

## Conceptualizing Language and Gender in the Global Urban Context: Jennine Capó Crucet on *How to (Never) Leave Hialeah*

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**Abstract:** Jennine Capó Crucet is a Miami-born writer of Cuban immigrant parents. Although her work has yet to gain much recognition in the academy, Capó Crucet is the first Latina to win the Iowa Short Fiction Award in 2009 for *How to Leave Hialeah*, among numerous other honors. The present article analyzes Capó Crucet's short story "How to Leave Hialeah," the ending story of her debut collection. The narrative voice and protagonist satirize the notion of (not) returning to the homeland as an authenticator of cultural identity in diasporic communities in Miami. However, once the main character leaves, she inevitably reproduces and lives in the same discourses of (not) coming back. Thus, the idea of returning home in exiled characters is both reproduced and destabilized in the protagonist, who finally understands hers is a fluid, multiple identity, beyond the effects of internal-external migration processes on language, culture, and gender. I explore how the short story contests monolithic notions of belonging—in terms of nation(ality) and masculinist national imaginaries, spatiality, and family bonds and origins—by asserting, both linguistically and socially, new discourses that negotiate the global and the local in novel, non-dichotomous ways.

**Key Words:** Home, urban accent, beyond the hyphen, national imaginaries, gender.

Jennine Capó Crucet is the author of the short story collection *How to Leave Hialeah* (2009), the novel *Make Your Home Among Strangers* (2015), and the compilation of essays *My Time Among the Whites: Notes from an Unfinished Education* (2019), among other works of (non-) fiction. “How to Leave Hialeah” is the title and closing story of her debut collection. The short story is set in Miami-Dade County, the imagined Cuban-American space par excellence. More precisely, the eleven short stories take place in Hialeah, a working-class city in Greater Miami known as “The City of Progress,” echoing the efforts of its inhabitants to continue to grow and improve their quality of life in the US. Capó Crucet affirms that in her compilation of short stories, she wanted to capture “the idea of a big, overcrowded city still feeling small and inescapable, with everyone up in each other’s business, connected in some vague way but not necessarily recognizing it” (“How to Leave and Why”). Global Miami, and Hialeah itself, is expressed in multifaceted forms of heterogeneous neighborhoods resulting in diverse expressions of locality, and Capó Crucet’s book and language use capture this idea.<sup>1</sup>

In different popular cultural productions, the global immigrant city of Miami has been portrayed as an ideal scenario for crime-tv series such as *Miami Vice*, *CSI Miami*, and *Dexter*; as well as in print-narratives such as Tom Wolfe’s *Back to Blood*, and Carolina García-Aguilera’s Lupe Solano series. However, Hialeah—often considered “this tacky, over-the-top, obnoxious place” in the popular imaginary—has rarely served as the main setting for US Latina artistic productions (Gomez).<sup>2</sup> Against this backdrop, Capó Crucet’s works contribute to raise the visibility of a Miami community that distances itself from the Art Deco, paradisiacal, and luxurious imaginary of South Beach, Brickell Avenue, or the mansions of Coral Gables, as well as the historical early-exile Cuban enclave of Little Havana. Hialeah, a community with a population of 95.8% of Hispanic/Latino inhabitants, is home to working-class Cuban immigrants of all “waves”: the first-generation post-1959, the generation of the Freedom Flights from 1965 to 1973, the so-called “Marielitos” in the eighties, the “balseros” in the nineties, and more recent arrivals in the 2000s (Lynch “Expression”; Carter & Lynch).

Capó Crucet describes herself as a Miami writer, as she reveals in an interview with Mark Mustian and Diane Roberts. Instead of using more common designations to define her identity in terms of nation—such as Cuban or US writer—or in terms of ethnicity—such as Latina writer—she identifies as a writer in relation to the urban space where she grew up, a place that she chooses as the setting of many of her works. In *How to Leave Hialeah*, she gives voice to a particular working-class immigrant experience in Miami “from a bunch of different angles,” providing the reader with a “sense of place and a sense of culture that isn’t necessarily Latino culture but is very much American culture.” I interpret this clarification as a redefinition of what US literary narratives and cultural identities can mean (Capó Crucet, “Furious”).

The author was born in Hialeah to Cuban parents who emigrated before adolescence. Capó Crucet affirms in another interview with Melissa Scholes Young at *Fiction Writers Review* that the main character of “How to Leave Hialeah” also comes from Hialeah, “a background that most people would define as lower-class, and she’s thrust into a world that is different from home in pretty much every way imaginable” (“How to Leave and Why” 2). For the protagonist, the myth of the Cuban memory should remain in a more distant past. However, the fact that Miami is her home base enforces the burden she bears since, as grancaribeña writer Cristina García states, to a great extent “in Miami [...] very rigid ideas of what it means to be Cuban exist, and the mindset here is ‘you’re with us, or you’re against us’” (del Rio 44). García adds that this is a very exclusive notion: “It doesn’t include all us who also consider ourselves Cuban and think very differently,” and I would add, who imagine and create a Caribbean in dispersion that is heterogeneous and that has multiple gradients and (diasporic) imagined subjectivities in

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1. According to the 2020 US Census Bureau, 95.8% of the population of Hialeah was Hispanic/Latino, of which around three quarters is estimated to be Cuban or of Cuban descent.

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2. Only exceptionally Hialeah has served as scenery of a few episodes in literary works. For example, in García-Aguilera’s *Havana Heat*, Lupe Solano enters the community of Hialeah, which she disdains, and the recent web comedy series *Hialeah*, produced by former Hialeah resident Melissa Carcache, takes place there as well.

terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and identity (44).

I use the designation “grancaribeña” in an attempt to transcend geopolitical spaces based on monolithic cultural imaginaries of the US and the Caribbean. Within the context of postmodernity *qua* late capitalism, the term “US Latina” and the hyphenated notion that the nomenclature “Cuban-American” implies, demand reconsideration as they lack the sort of fluidity, flexibility and linguistic instrumentality observable in the post-national(ist) era.<sup>3</sup> The literary and cultural Gran Caribe, imagined as such, offers the possibility to decolonize the predetermined national imaginaries imposed upon Caribbean identities and so-called hyphenated identities in the US. I refer to the Gran Caribe as a cultural and sociolinguistic space in which the traditional dichotomy “los de aquí / los de allá” [‘those from here / those from there’] between the US and the Caribbean is unraveled and, consequently, the Hispanic Caribbean connects to other non-Spanish-speaking parts of the Caribbean and their diasporas.<sup>4</sup>

This article eschews the pervasive conceptual metaphors of hyphens, bridges, borders, and other in-between spaces that have traditionally prevailed in the readings of these artistic productions and that perpetuate the *status quo* of a binary system. I argue that “How to Leave Hialeah” moves beyond these metaphors to fundamentally question traditional structuralist notions of language and identity, as well as modern views of nationhood. Although written mostly in English, “How to Leave Hialeah” aligns with a Hispanophone Caribbean literary tradition. To that end, I explore how the second-generation female protagonist challenges monolithic notions of belonging—in terms of space, family, and masculinist national conceptions—by forging novel discourses that negotiate the global and the local in original, non-dichotomous ways, both linguistically and socially.

In the first section of this article, I consider how the diasporic dilemma of ‘returning home’ is both reproduced and destabilized in the story’s protagonist. The concept of a determined geographic and national “home(land)”—and its apparently indissoluble association with birthplace, ethnic and gender identities, and a mother tongue or native language—is misleading for her. As we will see in section two, the protagonist finally understands her identity as fluid, multiple, and beyond the effects of internal-external migration processes through the notion of urban language. Accordingly, section three explores how Capó Crucet’s revision and reinterpretation of the androcentrically-constructed one language/one nation ideological imperative of modernity problematizes the silenced role of women (writers) in US, Cuban, and Cuban-American imaginaries. With their creative writing, these authors revisit the national and cultural archives that have traditionally defined them.

### Hialeah as the New (Not) Returning Home

You know everyone will still be in Hialeah when you decide to come back. (Capó Crucet, “How to Leave” 158)

The title and plot of “How to Leave Hialeah” evoke the traditional trope in Modern literature of returning to the homeland in certain diasporic communities in the US. According to Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, “esta insistencia en el viaje o el retorno sigue privilegiando el vínculo con un territorio nacional único o la experiencia de los migrantes de primera generación como fenómenos que autentican identificaciones culturales” (37). The protagonist of Capó Crucet’s short story—a partial alter ego of the author, if we consider her biography—attempts to escape these narratives that pervade Miami’s Cuban communities, but she is always somehow trapped in them.<sup>5</sup> For the female main character, who finds herself living in the US Midwest, the “Cuban” home is Hialeah. This idea conceptualizes a Greater Cuba encompassing both

3. For a summary of the use of the terms “Latino” and “Latinidad” since the 1980s and their implications, see Aparicio (2009, 2019).

4. Although I acknowledge the Creole, Francophone, and Anglophone dimensions of the Caribbean, I intentionally write *el Gran Caribe* in Spanish because the text I examine is specifically related to the Hispanic Caribbean. However, to be more accurate, this is a Gran Caribe spoken through multiple languages and accents, which do not correspond to nationally delimited geopolitical boundaries.

5. In her online biography, Capó Crucet states that she writes to her younger, immature self “looking for a way into the world, and ... for her future friends and lovers, Miami natives or not, that they be ready to meet her.” Her depiction of Miami becomes “a complex portrait of a place you both love and can’t wait to escape,” as the author asserts in an interview with Melissa Scholes Young (“How to Leave and Why”).

the Caribbean island and South Florida, and shows how first-generation Cubans in Hialeah, represented by the protagonist's parents, continue living as Cubans in America (Pérez-Firmat, 3,7).

Capó Crucet detaches from the most common autoethnographical "I" in "ethnic Latina" narratives in the US because her writing is equally "American," although this literary technique is not normally applied to US academic and formal environments.<sup>6</sup> The young protagonist tells her story in a second-person narration, thus expressing her inner monologue while standing in a middle-point between academia's lack of recognition of the value of personal experience —"too often preferring to discuss the pattern of the whole: how entire groups behave to the detriment of the singular"— and the first-person type of narrative often found in the earliest novels of so-called US ethnic writers (Álvarez 74). Like Capó Crucet, Junot Díaz also writes in the second person (e.g., in "Miss Lora") when he takes distance from the story, as well as when he desires to comment on his younger self (Leyshon). Along the same lines, Patricia Engel's novel *Vida* shifts to the second person in the chapter "Green", although still being told from the point of view of the protagonist, Sabina. The Miami-based author explains that the decision to use a second person narration serves Sabina to zoom out from the battle she is fighting with herself and understand her persona a bit more (Falco 1). Indeed, Capó Crucet's use of the second-person narrative, combined with the second-person singular imperative, does not offer instruction, guidance, or advice. Her sarcastic and humorous tone, reflective of the writer's background in sketch comedy, is used as a "way around a character's lack of self-awareness," as Capó Crucet affirms ("How to Leave and Why"). Humor helps readers understand even what the main character herself cannot. This sarcasm from the second-person point of view also suggests that the protagonist openly defies the sometimes-static vision of the world in exile that has molded her identity since she was a child:

begin formulating arguments that will convince your parents to let you move far away from the city where every relative you have that's not in Cuba has lived since flying or floating into Miami ... you are their American Dream. Get their blessing to go to the one school that accepts you by promising to come back and live down the street from them forever. (156)

In other words, the protagonist is the American Dream of her parents' generation. She is supposed to live both the life they could not (afford to) live due to their migratory status and their working-class condition. "Do not tell anyone your father never finished high school," says the narrative voice, but she is also forced to remain closely tied to her community of origin (156). This shows the duality the main character must face in her everyday life: assimilating to mainstream American culture while remaining participatory in her parents' Cuban narratives.

When the protagonist finally leaves Hialeah, she realizes that she does not fit in well in the university environment of New England, despite their telling her that: "You are important to our university community [...]. You are part of our commitment to diversity" (156). She thus starts to feel relieved by the plan of going back to Hialeah, a place that feels more like home at this moment, for the Christmas holidays. However, as time goes by, after four years away from Hialeah, she finds herself in a state of disarray: "you are panicking when you think about going back—you had to leave to realize you ever wanted to" (159). Joining the Spanish Club does not help her remember who she was in high school nor does it get her excited about moving back home, as is suggested by a Latino fraternity member at the university with whom she is romantically involved. The Latino Studies seminar in which she enrolls (and is assigned a grade of A-) does not clarify her doubts and anxieties either. The distance between the university environment and the protagonist's background is made all the more apparent to her when

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6. See McAuliffe for a detailed account of how works of so-called "ethnic writers" such as Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* qualify as autoethnographies.

she talks to her parents about some of the topics discussed in her classes— “What does it really mean to be a minority? How do we construct identity? How is the concept of race forced upon us?”—to which her father exclaims, “What the fuck are you talking about?” (160). Her involvement in The Latino Studies seminar even leads her to break up with her boyfriend “after deciding he and his organization are posers buying into the Ghetto-Fabulous-Jennifer-Lopez-Loving Latino identity put forth by the media” (160). The university Latino community reproduces the images and narratives, as well as protonarratives, of this Other ingrained in the US imaginary and reproduced in what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai defines as the notion of mediascapes (“Disjuncture” 288-9). With this term the scholar refers to the complex sets of metaphors, images, and narratives created by the media that blur the lines between realistic and fictional landscapes and project an often idealized and/or stereotyped vision of the Other and of other worlds.

By dating a member of the Latino fraternity on campus, the protagonist was seeking refuge in her roots when feeling threatened by her new white Anglo environment. He is of Puerto Rican origin, however, and his parents are third-generation, so they do not speak Spanish at all. All in all, he experiences a very different kind of ‘Latinidad’, as expressed in the following passage:

Tell him you’ve always liked Puerto Ricans (even though every racist joke your father has ever told you involved Puerto Ricans in some way) ... Do not look confused when his mother serves meat loaf and mashed potatoes and your boyfriend calls it real home cooking. ... Hold your laughter even as she claims that Che Guevara is actually still alive and living in a castle off the coast of Vieques. (159)

This episode disarticulates the assumed happy notion of pan-Latinidad. It is also a direct critique of the umbrella term ‘Latino’ when it does not consider the diverse and complex array of ‘Latinidades’ in terms of generation, national imaginary, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. This paragraph shows the different “migrant” experiences of a fourth-generation Puerto Rican man in New Jersey and a second-generation Cuban woman in Hialeah. Contrary to what occurs to her, for him the Latino experience becomes an idealized aspect of a distant past that exerts little influence on his persona.

After graduating college in New England, the protagonist decides she cannot return “home” because she needs to determine what “home” means before she can go there. This decision is neither welcomed by her father nor by her mother, who reminds her, “But mamita, you made a promise” (160). Her parents prioritize “home” and a marriage over their daughter’s education. But the protagonist experiences similar emotions as Capó Crucet: the realization that there are parts of her identity “that have come to [her] since leaving home, and those parts just do not fit with the parts of [her] that need to think of Miami as home base” (“How to Leave and Why”).

The protagonist then pursues graduate studies in the so-called Great White North, the rural Midwest. This place epitomizes the stereotypical “real” America that conforms with the imaginary of both migrants and United States nationals. The narrative voice sarcastically expresses this idea: “Move to what you learn is nicknamed The Great White North. Tell yourself, this is America! This is the heartland!” (160). Once she settles there, she realizes that “nice” people from the North make her feel that Hialeah is more “home” than ever:

Appreciate how everyone is so nice, but claim Hialeah fiercely since it’s all people ask you about anyway. They’ve never seen hair so curly, so dark. You have never felt more Cuban in your

life, mainly because for the first time, you are consistently being identified as Mexican or something. (160)

Hialeah becomes an extension of Cuba. Having been born in this city does not automatically confer the main character a badge of unmistakable “Americanness”. Her features, background, and her Miami Latina accent raise suspicion. At the beginning-of-semester party at her graduate program, the protagonist slips Spanish words into her sentences to see if anyone asks her about them. A student drives her home after the party because he does not think she is able to take the bus, and she says “What, puta, you think I never rode no bus in Miami?” Whereas this is probably a common way of speaking and a typical language crossing among her circle of friends in Hialeah, the student replies: “That’s fascinating –what does puta mean?” (161). Her mother’s advice is to assimilate to the new culture: “Why can’t you just shut up about being Cuban, your mother says ... No one would even notice if you flat-ironed your hair and stopped talking” (163). This context reflects monolingual codes, seeing certain multilingual practices as “exotic” and “fascinating” (161). She is even called Spic for the first time in this new environment (163).

As the protagonist endures these racialized episodes in the Midwest she refuses to go back to the narratives and memories her parents and community inflicted on her: “Start to worry you have communist leanings—wonder if that’s really so bad. Keep this to yourself; you do not want to hear the story of your father eating grasshoppers while in a Cuban prison, not again” (164). At least in the Midwest, she can freely vote for the Democrats without feeling the pressure of Hialeah’s politics that both her parents and her circle of friends support. Therefore, she decides to stay and find a job, not thinking of returning to Hialeah until she is forced to do so because of the passing of her cousin Barbarita.

Only such a disturbing family event can reconcile her with “home,” or what used to be “home.” A major trauma in her family/community leads her to overcome the feeling of dislocation and moves her to take action. She did not even know that Barbarita had been ill for six months; she had been too busy making up excuses for not coming back to Hialeah (165). But, while the protagonist avoided the family stories about roots and memories, she now feels left out. In this time of crisis, she realizes she was staying on the hyphen, in the in-between, and that she needs to get off and surpass the “rejas” of her home in Hialeah (168). Even though she tried to convince herself that those physical rejas were a metaphor for her childhood, “a caged bird, wings clipped, never to fly free; a zoo animal on display yet up for sale to the highest-bidding boyfriend; a rare painting trapped each night after the museum closes,” she now understands that she wanted to believe it, because that made her departure an escape and not a desertion (168). Only at this moment of self-realization, forced by her guilt for deceiving a member of her community of women, can she go back to Hialeah “ready to mourn everything” (169).

From this moment on, she realizes she was perpetuating those dualistic imaginaries that she was condemning and escaping from. The protagonist was following the ideological process Judith Irvine and Susan Gal’s denominate fractal recursivity:

the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level ... the myriad oppositions that can create identity may be reproduced repeatedly, either within each side of a dichotomy or outside it ... In any case, the oppositions do not define fixed or stable social groups, and the mimesis they suggest cannot be more than partial. Rather, they provide actors with the discursive or cultural resources to claim and thus attempt to create shifting “communities,”

identities, selves, and roles, at different levels of contrast, within a cultural field. (404)

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Hence the dichotomy US/Cuba was recreated (in terms of identity and sociology) within the US side of the dichotomy, to yield Hialeah/Northern US, Hialeah as Cubanness/the Midwest as Americanness, Spanish/English, etc. But she is now ready to mourn the death of those macro-narratives and accept her multiple self; to live here and there (in the Cuba of her parents, Hialeah, and the Midwest). She can now connect all the micro-narratives that form her identity and live with and through them, leaving behind both the inherited traumas of her Cuban side, and the traumatized reactions to racial and gender discrimination on the American side of the hyphen. The main character can finally think of herself as part of a Gran Caribe in dispersion and understands that her cultural identity does not depend on her (not) returning to Hialeah. She is prepared to mourn the person she was and accept the person she has become. Thus, the end of the story implies a new beginning for the protagonist beyond the hyphen.

### Not Spanish, but Urban

You have seventy-six students and, unlike your previous overly polite ones, these have opinions. Several of them are from Chicago and recognize your accent for what it actually is—not Spanish, but Urban. Let this give you hope. Their questions about Miami are about the beach, or if you'd been there during a particular hurricane, or if you've ever been to the birthplace of a particular rapper. (Capó Crucet, "How to Leave" 164)

The protagonist is finally ready for her return visit to Hialeah just as she begins a job as an adjunct instructor at a junior college in southern Wisconsin teaching a course titled *The Sociology of Communities*. Here the protagonist's students ultimately interpret her accent as urban, not as Spanish or Hispanic, as it had been perceived at the previous institutions where she had studied. This recognition of an urban accent coincides with the birth of the protagonist's celebration of a fluid identity. The protagonist thus finally escapes the macro-narratives surrounding her cultural and linguistic identity in the Midwest and New England, to which the narrative voice also gives macro- and non-specific nomenclatures as representations of the stereotyping dominant "white Anglo" discourses. The students' comments and questions about Miami have nothing to do with Hialeah, origins, ethnicity, or Spanish language, but about trivial popular perceptions regarding climate or music, which place Miami as part of a global landscape. The narrative voice highlights the complex, contradictory and diverse spaces such as her classroom, where people from Chicago interact with locals from southern Wisconsin.

Metropolises such as Chicago are multiple, diverse and global. In them, multiaccentuality is recognized, contrary to what occurred in the rural Midwest or New England, where multiaccentuality was not perceptible. This sociolinguistic phenomenon of late modernity manifests itself primarily in global urban spaces, as Appadurai and Blommaert suggest in their cultural and sociolinguistic analyses of (late) modernity and globalization. Urban spaces are the suitable contexts for diasporic public spheres to emerge since they are "part of the cultural dynamic of urban life in most countries and continents, in which migration and mass mediation coconstitute a new sense of the global as modern and the modern as global" (Appadurai, *Modernity* 10). Appadurai's assertion in *Modernity at Large* that nation-states are entering a terminal crisis (21) leads him to propose an alternative conceptualization to Benedict Anderson's imagined communities. He proposes the concept of "diasporic public spheres": collective imagined places where a dialogue is established between those who stay and those who leave, between the local and the global, and among diverse

localities inside the global. The conceptual tool of “diasporic public spheres” helps us link imagination to a post-national political world which “proves not to be a system of homogeneous units (as with the current system of nation-states) but a system based on relations between heterogeneous units” (23). Metropolitan Miami is a clear representation of a diasporic public sphere where global urban Miami establishes a dialogue with local Hialeah.<sup>7</sup> The protagonist’s new university environment is representative of this concept as well. Despite its rural setting, students come from all over, but principally from another global city, Chicago. This shows the current situation of flows and migration not only at a transnational but also at a national level: from rural to urban areas and vice versa. Hence arises the need to revise nation-state and center-periphery ideologies, together with the notion of ‘community,’ since these are less bound by geopolitical or ethnic identity constraints.

Grancaribeñas inhabit several languages, rather than an in-between language. Through the textual practice of linguistic crossing these artists manifest movement and multiplicity. I build upon Ben Rampton’s notion of language crossing, which the sociolinguist defines as “the use of language varieties [generally] associated with social or ethnic groups that the speaker doesn’t normally ‘belong’ to” (“Language” 485). This is the use of a language or linguistic variety that is assumed not to belong to the subject who is using it, and thus requires permanent movement across and blurring of traditionally fixed ethnic and social boundaries, posing “questions of legitimacy that participants will need to negotiate” (“Language” 485). He argues that crossing is also about creativity — much neglected in modern linguistics — about “people transgressing the conventional equation of language and ethnicity prescribed for them in ethnic absolutism [...] evidence of cultural innovation in globalized [...] spaces” (*Crossing* 6). Rampton’s arguments move beyond the structuralist synchronic approach to language study in the field of modern linguistics toward a postmodern logic. Due to diasporic processes and technological advances in an increasingly interconnected world, a linguistics based upon geopolitical boundaries becomes less viable for purposes of cultural and social analysis. There is now an interest in fragmentation, multiplicity, and contradiction beyond the idea of desired totality of an imagined nation-state. Framed within this theoretical approach, I sustain that authors like Capó Crucet are concerned with mobile language resources and cultural identities rather than linguistically and culturally defined and immobile subjects and objects.

What happens in the protagonist’s classroom in southern Wisconsin is a characteristic step in globalizing processes, which creates individual and societal multilingualism. Her urban English is global and, at the same time, it has been “vernacularized”; it is an English with local specificities, which is ever more common in urban spaces of globality. Urban spaces break with the still persistent dichotomy urban/rural, and city/village because, as Blommaert explains, the world has become “a tremendously complex web of villages, towns, neighborhoods, settlements connected by material and symbolic ties in often unpredictable ways” (1). That the protagonist talks about an urban accent instead of a Spanish one does not mean she is rejecting her Cuban origins or that she is ashamed of her Hispanophone self. Rather, it implies that she has acquired a non-binary conceptualization of the world around her (i.e., she does not think of her linguistic self as Spanish/English) and that she perceives languages, English in this case, as crossed, fluid, and multiple (cf. Rampton “Language”).

To understand the identity of Capó Crucet’s protagonist, we need analytical tools that can be used to study language phenomena “as located in and distributed across different scales, from the global to the local, and to examine the connections between these various levels in

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7. For detailed information on the global/local dialectic in global cities, see Sassen, and Collins, Slembrouck, & Baynham.

ways that do not reduce phenomena and events to their strict context of occurrence” (Blommaert 1). Accordingly, I use the theoretical framework of Heller’s understanding of bilingualism and Blommaert’s sociolinguistics of globalization rather than studies of code-switching, which understand “codes” as “artefactualized languages”, and which in most cases fail to do justice to complex linguistic identities and situations (Blommaert 12, Heller 6-8).<sup>8</sup> In fact, these often continue to perpetuate a dualistic mode of thinking about two separate, bounded and static/standard notions of language and national imaginaries. In current linguistic repertoires, there is more than “language” at play. As Blommaert states, these are repertoires

constructed out of bits and pieces of conventionally defined ‘languages’ and concretely assuming the shape of registers and genres, of specific patterns of language in communicative forms ... even if such resources can be conventionally tagged as ‘belonging’ to language X or Y, it is good to remember that the whole point is about the dislodging of such resources from conventional origins. This ... is a sociolinguistics of mobile resources, no longer a sociolinguistics of immobile languages. (43)

This paradigm focuses “not on language-in place but on language-in-motion, with various spatio-temporal frames interacting with one another,” which Blommaert calls “vertical scale levels,” in which social, cultural and political indexical distinctions occur (5).

The protagonist’s linguistic situation is an example of the superdiverse multilingual repertoire Blommaert denotes. She does not share one common language and culture associated with one particular place or community. In her, a “transformative ‘diversification of diversity’” occurs in terms of ethnicity, country of origin, gender, social class, labor market experiences, and spatial and local factors (Vertovec). She is born and raised in Hialeah, where the Spanish language used is combined with other Spanish varieties in the area and with the English learned at school –as driven by an ideological nationalist imperative—for the younger generations. Our female character moves translocally when pursuing a college degree in New England, and then takes a job in southern Wisconsin. She also moves transsocially because, through education, she ascends to an upper-level social-class scale while maintaining her family links in Hialeah. Her migration status is equally complex; it is not as straightforward as

people emigrating and immigrating –that is, a change in the spatial organization of one’s life in an enduring way. People left their country and settled in another. In that new country, they lived separated from their country of origin, perhaps (but not necessarily) in ethnic communities. They took their languages and other cultural belongings with them, but the separation from the land of origin and the permanent nature of migration was likely to bring pressure to accommodate to the host society. (Blommaert 6)

Whereas this resembles the protagonist’s parent’s migratory process, it greatly differs from her own “migratory” or ethnic condition; her way is toward a diversification of diversity, a complex multilingual repertoire in which “ethnic” and/or “original” languages and varieties are combined with *linguas francas* and, as a result, ethnicities are recategorized (Rampton, “Language”; Crossing). In spite of being an American citizen by birth, the protagonist is identified as Cuban at home, and as the American Dream by her immigrant parents. At home, she hears and has always heard Spanish; and she speaks vernacular English with Spanish crossings when socializing in Hialeah.<sup>9</sup> Once in the North, she is perceived as a Hispanic/Latina or “as the Mexican one” (162). Linguistically, she functions in English at school, at work, and in social

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8. Blommaert refers to the traditional focus of sociolinguistics on static variation, local distribution of varieties, and stratified language contact (1).

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9. In 2016, 93.1% of the population of Hialeah (five years and older) reported speaking Spanish at home.

events. Her English is accented; it is perceived as Hispanic, or maybe Miamian, by her classmates in New England, and as urban by her Chicago-origin students in southern Wisconsin. She reads literature, writes emails, and probably watches television in standard English, but phone communication with her parents is in vernacular Cuban Spanish. When she visits Hialeah, radio commercials are often in a series of Spanish varieties as well, and television news is given in a “neutral” US variety of the Spanish language that has little to do with the one spoken by her parents.<sup>10</sup> This type of fragmented or sometimes “incomplete” linguistic and cultural repertoire reflects the highly diverse life-trajectories and environments of many migrant subjects (Blommaert 8).

Capó Cruet’s own writing strategies reveal a deviation from standard American English practices and conventional narrative forms in favor of an urban language. The language of her fiction is in English with the exception of a few lexical insertions in Spanish without using the visual mark of italics, which we do find in other narratives of the Gran Caribe, such as Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban* or Achy Obejas’s *Memory Mambo*. In her second novel, *Days of Awe*, Obejas—following Junot Díaz—also eliminates the italics with the shared intention of naturalizing the Spanish inclusions. The author confesses that italics emphasized “the other rather than the commonality” and that today words like *bodega* should be considered part of an American vocabulary (Obejas, “Days of”).<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Capó Cruet’s compilation of short stories does not provide the reader with a glossary for clarification of the Spanish terms, as Obejas does.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, we can affirm—following Lourdes Torres’s opinion—that the Spanish language in “How to Leave Hialeah” is “easily accessed, transparent and cushioned” (79).

As García states, such insertions are integrated in the narrative to indicate that the story is also taking place in Spanish (Lynch, “Novelist”); they can “disrupt, enchant, occlude or highlight the taken-for-granted English of American literature and can thereby perform wonders of poetic signification as well as cultural critique” (Lauret 2). The inserted Spanish words would all convey different connotations than the ones intended if they were written in English. In some cases, expressions emerge in the characters’ dialogues with a mimetic or emotional purpose. Certainly, their manifestation in grancaribeña literary works makes US readers conscious of the probable presence of Spanish in their own environment. They also question the mythical and foundational narratives “created in exile, a group hallucination” of what “Cubanness” should mean and in which language (Obejas, *Memory* 25).

Through the lexical “branding” constituted by their Spanish insertions and other language crossings, I group grancaribeñas together in a heterogeneous community of literary practice.<sup>13</sup> The inclusion of Spanish lexicon in principally English texts (or vice versa as in Santos Febres’ *Sirena Selena*, for instance), with the use of the visual mark of italics in some cases, becomes a type of lexical branding (the avoidance of italics then becomes a sub-branding process within the main one) through which these authors create an image for their community of writing practice.<sup>14</sup> My analytical and conceptual apparatus regarding the notion of community of practice pairs with Rampton’s conceptualization of Lave

10. For a study on the “Mexicanization” of what is considered a “neutral” Spanish in the media, see Artman. See also Valencia and Lynch.

11. Junot Díaz explains why he does not use italics either: “allowing the Spanish to exist in my text without the benefit of italics or quotation marks was a very important political move. Spanish is not a minority language. Not in this hemisphere, not in the United States, not in the world inside my head. So why treat it like one? Why ‘other’ it? Why denormalize it? By keeping the Spanish as normative in a predominantly English text, I wanted to remind readers of the fluidity of languages, the mutability of languages. And to mark how steadily English is transforming Spanish and Spanish is transforming English” (Céspedes, Torres-Saillant & Díaz, 904; cf. Lyn Di Iorio Sandín).

12. As regards the glossary, Obejas affirms: “The glossary’s ... not just language-based. It’s about culture and history. It was a way to create context, for those readers who want it, without interrupting the flow of the story ... there are no footnotes, so the reader has to decide whether she wants to see if there’s anything back there, in the glossary, about whatever it is she thinks she may have missed, or wants to know more about” (Prezioso 1) That the readers have to see “if there is anything back there” symbolizes what these writers intend to accomplish with their Spanish insertions: that the US, “Cuban-American,” and/or other (non-) hyphenated audiences need to cross languages to see what there is behind this mode of production.

13. It is heterogeneous because the works within this community of literary practice embrace complexity, contradictions, and contesting ideologies, together with social differentiations. In fact, Capó Cruet’s short story differs from other texts of the Gran Caribe in matters of geography, ethnicity, and social class, among others.

14. I draw on Mark Sebba’s orthographic notion of ‘branding’, referring to a specific visual/graphical element of written language (unlike oral language) which becomes an emblem of a group of people who use the element in question in their writing practices, and which may be recognized even by those who do not know the language in question. By way of example, the scholar mentions the debate around the grapheme “k” in the representation of Basque in Spain, which is used subversively when Castilian has “c” as a brand for language activists in the Basque counterculture to make Spanish look like Basque. As Sebba suggests, the existence of a choice of two different “brands” (i.e., using italics or not in our case of grancaribeña writers) to provide the same function increases the identity-marking potential, so it also increases the ideological potential of the choice.

and Wenger's term.<sup>15</sup> Instead of thinking of static and foundationalist communities that pre-exist and pre-determine people, there is a growing emphasis on the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion of specific groups and interactions and on the flows of people, texts, images, and ideas across social and geographic space as well as local and global networks (Rampton "Speech" 1; Crossing 2). Along the same lines, this article conceptualizes a literary community of practice because, as stated by Rampton, "scholarship itself is no longer regarded as simply reporting on communities—it also helps to create them, destroy and prevent their inception" ("Speech" 1). If we acknowledge that language use and social organizations are intrinsically linked, then the transformative language employed by grancaribeña writers opens up a solitary space for non-dichotomous modes of expression, social categories, and types of social and literary organization.

Methodologically, I combine the community-of-practice perspective with a language ideologies approach. As the protagonist of "How to Leave Hialeah" does, this viewpoint allows me to analyze 'community' as a political construct, questioning the stereotyped assumptions conveyed through hyphenated conceptualizations, the ideological and political connotations they entail, and the exclusions they can create. The representational implications and meanings of the language practices in grancaribeña texts create a translocal post-national community of literary practice that suggests global social transformation, one that is not based on a unified language, common subjectivity, or a national identity or territory.<sup>16</sup> It is neither chronological, nor spatial or necessarily virtual, but linguistic and feminist, sharing a political sense of aesthetics of multiplicity. Maria Lauret suggests that the intra-textual multilingualism observable in these writers could be a defining feature of global literature in the future (5). The insertions of the Spanish local into the English lingua franca of globalization processes are a way to disclose the heterogeneous reality of the local. They also place the socially peripheral into the discursive center and resist global forces (while reshaping and participating in them) as well as concomitant hegemonic discourses of power, foundational writing codes, and authoritative codes established by canonical male writers.

I interpret Capó Cruet's entire compilation *How to Leave Hialeah* as a symbolic representation of Appadurai's notion of "vernacular globalization," of the postmodern dialogue between the local and the global, both in linguistic and cultural terms. The book reflects a type of vernacular globalization in the sense that through her artistic production and aesthetics of multiplicity, she produces globality "at one particular scale-level, lower than the fully global one: it is the connectedness of small pockets of people located (and 'local') in different parts of the world, sharing cultural products and being involved in processes of joint cultural production" in what I call a grancaribeña community of literary practice (Blommaert 77).

#### An Excuse to Leave and a Reason to Go Back

My job in LA was working with students ... who went to some of the most under-served high schools in the county ... I told them bluntly, ... as much as the rest of your lives will be a reward for valuing your mind and your education over more ephemeral things, you will never relate to your family in the same way... You will never really belong in either place once you go... you are strong enough to be all these different versions of yourself and still be okay. (Capó Cruet "How to Leave and Why")

If we accept that language has been a key element in the development processes of modern nation states, and that such projects are also constructed based on a patriarchal model, then the language crossings of this community of practice of women writers offer a highly sensible feminist alternative to the spatial concept of nation-state and the roles of masculinity and femininity associated with it. Judith Butler's notion of the ideological play of performativities broadens the idea of a linguistic

15. Lave and Wenger first proposed this notion to refer to a group of people who share a craft or a profession. For a detailed explanation of the concept, see these authors' cited work.

16. I adopt Santos Febres' definition of "translocality" as a tool that "defines the social and discursive practices of writers that reflect upon conditions of circular migration. It differs from hybridity or oppositional consciousness in that it focuses on the problems of location and displacement within multinational contexts. Translocality directly applies to texts that respond to multiple discursive fields of racial, class, national, gender and sexual identities. It sets them in motion and pays attention to textual practices that uncover and thus criticize conditions of multiple oppressions" (176).

community of practice, supported by the sociolinguistic theory presented, to include a gender and a feminist political approach to these artistic productions. If we accept the argument regarding the performative function of language when it occurs in unison with certain social norms, and the “reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler 2), we can interpret these authors’ language crossings as an acknowledgement of exclusionary processes in the current ontological domains and a resignification of them in an effort to (1) deconstruct the wholeness of the languages we know, (2) give ontological visibility to those voices (as regards language, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and national imaginaries) that remain in the domains of unthinkability, and (3) destabilize binary systems constructed through the repetition of those regulatory codes which create an ontology of inclusion and exclusion. If the repetition and performativity of normative discourses— i.e., regulatory language (or languages) – are the creators of established gender roles and identities, the alteration in the use of these languages (by means of language crossings, and a resulting aesthetics of multiplicity) in the grancaribeña narratives can be viewed as an effort to transform dualistic modern notions of language, nationhood, gender, and ethnicity.

Capó Crucet’s use of the second-person point of view not only conveys a sense of impersonality but also of repetition to the story, as if the narrated experience happened to more women in the protagonist’s situation. The second-person narration expresses what is expected to happen to a Latina who is raised by a Cuban family in Hialeah and who moves up north. This is also the reason why readers never know the protagonist’s name. She may even be inviting those women in her situation to transcend the static national and masculinist hegemonic regulatory frames that shape their identity on both sides of the Cuban-American hyphen, a process that is as difficult to escape as leaving Hialeah: “It is impossible to leave without an excuse—something must push you out, at least at first. You won’t go otherwise; you are happy, the weather is bright, and you have a car” (153).

It is as difficult for Capó Crucet’s protagonist to leave Hialeah—and its constitutive discourses from both the Caribbean and the US—as it was for her parents to leave Cuba and not long for this (home)land. Michael Cardenas Jr., the protagonist’s boyfriend in high school, is her main pretext to escape: “Your mother will love him because he plans to marry you in three years when you turn eighteen. He is nineteen. He also goes to Miami High, where he is very popular because he plays football and makes fun of reading” (154). Although born in the US, Michael embodies the stereotype of the “macho Latino.” He is obsessed with having sex with the protagonist, to possess her because “you are a virgin and somewhat Catholic and he knows if you sleep together, you’ll feel too guilty to ever leave him” (154). He seems happy with his working-class condition and finally attends Florida State University with the only aspiration of having sex with college girls, who “have sex with you without crying for two hours afterward” (154).

Nevertheless, these are not the girls he will probably end up marrying. Michael may perpetuate the traditional gender roles that have been passed on to him through generations and will marry a woman that takes care of him:

Your friends have parents just like yours, and your moms are always hoping another mother comes along as a chaperone when you all go to the movies on Saturday nights because then they can compare their husbands’ demands—put my socks on for me before I get out of bed, I hate cold floors, or, you have to make me my lunch because only your sandwiches taste good to me—and laugh at how much they are like babies. (154)

The protagonist's way of escaping this intra-generational gender-role tendency is formal education. Explained as if it were almost done unconsciously, it is during the "broken-up weeks" with Michael "that you do things like research out-of-state colleges and sign up for community college classes at night to distract you from how pissed you are. This has the side effect of boosting your GPA" (154). When she is officially "dumped" by Michael because "you are stubborn about the sex thing, and still, you can't think of your butt as anything other than an out-hole," she decides to apply for colleges outside Florida (155). The fact that she only dedicates herself to her education as a second alternative path to her romantic relationship with Michael predicts how difficult it is to escape the surrounding gender roles. A marriage with Michael would have most probably made the protagonist follow the gendered social norms she has grown up with in Hialeah. Through higher education, she can resist the hegemonic masculinity of her Cuban background.

Therefore, the protagonist struggles to leave not only her "home" (in) Hialeah but also the attached masculine hierarchy she has experienced since birth. As Susan Strehle states, "both home and nation draw on and perpetuate a fundamentally patriarchal authority, hardly unique to these institutions" (432). For example, when she is about to leave for college, her mother has a "vague" sex talk with her suggesting virginity until marriage (155). Her mother perpetuates this marianismo throughout the entire story. It is important to remember that "stereotypically women are taught not to complain" (Álvarez 71). On another occasion, when the protagonist breaks things off with a Spaniard she was dating at the university in New England, she does not tell her mother because "she loves Spaniards, and you are twenty and not married and you refuse to settle down" (159). For women indoctrinated into the masculine hierarchy like her mother, education is nothing compared to marriage (Álvarez 71), so excellent grades still constitute "coming back with nothing" (159). For that reason, when the protagonist returns for the first time to Hialeah and refuses to talk to Michael, her mother betrays her by telling him that her daughter is in her bedroom, although she had asked her to say that she was not home (157).

It is not until she starts college that the protagonist is sexually liberated: "You have had sex with one and a half guys [...] and yes, there'd been guilt, but God did not strike you dead" (157). It is not arbitrary that she chooses Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* as the subject of her senior thesis.<sup>17</sup> In a less dramatic way, she also escapes because she does not want to marry under her family's pressure. Of course, the protagonist can now, when recounting her past, be sarcastic about her relationship with Michael and her mother, because she has managed to leave and distance herself. However, the masculinist hierarchy not only happens at "home" and the national imaginary connected to her "homeland." It also takes place in academia, white American literacy and national pride, into which she has been formally educated. When she moves to "The Great White North" for her graduate studies, she is the only person who is not white in her department; indeed, she feels her African roots more than ever (161). Back in New England, she already realizes that the universities' claim for diversity is only an institutional façade (158). Consequently, the men that approach her do it because they see her as exotic. For instance, she starts dating a third-year graduate student who finds her "fascinating" and asks her "all sort of questions about growing up in el barrio" until she discovers that he has been using her for research purposes without telling her: "he's recently changed his dissertation topic to something concerning the Cuban-American community in Miami" (162). He excuses himself: "Maybe I did ... But that isn't why I dated you, it was a bonus" (162). He has always seen her as someone exotic that can be the object of his research. The conflict of representation is at stake here. The protagonist has not even

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17. This novel, published in 1748, tells the story of a heroine's escape from a loveless marriage arranged by her family for the sake of wealth.

been given the chance to speak. She has been given the role of Gayatri Spivak's subaltern, who cannot speak, and her boyfriend gives voice to a white, male, privileged, academic, institutionalized postcolonial discourse that studies the subaltern through the same modes of colonial dominance it seeks to disarticulate.

Not long before, the protagonist had learned of her boyfriend's third testicle. Far from using the word "exotic" to describe his physical condition, because she has learned "that word is used to push people into some separate, freakish category," she feels a kind of solidarity with him: "...think that you could love this gloomy, deformed person; maybe he has always felt the loneliness sitting on you since you left home" (162). This anecdote demonstrates how a different physical condition in a white man does not have the same heavy burden as being 'Latina' (i.e., from a different ethnicity) in that context. He still fits a system, perpetuated in academia, which sees her as belonging to a non-regular community in the US. However, this same academia, serves also as a tool for resistance. She is now inside the official discourse and, from there, she can begin deconstructing it.

Also, academia allows her to move across classes. She can leave her lower-class condition, a fact that partly liberates her from being subsumed into those gender roles she seeks to avoid. For a moment, she forgets that it is her community of women both in "white America" and in Hialeah that will end up giving her more power to evade and contest those fixed imaginaries. Although she wonders, "Is this really happening? I am part of this group?" she sits "in biweekly off-campus meetings with your fellow Latinas, each of them made paler by the Great White North's conquest over their once-stubborn pigment. They face the same issues in their departments—the problem, you're learning, is system-wide. Write strongly worded joint letters to be sent at the end of the term" (162-63).

Yet, with her departure, she has left women in Hialeah behind. The first time the protagonist goes back to Hialeah after her first semester in New England, she visits Myra, a high school friend, who does not react well to the protagonist's Oh man, that sucks comment, when Myra tells her she still works as a truck dispatcher for El Dorado Furniture (157). Although Myra tries to ignore the comment, the protagonist insists: "Seriously, chica, that's a high school job —you can't work there forever" (157). Myra responds, "Shut up with this chica crap like you know me ..." (157). The protagonist determines Myra is jealous and comprehends they now belong to rather different worlds. Now that she fits an educated class, she breaks the pact among women she had with Myra (a pact that contemplates multiple specificities—cultural and social, among other particularities—in each of these women). Also, in a way, she breaks the pact with her cousin Barbarita. The alliance among cousins in a forced eternal exile is what would help them resist the masculinist macro-narratives they have lived with. But Barbarita died from a brain tumor diagnosed six months earlier. Although the protagonist tries to blame her mother for not telling her, for robbing her final hours with her cousin, and for depriving Barbarita of her [own] escape, she recognizes that she had not talked to her cousin for eight months— "at Noche Buena, last time you were home" (165). The protagonist excuses herself, "that is normal—you live far away," but she feels she has betrayed Barbarita (165).

We know that Barbarita was a lesbian. Her family does not fully accept her sexuality, not even Barbarita's mother, a fact that informs the reader of the difficulty of being lesbian in Hialeah. Only the protagonist accepts Barbarita's sexuality as natural, and only could she make fun of her by calling her Barbarino. She feels responsible for not having facilitated Barbarita's escape: "she has never been further north than Orlando. When she was a teenager, she'd bragged to you that one day, she'd move to New York City and never come back" (165). And only

now that her cousin is dead, she is finally keeping her promise of going back. But she understands she can only do it by accepting all the fragmented parts that constitute her identity: she drinks Café Bustelo in an “I-don’t-do-Mondays” mug (167). The protagonist does not find in her Cuban heritage an identity lost between two worlds, but rather reaches a self-affirmation of her multiple self. At the same time, the protagonist enjoys the possibility of the promised American dream of upward mobility, inaccessible to the other women in her Hialeah community.

The same occurs in Capó Crucet’s writing process. As Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Sternbach argue, rather than assuming the conventional readings of “minority” literature in the US, which emphasize each ethnic group’s search for identity, critics should be claiming that these writings argue for self-affirmation, “a self-perception and a self-definition that stems from her rootedness in her heritage and in her historical circumstances ... a search for the expression or articulation of that identity, but not for her identity itself” (3). In my interpretation, grancaribeña writers demonstrate how, acknowledging their histories and collective beings, their female protagonists become subjects whose “psyche is intact, contrary to the schizophrenic stereotype imposed on [them] by mono-cultural Anglo-Americans [and I would add, mono-cultural Caribbeans, or Caribbean macro-narratives], who cannot, and will not, understand a [multiple] reality” (Ortega and Saporta Sternbach 17). Through her writing of “How to Leave Hialeah,” Capó Crucet also escapes the feeling of being trapped by the aforementioned two worlds, “mostly by manipulating the story’s time span (several years) and by using the second-person voice (which I tried to avoid, but again, eventually the story demanded it, and I do what the story tells me to do),” as well as by her stand on language(s) (“How to Leave and Why”). For the author, creative writing and formal education open the door to an otherwise unimaginable new world beyond binaries and predetermined existences.

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