons and get to know the city of New York. Apart from this, César helps Ana earn a living by selling her own food, "tortas fritas." In one of their excursions, Juan takes Ana to the beach: "I wait for the waves to touch my toes and the breeze to brush my skin, to cool me off, making the heat bearable. My eyes heavier, my arms and legs of lead, my breath steady. I no longer care where I am. I am home, happy" (Cruz, 2019: 229). It is through her connection with the sun, the sand and the water that Ana travels back home to the Dominican Republic. The contact with nature awakens her senses and makes her reconnect with her body, feel again her breasts, neck, toes, skin, arms and legs. She has found home in her own body. This liberation makes her feel other emotions such as sexual desire. Ana and César get involved in a love and sexual relationship in which Ana approaches sex from a completely different perspective, with freedom, passion and without fear: "I turn around for him to unzip my dress. To undo my bra. My underwear. All off. All on the floor" (Cruz, 2019: 265). This affair is no more than a break in Ana's hostile life that helps her connect with her emotions and her body as a woman.

Ana's dehumanization through Juan's violence is illustrated by identifying herself with the black man who was killed in the Audubon Ballroom, that she can see from her window and who happens to be the black activist Malcom X:

One of my hands hugs the side of my bruised neck. I look out the window. It's still light out. For the first time in a long time, the people who gather to speak about the dead politician are

gone. Only the police remain. Every day, a woman in a red hat places fresh flowers at the entrance so people won't forget what has happened to Mr. X. A lover? His wife, Betty? Mrs. X?

Ana X. I repeat in my head as Juan talks and talks (Cruz, 2019: 97)

The “X” symbolizes Ana’s annulation, erasure of identity and personality implied in this dehumanization process provoked by immigration, Juan’s violence and society. This fragment contributes to Ana’s internalization of the borderland conflict with Juan’s attempt to overshadow Ana however, Ana finds the way to rebirth in the fracture with her motherhood.

Apart from this, one of the reasons to explain Juan’s violence towards Ana is related to the racism and marginalization suffered by non-white men in the white American society. In her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), Maya Angelou explains this situation of entrapment as the “tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power” (2007:291). In relation to this, and some years later, Crenshaw asserts that “the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class” (1991: 1242) and concludes that “racism is linked to patriarchy to the extent that racism denies men of color the power and privilege that dominant men enjoy” (1991: 1258). An example of this situation is shown in the novel when Juan struggles to find a job: “I’ll work for free today. You’ll see how good I am. And then tomorrow you’ll choose me for sure” (Cruz 2019: 15). Juan’s desperation and frustration provoked by his vulnerable social position is transformed at home in the violence he exercises against Ana. In this power relations structure, Ana suffers a double oppression as an immigrant woman and her patriarchal home, which for Juan “is not simply a man’s castle in the patriarchal sense, but may also function as a safe haven from the indignities of life in a racist society” (Crenshaw, 1991: 1257). Then, Ana is trapped in Juan’s “safe haven” and the “tripartite crossfire” that her home represents, however Ana will find her freedom through her body’s wounds and scars and cross the threshold of the apartment.

3. BODY-LAND: THE BORDERLAND

Ana’s life changes radically in New York with her pregnancy. Once she expects to give birth an American baby, her body becomes a passport not only for her but for everyone in her family. In this sense, Ana’s body becomes a metaphor of the borderland in her condition as a Dominican immigrant woman. Cruz creates this metaphor from Ana’s pregnancy and how it is product of one of the multiple sexual abuses she suffers: “I stare at my reflection, at my flushed face, my hands still trembling. Something has happened to my body. Something inexplicable” (Cruz, 2019: 90). In this sense, Ana’s borderland is essentially female and from the experience of Dominican immigration making evident its intersectional nature.

Gloria Anzaldúa defines the U.S-Mexican border as “una herida abierta” (an open wound) (25), “where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture” (2012: 25). Ana’s physical open wound happens in the birth of her daughter as a symbol of that third world, the in-between space, the border culture or, as Anzaldúa calls it, “*la rajadura*” (26) “the abyss that no bridge could span” (2012: 26): “I hold Altagracia, my smile tense, my legs heavy pipes. The anesthetics wear away. My stitches pinch. I may not have understood the doctor’s assessment, but I feel every bit of the damage. I was ripped open from one side to the other. The doctor called it a third-degree laceration. I feel feverish and weak, but I smile. Mamá and Juan want me to be strong” (Cruz, 2019: 310). Ana’s body materializes the border in the moment her daughter is born. Still, the wound in her body, apart from representing the frontier, “*la rajadura*”, it also stands for all the pain, suffering, physical and sexual abuse Ana went through until she becomes a mother. As Anzaldúa states, “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (2012: 25), referring to the affective aspect of this “constant state of transition” (2012: 25) that Ana experiences as a wife and now as a mother in the diaspora. Again, emotions play a fundamental part in the representation of Ana’s body as a borderland whose “affective alienation is a matter not only of the coordinates defining the shift from the familiar to the unfamiliar but also of the terms in which the dynamics of a creolized Dominican culture has mediated the Dominican subject” (Méndez, 2012: 5). It is in this “emotional creolization” (Méndez, 2012: 5) or “racial, ideological, cultural and biological crosspollinization” (2012: 99) as Anzaldúa calls it, that the consciousness of the “new mestiza” is in the making (2012: 99), “*una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderland” (2012: 99). Thus, from Anzaldúa’s perspective, Cruz represents in Ana’s body the materialization of the essential femaleness of the borderland: “An American baby, I repeat. That’s what Mamá wants. Juan wants. A blue-blooded baby with a blue passport and all its benefits” (Cruz, 2019: 106). Ana’s open wound “underlines porosity and vulnerability, as it undesirably opens the body to the outside. [...] different forms of body openings to the outside testify to the dangers of contamination and loss of identity” (Manzanas & Benito, 2011: 94). Thus, Ana’s body becomes the female borderland where a female intersectional consciousness opens and exists in the fracture. Ana’s vulnerability turns into her strength to reconfigure her female identity as an immigrant Dominican woman who, after the birth of her first daughter, recreates her immigrant space from her female consciousness.

Even though Juan knows Ana’s weak health condition, he hits her again right after coming from the hospital: “Get away from her, Mamá says, and balls the dishtowel she’s holding and presses it on me to stop the blood. But it’s coming too fast, a fountain. You monster! She yells at Juan” (Cruz, 2019: 315). As if illustrating Anzaldúa’s words, Ana’s

haemorrhage represents “the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country” (2012: 25). Apart from this, there is an explicit change of behavior in Ana’s mother as she protects and defends her daughter from Juan’s violence. This event is part of Ana’s transition into motherhood and how she comes into terms with her mother in her motherhood. Some lines before this, Juan attempts to hit Ana in the face but he fails and “slaps my Dominicana off the windowsill. She flies across the room and shatters all over the floor” (Cruz, 2019: 315). The doll, that symbolized the submissive Ana, the one that had “no eyes, no lips, no mouth” (2019: 58), is now broken, shattered on the floor as Ana bleeds through her open scar. However, in this dramatic incident Ana leaves her old self behind, the Dominicana, to become a stronger and independent woman. Ana transforms her vulnerability into resistance and her body into a site of contestation in order to create a space for her and her daughter. Ana finds resistance in her femininity and her vulnerable female body. According to Butler, bodies resist power by showing their vulnerabilities (2016: 15) and concludes that “the body, despite its clear boundaries, or perhaps precisely by virtue of those very boundaries, is defined by the relations that make its own life and action possible” (2016: 16). With her motherhood and her female body, Ana challenges what Alexander calls the “masculinist nation-state” and transgresses “bodily (border) restrictions and cultural boundaries” that allow “spaces of female empowerment” (2001: 19). Ana’s vulnerability makes her stronger when the metaphorical representation of the border is completed in her motherhood and this reunites her with her mother. As Yrizarry argues in relation to Cruz’s fiction, the novel ends with “the character’s realization that what is lost at the border, or beneath the surface of the cave, must be reclaimed through collective voice” (2016: 110). Both Ana and her mother find in the border their lost mother and daughter bond and elaborate together a space of reclamation. Thus, the fact that Ana’s immigrant experience is reinvented from her femaleness, from her motherhood and from this inherent female border, reverses the patriarchal conception of motherhood from a Dominican perspective represented by the mother. Not only does it heal their relationship, it overcomes the gap existing between mother and daughter: “She lays her head on my chest, and she lets me comb through her graying hair. And that’s when Mamá’s cries come in, a tropical storm without warning, her wail with no top or bottom. Finally she understands everything I have sacrificed, everything I have survived for her and for the family” (Cruz, 2019: 317). Ana’s wound turns into a scar. Her body closes the abyss her experience with Juan in New York became until her daughter is born (Manzanas & Benito, 2011: 94). Ana’s “rajadura”, “the abyss that no bridge could span” (Anzaldúa, 2012: 67) is healed and her daughter Altagracia becomes a metaphor of that female in-between space that reunites Ana with her mother and sutures her wound. As Manzanas and Benito explain, “If the body, as the nation, is always susceptible to being gashed and cut on its external enclosure, scarring is seen as the desirable solution. [...] The scar, sturdy and elevated, reads as a memory of previous transgressions, as it stands strong

against any possible new infection” (2011: 94). As she tells her mother, New York has “made her strong” as her “stiches are finally gone” (Cruz, 2019: 318) and she is “able to move around without feeling any pain” (Cruz, 2019: 318). Ana’s scar is the physical trace of her suffering but also evidence of her strength and resistance in this new life and space opened by the birth of her daughter. Altagracia is the beginning of a new life, of a new Ana and of the first generation of Dominican-American women in the family: “New York looks good on you, he says. You planning to stick around? I look out to see Mamá and Lenny. They’re all bundled up, eagerly waiting for me to return, their eyes wide and fresh.

Yes, I say. Yes, I am” (Cruz, 2019: 319). For the first time in the novel Ana exchanges “Ana X” (Cruz, 2019: 97) for a reaffirmation of her identity and her existence, “Yes, I am.” Again, this reminds us of Anzaldúa’s words, since Ana has found the Ana hidden behind the X ‘*Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy*’ (2012: 85). It is through her scarred body and in the materialization of the borderland that Ana finds her reaffirmation as a woman. Instead of erasing her, the assimilation of the border reshaped Ana’s body with the marks and injuries, the “emotional inscriptions” (Méndez, 2012: 6) of the diaspora that pushed Ana to reaffirm her identity even when she was brutally cancelled out.

4. CONCLUSION

Angie Cruz’s *Dominicana* shows the pain and sacrifice of the Dominican immigrant experience in the United States during the 1960s. Concretely, Cruz chooses a Dominican young girl to illustrate how the experience of immigrant women became even more traumatic and painful than the one lived by men as they had to cope with the Latino heteropatriarchal structure that oppressed and silenced them. Cruz transforms the female body into a site of vulnerability, resistance and contestation where the protagonist, Ana Canción, finds her own space, her homeland. Emotions become fundamental to understand Ana’s body as a metaphor for the immigrant experience and the imaginary border Dominican immigrants crossed to reach the promised land. Ana connects with all her emotions: pain, hate, fear, disgust, shame and love to understand her immigrant experience as an emotional one linked to her body and the marks this experience writes on it. Ana’s body becomes the borderland, the in-between space Ana creates for her to live in the diaspora and that opens with the birth of her daughter. Motherhood helps Ana to cross her internal borderland and assume a more powerful role in the oppressive patriarchal structure her home represents as her daughter is the visa for the whole family to stay in the United States. Ana’s motherhood creates a strong emotional link with her mother represented by Altagracia, Ana’s daughter, and it is through motherhood how both mother and daughter, Ana and her mother, create a strong emotional link inexistent until then. Her female body and motherhood transform Ana’s body into the borderland, the in-between space Ana creates for her to live in the diaspora. Cruz’s novel creates an

intrinsically female border, a female in-between space in order to depict the essence of the female immigrant experience and it is from there where she reinvents the female stereotypes and gives birth to a hybrid female space. The novel ends with the arrival of her daughter, Altigracia, and the beginning of a generation of Dominican American women Ana started and made possible by finding resistance in her vulnerability.

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