

Navigating Hybridity and Female Empowerment in *Anca's Journey*:

A Feminist and Cultural Analysis of Migration and Identity

Regine Juliana Leonora Hutahayan¹, Kenzie Cornelius Derick², Nixon Dyllen Roling³,

Oliver Rafael Jeswin⁴, Ben Othniel Supriadi⁵, Michelle Whitney Ang⁶

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Email: regine.juliana@sekolahmakarios.id, kenzie.cornelius.derick@sekolahmakarios.id,

nixonroling@sekolahmakarios.id, oliver.rafael.jeswin@sekolahmakarios.id,

ben.othniel.supriadi@sekolahmakarios.id, michelle.whitney.ang@sekolahmakarios.id

*"For I know the plans I have for you, 'declares the Lord,'
plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future."*

— **Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)**

ABSTRACT

This research examines Ruth Siburt's *Anca's Journey* through the lenses of *Liberal Feminism* and *Cultural Hybridity*, focusing on how the story addresses traditional gender roles and the complexities of migration. Using Betty Friedan's *Liberal Feminism* (1963) to explore themes of female empowerment through education and Homi K. Bhabha's *Cultural Hybridity* (1994) to analyze identity negotiation as a secondary theory, As the results: **1)** *Anca's Journey* subverts traditional gender roles by portraying Anca's intellectual growth as a central form of empowerment. Her education allows her to transcend societal expectations typically placed on young girls, aligning with Friedan's feminist ideals. **2)** The story highlights the resilience and agency of its female characters, particularly Anca and her mother, as they navigate societal pressures in a patriarchal, migration-focused narrative. Anca's refusal to accept labels like "lame" demonstrates her resistance to restrictive social judgments, while her mother's protective role illustrates maternal agency. **3)** Anca's intellectual growth is a key factor in her ability to navigate her cultural environment, as she balances the expectations of her Romanian heritage with her new life in America. This reflects both feminist and hybrid identity formation theories. These findings illustrate how *Anca's Journey* not only challenges traditional gender expectations but also reflects the broader social realities of migration, using education as a means of empowerment and identity negotiation.

Keyword: *Children's literature, Liberal Feminism, Cultural Hybridity, Female Empowerment, Cultural Identity*

INTRODUCTION

Migration and identity formation are themes deeply intertwined with the human experience, particularly in literary works that explore the journeys of individuals or families navigating cultural transitions. Children's literature often plays a crucial role in shaping young minds by providing not only the excitement of reading and exploring imagination through text and illustration but also opportunities for learning about complex social issues. "*Children's literature serves as a powerful tool for shaping identity, often reflecting and reinforcing societal norms and cultural values.*" (Nikolajeva, 2009, p. 26). In *Anca's Journey*, the focus on cultural

hybridity and the challenges of migration provides young readers with a narrative that mirrors the experiences of many children today, helping them navigate their own feelings of identity and belonging. *Anca's Journey*, a children's illustrated storybook by Ruth Siburt, presents a narrative of a young girl and her family's migration from Romania to America in the early 20th century. Through the lens of feminist theory and cultural hybridity, the story offers rich material for critical analysis, highlighting both the gendered dynamics of empowerment and the complex negotiation of cultural identities.

Anca's Journey, authored by Ruth Siburt and illustrated by Gabhor Utomo, was published by Learning A-Z. The narrative centers on Anca, an estimated 8-year-old girl from Romania, alongside her mother as they start the journey of migration to America in 1907, aiming to reunite with Anca's brother, Eugene. Drawing inspiration from historical themes surrounding immigration, the story intricately weaves a narrative that emphasizes resilience and adaptability during an era of significant migration. Gabhor Utomo's illustrations effectively capture the emotional landscape of Anca and her fellow immigrants aboard the steamship. The storyline highlights Anca's endeavor to conceal an ankle injury during the medical examination at Ellis Island, where the uncertainty of being returned due to health concerns casts a shadow over her journey. Aimed at young readers between the ages of 6 to 10, the book familiarizes them with the intricacies of immigration through Anca's courageous voyage, underscoring themes of familial bonds, determination, and optimism. With its historical backdrop and relatable protagonist, the narrative offers both an informative and captivating reading experience for children. The book has garnered acclaim for its ability to connect with audiences and foster dialogues regarding immigration and the assimilation into new cultural environments.

Written in the character's perspective as a child, '*Anca's Journey*' is a touching illustrated children's story that adopts a young girl's name, Anca and her family as they move as diaspora to a new country. Faced with the challenges of adjusting to a different culture, language, and environment, Anca struggles to fit in while holding on to her cultural roots. Through her journey, Anca learns the importance of embracing her identity and discovers that it's possible to blend her old and new worlds. The story highlights themes of cultural hybridity, resilience, and the emotional experience of migration, making it a touching narrative for children experiencing similar life transitions.

In the recent study *Cultural Hybridity and Identity in "Contemporary Children's Literature: Analyzing the Migrant Experience"* by Sharma (2022), examines the portrayal of migrant children's experiences in modern literature. Both Sharma's (2022) and this study explore cultural hybridity and how migrant children navigate the challenges of adapting to a new culture while maintaining their original identity. They share the theme of using literature to foster empathy and understanding of cultural diversity among young readers. However, Sharma's research provides a comparative analysis across multiple texts and age ranges, whereas *Anca's Journey* offers a more focused, narrative-driven approach that emphasizes the experiences of one child, primarily targeting readers aged 6 to 10. The research gap lies in the need for further exploration of how singular, character-focused stories like *Anca's Journey* can uniquely impact young migrant children's emotional resilience and

self-perception in the face of cultural displacement, as Sharma’s (2022) work, the psychological development of individual characters in this context has not yet been discussed.

In this research, employing Liberal Feminism in *‘The Feminine Mystique’* (1963) by Betty Friedan and *‘Cultural Hybridity’* in *‘The Location of Culture’* (1994) by Homi K. Bhabha explores the intersection of how Anca’s Journey challenges traditional gender roles while simultaneously navigating the cultural complexities of migration. *Liberal Feminism* emphasizes equal opportunities and rights for women, focusing on education, agency, and empowerment. Friedan (1963) argues that women’s fulfillment should also encompass intellectual and professional growth to intellectual and professional development, as “*the feminine mystique permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their identity by over-investing in physical appearance and the approval of others*” (p. 49). Anca’s intellectual capacity and her mother’s resilience in facing societal constraints highlight how Anca’s Journey reflects feminist struggles for gender equality in various forms. Meanwhile, *Cultural Hybridity* provides a lens to understand the migratory journey of Anca and her family. Bhabha (1994) explains that cultural hybridity emerges in the “*in-between spaces,*” where individuals and groups negotiate new identities through cultural exchanges, creating spaces of both conflict and innovation (p. 2).

By examining Anca's Journey through the dual lenses of Liberal Feminism and Cultural Hybridity, this research seeks to uncover how the story not only represents the challenges of migration and gender but also how it redefines female roles and cultural identity within the context of a migratory experience. This integrated approach offers a nuanced perspective on the intersection of gender and cultural identity in children's migration narratives. The analysis contributes to the broader discourse on migration, identity, and gender in children's literature, ultimately enriching our understanding of how these themes intersect and evolve in the context of modern feminist and cultural studies.

Binary Opposition

| PHYSICAL DISABILITY | PERCEPTION OF HEALTH |
|--|---|
| Anca’s physical injury, specifically her ankle, symbolizes the personal challenges she faces as an immigrant child in a foreign land. Her injury forces her to question her ability to assimilate into the new culture while confronting the limitations placed upon her by society. “ <i>Women have been conditioned to accept, and even perpetuate, a standard that defines them primarily by physical fitness and appearance</i> ” (Friedan 1963, p. 49). | The societal perception of immigrants’ health as a prerequisite for their acceptance into America is a critical theme. Immigrants are expected to conform to a specific standard of health, without regard for personal circumstances, highlighting the rigidity of cultural expectations. This standard symbolizes the barriers to entry that migrants face, particularly when perceived as physically unfit. “ <i>Cultural hybridity is the moment of transition where identity and power relations are redefined</i> ” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5). |

METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative research design to analyze the children's illustrated storybook *Anca's Journey* by Ruth Siburt, guided by Betty Friedan's Liberal Feminism, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Homi K. Bhabha's theory of *Cultural Hybridity* (1994). The analysis focuses on exploring how the characters, particularly the protagonist Anca, navigate issues of gender empowerment and cultural identity within the context of migration. *Liberal Feminism* will be employed to examine how the story challenges traditional gender roles, particularly in terms of female empowerment, intellectual growth, and the agency of female characters. *Cultural Hybridity* will be used to analyze how Anca and her family negotiate their Romanian heritage while assimilating into American society.

Data collection involves a close examination of the book's narrative, focusing on key themes of *health, migration, and gender roles* and the related illustrations. When exploring the theories of *Liberal Feminism* and *Cultural Hybridity*, both frameworks employ terms that emphasize individual agency, identity formation, and societal structures. *Liberal Feminism*, grounded in the work of Betty Friedan and others, frequently uses terms like "equality," "rights," and "individual autonomy," stressing the need for women's equal access to opportunities in society, particularly in education, employment, and politics. It focuses on deconstructing legal and social barriers that prevent women from achieving parity with men. In contrast, *Cultural Hybridity*, as conceptualized by Homi K. Bhabha, introduces terms like "hybrid identity," "third space," and "in-betweenness," which reflect the fluid and evolving nature of cultural identity in postcolonial and migratory contexts.

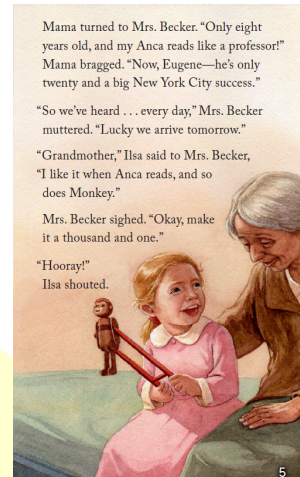
The findings will be compared with existing literature on feminist theory and migration to situate this study within broader academic discussions. The analysis aims to investigate how children's literature can serve as a medium for exploring issues of *identity formation, gender, and cultural adaptation* in the migratory experience. The study's scope is limited to gender empowerment and cultural hybridity using the binary opposition of physical *disability vs. perception of health* as a reflection of gender and cultural norms. Ultimately, this approach seeks to demonstrate how *Anca's Journey* not only reflects the cultural tensions and gender challenges faced by migrant children but also serves as a literary device for understanding how children negotiate their identities in the context of migration and gender expectations.

DISCUSSION

1. Challenging Traditional Gender Roles in *Anca's Journey*

The story opens with Anca on a steamship with her mother and other immigrants, traveling to America. Her mother insists on hearing a letter from Anca's brother, Eugene, once again, even though they have read it many times. This scene establishes the family's close bond and anticipation of reuniting with Eugene, who had moved to New York earlier. Anca is depicted as a smart, young girl with strong reading skills, and her mother's

pride in her is evident. The illustration on this page likely shows Anca in a position of intellectual authority or confidence, symbolizing her capability and subversion of traditional female roles. The illustration from *Anca's Journey* features warm, soft tones that create a cozy domestic scene where Ilsa, holding a toy monkey, sits beside her grandmother, Mrs. Becker, both engaged in conversation about Anca's impressive reading skills. The setting is intimate, with Ilsa's excitement and wide smile drawing attention to the familial bond and shared admiration for Anca.



The gentle expressions on Mrs. Becker and Ilsa's faces highlight affection and encouragement, highlighting the supportive role of the older female figure saying, "*Only eight years old, and my Anca reads like a professor!*" (Siburt, p. 5), "*Mama helped Anca put on her shoes. Her foot felt like an overblown balloon.*" (Siburt, p. 14) These statements, made by Anca's mother, immediately signals a departure from traditional gender expectations for young girls. The fact that Anca is celebrated for her intellect challenges the conventional portrayal of female characters, especially in historical contexts where girls were primarily expected to adhere to domestic responsibilities or remain passive. "*denial of women's education perpetuates gender inequality*" (Friedan, 1963, p. 57). Here, Anca's intellectual growth and capabilities are a source of pride and empowerment, positioning her as a figure of intellectual prowess. By emphasizing Anca's academic ability at such a young age, the story not only elevates her character but also challenges the societal limits typically imposed on girls in similar settings. the nurturing role of women, yet also demonstrates maternal strength. Friedan criticizes "*how traditional roles like motherhood often overshadow women's potential for greater societal participation*" (Friedan, 1963, p. 234). This directly challenges the idea that women, or in this case, girls, should be confined to roles that de-emphasize their mental capabilities in favor of physical or domestic expectations. By portraying Anca as an intelligent, capable character but at the same time gaining support from her mother. The story aligns with the idea that women and girls can break free from restrictive gender roles through education.

In the context of migration, where survival and adaptation often overshadow intellectual development. Bhabha's theory suggests that hybridity occurs when cultural identities are renegotiated and redefined through encounters with societal norms. He explains that "*Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects*" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 112). As a migrant child navigating the cultural pressures of adapting to a new society, her ability to thrive intellectually represents a form of hybrid identity. She is neither bound by the limitations of her Romanian heritage, which may have prescribed certain gender roles, nor completely assimilated into the American cultural expectations of health and physical prowess. "*The third space becomes a site of struggle and negotiation, where identities are constantly being formed and re-formed in response to cultural pressures.*" (Soja, 1996, p. 139). Instead, Anca's

identity is formed through a negotiation of these cultural spaces, where her intellect allows her to redefine herself in ways that break traditional gender norms.

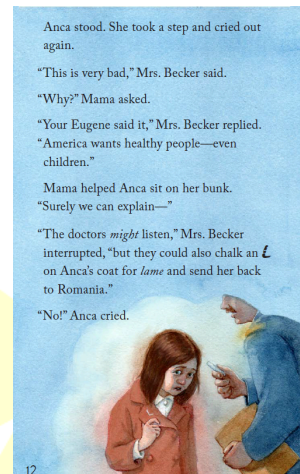
The quote, "*Anca, you were a toddler when I left. I know from your letters you are smart. I hope you have grown strong too*" (Siburt, p. 9), highlights the dual expectations placed on Anca, celebrating her intellect while emphasizing physical strength. This reflects the common societal pressure on women to excel both intellectually and physically. In liberal feminism, as discussed by Friedan (1963), critiques these unrealistic standards, noting that expecting women to balance intellectual achievement with physical perfection is harmful: "*Societal expectations for women to be both intelligent and physically idealized are unrealistic and ultimately damaging to their development*" (p. 128). In the case of Anca, while her intellect is acknowledged through her letters, there remains an implicit expectation that she must also prove herself physically capable, especially in the context of migration. "*Migration narratives in children's literature provide young readers with frameworks to understand displacement, identity, and the concept of home.*" (Smith, 2017, p. 98). This dual standard, which ties her success to both her mind and body, mirrors the broader societal issue of placing undue burdens on women to meet impossible standards across multiple areas of their lives.

Through Cultural Hybridity, Bhabha's concept of the "*third space*" frames Anca's growth as part of her identity negotiation within the context of migration. In this hybrid space, she must reconcile both intellectual and physical expectations as she navigates her new environment. Bhabha (1994) explains that the third space is where new structures of identity emerge: "*The 'third space' displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority*" (p. 209). Anca's journey, therefore, symbolizes both the intellectual and physical demands placed on women, showing how she must succeed in both realms to adapt to her new life. Anca's Journey illustrates the dual standard for women's intellectual and physical abilities. While her intellect is praised, she is also expected to be physically strong, reflecting broader societal pressures as part of her identity negotiation.

The quote "*Eugene—he's only twenty and a big New York City success*" (Siburt, p. 5) emphasizes the typical success narrative expected of men. While Eugene's achievements are framed in terms of public success and economic mobility, Anca's intellectual accomplishments remain confined to the domestic sphere. Friedan (1963:42) argues that this dynamic is part of the "*feminine mystique*," where women are limited to roles within the home, unable to pursue their individual potential: "*Women are defined by their roles within the home rather than as individuals in their own right.*" In the hybrid culture perspective, Bhabha's concept of liminality highlights the negotiation of identity in a migrant context. Eugene's success reflects the tension between old-world traditions and new-world opportunities, demonstrating how migrants exist in a space where identities are continually redefined. "*Hybridity is a form of liminality that resists closure and allows for a continual negotiation of identity*" (Bhabha 1994, p. 252). Eugene's story, therefore, emphasizes the expectations for men to succeed in public, while women, like Anca, remain in a limited space of negotiation.

2. Female Agency and Resilience in the Context of Migration

This illustration from *Anca's Journey* depicts a tense moment where Anca, visibly distressed, faces the possibility of being labeled "lame" and sent back to Romania, as quoted "America wants healthy people — even children," (Siburt, p. 12). She sits hunched over, highlighting her vulnerability, with a sad expression reflecting her internal struggle. Next, as Mrs. Becker interrupts, "but they could chalk an L on Anca's coat for lame" (Siburt, p. 12). Her red coat, standing out against the muted background, symbolizes her emotional intensity and strength. Next to her, her mother kneels, offering comfort, "Surely we can explain—" Mama says. (Siburt, p. 12) visually reinforcing her role as a protector trying to explain their situation. The soft light around the mother contrasts with the cooler tones of the setting, representing hope amidst uncertainty. In the background, Mrs. Becker's statement about America wanting healthy people embodies the societal pressure Anca faces. "No!" Anca cried. (Siburt, p. 12) The overall illustration emphasizes Anca's vulnerability and the support from her mother as they confront societal expectations.



In *Anca's Journey*, female agency and resilience are explored within the constraints of a patriarchal and migration-focused narrative, particularly through the actions of Anca and her mother as they face societal pressures. The line "America wants healthy people—even children" (Siburt, p. 12) reflects the rigid expectations placed on immigrants, where physical health becomes a decisive factor in their acceptance. The threat of being labeled "lame" ("but they could chalk an L on Anca's coat for lame," Siburt, p. 12) exemplifies how easily immigrants, especially women and children, can be reduced to physical judgments, ignoring their other abilities.

When Anca defiantly cries, "No!" (Siburt, p. 12), "'Stand,' Mrs. Becker commanded. 'Practice walking'" (Siburt, p. 14). This instruction reflects societal pressure on women to conform to physical ideals, even in difficult circumstances. Friedan critiques "the obsession with female appearance as a means to restrict women's potential" (Friedan, 1963, p. 143). Hence, it marks a moment of personal agency, as she rejects the societal label of "lame" based on her injury, and even gets solidarity assistance from Mrs. Becker. Breaking the traditional norms, the characters show resilience and empowerment. This page is critical as it introduces the conflict surrounding Anca's injury and the societal expectation that immigrants, even children, must be physically fit. The visual likely portrays Anca struggling with her physical condition but remaining determined. The tension between her physical limitations and her inner resilience is significant, as it reflects her agency in a world that places rigid expectations on her. Therefore, this resistance aligns with Liberal Feminism as outlined by Betty Friedan. Friedan (1963:152) asserts that women must reject limiting labels and assert their independence, "Women must assert their own identities, rejecting societal labels that restrict them." In this

scene, Anca's refusal to accept the "lame" label represents her resilience against a system that seeks to limit her potential based on physical judgments. This is an example of how women, even young girls, can push back against patriarchal systems that define them by superficial traits like appearance or physical capability.

Simultaneously, Anca's mother demonstrates maternal agency when she says, "Surely we can explain—" (Siburt, p. 12), attempting to negotiate for her daughter. "Women in migration stories often experience dual marginalization due to both gender and cultural displacement." (Mahler & Pessar, 2006, p. 28). Although women in patriarchal societies are often subject to domestic roles, they can still assert power within those constraints. Friedan (1963) argues how women have historically used their roles as caregivers to exert limited power, while advocating for more direct forms of empowerment: "Women have often used their roles as caregivers to exert influence, but direct empowerment is crucial" (p. 176). Mama's attempt to protect Anca highlights her strength in a system that restricts women's autonomy, illustrating how maternal roles can also serve as a form of resistance within patriarchal structures.

In Cultural Hybridity, these moments can be seen as part of the negotiation of identity within the "third space" that immigrants inhabit. Bhabha (1994:209) explains that cultural hybridity occurs in this liminal space where new identities and meanings are constantly being negotiated: "The 'third space' displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives." Anca and her mother, as migrants, are caught between their old-world identity and the new-world expectations imposed on them. Anca's refusal to accept the "lame" label is a negotiation of her identity, where she asserts her worth despite the physical standards imposed on her. Her mother, likewise, navigates this third space by using her limited authority as a caregiver to advocate for Anca, blending traditional maternal roles with an assertive stance in the new cultural context.

Thus, Anca's Journey portrays female agency and resilience through both a feminist and cultural hybridity framework. Anca's personal agency in rejecting the societal label of "lame" and her mother's maternal advocacy reflect the resilience women exhibit, even within restrictive environments. "Feminism in children's literature has evolved to challenge traditional narratives, giving young female characters agency and complexity." (Clark & Foster, 2005, p. 41). It shows how both characters navigate the limited space between their old-world cultural identity and the new societal norms they must confront, allowing them to redefine their roles within the migration-focused narrative.

3. Intellectual Growth and Cultural Hybridity in *Anca's Journey*

In this illustration from *Anca's Journey*, the visual elements reflect the themes of female agency, resilience, and societal expectations regarding physical ability. Anca is at the center, visibly struggling with her injured ankle, yet determined to meet the demand placed on her by Mrs. Becker, who commands her to "Stand" and "Practice walking." This pressure to conform to societal standards of health, despite Anca's pain, illustrates the rigid expectations placed on individuals, particularly immigrants, to demonstrate physical fitness. Anca's

tight-laced boots and strained posture symbolize both her resilience and the physical constraints she faces. Next to her, Ilsa holds her hand, offering support and emphasizing female solidarity in the face of adversity. This act of mutual care between the girls highlights how female characters support one another to navigate the challenges imposed by patriarchal and migration-focused systems. The presence of an older woman in the background suggests a multi-generational experience of women dealing with societal pressures. The illustration captures Anca's physical and emotional struggle while demonstrating her resilience and the importance of female support in confronting societal expectations.



This page is critical as it introduces the conflict surrounding Anca's injury and the societal expectation that immigrants, even children, must be physically fit. The visual likely portrays Anca struggling with her physical condition but remaining determined. The tension between her physical limitations and her inner resilience is significant, as it reflects her agency in a world that places rigid expectations on her. Nonetheless, in *Anca's Journey*, education and intellectual growth are depicted as powerful tools for female empowerment, in line with the principles of Liberal Feminism. *"The development of intellectual capabilities in female characters reflects the feminist push for gender equality in all spheres of life."* (McRobbie, 2009, p. 57). The repeated references to Anca's intelligence throughout the story highlight the role of education as a means to break the limitations imposed by societal expectations, especially for girls in patriarchal structures.

The statements *"Anca reads like a professor!"* (Siburt, p. 5), *"I know from your letters you are smart."* (Siburt, p. 8), *"I'll help you,"* (Siburt, p. 14) Ilsa said, and she held Anca's hand. These serve as a significant moment in the story, where Anca's intellectual abilities are celebrated. This emphasis on her academic prowess aligns with Liberal Feminism, particularly Betty Friedan's argument that women should have the opportunity to engage in intellectual pursuits to break free from domestic confines. Friedan (1963) stresses that education is essential for women to achieve personal and professional fulfillment, arguing that *"Women must be liberated from domesticity and empowered to engage in intellectual and public life"* (p. 107). Anca's intellectual growth symbolizes a departure from traditional gender roles that confine women and girls to the domestic sphere, positioning her as an empowered young female character who is recognized for her mind.

Similarly, the line *"I know from your letters you are smart"* (Siburt, p. 9) reinforces the importance of education in Anca's life. Her intellectual capacity is not only acknowledged but celebrated, showing that her education is a key factor in her personal empowerment. This reflects Friedan's assertion that education is critical for breaking down gender barriers and achieving equality. *"Education is the foundation for gender equality, allowing women to challenge and overcome the societal structures that limit them"* (Friedan, 1963, p. 112). Anca's education thus becomes a tool for both personal development and societal defiance, as her intelligence allows her to rise above the challenges she faces as a young girl and a migrant.

In contrast to her intellectual strength, Anca is also expected to demonstrate physical competence. The line “Stand,” Mrs. Becker commanded. “Practice walking” (Siburt, p. 14) reflects societal expectations that Anca must not only prove herself intellectually but also meet physical standards. “It is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others.” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 56) This pressure to conform physically contrasts with the emphasis on her education and intellect, illustrating the dual expectations placed on girls and women to succeed in both arenas. Education gives Anca the tools to articulate her identity beyond the roles imposed on her by society. In the process of learning and growing intellectually, she is able to redefine herself and express her individuality. Bhabha’s quote highlights the importance of language and education in constructing and articulating new identities, particularly in environments that demand negotiation between different cultural expectations. Friedan criticizes this societal obsession with physical appearance and ability, arguing that it detracts from women’s intellectual and personal growth: “The societal fixation on physical fitness and appearance limits women’s opportunities for true personal and intellectual development” (Friedan, 1963, p. 143). The juxtaposition of intellectual empowerment with physical demands further highlights the challenges that girls like Anca face as they navigate both societal and patriarchal expectations.

Anca’s Journey uses education and intellectual growth as key tools for female empowerment, in line with Liberal Feminism. The recognition of Anca’s intelligence serves as a counter-narrative to traditional gender roles, emphasizing the importance of education in breaking down barriers and promoting equality. However, the story also reflects the tension between intellectual and physical expectations, demonstrating the broader societal pressures placed on women and girls to excel in all areas of life. At the end of the story, all members of the family reunite and feel happy as they arrive at the port.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the research shows how Anca’s Journey challenges traditional gender roles and addresses the issue of migration through the dual lenses of *Liberal Feminism* and *Cultural Hybridity*. The story highlights how education and intellectual growth become key tools for female empowerment, as seen through Anca’s journey. The repeated references to her intelligence and learning emphasize the feminist argument that women, including young girls, should have the opportunity to break free from domestic confines and pursue intellectual fulfillment. Anca’s education not only enables her personal development but also challenges the societal expectations that limit women’s roles, aligning with Betty Friedan’s Liberal Feminism.

Cultural Hybridity helps us understand Anca’s negotiation of her dual identity as a migrant child. Anca navigates between the cultural traditions of her Romanian heritage and the new demands of American society. Her intellectual growth takes place in a metaphorical “third space,” where new identities are formed through the blending of cultural influences. Anca’s resilience in the face of societal expectations regarding both physical health and intellectual competence demonstrates the intersection of gender and cultural identity.

Ultimately, *Anca's Journey* uses the themes of migration, education, and gender to depict the ways in which female characters can assert *agency* and *resilience* within patriarchal and migration-focused narratives. The story portrays how girls like Anca can resist limiting societal labels and expectations by embracing both intellectual empowerment and cultural negotiation. This integrated approach offers a nuanced understanding of how children's literature can reflect and shape discussions on gender equality and cultural identity in migration contexts. Portraying intellectual growth as a form of empowerment, the narrative sometimes reinforces traditional expectations regarding physical strength, especially for migrants. The pressure on Anca to demonstrate physical fitness ("*America wants healthy people—even children*") reflects societal voices that prioritize physical capability over other forms of strength. This expectation places undue pressure on young girls like Anca, who are already grappling with the challenges of migration and cultural adaptation.

The narrative emphasizes Anca's resilience but does not fully explore the emotional toll of living between two cultures, which is a key aspect of cultural hybridity. Migrant children often face deep psychological struggles in maintaining their cultural roots while adapting to new societal norms, and these internal conflicts could have been more thoroughly examined in the story. By focusing predominantly on Anca's intellectual abilities and physical resilience, the story could risk simplifying the lived experiences of migrants who deal with more complex issues such as trauma, discrimination, and economic hardships. A more nuanced approach to these challenges could have deepened the narrative's engagement with feminist and cultural theories, offering a more critical perspective on the broader social structures that limit women's and migrants' potential. Despite criticisms, *Anca's Journey* remains an important text for introducing young readers to the themes of gender, migration, and identity formation. The illustrated story offers valuable insights on how children's literature can serve as a platform for exploring dynamic social issues, empowering young readers to reflect on their own experiences of identity and belonging. Through the lenses of Liberal Feminism and Cultural Hybridity, the story emphasizes the importance of intellectual empowerment and cultural negotiation in shaping resilient female identities, contributing to the broader discourse on migration, gender, and literature.

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