Language Crossing and Multiaccentuality in Women Writers del Gran Caribe: Narrative, Drama, and Performance

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LANGUAGE CROSSING AND MULTIACCENTUALITY IN WOMEN WRITERS
DEL GRAN CARIBE: NARRATIVE, DRAMA, AND PERFORMANCE

By
Francisca Aguiló Mora

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LANGUAGE CROSSING AND MULTIACCENTUALITY IN WOMEN WRITERS DEL GRAN CARIBE: NARRATIVE, DRAMA, AND PERFORMANCE

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In this dissertation, I argue for a much-needed reconsideration of language and gender in the constructions of local, postnational, and global identities in the *Gran Caribe*, which dislocates the Latino US, although not necessarily dismisses it. I explore the ways in which Caribbean and US Caribbean-origin women writers and playwrights such as Achy Obejas, Mayra Santos Febres, Jennine Capó Crucet, Aurora Arias, Caridad Svich, and Josefina Báez reinterpret language through practices of language crossing and linguistic virtuosity, thus creating a *grancaribeña* community of practice. By questioning macro-narratives through the linguistic, aesthetic, and thematic components of their texts, these authors and their works have been exposed to critical accusations of inauthentic misrepresentation of their cultures of origin. In response, I demonstrate how these texts contest the linguistic boundaries of US, US-Latina, US-Caribbean, or Caribbean discourses as traditionally defined. The crux of my argument is that these authors employ and actively construct a language that destabilizes national imaginaries and cultural archives of both the US and the Caribbean. Reframing the notion of “life on the hyphen,” i.e., the state of being between languages and nations, I maintain that the linguistic forms and discursive patterns evident in the texts that I study are not suggestive of in-betweenness or burden of linguistic identity, but rather perform an aesthetics of multiplicity within their own right.
For David and Quelenn, who shared their love, time, and efforts.
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CHAPTER 1. Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, women writers, playwrights, and performers, the daughters and granddaughters of the Hispanophone Caribbean diaspora in the US, have published literary and theatrical works that address issues of language, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, displacement, memory, exile, nation, and community. The pervasive conceptual metaphors of bridges, borders, and other in-between spaces—forming what we may call “the ontology of the hyphen”—have traditionally prevailed in the readings of this artistic production. However, these texts move beyond the hyphen and, although written mostly in English, group together with a Hispanophone Caribbean literary tradition to fundamentally question traditional structuralist notions of language and identity, and Modern views of nationhood.

In the current dissertation, I argue for a much-needed reconsideration of language and gender in the constructions of local, postnational, and global identities in the Gran Caribe, which includes the Latino US. I explore the ways in which Caribbean and US Caribbean-origin women writers, playwrights, and performers such as Cristina García, Achy Obejas, Jennine Capó Crucet, Mayra Santos Febres, Caridad Svich, and Josefina Báez reinterpret language through practices of language crossing and an aesthetics of multiplicity, thus creating a grancaribeña community of practice. By questioning macro-narratives through the linguistic, aesthetic, and thematic dimensions of their texts, these authors and their works have been exposed to critical accusations of inauthentic misrepresentation of their cultures of origin. In response, my dissertation demonstrates
how these texts contest the linguistic boundaries of US, US-Latina, US-Caribbean, or Caribbean discourses as traditionally defined.

The present project aims to respond to two main research questions:

1) How do the analyzed writers and playwrights/performers challenge prevailing national and cultural masculinist macro-narratives linguistically, aesthetically and thematically in their artistic productions?

2) What are the specific language practices that these writers and playwrights employ, and what ideologies and intentionalities of language might underlie them?

The research methodology consists of a) a critical discourse analysis (CDA, Fairclough) of the texts to examine how these authors contest social and political ideologies and power relations through their literary language; b) a literary critical analysis of their narratives and theater plays and/or performances to show how in these artistic productions characters cross languages and question predetermined meanings and identities, challenging conventional portrayals of the US, the US-Caribbean, or the Caribbean.

Understanding the relational and transdisciplinary nature of discourse, I use Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the practices of language and genre crossings, multiplicity, and multiaccentuality in these literary and theatrical works and consider how these practices reshape national imaginaries and reconstitute ethnic and gender identities in the sociopolitical context of the Gran Caribe. My analysis considers how language and genre crossings in these texts are presented and organized by the writers. I explain and interpret these language practices/strategies in relation to the socio-ideological context of
the texts and their authors—while I engage in a dialogue with and a critique of parallel or previous interpretations of such practices. In addition, I carry out a literary critical analysis of thematic components of the texts under study, relating language and gender issues to the main female characters of the texts. At the level of discursive practice, I study questions of production and consumption. I analyze the ways in which the language practices in them help these texts destabilize literary canons and traditions. At the macro-level, I take into account the all-encompassing ideologies, societal currents, and power inequalities—as regards language, national imaginaries, and gender—that have an effect on the texts studied.

The crux of my argument is that these authors employ and actively construct a language that destabilizes national imaginaries and cultural archives of both the US and the Caribbean. Reframing the notion of “life on the hyphen,” i.e., the state of being between languages and nations, I maintain that the linguistic forms and discursive patterns evident in the texts that I study are not suggestive of in-betweenness or burden of linguistic identity, but rather perform an aesthetics of multiplicity within their own right. The imagined-communal texts of the examined writers and playwrights/performers reinterpret language through the use of language crossing as a projection that alters a reality, i.e., they produce a reality of movement and multiplicity through a mucho multi language, which at the same time problematizes the traditional silenced role of women, and women writers specifically.¹ In other words, these authors produce texts with a clear

¹ The adjectival phrase Mucho multi is extracted from the following lines of the screenplay Carmelita Tropicana: Your Kunst Is Your Waffen: “Hello people, you know me, I know you. I am Carmelita Tropicana. I say Loisaida is the place to be. It is multicultural, multinational, multigenerational, mucho multi. And like myself, you’ve got to be multilingual. I am very good with the tongue” (137). As stated by Arrizón and Manzor, referring to “latinas on stage” (2000), “borrowing from Latino, Third-World and Anglo-European cultural traditions, their works critique concepts of time and space as well as patriarchal,
purpose of power acquisition vis-à-vis the traditional place of women—and women writers—both in the US and the Caribbean. As Rita Felski affirms, “our sense of what it means to be a woman, of how women look, talk, think, feel, comes from the books we read, the films we watch, and the invisible ether of everyday assumptions and cultural beliefs in which we are suspended. Rather than subjects producing texts, in other words, texts produce subjects” (181). With their creative writing, these authors create a sense of gender as a performance, and revisit the national and cultural archives that have traditionally defined them.

1.1. **Life Without a Hyphen, Life Without a Border: Life on the Matrix**

It has been a common practice to view Latina(o) literature as sociology rather than as a literary production… When, indeed, it is acknowledged as literature, one of the obstacles cited that impedes its systematic study is the nature of the language in which it is written. Its bilingualism furnishes a pretext for Spanish and English departments to dismiss it; Spanish professors condemn the “mangling” of the language, a phenomenon they grace with the word “Spanglish.” Further, as a literature produced in the United States, it is theoretically beyond the purview of the countries they study. This attitude not only ignores the factors that contribute to a Latina(o) presence in the U.S., but also refuses to connect Latinas(os) to the larger Latin American community. English departments, in contrast, consider that bilingualism makes Latina(o) literature inaccessible to non-Spanish speakers. (Ortega and Saporta Sternbach 5)

Arjun Appadurai’s assertion in *Modernity at Large* that nation-states are entering a terminal crisis (21) leads him to propose an alternative conceptualization to Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities through the concept of “diasporic public spheres”:

heterosexual, and ethnocentric cultural values held dear by both the Anglo art establishment and by the older Latino community” (18). They add that these Latinas on stage “rely upon strategies of fragmentation and disruption with tools…from their multiple dis- and re-locations” (18). Adapting this quote for my analysis, I argue that fragmentation and disruption are achieved in the women artists analyzed –on stage and on paper—through the reconfiguration of language, which I interpret as one of the tools to which Arrizón and Manzor refer.
collective imagined places where a dialogue is established between those who stay and those who leave, between the local and the global, and among diverse localities inside the global; diasporic public spheres as the concept that helps us link imagination to a postnational political world, which “proves not to be a system of homogeneous units (as with the current system of nation-states) but a system based on relations between heterogeneous units” (23).

In 1983, Benedict Anderson proposed that nations are imagined political communities inherently limited and sovereign. Print capitalism, as well as what he calls the essential “fatality of human linguistic diversity” (43) shaped imagined communities and national languages in the Modern Era. Consequently, imagined nations or communities acquired a collective dominant symbolic value or nationness to which individual members of the community have felt deeply attached. However, such delimitations do not take place alone in late modernity when postnational imaginaries co-exist with Modern conceptualizations of nations (Heller, Paths). Appadurai similarly states that in this period of late modernity “the modern and the global often appear as flip sides of the same coin” (3). In the global world today, according to Appadurai, media and migrant border crossings become the major creators of alternatives to past notions of nationhood and nation-states. Through global migration processes and the presence of digital media as the driving forces of transnational or even postnational communities, the imagined communities Anderson was describing no longer necessarily correspond to a specific national construction associated with a bordered geographical space.

The literary and cultural *Gran Caribe* that I imagine in the analyzed works of women writers and playwrights/performers offers the possibility to decolonize the

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2 Anderson describes the processes of national conceptualization in the 19th century.
predetermined national imaginaries imposed on Caribbean identities and so-called hyphenated identities in the US. I refer to \textit{el Gran Caribe} as a cultural and sociolinguistic geopolitical space in which the traditional dichotomy \textit{los de aquí / los de allá} between the US and the Caribbean is unraveled and, consequently, the Hispanic Caribbean connects to other non-Spanish-speaking parts of the Caribbean and their diasporas. In this imagined space, diverse and dispersed Caribbean artists inhabiting different places in the US and the Caribbean cross borders and languages to share ideological projects or to discuss political views. Carole Boyce Davies’ formulation of the notion of “re-mapping” is highly relevant to my project. In her recounting of the different ways of perceiving the Caribbean as a geographical or geopolitical space, she conceptualizes the Caribbean not so much as “a geographical location but a cultural construction based on a series of mixtures, languages, communities of people” (13). Although I acknowledge the Creole, Francophone, and Anglophone dimensions of the Caribbean, I intentionally write \textit{el Gran Caribe} in Spanish because all the texts I examine are specifically related to the Hispanic Caribbean. Furthermore, doing so, I also cross languages in the same way and with the same ideological purpose these writers do in their artistic production. However, to be more accurate, this is a \textit{Gran Caribe} spoken through multiple languages and accents, which do not correspond to delimited geopolitical boundaries.

Although in many cases the authors’ dialogues are based on contradictions (different metaphors, cultural representations, and certain political ideologies)—a quality that has been commonly cited as one of the hallmark traits of postmodernity—, these paradoxes are not static, but rather, creatively productive.\footnote{This is a feature of a postmodern ontology in contrast with a modern one. Paradoxes never deny possibilities; furthermore, they change meanings in the writing process. That is why they open new} Carolina Hospital anticipates
this idea in the prologue of her anthology *Cuban American Writers. Los Atrevidos*:

“Oppositions predominate in the texts and it is from these tensions that emerges a daring creativity… synthesis rather than antagonism, syncretism rather than divergence… forging a new literature that mingles and intertwines different cultural legacies in order to violate and transform reality” (18). For instance, whereas the narratives on the islands, especially in the case of Puerto Rico, often base their fictional discourse on the colonial relationship between the US and the Caribbean, it is precisely this same relationship that functions as the “motor narrativo, punto de arranque” (Rivera 8) of these works in the *Gran Caribe*. The analyzed women writers’ productions from the Hispanic Caribbean share with the US daughters of the Hispanophone Caribbean diaspora the same will to dismantle traditional “narrowly defined island national discourse[s]” (Pérez Rosario 2), as well as linguistic and cultural conceptualizations, in the imaginary of/imagined *Gran Caribe*.

In sum, within the conception of a *Gran Caribe*, I explore the transformation of hegemonic narratives and theatrical language(s) in a selection of authors that I group together through their literary works, the language practices in their texts, and shared affinities and ideologies (while acknowledging and embracing complexity and contradiction in/among them). I explore the creation of concepts of affinity among the works of these women writers through their language use and the ways in which they distance themselves from prevailing cultural models and traditional geopolitics that are placed on both sides of a forcibly positioned hyphen. On the one hand, these writers deconstruct memories and diasporic traumas imposed by their ancestors. On the other
hand, they recapture and value their imagined and inherited Caribbean locality as a destabilization strategy of cultural macro-narratives. Borrowing artist and writer Coco Fusco’s words in *English is Broken Here*, I claim that the authors I study share “a healthy skepticism toward the nationalist rhetoric of [their] parents’ generation and a growing curiosity about one another” (5). These writers visit or re-visit the islands and the US in pursuit of the creation of an artistic *Gran Caribe* network because, for them, “monolithic descriptive models do not work anymore” (Fusco, *English* 13). They distinguish themselves from an inherited epistemology which rests upon the principle of duality both in the US and the islands: “real identity versus fake identity, original versus copy, upper class versus working class, good Spanish versus bad Spanish” (15). Precisely for these reasons, in my analysis, I group together the US and the Caribbean islands writers’ works as means of conceptualizing an artistic *Gran Caribe* that is heterogeneous and translocal. I adopt Santos Febres’ definition of “translocality” as

\[\ldots\ a\ tool\ that\ defines\ the\ social\ and\ discursive\ practices\ of\ writers\ that\ reflect\ upon\ conditions\ of\ circular\ migration.\ It\ differs\ from\ hybridity\ or\ oppositional\ consciousness\ in\ that\ it\ focuses\ on\ the\ problems\ of\ location\ and\ displacement\ within\ multinational\ contexts.\ Translocality\ directly\ applies\ to\ texts\ that\ respond\ to\ multiple\ discursive\ fields\ of\ racial,\ class,\ national,\ gender\ and\ sexual\ identities.\ It\ sets\ them\ in\ motion\ and\ pays\ attention\ to\ textual\ practices\ that\ uncover\ and\ thus\ criticize\ conditions\ of\ multiple\ oppressions.\ (The\ Translocal\ 176)\]

To avoid the dualistic implications of the hyphen in labels such as “Cuban-American” with an eye to a poststructuralist conceptualization of language, I opt for the term *usanas* to name the Caribbean-origin US writers I analyze. This term derives from Lillian Manzor’s designation of “teatro usanocubano” (“Más allá”), which refers to theater plays that present a perspective “que no es puramente cubana ni puramente del exilio ni puramente anglo” (xiii), and that are not based on a static conception of opposed
national imaginaries or cultural identities, which hyphenated terms such as Cuban-American or Dominican-American imply. I rethink hyphenated categorizations with the name usana, which also distances itself from the most common denominations such as “Latina,” “Hispanic,” or “US Latina.” According to Frances R. Aparicio, since the eighties, the use of the terms “Latino/a” and “Latinidad” have generated critical reflection about their political and social implications, their negative or positive impact, and their semantic viability and potential (“Cultural” 623). Aparicio adds that

the term “Latinidad” or in its plural form, “Latinidades,” has been deployed more recently to understand the shared experiences of subordination, resistance, and agency of the various national groups of Latin American descent that comprise the U.S. Latino/a sector. Latinidad is a conceptual site that engages the power dynamics behind the deployment of an umbrella, ethnic term that occludes the vast heterogeneity of our individual, regional, and national experiences. Yet at the same time it serves to foreground the very specificities that the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” have erased. (623)

When Manzor describes what the teatro usanocubano consists of, she explains that such plays re-territorialize and reinvent the cultural and political subject, and that they are not based on a “concepto estático y homogéneo de una identidad nacional o cultural opuesta o separada de otra cultura” (“Más allá” viii), as suggested by Pérez Firmat’s notion of the “one-and-a-halfer” (Life 5) and his conceptualization of the hyphen as “a plus sign… a question of addition not subtraction: Cuban + American” (Life 14-15), an essentialist idea that perpetuates the status quo of a binary system. Pérez Firmat’s conceptualization of hyphenated identities contemplates them as an addition of national imaginaries in a (non-)tense equilibrium (Life 5). Manzor proposes instead a destabilization of the predetermined national cultures on each side of the hyphen “a través de la inserción de la diferencia, del ‘otro’ dentro del cuerpo nacional político, [un
cuerpo que se compone del sujeto] cubano isleño y el cubano diaspórico[,] el hegemónico usano [y] el emergente latino en Estados Unidos” (Manzor, “Más allá” viii).

Carole Boyce Davies revises all the names that have been used in reference to the daughters of the Caribbean diaspora in Western societies: Black, African, African-American, Black British, Minority, Latina/o, West Indian, Caribbean, Hispanic, People of Color, Women of Color, Afro-Caribbean, and/or Third World. She affirms that each of these designations embody “an original misnaming and the simultaneous constant striving of the dispossessed for full representation. Each therefore must be used provisionally; each must be subject to new analyses, new questions and new understandings” (5). In other words, she states that every time we get to a definition, we may start anew with “a new analysis, a new departure, a new interrogation of meaning, new contradictions” (5). If we agree that “the use of any label is a political act that contributes to identity formation” (Sandoval-Sánchez, qtd. in Aparicio, “Cultural” 622), the political act of naming I carry out in this project serves the purpose of avoiding the fixed and predetermined cultural and national definitions that surround these women. Following Boyce Davies’ notion of renaming, designations such as “Hispanic,” “Latina,” or “US Latina” must be provisional, and they must be revisited constantly to remain fully representative.

I argue that within the context of postmodernity qua late capitalism, this hyphenated notion, like the term “US Latina,” demands reconsideration since it lacks the sort of fluidity, flexibility and linguistic instrumentality observable in the postnational(ist) era. Playwright Caridad Svich acknowledges that the designation “US Latina” is no longer productive for her own purposes:
Of course, I have always believed that the term ‘Latina/o Theater’ will become obsolete, because what we are talking about is American theater or World Theater. Plays don’t belong on one shelf or to one audience of a certain nationality or color. They are so much more than that...Yet, cross-cultural issues can’t help but bleed into the work, editing, and all else. (García Romero 30)⁴

The derivative neologism usana functions as a collective demonym, adding the Spanish feminine morphological inflection (-ana) to the acronym for United States of America. Although in Spanish the masculine ending (-o) is the inflection used for generic nouns, I use the term usana with a generic purpose to refer to those female authors writing in the US in the single-unit compound noun usanacaribeño/a. I will use grancaribeñas as the designation for all the artists whose works I examine in an attempt to transcend geopolitical spaces based on traditional monolithic national and cultural imaginaries of the US and the Caribbean. At the same time, I seek to reveal the contradictions and contesting ideologies within grancaribeñas, together with their differentiation in terms of culture, ethnicity, sexuality, and social class. Grancaribeñas are connected through a matrix of crossings represented in their artistic productions.

Because of their creative language crossings and resulting aesthetics of multiplicity, it is unquestionably not an easy task to classify the writers and playwrights/performers whose work I analyze. Through extensive archival research at the Cuban Heritage Collection of the University of Miami, I have observed, for example, that some critics, together with other members of the theater community, describe playwright Caridad Svich as an “American new voice.” Others, the vast majority, emphasize her multiple descent: “of Cuban, Croatian, Argentine and Spanish descent.” Some of them call her a “Latino playwright” [my emphasis]; others merely note that she was born in

⁴ The same categories these artists reject—in terms of gender, ethnicity and nationality—because they group them as the “Other” are the labels that give them at the same time the power and visibility that society denies them.
Philadelphia and lives in Los Angeles; a small number prefer to name her “hispanoamericana;” some opt for “a Cuban-Argentine-Spanish-Croatian hybrid.” Particular cases define her poetically as “a blend of warm flamboyance” (Borden) or “a cartographer of cultural dreamscapes” (Maxwell). The authors are constantly asked how they would name themselves, and they fall into natural contradictions and hesitancy. To the question Eduardo del Rio poses, “Let’s talk about labels for a moment. How do you see yourself? Are you a Cuban, Cuban-American, Latina?” (94), Achy Obejas answers that the Cuban part of her self is always there whether she is a Cuban writer, a Cuban-American writer, or a Cuban who writes. To the same question, Cristina García responds that she sees herself as multiple: Cuban, Latina, and also New Yorker. She basically resents the exclusionary use of these sorts of labels (44). Carolina Hospital affirms that she is very much against labels and wonders what exactly the term “Cuban-American literature” means. She states that: “It’s written by people who are both Cuban and American, and if they choose to write in Spanish, or if they choose to write in English, or if they choose to write in Spanglish … who am I to say? Authors write the best literature they can, and they choose whatever is true to themselves, what’s authentic. To me, Cuban-American literature is … more than being Cuban or American” (51). Julia Álvarez names herself sometimes as an American writer (Vázquez 90), other times as a Dominican-American writer (“Doña Aída” 822), but especially a writer who is Latina—and not a Latina who is a writer—because she does not want to be “hemmed in by a label even if what [she] produce[s] derives from the experiences and the concerns that are in [her] being” (Rosario-Sievert 33). Jennine Capó Crucet defines herself as a Miamian writer (Furious Fiction). Migdalia Cruz as “Puerto Rican-American, and before that, …
as a Nuyorican, Puerto Rican from New York, which is a whole other thing” (López, “Black” 203). Josefina Báez goes for a more fluid designation as a (york)dominican(york). What all have in common is that they constantly problematize essentialist forms of identity. Therefore, even if usanas agree on calling themselves American, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban-American or Dominican-American, they prefer a non-determinist, more fluid and flexible notion of cultural identity that reflects and embraces multiplicity. This is conveyed in their texts, as I will demonstrate in this dissertation, seeking to evade the hyphen that constitutes binary, totalizing forms of identity within the waning national(ist) framework of modernity and structuralist thought in language analysis.

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In their subsequent works (for example in Obejas’ *Days of Awe* (2001), García’s *A Handbook to Luck* (2007), Caridad Svich’s *Jarman* (2014)), these authors have attempted to rid themselves of the so-called “burden of representation” (Procter) – which refers to the expectations of representativity placed by the audience, critics and scholars on ethnic writers—in their pursuit of an aesthetics of multiplicity. These artistic productions question readers’ expectations, challenge conventional assumptions about the fiction produced by women from diasporic communities, and resist classification through unconventional perspectives and literary strategies. For example, Ana Lydia Vega explains that in Puerto Rico, “once you begin to publish and achieve a certain standing, then everyone expects you to fulfill your ‘patriotic’ obligations, no matter how hard you try to distance yourself from all that in your personality and work” (Hernández 55).

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5 Most of them reject these and other labels because they ghettoize and place them in a type of sub-culture or minority group, denying their option to establish a literary conversation with mainstream literary circles. On the other hand, these labels emphasize gender and ethnic specificities that allow them to enter the literary marketplace. They somewhat admit the need for a label in order to acquire some degree of sociocultural prestige and visibility.
Cristina García hopes that younger writers in her situation will feel free to write on whatever interests them: “If it happens to be identity issues, or about exile, great. But if [they’re] interested in the Middle Ages and wan[t] to write a novel set there, then [they] should write it … not being secluded or isolated into [their] own hyphenated American-ness” (Del Rio 46). In fact, in a Handbook to Luck, García continues to confront alienation through a multiplicity of characters, far from her own diasporic experience: a woman in El Salvador, a woman in Tehran, and a Cuban who grows up in Las Vegas. Similarly, Obejas’ Days of Awe focuses on being Jewish and being Cuban, an underexplored aspect of Cuban diasporas. The language crossings and aesthetics of multiplicity these texts convey through multilingualism, multi-focal perspectives, and genre/gender blending increasingly become a feature of twenty-first century world literature; a literature which creates a utopian imaginary in which multiplicity and multiaccentuality is the norm and not something different and specific. If we think of language as practice, as Monica Heller urges us to do, “and put the speakers, not the system, at the centre of our analysis, we have then to wonder why we need a concept of autonomous linguistic system at all” (8). Instead, as Álvarez-Cáccamo asks, “What if we replaced the idea of code with the idea of linguistic resources which are socially distributed, organized certainly by speakers individually and collectively, but which do not necessarily ever have to correspond to some closed and wholly describable system? What if language were part of a set of practices which had varying manifestations (both for individuals and sets or networks of people)…?” (Heller, “Bilingualism” 8). The emphasis should lie on the linguistic and writing resources these authors employ and on

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6 Cristina García’s Monkey Hunting (2003) and The Lady Matador’s Hotel (2010) also follow this global(izing) trend.
how/why they employ them. Accordingly, I argue here that the literary discourse of grancaribeñas can best be understood through the notions of language crossing and multiaccentuality, which convey mobility, and a multiplicity of voices and perspectives.

1.2. Movement, Fluidity, and Multiplicity: Language Crossing in the Artistic Production of el Gran Caribe

Grancaribeñas inhabit several languages, unlike the idea of inhabiting in-between languages or “dancing between two cultures” (Luis). Certainly, while some of the so-called US Latina texts remain in the in-between space, and while some of the texts written by women writers in the Hispanic Caribbean continue to be inserted in fixed Caribbean macro-narratives, the grancaribeña texts under analysis in the present work cross languages and accents, and inhabit multiple spaces. I propose that it is specifically through the textual practice of “language crossing” that grancaribeña writers, playwrights, and performers manifest movement and multiplicity. The idea of “language crossing” is taken from the work of sociolinguist Ben Rampton. In his study of the language practices and speech varieties of young adolescents in Britain—through which they destabilize ethnic identity as most often conceptualized in public and policy discourses—, Rampton demonstrates the significant role that language plays in daily cultural politics. He explains that much of twentieth-century linguistics was focused on regularity in grammar and coherence in discourse. These properties were assumed to originate in stable communities and social networks (Crossing 1).

Rampton defines “language crossing” as “the use of language varieties [generally] associated with social or ethnic groups that the speaker doesn’t normally ‘belong’ to”
(“Language” 177), i.e., as the use of a language that is assumed not to belong to the subject who is using it, and thus requires permanent movement across and blurring of traditionally fixed ethnic and social boundaries, posing “questions of legitimacy that participants will need to negotiate” (“Language” 177). Rampton adds that it is also about creativity—much neglected in modern linguistics—, about “people transgressing the conventional equation of language and ethnicity prescribed for them in ethnic absolutism…evidence of cultural innovation [and hybridity] in globalized … spaces” (Crossing 2). Sociolinguistics has traditionally contested the purported homogeneity of language in society. However, “linguistics of community” (as termed by Mary Louis Pratt) or the sociolinguistics of distribution “imagine separate speech communities with their own boundaries, sovereignty, fraternity and authenticity … giv[ing] rise to a linguistics that seek to capture identity, but not the relationality of social differentiation” (Pratt 56, 59). These methodological approaches—of which William Labov’s work is representative—focus on space and time from a horizontal and stable perspective (see Rampton; Blommaert), fostering a discourse of ethnic absolutism (Gilroy), i.e., the conviction that a person’s ethnicity is fixed, and shapes to a great extent her identity. Therefore, Rampton bases his research on communities of practice, interested in how “notionally multiple memberships and identities get constructed and integrated in social practice” instead of “treating people just aggregations of ‘tickbox’ social variables [such as gender, nationality, ethnicity as independent modules]” (“Speech” 5).

Rampton’s arguments, as well as those of Blommaert in The Sociolinguistics of Globalization (2010), move beyond the structuralist synchronic approach to language study in the field of modern linguistics, in which language was understood as “a bounded,
nameable, and countable unit, often reduced to grammatical structures and vocabulary and called by names such as ‘English,’ ‘French’ and so on” (Blommaert, *The Sociolinguistics* 4). Due to diasporic processes and technological advances in an increasingly interconnected world, a linguistics based upon geopolitical boundaries becomes less viable for purposes of cultural and social analysis. There is now an interest in fragmentation, multiplicity, and contradiction: “in the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, and in the flows of people, knowledge, texts, images, and objects across social and geographical space” (Rampton, *Crossing* 2) beyond the idea of desired totality of an imagined nation-state. Therefore, there is a need to rethink our conceptual and analytical tools. To that end, Blommaert proposes a sociolinguistics of mobility that approaches language in motion, framed in terms of trans-contextual networks, flows and movements, vertical layers, and various spaces and times (*The Sociolinguistics* 1). My study is framed within this theoretical approach—concerned with mobile language resources rather than linguistically defined and immobile objects—in the analysis of language practices occurring in different, layered, vertical scales (in terms of gender, ethnicity, class) in the selected *grancaribeña* texts.

This conceptualization also appeals to Monica Heller’s understanding of language in late modernity “as ideology and practice, … away from a ‘common-sense,’ but in fact highly ideologized, view of bilingualism … [and] which privileges language as social practice, speakers as social actors and boundaries as products of social actions” (“Bilingualism” 1). Heller urges readers to resist fixed and unquestionable national boundaries and bounded units of code and community to consider bilingualism rather as a process in real practice or functionality in the age of globalization (1). She affirms that
the prevailing twentieth-century view of bilingualism was anchored in a structuralist view of languages based upon ideological notions of nationhood and state: unified, fixed and monolingual nation-states, to which “bilingualism necessarily stood as a potential problem … or as a threat to their boundaries” (3). Still nowadays, many institutional discourses and spontaneous conversations reproduce these discourses based on the ideological motto “one nation, one language.” The corpus of literary and theatrical texts analyzed in this dissertation, however, demonstrate that, as Heller argues, “conditions are changing, [and that] it is possible to challenge the hegemony of that view, and to offer another view that is better able to account for the ways speakers are drawing on their resources at a time when boundaries are often deliberately played with” (2). Along these lines, my analysis of multiaccentual texts, and the language crossings in them, addresses “movement, diversity and multiplicity” (Heller, “Bilingualism” 6). To study language as practice, we must consider and focus on the speakers collectively, not only on the linguistic system (8), and examine the social, political, and economic ideologies that serve to construct and condition the use of a language or languages. For this reason, questions of aesthetics, gender, ethnicity, class, or sexuality are also to be accounted for when considering the language practices in the texts by the selected writers. The concept of language crossing resides within the sort of framework of mobility that Blommaert and Heller propose.

Methodologically, the type of interactional micro-analysis carried out by Rampton corresponds in this project to the analysis of the transformative language found in texts of the *Gran Caribe*, the thematic contents in them, and the aesthetics of multiplicity they reflect, which could all be read as what Appadurai calls “subversive micro-narratives”
(10). Through these micro-narratives, these women authors seek to destabilize masculinist macro-narratives of nationness, gender, and language into an attempt to overcome totalizing generalizations and eroticizing tendencies in ethnic, gender, and cultural imageries that still reside in the notion of hyphenated identities, represented linguistically in the notion of “code-switching.” Rampton argues that the concept of code-switching perpetuates the construction of stereotyped “others” opposed to an “us.” Code-switching reflects the hyphenated conceptualization of identity developed in the previous section, assuming that bilingual speakers move between different language-marked identities, associated with fixed national imaginaries –usually one language belonging to a minority community vis-à-vis the institutionalized language (and national imaginary) (“Speech” 6-7). Blommaert conveys a similar stance when he states that conventional studies of code-switching fail to do justice to the complexity of multilingual, multi-scaled and superdiverse repertoires in particular micro-environments in a globalized world (12, 42). Language crossing destabilizes these traditional notions of belonging and gives room to transitional, complex, non-static language practices that represent cultural identities with multiple configurations. Rampton suggests an intricate dialectic between language, peer group belonging and ethnic otherness in the concept of language crossing that expands the linguistic notion of code alternation (“Language” 177), in the sense that “many people alternate with more than just their national standard(s) languages and the home vernacular” (Crossing 9). Language crossing contemplates that “social groups are actually plural and internally fragmented, cross-cut by … (sub-) groupings with cultural resources that many members of the larger group are

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7 For a reconceptualization of the notion of communicative “code” in “code-switching” and for a revision of studies on this phenomenon, see Álvarez-Cáccamo.
never likely to be able to either access fully or master properly” (“Language” 180).

Therefore, “crossing” is the step taken—or to be taken—away from a Modern and structuralist concept of bounded categories of language, culture and identity towards a more heterogeneous concept corresponding to the logic of postmodernity.8

In his seminal treatise The Postmodern Condition, Jean-François Lyotard defines “postmodern” as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv). He affirms, “the society of the future falls less within the province of a Newtonian anthropology (such as structuralism or systems theory) than a pragmatics of language particles.” He adds that “[t]here are many different language games- a heterogeneity of elements” (xxiv). Based on Wittgenstein’s notion of language games, which he describes as “the various categories of an utterance that can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses of which they can be put” (10), Lyotard claims that we now start representing ourselves through multiple language moves (i.e., a multiplicity of meanings) or localized micro-narratives, which are “the minimum relation required for society to exist” (15). Every move depends on “a feeling of success won at the expense of an adversary: the accepted language” (10), i.e., the macro-narratives. The authors studied in this dissertation use and confront the still present Modern macro-rhetoric and rewrite it

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8 As demonstrated by most of the sociolinguistic studies on code-switching (García 2009, Koike 1987, Sánchez 1994, Toribio 2004, Zentella 1997), this linguistic phenomenon in the US is owed mainly to discourse-pragmatic factors, and to a much lesser extent to the lack of competence in the switched languages. In the case of grancaribeña artists, language crossing happens for reasons of both form and function, and for aesthetic and ideological motives. Sometimes these authors’ goal is merely to remind the reader that the story “is going on in Spanish” (Lynch, “Novelist”). On other occasions, they cross languages to create a particular aesthetic effect (“multiplicity,” “opacity”). And in most cases, they combine form and function to an ideological end: a right to opacity (Glissant), a “punch” (Lynch, “Novelist”) to their readerships, or as “a marker of Hispanic identity” (Pérez Rosario 11). For a description of discourse-pragmatic functions of code-switching in Spanish speakers in the US, see Klee & Lynch 226. Although some of these functions may coincide with those of the language crossings in the fictional works of grancaribeñas, I intentionally avoid the term “code.” As Heller affirms, the mere concept of “code” is clearly related to “autonomous and bounded linguistic systems” (“Bilingualism” 7) or national imaginaries, which are perpetuated by hyphenated categorizations.
“more as vernacular globalization and less as a concession to large-scale national and international policies” (Appadurai 10). They create a *grancaribeña* community of practice of local micro-narratives that are diverse yet complementary, accomplishing a shared ideological aim and resulting in an aesthetics of multiplicity. *Grancaribeñas* reinterpret the “original” and official languages, and their artistic traditions, transforming them to render multiple significations. This idea can be clearly observed in Caridad Svich’s resemantization of the Greek and Latin Classics in her plays and the intersections between high and low art, and formal and alternative stage languages, among other fusions of pre-existing styles.9 These and many more crossings in the narratives and plays/performances (both the scripts and the stage productions) analyzed in this project—crossings of bodies, languages, disciplines, genders, genres, media, cultures—result in an aesthetics of multiplicity that moves beyond categories, and that Michael Cerveris defines as a “change from the traditional twentieth century Western concept of art and non-art to … a new aesthetic for the twenty-first century” (15).

### 1.3. *Grancaribeñas*: A Literary Community of Practice

As observed in the previous section, language as a national, homogeneous, and static unitary system is a problematic construct in the era of late modernity when globalization and constant migration flow blur borders and deconstruct monolithic and monolingual national imaginaries. The literary corpus in the present study questions the

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9 Although the ideological blending of styles and disciplines emerged already in the avant-garde movements, the political purpose in each case is different. At the vanguard, artists created an effect of estrangement to underline the specific creative process. On the other hand, *Grancaribeñas* write and create with/through shared resources and practices that group them in a community of practice that subverts predetermined norms with a common political end. Their art is relational, in the sense that is not art for the art’s sake but it creates dialogs with certain social aspects.
idea of a national and official language representing a delimited geographical space in both the US and the Hispanic Caribbean. I observe that these literary works give way to a reinterpretation of language through which the practice of language crossing contributes to a reconceptualization of national imaginaries, and ethnic and gender communities. Since these writers and their works participate in “the global currents and flows of ‘our America’,” we need to emphasize, as Lillian Manzor suggests, the insufficiencies of cultural and historiographical categorizations connected to a ‘modernist’ concept of the nation-state [which] excludes a great percentage of the world’s population [of which] a large part ... is composed of exiles, refugees, temporary citizens, and other types of deterritorialized people. Furthermore, this construct of nation-state is related to systems of conventional signification which presuppose a unique national identity tied to a specific geographical location; that is, ‘national culture’ presupposes a specific geographical space with well-marked and stable borders. However, displacements, physical border crossings, and cultural discontinuities force us to theorize ‘national identity’ in another light, to disarticulate at the theoretical level what history has already separated: the anchoring of a ‘national culture’ within one specific geographical space and within one linear history. (“Performative” 254)

The productions of the women writers, and playwrights/performers analyzed share creative engagements —or what Appadurai calls “diasporic public spheres”— to transform the national imaginaries that have traditionally surrounded and defined them with the use of a language that defamiliarizes English and Spanish, and English-Spanish, in order to embrace the heterogeneous realities and geopolitical spaces they inhabit in late modernity.

In this dissertation, I borrow Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s (1998) notion of “community of practice,” defined as “people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor [, for example] a band of artists seeking new forms of expression” (“Communities” 1). The members of a community of practice “develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing
recurring problems—in short, a shared practice” (2). For my present purposes, the community of practice is conceptualized as “a space of contestation in which [they] seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern” (Appadurai 4), and which escapes the traditional association of community with the second element (the one in an inferior position) in the Modern binary dichotomies: “vernacular, oral modes of expression; close, solidary, home-based networks; minority and working class groups” (Rampton, “Speech” 3). According to Rampton, in the dichotomous “linguistics of community,”

Conflict and misunderstanding were certainly recognised, but they were thought to occur in the gap between integrated cultural and linguistic systems. The gap itself was seen as (merely) the place for educational interventions designed to help the proponents of different systems to understand each other and adjust, not as a site where people improvised practices and relationships that deserved sociolinguistic study in themselves. (“Speech” 4)

Therefore, this understanding of community, and the study of language in “linguistics of community,” goes hand-in-hand with the hyphenated conceptualization I contest in the present study.

Lave and Wenger’s original concept of “community of practice,” on the other hand, relies on the active interaction among its members. I cannot affirm that there is an intentional dialogue regarding the creation of a community of practice among the women writers and playwrights/performers I analyze in this project. However, interactions with each other’s work exert mutual influences. For instance, when asked why she no longer used italics for Spanish terms in her novels following Memory Mambo, Achy Obejas confessed that she decided to break with this convention after reading Drown by Junot Díaz, in which he does not italicize, and realizing the fluidity and poetics of language in this way. The turning point was when Obejas met Junot Díaz in Havana. She recounted
that they kept crossing languages during their conversation and she could no longer imagine their words in different typefaces and fonts (*Days 2*). On another occasion, Obejas admitted to having read Cristina García, although she accused her of deploying a lack of diversity (especially in terms of multiple sexualities) in her novels (del Rio 91). Similarly, Julia Álvarez has read and reviewed Jennine Capó Crucet, underlining the Miami-native’s ability to portray a community’s voices. Also, Caridad Svich frequently reads scripts and sees productions of coetaneous *grancaribeña* playwrights such as Nena Beber, among others. In addition, these writers often meet at events and through on-line spaces—as pointed out by Holloway et al. in their article about emerging women writers learning to write in a community of practice (133)—, which complements Appadurai’s notion of the digital media as one of the driving forces for the creation of translocal and postnational sodalities (8). Furthermore, I agree with Holloway et al. when affirming that

> [f]iction writers learn through writing but also through many varied practices related to the writing process such as reading other authors’ works, attending readings and conferences, taking or teaching classes, or entering into editing partnerships. They also belong to the larger constellations of practices formed through writers’ unions, publishing houses, distribution agencies, and arts councils. [Finally,] fiction writers’ relationships to their audiences are also part of their communities of practice. (Wenger 126, qtd. in Holloway et al. 133)

In these ways, the authors whose work I analyze can be said to form a literary community of practice through shared activities. My adaptation of Wenger’s “community of practice” follows the original concept in that these women authors share a domain (creative writing as an artistic production) and a practice (a repertoire of language resources and practices that result in an aesthetics of multiplicity). This community of practice may not focus on face-to-face and oral interaction between the authors, yet through a shared repertoire of language practices and politically-charged stylistic
resources, they are forging a community of literary practice that is not oral—as in Rampton’s sociolinguistic analysis, but written.

My analytical and conceptual apparatus regarding the notion of community of practice pairs with Rampton’s own conceptualization of Lave and Wenger’s term. Instead of thinking of static and foundationalist communities that pre-exist people, there is a growing emphasis on “the flow of people, texts, and ideas across local and global networks, as well as in interaction with ‘strangers’ inside, outside and at the boundaries of specific groups and interactions” (“Speech” 1). Along the same lines, this study destabilizes previous establishments of fixed communities and conceptualizes a literary community of practice since, as stated by Rampton, “scholarship itself is no longer regarded as simply reporting on communities—it also helps to create them, destroy and prevent their inception” (1). If we acknowledge that language use and social organizations are intrinsically linked, then the transformative language employed by the present writers opens up a space for non-dichotomous modes of expression, social categories, and types of social and literary organization. I do not analyze the language practices and resources between texts or authors, but rather a heterogeneous use of language within a solidary, complex, sometimes contradictory group of texts and authors.

Methodologically, I combine the community-of-practice perspective with the language ideologies approach in sociolinguistics. This viewpoint allows me to analyze “community” as a political construct, questioning the stereotyped assumptions conveyed through hyphenated conceptualizations, the ideological and political connotations they entail, and the exclusions they carry out. Drawing on the combination of both approaches with a purpose of critical literary and discourse analysis, I explore how the
representational implications and meanings of the language practices in the analyzed texts disconnect from prevailing masculinist assumptions of gender and nationness. In sum, the community of practice presented in the current project is not based on a unified language, common subjectivity, or a national identity or territory. Through the postmodern practices of language crossing in their texts, the present authors create a translocal postnational community of practice that suggests global social transformation. As stated in the previous section, the *grancaribeña* community of practice is neither chronological, nor spatial or necessarily virtual, but linguistic and feminist, sharing a political sense of aesthetics of multiplicity.

### 1.4 Gender: Nominalist and Postmodern Feminisms

Feminist critics influenced by poststructuralism draw on similar ideas to tackle the relations between art and gender. They begin by stressing the importance of language and representation in defining who we are as men or women. (Felski 38)

If from the Modern Era language has been inextricably linked to projects of nationhood, and if we acknowledge that large centralized nation-states are constructed and maintained on a patriarchal basis, then the language crossings of this community of practice of women writers offer a highly sensible feminist alternative to the spatial concept of nation-state which disarticulates the roles of masculinity and femininity associated with predetermined notions of nation-state. George Yúdice argues that feminism is a discourse that “es deconstructor de todo nacionalismo, [porque] va más allá del nacionalismo” (1), and Jean Franco notes that women have only played a secondary role in the construction of nations, affirming that “toda identidad nacional es, en esencia, una identidad masculina” (81, qtd. in Zubiaurre 5). In this regard, the present texts under
analysis revisit and reinterpret “one nation/one language” ideology, which is an androcentrically-constructed macro-narrative. The use of feminist theory and literary criticism in this dissertation responds to the “sentido originario del vocablo teoría: hacer ver. Pero, en cuanto teoría crítica, su hacer ver es a la vez un irracionalizar” (Amorós y de Miguel 16): an estrangement of national imaginaries, masculinities and femininities linked to the nation-state, languages, and aesthetics of representation; and the embracing of unstable multiplicity that this community of practice of women writers del Gran Caribe aims to accomplish through their language crossings.

In other words, in my conceptualization of a literary community of practice that is shared by grancaribeñas, and which its members imagine through their narratological and theatrical use of language(s), these women writers propose a reinvention of the masculinist linguistic constructions that have traditionally shaped the Caribbean and the US, of foundational rhythms, and painful cartography borders. As stated by Felski in her digression on postmodern aesthetics and feminist theory, “it is not the gender of the author that dictates how feminist scholars should value art. Rather, it is the formal elements of the work itself, the extent to which these elements come together to question our everyday assumptions about the reality, coherence, and separateness of male and female identity” (182). I affirm that the aesthetics of rupture, fragmentation, and disidentification apparent in the writings of grancaribeñas is what makes their works feminist, in the sense that they move away from fixed definitions of a feminine identity towards a heterogeneous (non-) identity. If language and culture is what shapes women’s subjectivities and realities, then the crossing of languages and questioning of cultural

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10 As Ana M. López affirms, “Latin American nations have foundational literary romances, but they have also foundational rhythms which are fought—over and crossed—with as much regularity as their painful, real cartography borders” (“Of Rythms” 311)
representations in these texts bring these authors together in their contestation of static feminine US Latina and Caribbean identities. Traditionally, “the modern novel has been used as a sociological document by a number of contemporary investigators; nevertheless, its worth does not rest on the information it provides about a world depicted within. It is valuable as a social document in the sense that the novel expresses the subjective and intersubjective structures which operate within a given community” (Ellis 27). In the present corpus under study (novels, short stories, and drama/performance), language crossings and an aesthetics of multiplicity enable a process of female power acquisition from a feminist point of view, since this appropriation of language, or this mobilization of linguistic expression, allows these writers to alter surrounding notions of identity.

With the nominalist act I am performing, I pursue a feminist strategy of estrangement and problematization of the hyphen, placing grancaribeñas in a position of power since they share a community of practice that gives them visibility. This political act of naming corresponds to Amorós and Valcárcel’s nominalist feminism, which operates within the same masculinist Enlightenment ideas but transforms them to fit women’s right to name, and, through naming, creating realities from the perspective of a given community of women. I take a nominalist stance to designate what tended to be made invisible among women who share ethnic and ideological affinities, while acknowledging and maintaining their cultural specificities, since they “are not so much a

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11 Amorós defines nominalism as “una actitud filosófica consistente en atribuir a la realidad individual todo el peso ontológico y a minimizar, o bien a reducir a un mero expediente pragmático para proceder a la denominación de un conjunto de individuos con algún rasgo en común, el correlato extralingüístico de los términos universales” (74).
12 The idea of bringing into existence through naming was well argued by Searle in his reformulations of Austin’s speech act theory. See Searle 1969, 1995.
‘natural’ affinity group, as women who have come together out of political necessity” (Moraga n.p.). These women writers’ affiliation is based upon common ideological affinities rather than common identities, which would essentialize the formation of the group. Celia Amorós cites Donna Haraway’s notion of politics of articulation rather than representation, in which language or discourse is just one process of articulation (Haraway, “The Promises” 324). Drawing upon Haraway’s concept of articulation, Amorós explains that

… la idea de articulación da juego para concebir coaliciones entre diversos sujetos políticos de forma flexible, funcional en relación con las necesidades de las luchas. Ninguno de esos sujetos tiene a priori título especial alguno para instituirse en algo así como grupo de vanguardia en base a presuntas características esenciales. Pero, de nuevo, ello no implica que todos los actores sean iguales. El “centro dinamizador” parte de aquel grupo directamente concernido por el problema del que arranca la lucha en cuestión. (Amorós, “Sujetos” 368)

Therefore, I bring this group of writers together in a pact of political necessity, under the designation of grancaribeñas.14

For this project, and towards a plural feminist approach, it is important to combine the nominalist feminism described —grounded in the Enlightenment and Modernity— with Judith Butler’s notion that cultural and gender identities, as well as boundaries, are constructed and constituted through the recurring and performative use of

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13 Even when I refer to grancaribeñas in general, in my analysis of the texts, I contemplate the cultural, historical, political, linguistic, and aesthetic specificities of each text and author. For a detailed historical and political contextualization of different Hispanic Caribbean authors and their diasporas (Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Dominican), see Pérez Rosario.

14 This pact should be understood as a strategy to acquire agency in order to create a community of practice where these women are not the objects of the pact but the subjects who form the pact (Amorós La gran 126) after having previously acquired “la individualidad [aunque esto devenga en] un verdadero ritual iniciático” (Amorós La gran, 191). As stated by Valcárcel, “paradójicamente, la conquista de la individualidad no es una tarea individual” (139). The community of practice is their means of individual power acquisition as female writers.
a language that remains within regulatory frames. Therefore, we cannot consider these concepts in a static manner, as if they possessed a fixed foundation, as with the essentialist idea of multiculturalism that holds a determinist view of culture(s). However, as stated by Amorós, equally important in cultural dynamics as shared conventions, “son los conflictos, las tensiones, los desajustes, desgarramientos, disensos y, desde luego, el fenómeno del cambio cultural. …Nunca tiene lugar ni la total asimilación ni la total destrucción de una cultura por otra … las culturas están en un proceso permanente de construcción y reconstrucción” (“Feminismo” 223-4).

Butler’s notion of the ideological play of performativities (understanding the performative nature of language) broadens the idea of a linguistic community of practice, supported by the sociolinguistic theory presented, to include a gender and a feminist political approach to these artistic productions. If we accept the argument regarding the performative function of language when it occurs in unison with certain social norms, and the “reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler, Bodies 2), we can interpret these authors’ language crossings as an acknowledgement of exclusionary processes in the current ontological domains and a resignification of them in an effort (1) to deconstruct the wholeness of the languages we know, (2) to give ontological visibility to those voices (as regards language, gender, sexuality, and national imaginaries) that remain in the domains of unthinkability, and (3) to destabilize binary systems constructed through the repetition of those regulatory codes which create an ontology of inclusion and exclusion. Then, if the repetition and performativity of normative discourses, i.e., regulatory language (or languages), are the

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15 The concept of performativity, which derives from J.L. Austin’s speech act theory, contests the very notion of a preexisting subject that the term “performance” conveys.
creators of established gender roles and identities, the alteration in the use of these languages (by means of language crossings, and a resulting aesthetics of multiplicity) in the grancaribeña narratives and dramatic texts analyzed can be read as an effort to transform established dualistic notions of gender, ethnicity and nationhood, among other social constructions on the one hand, and literary and theatrical canonical genre constructions on the other.

Butler claims that subjects cannot act out of the norms that precede them and to which they need to conform. In other words, we can never get to know a subject as a nude matter because what we always know are the constructions of it. Butler’s postmodern feminism intends to disrupt the gender/sex binary and other dualistic concepts such as that of men/women. The philosopher proposes that there is a gender ideal-norm that we can never reach and we draw on it to then alter it and carry out performativities of it. Butler then focuses on these alterations, these performativities, and denaturalizes them (or irrationalizes them, as Amorós would put it) to show these are merely gender conventions. The analyzed texts purposely alter the ideal-norm of language, nation and gender, not only to show that these notions are conventions but also to offer new possibilities that dissolve the concept of an ideal-norm. I interpret the conscious crossings with language in these texts as the conscious ideological play of performativities Butler suggests. In fact, through the theoretical terminology she uses, Butler is already creating a different ontology. She posits “matrices” as an imaginary crisscrossed space from where multiple forms of knowledge emerge and interrelate, and as a way to disarticulate the concept of paradigms (related to linearity, series, taxonomies, and categories). She also postulates that “hyperbole” has a disruptive potential since it is
a disloyal repetition of what is being repeated, and that “resignification” allows us to destabilize binary systems. This is the sort of language that the women writers examined in this dissertation reflect in their literary productions as a way to conceptualize a Gran Caribe. They break from an ontology based on linearity and binary oppositions in favor of a conceptualization of the world as a matrix of relations (i.e., gender relations, social relations). In other words, Butler’s political project consists of undoing coercive normative impositions. She asserts that the processes of becoming are never-ending. In that sense, she states that a woman is never born a woman but this categorization actually consists of a process of becoming (cf. de Beauvoir).

Butler’s analysis of the never-ending play of gender norms informs my reading of the language practices that grancaribeñas realize, understood as estrangements, contradictions and crossings in a postmodern logic that disrupts the binary oppositions of a modern logic. Butler seeks to identify the ontological exclusionary processes by giving them meaning and by re-signifying them beyond hierarchies, subordinations, and domains of unthinkableability. She intends to create a theoretical conceptualization that gives signification to bodies that were denied ontological significance. For Butler, what remains outside the “thinkable domains,” which are needed to create the normative domains, are “unthinkable non-subjects”: “the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation” (Bodies 3). Butler’s ideological theorization is significant in this study in the way she conceptualizes language and gender as a play of exclusionary and inclusionary matrices. Although her project is not nominalist as this study is, the creation of a community of
practice and the nominalist process are essential steps toward power acquisition. The name I propose is also a needed typology that dismantles the traditional binary oppositions that Butler herself still uses in her conceptualization.

I draw on Butler’s paradoxical notion of a subject possessing agency and, at the same time, being constituted by the constraints of a construction (x), and I rename these authors under the designation of Grancaribeñas while proposing a new space outside physical borders. I also acknowledge the exclusionary forces (the normative domains they disidentify with) that have shaped these authors’ identities and dis-identities, while I resignify these authoritative realms, and signify them through a nominalist act. This act results in an inevitable construction of identity in a type of strategic essentialism (Spivak), ideas shared by Rosi Braidotti:

In feminist theory one speaks as a woman, although the subject “woman” is not a monolithic essence defined once and for all but rather the site of multiple, complex and potentially contradictory sets of experiences defined by overlapping variables such as class, race, age, lifestyle, sexual preference, and others. …One speaks as a woman in order to empower women, to activate socio-symbolic changes in their condition: this is a radicalist anti-essentialist position. (4)

Although these types of female categories (such as US Latina) are here deconstructed and claimed to be fragmented and heterogeneous, a universalist and essentialist discourse is used strategically for the purpose of a feminist claim. Thus, the term I propose performs what it criticizes, yet at the same time creates a necessary paradox, understanding “paradox” in the postmodern sense – as producer of new forms of knowledge - rather

16 Butler is aware of the necessary paradox in postmodern thinking on cultural and gender identities, as she explains in the following quote: “… a willful and instrumental subject, one who decides on its gender, is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realize that its existence is already decided by gender. Certainly, such a theory would restore a figure of a choosing subject—humanist—at the center of a project whose emphasis on construction seems to be quite opposed to such a notion. But if there is no subject who decides on its gender, and if, on the contrary, gender is part of what decides the subject, how might one formulate a project that preserves gender practices as sites of critical agency?” (Bodies x).
than in the sense of the tragic paradox of modern ideology.\textsuperscript{17} These authors become \textit{sujetas} constituting a community of practice through the language crossings in their narratives, their pursuit of an aesthetics of multiplicity, and their thematic contents reflecting a postmodern logic. Importantly, the nominalist stance I take allows these writers and their artistic productions to become thinkable. They seek to be no longer the “dreaded identification against which—and by virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life” (Butler, \textit{Bodies} 3).\textsuperscript{18}

Although Weedon states that “[w]e cannot look to authorial consciousness for the meaning of a text, since this is always open to plural readings which are themselves the product of specific discourse” (20), this study complies with the need for a legitimized space for \textit{grancaribeña} writing in scholarly, literary, and publishing spheres. I intend to give voice and visibility to these women writers \textit{del Gran Caribe}, whose conversations have been traditionally appropriated by patriarchal anthropological discourses coming from both their Anglo and Caribbean contexts. I also deliberately create a contradiction in the postmodern sense: I disarticulate given labels that have traditionally grouped these writers in a minority group in order to give them an alternative name. This designation continues giving them a differentiated place in relation to mainstream world literature,

\textsuperscript{17} Postmodern paradox, based on contradiction rather than opposition, opens discourses to anew possibilities in already known and old discursive practices. On the contrary, the modernist paradox was the figure that expressed the impossibility of overcoming the societal limitations, and the limits of art itself because it was created with “social” elements.

\textsuperscript{18} I use the term \textit{sujeta} after Amelia Valcárcel, who explains her use of this term “en tanto que toda sujeta es sujeta precisamente por aquello que comparte el genérico, que puede ser usado desde el campo enemigo como arma arrojadiza (nada más que una mujer), se vuelve reivindicación primero de lo Común con cualquier otro sujeto, vindicación de la naturaleza humana, de las condiciones nuevas de la subjetividad que se nos niegan, vindicación solo más tarde de lo que solo como género nos es común, de una más o menos mitologizada condición genérica femenina, ya no defectiva, sino auto-valorada, re-generada, con los problemas sobre la asunción positiva que de lo defectivo cabe realizar” (106). This notion of \textit{sujeta} underlines the revalorization of the generic “women” that occurs with the creation of a \textit{grancaribeña} community, which is the step to be take before achieving “la individualización real como ‘sujeta’ y despojarse del significado relativo a ‘sujección’ del término” (Amorós 192).
since it also gives them a role of innovators in a community of practice that, from its 
Margins, actively engage in the disarticulation and estrangement of fixed notions of 
Language, gender, nation, and stable aesthetic labels. The present selection and creation of 
a literary corpus of *grancaribeñas* responds to a necessary imagined utopia (Showalter): a 
desired reality that can only be made possible through the conceptualization of a political 
Platform such as the one constructed through the use of the terms *usana* and 
*grancaribeña* and through this imagined *Gran Caribe* in which these authors can share 
their linguistic practices. As Appadurai affirms, “the imagination, especially when 
collective, can become the fuel for action... and not only for escape” (7). Accordingly, 
this literary community of practice, which adopts postmodern notions of language (Heller, 
*Paths*), helps give visibility to non-canonical narratives that have been marginalized by 
patriarchal discourses of power in a neocolonialist and late capitalist world.

In sum, in *grancaribeña* writers and playwrights/performers, canonical languages 
are displaced and deconstructed as a *grancaribeña* language and imagined and created 
spatiality emerge to express postmodern conceptualizations of space and temporality, and 
of postcolonial centers and margins: Europe, US and the Caribbean, high and popular 
culture, the local and the global, the classic and the ultra-modern, English and Spanish, 
black and white, masculine and feminine, unity and fragmentation, speech and recital. 
There is a will to inscribe a greater language that destabilizes the wholeness of the 
national imaginaries (inside the US and from the Caribbean countries of origin) that have 
traditionally shaped these authors’ identities.
1.5. **Organization of the Present Work**

As a practical classification tool, I divide the chapters according to modern literary genres (narrative, short story, drama/performance), while I also emphasize in my analysis the genre crossings observable in these works, following a postmodern approach. After this introduction (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 examines three well-known and extensively discussed and critically analyzed novels: Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), Achy Obejas’ *Memory Mambo* (1996), Julia Álvarez’s *¡Yo!* (1997), and Mayra Santos Febres’ *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (2000). The main purpose of this chapter is not analyzing these works as types of *bildungsroman* in which the main female character searches for individuality while living a traumatic in-between space. I do not dismiss these readings of the novels, but I contribute to the field with an analysis of the language, genre, and gender crossings in them to (1) question the notions of native speaker, mother tongue, (home)land, and doubled selves in the *Gran Caribe*, and (2) argue that the search for a (non-)identity as women—and women artists—can only be achieved through a pact among women (in exile and on the islands). Likewise, I group together Cristina García, Achy Obejas, Julia Álvarez, and Mayra Santos Febres in a community of literary practice through a type of lexical “branding” in their narratives.

Chapter 3 explores short stories in the *Gran Caribe* with the analysis of Jennine Capó Crucet’s “How to Leave Hialeah” (2009), Ana Lydia Vega’s “Pollito chicken” (1977), and Aurora Arias’ “Emoticons” (2007). “How to Leave Hialeah” is analyzed through the notion of “urban language” as a representation of a type of vernacular globalization (Appadurai). The idea of “returning home” in exiled characters is both reproduced and destabilized in the second-generation female protagonist, who realizes
the importance of pacting with the community of women around her. I read the controversial, debatable, in other words, impossible “Spanglish” used by the narrative voice in “Pollito chicken” not as a mere critique of Nuyoricans or Puerto Rican assimilation to the American ways, but as showing the complexity of female characters like Suzie and grancaribeña texts like “Pollito chicken.” I argue that this short story cannot be read through the notion of code-switching or the erroneous concept of “Spanglish.” Finally, Aurora Arias’ “Emoticons” is a clear example of a postnational, post-Dominican text that requires analytical tools that embrace the complexity of current linguistic situations and (post-) identities in a glocalized world. In this short story, Arias introduces virtual language as part of ordinary language crossings in postmodernity.

Chapter 4 analyzes Caridad Svich’s The Tropic of X (2005) and Migdalia Cruz’s Satyricono (2015), both theatre plays, and Josefina Báez’s Levente no. Yolayorkdominicanyork (2012), a performance theatre text. In them, crossings of languages, (non-) traditional theatrical disciplines, bodies, gender, cultures, and media contribute to an aesthetics of multiplicity. In the works by Caridad Svich and Migdalia Cruz, this is a poetic aesthetics, and in the text by Josefina Báez, this aesthetics of multiplicity is hyper-quotidian. The texts become performative representations of this multiplicity, all of them successfully escaping definitions of any kind, and fixed notions of space and time through linguistic, formal and thematic strategies.

In the conclusions, I summarize the main arguments of this dissertation, and the theoretical perspective that has framed the project. I also propose future research directions. Finally, I highlight the contributions that this dissertation makes to the field.
CHAPTER 2. Beyond the Hyphen: Crossings Toward an Aesthetics of Multiplicity in Four Novels del Gran Caribe

Lillian Manzor clarifies her use of the designation usanocubano, previously mentioned and explained, and US Cuban (“Who Are”), to refer to a Cuban theater in the US in which the simplistic “ethnic” tag is transformed. The dramaturgy she analyzes deconstructs traditional gender and racial constructs in Cuban culture while it reconfigures a collective Latino identity based on gender and race (“Who Are” 163). This last term –US Cuban– “reject[s] the usage of Cuban-American because, in its inherent redundancy, it reproduces the cultural and political imperialist ideologies that have characterized the last two centuries of history in North and South America” (“Who are” 163). It also underlines the cultural transformations that have been taking place in the US in recent decades in an attempt to recognize cultural multiplicity. As I argued in the introduction, with the creation of the terms usana and grancaribeña, I also seek to avoid the use of the hyphen to designate authors and texts that cross languages and genres in an attempt to disarticulate dualistic thinking as regards questions of language, nation, and gender.

The name “US Latino/a/@” has become an umbrella term to label many different kinds of artistic productions in the US. This research projects seeks to distinguish artistic production (narrative, drama, and performance) both in the Caribbean and the US that still follow a hyphenated conceptualization and ideology from those texts that move towards an epistemology of fluidity through an aesthetics of multiplicity in el Gran Caribe. It is through their language use that grancaribeña writers imagine such an epistemological alteration. Examples of narrative texts that reflect a hyphenated ideology,
in contrast with grancaribeña texts, are Gustavo Pérez Firmat’s Life on the Hyphen (1994), Next Year in Cuba (1995), and Cincuenta lecciones de exilio y desexilio (2000), Ruth Behar and Juan León’s Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba (1994), Margarita Engle’s Singing to Cuba (1993), Judith Ortiz Cofer’s Silent Dancing (1991), Nicholasa Mohr’s Nilda (1986), and Esmeralda Santiago’s When I was Puerto Rican (1993). In his autobiographical memoir Next Year in Cuba (translated as El año que viene estamos en Cuba), Pérez Firmat openly exposes this sense of duality:

> Al parecer, siempre albergaré lealtades divididas. Podría pasarme el resto de mi vida tarareando “Surfin USA” y no por ello me sentiría más asimilado. Por otra parte, podría amurallarme dentro de un Miami mental, dentro de una Habana de concreto, y seguiría amarrado a la cultura norteamericana. En lugar de fundir Cuba y Estados Unidos, oscilo sin cesar entre el uno y el otro. Mi vida no es síntesis sino vaivén. (201)

The same traumatic “vaivén” occurs in linguistic terms, according to the scholar:

> “A veces me ha parecido que entre el Yo y el I inglés se abre un abismo imposible de salvar, porque al nombrarnos en una lengua u otra proyectamos o engendramos identidades diversas, tal vez irreconciliables” (Cincuenta lecciones #17). The specific case of Pérez Firmat’s Life on the Hyphen is an important step toward questioning the island-centered canon of lo cubano and nationalist discourse on Cuban identity (Duany, “From the Cuban” 22), and re-defining “the negative connotations of straight-line assimilation theory that predicted that second- and third- generation immigrants would be absorbed by the receiving culture and lose their ancestral ‘roots’” (Duany, “From the Cuban” 23). Duany concludes that this work has contributed to a nonessentialist and poststructuralist approach to Cuban identity (Duany, “From the Cuban” 24). Nonetheless, Duany’s main critique to this text is that “Pérez-Firmat seems to believe that Cuban émigrés continue to think and write like Cubans in America, rather than Americans of
Cuban origin, and that their physical displacement does not produce a significant cultural dislocation” (24). Duany states that Pérez-Firmat paints an “overly rosy picture” (24) of this in-between position. I would like to reiterate that his metaphor of the hyphen, his notion of appositionality and biculturaltion, and the approach and examples he chooses to analyze as representative of Cubans in Miami perpetuate an essentialist, static view of Cubans in the US. Furthermore, although dominant narratives regarding cultural and national identity in the US and Cuba are somewhat opened, they are never disarticulated (basing on notions of ethnicity, class, and gender), and a binary conceptualization of Cuban-Americans is still presented. Ruth Behar and Juan León take a step forward with their edited volume Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba, transcending geopolitical and disciplinary frontiers. As Duany corroborates, the collection has contributed to reconfiguring national identity as a complex and heterogeneous cultural space with no static, and impermeable borders (“From the Cuban” 27), away from the political extremes of Miami and Cuba. The image of the bridges replaces the “natural” language, giving agency to humans’ invention and imagination, and also suggests that the bounded lands and national imaginaries on each side of the bridge are not so constrained (Duany, “From the Cuban” 28). They open at least where the bridge starts and arrives. Conversely, the metaphor of the bridge still conveys a sense of duality. It can be “divisive as well as connecting structures” (Duany, “From the Cuban” 27). This image depicts a transnational dialogue, but does not fully go beyond the national imaginary.

The location on the hyphen of some other of these works is usually presented as traumatic, schizophrenic, and/or conflictive. In her article “Transgressing Borders: Puerto Rican and Latina Mestizaje,” Suzanne Bost describes Judith Ortiz Cofer as “a latina
identity … in tension between the island [Puerto Rico] and the mainland” (189). In *Silent Dancing*, the first person narrative voice describes her in-between position as a “cultural schizophrenia” (34): “Cold/hot, English/Spanish; that was our life” (129). In some occasions, we could affirm that these hyphenated texts move to the other side of the hyphen but they do not transform either side. In other words, they live in-between English and Spanish, Cuba and the US, or Puerto Rico and the US; or they live on both sides while maintaining each national pre-determined imaginary, their separate macro-narratives and their separate geographical spaces. In these works, we rarely observe a real dialogue between both imaginaries, and, outside the text, their authors rarely establish such a dialogue with authors who remain on the island(s). In the case of Puerto Rico, this is especially true due to the neocolonial relationship that the island maintains with the US. Ortiz Cofer, Santiago and Mohr define themselves as Puerto Rican, although they write in English due to having been educated in that language. Ortiz Cofer wants her work to be recognized as coming out of the Puerto Rican tradition (Bost 192), but she admits she must constantly defend her “Puertoricanness”. A pervasive dichotomy (Derrickson 128) can be found in novels such as *Silent Dancing* in the narrative voice and the main character’s contrastive descriptions of her mother and father (and their opposed appearances, languages, hometowns, and families). Some of them still present remains of a linguistic imaginary of “roots, uprootedness, transplants, the mother earth, … the trunk of national culture” (Duany, “From the Cuban” 2), and I would add, the mother tongue.

19 Ortiz Cofer confesses having to constantly justify that her novels are written in English while she maintains that she is Puerto Rican: “I really resent the prevalent attitude that if you really care about the Island you have to write in Spanish. It is not my fault that 95% of my education was in English in American schools .... I have recently been asked to justify writing in English since I consider myself a Puerto Rican. I find this accusation, in view of the circumstances I just explained, a bit illogical”. (Acosta-Bélen 90-91).
In these ideologically hyphenated texts, bilingualism is a traumatic struggle for identity and belonging, because their characters do not fit into “mono-culturally defined notions of normal” (Derrickson 135) on either side of the hyphen.

While in texts like Mohr’s Nilda, “el final abierto … sugiere que es la sociedad la que debe cambiar para poder acomodar a este nuevo tipo de identidad híbrida que la joven protagonista de la novela representa” (Sáez 102-3), grancaribeña texts reflect language crossings that seek to alter social discourses regarding the norm of language, and the norm of belonging. I argue that, in these texts, crossing constitutes a form of “political action [which] … aims to make or unmake groups …by producing, reproducing or destroying the [mental, verbal, visual, or theatrical] representations that make groups visible for themselves and for others” (Bourdieu, Language 127). The present project proposes and explores a less essentialist and more fluid language of (cultural, linguistic and identity) crossings. This first chapter analyzes four grancaribeña narratives that cross genres and languages toward an aesthetics of multiplicity: Achy Obejas’ Memory Mambo, Cristina García’s Dreaming in Cuban, Julia Álvarez’s ¡Yo!, and Mayra Santos Febres’ Sirena Selena vestida de pena. All of them embody a diverse Gran Caribe in dispersion that includes authors and texts related to Cuba, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, Chicago, and New York.

Cristina García’s Dreaming in Cuban (1992) narrates the (hi)stories of three generations of a Cuban family in relation to the 1959 Revolution. The plot gives special attention to the female genealogy because “[s]o much of history is written by and about men” (Cristina García in Shibuya Brown 250). Abuela Celia starts the genealogy. Her deceased husband Jorge del Pino is revealed through Celia’s letters to her previous
Spanish lover Gustavo, and through his ghostly appearances to her daughter Lourdes. Abuela Celia, who believes in and supports the ideals of Castro’s communist regime, never leaves Cuba, despite feeling like a prisoner on the island (49). Although her daughter Lourdes emigrates to New York with her husband Rufino and daughter Pilar in opposition to the regime, and her own husband goes to the US for specialized medical care, she remains behind, true to her ideals. Pilar, García’s alter ego as admitted by the author herself (Shibuya Brown 251), is a child of the Cuban Revolution raised in New York under her mother’s anti-Communist and US assimilationist mandates, and dreaming of a Cuba that she hardly remembers.

Achy Obejas’ *Memory Mambo* (1996) narrates the (hi)stories of Juani Casas, a 25-year-old Cuban-born woman living in Chicago and running her family’s laundromat. The novel is set around Juani’s search for uncovering the lies in her family, especially those that come from her parents’ generation, and the Cuban memories this exile generation has imposed on her. The protagonist also struggles to dismantle the lies in her own self as regards her gender and sexual identity as a lesbian, and as a Cuban growing up in the US. As in *Dreaming in Cuban*, in these characters, the effects of the Cuban revolution and Castro’s regime are inevitably personal as well as political. The struggle between the personal and the political resides in their bodies and their means of expression. Obejas, like García, gives special attention to the female family members, and places Juani in dialogue with her sisters and cousins in the US and on the island in the quest for acceptance of her own multiplicity, and elsewhere assumed unthinkability.

In Julia Álvarez’s *¡Yo!* (1997), a sequel to *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* (1991), the author’s alter ego Yolanda follows and culminates the path initiated
in the earlier novel in search of the recognition of a fragmented female self. The structure of the novel symbolizes this postmodern fragmentation by giving a space on paper to multiple perspectives and contradictory voices. The fragmented structure of the novel ultimately symbolizes the reaffirmation of Yolanda’s identity as a woman and as a writer that cannot be without the community of voices that tell their stories about her. Through their writing, both Julia Álvarez and Yolanda García can finally exclaim their “¡Yo!,” a yo that is complex, multiple, and fragmented; a yo that disregards a false US monolingualism by exclaiming the Hispanophone presence in this country. ¡Yo! is at the same time a claim for a language other than English, a gender other than male, a sexuality other than heterosexual, an ethnicity other than white. It is an articulation against the grand narrative of Americanness and Caribeanness, embracing instead a matrix of micronarratives.

Mayra Santos Febres’ *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (2000) relates the story of Selena, a 15-year-old drag singer and performer traveling from Puerto Rico to Santo Domingo with his mentor and manager Miss Martha Divine, who introduces Selena into the glamorous and luxurious world of drag performance, leaving behind a life of urban poverty in San Juan. Selena can also be considered Santos Febres’ alter ego, as confirmed by the author in an interview with Marcia Morgado. To the question “¿Cuánto de ti hay en Sirena?,” Santos Febres answers: “Mucho. Yo siempre quise ser travesti. A mi manera, lo soy” (6). Sirena Selena’s talented voice allows her to become a bolero diva in

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20 Álvarez admits that “A lot of *The Garcia Girls* was based on [her] own experience … But there is a lot of fictionalizing [as well.] It’s the combining, the exaggeration, the redoing, the adding on, that makes it original rather than autobiographical” (Rosario-Sievert 35).
Santo Domingo and empowers her to redefine fixed sexual, national and class imaginaries in the Caribbean.

Pilar, Juani, Yolanda, and Selena find themselves in the midst of an identity crisis provoked by their feelings of displacement, and their incessant struggle not to be constrained by a forced bipolarity (English/Spanish, Caribbean/American, Man/Woman, Heterosexual/Homosexual). Through physical and/or metaphorical journeys to the assumed “source,” they are all in the process of recognizing their multiple, complex, and contradictory selves against the ideological discourses and forces that oblige them to be a certain type of American, Cuban, or Dominican woman, or that expect them to possess a hyphenated identity that places them on a hyphen or a bridge between those national and cultural imaginaries, and predetermined gender and/or sex roles. These trips back to their “roots” only confirm that an answer to their (non-)identity search is not to be found “here” nor “there,” but here, there, and everywhere. García, Obejas, and Álvarez all present particular female experiences around exile and displacement as multifaceted as they are. For them, linguistic fragmentation is no longer experienced and presented as a traumatic burden as it was for their parents’ generation. Focusing on certain specificities in terms of gender, sexuality, culture, and (post)nationality, they all have similar yet particular ways of crossing genres and languages to disarticulate the narratives and family imperatives that have traditionally constrained them.
2.1. Genre/Gender Crossings

Critics and theorists who write about postmodern texts often refer to ‘genres’ as a term inappropriate for characterizing postmodern writing. The process of suppression results from the claim that postmodern writing blurs genres, transgresses them, or unfixes boundaries that conceal domination or authority, and that ‘genre’ is an anachronistic term and concept. … These critics assume that a genre theory of the novel is committed to backgrounding literary artifice, to demanding coherence, unity and linear continuity. But though such an assumption may apply to some generic theories, there are others that are perfectly compatible with multiple discourses, with narratives of discontinuity, with transgressed boundaries. (Cohen 11)

Although many critics have claimed that postmodern writing is non-generic, I maintain that postmodern texts follow one or more traditional genres (Derrida, “The Law” 65; Perloff; Cohen) that are combined, disrupted, dislocated, decentered, and/or contradicted, and their formal and structural norms violated, in an attempt not to fit into established (generic) categories. This process of problematization, openness, inclusiveness and flexibility of the modern concept of genre derives into what Marjorie Perloff calls “postmodern genre(s).” According to Perloff, the paradox of postmodern genre is that “the more radical the dissolution of traditional generic boundaries, the more important the concept of genericity becomes” (4) with the establishing of a generic totalizing order to contest it through fragmentation and intertextuality.

Postmodern genres, while having features that are characteristic of modern genres, blur and blend these to reflect a new way of thinking (Cohen 15) against the notions of purity, and objecthood. Cohen quotes Clifford Geertz’s essay, “Blurred Genres,” to suggest that this procedure represents a change in social investigation from modernist inquiry (concerned with the dynamics of collective life in order to alter it as desired), into the study of “the anatomization of thought, not the manipulation of
behavior” (178) in postmodern inquiry. I would add that the blending of genres in the
postmodern narratives I analyze in this chapter denaturalize fixed ways of thinking
related to social and political practices both in the US and the Caribbean. These are also
fictional forms of relational autobiographies in which life histories are not conceived
from the perspective of a fixed and isolated “I” that could define/dissolve itself (as
happened in Modern narratives). Rather, the “I” can only be created in relation to
alternative perspectives and experiences that disarticulate the stability and uniformity of
the Modern “I,” as we will clearly see in Julia Álvarez’s ¡Yo! (the title of which
implicitly symbolizes this postmodern paradox). Whereas this type of generic blurring
has been present in literature dating to the classical epic, the Bible (Weinstein 263), and
again in the eighteenth century genres (Cohen), the simultaneous affirmation and crossing
of boundaries is more postmodern (Hutcheon, “Historiographic” 62). Although
fragmentation and genre blending in diverse narrative forms was present in the Modern
period (for instance, in avant-garde movements), différance (cf. Derrida) resides in the
ideology behind multiplicity and hybridization in postmodernity. If Modern genre
blending had an experimental nature (e.g. the art form as a way of offering alternatives to
scientific precepts and “objective” realities), in these postmodern texts, the world-view is
what genre blending aims to change. Multiplicity, blending, and fragmentation seek to
change the focal point. For this reason, although in postmodern texts we witness the death
of grand narratives, there is not a lack of possible means of expression that make art
exhaust (as the blank page of the Modern avant-garde used to symbolize).

The vast majority of the so-called “ethnic” or “migrant” narratives emerging in
the US in the nineties follow to a certain extent the Modern Bildungsroman pattern of the
young second-generation female immigrant who must overcome the identity crisis
produced by a feeling of displacement, and not belonging in terms of gender or ethnicity,
either in the US or the Caribbean. These narratives culminate in a sometimes-
metaphorical, sometimes-physical trip back to the islands of their ancestors to realize this
is not their homeland either. But this trip back to the “roots” helps them disarticulate the
imposed female and national identities after having filled the voids in the (hi)stories told
to them at home, which inevitably have constrained and politicized their personal life
experiences. Thus, by connecting the private to the public, their experiences as women
belonging to an ethnic minority are legitimated (Hutcheon, “Historiographic”161). The
employment of this genre has become increasingly common among writers who come
from so-called minority groups since it allows for a process of maturity and/or identity
formation of a protagonist who diverges from the dominant order of a particular society.

*Dreaming in Cuban, Memory Mambo, How the García Girls Lost their Accents, ¡Yo!,
and Sirena Selena vestida de pena* can be read as partially fitting examples of this literary
genre. They share thematic components with this genre, although their structural,
linguistic, and formal strategies somewhat diverge from it. The use of autobiographical
aspects in these fictional narratives “expose plural models of group formation and
community identity … to complicate the stability of history, autobiography, and fiction”
(Vázquez 383). The history of these female protagonists is inflicted with a structured
historical trauma (caused by exile and other types of dislocation related to ethnicity,
gender, and sexuality) that passes down from generation to generation in their families
both on the islands and in the US. These family (hi)stories are founded by the male
members, who are the active constructors of discourses of gender, sexuality, and
nationness. Cristina García, Achy Obejas, Julia Álvarez, and Mayra Santos Febres focus on the female characters and genealogies through non-linear, multiple-perspective narrations to transform the domineering masculine Modern History/stories, structures, and notions of nation in their families and surrounding societies. At the same time, they give voice to these women through pacts among their counterparts. The postmodern novel genre thus appropriates other (high and popular) genres and, in doing so, transforms itself conceptually, transgressing the notion of the novel as the master narrative historically attributed to male writers.

I would venture to say that *Dreaming in Cuban*, ¡Yo!, and *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* merge to a great extent with a Künstlerroman, or artist novel, which is about the development and personal growth of an artist. Lemon defines *Künstlerroman* as incorporating one or more of these discourses: “personal confessions and psychological introspection, social critique and cultural analysis, linguistic playfulness and narrative experimentation, or theoretical digressions about art and creativity” (xiii). She adds that it may also take the shape of different genres, most often having more elements of the *Bildungsroman*, “if the interest lies in providing a kind of profile of the artist’s early growth, development and background” (xiii). Finally, the scholar concludes that the artist novel may or may not be autobiographical. The novels analyzed in this dissertation can be read to a greater extent as “feminist Künstlerromans”—rather than mere *Bildungsromans*—deploying postmodern strategies of disruption and multiplicity because 1) there is in their female main characters a process of self-awareness of being/becoming a female subject; 2) there is an explicit reflection in these novels on the lack of artistic tradition among women; and 3) these female characters show an awareness and a need to
be the writers and creators of the (hi)stories of female antecessors. Furthermore, I find Hutcheon’s designation “historiographic metafiction” particularly suitable for these works. Hutcheon defines “historiographic metafiction” as “novels that are intensely self-reflexive but that also both re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge” (“Historiographic” 54-55), thus creating an unresolved contradiction. It is a re-writing and a re-presentation of the past both in fiction and in history “to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological” (“Historiographic” 59). For the female main characters of the texts analyzed, “what is past is prologue,” as quoted in William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest.* Aesthetically, the reorganization of traditional structures responds to the crises of both the linear novel and historical representation (Jameson, “Periodizing” 180; Hutcheon, “Historiographic” 61).

*Dreaming in Cuban* is divided into three principal asymmetrical parts composed of unnumbered episodes, which are at the same time constituted by short fragments or vignettes bearing the name of one of the four main female characters: Celia, her daughters Felicia and Lourdes, and Lourdes’ daughter Pilar. A few fragments are presented under Luz’s and Ivanito’s names (Felicia’s daughter and son). Whereas most of the vignettes are third-person narrations, Pilar’s fragments are narrated in first-person. Considering that this character is the author’s alter ego aside from the protagonist of the coming-of-age story, these parts of the novels are partly autobiographical, as proposed by

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21 In comparison with Modern artist novels, one of the features of the postmodern artist novel is the change of focus: Modern artist novels focus on the relationship between the artist and the art. Postmodern artist novels focus on how the artistic production builds the artists’ relationship with the world around them.

22 Zadie Smith, British writer of Caribbean origin, uses this quote as an epigraph in her debut novel *White Teeth.* Its main character, Irie Jones, London-born of Jamaican origin, goes through a process of search for a (non-) identity similar to Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban.*
Álvarez-Borland (“Displacements”). We could read these fragments as an autobiographical narration crisscrossing historical and fictional narratives to resolve the dislocation of exile, while also finding a space for feminine agency and (non-) identity (cf. Vázquez 384, referring to Julia Álvarez’s ¡Yo!) in el Gran Caribe, in this case, Cuba. The first-person narration emerges again only in Celia’s letters. Four vignettes intermingled sporadically throughout the novel are dedicated to these correspondences resulting in a combination of epistolary fiction and novel, with components of family drama, magical realism, and coming-of-age story. The epistolary sections follow a chronological classification: 1935-1940, 1942-1949, 1950-1955, and 1959. The letters are addressed to Celia’s Spanish lover Gustavo before her marriage to Jorge del Pino. The novel ends with Celia’s last letter to Gustavo, dated eleven days after the birth of the Revolution and the same day Celia’s granddaughter Pilar was born: January 11, 1959. According to Celia, Pilar will remember everything, so there is no need to keep writing Gustavo to record her memories. The epistolary narrative then serves as a way of recording the family history for Pilar and future generations, as also occurs in Julia Álvarez’s ¡Yo! with Yolanda’s creative writing. When Pilar leaves Cuba to emigrate to

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23 As Hutcheon states, “it is part of the postmodernist stand to confront the paradoxes of fictive vs. historical representation, the particular vs. the general, and the present vs. the past. And its confrontation is itself contradictory, for it refuses to recuperate or dissolve either side of the dichotomy, yet it is willing to exploit both” (“Historiographic” 56). McAuliffe (2011) rather interprets Dreaming in Cuban as a literary autoethnography “through its basis on historical fact, the use of a member of the minority community as the narrator, and through the ‘insider’ view of what it means to be Cuban-American forging a new identity” (4). The fact that we observe different valid points of view on the genre label ascribed to this novel supports the notion of a common generic blending in the postmodern novels that I analyze.

24 Epistolary fiction has traditionally been considered one of the feminine genres par excellence.
New York at the age of two with her parents, Celia continues the correspondence with her.

While both Celia’s letters and the novel end with Castro’s Revolution in 1959, the novel does not follow a chronological organization, starting in 1972, with Celia guarding the north coast of Cuba from gusano traitors from her house by the sea (3), and a thirteen-year-old Pilar’s determination to go back to Cuba. The second part of the novel starts with a 1974 vignette, followed by others dated 1975 and 1976, and then going back to 1975, 1976 and jumping ahead to 1978, then back to 1977, and moving forward to 1978 again, followed by one in 1980, another in 1979, and finally 1980. The third and last part of the book takes place in 1980, with Pilar’s visit to Cuba, and ends with Celia’s last letter to Gustavo in 1959. This achronological order, together with the destabilizing language crossings analyzed in the following section and the multiplicity of voices telling the family (her)story/stories, dismantles the conventional Bildungsroman and the customary Modern, masculinist way of relating history toward a type of ensemble novel in which a family genealogy of women seek to know the family (her)stories. To this end, Pilar’s need to go back to the “source,” to what caused the sense of displacement, 1959’s Revolution in this case, which is essential to finally knowing where she belongs and who she is.

In Dreaming in Cuban, passages of poetry intersperse with prose, especially in the vignettes about Abuela Celia, who enjoys Federico García Lorca’s poems and whose dream is sailing to Spain, to Granada “with nothing but a tambourine and many carnations” (243). For instance, intertextuality appears as we read two stanzas of the Spanish poet’s poem “Paisaje” (94). Celia also recites García Lorca’s “Casida de las
palomas oscuras” to Felicia when she cannot sleep as a child. A stanza of this poem appears on page 109. García’s intermingling of Lorca’s poetry with the traditional prose style of narrative reminds the reader of the historical connection between Cuba and Spain. There is also a political connection between Celia and Lorca, both sharing leftist ideals in the middle of political tensions. But what mostly influences Celia is the Spanish folk poetry, popular flamenco music and dance. The book’s configuration, with its blurring and mixing of genres and its language crossings, symbolizes who Pilar is: a fragmented self composed of pieces and memories that she herself has now been able to put together as in a puzzle, which continues to be fragmented. She has now been able to paint her own portrait, and she has been able to paint and fill the voids in (her)story, which is complex, multiple, and in which women (in her family) hold a place.

Achy Obejas’ Memory Mambo, a first-person fictional autobiography by Juani Casas, follows the traditional numbered chapter organization. Structurally, perhaps what is most striking is a glossary at the end of the novel to culturally define or explain to an “Anglo” readership Spanish words and expressions, cultural and historical facts, and popular songs, genres that become part of the novel. Whereas the author occasionally limits the entries to a literal translation of the word (e.g. abuela: grandmother, or aquí: here), she often gives a more detailed cultural explanation of the concept, such as for the word americanada, which Obejas defines as “an American thing or mannerism, usually related to behavior or attitude rather than objects; usually pejorative” (239). One may think that the glossary contradicts the ideology behind the language and genre crossings that Obejas carries out in the novel, as I interpret them in the following section, but I believe the glossary is yet another act of transgression on the author’s part. The glossary
is assumed to be an informative genre that offers much-needed explanations of cultural referents that are otherwise difficult for an “Anglo” readership and/or a cultural outsider to follow. However, at the same time, Obejas subverts the presupposed objectivity of the glossary. This attack on “objectivity” occurs in definitions such as that of *mojito*, defined as “a *delicious* Cuban drink made with rum, lime juice and mint” (245, my emphasis); the description of *tres leches* as “an *unbelievably heavy, rich, sweet dessert*” (247, my emphasis); or in the explanation of *Varadero* as “a beach resort outside of Havana, *probably one of the most spectacular beaches in the world* …” (248, my emphasis).

Subverting the objectivity of the glossary, these specific examples contest at the same time the effects of subjectivity: the kind of visibility or representativity that the subject exerts on the defined object through the use of qualifying adjectives. It is no coincidence that the objects described are linked to popular and superficial symbols representing certain—often stereotyped—national and cultural Cuban imaginaries. In some other entries, the definitions are close to being satirical. For instance, Obejas explains the meaning of *tortilleras* as “slang for ‘lesbians’; literally means ‘tortilla-makers’,” and *tremendos cojones* as “vernacular; literally ‘tremendous balls’” (247). These altered definitions are used to conceptualize socio-generic roles and behaviors. The literal translation of these terms sounds comical, even absurd, perhaps intending to prove the impossibility of literal translation of such Spanish expressions into US English, and the “Anglo” imaginary.

This play with the literal translation of particular cultural expressions proves that each language entails very specific and different sociolinguistic worldviews. As a bilingual reader, these translations look nonsensical. Language crossings prove to be a
more accurate way to proceed to maintain the cultural referent and to resist a cultural translation, which often results in an inevitable cultural violation. Therefore, whereas the glossary is supposedly aimed at assisting “Anglo” non-bilingual readers to better understand the cultural depictions of the novel, Obejas at the same time plays with this assumedly objective genre, exercising the power that her bilingualism confers to her over an imagined monolingual “Anglo” readership. The glossary works as a way to argue in favor of the Spanish lexical insertions in the rest of the novel. The visuality, representatitivy and/or semantic load that a word or expression has in a language (Spanish) differs from those in another language (English in this case). This is the reason why a literal translation, or even a translation searching for a similar expression with a similar sense in English, is not advisable, because the same metaphors, images, and analogies will not be achieved in the other language, and cultural imposition may occur.

Julia Álvarez’s ¡Yo! is aligned with Cristina García’s debut novel in the structural blending of genres as a way of re-imagining and re-inventing masculine historical and/or autobiographical narratives about imposed memories, and male dictators. The focus on female fictional autobiographies (with the combination of fact and fiction, and the personal with the political) in García’s, Obejas’ and Álvarez’s texts allow their protagonists to gain agency only when forming a pact with the female community in their families, which, on another level, represents a disruption of narrowly-defined national imaginaries toward a postnational conceptualization. Through their use of postmodern linguistic and literary structures and tropes, they deconstruct predetermined macro-narratives of nation, gender, genre, and sexuality, as well as imposed and structured
narratives of inter-generational personal and historical traumas. Vázquez’s quotes Lipsitz in support of this idea:

… genre instability can be an indication of broad changes in society because it suggests “the old stories (are) inadequate or at least incomplete” (186). Lipsitz’s intervention gets us to see that there is more than simple “play” involved in the postmodern pastiche of textual modes and genres. In moments of broad social crisis, the combination and redeployment of genres that appear in postmodern texts can point to larger issues related to identity and community. (386)

It is not surprising, then, that the novel does not follow a traditional numbered-chapter organization, as also observed in Dreaming in Cuban. Álvarez’s ¡Yo! is divided into three parts, each composed of five vignettes told by different members of Yolanda’s community. Each vignette is given a name—the narrator of the short story—, and a literary genre in Part I: “The sisters-fiction,” “The mother-non-fiction,” “The cousin-poetry,” “The maid’s daughter-report,” “The teacher-romance,” “The stranger-epistle.” In Part II, each character-narrator is given a specific plot point or unit of story: “The caretakers-revelation,” “The best friend-motivation,” “The landlady-confrontation,” “The student-variation,” “The suitor-resolution.” Finally, in Part III each character-narrator is given a specific element of story/fiction: “The wedding guests-point of view,” “The night watchman-setting,” “The third husband-characterization,” “The stalker-tone,” “The father-conclusion.” As a postmodern artist novel that alters and destabilizes the Modern image of the artist as a genius in search of spiritual inspiration, these sub-titles parody those creative writing programs based on Modern, structuralist notions of language and writing. Through the integration of these sub-titles in her postmodern novel, the author refers to the classical components of a novel and of literary analysis to alter them.

Furthermore, the multiple structure of the novel has three main functions from my point of view. First, the creation of multi-perspectival narrative voices with a concomitant
narrative power within the novel deconstructs the monological uni-perspectival master narrative, which had been characteristic in the early stages of Chicano, Nuyorican, Dominican-American, or Cuban-American writing in the US. These groups relied upon a stable sense of identity and community in opposition to mainstream “Anglo” paradigms. Álvarez attempts to compensate the readers and the other characters and members of her community the fact that she offered a single perspective/reality/truth and authorial tone in her debut novel. 25 ¡Yo!, on the contrary, appears to have been written by various characters offering a multiplicity of standpoints, truths and realities, and a more vibrant, fluid, far-reaching and subtle notion of the self. The fragmented structural aesthetics of the novel responds to what Ellen McCracken calls “the revenge of the characters,” as a way of “recuperating and renewing the self-narrative of an exiled Latino community in the United States” (223). Therefore, the autobiographical and authorial monopolizing tone and perspective of the García Girls is debunked while multiple ideologies, truths and meanings have a place in and help create a dialogical story. The notion of subjectivity and of a controller narrator is problematized. No subject can know the past through memory with certainty: “We only know the past through its textualized remains” (Hutcheon, “Historiographic” 67). As quoted in the introduction, “Rather than subjects producing texts, in other words, texts produce subjects” (Felski 181). Felski’s quote brings us back to Butler’s notion that gender identities are only performativities of the norm-ideal, which are the ones we can mirror or alter. By giving each character’s vignette—functioning as a micro-narrative—a novel sub-genre, unit of story, or element of fiction,

25 ¡Yo!’s first chapter deals with Yolanda’s sisters and mother’s irritation for the publishing of her first novel. They cannot see the fictional part in the family stories. Julia Álvarez similarly explains that, also for her, “It was very hard to get our wonderful tías and other family members to understand that because there was just enough truth in it to make them ask why I was lying” (Rosario-Sievert 35).
a new type of novel is created. Through fragments and a multiplicity of voices, literary styles, and tones, this new type of novel incorporates the auto-referential aspect of the Modern novel, although being a type of postmodern artist novel (in which the art is creative writing).

Second, the novel becomes a re-writing of the masculinist historical and intra-generational traumas in Yo’s family and surrounding US and Caribbean societies. Voices that (His)tory has silenced one way or another are given a place to be heard, and speak their truths. As Vázquez affirms,

[by] self-consciously deploying stories as alternatives to the official versions of truth, Álvarez’s work promotes the recovery of history. From this standpoint, certain ‘fictional’ versions of events can offer a better understanding of history than more mainstream records would indicate. By re-imagining this history, stories can operate in a future anterior that opens the possibility of working through these traumatic events. (394)

While fragmentation and multiplicity have been traditionally considered as inflicting trauma, Álvarez proposes an exclamation, even a celebration, of that fragmentation and multiplicity through her writing. Fragmentation is no longer an obstacle but a given; a fragmented writing with aesthetics of multiplicity that becomes her new homeland, after having stripped the notion of home(land) of its previous imposed meanings and implications (delimited geographical boundaries, fixed national imaginaries, and rigid linguistic notions and categories). Third, the fragmented, multi-focal narrative of the novel, and the resulting aesthetics of multiplicity, can be read as Yolanda’s final realization of a self- (non-) identity as an usanacaribeña female writer (which were mainly forgotten in the Latino artistic manifestations in the sixties and seventies) that has only been possible through a bond with the community. Contrary to what occurred in Modern avant-garde artistic projects (which also experimented with artistic languages),
the analyzed artists realize that their art must serve to integrate them in the community instead of keeping them apart in “Ivory towers.” Álavax explains how she had a difficult time being female and being a writer not only in the US but also in her family, and back in the Dominican Republic as well, where “it was always men who had opinions. Women catered to them and kept their mouths shut” (Rosario-Sievert 33).

In ¡Yo!, Álavax presents an artist novel of postmodern aesthetics that allows for a (de)construction of the self through the community. Yolanda can finally affirm her female writer ¡Yo!, –exclaimed in Spanish although she writes in English. This is an “I” constructed by a multiplicity of voices in her community, each offering a different point of view about the protagonist. This “I” is both subject and object, in contrast with the Modern artist novel in which the subject used to be the only creator and the only vision we had of the created object. In ¡Yo!, the characters that were previously narrated by Yolanda –or Julia Álvarez in her debut novel – are given the chance to counter-narrate that master authorial narrative in a type of testimonio and, now, Yolanda becomes a narrated character. However, the final representation of Yolanda is all the same in the author’s hands. Therefore, the book’s larger narrative project poses key questions of representation and reality (McCracken 226). ¡Yo! signifies Álvarez’s own claim as a woman writer who has the final say on the complex issues of identity and representation, and the fine line between reality and simulacra that postmodernity has blurred, according to Baudrillard (Simulacra). For instance, McCracken quotes the episode in which one of Yo’s sisters asks Fifí that Yolanda not be told she is pregnant because she does not want her baby to become “fictional fodder” (¡Yo! 7) in a published book, yet “we encounter the simulacrum of this baby precisely as we read the details of its conception and birth in the
book in our hands” (McCracken 226). Álvarez, ultimately in control, decides that the community must play an important role in the construction of the authorial self: Yo –as Yolanda and as Julia Álvarez. There is an emphasis on the pact with the community in this formation of a postnational female subject, as also occurs in Memory Mambo and Dreaming in Cuban. Drawing on what Vázquez states in his analysis of Alvarez’s works, female’s power acquisition in these narratives occurs only through the female protagonist’s relationship with her community of women toward a postnational view of the self (384). The use of non-rigid genre structures, the crossings of modern and postmodern aesthetics, the practices of “irony, play, and pastiche” (Hutcheon, The Politics), and the alteration of the genre of the artist novel in these writers question the stability and totality (Lyotard) of the master narratives of history and aesthetic production in the US and the Caribbean.

Although Sirena selena vestida de pena follows a numbered-chapter organization, the structure of the novel and the subsequent aesthetics similarly results in a sense of fragmentation, disruption, and multiplicity. Chapter I, for instance, consists of a single paragraph in poetic language addressed in the second person singular to the character of Sirena Selena. The use of a poetic language in the novel, especially when describing Selena’s majesty, magic, and sophistication, reminds one of Butler’s description of poetry as signifying “the recovery of the maternal body within the terms of language, one that has the potential to disrupt, subvert and displace the paternal law” (Butler, Gender 102). Chapter II follows a third-person narration that uses a direct, colloquial language to speak for Martha Divine, Selena’s agent, “su guía, su mamá” (8). Chapter III is first-person narrated by Sirena Selena in a well-known prayer to the Santísima María Piedra de Imán,
to which Catholics plead for prosperity. Chapter IV is also third-person narrated to describe Martha and Sirena Selena’s plane flight and arrival in Santo Domingo. Again, the third-person narrator seems to be limited to knowing the feelings and thoughts of Martha Divine more than Sirena Selena’s. Chapter V is also first-person narrated, this time by Martha Divine, who relates the stories of drag divas in discos in San Juan such as Flying Saucer, and The Bazzar, among other bars. Chapter VI consists of a whole dialogue between Sirena Selena as a boy and her abuela, with various extracts from bolero lyrics sneaking in. Unexpectedly, this chapter does not follow the written conventions for a dialogue: it is all written in a narrative format and readers understand by the context who says what. The bolero lyrics are marked with italics. Although written, dialogues are punctuated and formatted in a way that the reader knows characters are having a conversation. This chapter transgresses this convention, while it also blends music—the local and popular bolero—as a narrative resource.

The insertion of popular Spanish, Caribbean or Latin American song lyrics occurs in Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban*, and Achy Obejas’ *Memory Mambo* as well. For instance, Mexican Vicente Fernandez’s “Cielito Lindo” and Cuban Juan Manuel Villi (Benny Billy)’s “Corazón Rebelde” in *Dreaming in Cuban*; Cuban folk songs “Drume Negrita” and “María Cristina” in *Memory Mambo*; and Puerto Rican Rafael Hernández’s “Ausencia” and Puerto Rican Sylvia Rexach’s “Nave sin rumbo” in *Sirena Selena*. These popular songs serve as melodramatic narrative resources that blur the line between low and high art. In them, the postmodern paradox is represented. While their lyrics usually reproduce traditional masculinist socio-sexual roles in the Caribbean, in these novels this musical genre functions as a micro-narrative destabilizing grand narratives of
genre/gender, nation, and especially, in the case of Sirena Selena, sexuality. In this regard, the ambiguous use of the gender pronouns to talk about Sirena Selena is an example of genre/gender destabilization in the figure of the travestite, represented in the novel structure and aesthetics. Whereas most of the chapters describing Selena’s present refer to her as “she,” in some other moments there is a variable use of the gender pronouns: “‘Vampiresa en tu novela, la gran tirana’, ensayaba en el avión la Sirena camino a la República Dominicana. Iban de negocios, él y Martha. Primer avión que coge, primera vez que brinca el charco. La segunda será a Nueva York, lo presiente” (9. My emphasis). The variability of gender pronouns, narrative styles and (popular) resources, as well as person narrations, together with an absence of a clear linear chronological order, reflect once again the postmodern logic of this novel, which moves beyond traditional genres and narrative styles to depict characters that also move beyond conventional genders and sexualities, like Martha Divine and Sirena Selena. The novel displays the marginal Puerto Rican and Dominican underground, something that cannot be achieved uniquely through traditional and master literary devices. For example, Sirena Selena’s Chapter XXXVII mirrors through the performativity and visuality of language the movement of Sirena Selena as she majestically and sensually goes down the stairs singing, step by step, opening her show at a reception at Juan Dolio’s elegant mansion:

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26 I develop this idea in section 2.2.3.4.
27 For a detailed analysis of the literary resources that make Sirena Selena vestida de pena a transvestite novel, see the M.A. thesis of Rachel M. Geddie.
As the figure of the transvestite, the novel is open to multiple resignifications, and multiple aesthetic and genre possibilities beyond master literary devices that have traditionally followed the precepts of a patriarchal hegemony.

In sum, all these texts transgress modernist generic norms by interacting with other (popular) genres to blur traditional ones. Nonetheless, we still conceive genres in attempt to diverge from these modernist practices, since “the very concept of transgression presupposes an acknowledgement of boundaries or limits…, presuppose genres” (Cohen 16). Rather than rejecting the notion of genre, postmodern writings incorporate genres that were previously considered less prestigious (such as popular genres), affording them a place in literature. As Hutcheon affirms, “the ideology of postmodernism is paradoxical, for it depends upon and draws its power from that which it contests” (“Historiographic” 69). The postmodern world-view overcomes the Modern concept of originality and progress to show how different traditions can be equally incorporated in the creation of imaginaries. In that sense, as Hutcheon suggests, grand narratives are used and debunked, and mainstream texts are necessarily appropriated, to be altered or even parodied.
2.2. Language Crossing: (Pick)Pocketing Spanish, (Pick)Pocketing

**English**

Our world is becoming a place with shifting borders, where nations form and reform. But what we’re really creating are new languages. (Julia Álvarez in Rosario-Sievert 33)

For grancaribeñas, crossing language(s) in their texts is a way to transform the world around them. Usanacaribeñas write mostly in English because this is the language in which they received formal education. English is the language in which they were trained intellectually (Eduardo Machado in del Rio 19), and for most of them there is an intimate connection between “acquiring the [English] language and developing as writers” (del Rio 19). Eduardo del Rio proposes in the introduction of his *Conversations with Cuban-American Writers*—which includes interviews with Cristina García and Achy Obejas—that

…for some of them, Spanish may be a mere memory or something experienced sporadically through familial bonds. ... For all of these writers, however, their linguistic consciousness includes a sense of both languages. Because of this duality, the body of Cuban-American writers’ works is written primarily in English, as they seek to express this conflict in the language that is the embodiment of it. (4)

I would not group authors such as Dolores Prida or Gustavo Pérez Firmat together with Achy Obejas and Cristina García, as del Río does, because the former pertain to a hyphenated ideology, as previously explained. Likewise, I do not agree with the idea that English language represents conflict and confrontation for authors like García or Obejas, as this only serves to perpetuate the notion of struggle between *los de aquí* and *los de allá*, between English and Spanish, and the national imaginaries that each of these
languages have traditionally epitomized. Rodríguez-Mourelo takes a stance similar to mine when dealing with issues of displacement in “Cuban American” literary texts: 28

… the responses to representations of displacement I am seeking cannot be seen as a contraposition of inside/outside; nor merely as a “bridge” or “hyphen” as these images imply a two-sided concept and can be applied only to the Cuban American experience. For this reason, scholars such as Jorge Duany [2000] call for more fluid discourses that ‘transcend the insular territory, the juridical definitions of citizenship and nationality, the traditional postures of political ideology, and even the standard opposition between Spanish and English’. (Rodríguez-Mourelo 27. My emphasis) 29

On a related note, Carolina Hospital suggests in her “collection of works by Cuban American writers”, 30 Los Atrevidos, that these writers are daring because they “choose” to write in English at a time when Spanish is the language ascribed to these authors. Hospital provides them with an agency to choose that these writers do not always possess. Their audacity is true if we consider the accusations of inauthenticity they face from other writers, readers, and critics alike. But whereas some of usanacaribeña authors can create both in Spanish and English, most of them feel capable

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28 Scholars, writers and critics alike often continue using these hyphenated taxonomies to refer to the authors I analyze in this dissertation project. I will only use these categorizations when reporting what others said and, when doing so, I will use quotation marks to emphasize the distance I keep from such designations.

29 The use of the metaphor of “building bridges” is inspired by Ruth Behar’s Bridges to Cuba (1995), a book that the author envisions as an artistic bridge and “a space for reconciliation, imaginative speculation, and renewal” (5). This book stems from Behar’s “personal quest for memory and community” (6) and with it, the attempt to recommence a conversation between Cuba and the diaspora in the US; a conversation that was interrupted by what she calls “the polarizations of Cold War thinking” (5). I find the bridge metaphor similar to that of the hyphen, inadequate for the thesis of this project since it perpetuates a system of binary oppositions. My analysis of shared linguistic and literary strategies in works from the US and the Caribbean responds to the attempt Lillian Manzor makes when comparing a US-based play by Elias Miguel Muñoz and a Cuba-based play by Senel Paz in her chapter (“Performative”) in Behar’s edited book. Instead of interpreting this effort as the creation of “a bridge between the two theaters” (253), this study imagines a Gran Caribe that allows the questioning of “categories of culture and literary history based strictly on nationalist precepts” (Manzor 253) and that presents feminism as an antinationalist discourse.

30 Whereas Hospital breaks ground in the field by including among the so-called “Cuban-American” writers in her anthology, those authors who write their texts in English, she still follows what I call “the hyphen conceptualization” when celebrating the richness and complexity of the cultural space “on the hyphen” between Cuban and American (16-18). Whereas she chooses not to use the hyphen, her use of “Cuban American” still reflects a hyphenated conceptualization. The name still implies the tense duality that I aim to avoid in this study, and the hyphen continues being imagined between the implied wholeness of these two national imaginaries: Cuban and American.
or comfortable doing so principally in English. I seek to deconstruct in the present study the suggestion that “by choosing either Spanish or English these writers intentionally give up the idea of belonging to intellectual communities that are essential for their creative survival” (Álvarez-Borland, Cuban-American 9. My emphasis). The case of Puerto Rican Rosario Ferré is illustrative; she affirms that writing in English opened the US and European literary markets for her. On the contrary, through their language crossings, grancaribeña writers gradually transform and insert themselves into both the US and the Caribbean literary traditions, which they mesh while creating both a grancaribeña literature that is multilingual and multiaccented. For example, in her introduction to the Cuban anthology she edits, Estatuas de sal. Cuentistas cubanas contemporáneas, Mirta Yáñez affirms that “la otra orilla’ de la cuentística cubana” also belongs to Cuban literature –“quíeanlo o no”—although they write in a “lengua intermedia, o llanamente en el idioma del país donde se han formado, en inglés” (39). For Yáñez, writing in English does not exclude the authors in exile from the Cuban academy. However, her afterthought “quíeanlo o no” shows the controversial tendency towards distinguishing between the writers on either shore at a time when “la dilucidación de este complejo

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31 When asked about her identification with US Latina writers after she began to write some of her works in English, Ferré admits that “[e]llas escriben en inglés porque perdieron el español y hubieran querido no perderlo. Pero son un producto de su sociedad. El español lo perdieron y ya no lo pueden recuperar. … Mi caso es diferente porque yo tengo las dos armas. … El escribir en inglés es estrictamente una cuestión de táctica” (57). Ferré dissociates herself from Caribbean writers in the US, basing her arguments on static and binary notions of language (English/Spanish). I group all the authors in this dissertation together in terms of their transformative language, irrespective of which “side” of the Caribbean they write from. Mayra Santos Febres herself, for example, admits sharing affinities with Ana Lydia Vega, while she does not identify with Ferré’s confessional literature (see Morgado 5).
fenómeno solo ha comenzado por ambas partes” (39). Authors such as Achy Obejas have their place in this short story compilation, co-edited with Marilyn Bobes.32

As Karen S. Christian deliberates, why should literary canons be mutually exclusive? (20) Why should writing in one language or another necessarily place works and authors in stable national identity categories or literary traditions? (18) Should Cristina García, who hardly ever writes in Spanish, be placed in a different national identity or literary canon than Achy Obejas, who writes in both languages? Or should Julia Álvarez, who writes mostly in English, be placed in a different national identity or literary tradition than Mayra Santos Febres, who writes principally in Spanish? What happens when all of them cross languages in their narratives? Not only is the act of classifying the so-called US Latina writers and giving them a label not easy, but it also remains extremely complicated to make a direct connection between language and (national) identity or literary canons in these writers, as makes Álvarez-Borland when referring to Cuban-American authors writing in Spanish:

Spanish means a link to [their] roots and to the traditions of the culture of [their] nation …. Those who have chosen to write in their native tongue feel that their literary production very much belongs to the tradition of Cuban letters and therefore want to be a part of this canon. In other words, their identity as writers neither comes from nor belongs to North American letters. (Cuban-American 153-154)

Christian states that “[i]n making this connection between language and identity, Álvarez-Borland fails to acknowledge the complexity of the linguistic issues that Cuban-American writers present. [Her] reliance on static, clearly demarcated literary categories” (21. Italics are mine) moves away from the texts that are the motivation of the present

32 Interestingly, Obejas’ short story “We Came All the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?” (1994) is published in Spanish for the first time in Estatuas de Sal as “¿Vinimos desde Cuba para que te pudieras vestir así?”
study. Her notion of linguistic choice, together with the conception of Spanish language as directly linked to these authors’ “original” culture and nation is problematic if we consider the translocal and postnational nature of these novels. As Butler suggests, those identities that do not fit into the regulatory frames or established categories challenge the validity of the categories themselves.

Hence, the sporadic use of Spanish in the works of *usanacaribeñas* should not be interpreted as a rejection of US letters and/or cultural identities, but as a redefinition of what US letters and cultural identities should mean. Likewise, Mayra Santos Febres’ insertions of English in *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* do not necessarily suggest a rejection of a Puerto Rican canon or cultural identity, or her search for inclusion in a US canon and assimilation to a US cultural identity. She is otherwise moving toward a redefinition of Puerto Rican canonical literature, laying claim to a more linguistically fluid Puerto Rican cultural and national imaginary. With their insertions of Spanish, or English in the case of Mayra Santos Febres, these writers reconceptualize the monolingual and often white national imaginary of the literary tradition both in the US and the Caribbean. They move beyond literary canons classified by static language as a representation of a bounded nation and lay claim to a postnational approach. Through the function, meaning, and aesthetic effects of their language crossings, the fluid, transnational, and often-postnational nature of *gran caribeña* artistic productions is highlighted. As stated by Hospital in her prologue to *Los atrevidos*:

> When we categorize writers, especially in today’s fluid socio-political reality, (with so many artists in exile) we must resist the temptation to simplify. Writers cannot be defined simply by their choice of language, or their place of birth or

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33 In agreement with Christian, “this writing [in the US] problematizes traditional notions of straight-line assimilation and language shift, whereby immigrants follow a uni-directional trajectory toward English dominance” (18).
residence. A detailed study of the cultural, social and linguistic legacies prevalent in the texts is crucial. Most writers today, especially in the United States, cannot be pigeonholed into a single national identity [or in a national identity at all].” (17. My emphasis)

In fact, although the *usana* works analyzed in this chapter are written mainly in English, some of these authors write occasionally in Spanish (see for instance, Achy Obejas’ poems “El bote” or “Historia de amor” or her short stories collection *Aguas y otros cuentos*), while *grancaribeñas* on the islands’ literary work is occasionally translated into English as well (for example, Santos Febres’ *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* was translated into English, under the title *Sirena Selena: A Novel*, by Stephen Lytle).

Different communities, therefore, adopt this artistic production and aesthetics of multiplicity through language and gender/genre crossings that are traditionally ascribed to different linguistic traditions and national imaginaries. In this way, a transnational—even postnational—community of literary practice emerges.

Achy Obejas explains that in Cuba, they want to have her as a Cuban writer but the fact that she writes in English is an obstacle. She responds that language rules are arbitrary because language and use of language is not static, and agrees that “[i]t makes sense to [her] that most Cuban-American writing would be in English, because the writers who are creating that literature are people who, for the most part, have been educated in the United States” (del Rio 90. My emphasis).34 Obejas adds in her interview with Eduardo del Rio the following arguments:

… that’s the key. It’s not that people are bilingual, or culture dominant, or whatever, but, more specifically, that they’re educated in the United States, so this becomes the language we’re comfortable with… this is the language in which you

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34 Note the use by Obejas of a hyphenated taxonomy to insert herself as a writer; Julia Álvarez does the same. Nonetheless, I argue that language usage in their writings does not reflect a traditional hyphenated conceptualization.
are having formal intellectual conversations. This is the language of school, of business, of trade. So it becomes the language in which you function. (90)

Ortiz Cofer also affirms that English becomes “a choice of expediency” in her writing since she has been formally educated in this language (Torres 80).\(^\text{35}\) She explains in an interview with Acosta-Belén that Spanish is essentially her “second language … my subconscious language, my cultural language, my birth language. But I cannot write in Spanish because much of the grammar is alien to me. English is the language of my schooling,” she adds. And she continues:

However, my home language was Spanish; I spoke only in Spanish with my mother; I dream in Spanish … I cannot write a poem in Spanish since I have lost my intimacy with the language and you have to be very fluent in a language to create metaphors… I feel very close to my heritage. Even if I cannot be geographically in the place where I was born, I consider myself a Puerto Rican the same way that anybody living on the Island is a Puerto Rican and if I could, I would write in Spanish. (90)

Cristina García declares in an interview with Andrew Lynch that, as a matter of practicality, English is the “original” language in which she conceptualizes the creation

\(^{35}\) In the novels that recreate a traumatic in-between position (Esmeralda Santiago’s *When I was Puerto Rican*, Ortiz Cofer’s *Silent Dancing* or Nicholas Mohr’s *Nilda*), this idea of the school as an institution playing a homogenizing role through its legitimization of monolingualism and assimilation is better described. For instance, Ortiz Cofer recounts her experience in the US with a teacher who struck her on the head when she thought she was being disrespected when, in fact, Judith did not understand English (66). The experience was no less traumatic in Puerto Rico, where the “Department of Education had specified that as a U.S. territory, the Island had to be ‘Americanized,’ and to accomplish this task, it was necessary for the Spanish language to be replaced in one generation through the teaching of English in all schools” (54). In *When I Was Puerto Rican*, when entering a US school, Nega is put back a grade regardless of her excellent academic record because she does not speak English (226). Finally, the Spanish classes that Nilda takes are given with a strong English accent and no “Latino” accents are allowed in the class. Miss Reilly, Nilda’s Spanish teacher, assures her students that Castilian Spanish is “the real Spanish” and the only one that they will learn and speak in her class, “nothing but the best!,” she adds (214). Schools, therefore, help establish what Anderson calls an “ideal imagined citizen (…) who shares a way of talking, a common knowledge and experience, as well as a collective understanding of the way to conduct oneself in both a physical sense as well as for communicative purposes” (141). Undoubtedly, bilingual and multilingual diverse realities pose a challenge to this “ideal” imagined citizen or community. With the existence of these bilingual realities, or the acknowledgment or recognition of them, changes in the school curricula, as well as in the public services, government laws, and social and cultural practices need to be introduced. However, these changes are not so easily produced. The school system, traditionally defending monolingualism, standardized language and cultural homogeneity goes through a process of *erasure* that constructs those students “whose cultural and linguistic resources are different as instead having deficient or non-existent resources, and therefore as ‘bad’ or ‘incompetent’ students” (Moyer & Martín Rojo 144).
of her literary works. García admits that she includes in the dialogues in her novels “pockets of Spanish” (Lynch, “Novelist”) but this fact does not mean for her that she thinks and/or would want to write in this language, as Ortiz Cofer would. Furthermore, García never expresses such a firm identification with a national identity, neither Cuban nor American. García asserts that she writes in an English with an “underlying pulse of Spanish” in some of her characters; an English “that is informed by the kind of underground river of Spanish and that tries to accommodate its particular rhythms and surges and syncopations … so that it captures some Spanish” (Lynch “Novelist”). Aparicio describes in a similar way US Latino writings in English: “a close reading of their lexicon and syntax reveals the underlying presence of Spanish in most of their works” (“On Sub-versive” 797). Similarly, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel explains that, although written in English, in these texts, “el español subyace, o es punto de referencia constante para transmitir la idiosincrasia de los personajes” (20). García wanted Dreaming in Cuban “to feel as though the reader were experiencing it in Spanish” (Lynch, “Novelist”; Shibuya Brown 254).

Julia Álvarez also contradicts Ortiz Cofer when declaring that English (as the language of her craft) is her new homeland.36 Álvarez admits she is not a Dominican writer “or really a Dominican in the traditional sense” nor “una norteamericana … a mainstream American writer” (“Doña Aída” 822; Rosario-Sievert 33), thus escaping from national preconceptions connected to one physical space and one language. She admits never having written in Spanish because, as she explains, “writing requires an apprenticeship,” and she never “went through that apprenticeship in Spanish” (Rosario-

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36 In section 2.2.3.3., I explain how I interpret this metaphor of (English) language as homeland by Julia Alvarez.
Sievert 32). The author adds that she has “no business writing in a language [i.e.,
Spanish] that [she] can speak but ha[s] not studied deeply enough to craft” (“Doña Aída”
822).³⁷

What all usanas have in common is that in their spoken “finger-snapping, gum-
chewing English, [they] sometimes sli[p] in una palabrita o frase en español” (Álvarez,
“Doña Aída” 822). In their writing, as a creative and strategic process –and not a mere
reflection of their orality—, they tone their English with Spanish rhythms and sounds
(Jacques 26) in a language crossing that goes beyond a mere switching of cultures and/or
languages.³⁸ This is a linguistic phenomenon that occurs in grancaribeña works that
defamiliarizes in a way the Spanish language of the Caribbean culture of “origin” and the
English language of an imagined homogeneous US. On the other hand, Mayra Santos
Febres, who obtained a Ph.D. at Cornell University, writes mostly in Spanish because in
Puerto Rico, as she affirms, “la lengua literaria, la de resistencia cultural [vis-à-vis
English], en la que se expresan las pasiones y las rabias, es el español” (4). Her writing
reacts against a purist view of a (national) Spanish language, and against English
colonizing moves.

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³⁷ Although she admires literature written in Spanish by authors such as Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo, Julia
de Burgos or Ana Lydia Vega (one of the writers analyzed in this project), Álvarez admits that she “cannot
emulate their wonderful mastery of that [Spanish] language” (“Doña Aída” 822).
³⁸ In “One Island, Many Voices,” the novelists Roberto Fernández and Pablo Medina confirm their ability
to write in both Spanish and English depending on what the “subconscious mind dictates” (19), which
expresses the duality they feel toward the languages and cultures on each side of the hyphen that separates
Cuban from American. This is not the approach grancaribeñas take.
2.2.1. On Native Speakers, Mother Tongues, Home(Lands), and Doubled Selves

The analyzed texts’ implicit criticism of the national imaginaries on either side of a divisive hyphen goes hand-in-hand with what are misleading, non-transparent concepts: those of “native language/speaker” and “mother tongue” – as is the concept of “home(land)” – and accordingly, the traditional indissoluble association of a “mother tongue” or “native language” with birth, and a determined geographic and national “home(land).”

With a focus on the field of applied linguistics, Alan Davies considers in *The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality* the difficulty in defining what a “native speaker” is. Davies confirms that the presumed-common sense and consensual views of a “native speaker” are insufficient. The scholar admits that the native/non-native speaker distinction reflects Chomsky’s view of language as universal grammar, which is based upon innate mental linguistic structures, and ignores social factors and heterogeneous contextual realities. Chomsky proposes the notion of an “idealized native speaker” – conceived as monolingual — as the model of grammatical competence. Obviously, this ideal native speaker producing an ideal language lives in a homogeneous and static

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39 The RAE on-line dictionary defines “mother tongue” in the following national terms: “Lengua materna: La que se habla en un país, respecto de los naturales de él.” Oxford Dictionaries also opts for this deceptive definition of “mother tongue”: “The language that a person has grown up speaking from early childhood.” This definition does not contemplate the reality of subjects that have experienced migration, displacement or a situation of bilingualism or multilingualism. Traditionally the ‘mother tongue’ has been also understood as one’s first or primary language, as expressed in Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary: “the language that a person learns to speak first.” The definition of the RAE relies upon national/political criteria, while Oxford and Merriam-Webster rely upon nativism (i.e., mother tongue as a biological “critical period” function of early childhood).

40 After this, Davies details the complexities of the knowledge and skills possessed by the “native speaker” and intends to make this complexity less exclusive and more ordinary for non-native speakers, since his focus is on second language acquisition.
speech community. From an educational perspective, Michael Halliday affirms that certain kinds of abilities in the mother tongue are never or hardly ever acquired in a “second” language (199-200). Davies also believes that, whereas the “native speaker” may be a “native speaker” of more than one first language, after puberty it is almost impossible to become a “native speaker” of the second language (207), but he concludes that, with the exception of early childhood exposure, all the assumed characteristics of the “native speaker” are dependent on the amount of contact and practice with the target language, and on attitudinal and identity factors.

But, which one is the second language in the usanacaribeña writers and playwrights/performers here analyzed? Which one is the mother tongue? Are not their written (and often conversational) abilities in English superior to their abilities in the Spanish tongue of their mothers? American structuralist Leonard Bloomfield uses the term “native language” to refer to the first language as “the one that starts at one’s mother’s knee” (43), a definition proven not so transparent in the analyzed usanacaribeña authors, whose Spanish “first language” comes to a halt at an early age when they receive schooling (Lynch, “Key” 82; Piller, “Who, if” 5). Whereas Spanish is these authors’ mothers’ tongue, could we not consider English to be their “native language” if we take into account their competence and performance abilities? Would they consider English and/or Spanish to be their “native language”? Although declaring not to have a definitive response for this and other similar questions, or a clear-cut

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41 This linguistic ideal can be compared to Butler’s notion of a gender ideal in Gender Trouble, in the sense that they are both constructions based on universal models that do not exist per se. What we see are the performativities that seek to emulate or alter the conventions proposed by these ideals.

42 Davies considers six criteria to characterize the “native speaker”: childhood acquisition, intuitions about idiolectal grammar (Grammar 1), intuitions about group language grammar (Grammar 2), discourse and pragmatic control, creative performance, and interpreting and translating (211).
criterion for the concept of “native speaker,” Davies assumes that in such cases the issue has more to do with timing of input in the language than the kind of input (cf. Beaudrie and Fairclough, *Spanish*), and with the speakers’ predisposition (in terms of identity and confidence) to attain and accept both the assumed-inherent characteristics of the “native speaker,” and the ideological social perceptions surrounding this notion. According to general agreement in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, the usanacaribeña writers and playwrights/performers I analyze in this project would be Spanish heritage language (HL) speakers since they were (born and) educated entirely in the US, and their family members most probably use Spanish restrictedly (Lynch, “Toward” 30). As Lynch clarifies, the term “heritage” should not invoke any degree of bilingual competence through a generational classification (see also Lynch, “Key” 89-90). Likewise, this term eludes debates on who is more “bilingual” or more “native” (“Toward” 30).

The discourses based on a “homogenised, error-free linguistic Eden” (Davies 214) and on “group membership” regarding the notion of “native speaker” fail in usanacaribeña writers. As regards the treatment of the error in SLA, Lynch urges scholars and teachers to avoid “the trap of the ‘never-native speaker’” (32), which he

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43 Lynch affirms that “(1) English is the language of more frequent everyday use among most Spanish HL speakers; (2) English is the socially ‘preferred’ language of interaction among Spanish HL speakers; (3) most HL speakers do not insist that one must speak Spanish to be considered ‘Hispanic’ or ‘Latino’; (4) English literacy and formal discourse skills of the majority of U.S.-born bilinguals are prescriptively superior to their Spanish skills” (36).

44 Lynch explains that, in the context of the language classroom, HL learners often do not identify with the label of “native speakers” of Spanish. Some of them do not even consider themselves as Spanish speakers of any kind, but as Spanish second-language learners (30-31).

45 Davies concludes that the concept of the native speaker “is not a fiction but has the reality that ‘membership’, however informal, always gives. Therefore the native speaker is relied on to know what the score is, how things are done, because s/he carries the tradition, is the repository of ‘the language’. The native speaker is also expected to exhibit normal control especially in fluent connected speech (though not of course in writing), and to have command of expected characteristic strategies of performance and of communication. A native speaker is also expected to ‘know’ another native speaker, in part because of an intuitive feel, like for like, but also in part because of a characteristic systematic set of indicators, linguistic, pragmatic and paralinguistic, as well as an assumption of shared cultural knowledge” (208).
defines as the persistent assumption that second-language learners will never acquire the status of “native” speakers, and that they will forever be deficient in their language capabilities (33; see also Firth and Wagner; Pavlenko “I Never”). He argues that because Spanish second-language and HL learners will never be “a monolingual speaker of the target language” (Lynch, “Toward” 33), it makes little sense to continue comparing their linguistic development with the norms of an idealized monolingual “native” speaker (Lynch, “Toward” 33). On his part, Davies considers, among other factors, that language creativity is of major importance to the concept of the “native speaker” (90). While “non-native” speakers’ linguistic creations, inventions and games are often considered as errors, as “a slip in performance” (Piller, “Who, if” 11), “native speakers” performing the same linguistic games and inventions are regarded as creative, and their grammatical inaccuracies as a sign of lack of competence acquisition. If a community acquires enough power and visibility, it can participate in and inscribe certain linguistic transformations such as borrowings without being questioned. Therefore, Davies resolves that the opposition native/non-native speaker is ultimately one of power (215).

Identity and ideological judgments in terms of pronunciation, grammar, semantics, pragmatics, discourse, and style are usually made to determine if a speaker’s language use is characteristically native or non-native (cf. Davies 199). What happens, then, when speakers receive an accent at birth (at “their mothers’ knees”), or other semantic, grammatical, or pragmatic traits, that may be judged as not belonging to those

46 Lynch quotes Cook to support this argument when the latter states that we must “go beyond the native speaker” in SLA research and second-language teaching by convincing learners that “they are successful multicompetent speakers, not failed native speakers” (204, qtd. in “Toward” 33).

47 These inclusive/exclusive judgments on “native speaker” expectations are based on the following premises, according to Davies: flexibility of expression, avoiding avoidance, expecting interaction between native speaker-native speaker to be intelligible, fluent spontaneous discourse, strategies of performance, paralinguistics, and foreignness (200-204).
possible accents and features of the idealized “native speaker”? Certainly, behind common definitions of a “native speaker” there are socio-political and ideological assumptions related to nation and national origin, as well as gender and ethnicity. The “native speaker” status is not so much a consequence of linguistic performance as acceptance into a given “native speaker community.” Piller agrees that the constructed imaginary of the “native speaker,” i.e., “a canonically literate monolingual middle-class member of a largely fictional national community whose citizens share a belief in a common history” (Kramsch), is based upon criteria other than linguistic ones. She affirms that the performance and perception of ‘native speaker’ status is strongly tied to other aspects of social identity, namely nationality (“Who, if” 6). For instance, the scholar demonstrates that women with partners from another linguistic background are often no longer perceived as legitimate “native speakers” of their first language, based on the Napoleonic Code, the first modern statute to decree that a wife’s nationality should follow that of her husband (Piller, “Something”; cf. McClintock). Similarly, usanacaribeñas are hardly perceived as “authentic native speakers” of English given their ethnic traits, Spanish accent, or simply their known Hispanophone origins.

Even if they were born in the US or immigrated before puberty, how can usanacaribeñas be English “native speakers” if their parents were from Cuba/Puerto Rico/Dominican Republic and they first spoke Spanish with them? How, being Spanish “native speakers,” do they dare to write in English? Works such as the ones analyzed, by virtue of being written mostly in English, at times have been critically exposed to accusations of inauthenticity and of misrepresenting their authors’ cultures of origin and Spanish “mother tongue” (Ween). Lori Ween explains that one of the critical responses to
these texts has defined them as “translational backformations” (128), which refers to the linguistic result obtained when translating a text to its assumed “original” language. This belief assumes that usanacaribeñas think in Spanish and write these texts in English through a translation mode. Consequently, the next translation of these texts into Spanish results in a translational backformation through which the “original” meaning of the text is recodified or recreated. From this perspective, the use of the English language in these texts would restrict the authenticity of the representation of Caribbeanness both in the US and on the island. However, this affirmation is reductionist and ignores some of the most important socio-cultural aspects and ideologies behind the language practices of this literary and artistic phenomenon. As argued in this dissertation, through their literary and theatrical language(s), the works analyzed reflect an emergent cultural mode of production that goes beyond the mere inclusion of terms in the Spanish language or themes related to the authors’ Caribbean origins.

Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel also problematizes the assumptions about the “native speaker” and the concept of “mother tongue.” While she sustains that “la lengua materna es una coordenada clave para la identificación étnica o cultural de muchos artistas” (Caribe 371), she examines what happens when the relationship with the “native” or “mother tongue” is displaced by another language in authors such as Junot Díaz, Julia Álvarez or Cristina García (371): “¿Cuál es la lengua nativa en estos casos y qué función desempeña la ficción en esta reconfiguración de un idioma primario” (372) and of static notions of nation? What happens when the writers do consciously cross languages in their writings? (cf. Ch’ien, “The Shit”). In certain Caribbean writers, having to write in “the colonial language” is portrayed through a sense of loss. Davies mentions
the case of Jamaica Kincaid, Antiguan novelist writing in the US, who regrets the loss of her “mother tongue”:

…what I see is the millions of people, of whom I am just one, made orphans: no motherland, no fatherland, no god… and worst and most painful of all, no tongue. For isn’t it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? (43)

Usanacaribeñas seem to have overcome this painful feeling of loss through their language crossings, which become their own means of expression beyond colonizing languages and/or varieties both in the US and the Caribbean. In fact, we could also be speaking of the notions of “native speaker/mother tongue” as deceiving in the grancaribeña authors writing from the islands. As an example, Santos Febres rejects the standard/Peninsular Spanish variety as her “mother tongue,” which editorialis, and other official institutions try to impose on writers:

Hablar en el español nativo, en este que se da en clave Caribe y otras tantas, hablar y escribir en la lengua que se hace viva entre la boca es pa’ las machas de pelo en pecho y pa’ los jevos que andan derecho. Porque créanme que hay que pelear. Hay que pelear, por ejemplo, con editores “internacionales” es decir, del lao más global del planeta, pa’ que no le endilguen a uno una nota al calce, un glosario a final de capítulo … O peor aún, fajarse para que no obliguen a una “traducción” a lengua más accesible. Entonces, más rápido que volando, te cambian arrebatao por endrogado, greña por melena, embuste por “mentira.” Y (no joda, caballero) la bamba, el griferío y el griterío te lo dejan fuera. Lo que termina publicado parece libreto de Univisión. (“Español” 191. My emphasis)

For the author, el español nativo is not the language editorialis translate her work into, but the Spanish en clave Caribe que se hace viva entre la boca. Here, the ideological aspect of standard languages comes into play. If we insist on asking what the native language/mother tongue of grancaribeñas is, the answer becomes even more complicated because Spanish and English in their standard varieties, i.e., the languages, are not anyone’s “native” languages (cf. Piller, “Who, if” 4). Undoubtedly, people living in
certain areas of the US or the Spanish-speaking world will feel more identified with this variety, but not grancaribeñas, whose Spanish and English are—to a lesser or greater extent—in clave Caribe, and whose literary English is permeated with the rhythm and musicality of oral expression.48

Although Santos Febres employs the notion of “native language,” I argue in favor of not perpetuating the use of such concepts because 1) they are idealizations of little elucidatory value (Piller, “Who, if” 13); 2) they preserve the constructed dichotomy Self (Native speaker)/Other (Non-native speaker) (Pennycook, English); 3) common judgments regarding who is a “native speaker” are intolerant and exclusionary of those not included in the label (Davies 200); and 4) the Native Speaker/Non-Native Speaker binary opposition implies “homogeneity throughout each group, and clear-cut distinctions between them. So a NS [native speaker] is assumed unproblematically to be a person with a mother tongue, acquired from birth” (Firth and Wagner 291). I maintain that the only own(ed) language of grancaribeña artistic production is that of crossing and multiplicity. Martínez-San Miguel proposes that “la ficción [or the language of fiction] pasa a desempeñar la función del idioma nativo en estas narrativas de las nuevas ontologías de la globalización” (370), as we will appreciate in the analyzed texts.

48 To argue that the notion of standard language is a myth, together with such notions of “native speaker,” and “mother tongue,” Piller quotes the work by Lippi-Green in which the scholar identifies the imagined features of Standard US English speakers, according to sociolinguistic surveys completed by members of US population. The “ideal” Standard US English speaker has no regional accent; resides in the midwest, far west or perhaps some part of the north-east (but never in the south); has a more than average or superior education; is an educator or broadcaster; pays attention to speech, and is not sloppy in terms of pronunciation or grammar; is easily understood by all; and enters into a consensus of other individuals like themselves about what is proper language (58). Grancaribeñas and grancaribeña texts do not reflect this imaginary in several ways, as they do not reflect Standard Spanish imaginary.

49 Piller adds that errors should be addressed “with what- and how- questions instead of who-questions. ‘What constitutes an error or bad writing and how can it be improved?’ instead of ‘Who produced it?’ (13).
Grancaribeña writings escape schizophrenic representations of “doubled selves” (Pavlenko, Bilingual), and of “a bilingual as two monolinguals in one body” (Grosjean), conveyed in the notions of “native speaker,” and “mother tongue” – in association with a geopolitically delimited “home(land).” According to Pavlenko, the view of bilingualism “as a problem of two incompatible identities, … as linguistic schizophrenia” (Bilingual 3) that emerged in the “migrant” writings of the first half of the 20th century, has not vanished, although it diminished in the second half of that century. As I already discussed in the previous section, the drama of duality, engrained in bilingualism and accompanied by terms such as bifurcation, bigamy, split, gap, alienation, and double vision (Pavlenko, Bilingual 5) still pervade numerous works by the so-called “Latina/o” writers and playwrights/performers. Instead, the work by grancaribeñas challenges essentialist notions of the self, and suggests that “anxieties over an inner split may stem from the lack of social acceptance of bilingualism and may disappear once bi- and multilingualism are accepted as the norm, rather than an exception” (Pavlenko, Bilingual 28). Language, and genre/gender crossing(s) in grancaribeña artistic production work toward creating an aesthetics of multiplicity that denaturalizes the ontology of the

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**50** Pavlenko demonstrates that bi- and multilingual speakers often feel like different people when speaking different languages, or are perceived this way by their interlocutors. She enumerates the different discourses that prevail in relation to this perception: one language-one personality, one language-one culture, language socialization, language in relation to emotions or taboo words, language and mind-set, one language as real and the other as artificial, language depending on registers, language and intimacy, language and proficiency, among others. What she concludes is that there are no clear, objective patterns inherent in the Spanish or English languages, but it depends on speakers’ apprehension of those languages. Of course, that apprehension is sometimes molded by prevailing linguistic discourses, which grancaribeña writings, and literary scholars as myself, seek to denaturalize.

**51** With this quote, Pavlenko refers in general terms to the work of a younger generation of writers that grew up in the sixties and seventies, “witnessing the revival of ethnic consciousness and experiencing the influence of postmodern thought” (28). As I already mentioned, I do not group grancaribeña writers according to generational patterns, but in terms of linguistic and aesthetic strategies. In fact, not all the writers who grew up in the sixties and seventies have abandoned “the drama of duality” or “linguistic schizophrenia.”
hyphen, i.e., the pervasive (self-) perception of bilingualism or multilingualism as double-selfness.

2.2.2. Lexical Branding in Grancaribeña Narrative

*Grancaribeñas* can be grouped together in a community of practice through their intentional linguistic virtuosity in a type of lexical branding constituted by their language crossing. It is important to remember that I analyze the written practices of *grancaribeña* authors, not their oral practices, and that we cannot consider the writing process a mere reflection of oral practices (Harris). Mark Sebba coins the term orthographic “branding” to refer to a specific visual/graphical element of written language (unlike oral language) such as an alphabetic character, which becomes an emblem of a group of people who use the element in question in their writing practices and which may be recognized even by those who do not know the language in question. The inclusion of Spanish lexicon in the principally English texts (or vice versa) of *grancaribeña* writers, with the use of the visual mark of italics in some cases, can be understood as a type of lexical “branding” (the avoidance of italics then becomes a sub-“branding” process within the main one) through which these authors create an image for their community of writing practices. As Sebba suggests, the existence of a choice of two different “brands” (using italics or not in this case) to provide the same function increases the identity-marking potential, so it also increases the ideological potential of the choice. The Anglo readers of these texts may

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52 By way of example, Sebba mentions the debate around the grapheme “k” in the representation of Haitian Creole, Tagalog in the Philippines, and Basque in Spain. He also mentions the use of “aa” in Denmark. Specifically, “k” is used subversively when Castilian has “c” as a brand for language activists in the Basque counterculture is to make Spanish look like Basque. Although Sebba’s notion of “branding” applies specifically to orthographic elements, I draw on this concept to refer to the language crossing of lexical insertions occurring in *grancaribeña* narrative works.

53 See Achy Obejas on her use of italics, pages 87-88.
not fully understand the meaning of the Spanish lexical insertions but they surely recognize them and interpret that these insertions convey a cultural and ideological move.

Considering that writing a language involves creating an image, Sebba draws on Irvine and Gal’s notion of “iconization” as ideological process (2000). These scholars define “iconization” as the transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features (or varieties) and the social images with which they are linked. Linguistic features that index social groups appear to be iconic representations of them, as if those features somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence (37). “Branding” may involve “iconization” but these are distinct processes. In addition, Sebba terms as “attribution” the step previous to “iconization,” in which one group of people, A, associates a linguistic feature or language-related practice, X, to a group of people, B, who use that feature or engage in that practice (209). Sebba’s concept of “attribution” is related to Le Page’s notions of “projection” and “inner models of the universe” (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 115) as “individual models which ultimately become collective when enough others share the same ‘view of the universe’, which they have ‘projected in words’,” (qtd. in Sebba 209). “Attribution,” according to Sebba, involves “a discursively constructed model of the universe in which a perceived group is perceived to engage in a particular perceived linguistic behavior” (2-3). These three ideological processes, “attribution,” “iconization,” and “branding” appear in the narratives of the community of practice of women writers I analyze. Not only the producers (writers) but also the receivers (readers, critics) identify grancaribeña works as a group through the attribution of perceived practices of language crossing (more precisely the lexical insertions in another language) as characteristic of the narratives by this community of writing
practice. The attribution of this specific linguistic feature to this group of writers’ artistic production involves the non-attribution of this feature to other groups’ productions who may have a more structuralist perception of language, resulting in different ideologies as regards nation and identity. These same groups may react negatively to the “brand” or “look” (Sebba) and may attempt to change it. ‘Iconization’ also takes place because the sign relationship has been transformed into an iconic one. In other words, the linguistic feature of language crossing through lexical insertions in another language (Spanish or English) is an iconic representation of these writers. Their writing practices of language crossing depict the multiple, and fluid nature of the authors themselves and their common ideology of multiplicity. Lastly, “branding” is accomplished through these writers’ process of identity disarticulation by verbal and/or visual discursive means, with which they achieve a “distinctiveness or unique selling point” (Sebba 213). Whether the agency of this ideological process started with the writers or the readers, and whether the lexical “branding” of these texts is welcomed or rejected by the readership, the language crossings these writers create have strategically become an identity and ideological brand that gives them and their literature visibility in both the local and the global literary marketplace.54

54 The visual distinctiveness that this process of “branding” exerts on these works makes them difficult to translate since their linguistic distinctiveness and unique selling point is precisely the language crossings in them. Cristina García expresses extreme discomfort when reading the Spanish translations of her works, such as Soñar en cubano (1994) because, she explains, whereas English falls short somehow in capturing the Spanish, the Spanish versions of their works also miss “a tremendous … dimension in terms of word play, implication, and reference and context” (Lynch, “Novelist”). Julia Álvarez’s preoccupation with this notion of an impossible translation from her English into Spanish seems evident in the following quote by Yolanda’s father in ¡Yo! on the translation into Spanish of American cowboy movies in the Dominican Republic: “What my girls most loved to watch were the American cowboy movies which were dubbed by a deaf person, I think. Years later, when I saw an episode of Rin-Tin-Tin in Spanish, I spent most of the half hour laughing. The lips and the words just didn’t go. Barks would sound a few seconds after Rin-Tin-Tin barked. Same with the gunshots, so that the villain would be clutching his bloody side and falling in a cloud of dust before you heard the bang-bang-bang of the gun” (302). Almost the same passage is found in How the García Girls Lost their Accents, voiced by Yoyo: “The height of violence for us was on the weekly
In *Dreaming in Cuban, Memory Mambo* and ¡Yo!, the use of language crossings resulting in this type of “branding” is practically limited to the mentioned insertions of Spanish lexicon in the English texts. This language move does not result in a total lack of intelligibility (i.e., it does not require a bilingual readership to understand the novel), but it may suggest a sense of opacity to some strict, purist, and elitist discourses of Americanness and Caribeanness, as Frances R. Aparicio also suggests through the concept of “tropicalization”.55 “this tropicalizing gesture destabilizes discursive hegemonies that have been historically tied to US relations with Latin America … to objectify and silence the heterogeneous voices of an emergent cultural sector in the United States” (“On Sub-verse” 796). Maria Lauret prefers to see this semantic and orthographic alteration in the US academy as an “import,” a “migration,” or as “wanderwords” that “carry cultural baggage and represent otherness in American English textual environments” and that “deliberately appear to obstruct the transparency of English” (1). The terms “import,” “migration,” “verba peregrina” (Quintilian), and “wanderword” that Lauret uses to describe what I call language crossing perpetuate the television Western imported from Hollywood and dubbed clumsily in Spanish. Rin Tin Tin barked in sync, but the cowboys kept talking long after their mouths were closed. When the gun reports sounded, the villains already lay in a puddle of blood” (227). These passages pose interesting questions of language and translation: is language faithful to actions or vice versa? Is it impossible to speak and act Spanish in an American world? Is there an appropriate way to culturally translate Yolanda’s, Pilar’s, Juani’s, and Sirena Selena’s means of expression? Is there an accurate way to translate *grancaribeña* novels into Spanish? Yolanda’s diminutive nickname, Yo, is an example of the impossibility of (cultural) translation of these *grancaribeña* narratives since Yo means also an “I” that conveys an idiosyncratic subjectivity that resists translation into one of the two languages, and national and cultural imaginaries that Yolanda questions. Luis states that Yolanda is all “Yolanda, Yoyo, Yosita, Yo, and last but not least, the English Joe. And above all she is Yo, the Spanish first-person pronoun, the “I” of the narrator” (276). This is a related secondary topic that may be further developed, but which is not the main focus of this dissertation.

Borrowing one of Hernández Cruz’s titles, Aparicio defines “tropicalization” in US Latino/a writings as “a cultural and discursive counter-movement developed by Latino/a communities that dialogizes homogeneous Anglo constructs of the Latino/as as Other” (796). Aparicio compares this concept with what George Yúdice and Juan Flores have termed “transcreation” (1990). The term “tropicalization” re-uses the stereotype of the Latino exotic to counter-attack and deconstruct homogeneous and hegemonic notions of Americaness.
view of these “other” languages as Other, as the “intruders,” as the permanent immigrants, although she explicitly states this is not her supposition (7). From here, we can deduce that as the migrant subject or language penetrates in the national language, the level of intrusion increases (while at the same time the migrant’s intrusion, “actuando a la manera de un mecanismo mnemotécnico[,] … revalida la supuesta normalidad” [Delgado 22] of the national language). Lauret rather sees the English language as the permanent intruder throughout imperial and globalizing processes. However, she uses the migrant metaphor with these “other” languages and writers, placing them in the perennial role as “wanderOthers” of the stable English language. On the contrary, the metaphorical concept of language crossing intermingles languages and their crossing at a same level, breaking equally with the assumed transparency, uniaccentuality and monolingual code of any language.

This break—or rupture in Appadurai’s terms—has a direct effect on the readership. Aparicio affirms that this literature “privileges the bilingual/bicultural ideal reader as it simultaneously achieves a balance negotiating between an Anglo monolingual audience and a Latino (bilingual) readership. However, a monolingual reading can only be a partial, limited one” (“On Sub-versive” 800) due to the above-mentioned opacity of these novels. Through this intended opacity, the “ideal monolingual American reader, who has been glaringly positioned throughout history as the prototypical embodiment of cultural literacy” (800), is displaced and somewhat marginalized or, alternatively, forced to cross cultures and languages and accept a heterogeneous reality in the US. Torres corroborates that the target readership of these writings is imagined as English-only

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56 Manuel Delgado affirms that the migrant subject will be permanently seen as an intruder, who has not been invited (14). This terminology emphasizes aspects that I seek to avoid because they perpetuate the vision of these writers and their artistic works as “intruders.”
readers and in some cases they favor a bilingual readership (77). We must bear in mind that most heritage speakers of Spanish that may be interested in reading these novels have received most—if not all—of their formal education in English (cf. Beaudrie & Faireclough).

In the case of writers in the islands such as Mayra Santos Febres, the language crossings and the multiaccentual tone of their texts destabilizes not only a monolingual audience in the Caribbean, but also a purist, homogeneous, standard view of the Spanish language. Works like *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* cross languages and dialects with no glossary at the end of the book or chapter, “como si uno estuviera publicando un capítulo pa’l *National Geographic*” (Santos Febres, “Español” 191). As Santos Febres states, “el español en clave Caribe” remains in her texts “resisting translation” from editorials into an official, standard Spanish (usually Peninsular). A “pure monolingual” Spanish in the Caribbean is a myth; English crosses into a fluid Spanish that has little to do with the normative linguistic prescriptions established by “gramáticos, lingüistas y académicos” or “Nebrija, María Moliner y sus secuaces” (“Español” 192). Santos Febres’ local and popular varieties of Spanish dismantle those grand linguistic narratives. Considering that language constantly changes, *grancaribeña* writers reinvent the Spanish and English languages, as Santos Febres observes, “pariendo una palabra, un juego con el idioma en frecuencia vacilón, una frase que recombine en la punta de una lengua siglos de mestizaje, bachata, ira, opresión, combate, deleite, historia y alianzas” (“Español” 193). Through globalizing processes and the increasing attention that editorials and artistic creators are paying to diversity, writers “tanto del lao de acá como del lao de allá” seek to find a place in their characters’ voices “para que entre las páginas de un libro se le rinda
el homenaje que se merecen todas las cosas vivas y mutantes. Y las palabras lo son, más
si nacen en países … mutables como estos que el mar Caribe baña” (“Español” 193).

In Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban* and Achy Obejas’s *Memory Mambo*,
Spanish words find a place in an otherwise English discourse, and are inserted through
the use of italics—“as if to emphasize their strangeness” (Lauret 2)—, whereas in Julia
Álvarez’s ¡Yo! these words rest in the narrative without any printing style or other mark,
which is an even greater attempt to disclose a heterogeneous Latina representativeness in
the US. In some occasions, there is a contextual explanation or translation of these words
whereas in others there is no way to know the meaning of the word by context. For
example, in ¡Yo! the reader finds this contextual translation of the Spanish word: “‘The
husband had himself fixed years back de propósito.’ On purpose” (247). But most of the
time, the readers are not offered a translation or explanation of the terms and expressions
in Spanish in either of these works, for instance: “Their child could be raised with all the
privileges and comforts of los ricos” (¡Yo! 253). In *Memory Mambo*, readers can find the
definition and/or translation, literal and free, of the Spanish terms in a glossary at the end
of the book (239). In her second novel, *Days of Awe* (2001), Obejas eliminates the italic
font for the Spanish words with the intention of naturalizing her language crossings. As
regards the glossary, Obejas affirms that

... [t]he glossary’s a different story, because it’s not just language-based. It’s
about culture and history. It was a way to create context, for those readers who
want it, without interrupting the flow of the story … there are no footnotes, so the
reader has to decide whether she wants to see if there’s anything back there, in the
glossary, about whatever it is she thinks she may have missed, or wants to know
more about…The italics I’ll never use again; the glossary, yes. (Preziuso 1)57

57 Junot Díaz explains why he does not use italics either: “allowing the Spanish to exist in my text without
the benefit of italics or quotation marks was a very important political move. Spanish is not a minority
language. Not in this hemisphere, not in the United States, not in the world inside my head. So why treat it
like one? Why ‘other’ it? Why denormalize it? By keeping the Spanish as normative in a predominantly
Achy Obejas confesses that italics emphasized “the other rather than the commonality” and that nowadays words like bodega and intifada should be considered part of American vocabulary (Obejas, “Days of”). The fact that the readers have to decide “if there is anything back there” symbolizes what these usana writers may intend to accomplish with their language crossings: that the US and the “Cuban-American” or other (non-) hyphenated audiences need to cross languages to see what there is behind this usanacaribeña mode of production.

In Torres’ terms, we can affirm that the use of the Spanish language in Dreaming in Cuban, Memory Mambo and ¡Yo! is “easily accessed, transparent and cushioned” (79). Considering my previous arguments, I would state that “by signaling otherness through their language choice [these usanacaribeña writers are not] consciously trying to exclude some readers” (Torres 90). Instead, they are obliging them to equally cross languages and, for the most venturous, see “if there is anything back there.” Indeed, the usanacaribeña community of practice requires the inclusion of US and hyphenated readerships in order to question their prevailing discourses. Cristina García also suggests this idea when she indicates that the Spanish insertions in her works may be seen “like a punch” (Lynch, “Novelist”). When interviewing Cristina García on the conceptualization of language in her novels, Andrew Lynch points to a passage in Monkey Hunting in which one of the main characters, Domingo, realizes that “other languages that he acquired didn’t have the same memory-packed punch as the mother tongue” (54). Lynch asks the novelist if this quote captures the essence of what would be the function of the

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English text, I wanted to remind readers of the fluidity of languages, the mutability of languages. And to mark how steadily English is transforming Spanish and Spanish is transforming English” (Céspedes, Torres-Saillant and Díaz, 904).
Spanish lexical insertions in her texts. She answers that indeed it is “all about that” and adds that these insertions also work as punches to remind the readers that although written in English, the stories are occurring in Spanish. García adds that these are also words that would convey different connotations than the ones intended if they were written in English. This “punch” may be delivered to the US readership to remind them of their Spanish-speaking reality and to the “Cuban-American” readership that imposes their myth “created in exile, a group hallucination” (Obejas, Memory 25) of what “Cubanness” should mean.

Most of the Spanish words contained in usanacaribeña texts emerge in the characters’ dialogues with a mimetic or emotional purpose (cf. Pavlenko, Bilingual; Pavlenko, Emotions). Others are integrated in the narrative to indicate that the story is also taking place in Spanish or merely to “disrupt, enchant, occlude or highlight the taken-for-granted English of American literature and can thereby perform wonders of poetic signification as well as cultural critique” (Lauret 2). In some other cases or in all of them, vocabulary or sentences in Spanish are placed to make Anglo reader conscious of the presence of Spanish in their own background. This lexicon usually refers to everyday language: words that are – sometimes—easily recognized by Anglophone readers, and expressions and sayings containing so many cultural connotations that translating them becomes a difficult or impossible task since the translation does not have the same cultural referent (Torres 77; Otheguy, “Las piedras” 16). For example, these are some of the Spanish words inserted in Achy Obejas’ Memory Mambo: tío and tía, primo and prima (family lexicon), qué carajo (colloquial expression), independentista (term belonging to the specific Puerto Rican political context), cafesito or ropa vieja (typically
Cuban drink and food, \textit{comemierda} (name-calling which is very much used in everyday talk in Cuban communities). In Cristina García’s \textit{Dreaming in Cuban}, we find \textit{finca} (type of housing), \textit{novelas} (Latino soap operas), \textit{artista, mi cielo} (affectionate way of addressing to someone), \textit{caballero} (referring to a man), \textit{mi hija} (family lexicon). In Julia Álvarez’s \textit{¡Yo!}, the reader finds interjections such as \textit{Ay, Ay!!!} or \textit{ya, ya} and vocabulary like \textit{compañeros} (referring to those people sharing an anti-Trujillo ideology in the novel), \textit{mami} (family lexicon), \textit{Gran Poder de Dios} or \textit{la Virgencita de Altagracia} (religious terms), \textit{doña} (honorific title to show respect), \textit{amorsito} or \textit{abrazo} (affectionate words), \textit{buenas} or \textit{por favor} (courtesy words), among many other words that apparently do not have a specific referential load, such as \textit{simpático}, \textit{promesa}, \textit{nada}, \textit{palabritas}.\footnote{I use italics myself for these lexical insertions in Spanish to follow academic documentation conventions. However, ideologically, I would be more in favor of not using them.} Largely, these lexical insertions are common nouns in Spanish whose translation into English would not capture their cultural referent and connotations (Otheguy, “Las piedras” 16). In his study of English lexical insertions in the Spanish of New York, Ricardo Otheguy concludes that these lexical inclusions take place when the speaker conceptually perceives in a different way the referents in the English and Spanish words. In most of the cases, these insertions have nothing to do with a lack of knowledge of the Spanish or the English language:

La presencia en el discurso español de las palabras del inglés … responde… a una amplia gama de factores anímicos, conceptuales y comunicativos, nacidos desde muy dentro de la vida del hispanohablante de los EEUU… [S]ería de un rudísimo simplismo pensar que se trata, siempre y en todo lugar, de una situación deficitaria, de olvido o rechazo de la lengua ancestral. Son la vida norteamericana, y los esquemas conceptuales que le dan forma, los que llevan los significantes del inglés a labios del hispano, quien en ellos busca los significados que necesita para expresar su realidad, y que usaría igual por muy bien que conociera alternativas léxicas y fraseológicas españolas … (44; cf. Otheguy “A Reconsideration”)
Although Otheguy’s study examines the English lexical and occasionally phraseological insertions in the spoken Spanish of New York, the hypothesis he proves works with the written Spanish lexical insertions in *usanacaribeñas* in the sense that they use these insertions all the same although they know the English lexical and phraseological alternatives. Their motives respond to ideological, political, conceptual, and aesthetic moves. It is also an act of producing meaning through a repeated use of quotidian language.

In Mayra Santos Febres’ *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*, we find the spontaneous presence of the English language in dialogues: *sorry, child labour, baby, too much, “Wait, wait, wait, hold on a minute”* (177). This adds to the quotidian tone of the novel showing the undeniable presence of this language in the everyday life of Puerto Rico and Dominican Republic, e.g. English-named consumer products of technology and cosmetics, as effects of global capitalism: *Surroundsound, lipstick raspberry wine, gloss,* among others. However, when the narrative voice focalizes the character of Martha Divine, it also crosses languages sporadically: “Luisito was on a mission” (31), *wasting, crowd,* among others. Moreover, chapter XXXV is wholly written in English in a first-person narration by a Canadian tourist, interviewed by an anonymous “you.” The inclusion of this chapter questions once more the direct connection between nation, language, readership, and literary canon. Monolingual Spanish speakers in the Hispanic Caribbean will be troubled when facing this chapter. Although they are most probably used to lexical insertions in English in their everyday language use, this requires a more proficient reading ability in that language, from inside or outside the physical Caribbean.

Even though the English variety is supposed to be Canadian, there is a complete
erasure of the linguistic traits that would make the reader recognize it as such. This character’s monologue sounds totally standard and neutral. This ideological move of “erasure” (Irvine and Gal) renders this person invisible, anonymous, which reinforces his role as the eternal outsider: the Canadian tourist who travels to a Caribbean sex tourism destination and shows a condescending attitude toward locals. This erasure of accents results in the conception of anonymity on which hegemonic (standard) languages rest their authority, according to Kathryn A. Woolard. The Canadian tourist then possesses a voice from nowhere, assumedly universal, non-ethnic, neutral and objective ("La autoridad"). This middle-upper class Canadian assumes that English is a global lingua franca that will be understood by everyone, ignoring that competence in this language is correlated with social class and access to formal education. His standard English contrasts with the local accents reflected in the book, representing a contradiction between the world to which he belongs and the Caribbean he sells and portrays, and on which all the characters in the novel make a living: a stereotyped and exotic Caribbean with the “beaches, the sun, the laid-back atmosphere” (191) where one can have affordable sex with “[p]retty chocolate skin, incredible bodies … [that] go to bed with you, enjoy the whole thing, but as soon as it is over, they revert back to that Latin Lover Macho role they grew up with” (192). The Spanish variety of the local community is viewed, then, as authentic. It is seen as deeply rooted in the specific social and geographical territory; it is private and particular; it is from “somewhere” (Woolard, “La autoridad”). On the other hand, the inclusion of this chapter reveals the ignorance and

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59 Irvine & Gal define “erasure” as the process by which language ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons and sociolinguistic phenomena invisible (38). For example, a social group or language may be imagined as homogeneous, with their linguistic variation disregarded, which happens with the character of the Canadian tourist speaking a kind of neutral, Standard English.
superficiality of the visualizer of the Caribbean as a sex tourist destination. Ironically, this revelation takes place mostly in the readers of his same social circle (those who will fully understand the language). Rivera affirms that “el capítulo queda vedado a los lectores monolingües, fenómeno que resalta la falta de relevancia del capítulo para la trama de la novela. En cierto sentido, el capítulo 35 no … añade nada a la trama … Si bien los lectores bilingües no compartimos con los monolingües el destierro al que el capítulo los envía, sí compartimos la extrañeza” (11). Spanish monolingual readers of this novel continue residing in the (assumed) naiveté of not being aware of how they are seen by first-world tourists. The unfamiliarity with the language of power forces them to remain in an objectified position both on the Caribbean and in North America. However, the continuous crossings between the two languages in the rest of the novel question this classical binary opposition between the foreign colonizer and the colonized local. I believe that this chapter serves to highlight, or bring into sharper relief, the act of language crossing per se in the novel at other (micro) discursive levels. In other words, this chapter, all in English, might be a macro crossing that serves to call the reader’s attention to the language strategies and practices that occur all throughout the novel.

Santos Febres’ language crossing in Sirena Selena vestida de pena also seeks to destabilize her audience, and disarticulate predetermined national discourses in relation to gender and sexuality. This chapter, together with the inevitable inclusion of English lexicon with no italics in the rest of the novel, confirms again the “punch” to transparent languages and fixed national imaginaries, and the impossibility of monolingualism in el Gran Caribe. This is a Gran Caribe with an “impure” English in the margins of the US
and an “impure” Spanish in the margins of the Caribbean (Rivera); a Gran Caribe in which language crossings become the representation of the inevitable back-and-forth among the Caribbean islands and the US mainland, resulting in multiaccentuality, although we sometimes observe the intentional erasure of any accents to create an intentional artificiality as a move of transgression.

Lauret suggests that “Intra-textual multilingualism, as represented by migrant writing sprinkled with wanderwords or, in its more radical manifestations, as fully bi- or multilingual texts, could thus be a defining future feature of global literature” (5). The insertions of the Spanish local into the English lingua franca of globalization processes, and the other way round, are a way to “unvei[l] the heterogeneous reality of the local” (Rengel 142); “bring the socially peripheral into the discursive center” (140); and resist global forces (while reshaping and participating in them) as well as concomitant hegemonic discourses of power, foundational writing codes, and authoritative codes established by canonical male writers. The insertions of the English global into the Spanish local in Santos Febres’ novel respond to the same “production of locality” (Appadurai) since the presence of English in Puerto Rico cannot be denied, given the islands’ connection with the US (at political, ideological, professional and personal levels). The insertion of English breaks with the authority of a purist ideology regarding the Spanish language in Puerto Rico, which tends to shun perceived English-influenced forms, particularly lexical Anglicisms. This is a production of locality in globalized ways

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60 Not adhering to the notions of “linguistic purism” or “linguistic nationalism,” I utilize this same terminology in a tongue-in-cheek manner to advocate for the right to opacity and multiplicity, and as a critique of language-dichotomous critical readings of these narratives and linguistic performances.

61 Patricia L. Rengel does not refer specifically only to the Spanish language and the vernacular in her use of the local but also to the depictions of women, popular music, orality, puns and humor in the essays of Ana Lydia Vega—features that are all also present in the texts I analyze in this chapter. These local manifestations are affected by their crisscrossings with the global and, at the same time, serve to redefine/rework both local and global imaginaries.
created by mobile texts and migrant audiences (Appadurai 9). These novels reproduce locality through the use of popular language(s) (against the idea of a neutral or Standard English and Spanish), popular characters (maids, transvestites) and postmodern literary tropes of popular music (mambo, bolero), art (punk, and abstract painting), and religion (santería). These all function as micro-narratives creating a postmodern rhetoric that decenters the macro-narratives of the islands and of exile, in terms of gender, sexuality, and nation. In that regard, these narratives are open to global flows since, according to Appadurai, “globalization is itself a deeply historical, uneven, and even localizing process” (17) because the way in which locality is produced and reproduced “requires the continuous construction, both practical and discursive, of an ethnoscape (necessarily non-local [i.e., global]) against which local practices and projects are imagined to take place” (184). Through such crisscrossing of local specificities, these narratives enter the framework of postmodernity and postnational ideologies.

Achy Obejas, Cristina García, Julia Álvarez, and Mayra Santos Febres form a community of practice of gran caribeñas that, through their language crossings (both literally in the linguistic form of their texts and in the portrayal of the thematic questions raised in them), question their polemic referent (and the polemic referent of their texts and their protagonists): the hyphen, which perpetuates a binary system between the predetermined national imaginaries that these macro-narratives metonymically represent. Through their linguistic “branding,” they challenge an imposed hyphenated identity that places a Cuban, Puerto Rican or Dominican origin before a US present or that offers a

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62 By “ethnoscape,” Appadurai means “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (33).
misleading and simplistic view of America and the Caribbean; a hyphen that traumatically separates discourses that do not represent these sujetas. These texts present the impossibility of constructing a “pure” memory represented in a “pure” and “original” Spanish or English language. Surely, the language crossings of these grancaribeña authors, which expose the “problematic and deceitful” (Lynch, “Novelist”) nature of national languages, make even more explicit the impracticality of (cultural) translation inherent in all literary works.63

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63 For example, Spanish editor and translator Marisol Palés Castro translated *Dreaming in Cuban* as *Soñar en cubano* into Spanish in 1994. Not only does this version lack the indispensable language crossings present in *Dreaming in Cuban* but also it is translated into the peninsular Spanish variety. Therefore, the Cuban particularity of the English version is hardly perceived in the Spanish translation, in which peninsular slang such as *Oye tío* (184) or *Vale* (185, 190) stirs the readership from their Cuban dream. This translational move perpetuates the purist notions regarding language and language varieties that have prevailed in Latin American national imaginaries. Playwright Dolores Prida translated *¡Yo!* into Spanish in 1998. Prida maintains some lexical insertions in English: those that carry a particular semantic load and cultural reference in English, such as *cool* (66), *homecoming* (79), *preppie* (67), or *milk and money* (81). In 2000, Stephen Lytle translated *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* into English as *Sirena Selena: A Novel* in 2000. In the English version, the crossing into English in the chapter narrated by the Canadian tourist is imperceptible, “remaining unmarked in the text, in a way eliding its potential significance for English-language readers who may have more in common with the gay Canadian than with Selena or the other Spanish-speaking characters” (Rodríguez 209). The ideological move carried out by Santos Febres loses its initial intentionality of disruption, and of distancing this character and his eroticizing perspective from the rest of the book. On the other hand, by making the novel accessible to an Anglo readership, these get to know the “other” Caribbean that is portrayed through the characters of Selena, and Martha Divine and their underground world. This is the translation of the three that best captures the language crossings present in the author’s texts. Rodriguez affirms that “Stephen Lytle’s English translation of the text contains unusually heavy doses of Spanish, demanding a basic knowledge of Spanish that evidences how Spanish has come to function as the foreign national language of the United States, much the way English functions for Puerto Rican readers. In Lytle’s text, words such as *maricón, hombre, locas, mi amor, abuela, puta, mijito, mamita, querida*, and *vieja* infuse the English translation, making literal the transnational multiplicities of the text. The result is that the English translation of the novel registers the same heteroglossic effect as many US Latino novels written in English” (216). By maintaining to a greater extent the intentionality behind the language crossings in Santos Febres’ *Sirena Selena*, Lytle creates a new text that somehow follows the same aesthetics resulting in new transgressions, which are equally significant. In *Sirena Selena: A Novel*, the Anglo readership can see themselves reflected in the only chapter that is unintelligible for the Spanish-speaking readership. In the end, only bilingual readers can fully understand and participate in the multiple, and complex points of views of these texts. For once, their bilingual, bicultural, and multiple identities place them in the position of power, while monolingual national imaginaries are the ones feeling a sense of dislocation. An entire dissertation could be written on topics of (cultural) translation regarding these texts, but this is not the focus or theoretical framework of the present dissertation project.
2.2.3. Beyond Spanish and/or English: Artistic Expressions of Multiplicity

If the language crossings of these authors represent an effort to step away from monolingualism and static national and cultural imaginaries, as well as binary modes of expression (of which code-switching would be an example, as detailed in Chapter 3), and if the genres blending in their novels point to questions of gender representation, the main characters of their texts go even further by finding alternative modes of artistic expression that move beyond the English/Spanish dichotomy, allowing them to express the multiplicity of their female selves. For Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban*, that artistic expression is painting. For Juani in *Memory Mambo*, Obejas utilizes the trope of mambo dance and music. For Yolanda, it is through creative writing that she can finally express her woman self. Something similar occurs with Selena in Mayra Santos Febres’ *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*. For Selena, her voice and singing talent become the means of expression that allows her to create a self vis-à-vis the image of “diva,” a self that emerges without identity constraints of sexuality, class, or nationness. These texts insist on breaking the traditional essentialist connection between a language and a static cultural identity, to focus on the “imposibilidades de la palabra, que no son resultado solamente de los conflictos del bilingüismo o de la extranjería indomesticable del migrante, sino de la insuficiencia misma del lenguaje para captar y capturar los matices de la emotividad, el dolor, y la extrañeza que se produce cuando el sujeto vive simultáneamente más de una lengua y una cultura” (Martínez San Miguel, “Bitextualidad” 29). As these protagonists’ cultural experiences cannot be narrated in a singular, static language, these authors articulate dynamic, fluctuating, and manifold (non-) identities through a transformative use of both languages. Their main characters,
for their part, reject invisibility through other means of expression, since “no appropriate
name is available in the standard language repertoires, whether English or Spanish,” as
stated by Flores and Yúdice referring to the first gestus of Latino cultural practice (60).
At the same time, Pilar, Juani, Yolanda, and Selena, as well as García, Obejas, Álvarez,
and Santos Febres, imagine and create a Gran Caribe in dispersion while redefining the
national imaginary to which they relate, including their cultural specificities through
different manifestations of locality: local accents and languages, popular music and
painting, and minority and marginalized fictional characters.

2.2.3.1 Cristina García’s Dreaming in Cuban: Painting Is its Own Language

Pilar, in Cristina García’s Dreaming in Cuban, searches for a heterogeneous mode
of expression in which this female protagonist can express her worldview in a language
that is neither English nor Spanish: “Painting is its own language… Translations just
confuse it, dilute it, like words going from Spanish to English… Who needs words when
colors and lines conjure up their own language?” (59, 139). As Álvarez-Borland explains,
“[t]o the dilemma of language loss, Pilar finds that visual images communicate meaning
much more effectively than does language” (“Displacements” 46). Therefore, in the trope
of painting, the decolonizing project carried out by the author and the protagonist of the
novel seems to materialize. In painting, Pilar finds the ideal visual representation of
language crossing as the artistic means of expression that can replace the patriarchal
macro-narratives that have traditionally narrated women’s history. In the novel, painting
functions as a subversive micro-narrative that destabilizes the US and Caribbean macro-
rhetoric and creates a type of vernacular globalization (Appadurai).
Dreaming in Cuban is set in New York, an urban ethnic enclave that, together with Chicago or San Juan, helps imagine and create a Caribbea in dispersion that is heterogeneous and that has multiple gradients and (diasporic) imagined subjectivities (in terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and identity). The enclave is no longer defined by the notion of “(not) returning to the homeland” that constantly takes place in certain homogenous discourses in some diasporic communities in Miami, for example. As Martínez-San Miguel states, “esta insistencia en el viaje o el retorno sigue privilegiando el vínculo con un territorio nacional único o la experiencia de los migrantes de primera generación como fenómenos que autentican identificaciones culturales” (Caribe 37). Pilar, like Juani, does not identify with those discourses that first-generation exiles perpetuate, which is one of the reasons for the conflict between Pilar and her mother Lourdes in Dreaming in Cuban. Pilar lacks those cultural referents that her mother repudiates. She must find those lost fragments in Cuba, and her Abuela Celia to finally compose her fragmented self.

Once more, language and (non-) identity are interrelated in this novel: the third and last section of the book is named “The Languages Lost” to refer to Spanish and those aspects of life in Cuba that have been lost to Pilar. Derrida starts his Monolingualism of the Other or, The Prosthesis of Origin with the statement that the Moroccan novelist Abdelkebir Khatibi speaks of his “mother tongue” in French. Khatibi affirms that his mother tongue has “lost” him (35) instead of his having lost his mother tongue due to

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64 Rodríguez-Mourelo explains that: “Fracture among the different members of the family is explicit. Between Celia and Lourdes (mother and daughter), fracture is a result of ideology; between Lourdes and Felicia (sisters), it is a result of geographic separation and distinct circumstances; between Lourdes and Pilar (mother and daughter), it is a result of upbringing in different realities. Thus, the family is separated by time (different generations), by space (geographic location), by political ideology, and by their responses to it.” (162)
what Derrida calls “the hegemony of the homogeneous,” the monolingualism imposed by
the colonial powers. Derrida adds that “certainly, he [Khatibi] evokes a language of
origin which has perhaps ‘lost’ him, but which he himself has not lost … He has a mother
tongue plus another language” (36). In this way, initially Pilar thinks she needs to recover
that language that has “lost her,” Spanish, to achieve a personal and social understanding
of the historical silences she has inherited. But, once she has all the pieces of her portrait
puzzle, she realizes that the only language she identifies with is a means of expression
and representation that is fluid and free of the burden that English and Spanish languages
carry for her: painting. As explained by Álvarez Borland, in Pilar, “García dramatizes the
anxiety of the search for voice and identity. The expression of fracture together with the
demand for freedom become explicit in the need to be freed from maternal ties, political
stereotypes, geographic locations, and traditional language. In this sense, painting will be
the only conduct for expression and liberation” (Cuban-American 137).

In the opening chapter of Dreaming in Cuban, a third person narrator describes a
lonely Celia lamenting the solitude the Revolution has brought her by separating her from
her family. Nevertheless, she feels indebted to the revolutionary cause and offers her
services to the Líder from her house by the sea as the primary lookout for Santa Teresa
del Mar. She regrets that her granddaughter Pilar “writes to her from Brooklyn in a
Spanish that is no longer hers” (7).65 As a remedy for her granddaughter’s language
“loss,” Abuela Celia encourages Pilar to go to painting classes (29). Abuela Celia is
Pilar’s female connection to the island, to the silences in her family history. In the novel,

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65 The omniscient narrator adds that Pilar “speaks the hard-edged lexicon of bygone tourists itchy to throw
dice on green felt or asphalt” (7).
she plays the role of filling the voids that the first-generation exiled Lourdes has left in Pilar.

Pilar’s art is not traditional or realist. Her paintings do not consist of well-defined, static portrayals, but are filled with “knots and whorls of red that resemble nothing” (7), as described by a nonjudgmental Abuela Celia. Lourdes, on the other hand, thinks that Pilar’s abstract paintings, “violent-looking with clotted swirls of red” (29), are morbid. Abstract painting becomes Pilar’s language. She explains it in the following way: “Abstract painting is more up my alley. I feel more comfortable with it, more directly connected to my emotions” (233). This means of expression in Pilar escapes binary thinking and imposed static and constraining identity and national imaginaries. Pilar’s notion of aesthetics resembles Carroll’s concept of “paraesthetics” in contrast to classical aesthetics. As Felski explains, “while classical aesthetics speaks of the harmony, totality, and integrity of the art work, paraesthetics prefers the language of contradiction and undecidability. … it crystallizes and comments self-consciously on a general cultural condition: the end of metaphysics, the lack of foundations, and the slippery and indeterminate nature of language and communication” (181). The knots and whorls Pilar paints deconstruct an ontology based on linearity and binary oppositions in favor of a postmodern conceptualization of the world as a fluid matrix of relations: a crisscrossed space from where multiple significations (red knots and swirls) emerge and interrelate. Rather than expressing a universal truth of a female identity, Pilar’s art and aesthetics of multiplicity question and unsettle a universal assumption of a female identity, subverting taken-for-granted truths of gender.

66 The usanacaribeña novels I analyze in this chapter show a first generation that is traumatized due to their exilic condition and its implications. The trauma of exile does not allow them to mourn their loss. This lack of mourning leaves silences and voids in the next generation.
The violence in her paintings—the red color standing for blood—represents the violence inflicted on the protagonists I analyze due to their language loss, their sense of national and gender displacement, and the structured traumas and predetermined ideologies imposed on them by the previous generation. Indeed, Lourdes is the one who silences Pilar, who clips her wings and means of expression, contrary to Abuela Celia, who encourages her to take painting lessons. For instance, Lourdes refuses to let Pilar accept the scholarship she wins to art school in Manhattan: “She said that artists are a bad element, a profligate bunch who shoot heroin” (29). Also, the punishment she gives her daughter is “no painting for a month” (20). As it will happen with Juani’s mother in Memory Mambo, Lourdes apparently perpetuates a patriarchal worldview. Whereas Juani’s mother conforms to a patriarchal world around her, Lourdes is the one adopting a traditional hegemonic masculinity herself. His domineering wife even silences Rufino, Lourdes’ husband and Pilar’s father. Rufino is weaker and cannot give his wife what she needs (21); only Lourdes’ father could do it. Rufino never adapts to their new place in New York:

It became clear to Lourdes shortly after she and Rufino moved to New York that he would never adapt. Something came unhinged in his brain that would make him incapable of working in a conventional way. There was a part of him that could never leave the finca or the comfort of its cycles, and this diminished him for any other life. He could not be transplanted. So Lourdes got a job. Cuban women of a certain age and a certain class consider working outside the home to be beneath them. But Lourdes never believed that. (129-30)

On the other hand, Lourdes dismisses the privileges of having married into the Puente family, refusing to spend her days engraving silverware, watching novelas on television, and perfuming her wrists either in Havana or in Hialeah or Little Havana, Miami.

“Lourdes knew she could never be this kind of woman,” explains the narrative voice
She rejects the type of community of women in exile that perpetuate the traditional feminine models of the country of origin. In the US, Lourdes and Rufino exchange traditional patriarchal gender roles, while maintaining a binary opposition. Lourdes is a castrating figure for Rufino. She is the one “wearing the pants” at home – literally and metaphorically. She is the breadwinner while Rufino stays at home in his workshop. She reinvents herself at the margins of the established norms regarding gender and social class. Lourdes owns a bakery and has a second job as an auxiliary policewoman. Rufino used to help Lourdes in the bakery “but she lost patience with him. As handy as he is for some things, he couldn’t get the hang of the pastry business, at least not the way my mother runs it” (31), explains Pilar. Lourdes enjoys wearing her thick-soled black shoes as a policewoman: “These shoes are power. If women wore shoes like these, she thinks, they wouldn’t worry so much about more abstract equalities” (127). Back in Cuba, the Revolution exerted gender violence on Lourdes. She was brutally raped by a soldier, and she had a miscarriage after falling off her horse. Both traumatic events happened while Lourdes was trying to protect their property against the soldiers of the Revolutionary government. To recover from these traumas inflicted on her due to her gender condition, Lourdes would transgress traditional gender roles and perform the masculine role in a patriarchy. Lourdes’ type of transvestism, her disruption of conventional gender roles, offers Pilar a different gender model from those usually ascribed to women.

However, it is still not the model Pilar desires for herself. As we will see in Juani’s mother as well, Lourdes holds racial prejudices against the Irish, Italians, Jews, Blacks, and Puerto Ricans—problematicizing the notion of a possible pan-Caribbean or pan-Latino solidarity—while disdaining her daughters’ aspirations for equality. This is
only one of the reasons why Lourdes and Pilar have problems communicating. On the other hand, Rufino and Pilar get along well and are able to communicate. Mourning the loss of her unborn son, Lourdes dreams she “would have talked to her son the way Rufino talks to Pilar, for companionship” (129). It is thanks to her father, who persuades her mother “in his unobtrusive way” (29), that Pilar can finally go to art school in Manhattan. He even constructs a studio in the house where she can paint and express herself:

For some reason I think about Jacoba Van Heemskerck, a Dutch expressionist painter I’ve become interested in lately. Her paintings feel organic to me, like breathing abstractions of color. She refused to title her paintings (much less do patriotic murals for her mother’s bakery) and numbered her works instead. I mean, who needs words when colors and lines conjure up their own language? That’s what I want to do with my paintings, find a unique language, obliterate the clichés. (139)

Pilar transforms this modern view of art and agrees to paint a mural commissioned by Lourdes for the opening of her second bakery, Yankee Doodle Bakery. From a postmodern perspective, she disarticulates traditional and nationalistic patriotic narratives through this work of art. Her art allows Pilar to deconstruct the two national imaginaries and colonizing discourses that have grown up on and with her: the conservative American national imaginary of some of the first-generation Cuban-American exiles, represented in Lourdes, as well as the US national imaginary. While Lourdes experienced gender violence in Cuba, Pilar is molested in New York’s Central Park. Her critique of the US hypocritical claim of freedom is clearly observed in this mural of the Statue of Liberty. She dismisses her mother’s conservative interpretation of US politics and culture and she can express this rejection through her art. Pilar’s version of the Statue of Liberty is, according to Luis, “a political commentary of how immigrants are treated in the
United States … [and there is] an allusion to the influence of the women’s movement upon the artist” (218). As expected, Lourdes and the American guests at the opening feel offended by what they contemplate once the painting is unveiled.

The above quoted Jacoba Van Heemskerck was a pupil of her father, also a painter. Pilar also shares a passion for creativity with Rufino. His workshop and her studio are next to each other. He has brilliant ideas of devices he plans to invent: “a voice-command typewriter” for secretaries (30), projects on artificial intelligence (131), or any other project that “conduct[s] electricity, engage[s] motion with toothed wheels, [and] react[s] in concert with universal laws of physics” (65). However, both artists, Pilar and Rufino, are undermined by the domineering figure of Lourdes, who rings a bell when she wants them to stop doing what they are doing in their workshop and/or studio. Rufino, the traditional head of the family in Cuba, is unable to reinvent himself after migration to the US. While he continues trying to invent and metaphorically create foundational narratives in his little workshop, as expected of his role in a patriarchal system, none of his projects are ever completed. It is Lourdes the one who assumes the patriarchal role, since “[u]nlike her husband, she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention” (73). While her husband is still anchored in his Cuban imaginary, Lourdes “wants no part of Cuba, … which Lourdes claims never possessed her” (73). Cuba has been too painful for her and, although she used to love her homeland, she prefers to forget as an act of survival. Rufino, as his last name indicates (Puente), has remained on the bridge between Cuba and the US, a state of being which Lourdes repudiates, choosing for the moment the US side: “She [Lourdes] decides she has no

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67 For an accurate and detailed description and interpretation of Pilar’s mural of the Statue of Liberty, see Luis 218.
patience for dreamers, for people who live between black and white” (129), expounds the
narrative voice. As Pilar also affirms, Lourdes’ “views are strictly black-and-white” (26).
We thus observe how Lourdes represents the authoritarian, polarized discourses—in
terms of socio-cultural (racial) values—of many first-generation Cuban exiles in the US,
especially in Miami, as stated by the author, although Lourdes settles in New York,
where she can assimilate even more profoundly to the American ways. That said,
Lourdes seems to choose staying on the American side of the hyphen of Cuban-
American. She is here, not there; speaks an accented English, not Spanish; feels
American, not Cuban; and lives a capitalist life—in New York, not Miami—not a
communist one. Abuela Celia is the one staying on the Cuban side. As McAuliffe
affirms, Celia is the “authoritative voice of Cuban culture” (4). Rufino also follows a
hyphenated conceptualization of the world, but he remains on the hyphen, in the “in-
between” between Cuban and American, here and there, and Spanish and English.

It is Pilar who finally tries to escape this bipolar epistemology, as Cristina García
herself through her language use (and the rest of protagonists and authors analyzed in this
chapter): “Personally, I’m more interested in the … shades of gray between these two
extremes. … There are many ways to be Cuban and I resist the notion that to be Cuban is
to hold particular political views or act in certain circumscribed ways” (García in Shibuya
Brown 250). While Lourdes “abhors ambiguity” (65), ambiguity is Pilar’s language,
which she expresses through her paintings. She is both Cuban and American, Spanish and
English, here and there, and a complex, multiple self. Her return back to the “source”

68 While I agree with McAuliffe that Celia represents one of the political views on the Cuban Revolution,
different from the future generations, Lourdes, and Pilar, I think that the scholar’s affirmation “Celia is the
embodiment of Cuba itself” (4) is too reductionist and does not reflect García’s imagined ontology.
Characters such as Ivanito or Felicia, among others in the novel, together with those who did not have a
place in Dreaming in Cuban, show a multiple Cuba in terms of politics, ideology, gender, and sexuality.
makes her recover the language that had lost her. She starts dreaming in Spanish (235) but, at the same time, she realizes that she belongs to New York, to the US: “I know now it’s where I belong—not instead of here, but more than here” (236). For Lourdes, on the contrary, her trip back to Cuba reconciles her with her Cubanness. She even dances the conga in a wish to “show her daughter the artistry of true dancing” (224). Pilar, however, “moved jerkily, off the beat, sloppy and distracted. She dances like an American” (224). In that sense, she does not belong to Cuban national identity either. Although she initially idealizes Cuba and Abuela Celia, once she visits the country, Pilar also realizes the contradictions inherent in the Cuban government. Her visit coincides with the Mariel exodus in 1980. Her cousin Ivanito wants to leave the country and Pilar does not tell Abuela that she has seen him in the Peruvian Embassy ready to embark.

It is through her painting that, one more time, she comes to terms with her feelings. In the last chapter, Abuela Celia asks Pilar to paint her “in a flared red skirt like the flamenco dancers wear” (232) with a few carnations. When Pilar is about to start the portrait, Abuela Celia asks her if she is going to stay with her this time. While Pilar paints, Abuela Celia tells her about how before the Revolution, “Cuba was a pathetic place, a parody of a country … Freedom, Abuela tells [her], is nothing more than the right to a decent life” (233). However, when Pilar asks her if she can paint anything she wants in Cuba, and Abuela Celia says yes as long as she does not attack the state, Pilar doubts of this discourse of freedom. To the Líder’s famous lines Abuela Celia quotes: “Within the revolution, everything; against the revolution, nothing,” Pilar wonders “what El Líder would think of [her] paintings. Art, [she]’d tell him, is the ultimate revolution” (235). This de-idealization of Cuban-imposed discourse on Pilar coincides with how
uncomfortable she feels with classical painting while she paints her Abuela’s portrait, but she paints her just the way the old woman wants all the same, respecting her ways, and contrary to the clash she feels with Lourdes.

The last part of the novel evidences the existing generation gap in terms of national identity and imaginary between Lourdes, Pilar, and Abuela Celia, a family separated by the 1959 Revolution and different political views. Cristina García gives equal weight to all of these points of view, without privileging one over the other. While she feels more identified with Pilar, she respects and even understands the motives behind Celia’s and Lourdes’ decisions. García clearly expresses this idea:

I grew up in a very black-and-white situation: My parents were virulently anti-Communist, and yet my relatives in Cuba were tremendous supporters of Communism, including members of my family who belong to the Communist Party. The trip in 1984 and the book, to some extent, were an act of reconciliation for the choices everybody made. (Luis 216)

If grancaribeña writers disarticulate these black-and-white discourses around them through their creative writings, Pilar's artistic means of expression is her means of articulating the shades of gray in her woman self, and also her means of making a feminist claim, as the authors of these novels do through their creative writing. Pilar expresses her anxieties on this matter in the following manner:

I think about all the women artists throughout history who managed to paint despite the odds against them. People still ask where all the important women painters are instead of looking at what they did paint and trying to understand their circumstances. Even supposedly knowledgeable and sensitive people react to good art by a woman as if it were an anomaly, a product of a freak nature or a direct result of her association with a male painter or mentor. Nobody’s even heard of feminism in art school. The male teachers and students still call the shots and get the serious attention and the fellowships that further their careers. As for the women, we’re supposed to make extra money modeling nude. What kind of bullshit revolution is that? (139-40)
Accordingly, every time Pilar is asked to paint a classical portrait by each of the discourses representing the national and gender imaginaries that traditionally have surrounded her (Cuban –Abuela Celia-portrait, and American –Lourdes-the Statue of Liberty), she expresses discomfort. She would rather do abstract painting (which symbolizes an aesthetics of multiplicity), which is a truly free means of expression for her multiple, ambiguous and fluid woman self. At the end of the novel, Pilar learns to sever the ties that had bound her to Abuela Celia. She has left the binary reasoning between an alienating “here” and an idealized “homeland.” She has recovered the language that had lost her, to become a complete, multiple self.

When in the final passage, Celia submerges into the sea in what most have interpreted as a suicide; she recites the same stanzas of Lorca’s “Paisaje,” but this time they are translated into English. The only word written in Spanish in this passage is “duende” and this time it is not italicized. Celia realizes “she has never been farther than a hundred yards off the coast of Cuba” and starts considering “her dream of sailing to Spain, to Granada, of striding through the night with nothing but a tambourine and too many carnations” (243). In flamenco dance, and as defined by Lorca in his famous lecture “La teoría y juego del duende” (1933), the “duende” is this art’s irrational soul, and dark side of a work of art that moves beyond conventional styles. I interpret this last passage as a realization by Abuela Celia –the character that is most stuck in her national imaginary and her physical space—regarding the futility of binary ideologies in terms of nation, language, and space. She is now even ready to cross into the English language because the burden of Spanish/English is deceitful and has only separated her from her
family. Like Pilar, she only finds in art, in the duende in Lorca’s poetry, the means of expression, and she succumbs to it.

2.2.3.2. One Step Back, and Two Steps Forward to the Sound of Achy Obejas’ Mambo

...she insisted that language in and of itself is irrelevant, that it’s the message that’s being drummed in that matters, whether it’s in Hebrew or Swahili or pig Latin. (Obejas 116)

“Hey, we’re into communicating, okay?” she said with a chuckle. “It’s sort of like singing ‘Guantanamera’—everybody gets a chance to make up their own verse.”

“Memory mambo,” I said, one hand in the air, the other on my waist as if I were dancing, “one step forward, two steps back—unnngh!” (Obejas 194)

The title novel by Achy Obejas, Memory Mambo, informs the reader about the two major themes of the book: the memory that the first generation is trying to impose on the usanas like Juani and the mambo as a trope of the crisscrossed languages grancaribeñas speak. Through the local micro-narrative of the mambo dance and music, which functions as the symbol of a community that is both created as a “product of black American popular forms, as well as of US cultural imperialism” (García, D. 506), Obejas presents a female protagonist, so-called “contra toda lógica semántica” second-generation immigrant (Delgado 14) who, thinking of herself as “the product and victim of narrational and national dissimulations” (Allatson 1), follows an imaginary process towards a postnational subjectivity. Throughout this process, she realizes that she must cross the predetermined languages to speak against the macro-narratives of identity, culture, heritage, gender, and sexuality that have shaped her subjectivity up to the moment. More precisely, Juani carries out a type of culturalism—to borrow Appadurai’s
term—that implies the mobilization and displacement of patriarchal and homophobic discourses in the US and in her heritage culture. In *Memory Mambo*, Juani Casas is mambo and it is through this dance and rhythm that the protagonist decolonizes her Cuban memory and desarticulates the dominant macro-narratives in her US present. The mambo, since it defies any attempt at being defined, could be understood as a *queer* concept, as Juani herself, who symbolizes “a queer engagement with both a dominant Cuban exile imaginary and the US national imaginary” (Allatson 1).

I do not intend to carry out in this section a queer interpretation of the first novel by Achy Obejas as Allatson does (see Allatson), nor do I seek to focus on the construction and deconstruction of the individual and collective memory in *Memory Mambo* (see Flores). Rather, I aim to read the text through a feminist lens different from Zubiaurre’s. While Zubiaurre bases her analysis on an individual and individualist feminism that seeks to create a solid Modern “I,” the feminist perspective I propose is relational and connects to the themes and subjects that conform the community of women the main character chooses to create. I read *Memory Mambo* as the proposal of an imaginary through the creation of a postnational community of women. This interpretation offers a new perspective that expands and at the same time refutes the literary criticism mentioned above, as these articles address the macro-narrative of a national inscription in the novel. On the other hand, critical feminist theory points to new strategies and conceptualizations of communities that differ from the premises of individualization characteristic of the macro-narratives of modernity.

*Memory Mambo*’s female protagonist, Juani Casas, seeks to debunk the foundational myth that has prevailed in her Cuban family: the story of the duct tape that
Juani’s parents create and repeat over and over again throughout her life. Alberto José Casas y Molina, Juani’s father, invented duct tape when living in Cuba. Unfortunately, the CIA, for whom he would work after the Cuban revolution, stole from him the formula of the product. Juani introduces the story with the following words:

MY FATHER BELIEVES HE INVENTED DUCT TAPE. He sees it as the great tragedy of his life because, if the Americans hadn’t stolen it out from under him, he’d have been rich, and we’d have been much happier. If things had gone the way he believes they should have, we’d never be running the Wash-N-Dry Laundry/Lavandería Wash-N-Dry in Chicago. The way my father tells it, he invented a formula for a strong, durable black cloth tape, ideal for packing, and immune to rain and snow (although this, of course, was theoretical because, never having been out of Cuba in his life at the time of this great discovery, he didn’t really know). He called his breakthrough cinta magnética, even though it had nothing whatsoever to do with magnetics, electricity or power of any kind.

I don’t know how much of this is true. I have a vague memory of shirtless men in the patio of our home in Havana brushing whole strips of black cloth with some horrible, stinky glue. (24)

Although knowing this is a fake story, a patriarchal myth perpetuated by Juani’s mother, Juani will not insist on discovering the truth until she visits her sister Nena in Miami. Flores points out the fact that it is precisely in Miami, the foundational city of the “Cuban-American” imaginary, where Juani will discover the truth behind the family myth (769): “…everybody in our family’s a liar,” says Juani to Nena. “Everybody’s dancing around the truth” (194), concludes Juani with the dance metaphor that pervades the novel. Having chosen Chicago instead of Miami as the narrative geopolitical setting

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69 Yolanda Flores resorts to the concept of “counter-memory” to describe the narrative strategy of the novel, its rhetorical project (764), and the way in which Juani subverts the traditional definitions of memory. Historian George Lipsitz, quoted by Flores, defines this notion as “a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal… It demands revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past. Counter-memory embodies aspects of myth and aspects of history, but it retains an enduring suspicion of both of them” (162). Flores adds that in Memory Mambo “la memoria no es únicamente personal sino comunitaria … Como en el baile del mambo, se da un paso hacia adelante, se avanza en la búsqueda de la ‘verdad’, sólo para retroceder, para dar dos pasos hacia atrás en la indagación de los recuerdos” (765). Juani seeks to establish a conversation with her sisters and female cousins, with whom she imagines a translocal community in which they can disarticulate the memory monologues invented by their progenitors.
of her novel may respond to Obejas’ aim at questioning prevailing myths, like the one that considers the Cuban exiles in Miami to be the founders and only bearers of the “Cuban-American” national discourse.\textsuperscript{70} Obejas introduces the journey of decolonization that Juani embarks on in the following way:

I’m not that old, just twenty-four, and I often wonder just how distinct my memories are. Sometimes I’m convinced they’re someone else’s recollections I’ve absorbed… and I no longer know if I really lived through an experience or just heard about it so many times, or so convincingly, that I believed it for myself –became the lens through which it was captured, retold and shaped… Sometimes I’m as sure that I couldn’t have heard the stories about the memories anymore than lived through them—that both of the experiences are false for me—and yet the memory itself will be so fresh, so fantastic and detailed, that I’ll think maybe my family and I are just too close to each other. (9)

In Miami, Juani meets Bernie, Nena’s Afro-Puerto Rican boyfriend of Jewish background and, thanks to him, enters the virtual world for the first time. It is through Internet that Juani is able to unmask the fraud of the duct tape.\textsuperscript{71} In other words, Juani reacts against the oral family macro-narrative of her parents through her incursion into digital media. In line with Appadurai, a rupture with an imposed past takes place through a migratory process and through the irruption of the digital media as the driving forces of a translocal and postnational community of \textit{grancaribeñas}. Furthermore, the digital media allows Juani to create a virtual community with a racialized “other.” This move represents another crossing through the family patriarchal and racial hegemonic language. In relation to this racial conflict in her novel, Achy Obejas explains, “older,

\textsuperscript{70} We observed that in \textit{Dreaming in Cuban}, Cristina García also chooses a city other than Miami, New York, as the novel’s setting, avoiding national discourses that are predetermined by the Cuban diaspora there.

\textsuperscript{71} Juani asks Bernie to help her find on the web all the information they can about duct tape. They also search for her father’s name, which never appears as the inventor. Juani eventually realizes that her father’s story is fake and that her mother has been conspiring with him all these years. Juani reacts to this discovery stating that: “this is definitive proof Papi didn’t invent duct tape, but I don’t need it. I’ve always known Papi was a fraud, I’ve always known the whole duct tape story’s a fantasy… Why do I want so hard to believe?” (204, 205).
earlier arrivals – like their peers in the US – tend to have a limited vocabulary with which
to discuss race and are quite uncomfortable with the topic. This is further complicated by
the fact that this group is primarily white and ‘becomes’ non-white upon arrival in the US
when it is viewed as ‘Latino’” (Preziuso 1). Juani’s mother maintains these racialized
discourses:

When we were little, my mother was always after us: “Caminen siempre por la
sombra”—always walk in the shade. She was terrified that too much sun would
somehow reveal our real heritage, whether Indian or black… her immediate goal
became to get us out of Cuba, out of Latin America, out of any country where we
might couple with anybody even a shade darker than us…. (34-5)

Juani challenges racist discourses in her family with the community she imagines with
Bernie, as her sister does dating him, and at the same time they offer resistance to the
process of racial and cultural otherness that they suffer in the US, where they are still
considered to be outsiders. Certainly, neither José Martí’s utopian vision of racial
blending nor his pan-Americanism is presented as unproblematic in the novel.72 The
racial tensions in Juani’s family as well as her conflictive affair with Puerto Rican Gina
show once again that the notion of pan-Caribbeanism “run[s] the risk of homogenizing
the region into a collection of undifferentiated, repeating islands” (Aching 4). This is why
it is important to conceptualize the Caribbean as a heterogeneous Gran Caribe that is
composed of specific localities, including those in the US.

While Juani –through her discovery of digital media—unmasks the myth of
Cubanness sustained in exile through oral stories, she resists at the same time the global
imperialism that emerges with global media, and she does so through what is local in the

72 In the glossary at the end of the book, Achy Obejas expresses the difficulty she finds in defining José
Martí: “Today, he is praised and claimed by both the Cuban revolutionaries and by Cubans in exile” (244).
The same political figure reflects the ideological, political and racial tensions that exist in inter-Cuban
relations. This shows that the notion of “cubanidad” or “lo cubano” does not often recognize the diversity
and multiple (hi)stories inherent in these social designations.
mambo, and through the creation of a community of action and practice; a community of *sujetas* sharing common interests of freedom. They are not grouped together under any normative identity constructs. In fact, the only norm of this community is the heterogeneity of (non-) identities. The musical genre of mambo, like Juani, threatens all attempts at totality, all imaginaries of a racially, culturally, and sexually homogeneous world. Mambo confirms the US colonization and neutralizing attempt while it evidences the racial, gender and sexual tensions that characterize the local community.

Musical allusions abound throughout the novel. For instance, Juani listens to popular songs that pertain to the Cuban folklore like “María Cristina” (150) or “Mamá Inéz” (215) when, in moments of crisis, she wants to escape her reality in her US present. She takes refuge in this local music genre because these songs are the only non-mediated memory that she keeps from her childhood in Cuba. Also, in *Memory Mambo*, everybody plays the same game with memory as they play with “Guantanamera,” which Allatson describes as “the unofficial national anthem of island and exiled Cubans [which] circulates as a world-renowned cultural product but one subject to constant revision, with no correct, original, or authoritative lyric” (1). In this song, everyone can add his or her own verse. Juani seeks to undo this burden of a “correct, original, or authoritative lyric,” and she expresses her desire to search for her own vision of a Cuban past, a vision that she creates with the help of the community of women she is at the same time imagining. Juani forms a pact with some of her cousins in exile, as she describes the cousins living in Chicago, and she starts a dialogue with Titi, a lesbian cousin in Cuba. This imagined community symbolizes the creation of a *Gran Caribe* that is not limited by geographical
frontiers but that is constituted by women sharing affinities and a similar discourse on race, gender and sexuality issues, among others.

Other *grancaribeña* writers that I include in the community of practice have also emphasized the importance of the trope of music in their literary creations. Santos Febres affirms that she likes to develop a musical language that reproduces “el ‘tono,’ la ‘cadencia’ conceptual y sonora que se planta frente a lo caribeño como experiencia profunda …, compleja e integrada” (Morgado 2-3), beyond an exotic or touristic vision of the Caribbean. Similarly, Cristina García uses a variety of Cuban music styles to organize her anthology of Cuban writers *¡Cubanísimo!*: According to García, “Writers distinguish themselves by the quality and music of their sentences. … One element ties the longing for identity together, and that is music” (xiii). García describes the mambo as the most rapid, audacious, and expressive of the Cuban music styles. Contrary to Luis’ claim that the “coming together of Latino Caribbean and Anglo-American people is a metaphorical dance between two cultures” (189), Obejas’ and Juani’s mambo dance present culture and identity as fluid notions that take multiple and complex forms as the mambo itself. There is not one culture dancing with another since the mambo is not even a partner dance.

The local and popular musical trope of the mambo has been previously used as a narrative technique by Cuban-American male writers such as Oscar Hijuelos (*The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*) or Gustavo Pérez Firmat (*Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*) to provide a hyphenated conceptualization that differs from the use of the mambo by Achy Obejas. Pérez Firmat affirms that the mambo is “a bicultural

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73 Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz had previously defined the mambo as “un estofado de sonoridades” (1951, 80).
creation with divided roots” (72), “a hybrid, hyphenated musical form … a music of acceptance, not resistance” (11) that “serves as a bridge between sections” (12). Pérez Firmat bestows upon the mambo the role of being one of the great icons of a hyphenated Cuban-American culture (72), together with the character of “Ricky” Ricardo (a prototype of the “exotic macho latino”). On the contrary, Obejas resorts to the local micro-narrative of the mambo, “como una polifonía de ritmo espontánea … y como una anarquía de tiempo” (Flores 769) that escapes cataloging and cultural translation. Mambo also destabilizes the tensions in the novel between the local and the global, the masculine and the feminine, the heterosexual and the homosexual, and the Cuban, the Americans, and the Cuban-Americans by disrupting this binary and divisive mode of thinking that terms such as Cuban-American, and metaphors such as the hyphen and the bridge, perpetuate.

In Memory Mambo, the mambo is the language crossing that gives way to a translocal Gran Caribe, where people dance alone in a group. Like Juani, who imagines a community of women who dance individually in a group, the mambo is a heterogeneous and indefinable dance that allows the rupture of heteronormative and patriarchal partner dances. In his socio-historical revision of the mambo, David García highlights how this musical genre was born in Cuba and how it then crossed borders and arrived in the US in the fifties. By then, dance professors and critics aspired to discipline and standardize a dance that was described with the use of words such as “salvaje, jungla, sudoroso y primitivo” (505). From that moment, a spatial and temporal process of racial otherness starts against this musical genre, on which the conservative sectors in both the US and Latin America articulate “their desires and anxieties concerning race, sexuality, and
national identity” (506). These are the same racial, sexual, and identity tensions Juani needs to confront. Like mambo, Juani finds herself trapped within two national imaginaries that constrict her identity. Despite these attempts of standardization and neutralization both in the US and Latin America, mambo steps are originally free and individual although danced in a group. Juani aspires to do the same, dancing alone in a group, as a reaction against a heteronormative dance (dance partners are usually a man and a woman) and patriarchal (the man takes the lead and guides the woman). In neither of the national imaginaries that surround Juani, is it imaginable that two women can be dance partners. This is the reason why Juani creates a postnational imaginary in which this can happen. In the meantime, by dancing the mambo alone, Juani resemanticizes the heteronormative and patriarchal macro-narrative of the partner dances which would be characterized by Juani’s cousin Caridad and her husband Jimmy: “Caridad accedes to the operations of a machista bodily economy by which conventional gender demarcations and roles are maintained and perpetuated. Caridad’s public movements are policed by Jimmy and her dutiful subservience is ensured by violence” (Allatson 7). Ironically, it is Caridad who teaches her cousins how to dance the mambo, while adopting the man’s lead role for the purpose (18). However, throughout the novel, Caridad stops dancing and becomes immobile. She is devoured and consumed by her husband’s machismo and gender violence while she keeps “standing by her man” (236), even in the most aberrant episodes of physical and sexual violence. Although Caridad’s representation of femininity is an exception in the novel, far from the rest of feminist or proto-feminist female characters that Obejas introduces, this character creates the necessary tension for
the utopian objective of the novel. The imagined pact among women in the text is created in relation to and in tension with experiences such as that of Caridad.

The trope of mambo materializes both decolonizing projects: those Juani and Obejas undertake. The mambo offers them a free artistic means of expression, far from English or Spanish. With the metaphor of the mambo, Obejas configures a postnational community of women inside and outside the text; a community that debunks those projects of nation in the traditional novel that have given women a secondary role, a role “siempre auxiliar y subalterno … en la construcción de naciones” (Zubiaurre 5).74 Juani defines the basis of her pacts of ideological affinity with her cousins in exile. These pacts are not based on traditional linguistic precepts or liberal feminist positions:

I know a lot of people think cousins in exile are really random relationships, links forged out of loneliness and desperation. And that’s kind of true, I admit, but there’s more: We have an affinity, a way of speaking that’s neither Cuban nor American, neither genetic or processed. There’s a look, a wink, the way we touch each other. We communicate, I suspect, like deaf people – not so much compensating for the lost sense, but creating a new syntax from the pieces of our displaced lives. (13)

Amorós, building upon Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg manifesto” (1985), clearly supports this quotation since,

... cualquier componente puede ser conectado con cualquier otro siempre que puedan ser construidos la pauta y el código correctos para el procesamiento de señales en un lenguaje común. De aquí se derivaría la propuesta de una coalición basada en la afinidad, en lugar de tomar la identidad como base. Nos situamos así más allá de las ‘políticas de la identidad’ de los 80. Justamente, para construir las identidades necesitamos ‘nuevas estrategias reflexivas’ [para] dar respuesta a la necesidad urgente de unidad política para afrontar con eficacia las dominaciones

74 Obejas creates a main character that represents a relational feminism with her pact with the women of her extended family. This postmodern relational feminism seeks to create a community of practice similar to what happened to relational feminism in 19th century France and England, when working-class women grouped together in search of solutions to specific problems that emerged due to the social changes that were occurring in the different states of Industrialization. Juani’s relational feminism, which starts as a result of her social environment, does not share with these women their demands of state intervention. Hers holds a post-modern approach that seeks to create translocal communities of practice separated from the practices of a nation-state.
As regards Titi, her cousin living on the island, Juani does not know her personally, “only through stories … re-told by relatives” (75). At the end of the novel, readers understand that she will soon meet her when Juani visits the island. But all the same Juani feels related to her in terms of sexuality, gender, and ideology. This alliance offers a spatial alternative to national pacts and visibility to these socially-hidden group of women. Furthermore, it deconstructs the patriarchal system in which these women live. In their community, they are able to create types of associations in which they are not the objects of the pact but sujetas pacting. They even establish their own bases of community. They create what their societies do not offer them. They have created a community with agency to defend their particular micro-narratives.

As happens with mambo, Juani resists to turn into an emblem of “lo cubano” or into an object produced by and for the US. She needs to confront the feelings of anxiety that sujetas like her provoke in an imagined-homogeneous first generation of exiled Cubans, as well as in a monolithic US national imaginary. Mambo, like Juani, has evaded a “pure and homogeneous” inscription. The soul of this musical genre resides in this non-inscription into identity narratives, in this freedom of expression, in this fusion of fragments. The same occurs to Juani, who has had to fragment her identity, and decolonize the national and gender homogeneous and heteronormative imaginaries that

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75 Juani describes her connection with Titi: “I know everything just by gazing at her; I know it in my heart, which reads and decodes her every gesture and look. More importantly, I also know that the damage in Titi’s soul—and it’s there, clear as the blue skies in every one of those photographs—… is connected to how she loves, or more precisely, how she’s not allowed to love. Her face … is a map of a sealed island, surrounded not by water but by an invisible, electrified barbed wire” (75).
insisted on defining her. Now, among the pieces of a fragmented self, of invented and imposed stories, and in an imagined and created community of women, she can finally affirm “It’s quiet now” (237), concludes Juani, and Obejas ends the novel.

The most critical part of the plot occurs when Jimmy sexually abuses Rosa, Pauli’s little daughter. This is an event that provokes a crisis in Juani, even a graver crisis than the one provoked by her physical and verbal fight with Gina. After this dreadful event Juani affirms and feels that “It’s quiet now” (237). Even though Jimmy falsely accused Juani of sexually abusing Rosa in the presence of her community of women, the pact resists. The text suggests the inclusion of lesbian cousin Titi, living in Cuba, in the community, which transforms the space of this community into a Gran Caribe. This ending indicates that the decolonization process Juani began finally occurs. Through the creation of a community of sujetas with her sisters and cousins in exile and on the island, Juani rids herself of polemic referents: the hyphen, cultural translation, heteronormative narratives, and national imaginaries as macro-narratives. These are referents that do not correspond to her anymore, as her past role as a mediator between the national imaginary of her parents and that of US society:

He [her father] has always relied on me… to engage the world outside the family. It all started with me helping the adults with language stuff – my English has always been the best in the family; even before the business, I was the one who was always dealing with American authorities. I’d be the one who placed the overseas calls to Cuba, the one who translated insurance forms, the one who talked to the postman. (140)

Juani opens up to the possibility of moving beyond the hyphen. She escapes identity categories and binary systems, and enters a heterogeneous translocal community that shares ideologies and vital experiences far from the discourses of origin, roots and dichotomies that prevail in the previous generation.
With *Memory Mambo*, Achy Obejas makes room for local micro-narratives that constitute the global. In that sense, the mambo functions as a type of vernacular globalization. Furthermore, the mambo is a combination of rhythms that allow its dancers/singers to create their own narrative and performativity. Mambo works as a utopian alternative of traditional gender and nation macro-narratives and performativities. This idea is suggested through the language crossing in her text and takes place finally in Obejas’ use of this musical genre as a popular artistic and literary expression in a world that Juani imagines as postnational and post-identitarian, and beyond binary modes of expression: Spanish and/or English, Cuban and/or “American”, *los de aquí / los de allá*. Lori Ween contemplates “the idea of the ‘greater language,’ which can also be seen as a greater sense of Cubanness that incorporates different ‘fragments’ of the community into a larger, more reflective, and certainly more diverse Cuban image” (140). In *Memory Mambo*, mambo is this “greater language.”

*Memory Mambo* presents two national imaginaries in crisis and opens up the possibility of a postnational imaginary to the sound of the mambo as a non-exclusive notion. Obejas suggests a non-national but communitarian “diasporic public sphere” (Appadurai 22), which allows a balance between the concepts of community and diaspora. This is a translocal space in which Juani, her imagined community, and *Memory Mambo* can be and live.
2.2.3.3 Julia Álvarez’s ¡Yo!: Creative Writing Is the Only Homeland

...English, those verbal gadgets, those tricks and turns of phrases, those little fixed units and counters, became a charged, fluid mass that carried me in its great fluent waves, rolling and moving onward, to deposit me on the shores of my new homeland. I was no longer a foreigner with no ground to stand on. I had landed in the English language. (Julia Álvarez, “My English”)

I don’t hear the same rhythms in English as a native speaker of English. Sometimes I hear Spanish in English (and of course, vice versa). That’s why I describe myself as a Dominican American writer. That’s not just a term. I’m mapping a country that’s not on the map, and that’s why I’m trying to put it down on paper. It’s a world formed of contradictions, clashes, cominglings—the gringa and the Dominican, and it is precisely that tension and richness that interests me. Being in and out of both worlds, looking at one side from the other side ... These unusual perspectives are often what I write about. A duality that I hope in the writing transcends itself and becomes a new consciousness, a new place on the map, a synthesizing way of looking at the world. (Julia Álvarez, “Doña Aída”)

¡Yo!, the sequel novel of the García Girls, allows the reader to hear the voices of those characters who were “fictionally victimized” (Álvarez ¡Yo! 6) by Julia Álvarez and Yolanda herself in their first novel. These plus many other characters’ voices are heard in a novel composed of fragments put together as in a puzzle. ¡Yo!’s opening vignette “The sisters,” which serves as a sort of prologue, is first-person narrated by Yolanda’s youngest sister Sofia (Fifi). Yolanda tries to explain to her sisters and her mother that what was written about them and the rest of the family in her first novel was not necessarily true but a work of fiction. This explains why the genre ascribed to the vignette is “fiction” (3), which may represent the fictions existing at the García’s: “And

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76 Álvarez likes to quote the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz, who said, “Language is the only homeland” (Jacques 24).
77 I adopt Suárez’s use of the term “vignette,” which best describes the narrative structure taking place in ¡Yo! rather than the traditional term “chapter” (McCracken, Johnson, Ibarrola-Armendariz, Halloran), which, especially when numbered, follows the logic of a linear ordered narrative. The term “vignette,” on the other hand, expresses the independence of each story, while forming together a fragmented narrative.
I’m shaking my head, no, no, because I don’t know what to believe anymore except that everyone in our family is lying” (13), exclaims Fifi.

The following vignette, on the contrary, is given the genre label “nonfiction.” The vignette is a first-person narration by Yolanda’s mother, who does not mention how mad she is with Yolanda about the publishing of her book, although the readers know about her feelings, which are described by other characters. She focuses on language instead. This is how she opens Part I: “To tell you the truth, the hardest thing coming to this country wasn’t the winter everyone warmed me about—it was the language” (21). Quite the reverse, their daughters were “jabbering away in English like they were born to it” (35). After an interview with the social worker at the girls’ school about the “disturbing” (33) stories Yolanda has been telling at school, Yo’s mami reads what the social worker has noted about her: Trauma/dictatorship/ family bonds strong/ mother devoted.

Yolanda’s mother admits that she envies her daughter for being able to express through her storytelling what terrifies her. She herself “can’t find the words in English—or Spanish” (34).

The relationship between language and identity is highly significant to Yolanda—and, consequently, Julia Álvarez as Yo’s alter ego—and, as such, it is very much present in both How the García Girls Lost their Accents and ¡Yo!. The first novel presents to a greater extent Yo’s struggle with language(s) in a bildungsroman or coming-of-age story narrated in reverse, while ¡Yo! focuses on the multiple nature of the protagonist’s identity and how this can only be expressed through creative writing.

How the García Girls Lost their Accents echoed Yolanda’s struggle with the notion of a primary language or mother tongue:
In halting Spanish, Yolanda reports on her sisters. When she reverts to English, she is scolded, ¡En español!. The more she practices, the sooner she will be back into her native tongue, the aunts [in the Dominican Republic] insist. Yes, and when she returns to the States, she’ll find herself suddenly going back over some word in English or, like her mother, mixing up some common phrase. (Álvarez, *How the García* 7)

When Yolanda goes back to the Dominican Republic in the first part of the *García Girls* (which is chronologically the most recent) supposedly in search of her “roots,” a “home,” and a female (non-) identity, she realizes that she has somewhat lost her Spanish, or her Spanish has lost her. A poet she meets at her cousin Lucinda’s party tells her “no matter how much of it one lost, in the midst of some profound emotion, one would revert to one’s mother tongue” and “he put[s] her through a series of situations. What language … [does] she love in?” (13). Yolanda does not feel at home in English or in Spanish. She has lost intimacy with her mother’s tongue, which is not her mother tongue any more. And she takes refuge in her new homeland: creative writing. As soon as she arrives in New York, an unfriendly, inhospitable place for her, “she [takes] root in language [through creative writing]. By high school, the nuns were reading her stories and compositions out loud in English class” (Álvarez, *How the García* 141). For her, it is precisely the creative nature of writing that makes this art the perfect means of subjective linguistic expression that is not directly linked to a particular language, fixed territory or nationality. It is not the English language *per se* and all the ideologies that lie behind this language in *el Gran Caribe* that she feels attached to but to a new, free, individual and creative expression *in* English. Martínez-San Miguel articulates this idea in her analysis of Álvarez’s debut novel:

> Para Yolanda, la literatura o la escritura desde la imaginación ocupan el lugar que ya no le pertenece a un idioma en particular. De ese modo la ficción posee un espacio de legitimidad subjetiva que no se encuentra en el español o el inglés
propiamente. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* está dedicada precisamente a esa exploración de la ficción como lengua materna alternativa, como lugar de pertenencia para el sujeto migrante. (*Caribe* 380)\(^78\)

Julia Álvarez goes through a similar process. When she was a child living in the Dominican Republic, “… English was the sound of worry and secrets, the sound of being left out” (“My English” 273). “*Say it in English so the children won’t understand*” would emerge from her parents’ mouth when they would talk about dissident politics under Trujillo’s dictatorship (273). When her parents enrolled her at the Carol Morgan School, an American School in Santo Domingo, she began to learn more English while her mother would repeat to her and her sisters that it was very important that they learn *their* English: “She always used the possessive pronoun: *your* English.”\(^79\) evokes Álvarez, and she continues: “Unfortunately, my English became all mixed up with our Spanish. Mix-up, or what’s now called Spanglish, was the language we spoke for several years. There wasn’t a sentence that wasn’t colonized by an English word” (274).\(^80\) If language is the main instrument used to construct a national imaginary (‘one nation, one language’ ideology), Yolanda’s and Álvarez’s distress at crossing languages gives evidence of their sense of dislocation. On the other hand, Álvarez’s mother’s use of the possessive adjective *your* when referring to her daughters’ English ability reflects the void between first and second immigrant generations in the US. English will never be the language of

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\(^78\) For a more detailed analysis of language, writing and identity in *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, see Martínez-San Miguel 2003.

\(^79\) As remarked by Ben Jacques in “Real Flights of Imagination,” Álvarez’s mother tells her daughters in the poem “Sound Bites” to “put English words in [their] mouths … so that even as a brown-haired, / olive-skinned spic chick, / [they] can click with the gringas;” so that they can survive in the US in the years “before bilingual education, or multiculturalism” (24).

\(^80\) Later on, after having spent considerable time in New York, when going back to the island following her parents’ desire that Álvarez and her sisters did not lose their tie to the native land, their ‘aunts and uncles tried unsuccessfully to stem this tide of our Americanization, whose main expression was, of course, our use of the English language. ‘*Tienen que hablar en español,*’ they commanded. ‘*Ay, come on,*’ we would say as if we had been asked to go back to baby talk as grown-ups” (Álvarez, *Something* 64).
the first generation, but it is the language of the second. I read these works as a subversion of postcolonial notions that claim that historical, trans-generational traumas become structured as a way of defining and unifying “second-generation” identities. These novels’ main characters will be forced to fit into a position of in-betweenness, inhabiting the margins of society and feeling at home neither in the US nor in their parents’ land. For them, the historical trauma through which their ancestors almost certainly went becomes structured and it is not always straightforward to escape from it.

When she arrived in New York, Álvarez soon overcame the first shock when realizing everybody there was speaking English and started “not to hear it as English, but as sense. I no longer strained to understand. I understood. I relaxed in this second language” (276). It is as soon as sixth grade when an English teacher nurtured in the writer-to-be a love of language (276) and she started feeling that English language was her homeland, as expressed in the epigraph of this section.81 Yolanda, when visiting a house to rent, also expresses this feeling. The landlady is the one narrating this vignette (entitled “The confrontation”):

… she’s telling me all about how she’s not originally from this country but came when she was a kid and now she has this job over at college. All the time I’m wondering if she’s giving me some story because she’s talking English better than me. So I say, “You sure picked up English,” and she looks at me a moment and says, “Language is the only homeland”. This poet once said that. When there’s no other ground under your feet, you learn quick, believe me. (153)

Instead of reading this quote from assimilationist lenses, I interpret this conception in the sense that English is “the language of her craft” (Jacques 26) and her craft is the place where she can be quiet in a fragmented woman self, as happened to Juani with the

81 Álvarez explains that she found in creative writing in English “a portable homeland, the world of the imagination and it was in that world where I really set down roots. I left the Dominican Republic and landed not in the United States but in either the English language or the world of the imagination” (Rosario-Sievert 32).
mambo and to Pilar with the creative art of painting, and as will happen to Sirena Selena with her voice and the art of singing. Cristina García herself reveals “it wasn’t until I started writing fiction at age thirty that I realized there was this whole groundswell of stuff I had interjected [myself into] and absorbed that I wasn’t even aware of” (del Rio 45). She is referring to her Cuban self. Through fiction writing, her multiple selves would coalesce. The same occurred to Julia Álvarez, who confesses that the confusion conveyed by her multiple self is what confirmed her as a writer. Álvarez adds that emigration for Caribbean women writers helped them “to escape the confining definitions of [their] traditional gender roles … and a patriarchal system [through economic and intellectual independence] that doesn’t even pretend to be something else” (“Doña Aída” 822). In fact, in their visits back to the Dominican Republic, Álvarez and her sisters would spend time “kibitzing in English on the crazy world around [them]: the silly rules for girls, the obnoxious behavior of macho guys …” (Something 64). They would do the same on the school playground in the US talking in Spanish when intending to dismiss their surroundings. Through the years, only her craft would allow Álvarez to escape the imposed dichotomy of those two wor(l)ds (Spanish/English) to create an own, personal, imaginative world where each piece of her fragmented woman self could live.

In How the García Girls Lost Their Accent, Álvarez voices Yolanda (and her sisters)’s search for an identity and her lack of communication with both Dominican and US national imaginaries. In this quest, language plays an important role. As Miryam Criado states, “Julia Álvarez presenta en su novela la dificultad de las hermanas García por encontrar un lenguaje que consiga expresar su experiencia vital mediante una doble

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82 In her interview with Shibuya Brown, Cristina Garcia insists on this notion that fiction writing made her aware of her Cuban self: “It wasn’t until I started to write fiction that my private Cuban self merged with my public self” (251).
dicotomía: inglés versus español, lenguaje masculino versus lenguaje femenino” (196). In the last paragraph of her article, Criadó refers to the very last passage of Álvarez’s debut novel, the moment in which Yolanda and her family move to the US.83

Then we moved to the United States. The cat disappeared altogether. I saw snow. … I began to write, the story of Pila, the story of my grandmother. I never saw Schwarz again …I grew up a curious woman, a woman of story ghosts and story devils, a woman prone to bad dreams and bad insomnia. There are still times I wake up at three o’clock in the morning and peer into darkness. At that hour and in that loneliness, I hear her, a black furred thing lurking in the corners of my life, her magenta mouth opening, wailing over some violation that lies at the center of my art. (289-290)

This is also the moment in which Yolanda’s creativity flourishes through the art of writing.84 Criado states that “Yolanda parece haber intuido la necesidad de encontrar una voz propia, un lenguaje femenino cuyos significados no vengan impuestos por una visión falogocéntrica y dicotómica del universo” (203). Although in the last lines of the novel quoted above, Yolanda admits that there is still some violation lying at the center of her art, Criado concludes that the fact that she recognizes this violation – “impuesta por la asimilación cultural y sexual que a toda mujer se le requiere para triunfar – … abre el camino … para que algún día Yolanda, y por extensión cualquier escritora, pueda deshacerse de todo aquello que es ajeno a ella como mujer y pueda contar sus historias libre de imposición” (203). Julia Álvarez’s ¡Yo! becomes the completion of this path initiated by Yolanda in García Girls.

Those logocentrist critics and scholars who see language as bound to a national imaginary, cultural identity, and political ideology, and censure writers such as Julia

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83 The novel is structured in reverse chronological order. The first section takes place between 1989 and 1972. The second section narrates the period between 1970 and 1960. Finally, the third section occurs between 1960 and 1956.

84 For Julia Álvarez, creative writing also began when she immigrated to the US. She admits that she “would never have written if [she] had never left the Dominican Republic and kept speaking only Spanish” (Rosario-Sievert 32).
Álvarez for writing in English, assume that writing is a mere representation of oral speech: writing “as a surrogate or substitute for speech[, as] visible speech” (Harris xi). This assumption disdains the creative process and the strategy behind this art. As already observed, Álvarez’s craft is meticulously entwined with Spanish words (Jacques 26), turning fiction into Yolanda’s and Álvarez’s “homeland” or “mother tongue,” as Martínez-San Miguel proposes:

… Este desplazamiento de la lengua materna vulnera, al mismo tiempo, el vínculo semántico y simbólico entre madre, nacimiento y nación, de forma tal que la ficción como idioma nativo también lleva a repensar las definiciones clásicas de la identidad nacional para proponer los imaginarios como modos de identificación más cohesivos que las metáforas genéticas o espaciales. (Caribe 370)

By affirming that the language she uses in her writings is her homeland, Álvarez creates a place through language that does not exist on the map but on paper, and that gives free rein to a world that is mobile, in which “borders are melting; nationalities are on the move … [and where a] multicultural perspective is more and more the way to understand the world” (“Doña Aída” 822); and to a world that gives voice to traditionally silenced subjects both in societies and in literature: “latina” women. Her muses and her inner voice as a usanacaribeña writer do not come from “a tower …, but down in the kitchen among the women who first taught me about service, about passion, about singing” (Álvarez, Something 162).  

85 See “Doña Aída,” Julia Álvarez’s response to writer Aída Cartagena Portalatín, who reprimands Álvarez for writing in English.

86 Álvarez explains that during a stay at Yaddo, the New York writer’s colony, she was assigned to write in the tower room at the top of the stairs of the spacious mansion. While trying to find inspiration among the “big and important” names (Homer, Yeats, …), she realized that her woman’s voice was to be found in the cook of the mansion, in the woman vacuuming the floors. These women’s voices brought Álvarez to her girlhood memories: “…the voice of Gladys singing her sad boleros, Belkis putting color on my face with tales of her escapades, Tití naming the orchids, Ada telling me love stories as we made the beds …, Mami and the aunts with the cook in the kitchen bending their heads over a pot of habichuelas …” (160-1).
In ¡Yo!, during her writing retreat to a little village in Santo Domingo, Yolanda chooses a tower room at the topmost floor of Don Mundín’s house with windows on all four sides (119) from which she can see “the village below, the crooked streets winding uphill, the bell tower on the tiny chapel. The mountains loomed above, the river tumbled down” (117-8). But, most importantly for Yo’s inspiration, she can observe from there “the mayor’s house, the mangy dog tied to the mango tree; the old woman Consuelo … sweeping her yard…” (131), and she can easily go downstairs to the kitchen to chat with Elena, the cook, who admits that all that Yolanda asks her and Sergio to do is talk to her (120). Often, Don Mundín’s house caretakers are also called up from the kitchen or the yard to watch the view from the tower room when the sun is low on the mountains (118).

For the rest of the time, Yolanda “shut[s] herself in the tower room all day, only coming out in the afternoon to nibble at some insignificance in the kitchen and then to wander through town talking to the villagers as if everyone were a relation of hers” (129) in search for inspiration among their ordinary lives. The chosen room to write is an intertextual reference to Virginia Woolf’s feminist claim in A Room of One’s Own (1929), in which the writer relates the difficulty that women face to become professional writers. Álvarez still agrees with Woolf on this claim. However, Yolanda’s emphasis on being in touch with the women in the kitchen and the village in search of an inspirational community can be read as a critique to Woolf’s exclusion of “other” women (of color, or of lower social classes, or Latinas, as Álvarez herself). In her own version of a postmodern artist novel, Julia Álvarez presents the art (creative writing) as a means of expression of the self. To Yolanda, the art is not on top of everything; it is not a dogma – as it was in the modernist trope of the Ivory tower—but a means of understanding the
world around her. Her art is a means of expression more than a means of creation, and the artist is more a recycler (of popular and ordinary worlds) rather than a creator of extraordinary worlds.

Although the readers do not find this out until the last vignette of the novel, entitled “The father,” the violation that lies in Yolanda’s creative art comes from the patriarchal figures that surrounded her in the Dominican Republic, and that continue to cast a shadow over her in the US. Her creative process is also disrupted by the lies and fabrications of Yolanda’s father, of first-generation Dominican exile, similar to Juani and her progenitor in Achy Obejas’ Memory Mambo. In this concluding vignette,87 we gain access to Yo’s father’s voice in a confession-like first person narrative. It is not until this moment that readers appreciate the exceptional relationship that Yolanda has with her father, who admits that only Yo, among all of his daughters, is able to understand his secret heart (292). We learn that he is the only one in the family who not only seems not to be offended by Yolanda’s writing about him and his stories, but he even gives her “the full cup of [his] life to drink from” (293). However, Yo does not swallow everything in that cup in one gulp. She researches every piece of information and when she discovers a loose end, she interrogates her father: “Are these just lapses of memory or did you make the whole thing up and if so why?” (293). As occurred with Memory Mambo’s Juani and Dreaming in Cuban’s Pilar, Yolanda does not trust the stories (i.e., memories) imposed by the first generation in exile, especially by the fatherly figure, to whom she communicates only through writing, as her only means of empowerment against domineering masculinities.

87 The author literally ascribes to it the function of concluding (292).
In this final vignette, her father uncovers a distressful story of Yolanda’s past, a memory that has been his “shameful secret” (302). As a little girl in Santo Domingo, Yolanda finds a gun that her father had carefully hidden under a floorboard on his side of the walk-in closet. One Saturday, while she is with her sisters at General Molino’s house watching a cowboy movie, she makes up a story about her dad having a gun with which he is going to kill all the bad people. She admonishes the General: “the bad sultan ruling the land and all the guards who protect him in his big palace… yes, and El Jefe, and maybe you, too” (305-6). Although the father “was not hiding that gun to blow the dictator’s head off [but] to go hunting for guinea hens” (299), being involved in the underground, this entails a risk the García family cannot face. The punishment Yolanda receives is as terrible as the fear her parents feel; a fear that they instill in her:

As my wife held her, I brought down that belt over and over, not with all my strength or I could have killed her, but with enough force to leave marks on her backside and legs. It was as if I had forgotten that she was a child, my child, and all I could think was that I had to silence our betrayer. “This should teach you a lesson,” I kept saying. “You must never ever tell stories!” (307)

After the “pela she’ll never forget” (306), Yo is terrified of the figure of her father. Until her father’s confession through a letter, at the end of the novel, he seems to embody a longstanding patriarchal system that has been silencing her and women writers like her—by prohibiting/excluding her/their storytelling. As a consequence, Yolanda fears domineering types of masculinities both on the island and the US, which results in her problems of communication with the men who embody those masculinities.88

After her father’s prohibition of her storytelling, Yolanda can only communicate with him through writing. Yo’s father explains that his daughter writes him “one, two

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88 See the episode of Yo’s lack of communication with the campesinos in the Dominican Republic, and with Yo’s first husband in the US in How the García Girls Lost their Accents.
letters a week [and,] because of our many letters, I always shake my head when my wife offers me the phone” (293-4) to talk with Yolanda. In this last vignette, “the father” decides to give Yolanda his blessing, which needs to be given in her language, “in story form for Yo to believe in it” (296). He resolves to finally acknowledge her and her destiny: to tell stories. Her father’s stories symbolize the macro-narratives pertaining to patriarchy both on the island and in exile and those narratives created in exile by the first generation, which were described as “a group hallucination” (25) in Memory Mambo. Our protagonist is meant to debunk all of them, as Juani was. I do not interpret Yo’s father’s final blessing as if she needed the male figure’s permission to develop her artistic expression, but as Yo’s achievement of a central place—personal and professional—in a men’s world. The remembrance of her father’s history (the History) will now be revised and re-written from a woman writer’s point of view. Indeed, her father’s confession at the end of the novel allows Yolanda to understand, without justifying it, that her father may have done what he did because of the terror he felt as a result of the repressive measures of dictatorship. This complicates the initial interpretation readers may have and suggests how censorship permeates all aspects of life. The result is that Yolanda writes her stories instead of relating them orally. Therefore, in the end, her father, that patriarchal figure, is the one who encourages her to enter a space that has been traditionally reserved for men: that of creative writing.

Yolanda’s mami feels reluctant to be exposed in her daughter’s writings, although being repeatedly asked by Yo and her husband: “What is the point of shrouding yourself in silence? The grave will do that for you for all eternity” (298). Yo’s mami, who after

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89 I interpret the generic use of these categories (“The father,” “The mother,” “The sisters”) as macro-narratives that Yo and Álvarez deconstruct and destabilize through creative writing.
her daughter’s first book publication stops talking to her for a period of time, makes it clear that she wants to keep her anonymity anyhow. Having lived in fear of persecution under Trujillo’s dictatorship in the Dominican Republic, it is understandable that silence remains to be the general tone of this generation. Yet, Yo’s father decides to break the silence toward the end of the novel and let Yolanda pass García’s story on to his grandchildren and great grandchildren. For that purpose, he needs to bring his wife into the story and “say her lines but [he] will keep that to a minimum to respect her feelings” (298). She insists that “all she wants is three things on her tombstone, her name, her date of birth and death, and this summary of her life: She had four girls. Enough said” (298), highlighting uniquely and actively her role as a mother. On the one hand, she preserves the imposed silence of Trujillos’ dictatorship. On the other hand, by letting her husband “say her lines,” she is also subsumed by an assumed domestic authority in patriarchal societies. In fact, although her husband thinks that the eulogy on which she has decided for her tombstone conveys “a wrong tone altogether” (298), the alternative he offers keeps her in an inferior position as a woman. He proposes “something a bit more flattering to herself and others: Adored Wife, Beloved Mother, Treasured Grandmother, Friend to One and All” (298). In her proposed eulogy, what Yo’s mother really does is 1) break with the sentimentality ascribed to women; 2) eliminate the presence of her husband; and 3) give privilege to her daughters. With the concluding phrase “enough said,” she shows how proud she is of her role as a mother. Her epitaph is all about women; it creates a pact with the women in her family, framed in a traditional, Modern relational feminism. The fact that she conveys “a wrong tone” symbolizes the transgression of adopted gender roles that she performs in alternative ways. On the
contrary, together with her role as a mother, her husband’s version also includes her role as a wife. The fact that she becomes the recipient of the action in the use of the passive voice by her husband, who becomes the agent of the action, leaves her in a passive position for eternity—contrary to the active voice used in the eulogy she intends. However, by remaining silent and not passing her story on to her daughter, she is still perpetuating a patriarchal tradition through generations, as well as the historical traumas that live with her. Something similar occurs with Juani’s mother, who is accomplice to her husband José Alberto Casas y Molina’s imposed and fabricated macro-narratives.

The persistent silence of Yo’s mother, once they have fled to the US, can also be understood as her inability to adjust to her daughter’s language: English, i.e., to the new environs in exile. She will never take part in her daughter’s new homeland and mother tongue: fiction. It is important to remember at this point that the vignette dedicated to her—of which she is the protagonist and the first-person narrator—is ascribed the genre “non-fiction.” This highlights the gap between Yo’s language (fiction) and hers (non-fiction, as the epitaph she desires). Álvarez starts Part I of the novel focusing on Mami’s struggle with learning the English language, which she always endorsed for her daughters (your English), but never for herself. Once more, these silences by first generation mothers toward their daughters—also observed in Pilar and Lourdes, Juani and her mother, and the lack of a biological mother figure in Sirena Selena—reflect the existing void between first and second generation female subjects and the need of the latter to go
back to their “roots” through a trip *in situ*, or through their grandmother’s storytelling, to fill the void.  

Contemporary scholars of postcolonial, cultural and literary studies of the diverse Caribbean migrant experiences in the US have presented second- and third-generation migrants as traumatized subjects who find the necessity to look for their historical “roots” in order to assert an identity in the US, without taking into account that, for them, the exile experience has become more distant and does not carry the same burden of rootlessness as for their parents. Yolanda, as Pilar and Juani would do, revises her traumatic past, in order not to relive it positively but not to re-live it at all, although the acknowledgement of this past helps her better understand her mother, and reach a more balanced individual identity escaping from predetermined imposed ideas of a unified, fixed and essential subjectivity for second-generation migrants. Pilar, Juani, and Yolanda ultimately decide not to live a present traumatized by a difficult past but an overtly multiple, complex and contradictory present in which everybody is the same and different at the same time, in which the children of the Caribbean diaspora are no longer defined and regrouped by trans-generational structured traumas but by their multiple specificities.

In sum, after filling those voids by travelling back and forth between the Dominican Republic and the US, Yolanda can find herself, her *¡Yo!* through the process of creative writing, once her father has lifted the veil previously imposed on her. Only through her craft can she find her voice and shout it out: *¡Yo!*, i.e., a *grancaribeña*

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90 The important fact is that Pilar, Juani and Yolanda have mothers. Before 1980, it was common that non-traditional female main characters were orphans, because only through orphanhood—the lack of role models, their uniqueness and transgressive personalities were explained. In the narratives analyzed, the figure of the mother emerges. The fact that they are exiled mothers already forces them to abandon the traditional socio-sexual and national codes they have grown up with, and they must re-adjust or reinvent themselves in the new environment. This re-adjustment questions to a lesser or greater extent those “original” and universal national and gender imaginaries. This alteration is essential, consciously or not, to their daughter’s own process of learning and maturation.
woman (writer). Only through storytelling can she reconcile the dichotomies (Spanish/English, allá/acá, masculine language/feminine language) that have bounded her. Both Julia Álvarez and Yolanda can find in writing a homeland in which their multiple, fluid and crisscrossed ¡Yo! resides, a Yo that she can now assert because it is not silenced any more. This is a Yo that can create a present and recreate (not negate) a past; that can transform silences into words, personal and family traumas into (her)stories –into the story of an “I” that is created through writing as both an individual and communal process, because it is also a re-writing of collective (hi) stories of migration.

2.2.3.4 Mayra Santos Febres’ Sirena Selena vestida de pena: The Performative Power of a Transvestite Voice Singing Boleros

Described as “Una novela para el Nuevo Milenio” (1) by a special edition of the Centro Journal at Hunter College in New York fully dedicated to this novel, Juan Pablo Rivera underlines the importance of Sirena Selena vestida de pena for the caribeña literary corpus both on the island and in the US diaspora. This supports my inclusion of this novel in this chapter. Rivera highlights the misleading notion of “mother tongue,” which I have already considered at the beginning of this chapter. According to the
scholar, there are no mother tongues that permanently belong to us—no more than static national imaginaries correlated with them, I would add—but changing “surrogate mothers” or madrinas instead. In Sirena Selena, Martha Divine acts as Selena’s madrina. Interestingly, she uses an English (artistic) name and she is Selena’s manager, meaning that she partly exploits Selena’s talented voice for her own personal gain. Because Selena is under adult age, the morality of Martha Divine’s industry is dubious although, to a lesser or greater extent, it lifts Selena out of a marginal background in San Juan. The fact that Martha Divine is the character using more English in her interactions, together with the Anglicization of her (artistic) name, connects to the island ideologies that perceive this language as related to imperialism and neo-liberalism, and to the cultural show business. However, the language crossings also appear in other characters and in the narrative voice in the rest of the novel, breaking with fixed dichotomic notions. As Rivera explains, “parece, simplistamente, identificar a unos como colonizados y a otros como colonizadores, atar una sola lengua a un solo origen nacional y de ahí a una identidad única. A esas conclusiones llegaría el pensar bipolar, pero no el que ve en el bilingüismo una posibilidad creativa” (12). However, Rivera’s use of the term code-switching to refer to the linguistic practices in the text propagates this bipolar ontology. I have already analyzed the linguistic strategies Santos Febres follows to escape this bipolarity, and I have also argued how Santos Febres escapes this bipolarity through her aesthetic techniques. Thematically, it is through Sirena Selena’s voice singing boleros that a fluid identity can be expressed. The performative function of her voice frees her from static national imaginaries, social class groupings, and gender and sexual roles in and outside the Caribbean. It is through her musical voice that she can move beyond national
frontiers to become a global diva, and it is also thanks to her talented voice that she can betray Martha Divine to become self-sufficient.\footnote{While the narrative voice tries to remain ambiguous through a random use of gender pronouns when referring to Selena, although the “she” prevails, I will consistently use the feminine pronoun.}

If we assume the performative condition of the transvestite, and the postmodern condition of Santos Febres’ novel,\footnote{Rivera explains that “Si bien Santos Febres se distancia de esta crítica ‘posmo,’ como la llama en su ensayo ‘Leyendo lo posmoderno,’ nunca llega a rechazarla del todo. Su aparición en diversos medios, su escritura conscientemente trans-genérica, su énfasis en la construcción de las sexualidades, su manejo del humor y la parodia, sus aproximaciones críticas al racismo y a las teorías sobre el deseo y el espectáculo y su intento por reconfigurar la labor intelectual, son netamente ‘posmo.’ O, por lo menos, afines a un materialismo histórico que se ha nutrido de las lecturas de Bataille, Baudrillard, Foucault, Barthes, Derrida, Irigaray: las vacas sagradas del pensamiento posmoderno. ‘Sobre cómo hacerse mujer,’ por ejemplo, uno de los ensayos de Sobre piel y papel, es una reflexión (una puesta en escena, más bien) en clave autobiográfica de las propuestas de Judith Butler en torno a los aspectos ‘performáticos’ del género y la sexualidad” (2). For her part, Arroyo admits that Caribbean texts like Sirena Selena cannot be strictly considered “postmodern” but they possess postmodern features such as the inclusion of transnational cultures and communities affected by a global economy (43).} it makes sense to revise the status of the voice in postmodern performance practice. Throughout modernity, the voice has been interpreted as intrinsically connected to speech; hence we observe Derrida’s well known critique of structuralist logocentrism, of which Saussure is representative. Performance critics such as Phelan or Dolan focus on the representation of the body and the dramatic text more than the use of the voice (Kimbrough 202). However, as Kimbrough argues,

a paradox exists in the relation between poststructuralist theory and postmodern theatre practice. Even though Derrida’s critique of the voice plays a significant role in his deconstruction of the Western philosophic and phono-logocentric traditions, the voice persists as a significant site of signification in contemporary performance. … an interest in the essential nature of the human being persists despite the obstacles and arguments presented by poststructural theory. (238)

Kimbrough adds that postmodern performers consciously look for agency and intentionality in a classifiable speaking subject. I argue that Sirena Selena is an example of how the texts I include in my analysis disrupt Modern theatrical aesthetics, as well as Modern notions of cultural identity, “a process that the poststructuralism of Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard may make available” (Kimbrough 207), to question dominant
codes and meanings while proposing alternative languages and significations. At the same time, the focus on Selena’s voice confirms the persistence of the agency and intentionality of the human being. This productive paradox between postmodernism and a necessary humanism as theoretical framework already appeared in my use of Butler’s postmodern feminism in combination with Amorós and Valcárcel’s nominalist feminism. I adhere to feminist philosopher Rodríguez Magda when she states that we should use “post-modern, fluid fragmentarity as a mechanism for reversing power/knowledge coagulation, without reductionist objectualisation. The gnoseological weakness of our time allows us to deconstruct and reconstruct the theories and criteria for subjectivisation” (2). This paradox comes to life in the character of Sirena Selena. In Selena, voice, body, performance, and bolero are used toward the conceptualization of a postnational global subjectivity, which breaks with traditionally prevailing national imaginaries of Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and the US. Sirena Selena acts as what Arroyo calls a “cuerpo creativo por excelencia” (42), in which racial, social, gender and sexual issues performatively negotiate with and against national imaginaries.

Selena’s voice –“dulce, diáfana y cristalina, que huele a miel” (12)—serves as a nominalist trope. It is through her voice that she can create and (re)affirm her “I.” The voice has enough transparency not to be marked by race, sexuality or social class. Through her voice she reaches and touches people’s hearts while maintaining a distance with the character she performs. Everyone is equally moved by the same heartbreaking sadness when they listen to Selena’s voice, and they are forced to think of their most intimate desires as well as “situaciones tristes, conmovedoras, y que le[s] causan pena” (45). Her transparent voice makes everyone transparent, to the point that even the upper
social classes feel betrayed by the surfacing memories of their most inner and forbidden desires:

Los hombres no podían dejar de agarrarse el vientre, les dolía la presencia de aquella Sirena, de aquel ángel que traslucía bajo sus ropajes fuego y hielo seco, fuego y hielo seco. Y era el hijo hermoso, la núbil sobrinita que un día se les sentó en las faldas y los hizo retumbar, los hizo correr hasta la barra más triste, los hizo reventar de monedas estridentes velloneras, los hizo implorar que aquella quemazón maleva les dejara en paz la carne. Recuerdan cómo escaparon, años corriendo cimarrones por las calles y la casa de citas de la calle Duarte. ¿Y todo para qué? Para caer en esta trampa de Sirena. (206)

The transparency of Selena’s voice contrasts with her racialized body. To acquire a non-racialized figure, she undergoes a long, painful process of applying make-up to hide her mulatto indigenous racial self and turn into “algo indefinido, una mujer-niño, una diva” (Arroyo 45). Although in most cases, the voice informs of a specific gender construction, Selena’s voice of “dulzura” (10) defies gender marking. Her voice is compared with “los ángeles caídos del cielo” (10), a “voz de ángel dominical” (10), a gender-neutral figure, as Sirena Selena herself: an almost magical figure. For the rest of the characters, their voices are described as far from Selena’s: her abuela’s voice is “temblorosa” (92); the voice of Valentina (Selena’s previous madrina) is “ronca y quebrada” (85); and Martha Divine’s voice betrays her since it is the only aspect in her self that informs of her “male” condition. The narrative voice describes Martha Divine’s voice in the following terms:

No exhibía un solo pelo que la delatara. Solo su altura y su voz y sus ademanes tan femeninos, demasiado femeninos, estudiadamente femeninos. Su dentadura era perfecta, sin una mancha de nicotina, aunque fumaba sin parar. Este hábito acaso explicara aquella voz granulenta, como si millones de partículas de arena se hubiesen aposentado en la garganta … (9)
In fact, the narrative voice maintains bipolarity throughout the novel when telling about Martha. Instead, ambiguity surrounds Sirena Selena.\(^93\) The narrative voice is never clear about her gender; we, the readers, driven by social norms, label her as a “transvestite,” although she is clearly differently portrayed than Martha Divine in the novel. Only her own voice allows Selena to become who she is: Sirena Selena (11). The language the narrative voice uses when talking about la Sirena is persistently poetic, ambiguous, and opaque, since the identification of people through gendered personal pronouns acts as an imperative to perform one’s identity in established ways (Butler, *Excitable* 49). The narrative voice crosses the imperatives of language regarding the use of gender in personal pronouns. Therefore, although her body performs gender crossing, Martha Divine would narratologically (and socially) characterized through a hyphenated conceptualization: man/woman, English/Spanish, Puerto Rico/Domican Republic, whereas Sirena Selena would be the representative of a *grancaribeña*, together with Pilar, Juani, and Yolanda. In her, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation and language remain fluid, fragmented, dynamic, and non-transparent, beyond the Modern binary thinking that constructs gender linguistically as binary:

> Even if identities that lie outside gender norms are to be constructed linguistically, most of the time they are still conceptually rooted in gender-binary discursive structures. Terms like intersexuality (“between the two”), transsexuality (“from one to the other”), androgynous (“male-female”) or bisexual (“both”) compare the respective identities to normative gender binarism and therefore lose some of their subversive edge, as they actually support rather than challenge dominant discourses” (Motschenbacher 157).

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\(^{93}\) Sirena Selena is a kind of “wonder.” The narrative that surrounds Sirena makes her exceptional. The narrative voice constantly inserts her in a narrative of the inefable, without emphasizing a sense of abjection, which would be the normal procedure when describing a subject out of the norm. On the contrary, the narrative voice exerts on her a visuality typical of the fairy tale or the myth.
Martha Divine resides in these gender-binary discursive structures. On the other hand, and thanks to her voice, Selena crosses languages, gender, class, and national boundaries; she crosses frontiers in the Caribbean and becomes a “diva del Caribe” (12). Readers may infer at the end of the novel that her voice will take her on transatlantic trips and she will become a global diva following her “premonición de una vida nueva a partir de ese plan de presentarse en otro país, aunque fuera en la isla de al lado” (11). Martha, on the contrary, goes back to Puerto Rico, to her previous drag show, with hopes of doing business again some day in the Dominican Republic. She continues moving on the two sides of the hyphen: Puerto Rico-Dominican Republic. Arroyo, in her critique of Puerto Rican letters that seem to ignore the Dominican presence in the novel—suggests the construction of a transCaribbean subject in Sirena Selena, and a transCaribbean novel, *Sirena Selena*. I would also include in this Caribbean imaginary the US, Canada and some parts of Europe, which are represented in the flux of tourists and businessmen and women between these places, and the island. I agree more with her reading of Sirena Selena—both the character and the novel—as postnational, since it breaks with Dominican, Puerto Rican and other national imaginaries.

Selena’s performative and sensual voice is not only the means of free expression of her non-identity, but also her tool to ascend socially and economically: “Quería protegerse la voz. Bien que lo sabe la Sirena. Lo único que tiene es su voz para lograrse otra más lejos” (13). La Sirena prays to the Virgen María Piedra de Imán for the protection of her voice, which she also offers as “su mayor prenda” if the Virgen guides

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94 For a reading of the novel focusing on the economic transformation that Caribbean subjects experience in a global economy, see Arroyo. See Grau-Lleveria for an analysis of how the characters’ participation in and control of the capitalist system around them allows them to create a positive identity, overcoming—to a greater or lesser extent—their social and gender marginality.
her and illuminates her path (17). Even Solange, the wife of Selena’s lover, admits the agency that the voice confers to Selena, while she depends on her husband and her husband’s money to continue performing her social role:

La voz de la Sirena le agitó el pulso, le suspendió el respiro. … Nada se podía contra ella. … Les robaba la calma y esas otras cosas seguras con que sus invitados habían llegado a la fiesta. A la fiesta de Solange, la que ella preparó con entusiasmo, vigilando cada ínfimo detalle… Pero la embaucadora en su vestíbulo, qué sabe de eso, qué sabe del trabajo que da aprenderse de memoria todas las menudencias que revelan la clase, el gusto, el pedigree. Ella no tiene que ocuparse. *Ella tiene su voz. Pero Solange, ¿qué tiene? Un marido. Y eso ayuda, pero no asegura. Da entrada, pero no otorga la llave mediante la cual Solange misma puede abrir las puertas de la aceptación.* (214-5. My emphasis)

Solange has a moment of realization of her own lack of independence vis-à-vis Selena’s autonomous self. Through her voice, Selena is able to escape her marginal social background, up to the point that she becomes independent from Martha Divine and her lover Hugo toward the end of the novel.

Sirena Selena occupies her voice with the bolero. As we saw in *Memory Mambo’s* Juani and the folk songs of her childhood, Sirena takes refuge in the boleros her abuela used to sing when she experiences sexual and/or physical abuse working in the streets:

Una noche, mientras un señor muy circunspecto le chupaba entre las piernas, el sireno empericado recordó un bolero entero de la abuela… Sirena seguía entonando boleros, uno tras otro y mientras más de adentro los sacaba, más lento chupaba el señor, más se le enternecían las comisuras de la boca, el apretón de la mano contra la base de su pubis… Todos los boleros de la abuela eran el caudal que necesitaba para protegerse para siempre de las noches en la calle. (92)

Only when she and Hugo are intimate for the first time is Selena unable to think of a bolero: “¿Por qué no logró recordar aquel bolero la primera noche en que Hugo la besó?

¿Por qué no pudo, como siempre había podido, perderse en un ronroneo de canciones,

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95 As is common, these protagonists escape a generation in their female genealogies to seek comfort in their abuelas (Pilar, for example).
alejarse de aquello que le pasaba a su cuerpo, mientras ella se perdía en otra parte?”

(234). It seems that she may have fallen in love with Hugo. However, she cannot afford love. As Grau-Lleveria argues, Selena sells the ideology of love in boleros, but she is not trapped in it (246). She must focus on her personal and professional goals as an artist and, to that end; she must refuse love and other mundane experiences. Grau-Lleveria interprets the bolero in Selena as the transformative tool that turns her into an artist: “deja de existir en la marginalidad; no es más objeto sexual; al cantar boleros se transforma en productora y controladora del arte y sus efectos” (247), i.e., effects on the audience.

Sirena is able to control the feelings and emotions that would only alienate her and distract her from her path to (non-) identity, and to social, and economic success.

The bolero is the genre that best fits her fluid, ambiguous self. As Arroyo suggests,

como lugar de la voz, [el bolero] es el creador de la androginia, ya que en el ‘tú’ y ‘yo’ del bolero, y en la voz del cantante, media ese ‘saber’ ambiguo donde ‘se privilegia la posición del sujeto en su recorrido de letras y melodías de todas las formas circundantes; el sujeto desea y el sujeto seduce. Todo parte del sujeto y todo vuelve a él, de la misma manera que la seducción parte del deseo.” (43, Arroyo quotes Iris Zavala 130)

Rodríguez describes this music genre as intended to be illusive, meant to reveal universal angst, love, and drama, regardless of the nationality or gender of the performer. She adds “Selena uses the hallucinatory power of the bolero to transport and transcend space, time, and situated bodies and to seduce and disarm those that would confine her” (218). Sirena is “vestida de pena,” as a simulacrum of sadness, a sadness she inflicts on others but cannot afford for herself. The bolero, a genre the lyrics of which can be seen as modernist
fills the voice of Selena while she keeps a distance from its content, and the pages of Sirena Selena vestida de pena, a character and a novel with postmodern traits, blurring the divisory line between high and low art.

Sirena Selena vestida de pena can thus be grouped together with Dreaming in Cuban, Memory Mambo, and ¡Yo! through common transformative language crossings and an aesthetics of multiplicity. Thematically, their female protagonists—Pilar, Juani, Yolanda, and Sirena—escape imposed national imaginaries, and gender and social constructs through a means of expression other than English or Spanish in a binary sense. Painting, the mambo, creative writing, and singing function as subversive micro-narratives that destabilize masculinist macro-narratives on nationness, and gender and sexuality, and allow the expression of multiple and fragmented postnational female selves. Through these linguistic, thematic, and aesthetic components in their texts, Cristina García, Achy Obejas, Julia Álvarez, and Mayra Santos Febres, who write in and about a postnational Gran Caribe constitute a community of practice. This literary community of practice crosses not only languages but also genres to include short story writers and drama/performance playwrights, whose texts are the focus of the following chapters.

As observed in the grancaribeña novels analyzed in this chapter, the genre blending, the fusion of past and present, the centrality of traditionally marginalized or silenced characters, the irregular and fragmented narrative structure, the merging of a poetic and a prosaic language, the inclusion of popular musical tropes such as the mambo or the bolero, the language crossings, and the multiaccentuality present in these works,

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96 For an article that analyzes comparatively the popular genre of the bolero with the literary movement of Modernism, see Muñoz-Hidalgo.
are aspects that contribute to a postmodern aesthetics and allow for the literary representation of multi-layered postnational and, in some cases, post-gendered identities in *el Gran Caribe*. 
CHAPTER 3. An Urban English, an Impossible Spanglish, and an “Emoticoned” Spanish: Crossings Toward an Aesthetics of Multiplicity in Three Short Stories del Gran Caribe

The short story is a common genre in grancaribeña writers, especially those writing from the islands and those at the beginning of their careers. Although there is little international demand from editors for the short story genre, as Ana Lydia Vega expresses (Hernández 54), anthologized short stories have begun to serve as materialization of the Gran Caribe. For example, in the Dominican Republic, we find Combatidas, combativas y combatientes. Antología de cuentos escritos por mujeres dominicanas (1992), edited by Daisy Cocco de Filippis, including names such as Hilma Contreras, Aída Cartagena Portalatín, and Ángela Hernández, with Julia Álvarez as the only usanacaribeña. The poet, essayist, and playwright Chiqui Vicioso also appears in the anthology with a critical essay titled “Los caminos de solidaridad entre mujeres escritoras.” In it, she makes a feminist claim in line with the one I propose in this project, i.e., a relational feminist view in which individuality is acquired and recognized through a (literary) community of practice. According to Vicioso, what lacks in the Caribbean is an “aporte femenino a la creación de una ideología donde la fraternidad y la solidaridad sean la piedra fundamental” (408). Vicioso mentions Camila Henríquez Ureña as the pioneer in signaling this lack. In 1930, the writer listed the fundamental dimensions that such a fraternity should encompass, including a cultural movement that is collective and that propagates vertically as well as horizontally (408). Chiqui Vicioso then enumerates a series of organizations that have been working toward filling this gap. For instance, the Círculo de Mujeres Poetas, the Centro de Investigación para la Acción Femenina
(CIPAF), and an incipient movement in Puerto Plata represented by the Sociedad Renovación in Salcedo, led by Emelda Ramos.

However, there is still much work to be done. Too often, the dialogue between the island and the metropolis remains difficult, and even among the islands themselves. Static notions of language and nation—too ontologically integrated—still pose obstacles for the grancaribeña community of practice. By way of example, Aída Cartagena Portalatín criticizes Julia Álvarez for writing in English, and there is language-related tension between Ana Lydia Vega and Nicholasa Mohr, which I will explain in this chapter. In Puerto Rico, indeed, the political context makes this dialogue all the more difficult, and the anthologies including usanacaribeñas are also very few. Among the few is Mercedes López-Baralt’s *Literatura puertorriqueña del siglo XX* (2004), which includes short stories and fragments of novels by Mayra Santos Febres, Ana Lydia Vega, Rosario Ferré, Carmen Lugo Filippi, Magali García Ramis, and Mayra Montero, among many other male writers; Esmeralda Santiago stands as the only US Puerto Rican woman writer in the anthology. It is noteworthy that there is a section of the book titled “La nación flotante, aquí y allá.” Although including women writers from aquí y allá, the anthology ignores many writers from allá most probably because they evade the hyphenated conceptualization this anthology still observes. In the seventies, this type of compilations included only male writers, such as Enrique A. Laguerre’s selection of cuentos puertorriqueños in 1975. Puerto Rico has now a few anthologies of only women writers.

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97 See Julia Álvarez’s “Doña Aída; With Your Permission” for the complete response of Julia Álvarez to the attack: “Doña Aída embraced me, but then in front of the mikes, she reamed me out. ‘Eso parece mentira que una dominicana se ponga a escribir en inglés. Vuelve a tu país, vuelve a tu idioma. Tú eres dominicana.’ (‘It seems unreal that a Dominican should write in English. Come back to your country, to your language. You are a Dominican.’) Since she was grand and old—and I was raised to have respeto for the old people—but also because she was arguing in Spanish—and I can usually only win my fights in English—I kept my mouth shut. What is it that I would have said?” (821)
“de aquí” such as Mujeres de palabra (1994) featuring María Negroni, Rosario Ferré, and Mayra Santos Febres, among others.

Grancaribeñas are now starting to move forward with anthologies such as Estatuas de sal (1996), a compilation by Mirta Yáñez and Marilyn Bobes. This anthology was extraordinary at the time for its inclusion of exile writers such as Ruth Behar, Uva de Aragón, Mayra Montero, and Achy Obejas, whose short story “We Came All the Way from Cuba so You Could Dress Like This?” was translated into Spanish for the occasion. More recently, an anthology edited by Ann Louise Bardach in 2002 includes short stories translated into Spanish by Cristina García, Ana Menéndez, and Achy Obejas together with names such as Reinaldo Arenas or Pablo Medina, which disarticulates traditional national and gender imaginaries that have been historically connected with the title of the anthology: Cuba. While including usanacaribeña writers, ironically, the book opens with a geographic map of the island and one of Havana. This move highlights the need to rethink geopolitical boundaries in relation to the nation-state and national imaginaries in today’s postnational era. However, the anthology was not immune to controversy, since “on the other side of the other great mad overcaffeinated Cuban divide, some exile writers refused to be in a collection that includes writers still living in Cuba” (xviii), showing a still present dichotomous thinking that separates the island from the mainland. This oppositional thinking usually accompanies questions of language, nation, and gender, as we have already explored. In 2007, Achy Obejas edited Havana Noir, turning Havana into a crime scene. In this anthology, her short story “Zenzizenzic” appears along with those by Leonardo Padura Fuentes and Ena Lucía Portela, among others, most of them translated into English by Obejas herself. The compilation is a response to Miami
Noir (2007), an anthology that included only one Cuban writer. Both collections are part of Akashic noir genre series. Each book is set in a different city and neighborhood: the Bronx, Los Angeles, Miami, and Havana (as urban spaces of the Gran Caribe). Still today, there is no anthology of short stories that inarguably reflects a grancaribeña community of literary practice. The above-mentioned compilations are all monolingual since those crossing writers resort to translation, thus perpetuating the fixed ontological connection between language, nation and national imaginary, and literary tradition/canon. With the present chapter, I seek to question once again the still persistent linguistic polarization between island and mainland literary works. All of the short stories analyzed cross languages in common and particular ways, and all of them share a feminist perspective that defies gender constructs, and redefines them in terms of their displaced cultural experiences.

This chapter examines Jennine Capó Crucet’s “How to Leave Hialeah,” Ana Lydia Vega’s “Pollito Chicken,” and Aurora Arias’ “Emoticons.” Capó Crucet is a Miami-born writer of Cuban immigrant parents. Although her work has yet to gain much recognition in the academy, Capó Crucet is the first “Latina” to win the Iowa Short Fiction Award in 2009 for How to Leave Hialeah, among numerous other awards and honors. Together with a long list of additional publications, the writer’s first novel, Make your Home Among Strangers, was published in 2015. Vega’s well-known “Pollito chicken” reflects a transgressive, purposeful use of an artificial and impossible “Spanglish.” Although “Pollito chicken” apparently provides a mere critique of

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98 However, this is not usual in the US, where critical anthologies such as Reading U.S. Latina Writers: Remapping American Literature, edited by Alvina E. Quintana, only include articles about works by “US Latinas”, such as Julia Álvarez, Cristina García, or Judith Ortiz Cofer. Another name is Telling to Live. Latina Feminist Testimonios by The Latina Feminist Group (2001).
Nuyorican assimilation to US culture, what results is a complex text characterized by gaps and contradictions. It is perhaps thanks to the narrative’s witty use of artificial “Spanglish” that the story is being read and studied in the US, crossing the imagined border between the island and mainland, between texts written in Spanish and those written in English, and potentially between Spanish departments and English departments in US universities. The contrast of this text with Capó Crucet’s short story and the other usanacaribeña texts under analysis in this dissertation points to a productive paradox in which different projects—with the same but also different authorial ideological motives—enter into dialogue through the use of analogous and diverse language crossings and depictions of diasporic female main characters. Finally, Arias’ “Emoticons” fully destabilizes systematic notions of language, gender, ethnicity, territory, and nation in a well-portrayed Santo Domingo in the era of globalization. Far from a mere celebration of multiaccentuality, hers is a depiction of a world that is multiple, complex, and contradictory, in which characters escape any form of categorization, yet still suffer from a sense of dislocation. Arias transcends ontological binaries to portray a Gran Caribe that is postnational, yet still not exempt from the influence of neo-colonial forces in terms of language, nation, gender, and ethnicity. These grancaribeña authors still suffer “aislamiento; falta de respeto y reconocimiento a nuestra producción; acoso sexual; [and] falta de medios para difundir nuestro trabajo” (Chiqui Vicioso on Dominican writers 409). Consequently, all seek to debunk macro-narratives in the Gran Caribe, and they do through language practices conveying multiplicity.
Jennine Capó Crucet’s short story “How to leave Hialeah” is the title and ending story of her debut collection *How to Leave Hialeah* (2009). The short story is written in English and is set in Miami-Dade County, the imagined Cuban-American space *par excellence*. More precisely, the eleven short stories take place in Hialeah, a working-class city in Greater Miami labeled “The City of Progress.” According to the 2010 US Census Bureau, 94.7% of the population of Hialeah was Hispanic/Latino, of which 73.3% was Cuban or of Cuban descent. Between 2009 and 2013, 92.8% of the population of Hialeah spoke a language other than English at home. In 2000, 92% of Hialeah residents reported speaking Spanish at home. Miami as an immigrant and global city has been the ideal crime scene in TV series (e.g. *Miami Vice, CSI Miami, Dexter*) and print narratives (e.g. Tom Wolfe’s *Back to Blood*), especially those in the crime fiction genre (e.g. Les Standiford’s John Deal Miami crime novels, Vicki Hendreicks’ *Miami Purity*, Barbara Parker’s *Suspicion* series of novels, or Carolina García-Aguilera’s *Lupe Solano* series). However, Hialeah has rarely served as the main setting for these artistic productions, except as scenery of a few episodes (for example, in García-Aguilera’s *Havana Heat,*
Lupe Solano enters the community of Hialeah, which she disdains (198). Jennine Capó Crucet gives visibility to a Miami community that distances itself from the *Art Deco*, paradisiacal, and luxurious imaginary of South Beach, Brickell Avenue, or the mansions in Cocoplum. Hialeah is home to working-class Cuban exiles of all “waves:” the first generation post 1959, the generation of the Freedom Flights from 1965 to 1973, the so-called “Marielitos” in the eighties, the “balseros” in the nineties, and more recent arrivals in the 2000s (see Lynch “Expression”; Carter & Lynch “Multilingual”).

Capó Crucet describes herself as a Miami writer. With the exception of a few lexical insertions in Spanish, her writing is in English; her compilation of short stories does not provide the reader with a glossary for the clarification of the Spanish terms. Instead of the most common designations in terms of nation, such as Cuban or US writer, or in terms of ethnicity, such as Latina writer, she defines herself as a writer in relation to the urban space where she grew up and which is the setting of many of her works. In *How to Leave Hialeah*, she seeks to give voice to a particular working-class immigrant experience in Miami “from a bunch of different angles,” providing the reader with a “sense of place and a sense of culture that isn’t necessarily Latino culture but is very much American culture” (*Furious Fiction*). By using the second-person narrative voice, the main character of “How to Leave Hialeah” avoids addressing any of the worlds that initially oppress her and instead addresses her own *gran caribeña* community.

This short story differs from other *usanacaribeña* texts in matters of social class. The writer affirms in an interview that the main character of the story “comes from a background that most people would define as lower-class, and she’s thrust into a world

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99 See the whole interview in the program *Furious Fiction*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdaU_oHqM_8
that is different from home in pretty much every way imaginable” (Scholes Young 2). In terms of generation (which as explained before is not a relevant feature for the inclusion of these authors in a community of practice), Capó Crucet is the youngest among those considered in this project. She was born in Hialeah to Cuban parents who emigrated before adolescence. For her, the myth of the Cuban memory should remain in a more distant past. However, the fact that Miami is her home base enforces the burden she bears since, as Cristina García states, to a great extent “in Miami, … very rigid ideas of what it means to be Cuban exist, and the mindset here is ‘you’re with us, or you’re against us’” (del Rio 44). García adds that this is a very exclusive notion: “It doesn’t include all us who also consider ourselves Cuban and think very differently” (44).

3.1.1. Hialeah as the New (Not) Returning Home

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

The title and plot of “How to Leave Hialeah” goes back again, in a particular way, to the notion of “(not) returning to the homeland” that, as argued in the previous chapter, usually takes place in certain discourses of some first-generation diasporic communities in Miami. The main female character of this short story, a partial alter ego of the author if we consider the biography Capó Crucet herself signs on her webpage,100 narrates the story in a sarcastic and humorous tone—which evokes the author’s background in sketch comedy writing—, and an apparently instructional second person. For her, the “Cuban” home is Hialeah, an idea that follows the most traditional conceptualization of Cuba’s encompassing both the Caribbean island and South Florida. However, the northerly

100 See http://jennine-crucet.squarespace.com/bio/.
location of the story’s main character expands this vision, as Caribbean mobility spreads all over the US (as well as other transatlantic areas such as New England and the Midwest). In a way, this short story shows how first-generation Cubans in Hialeah, represented by the protagonist’s parents, have not assimilated completely to the “American ways” and they continue living as Cubans in America.

However, the sarcastic tone of the second-person perspective of the young main character suggests that, in her case, she openly defies this sometimes-static vision of the world in exile:

…begin formulating arguments that will convince your parents to let you move far away from the city where every relative you have that’s not in Cuba has lived since flying or floating into Miami; you will sell your car, you will eat cat food to save money, you are their American Dream. Get their blessing to go to the one school that accepts you by promising to come back and live down the street from them forever. Be sure to cross your fingers behind your back while making this promise, otherwise you risk being struck by lightning. (156)

Capó Crucet moves away from the autobiographical “I” we observed in García, Obejas, and Álvarez to detach from the autoethnographical component that is expected in “ethnic Latina” narratives in the US because her writing is equally “American.” The second-person narration stands in a sort of middle-point between academia’s lack of recognition of the value of the personal experience—“too often preferring to discuss the pattern of the whole: how entire groups behave to the detriment of the singular” (Álvarez, On Haunted 74)—, and the first-person type of narrative that normally takes place in the debut novels of “US ethnic writers.” Her use of the second-person narrative, combined with the second-person singular imperative, does not offer instruction, guidance, or advice. The narrative voice and protagonist of the short story narrates her—and somewhat the author’s—own story of leaving and (not) returning to the “Cuban home” from an external
and anecdotal point of view. Humor is used as a “way around a character’s lack of self-awareness” (Scholes Young); and the use of the second person is employed by the narrative voice (the protagonist) as a way of distancing herself from her own actions, as if she was talking to a younger, immature self.

Although she does not specifically mention this short story, Capó Crucet explains in the Bio section of her webpage that she writes “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” (2). At the same time, this use of the second-person narration conveys a sense of impersonality and repetition to the story, as if the narrated experience happens to more women in her situation, as if she is narrating what one expectedly does, and what expectedly happens to a “Latina” being raised in Hialeah in a Cuban family and moving up north. This is also the reason why readers never know what the protagonist’s name is. She may even be inviting those women in her situation to “leave” the static national imaginaries and masculinist hegemonies on both sides of the hyphen. This idea can be supported by Butler’s notion that the repetition of regulatory frames is what shapes your identity, a process difficult to escape from, as it is challenging for this main character to escape Hialeah: “It is impossible to leave without an excuse—something must push you out, at least at first. You won’t go otherwise; you are happy, the weather is bright, and you have a car” (153). Leaving Hialeah and its surrounding discourses from both the Caribbean and the US is as difficult as it was for her parents to leave Cuba and not to long for this imagined (home)land. The protagonist is trying to escape the narratives of (not) returning home that prevail in her background. However, she is in a way trapped in them. To a certain extent, Hialeah becomes for her
what Cuba was for her parents. She satirizes the notion of “(not) returning to the homeland” as an authenticator of cultural identity that constantly takes place in certain homogenous discourses in some diasporic communities in Miami, but once she leaves, she inevitably reproduces and lives in the same discourses of (not) coming back. Jennine Capó Crucet’s depiction of Miami becomes “a complex portrait of a place you both love and can’t wait to escape” (Scholes Young).

As shown in the aforementioned quotation, the protagonist is the American Dream of her parents’ generation. She is supposed to live both the life they could not (afford to) live due to their migratory status and their working class condition (“Do not tell anyone your father never finished high school” (156), says the narrative voice), but she is also forced to live their Cuban way of life. This quotation shows the duality the main character must face in her everyday life; that of living the American ways while remaining in her parents’ Cuban narratives. Through a satiric, humorous narrative tone, and the use of the second-person narration as her distancing from a story that keeps repeating for usanacaribeñas like her, she seeks to escape the traumas both the American society and her Cuban family/neighborhood impose on her, and the masculinist narratives of both national imaginaries.

When finally leaving Hialeah, the protagonist realizes she does not fit the university environment in New England either, even though they say “You are important to our university community. … You are part of our commitment to diversity” (156).

101 The superstition about the lighting represents her assumed Cuban superstitious self. In the only critical essay written on How to Leave Hialeah so far, Álvarez states that “Hispanics have a strong belief in the supernatural, religious, and magical often living in a sacred space which is different from the common American belief in scientific reasoning” (69). I would add “archetypical” or even “stereotypical” before her use of “Hispanics” and “American.” In a way, these kinds of comments perpetuate the hyphen ideology our protagonist also maintains at the beginning of her story but seems to overcome at the end.
Hence, she starts feeling relieved with the plans to go back to Hialeah—which feels more like home now—for the first Christmas holiday (156). However, after four years away from Hialeah, panic arrives: “panic that you are panicking when you think about going back—you had to leave to realize you ever wanted to” (159). The protagonist starts doubting the meaning of “home” and what “home” is for her. Neither joining the Spanish Club nor taking a Latino Studies class makes her remember who she was in high school, or makes her get excited about moving back home, as suggested by a Latino fraternity brother at the university (160). Not only does the seminar not clarify her doubts and anxieties (she gets an A- in the course), but it even pushes her to break up with the fraternity brother “after deciding he and his organization are posers buying into the Ghetto-Fabulous-Jennifer-Lopez-Loving Latino identity put forth by the media” (160). This idea connects to Appadurai’s notion of mediaescapes in postmodernity, as the images and narratives, and protonarratives, of the Other that the distribution of the electronic capabilities produce according to the interests of those who own and control them (35).

When stating what she learned in the seminar to her parents, such as “What does it really mean to be a minority? How do we construct identity? How is the concept of race forced upon us?,” she receives a “What the fuck are you talking about?” (160) from her father as an answer, who does not see himself as an object of academic, white-collar theorizations. After graduating, the protagonist decides she cannot come “home,” because she needs to know what “home” means before she can go there (160). This decision is welcomed neither by her father, who “throws his fork on the floor and yells, What the fuck are you talking about?,” nor by her mother, who responds “But mamita, you made a
promise” (160). The protagonist’s parents, contrary to what occurred with Julia Álvarez’s Yolanda, seem to prioritize “home” and a marriage over their daughter’s education. But the protagonist experiences the same thing as Capó Crucet: the realization that there are parts of her identity “that have come to [her] since leaving home, and those parts just do not fit with the parts of [her] that need to think of Miami as home base” (Scholes Young).

She then pursues graduate studies in the so-called Great White North (160) – the rural Midwest more precisely, which epitomizes the imagined real America by both the Cuban national imaginary symbolized by her parents, and the American homogeneous national imaginary on the other side of the hyphen of Cuban-American. The narrative voice sarcastically expresses this idea: “Tell yourself, this is America! This is the heartland!” (160). Once living there, she realizes that “nice” people from the North make her feel that Hialeah is more “home” than ever:

Appreciate how everyone is so nice, but claim Hialeah fiercely since it’s all people ask you about anyway. They’ve never seen hair so curly, so dark. You have never felt more Cuban in your life, mainly because for the first time, you are consistently being identified as Mexican or something. This thrills you until the beginning-of-semester party for your grad program: you are the only person in attendance who is not white, and you’re the only one under five foot seven. (160)

Hialeah becomes an extension for Cuba. Having been born in this city does not automatically confer “Americanness” upon the main character due to her ethnic features – the dark greenish circles hanging under her eyes, the dark curly hair (163)—and migrant background, and her Spanish/Miami accent.

Whereas Pilar, Juani or Yolanda were raised in a Cuban or Dominican family in an Anglo public/social environment, and they initially idealized and then deconstructed a Cuba/Dominican Republic they had imagined from stories told at home, letters and other memories and narratives, the current Miami female character lives her parents’ Cuban
way both at home and in the US city she was raised. It is only when leaving Hialeah that she starts feeling she does not fit into the “real America.” If Pilar, Juani, and Yolanda tried to decolonize the two national imaginaries represented on either side of a hyphen between Cuba(n) or Dominica(n) and America(n), Capó Crucet’s main character must go through a similar process, but for her Hialeah becomes part of the homogeneous and static Cuba(n) part on one side of the hyphen. In fact, in an attempt to seek refuge in her roots when feeling threatened by her new white Anglo environment, she starts dating a brother in the campus’s Latino Fraternity. He is of Puerto Rican origin, but his parents are third-generation so they do not speak Spanish at all:

Tell him you’ve always liked Puerto Ricans (even though every racist joke your father has ever told you involved Puerto Ricans in some way). Visit his house in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and meet his third-generation American parents who cannot speak Spanish. Do not look confused when his mother serves meat loaf and mashed potatoes and your boyfriend calls it real home cooking. … Hold your laughter even as she claims that Che Guevara is actually still alive and living in a castle off the coast of Vieques. (159)

This story disarticulates once more the assumed happy notion of pan-Latinidad, as we observed in the treatment of the conflictive relationship between Gina and Juani in Achy Obejas’ *Memory Mambo*. It is also a direct critique of the umbrella term “Latino,” especially when referring to “Mexican or something,” i.e., when it does not take into account the diverse and complex array of “Latinidades” in terms of generation, national imaginary, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. This paragraph shows the different “migrant” experiences of a fourth-generation Puerto Rican man in New Jersey and a second-generation Cuban woman in Hialeah, as different from Juani’s, Pilar’s, and Yolanda’s existences. For him, the “Latino” experience becomes an idealized aspect of a distant past that exerts little influence on his persona.
The more our protagonist is seen as the stereotype of a “Latina” (as an exotic umbrella term that does not contemplate multiplicity and cultural specificities); that sees her as “Mexican or something,” she feels more attached to her Cuban self than ever: “Chug the wine and decide that everyone in the world is a poser except maybe your parents” (161). She even succumbs to the stereotype as an act of provocation: “Have another glass of wine and slip Spanish words into your sentences to see if anyone asks you about them. Consider yourself very charming and the most attractive female in your year, by far—you are exotic” (161). In her new environment in the Midwest, she is even called Spic for the first time: “You have not heard the word Spic used in the past decade. Your parents were Spics. Spics is so seventies. They would not believe someone just called you that. Crack up because even the Midwest’s slurs are way behind the East Coast. Rename the computer file of your dissertation draft Spictacular” (163). Her mother’s advice is to assimilate to the “American” ways: “Why can’t you just shut up about being Cuban, your mother says after asking if you’re still causing trouble for yourself. No one would even notice if you flat-ironed your hair and stopped talking” (163). She does not want her daughter to suffer from alienation due to her ethnic origins: she is the American Dream, although, at the same time, she makes her daughter promise she will come back “home,” marry, and live close to her and her husband.

While suffering from these racialized narratives in the “real America,” the protagonist does not want to go back either to the narratives and memories her parents and community inflicted on her, as occurred to Juani and Pilar: “Start to worry you have communist leanings—wonder if that’s really so bad. Keep this to yourself; you do not want to hear the story of your father eating grasshoppers while in a Cuban prison, not
again” (164). At least in the Midwest, she can freely vote for the Democrats without feeling the pressure of Hialeah’s politics that both her parents and her circle of friends forever support:

Decide to stay in the rural Midwest partly for political reasons: you have done what no one in your family has ever done—you have voted in a state other than Florida. And you cannot stand Hialeah’s politics. You monitored their poll results via the Internet. Days before the election, you received a mass email from Myra urging you to vote for the candidate whose books you turn upside down when you see them in stores. (163-4)

Therefore, she finds a job in the Midwest not yet thinking of coming back to Hialeah until she is forced to do so because of a death in the family: that of her cousin Barbarita. Only such a traumatic family event can reconcile her with “home,” or what used to be “home.” A major trauma in her family/community leads her to overcome the trauma of dislocation. She did not even know that Barbarita had been ill for the previous six months. She was too busy making up excuses for not coming back to Hialeah: “you had to find a job, and the market is grueling. Your mother had said she understood. Also, you adopted a rabbit in April (you’ve been a little lonely in Wisconsin), and your mother knows you don’t like leaving the poor thing alone for too long” (165). But, while the protagonist was the one avoiding the family stories about roots and memories, she now feels she has been left out. It is in this time of crisis she realizes she was staying on the hyphen, in the in-between, and that she now needs to get off and surpass the rejas of her home in Hialeah. Even though she tried to convince herself that those physical rejas were a metaphor for her childhood, “a caged bird, wings clipped, never to fly free; a zoo animal on display yet up far sale to the highest-bidding boyfriend; a rare painting trapped each night after the museum closes” (168), she now understands that she wanted to mean it, because that made her leaving an escape and not a desertion (168). Only at this
moment of self-realization, forced by her feeling of guilt for having deceived a member of her community of women, can she go back to Hialeah “ready to mourn everything” (169). From this moment on, and after realizing she was perpetuating those binary macro-narratives she was condemning and escaping from, she is ready to accept her multiple self; to live here and there (in the Cuba of her parents, Hialeah, and the rest of the US); to connect all the micro-narratives that form her identity and live with and through them, having left behind the traumas that both narratives on each side of the hyphen were imposing. She is now ready to mourn the death of those macro-narratives (Hialeah as Cubanness/the Midwest as Americanness; English/Spanish). The end of the story implies a new beginning for our protagonist off the hyphen.

3.1.2. Not Spanish, but Urban

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

Our protagonist finally goes back to Hialeah “ready to mourn everything” just when she has started a job as an adjunct instructor at a junior college in southern Wisconsin teaching a course called “The Sociology of Communities.” Capó Crucet’s protagonist feels that her students, several of them from Chicago, finally understand her accent as urban, not as Spanish or Hispanic, as it was perceived at her previous institutions both in the Midwest and in New England. Even her students’ comments and questions about Miami have nothing to do with Hialeah, ethnicity, or Spanish language,
but about trivial popular perceptions regarding climate or music, which place Miami as part of a global landscape (Appadurai). This recognition and celebration of an urban accent coincides with the birth of our protagonist’s recognition and celebration of a fluid identity. The narrative voice highlights the complex, contradictory and diverse spaces such as her classroom, where people from Chicago interact with locals from southern Wisconsin. Urban spaces such as Chicago are multiple, diverse and global. In them, multiaccentuality is recognized, contrary to what occurred in the rural Midwest or in rural New England, where multiaccentuality was not perceptible. It is primarily in urban spaces this phenomenon manifests in the period of late modernity and globalization (Blommaert; Appadurai). Urban spaces are the suitable contexts for diasporic public spheres to emerge since these are “part of the cultural dynamic of urban life in most countries and continents, in which migration and mass mediation coconstitute a new sense of the global as modern and the modern as global” (Appadurai 10). Metropolitan Miami is a clear representation of a diasporic public sphere, where global urban Miami establishes a dialogue with local Hialeah. The protagonist’s new university environment is representative of this concept as well. Despite its rural setting, students come from all over, principally from a global city as Chicago. This shows the current situation of flows and migration not only transnationally but also internally, from rural to urban areas and vice versa.

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

Capó Crucet’s own writing strategies reveal a deviation from standard American
English practices, and conventional narrative forms in favor of an urban type of language.
She moves away from a naturalized rigid conceptualization of the English language. To
analyze the linguistic condition of Capó Crucet’s protagonist, we need analytical tools
that can be used to study phenomena “as located in and distributed across different scales,
from the global to the local, and to examine the connections between these various levels
in ways that do not reduce phenomena and events to their strict context of occurrence”
(Blommaert, Sociolinguistics 1). Accordingly, I use the theoretical framework of
Blommaert’s sociolinguistics of globalization rather than sociolinguistic studies on code-
switching, which understand “codes” as “artefactualized languages” (Blommaert,
Sociolinguistics 12),102 and which in most cases fail to do justice to complex linguistic
identities and situations while continuing to perpetuate a dualistic mode of thinking about
two separate, bounded and static/standard notions of language and national imaginary. In

102 Blommaert refers to the traditional focus of sociolinguistics on static variation, local distribution of
varieties, and stratified language contact (1).
current linguistic repertoires, there is more than “language” at play, as I already noted in chapter 1. As Blommaert states, these are repertoires

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

Aside from the established paradigm of the “sociolinguistics of distribution,” the scholarship that studies the linguistic patterns of migrant subjects fixed in space (studies on distribution of variables in one locality or across cities, countries or regions), and time (studies on generational transmission), Blommaert argues for a “sociolinguistics of mobility.” This paradigm focuses “not on language-in-place but on language-in-motion, with various spatio-temporal frames interacting with one another” *(Sociolinguistics 5)*, which Blommaert calls “vertical scale levels,” in which social, cultural and political “indexical” distinctions occur.

Our protagonist’s linguistic situation is an example of the superdiverse multilingual repertoire Blommaert denotes. She does not share one common language and culture associated with one particular place or community of people. In her, a “transformative ‘diversification of diversity’” (cf. Vertovec) occurs in terms of ethnicity, country of origin, gender, social class, labour market experiences, and spatial and local factors. She is born and raised in Hialeah, a characteristically Cuban community of Miami, where the Spanish language used in town combines with other Spanish varieties in the area and with the English as lingua franca at school for the younger generations, the sons and daughters of Cuban (and other Hispanophone) working-class parents. Our
female character moves translocally when pursuing a college degree in New England, “the real America,” and then takes a job in southern Wisconsin. She also moves transsocially because through education, she now ascends to an upper-level social-class scale while maintaining her family links in Hialeah. Her migration status is equally complex; it is not as straightforward as people *emigrating* and *immigrating*—that is, a change in the spatial organization of one’s life in an enduring way. People left their country and settled in another. In that new country, they lived separated from their country of origin, perhaps (but not necessarily) in ethnic communities. They took their languages and other cultural belongings with them, but the separation from the land of origin and the permanent nature of migration was likely to bring pressure to accommodate to the host society. (Blommaert, *Sociolinguistics* 6)

Whereas this resembles our protagonist’s parent’s migratory process, it greatly differs with her own “migratory” or ethnic condition; her way is toward a “diversification of diversity,” a complex multilingual repertoire in which “ethnic” languages and varieties are combined with lingua francas and, as a result, ethnicities are recategorized (Rampton). While being an American citizen by birth, our protagonist is seen both as the American Dream and as a Cuban at home, although her parents are the ones who immigrated, and as a Hispanic/Latina or “as the Mexican one” (162) in the North. Linguistically, she functions in English at school, at work, and in social events in the North. Her English is accented; it is perceived as Hispanic, or maybe Miamian, in New England, and as urban in Wisconsin. At home, she hears and has always heard Spanish; and she talks a vernacular English with Spanish crossings when socializing in Hialeah.103

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103 As mentioned above, at the beginning-of-semester party at her graduate program in New England, our protagonist slips Spanish words into her sentences to see if anyone asks her about them. A student drives her home after the party because he does not think she is able to take the bus, and she says “What, puta, you think I never rode no bus in Miami?” Whereas this is probably a common way of speaking and a typical language crossing among her circle of friends in Hialeah, the student replies: “That’s fascinating—what does *puta* mean?” (161) While these crossings are perceived as natural in Miami, her new context reflects more monolingual codes or practices, seeing certain multilingual practices as “fascinating and exotic”.

Once in Wisconsin, she reads literature, writes emails, and probably watches television in Standard English, but phone communication with her parents is in Cuban Spanish. When she visits Hialeah, radio commercials are often in a series of Spanish varieties as well, and television news is given in a standard or “neutral” US variety of the Spanish language that has little to do with the one spoken by her parents (Artman). This type of fragmented—sometimes “incomplete”—linguistic and cultural repertoire reflects the highly diverse life-trajectories and environments of today’s migrant subjects (Blommaert, *Sociolinguistics* 8).

Indeed, the whole book, *How to Leave Hialeah*, can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of Appadurai’s notion of “vernacular globalization,” of the postmodern dialogue between the local and the global, both in linguistic and cultural terms. Capó Crucet affirms that in her compilation of short stories, she wanted to capture “the idea of a big, overcrowded city still feeling small and inescapable, with everyone up in each other’s business, connected in some vague way but not necessarily recognizing it” (Scholes Young). Global Miami, and Hialeah itself, is expressed in multifaceted forms of heterogeneous neighborhoods resulting in diverse expressions of locality, and Capó Crucet’s book and language use capture this idea. The work of all of the authors analyzed in this dissertation reflects a type of “vernacular globalization” in the sense that through their artistic production and the aesthetics of multiplicity, they produce globality “at one particular scale-level, lower than the fully global one: it is the connectedness of small pockets of people located (and ‘local’) in different parts of the world, sharing cultural

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104 The writer adds, “The bulk of the stories in the book happen within in a ten- or fifteen-block area, so the characters are neighbors and they naturally float in and out of each other’s stories” (Scholes Young). In fact, the author confesses that she reads the “Neighbors” section of the *Miami Herald* every morning in search of “spectacular ideas for stories” (Scholes Young).
products and being involved in processes of joint cultural production” (Blommaert 77) in a community of practice.

3.1.3. An Excuse to Leave and a Reason to Go Back

My job in LA was working with students in South Los Angeles who went to some of the most under-served high schools in the county. I had a lot in common with them as far as background … I told them bluntly, as fun and as challenging as the next four years will be, and as much as the rest of your lives will be a reward for valuing your mind and your education over more ephemeral things, you will never relate to your family in the same way. You will never fit in here the way you think you have so far. You will never really belong in either place once you go. You are going to be stuck between two worlds because one formed you into the person who feels fulfilled by the second. You are taking the hit for your future children and their children—no one after you will feel torn in exactly this way again—and you are doing that because you are strong enough to be all these different versions of yourself and still be okay. (Capó Crucet in an interview with Scholes Young)

The narrative voice starts the story by affirming that it is impossible to leave Hialeah without an excuse. Michael Cardenas Jr. is the main character’s pretext to escape from Hialeah. He is her boyfriend in high school: “Your mother will love him because he plans to marry you in three years when you turn eighteen. He is nineteen. He also goes to Miami High, where he is very popular because he plays football and makes fun of reading” (154). Although born in the US, he is the personification of the prototype of the “macho Latino.” Michael Cardenas Jr. presents the four values that have been archetypically considered “Latin” in certain social sciences studies: “personalismo, familismo, marianismo y machismo” (Cauce & Domenech-Rodríguez 12-14). He is obsessed with having sex with our protagonist with the goal of possessing her because “you are a virgin and somewhat Catholic and he knows if you sleep together, you’ll feel too guilty to ever leave him” (154). He seems happy with his working-class condition and
finally attends Florida State University—which has rolling admissions and various guarantees of acceptance for Florida residents—with the only aspiration of having sex with college girls, who “have sex with you without crying for two hours afterward” (154). Nevertheless, these are not the girls he will probably end up marrying. Michael Cardenas Jr. will possibly perpetuate the traditional gender roles that have been passed on to him through generations and will marry a woman that takes care of him:

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

The protagonist’s way of escaping this intra-generational gender-role tendency is literacy, formal education. Explained as if it was almost done unconsciously, it is during the “broken-up weeks” with Michael “that you do things like research out-of-state colleges and sign up for community college classes at night to distract you from how pissed you are. This has the side effect of boosting your GPA” (154). When she is officially “dumped” by Michael because “you are stubborn about the sex thing, and still, you can’t think of your butt as anything other than an out-hole” (155), it is when she decides to apply for colleges beyond Florida.105 A young man like Michael would have placed obstacles in the protagonist’s way to an education. A marriage with him would have probably made our protagonist play the traditional gender roles that have surrounded her both in her domestic and publish spheres since she was born. Through literacy, she can

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105 The narrative voice admits that she cries “because you’re genuinely hurt—you love him, you do—and because you did not apply early-decision to any colleges because you hadn’t yet decided if you should follow him to FSU” (155).
resist the dominant hegemonies and masculine hierarchies both in her Cuban background and in the “white America.”

Susan Strehle states, “both home and nation draw on and perpetuate a fundamentally patriarchal authority, hardly unique to these institutions. By no accident, the discourse of home and nation points to this authority in allied ways, so that nations – ‘motherlands’ and ‘fatherlands’ – have ‘founding fathers’ and patriarchal homes have ‘governors’” (432). The protagonist of “How to Leave Hialeah” struggles to leave not only her “home” (in) Hialeah but also its connected national imaginary and masculine hierarchy. What her mother advises her to do is simultaneously assimilate to the American ways and also maintain the masculine hierarchy she has experienced at home since birth. When she is about to leave for college, her mother has a “vague” sex talk with her suggesting virginity until marriage:

… She may rent The Miracle of Life; she may not… –I was a virgin until my wedding night, she says. Believe her. Ask if your dad was a virgin, too. Know exactly what she means when she says, Sort of. Try not to picture your father as a teenager, on top of some girl doing what you and Carla call a Temporary Penis Occupation. Assure yourself that TPOs are not sex, not really, because TPOs happen … without any actual movement on your part. Do not ask about butt-sex, even though Michael has presented this as an option to let you keep your semi-virginity. Your mother will mention it briefly on her own, saying, For that men have prostitutes. (155)

Her mother perpetuates this marianismo throughout the entire story. It is important to remember, “stereotypically women are taught not to complain” (Álvarez, On Haunted 71). When the protagonist breaks things off with a Spaniard she was dating at the university in New England, she does not dare tell her mother because “she loves
Spaniards, and you are twenty and not married and you refuse to settle down” (159).

For her mother, excellent grades in her daughter’s academic career still constitute “coming back with nothing” (159). For women indoctrinated into the masculine hierarchy, education is nothing compared to a man (Álvarez, On Haunted 71). For that reason, when our protagonist comes back for the first time to Hialeah and refuses to talk to Michael Cardenas Jr., her mother betrays her by telling Michael her daughter is in her bedroom, although she had asked her to lie and say she was not home: “Swallow down the wave of nausea when you catch your mother winking at him and tilting her head toward that window. Pack immediately and live out of your suitcase for the one week left in your visit” (157). Only education offers our protagonist the tools to leave behind those marianist gender roles she has grown up with in Hialeah. She starts freeing her sexuality and cultural constrictions at college: “You have had sex with one and a half guys (counting TPOs) and yes, there’d been guilt, but God did not strike you dead” (157). It is not arbitrary that she chooses Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa as the subject of her senior thesis. In a less dramatic way, she also escapes because she does not want to marry under her family’s pressure either. Of course, our protagonist can now, when narrating the past, be sarcastic about her relationship with Michael and with her mother, because she has managed to leave and take some distance.

However, the masculinist hierarchy not only happens at “home” and the national imaginary connected to her “homeland.” It also takes place in academia, and white

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106 The Spaniard’s colonizer/colonized complex that pushes our protagonist to break up with him, the fact that “he mentions your preference for being on top during sex subconsciously functions as retribution for his people conquering your people” (158), is precisely what makes her mother particularly like Spaniards. 107 Álvarez supports her argument presenting a study on gender roles in Hispanic cultures by Barton and Hamilton 171, which confirms that “traditionally the man is more educated, more literate than the woman[, who] is thought not to need a higher education as she should constrain her efforts towards getting a man” (71).
American literacy and national pride, into which she has been formally educated since she started in the school system. Once she starts college in New England, this is the reality she lives in. Diversity is only a university aphorism, and too many stereotypes and prejudices still surround those students who are “special” like her. When she moves to The Great White North for her graduate studies, the situation gets even worse. She is the only person who is not white in her department; she feels her African roots more than ever (161). The men that approach her do it because they see her as exotic. For instance, she starts dating a third-year graduate student who finds her “fascinating” and asks her “all sort of questions about growing up in el barrio” until she discovers that he has been using her for research purposes: “he’s recently changed his dissertation topic to something concerning the Cuban-American community in Miami” (162) without telling her. He excuses himself, “Maybe I did … But that isn’t why I dated you, it was a bonus” (162). He has always seen her as someone exotic that can be the object of his research. The conflict of representation is at stake here. The protagonist has not even been given the chance to speak. She has been given the role of a subaltern that cannot speak (Spivak), and her boyfriend gives voice to a white, male, privileged, academic,

108 The main character wants to do well in her classes, because “emails from the school’s Office of Diversity have emphasized that you are special, that you may feel like you’re not cut out for this, that you should take advantage of the free tutors offered to students like you” (156). Also, although in the anti-binge drinking posters the Hall Director puts in her mailbox there is a group of eight grinning students of which only one is white, “You look at your residents and … they are all white, except for the girl from Kenya and the girl from California”, with whom she starts to hang out and laugh at the slogan Such Diversity in One University! (158).

109 This episode is reminiscent of an episode in Julia Álvarez’s ¡Yo!. Yolanda writes a “report” for school about Sarita, the daughter of their maid Primitiva: “What she proposed to do was observe my acculturation—I’d never heard of such a thing as a way of understanding her own immigrant experience” (62), says Sarita. Sarita feels that this report tries to capture and fix her: “I still felt as if something had been stolen from me. Later, in an anthropology course I took in college, we read about how certain primitive (how I hate that word!) tribes won’t allow themselves to be photographed because they feel their spirits have been taken from them. Well, that’s the way I felt. Those pages were … a part of me” (66). It is not what Yolanda writes about her that annoys her, but the fact that Yolanda sees her as an object of study. Sarita is silenced by the words on Yolanda’s report. She is not given the chance to speak for/about herself.
institutionalized postcolonial discourse that studies the subaltern through probably the same modes of colonial dominance it seeks to disarticulate. Not long before, the protagonist had learned of her boyfriend’s third testicle. Far from using the word *exotic* to describe his physical condition, because she has learned that “that word is used to push people into some separate, freakish category” (162), she feels a kind of solidarity with him: “…think that you could love this gloomy, deformed person; maybe he has always felt the loneliness sitting on you since you left home” (162). This anecdote demonstrates how a different physical condition in a white man does not have the same heavy burden as being “Latina” (i.e., from a different ethnicity) in that context. He still fits a system, which is perpetuated in academia, which sees her as belonging to a non-regular community in the US.¹¹⁰

However, this same academia, belonging to the American formal education she has always received, serves as a tool for resistance at the same time. Leaving Hialeah and obtaining an education allows her to escape and denaturalize both national and masculinist imaginaries that have always surrounded her. She is now inside the official discourse and, from there, she can start deconstructing it. Also, academia allows her to cross classes. She can leave her lower-class condition, a fact that partly frees her from being subsumed into those gender roles she seeks to avoid. For a moment, she forgets that it is her community of women both in “white America” and in Hialeah that will end up giving her more power to evade and contest those fixed imaginaries. Although she wonders, “Is this really happening? I am part of this group?” (162-3), she sits “in biweekly off-campus meetings with your fellow Latinas, each of them made paler by the

¹¹⁰ The narrative voice states that she has to change advisors several times until she finds one who does not refer to her as the *Mexican one* and does not ask her how her research applies to regular communities (162). What is more, she overhears the program coordinator call her a *Spic* doing research about *spics* (163).
Great White North’s conquest over their once-stubborn pigment. They face the same issues in their departments—the problem, you’re learning, is system-wide. Write strongly worded joint letters to be sent at the end of the term” (162). Yet, with her departure, she has left women in Hialeah behind. The first time she goes back to Hialeah after her first semester in New England, she visits Myra, a high school friend. Myra does not react well to our protagonist’s *Oh man, that sucks* reaction, when her friend tells her she still works as a truck dispatcher for El Dorado Furniture (157). Although Myra tries to ignore the comment, our protagonist insists: “Seriously, chica, that’s a high school job—you can’t work there forever” (157). Myra responds, “Shut up with this chica crap like you know me … Then she slams her pool cue clown on the green felt and throws the chunk of chalk at you as she charges out” (157). The protagonist determines Myra is jealous and comprehends they now belong to rather different worlds. Now that she belongs to an educated class she breaks the pact among women she had with Myra (a pact that contemplates multiple specificities—cultural, and social, among other particularities—in each of these women). Also, in a way, she breaks her pact with her cousin Barbarita. As similarly happens in *Memory Mambo*, the pact among cousins in a forced eternal exile is what helps them resist the masculinist macro-narratives on gender and nation they have lived with. But Barbarita has died. She has had a brain tumor for six months and, although the protagonist tries to blame her mother for not telling her, for robbing her final hours with her cousin, and for robbing Barbarita of her [own] escape (166), she recognizes that it has been eight months since the last time she talked to her cousin—“at Noche Buena, last time you were home” (165). The protagonist excuses herself, “that is normal—you live far away” (165), but she feels she has betrayed Barbarita.
We know that Barbarita was a lesbian: “The family scandal became Barbarita’s special lady-friend, with whom she’d been living the previous eight years” (166). Her family does not fully accept her sexuality, not even Barbarita’s mother. Consistent with the humorous style of narrating, the narrative voice explains,

Barbarita loved papaya and making jokes about papaya. One time, before she even knew what it meant, she called her sister a papayona in front of everyone at a family pig roast. Her mother slapped her hard enough to lay her out on the cement patio. She did not cry, but she stormed inside to her room and did not come out until she’d said the word papayona out loud and into her pillow two hundred times… She’d told you this story when your parents dragged you to visit Barbarita’s mom and her newly busted hip while you were home during one of your college breaks. Barbarita’s mother … said, I never understood why you even like that fruit. It tastes like a fart. (166)

Playing with the meaning of papaya in Cuban dialect (i.e., vagina), the narrative voice informs the reader of the difficulty of being lesbian in the Hialeah community. Only our protagonist seems to accept Barbarita’s sexuality as natural, and only could she make fun of her by calling her Barbarino (165). She now feels responsible for not having facilitated Barbarita’s escape: “she has never been further north than Orlando. When she was a teenager, she’d bragged to you that one day, she’d move to New York City and never come back” (165). Now, she is finally keeping her promise of going back. And she goes back ready to mourn everything; ready to mourn her cousin, but also both macro-narratives on each side of a hyphen that did not let her be her multiple self, neither here not there. She is ready to mourn the person she was, and start accepting the person she has become. But she now knows she can only do it by accepting all the fragmented parts that form her (non-) identity: she drinks Café Bustelo in an “I-don’t-do-Mondays” mug (167). As happened with Pilar, Juani, and Yo, the protagonist does not find in her Cuban heritage an identity lost between two worlds, but rather reaches a self-affirmation of her
usana self. At the same time, the protagonist is given the possibility of the promised American dream of upward mobility, traditionally denied to women in her situation.

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

The urban English and the particular aesthetics her writing conveys engage her participation in the community of practice represented in this project. Official discourses have traditionally marginalized all these writers because of their gender and ethnic origins. For that reason, belonging to a community of literary practice becomes a way to gain visibility and accessibility so that a larger readership/audience recognizes their work.
Far from marginalizing them even more, their linguistic and aesthetic “branding” makes their works marketable and, in a sense, unique, while at the same time serving to denaturalize monolingual and monolithic macro-narratives and literary canons, toward recognition of multiplicity as a “normal, natural means of expression” in its own right. As stated by Ortega and Saporta Sternbach, “major critics have recognized the immutable quality of the canon in spite of the changing social circumstances that originally put works in it. As a result, canonized works become subsumed into a static monolith and as a consequence, works by women, people of color, and working classes are rarely considered universal enough to be valued as ‘good taste’ or ‘great books’” (4). Through their linguistic, aesthetic, and thematic strategies, the women writers whose works I analyze create a community of practice that empowers them to attain the utopic goal of multiplicity in the artistic production of the Gran Caribe. In Capó Crucet’s specific case ("first in their family to go to college, from a low-income community, from a high school with a high drop-out rate where the bulk of the students don’t go on to a four-year school,” as admitted by the author herself in an interview with Scholes Young), formal education and creative writing open the door to an otherwise unimaginable new world beyond binaries and predetermined existences.

3.2. Ana Lydia Vega’s “Pollito chicken”: The Impossible Spanglish

Puerto Rican Ana Lydia Vega published “Pollito chicken” in 1981 as part of the anthology Virgenes y mártires (co-authored with Carmen Lugo Filippi). The title of the short story refers to a children’s bilingual song that was used in elementary schools in Puerto Rico during the first half of the twentieth century to make Puerto Ricans bilingual
Spanish/English, in keeping with the language policy of the US government. As Martínez-San Miguel reminds us, it is important to take into consideration that this short story was written before the debate of the early nineties regarding making Spanish the official language of formal education (*Coloniality* 148). The title anticipates Ana Lydia Vega’s ostensible ideology behind the story: the struggle against US cultural imperialism in Puerto Rico and the importance of language and language choice in her own nationalist stance. Furthermore, the title ironically presents translation and equivalence from Spanish into English as unproblematic, whereas the artificial code-switching throughout the text portrays quite the opposite. Other themes emerge as we read the story: US capitalism, tourism as a new indicator of imperialism in Puerto Rico, and questions related to gender, sexuality, and race in the US, and especially on the island.

The text may be read as having two intentional purposes that seem indisputable and that clearly group Vega with her *grancaribeña* counterparts: that of denouncing cultural imperialism on the one hand, and the lack of female agency on the other, both in the US and the *Gran Caribe*, especially in Puerto Rico. Like the rest of the texts I analyze, “Pollito chicken” explores the problematic role of its female protagonist as framed within both US and Caribbean conceptions of nationness. Martínez San Miguel declares that Spanglish is used to epitomize the limits of these national imaginaries (147). On the other hand, Diana L. Vélez has argued the ideological crux of the story is that of national unity, “unity between the *asimilaos* and the islanders, … national unity between Nuyoricans *malgré lui* and island Puerto Ricans” (69-70, 71), but she complains that the result is a narrative voice ridiculing Nuyoricans. This is a clear example that supports what Roland Barthes argues in “The Death of the Author”: a text can have as many

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111 The lyrics are “Pollito-Chicken, Gallina-Hen, Lápiz-Pencil y Pluma-Pen….”
interpretations as readers, who may be totally detached from the author’s intentions when writing. In this regard, Vélez uses the following quotation by Catherine Belsey as the epigraph of her essay “Pollito chicken: Split Subjectivity, National Identity, and The Articulation of Female Sexuality in a Narrative by Ana Lydia Vega:”

The unconscious of the work-[not of the author]-is constructed in the moment of its entry into literary form in the gap between the [ideological] project and the formulation. … The object of the critic, then, is to seek not the unity of the work, but the multiplicity and diversity of its possible meanings, its incompleteness, the omissions which it displays but cannot describe, and above all its contradictions. (135, 109, qtd. in Vélez 68)

Building upon Vélez’s idea that the story’s movement toward the author’s ideological end is “inscribed with hesitancy, gaps and contradiction” (71), I will argue that language usage in the short story partially betrays the author’s alleged intentions, and totally contradicts the aims of the “Spanglish” code of the narrative voice. That said, the main argument of my reading of “Pollito chicken” relates to the narrative voice’s use of “Spanglish.” With the support of sociolinguistic theory and research on the phenomenon of “code-switching,” I demonstrate that the notion of Spanglish in the story is not based on empirical evidence. Furthermore, the “code-switching” in which the narrative voice engages in “Pollito chicken” proves to be artificial. I argue that Ana Lydia Vega’s language crossing relies on her purposeful use of an artificial “code-switching” as the expressive means of the narrative voice to contest the hyphen ontology inherent in the concept of “code-switching.” Furthermore, the fact that the “code-switches” are artificial serves to dismantle the idea of “Spanglish” as an innovative or hybrid sort of language.

In brief, the unique and particular use of “code-switching” in “Pollito chicken” is Vega’s subversive language crossing. The intentional depiction of an artificial, static “code-switching” disputes the hyphen ideology behind this notion, and advocates for a
more fluid conceptualization of languages in contact, as we see in all grancaribeña texts I analyze. The narrative voice imposes on Suzie the same hyphenated ontology that the national imaginaries on each side of the hyphen impose on grancaribeña writers, and playwrights/performers. The artificiality of the story’s “code-switching,” as the representation/manifestation of the hyphen ontology, places language in sharp relief, to the end of emphasizing that the hyphen is itself an equally artificial (and enforced) construct.

3.2.1. A Controversial Short Story

“Pollito chicken” relates through “code-switched” prose the story of Suzie Bermúdez, an apparently assimilated Puerto Rican living in New York who returns to the island with a US tourist’s gaze. She is inspired to take a vacation to the island by “el breathtaking poster de Fomento que vio en la travel agency del lobby de su building. El breathtaking poster mentado representaba una pareja de beautiful people holding hands en el funicular del Hotel Conquistador” (75). Although the narrative voice informs us as to the protagonist’s disdain for Nuyoricans as “lazy, dirty, no-good bums” (75) and islander Puerto Ricans as a “vociferante crowd disfrazada de colores aullantes y coronada por kilómetros de hair rollers” (76), Suzie’s apparently repressed nationalist Puerto Rican self will ultimately flourish in the moment of sexual orgasm with a “native specimen” (78).

Most academic articles on “Pollito chicken” remind the reader about the debate that took place between US-born Puerto Rican Nicholasa Mohr and Puerto Rican-based Ana Lydia Vega on the historical divide between diasporic and insular Puerto Ricans in
terms of identity and literary traditions. The title of Mohr’s testimonio was “Puerto Rican Writers in the U.S., Puerto Rican Writers in Puerto Rico: A Separation beyond Language” (1987). Mohr affirmed that “it is much more than language that separates the Puerto Rican writers born and/or raised here from the writers in Puerto Rico” (113), referring to class inequality, racism and machismo on the island, where authors like Mohr are regarded as “outsiders,” “gringos,” and “Nuyoricans” (114). She criticizes the island writers’ disdain for continental Puerto Ricans. Although she does not mention any names explicitly, she describes as an example Ana Lydia Vega’s “Pollito Chicken,” asserting that the caricature of language alternation in the story is “ludicrous” and “far-fetched” (Mohr 114-5). Mohr explains that:

I am not an avid reader of the literature of Puerto Rico. However, throughout the years I have become mildly familiar with some of the work of these writers. Most of the time, I have found their work to be too obsessed with class and race, thus narrowing their subject matter into regional and provincial material. Their commonly used baroque style of writing in Spanish seems to act as filler rather than substance. Recently, I read a story that attempted to deal with a working-class Puerto Rican woman from New York who goes to San Juan for a holiday. The use of what the author considered to be a cross between Spanish and English, which is referred to as Spanglish, was incorrect and ludicrous. No one here speaks that way. The storyline was quite silly and the story rather far-fetched and stupid, much like a cartoon. This writer had very little knowledge of who we are here and, I suspect, holds quite a bit of disdain and contempt for our community. This author is not the only one with this attitude. Unfortunately, it is quite common among the Island’s intellectuals. (114-5)

While it is indeed accurate to state that the language crossing observed in “Pollito chicken” is not representative of the way that people speak in the US (as I will be explaining in detail in the following section), Mohr seemingly ignores the critical argument behind Vega’s artificial language in the story. The cartoon-like “code alternation” in “Pollito chicken” is most probably intentional. The codes and the register of the text are subverted to a particular political and ideological end.
The use of English by Nuyorican writers such as Mohr also gives “rise to tensions between the island and Nuyorican writers” (Pérez Rosario 8). Vega herself draws a risky—and in my perspective, equivocal—connection between language and nation when accusing Rosario Ferré of taking a specific political stance by writing in English. Although Ferré argued that her choice of writing and/or translating some of her literary pieces in(to) English responded to commercial (i.e., market) demands, Vega asserted that “Ferré’s decision must be deemed a political one” (Hernández 58). Vega declared that “literature is closely linked with a writer’s first language” (59) and that, in most cases, writers who write in languages other than their mother tongue come from colonized countries, where the adoption of another language is the result of colonial imposition (cf. Pavlenko). Finally, she reproaches Ferré’s use of English, affirming that it “flies in the face of a strong tradition [in Puerto Rico] of defending Spanish” (59). Even if Ferré’s decision responded to political motivations, Vega’s assumptions regarding language, nation, and first language/mother tongue are also bounded, as argued in the previous chapter.

In her arguments, Vega even obliterates the realities of, for instance, US-born Puerto Ricans. Although they were not actually born and raised in “a colonized country,” their parents’ country, a space that belongs to them as well, has suffered from (neo-) colonialism. Their mother tongue (Spanish) and first language (English) are not the same in most cases, and furthermore, their colonized mother tongue (Spanish) was once also a colonizing language. Vega also too easily connects national pride with the use of an assumed national language. Finally, she forgets to mention the frequent language crossings that occur in Ferré’s texts in Spanish (with insertions of English), basing her
discourse instead on a dichotomous epistemology that perpetuates the oppositional binary English/Spanish, here/there, us/they.\textsuperscript{112}

A decade following Mohr’s comments regarding “Pollito chicken,” Vega expressed the following in an interview with Israel Torres:

Yo siempre he expresado un gran respeto por los escritores de allá y por la cultura puertorriqueña de Estados Unidos, que yo considero una con la nuestra, como otra parte de nuestra propia realidad, y de hecho, he escrito un ensayo que se llama “Saludo a los niyoricans” publicado en mi libro \textit{Esperando a Loló y otros delirios generacionales}, que es verdaderamente un homenaje a ellos, a los escritores puertorriqueños de allá y a los puertorriqueños de Estados Unidos en general. (3)

Later, in an interview with Carmen Hernández in 2000, she responded directly to Mohr’s attack, explaining that Mohr’s reading of the story was not the one she had intended:

“Suzie Bermúdez, the protagonist, is not even a Nuyorican, because she has been in the States for only ten years. I understand, however, that Puerto Ricans in the States have been subject to so much prejudice and racism that they may feel offended if they thought that the story poked fun at them” (57). She then recognized that a written text fends for itself and that, especially when written as irony, satire or parody, a text is left open to many (mis)interpretations, sometimes according to the reader’s particular interests (Vega 57-8). This same idea of the author’s death is retrieved by Vélez to interpret the text in a way that Vega would probably again consider a misinterpretation.\textsuperscript{113} Although my own

\textsuperscript{112} Bost argues that “linguistic code-switching, self-reflexivity, crossing between different genres, and a reconfiguration of subjectivity without a singular” are characteristics of Ferré’s work, which might be called postmodern, according to the scholar (195), who adds that: “Although many of Ferré’s short stories were originally written in Spanish, and later translated into English by the author, she wrote \textit{The House on the Lagoon} originally in English. Her dedication to disseminating her works to English-speaking readers reflects her commitment to the Puerto Rican diaspora, inclusive of the U.S. mainland. Unlike Vega, who writes primarily in Spanish (but does give interviews in English), Ferré consciously situates herself in the U.S.-Puerto Rican context and bridges the divide between her own work and that of mainland writers, such as Ortiz Cofer and Levins Morales” (207). However, I will show how the authors’ intentions are often not so clearly manifested in their written texts.

\textsuperscript{113} Vélez concludes her article in the following way: “In the case of this story, at least, that wish might well
reading of “Pollito chicken” differs from that of Vélez, I agree with her suggestion that “Pollito chicken” debunks the notion of the “unproblematical straight line of the Saussurian model, [together with] the concept of a single authorial intention, a concept born of that linguistic model” (68). There is, in effect, a gap and multiple contradictions between the author’s supposed intentions, the narrative voice, the text, and the portrayed female main character, revealing a complex narrative discourse that goes—intentionally or not—beyond an ostensibly superficial duality.

3.2.2. A Debatable Use of Spanglish

For decades, sociolinguists have studied the phenomenon of so-called “Spanglish” and there is still no consensus regarding precisely how to define it. Betti considers “Spanglish” as the result of the “encuentro (o del choque) entre dos mundos, dos sensibilidades, dos culturas e idiomas: el hispánico y el anglosajón” (104). Ilan Stavans describes it as “a bridge of sorts” (“Spanglish” 555), a juxtaposition of the two languages (556), the result of “the evident clash between two full-fledged, perfectly discernible codes” (557), the meeting of two different cultures (Dictionary; Spanglish: The), and as “nuevos crisoles gramáticos y sintácticos, mezclas increíbles de inventiva” (Spanglish para: 32-3). This kind of conceptualization prolongs the dualistic non-fluid metaphor of the hyphen, or the bridge. More technically, Moreno Fernández defines this phenomenon as one that includes a variety of linguistic features, such as Anglicisms in Spanish, or Hispanisms in English, borrowings, calques, and aleatory switches and alternations that be the expression of a deeply felt resentment to a generation of Puerto Ricans who put into question the much fought for cultural and national identity of that island colony. The Nuyorican is, in a certain sense, the islanders’ Other, and the text’s conscious project of an overarching national identity is undermined as it takes literary form. It too, like Suzie, like the reader, is a house divided against itself” (75).
increasingly emerge in the “in-between” areas of the bilingual continuum (24). This definition coincides to a great extent with Torres’s enumeration of linguistic manifestations of this phenomenon: non-integrated and integrated borrowings (yarda from ‘yard,’ for example), one-word calques (carpeta from ‘carpet’), complex calques (máquina lavadora from ‘washing machine’), or syntactic calques (tuve un buen tiempo from ‘I had a good time’). Marcos Marín adds the practice of grammaticalization to these linguistic entities: the development of new morphological elements such as the postposition p’atrás in llamar p’atrás or para atrás (meaning ‘call back’). Lipski coincides with Moreno Fernández, Torres and Marcos Marín. Additionally, he clarifies that the intersentential code switching is not so aleatory but follows a series of grammatical restrictions. Like Marcos Marín, Lipski rejects the term “Spanglish” because it very often suggests “una procreación ilegítima, una mezcolanza de español e inglés universalmente considerada como enfermedad lingüística de consecuencias mortales para la vitalidad de la lengua española, no solo en los Estados Unidos sino a través del mundo” (321).

Otheguy considers the term “Spanglish” a misnomer, because Spanish/English bilingualism in the US does not reflect any sort of “new” language or linguistic variety with its own grammatical structures, i.e., there is no linguistic hybridization evident in the speech of US Latinos (as held by Fernández-Ulloa, Limón, Stavans) nor a “tercer código” (320). To see a detailed classification of examples of linguistic practices characteristic of these speakers, see page 326 in Lipski.

114 Lipski adds two more linguistic manifestations to the ones proposed: “las desviaciones del español gramatical encontradas entre hablantes vestigiales del español” and, in some cases, “las características del español hablado y escrito como segunda lengua por millones de estadounidenses que no provienen de familias hispanas, pero que han aprendido algo del español debido a su utilidad en su vida personal o profesional” (322). The sociolinguist defines “vestigial” speakers as “personas de ascendencia hispana en cuyas familias se ha producido un desplazamiento idiomático del español al inglés en el transcurso de una o dos generaciones, y donde existe una competencia lingüística desequilibrada hacia los conocimientos receptivos o pasivos” (320).
Rather, Otheguy points to switching and selection instead of mixture and hybridization (“Las piedras” 21):

No hace falta mucho análisis, ni culinario ni lingüístico, para hacerse cargo de que cada uno de esos elementos culturales mantiene su propia integridad estructural, que no hay ni inglañol, ni frijolburgers, que aunque el tejido lingüístico es distinto al de nuestros países de origen, las hebras de distintos colores son las originales, fácilmente discernibles para todo el que se moleste en observar con ánimo de separarlas. (“Las piedras” 21)

Whereas Otheguy acknowledges that the term is used positively as a symbol of bicultural identity by some linguists (e.g. Zentella and Betti) and literary scholars (e.g. Stavans), he also highlights that this term is often perceived as denoting a “bastard jargon” (as also noted by Lipski, and Stavans “The gravitas”), and that it is frequently used to denigrate Latinos in the US and their ways of speaking (Otheguy and Stern 86). This phenomenon inaptly termed “Spanglish” is more an action (i.e., a verb) than a new language (i.e., a noun); it is an “obrar lingüístico” (Otheguy “Las piedras” 31). Accordingly, grancaribeñas cross languages in this “obrar lingüístico.” English and Spanish are crossed, as are different English or Spanish varieties and tones, registers, or other nuances in these languages or varieties. These crossings reflect the idea that geopolitical frontiers no longer prevent the creation of a Gran Caribe. In their language crossings and multiaccentuality, they negotiate the predetermined cultural discourses that have traditionally given shape to each national language, towards the end of forging a postnational(ist) linguistic state of affairs.

Otheguy and Stern opt for defining “Spanglish” as a popular variety of Spanish in the US that contains, as any other Spanish variety, local lexicon (lonch, bildin) and

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115 This idea corresponds to Zentella’s use of the term “Spanglish.” For her, the term is not intended as the expression of a hybrid language, but rather, as a way of using the languages in play. More concretely, it is about conversational and communicative strategies of Puerto Rican New Yorkers, such as the insertion of Spanish phrases and sentences into English discourse, and vice versa (Otheguy and Stern 96).
doublets (*beismen/sótano*), as well as lexical borrowings, local meanings, morphological geographic variation, and non-Hispanic-origin phraseology. Therefore, according to Otheguy and Stern, “[w]ords like *bildin* and *jáiscul* allow us to speak of popular North American Spanish, just as, for example, *trusa* ‘bathing suit’ and *guagua* ‘bus’ allow us to speak of popular Cuban Spanish, but neither justifies terms like Spanglish or Cuban” (88). In no case is there in the US a community of speakers who have a new or different “underlying linguistic system,” but rather a development of lexicon and phrases “in perfect Spanish that express new cultural elements” (Otheguy and Stern 92). One of the main arguments Otheguy and Stern present against the use of the term “Spanglish” is that of avoiding the denigration of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the US setting. This term contributes to “closing the doors of personal and economic progress to speakers who would be better served by thinking of themselves as speakers of Spanish” (98), a world language which offers a valuable tool to both individuals and the community. Otheguy argues that it is precisely the lack of use of the Spanish language in the subsequent generations of Hispanics in New York that impedes the development of any kind of “hybrid code or language.”

Otheguy and Stern present four main reasons to argue against the use of the term “Spanglish”: first, it obscures the fact that the features of popular forms of Spanish in the USA are, for the most part, analogous to those of popular forms of the language in Latin America and Spain; second, the term erroneously proposes that popular Spanish in the US is of an extraordinarily hybrid character; third, it mistakenly implies that Spanish in the US is characterized by structural mixing with

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116 He expresses this idea in the following way: “... la causa primordial de la ausencia de un Spanglish, la constituye ... la casi desaparición del español en la tercera generación. Pues sucede que los hablantes que empiezan a dejar entrever en su español rasgos mixtos ... no han llegado nunca a formar comunidad ni a cuajar en un habla estable” (“Las piedras”17)
English; and fourth, it unnecessarily separates Spanish-speakers in the US from those living elsewhere (85-6). They finally state that the term entails an ideology of exceptionalism that dispossesses the North American Latino community of one of its major resources: “mastery of a world language whose potential contribution to both individuals and the community is undeniable” (86).

The present project eschews the term “Spanglish” for the reasons cited above, and for the ideology of the hyphen this term entails. Furthermore, whereas the significance of grammatical and sociolinguistic research on code-switching is unarguable, and has served to revalorize the situation of Spanish in the US, the ontological notions of “code,” and “code-switching” and/or “alternation” that most sociolinguists use (Marcos Marin, Lipski, Stavans, Betti, Appel and Muysken, McClure, León Jiménez, among many others) perpetuate the perception of languages and communities as autonomous, bounded units instead of seeing language as a dynamic social practice and speakers as social actors (Heller, Blommaert, Rampton).

Auer offers an alternative approach by arguing that “code-switching” language data needs to be interpreted as part of verbal action, of interaction that creates communicative and social meaning, which requires interpretation both by co-participants and analysts (“Introduction” 1). According to Auer, neither speakers’ intentions nor recipients’ interpretations are meaningful if they do not materialize in “interaction” (Bilingual 6). Not only does he insist on the conversational dimensions of “code-switching” from a conversation analysis approach but he also suggests reconstructing participants’ categories instead of imposing external linguistic or sociolinguistic ones on them (“Introduction” 2). Rampton supports this idea when noting that scholars should
avoid the tendency to focus only on variation in the salience and cultural contents of ethnic categories, focusing instead on ethnic recategorization (“Language” 300).

According to Auer, research has traditionally emphasized the strict sociolinguistic and grammatical (intra-sentential) aspects of this phenomenon (“Introduction” 3), failing to consider 1) the sequential implications of language choice in conversation, which brings subsequent language choices by the same and other speakers in the conversation; 2) the local processes (participants, topic, or setting) and, therefore, the place within the interactional episode in which languages alternate; and 3) those patterns of switching that go beyond the sentence (i.e., conversational “moves” and “intonation units” (“Introduction” 3).117 This view of language as performance is developed by Álvarez-Cáccamo, who, together with Auer, proposes a shift from a structural towards an interpretative approach to bilingualism. Álvarez-Cáccamo states that what a “code” is should depend on participants’ perceptions, not those of linguists. The idea that “code-switching” is the juxtaposition of two codes or languages and monolingual constraints and grammars is not only problematic, but also irrelevant (Auer “introduction” 13, Álvarez-Cáccamo 36).

Álvarez-Cáccamo, as well as Rampton, proposes a communicative view of codes and indexical values of varieties that keeps apart the notions of “code” and “speech

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117 Auer moves beyond the research previously cited, which relates code-switching to a group membership in particular types of bilingual speech communities, assuming that the type of code-switching may vary between speech communities, and which concludes that intra-sentential code-switching is constrained by syntactic and morphological aspects that may (not) be universal (“Introduction” 3). Auer builds upon Zentella’s (1981) three proposed types of factors related to language alternation: “on the spot” factors (topic, psychological setting, and addressee), “in the head” factors (‘crutching’, or ‘footing’ for example), and “out of the mouth” factors (linguistic knowledge about phonological and syntactic restrictions on language alternation). However, in Bilingual Conversation, Auer notes that Zentella fails “to consider adequately the sequential implicativeness of language choice in conversation, i.e., the fact that whatever language a participant chooses for the organization of his/her turn, or for an utterance which is part of the turn, the choice exerts an influence on subsequent language choices by the same or other speakers” (5).
Álvarez-Cáccamo suggests “speaking of ‘switches’ only at points where [communicative] activities change or local identities are reconfigured in spite of a single variety being used” (38). As Auer indicates,

while most approaches to the pragmatics of code-switching have started from the presupposition that there are two languages which are used alternatingly, and proceeded to ask what function switching between them may have, it may well be advisable to ask the question in the opposite way: that is, to start from the observation that there are two sets of co-occurring variables between which participants alternate in an interactionally meaningful way, and then proceed to seeing them as belonging to or constituting two ‘codes.’ (Auer “Introduction” 5; see also Álvarez-Cáccamo)

In addition, with his use of ethnographic and interactional methods in sociolinguistics, Rampton proposes focusing on the emergence of new plural ethnicities and not so much on bilingual ingroups, and more on incongruity and contradiction than on coherence and sistematicity (“Language” 290). Finally, although Auer and Álvarez-Cáccamo insist on the conversational dimension of this linguistic phenomenon by affirming that only a comprehensive examination of talk may tell us when precisely what is generally called “code-switching” is certainly a manifestation of “switching the code” (Álvarez-Cáccamo 43), their perspective can be adapted for the written language crossing I analyze in this section. In fact, I draw on Rampton’s notion that, from the perspective of research on language crossing, it is crucial not to conceptualize conversation as a genre distinct from

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118 As Álvarez-Cáccamo explains, “Rampton’s careful analysis shows that integrated community repertoires (English/Creole/Black, or English/Standard Asian English/ Punjabi) are tactically mobilised in non-transparent ways for identity building purposes. The boundaries between the “codes,” however, often remain unclear. It rather seems that particular markers (e.g. [d] for [o]) may come to represent entire social styles with associated meanings and given status in members, linguistic ideologies” (38). The scholar also offers examples in which the relevant, meaningful, and intentional switches occur not between languages but rather between educated and informal speech, or between lexical, prosodic or syntactic materials in the same language.

119 Álvarez-Cáccamo presents four possibilities in discourse: “a switching of communicative codes with language alternation (Gumperz’s ‘situational switching’), not-switching with language alternation (most of conversational ‘code-switching styles’), not-switching without language alternation (short utterances in monolingual speech), or switching of codes without language alternation (where the same variety is used across an activity boundary)” (38).
stylization and artful performance (“Language” 309). To support this idea, Rampton builds upon Bauman and Briggs’ appreciation that “performances are not simply artful uses of language that stand apart … from day-to-day life, … performances move the use of heterogeneous stylistic resources, context-sensitive meanings, and conflicting ideologies into a reflexive arena where they can be examined critically” (60). In my analysis of language crossing in “Pollito chicken,” I consider the question of what language/variety is being used in relation to linguistic ideologies, cultural identities, and the social and discursive practices that this use of language invokes (i.e., a sociolinguistics of distribution approach). Also, and most importantly, I consider language crossing and indexical values from a perspective of mobility and multiplicity, following Rampton and Blommaert’s conceptualizations. I do not see language as a linguistically defined object, but I focus instead on language resources employed within determined sociocultural, historical, and political contexts (Blommaert, Sociolinguistics 5).

Most of the critical readings of “Pollito chicken” continue referring to the story’s use of language as “Spanglish.” Rodríguez affirms that the short story becomes an “emblema de hibridación lingüística puertorriqueña y neoyorquina que conocemos con el nombre de Spanglish” (4). She interprets the character of Suzie as a palimpsest in which the female protagonist’s Puerto Rican soul literally hides under popular American symbols in the quest to erase her Puerto Rican ancestry:

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120 Auer and Álvarez-Cáccamo continue using the term “code” although they argue for reconsidering its meaning and implications. Following my stance regarding the act of naming, I will continue using the term “crossing,” a metaphor that relates more transparently to the ideological and political view of the present project.

121 See Introduction for a more detailed review of Blommaert’s theories and conceptualization.
Tan pronto hizo sus arrangements de rigor, Suzie se precipitó hacia su de luxe suite para ponerse el sexy polkadot bikini que había comprado en el Gimbel’s especialmente para esta fantastic occasion. Se pasó un peine por los cabellos teñidos de Wild Auburn y desrizados con Curl free, se pintó los labios de Bicentennial Red para acentuar la blancura de los dientes y se frotó una gota de Evening in the South Seas detrás de la oreja. (77)

The switches to English from an apparent Spanish base would serve as a trope for Suzie’s intended transformation; the switches from one language “system” into another reflect the social conventions Suzie rejects, on the one hand, and adopts, on the other (Rodríguez 8). Muñoz explains the language crossings in “Pollito chicken” as a “code-switching” presented by the narrative voice with the intention to show how “un idioma (el inglés norteamericano) … invade e influye a otro (el español puertorriqueño)” (98) resulting, according to the scholar, in a discourse which escapes the colonizing monolingualism while “a new communicative code” emerges. Therefore, the narrative voice would represent a common “subcorriente ideológica que equipara la compenetración del inglés y el español en los Estados Unidos y la tantas veces criticada postura imperialista de los Estados Unidos frente a las naciones hispanoamericanas” (Lipski 321). However, Muñoz admits that the resulting use of language does not show a “subordinación por parte del hablante bilingüe al discurso colonizador” (98) and he reads this linguistic phenomenon as an “enriquecimiento cultural” (98). In that way, he agrees that the text betrays the most probable intentions of the narrative voice.

Vélez describes the discourse of the story as split into two national languages, which represents the protagonist’s split subjectivity. She describes this use of language as a stylized version of what is commonly called “Spanglish” and what linguists name Spanish-English “code-switching” (71). Green interprets the discourse as “a code-switching metaphor” of Suzie’s inconsistencies as a colonial character constituted by two
national languages (134). Likewise, the epigraph of the story mentions this idea of being in-between two cultures and languages: “Un homme à cheval sur deux cultures est rarement bien assis (Albert Memmi)”. All these analyses, and the terminology these scholars use (Spanglish, code, system, two national languages, invasion), portray the binary conceptualization of the hyphen, which the notion of “code-switching,” and the artificial “code-alternation” used in the text, also depict. The linguistic “codes” in “code-switching” symbolize regulatory “codes” that create or maintain an ontology of inclusion and exclusion regarding ethnic, gender, and national discourses (Heller). Most critics would also agree that the language crossings in Vega’s short story are not spontaneous or “authentic” (Vélez, Mohr). I argue that the artificiality of the “Spanglish” used is precisely the main crossing of the text.

The story is told by an omniscient explicit narrative voice that maligns the female protagonist through an ironic tone. The narrative voice relates the story in Spanish with constant crossings to English. Suzie Bermúdez (the narrative voice uses the English phonology in her last name to demonstrate the character’s assimilation to the American ways) is never given a chance to speak for herself. Readers only hear her voice in direct dialogue and without the mediation of the third-person narration when she speaks to her boss in the US in formal English at the very beginning of the story: “I really had a wonderful time, dijo Suzie Bermúdez a su jefe tan pronto puso un spike-heel en la oficina” (75), and when she shouts in popular Spanish “¡Viva Puerto Rico Libreeeeeeeewwww!” (79) while having a sexual orgasm with the local Puerto Rican bartender at the very end of the story. The rest of the story is told in a third-person

122 This recurrent criticism resembles the one Stavans has received for his use of an assumed “Spanglish” in his translation of the first chapter of El Quijote. For a detailed list of arguments against Stavans’ use of “code-switching”, see Lipski 322.
narration through language crossing. The fact that Suzie speaks in English in the US and Spanish in Puerto Rico (when her repressed self emerges at the height of orgasm) follows in a way the idea of duality and of palimpsest that Rodríguez proposed, i.e., Suzie has a Spanish/Puerto Rican self hidden under the US/English cover. Rodríguez affirms that “este singular uso de dos idiomas en contacto metaforiza en definitiva la práctica de una estrategia orientada a destruir el estereotipo evidenciando lo dual” (4). However, I will argue that both the artificial “code-switching” the narrative voice uses, and the language Suzie uses when she escapes the narrative voice’s narration, are examples of language crossing. As such, they problematize the traditional readings aforementioned, providing a much more complex and fluid interpretation of the story, off and beyond the hyphen.123

To begin with, the fact that critics and scholars consider the narrative voice’s “Spanglish” as artificial and inauthentic validates the stance against the existence of any sort of “new” language. “Spanglish,” and the hyphen ideology this term implies, is an artifice. The narrative voice seeks to create (superficial, artificial) “code switches” – which do not correspond to the spoken reality of bilingual speakers neither in New York nor in Puerto Rico—to ridicule and symbolize Suzie’s superficiality and artificial “Americanness.” Nevertheless, much more complex crossings result, which may imply a multifaceted (non-hyphenated) subjectivity in Suzie under the apparent and imposed binary discourse or assumed “Spanglish.” One may argue that the language crossing in the text reinforces the negative stereotypes that contribute to the denial and refusal of the conception of a potential variety of Spanish particular to the US. Vélez, for instance,

123 Not adhering to the notion of “code-switching” as alternation reflecting a hyphenated ontology, I place the term “code-switching” in quotation marks, accompanied by the adjective “artificial.” The portrayal of an artificial “code-switching” is precisely the language crossing in the text; a language crossing that contests the hyphenated notion of “code-switching.”
claims “Suzie’s ‘impure’ monologue [and] utterances are caricatures of a colonized discourse known to islanders as that of the pitiyanqui” (70). Certainly, there is an overstressed use of non-integrated English borrowings that respond to brand names (i.e., market terminology) and terms with strong US cultural referents in the story. Examples of these are welfare, food stamps, spike heel, Bermuda-Shorted Continentals, Polaroid cameras, Wild Auburn, Curl-free, Bicentennial Red, Evening in the South Seas, imitation Pierre Cardin mini-suit, Coppertone suntan oil. Through them, the narrative voice parodies and censures US capitalism and body-worshipping consumer society.

Furthermore, when the narrative voice speaks for Suzie about the main character’s fellow Puerto Ricans, the language used is English. Likewise, this choice of language portrays an assumed generalized racist tone in the US to depict negative stereotypes surrounding Puerto Ricans: “… prefería mil veces perder un fabulous job antes que poner Puerto Rican en las applications de trabajo y morir de hambre por no coger el Welfare o los food stamps como todos esos lazy, dirty, no-good bums que eran sus compatriotas” (75. My emphasis) or “Y todavía esos filthy, no-good Communist terrorists se atrevían a hablar de independencia” (77. My emphasis). Following a similar strategy, Spanish is used when aiming to depict a generalized racist tone in Puerto Rico toward stereotyped African-Americans: “… sacó todos sus ahorros de secretaria de housing project de negros –que no eran mejor que los New York Puerto Ricans pero por lo menos no eran New York Puerto Ricans” (75-6. My emphasis).

Moreover, we observe a high frequency of noun phrases in English, such as “… contarles el surprise return de Suzie Bermúdez a su native land tras diez años” (75) or “Aprender a hablar good English, a recoger el trash que tiraban como savages en las
calles y a comportarse como decent people era lo que tenían que hacer y dejarse de tanto fuss” (77). Contrary to what we observed in the writing of usanacaribeñas García, Obejas and Álvarez’s texts, in which nouns related to the family were the most common ones used in Spanish (abuela, tía), the narrative voice in “Pollito chicken” refers to Suzie’s “Mother,” “Grandma,” and “Dad” in English, with a most probable purpose of conveying the protagonist’s dismissal of her island “roots.” Likewise, we detect a repeated and stylized use of adverbs modifying adjectives, such as “strikingly blue” or “deliriously happy,” together with a very formal and literary recurrent use of adjectives both in English and in Spanish, which may result in the “Baroque” sort of literary language of which Mohr accuses island writers: breathtaking poster, shocking pink, fabulous job, vociferante crowd, meliflua music, quivering voice, rubicundo crew-cut, batientes eye-lashes, blushing young-lady. All of the English insertions in the story correspond to non-integrated borrowings, which are crossed without italics.

The reader does not observe any other textual manifestations that are representative of Spanish in the US or other varieties of Spanish, such as phonologically integrated borrowings, lexical and morpho-syntactic calques, lexicon with semantic extension (Lipski, Nash, Otheguy, Mendieta), discourse markers to organize the narrative (Koike), or crossings with the purpose of clarifying, change of footing (theme, direct/reported speech), addressing the interlocutor(s) or calling their attention (Zentella). Furthermore, crossings occur between national standard codes. Lexical and phonological insertions of other linguistic varieties and/or registers are rarely apparent in the narrative voice. As stated previously, this absence results in an artful, poetic and artificial “Spanglish” that disarticulates the existence of such a notion. Sentences like “San Juan is
wonderful, corroboró el jefe con benévola inflexión, reprimiendo ferozmente el deseo de…” or “un altoparlante difundía meliflua music from the Tropics” do not correspond to the informal register of the linguistic phenomenon of conversational language crossings. In that sense, Ana Lydia Vega, like usanacaribeñas, crosses not only languages, but also styles in her artistic creation. She creates an estrangement from dominant narratives in both traditional literary genres and in the writers’ socio-political and socio-historical contexts.

In “Pollito chicken,” the narrative voice’s crossings are rigid, and humorously superficial in an attempt to represent (and condemn, Vélez would argue) Suzie’s own apparent use of language and her dichotomous identity. This is an intentional “Spanglish” in which “code-switching” takes place with all the hyphen connotations this terminology implies. However, as I noted at the beginning of this section, contradictions arise in the text. The narrative voice betrays Suzie. Vélez argues that the “speaking voice is that of the narrator, but it is inflected with the emotional structure of the character. [However, as] readers, we do not quite know when the fictive narrator agrees with Suzie’s assessments and when s/he is being ironic, that is, implicitly criticizing her views” (70). I would even add that we do not quite know when the narrative voice succumbs to the stereotypes surrounding US Puerto Ricans and does not allow us to see and hear usanacaribeña Suzie. When readers finally hear Suzie speaking in Spanish, a meaningful crossing occurs, as Álvarez-Cáccamo, Rampton and Auer would suggest, from a standard variety of Spanish in an artificial “code-switching” between two national, standard languages enunciated by the narrative voice to a local variety pronounced by the main character Suzie. So far, the narrative voice had spoken for Suzie in a stylized, artificial
“code-switching” (I mean “code-switching,” not Rampton’s idea of crossing) in which the “switches” were between two national languages in their standard forms. However, the very last sentence formulated by Suzie in direct speech does show a phonological crossing: Suzie speaks with a local Puerto Rican accent (lateralization of /r/ before the voiceless alveolar /t/), “moving from a contact language to … the local inflection of a European language in the Caribbean” (Martínez-San Miguel, Coloniality 150). This moment of intimacy, which Vélez calls an allegory of the Freudian concept of the “return of the repressed,” activates a language crossing from an imposed “code-switching” (i.e., a hyphen) to an “apparently monolingual Hispanism… expressed in a very popular variant of Puerto Rican Spanish that is hardly a reflection of a traditional pro-Hispanist white creole nationalist imaginary” (Martínez-San Miguel, Coloniality 150). This is the only moment in which we directly hear Suzie speak Spanish through dialogue form. The main character moves outside the language varieties she normally uses and briefly adopts a language or “communicative code” (in Álvarez-Cáccamo and Rampton’s sense) to which she normally does not have full and easy access, as occurs with the adolescents’ crossings that Rampton analyzes in the context of London. While the narrative voice tries to impose on Suzie an artificial “code-switching” between two dominant standards, Suzie crosses languages and appropriates another variety in a moment in which her everyday world is suspended.

It is not a coincidence that it is the bartender who narrates his sexual encounter with Suzie, which is meant to give cultural “authenticity” to the protagonist. The narrative voice was focused on emphasizing the artificiality of Suzie’s Puertoricanness and US-Puertoricanness; her assumed return to Puerto Rican “authenticity” must
therefore be narrated by someone else. The moment of sexual intercourse with the bartender shows a clear interruption of the routine flow of the normal social order for Suzie, as Rampton notes in acts of language crossing: “moments and events in which the hold of routine assumptions about social reality [is] temporarily loosened” (298). Suzie’s crossing does not mean that she is actually “local or authentic Puerto Rican;” nor does it imply that Suzie can move unproblematically in an out of the bartender’s and her own heritage language in a kind of open “bi-cultural code-switching” (cf. Rampton 299). In fact, we see that when back in the US, Suzie returns to monolingual English when she talks to her boss. She is not and cannot be “Puerto Rican” if that national imaginary does not contemplate her diasporic part of a multiple self. Suzie’s crossing occurs in social settings in which the boundaries around ethnicity are relatively fixed. The narrative voice insists on placing her on the hyphen in-between two static and essentialist national and ethnic imaginaries, each with masculinist constructions of gender roles. However, Suzie—although momentarily—steps away from the hyphen, and violates these boundaries at the end of the story. Rampton explains that crossing is a form of “heretical discourse” that breaks the doxic authority of the idea that ethnically [and I would add nationally], you are what you’re born and[/or] brought up (168-70).

Through the language crossing that an artificial “code-switching” epitomizes, and Suzie’s language crossing at the end of the story, Ana Lydia Vega questions the ethnic and national absolutist imaginaries Suzie was born and brought up with, which the narrative voice intends to perpetuate. The narrative voice compels Suzie to embrace and cultivate the dichotomous vision of language and national imaginaries she has inherited. However, Suzie temporarily crosses languages and explores repressed varieties, and
ethnicities. For a moment, her vacation becomes a journey to fill her historical voids to the end of embracing her multiple self, and a fluid sense of her own (non-) identity. Nevertheless, the narrative voice presents Suzie as going back to “normal” after the orgasm episode. That said, whereas the narrative voice speaks for Suzie in an artificial “code-switching” perceived as an expected routine to ridicule Suzie, Vega is finally ridiculing the narrative voice (i.e., the hyphen ontology) through the language’s artificiality. This is the true language crossing of the story.

Therefore, there is a clear contradiction in the text between the narrative voice, the author’s apparent intentions, and the female main character. The narrative voice wants to mediate through language the ontological imaginaries surrounding subjects like Suzie, maintaining a dualistic, hyphenated ideology throughout the narration. Nonetheless, I have argued that the artificiality of the narrative voice’s “Spanglish” stands precisely for the non-existence of that notion, and the hyphen ideology it involves. In fact, there is a fissure in the narration and Suzie can momentarily escape the hyphen, showing a much more complex linguistic self that can be better analyzed from the approach of a sociolinguistics of mobility: she speaks English at work in the US and in other social spheres in the US and Puerto Rico, but she comes from a working-class family in Lares –symbol of Puerto Rican nationalist sentiment and the fight for political independence. Her Grandma –most probably a representative of a white creole imaginary—was racist against her Dad’s African physical features, which, together with their socio-economic condition, led her mother to migrate to the US.124

124 When first stepping on the island, Suzie thinks of seeking refuge at her grandma’s house in Lares, but then she remembers the woman’s racist attitude toward her dad: “La visión de aquella vociferante crowd disfrazada de colores aullantes y coronada por kilómetros de hair rollers la obligó a preguntarse si no era preferible coger un bus o algo por el estilo y refugiarse en los loving arms de su Grandma en el countryside
background, the narrative voice makes us understand that Suzie can speak a more standard Spanish while she speaks also the popular local variety.

The case is not so simple as interpreting Puerto Rican Spanish as Suzie’s “real” language and Puerto Rico as her “true” nationality. Suzy’s subjectivity crosses imageries from many worlds: “the New Yorker and the jíbaro, the aesthete in Old San Juan to the barrio Nuyorican … the fox-trot in the Empire State Building, the heat of the sun on a zinc roof in the island’s interior, the bikini from Gimbel’s, the Tarzan-like chest of the bartender” (Natarajan 135). As a diasporic character, she inevitably moves through orders of indexicality (Blommaert) which “define the dominant lines for sense of belonging, for identities and roles in society …. Movement of people across space [implies that] spaces are always someone’s spaces and they are filled with norms, expectations, conceptions of what counts as proper and normal (indexical) language use and what does not count as such” (Blommaert 6). The narrative voice is imposing those norms on Suzie. She treats her as a migrant subject who assimilates to the host society and tries to erase her “true origins” instead of seeing Suzie as what she is, a migrant subject in a global world characterized by flows. Suzie belongs to a superdiverse background with a complex linguistic repertoire that translates into a not clear-cut notion of in-betweenness, as the one the narrative voice proposes, or of nationality, as the author may apparently seem to propose.

de Lares. Pero on second thought se dijo que ya había hecho reservaciones en el Conquistador y que Grandma bastante bitchy que había sido after all con ella y Mother diez años ago. Por eso Dad nunca había querido -además de que Grandma no podía verlo ni en pintura porque tenía el pelo kinky- casarse con Mother, por no cargar con la cruz de Grandma” (76). The text shows how Puerto Rico is not exempt of ethnic and gender inequalities either. Also, we know about her social class in Puerto Rico when Suzie tastes a piña colada for the first time and the narrative voice compares it to the drinks she remembers from childhood: “ella pertenecía a la generación del mavi y el guarapo que no era precisamente what she would call sus typical drinks favoritos” (77). Vélez states that here again the joke is on Suzie, but “it is a joke only for the enjoyment of island Puerto Ricans, and despite the text’s conscious project of national unity, Nuyoricans are not included in the joke except as its objects” (73).
On the other hand, Vega’s intention of unifying “the asimilaos and the islanders” (Vélez 70) is partially achieved. Suzie’s Nuyorican self reconnects with her insular self through finally voicing colloquial Puerto Rican Spanish. This act may be read through Brathwaite’s idea that the true “nation language” is Puerto Rican Spanish (cf. Martínez-San Miguel 151). Consequently, Suzie’s exclamation would symbolize her desire to preserve Puerto Rican cultural nationalism. However, the opening of the story informs the reader that the protagonist seemingly goes back to her monolingual English when in the US again. Here, the author’s apparent nationalist and pro-independence stances falter within the context of Appadurai’s diasporic public spheres. As Martínez-San Miguel argues, for diasporic subjects like Suzie, “nationalism is not only impossible but also almost invisible, since that political imaginary effectively denies the possibility of the intracolonial displacement that prompts Suzie’s journey” (Coloniality 151). Nevertheless, Martínez-San Miguel continues using the hyphen metaphor when stating that it is Suzie’s living in “Spanglish” and between two homes that makes this nationalist imaginary impossible. Rather, I claim that Suzie escapes from the hyphen, from a “Spanglish” that does not allow her to be usanacaribeña, ultimately grancaribeña. Furthermore, I maintain that Vega’s language crossing, i.e., her strategic portrayal of an artificial “code-switching,” contests the essentialist imaginaries on each side of an enforced hyphen, and even challenges the possibility of a nationalist Puerto Rican ideology in Suzie. Suzie is neither on the hyphen nor on either of its sides.

In sum, the narrative voice’s language crossing (presented as an artificial “code-switching”), as well as the crossings among the narrative voice, Suzie, and the author’s  

125 Indeed, one of the salient features of Vega’s narratives is the use of Puerto Rican street language and oral cultures, with particular emphasis on the popular Spanish spoken among the working sectors in Puerto Rico (Martínez-San Miguel 148).
apparent intentionality, create a text that offers an alternative imaginary beyond the boundaries of the Modern Puerto Rican notion of nationness. Indeed, the paradoxes inherent in the text follow a postmodern logic.

3.2.3. In Search of Suzie’s Voice

Throughout this project, I argue that language crossing and fluidity in the chosen texts relate to gender. Gender is inevitably a central category in the redefinition of language and cultural identity in the writing of _grancaribeñas_. As I stated in the previous section, Suzie Bermúdez cannot “mother” the Puerto Rican nation (Martínez-San Miguel, _Coloniality_ 151) for two main reasons: her multiaccentuality, and her gender. Nationalist and pro-independence political projects reflect “one language-one nation” ideology, static geopolitical boundaries, and patriarchal narratives. As Duany explains, such projects are based on “a telluric, agricultural, or arboreal language … that exclude[s] the possibility that national identity may ‘flourish’ or ‘bloom’ outside the soil of the fatherland, [and views] the diaspora as alien and distinct from the nation” (“From the Cuban” 2).

In “Pollito chicken,” the narrative voice accuses Suzie of approaching the island from the colonized perspective of the assimilated migrant, who goes back to Puerto Rico as a tourist (i.e., an outsider) and, therefore, questions through an artificial “code-switched” language the possibility that Suzie can be a national(ist) representation of an “authentic” Puerto Ricanness. Only momentarily does Suzie seem to become a national subject at the end of the story, but this moment is evanescent. Suzie cannot completely accept her Puerto Rican origins or make any sort of pro-independence claims, because doing so would also mean accepting “the limiting patriarchal structure of Puerto Rican
This is something that the condemning narrative voice does not explicitly consider. Throughout the story, the narrative voice parodies Suzie’s “assimilation” while it also conveys how her female condition is precisely what estranges her from the island: if she had stayed, “[s]e hubiera casado con algún drunken bastard de billar, de esos que nacen con la caneca incrustada en la mano y encierran a la fat ugly housewife en la casa con diez screaming kids entre los cellulitic muslos mientras ellos hacen pretty-body y le aplanan la calle a cualquier shameless bitch” (76). Only when referring to the “drunken bastard de billar” does the narrative voice cross to a more colloquial language. This crossing also occurs in the following part:

Esa misma noche, el bartender confesó a sus buddies hangleadores de lobby que:
- La tipa del 306 no se sabe si es gringa o pueltorra, bródel. Pide room service en inglés legal pero, cuando la pongo a gozal, abre la boca a grito en boricua.
- Y ¿qué dice? respondió cual coro de salsa su fan club de ávidos aspirantes a tumbagringas. (79)

*Hangueadores* is the only integrated borrowing that we find in the narrative voice’s “Spanglish,” and its tone becomes more colloquial only when referring to the Puerto Rican “mamitólogos” (79). Therefore, the narrative voice perpetuates her critique of Suzie’s apparent Americanization through “Spanglish,” but crosses registers to criticize the island’s machismo.

Indeed, if popular and local Puerto Rican Spanish can be considered symbolic of the “nation” language (Brathwaite), and if nation is created by “founding fathers,” it stands to reason that these Puerto Rican characters—as representations of the Antillean macho and machista with “tarzánico pecho” (78)—should speak this local variety: “Ujté ej pueltorriqueña, ¿noveldá?” (78). At the end of the story, Suzie, a woman, enters

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126 Her own mother left the island as a single mother. Suzie’s Dad did not want to marry her mother because of Grandma’s racist comments toward him. Suzie escaped both limited imaginaries in terms of gender and race.
momentarily the sphere of the national, and the narrative voice cannot endure such a contradiction. Although it “does not approve of the bartender any more than she [the narrative voice] does of Suzie … It is incapable of telling that part of it and must allow another, more single-voiced character to take it from there. The collapsing of the sexual into the national must come from a voice which, to quote a Puerto Rican (rural) saying: “tiene los pantalones bien amarraos” (Vélez 74). This is what Vélez reads as a “revenge narrative” on Suzie from the narrator (74). The narrative voice decides to finally omit Suzie’s inferiorized role as a woman in Puerto Rico but also in the US, and does not show solidarity with the protagonist. Suzie is described as dreaming of marrying a white man from the US, following, on the one hand, the US marketing propaganda of Puerto Rico showing “una pareja de beautiful people holding hands” (75) and, on the other, “the whitening and self-denigrating colonized discourse of the tragic mulattas prevalent in Caribbean nineteenth century narratives: the only way out of colonial stagnation is marrying a white metropolitan male that would allow Suzie to aspire to a US American identity” (Martínez-San Miguel, Coloniality 150).127 In reality, her boss – a representation of the straight All American—just sees her as a Spic. In the end, Suzie only achieves her sexual liberation succumbing to what the narrative voice most abhors of Puerto Rican culture. In a way, Suzie is portrayed through satire as she perpetuates patriarchy. As Martínez San-Miguel argues, “In this regard, Vega’s narrative does not seem to offer a new script for the Caribbean mulatta that would allow her to circumvent the imperial consequences of the coloniality of diasporas” (Coloniality 150).

127 The narrative voice recounts that “Cuando Suzie Bermúdez se casara … sería con un straight All American, Republican, church-going, Wall-Street businessman, como su jefe Mister Bumper porque esos sí que son good y tratan a sus mujeres como real ladies criadas con el manual de Amy Vanderbilt y todo” (77).
I interpret the story’s ending as yet another example of the contradictions in the text between the author’s apparent intentions, the narrative voice, and the character of Suzie. When Vega complains in an interview (Hernández) about the fact that once Puerto Rican writers begin to publish they are expected to fulfill their “patriotic” obligations, she admits that she cannot help wondering: “Is my work being read in a way that excludes all ironic, humorous, and/or problematic possibilities? Can this homage be in reality a denial of the texts’ purpose?” (55). According to the author, people need to create the myth that Puerto Ricans who write do so for the fatherland. As a feminist, she distances herself from this interpretation of her texts. She does not write for the “fatherland.” At the same time, however, she maintains what many critics consider a contradictory authorial standpoint as an independentista. The paradox in this postmodern text, which Vega herself cultivates through her language crossing, i.e., the use of an artificial “Spanglish” undermines her own authorial authority and independentista claim. Vega addresses the contradiction of being feminist and at the same time pro-independence with the following arguments: “Yo soy independentista, yo creo en la independencia para Puerto Rico […] no me opongo a la estadidad por razones de nacionalismo ni nada de eso, sino por razones prácticas de convivencia humana” (Matibag 87–8). As Green explains, by basing her pro-independence views on reasons other than nationalism, Vega prudently eludes the label of “nationalist,” with all of its patriarchal connotations. This allows her room to expose the violence towards women contained in traditional nationalist narratives, such as jibarismo, while still supporting the Puerto Rican struggle for independence (130).

“Pollito chicken” not only embraces contradiction with respect to language and nation, but also regarding language and gender. On the one hand, we never hear Suzie’s
voice, but rather a stereotype of her. The author makes the narrative voice deny Suzie the opportunity of self-representation and takes its mockery as far as passing the baton to the “mamitólogo,” who is the one who scorns Suzie with his “fan club de ávidos aspirantes a tumbagringas” at the end of the story. On the other hand, Vega “addresses the combined workings of identity categories inherent in the position of the Puerto Rican female subaltern and migrant” (Green 137). In that sense, the author deconstructs the traditional mono-perspective views of identity macro-narratives by offering both gender narratives: the one of the female subaltern in Puerto Rico, and the one of the female migrant.

Furthermore, Vega points to the restricted contribution of women in any form of discursive practice in contemporary Puerto Rican society, as Green suggests (138). The migrant female subject is shown to be prone to a greater lack of agency than that of the island subaltern “because of the added oppression of the discourse of anti-colonial nationalism, which has been shown to be directed towards mainland Puerto Ricans” (Green 138), an added national burden that demands an “authenticity” she does not have nor wishes to have. The narrative voice embodies this discourse. However, Suzie is never portrayed as a victim of the sexual encounter with the bartender, nor does this sexual encounter stop her from continuing to be the multiple and complex self that she is in the story’s beginning.

Ana Lydia Vega presents a complex text that, contrary to what Vélez affirms, partially fulfills her initial intentions of (“national”) unity between Puerto Ricans in the US and on the islands, and does present and denounce gender roles and inequalities in both terrains. Although the narrative voice silences the female character through “code-switching,” and portrays Suzie as a stereotypical hyphenated identity more on the US side
of the hyphen that seems to purposefully repress the Puerto Rican side, the resulting written text contradicts this dominant (narrative) voice. Vega’s language crossing with the use of an artificial “Spanglish” in a narrative voice that speaks for Suzie contests and deconstructs such a hyphen-conceptualized notion as “natural” and, consequently, we may conclude that Suzie’s is not a dichotomous identity, but a much more complex one. As such, although the narrative voice apparently takes revenge on Suzie at the end of the story, the text all the same highlights the gender problems that arise for a woman like Suzie in Puerto Rico and in the US. Certainly, we may want to hear Suzie or, at least, an alternative script for her. But, this is precisely what Vega may be trying to tell us with her particular language crossing: that grancaribeñas, and especially usanacaribeñas, are still too much read through the lenses of a forced hyphen on the one hand, and an imposed silence in patriarchal societies on the other.

3.3. **Aurora Arias’ “Emoticons”: The Virtual (Non-) Language**

For two decades, Dominican Aurora Arias’ short story writing focuses on a harsh and humorous depiction of the concrete realities and everyday life of the urban space of Santo Domingo. Her two first anthologies of short stories – *Invi’s Paradise* (1998) and *Fin de mundo* (2000) – are set in the eighties in the context of an accelerated process of modernization driven by the presidency of Joaquin Balaguer, “una especie de segundo trujillato” (Maguire 128). In her last compilation, *Emoticons* (2007), the stories are very much urban, and portray a Santo Domingo that carries the burden of history as it finds itself on the threshold of globalization (Maguire 127). Arias presents a wide range of diverse characters, belonging to different social classes, and ethnic and gender groups,
and whose identities move beyond fixed categories related to nationalities or national imaginaries. No matter where they come from or their skin color, all of them live on the margins of society and the city for different reasons. Through a focus on violence, sarcasm, chaos, and desolation, Arias reveals the complexity of survival in the Santo Domingo of the twenty-first century: “en un ambiente donde la migración, el turismo y las inversiones empresariales extranjeras han reforzado las divisiones inalcanzables entre las élites y los que no tienen nada (a veces ni siquiera la ciudadanía), a la vez que han producido nuevas prácticas locales y nuevas estrategias de supervivencia” (Maguire 127).

Furthermore, the author shows a special interest in the transatlantic convergences between Santo Domingo and the US or even Europe, as well as in themes of inter-island migration, local racism, and the role of women in postmodern societies.128

“Emoticons” relates in a humorous and sarcastic way the story of Julieta, a Spaniard who travels to the Dominican Republic to meet in person Pepe, a Dominican whom she has previously met online. These characters interact with James Gatto, an expatriate now living in Santo Domingo and recurrent character in all the short stories of the collection; Agente Lali, a corrupt ex-anti-narcotics police officer; and Kika, Pepe’s sister, with whom he lives.129

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128 As we clearly observed in Mayra Santos Febres’s *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* and in “Pollito chicken” (although this story was written much earlier), Arias reflects how migration and the increase of tourism in the Hispanic Caribbean in recent decades have shaped the poetics and aesthetics of *Caribbeanness* in literary production. Arias’ depiction of the Dominican Republic resembles that of Mayra Santos Febres in *Sirena Selena*, in which marginal and diverse characters struggle for survival in a changing society. In both, the characters’ (lack of) mobility in a mobile world is highlighted.

129 Valerio-Holguín describes the characters of the whole anthology, *Emoticons*, as “sujetos liminares, siempre al borde de una crisis, al límite de su propia identidad, entre fuerzas que los halan en diferentes direcciones: un rastafari criollo, una judía lesbiana, un homeópata adventista, una niña híbrida entre alemana y sankipanqui, una compositora de bachata con sida, un ex-izquierdista recogedor de botellas y un ex agente de anti-narcóticos vendedor de teléfonos celulares robados.” The scholar affirms that these characters depict postnational forms of identity (“Emoticons” 2).
3.3.1. Post-Nationness and Post-Dominicanness in Aurora Arias’ “Emoticons”

In her article, “Tourists, locals, and migrants: linked mobilities in short fiction by Dominican writer Aurora Arias,” Andrea Easley Morris explores the representation of moving and non-moving characters in the collection Emoticons, set in the context of increasing tourism and out-migration in the Dominican Republic since the 1990s. The scholar examines the relationship between the local and the global, and current patterns of mobility between developed/developing countries in the short story I analyze here: “Emoticons.” Easley Morris focuses on the term “glocalization” to describe the relationship between the local and the global in the Santo Domingo urban scene that Aurora Arias describes. With the concept of “glocalization,” Roland Robertson argues that the global and the local are not opposites but mutually constitutive: global economic and cultural tendencies influence the local, but localities also interrelate with and alter these global tendencies. Appadurai expands this interaction between the local and the global through the notion of “vernacular globalization” (10) to explain how the still-present megarhetoric of developmental modernization that we see in places such as the Dominican Republic “is often punctuated, interrogated, and domesticated by the micronarratives of film, television, music, and other expressive forms” (10). In Emoticons, as in most of the other texts analyzed, music functions as the type of

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130 See the full article for a detailed analysis of how globalization has transformed the Dominican economy with a dramatic rise in global tourism since the 1960s, with its social implications, and a rise of out-migration, due to job opportunities in Europe or the US and the domestic economic crisis in the eighties.
131 The scholar also focuses her analysis on the short story “Bachata,” found in the same collection.
132 Morris notes that the term “glocalization” refutes the idea that globalization is a one-way homogenizing force that emerges from the industrialized world (82).
subversive micronarrative to which Appadurai refers, as I will explain later. Also, Zygmunt Bauman makes a reinterpretation of the notion of glocalization to underline how mobility, and the lack of mobility, becomes “the main stratifying factor of our late-modern or postmodern times” (2). Bauman uses four subjects in urban societies as metaphors of postmodern fluid identities epitomizing who is (not) mobile and in what ways: the tourist, the vagabond, the stroller, and the player. These marginal identities represent the combination of accents and voices that constitute postmodern cities.

In “Emoticons,” Morris reads Pepe as the vagabond, Julieta as the tourist, and James Gatto as the stroller. Pepe, although having achieved virtual mobility through his relationship with Julieta, has limited physical mobility. He is unemployed—“displaced by a changing economy increasingly structured to support tourism” (Morris 87), and needs to live with his sister Kika. His unique potential mobility is the result of need and economic distress. Julieta, on the contrary, the tourist, travels for enjoyment or profit. Lastly, we find James Gatto, as the stroller, “among strangers and being a stranger to them (in the crowd but not of the crowd), taking in those strangers as surfaces . . . and above all seeing and knowing of them episodically” (Bauman 26). In relation to consumption in this neo-colonial capitalism in which Santo Domingo is immersed, Pepe represents Bauman’s notion of “flawed consumer” and Julieta the “free consumer.” She is determined to enjoy Boca Chica from the gaze, the smell, and the palate of the tourist: observing “la gente, los turistas, los gift shops, los puestos de frituras, las palmeras, los bares, la caída del atardecer, la noche que los atracó metidos en un tumulto de pieles soleadas con su consiguiente carterista” (88); eating langosta and paella marinera; drinking Brugal and Coca-Cola; and smelling “el olor a mar” (88). She remains all the

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133 He proposes that the pilgrim was the most appropriate metaphor for Modern times.
time ignorant and careless about the economic hardships Pepe and locals like him are going through. James Gatto is, on the other hand, perceived as merchandise: an exotic Other in Santo Domingo, “despojado de su contexto socio-político, … solo es ‘deseado’ como mercancía” (Valerio-Holguín, “Lucha” 139).

However, at some point in the story, all of the characters change these roles: Pepe refuses the role of the vagabond imposed by the tourist’s presence when he discards migration as an option: “mejor me quedo en mi país” (75). Julieta considers abandoning her role as a tourist when asking Pepe to marry her: “¿Qué tal si nos casamos de verdad, con todas las de la ley, Pepi?” (74). Finally, James Gatto’s role as the stroller merges with the tourist image. As Morris explains, “Gatto identifies with Julieta, a foreigner enchanted by the Dominican landscape, and like her he seems oblivious to the economic hardships suffered by the majority of Dominicans” (89). In the end, none of the characters in “Emoticons” are what they seem to be. None of them have an easy existence; not even the stroller Gatto or the tourist Julieta. Gatto, “pulcro y bien vestido, no trae encima nada más que su presencia, su porte salvador de buen tipo,” but “no hay dudas de que esconde algo” (73). Julieta, as her email address notes (julietakiereser@hotmail.com), desires to be Julieta (the protagonist of a universal love story), but she is Dolores (“la española”), and she is not thirty-five years old, as she had virtually told Pepe, but fifty-five. Under her apparent “fragilidad indefensa” (69), there is

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134 Gatto’s explanation of the Dominican Republic’s lifestyle completely ignores the way locals are experiencing the economic crisis: “Yo dejé mi país por ‘esto’, porque en esta isla hay maneras de vivir ‘suave’, sin mucho afán, no importa si no ganas tanto dinero, y por otro lado, no necesitas trabajar demasiado, mirame a mí, y hay otros encantos, sol, fiesta, todo se puede hacer mañana, explica Gatto” (74). Often, expatriates are the ones occupying the higher position in the tourist sector (hotel managers, etc). While living on the Caribbean islands, they very much ignore the social, economic, and cultural situation outside the resort where they live. Locals, then, suffer from the lack of consideration those bosses have regarding their realities. Working in this type of resorts in their own cities, locals feel alienated in their own land (see Cabezas 16).
a “sonrisa entre dulce y siniestra de dientes manchados por la nicotina” (66), which denote a tougher life than that she is living in the Caribbean. Furthermore, Julieta is not a sex traveler that flies to the Caribbean and stays in a hotel or resort with the sole purpose of sexual and romantic intercourse with a young local. Contrary to what may be expected, she—the tourist, the European—stays in a local’s home and is the one blindly trusting Pepe and wanting to marry him, although he is a “a caribeño desempleado que no tenía en qué caerse muerto” (66) as he describes himself. Paradoxically, he is the one to refuse her proposal. He is worried that he could not contribute economically to the marriage. To her proposal, he answers: “Tú estás en un país en quiebra, un país dolarizado, habría que esperar que las cosas mejoren algún día, y yo en España no tengo curro” (74). Pepe is not the typically portrayed sankipanqui (male sex worker). Despite his economic problems, “[n]o se consideraba un sankipanqui, pero por lo mismo, no tenía el tigueraje preciso para enfrentarse a un posible percance” (68). Far from taking advantage of the European tourist who falls in love with him, he feels that he has to be “el protector de Julieta” (68). Not only does he not abuse Julieta’s trust but he is even the one who is robbed of Julieta’s money: “Habían cambiado en pesos algunos euros que ella le entregó confiada a su acompañante para que los guardara” (68).

As for the secondary characters, James Gatto’s nationality is unclear: “un curioso del mundo de nacionalidad incierta, dedicado a dar vueltas por la isla buscando lo que no se le ha perdido, es decir, el paraíso” (68), explains the narrative voice speaking for Pepe. Although Gatto seems to be happy on the island, he still feels nostalgic for the past he left behind: “Aquella mujer [Julieta] le parecía simpática. Le provocaba nostalgia su acento extranjero, su asombro, esa misma nostalgia que lo mantenía vivo, y a pesar de ello,
apartaba de su lado como a un mal” (68). Agente Lali, a corrupt ex-policeman, currently seller of stolen cellular phones, and proud of being a “buscavida … pues, según sus propias palabras, eso e’ lo que hay” (69), is more willing to marry Julieta and leave the island than Pepe: “yo me la busco bien aquí, pero como sea, estoy dispuesto a todo por buscármela mejor en tu país” (71), affirms the Agente. He even shows more interest in showing Julieta the island’s local delights than Pepe, although he is probably the one who cares least about her, being more interested in her citizenship.

Through these characters, Arias moves beyond stereotypical or simplistic representations of interactions between Dominican nationals and foreigners. The virtual intercourse between Julieta and Pepe, the flirtation between Kika and Gatto, the love triangle among Pepe, Julieta, and Agente Lali, the mysterious relationship between Gatto and the Agente, the bond between Kika and Julieta, and the solidarity Gatto shows toward Kika as outsider, debunk simple binaries between foreigners and locals, such as those of colonizer/colonized, or exploiter/exploited. Arias shows how globalization places everyone in a delicate situation: “As travelers –whether tourists, migrants, or locals—we literally carry the ‘baggage’ of shared histories of colonial, imperial, and now globalized relations” (Morris 94). The representation of these characters in constant flux, resulting in complex forms of identity, questions the traditional idea of a fixed and bounded national Dominicanness.

Benedict Anderson identified print capitalism as the key factor in the construction of national imaginaries during Modernity. In the context of postmodernity or late modernity, electronic media progressively dominate mass mediation. Media and migration flows link audiences across national boundaries to start conversations between
those who move and those who stay (Appadurai 22), and those who plan to move and/or choose to stay, thus creating what Appadurai calls “diasporic public spheres.” These are “no longer small, marginal, or exceptional …[but] part of the cultural dynamic of urban life in most countries and continents in which migration and mass mediation coconstitute a new sense of the global as modern and the modern as global” (10). According to Appadurai, diasporic public spheres are no longer national; rather, they constitute the space of a postnational discourse and political order based on mass media and the movement of refugees, activists, students, and laborers (22). The Santo Domingo depicted in “Emoticons” may well be considered a heterogeneous diasporic public sphere consisting of the movement of workers, expatriates, and tourists; clearly some of this movement is facilitated through electronic media, as I will highlight in the following section. As Appadurai states, it seems clear in these narratives that “in the longer run, free of the constraints of the nation form, we may find that cultural freedom and sustainable justice in the world do not presuppose the uniform and general existence of the nation-state” (23). But Aurora Arias shows also the negative effects of the vernacular globalization we find in Caribbean spaces with the representation of liminal characters in crisis that go through dislocation, and a feeling of alienation (Valerio-Holguín, “Emoticons” 6). Although this crisis is exacerbated by tourism as a neo-colonial phenomenon in the Caribbean, Arias challenges the expected roles of a sex tourist, and a sex worker, and questions any kind of binary relationship between the Spaniard and the Dominican, the local and the global, and the insular and the foreign.

In “Emoticons,” globalization and postnationality place all of the characters in a shared crisis as a necessary step for social change. What is certain is that the text
contradicts the Modern official discourses of nationess and Dominicanness. According to Valerio Holguín, a postnational imaginary in the Dominican Republic works as a reaction to the economic crisis on the island since the eighties and to neoliberal politics by the different governments (3), factors that have invigorated in- and out-migration, and have impacted the tourist sector as well as the mass media. The scholar affirms that “las nuevas generaciones han abandonado el mito de la nación dominicana como resultado de la unión armoniosa entre indios y españoles, católica, hispánica para dar paso a una identidad múltiple que reta la homogeneidad cultural de lo que Néstor Rodríguez denomina ‘la ciudad trujillista’” (3). Arias characterizes postnational, post-Dominican identities in her short story through the language crossings in the text (verbal and virtual), the itinerant condition of its characters (who cross borders through different means), and the problematic classification of these characters, who suffer from persistent colonial and national discourses, while living through and negotiating with the globalization processes in which they are inserted.

3.3.2. “Eres muy cibernética”: Stuttering to the Deaf

… ellos [referring to Puerto Rico] tienen esa lucha por conservar el español como el idioma en contraposición con el inglés. Y nosotros vemos como una ventaja que ellos tengan ese acercamiento al inglés y ese bilingüismo como una apertura. Yo lo entiendo, yo sé de qué se trata eso. Es como una penetración. La primera vez que yo fui a Puerto Rico, porque en Santo Domingo tener una visa americana es la gran cosa, cuando yo llegué allá y vi todos los leerers en inglés me llamó mucho la atención. Eso fue en el ’92, y luego Santo Domingo se puso igual. En vez de decir Salón de Belleza dice Beauty Palace porque suena más. (Aurora Arias interviewed by Soberón, 3)
As occurs in all the texts I analyze in the current project, the main characters’ move toward a postnational identity in the *Gran Caribe* is reflected in the language they use, the language used by the narrative voice, and/or the language strategies carried out by the authors. The title “Emoticons” itself introduces a very global, postmodern language: the virtual language, or what David Crystal names “Netspeak” (*Language*), which chooses English as verbal expression. Emoticons are non-verbal symbols used in electronic mail and text messaging to express the emotions of the person who writes. These are designed to show an emotional facial expression. If made through the combination of keyboard characters, they are typed in sequence on a single line, and placed after the final punctuation mark in a sentence (Crystal 36). Newer technologies such as smartphones have included a wide range of emojis, i.e., non-ASCII emoticons, or picture ideograms, including a broader variety of facial expressions. However, emoticons’ semantic role is sometimes insufficient. They unsatisfactorily express the complexity of our beings and our emotions (see Crystal), and in every new version of the app, more and more of these icons are added. In fact, Crystal refutes the idea that Emoticons are “the paralanguage of the Internet” (Dery), since they need to be consciously added to a text and, he continues, “their absence does not mean that the user lacks the emotion conveyed… . There is also no guarantee that the person who sends a ‘grin’ is actually grinning at all – a point which also applies to abbreviations used: how many people are actually ‘laughing out loud’ when they send LOL?” (34). As emoticons themselves, many of the characters in “Emoticons” can only express ideas or icons of emotions, but not actual emotions, at least not through nationally bounded languages. This is the case of Pepe and Julieta.
As soon as Julieta lands in Santo Domingo, we are aware of her “transhumant” (Valerio-Holguín, “Emoticons”) condition. A third-person narrative voice placed most of the time in Pepe’s thoughts describes her as a “pasajera venida de otro mundo… con su habitual cara de perdida” (65). The description we are given of her could be perfectly describing an emoticon: “tan blanca, tan tía, tan española” (65). She is defined by means of the fixed categories of ethnicity ( datePicker ), language ( a word representing the colloquial Peninsular Spanish variety ), and nationality ( map ), although she will cross all these notions. Pepe is described through his stereotypical Caribbean ethnic features as “Moreno, sonriente, boca grande y gruesa” ( face ). The “sonriente” emoticon expression has nothing to do with the pessimistic, gloomy face he shows throughout the story.

Julieta crosses “el charco” (65) only to meet Pepe, with whom she has been chatting online for months, “conociéndose, intimidando, hablando de sus vidas, las soledades, los divorcios, el trabajo, la depresión. Y luego, metiéndose en amores, casándose, incluso, en una página para amantes virtuales donde se prometieron amor eterno, sin haberse visto, sin olfatearse, sin mirarse a los ojos jamás” (66). However, there are many things that they do not know about each other yet. For example, Pepe, or Pepi, “apodo cariñoso que [Julieta] utilizaba en el chat” (65), had not heard Julieta’s voice before, which now he describes as a “voz sin voz,” a “voz susurro como metida en un encantamiento, como surgida del más absoluto silencio” (66). Before meeting her, what interested him about Julieta was not her voice but how well she chatted: “…Pepe no había conocido una mujer que chateara tan bueno como Julieta” (65). Both face-to-face conversation and physical sexual intercourse are replaced by online chat. We thus observe how, through the story’s two main characters, the interconnection between
electronic media (the web) and migration (as the two major diacritics in the rupture with tradition and Modernity as the basis of the conception of the nation-state, as argued by Appadurai) effect on the work of imagination, a constitutive feature of postnational subjectivities. Migration and electronic media in the postmodern world allow Julieta and Pepe to create scripts for other possible selves, lives, and worlds beyond the predetermined ones belonging to fixed national imaginaries (see Appadurai 3).

Physical journey in Julieta and desired migration in Pepe, together with electronic mediation—electronically-mediated communication through virtual images, calligraphies, and emotions—allow the couple to imagine other ways of being (e.g. “ser Julieta” in her e-mail address), which overlap with role models in literature, film, music, and other genres disseminated through mass media. It is no coincidence that Dolores “kiera ser” Julieta, the most famous and universal literary representative of romantic love.

When emoticons, as mobile symbols that cross national languages and boundaries, meet deterritorialized users such as Pepe and Julieta, the result is forces that urge and induce the works of imagination toward spaces that are not bounded by the local, the national, or the regional. For Julieta and Pepe, the work of imagination becomes a space of contestation in which they seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern (Appadurai 4). A representation of this idea is the narrative voice’s crossing

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135 Appadurai recognizes that there has been a general rupture with the Modern moment in the tenor of intersocietal relations in the past few decades (2), but not a total break with all pasts. The interconnectedness between media and migration in late modernity is both what generates this rupture but also the central point of the link between globalization and the modern. Appadurai acknowledges that, while “electronic media offers new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds[, it also marks] and reconstitutes a much wider field in which print mediation and other forms of oral, visual, and auditory mediation might continue to be important” (3). Similarly, he states that mass migration is not a new characteristic of human history but, when intermingled with “the rapid flow of images, scripts, and sensations” across various types of previously impervious boundaries that electronic media provides (which Appadurai calls “technoscape”), it offers a new “order of instability” in the construction of postnational identities (4).
of the names used to refer to the main female character: sometimes the narrative voice remains in the modern conceptualization of identities in terms of national imaginaries and nationalities and names Julieta “la española,” whereas often she agrees with the reinvention of Dolores’ self into a postnational self (Julieta), and calls the female protagonist Julieta.

When Julieta arrives in Santo Domingo, the means of communication between the two is not much different than the one Pepe and Julieta used on the web. Julieta makes clear from the very beginning that she is deaf, a fact she had not revealed before, so Pepe will have to communicate with her “de frente y muy despacio” (66) or in writing, as they always did virtually. Pepe also has a language impediment: he stutters. Obviously, a stutterer talking to a deaf individual highly complicates communication. In that sense, the author also portrays the negative effects and the problems of communication among the participants of the globalized, postmodern world she so well describes.

3.3.2.1. Dolores julietakiereser@hotmail.com: A Deaf Woman with her Own Body

Julieta –because we never get to know Dolores, only the virtual postnational icon that represents her—imagines a world through the web and her trip to Santo Domingo in which she is free to move, in which she is not anchored to her physical reality, although the narrative voice often continues defining her according to her nationality (“la española”). However the protagonist crosses languages (and gender and national roles and imaginaries) and rebaptizes herself as Julieta. In the world she imagines and creates through virtuality, she is not fifty-five, but thirty-five. As Julieta, she is not a mother of
four daughters, a grandmother of two, and the ex-wife of several ex-husbands. As Julieta, she is not trapped within the boundaries of a chaotic household, but her home is wherever she is and wherever she can be what she imagines to be. As Julieta, she forgets about a boring job and about money. Finally, Julieta can leave behind in Madrid “un sinfín de agonías … para por primera vez, irse a echar una canita al aire en el Caribe” (72).

Ironically, the excess of sun nine years before—probably on a beach somewhere in Spain—“le iluminó el destino”:

Nueve años antes, había caído en coma, producto de una terrible insolación que a cambio de unas semanas de sufrimiento le iluminó el destino. Un error médico la envió al otro lado de la existencia, de donde fue devuelta, sana y salva, pero sin facultades auditivas. Como recompensa, se le abrió otro sentido, el del despiste; desde entonces, su familia la tenfa por loca, por inepta, por incapaz de hacer algo por su vida. (72)

When she loses the ability to listen to people in her family, they look down upon her.

In their study on listening and gender, Purdy and Newman point out the importance of gender stereotypes when considering the difference in communication between men and women. They show that the fact that women are (considered) better listeners is a result of social learning, of gender effects (2). Studies show that women have been largely assumed to be better listeners than men because they have been taught a muted form of communication (Rubin). Socially, women are rewarded for listening and not for speaking in inter-personal communication. In effect, Purdy and Newman find that females are assigned the characteristics of good listeners and males are assigned the attributes of poor listeners. The scholars conclude that dichotomous stereotypical perceptions of female and male listening characteristics are being reproduced in the

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136 Assumptions are that men, on the contrary, are unable or unwilling to listen to others especially in personal encounters (see Rubin).
surveys of their study (7). Julieta, far from being a victim of this hearing deficiency that stereotypically devalues her as a woman, subverts what is a socially assumed defect and turns it into her way of breaking free from social constrictions placed on women. Clearly, she was not comfortable in the role assigned to her as the listener in men-women relationships, i.e., the one responsible for inter-personal communication, and that is the reason why she went through four divorces. Therefore, deafness empowers her. And now not only does she not have to be the constant listener but she also acquires a “voz susurrante” (68) that captivates everyone. However, the deafness that for her is a means of empowerment and escape from traditional gender roles is, for her family (for “Dolores”’s family), a sign of madness.

Emily A. Maguire analyzes how in Aurora Arias’ anthology *Emoticons*, the contradictory environment of a city that debates between remaining in the national imaginaries and moving beyond them is particularly manifested in women characters’ bodies, and minds through madness. As the scholar reminds us, madness symbolizes a condition of alterity that permits a dialogue between traditionally opposed discourses on the one hand, and a resurgence of forgotten or silenced narratives on the other (129). The official discourse on gender and nation in Julieta’s country, Spain, does not contemplate the existence of alternative micro-narratives, which are perceived as abnormal or abject. Julieta cannot even tell the truth about her trip to her family. She must lie and say that she is attending a wedding in Seville, an excuse which would comply with social

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137 Participants in the study were given a list of 58 characteristics of listeners (such as “understanding,” “honest,” “gives little advice,” or “non-judgmental”), and they had to mark if they considered them to be typically male, somewhat male, true of both sexes, somewhat female, or female.

138 Maguire does not include Julieta and “Emoticons” in her analysis. She focuses instead on the short stories “Click”, “Parquecito,” “Derrumbe” and “Jarabacoa, 1983”. I will explore Julieta’s portrayal as a mad woman as well.
expectations and national boundaries. Julieta’s deafness provides her a female autonomy that male figures and masculinized societies dread. Julieta’s physical disability provides her with an “encantamiento” (65) that makes patriarchal figures “estremecer” (66).

Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* analyze how historically male writers have generated the extreme images of “angel” and “monster” in literature, and they propose to eradicate these roles, which sometimes still persist in current literary epistemologies. The feminist scholars quote Karen Horney and Dorothy Dinnerstein to affirm that

…male dread of women, and specifically the infantile dread of maternal autonomy, has historically objectified itself in vilification of women, while male ambivalence about female ‘charms’ underlines the traditional images of such terrible sorceress-goddesses as the Sphinx, Medusa, …and Salome, all of whom possess duplicitous arts that allow them both to seduce and to steal male generative energy. (34)

In other words, in their very madness and abnormality, these women possess powerful virtuosities, as is the case of Julieta. She has the effect of both enchantment and destabilization on Pepe. While he claims that he is captivated by Julieta’s charms, he constantly grows very nervous because she does not listen (due to her deafness) and does not want to listen to him (intentionally), especially about the precarious economic situation of the island. Whereas Julieta insists on eating lobster “pues ando de vacaciones y el dinero está para disfrutarlo,” Pepe answers with extreme nervousness: “‘Julieta, en este país estamos en crisis, en crisis, cri-sis, crisis económica’ … tan despacio y de frente como se lo permita su tartamudeo,” explains the narrative voice (66). Julieta’s deafness has the power to trigger Pepe’s stammer and increase his hysteria:

“—Yo creo que me sacaron la cartera del bolsillo—dijo Pepe, tanteándose los pantalones a la hora de pagar la cuenta.
—¿Más langosta? — fue la respuesta susurrante de ella …
—Ustedes los centroamericanos llevan la música por fuera y por dentro –comentó risueña Julieta …
—Nosotros somos caribeños, no centroamericanos –quiso decir Pepe, pero no pudo, histérico como estaba, con las manos hundidas entre las sienes.
—¿Y a-ahora? –tartamudeó para sí.” (67)

As observed in this extract, Julieta’s physical deafness serves multiple purposes: a feminist one that frees her and gives her visibility, and the one that symbolizes a colonizing cultural ignorance that she does not have any intention of curing: “esta mujer que no entiende, que no escucha, que lo mira todo con ojos de excitación, con aire de Viejo Mundo afanado en renovarse en las aguas de estos mares, sin saber de la crisis actual, la de siempre”(67), ponders Pepe. In all its meanings, Julieta’s “disability” has the power to transfer the illness, the abjection traditionally attributed to women, to Pepe, who is the one that now has a linguistic disability and suffers from hysteria, an emotional behavior historically attributed to women. As Maguire recaps, hysteria was originally attributed semantically to the female body (the etymology of the word derives from the uterus). This feminization of the illness implied that the hysterical male was also directly feminized: “cualquiera que sufría de ella entraba en la categoría de ‘otro’, ‘diferente’, ‘enfermo’,” explains Maguire (130). Julieta’s deafness, socially perceived as madness, empowers her and transforms Pepe into the “monster” or the “mad” one through those qualities traditionally attributed to these “other” women: stutter and hysteria.

Furthermore, if madness and hysteria were historically related directly to the female body, the freedom that Julieta’s deafness bestows upon her results in sexual freedom as well. Contrary to expectation, “la canita al aire que echa Julieta” in the Caribbean is not sexual. Arias disarticulates the image of the European sex traveler in the Caribbean. Julieta’s sexual life has been replaced by virtual intercourse. On the web, she
becomes close to men. She even practices what Pepe describes as “bigamia virtual” (69). She feels free to date as many men as she desires, and she even dares to meet one of them, Agente Lali, “‘en la casa de Kika, donde vive Pepi, un chico muy majo que también me pretende” (69). While Pepe follows the rules of a traditional monogamous relationship in his virtual encounters with Julieta, “con la que se suponia que le unía un serio compromiso cibernético-marital” (69), this electronic media allows Julieta the freedom to cross social and national boundaries regarding love and relationships, and the role of women in them. Her freedom allows her to never physically consummate the virtual intimate relationship with Pepe.

Night after night, Julieta refuses to have sex with him. In the beginning, Pepe blames his own nervousness: “Perdóname si anoche estuve tenso, la próxima vez, ten a la mano un sedante,” says a note he writes to Julieta (70). He is the one who grows tense on their first night together, not Julieta, as may be commonly expected. However, he also needs to reinforce his manliness: “¿Te gusta lo que has visto de mi polla, Julieta? Yo soy usualmente muy potente en la cama, ¿entiendes?” (70). He insists after a few nights, “Creo que definitivamente no quieres follar conmigo,” he writes to her (73), or “No te gusta follar, eres muy cibernética” (74). When Pepe, trying to find a response to Julieta’s lack of sexual appetite, exclaims “¿No será que se niega a tener sexo porque lleva casi un mes aquí, en este calor tropical, y todavía no he visto a Julieta bañarse?” (73), Julieta wakes up from her absent-mindedness to raise her voice in her own defense. She has even heard Pepe this time (he did not write down his interrogation). She replies, “¿Qué dices, Pepi? ¡Pero si mi cuerpo es mío y yo hago con él lo que me venga en ganas!, susurra Julieta, como si por fin oyera” (73). Her deafness momentarily disappears to claim her
body as only pertaining to herself. As Maguire argues in her analysis of other “locas” in Arias’ short stories, these women’s bodies personify the surrounding social conflict. Julieta can only be herself via electronic media, and the relationships she has virtually are the ones that matter for her. Emoticons represent her liberated self. Paradoxically, emoticons (i.e., Julieta) become who her free being is, while “real” Dolores (i.e., “la española”) is constructed through bounded social and national imaginaries that confine her and force her to be who she is not. In that context, she is an outsider, a “loca,” whereas virtual language allows her to express her inner self. In other words, the assumed artificiality and simulacrum that emoticons and virtual language convey become Julieta’s reality (cf. Baudrillard). In that sense, Arias questions those Modern notions of what is real and what is not, and what is accepted and what is not in today’s postmodern era.

Julieta’s liberation in the Caribbean is not sexual, but a feminist and female type of liberation. As in the cases of Juani, Yolanda, and Capó Crucet’s main character, Julieta’s feminist purpose is relational. She establishes a bond with Kika, Pepe’s sister, which empowers them both:

… ambas mujeres pasaron de anfitriona y huésped a inevitables amigas… Pepe las veía charlar sentadas en la terraza del jardín hasta que anochecía, mientras él, en busca de la tregua que la presencia de Julieta no le concedía … transitaba nervioso de aquí para allá. ¿Dónde está Pepi?, preguntaba la española en cuanto habían pasado unos minutos y no lo veía. ¿Se fugó?, volvía a susurrar, segura de que la respuesta a su pregunta podía ser positiva; y a seguidas, sin poder evitarlo, Kika y la española reían. Pepe no podía entender tanta risa, tanto disfrute, tanto soñar futuros negocios en común e idas a la montaña y al mar, con “looo-oo-jodidos que estamos en este país, Julieta, ¿entiendes?” subrayándole por escrito “no te lleves de mi prima Kika, que ella vive a su aire”. “Pero qué necios estos tíos”, replicaba Julieta, con una cómica mueca de desdén. (72)

Together, they poke fun at Pepe and his anxieties. Julieta even acknowledges that her (intentional) deafness, and her freedom to decide what to do or, better stated, not to do
with her body may end up in Pepe’s abandonment, yet she takes the risk, and even laughs with Kika at the possibility. Pepe, on his part, is somewhat afraid of the women’s bonding, which he may see as a threat to his masculinity. He does not understand that Kika’s lifestyle (“vive a su aire”) is precisely what attracts Julieta. Kika is even much less connected to the precarious economic situation of Santo Domingo than Pepe because, for her, as a Dominican woman, Pepe’s pessimism and feeling of needed survival would have most probably an effect on her body. In other short stories of *Emoticons*, the local women need to prostitute themselves for economic survival or are forced to do so by their male counterparts. At the end of the short story, Kika even joins Julieta in her touristic enthusiasm and economic frivolity: “¡Entonces vamos a comernos una paella marinera en Boca Chica!, planifican con súbito entusiasmo Kika y la española …” (75).

We have observed how Arias constructs Julieta’s deafness and consequent madness as a space to disrupt the established social order that sanity represents. Not only is the mad woman not silenced in the story, but she is also given the gift of being deaf. However, in her effort not to depict women as either angels or monsters, and on the contrary, present the reader with complex and contradictory characters in a globalized and postmodern Dominican Republic, Arias also shows how Julieta uses her deafness to perpetuate a colonizing view of the Caribbean. While her deafness allows her to rebel against imposed macro-narratives in terms of national imaginaries and gender, she also uses her (dis)ability to ignore cultural realities, and socioeconomic problems in the Caribbean. She prefers not to hear how the European presence on the island contributes to it. Pepe constantly accuses her of ignoring his reality: ¡*todo lo poetizas, todo lo pones tan fácil, se nota que en España tú vives sin problemas!* , writes Pepe (74). Although
Arias deconstructs predetermined binaries as regards the interactions between the foreigners and the locals, at the same time she emphasizes the tensions that result from the relationships between foreigners and locals “in the context of tourism, especially when tourists from former colonizing powers interact with residents of former colonies” (Morris 87). As Morris points out, Julieta continues to impose “a tourist’s imaginary of the Dominican Republic (or at least some part of Latin America) and its residents” (88). She is determined to maintain her distance, pretending not to understand even when things are literally written out for her (88). To conclude, Julieta’s madness becomes a metaphor of the madness of a city that needs to negotiate between a national(ist) past of voids and silenced histories and a present in which those national imaginaries are constantly crossed, renegotiated, and transformed.

3.3.2.2. A Language of Globalization

Julieta’s madness is particularly evident in her linguistic and communicative performance. As already stated, she chooses to identify with the virtual language: “Me sorprende la forma alucinante en que te saltas la realidad, ¡todo lo poetizas...!”, blurts out Pepe. As we also observed in previous texts under analysis, Julieta’s identity is a postmodern contradictory product of migration and electronic media. She once more blurts the divisory line between reality and virtuality; as Baudrillard affirms, symbols and signs (such as emoticons) have replaced the traditionally assumed meaning of reality. Emoticons and virtual language do not mediate or conceal Julieta’s reality, but rather constitute her reality, its own pure simulacrum (6); “reality no more exists outside than inside the limits of the artificial perimeter” (15) of these symbols. Cultural and media
symbols have become, according to Baudrillard, the very basis of our perception of reality.\textsuperscript{139} Following Baudrillard’s notion of hyperreality, these symbols do not necessarily possess a referent or represent a preceding object. Media is no longer a mediator of an external reality because it is a constructed reality in and of its own right. Meanings are ever changing, so reality becomes irrelevant. In postmodernity, the simulacrum precedes the original meaning to the point that the dialectical polarity between reality and representation disappears:

Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is Utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the Utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum. (6)

For Julieta, emoticons are the simulacrum language that constructs her perception of the world. When Kika asks Pepe “¿… tú conoces bien a esa mujer que piensas traer a casa?” (66), she is following the idea that there is a reality that Julieta’s virtual language hardly reflects. We then know that there is no correspondence between that language as a symbol (the emoticons) and “real” Dolores. And there is no correspondence because the virtual Julieta is not Dolores, and does not want to represent Dolores either. It is this simulacrum Pepe knows and loves, and it is Julieta, not Dolores, whom he meets. In fact, Julieta never abandons the “emoticon,” metaphorically speaking. She remains as Julieta until the end, because this is her new reality. In fact, it is the narrative voice that discovers Dolores, as she was the real self hidden under Julieta. The narrative voice persistently calls Julieta “la española” insisting on defining her in terms of nationality, a

\textsuperscript{139} Baudrillard reminds the reader “whoever is underexposed to the media is desocialized or virtually asocial” (79).
notion that Julieta seeks to escape. Julieta, on the contrary, laughs at this idea: “A Julieta todo le provocaba risa, en especial ella misma” (71).

Julieta’s language is the supposedly-artificial language of the emoticons, poetry, and music. In reply to Pepe’s pessimism and insistence on a traditional kind of relationship that is not the type she is interested in, Julieta resorts to a poetic language reflective of the experience of virtual reality: “Como no te tengo, estoy contigo siempre” (74); “Como no te tengo, te imagino, sólo sensación y gusto, sólo paso de espuma y arena” (74); and “Sin tocarte, tengo mi piel llena de ti” (75). She perceives the Pepe she meets in Santo Domingo as the Pepe she desires and imagines through the web. Not interested in his physical “self,” or his “real” space (in the geographic sense), she is in love with the Pepe she does not touch, with the simulacrum, which is no less real for her.

The short story ends with Julieta singing the Antonio Manzanares bolero “Somos novios.” As I mentioned previously, music serves in these grancaribeña narratives as a subversive micro-narrative to redefine Modern macro-narratives. Valerio-Holguín affirms that musical genres reproduce the fight among socio-political and cultural discourses (“La lucha” 127). More specifically, he explains that the Dominican musician Luis “el Terror” Días calls “lucha Sonora” to the articulation between politics and music in the years of the “Balaguerato” (“La lucha” 127). Similarly, Julio Ramos’ notion of “paisajes sonoros” refers to popular music as the inscriber not only of national imaginaries but also transnational and, I would add, postnational. In all cases, popular music, together with migration flows, lead to a questioning of the official and high-art imaginaries that prevailed in Latin America during the first half of the 20th century. Popular music also

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140 This may be a reason why she even confuses his nationality, thinking he may be “centroamericano” (67) together with her “deafness” regarding Pepe’s Caribbean reality.
gives voice to discourses that had been previously subjugated. Valerio-Holguín ratifies that music is a cultural discourse and space that embodies different ideologies, and is intrinsically connected to cultural identities. According to the scholar, in the Dominican Republic scene, merengue was the hegemonic music in the imaginary of the nation, being even a symbol of resistance against the first US invasion (1916-1924) and the neocolonial hegemony of this country (129). At the beginning of the sixties, bachata emerged, also low-class in its origins, and essentially machista in its lyrics. Both the merengue and the bachata are no longer marginal, thanks to Trujillo’s use of the former for propaganda purposes, and mass migration from rural areas to the city after Trujillo’s death in the case of the latter. But, the music of a postnational condition in the Dominican Republic is for Valerio-Holguín the originally low-class and “indecent” reggaetón, “a fusion of rap, reggae, hip-hop y, según el país o el intérprete, salsa, merengue y bachata, entre otros” (132).

In the compilation *Emoticons*, and in most of the works analyzed here, images are created through the use of a variety of musical genres in el *Gran Caribe*, via the recitation of fragments of lyrics by the characters or the narrative voice, descriptions of dances, or intertextual references to songs, bands, or singers. When these symbols are imagined and created collectively by this community of literary practice, they become fuel for action, to use Appadurai’s term (7), to create certain types of aesthetics that, at the same time, alter fixed and national cultural identities. Although the bachata is the protagonist in one of Arias’ short stories to the point that this musical genre is also the title of the story, and although reggaetón is also present in other stories of the collection,

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141 See the full article for a detailed analysis and historical background of each musical genre in the Dominican Republic.
the bolero is the musical genre that appears in “Emoticons.” “Somos novios” persists as an expression and construction of the feeling of love (Valerio-Holguín 136). It is important to add that this specific bolero song is one of the most transnational ones, and definitely one that is widely known in Spain; not only Manzanares’ original but also, and even more so, Luis Miguel’s version (1994). Therefore, it is a clear example of vernacular globalization. Furthermore, the fact that Julieta sings this well known bolero but does not hear the music that plays in Santo Domingo at the moment reflects how she is victim to the type of consumerism that globalization entails, in which some cultural products get to enter the global market, whereas others remain immobile. Julieta shows no interest in getting to know the local music, but adheres to the global stereotypes of the Caribbean: “…aunque no la escuchaba, sabía que había música a su alrededor, se notaba en el agua, en la brisa, en el tumbao de las mujeres al caminar” (67). She does not need to hear the music because she is carried away by the stereotypes that the global marketplace has helped to perpetuate. She appropriates “Somos novios” and moves it into her local repertoire because it is sung by the Latino bolero singer par excellence, at least in Europe: the Mexican Luis Miguel. Last but not least, it is significant to note how the lyrics of Manzanares’ bolero singing to a love that is “limpio y puro” may reflect the script Julieta has imagined for herself. Paradoxically, her singing of this specific traditional bolero (as a Latin American symbol) can be read as a redefinition through migration and virtual language of what this type of love (“limpio y puro”) may mean for a postmodern subject like her, a postmodern subject who sings boleros through the use of emoticons.

Not only does the inclusion of musical genres such as the bolero and virtual means of expression such as emoticons act as subversive micronarratives in Arias’
literary text. It is important to underline other crossings in her narrative that result in the use of a language of globalization. To start with, I will focus on the use of brands that replace the common noun to refer to certain commodities, for example *Brugal*, *Fortuna*, *Marlboros*, or *Nescafé*. Interestingly, all of these trademarks are italicized except for *Fortuna*, which is the Spanish brand of cigarette that Julieta smokes; therefore, she is very much familiar with it. As Valerio-Holguín notes,

> Un aspecto importante que contribuye a forjar la identidad trashumante de la postdominicanidad es el consumo de marcas a partir de un imaginario globalizado. Naomi Klein ha señalado que el consumo de marcas es un idioma universal (Canclini 25). El consumo es un signo de modernidad, pero también de adscripción al grupo nómada virtual, a la comunidad virtual, a la modernidad virtual. De manera tal que existen en el mundo tribus Nikes, tribus Gucci, Mercedes Benz o Ralph Lauren. El consumo, por parte de los integrantes de estas tribus globales, crea identidades transnacionales o trashumantes y proporciona un repertorio de emociones icónicas de un imaginario jet set internacional. ("Emoticons" 4)

In the case of Julieta’s fascination with the rum *Brugal*, we see yet another example of vernacular globalization. In all examples, the semantic loans would not be the same if they were saying cigarette, rum, or instant coffee, because these words do not possess the iconicity of cosmopolitanism and globalization, as well as locality in the case of *Brugal* or *Fortuna*.

On the other hand, it is important to note the variety of registers that Arias conveys in her narrative. The sociolinguistic situation she conveys is not horizontal and homogeneous but composed of vertical layers and heterogeneous linguistic scenarios. Clearly, the linguistic situation she depicts connects with a mobile environment in which language is in motion, framed in terms of trans-contextual webs, flows and movements, vertical layers, and various frames of space and time, therefore requiring an approach like Blommaert’s sociolinguistics of mobility (*Sociolinguistics* 1). Julieta’s Spanish is
peninsular, but she is in the geopolitical space of Santo Domingo, and she reflects the strong influence of a virtual linguistic register and style. Her use of “tíos” for men is even adopted with no italics (72) by the narrative voice, which for the most part remains in a neutral Spanish accent and tone, except for the phonetic colloquial use of “tumbao,” and for the lexical inclusion of English terms such as gift shop, italicized to mark the US influence on the island.

Pepe, on the other hand, is a middle-class Dominican who, despite having traveled abroad, has mainly stayed on the island. His Spanish is rather standard, except for his use of local lexicon such as “chele” (67) or “carterear” (67). What is more surprising is that he inserts naturally peninsular Spanish colloquial terminology when talking or writing to Julieta: “curro” for job (66,74), “follar” for have sex (73, 73), and “polla” for penis (70) emerge in Pepe’s speech with no mark of italics. This shows an emergent transnational character of the Spanish language in the text, thanks to electronic media. Moreover, Pepe may be adapting his speech to gain Julieta’s rapport. These are what Auer or Rampton would call significant crosses that happen in conversation, and in which all of the participants play an important role in the crossing. In this case, the crossing occurs between national language varieties, and between registers, and these follow specific ideologies or intentionalities. Pepe crosses from a standard Dominican variety of Spanish to peninsular Spanish; and from a neutral discourse to an informal one. The participant in the conversation, i.e., Julieta, the receiver, inspires these crossings because Pepe wants to call her attention, and make physical sexual contact with her.

Whereas Arias does not use italics for the local lexicon that Pepe uses (carterear, chele), she does when the narrative voice uses terminology with stronger cultural
referents such as sankipanqui, tigueraje (68) or passola (71), showing again how the narrative voice is more preoccupied than the story’s characters with delimiting languages and nations than Pepe and Julieta are. Agente Lali, who belongs to a working-class black neighborhood, speaks through a very colloquial register, and a local accent: eso e’lo que hay (69). This phonetic transcription in Agente Lali to mark his ethnic speech “de barrio” is accompanied by local food vocabulary: “Agente Lali trayendo consigo una funda llena de empanadas de pollo, chicharrones de Puerco o cualquier fritura típica para que la degustase Julieta” (73) or “¿Cuándo quieres que te cocine un sancocho, allá en mi barrio, mami?” (74), in order to emphasize his regional accent and background. Gatto, on the other hand, has erased his foreign accent and has now a very neutral Spanish that makes him of “nacionalidad incierta.” In that sense, he represents the ideological authority given to those languages or varieties that come from “nowhere” (Woolard). As an affluent white expatriate, he maintains this authority symbolized in his Spanish with no accent in the Dominican Republic as well. Pepe affirms when he first meets Gatto: “En cualquier lugar, y más aún, en Boca Chica, resulta oportuno hacerse acompañar de alguien así. Al fin y al cabo, ser blanco es una profesión en este país, tal y como suele decir el común de la gente” (68).

Finally, I would like to note the crossing of written and oral registers as the characters’ mode of expression. The fact that they need to constantly write notes to Julieta due to her deafness symbolizes the use of digital (i.e., written) language in our everyday interactions. Oral conversations easily intermingle with text messages, whatsapps and the consequent emoticons. The one portrayed by Aurora Arias is a linguistic situation of globalization in which different spaces (Spain, the US, the
Dominican Republic, the city, and the suburbs) and different times (the present Dominican time, the virtual non-time, the time difference with Spain, the linguistic legacies of past histories) merge with different vertical layers in terms of social class, gender, race, sexuality, and markets, which result in multiple language crossings and accents. As occurs with Capó Crucet’s “How to Leave Hialeah” and Ana Lydia Vega’s “Pollito chicken,” the representation of a fluid language of globalization through language crossing epitomizes polyphonic spaces of multiple crossings and accents, in which the official national discourses are renegotiated through subversive verbal and non-verbal micro-narratives such as emoticons, popular music, linguistic crossings, and gender empowering (dis)abilities.
CHAPTER 4. “There Is No One Language” in el Gran Caribe: Crossings Toward an Aesthetics of Poetic and Hyper-Quotidian Multiplicities in Three Theater Plays/Performances del Gran Caribe

I devote this chapter to grancaribeña drama and performance with the analysis of Caridad Svich’s *The Tropic of X* (2005), Migdalia Cruz’s *Satyricono* (2015), and Josefina Báez’s *Levente no. yoyorkdominicyork* (2012). In these plays and performances, or plays/performances, the aesthetics of crossing and multiplicity reaches its full potential. Crossings occur among cultural and social boundaries, disciplines, genres, gender, language, national imaginaries, bodies, and space and time delimitations. Spoken word, poetry, microtextuality, intertextuality, hypertextuality, popular music, past, present and future, here and there, myth and reality, the global and the local, and multiaccentuality cross into one another while disarticulating essentialist notions of totality.

Caridad Svich defines herself as a “playwright, songwriter, editor and translator living between many cultures, including inherited ones.”142 The playwright explains that her commitment “to the stage and performance, to the printed world, digital publication, arts advocacy, leadership and mentorship has continuously circled around these bridges of land and country, imagined homeland, and eternal road: the metaphorical, spiritual, physical and emotional plain-spoken and weird, twisted songs that make up maps of local and global yearning in a post-post-colonial world” (*Trans-Global* 5-7).143 One of the most prolific contemporary playwrights, Svich has written more than thirty full-length plays and more than ten short plays, in addition to more than fifteen adaptations/translations.

*The Tropic of X* explores the impact of globalization, colonizing capitalism,

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142 See “About me” section on her web page: http://caridadsvich.com/about/.
143 Although even the playwright herself, assuming predominant discourses and ontologies, continues using the metaphor of the bridge, her works totally escape such a conceptualization.
transnationalism, technology, language and culture “in the polyglot Americas, leaning
south” (Svich, The Tropic 16). This play premiered in a German-language translation at
ARTheater-Cologne, Germany in 2013, and was later staged at Single Carrot Theatre in
Baltimore in 2013.

Migdalia Cruz is called a Nuyorican playwright, author of well known Latina
plays such as Cigarettes and Moby Dick, Latins in La La Land, Lucy Loves Me, The
Have-Little, and Miriam’s Flowers. She has written a total of forty-eight productions. In
her plays, she seeks to give voice to those groups in US Latino and Puerto Rican societies
that are underrepresented in terms of gender, ethnicity, social class, and sexuality. She
states that she writes about poverty from a woman’s point of view (López, “Black” 203).
She is one of the pioneers in staging taboo issues of female sexuality in Latina characters.
Her female characters usually experience certain kinds of pain, often in relation to the
trauma of displacement and assimilation. She admits that her childhood in the South
Bronx influences this tragic component of her plays, but rejects being categorized as the
ghetto Latina who writes only for and about this specific community (see López,
“Black”). While Caridad Svich’s works blur the dividing line between play and
performance, Migdalia Cruz does not consider herself a performance artist at all (López,
“Black” 207). With Satyricon, Cruz seems to have stepped off the distressing hyphen,
and aligned with Svich’s poetic aesthetics of multiplicity. Inspired by Petronius’
Satyricon, circa 61 A.D. and Fellini’s Satyricon, 1968 A.D., the play is advertised as
taking place in a dystopian future, when “a corrupt Empire with a floating Capitol is
undone by the humanity—which is the music—of its people. In this play with music,
adult nightclubs, public executions, Italian movie scores & reggaeton flourish” (New
Play Exchange). This play received its first reading at INTAR in October 2011 (Lou Moreno, artistic director) and was directed by Daniel Jáquez. Subsequently, it was developed at the Lark’s Meeting of the Minds, 2013-14, with roundtables at the Lark in 2014 and 2015. It then had a workshop during INTAR’s New Works Lab Series in June 2015, directed by Daniel Jáquez with music by Cristian Amigo. *Satyrícioño* tells multiple stories that crisscross around Octavio, the Presidemperor of IDA (the Ignited Dominions of Amerika). Poets, lovers, wives, sex workers and all types of sex consumers, voices from the radio, servants, bastard sons, maids, and daughters create a matrix of complex characters, all carried away by the forces of verbal, physical, emotional, and sexual violence and authoritarianism.

Josefina Báez (La Romana, Dominican Republic/New York) defines herself on her webpage as a “Storyteller, ArteSana, performer, writer, theatre director, educator, devotee. Founder and director of Ay Ombe Theatre (April 1986). Alchemist of artistic/creative life process, Performance Autology© (creative process based on the autobiography and wellness of the doer).”¹⁴⁴ *Levente no. yolayorkdominicanyork* is Báez’s last performance text, which Junot Díaz describes as the performer’s best work so far (“su mejor trabajo hasta ahora”) and Miguel D. Mena as the best script for the Manhattan Dominicanness (“el mejor libreto para la dominicanidad manhattanera”). This work presents the quotidian world of a created space, the Ni e’, through Kay’s voice, which at the same time gives voice to her women neighbors. The Ni e’ is related to Washington Heights, New York, and La Romana, Dominican Republic; and to New York English, and Dominican Spanish, but it is at the same time none of the above. The

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¹⁴⁴ See https://about.me/josefinabaezayombet.
ontological condition of the Ni e’ is its non-geographical delimitation, its non-established identification (in terms of nation), and its non-dichotomous non-essence. The Ni e’s language, *Dominicanish*, is created through crossings, and the female neighbors in the Ni e’ do not form a speech community, but a community of practice in which multiplicity is their everyday stimuli.

In the three works I analyze in this chapter, language plays a critical role. Language, genres, registers, and written styles are altered to question assumptions of fixity and what is commonly assumed to be the logical order of things in a Modern world. These linguistic and formal crossings reflect an attempt to destabilize those other notions that regulatory languages serve to fix: gender and national imaginaries. From a poetical artificiality in Caridad Svich’s and Migdalia Cruz’s plays to a performative hyper-quotidianiness in Josefina Báez’s ‘performance theatre text,’ all these artistic productions accomplish an aesthetics of multiplicity that disarticulates the hyphen ontology. My analysis will focus on the play scripts.

### 4.1. Caridad Svich and Migdalia Cruz: Poetic Crossings

Giving voice to unvoiced passions and political issues through the use of a formal stage language, both visual and verbal, the artists in this section move within rapidly fluid territories of word, action, and image to up-end the English-language alphabet and make a new geographical site for their borderless linguistic play. Inverting, subverting and cataloguing new ways of seeing, hearing and feeling text and light in space over time … these practitioners illuminate history with their language-dense, language-opaque, language-transparent work … (Svich, “The Dynamics” 11)

In drama/performance, Caridad Svich positions herself “in a new writing that places *Latinas* as part of a mainstream and away from the myth of marginalization,
writers and characters that are Latina with no questions asked” (“Lifting” 5. My emphasis). She reacts against the idea shared by most theatre communities regarding what a “Latina” playwright should write. In “Home, Desire, Memory: There Are No Borders Here,” Svich acknowledges that it was at INTAR Lab in NYC, under the direction of Maria Irene Fornés, where she found a community of writers of which she felt she was a part. This community of writers generally shares common themes, ideas, modes of expression, and a connection to the “source” (i.e., Fornés) while maintaining very different points of view. In her talk, “Lifting the Veil: Latinas al Borde,” Svich similarly places the American avant-garde playwright Maria Irene Fornés as the source and inspiration for the usanacaribeña playwriting community, and these writers as Fornés’ legacy. Svich, whose works resist and defy categorization, demanded that her students take “themselves seriously as dramatists by focusing on formalism and aesthetics above all else… She artistically confirms their existence not merely as Latina

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145 An adaptation of this speech, which was presented as the closing of a plenary session entitled “Regenerating the Dream: Latina Theatre & Performance Between Two Millennia” as part of the 1999 MALCS Summer Institute (Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social) at University of Minnesota, August 14, 1999, was later published as the Introduction to “Out of the Fringe: In Defense of Beauty” of the anthology Out of the Fringe: Contemporary Latina/Latino Theatre and Performance (2000), edited by Caridad Svich and María Teresa Marrero.

146 Unfortunately, states Svich, “…unlike her contemporaries Wilson, McNally, and Shepart, Fornés’ work has not been fully recognized by American theater-goers. She remains, for many, an interesting footnote to the still-flourishing Off-Broadway movement, which she helped found. Perhaps this neglect is due to the fact that she is a Latina. Or perhaps she is a Lesbian. Or because she is simply a woman writing in the theater in this country….her unruliness [and mentorship] have been a blessing for the future of Latina theatre…an entire generation of dramatists have forged their own unique and brilliant paths in an effort to define and redefine Latina theater” (“Lifting the Veil” 94). In a letter by Max Ferra, which I found at the CHC archive collections, INTAR’s artistic director submits an application to fund Fornés’ production Manual for a Desperate Crossing. In this play, we find the recurring themes of forced migration, ethnic cleansing, displacement, and immigration in US Latina works. But multimedia is also taking place in the production, as will happen in usanacaribeña plays and performances. Together with the visual effects, bilingualism also occurs (as happens in Cap-a-pie (1975), Fornés’ bilingual piece with song lyrics of her own (music by Jose Raul Bernardo)). Manual for a Desperate Crossing is “told in rhythmic prose, in English, with the simultaneous Spanish translation text presented as slides on the back wall scrim. The Spanish text is also utilized for choral refrain, and to indicate that experience transcends language. English language subtitles break the play into scenes each of which becomes its own verse or stanza in the epic journal.” (Description of the Project by Max Ferra, INTAR Artistic Director). This diversity in the dramatic voices will remain and be exploited in usanacaribeñas such as Caridad Svich.
playwrights but as playwrights, period” (López 52). Therefore, in a way, she is undoing her particular or local identity. This is an idea that grancaribeñas explore with their literary aesthetics. They often want to be considered simply as playwrights or writers, or sometimes even as US playwrights or writers. When doing so, they are not rejecting their inherited ethnicity. As Rampton explains regarding language crossing in his study of British adolescents of diverse inherited ethnicities,

… language crossing cannot be seen as a runaway deconstruction of ethnicity, emptying it of all meaning … But this doesn’t mean that adolescents [and the writers that I study here] submitted reverentially to ethnic absolutism. If what Hall calls the dominant … nation notion of ethnicity had been hegemonic, language crossing would have been unacceptable. It wasn’t. Inherited ethnicity certainly wasn’t … abandoned, but neither was its influence left unquestioned… (“Language” 191)

In other words, whereas inherited ethnicity is certainly accounted for, it is not perceived as the whole of their personas, as we will see in the work of Caridad Svich, Migdalia Cruz, and Josefina Báez as well.

After Fornés, Caridad Svich classifies so-called US Latina playwrights in three groups according to aesthetic styles. Milcha Sanchez-Scott and Cherrie Moraga, among others, form the first aesthetic group. They deal primarily with the family unit, coming-of-age themes, and the question of assimilation while addressing cultural trauma. They convey a militantly lesbian, gender, and political aesthetics. And they go against the “yuppie realism” and “TV movie-of-the-week” pieties of contemporary Anglo drama, [and] the more elusively rigid machista models of Latino theater.

Migdalia Cruz (with her first plays), Coco Fusco, Carmelita Tropicana, and I would add, Ana Maria Simo and Dolores Prida, would be representatives of the second aesthetic group, which is inspired by “language playwrights” such as M. Wellman, L.
Jenkin, and C. Congdon. Svich describes them as an imagistic, more realistic and more metaphorical theater, which somewhat moves beyond issues of coming-of-age and assimilation to question both the Latina and Anglo cultures of which they are part. It is a less paradigm-ridden work of what Latino theatre should be. They explore taboos, the female body, and what is not considered “acceptable” representation. They acknowledge the gay and lesbian sensibility in Latina culture, the socially transgressive, and the feminist and postfeminist. Finally, they place themselves outside the imposed “ghetto” of “Latino” theatre and sit in all its complexity at the “American” table (7). But, whereas these playwrights start moving beyond traumatic themes of assimilation and border crossing, roots and origins, there is still an explicit preoccupation with these issues, which are embodied as traumatic. As a matter of fact, and according to Svich, the theatre community keeps expecting usanacaribeñas to deal with coming-of-age, non-assimilationist projects; questions of immigration in the US; and the American-dream. In this regard, a 1984 letter by Robert Federico, the resident designer of Repertorio Español at the time (current executive director), is highly significant. He “suggests” to Dolores Prida the following “idea to contemplate” in her play Botánica:

… [the character of the daughter] should be successful in her endeavors to be a “vice-president” of a big corporation. She should turn to the botánica because her roots are stronger than her assimilationist ambitions and not because she is a loser in the “job market”. The truth is that Citi, Chase and Chem would be falling over one another to have a Latina as a vice-president. (CHC5257 Repertorio Español Records, 1968- Box 15)

To a certain extent, these playwrights are forced to write in the way that a hyphenated “Latina” should write, according to a masculinized theater community. As a result, we find texts like Ana Maria Simo’s Going to New England, which tells the story of a Puerto Rican family who imagines New England as the ideal place to live. This play examines
the traditions of Latino machismo and Roman Catholic values, and explores erotic
taboo, characteristics of this second aesthetic group of playwrights, consistent with
Svich. Moving towards the theatrical language(s) that will take place in *grancaribeñas*,
Simo uses a minimalistic language. She also includes visual imagery and a non-
traditional, non-linear structure with short scenes without any beginning, middle or end.
Her play appears as a series of assembled snapshots. In *Exiles*, Simo continues to deal
with the traumatic pain of exile. We also find Miranda, an assimilated downtown Puerto
Rican female character who strongly disregards her Latino roots in Migdalia Cruz’s
*Cigarettes and Moby Dick*. Finally, Dolores Prida’s *Coser y Cantar* and Melinda López’s
*Midnight Sandwich/Medianoche* would be depictions of theatrical texts graphically
following what I call a hyphenated ideology in drama.

It is indeed interesting to observe how Dolores Prida’s *Coser y Cantar* portrays
the binary bilingual expression from the very first page, in which the introductions of
SHE and ELLA are based on a stereotypical description for each national imaginary
(English/Spanish, US/Cuba, here/there):

SHE is presented with “piles of books, magazines and newspapers … A pair
of ice skates and a tennis racket are visible somewhere. Her dressing table has
a glass with pens and pencils and various bottles of vitamin pills. SHE wears
jogging shorts and sneakers. ELLA’s area is somewhat untidy. Copies of
*Cosmopolitan, Vanidades* and *TV Guías* are seen around her bed. ELLA’s
table is crowded with cosmetics, a figurine of the Virgen de la Caridad and a
candle. A large conch and a pair of maracas are visible. ELLA is dressed in a
short red kimono. (49)

On the same page, there is an important note from the author, which symbolizes the
burden of linguistic identity in a stage of in-betweenness (in-between languages, and in-
between nations), and how this burden extrapolates to gender identity: “This piece is
really one long monologue … ELLA and SHE never look at each other, acting
independently, pretending the other one does not really exist, although each continuously trespasses on each other’s thoughts, feelings and behavior. This play must NEVER be performed in just one language” (49). This evidences the difference between this play, which maintains a traumatic Modern, nationally-labeled binary way of thinking, and the plays/performances by Caridad Svich or Josefina Báez, which, as I will demonstrate, partake in a postmodern logic of linguistic fragmentation, multiaccentuality, and crossing.147

Lastly, playwrights such as Anne García Romero and Nena Beber constitute the third aesthetic group, as proposed by Svich. I would add Svich herself to this group, as well as Migdalia Cruz (in plays such as Satyricono). Their style is personal and idiosyncratic; eerie and emotive; metaphorical and lyrical; and aligned with poetry, spoken-word movement, and alternative music and theater scenes. They are placed in the margins of what was an already-marginalized theatrical movement. Their works perform “Latinidad” without the word “Latina” necessarily attached (14):

What to do with a Latina writer that does not use ‘Spanglish,’ ‘sombreros,’ ‘salsa,’ or other expected cultural signs? ... Instead, cultural allusions, mythic images and symbols from the writers, personal iconic vocabulary co-exist on the same playing field, moving freely, within the demands of a given text, with a fluidity that … question[s] the very notion of ‘assimilated’ text. (Svich, “Lifting the Veil” 14-15)

147 Certainly, bilingualism is very much present from the beginning of US Latina productions. In a biographical sketch by Ela Troyano on her participation in Carmelita Tropicana’s filmed show The Day the Dollars Fell from the Sky, bilingualism is present and vivid. And the aesthetics of the production resemble what we will see in Caridad Svich’s work: “Though they start to speak in English, they falter and continue in Spanish as they proceed with their anecdotes in a normal speaking voice. A voice-over will translate to English. The effect will be overtly theatrical, a sort of Brechtian ‘alienation’ effect… The aesthetics of this film breaks with traditional linear and ‘formula’ patterns in narrative cinema. It also differs from traditional or established precepts of the avant-garde by using popular and irreverent formats. Cuban characters rising out of a melting pot of Latino cultures behave illogically informed by a popular mysticism derived from a mixture of Christian and Afrocuban religions.” (2)
They do not limit themselves to Spanish or English, to one theatrical language or another. Their work is open and multi- in a will to inscribe an aesthetics of multiplicity. Svich explains:

> When I am dealing with a Latino organization, I am often asked: ‘Why isn’t my work more Latina?’ as if one could manufacture a recipe that would guarantee with just a couple of sprinkles of cayenne or magic realism or well-appointed beloved Spanish phrases the making of a Latina play. When I am dealing with a predominantly Anglo organization, the comment often raised is “Your work is too Latina. Our audiences,” by which is meant the anonymously white general public “will have trouble accessing this world,” as if Latinas live on another planet. (12)

In these plays, the presence of both Americanness and caribeñidad is often so subtly articulated that it is difficult to express what aspects of these plays are responsible for it, if any. These playwrights will have an influence on the above-mentioned groups, who will begin crossing theatrical languages as well. Migdalia Cruz’s Satyricono is an example of this tendency.

The playwrights/performers I analyze in this chapter move a step beyond those who examine language from a unique ethno-cultural perspective connected to a socio-cultural identity. They dedicate themselves to language itself, to semiotics and structure, and to language’s connection to mythology, and cultural constructions (cf. Svich, Trans-Global 9). For instance, in Caridad Svich’s The Tropic of X, we do not even know where exactly the Tropic of X is because it is an imagined space created through language, sound, image(s), and moving bodies. In the quote that serves as an epigraph of this chapter, Svich refers to the playwrights and performers anthologized in her edited work Trans-Global Readings. Crossing Theatrical Boundaries, but she may well be describing the theatrical work of the playwrights/performers analyzed in this chapter, works which perform a grancaribeña literary conceptualization with an aesthetics of multiplicity.
Indeed, Michael Cerveris describes this aesthetic drive as placing “a premium on fluidity, intent, integrity, accessibility, communication and universality as (its) dominant meaningfulness” (24). In the above-mentioned collection of interviews and reflections that Svich edited in 2003, she uses the concept of crossing to describe a new aesthetics in performance art in the US. Interestingly, the book is divided into the following four major sections: “Crossing Media,” “Crossing Culture,” “Crossing Language,” and “Crossing Bodies.” These are precisely the types of crossings that I analyze in this section.

4.1.1. Caridad Svich’s *The Tropic of X* and Migdalia Cruz’s *Satyricono*:

Poetic Resemantizations of the Classics

Svich is always ‘after words,’ in the sense that she goes after them, chases them around the stage, makes language matter and makes matters of language –turning words into sounds that accompany themselves rhythmically, chant-ramping them up so that they conjure as well as represent, and somehow still getting them to perform the usual dramatic functions of dialogue, exposition, and plot development. (Underiner ‘After Words’)

Caridad Svich’s *The Tropic of X* portrays postmodern conceptualizations of language and space. It is “a play about migration, exploitation, intersexuality and globalization” (Svich’s webpage) that focuses on the lovers Mori and Maura, who suffer the consequences of language loss in global capitalism. They struggle for survival in a postmodern world of “a market of video arcades, old and new drugs, Nescafé internet cafes, swift-changing political regimes, fluctuating currency, cheap sex for the tourist trade, ex-bullrings turned into discos and hotels, white cars and bright blue houses with
peeling paint, and fresh murals on ruined walls” (Svich, *The Tropic 16*). Critic Amanda Gunther writes the following synopsis of the play:

Picture a world where the rules are constantly changing and if you can’t keep up you slip through the cracks of society into something altogether undetermined. Polyglot America— where Latin and South have joined equal power rankings with North and the urban street scene is where the action thrives; every person living for their next fix, their next high. Arcades, hookers, drugs, the challenges of maintaining hope in a world deconstructed and destroyed where the only prevailing beam of light that filters through it the chance of true love. (1)

Drugs, poverty, violence, prostitution, and authoritarian regimes emerge with diverse guises in *The Tropic of X*. Although readers are never explicitly given an exact location, only that the play is set in a random space in the tropics, “in the polyglot Americas, leaning south [with] a view of the limitless dirty sea” (*The Tropic 16*), critics and stage directors have assumed that this setting is on the shores of the Caribbean: “Even in the loveliest Caribbean idyllic vacation spot, the history/story is split. … From the point of view of those that live on the edge of society the Caribbean scenario sometimes becomes so alien and disturbing that one feels the cultural dispossession of this colonized society in an almost literally physical sense” (Westhoff). Underiner considers that what Hilton, the cowboy of the island, calls “here in the Z” (*The Tropic 35*) is actually the Caribbean basin. Therefore, while the playwright seeks to move beyond geopolitical delimitations, and notions of nation and nationality, her known Cuban origin bears weight in the reception of her work. Arboreal epistemology/ontology, which looks for origins, roots, and foundations towards a definite direction, is still very much present. However, *The Tropic of X* banks on the notion of crossing with no origins, and on a matrix of multiple possible directions.
Migdalia Cruz’s *Satyricoño* is set in the Ignited Dominions of the Amerikas, “what’s left of what used to be the U.S.A.” (10), specifically in the historical community of La Perla, in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico. The K in Amerikas may respond to the heavy metal band Ramstein’s vision of “Amerika” (i.e., US) as the extended producer of globalized cultural imperialism, and corruption. Alternatively, Cruz’s keeping of the German K in Amerika may refer to the type of countercultural orthographic “branding” used in favor of anarchism. Either way, it seems to be an implicit critique of what is predominantly called “America” (the US), which ignores the “other” America of the South.

Although the stage design seems to be more explicitly specified in this play, the way in which the setting is portrayed, as in *The Tropic of X*, is not descriptive of traditional Caribbean imaginaries, in this case Puerto Rico. Indeed, *The Tropic of X*’s sea was “dirty,” and *Satyricoño*’s Amerika is “ignited.” Both adjectives reflect the contamination, violence, and corruption that permeate these spaces. As critic Tim Smith indicates, “People anxious about seismic demographic shifts already under way in the Western Hemisphere may be a bit unnerved by Caridad Svich’s futuristic drama … The playwright’s vision conjures a world where North and South America have fused into a strange mélange where languages and longings converge, or collide” (1). If we search for defining conceptualizations of space, nation, gender, sexuality, and language, these are not the plays to read/see. Dramaturg Catherine María Rodríguez exquisitely summarizes *Satyricoño*’s plot in the following manner:

> With a positively pornographic politic, dominating Emperor-President Octavio has taken the world as his submissive: while the political elite entertain Octavio by pleasuring themselves with excess (or else), the have-nots keep to their dilapidated hoods. But the astrological signs point to an impending end to the
perversion... and to the mean streets of the once-enchanting, now-ghetto island of Puerto Rico. In the holed-up barrio of La Perla, Junior—bastard son of Octavio, current sex slave, and wanna-be Reggaeton icon—plots revenge against his hedonistic absent father. With the unlikely assists of matriarch and sexual cougar Poderosa, sibling and Security Chief Lujuria, and competing queer partners Enco and Clyvio, Junior embarks on a risqué rough ride to off the leader of the free-ish world. (11)

Time structures are not conventional in either play. The Tropic of X never sets a specific time frame for the story, but we understand its futuristic condition through the language and aesthetics used, the presence of visuality and technology, the mentioned changes in the landscape, and certain music references as “old.” It is certainly set in the new “millennial wave” (65). Satyricono, on the other hand, explicitly takes place in the future, in 2064 A.D. Both plays can definitely be described as presenting a dystopian—not so distant—future (but also a present and a past), and a dystopian Gran Caribe. Also, both plays cross times through their blending of Classical and postmodern drama. Through the resemantization of the Classics, Svich and Cruz remind us that there is no such a thing as an original play (Mee).148 They create a unique artistic production that builds upon human behaviors that cross time and space.

The Tropic of X is written after the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Troubadour Orpheus, gifted with a sweet singing voice and skills on the lyre, and the nymph Eurydice fall in love. While the lovers are escaping from Aristaeus, the son of Apollo who desires Eurydice for himself, the nymph dies from the bite of a poisonous snake. Thanks to his musical charms, Orpheus can rescue his wife from the Underworld on one condition imposed by the King of the Dead: he cannot look back at Eurydice as she follows him. Ultimately, of course, he cannot resist doing so, thus forcing Eurydice’s

148 In “The Culture Writes Us,” Mee affirms that none of the Classical Greek plays were original; neither were Shakespeare’s plays. They were all based on earlier texts (poems, plays, or myths) (9).
return to the Underworld. Orpheus ends his days alone until wild women of Thrace kill him by tearing him from limb to limb. The legend has several versions of the ending. The most heartening one recounts that Orpheus’ soul returns to the Underworld, where he can reunite with Eurydice. In Svich’s play, Mori is the one who is the object of desire of both the transsexual Kiki and the Euro-despotic Fabian, and the one who becomes a ghostly figure when he is imprisoned and his language is stolen by Fabian’s regime. Maura (instead of Orpheus) is the one who mourns Mori (instead of Eurydice) and decides to search for him. Svich crosses traditional gender roles. In The Tropic of X, the victim and object of desire is the male character. Furthermore, gender crossings among the characters occur in the play. Toward the end, Maura transforms herself into a boy, and Mori becomes a girl through Fabian (the regulatory voice)’s performative utterances: “I am a girl now. That’s what they tell me” (67), admits Mori. As Orpheus and Eurydice, Maura and Mori can be together in death.149

As for Satyricon, this play reinvents Petronius’ and Fellini’s Satyricon. For example, from Petronius’ piece, the dictatorial Presidemperor Octavio replaces Gladiator Encolpius. Petronius’ character Giton resembles Satyricon’s Junior, Octavio’s bastard son, and speechwriter Enco’s sixteen-year old servant. The character of the hermaphroditic priestess in Fellini’s adaptation inspires the hermaphrodite condition of Filomena, Octavio’s wife and First-Lady of the Republic. Cruz’s play borrows from the Menippian satire the blending of comic and serious elements, prosaic and poetic passages, erotic and decadent qualities; the non-historical, non-realistic, therefore

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149 In the play, Mori compares his relationship with Maura to that of Tristan and Isolde, a medieval love-romance inspired by a Celtic legend. Isolde’s husband King Marke truncates the love story between the princess Isolde, and the King’s nephew and loyalist Tristan. Tristan is wounded by the King’s other loyalist, Melot, and dies before Isolde arrives to his side. Isolde kills herself to reunite with Tristan in the afterlife. The tragic ending of the legend resembles that of Orpheus and Eurydice, and that of Mori and Maura.
fantastic tendency; the mixture of the fantastic, symbolic, and even quasi-religious with a “crude slum naturalism” (Bakhtin 115); the combination of invention with philosophical reflection; the conditions of insanity, split personality, dreams, and excessive passion; the scandal, eccentricities, inappropriate speech, violations of politeness and social expectations; the contradictory characters’ behaviors; and the variety of other genres, often to parody them.150

The reinvention of the Classics in S dich and Cruz responds to alternative ways to approach our past and history, our world and origins. Technology and hypertextuality open up for us the possibility to access and imagine “Web link upon Web link” (“Divine” 11) the “bits and bytes and bleeps” (11) of histories that do not necessarily correspond to the foundations of the Modern historical perspective. S dich affirms that contemporary artists seek the classical myths “because it is our inheritance. In it, we look for our origins” (11). This search for grancaribeña’s origins in the universal Classics moves beyond delimited imaginaries of roots, origins, and homeland connected to the birth nations of these artists. From a postmodern perspective, these playwrights feel more identified with the possibility of multiple interpretations the Classics have to offer.

According to Underiner in her reading of The Tropic of X, “connecting the discourse of myth with the discourse of history … the myths of the past [with] those of the present [reveals] the dystopic underbelly of destination paradise, specifically in terms of the region’s complicated histories” (“After Word”). Also, going back to the universality of the Classics is a way to escape ghettoizing labels placed only according to the author’s

150 See M.M. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevski’s Poetics, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 112-21 for a detailed description of the characteristics of the Menippean satire, which started with the philosopher Menippus (3rd c BC). This sort of satire was established as a genre by the Roman satirist Varro, an older contemporary of Horace whose works exist only in fragments (examples are the works of Lucian, who often uses Menippus as a character).
“Latina” background. Whereas migration, exile, and displacement are brought onto stage, the stories that derive from these myths are based on C/classical human conditions, tragedies, passions, and narratives that can happen to everyone, everywhere, at any time. It is a reaction to realism, and a strategy to disarticulate Modern naturalized notions of, for example, sexuality (as well as nationality, ethnicity, language, and gender). Queerness and homosexuality are performed on stage as ancient conditions of the human being. The Classics tell global stories, and stories that cross time and space. However, these artists will “localize” them (through language crossings and non-geopolitical conceptions of the Caribbean) in a sort of multi-modal and multi-layered “vernacular globalization” (Appadurai) to avoid Western uniformity and the homogenizing processes that globalization may entail, and to contemplate multiplicity instead.

Indeed, Svich’s and Cruz’s reinvention of the Classics may be read as a disarticulation of totalizing, official Western discourses, languages and literatures: naturalized “universalities” that the two playwrights revisit in these plays. Accordingly, these Classic myths are not perceived as merely universal in these plays, but as somewhat belonging to “somewhere.” Woolard suggests that the ideological value of authenticity is given to minority languages and varieties, which are perceived as belonging to “somewhere.” On the other hand, official languages and varieties are ideologically valued as anonymous, and universal, representing a view from “nowhere.” Although Woolard’s notions are set in the specific linguistic scenario of Spain, we can read Svich’s and Cruz’s resemantization of the universal Classics, situating them in the Caribbean (or in the Tropics, in the Americas, leaning South), as providing a certain authenticity to these texts, and altering the assumed universality of the Western narratives. However, at the
same time these plays move beyond such dichotomous categorization of nowhere/somewhere, or universal/authentic. Theirs is a “somewhere” that does not correspond to national imaginaries, geographical boundaries, or the ideologies circumscribed in-between such delimitations. It is a fluid space that denotes multiplicity in all respects.

4.1.1.1. ‘Haven’t You Heard del Babel in Which We Live?’: Crossing

Language

There is no one language or haven’t you heard del Babel in which we live? (Svich, The Tropic 14)

I’m like an ancient language he doesn’t speak anymore. That’s what happens when people get famous. They forget how they once spoke. They only remember things in the present. What kind of fucked up language is that? One you can never remember because it never happened, it only happens. (Cruz, Satyricono 52)

Language and other crossings in Caridad Svich’s The Tropic of X and Migdalia Cruz’s Satyricono reflect the need to think in terms of global complexities instead of the binary simplicity their characters bleed in late modernity: “Bleeding binary code” (48), states Mori in The Tropic of X. The crossings in these plays portray a superdiverse world that cannot be “neatly divided into clear and transparent categories” (Blommaert, Sociolinguistics xiv). Moreover, the recovering of the Classics, although resemanticized, reminds us that superdiversity has always existed and, therefore, the Modern tendency towards uniformity was exactly that: a constructed ideological

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151 The notion of “superdiversity” refers to the social, cultural and linguistic diversity in societies all over the world during the past few decades, which is more complex than what has traditionally been captured in the notion of multiculturalism. Superdiversity refers to such demographic and social changes as the increase in the categories of migrants, in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language and religion, and also in terms of motives, patterns and careers as migrants, processes of insertion into, settling in and interactions with the host societies (see Vertovec; Blommaert; and Rampton).
predisposition, based on notions like “native speaker,” “mother tongue,” and “ethnolinguistic group.”

_The Tropic of X_ constantly refers to language and tongue as symbols of identity and power. The couple Mori and Maura fight for their language not to be stolen in a simulacrum world of global capitalism where the lingua franca is not academic or literary English, but the corrupted English of commerce, entertainment and advertising, the English of global capitalistic Babylonia (Carlson “In Which”): “no one can stop me cause I still got my tongue” (19), says Hilton, the cowboy of the islands, a cultural crossing himself; or “My tongue is mine. I do with it what I will” (21), affirms Mori. Carlson characterizes the couple Mori and Maura, together with their transsexual friend Kiki, as “modern Calibans” (“In Which” 5), imprisoned by the language of the colonizer. In fact, Kiki is also subordinated to the lingua franca. Maura informs the reader, “Morning, noon and night Kiki has to be ready for any cold suit who speak[s] the lingua franca,” to which Mori sarcastically reacts, “or the franca lengua... The honest tongue, the frank tongue…” (29).

The characters, society’s outsiders, constantly have to prostitute themselves (physically and linguistically) according to the demands of the (assumed honest, frank and transparent) official language and the language of global economy. As Carlson argues, “the language of the colonizer [creates] the most complete and effective prisons, the prison which controls thought and expression” (“In Which” 5). Mori demands linguistic freedom, but the fact that he does so through the master’s language, English, already indicates how difficult it is to escape from linguistic imposition. Maura warns
Mori: “…bottom-feeders are the first to get screwed, cause we’re disposable” (31). Even so, Mori takes refuge in his language as the only thing that is his own: “I’m not disposable. I got words right? I can say things, do things” (31). Maura tells him that they are social outsiders because they do not speak the legitimate language, they do not belong to the “habitus” (in Bourdieu’s terms), and that is the reason why society thinks of them as “the X corner of the alphabet.”

Maura and Mori reproduce Butler’s idea of performativity as the creator of identity. In fact, towards the end of the play Fabian (who represents the discourse of power, the official discourse) repeats to Mori that he has a “weak tongue” (45), and “No language. Rules” (55) until Mori finally loses his tongue (i.e., his identity): “They stole my tongue, Maura”, says Mori, and, as a result, Mori’s tongue spits Z’s, the end of the alphabet (78). When captured by Fabian and turned into a mere number, Mori insists on the learned importance of not having an accent: “I don’t have an accent, I don’t even have a twang” (scene IV); “My accent’s crap. I learned the wrong alphabet” (scene 21); and to Maura: “You have an accent. Lesson five: no accents” (83). Woolard’s notion of anonymity in a language, i.e., the ideological authority given to a language pronounced with no perceived “accent,” is instrumental for an analysis of Fabian’s (i.e., the authoritative voice) insistence on the importance of not having an accent. According to Woolard,

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu criticized the ideological project of universality and anonymity that undergirds the hegemony of … dominant languages in general. … [L]isteners recognize the authority of a dominant

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152 According to Butler, who borrows Austin’s idea of performativity, gender is an act that brings into being what it names through performativé repetition: in this context, a “man” or a “woman.” Gender identities are constituted by language, which means that there is no gender identity that precedes language. J.L. Austin calls “performativé utterance” to those speech acts that “do something” if pronounced in the appropriate circumstances. See Austin’s “How to Do Things With Words.”
language, but fail to recognize the historical developments and the material power difference between social groups that underpin that authority. This ideological erasure (Gal/Irvine 2000) is what allows dominance to become hegemony... Under the persuasive power of schools and media, people come to endorse a language’s power as genuinely inhering in the language itself. Having lost its social roots, it becomes a language “from nowhere.” (“Language” 5,6)

Fabian, acting as the perpetrator of the ideological project of universality and anonymity maintains the official language’s hegemony by making Mori recognize the authority of such lingua franca without questioning. Mori’s insistence on his pronunciation as lacking an accent responds to a survival strategy when Fabian, who symbolizes the master language, captures him. As Hilton affirms: “We allow our language to be owned … To be protected … To be copyrighted… This is how we live after Babel” (65). At the end of the play, Mori will be finally speaking an English with no accent, a neutral or normative language, a nowhere language that only takes place after Mori’s “authentic” language has been stolen.

Fabian sexually exploits, captures, and tortures Mori until being reduced “to a genderless and cultureless number, a trashstuffer to be discarded on the trash heap of global capitalism” (Carlson, “In Which”). Toward the end of the play, Fabian kicks Mori in the mouth to completely silence him. The last scene shows Mori and Maura totally nude against the sea wall. To Frankie’s question “You speak Spanish, eh?” Maura answers, “I speak words.” To his question, “And you, you’re not American?, she responds, “I’m nothing” (20). Mori also insists,

They stole my tongue, Maura.
They took it just like that, …
They stole my name, They took it from me.

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153 Indirectly, Fabian steals Maura’s tongue as well because she claims that Mori “is [her] tongue” (scene XX).
154 Frankie is the man who watches the road that leads to where Mori is imprisoned. The same actor who plays Fabian plays this character.
They took my sex, too.
They say I’m a girl. … (scene 17)

The cowboy Hilton’s voice ends the play by broadcasting that “Two pure ones/
have been found/ hard as mules/ on the sand/ against the rough sea” (85). This
comparison of Mori and Maura’s bodies with animal flesh symbolizes their final voice of
freedom that surfaces only when Mori and Maura have been dispossessed of language,
gender, identity, and cultural constrictions imposed on them by the dominant regulatory
discourses. Their nude bodies may symbolize the “body matter” Butler affirms that we
never get to see behind sedimented gender performativities.

The power of language, and the language of power are also presented and
questioned in Migdalia Cruz’ Satyricono. In the play’s portrayal of a decadent dystopian
future in the Ignited Dominions of Amerika, “Each one is trying to kill him or herself—
unsuccessfully—over and over again./ One slits his throat. One hangs herself. Two take
poison./ Another one hits his head repeatedly with a dictionary./ One holds her head in a
deep basin of water until she can no longer breathe—/ comes up for air, and then tries
again./ One takes line after line of cocaine—he is covered in white powder” (10. My
emphasis). In this fragmented exposition of vignettes, the depiction of a person trying to
kill him/herself by hitting his head repeatedly with a dictionary is especially noteworthy.
The dictionary, assumed to be the legitimate voice of “the official language” hits
repeatedly upon our bodies to mold and transform them into the constructions society has
predetermined for us. As Butler suggests, language as identity performance is not
something that subjects can easily choose. On the contrary, the correlation between
language and identity, or the conception of language as a site of identity performance,
implies a set of repeated acts within highly rigid regulatory frames that sediment over
time to construct the appearance of a given (gender, linguistic, national) role. The recurrent hitting of the normative language onto our heads performs these repeated acts here.155

In *Satyricono*, Octavio, the Presidemperor, is the dominant, official voice that subjugates everyone else in his dominions. He admits that he likes “palavering” to the masses in his speeches, i.e., talking unnecessarily at length, idle and misleading speech: “Yes. I have just the thing. I like palavering to the people. I like that word. Palavering” (20). Those who defy Octavio’s official language are brutally tortured and killed by the Presidemperor himself. Enco, Octavio’s scribe and speechwriter, is from the beginning of the play presented as wanting to kill himself before Octavio does. He knows he is on Octavio’s list and the only reason is that he does not write the exact words Octavio wants to pronounce in his speeches. When this task is given to Malpuso, the Poet-Laureate for Octavio, the result is hardly improved:

OCTAVIO: Them between neutral not is God that know we and war at been always have, cruelty and justice, fear and freedom. Certain is outcome its yet, known not is conflict this of course the people American the for security and freedom for struggle this waging in relent not will I rest not will I, yield not will I. (an aside) Words flow like water; but any relevance, they have none! (Back to the speech) It inflicted who those and country our to wound the forget not will I. You thank. (31)

Those who master the letters are the only ones who, through language, can rebel against Octavio’s dictatorship. Malpuso cannot find the inspiration when having to write the “official” verses Octavio wants to hear:

… He thinks I find my inspiration in nature. And there are some who believe that—but I prefer a blank room, a comfortable chair, a glass of rum. Putting together families of words is hard work made easier with a bit of spirits. … (Pause)

155 See section 1.4. for a detailed explanation of how I frame the present work through Butler’s theory of performativity in relation to language and gender.
Why does he make me stay here?
(It begins to rain. There is lightning.)
I’m not afraid of you!
...Inspiration, where are you? (21-2)

On another occasion, Malpuso admits that he despises the sonnet, especially the first part of a Petrarchan sonnet, the octave:

The Petrarchan sonnet—abba abba, then cdc dcd or cde cde—14 lines, blah, blah, blah. Boring meter, such a predictable rhyme scheme...For the Gods’ sake! Anyone who can count can do it—but not everyone’s a poet. Only those who’ve never trusted words alone are the true poets. Poets believe in people. Blood. Love. (43-4)

It is not a coincidence that he loathes the octave, i.e., Octavio, since the octave, as Octavio, represents the norm in poetry, the predictable language, and the official code. A poet, he states, never trusts words alone, the given words. As Svich and Cruz themselves, a poet tells the stories of people as subjects freed from normative social impositions. A poet hates to be forced to write following the normative codes and constraints, confesses Malpuso. By freeing himself of predictable meters and rhyme schemes, Malpuso can create for everyone, not only for those in power. Blood and love work as symbols to represent equality among human beings.

Migdalia Cruz and Caridad Svich can be read as poets freeing themselves from uniform “boring meters” and normative theatrical languages to express a poetics of multiplicity. However, they show us in their respective plays that freedom from language is not easily achieved. Like Mori, Malpuso was tortured and finally killed:

We see several people tied to stakes.
They have been sexually mutilated.
They are bloody and broken. One of them is MALPUSO, the poet. (50)
In a last attempt at survival, the poet writes a poem for Octavio following official precepts: “I have a poem for you, your Imperial Majesty” (51). Octavio responds, “Haven’t I cured you of that yet? There is nothing worse than a bad poet, writing poems in your honor” (50). To Malpuso’s insistence, Octavio gives in and listens to the poem after threatening the poet: “It is certainly your last one. Proceed” (51). The poem says, “Birds fell from the sky, with birth’s sweet cry—a son was born” (51). With traditional rhythms, Malpuso’s poem aims to uncover the existence of his adopted grandson Junior, Octavio’s bastard son from his affair with Poderosa, a prostitute. But before that can occur, Octavio expresses his discontent with the poet’s verses for not including the figure of the Sun (“Where did the Sun go?,” 51) and sets Malpuso on fire. But Malpuso is not the only one tortured and killed for not speaking “the official (poetic) language.”

The sisters Tullia and Vita, Octavio’s housemaids, speak Pig Latin. For example,

TULLIA: Eway ereway onway eakbray. [We were on break.]
VITA: Oday usway away olidsay, Odayñaway Ujurialay, andway onday’tay akemay usway ogay inway erethay. Ehay isway alwaysway yingtray otay ucksay onway ymay ittiestay andway eythay areway eryvay ensitivesay.
[Do us a solid, Doña Lujuria, and don’t make us go in there. He is always trying to suck on my titties and they are very sensitive.] (19)

The author’s notes indicate, “Cue cards or supertitles appear translating TULLIA & VITA’s Pig Latin” (18). The fact that they speak Pig Latin highlights the marginal position their gender and social class offer them in Octavio’s society. Octavio constantly takes advantage of his political power and despotic masculinity to sexually abuse Tullia and Vita. This language crossing is probably used as a refuge, and as a resistance to speaking the master’s language. The playful nature of Pig Latin may even suggest that the sisters are poking fun of “the official language” with complicity, sealing a pact of solidarity among these women. However, after being raped, Octavio dismembers and
kills them. It is only when they are beheaded and continue appearing in the play as talking heads that they perform other language crossings. Liberated from their bodies, which were also their prisons, they can now cross into other languages as well, official or not, and speak all English, Latin, and Pig Latin (81, 87, 89). They are now literal talking heads (i.e., beheaded) acting as talking heads (i.e., commentators) in the play. Their role is from now on that of the chorus in Classical drama; that of commenting on the dramatic action, as was the role of Hilton, and sporadically Kiki, in *The Tropic of X*.

The sisters now ally with Junior in his plan to kill his father, who insists on not recognizing him as his son. However, the one who finally kills Octavio is Filomena, Octavio’s wife. The final rebellion comes from the hands of a hermaphrodite woman, who has been physically and verbally abused continually by her husband. Filomena admits that Octavio wants her too much, but that she is tired and hungry for words (37). She hungers to “read and talk and listen to people reading and talking” (37). As Enco admits, “The woman behind the man always carries the sharpest knife” (94). Now, everybody will be able to talk, and read in his or her desired language. “A Puerto Rican Woman President,” Junior concludes. National and gender labels are used for the first time strategically in a type of revolutionary essentialism, since Filomena’s nationality and gender are not so clear-cut.

As stated above, language has a relevant role in relation to (lack of) power, and (non-) identity in Svich’s and Cruz’s plays. Diverse language crossings reiteratively occur with the probable purpose of disarticulating sedimented identities, languages, and national imaginaries, toward an aesthetics of multiplicity. *The Tropic of X* is written in English with the inclusion of some words in Spanish, as occurs in most of the
usanacaribeña artistic productions analyzed in this project. Some examples of this lexicon are: oye, turista, cojones, pelón, matador, pendejo, guerrilla, mala noche, papi, carajo, chulo, tirano, sangría, merengue, papeles. As specified in the case of the narratives, in some of these works so many cultural references are implied that the texts escape translatability. In many other cases, these are swearwords, taboo words, or expressions with a deeply emotional charge. In Emotions and Multilingualism, Aneta Pavlenko explains that many late bilingual and multilingual speakers report experiencing higher emotional intensity when saying taboo words in their “primary” language. Therefore, the use of these types of words in Spanish in Svich’s text could mean the emergence of the Spanish language as the characters’ “primary” language, or as the “underground river” (Lynch, “Novelist”) of the text. In his introduction to The Tropic of X, Carlson states: “Spanish, the presumed original language of Mori and Maura surfaces … only in isolated insulting words” (6). If that were the case, the Spanish language could perhaps be understood to be associated with the bilingual characters’ sense of intimacy, and with their sub-consciousness, revealed through emotions. In consequence, Svich’s bilingual characters would disclose their inner selves through language, as a deep aspect of their identity. At the same time, their language would show how weak the hegemonic language Fabian imposes is when the “other” languages continually emerge through emotion.

In The Tropic of X the connection between language and intimacy is posed. When Mori is robbed of the language with which he identifies, his emotional capacity is taken away from him as well. He forgets who Maura is and when she promises to stay with him

156 This statement is generally pronounced here. For a thorough study of the nature of language embodiment in bi- and multilingual subjects, see Pavlenko 2005.
until the end, Mori answers: “Forget me […] You’re a strange boy.” Something similar occurs in *Satyricoño*. For instance, Poderosa, Junior’s mother, speaks in Spanish only when she becomes highly annoyed with her son: “(An aside) Ese mojón de mi coño siempre tiene que joder conmigo como un ojo de culo. Shucks! He never had it that bad—he had me” (92). This linguistic portrayal may be at the same time confirming the reality of language contact in the US: on the one hand, Spanish is in a precarious situation in relation to English and, on the other hand, the language crossings of Spanish heritage speakers may respond to identity claims, among other already mentioned pragmatic factors.

However, when reading Svich’s play, my perception was that the inclusion of Spanish lexicon resulted in a type of purposefully created linguistic artificiality, confirming how complex it is to speak about “primary” or “secondary” languages in bilingual speakers. In the author’s instructions for the setting of the play, Svich states, “occasional Spanish words and phrases are italicized in the script, as are other non-English-language phrases.” My reading is that Svich is consciously creating this estrangement effect (cf. Brecht) with the languages she knows so well. Through Svich’s “artificial” aesthetics of multiplicity, through her language crossings and multiaccentuality, the readers and audiences are constantly aware that they are participating in a theater play, and are provided with the opportunity of analyzing the crossings without completely identifying with/in them.

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157 At this point of the play, the protagonists’ genders have already been crossed.
158 Being bilingual herself, it is difficult to think that she creates this linguistic artificiality unconsciously. Furthermore, play with language(s) is pervasive in her works. However, she also knows that a balanced bilingual subject is a problematic construct, and in the US, English is hegemonic.
In Migdalia Cruz’s *Satyrichoño*, we also find Spanish lexical insertions such as *ven acá* or *hijo de puta*, but crossings into Spanish occur particularly in musical expressions. Junior expresses through music what he cannot express through language, and can speak through music the languages he cannot normally speak. In the following quote, he rebels against Octavio through a regaetton song in colloquial Spanish, with English crossings:

Vírate. Vírate mi gente, Vírate.  
Pásalo. Pásalo por mano, pásalo.  
Dámelo, da’me en mi culo, dámelo.  
Like the economy, set it free.  
Vírate, Vírate, mi chula, Vírate.  
Vírate, Vírate, mi chulo, Vírate.  
Dámelo todo—even a la modo.  
Dámelo.  
El sexo y el poder es pa’ la gente.  
El pretexto es lo suyo, Señor Presidente. (43)

Similarly, Malpuso, when he is no more than living ashes, finds a new means of expression in music. Also singing in Spanish, he renders a love song or a sort of bolero with a touch of parody in the last verse (which crosses lyrics more characteristic of the regaetton) to satirize both musical genres:

Te quiero con esperanza, me muero de amor por ti.  
Soy siempre tu macho, mi hembra, muchacha.  
Animales mansos entre nosotros, bestias asquerosas con otros.  
Pero tú y yo, juntos, somos como unas estrellas en los cielos—  
Bellos—sin igual. Un llanto—sin respirar.  
Quiero partirte hasta las nalgas, mi negra, hasta que la luna pase delante del sol.  
(81)

These crossings into different musical genres in Spanish liberate the characters from governmental rigidity. Language is once more portrayed as a form of music, or music as a form of language. Music does not manifest the rigid categories that we find in conventional languages. The composer can play with its keys and forms to reinvent and
create multiple musical genres, rhythms and lyrics. This is what Svich and Cruz, and other grancaribeñas analyzed, do with language as well. In that sense, language is portrayed as a type of music. Their language crossings are a way to distance themselves from given realities. Through grammar and genre crossings, and wordplay, these playwrights express the flexibility and fluidity they identify with, and play with audience expectations to defy and make them defy conventional social categories.

Certain musical genres, for example reggaeton in the Caribbean, continue expressing the same violence against women that Octavio, the hegemonic discourse(s), inflicts on the female characters in Satyricoño. Women’s bodies constantly play a central role in Migdalia Cruz’s plays. In an interview with López, Cruz affirms that the one thing women own are their bodies (211). It is common to observe, therefore, that sexuality is the only tool of empowerment that women have in Cruz’s plays (see for instance the character of Poderosa in Satyricoño, a sexually free matriarch and single mother who has as many young lovers as she wishes). However, these same female bodies are also usually portrayed as the target of male violence, as in the case of Tullia and Vita, and Filomena. Likewise, Cruz’s Miriam’s Flowers depicts the female body as the victim of self-mutilation as a type of spiritual healing due to the main character’s low self-esteem due to a feeling of loss (Cruz in López, “Black” 214). This self-mutilation has also been read as a process of “critical re-signification” of the Hispanic woman’s role and identity (López, “Violents Inscriptions” 186). Miriam’s body becomes the only locus from which to speak (López, “Black”); a matrix on which to inscribe this critical re-signification (Agustí). Cruz leaves behind a crude realism, as well as the themes of Catholicism,

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159 Migdalia Cruz affirms that explicit violence in her plays comes from her Catholic upbringing: “I was obsessed with the church when I was a kid. The blood rituals and the eating of Christ’s body and drinking
migration, traumatic assimilation, and origins, but institutionalized male violence against
the female body is still very much present in *Satyricono*, although it is depicted through a
satiric, humorous tone, and the ending inspires hope. Filomena, a hermaphrodite,
removes Octavio from power, and the first thing she does under her presidential mandate
is marry Lujuria and Oenothea, a lesbian couple.

To conclude, the subversion of the learned and taken-for-granted (theatrical)
languages allows Svich and Cruz to become poets of a dramaturgical aesthetics of
multiplicity. The use of a poetic language and aesthetics provokes a discordant effect in
the audience, so that they perceive the multiplicity, fragmentation, and desolation that the
playwrights intend to convey. Furthermore, this poetic musicality urges the audiences “to
not only think of story and narrative, but also (and sometimes, instead of) think of
motion, space, tempo, rhythm and time as its own narrative strategy. … [T]hese artists
scavenge, dig, exhibit, recall and reclaim forgotten words, histories, mythologies and
places in the imagination in order to liberate dramatic texts from the constraints of
theatrical tradition” (Svich, *Trans-Global* 10). The *Tropic of X* and *Satyricono* move
away from homogeny and polarity to take a stand for crossing, as the titles themselves
indicate. Cruz’s proposed title crosses English and Spanish, and resemanticizes the
Roman Classical piece with the inclusion of the female genitalia (as said in colloquial
Spanish) indicating the importance of language, satire, female bodies, gender, and
sexuality (in the portrayal of women characters) in the play. Svich’s tropic is on the
matrix of X, which, according to Underiner, “is not the unknown variable of a fixed

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his blood is part of every Sunday mass, which is a bizarre, strange, cannibalistic thing that was kind of
sexy, too. It was mysterious, so sacred and vulgar” (López, “Black” 213).

160 As I mentioned before, although, as an editor, Svich talks about coetaneous artists in this anthology
(*Trans-Global Readings*), she may very well be describing her own work with the same words. Actually,
Migdalia Cruz is one of the dramatists interviewed by Svich in the book.
equation, nor the eternally elusive Other that would only reinforce the tropes of the tropical exotic [but] what comes after the words have yielded the meanings we think they have” (“After Word”). The X is the graphic instance for crossing, and marks the spot of an emergent aesthetics of poetic multiplicity on the grancaribeña theatrical scene.

4.1.1.2. Crossing Media, Culture, and Bodies

Following their poetic aesthetics of multiplicity, other crossings take place in Svich’s and Cruz’s plays. There is a significant crossing in media as well. Gharavi, who, together with Pinholster, was in charge of the digital media production in Caridad Svich’s *Iphigenia...*(a rave fable) in the Galvin Playhouse in Arizona in 2007, confirms the rapid growth in the inclusion of digital media in theater productions. In the play script *Iphigenia...*(a rave fable), Svich requires a video format for the projection of some characters. Adolfo, Camila, and News Anchor are both live and video characters, and Virtual MC, Glass-Eyed Man and Orestes merge solely on the screen. Svich expresses her requirement in this way: “Live feed, pre-recorded video, photo stills, and projections are all part of the visual landscape of this play. Low-tech and high-tech approaches are equally encouraged, depending on production resources.” This is another type of crossing of stage levels: the physical and the virtual ones. According to Svich, “when an artist crosses media in performance, multiple time-frames exist in space. The body is not only the live body but also the mediated one on film and video, or it is dis-embodied as only a voice pre-recorded, and therefore severed from its origin, yet somehow still signaling its liveness in theatrical space” (“The dynamics” 3). In the case of Atlanta’s stage production of *Iphigenia...*(a rave fable), some of the characters occupy both spaces. In this same
stage-production there are two types of digital crossings: linear (pre-recorded videos and projection of images) and interactive (between the characters in the videos and the “live” characters on stage) (Saltz).

In *The Tropic of X*, Hilton, the DJ cowboy of the island airwaves, is presented as a voice-over. He opens the play presenting himself as “the voice”: _Oye oye oye oye oye oye oye_ oye/ This is the voice/ The voice/ The voice.../ This is the voice of radio *Dos Equis*.” Analogously, Mina the Meteorologist in *Satyricono*, the one who forecasts both the weather and the future for Octavio, is described as a “seductive and dangerous voice from the radio” (1). Both voices mediate other characters’ selves as a representation of a media-saturated culture. Furthermore, the crossing between digital language and the “live” language of the actors creates an allegory of Baudrillard’s notion of hyperreality, which makes the hypertext its way of expression. In line with Baudrillard, the simulation of reality is the new reality. We do not know what the original object is. The meaning is decentralized and gives room to multiple significations. In Svich’s plays, digital language and acting language crossings blur the dividing line between live and virtual spaces, resulting in a language that inhabits postmodernity. Actually, the stage production of *Iphigenia* in Atlanta is composed of three stage levels: the virtual (the screens); the ‘foreground live,’ where the actors interact with the audience, who are standing on the floor like in a rave; and three more stages at different heights. This crossing of stage spaces and the interaction between the audience and the actors break with the prevailing “binary public cultural discourse” that Svich criticizes (“US Polyglot” 197).

Furthermore, Svich adds that, “if music is involved, then the added element of precise musical time becomes part of the performing’s body and the audience’s body of
action, reflection and remembrance” (“The Dynamics” 3). The musical crossings create new linguistic, emotional and physical sites of performance. Music crossings go from the techno, electric boogaloo, hip hop played by the DJ cowboy who performs “his rodeo tricks [in] a song from a long-ago Western idle” (The Tropic 45) in the Tropic of X to musical insertions of neo-funk/punk, jazz, orchestral movie music, hip hop, regaetton, and rap in Satyriconño. In Svich’s play, some characters even sing songs that are originally composed by the playwright and “may be obtained by contacting the author, or the author’s lyrics may be re-set by another composer” (Svich, “Production & Scripts Notes”). In Satyriconño, we find specific song titles as intertexts, such as Nino Rota’s “La dolce Vita” from Fellini’s film, or Janis Joplin’s “Kozmic Blues.” Svich and Cruz seem to move comfortably in music-theatre/performance, breaking borders, constantly following the fluid demands of the form itself. Through musical crossings in these plays, high and low art, and cult and popular forms, are once more intersected to break with societal and artistic barriers.

Finally, as already explained, these works deconstruct predetermined cultural identities framed by national languages, binary gender and sexual categories, and stereotyped notions of ethnicity. To exemplify this defiance of categorizations, in The Tropic of X a same actor can play more than one role. The fact that Fabian also plays the role of Frankie may surprise the audience, who is forced to question the naturalized constructedness of identity/ies. Additionally, characters are never described according to their physical traits or conditions, offering the possibility of diversity among actors. We do not know much of characters’ origins or nationalities either. Similarly, the constructedness of gender and sex roles is made evident in the character of Kiki, a “part-
time hustler of fluid gender.” Kiki expresses the impossibility of gender definition for himself: “they don’t got a name for me cause I’m too special” (24). In Satyricono, the new Presidemperor will be Filomena, a hermaphrodite, who exerts a fatal attraction on Octavio, and who used to show her penis for money when she worked in a circus. A homosexual love triangle takes place between Enco, Junior, and Cylvio. Explicit lesbian sex scenes occur between Lujuria and Oenothea, who end up getting married. Poderosa’s sexual freedom materializes in her orgies with Arroz and Gandules, friends of her son Junior. Cruz particularly emphasizes sexual fluidity also in women, whose bodies are the direct sufferers of the negative consequences of global capitalism, migration and displacement, poverty, and sexism. Gender, sex, and sexuality are shown to be ideological apparatuses of power(lessness). Michael Cerveris affirms that

…the inclusion of cross-cultural perspectives has become an almost automatic response in contemporary culture. Those in our present-day society with creative impulses have matured in a milieu of mediated sensory saturation where they were and are integrated with high art and popular culture, postmodern amalgamations, multi-culturalism, and ‘isms’ of every stripe on a daily basis. (23)

However, there is still a prevalence of dichotomous thinking in these same –isms.

Through the aesthetics of multiplicity in their plays, Caridad Svich and Migdalia Cruz take a step toward the accomplishment of an ontology of crossing in postmodern theatrical arts. Their plays aptly depict a prevalent universal and global culture without obliterating the particularities within the Gran Caribe, while at the same time conveying intricate stories of complex characters who connect and relate outside fixed identity categories.
4.2 Josefina Báez’s *Levente no. Yolayorkdominicanyork*: A Text That Performs, a Text from Performance or a Text To Perform

*Levente no. Yolayorkdominicanyork*

A performance theatre text
(a text that performs, a text from performance or a text to perform)
with character(s).
A novel in Dominicanish.
A poem with grajo.
A commentary without visa neither a dream.
A film script for one actor to exercise her many cells; for many actresses without make-up nor private camerinos nor adopted or twin kids.
Hyper-quotidian aesthetic.
Realismo panfletario.
Saga simplista.
Texto ratatá.
Bucle interminable.
Eros con un pa’cá y un pa’llá, buscando lo que no se le ha perdido.
Una isla-pueblo-barrio-mundo-edificio.
Película diaria.
Documental de todos los días.
Donde sí ves algo no se dice algo.
Se dice de más.
Aquí es Manhattan. Allá, Erre De.
Tú, yo o alguien a quien conocemos.
Dominican@ o no.

*Ay Ombe Serie Panfleto*

*Levente no.Yolayorkdominicanyork* is a solo performance text in which Quisqueya Amada Taina Anaisa Altagracia Indiga –who everybody calls Kay or La Gorda, voices a first person narration that splits into many and multiple female characters, whose “encuentros, cuentos, anécdotas e historias” (81) she voices and perfoms. She plays the role of a/many “levente(s),” a term in colloquial Dominican Spanish for *picaro/a*, and relates her own adventures and misfortunes and those of her female neighbors in the Ni e’, a building in a barrio in New York, or what Kay calls an “edificio-barrio-pueblo-país-isla-continente-mundo” (53).
Josefina Báez starts her text by describing it as a performance theatre text, which means, according to the author, that this is a text that performs, a text from performance, or a text to perform. If we take Peggy Phelan’s explanation of what the art of performance entails, Báez’s would not be so straightforwardly considered a performance. Phelan expounds that,

Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being … becomes itself through disappearance. (146)

On a different note, De Marinis defines “performance text” as a “theatrical performance, considered as an unordered (though complete and coherent) ensemble of textual units (expressions), of various length, which invoke different codes, dissimilar to each other and often unspecific (or at least not always specific), through which communicative strategies are played out, also depending on the context of their production and reception” (48). As we can see, the concepts of theatrical performance and performance text do not fully coincide but, following her constant blurring of classifications, Báez defines her work as a “performance theatre text,” and right after that, she portrays her text also as a novel, a poem, a commentary without visa, and a film script.\textsuperscript{161} She constantly opts in and out of established demarcations of gender, ethnicity, national identity, and also genre. She continues describing her work as demagogic realism, simplistic saga, ratatá text,\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{161} De Marinis defines “theatrical performance” as involving theatre as “a material object, the phenomenal field that is immediately available to perception and to an analytical approach” (48). He defines “performance text” as a “theoretical object, … the theatrical event considered according to semiotic-textual pertinence, assumed and ‘constructed’ as a performance text within the paradigms of textual semiotics” (48). Often, theatrical performances also constitute performance texts. For a detailed study of the textual aspects that constitute theatrical performances, see De Marinis.

\textsuperscript{162} Dominican slang to indicate something is going great or someone looks good.
never-ending loop, eros with a here and there, everyday film, and daily documentary, therefore satirizing the genres belonging to traditional means of communication, which coalesce in the text with genres in the cybernetic world: “Telegrama,” “Cartas,” “Beeper,” “E-mail,” “Chat,” “Celular,” “Text messages,” “Blog,” and “Face Time” (52-3).

Báez’s text is certainly reproduced and recorded in the form of a printed and published book, but that does not mean that it is not a performance (text). When asked about the genre of one of her works Comrade, Bliss ain’t Playing, Báez declares in an interview that she always names her works performance text because everything she writes is to perform it, with the exception of Levente, her last project. The performer adds that she ultimately embodies what she writes without defining the works as theatre, poetry, or prose. She concludes affirming that she writes without previously thinking in genres (Malaver 2). Although Levente may not be written to perform as-is, since it is certainly too extensive, it can be equally perceived as a performance text since the process of writing is a performance in and of itself. Malaver asked the artist if one of her works, Como la una, had been written as a performance text. Báez responded: “No escribo como para performance. Escribo. Y lo que escribo lo performeo. Y es que la misma escritura es un performance” (2-3). Certainly, Levente fulfills many of the characteristics of a “performance theatre text,” as she calls her work. First, the lack of page numbering or chapter/scene division in the text seemingly obligates the reader to read it straight through. In that sense, the text’s life is in the present.163 The promotional video of the book exemplifies the live participation of the reader in the present by

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163 The page numbers I use in this section to quote fragments from Levente no. Yolayorkdominicareyork correspond to my own pagination.
showing Báez reading the book along the streets of New York City (walking along a crowded sidewalk, going down a flight of stairs in Central Park, sitting on a typical fire escape balcony, leaning on a store mirror that advertises its products both in English and Spanish, and crossing the street through the traffic), while Báez’s off-camera voice reads fragments of it.¹⁶⁴ The collective addressee, the readership in this case, is present at the very moment of the production of the performance, because the performance is produced while the text is being read. As regards the condition of reproducibility of *Levente*, we need to take into account that contextual reproducibility is always impossible (De Marinis 58). De Marinis explains that even if “the text-in-itself recurs in an identical way, what will always inevitably vary is the text-in-situation (thus constituting an unrepeatable event)” (53). As Phelan admits, “Performance occurs over a time that will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as ‘different’” (146). Therefore, different readers in different contexts will interact differently with this multi-modal book, creating a new performance on each occasion.

Another way of reading the text is by just opening the book to any page and reading a fragment of it from there forward. Since the book does not have a linear plot, chronological order, or clear time frame and spatial setting, this is perfectly feasible. Almost every passage in the text focuses on a different theme, character, and/or story. But none of the pieces or short sections have a definite ending, nor even a beginning most of the time. Accordingly, every fragment read is a new performance in which to participate. Actually, this performance theatre text does not finish on the last page of the printed book. Hypertextuality appears with the blog quoted in the text

¹⁶⁴ See this promotional video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGqf7GrSt3U.
(http://leventeno.blogspot.com). This blog continues creating entries “desde el personaje de la Kay quien nos sigue informando de la vida en el Ni e’. Porque para Josefina Báez es claro que … el texto es un organismo vivo y el lector mismo es la performance” (Jiménez-Vera). In that sense, the text is a performative never-ending loop (“bucle interminable”).

In fact, although Báez mentioned that this text was not initially written to be performed live, and although I have affirmed that the performance act is the writing and reading of such a text per se since the text is too long to be performed live, Báez shows how any of the fragments of the text can be bodily performed as well. Ay Ombe theatre troup, founded and directed by Báez, has indeed created a recorded performance from an extract of Levente titled “Algo no cuadra. Levente no.”165 It consists of a compilation of snapshots in which the solo performer, Báez herself, shows a series of acronyms to be used in Internet slang. However, the three letters do not stand for the expected English expressions such as LOL (Laughing Out Loud) or OMG (Oh My God) but for Dominicanish expressions such as ATT (Aquí ta’ to’), DDR (Destornillá de la risa), or EEP (E’to étá de pinga). Báez is dressed in black over a black background, creating a type of black theatre in which the light falls on the white signs she holds with the acronyms written on them. In each snapshot, a face or face-and-hand gesture by the performer accompanies an acronym, together with the performer’s voice-over saying what the acronyms stand for. In this clip, Báez offers the presence and articulation of her photographed body to a fragment of Levente. Thus, the body remains at the centre of the performance art as a text in itself. In fact, even the body-text of Levente no.

165 See the performace at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PaLdLGVAeYM.
Yolayorkdominicanyork is a performative act in itself, acting as a metaphor of the performer’s body.

4.2.1. Disinventing, and Reinventing Genres

After having transcended the disciplinary constraints of textual theatre, and of certain definitions of performance art, Báez follows in her text the three steps that Pennycook proposes to address language: disinvention, reinvention, and performativity (“Language” 6). Pennycook states that in order to reconstruct a way of doing language studies, we need to disinvent the myths about “the autonomy systematicity and rule-bound nature of language, its privileging of supposedly expert, scientific, linguistic knowledge over everyday understandings of language, its belief in the primacy of spoken language and the existence of homogeneous speech communities” (“Language” 6). In a like manner, Báez disinvents canonic literary genres, authoritative voices and discourses, and homogeneous stories, characters, and communities traditionally prevailing in literary and theatre texts. Levente blurs the conventional techniques of coherence and completeness that are assumed as characteristic of established textuality, according to widely accepted statements in both linguistic theory and textual theater (De Marinis 57). The coherence of such a performance text resides in the relation of a heterogeneous network of expressive elements. Correspondingly, intertextuality—a postmodern trait—is very much present. As De Marinis explains, “the intertextual effort acquires major importance in relation to the production of the performance text” (4).\textsuperscript{166} Intertextuality characterizes the performance text as

\textsuperscript{166} By intertextuality, De Marinis alludes to “the complex and variegated play of borrowing, citation, implicit or explicit references, dialogues from afar, and substitutions, which substantiate the relationships between the texts of a given culture (and even between texts of different cultures)” (4).
a mixture of old and new, of the ‘already said’ and the ‘not yet said’. In more precise terms, it permits us to conceive of performance as an original combination within a textual structure of preexisting codes … and distinctive codes that are created anew with each performance … While the performance text utilizes the codes of the cultural text, it nevertheless transforms and reinvents them, admittedly to a different extent on each occasion… (4-5)

Hence, Báez’s text alludes to multiple works of literature and music, and to popular social commentary. For example, she refers to Cervantes’ *El Quijote*: “Tiene que haber algún cuento que diga que en un lugar con la mancha, con la mancha de plátano, de cuyos nombres yo tengo mis nombres, una mujer pobrecita, pobrecita muy, muy pobrecita, aprendió a nadar después de ahogarse casi siete veces en el intento” (19). Here, the figure of the *picaro* in the *novela picaresca par excellance* is substituted by a low-class woman from the Ni e’ with the purpose of inserting this female figure into the canon, or deconstructing a historically Westernized, and male-occupied literary tradition. Similarly, in the Ni e’, Ulysses is not a unified one, but a contradictory many: “Y una sola mujer/ se desdobra en muchas. Y un solo hombre también./ Ellos en su viaje a Ítaca./ … ellos son, van y están, aquí y allá./ Se cambian de nombres y apartamentos./ … De ciudadanías y metas./ … De géneros y colores… Juegan un juego pesadísimo./ Lleno de contradicciones” (79). We also find a reference to Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) to emphasize Dominicans’ place in the ranks of US literature: “Ahí anda la Kay enamorá de un tal Oscar Wao que por lo que ella me ha leído, el tipo no está en ná’… Ella con su afán de ser escritora siempre está leyendo. … quien escribió del susodicho Wao es un dominicano de New Jersey que se ha ganado un premio de americanos. Ella lo llama el ‘ecrire bueno. ¿Viste por dónde andan los dominicanitos?’” (45). Intertextuality also emerges to perform political criticism, along with a feminist claim. For instance, the narrative voice expresses her discomfort with monarchy and male
sovereignty when she refers to Spain’s previous King, Juan Carlos I, and what he said to the former Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez: “Yes to fuck. Excúseme, to fornicate. To Fornicate Under the Consentment of the King. King who? FUCK.... Kings and kingdoms are fucked up. ¿Por qué no se calla? Lo dijo. To consent my bed works ... fuck that shit. Que se calle él” (6). There is a profound critique in the text of social and institutionalized male control over women’s bodies and sexuality both in the US and the De Erre.

Literary and non-literary intertexts pervade Báez’s performance theatre text. As such, the text disinvents the conventions of a novel, poem, film script, or documentary and has at the same time some of the features of each of these genres, as a way of altering and reinventing them. For instance, the cadence and intonation of some parts of the text resemble slam poetry, especially if read aloud. The constant occurrence of literary figures such as anaphoras also add a poetic component to the text. For instance, “De aquí cada quien lo ve desde su ladito. Desde su librito. Desde su pastora. Desde su tambor. Desde su incienso. Desde su obispo. Desde su diezmo” (54). Other repetitions also occur: “I really, really, really just wanted to get lucky” (6), or “Música, música, música. MÚSICA.” (11). In some parts, expressions rhyme with assonance or consonance: “Mambo rabioso. Mi mambo sabroso” (5), “Muy normalota. Molleta./ Una morenota” (5), or “El país no es el gobierno ni los ricos./ Ni de ti ni de mí están hablando./ Ni de mi tío ni de mi primo./ Ni del pulpero ni del panadero” (30). We even have examples of polyptotons: “Me mataron a mi muchacho./ Mi muchacho mató a alguien./ Alguien mató a mi muchacho…” (17); inversions: “Olla big time. Big time olla” (21); and alliterations:

167 On page 17, there is another clear example of anaphora, in which the word “Qué” is repeated many times at the beginning of the sentences: “Qué esteriquito./ Que donde está el parque, ahí estacionaban a los burros./Que los puertorriqueños cortaron caña para la Puerto Rican Sugar...”
“Me my mami chula” (5. My emphasis) or “Mirta la del 3N, se presenta como Mirta Machera y machorra, la jeva de Miguel Melao. Su franela con U of M hace coro a la Universida de su Melao. Nada de University of Maryland, U Mass, University of Michigan. La universidad del macho. El mister es el master” (9. My emphasis). These rhetorical elements add rhythm and musicality to the text, and function as performative devices to create fragmentation, disorder, and repetition. On the other hand, the multiplicity of protagonists and voices is reminiscent of a choral novel, but the fact that these are women’s voices aiming to reveal the condition of the women in the Ni e’ (i.e., working-class, diasporic women) subverts the male-oriented nature of this genre. Finally, the quotidian stories add a touch of documentary to the text. When she describes the text as demagogic realism, and mere “propaganda” (82), she is playing with those categories, recovering the realism as another form of aesthetic, and questioning its assumed transparency. “Ficción. No ficción,” resolves the performer. These are only some examples to demonstrate how Levente no. Yolayorkdominicanyork plays with but it is encoded in none of the traditional genres and rhetorical figures the author ascribes to the text, to the point that even the literary and discourse analysis is complicated. The narrative voice articulates this idea in the following manner:

No ficción.
… Lo que vemos-oímos-leemos-escribimos podrá pasar por variados análisis, pero siempre su realidad es más compleja.
(81. My emphasis)
As such, this text is a performance also in the sense that it escapes traditional stylistic or generic definitions, reinventing them. As Sally Banes affirms, in the late seventies, “individual performances often were concerned with illustrating or probing precisely the problems of the identity, definition, and limits of art in general and of performance in particular” (3). Whereas Jerome Rothenberg proposed that one of the main characteristics of performance is its rejection of paradigms in itself, the American poet offered several characteristics that describe this art, extended by other performance artists and art critics (cf. Banes 3). Josefina Báez’s *Levente no. Yolayorkdominicanyork* complies with the break between high and low art, the emphasis on action and process, the presence of the artist in the artwork, the spectators/readership’s active participation, the portrayal of time in non-theatrical ways, and the non-traditional narratives and dramatic structures. Certainly, all attempts to define performance are immediately challenged with counterexamples (Banes 6). The author successfully creates a performance theatre text which escapes definitions and designations, and which remains breathing and alive, as a “bucle interminable,” and a “flujo sin límite de posibles interpretaciones” (81). Paper and reproduction cannot capture and fix *Levente no. yolayorkdominicanyork*. Her written words never become constative utterances (describing things in the world), but they remain performative (enacting) with each reading act. Phelan relies on J.L. Austin’s distinction between performative and constative utterances to support her idea that a performance lives in the present, and cannot be repeated or reproduced. She argues that each reproduction of a performative utterance becomes a new performative act by someone who is qualified. On the contrary, she says, if the utterance is repeated by someone else (not qualified), such an utterance
becomes constative (149). Phelan affirms, “Performance’s challenge to writing is to discover a way for repeated words to become performative utterances … rather than constative utterances” (149). The next section will show how Josefina Báez achieves such a mission through her language crossings.

As Pennycook reminds us, Austin’s notion of performativity has not only been related to performance art, but it has also been analyzed, revised, and adapted by a significant number of scholars (from Searle’s speech act theory to Derrida, Bourdieu, Butler, Habermas, Deleuze and Guattari, and Laclau). It has turned into a crucial term to disarticulate essentialist notions of gender, sexuality, and identity. I read Levente no. Yolayorkdominicanyork not only through the correlation of performativity to performance art, understanding that “performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it simply be equated with performance” (Butler, Bodies 95), but also through the idea of language as a product of performative acts (Pennycook 14), and through Butler’s notion of gender performativity, as developed in the following sections.

4.2.2. *Dominicanish*: A Linguistic Reinvention that Performs a Hyper-Quotidian Aesthetics of Multiplicity

...there is no natural fixed structure to language. Rather, speakers borrow heavily from their previous experiences of communication in similar circumstances, on similar topics, and with similar interlocutors. Systematicity, in this view, is an illusion produced by the partial settling or sedimentation of frequently used forms into temporary subsystems.” (Hopper 145-6)

Viejo, viste, no tuve muchas faltas de ortografía. La blanca me está enseñando español. Aunque ella dice excúseme cuando debería decir perdón. (Báez, Levente 52)
From the very beginning, in the title itself, and throughout the text, the solo performer defines herself not as a “levente”—a sort of Dominican *picaro errante*—, but as *yolayorkdominicanyork* (i.e., “yo, la yorkdominicanyork”, and “yola, yorkdominicanyork”). All the same, her tone will certainly be *picaro* throughout the text. She talks in a humorous and/or satiric way about herself and all her women neighbors in the Ni e’ as *yorkdominicanyorks*, sometimes as simply *dominicanyorks*. With the creation of this name, she follows the same nominalist process in a feminist sense I follow in this project. Through the conception of a designation that contemplates all her identity gradients, she dismisses binary hyphenated designations such as Dominican-American, which perpetuate an ontology of inclusion/exclusion. She is redefining herself by rejecting fixed identity categories, in order to give ontological visibility to those voices in the Ni e’ that remain socially unthinkable. On the one hand, she revalorizes a term that has negative connotations in the *Erre De* or *Di Ar* (i.e., Dominican Republic), as spelled in the text, for being the label of a double marginality: Dominican-york describes those low-class Dominicans who have migrated and, therefore, are believed to have assimilated. As Silvio Torres-Saillant outlines, “el dominican-york existe en el país como un subalterno que ocupa el más bajo tramo del orden moral….Hablar como dominican-york presupone el reconocimiento de una marginalidad intrínseca. Implica reconocerse como la voz de la alteridad” (20).

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168 Báez plays with words throughout the text. *Yola* is also the name given to the makeshift boat on which many Dominicans embark to get to Puerto Rican shores.

169 De Maeseneer explains that “‘Levente’, inspirado en levantino, es un término despectivo que se usa en la República Dominicana para referirse a un errante, un desarraigado, alguien que no tiene costumbres identificables. El levente siempre está en movimiento y regularmente del lado dudoso de la ley. Es el que está en dos tierras, o entre tierras, o entre mares” (350).
On the other hand, Báez reinvents a term that is linked to marginality also in the US, since the Dominican community is one of the most deprived ethnic groups in New York, as documented by Emilia Durán-Almarza by quoting Ramona Hernández and Francisco Rivera-Batiz’s study “Dominicans in the United States: A Socioeconomic Profile, 2000” (77). However, the fact that the performer places york both at the beginning and at the end, and most of the times without a hyphen, emphasizes the moveable nature of these labels and identity markers, and the importance of the urban space of New York in which she grew up and lives. First, not to get trapped in definitions that place her – and women like her—on a stable identity construction, and on a static hyphen (i.e., an assumed circumscribed in-between space), Kay offers the many possibilities the name has. All aspects of her constructed identity are flexible and moveable, and she can play with them as much as she desires. For example, she says:

Below some tags and trigger words for the engine searching for me: York Dominican, Dominican York, York Dominican York, Dominicanyorkness, DominicanYorknity, Dominicanyorking, Yorkdominicania, Yorkdominicanyorkneo, Dominicanyorkiando, Dominicanyorkinidad. (26)

She performs the fluid and ever-changing condition of constructed identities through a label that escapes rigidity and quite the reverse, goes through constant transformations: from an adjective to a noun, and from a noun to a verb in their different forms, with both English and Spanish morphological endings (-an, -ness, -ity, -ing, -ania, -neo, -ando, -dad). Second, the fact that york, and not American, occupies the opening and closing position in the term responds to the character’s affiliation to this urban space more than to an American national imaginary, as occurs in hyphenated designations. In her analysis of Josefina Báez’s most studied work Dominicanish, Durán-Almarza states,
This transgression of the traditional space of the nation as the basis for the formation of ethnic identities points to the importance of the city of New York in the creation of Caribbean and Latino identities, particularly in the case of the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico … The city of New York represents “a transnational enclave, a translocal crossroads whose location stands both below and beyond the U.S. nation state” (Laó-Montes 1997: 181) enabling the creation of glocalized identities that claim their own space in the U.S. metropolis. (77)

This is another clear example that supports the conceptualization of a Gran Caribe in which cities such as New York become “a geographic, economic and symbolic extension of the Hispanic Caribbean that reconfigures classic definitions of insular experience in order to incorporate it to an alternative cartography delimited by culture and its displacements” (Martínez-San Miguel, Caribe 325). This is a Gran Caribe that defies US discourses on nation and multiculturalism, predominant ideological conventions in the Caribbean, and what is assumed to constitute the notions of caribeñidad and Americanness.¹⁷⁰

Not only does Kay undefine and redefine herself and the women in the Ni e’ through the creation of the designation yorkdominicanyork, but she also reinvents the language(s) that define them, and that they are assumed to speak. The language in which she performs—and that performs her (non-) identity—is not English or Spanish as traditionally coded and imagined, but Dominicanish, as she asserts (“A novel in Dominicanish,” 3). As I propose in this study through the use of Rampton’s notion of language crossing and Blommaert’s theoretical framework of a sociolinguistics of

¹⁷⁰ Martínez-San Miguel adds that “Living in New York, walking its streets, imagining the contour of its ways of identification and belonging already implies asking oneself about the problematic position that this city has occupied inside the imaginaries of an U.S., American and Latin-American identity. From inside, right from the metropolis’ interior, there emerges a series of experiences that make a coherent and harmonic definition of Anglo Americanness impossible. It is, then, a city that is defined from ethnic coexistence as another form of belonging to those micro-communities from diverse countries that define the New York experience” (471). This argument, together with the fact that New York City is the second largest city in terms of Dominican population after Santo Domingo (Durán-Almarza 79), supports the idea that Dominicaness cannot be defined according to historically traditional ethnic and national frontiers.
globalization, Pennycook argues for the need to rethink the conception of language as traditionally articulated in linguistics and applied linguistics. He draws upon the notion of performativity “as a way of thinking about language use and identity that avoids foundationalist categories, suggesting that identities are formed in the linguistic performance rather than pregiven” (1). Pennycook proposes the inclusion of the body, music, dance, and other forms of representation into an understanding of meaning, i.e., “a much broader set of integrated meaning-making practices” (6), and the development of an anti-foundationalist understanding of language “as an emergent property of social interaction and not a prior system tied to ethnicity, territory, birth, or nation” (6). In that sense, the writers, playwrights, and performers here analyzed have questioned through their language crossings and their aesthetics of multiplicity the canonical, Modern notions of national languages, mother tongue/native speaker, multiculturalism, and code-switching. Furthermore, they have included other means of expression (such as music, painting, creative writing, emoticons) as meaning-making. Báez equally disinvents established notions of language, and reinvents them with a sense of diversity and fluidity, to finally perform an aesthetics of multiplicity to its fullest.

By speaking in Dominicanish, the performer emphasizes local Dominican to the detriment of the notion of a standard, bounded Spanish, ideologically related to the white or creole middle-class in the Caribbean: “No es por joder, pero yo no voy a decir árbol sólo para que crean, para hacerme la fina o para que me entiendan. Yo digo mata. Nosotros decimos mata. Sí, sí, mata. Mata, mata, mata. ¡Po!” (15). She also disrupts the erroneous notion of “Spanglish” which, as I previously argued, shares the epistemology of the hyphen between two whole, limited national languages, and does not contemplate
switches from standard to local varieties, or from formal to colloquial language registers. Durán-Almarza states that, “by appending the suffix –ish to the term Dominican she is able to create a witty wordplay combining the different meanings that the suffix -ish conveys to nouns and adjectives in English” (75-6). The scholar adds that “adding -ish to nouns results in adjectives that indicate the origin or language of the community denoted by the noun, as it is the case with English or Spanish” (76). Therefore, Dominicanish would refer to a language that crosses American English and Dominican Spanish and that identifies the performer with a Dominican origin. However, since the term “also provides the –ish meaning of ‘in a certain way, approximately’ (Oxford English Dictionary) as in greenish or ‘having the qualities or characteristics of’ (Oxford English Dictionary) as in childish” (Durán-Almarza 76), the denomination also highlights the lack of pre-given static identities: she is not “Dominican” in the sense the Modern national imaginary conveys.

Whereas Durán-Almarza insists on placing the narrator in an interstitial, in-between space between Erre De or Di Ar and Washington Heights, New York (she continues using the metaphors of the hyphen and the bridge), I argue that Báez is performing through her language practices a fluid, postnational, contradictory space: the Ni e’. “La casa es el Ni e’. La patria también. Ficción” (80), the narrator utters. The Ni e’ is all an “edificio-barrio-pueblo-país-isla-continente-mundo” (53), and it is none of the above at the same time, because “Ni e’ (ni es)”, i.e., not only “ni es aquí ni allá” but also it does not even physically exist. Therefore, it does not correspond to geographical, national, territorialized delimitations. It is in fact “un edificio que aparece en cada barrio. En muchos barrios. Se podría decir que es un edificio con alas”, explains Kay.
Throughout the text, the performer constantly insists on her unique belonging to the Ni e’, a space created by its own language (Dominicanish) and cyberlanguage (‘Aquí está la primera parte del cyber language del Ni e’ para todos’ (57)), even by its own unquestioned doctrine (‘Pero recuerda, por tus forwards te conocerás dice la biblia del Ni e’’ (59)); and whose inhabitants, ‘personajes y posibles personas. Todos, con la herencia de la corriente migratoria a la que pertenecen, [niegan] con hechos, cualquier etiqueta flotando para una definición’ (81). Therefore, the Ni e’ is not an interstice, an empty space between two wholes, but a no-space that did not pre-exist according to national, ethnic, and gender conventions, but that is created through the language spoken by its women speakers.

Butler maintains that language should not be perceived as “a static and closed system whose utterances are functionally secured in advance by the ‘social positions’ to which they are mimetically related” (Excitable 145). Pennycook relates the philosopher’s critique to Bourdieu’s analysis of Searle’s notion of speech act and performativity (Language): “For Bourdieu, performative utterances must always fail if the speaker does not have the institutional power to speak,” explains Pennycook (12). Butler proposes that, by perceiving social institutions as static, Bourdieu fails to recognize the possibility of social transformation (“Performativity’s” 147), and by maintaining that performative utterances are only effective when they are spoken by those who are (already) in a position of social power, Bourdieu excludes the possibility of an agency that arises from the margins of power (“Performativity’s” 156). Butler, by contrast, examines what performative processes can be conveyed by those who are not socially authorized to do so: “I would argue that it is precisely the expropriability of the dominant, ‘authorized’
discourse that constitutes one potential site of its subversive resignification” (“Performativity’s” 157-158). Likewise, I explore the performative linguistic processes enacted in Báez’s text through an analysis of the performer’s language practices, understanding “the productive force of language in constituting [or disarticulating] identity rather than identity being a pregiven construct that is reflected in language use” (Pennycook 13). This is a postmodernist approach to language that suggests that performative language practices construct who we are instead of our language practices being a result of who we already are. Whereas regulatory and repetitive language practices produce “ritualized and sedimented” social performatives (Butler, “Performativity’s” 120), alternative, multiple, and fluid language practices do not allow for an assumed static direct relationship between discourse and identity. The postmodern language practices in Báez’s text are neither limited to the inclusion of lexicon of another language in the narrative nor to mere intra- or extra-sentential crossings, which occur all the time as well. The language crossings in this text are assorted and, in most cases, unpredicted.

To begin with, whereas the Narrador (a figure which only appears on the first page) seems to mostly speak Dominican Spanish, as soon as Ella starts talking on the second page, she does so predominantly in English (with Spanish crossings). For example:

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171 Pennycook states that “the notion of perfomativity fills that gap in poststructuralist theory to do with the making of the subject: From a poststructuralist point of view, the subject is produced in discourse. … the relationship between subject and discourse, however, has been conceived in largely static terms, whereby a subject chooses to take up a subject position in a pregiven discourse” (14). However, utterances only become performative through repeated acts within highly rigid regulatory frames.
What does it mean to be Dominican-American to you?
What are the struggles that you and your family face everyday?
What is your message to other Dominican-Americans?

... 
Yes. I have the privilege of tasting yours and mine. And I would keep mine by choice. Arepitas de yuca, chocolate con maicena, yaniquecas, bollitos de harina de maíz (don’t forget to sprinkle some anís seeds) and morir soñando. (5)

In this specific passage, the Spanish lexical crossings are the typical insertions related to food (very frequent throughout the reading), a cultural referent difficult to translate into English: “Lo que más le gusta comer es locrio. Eso fue lo único que no pudieron traducir. Locrio. Lowkeyrio. Low-key-rio” (11). However, when Ella-el-Pueblo(s) begins to speak for practically the rest of the text, she mostly speaks in Dominican Spanish again, although in some parts no clear, particular language is easily discernible.

For the first time in the texts studied, we find a significant number of crossings (borrowings, specifically) phonologically integrated such as *boses* (for bosses), *flú* (for flu), and *San Givin’* (for Thanksgiving); morphologically integrated such as *chateo* (for chat), and *showsero* (for show man); and both phonologically and morphologically integrated such as *gugleas* (for google), *rufo* (for roof), *biles* (for bills), *bipéame* (for ‘to beep’), and *lakiáron* (for ‘to lock’). As expected, non-integrated borrowings are abundant: baby shower, laundry, full, car wash, dog walker, bakery, overtime, blower, freezer, among many others. Most of them refer to daily vocabulary and reflect a life in

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172 This quote refers to a couple just married for visa purposes rehearsing what to say to inspectors of the Department of Homeland Security when visiting their home: “Ayer éramos todas invitadas a hacer bulto, en el 9C, en la boda de Inocencia y un vivo-muelú-pechú, culichumbo y baila malo. Ojalá y pague los cuartos a los que se comprometió. Si tú lo ves dándole el beso pa’ la foto ... Tú juras que salió de esas telenovelas donde nadie habla ni se parece a nosotros. Aprovecha. Ya ensayaron todas las preguntas de siempre. Sí, sí, sí, los colores de panti, cuánto gana, todos los nombres de las dos familias, sus gustos-por atrás-bañarse antes de acostarse-cortarse los pelos de la nariz los viernes-mirar la noticia en la cama ... Lo que más le gusta comer es locrio. Eso fue lo único que no pudieron traducir. Locrio. Lowkeyrio. Low-key-rio” (11). They can say everything in English except for this typical Dominican dish, which has no equivalent referent in the US.
the US. Those words with strong cultural referents occur in English as well: “…comencé a recitar el pledge of allegiance” (34), “Será eco-friendly pero no lo podemos pagar” (38), or “…conseguí trabajo en un 99 cent store” (7). Indeed, the presence of literal translations and wordplays such as “Between, between and drink [instead of bring] a chair” (for *Entre, entre y tome asiento*) reveal the dissociation of the signifier and the signified in diasporic characters and superdiverse linguistic situations, and problematizes the difficulty, sometimes impossibility, of cultural translation without a certain degree of cultural violation. Languages, varieties, styles, and registers are crossed so much that italics do not serve a purpose in this text. Additionally, as we saw in Aurora Arias’ “Emoticons,” we observe the repeated use of US brand names as a reflection of globalized capitalism, for instance “Cuisinart,” “avena Quaker,” and “Blackberry.” Conversely, local brand names connected to the Dominican world of the characters are also used with no further contextualization, as a way of revalorizing the local products/market in the De Erre: “Eso no olía ni a Fabuloso ni mucho menos a Mistolín” (13), referring to detergent products. As also occurred in Aurora Arias’ short story, virtual language is very present in such a type of postmodern text. Internet slang persistently emerges in the performer’s telling. She fluently crosses into acronyms such as LOL, ROFL, LMAO. At one point, the narrator decides that LOL—an acronym for the English expression Laughing Out Loud—is not enough, and provides a long list of more than two hundred Internet acronyms “del Ni e’ para todos” (57-59). After sharing this list, the performer will use some of these acronyms in her narrative, forcing the reader to go back to the list and check what the acronyms used stand for, and therefore, making the reader interact with this cybernetic *Dominicanish* slang. For example, she uses ATU for
allá tú, YEF for y e’fácil, GQR for guay qué risa, YLS for ya lo sabe (60), NMJ for No me jodas (63, 65), TFE for ta fuellllte (70), or DDD for drama, drama, drama (74-5).

With the creation of this *Dominicanish* list of acronyms to serve the purpose of the expression of Internet slang, she is going through a process of “vernacular globalization” in which *Dominicanish* locality intermingles and alters the global language *par excellence* and Internet’s lingua franca. This move also reminds us how “demographic and social changes are complicated by the emergence of new media and technologies of communication and information circulation” (Blommaert and Rampton 3), which connect emigrants and dispersed *grancaribeñas* transnationally, and redefine the idea of static communities, cultural identities, and language practices linked to these notions.

The mentioned brand names belonging to a Dominican referential context, and the listed *Dominicanish* acronyms for Internet slang are accompanied by an extensive repertoire of regional lexicon. Only Dominican speakers or speakers with close ties with Spanish varieties and cultural referents in the Caribbean can understand the semantic load of more or less colloquial terms, and slang words such as *cocolo* (used in the Hispanophone Caribbean to refer to non-Hispanic African descendants, or darker skin people in general), *timacle* (an extraordinarily strong man), *vacana* (cool), *matatana* (slang word to refer to a female who is the best at whatever she does), *jabao* (a type of mixed-race subject), *topao* (a game played by kids, equivalent to playing tag), *tanibol* (what Dominican kids say to indicate a ‘pause’ in the *topao* game), *yipeta* (a generic for an SUV, probably derived from Jeep), or *fucú* (bad luck), among numerous others.

Readers also encounter popular sayings such as “*barrigón aunque lo fajen*” (deterministic saying, natural human inclinations do not change through education, punishment, or
threats), “perlas a los puercos” (English equivalent would be ‘cast pearls before swine’), “morirse en la víspera de la muerte” (normally is used in the negative form: nobody dies before their predestined date), or “el mal comió no piensa” (one needs to eat to be productive). Only the expression that opens the narrative is accompanied by a clarification of its meaning: “‘San Juan con corpo, San Juan con corpo’ (frase popular de antaño en reconocimiento de algo o alguien especial/atrevido/extracotidiano; invocación de protección al ver algo fuera de lo común)” (4). With this popular expression, Báez warns the readers/spectators that they are about to interact with a text that is “especial/atrevido/extracotidiano,” i.e., not following canonical dictates either in terms of language, form or content.

We also find references to folk tales. For example, “Todavía mi mamá sigue repitiendo esos cuentos: Ese de una mamá que sembró viva a su hija. De la muchachita salió una mata. La mata cantaba: Hermanita, hermanita, no me jale mis cabellos que mi madre me ha sembrado por un higo que ha faltado” (70). The presence of popular sayings and tales provide the text with a definite oral feel, which is also attained through the recurring use of phonic resources such as the interjections “Eee Ooo” (5) or “Uuuuuuy” (10), the separation of syllables in words to indicate pauses, as in “ne ce si ta ba” (8), “ma—la —pa—la —bro — sa” (10), or ¡¡¡Ex qui si to!!” (17), and the linking of words, as in “Quesernueranquesernueranquesernueranquesernueranquesernueranquesernueranque” (48), or “Oh pero bueeenoo. Estas madres de ahora son las reina... my kids are thebestbrightesttallestmostbeautifulmosthandsomemostthisthismostthat” (22). In addition, we observe a strong presence of aphorisms such as “Aprende el difícil morena, para que se te haga más fácil” (22), “Cada cabeza es un mundo” (46), or “El que tiene cuarto vive bien
wherever he wants” (29), and maxims such as “Como te digo una cosa, te digo la otra” (56).

Likewise, Dominican Spanish is persistently, graphically represented as pronounced in an oral, informal register, probably to denote the working-class condition of the characters, on the one hand, and to highlight Dominicanish locality, on the other, since the pronunciation traits conveyed correspond to this Spanish variety in a non-standard, quotidian form. Furthermore, since this is a text that may be performed, this representation of orality marks the accents in which the text should be acted out. By way of example, we find na’ for nada, to’ for todo, ¿Cómo tú ta’? ¿Tú’ ta’ asutá? instead of ¿Cómo estás? ¿Estás asustada?, e’ for es, pa’ for para, uté for usted, lao’ for lado, Ofréjjjjjcome for Ofrézcome, or er’ mundaso for el mundazo.

The narrative voice reclaims with a humorous tone her right to speak and pronounce in Dominicanish as she pleases in the following extract, when a woman from the Cono Sur accuses her of not speaking a “good, correct” Spanish:

Ahí enfrente está la mujer del Coño Sur, como dice ella. … Ya me tiene agitá de tanto decir que nosotros no hablamos bien el español. Se ríe porque cambia mos la L por la R, que si no ponemos las eSes. ¿Seré yo dueña de algún idioma? Ella con todo y su buena pronunciación, aquí está en lo mismo que nosotros, cogiendo lucha y cupone. Perdón, cuponesss, con eSe al final. Anoche le dijé que si se pronuncia la R donde nosotros ponemos la L, se baja la matriz y se seca la risa. Se quedó con la cara como un mormón. (48)

This vindication, together with the aforementioned language crossings through “sight and sound, convergence and contradiction” (Lauret 63) may be read through Edouard Glissant’s notion of the right to opacity. Affirming that a neutral and universal monolingualism or a supposedly transparent lingua franca is always apoetical and false, Glissant demands the right to opacity in literary language (1997). Although, in a societal

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173 English nonstandard forms –commonly attributed to the less educated and often to African-American vernacular—also often emerge in the text: ain’t (am not), lotta’ (lot of), sis’ (sister), Da’ Heights (the Heights).
and institutional centripetal tendency, grancaribeña texts tend to adopt English or Spanish as their vehicular language, they also follow a centrifugal movement. They move away from “the outmoded … principle (if not the reality) of a language’s intangible unicity” (Glissant 118) and they show that “multiplicity has invaded vehicular languages and is an internal part of them from now on” (118). Spanish and English “are no longer monolingual” (119). Opacities, according to Glissant, “must be preserved [and] an appetite for opportune obscurity in translation must be created” (120). Grancaribeñas follow inevitable centripetal forces by writing their works in English or Spanish respectively, but they also exert centrifugal linguistic forces by not reducing their language to the transparent (117). In Josefina Báez’s Levente no.

Yolayorkdominicanyork, semantic opacity would be then very much present, often extremely explicit: “O dirá otra cosa en su lenguaje, que diga eso. Ascaracaracatiski taskatsiki tascaracatiskation” (13).174

While I mentioned that the linguistic practices in the novels analyzed in the first chapter would be classified as easily accessed, transparent or cushioned by Torres, in this case she would be talking of a “radical bilingualism” because the text “captures the broad array of Spanish and English linguistic options used by bilingual speakers. Monolingual speakers of both languages would find parts of this text difficult to read” (Torres 87). But it is necessary to add that even bilingual Spanish/English readers with little knowledge of Dominican vernacular would find parts of the text difficult to read. Thus, according to

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174 This notion of opacity or unintelligibility has been revised in the critical readings of bilingual and multilingual texts. In her study of the inclusion of words and passages in other languages in literary texts in English, Lauret argues that these linguistic insertions produce a deliberate semantic opacity “to obstruct the transparency of English” (1). In Weird English, Ch’ien states that the new Englishes that postcolonial or immigrant writers such as Arundhati Roy, Maxine Hong Kingston, Salman Rushdie, and Junot Díaz create, produce a “balancing act of intelligibility and experiment” (11). For her part, Lourdes Torres would probably agree that Báez’s text requires not only a bilingual reader, but a reader able to understand Dominicanish.
Torres’ arguments, Báez’s would fall into the category of one of the few grancaribeña texts that does not accommodate at all to its various imagined audiences.

At this point, the question I pose is, does Glissant’s notion of opacity perpetuate to a certain extent the assumption that national linguistic imaginaries are somehow transparent? Why should linguistic expressions of multiplicity be perceived as opaque? Glissant is purposefully questioning the assumed transparency of lingua francas with his strategic essentialist use of opacity—which he makes clear does not mean obscurity, in a sense of totality. Instead, opacity is relational: “Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics…in freedoms” (190). Indeed, what he really demands is the recognition of an internal, organic multiplicity of languages—that should not be named as the French, for instance, because this is an epistemological anachronism (119) and an ideological convention. Nonetheless, we could wonder if the literary critic is all the same falling into a dichotomy that separates national languages and “other” languages and varieties, inevitably placing those “other” languages in an inferior position? The fact that these literary critics describe strategically these texts as “opaque” may represent a dynamics of persistent normativity in which the “innovative” language practices in these texts are viewed as “out of the norm,” a norm that a “system-in-language” determines.

What Báez expresses with her hyper-quotidian aesthetics of multiplicity is that for the women in the Ni e’, “official, national” languages are the ones which are opaque and

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175 Blommaert and Rampton agree that “Named languages – ‘English’, ‘German’, ‘Bengali’ – are ideological constructions historically tied to the emergence of the nation-state in the 19th Century, when the idea of autonomous languages free from agency and individual intervention meshed with the differentiation of peoples in terms of spiritual essences” (4). See also Gal and Irvine 1995.

176 Blommaert and Rampton reaffirm the need to move beyond the privilege accorded to the structure of language, and the treatment of language “as little more than a product/output generated by semantic, grammatical and phonological systems, which are themselves regarded either as mental structures or as sets of social conventions” (5).
intelligible, because they are constructed with an imagined audience and speech community in mind that do not correspond to the linguistic experiences in the Ni e’, in all the Ni e’s (understanding Ni e’ as a postnational (no-) space “con alas”). Linguistic multiplicity, fragmentation, mobility, and fluidity are for these women obvious, and ordinary practices due to current migratory flows, electronic media, and “glocalization” processes. Is this not what most of us experience in our everyday lives? Of course, many of us may not migrate. Similarly, as Appadurai elucidates, “many mass-mediated events are highly local in scope” (4). But, he adds, “few important films, news broadcasts, or television spectacles are entirely unaffected by other media events that come from further afield. And few persons in the world today do not have a friend, relative, or co-worker who is not on the road to somewhere else or already coming back home, bearing stories and possibilities” (4). This is the reason why Báez describes the aesthetics of multiplicity she depicts in her text as an aesthetics of hyper-quotidian multiplicity, because multiplicity is what is transparent (i.e., evident) in our current-day lives. However, homogeneity, monolingualism, and monolithic approaches to gender and sexuality, ethnicity, and national imaginaries are still prevalent in official discourses both in the US and the Caribbean. If a text like the one I analyze becomes unintelligible, somewhat opaque for readers, it is because official discourses and languages (first regulated by instructional discourses) do not represent the current paradigm of superdiversity (Blommaert and Rampton; cf. Vertovec) in which we live.

As stated by Bourdieu, “in the process which leads to the construction, legitimation and imposition of an official language, the educational system plays a decisive role” (“The Production” 469). Therefore, the text presents a devastating critique
of US “white and Asian top-notch” (5) school programs, in which counselors are very surprised when a “Dominican-American”—usually considered “dropout material” (5)—scores among the highest. Kay insists on sticking to her comfort zone (which is multiplicity and multilingualism) when her counselor insists on seeing this multiplicity as traumatic, and not seeing the student as “transparent” by covering her under the obscurity of layers of stereotypes:

I could blend-in telling the group how brownies, home-made apple-pie and Mom’s soup make me feel. But I stick to my heart. … Counselor? Get your dictionary to translate my comfort zone. … “And her Dominican mother works in a factory. And no father-figure in the household. That poor, bright girl, lives in a very dangerous neighborhood…. Her family can’t understand her devotion to books. … And still Kiskiya? Kosquiya Amara has an unbelievable rich vocabulary, exuberant critical thinking abilities and incisive humor. … But she is too passionate, too emotional. Too verbal, too direct. Too Hispanic. Sorry. Latin?” … Then two years later, I dropped out of high school … (6. My emphasis)

Kay finally conforms to the stereotype and becomes “dropout material,” which demonstrates how difficult it is to escape official discourses and regulatory frames, with the school as the main institution in which these discourses fix and sediment.

Monolingualism, and monolithic national discourses are out of Kay’s comfort zone:

“Sííííí, yo tambien quería estudiar. Pero que me enseñaran algo diferente: la historia de gente que se parece a mí, como en verdad es para los que siempre pierden” (6). It is at school that monolithic definitions of Americanness are constructed. Kay’s mother counter-attacks with lessons of Dominicanness these regulated performativities of what it means to be American:

…mami me preguntaba como noventa y nueve preguntas. ¿Cómo te fue en la escuela-Qué comiste-Qué aprendiste-Qué enseñó la Mrs Smith ésa-etc-etc-etc? Me puse la mano en el corazón y comencé a recitar el pledge of allegiance. La mía se paró en seco. … Ese día comenzaron las clases después de las clases, cada día. Aprendí mi primera poesía. Salomé Ureña. … Esa es tu pledge mija. … También aprendí el himno de las madres dominicanas, el himno nacional. El
himno a Duarte... Como tú comprenderás, los lios entre Mrs. Smith y mi mamá fueron muchos. And I still have issues with flags. (34)

This episode shows the in-between space, the hyphen she is forced to inhabit between the official discourses at school and at home.\textsuperscript{177} However, our protagonist has “issues with flags,” i.e., with both those totalizing national imaginaries that have been presented to her in tension. Instead, she has “the privilege of tasting yours and mine” (5), she metaphorically says to her counselor referring to food items pertaining to both cultures: brownies and apple-pie, but also “arepitas de yuca, chocolate con maicena, yaniquecas, bollitos de harina de maíz” (5). But she chooses not to carry any of those flags. To the question, “¿Y tú? ¿Cómo dices quién eres? Dominicano, americano, de Las Américas, del Caribe, eres isleño, de Hispaniola, de Aytí, taino, africano, españollllllll; Afro-Dominican, Taíno-African-Dominican, Dominican-American, DominicanYork, del Surrrrrr, del Este, del Cibao, del sur de la florida, serie 23, ¿serie 26?” (12), Kay insists:

¿Yo? Yo hoy soy una York-Dominican-york.
Ya lo sabes. (13)

To contest the burden of these dominant cultural and national discourses inflicted at home and in the school, the protagonist turns to popular music as an alternative language: “Me my hot hip hop steps./ Me mambo violento./ … Reaggetón./ Bachata urbana./ Dembow, dembow, dembow./ Boleros not even in a dream./ Me my mami chula salsa swing,/ …Merengue Queen./ Bachata Princess./ Me Queen of the Can/ Domini can

\textsuperscript{177} This dichotomy is presented in the following quote: “Los dueños de allá se curan, vacacionan, compran y mandan a sus hijos a las escuelas afuera. Nosotros, sin embargo, vamos al médico allá, dizque de vacaciones allá, compramos todas las vainas que hacen allá y todavía mandamos a los muchachos para allá porque dizque las escuelas de allá son las que enseñan y arreglan muchachos. Entonces. ¿Quién en verdad dominicana más? ¿Los de allá o los de aquí?” (29). The notion of authenticity and dominican\textbf{ness} is once more questioned in this quote, as well as the pervasive separation between aquí and allá.
that is/ Me, my bachata perreo” (5). As we have observed in all the texts here analyzed, music becomes a micro-narrative to contest official ideologies, linguistic practices and cultural identities. Music is a meaning-making form of expression through which individuals can express different levels of personal sensibilities and commitment. Kay identifies with most characteristic musical genres in the Gran Caribe: mambo, reaggetón, bachata, dembow, and even hip hop (originally from the US). She is not attached to one genre in particular. The array of musical expressions, together with her multiple language practices, allow her to “affiliate with different groups at different moments and stages” (Blommaert and Rampton 5). Such an idea connects with the notion of “linguistic repertoire” which, according to Blommaert and Rampton, has replaced traditional notions of “speech community” and “native speakers of a language.” This view “dispenses with a priori assumptions about the links between origins, upbringing, proficiency and types of language, and it refers to individuals’ very variable (and often rather fragmentary) grasp of a plurality of differentially shared styles, registers and genres” (5). The only point Kay makes clear about her musical affiliations is that “Boleros not even in a dream.” The bolero has been considered the most characteristic musical genre accompanying Latin American literature (cf. Valerio Holguín), and read as a “discurso complementario de la sensibilidad modernista desde la cultura popular … [que] alcanzó una dimensión identitaria continental, al representar de modo simple y comunicativo numerosos componentes del imaginario amoroso de Latinoamérica” (Muñoz-Hidalgo 3; cf. Valerio-Holguín). Therefore, it is understandable that Kay, who insists on freeing herself of an essentialist discourse of latinidad in which diversity and multiplicity may be erased, and of the notion of an idealized romantic love following the Latin American
patriarchal system, dismisses the bolero as the representation of such values. Each of the other genres Kay mentions holds contradictory meanings in which she can decide to be involved or not. For instance, she may be adopting the merengue’s low-class original condition while opting out of its reappropriation as a national symbol against the 1916-1924 US intervention in the Dominican Republic (Valerio-Holguín 129). In the example of the bachata, she may feel identified with the marginal contexts in which this genre emerged, but not with its _machista_ motifs.

What is important to note with the use of cyberlanguage and music in these texts is that meaning is multi-modal, communicated in much more than language alone. Blommaert and Rampton explain that people make meaning in gestures, postures, faces, bodies, movements, physical arrangements and the material environment (6), and “in varying combinations of oral, written, pictorical and ‘design’ modes (going on Facebook, playing online games, using mobile phones etc)” (6). Pennycook adds music and dance to this enumeration (6). Therefore, all of these communicative and semiotic resources need to be brought into analysis as well when studying language. In _Levente no._

_Yolayorkdominicanyork_, Josefina Báez is “doing language with words” (Pennycook 14) and with all her crossings with other modes of representation (Internet, music, etc). Rather than assuming the prior existence of a language within which variation occurs, the narrative voice reinvents language through performative acts of crossing and multiplicity. Through her language crossings, we see how social subjects are not pre-given but constructed through sedimented interpellations (cf. Pennycook, Butler “Performativity”).

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178 We observed how postmodern fiction such as _Sirena Selena vestida de pena_ has successfully regendered the discourse of the bolero (cf. Aparicio, _Listening to Salsa_ 125).
179 Blommaert and Rampton suggest Goffman; Goodwin 2000; Goodwin 2006; Bezemer & Jewitt on this matter.
In that sense, crossings disarticulate such pre-given and sedimented languages, discourses, identities, and imaginaries towards performing an aesthetics of multiplicity, and postnational and post-identity imaginaries. The language, and genre crossings, and the play with grammar (i.e., structure), demonstrate that fixed languages, and national imaginaries are an illusion and their assumed transparency a misconception. The word is always someone’s word (cf. Bakhtin), and it is always filled with accents, intentionality, and ideology. Language and genre crossings defy the supremacy of language-as-system over performance. Drawing on Pennycook’s ideas, by looking at the performativity of language, we can see how sedimentation occurs in language and national imaginaries, and even challenge it (15). Báez’s *Levente* not only performs language and an aesthetics of multiplicity, but by altering language through its language crossings, the text is altering somehow the world depicted.

**4.2.3. “I Will Not Call Myself Black Dominican”: Gender Performativity and El Ni E’ as a Diasporic Public Sphere of *inquilinas viviendo muchos mapas simultáneamente***

- Diantre, todas las hijas de las mujeres del Ni e’ hablamos igualito a la mai. Los varones hablan más inglés que las hembras. Quizás porque no están nunca en la casa. …
- No, no es así, los dos hablamos inglés. Ellos no hablan español. Hablan como los morenos. Nosotras hablamos como las morenas, con las del cuento, como las ñañas, como las boricuas, también tenaz, como las mujeres del Ni e’, como nos da la gana. Así hablamos las yorkdominicanyorks. En Dominicanish. ¿Tienes problemas con eso?
- Ya, ya, ya entendi. No hay que pelear por eso muchacha. Nosotros hablamos de todo esto porque en verdad nos importa el Ni e’ y el allá. A nuestra manera. (*Levente* 43)

Pennycook affirms that the question for language and gender studies is not “how do men and women talk differently, as if males and females preexisted their language use as given categories of identity, but rather—recalling Austin once again—how to do gender
with words” (13). To one of the women of el Ni e’ who asserts “Yo. Yo soy Afro-
dominicana” (12), Kay responds, “I ain’t carrying nobody’s freaking right flag. If you
ain’t blind you know that I am black. Prieta. Morena. Negra. I will not call myself Black
Dominican…But I respect you sis’, even if you don’t respect me. Power to you sis’” (12).
Kay renounces any type of definition related to her black ethnicity, which does not mean
that she denies her blackness. She is black, and by affirming that, she moves away from
notions of mestizaje that still prevail on racially prejudiced discourses on the island as a
way to erase African roots. But she renames herself and women in the Ni e’
performatively as yolayorkdominicanyork to escape from the burden of static flags and
labels imposed through masculinist and totalizing views. She is disarticulating fixed
designations that, through being repeated within regulatory frames, have constructed
solidified identities based on the polarization white/black, men/women. Through
nominalism, she alters (disinvents) pre-given identity markers and then, creates (reinvents
and performs) realities according to the perspectives of the women in the Ni e’, and she
does so with the support of a pact with women who share ideological affinities, while
acknowledging and maintaining their cultural specificities. These women, who remained
in the domains of unthinkability in socio-political, socio-generic, and ethnic terms, now
bestow upon themselves ontological significance through a performative language, a
language that acts.

Therefore, what I would like to highlight in the above quoted passage is the
existence of sisterhood among the female participants in the conversation. Kay’s
proposed nominalism takes place together with a relational feminist viewpoint. The
women in the Ni e’ become thinkable through the creation of a pact and space out of
shared interests and beliefs, i.e., affinity and political necessity. If I group the
grancaribeña writers, playwrights, and performers in a community of practice while
proposing an imaginary space outside physical borders, and beyond national, and gender
imaginaries, Josefina Báez proposes a pact among women in the Ni e’. Her Ni e’ is
equivalent to my Gran Caribe. It is a space “que aparece en cada barrio. En muchos
barrios. Se podría decir que es un edificio con alas. Que aterriza ... que se crea cuando se
juntan las Nienses. El edificio y el barrio aparecen. Eso es lo de menos. Lo importante
son las inquilinas. Viviendo muchos mapas simultáneamente” (55). The movable Ni e’
deconstructs the male-controlled constructions of nation and home both in the US and the
Di Ar. For the performer, home, the Ni e’, is not here or there, but here, there, and
everywhere. But this is an imagined “here, there, and everywhere” that is not constrained
by national frontiers, official discourses, bounded languages, and masculinist gender
imperatives:

Soy de aquí, estoy aquí y de aquí no me saca nadie.
Voy allá. Soy de allá. Ese allá no me lo saca nadie.
El aquí es mío. Y el allá también. Tengo residencia
permanente y ciudadanía de por vida en el Ni e’.
E’ ma’, yo soy del Ni e’.
Donde quiera y siempre hay problemas, en inglés o en español. (49).

Through the creation of the Ni e’, the performer certainly rejects the idea of “home” as a
patriarchal establishment where gender hierarchies are produced and preserved.

Similarly, by the fact that the Ni e’ is movable, she also discards the notion of
“homeland” as a fixed territory, with a clear origin and history, and its inextricable
connection with national languages and imaginaries (cf. Durán-Almarza 80). In fact,
many of the inhabitants in the Ni e’ are women who live alone, single mothers with their
children, and grandmothers with their daughters, and granddaughters:
Mi isla, mi pueblo, mi barrio, el pueblo-mundo que es mi building es hecho de women as heads of the households. Y todas borraron con mierda e’ gato las idas y venidas a sus pueblos.
Now I understand why.
Ay why Ay los tigers… These men…
They look like they do. But they don’t.
They sound like they do. But not quite.
Overrated souls. Overrated beds. (46-7)

Whereas this is not presented as an idealized space, the traditional nuclear family that has so frequently silenced its female members is not the habitus in the Ni e’: “Yanet, la vecina de la Rayana, tiene un hijo con un músico fantasmó - fantoche y ‘famoso’ que se lo negó”, “Daniela es una madre joven con ruedo que le pesa. … Las muchachas no la han dejado sola nunca. El Viejo que la preñó nunca más se vio” (11), or “Anoche ese hombre me dijo una vaina que me dolió ma’. Quizás es porque es verdad: ‘Nunca te dije que yo quería ser papá. Así que resuelve tú sola. Tú eres grande” (28). As these quotes demonstrate, the male figure both in Washington Heights and in the De Erre is often portrayed in the text as the tiguere or tigere machista. Nonetheless, the women neighbors in the Ni e’ are not depicted as victims, but as sexually active and free, although they sometimes make mistakes.

The narrative voice disarticulates the idea that this machismo is something that occurs only in low social classes and certain ethnic groups: “Mujeres, ustedes se han dado cuenta que las llamadas estrellas, famosas, princesas, millonarias parecen que no les baja la luna ni grajo. Y los maridos hacen lo mismo que los de nosotras. ¿Entonces, cómo lo ven desde ahí?” (28). However, as this quote shows, sisterhood does not yet occur among different ethnic groups, and social classes. As bell hooks explains, a feminism based on the notion of “sisterhood” has been recently dismissed due to its basis on an
assumed “shared victimization” (Feminist 47) and an “illusion of unity” (Feminist 46) that disguised women’s responsibility “for their role in the maintenance and perpetuation of sexism, racism, and classism, which they did by insisting that only men were the enemy” (Feminist 46). But, even so, bell hooks believes that sisterhood is still necessary.  

Similarly, in Levente, the creation of a pact among the women in the Ni e’ is presented as the empowering solution to deconstruct sexist standards in Dominican, US-Dominican, and US communities, and as the necessary move to transform the popular idea that women are women’s worst enemies. The narrative voice criticizes those women who help perpetuate a male-controlled system by censuring one another. On the contrary, she stands for a pact among the women in the Ni e’, where diversity and contradictions are not only recognized but respected; women that come together when there is a need to fight against male abuse over them:

Ley absoluta en el Ni e’. Podemos oír ruidos de chulería. De chercha. De tres buenas nalgadas a los muchachos jodones. Pero al oír hombre dándole a una mujer ... la ley dicta que subamos a las áreas designadas a buscar las llaves maestras. Y resolver con los bates que cada una tiene en su casa. Después hablamos. Piénsalo en Graffitti. We’re bad when there is no good. (40)

This shows the core of feminist sisterhood: a “shared commitment to struggle against patriarchal injustice, no matter the form the injustice takes” (hooks, Feminism 15).

Bell hooks affirms that “women need to come together in situations where there will be ideological disagreement and work to change that interaction so communication occurs...Women need to have the experience of working through hostility to arrive at understanding and solidarity if only to free ourselves from the sexist socialization that tells us to avoid confrontation because we will be victimized or destroyed” (Feminist 63). 

She complains that, “Casi todas las mujeres, si son casadas creen que las solteras se mueren por sus maridos, las solteras creen que se le arregla la vida con un marido y un muchacho, las que parieron dicen que hay que parir para ser una mujer, una mujer certificada, las machorras te restriegan que pueden ir a donde ellas quieran porque no tienen ninguna cola, las pájaras creen que todas las otras son pájaras, las cueras creen que sólo ellas singan bueno, para las jóvenes, las viejas están pasá, para las viejas, las jóvenes no tienen juicio” (55).
Through a performative language in a performance theatre text, Josefina Báez creates a space in which the women neighbors can speak (“¡Hablaron las vecinas!” 36). Austin affirms that for the performative utterance to succeed, it has to be performed following the linguistic conventions in the right context, by the right people, and to the right people. Building on this idea, Butler urges us to explore not only how established social and gender roles, but also social and gender transformations, operate through linguistic use. It is precisely by not following linguistic conventions that Báez achieves imagining a space where non-dominant subjects can pronounce performative utterances as well. Adopting and adapting Althusser’s notion of interpellation to the question of performativity, Butler argues that “the interpellation as performative establishes the discursive constitution of the subject as inextricable from the social constitution of the subject” (120). Through performative language crossings, resulting in a hyper-quotidian aesthetics of multiplicity, Báez projects the Ni e’. Actually, the written text itself performs the Ni e’ by the structure—or lack of structure—followed. The written performance-theatre-text narrates in a fragmented way the multiple stories of the women in the Ni e’. Short, irregular fragments explain the stories of each apartment in the Ni e’ and the women inhabiting it. The written text is performative in the sense that it graphically becomes the Ni e’ itself, a building-isla-barrio-pueblo con alas that does not belong to aquí or allá. Although readers can intuit from a unique mention in the whole text that the barrio the performer refers to is Washington Heights, and that Kay was born in La Romana, the Ni e’ is in fact an imagined no-space created through language that escapes national labels, time frames, and geographical frontiers. Indeed, it is even difficult for the readers to know when and where each fragment takes place.
The Ni e’ functions as an imagined postnational “diasporic public sphere” (Appadurai) that confounds nation-states as entities, and national imaginaries. This is a space created through language as a crossing of sound, image, text, and the moving body. The only geography in Svič’s, Cruz’s, and Báez’ plays/performances, the only “Aquís” are the texts themselves, in which its characters/inhabitants discard definitions and labels in terms of language, gender, and nation:


These texts, these Ni e’s, create an aesthetics of multiplicity (poetic in the first ones, and hyper-quotidian in the second) through the crossings of languages, tones, micronarratives of personal experiences and universal macro-narratives, hypertextuality, bodies, musical and literary genres, oral and formal registers, and styles. The Tropic of X, Satyricoño, and Levente no. yolayorkdominicanyork, and the spaces they portray, are what they are not. Their performative power resides precisely in their disarticulation of pre-given linguistic forms and identities towards the recognition of identities-that-are-not, that are not in-between a hyphen nor on any of its two sides.
CHAPTER 5. Conclusions

Globalization, together with migration flows, and new media and technologies of information circulation, have transformed the nature of linguistic, cultural, and social diversity in societies and local neighborhoods around the world (Blommaert and Rampton; Appadurai). Diasporic communities are no longer static and detached from transnational networks, a phenomenon that inevitably has an impact on conventional forms of identity and community. Mass media and migratory movements lead to the emergence of diasporic public spheres as part of the cultural dynamics of urban life (Appadurai) – New York, Chicago, San Juan, Santo Domingo, and Miami in the current project. Diasporic public spheres are central in the process of imagining a postnational political realm. Through this process, named languages connected to static national imaginaries, and territorialized peoples have been denaturalized, and linguistic practices have started acting against persistent normativity (Blommaert and Rampton). In that regard, post-structuralist and postmodernist understandings of language and linguistic practices need to be brought into line, together with the notion of superdiversity (cf. Vertovec), to complement the work done on ideologies of language, which already questioned structuralist, purist, and bounded views of language(s) and speech communities. But, a much more differentiated interpretation of the organization of communicative practice is prone to emerge, which centers on “genres, activities and relationships that are enacted in ways which both official and commonsense accounts often miss” (Blommaert and Rampton 2). Following this much-needed theoretical turn, I have engaged with Rampton’s notion of language crossing, and Blommaert and
Rampton’s theory of mobility and superdiversity to replace the theoretical concept of code-switching (in line with the metaphors of the hyphen, bridges, and borders in cultural studies) that has traditionally framed the type of texts analyzed in this dissertation. Also, I have drawn on the notion of community of practice (replacing speech communities) to group *grancaribeña* artistic production according to the language practices and strategies, and the aesthetic of multiplicity in these texts, which confirm the abandonment of the idea of unitary texts/languages/speakers.

The linguistic and discourse analysis of language crossing(s) in the selected literary and theatrical works has been indexical and multi-modal, considering the crossing of genres, genders, registers, accents, and styles as equally ideological and meaning-making; and encompassing not only written language (not necessarily following written conventions), but also creative writing, painting, musical genres, singing, performance, and emoticons and other types of virtual language as communicative signs. Furthermore, I have analyzed language crossing in *grancaribeña* artistic production with an emphasis on creativity, focusing on “nonstandard mixed language practices that appear to draw on styles and languages that aren’t normally regarded as belonging to the speaker, especially in recreational, artistic and/or oppositional contexts” (Blommaert and Rampton 7). Through the use of linguistic resources influenced by new media, gender and ethnic outgroups, and popular culture, *grancaribeña* language crossings move

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182 By indexicality, Blommaert and Rampton refer to “the connotational significance of signs. So for example, when someone switches in speaking and/or writing into a different style or register, it is essential to consider more than the literal meaning of what they are saying. The style, register or code they have moved into is itself likely to carry associations that are somehow relevant to the specific activities and social relations in play” (5), and this can what makes people join together for interest/ideological group sharing.
beyond the notion of switching between national standard languages, or between the home vernacular and the national standard (see Blommaert and Rampton).

The significance of language crossing in grancaribeña artistic production does not reside in their artful novelty (which may be not so innovative), but in the ideological strategies and intentionality behind the crossing(s) (as non-national language forms), on the one hand, and the (performative) social, cultural, and political effects of the crossing(s), on the other. In this dissertation, language crossings have been presented as inextricably related to a disarticulation of normative gender identities, and masculinist (national) discourses. Furthermore, the language practices in the examined grancaribeña narrative, drama, and performance present a vernacular globalization (Appadurai); they engage in a postmodern dialogue between the local and the global. Language crossings and the resulting aesthetics of multiplicity escape the nation(ness) to produce globality at local scale-levels. In other words, local micro-narratives interconnect with global resources and modes of circulation in the cultural production of a community of practice writing from/to different standpoints in the Gran Caribe.

All the chapters offer a linguistic analysis of the language crossings in them, as well as of other crossings that help accomplish an aesthetics of multiplicity. Similarly, all the chapters relate these crossings to an alteration of gender normativities socially imposed on the female main characters. In all the works, the genre blending, the blurring of linear chronology and space boundaries, the centrality of historically marginalized or silenced characters, the fragmented narrative and theatrical configuration, the inclusion of popular musical tropes such as the mambo or the bolero, and of virtual language such as emoticons, contribute to a postmodern aesthetics of multiplicity, which serves at the same
time as an indicator of an imagined postnational and post-gendered *Gran Caribe*.  

*Dreaming in Cuban’s* Pilar, *Memory Mambo’s* Juani, ¡Yo!’s Yolanda, *Sirena* selena vestida de pena’s Sirena, “How to Leave Hialeah”’s protagonist, “Pollito chicken”’s Suzie, “Emoticons”’s Julieta, *The Tropic of X’s* Maura/Mori, *Satyrícioño’s* Filomena, and *Levente no. yolayorkdominicanyork’s* Kay present a varied spectrum of female characters who take a leading role in the creation of female pacts that allow them to shun gender and national identity constraints. Their pacts with cousins and sisters in the islands and in exile, with new acquaintances in tourist scenarios in the Caribbean, and with neighbors in non-spaces, empower them to imagine a non-geopolitical *Gran Caribe* in which they can be in all their complexity. Outside the texts, in my own writing of this dissertation, I group Cristina García, Achy Obejas, Julia Álvarez, Mayra Santos Febres, Jennine Capó Crucet, Ana Lydia Vega, Aurora Arias, Caridad Svich, Migdalia Cruz, and Josefina Báez in a community of literary practice, in which language crossing is the common practice in a shared domain of creative writing. A resulting aesthetic of multiplicity sets their artistic production in a *Gran Caribe* as a diasporic public space that reconnects works written both on the island and in the US. This dissertation is at the same time an attempt to give visibility to the artistic production of *grancaribeñas*, still in a marginal position as regards US and Caribbean literary and dramaturgic canons.

Masculine discourses both on the islands and in the metropolis have traditionally been the active creators of definitions of what Caribbeanness should mean. Through my study and analysis of this literary corpus of contemporary *grancaribeña* women writers, and playwrights/performers, I have imagined and created a *Gran Caribe*, where different Caribbean narratives and definitions of Caribbeanness meet and have a conversation. The
women writers’ texts analyzed and their linguistic practices redefine national imaginaries both in the US and the Caribbean through the imagination of a Gran Caribe that is linguistically made manifest rather than delimited by geographical and geopolitical frontiers. Accordingly, I have included authors writing from and related to diverse points of the Gran Caribe (the US, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic). I could have certainly included writers from diasporic public spheres in other parts of the world but this would entail a longer, larger project. Moreover, the main focus of the present work was to disarticulate the hyphenated notions of bridges separating aquí from allá that have prevailed in the Caribbean diasporas in US, and in the Hispanophone Caribbean islands.

The inclusion of a crossing of narrative –novel and short story—, drama, and performance in the present project responds to the idea that the analyzed authors are grouped together in terms of shared linguistic and aesthetic practices rather than literary genres. However, due to academic and format restrictions, the chapter classification of grancaribeña’s artistic production according to literary genre follows a modern structure that should be rethought and revisited in the future. Also, the crossing of disciplines (sociolinguistics, literary analysis, and theater and performance studies) in this dissertation seeks to provide the academic field with a novel interdisciplinary perspective from a feminist, postmodern theoretical viewpoint. I have aimed to rethink Latina/o Studies through a postnational lens, offering the field of sociolinguistics a thorough critical discourse analysis of the language used in the texts examined. The study contributes to these fields by addressing key questions of language, gender, cultural authenticity, nationness, and the expression of latinidad and caribeñidad. Finally, often languages are crossed in the manuscript as a representation of the project stand. Although
the use of italics for the Spanish words and expressions in this project partially negates my stance, these markers respond once more to academic and format demands.

In the future, I seek to explore how specific US readerships and audiences react to the narratives and theatrical productions written by these authors regarding their language practices (language crossings and their multiaccentual condition), and the aesthetics these texts convey. Through an empirical study of reader perceptions (narrative) and audience responses (theater works) to this literary and linguistic repertoire, I aim to demonstrate how these texts contest the boundaries of US, US-Caribbean, or Caribbean discourses as traditionally defined. The research methodology to engage target narrative readership and theatre audiences consists of a full-scale study that includes quantitative and qualitative analyses of survey data completed by heritage speakers of Spanish (study of reader perceptions) and US Latina Theater audience participants (study of audience responses) in both Miami and New York City, as well as reflective interviews.

Initial results from a pilot study of reader perceptions (narrative) I carried out among Spanish heritage learners enrolled at a university in metropolitan Miami show that “the ontology of the hyphen” prevails. For example, a student identifying himself as Hispanic of Nicaraguan origins living in the US since he was eleven states that “es horrible leer Spanglish…Mezclar los dos idiomas suele perjudicar el texto” as a reaction to a fragment of Santos Febres’ *Sirena selena*, while he affirms that “Pollito chicken’’s use of “Spanglish” is “un poco mejor que los otros textos que intentaron mezclar el español con el ingles.” Similarly, a Cuban-origin student living in the US since she was

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183 I have also carried out pilot studies of audience reactions with theatre audiences through the distribution of a questionnaire. Due to pragmatic reasons, the participants had to answer multiple-choice questions, and therefore, did not have the space to elaborate their answers. This part is done through interviews, which will be analyzed as the project develops.
seven agrees that “Pollito chicken”’s “Spanglish” “is very common as a US bilingual latina.” Ironically, as developed in chapter 3, this is the text that portrays the most artificial language crossings. On the contrary, a US-born of Cuban origin confirms that “Pollito Chicken”’s language crossing “was a mess, it was not Spanglish.” But this same student describes the language crossings in the passages from The Tropic of X, and Levente as confusing, and in Sirena selena as not making sense. This student believes that the passage that flowed better was an extract from Mayra Montero’s Veintitrés y una Tortuga, fully written in a normative Spanish, with no language crossings. The fact that another student affirmed that Mayra Montero’s extract reminded him/her “of the kind of text we are used to reading in our Spanish courses” also implies this generalized perception of what is considered to be “correct” Spanish. In fact, many respondents agreed that passages would flow better if written in one particular language. Descriptions of the language crossings in these passages as “not making sense,” “not employing correct literary languages or word usage,” “hard to understand,” “annoying,” and “disruptive” predominate. Although the answers to the questionnaires need to be analyzed in detail considering all the possible variables, this initial approach to the results demonstrates that not only monolingual but also bilingual speakers in the US and the Caribbean still conceptualize language and identity in terms of totality, and language crossings in terms of “Spanglish,” i.e., code-switching as the representation of an hyphen that separates two bounded (national) languages and cultural identities.

To conclude, language crossings in grancaribeña texts can no longer be perceived as a dance between two cultures and languages nor as the simple alternate use of two languages (Weinrich 1953). It is not a partner dance, in which the man is the leader and
the woman the follower, but a dance performance composed of women writers who act as
performers and choreographers at the same time; dancing, interpreting and making
choreographies that are different from traditional dances (languages and cultures). These
authors present linguistic fragmentation positively as the place to inhabit and to speak a
postmodern language for which language assimilation and/or in-betweenness are not the
only alternatives possible. On the contrary, language crossing and multiaccentuality
become the markers of a community of literary practice that leaves room to maneuver, in
which a plurality of micro-narratives destabilize the wholeness of the national
imaginaries (inside the US and from the Caribbean countries of origin). This dissertation
suggests moving beyond the hyphen, and works as a little step of many more to be taken
towards an ontology of multiplicity in the Gran Caribe.


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