



ARTICLES:

Christina Civantos. "The Pliable Page: Turn-of-the-21st-Century Reworkings of Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés*." 2

Guadalupe Gerardi. "Interrogating Monstrosity and the Grotesque in Griselda Gambaro's *Nada que ver* and *Nada que ver con otra historia*." 13

Rodrigo Viqueira. "La escritura fonográfica de Rodolfo Walsh: La grabadora y la disputa por la voz obrera en *¿Quién mató a Rosendo?*." 21

Daniel Arbino. "'Together We're Strong:' Cross-Cultural Solidarity in Angie Cruz's *Dominicana*." 30

Marisela Fleites-Lear. "Miamiando: Performing Cubanness in the Time of Elián in Jennine Capó Crucet's *Make Your Home Among Strangers*." 40

Teddy Duncan, Jr. "Politics of Dismissal and Death: *Tentacle*, Necropolitics, and the Political Subject." 49

Cynthia Martínez. "The Ghost and the Double: Identity, Migration, and Storytelling in Francisco Goldman's *The Long Night of White Chickens*." 54

CREATIVE:

Lucía E. Orellana Damacela. "Blues." 65

Esteban Córdoba. Two short stories: "Espera" and "Risco." 69

Paul Evaristo García. "Darkest Before Dawn." 71

Ana Duclaud. "Alto Oleaje." 76

Alexander Ramirez. "The Decay of the Angel." 79

Shane Blackman. Three Sonnets: "Listen to Irene Cara", "Octavio Paz and the Nobel", "The Goals of Diego Maradona." 83

Allen Zegarra Acevedo. "Los de arriba." 85

Elliott Turner. "El Cautiverio." 87

Erika Said Izaguirre. "Del north al south." 95

Thomas Glave. "But Who Could Have Known? (Grief, Gratitude)." 104

Óscar Gabriel Chaidez. "Yuma." 111

REVIEWS:

Nuevos fantasmas recorren México. Lo espectral en la literatura mexicana del siglo XXI.
Por Carolyn Wolfenzon. Madrid-Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana -Vervuert, 2020. 338 páginas.
Reviewed by: Roberto Cruz-Arzabal. 115

Le Maya Q'atzij/Our Maya Word: Poetics of Resistance in Guatemala. By Emil Keme'.
University of Minnesota Press, 2021. 258 pages.
Reviewed by: Ignacio Carvajal. 117

Centenary Subjects: Race, Reason, & Rupture in the Americas. By Shawn McDaniel.
Vanderbilt University Press, 2021. 282 pages.
Reviewed by: Anibal González Pérez 119

Falso subalterno. Testimonio y ficción en la narrativa chilena de postdictadura.
By José Salomon Gebhard. Santiago: Piso Diez Ediciones, 2021. 196 pages.
Reviewed by: Ana Traverso Münnich 121

Miamiando: Performing Cubanness in the Time of Elián in Jennine Capó Crucet's *Make Your Home Among Strangers*

Marisela Fleites-Lear
Green River College

ABSTRACT: This essay scrutinizes the 2015 debut novel *Make Your Home Among Strangers*, written by Cuban American writer Jennine Capó Crucet. Through the methodology of textual analysis, it aims to critically examine and demonstrate how this novel centers on the process of shaping and re-shaping one's identity in its intersections with a complex web of traditions, history, immigration, politics, power struggles, place and displacement, socio economic and class determinants. Guided by J. Butler and J. Blocker's ideas on performativity, the essay posits that Cuban "exiles" occupy their exile "as a discursive position" to create and stage an identity. It examines the intersectional performativity of being Cuban in the United States, and the power/identitarian struggles of claiming Cubanness, as presented by Capó Crucet in her excellent first novel.

KEYWORDS: Cuban American Literature, performativity, Cubanness, Elián González, Cuban American identity.

When repeatedly confronted with the question "Where are you from?" Lizet Ramírez needs to ponder what is hidden behind that apparently innocuous question mark. Most would not know anything about Hialeah, this would not evoke any positive image, and it would not improve her pedigree. Miami, on the other hand, would be equated with hot nightlife, exotic sounds, bikinis, drinks that make you forget, blue waters and natural tanning. Her answer is a no brainer: Miami!, until she realizes what the real intention of the question is: "Where are you really from *from*?" They in fact want to know what is behind her dark complexion, her way of walking and the inflexions in her voice (Capó, *Make Your Home* 10). For the protagonist of *Make Your Home Among Strangers*, the realization of the implications of not having the "legitimacy" of being either a Cuban from Cuba or a "real" American from the U.S. plagues her efforts to fit in during her first year at an elite, mostly white college in the northern part of New York, particularly when the custody battle for a little Cuban boy washed ashore in the US places her *Cubanness* in question.

This essay scrutinizes the 2015 debut novel *Make Your Home Among Strangers*, written by Cuban-American writer Jennine Capó Crucet. Through the methodology of textual analysis, it aims to critically examine and demonstrate how this novel focalizes on the process of shaping and re-shaping one's constructed identity in its intersections with a complex web of traditions, history, immigration, politics, power struggles, place and displacement, socio economic and class determinants. The novel deals with the coming of age of a teenage protagonist facing off long-standing myths that have marked Cuban American Miami lore, while negotiating her newly found demands as a "minority friend," "a minority student,"

"an unprepared student of color," and attempting to assert her needs and ideas both at home and in college. The novel also provides a space for a multiplicity of perspectives and voices that allow for a web of identities and questionings complementing the main character's toils, trials and tribulations. As formulated by Jina Ortiz and Rochelle Spencer in the anthology *All About Skin. Short Fiction by Women of Color*, Capó Crucet joins a growing group of women writers of color that deal with the combined themes of coming-of-age, reinventing oneself, inhabiting various cultural borders within an "often hostile or indifferent world," the difficulties of negotiating both assimilation and fitting-in while finding ways to make one's voice(s) heard, as well as the issue of the demands placed on young girls of working-class families of color to mature faster than their white counterparts (7).

Jennine Capó Crucet was the first Latina to win the Iowa Short Fiction Award with her first book, the collection of short stories *How to Leave Hialeah* (which also won the 2010 John Gardner Award, and the 2010 Devil's Kitchen Reading Award in Prose). She was born in 1981 in Hialeah, Florida, but her first language was Spanish. Both her parents arrived from Cuba as teenagers and neither attended college, marrying very young. Her father worked as an electrician and her mother as a secretary. Capó Crucet graduated from American High, a high school on the border of Hialeah and Miami Lakes with a student population that is 68% Hispanic, 28% Black, 1% Caucasian, and 1% Asian. About 81% of the students receive free or reduced priced lunch (Wikipedia "American High"). Her parents were not in favor of her going far away to college, but ultimately supported her decision to go to Cornell University, after meeting a recruiter who convinced them of this important "investment" in her future (Capó

Crucet, *My Time Among* 8-10). She obtained a B.A. in English while writing and performing for one of Cornell's theater groups. She went on to earn an MFA degree in Creative Writing from the University of Minnesota and currently teaches as an associate professor of English and Ethnic Studies at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Capó Crucet confesses that although the characters in her novel are fictional, she draws from her personal experience as well as from her daily readings of the Miami Herald's section "Neighbors." In fact, the author explains in her 2019 collection *My Time Among the Whites*, that her father demands from her at book readings public clarification that he is not like the father in her debut novel, and that her parents are not like Lizet's (175). At the same time, in the essay of that collection entitled "A Prognosis" we learn about the complicated relation of the author with her father, who has never read any of her books. She concludes: "I have also come to accept that my books are in fact for him, and for people like him-people like me. This will always be true, whether he reads them or not: I want each book I write to be a way into something we couldn't otherwise face" (195). Nonetheless, in an interview with Connie Ogle for the Miami Herald, the author warns us not to identify the main character of her novel with her own life, since "She's definitely not me. There are important differences. She's a little more interesting than me! And she had her shit together way earlier than me." However, as proven by this novel's book-burning event after the author's discussion of it at Georgia Southern University in October of 2019 by a group of white students, the protagonist's struggles as a minoritized Cuban, both in her college as well as within her own "Cuban community," prove that "having her shit together" is marred by the insertion in a society plagued by hostility, marginalization of differences, inability to deal with the past, and outright discrimination.¹

A note about "performativity"...

Jane Blocker's methodology in her monograph *Where is Ana Mendieta?* for the use of the concept of performativity guides these pages. Following Judith Butler, J.L. Austin, Derrida, Homi K. Bhabha, and others, J. Blocker explains how "the performative describes a special class of actions that are derived from and may be plotted within a grid of power relationships" (24). As such, understanding performativity implies placing the emphasis on "liminality over legibility and change over fixity", which allows us to look at actions as social practices, rather than as commodifiable objects, in their interrelations with "the performances of everyday life and culture- in which they are embedded." Blocker emphasizes the fact that "performative identity is not homogeneous, stable, essential, and unified (and therefore limited to personality and/or ethnic type) but unfixed and destabilized in a way that makes its political imbrications paramount" (24). For Blocker, performativity as performed actions and utterances are already encoded with the meanings of power, hence, identity is not "something we have, but something we do... the effect of highly regulated action that nonetheless, as action, as

process, necessarily erodes oppressive identity categories." She clarifies that performative identities are not false, they are not a type of mask we consciously put on to obscure an essential self, but rather, they expose the daily challenges of that presumed "essential real self", revealing the negotiations among multiple identity possibilities that emerge, since "no one true identity exists prior to the act of performing. No one identity remains stable in and through performance" (24-25). The understanding of the performative nature of identity allows us to go beyond essentialism and discuss the historical, changing, intersected roles of gender, color, nation and ethnicity in shaping that identity not as mimesis but rather, as constantly creating "new homes for identity, new conditions of being and identifying" (26). These understandings are guided by Judith Butler's notion that the body that performs identity can't be defined but in its relationality to other bodies, including here, institutions, and networks of support (Butler 16). J. Blocker also applies performativity to understanding the nation and exile, an analytic angle that is central to this essay:

Under this paradigm, the nation is neither a thing nor a geographic location, but the effect of especially narrative repetitions. Enactment brings the nation into existence on the performative power of 'home,' patriotism, government, and land... Like the nation, exile is more than a location (or, more precisely, a lack of location). It is a product of a set of meanings that both engage and undermine the narrative of the nation... as a liminal state with the power to subvert nationalist rhetoric (26-27).

One can say, with J. Butler and J. Blocker, that Cuban "exiles" occupy their exile "as a discursive position" to create, to accumulate and dissimulate force, to stage an identity (27). It is precisely the goal of this essay to examine the intersectional-performativity of being Cuban in the United States, and the power/identitarian struggles of claiming *Cubanness*, as presented by Capó Crucet in her excellent first novel².

Intersections: Performing Cubanness in the age of the Elián González saga.

Place and water frame the opening lines of *Make Your Home among Strangers*, foreshadowing the importance of both in the interconnected stories of Lizet Ramírez and Ariel Hernández. While contemplating the canals that crisscross the city of Miami (as an almost 28 year old Lab manager that studies the depletion of coral systems), Lizet looks back and shares some family secrets hidden in those waters, and the illegalities that are buried beneath the surface³, much like the secrets of Ariel's water crossing 10 years earlier with his mother from Cuba to Miami in a flimsy raft, and his miraculous safe arrival to the coast of the U.S. Lizet, the narrator/protagonist takes us back to that time when, at the age of 18, her leavings

and returns to Miami/Hialeah during her 1st year of college paralleled Ariel's leaving Cuba and going back, each struggling with legitimacy and belonging as established and constructed by the world that surrounded them, a world that tried constantly to drown their own voices. Using a first-person narrative, the novel leads us into the negotiations of the meaning of home, homeland, *in-between-ness*, hyphenation, visibility, dis-location, and diasporic identity.⁴

Ariel Hernández is the fictional name in this novel of the character that fairly accurately portrays the saga of Elián González, the 5 years old boy who arrived in Miami on November 25, 1999⁵. Elián's mother had left with him and her boyfriend in a small boat from Cuba, supposedly without telling his father, Juan Miguel González Quintana (a waiter at an Italian resort in Varadero beach). The mother drowned in the crossing. A paternal uncle (Lázaro) and his daughter, Marisleysis González, took the boy in and refused to send him back to his father, after the case was co-opted by the political struggles of the Cuban American community. In January 2000, Elián's grandmothers came to the US to plead with the government; the father was also later allowed to travel to the US with part of his family to wait for the government's decision related to the case. On April 22nd, Janet Reno, then Attorney General, ordered the raid that took Elián out of the uncle's house. Elián was taken to Andrews Air Force to be with his father while awaiting the final outcome of the legal battle. They left for Cuba on June 28th, 2000. Elián has lived since then on the island with his father and stepfamily. The father was selected to be a member of Cuba's National Assembly⁶. Elián joined the Communist Youth organization, finished his high school at a military academy, and in 2016 he received a degree in Industrial Engineering from the University of Matanzas, while engaged to his girlfriend. He has expressed in interviews his desire to visit the US one day to thank those who helped him during the difficult year when he lost his mother. In June 2020 he announced that he was going to be a father himself, and that he was going to understand what his own father had gone through, asserting his agreement with his father's determination to bring him back to Cuba (Oppmann). As evidenced by the Elián González saga, the deep convoluted historic relations between the two countries can't be ignored when trying to understand the meaning of "being Cuban" within the Cuban-American community.

In Capó Cruet's novel, both the protagonist and Ariel, her quasi alter ego, were displaced at home by their parent's separation: The narrator Lizet grew up in Hialeah, where she attended school and graduated from one of the worst high schools in the country. She was forced to move to *Little Havana* in Miami with her mother after the nasty separation of her parents that led her father to sell their house. Lizet decided to apply to Rawlings, a university as far away from her family as possible, in the freezing north. This forced her to cross a linguistic and cultural barrier that proved very high, one that pushed her into being a "token minority" to boost institutional rankings. On the other hand, Ariel's parents' divorce took him out of his father's home and into a raft water-crossing that landed

him an orphan in a strange land, at the mercy of a political strife that predated his arrival. Place winds up uniting Lizet's and Ariel's destiny since he ended up at a house just one block from hers during his year as a pawn of the last remnants of the Cold War. Curiously, Lizet finds her voice in the process, whereas Ariel is forced to remain silent while others fight for the right to speak for him.

In her first year in the cold northern white space of Rawlings, Lizet realizes that her classmates at the university have learned about Hispanics from their AP English class where they read *The House on Mango Street*. They thought themselves experts in "the kinds of relationships that plagued [her] community" (65). To not disappoint them, she talks to them about her boyfriend back home as if he were a kind of monster, gang related, rough, a kind of "psycho papi chulo who wanted to control me" (65), a picture far from the truth of her high school sweetheart. Like her alter ego Ariel, Lizet didn't really understand the part she was playing, but "When everyone around you thinks they already know what your life is like, it's easier to play into that idea" (65).⁷ Hence, she tries to perform the Cubanness that is expected of her. Likewise, both students and teachers assume she knows, understands, and sees the world according to the rules of magical realism, a term Lizet really heard for the first time at Rawlings in her writing seminar. At the Student of Color Orientation meeting on her first week at Rawlings she saw that phrase for the first time, but she was "still brown enough from life in Miami to understand it meant me" (78). The meeting's goal was explaining the poor retention rate for minorities in the school (only 20% managed to graduate) and the services available to them (83). Only 3% of the students were Latinos. When looking around during the meeting, Lizet realized that some of the other Latinos came from an upper-class white Latino background, had attended private schools and were not ready to socialize with a poor Cuban from a notoriously under-performing High School. This was her first encounter with the fact that being Latina was no guarantee of fitting in even among other Latinos. She did meet Jaquelin, a half Honduran, half Mexican with an undocumented mother, which in a way made her feel better: "Jaquelin was proof that someone at Rawlings had it harder than me" (83). Her faculty advisor was assigned to her because his great-grandmother was Cuban, as if that were any guarantee of his potential sensitivity to her cultural clash. In fact, he was clueless and never met with her or really advised her on what was needed to succeed as a student, further demonstrating the college's superficial commitment to the "students of color" (95). The brochure from the Diversity Affairs Web site list of the relevant resources for minorities was for her another example of the seemingly poor opinion the school had of this group of students: in the list, the first resource was "Mental Health Clinic," the second "Financial Aid Office," and the third "Learning Strategies Center" (104). At the meeting, Lizet felt ashamed (83).

"What the fuck are you doing here?" was Lizet's sister's reaction when she appeared back in Miami on Thanksgiving Day, on her first trip home after being in college. Her mother and father kept re-

peating "You are not supposed to be here" (24). She had been gone for less than three months but had already lost her place at home and the right of belonging. Lizet had decided to go home for a holiday her family never celebrated since "Eating turkey on a Thursday seemed mostly arbitrary to my Cuban-born-and-raised parents" (7). She had taken the decision to fly home when she listened to the conversations of all her classmates, who couldn't stop talking about food, family and vacation plans, leaving her out of those exchanges. Rather than announcing her visit, she decided to surprise her family. Instead of being elated, the family took it as one more proof of her betrayal, of her attempts at being like a white independent American girl (36). In typical melodramatic Cuban-mom fashion, Lourdes is upset with her daughter's arrival because it interfered with her plans to get her from the airport her first time back home, which was not supposed to be until Christmas. "I was gonna bring you flowers, that first time! You stole that from me!" her mother explained (26). On the other hand, Ariel Hernández had beaten Lizet to Miami (24), arriving on November 25th, a few hours earlier than her, replacing Lizet in her mother's world, and taking the center stage. Cuba had managed to get in her way, both in her parents' relation to her and in the arrival of Ariel as a unifying symbol that took over her community. From then on, Ariel's arrival became a "Thanksgiving's miracle" for Lizet's mom (25), one that made her own arrival more like a nuisance. "If I was going to be invisible and miserable and cold, I could've stayed at school, saved myself the money" (29) thought Lizet, while her mother was glued to the TV, following the details of Ariel's arrival, repeating "his mother died" (27) while he was taken out of the hospital, his hand moved by his uncle to greet the cameras, as if the little boy were a voiceless/will-less marionette (27). Ariel's saga became crucial for Lourdes because it was centered on the death of his mother. The cult to the sacrificed mother, who risked and gave her life to save her son (from socialism, food lines, scarcity, the sharks, etc.), played very well in a community united by the cult of *La Cachita*, the dear Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, a Cuban Marian image and Patroness of the island.⁸ Lourdes saw her own sacrifice validated and suddenly, she had the opportunity to join a movement where she could play an important role. As soon as the first press cameras started rolling, Lourdes began performing and reinventing herself. While Lizet was struggling to straddle the two worlds in which she now lived, Lourdes performed to become the iconic spokesperson for the devoted Cuban mother.

"You look so freaking white" (144) was Lizet's parents separate reaction when they saw her for the second time during her Christmas vacation. Her darker color had made her different while at Rawlings and now proved to make her a stranger also at home, after the "lightening" of her skin in the cold north: her skin color became a metonym for the impossibility to fit in at either place. The family had been upset with her for applying and accepting behind their backs a scholarship to attend a faraway college, rather than either marrying her high school sweetheart or attending one of the local colleges. This act of defiance is aggravated more and more,

each time she returns home, by her multiple physical, linguistic, cultural, political and analytical transformations that lead her mom and sister to call her a disloyal traitor every moment they can. Until her arrival at Rawlings, Lizet never thought about the need to define herself as Cuban or as anything. But after arriving there, the constant questioning of her origin by her classmates, her inability to negotiate the initial ropes at the college, the inadequacies of her clothing, her lexicon, and her manners, all made her a misfit in a sea of whiteness at her college. She even changes her name: At home she was always called "El" or Lizet; but at Rawlings "going by Liz was easier than correcting people when they said, *Sorry, Lisette? Or Like short for Elizabeth?* after I told them my name" (84). She starts changing, consciously or not, and that misplaces her at home as well. Lizet's process of separation from her Cuban American Miami/Hialeah roots becomes evident not only in the new words she has learned to use [like awesome (31), sufficiently (144), proactive, advocate (75), sources and citation (53)], but also in her newly acquired possibility to question the authority of her family and community, and to request a validation of the sources of information (53). For example, she was not satisfied anymore with just the hearsay of the neighbors about Ariel's story. She now had "an honest desire for accuracy" particularly since she had been accused of plagiarism by her English teacher for "accidentally" forgetting to correctly cite her sources (11). She also questions the applicability of the United States' asylum policies for Cubans to Ariel's case. On the other hand, while at school, she realizes she needs to conform to the script her institution and classmates have created for her. She inhabits then a paradox, learning tools for critique at school which she applies at home (making her increasingly at odds with her community), while trying to conform to what she thinks it is expected of her at school, where she knows she doesn't belong.

News of the Ariel Hernández saga follows Lizet to Rawlings to deepen the abyss separating her from her classmates. While her mother is getting more and more embroiled in the center of the Ariel storm in Miami, many of her classmates are trying to be cool by hanging posters of *Che Guevara*, talking about the excellent health-care system in Cuba, and questioning the sanity of Ariel's mother for risking his life in the perilous journey. Lizet's Cuba is not Rawlings's Cuba. When Lizet tries to explain her version of Cuba, they discredit her, "not believing me when I explained how my mom sent a monthly package that included antibiotics, Advil, soap, Band-Aids, and tampons to my aunts still over there... [they didn't] understand how bad things are in Cuba" (88). Her classmates discredit her version both because Lizet was born in Florida and had never visited Cuba and because she was too "connected" to the idea of Cuba and the goals of Cuban Americans in Miami to be able to be rational about the whole thing. Her roommate tells her: "no offense, but as a Cuban person, you can't really expect people to believe that you'll be completely rational about this" (89). On the other hand, back at home, when she questions her mom's almost fanatical defense of Ariel's uncle and cousin's rights to keep the boy in Miami against his

father's wishes in Cuba, Lizet is actually told by her dad that she is not Cuban (when she tries to side with her mom) and that she is not even Latina ("Latinos are Mexicans, Central Americans," the father says) (314). Her mom also questions her *Cubanidad* and her betrayal to her roots every time she does something deemed un-Cuban, like leaving the family behind to go to college, or not accepting blindly the community's position demanding that Ariel be kept in the US, away from Cuba and his father. Her sister constantly accuses her of "acting white," which in her definition meant hurting people's feelings without noticing it (147). Lizet doesn't have the benefits of the "1.5 generation" (those born in Cuba but "made" in the U.S.A), the one that is able "to circulate within and through both the old and the new cultures... capable of availing themselves of the resources—linguistic, artistic, commercial— that both cultures have to offer... sufficiently immersed in each culture to give both ends of the hyphen their due" (Pérez Firmat 4-5). Hence, Lizet must try harder at being and not being Cuban, without noticing her actual freedom to be able to pick and choose according to each instance of her performance. The only moment when she feels liberated from this identity tug-of-war is when she is invited to a dancing party at Rowlings by Jaquelin. At that moment, she feels at last comfortable showing off the pride of her Cubanness to all her classmates. Both Jaquelin and Lizet are from cities and groups that know "how you enter a club" (117). At the party, she witnesses "the worst dancing I'd ever seen up to that point in my life," as if "something got lost between their brains and their bodies" (120). She finally dances with Jaquelin to the amazement of all other students, who at that point and for the first-time start imitating them, noticing them. It is her only moment of true happiness, one that made her feel closer to home, closer to being herself, not divided between *El* and *Liz* (124, 224). The dance floor becomes her locus of placement, the only place where "the others" can be displaced and she can be validated.

While Ariel is being made to perform in front of the adoring crowds and cameras, without the benefit of expressing himself or even the capacity of understanding his own situation, Lizet becomes more and more aware of her identity as performance and of Miami-Cuba as spectacle, as a "theme-park reffy, the reffines as main attraction, on display" (140)²⁰. Given the analytical tools she learns in her classes, and the gaze she develops from being away, she is able to use her newly acquired abilities to examine herself, and to look at her family and her community from the distant north, "isolated from our shared history" (139). Each of her four trips back home from college that first year become acts of recognition and rewriting, of detachment and a sort of Nietzschean perspectivism, of self-reflection and self-awareness. For instance, while waiting at a restaurant to meet her father for the first time in many months, Lizet orders a café con leche. The waitress brings all the components for her to prepare it. She reflects:

I was doing something I'd done hundreds of times before, but I was suddenly aware of my *performance* of making

café con leche, of trying to pass for what I thought I already was. I shook loose my shoulders, then watched the milk's spin die down. I poked the spoon's tip into it and lifted off the skin that formed on the surface, flicked it onto my waiting napkin. I was *camera ready*, a total pro. (166)

On her second trip back to Hialeah during her Christmas vacation, she decides to use what she had learned about magical realism in Rowlings to confront her old house in search for answers to her many questions and dilemmas:

As I navigated the city's asphalt grid toward my old house, I fantasized that it would happen: that a parrot or an iguana would drop out of a tree and trudge over to me, talk in Spanish about my destiny and tell me what to do. Or maybe some palm fronds from the trees lining the street would reach down and cradle me, then ferry me to an old spirit woman who'd call me by some ancient name and inscribe the answers to my problems on the back of a tiger/dragon/shark. Better yet, maybe she would become my temporary mom, since Ariel was borrowing mine. I had high hopes for my old house as metaphor, my old house as fantastical plot element to be taken literally, my old house as lens via which I could examine the narrative of our familial strife. I was ready for what I'd been taught about myself, about what it meant to be like me, to kick in. (178)

When she arrived at the old house, "there wasn't a parrot or a fucking iguana for miles," it was in fact "like a bad copy of my house." There was no magic (178-9). Here again the tension between trying to be the type of Latina Rowlings is teaching her to be and the reality of her past and present at home manifest itself, making her painfully aware of the new and multiple conflicting perspectives she is developing. Even the problematic essentialist paradigms she is receiving in Rowlings are allowing for her self-reflection.

Her mom, on the other hand, is experiencing a somewhat similar but reversed process. Having arrived in Miami at the age of 13, and having lived in Hialeah, she had learned English and had not been involved in Miami politics in any way. The separation from her husband, the departure of her youngest daughter, the single-mom pregnancy of her oldest daughter, losing her house and moving to the center of Cuban Miami, Little Havana, just two blocks from Ariel's house, transform Lourdes and places her on a path to finding agency, albeit one based on a manufactured and traditional reality to obtain credibility. Her performance allows for her self-placement in a public space of appearance, one that has been accessible to her Cuban American community, a group able to exercise a freedom to protest and resist, thanks to the infrastructures provided to them by the neoliberal space that have fostered their legitimacy, and their

feelings of invulnerability²¹. Hence, while Lizet is learning to “act white” and figuring out how to be Latina in an Anglo-white world, her mom is attaching herself more to her perceived Cuban-Miami roots. Lourdes goes back to being religious, speaking Spanish, comingling with the neighbors of the barrio, making T-shirts to protest Ariel's possible repatriation, and acting like the stereotype of the typical Cuban mother toward Ariel and particularly, toward his cousin Caridaylis (described fairly close to what the real cousin and “adoptive” mom for Elián González in Miami looked like, Marisleysis González.) Lourdes spends her days at the rallies in front of Caridaylis's house, she looks for the cameras, grabs the microphones, cries and tell stories. She has created her own character in Ariel's life: In her TV persona, she is a single mom who came from Cuba with her two daughters on a raft, Lizet a baby breast-feeding “until her milk turned to dust,” a sort of “Miss Dusty Tits on the news” as Lizet's sister calls her (228). In fact, at the rallies, Lourdes doesn't even introduce her daughters to her new neighbors, to avoid letting out the real truth of her past. In a twisted parallelism, on the one hand, Lourdes and her new friends do not legitimize Lizet as “hija,” while on the other, the government's Justice Department does not legitimize Cary²² as Ariel's guardian. At the rallies, Lourdes feels a sense of purpose and of loving community that she had not experienced before. She seems to truly believe in her new mission and her new self, she is not performing a “mask.” The death of Ariel's mom symbolized the deep loss of motherland for Cuban Miami, while the cousin Caridaylis represented the infinite capacity for love and *entrega* of an “accidental mother” who, because she looked like any other regular Miami girl, could be anyone. Lourdes “was becoming her own person finally, trying to learn who that even was via a new-found passion” (241), but does so through a performed self-created identity as mother/grandmother that requires ironically, abandoning her own daughters. Lourdes becomes the spokesperson for an organization she co-founded with other women protesters: “Madres para justicia” (Mothers for Justice). She appears almost daily on TV, with foundation on her face, mascara, “brows gelled into submission, blush swooped on the right bones, lip liner with ... coordinating lipstick. This face didn't shake or scream or let itself get messed with tears, this face had talking points. This face was professional” (286-7).

The power of her mother's transformation reaches Lizet via a TV screen at Rawlings and forces her to defend her mom and assume her lie in front of her classmates, who are following Ariel's process on the news daily, and asking/confronting Lizet about it. With her mother's new version of her fictitious raft crossing with her two girls, Lizet notes that in fact, her own degree of Cuban-ness is increased and validated since, in that story, Lizet's birth is placed in Cuba and her coming to the US was marked by tragedy and struggles (229). From that point on, she decides to stay “Cuban”: that is, put family first, shower at night, not accept the offer of a very generous summer internship at a lab in California, so that she would be able to go back to Miami to help her sister with the baby, and to

try to rein her mother back into the family (295). At this point, home and Cuba had contaminated Rawlings, displacing her once again.

On her third trip home for Easter, she decides to participate with her mom in the rallies with the secret intention of dragging her away from the movement (334). Only then Lourdes acknowledges her as her daughter while on a praying circle lying down on the asphalt all dressed in black (327), and only at that moment Lourdes expresses pride in her daughter, just for sharing with her something so important to their imagined community (333). It is at this point that Lourdes can express affection and tenderness for Lizet, once she thinks that Lizet has recognized her significance and her own legitimacy. These Cuban women lying down on the streets, using apparent “tricks of the weak” (Ludmer), were able to appropriate the Miami infrastructure with the contradictory purposes of restricting a father's right to his son, of providing the “miracle child” with an imagined community, and of claiming laws and spaces as a favored immigrant community – one that felt betrayed at that moment by a neoliberal US government that, until then, had sustained and privileged them. These women lying down on the street are the ones that have the capacity to define Lizet's rights to enter or not her own mother's space, and to design the performative acts that will guarantee her Cubanness legitimacy.

Looking at these public protests from Judith Butler's lens in “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance” lead us into some interesting reflections: The Cuban American diaspora in the US has been favored, compared to other immigrant groups, for complicated reasons, but in part because of the role this community played for the US's policies in the Cold War, and its usefulness in supporting anti-subversive, anti-communist US agendas in the region. From that perspective we could assume that their assembling to retain Ariel/Elián was not coming out of vulnerability, but rather out of a position of strength within the US-immigrant landscape. But immigrant communities always feel vulnerable because their situation can dramatically change at the whims of political winds. The Elián saga took place during the years of President Clinton's presidency, when the Cuban immigrant community feared losing that favored status. We could then affirm that contradictorily, the assembling “to protect Elián/Ariel” was coming out of both a position of power and a position of vulnerability, both shaping a performance of Cubanness with large political repercussions, not only within the community, but for the adopted country at large, particularly with their “voto castigo” or “the punishment vote.” Marchers against Bill Clinton's government decision to send Elián back to his father waved the banners “We will remember in November” (Clary). And they did: Many Cuban American votes against Al Gore in the following elections were guided by this cry (Schneider). The famous picture of Elián crying in the arms of his uncle²³, being pulled out of a hiding closet by a fully armed and clad US Border Patrol team has been seen, to this day, as a warning of the need for a constant mobilization of vulnerability that calls for unflinching agency²⁴.

At the end, Reckonings and Undoings: Performing displacements?

Lizet and her mother Lourdes witness together the raid to take Ariel out of his uncle's house (which actually happened for Elián on April 22nd, 2000). After Ariel is gone, Lizet finds her mother embracing Cary, comforting her while lying together on what had been Ariel's bed. All at once, Lizet realized that the real replacement for her in her mother's life was Cary, "someone she could be proud of, someone whose decisions she understood and would've made herself had it been her life, a daughter... who was blameless" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 352). Over the years Lizet tried to imagine different reactions she could have had at that moment, but in reality, she felt that the only thing left for her was leaving, "until home meant an address" (352). She still went back home in June as she had planned, to "the cold war" of her mom's apartment (364) which they shared with her sister Leydis and baby Dante. The last turning point occurred precisely on the day in June when the court finally decided in Ariel's father's favor, and he was allowed to leave the US for Cuba. That day, Lizet witnessed in Miami the clash between

her Cuban American Community and groups of non-Latino Miami citizens celebrating the end of the madness, with confederate and American flags, under the banner: "One gone, 800 000 more to go" (369). With this new promise of displacement and the impossibility of taking either side, Lizet ends up deciding for the ultimate line of betrayals in her mother's eyes: taking the internship in California, considering a research trip to Cuba, and voting that year in the elections for Al Gore. Even so, she knew that her vote probably was never counted (given the electoral fraud in Florida), in the same way that her needs were not met by either her family or her college but had to be negotiated by her in spite of the external demands to conform and perform. While Ariel's voice is unformed and unheard, Lizet's finds its way into shaping a new type of performance, once she is able to distance herself from the determinants imposed by her family and her ideologically restricting Miami Cuban community. Lizet's witnessing of the performance of power and identity in Elián's Miami allowed her to both position herself as a critical deconstructivist of the performativity of the "show," while at the same time, revising her own performativity, now shaped by the neo/liberal analytical tools offered to her by the freezing white-North.

NOTES

¹For more on the book-burning episode at Georgia Southern University see in the bibliography the articles by Greta Anderson and David Shih.

²It is beyond the scope of this essay to fully analyze the writing style used in this novel. Suffice to say that it is a masterpiece by the way it uses language to engage, to convey a sense of intimacy with the reader. The prose is extremely funny, witty, with a superb attention to details. In a way it reminds us of the style of Teresa Dovalpage's *Posesas de la Habana*, Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Ana Menéndez's *In Cuba I was a German Shepheard*, Achy Ovejas *Ruins*, and Dáina Chaviano's *La isla de los amores infinitos*.

³From motor oil from the many cars Lizet's father owned and sold, a dead hamster in his cage tossed in the water by her mother, together with dried watercolors, a stack of old CDs, and junk mail, to a dead body her father and his friends found in a nearby canal when they were teenagers (Capó Crucet, *Make my Home* 2).

⁴For an analysis of Cubanness see Mica Garret's "Cubanness Within and Outside of Cuba," although her idea that Cubans have always been victims can be disputed since it denies a very diverse group of people any agency and renders their multiple stories somewhat schematic. A very important analysis of the "in-betweenness" and hyphenated identity of diasporic Cubans continues to be the foundational work of Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen*. The iconic work by Louis Pérez Jr, *On Becoming Cuban. Identity, Nationality and Culture* deserves special mention. It explores the birth of the Cuban identity within the history of Cuba, in its convoluted relation with the United States.

⁵For more details on the Elián González saga see the corresponding Wikipedia entry in the list of works cited.

⁶A sort of Cuban Parliament which is an important governing body in the island.

⁷Likewise, when her classmates are laughing at *Life of Brian* by Monty Python (which she made the mistake of calling "The Monty Python") she pretends she knows this movie and tries to laugh with them at jokes she couldn't understand (77).

⁸The Virgin of the Caridad del Cobre, "The Lady of El Cobre", a Cuban Marian image, the Patroness of Cuba, "pontifically designated by Pope Benedict XV" in 1916, at the request of the soldier veterans of Cuba's Independence Wars against Spain. The image has been venerated in Cuba since around 1612 (Wikipedia).

⁹One can't help but noticing that El, as a nickname referring to the first letter of Lizet, is also the beginning of Elián's name.

¹⁰According to Jillian Hernández, "refly" is "a term used in Miami to denote recent refugees" (75), usually with a negative connotation. The Urban Dictionary record the word "refly" used in different ways and contexts. One, to indicate a type of self-referential understanding among a group of their shared cultural references without much analysis of the topic itself, that is, an attention to how others react to something (Urban Dictionary, "refly"). Other, as "ref" is used for someone in Miami that has recently immigrated from Cuba (legally or not) and is loud, trying to be as "American" as possible. It is also used as "exclamation of excitement, surprise or annoyance. Used in all situations deemed to be worthy." (Urban Dictionary, "ref").

¹¹ I am following here Judith Butler's ideas on vulnerability, resistance, freedom and infrastructure, and on Hanna Arendt's concept of "space of appearance". Butler explains that "freedom can be exercised only if there is enough support for the exercise of freedom, a material condition that enters into the act that it makes possible. Indeed, when we think about the embodied subject who exercises speech or moves through public space, across borders, it is usually presumed to be one who is already free to speak and move without threat of imprisonment or deportation or loss of life" (14).

¹² Cary, short for Caridaylis.

¹³ The picture won the photographer, Alan Díaz, the Pulitzer Prize. Díaz was born in 1947 in New York City to Cuban parents, lived a substantial part of his youth in Cuba, where he studied with a famous Cuban photographer, known for his Che Guevara's portraits, and returned to the US, to Miami, in 1978, where he worked for Cuban-American organizations (The Associated Press).

¹⁴ In Judith Butler's formulation, "vulnerability is enhanced by assembling... Yet, vulnerability emerges earlier, prior to any gathering... it seems we reverse the sequence: we are first vulnerable and then overcome that vulnerability, at least provisionally, through acts of resistance" (12). Calling attention to the "dual dimension of performativity" Butler explains that "we are invariably acted on and acting, and this is one reason performativity cannot be reduced to the idea of free, individual performance ... political resistance relies fundamentally on the mobilization of vulnerability, which means that vulnerability can be a way of being exposed and agentic at the same time" (24).

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Greta. "Georgia Southern Defends Book Burning as Student Right." *Inside HigherEd*, October 14, 2019. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/10/14/georgia-southern-students-burn-novels-after-author-visit>. Accessed 15 April 2021.
- Blocker, Jane. *Where Is Ana Mendieta?: Identity, Performativity, and Exile*. Duke University Press, 1999.
- Butler, Judith, Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay. *Vulnerability in Resistance*, Duke University Press, 2016.
- Capó Crucet, Jennine. "About Jg (Or: An Exercise in Oversharing)". jennine-crucet.squarespace.com/bio/. Accessed 4/5/2016.
- _____. *How to Leave Hialeah*. University of Iowa Press, 2009.
- _____. *Make Your Home Among Strangers*. St. Martin's Press, 2015.
- _____. *My Time Among the Whites: Notes from an Unfinished Education*. Picador, 2019.
- Chaviano, Daina. *La isla de los amores infinitos*. Vintage Español, Random House, 2006.
- Clary, Mike. "Tens of Thousands Protest Miami Raid." *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 2000, latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2000-apr-30-mn-25056-story.html. Accessed May 4, 2021.
- Frontline. "A Chronology of Elián González Saga.", www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/elian/etc/eliancron.html. Accessed 12 April 2017.
- Hernández, Jillian. "Miss, You Look Like a Bratz Doll": On Chonga Girls and Sexual-Aesthetic Excess." *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 3, Fall, 2009, pp. 63-90.
- Ludmer, Josefina. "Las tretas del débil". *La sartén por el mango*, Ediciones El Huracán, 1985, literaturaanimada.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/ludmer-tretas-del-dc39abil.pdf
- Mica Garrett, "Cubanness Within and Outside of Cuba". *LISA/LISA e-journal*, Vol. XI, n° 2, 2013. journals.openedition.org/lisa/5332. Accessed April 13, 2021.
- Menéndez, Ana. *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd*. Grove Press, 2001.
- Ogle, Connie. "Interview: Jennine Capó Crucet Talks Miami, Writing." *Miami Herald*. July 31, 2015. miamiherald.com/entertainment/books/article29630989.html. Accessed 20 September 2020.
- Oppmann, Patrick. "Cuba's Elián González says he wants to reconcile with his Miami relatives." *CNN*, August 25, 2017. edition.cnn.com/2017/08/24/world/elian-gonzalez-interview/index.html Accessed 21 April, 2021.
- _____. "On Father's Day, Cuba's Elián Gonzalez announces he's set to become a dad." *CNN*, June 21, 2020. edition.cnn.com/2020/06/21/americas/elian-gonzalez-cuba-expecting-baby-trnd/index.html. Accessed 21 April, 2021.
- Ortiz Jina and Rochelle Spencer, eds. *All About Skin. Short Fiction by Women of Color*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2014.
- Pérez-Firmat, G. *Life on The Hyphen. The Cuban American Way*. University of Texas Press, 1994.
- Pérez Jr, Louis A. *On Becoming Cuban. Identity, Nationality & Culture*. The Ecco Press, 1999.
- Schneider, William. "Elián González Defeated Al Gore." *The Atlantic*, April 30 2001, theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2001/05/elian-gonzalez-defeated-al-gore/377714/. Accessed 4 May 2021.
- Scholes Young, Melissa. "How to Leave and Why You Stay: An Interview with Jennine Capó Crucet." *Fiction Writers Review*. fictionwritersreview.com/interview/how-to-leave-and-why-you-stay-an-interview-with-jennine-capo-crucet/. Accessed 10 April 2021.
- Shih, David. "Another Thing the Book Burning at Georgia Southern Reveals." Nov. 25, 2019. www.insidehighered.com/views/2019/11/25/further-exploration-book-burning-georgia-southern-opinion. Accessed 10 April, 2021.
- The Associated Press. "Alan Diaz, Prize Winner for Photo of Immigration Raid, Dies at 71." *The New York Times*, July 6, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/04/obituaries/alan-diaz-prize-winner-for-photo-of-cuban-immigrant-boy-dies-at-71>. Accessed 26 May, 2021.

Urban Dictionary. "Reffy." <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Reffy> . Accessed June 17, 2021.

_____. "Ref." <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=ref>. Accessed June 17, 2021.

Wikipedia. "American High School (Miami-Dade County, Florida)." en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_High_School_%28Miami-Dade_County,_Florida%29

_____. "Elián González." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eli%C3%A1n_Gonz%C3%A1lez . Accessed May 25, 2021.

_____. "Our Lady of Charity." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_Charity . Accessed May 7, 2021.