

# Gender Considerations and Power (Re) Negotiation in Angie Cruz's *Dominicana*, Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent* and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

**Amadou Danlami**

University of Dschang – Cameroon

P.O. Box 49 Dschang

danlamiamadou@yahoo.com

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**Abstract:** *The gender agenda constitutes an ongoing topical issue in all aspects of life and in literature in particular. This work seeks to examine the manner in which Angie Cruz, Julia Alvarez and Ola Rotimi represent the relationship between power and gender in *Dominicana*, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* respectively. The question on which the research hinges is: How do Angie Cruz, Julia Alvarez and Ola Rotimi project the link between status and gender in *Dominicana*, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* respectively? It is hypothesized that gender plays an important role in establishing power structures in the set texts. From a theoretical perspective, Feminist Literary Criticism as articulated by Simone de Beauvoir is used. This work, divided into two sections, concludes that Angie Cruz, Julia Alvarez and Ola Rotimi present power structures as dependent on gender considerations that benefit both men and women. This paper contributes to the ongoing conversation about the relationship between gender and power (re)distribution; and also enhances an understanding of the manner in which power was negotiated and contested along gender lines in the Dominican Republic and Nigeria given the then social, cultural, economic and political contexts.*

**Keywords:** gender, power, feminist literary criticism, domination, emancipation

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender considerations have raised debates in all domains including sports, education, employment, science, culture, entertainment, technology, advertisement, politics and literature. In many parts of

the world, narratives about gender in general and feminism in particular, are conflicting as stated by Danlami thus: “There are diverse opinions about the rights of women in the world in general. With regards to Africa, some scholars posit that women are marginalized and endure a lot of hardship due to the social structures of African societies.[...] On the other hand, there are researchers who affirm that women in Africa are not neglected and do not suffer in the patriarchal societal setups.” (Danlami 2023: 11) Among those who posit that women are marginalized is Ifi who puts forth the following declaration: “Women are often relegated to subordinate roles, with limited access to education and economic opportunities.” (Ifi 1987: 45) Oyeronke shares this opinion, partly blaming colonialism, by stating that: “The colonial period entrenched patriarchal norms, further marginalizing women and restricting their roles to domestic spheres.” (Oyeronke 1997: 102) As already indicated, all critics do not share the opinion that women are dominated; as there are voices that affirm the view that women have positions of power and dominance. One of such critics is Susan Arndt who submits that: “Indeed, many African women are notable for their strong personality and dominant character. They are the heart of the family, and seem to hold many reins of family and communal life. Besides multiple forms of unofficial power, in many traditional African societies such as in Ashanti, Yoruba and Igbo society women too held official power” (Arndt 2021: 22). Aili Mari corroborates this perspective thus: “Women are increasingly taking on leadership roles, challenging traditional gender norms and advocating for gender equality.” (Aili Mari 2003: 150) It is against this background that this paper analyzes the manner in which gender considerations mastermind power dynamics in *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi. The question on which the research is anchored is: how do Angie Cruz, Julia Alvarez and Ola Rotimi present power on the backdrop of gender in *Dominicana*, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* respectively? It is hypothesized that gender considerations affect power (re)distribution between male and female characters in the texts. From a theoretical percept, Feminist Literary Criticism as articulated by Simone de Beauvoir is used. This theory examines how literature perpetuates or challenges the oppression of women, focusing on gender roles, power dynamics, and the representation of women in literary texts. Beauvoir states that: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” (Beauvoir 1949: 267) This implies that gender roles are socially constructed rather than innate. It aligns with the analysis of how female characters are shaped by societal expectations in the works of Cruz, Alvarez and Rotimi. This paper, divided into two parts, examines the manner in which male and female characters negotiate and contest power in Angie Cruz’s *Dominicana*, Julia Alvarez’s *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and Ola Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. The first section entitled “Projection of Patriarchy and Domination” scrutinizes the projection of patriarchy and domination of women while the second part named “Manifestation of Women’s Empowerment and Power Acquisition” delves into women’s emancipation and dominance in the texts.

### **Projection of Patriarchy and Domination**

Patriarchy and the domination of women are key thematic issues in Angie Cruz’s *Dominicana*, Julia Alvarez’s *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and Ola Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. This is because men use their masculinity to negotiate power and consolidate

dominance over women. This corroborates Connell's strong affirmation that: "Hegemonic masculinity [...] is always subject to contestation and change, but it remains a key mechanism through which men dominate over women" (Connell 1995: 77) In the works of Rotimi, Cruz and Alvarez, men use masculinity to have power over women through marriage and control; political manipulation; intimidation and insults; and economic dependence.

### **Marriage and Control**

Marriage is a significant aspect of the domination of women by men in the works of Angie Cruz, Julia Alvarez and Ola Rotimi. In *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez, patriarchal control within the institution of marriage is presented. In this dimension, Carlos, the father of the Garcia girls symbolizes traditional patriarchal norms wherein the man's views are perceived to be the family view; as Alvarez states that: "He was the head of the family, and his decision was final" (Alvarez 1991: 45). Against this backdrop, Carlos takes major decisions about his family without consulting his wife, Laura de la Torre. For example, Carlos decides that the family should move from the Dominican Republic to the United States of America without seeking his wife's opinion; indicating that as the man, his decision reigns supreme within the family and what the wife thinks is not of any importance. Arguably, this singlehanded decision to take the family to another country underscores his desire to protect and provide for his family; but also indicates that in the context of marriage the man can easily dominate and control a woman.

This patriarchal control within the family setup does not end with Carlos's wife but also extends to the daughters who are adults. In the first place, Carlos does not seek the opinions of his daughters, the Garcia girls namely Carla, Sandra, Yolanda and Sofia, about the family's migration to the USA. Furthermore, once in the USA, Carlos still exerts excessive control over his grown up daughters; including their emotional lives. This is perceived in the sense that he controls their movements, who they see and what they do in a bid to instill some good moral and cultural values in them and protect them from the USA environment which is dangerous in his opinion. But this is often seen as overprotection and often generates conflict between Carlos and the Garcia girls who perceive it as excessive patriarchal control and strictness; considering themselves as grownup girls who can decide for themselves and should not therefore be imposed on by any man, even their own father. Similarly, in *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz, Juan Ruiz uses marriage to exert control over his wife Ana. It is worth noting that Ana is married off to Juan Ruiz by her family in the Dominican Republic; mainly due to hardship and the hope that her marriage to Juan Ruiz will ameliorate not just her financial situation but that of the entire family. While in New York where Ana migrates to meet her husband, Juan Ruiz makes all decisions about their lives without consulting Ana; in line with the traditional gender rules that give men the authority to take some, if not all, decisions about the family without consulting the wife because he is considered the head of the family. One of such decisions concerns Ana's desire to work. Despite the fact that Ana has expressed the wish to have a job, Juan Ruiz decides that she will not work and will just have to stay at home. Cruz puts it thus: "Juan was adamant that Ana's place was in the home, tending to household duties and not seeking employment" (Cruz 2019: 67). The fact that Juan Ruiz wants his wife, Ana, to stay at home without

working reinforces a woman's traditional role as a housewife and limits her possibilities of emancipating herself since she will continue to be dependent on her husband for everything.

In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi, marriage is equally an element of control; but Rotimi differs from Cruz and Alvarez in that he presents polygamy and its ramifications in the control of women whereas Cruz and Alvarez project men who are married to single wives. In this light, polygamy is an important means of exerting control over women for Lejoka-Brown who marries multiple women without their consent or knowledge. This is evident when Liza, his American wife, discovers he has two other wives, Sikira and Mama Rashida, only when she visits his house in Nigeria. In a flashback, Lejoka-Brown explains the origins of his polygamy to his friend, Okonkwo, and wife, Liza, in separate occasions. Lejoka-Brown tells Okonkwo that his father married Mama Rashida, his late brother's wife, to him out of pity without his knowledge when he was fighting in Congo. He adds that: "Not that I don't like Mama Rashida as a person. I like and respect her – in many ways she is just like Liza herself – you know – well-mannered, quiet, full of concern: a well-bred African pigeon" (Rotimi 2009: 9) Unlike Mama Rashida who was married to Lejoka-Brown without his knowledge and for whom he has a lot of respect because of her good behavior, Lejoka-Brown married Sikira himself and has a lot of difficulties coping with her character which he considers bad. Referring to Sikira, Lejoka-Brown says: "I married that Problem (Sikira) four months ago." (Rotimi 2009: 10) Therefore, while Mama Rashida was married to Lejoka-Brown without his knowledge, he actually marries Sikira himself; but does not mention any of these women to Liza.

Lejoka-Brown polygamy is indicative of male chauvinism consolidated by his complaint to Okonkwo about how things have changed and he is sweating up and down renting an apartment for Liza, in order to conceal Mama Rashida and Sikira; his grandfather had one hundred and fifteen wives in their patriarchal society. He laments that: " But here I am , with only two crickets, expecting one more – just one more canary, and I can't just pick her up by the arm and say to her: 'Woman, I forgot to tell you: but as the whiteman says 'better late than never'. Here – meet your other ehm...sisters-in-marriage.'" (Rotimi 2009: 28) Lejoka-Brown's reference to women, his own wives, as "crickets" and "canary" reveal the disregard he has for them. Okonkwo advises Lejoka-Brown against the use of harsh words with or when referring to Liza by employing the proverb: "A paddler doesn't say a crocodile has an ugly lump on its snout, until he has safely crossed the river." (Rotimi 2009: 290) Okonkwo basically means that Lejoka-Brown should not use derogatory statements towards Liza as long as he has not settled the dispute they have; and prescribes the egg treatment of Liza to Lejoka-brown.

It is worth noting that some of the women, like Mama Rashida, do not have a problem with polygamy. When Polycarp tells Mama Rashida that Liza is around, she instructs him "You run quick and help bring in sister Liza's things" (Rotimi 2009: 19) It can be seen that Mama Rashida is already creating an affinity to Liza by calling her "sister" even before meeting her. This could be due to her African culture and Islamic religion in which the family is sacred; and align with Hudson-Weems declaration that: "Family Centrality is a major cornerstone of Africana

Womanism, as the true Africana womanist is never concerned solely about herself. She must be resolute in placing the family at the center for ultimate human survival” (Hudson-Weems 2010: 8). This could explain why both Lejoka-Brown and mama Rashida refer to Liza, the new wife, as “sister” to the other wives.

Polygamy is an instrument of control for Lejoka-Brown because his three wives keep each other on check so that they do not misbehave not only against him but against other men as well. This could be seen when Mama Rashida is doing her best to calm Liza down so that she does not confront Lejoka-Brown physically; after Liza discovers that he was not the only wife he had. Equally, there are instances in which Mama Rashida is cautioning Sikira to behave properly; including the efforts she puts in place to prevent a fight from occurring between Liza and Sikira; and when Alhaji Moustapha visits them and she forces Sikira to dress properly. Liza equally does her best to stop Sikira from being aggressive towards Lejoka-Brown. Sikira tells Liza that: “Sometimes I wish I had your kind of strong, strong heart, so I could tell our husband to go to hell.” (Rotimi 2009: 53) However, Liza, her mentor, rebukes her thus: “That’s silly – it isn’t right for a woman to tell her husband to go to hell, without a reason. [...] You must have a good reason for doing so; otherwise it’s ...sheer rudeness” (Rotimi 2009: 54) Therefore, polygamy helps Lejoka-Brown to maintain control over his wives as they keep each other on check.

Lejoka-Brown is also committed to directly controlling his wives so that they do just what he permits them to do; and keep away from whatever he does not like. An example is when Lejoka-Brown realizes that Sikira is putting on what he considers inappropriate clothing and bursts out: “What is that partly-hatched lizard egg for. [...] Go take the rag off” (Rotimi 2009: 56) When Sikira tries to say that what she is wearing is the dress worn in America and England, Lejoka-Brown curses: “The devil take you and your America” (Rotimi 2009: 57) After Sikira tries to resist, he adds “Do just as I say quick, or I’ll tear off that half-peeled banana from the rest of your body” (5 Rotimi 2009: 7) Lejoka-Brown threatens: “For the last time, sister, let your feet take you to your room fast before thunder rumbles down the group” (Rotimi 2009: 57) Sikira rhetorically asks if she is a slave in Lejoka-Brown’s house before being ordered around, and Lejoka-Brown says “You are one of the crazy headache I’ve been crazy enough to get into my crazy head!” (Rotimi 2009: 57) The headache allusion here is about all his wives and women in general. Thus Lejoka-Brown categorizes women as a problem irrespective of their individualities. Liza tries to defend Sikira and Lejoka-Brown tells her: “My dear woman, you have sunk to the low, low, low bottom of moral rud!” (Rotimi 2009: 58) He also picks an issue with Liza due to the way she dresses. When Liza steps into the house, Lejoka-Brown orders her to go straight to her room very fast and insulting her thus: “Go! You cheap, street woman!” (Rotimi 2009: 64). Lejoka-Brown sees any woman who does not act according to his will as a problem. And it intensifies his desire to bring his wives entirely under his control; even if it includes verbal violence as seen here.

### **Political Manipulation**

Cruz, Alvarez and Rotimi highlight, to various degrees, the manner in which men manipulate women for the sake of politics and control. In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, the political

manipulation of women by men to stay in power is evident in the marriage between Lejoka-Brown and Sikira. Lejoka-Brown marries Sikira primarily for political gain, as her mother is the leader of the market women and can help him ascend to power. This is evident when he tells Okonkwo that: "I married that Problem [Sikira] four months ago." (Rotimi 2009: 10) Lejoka-Brown explains that he marries Sikira whom he refers to as a "problem" in order to have women's votes in the upcoming elections since her mother is the all-powerful leader of the Nigerian Union of Market Women. Therefore, this marriage is not based on love or mutual respect which should be the foundation for marriage; but on Lejoka-Brown's desire to leverage Sikira's connections for his political ambitions. The use of politics to dominate women is equally perceived in Lejoka-Brown's interaction with Liza. When Liza and Lejoka-Brown are having heated a heated conversation about her deception, Liza tells Lejoka-Brown that: "I should have got out of here long ago and sued for immediate divorce. But like the idiotic daydreamer that I am, I kept hoping that after the elections, you'd come back to being the man I once knew in the Congo, and we'd sort things out honorably. But what is my reward? You called me 'a cheap, street woman' right in the presence of..." (Rotimi 2009: 69) Lejoka-Brown tries to defend himself and tells Liza that he intended to become an important personality after winning elections and make life comfortable for her. When Liza says his material possessions mean nothing to her and he insists that all women always say the same thing, Liza bursts out: "Is that so! Very well then, if you think you can make me happy only after you've become the prime minister of the whole continent of Africa and by riding in a hundred Rolls Royces strung together, with money strewn on the ground for me to walk on, then you are no more the Rahman Lrjoka-Brown I once loved – no" (Rotimi 2009: 70) This hyperbolic projection of Lejoka-Brown's political and financial successes in a sarcastic manner by Liza is because she feels that Lejoka-Brown wants to use his political ambitions to keep her under control.

To a limited extent, Angie Cruz and Julia Alvarez present situations in which political maneuvers permit men to exert domination over women. In *Dominicana*, Cruz highlights this with regards to Ana's marriage and migration to the United States of America. The political system of the Dominican Republic that is dominated by men has failed to provide decent lives for individuals and families; making many people to leave in hardship and take decisions for strategic political reasons. In this case, Ana's family decides to marry her off to Juan Ruiz who is much older than her as a calculated way to secure not just her future but that of the entire family; and consequently her feelings and happiness is not the reason for the arranged marriage without much attention to Ana's opinion as Cruz states that: "Marrying Juan was not Ana's choice but a calculated decision by her family to improve their standing" (Cruz 2019: 42). This is because the family perceives this marriage not just as a means through which family income could increase, but also as a path for their migration to America; but it puts Ana under the total control of Juan Ruiz, her husband.

On her part, Alvarez presents a situation where the Garcia family is unanimously moved from the Dominican Republic to America by Carlos, the family head, without consulting his wife or daughters, as a direct result of his political opposition to the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic. Here, gender is linked to power as male characters engage in politics and take decisions informed by politics that affect female characters, without consulting them. Alvarez brings this out

through one of the Garcia girls, Yolanda the dominant narrator, who says that: "Because of Papi's political involvement, the secret police had targeted our family, forcing us to flee" (Alvarez 1991: 50). In this context, the practice of politics is in the hands of men; but the consequences thereof affects everyone including women as men take decisions imposed by political dynamics that put women under further control without consulting them.

### **Intimidation and Insults**

Intimidation and insults are used effectively by male characters in the works of Ola Rotimi, Angie Cruz and Julia Alvarez to make women submissive to them. In Angie Cruz's *Dominicana*, Juan Ruiz, Ana's husband resorts to intimidation and insults to consolidate control over her. Juan Ruiz regularly abuses Ana verbally and this reduces her confidence and self-esteem; making her depend on him for everything, even emotionally. Thus the husband uses insults, by calling her "stupid" and "useless" (Cruz 2019: 78) to belittle the wife so that she remains submissive to him. Cruz states it thus: "Juan's harsh words cut deep, leaving Ana feeling smaller with each insult" (Cruz 2019: 89). Thus the insults that Juan Ruiz inflicts on Ana do not only hurt her but undermine her confidence and self-esteem, instill fear in her and make her more submissive to her husband. It can thus be seen that Juan Ruiz uses insults to consolidate his dominance over Ana and make her more controllable.

In a similar manner, in Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, Carlos regularly uses intimidation and insults to keep his daughters, who consider themselves adults, under control. As said earlier, when the Garcia family migrates from the Dominican Republic to the USA, Carlos is convinced that it is a great idea if he keeps his daughters under control in order to instill in them some moral and cultural values; but also to keep them safe in a US environment which he perceives as dangerous. However, the fact that the Garcia girls consider themselves as grownups that should no longer be controlled by their father is not just an obstacle but also a serious source of tension between Carlos and his daughters. In order to achieve his objective, Carlos resorts, among other things, to using intimidation and insults to keep his daughters under control. This is seen when Carlos refers to his daughters as "silly girls" (Alvarez 1991: 102) This verbal abuse is a manipulative tactic to belittle them and render them psychologically more controllable. This is exactly why he asks them: "Why can't you be more like your mother? Always obedient and proper" (Alvarez 1991: 102). This clearly illustrates the fact that Carlos uses derogatory and insulting words towards his daughters to render them puncture their self-esteem and render them obedient.

In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Lejoka-Brown is the main architect of verbal violence towards women. At the very beginning of the play when Lejoka-Brown is singing and exercising, his friend Okonkwo informs him that his wife is laughing at him as he attempts military steps with his fat stomach. Without stopping his exercise, Lejoka-Brown replies Okonkwo thus: "Hep... a woman...hep...an ordinary...hep...woman! [...] As for you hep...six years in England-hep...has made you....hep...soft like ....hep..woman!" (Rotimi 2009: 5) This is an instance of verbal violence lodged on gender domination as Lejoka-Brown insinuates that Okonkwo is not supposed to consider what "an ordinary woman" is saying. He uses simile to indicate that Okonkwo is now

“soft like...hep,,woman” after spending six years in England; instead of being strong as men ought to be. Such derogatory remarks about women constitute a strategy by Lejoka-Brown to intimidate Sikira; and keep her under control.

Also, Lejoka-Brown calls Sikira and when she does not come immediately, he rhetorically asks: “Where is the Sikira who answered “shaann” just nown na? (Rotimi 2009: 6) The onomatopoeia in the use of “shaann” to describe the way Sikira answered constitutes an instance of verbal violence against Sikira.

It should be noted that the women to whom Lejoka-Brown uses harsh words because he thinks they are “ordinary” women talk to him with a lot of respect and reverence. This is why Sikira answers “Coming my lord” (Rotimi 2009: 6) to her husband Lejoka-Brown. Mama Rashida also refers to Lejoka-Brown as “my lord” in the question: “Did my Lord call?” (Rotimi 2009: 12) The expression “Lord” often used when referring to God Almighty is equally employed by Mama Rashida when asking her husband what he will like to eat thus: “What will my lord eat this evening?” (Rotimi 2009: 9) This could be traced to the Islamic culture and African traditional patriarchy that reigns in the community.

Equally, Lejoka-Brown’s sarcastic responds to Sikira who inquires about the contents of the cablegram Polycap had brought is a subtle combination of intimidation and sarcasm. He rhetorically asks: “Is your name Rahman Lejoka-Brown?” (Rotimi 2009: 10) Similarly, Lejoka-Brown’s silence when Sikira asks him “Will she [Liza] be bringing us chewing-gum” (Rotimi 2009: 13) can be considered verbal violence. This is because the husband completely ignores her and continues talking to Okonkwo and say goodbye to mama Rashida as if Sikira does not exist.

### **Economic Dependence**

The dimension of patriarchy and male domination facilitated by the economic dependence of women on men is presented by the three authors. With regards to *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi, the women in Lejoka-Brown’s household are economically dependent on him; and he uses that as an instrument of control over them. Talking to Okonkwo, Lejoka-Brown boasts of his economic and financial strength thus: “If they put you on auction right now – you, your degrees, your coat, everything...I can buy you ten times, and still have plenty money left to buy you all over again” (Rotimi 2009: 6) It is thanks to this money that Lejoka-Brown takes care of his family by providing all their basic needs. Mama Rashida relies on Lejoka-Brown for financial support in everything she does. This is clearly brought out when Lejoka-Brown indicates that his father married the old Mama Rashida, his late brother’s wife, to him out of pity; so that he will take care of her. This economic dependence limits her ability to make independent decisions; as probably explains why unlike Liza who has her own money and Sikira whose mother is financial viable from her business, Sikira is very docile and loyal to Lejoka-Brown as explained earlier. Therefore, economic control is a significant way through which men maintain power over women in the paly.

The economic dependence of female characters on male characters also constitutes an important aspect in the domination of women by men in the novel *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz. This dynamic can be perceived in the marriage between Juan Ruiz and Ana. The fact that Ana totally depends on her husband, Juan Ruiz, for her financial needs limits her ability to think and act as she wishes; and makes her more submissive to her husband, Juan Ruiz. This is further reinforced by the fact that her husband prevents her from working; and the future looks bleak from this consideration because she is unable to pursue education. It is in an effort to break free from this chain that Ana resorts to secretly saving money from grocery shopping in order to construct a small egg nest (Cruz 2019: 102) and this is confirmed by the narrator who states that: "Every dollar Ana saved secretly was a step closer to reclaiming her freedom" (Cruz 2019: 151) Juan Ruiz perceives Ana's financial independence as a threat; as he knows that money is the only thing he can use to keep her under his control.

In the same manner, the novel *How the Garcia Girl Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez indicate that the economic dependence of women on men give men control over them. This can be seen in the fact that the four Garcia girls depend on their father financially; making it difficult for them to act independently though they consider themselves as big girls. The fact that Carlos provides most of the family needs and also protects them makes it difficult for them to get rid of his domineering tendencies. Yolanda highlights this by stating that: "We had no choice but to depend on Papi, who held the purse strings tightly" (Alvarez 1991: 112). Even when they get married, the Garcia girls' dependence on their various husbands gives the husbands control over them; which was a source of conflict and a key factor in the various divorces. Carla's marriage to Clark, Sandra's marriage to Joe and Yolanda's marriage to John all end in divorces partly due to the fact that their husbands on whom they depended economically exerted some control on them which they do not particularly like. There is no surprise, therefore, that Sofia's marriage to Otto is more stable and fruitful because she is more independent than her sisters; even though her husband still provides more for the running of the family because he earns more.

From all these, it can be seen that patriarchy and the domination of women in Angie Cruz's *Dominicana*, Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* do not occur naturally. Men use their masculinity through various strategies such as marriage and control; political manipulation; intimidation and insults; and economic dependence to keep women under control. The three authors have highlighted these elements in their respective texts to various degrees.

### **Manifestation of Women's Empowerment and Power Acquisition**

The domination of women by patriarchal men in Angie Cruz's *Dominicana*, Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* as explained above does not go unnoticed by the women. This is because in the three texts women undertake individual and collective endeavours to emancipate themselves, contest the domination of men and ascend to power. Muwhati and Zifikile share this vision as they state that: "Because of the value of womanhood in Africa's development, women's activism and struggles need to be part

of the broader effort to rid society of all injustices.” (Muwhati and Zifikile 2012: xvii) In works of Rotimi, Cruz and Alvarez, women seek to empower themselves and attain power through political engagement; solidarity and support; education and awareness; and economic empowerment.

### **Political Engagement**

The most significant way through which women emancipate themselves and (re)gain power in the three works is political engagement; and Sikira in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, by Ola Rotimi symbolizes this struggle as she becomes politically active, leveraging her position as the daughter of the all-powerful market women’s leader. Shortly after meeting each other, Sikira and Liza keep aside their initial differences and Sikira, with power ambitions, is getting sensitization and motivation from Liza. Sikira tells Liza “You are a strong woman, with a strong, strong heart. Sometimes I wish I had your kind of strong, strong heart, so I could tell our husband to go to hell.” (Rotimi 2009: 53) The act of telling her husband to “go to hell” represents emancipation to Sikira. However, Liza, her mentor, rebukes her thus: “That’s silly – it isn’t right for a woman to tell her husband to go to hell, without a reason. [...] You must have a good reason for doing so; otherwise it’s ...sheer rudeness” (Rotimi 2009: 54) This corroborates Hudson-Weems’s affirmation that: “Respect must be understood as being reciprocal, which demands that both parties must give the same back to the other.” (Hudson-Weems 2010: 10). But Sikira persists by indicating that: “But he too acts rudeness-like to me sometimes” (Rotimi 2009: 54) This is the beginning of Sikira’s awareness that men and women are created equal and that what a man can do a woman can also do; and their stride towards the dismantling of the female exclusion from major issues like power and politics spearheaded by the likes of Lejoka-Brown. This aligns with the views of Marx and Engels who opine that: “Every class which is struggling for mastery, even when its domination, as is the case with the proletariat, postulates the abolition of the old form of society in its entirety and of domination itself, must first conquer for itself political power in order to represent its interest in turn as the general interest, which in the first moment it is forced to do.” (1845: 54) Women therefore need to be politically more active and gain power in order to improve their situations; and this is the direction Sikira is taking.

Sikira’s political ambition starts to grow as Lejoka-Brown comes back home and sees Sikira singing songs of freedom to women and she suggests that all women can create a women’s party, win elections and become leaders. In surprise, Lejoka-Brown addresses Sikira thus: “Your legs; those of a baby antelope...zig-zag in movement. What’s the matter? (Rotimi 2009: 55) Liza tries to defend Sikira and tells Lejoka-Brown that it is wrong for him to insult Sikira by comparing her legs to those of a baby antelope simply because she is doing something normal for all human beings to do; having political and leadership ambitions.

Sikira keeps pushing on with her political ambition and with the help of other womwn, achieves success. This is seen when Okonkwo consistently shouts Lejoka-Brown’s name to announce to him that Sikira has become the party leader. Before Okonkwo could give the information, Lejoka-Brown asks: “So what’s the crowing all about?” (Rotimi 2009: 76) Here, Lejoka-Brown metaphorically refers to Okonkwo as a bird. A similar verbal assault takes place when he

rhetorically asks “Who is that crab” (Rotimi 2009: 76) after he sees Sikira borne shoulder high by a crowd as the new party leader while she throws slogans about freedom being practiced everywhere. By metaphorically referring to Sikira as a crab, Lejoka-Brown wants to belittle her since she is a woman thereby undermining her ability to lead the party and exercise leadership power. The reality though is that the educated party members whom Lejoka-Brown considered inferior have aligned with women to catapult Sikira to the apex of political power in their area; overthrowing the chauvinist Lejoka-Brown.

Close to Sikira in terms of female emancipation through political engagement is the character Yolanda in *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent* by Julia Alvarez. The four Garcia girls become very active in politics, challenge the political landscape that is dominated by men and strongly assert their agencies in a direct manner. Of all the Garcia girls, Yolanda is the most politically active as she attends political protests and delivers speeches in rallies. Her direct activism, fiery speeches and confrontational political approach is a great emancipation from the rather subtle and accommodating style of doing politics expected from women in the Dominican family and cultural setups. Alvarez affirms this in the following words: “Yolanda’s fiery speeches at rallies were a testament to her unwavering commitment to justice” (Alvarez 1991: 130) The justice Alvarez refers to in the line above also includes justice in the roles and treatment of men and women. Therefore, political engagement is an option used by Yolanda to achieve justice and the emancipation of women.

### **Solidarity and Support**

Closely related to political ambition is the fact that women unite and support each other; in order to emancipate themselves. In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi, this could be seen both in Lejoka-Brown’s house and in the political arena. As far as Lejoka-Brown’s household is concerned, Liza’s arrival is a catalyst that sensitizes the women and unites them to be able to stand their grounds against the husband. Despite the early conflict with other women when she arrives; Liza teaches Mama Rashida how to run her poultry business and she becomes financially viable; and lectures Sikira on the equality of men and women and that raises her political ambition. If Sikira leaves Lejoka-Brown to become the party leader while Mama Rashida leaves him for the village where she has enough space for her fowl business, it is thanks to the sensitization and spirit of unity among women, despite their differences, brought by Liza.

The formation of alliances by women to support each other is perceived more clearly in party politics. During deliberations in the National Liberation Party, Madam Ajanaku says she, an Owerri woman, gave her daughter’s hand in marriage to Lejoka-Brown who is Yoruba as a way of promoting national unity; before adding that: “I no know say na mango-mango, manafiki man nahim Lejoka-Brown bem o!” (Rotimi 2009: 66) Here, she says she never knew that Lejoka-Brown was a hanky-panky, hypocritical and selfishly cunning individual. She states that: “This wuna Lejoka-Brown, abi na Lejoka Yellow he say him be sef” (Rotimi 2009: 67) kicked her daughter from his house like a dog. By referring to Lejoka-Brown as a hanky-panky, hypocritical and

selfishly cunning person, and sarcastically referring to him as “Lejoka Yellow”, Madam Ajanaku is discrediting Lejoka-Brown as a leader, while laying groundwork for her daughter to takeover. Subsequently, women show their solidarity and support for one another by moving that Lejoka-Brown be voted out of the party totally and replaced by a female leader, and not just given a vote of no confidence as the party executive had suggested. This is in line with Hudson-Weems’s indication that men and women should work together for the empowerment of women by stating thus: “In Concert with the Male in the Liberation Struggle is a mandate for the survival of our families and our communities.” (Hudson-Weems 2010: 9). Mallam Gaskiya asks the party deliberations to go on break for ten minutes so that the executive members have consultations regarding the new developments, and Madam Ajanaku says: “Dat na too much grammar. We want woman candidate – wuna gree abi wuna no gree. We nodi beg wuna. Political party dem bacoo for this country; dem di wait we for vote” (Rotimi 2009: 68) Here, she sarcastically refers to Mallam Gaskiya’s proposal as nonsense, before reaffirming their stand with the threat a taking women to join another party. Mallam Gaskiya replies that they will be back in about fifteen minutes and Madam Ajanaku says: “Na wuna sabi! When una talk munumununu finish make una fin’ me come for my house. Abi?” (Rotimi 2009: 68) This literally means she does not care about what they will discuss outside; and that they will come back and meet them in the house. And she rhetorically asks the audience “Man wey carry ogbono soup-pot for hand, and di man wey carry foo-foo for head, na who go fin’ who go?” (Rotimi 2009: 68) In this pidgin proverb, she insinuates that the party needs them more than they need the party; since metaphorically they carry the soap while the party carries the foofoo. In this circumstance, Madam Ajanaku uses pidgin English belittle the party executive and their suggestions that did not align with the aspirations and empowerment of women. This is in line with Marx’s theory as Li states that: “Marxism encourages people to protect their rights and encourages workers to achieve their goals [...] Marxism creates a system with shared equality in which an emphasis on human rights is important. (Rotimi 2009: 29) This is the coming together of women to fight for their rights by combatting male domination and seeking power. And this yields its fruits because Lejoka-Brown as dismissed from the party and Sikira is voted in as the new party leader.

The solidarity and support of women towards one another is equally perceived in *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz because this is one of the things that facilitate Ana’s emancipation. Ana receives emotional attention and psychological support from women who identify as her friends; and this helps her to regain her confidence and self-esteem. This is particularly the case with Marisela who gives Ana a sense of belonging, practical advice and emotional support that help her to pursue her drives towards independence from the grips of the husband. Cruz indicates this perspective in the following words: “Marisela’s words were a lifeline, offering hope and practical advice when Ana needed it most” (Cruz 2019: 194) The support and solidarity are particularly significant given that Ana is in a foreign land far away from her family and friends; and is living with a husband who is doing everything possible to ensure that she remains dependent on him for everything especially in terms of finance and emotions.

The Garcia sisters in *How the Garcia Sisters Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez show solidarity and mutual support towards one another. This is particularly the case when they have individual or collective difficulties which may be financial, emotional, and familial; especially those linked to patriarchal dynamics and exerted by their father or various husbands. This solidarity and mutual support provides them the much needed resilience that permits them to work their ways through the various challenges life throws at them. Sofia brings this out by stating that: "In the face of adversity, we found solace in each other's company, a sisterhood that could not be broken" (Alvarez 1991: 185) Therefore, the Garcia girls always come together to support each other when they have individual or collective challenges despite the differences they have as individuals.

### **Education and Awareness**

Women also empower themselves in the works of Ola Rotimi, Angie Cruz and Julia Alvarez through education and awareness. As far as *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz is concerned, these elements are pivotal in Ana's emancipation. When Ana migrates from the Dominican Republic to meet her husband Juan Ruiz to whom the family offers her, the husband seeks to keep her under his control and takes steps to ensure that she does not empower herself in any way. One of the things he does is to deny her the possibility of going to school and getting educated. However, Ana is aware of the situation and is driven to equipping herself with knowledge and pursuing a better future for herself. Recognizing that she needs to learn speak English in order to have job and other opportunities in America, Ana decides to learn the English language; and Cruz says the following about that decision: "Attending English classes was Ana's way of claiming her place in a world that often sought to silence her" (Cruz 2019: 178). The novelist equally adds that: "Learning English was Ana's key to unlocking doors that had long been shut to her" (Cruz 2019: 210) Thus Ana seeks to learn English not only to be qualified for some jobs that require a mastery of the English language; but also to empower herself with the tools that are required to make informed individual decisions. In other words, learning English creates awareness in Ana that triggers her empowerment at different levels.

In *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez, women equally use education and awareness to emancipate themselves. The four girls pursue education in order to acquire the skills and knowledge that they need to free themselves from patriarchal dependence and dominance. A typical example of such a view is Carla who is determined to get educated and build a career in psychology; symbolizing the drive for empowerment through formal education. Alvarez affirms this by stating that: "Carla immersed herself in her studies, determined to forge a path to independence through education." (Alvarez 1991: 220) Carla perceives education and a subsequent career as the surest means towards her emancipation and breakaway from the traditional gender roles that require her to be a submissive housewife with no degree of independence.

With regards to Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Liza is at the centre of this perspective. Liza, who is educated and has lived abroad, brings new perspectives to Lejoka-Brown's household. First of all, she creates awareness on Sikira and Mama Rashida about their rights; the fact that men and women are equal; and encourages them to stand up for themselves.

This empowerment through awareness creation is a crucial step towards their emancipation as it plays a key role in Sikira's ascension to the leadership of the political party and Mama Rashida's movement to the village to continue her fowl business; as already explained above.

Personally, Liza uses her education to resist Lejoka-Brown's domination and control. Due to her disappointment and anger towards Lejoka-Brown for not telling her that he had two other wives, Liza meets Lejoka-Brown tells him she married him in the Congo thinking that she was the only wife; not knowing that she is one of three "sacrificial slaves" (Rotimi 2009: 39) in his "nauseating, clay-walled, gas-chamber" (Rotimi 2009: 39) of a house. This castigating description of Lejoka-Brown's house is Liza's way of telling him that he is poor and not up to her standard. Lejoka-Brown ignores the reference to women as "slaves" and loudly expresses his dissatisfaction to the insulting words used to describe his house and the reference to him as a possession. Liza offends Lejoka-Brown more by saying that: "Only bushmen and hooligans shout" (Rotimi 2009: 38) Consequently, Lejoka-Brown's anger intensifies and Liza tells him that anger can make him a nuisance in addition to increasing his pulse rate and overworking adrenal glands while running the risk of having affected kidneys, nerves problems, psychosomatic breakdown, peptic ulcer, high blood pressure, asthma, obesity, dermatitis, headache, insomnia, migraine, cardiovascular disorder among others, Lejoka-Brown angrily says "oohh...don't wish death on me, witch" (Rotimi 2009: 40) As seen here, Liza uses her education and specifically her knowledge about health matters to let Lejoka-Brown know that he is not more than her; or rather that he is not up to her level. Education, therefore, is a strategy of resistance and empowerment adopted by Liza.

### **Economic Empowerment**

As earlier explained, men in Angie Cruz's *Dominicana*, Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* use the economic dependence of women to dominate and control them. This is why women perceive economic empowerment as a means of empowering themselves. The character that symbolizes economic empowerment as a pathway to freedom from patriarchal domination and independence To achieve this, she learns from Liza about the best way to make her fowl business more profitable; which she actually applies and makes more profit from the business and consequently becomes less dependent on her husband. She is able to run her business alongside her family responsibilities to align with Hudson-Weems's statement that: "Flexible Role Player demonstrates comfort in the home place with family, and the workplace, not sacrificing either role in our quest for fulfillment" (Hudson-Weems 2010: 9). However, when Mama Rashida realizes that her business can better in the village, she is willing to leave Lejoka-Brown's house and settle in the village. She airs this out when Lejoka-Brown informs her that Liza is leaving and that he bumped his leg on a chair; and Mama Rashida says: "You better start bumping your leg into another woman" (Rotimi 2009: 79) She explains that Lejoka-Brown needs to look for a woman who will take care of him because she intends to relocate to the village where she has enough space for her poultry business; and even asks to take Polycarp, the houseboy, along to help her in the business. This confirms Beauvoir's statement that: "The woman who is economically independent will be able to assert herself and refuse the subjugation that has been

her lot.” (Beauvoir 1949: 723) Here, Beauvoir highlights the importance of economic independence for women’s empowerment; and that is exactly the perspective presented by Rotimi through mama Rashida.

As seen in this section, women do not find fulfillment in the domination and control exercised on them by men. As such, they take some individual and/or collective steps to emancipate themselves. Some of these things include political engagement; solidarity and support; education and awareness; and economic empowerment. These endeavours succeed as the women liberate themselves individually as seen through Sikira and Mama Rashida leaving Lejoka-Brown to seek better futures; and also collectively as symbolized by Sikira whom the women support to become the party leader and candidate for the upcoming elections.

This is equally true of Ana in Angie Cruz’s *Dominicana*. Ana’s economic empowerment is one of the key elements of her emancipation. This is because her husband, Juan Ruiz, tries everything possible to stop her from getting education and/or a job so that she will be totally dependent on him; thereby giving him the latitude to dominate and control her. When Ana starts earning her own money from the secret job she secures in the factory, she feels very much autonomous as stated by Cruz thus: "Working at the factory, even in secret, gave Ana a sense of pride and independence she had never known before" (Cruz 2019: 230) From this job, Ana plans to save money that can give her the possibility to run away from the oppressive environment she is in. She finally takes the difficult decision to leave Juan Ruiz and seek a better future for herself and her child thanks greatly to the fact that she earns her own money.

Emancipation through economic empowerment is also presented in *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez. This is because the four girls depend on men financially at various stages of their lives; first their father and then their various husbands. This economic dependence limits their abilities to think and act on their own because men use it to control them. Therefore, they seek to be financially independent in order to set themselves free from the patriarchal chains. The most glaring example is that of Sandra who decides to start her own business that will permit her to earn her own money, make her independent decisions and assert her agency. In line with this, Alvarez states that: "With her business thriving, Sandra no longer had to rely on anyone else for support" (Alvarez 1991: 240) Therefore, the fact that Sandra chooses to start up her own business in order to make her own money and stop depending on any man is great evidence of women’s emancipation through economic empowerment.

## CONCLUSION

This paper sought to examine the presentation of the relationship between gender and power in Angie Cruz’s *Dominicana*, Julia Alvarez’s *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* and Ola Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. By applying Feminist Literary Criticism and drawing on de Beauvoir’s insights, the research paper explored the manner in which gender dynamics affect power (re)negotiation and contest in the three texts. The research reveals that men

use masculinity through marriage and control; political manipulation; intimidation and insults; and economic dependence to dominate and control women. On the other hand, women strategize through political engagement; solidarity and support; education and awareness; and economic empowerment to emancipate themselves and (re)gain power. It provides an understanding of how gender plays a vital role in the power structures of Cruz, Alvarez and Rotimi's times; while contributing to the ongoing debate about gender issues by indicating the strategies of power (re)negotiation and contestation used by both men and women.

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