

Degree Project

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Mestiza Consciousness: Hybridity and Mimicry in Jennine Capó Cruet's *Make Your Home Among Strangers*

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Introduction

“Daughter of refugees, writer and 1st generation college kid”. These are three labels Jennine Capó Crucet, author of the novel *Make Your Home Among Strangers*, chooses to use when describing herself in her twitter page (@crucet). Her parents fled from Cuba to Miami, Florida where Jennine was born. As the first Cuban-American of her family she considers the awkward spelling of her name foreshadowing the awkwardness of her role. Jennine traces her writing explorations, which mainly focus on “the Americanization of things – of names, of people, of traditions”, to her experience “of maneuvering between two languages” (Crucet “Bio”). What it really meant to be Cuban was something she learned when accepted to college and introduced to her room-mate’s friends as her “Minority Friend” (Crucet “Bio”). She describes this experience as the beginning of everything: “facing and dealing with the outside world’s expectations of Cubans, Latinos from urban Miami”. Capó Crucet deals with these issues in her first book *Hialeah*, which is a collection of short-stories of Cuban-Americans who live in Hialeah, Miami. The immigrant experience and that of the second generation, the feeling of “not belonging”, the cultural divide, and the sense of betrayal to one culture or ethnicity when choosing the other, are topics which Capó Crucet deals with. Julia Alvarez, a well renowned Latina Fiction author says about Capó Crucet:

This is definitely a young writer to watch for, sassy, smart, with an unerring ear for a community’s voices, its losses, its over-the-top telenovela extravagances, and its poignant struggles to understand itself in a new land. I was glad not to have to leave Hialeah right away, but to stay long enough to

hear its many stories as told by a gifted writer. (Alvarez, qtd. in Crucet “about *hialeah*.”)

Capó Crucet is familiar with the immigrant experience having witnessed it in her parents but is also well acquainted with the experience of the second-generation immigrant who is split in culture, language and loyalties, as it represents her own experience. Capó Crucet herself says:

I strive in my writing to give voice to the voiceless, to give stories over to characters not yet readily found in established literature, to give them a place there where they belong. I write for a version of me out there now, looking for a way into the world, and I write for her future friends and lovers, Miami natives or not, that they be ready to meet her. (Crucet “Bio”)

In addition, she felt the need to answer the questions low-income second-generation immigrants going to college have. In an interview she explains:

They asked me for books to help them understand what they were about to do, coming from low-income backgrounds and going to places where suddenly, they were going to be minorities. I thought, ‘I have to write it! I’m the only one who can speak to [sic] these things the way these kids need to hear. (Ogle 2015)

In the same interview, Connie Ogle quotes the founder of the O, Miami poetry festival, P. Scott Cunningham, as he mentions that Jennine “represents a huge

swath of people who grew up in the '90s and 2000s who have a unique experience that hasn't been reflected in literature yet" (Ogle 2015). Even though the concepts of migration and immigration are far from new, Capó Crucet adds to the experiences of the people living it today.

Make Your Home Among Strangers is a novel which follows the journey of young Lizet, daughter to Cuban immigrants but born in the United States and her journey from a comfortable Hispanic neighborhood in Miami, to the classrooms, students and teachers of Rawlings College, New York. Parallel to her story we follow that of Ariel, a 5-year-old child who was saved from the rafts of the boat meant to carry him, his mother, and other refugees from Cuba to America. As the sole survivor of this journey, a struggle ensues in order to persuade the U.S. authorities to let Ariel stay with his American family, engaging a whole community but most importantly Lizet's mother, Lourdes. Lizet applies to different colleges without her parents knowing and is accepted to Rawlings. When disclosing her secret, she is accused of betrayal and her father decides to leave her mother, sell their house and force Lizet's mother, sister and nephew to fend for themselves. Not only is Lizet's notion of home questioned by her parents' divorce, but by leaving her Cuban-American community and she faces, for the first time, the struggles of being perceived as representative of a minority in a dominantly white institution. The novel is set in the millennial shift and reflects the split of identities, the sense of loss and betrayal, and the painful redefinition of home faced by the second-generation immigrant Latin-American woman.

Make Your Home Among Strangers was published 2015 and has of yet to be studied and analyzed in an academic context and therefore no previous research on the novel is currently available. Capó Crucet, on the other hand, has written a

previous book that already situated her in the Latina Fiction genre, *How to Leave Hialeah*, which is a collection of short stories about people who live in Hialeah, Miami. In the essay “On Haunted Shores: Restriction and Resistance in Jennine Capó Crucet's *How to Leave Hialeah*”, Camila Alvarez explores the conflict and tension developed by those living between and within the white and Hispanic culture. She does so by distinguishing three macro levels, one cultural and theological, one educational and the final one, sexual (66) and suggests that literacy becomes the flow of communication between the individual (micro) and the global (macro) (67). Alvarez's conclusion places Capó Crucet in the Latina Fiction genre by stating: “Capó Crucet speaks directly to the Hispanic girls . . . To choose their reality liberated to some extent from the pressures of society, culture, and family” (75). In addition, Elena Machado Sáez examines how Capó Crucet associates the challenges found in the representation and cultural legitimacy faced by Latino authors with the use of Celia Cruz and Santería as cultural symbols in the first short story found in *How to Leave Hialeah* (183). By depicting Celia Cruz and Santería as symbols for a multifaceted ethnic heritage based on Celia Cruz's Cuban roots yet a pan-Latino artist, the issue of privileging one culture over other cultures creates a divide within one and the same ethnicity (194). Once again, Capó Crucet deals with issues connected to culture, identity and ethnicity of the Latina community.

This finding of a voice, almost reclaiming a place in literature for those from a background hard to define due to its many roots, presented by Capó Crucet, coincides with postcolonial ideas (Barry 186). In *Make Your Home Among Strangers* the protagonist struggles with defining herself as Cuban or American, national definitions, and eventually creates her own definition. Another issue

which connects to the work of Capó Crucet, is focused on identity. Postcolonialism's main concern relates to doubled identity, or hybrid (Barry 188). The postcolonial writer is aware of identity as something fluid, divided or doubled bringing about multiple allegiances and contradiction created within them (Barry 189). It is therefore fitting to analyze *Make Your Home Among Strangers* through the postcolonial lens. Because the novel is not a classic Postcolonial novel, another approach could be examined using transnational and transcultural ideas. Albeit in this essay the postcolonial concepts of hybridity, multiple allegiances and dislocation are exemplified. These concepts originate from Postcolonial theory but will in this analysis be inserted within a wider context, gazing towards Latina Fiction.

Latina fiction as a genre is not a new concept. According to Ellen McCracken, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed United States Latinos who refused to assimilate in the American melting pot but sought an acceptance of their rights and recognition. By doing so, narrative was a crucial part of the coming social change leading to a boom of Chicano/Latino literature written predominantly by young men. It was not until 1980s and 1990s that women began to claim their stake in the narrative space (1). While male writers preferred the subject of nationalism, women brought forth political and cultural issues creating what came to be known as "New Latina Narrative" (McCracken 2). Further, McCracken problematizes the term "New Latina Narrative" as it limits narrative in time and manages to disrupt any imposed border (6). Additionally, McCracken explains that "Latina" as a label represents a wide range of authors with various Hispanic descents, where Cuban is one, but placing a writer in a specific national category might be hard due to the "the fluidity of identity" (3). According to her, Latina fiction should be viewed as an

independent translation of the Latina experience (4). Further, McCracken argues that Latina writing “embodies multiculturalism” by displaying it from two angles, “from above” and “from below” reflecting a dual identity, from above representing the outside perspective and from below the inside perspective (5). Though *Make Your Home Among Strangers* was produced after the surge of “New Latina Narrative”, by definition it is just that, a narrative told by a Hispanic woman with Cuban descent, making its own claim to the experience of multiculturalism and the definition of identity as plural.

Major influences that this thesis will draw upon are those defined by postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha. His definitions of the hybrid, and mimicry are considered “central to post-colonial theory” (Huddart 1). In addition, Gloria Anzaldúa’s definition on borderlands pointing out the “troubling and liberating” aspects it entails, helped create a mestiza consciousness which represents an acceptance of contradictions that allows for “new ways of thinking and being, new alliances and new strategies of resistance” (Loes 131). Anzaldúa’s work aims to exemplify the experience of the Hispanic woman in America. This thesis will study how these theoretical concepts connect to the perspectives of the sense of betrayal, the split personality, and the definition of home, all of which connect to the experience of the immigrant, and specifically, the second-generation immigrant Liz. This thesis will argue, by making use of Bhabha’s definition of hybridity and mimicry, and Anzaldúa’s definition of the mestiza consciousness, that *Make Your Home Among Strangers* portrays the experience of the second-generation Latina immigrant of the 21st century.

Hybridity, Mimicry and Mestiza Consciousness

Jane Hiddleston explains that Bhabha's concept of "dissemiNation" is a classification of the exploration of creating a national identity by masking or ignoring the traces of plurality in people with a heterogenous portrayal of the nation (113). Accordingly, Bhabha offers "a resistance of binary positions". In other words, nothing can be just one way or the other, attention must be given to subjectivity and ambivalence, especially in colonial discourse (Hiddleston 113). According to Bhabha, this is "a place of hybridity", where a new object, "*neither the one nor the other*", is produced (37). Further, Bhabha argues that the colonized embodies a force or ability to assimilate and subvert the authority of the promulgated culture. By this force it creates an alternative in between the native and the colonizer (Hiddleston 120). It is the exploration of said ambivalence, or alternative that has led him to define the concepts of hybridity and mimicry, traits found in postcolonial literature. Furthermore, though talk of colonizer and colonized might not seem pertinent to this text, Bhabha's texts show that culture and history are still very much connected to the present and important in relation to understanding cross-cultural relations (Huddart 1).

As an extension to postcolonial theories and concepts, Jenny Sharp argues that, though postcolonial studies have been the go to theory in regard to minority literature and diaspora, postcolonial as a term is not enough to describe the complex present in the United States (181). According to Thomas Faist, transnationalism has served as a lens through which "the aftermath of international migration" can be viewed (Bauböck and Faist 9). It is the processes in which international borders are transcendent: "changing forms of crossborder mobility, membership and citizenship and the compatibility – or incompatibility – of

migrant integration and cultural distinctions” (Bauböck and Faist 13). In other words, the cross-borders and sources of identity are not merely geographical. In *Make Your Home Among Strangers* the protagonist struggles with defining herself as Cuban or American or from Miami, Florida, geographical definitions, and eventually accepts her own definition separate from geographical identifiers. In addition, the question of crossing the border from working-class to upper-class can be discussed. Though not in the scope of this essay, transnationalism could add a dimension to the issues deal within Capó Cruet’s novel.

In the presumably globalized world, economy and culture bring about a degree of homogeneity, and should therefore celebrate cultural diversity, but the reality is much more problematic due to the doubled nature of the hybrid (Lodge and Wood 16). Bhabha’s definition of hybridity is explicitly, “a difference ‘within’, a subject that inhabits the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality”, a borderland between the home and the world (19). The hybrid possesses two (or more) inherited ethnicities, cultures and languages which allows a redefinition of identity. In addition, McLeod emphasizes how the hybrid identity is constantly in motion, unable to be complete in itself; rather it is subject to borders and no longer attached to home and identity as concepts (254). Cultural diversity is very much the source of the hybrid, since it derives from a history of negotiating and assimilating ethnicity and cultures, but it also uncovers the inability to exclusively belong to one of each (Lodge and Wood 16). According to Huddart, hybridity is not to be exclusively celebrated, because the constant negotiating between culture, language and ethnicity “is a difficult, agonistic process” (113). This produces anxiety, a wish to belong within the colonizing definition but still preserve a distance to it that differentiates them, and preserve an anger towards the colonizer, in effect creating

a doubling of self, a set of sympathies to both players (Hiddleston 117). This split or doubling is what leads to the concept of mimicry.

Bhabha explains that mimicry rises from the attempt of the dominant colonizing powers to subjugate the native by stating an example or ideal that embodies the values, cultural habits and expectations of the colonizer, which the native, unable to completely resemble, mimics but constantly slipping or failing and by doing so, displays the hybrid ambivalence (122-3). As Hiddleston explains, “it plays by the rules of the colonizer but at the same time it works against them” (119). The hybrid’s ability to act within the boundaries of the colonizer, but to also to react towards what is inside the boundaries, as if standing outside, gives the hybrid a unique insight but also an unsettling identity (Innes 12). Bhabha refers to this unsettling identity as a menace because of its doubled vision. In other words, the “partial presence” in both colonizer and colonized allows for an assessment of both sides giving none of them authority over the other (126). “*Almost the same but not white*” becomes Bhabha’s way of explaining how the colonized wishes to adapt to the colonizing but fails, arguing that it becomes a strategic objective (128). Further, Bhabha asserts that mimicry becomes the manifestation of the hybrid (172). In summary, the hybrid’s mode of expression is through mimicry and therefore, where we find a hybrid we also find traces of mimicry.

As discussed above, the hybrid is subject to borders and inhabits an ability to be inside and outside at the same time. These borders become crucial when discussing mestizaje (the mix of native American and Spaniard) or the mestiza consciousness. According to Loes Nas, “Borderlands represent the physical and discursive place where cultures meet and collide” (Loes 129). Cultures meeting and colliding are what define the immigrant experience. A country usually connected with migration

be it forced, or voluntary is the United States. Immigration is closely connected to integration, considered a necessity for every immigrant, in order to accept and adapt to the dominating Anglophone society (Loes 125-6). As the numbers of immigrants with Latin American descent have increased a need to express their own experiences has arisen. The Anglocentric culture that dominates the United States could be said to be under threat from the rising cultural identity of the hybrid (Loes 126). Thus, in this transnational situation, where one nationality is creating borders within another dominating nationality, the emergence of borderlands is a natural consequence and maybe even a necessity. Gloria Anzaldúa, considered a pioneer in defining and problematizing the concepts of borderlands, specifically in Northern American literature and Chicana identity, writes in the preface of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*:

I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that *tejas*-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape. However, there have been compensations for this *mestiza*, and certain joys. Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien" element. ... I have the sense that certain "faculties" - not just in me but in every border resident, colored or noncolored- and dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened. ... the "alien" element

has become familiar – never comfortable. No, not comfortable but home.
(Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* i)

Anzaldúa poignantly points out the issues of hybridization of culture and the hybrid's struggle with identity, its possibility of being painful, yet liberating, troubling but still a place called home. "The Borderlands are ... wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* i). While discussing the experience of the mestiza, Gloria Anzaldúa explains: "The new mestiza is sensitive to and aware of her ethnic and cultural mestizaje. She is politically aware of what goes on in these different communities and worlds and therefore brings a different perspective to what is going on" (Anzaldúa, "Rethinking Margins" 8). Gloria Anzaldúa and her definition of hybridity and mimicry as the mestiza consciousness has been celebrated by Capó Cruet as she uses her bicultural experience to further an understanding of what it entails to be American and Latina.

The Sense of Betrayal

Synonyms to the word betray, as "double dealing" and "two-facedness" show how the hybrid, thanks to its unique ability to straddle two or more cultures and its doubled identity, might be suspected of betrayal and branded a traitor by one of the two or more cultures. As Anzaldúa descriptively put it: "Not only was the brain split into two functions but so was reality. Thus people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between the two" (*Borderlands* 37). She also

adds that psychic restlessness haunts the mestiza because of her personality's duality or plurality (*Borderlands* 78). Undoubtedly living between two realities causes anxieties and emotional pain since neither of the sides fully embodies the hybrid. In Lizet's case, the protagonist of *Make Your Home Among Strangers*, the colliding cultures are her home culture of Cuban-Americans and the Anglo-centered culture she faces in school. Also, reaching for a higher education separates her from her family as she seeks another life than the one they have. Applying to college reveals Lizet's wish to live according to her consciousness, between two realities. As a Cuban-American girl she feels as if she has her future set up for her. "What woman who I knew from home *wasn't* taking care of a kid?" (Capó Crucet 239). Lizet's sister Leidy embodies these expectations as she becomes pregnant: "What was happening inside Leidy was my own worst-case scenario", clearly showing this was not an aim for Lizet. Leidy reasons: "Lizet, I graduated from school. So did Roly. [Leidy's boyfriend] This makes sense, this is what's next for us". Lizet discloses her feelings: "I wanted ... some test that would measure whether or not I was really headed for the same future" (Capó Crucet 33). Leidy is doing what is expected and the logical next step for a girl from Hialeah, Miami, but Lizet has other plans. She applies to the top three colleges in the country behind her family's back in an effort to not be molded with the same mentality as her sister. She says: "I wanted whatever result my actions brought – positive or negative - to indicate something irrefutable about me" (Capó Crucet 34). Aware that her actions were not expected of her and that they were not received as she wants them to be, she is brave enough to inhabit the world in between what is expected and what she dreams of. She wants "to know if [she]

was meant for something other than what Leidy and [her] mom had done for themselves” (Capó Crucet 34).

As a decisive moment in her life, she understands that this is where she no longer lives by her cultural heritage’s reality. She is now walking the borderland without knowing the consequences. Her wish to leave her present life behind leaves room for a feeling she is not familiar with: “I wanted to be gone already. It was a relief to think maybe I’d given myself a chance, and with that came a new feeling: guilt” (Capó Crucet 35). Guilt becomes the result of her wanting something different. When her letter of acceptance to Rawlings arrives, Lizet desperately tries to think of a way to disclose her secret without hurting her family’s feelings. She eventually “mustered the ovaries” to reveal the papers from Rawlings and the unexpected happens. “But my betrayal – that is the word my parents used over and over again for what I’ve done – gave them permission to finally abandon their marriage” (36). For choosing not to follow in the steps of her mother and sister, instead she follows her own dream, she is now branded a betrayer. Lizet no longer adheres to her family and their values. Likewise, Anzaldúa endorses this issue claiming that the mestiza transfers cultural and spiritual values from one group to another, “living in a state of perpetual transition” her dilemma is which collective to listen to. Further Anzaldúa adds, “*la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (*Borderlands* 78). Lizet’s inner war includes a choosing of sides. Either she conforms to her family’s standards and expectations, or she ventures to create her own by turning to a higher education. This struggle reveals her mestiza consciousness.

The true implications of the betrayal Lizet has been accused of are yet to be experienced. When returning home for Thanksgiving, she recalls leaving the house where she grew up. After her parents' divorce her father decided to sell the house, leaving Lizet, her mother, sister and nephew on the street: "Before he moved out, my dad kept saying to me, You betrayed us, this is a betrayal. He said it so much that the word stopped meaning anything—betray betray betray betray betray—until the woman from the bank sat us down in our own living room and explained what was about to happen" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 47). Though Lizet was made to believe she was the traitor, she knew she was not the only one who betrayed her family. Her father's betrayal was the one that made the strongest impact on her, allowing her to fully realize its signification: "No one said betrayal, but as I filled out my financial aid appeal form— alone in my room, the door closed, half my things in boxes marked Send to Rawlings and the other half in boxes marked Lizet's stuff—I knew exactly how much hurt could fit into a word" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 47). Lizet's father betrays the family but is never openly accused of it. Lizet, on the other hand, is repeatedly accused, so much so that the word "betrayal" loses its implication, but she cannot cause the pain and damage her father can.

The last straw that enables Lizet's final betrayal is that of her own mother, Lourdes. The same Thanksgiving Lizet returns home from Rawlings, Ariel Hernandez is found among the wrecks of the boat that carried him, his mother and others across the ocean. Ariel was the sole survivor. Lourdes, Lizet's mother was so immersed in the news feed from the TV recounting Ariel's tragic journey it completely absorbed her: "I told my mom detail after detail of my trip, all the planning that went into it, every word of my story bouncing back to me off the side

of her face. -It's a Thanksgiving miracle, Mami said, echoing the news anchors. But she was talking to the TV" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 25). Lourdes' engagement in Ariel story is the starting point of a pivotal moment in her life. Eventually she becomes so engaged in Ariel's fate that she stops going to work, and spends her days praying outside Ariel's home. Subsequently, it becomes clear to Lizet that her mother's obsession is not about Ariel as much as the female cousin who cared for him, Caridaylis: "—She's like an angel, Mami said. She is like a saint. ... —She's only nineteen. Think about taking that on, being a mom to him when he's gone through so much. I bet you can't even imagine it" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 141). Thus Lourdes finds attributes to Caridaylis' behavior that Lizet is unable to embody.

This becomes more obvious for Lizet as her mother continues to rally for the sake of letting Ariel stay in the U.S. Eventually, Lourdes confesses her feeling to Lizet while drunk during Noche Buena (Christmas Eve): "—You can go to *whatever* college for as long as you want, but about some things, you'll always be fucking stupid" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 201). Lizet's education was perceived as a direct rejection of the lessons life had taught Lourdes, lessons Lourdes now saw Caridaylis being forced to learn. She also felt she understood the fear Caridaylis lived with since she knew how it felt to lose a child. From her point of view, Lizet's gaining of independence meant Lizet no longer needed her and in that way, she lost a child. Lizet identifies her mother's affection for Caridaylis and involvement in Ariel's case as admiration with a hint of jealousy (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 241), but she eventually understands what is happening:

My leaving had allowed for someone new to come in, and I'd been wrong all that time in thinking it was Ariel. The real replacement was right there in my mom's arms [Caridaylis]: someone she could be proud of, someone whose decisions she understood and would've made herself had it been her life, a daughter who'd taken on more than anyone thought possible but who'd done it through no fault of her own, who was blameless. (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 252)

Lizet has been replaced by a girl her mother could relate to. Lizet's decisions are impossible for Lourdes to understand and the rejection Lizet experiences enables her to break free in a way the accusation of betrayal never could. In a similar manner, Anzaldúa points out, in her discussion on the mestiza consciousness that it does not only include a questioning or challenging of conventions; it refutes and defies the dominant culture reaching the ideal state of being "on both shores at once" (*Borderlands* 78). This duality and variety of options are in line with the hybrid identity. When Lizet finally comes to terms with the split between her and her family, the feeling of her abandoning them and being ambushed by her country and mother (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 356), she can finally make a decision which leads to her final betrayal.

Lizet is offered an internship that could take her to California, where she would work in a lab with her professor in chemistry, Professor Kaufmann (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 278), but she decides to delay telling her family, knowing they will not understand what an opportunity it is (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 284). Lizet's holding back coincides with her family holding back on information as well, referring to this as the "moment of familial reckoning" (Capó Crucet, *Make*

Your Home 283), the moment one finds out that the family has been hiding crucial events. The reckoning is experienced as a “brand new hurt”, a way in which the family makes clear their true feelings: “*Like you even care about who you left behind. Like you didn’t decide to abandon us first*” (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 286). By accusing the leaving child of abandoning their family, withholding events is justified. For Lizet it means she is not made aware that her mother is completely absorbed by the Ariel situation that Leidy is left carrying a bigger burden than expected. When Lizet returns for the spring break, she does so feeling that leaving home has been a mistake she now needs to undo (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 294). Prepared to be helpful to both her mother and sister, spring break becomes the point where she, as previously mentioned, realizes she is powerless to help her mother. Instead, she promises Leidy to be home for the summer to help her out with her nephew (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 325). When explaining to Professor Kaufmann why she is not going to accept the internship, she explains that her mom needs her:

—It’s hard to explain, I said.

And I regret what I said next: It’s like a cultural thing, I said.

—Ooooh, she said. Oh, well, then I’m sorry it won’t work out. She rested the pen on the pad and smiled again, said, It’s a shame that your family won’t let you participate.

—No, it’s not like that, I said. I just feel obligated to be there for them.

(Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 362)

Lizet feels forced to help her family. When met with conflict she decides to hide behind her Cuban heritage, explaining that in her mother culture family is a priority. As the hybrid between Cuban culture and American culture, she chooses to identify with the one that more closely resembles her own wishes but doing so requires a degree of mimicry, where Lizet resembles her Cuban heritage that expects undivided loyalty to family instead of the American that expects Lizet to fulfill her dreams, which is what she really wants. Exemplifying one such conflict is when Lizet explains to her chemistry professor why she cannot accept the offered internship and the professors following reaction: “[H]er confusion about how I’d be helping my mom and sister opened up a place for all the disloyal parts, all the parts that were jealous of Caridaylis” (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 362). Since Lizet had already been accused of betrayal and disloyalty, having to sacrifice her internship for a family she already feels disconnected from is painful and reminds her that she indeed has walked her own path, disregarding family, before and maybe she could do so again. The turning point comes when Lizet, while caring for her nephew, Dante, witnesses her mother partaking in a rally. Though Lourdes walks just a few steps away from Lizet and Dante is desperately screaming, she does not stop but keeps staring at the ground: “She kept her head tilted down, as if her steps were the most important thing in the world, the only thing she had any power over. She watched herself walk ... She kept moving forward. Nothing would distract her” (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 370). Lourdes’ disconnection from everything around her, her full immersion in what she thought of as important, relieved Lizet’s sense of responsibility. If her mother could walk without caring so could Lizet. Now she knew she could accept the internship, she could break the promise to Leidy. Lourdes later explains to Leidy:

“This is all about *her*. Her whole life is gonna be all about her from now on, right, Lizet? I say go for it” (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 374). Lourdes accepts Lizet’s cry for freedom but does not support it as she hints that Lizet is being egoistic. Eventually Lizet’s and Lourdes’ relationship becomes defined by the words “*betrayal, loyalty, traitor*” and in time Lizet admits how the “sting has faded and turned into something” she can manage (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 385). The accusation of betrayal is understandable when viewed through the lens of the hybrid’s double-sidedness. This ability to be both inside and outside means one side is prone to feeling betrayed. As for Lizet, one side meant prioritizing her family and the other, prioritizing herself. Whichever side she chose, one would feel led astray and for Lizet it meant that no matter which side she ended up betraying, “it would hurt either way” (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 388).

The betrayal Lizet is accused of, and eventually begins to come to terms with, identifies her as a hybrid. As Bhabha states, the hybrid’s ability to create a place where duality and symmetry are deconstructed can be viewed as a threat and/or a terrorizing of authority (165). In other words, Lizet’s breaking free from expectation, identifying her father as another betrayer and her mother as able to disconnect with her family at will, releases her from the boundaries she has felt forced to accept. With regards to this, Anzaldúa acknowledges: “When you do cross over to the other world or community and you return to the old world you find that you don’t belong anymore” (“Re-thinking Margins” 14).

The Split Personality

When Bhabha further discusses the hybrid, he suggests that it is the result of mutation from both the mother culture and alien cultures. In addition, he implies

that a power struggle between ‘the self’ and ‘the other’ connects to identity. Becoming different from the mother culture, a bastard, requires differentiating and disconnecting from it (159). Anzaldúa gives her mestiza perspective on this disconnection by using a multiplicity of identities in her text: “I take all the aspects of me: Anzaldúa the angry Chicana; Anzaldúa the academic; Anzaldúa the queer;” and so on (“Re-thinking Margins” 14). Likewise, in Capó Crucet’s novel the protagonist Lizet embodies three names, and each comes to represent an aspect of her split identity.

In the beginning of the novel the reader becomes familiar with the name Lizet. It is what her family calls her and when a stranger asks her her name she replies: “Lizet” (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 19). Omar, her boyfriend since junior year calls Lizet for El, just like some of her childhood Miami friends (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 85). Though in the beginning Omar is very supportive of Lizet going to Rawlings, he soon becomes part of what Lizet wants to leave behind when he fails to give her the support she so much needs:

I decided I needed to start thinking of Omar as *my high school boyfriend* leftovers from *the old me*. I loved Omar, but his reaction told me that he thought of my going away for school as an experiment that could fail, or an adventure that I might, at any time, give up. *You can always just come home*, he kept saying, but after that conversation, I heard it as a threat. (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 60)

As if tugging on the strand that still connects Lizet with home and restricting her from developing in the way she wishes, Omar threatens her with the option of

returning home, unaware of how much Lizet has changed, and her need to change further. At this point, Lizet begins to no longer identify with El, Omar's ideal of who Lizet is. She describes this divide as a future her looking back at Lizet in Omar's arms, "saying: No, no, no", aware that the Lizet that wanted a future with Omar was slowly realizing the impossibility of it. Even so, she finds it hard to accept it: "I don't know how, but I believed both versions" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 63). It is as if she needs to believe she can continue to be El while Lizet is moving away from her, described as two versions of her life, one where she stays together with Omar and one where she breaks free. Eventually, one version begins to weigh more than the other. Forcing Omar to take sides on the Ariel situation, Lizet realizes he does not understand her viewpoint, reminding Lizet how she was drifting away from Omar, from El. "I recognized it ...: Lizet playing a part. I'd thought a shirt from Leidy's clubbing stash would cover me by not covering me, would turn me back into El, but I was separate from her now, aware I was putting her on, and that colored everything" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 223). Putting on El as a mask, or an ill-fitting jacket only exposed the division inside Lizet: "Omar was lucky; he was still just one Omar – not broke like me, an El and a Liz trapped in one head" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 224). This incongruence in mutual understanding drives Lizet away from Omar but the true split happens when Omar hides how involved Lourdes is in the Ariel situation. Echoing Lizet's need of everything at home to be okay, he convinces her that Lourdes is okay, yet Lizet finds out through the news that that is not the case. When explaining to Omar that she is going to do something about her mother he replies: "- Oh! Okay yeah, he yelled. So now you know how to handle *everything*, huh? You got it all figured out, don't you? You think you're so fucking smart. ... -

Whose fault is it that you weren't here, huh? Maybe you need to think about *that*" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 310). As previously argued, Lizet is coming to terms with her alleged betrayal already, and Omar's reminder of her leaving, and, therefore, deserving exclusion, puts an end to El and allows Lizet to break up with Omar and his pseudonym of her.

Interestingly, the name of Liz was one Lizet chose by herself. When arriving at Rawlings people would call her Lisette, or ask if it was short for Elizabeth, and to avoid this she went by Liz (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 85). "I'd embraced Liz, had even covered up, with a lopsided heart filled in with blue pen, the *E* and *T* on the nametag our RA had taped to our door" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 86). In Rawlings she is to be known as Liz but is still Lizet. Liz becomes the side of Lizet that wants to fit in at Rawlings, that does not want to be perceived as foreign or strange, her expression of mimicry. The difference between Liz and Lizet is evident on returning to her dorm. A girl in her dorm reacts: "That's Jillian's roommate, she's Cuban, from Miami. —Jillian from your floor? another girl said. *Lizet*, I almost said without turning around. My name is Lizet— you *know* that—and it's also *my* fucking floor" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 99). When Lizet is reminded of Miami and her Cuban roots, as well as not having the right to claim ownership of her floor, she becomes Lizet again, forgetting that at Rawlings, she is Liz. She admits: "just a few days home had made it [her nickname Liz] strange to me again" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 85), exposing her inner conflict caused by the splitting of personality into Liz and Lizet, and that Liz is a constructed reflection of what is not Cuban or from Miami.

Another example of the relation between Liz and Lizet is put forth by Ethan, a student at Rawlings who showed a special interest in Lizet and is introduced to

her by her name Lizet (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 119). He never calls her Liz something which initiates an interesting reaction. The fact that Ethan comes from an economically challenged background and like Lizet is studying at Rawlings on a scholarship, contributes to a sense of kinship on Lizet's part. This kinship creates a wish in Lizet to share more of what is happening in her life with him but, she reaches the conclusion not to: "He was the only thing at Rawlings that home hadn't contaminated, and I'd wanted to keep him like that. No one but him consistently called me Lizet—not Liz, and never El—and though neither of us said this outright, I took it as some agreement between us to keep each other intact" (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 298). In Lizet's mind, her true name, the one that completely resembles her is Lizet, El and Liz only manage to reflect two sides of her multifaceted nature. As a hybrid, El was the expectations on her by Omar, and Liz was the down sized version of her that fitted Rawlings' expectations on who she should be, her Anglo-American mimic. As a mestiza, Capó Crucet manages to portray Lizet's straddling over two cultures but also multiple identities, giving her multiple voices and angles from which to narrate Lizet's journey of self-discovery.

The Definition of Home

Anzaldúa describes the mestiza as living on borders and margins, in an "alien" and uncomfortable element that eventually becomes home (*Borderlands* i). McLeod argues that home is a complicated idea for a migrant and divides the notion into two categories, the physical place, "a fixed, reliable sense of our place in the world", and "the *idea*", where we find "shelter, stability, security and comfort" (242). The sense of home is a central theme in Capó Crucet's novel. The opening line of the novel states: "Canals zigzag across the city I used to call home" (*Make*

Your Home 1). Immediately the reader is faced with a sense of before and now; before this city was home, now home has a new definition. Lizet refers to home many times and she almost always refers to Miami, where her family lives, but the sense of home becomes dislocated when arriving at Rawlings:

There, when people asked, So where are you from? and I said, Hialeah, they answered: Wait, *where?* And so I gave them a new answer: Miami, I'm from Miami. Oh, they'd say, But where are you *from* from? I was *from* from Miami, but eventually I learned to say what they were trying to figure out: My parents are from Cuba. No, I've never been. Yes, I still have family there. No, we don't know Fidel Castro. Once I learned what I was supposed to say, it became a chant, like the address I'd memorized but didn't think of as home." (*Make Your Home* 10)

Where Lizet is from is her home, but with the questioning from others a sense of home being taken away from her starts to grow. This gradual progress is further exemplified when on a visit home from Rawlings Lizet is picked up by her mom at the airport. The picture Lizet has of home is becoming distorted by her experiences from Rawlings. When she sees her mother, she sees her through the eyes of her schoolmates, as a tacky Cuban lady with a fake gold outfit and oily face. This newly acquired perspective scares Lizet and makes her stomach turn: "I did not like that I suddenly had this ability to see her that way, isolated from our shared history. I didn't know if she'd changed or if she'd always looked that way but now I could just see through my feelings somehow" (*Make Your Home* 139). Lizet describes her sense of change as a newly gained ability, one she does not like, and she struggles to sync her idea of home with reality, now that reality could be

viewed from the white upper class which dominated Rawlings. Her experience is in line with the mimicry of the hybrid. She wished to leave her home but was not prepared for the ambivalence experienced by the hybrid. Interestingly, she identifies this sense of loss of home with a wish to “*rise above*” what she had come from, a fact that made her feel like a traitor, but still, a fact she knew to be true in her core (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 139). To rise above her roots, she has to leave home, but it also means she begins to see home and its inhabitants differently which was as surprising as it was painful. Likewise, Anzaldúa argues that she too had to distance herself from her roots: “I had to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature” (*Borderlands* 16). Since Lizet’s idea of home is slowly becoming disconnected so is the physical claim on location the idea has. She admits to this at the end of the novel, as she witnesses her mother’s change and involvement in the Ariel situation: “I walked away, back to where I’d come from, grabbed my bag, then left that house and eventually that city, kept leaving, year after year, until where I was from became, each time, the last place I left, until home meant an address” (Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home* 352). From this point on home was wherever she was, a location marked by an address. Lizet became identical to Anzaldúa who stated: “I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry “home” on my back” (*Borderlands* 21).

Interestingly, Anzaldúa juxtaposes leaving home with feeling “competent enough on the outside and secure enough inside to live life” on her own (*Borderlands* 21). She needed strength based on independence to mark her way and walk her path as a mestiza. In Capó Crucet’s novel, Lizet recounts, like an anecdote, an incident from her early childhood. She is three years old and fascinated by the canal. She blows up her floaties and jumps right in it, while her

mother is occupied talking to a neighbor. Eventually she is found and rushed to the emergency. There she is prescribed antibiotics but is deemed otherwise well. The conclusion of the story tells something about Lizet. “Every version ends with almost the same lines: She was fine! All that worrying, all that time and money and crying wasted—and for what? She was *fine*. It made us want to kill her” (*Make Your Home* 5). Lizet’s early taste of freedom, though marred by the worries of her parents, did not bring any negative consequences. Their worrying was for nothing since she was fine and she did not need rescuing. Much like Anzaldúa’s turtle characteristics, Lizet carries “home” on her back and is thereby born independent, capable of marking her own path, proved by this anecdote, which shows that though Lizet might do something risky and even dangerous, she will be fine.

Conclusion

The thesis examines hybridity, mimicry and mestiza consciousness in the Latina fiction by Jennine Capó Crucet, *Make Your Home Among Strangers*, focusing on the sense of betrayal experienced by the hybrid, the multiple identities causing split and, how the definition of home changes. As a second-generation immigrant and the first in her family to pursue higher education, Lizet faces many of the trials and hardships of the hybrid, and therefore develops mestiza qualities when living in the borderland between American and Cuban cultures and expectations. The accusation of betrayal put forth by her parents becomes a main theme in the novel causing Lizet to feel guilt and pain while straddling two cultures as a hybrid. Lizet’s effort to not follow her mother’s and sister’s example leads her further away from her family. Her painful efforts to appease both sides by the use of

mimicry shows that the hybrid identity, though much celebrated, is a hard walk to walk, and by living with the pain and guilt this process involves, Lizet embodies Anzaldúa's mestiza. In addition, Lizet's straddling brings on the sense of mutation into different personas, El and Liz. El was created by her childhood friends from Miami, those she grew up with and was encouraged by Omar. When leaving Miami and wanting to disconnect from the life that awaited her there, she disconnected from El. El becomes more estranged from Lizet and eventually becomes a mask she wears to please Omar. Liz is the nickname Lizet herself chooses to go by at Rawlings in order to blend in, avoiding having to explain the origins of her real name. Liz comes to sympathize with the Rawlings culture dominated by the white upper class of America and becomes its mimic voice, as painfully experienced when Lizet sees her mom waiting for her at the airport. Likewise, the definition of home changes during Lizet's journey, from being a stable fixed geographical position to becoming an address, as "the idea" of home becomes values Lizet can carry with her, as Anzaldúa's turtle alter ego, marking her mestiza qualities and development. In all, Capó Crucet articulates how Lizet morphs from girl to woman exploring her hybridity, making use of mimicry and creating a place within the borderlands as a true mestiza. In conclusion, Homi Bhabha's words will still echo today and in generations to come: "For it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity" (244).

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