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Bicultural Identity in Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

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ANNOTATION

The purpose of this diploma thesis is to analyze bicultural identity in the novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez. It also deals with the process of assimilation and evaluates the influence of language, gender roles and culture. The essential historical background for this topic is explained at the beginning of the thesis. The findings are presented in the selected parts of the novel.

KEYWORDS

identity; culture; immigration; Julia Alvarez

NÁZEV

Bikulturní identita v románu Julie Alvarez *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

ANOTACE

Cílem této diplomové práce je analyzovat bikulturní identitu v románu *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* od Julie Alvarez. Práce se zabývá asimilací a vyhodnocuje vliv jazyka, genderových rolí a kultury. Důležité historické pozadí tohoto tématu je vysvětleno na začátku práce. Výsledky jsou prezentovány na vybraných částech románu.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

identita; kultura; imigrace; Julia Alvarez

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	IMMIGRATION ISSUES	4
2.1	HISPANIC/LATINO BACKGROUND	5
2.2	THE CHARACTERISTICS OF DOMINICAN IMMIGRATION	5
2.3	THE DOMINICAN HYBRID.....	8
3	DOMINICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE	10
4	JULIA ALVAREZ AND <i>HOW THE GARCÍA GIRLS LOST THEIR ACCENTS</i>	12
4.1	JULIA ALVAREZ	12
4.2	THE ART OF SEMI-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL.....	13
4.3	REVERSE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER	18
4.4	POINT OF VIEW	18
4.5	LANGUAGE DEVICES.....	19
5	THE USE OF SYMBOLISM	22
6	BICULTURAL IDENTITY	28
6.1	LANGUAGE.....	30
6.2	SEXUALITY AND GENDER ROLES	41
6.3	CULTURE CLASH.....	51
7	CONCLUSION.....	58
8	RESUMÉ.....	61
9	BIBLIOGRAPHY	65

1 Introduction

What happens when Dominican-American authors are forced to leave their native lands for political and economic reasons? Questions of immigration, acculturation and identity create a new situation. The displacement of Dominican people from their homeland to the United States has produced a tension between the culture of the country of their origin and that of the new homeland, one representing the past and the other the future of the immigrants.

At present, Dominican-American literature represents one of the most interesting constituents of American letters. The authors produce remarkable works in every conceivable genre including fiction as well as non-fiction. Julia Alvarez is one of many writers trying to depict the position of immigrants who come to the United States in order to find a new ‘place on the map.’

Alvarez’s novels deal with the immigrant experience and the struggles of bicultural identity. Her writing also appeals to a large audience. She seeks to connect the experience of cultural dislocation to the larger experience of American living, realizing that the source of her own writing is her personal experience. Her stories present American dreams contrasted with American realities. Alvarez uses this discordance in American life to reach out to readers from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Her desire is to create characters with whom her readers can connect. She also writes in order to connect the history. Through her poetry and novels, Alvarez creates an alternative historical reality in which characters speak, coming alive on the page. Her work falls into the category of literature of immigration, historical fiction and semi-autobiographical novel.

The purpose of this diploma thesis is to analyze the novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accent*. The aim is to explore the process of changing traditional values under the influence of the American heterogeneous culture and the basic differences between the Dominican and American world.

The collection of fifteen short stories follows the history of the García sisters – Carla, Sandra, Yolanda and Sofia – through their immigration and adaptation into American society. As the title suggests, the longer they remain in the United States, the less

Dominican they become. Despite the fact that the title refers to the loss of a Spanish accent, it uses the symbolic inference to describe the cultural losses experienced by immigrants who had to move to the United States from their homeland. The title also exemplifies the loss of home, family, relative, household, traditions, food, clothes and music. Generally speaking, the loss of a way of life can never be substituted. Although the title does not reflect the positive changes in the lives of the characters, the reader is able to recognize immediately that there are gains for many of the characters. For instance, the life that is not controlled by Trujillo, freedom from the restrictive gender roles, and the absence of a patriarchal society in which women do not have any social and economic opportunities.

Like Alvarez, the girls leave the Dominican Republic because of their father's involvement in a plot against Trujillo. The novel offers an insight into adolescence and adult life as the sisters' struggle with Dominican cultural expectations in the context of living in the United States. Told backwards, the reader meets the adult sisters with their problems. In the stories, the United States serves as a representation of the loss of innocence, while in the Dominican Republic, the girls' lives revolved around family and play.

The diploma thesis is divided into five main chapters. The first chapter of the thesis provides theoretical information about the historic movement of the Dominican people to the United States, the Trujillo dictatorship and its consequences. The second chapter focuses on the Dominican-American literature dealing with a new generation of Latino authors. The next chapter of the diploma thesis describes the structure of the novel including reverse chronological order, point of view and language devices. Symbols used in the novel represent another topic which is analysed in the following lines. The last chapter depicts bicultural identity as the most important theme of the novel. The analysis of particular features of bicultural identity is provided in the three subchapters dealing with the issues that are typical for literary theory.

Therefore, the first subchapter of the thesis depicts language as one of the crucial components of culture. The members of the García family struggle with the loss of Spanish and the acquisition of English.

In the second subchapter a discussion evolves about the sexuality and gender roles.

Although the parents continue to live by the strong Dominican customs and traditions, their daughters start to reject their traditional culture and become more and more involved in their new way of life. The following analysis of this subchapter deals with the term of machismo, patriarchal society and relationships.

The final subchapter of this thesis depicts the position of Dominican immigrants living in the new cultural environment. The issue is examined from various perspectives – rebellion, discrimination and the loss of homeland.

2 Immigration Issues

Many ethnically diverse groups have found their new home in the United States and this trend has continued until present day. Immigrants from all around the world have entered this country bringing their specific values and traditions with them. Either they have left because they wanted to fulfill the fabled American dream, or they were forced to leave the country of their origin. Roger Daniels in his essay *Immigration to the United States in the twentieth century* offers some reasons for coming to America:

For centuries this country has always been the traditional haven of refuge for countless victims of religious and political persecutions in other lands. These immigrants have made outstanding contributions to American music, art, literature, business, finance, philanthropy, and many other phases of cultural, political industrial and commercial life. (Daniels, 2006, 82)

As Marcelo Suárez-Orozco and Mariela Páez claim, the process of gradual demographics transformation gained extraordinary momentum during the closing decades of the twentieth century. More than a quarter of the U.S. population is composed of members of ethnically marked minorities including African Americans, Asian Americans and Latinos (Suárez-Orozco and Páez, 2002, 1). It is evident that the United States is becoming a country that is no longer homogeneous and of European origin.

The future of the United States will be in no small measure linked to the fortunes of a heterogeneous blend of relatively recent arrivals from Asia, from other parts of the world, and above all from Latin America. More than 35 million Latinos in the United States make up roughly 12 percent of the total population. The U.S. Census Bureau claims that by the year 2050, a full quarter of the U.S. population will be of Latino origin. This means that nearly 100 million people will be able to trace their ancestry to the Spanish-speaking, Latin American and Caribbean worlds (Suárez-Orozco and Páez, 2002, 1).

Similarly to other immigrants, the Latino/Hispanic people have to deal with many difficulties arising from their minority status. They live between two different cultures and two different worlds.

In the novel, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Julia Alvarez offers an interesting insight into memory and self-discovery of the García sisters exiled from the Dominican Republic. In order to understand and analyze the novel, it is necessary to focus on the implications of migration and put the situation of the Hispanic/Latino immigrants into the historical framework.

2.1 Hispanic/Latino Background

“The word *Latino* did not even exist fifty years ago.” (Suárez-Orozco and Páez, 2002, 1) “Hispanics” or “Latinos”, terms deriving from “hispanoamericano” and “latinoamericano,” are United States residents with roots in Hispanic America. While “Latino” is often used interchangeably with “Hispanic,” the nineteenth-century concept of “Latin America,” from which “Latino” derives, broadly referred to the peoples emerging from Spain, Portugal, and France’s colonies. The term “Hispanoamérica” referred solely to the Spanish-speaking peoples formerly residing in the Spanish colonies. In common usage today, both terms refer to the United States residents of racial and historical backgrounds in the Spanish-speaking countries of the Americas, including the United States (Kanellos, 2006, 135).

For where the 1960s can be said to have put Afro-American and its history to the most noticeable position in the form of Civil Rights, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, the sociocultural situation afterwards has pointed to another North American life and word: the Dominican Republic (Prosser, 2008, 17).

2.2 The Characteristics of Dominican Immigration

In general, people identify the Dominican Republic as a land that produces great baseball players and as a country with many tropical beach resorts. Despite the fact that the Dominican Republic is a tourist destination, the country has experienced poverty, crime, social unrest and failed governments.

In terms of historical factors, people from the Dominican Republic have massively

moved out of their home country in search of a better life in North America. Although there has been a Dominican presence in the United States at least since the late nineteenth century, the great exodus of Dominicans from their native land and the development of Dominican immigrant settlements in the United States date from the mid-1960s (Hernández and Torres-Saillant, 1998, 19). Social, political and economic problems were motivating factors behind the reasons to leave their country. Other reasons were the abandonment of an agricultural way of life, migration to the city and the lack of employment due to overpopulation. The historical motive of migration is described in the study written by Dulce Haeussler-Fiore and Ana Lopez-De Fede:

It is important to note that the historical motive behind any mass exodus is generally economic hardship in the country of origin and the lure of a better way of life and a better future for their children elsewhere. First they migrated from the country to the capital city. With overcrowding in the city, the lack of jobs, training and education, the poor and disenfranchised finally decided to relocate overseas. (Haeussler-Fiore and Lopez-De Fede, 2000, 22)

Migration from the Dominican Republic is considered as the engine fueling Dominican's demographic growth in the United States. Iain Chambers similarly states that Dominican migration is "reaching a magnitude and intensity never seen before." (Chambers, 1994, 5-6) It dramatically rose after the overthrow of the Trujillo dictatorship (1930-1961) and the easing of the United States immigration restrictions in 1965. The wave of Dominican migrants came as a result of civil strife following Trujillo's demise. Among those leaving in the 1960s were middle-class Dominicans who were seeking to avoid becoming victims of political violence, and in an effort to stabilize the country, visas were granted to potential opponents of the US-backed regime (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991, 42).

The dictatorship of Trujillo was one of the longest, cruelest, and most absolute in modern times. Jonathan Hartlyn offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for examining the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic:

What appeared to begin as another era of caudillo rule, however, soon transformed itself into what was probably the strongest and most absolute

dictatorship over to be established in Latin America. (Hartlyn, 1998, 85-86)

Trujillo was not the first strongman to dominate politics in his country, but his regime was the longest lasting of all of these having the greatest impact on life in the Dominican Republic. Of all the Latin American cases, Trujillo's rule may have had the most totalitarian tendencies, in terms of using technology to seek control over all aspects of the lives of Dominicans, including their private lives. In addition, technology has also been misused in terms of controlling communications, transportation, education, and intellectual and cultural life. The migrating Dominicans chose the United States as the country of their new home. They had to overcome several obstacles along the way, especially the separation of family members.

Immigrants from the Dominican Republic are among the ten largest immigrant groups in the United States. The Dominican population can be found throughout the country. They have settled largely on the east coast in the following states: New Jersey, Florida, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania and Connecticut (Hernández and Rivera-Batiz, 2003, 3).

The Dominican population is primarily urban in origin, occupationally diverse and includes many skilled and semiprofessional workers and persons who have completed their secondary and college education. It is a young population, with a median age of 25 years, with families largely headed by females (Stone, 2005, 191). Dominican immigrants are active participants in political and economic affairs taking place in the Dominican Republic. Their strong attachment to the Dominican Republic can complicate and delay their adaptation to the United States (Haeussler-Fiore and Lopez-De Fede, 2002, 5). Max Castro and Thomas Boswell's analysis of the Dominican population surveys documents the following:

Many of the immigrants are women. The majority of Dominicans work in a blue-, gray-, and pink-collar jobs, specifically in service occupation, as operators, fabricators and handlers. (Castro and Boswell, 2002, 13)

The novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* takes place in New York City where the community of Dominican immigrants has started their new life. New York City

has continued to dominate the location of Dominicans. Dominicans are currently the second largest Hispanic/Latino population of New York City, following Puerto Ricans. If current population growth trends continue, Dominicans will overtake Puerto Ricans as the largest Hispanic/Latino population of the City (Hernández and Rivera-Batiz, 2003, 3).

The Dominican population in the United States is dispersed throughout the United States of America. An examination of the conditions of Dominicans in each of the states shows that there is one main center of Dominican immigrants. The sociologists Ramona Hernández and Silvio Torres-Saillant point out in their study that: “New York is a center of Dominican life in the United States representing the community nationally.” (Hernández and Torres-Saillant, 1998, XX)

The greatest concentration of Dominicans in New York City is in Manhattan, where one out of every three Dominicans stays in. But just as the population has spread throughout the country, Dominican New Yorkers have also spread throughout the City. The Dominican population in the Bronx is now almost as large as that in Manhattan. There has also been substantial growth in Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island (Hernández and Rivera-Batiz, 2003, 3).

2.3 The Dominican Hybrid

Dominican migration in the context of political and economic consequences has created a hybrid space among the diverse cultures coming into contact. According to Homi Bhabha, hybridity is a new cultural and a privileged third space. The hybrid is considered to be ‘neither the one nor the other’ (Bhabha, 1994, 37).

The García girls arrived to the United State with their parents. As a result of migration, Gustavo Perez-Firmat refers to the immigrants of the third space as “members of the one-and-half-generation.” (Perez-Firmat, 1994, 4) They have to struggle with the transition from childhood to adulthood and with the relocation from one sociocultural environment to another. Perez-Firmat discusses the fact that one-and-half generation is capable of negotiating both cultures and can create what he calls a ‘hyphenated culture’. In addition,

he agrees with Bhabha in the ways that the hybrid (by being neither the one nor the other) can adapt more easily between two cultures.

In the novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* the characters experience an ambivalent attitude towards Dominican culture. There is a desire to return to their country of origin, but also a disregard towards their original culture. They become hybrids in the same sense that all migrants become blended when traveling beyond their homeland.

3 Dominican-American Literature

The importance of Dominican migration to the United States has mainly appeared in Dominican-American literature where the Dominican cultural identity is represented. The presence of Dominicans has created a significant number of authors who have experienced and described their personal adaptation into American society. The truth is that the topic of the Dominican and Dominican-American immigrants has been transformed into novels and memoirs very frequently.

Although Dominicans now constitute the most numerous immigrant groups in the United States, their literary presence has been largely overlooked. Alpana Knippling postulates the position of the Dominican authors as a problem: “not only work of writers has been excluded from multicultural revision of the American literary canon, but it has also been frequently omitted from anthologies, bibliographies and biographical guides to U.S. Latino literature.” (Knippling, 1996, 207) The Dominicans in the United States constantly asked themselves what the future of their work would be. Efraín Barradas analyses the situation and the problematic questions about their future:

Their question represents much more than the varying degree of certainty each individual author has about the survival of his or her work. These authors have to ask themselves what will happen to their work as part of a whole, as part of literature that defines not just them but their work as well. (Barradas, 1994, 93)

This marginalization of Dominican immigrant literature has presented certain challenges and created specific priorities for the writers. Dominican people have shown a great tendency to become excellent writers. They are known for their style. Authors of Hispanic descent have altered the landscape of American literature in numerous ways. As Allison Amend mentions: “these writers are able to capture the immigrant experience and frame it within a modern lens.” (Amend, 2010, 7)

Central interest in many Dominican-American literary works lies within the nature of identity. Dominican-American literature tends to share a very similar topic. The struggle

to become similar to Americans or blend into American life, while maintaining traditional customs and values, is frequently represented in the works. Authors examine the beliefs and attitudes that they see in the Dominican communities. They give voice to a segment of the Dominican population that had little chance of expressing itself in the world. Their work is also marked by the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo as well.

As the twenty-first century was ushered in, a new generation of Dominican-American authors burst onto the pages of US Latino literature. This new generation includes Junot Díaz with *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Loida Maritza Pérez with *Geographies of Home*, Nelly Rosario with *Song of the Water Saints* and Angie Cruz with *Let it Rain Coffee*. They were born in the United States or immigrated as children with their families. Fernando Valerio-Holguín describes the immigrants' situation: "all share the fact of publishing in the US, a fact that has disrupted the traditional literary cannon of the United States." (Valerio-Holguín, 2006, 1)

A comparable Dominican-American author is Julia Alvarez. She presents the beginnings of a vision for a new Dominican. One who has experienced emigration in contrast to those authors interested only in their own country. According to Bados Ciria, she belongs to the latest generation of Latino women who write in order to make bridges that link the margins to the center, as much as her books cross borders with an obvious intention: to allay the pain of acculturation and the stigma of being an outsider making the displacement of language and geography to be the medium of art (Ciria, 1999, 113). She can be considered a pioneer of the growing Dominican-American literature that connects two different cultures.

4 Julia Alvarez and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

4.1 Julia Alvarez

Julia Alvarez was born in the United States, in New York but moved to the Dominican Republic, her parents' homeland, when she was three months old. Her family lived there for 10 years but returned to New York when Alvarez's father's life was threatened as a result of his involvement on the underground movement that sought to overthrow the country's dictator (Spack, 2007, 30). She grew up in a middle-class Queens neighborhood but she never lost contact with the Dominican Republic. In the United States she was sent to a private school at the age of 13 and later she attended Connecticut College. Alvarez received a B.A. degree from Middlebury College and a Masters in Creative Writing from Syracuse University in 1975. She began publishing in 1984 with *Homecoming* that portrayed Alvarez suffering her middle age without a secure job and a family of her own (Ciria, 1999, 114).

Alvarez's personal experiences while being brought up in American society deeply influenced her various works. She has experienced the inner struggle when searching for her lost identity. She did not belong to any mainstream accepted by most people. Neither an American nor a Dominican girl, Alvarez wanted to be accepted. As Graciela Obert notes: "her homesickness and loneliness, and her desire to connect with others led her to writing books." (Obert, 2004, 293) Writing was a way to reconnect Alvarez with the culture and the past she had left behind.

Although Alvarez is primarily known as a novelist, she is also a well known poet. She is a storyteller, and each novel tells a number of stories. Her art of writing is grounded in the strong oral tradition of the Dominican Republic. In 1991, the novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* was published. Soon after the book was published it was an immediate success. The novel earned numerous honors, including the 1991 PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Awards. As Silvio Sirias states, it was selected a Notable Book

by the American Library Association (Sirias, 2001, 5).

4.2 The Art of Semi-autobiographical Novel

Literature is a medium through which the author can express opinion, experience, dream, aspiration or even political and social viewpoint. Literature can also speak through people who do not have a chance to express themselves. According to Lauro Flores: “life is similar to that of a thousand others, but through ‘chance’ it has had opportunities that the thousand others could not or did not have. By narrating it, once creates this possibility.” (Flores, 1980, 155)

Within each literary genre there are pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages that appear when the author has to decide whether to continue being authentic or whether to alter facts that the author has experienced. Following these expressions, literature can be divided into fiction and non-fiction.

The following paragraphs will analysed terms which are suitable for this diploma thesis - it is the novel (fiction) and the autobiography (non-fiction). These terms were chosen because of the fact that the novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is composed of short stories which convey a realistic depiction of the four girls, who along with their parents move from the Dominican Republic to New York. The stories center on Yolanda García and her sisters: Carla, the oldest; Sandi, the second oldest; and Sofia, the youngest. The novel is based on the personal story of becoming American and it is considered to be the semi-autobiography of Alvarez.

Peter Auger describes fiction in *The Anthem Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory* in these words: “the term’s standard meaning is an imaginative piece of prose, such as novel. However, it can refer to any creative writing that is based on invented, rather than true, events and characters. Fiction may be more or less realistic, but will usually be relevant to the real world in some way.” (Auger, 2010, 111) In other words, fiction can be based on a truthful fact. On the other hand, non-fiction is based on “the real world and experiences. Many non-fictional forms provide scope for creative writing and explicitly subjective viewpoint.” (Auger, 2010, 202) When clarifying non-fiction, it is also very

important to mention that this genre can sometimes be misleading due to inaccurate facts. Regarding the aforementioned definitions, there is a very thin line between literary genres. They tend to overlap as Wolfgang Iser explains:

Literature is generally regarded as fictitious writing, and indeed, the very term *fiction* implies that the words on the printed page are not meant to denote any given reality in the empirical world, but are to represent something which is not given. For this reason “fiction” and “reality” have always been classified as pure opposites, and so a good deal of confusion arises when one seeks to define the “reality” of literature. At one moment it is viewed as autonomous, the next as heteronomous, in accordance with whatever frame of reference is being applied. Whatever frame, the basic and misleading assumption is that fiction is an antonym of reality. In view of the tangled web of definitions resulting from this juxtaposition, the time has surely come to cut the thread altogether and replace ontological arguments with functional, for what is important to readers, critics, and authors alike is what literature *does* and not what it *means*. If fiction and reality are to be linked, it must be in terms not of opposition but of communication, for the one is not the mere opposite the other – fiction is a means of telling us something about reality. (Iser, 1975, 7)

Therefore, it is essential to state the exact meaning of the definitions. As Iser says, the most important aspect of literature is what literature does in the context rather than what literature means. There is not any clear boundary which precisely separates the above mentioned genres.

Generally speaking, readers can be confused whether the novel written by Alvarez is fiction or autobiography. It is due to the fact that she focuses on the family and events happening in her life. Even though she fictionalizes the novel, the setting and major issues are still based on the factual events. Alvarez’s accurate information in the novel falls into the category of autobiography. “Autobiography shows life in action, which gives it a great historical value. A fundamental feature that can be attributed to autobiography is the deep impulse to tell one’s story as a creature of one time and place.” (Obert, 2004, 290) In the work of Albert Stone, autobiography is depicted as self-living history:

A historical consciousness speaks out of singular experience, for some particular social group, to a wider audience. This triple articulation is at once

an act of perception and creation: what forces in the past have made me, how I now see and express my unique individuality. Autobiography is, simply and profoundly, personal history. (Stone, 1981, 2)

Many authors who have been considered immigrants have sought their own identity through expressing their lives in literature. By turning inward towards their own personal history, the reflection becomes a coping mechanism, a way to understand and discern the social constructs of the new social environment. This instinctual mechanism has supported their acculturation into the new society. Autobiographical works become a tool to bridge the divide between the author's world and his audience of readers. Stone describes the relationship between the author and reality, presenting autobiography as: "the ideological problem of the author; reveals the cultural context in which information is conveyed, and transforms an individual story into a cultural narrative." (Stone, 1981, 8) Autobiography brings life to literature. Personal experience and identity become the principle of this genre as Flores precisely claims in his study:

Through autobiography it is possible to chart the historical, cultural, and psychological factors surrounding the development of an ideology of the self, as well as to advance a critical attitude toward social institutions, turning what it seems an inherently private form of discourse onto the public social world. (Flores 1980, 154)

Within the framework of autobiographies, there is a correlation between themes of personal history and self-discovery. Because of this connection, it is the most common form of writing being chosen by immigrant writers. The emotional aspect of the autobiography is a component that renders readers a clearer perspective, and brings them emphatically closer to the events and experiences happening to immigrants all over the world today. When describing how the events happened, the combination of fiction and reality is a very effective way how to deal with the personal story. The critic Iwona Irwin-Zarecka notes that:

Whether recounting actual events or fictionalizing the account better to capture their meanings, the artist-as-witness is perhaps the most effective of all memory workers. The unique combination of the art's power to evoke feelings, to build empathy, with "empirical" claim to authenticity frames

remembrance in the greatest intellectual *and* emotional depth, as it were. And when such combination is used, as it often is, to speak of the ultimate good and evil, the call upon us to remember is complete. (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994, 153)

Alvarez is the creator of her own story which enables her to construct her own semi-autobiography. She has decided to stay loyal to the facts that give her a high level of authenticity, for example Alvarez's to the Trujillo regime. By recollecting and describing the atrocities that occurred under Trujillo's regime, she has fuelled her novel with power. Readers are attracted by the true events that they or their relatives and friends experienced. In the novel, Ali depicts the atmosphere when the mother of the four girls - Carla - recalls the situation on the Island.

Every night, she liked to read The New York Times in bed before turning off her light, to see what the Americans were up to. One night, she let out a yelp to wake up her husband beside her. He sat bolt upright, reaching for his glasses which in his haste, he knocked across the room. "*¿Qué pasa? ¿Qué pasa?* " What is wrong? There was terror in his voice, the same fear she'd heard in the Dominican Republic before they left. They had been watched there; he was followed. They could not talk, of course, though they had whispered to each other in fear at night in the dark bed. Now in America, he was safe. [...] But in dreams, he went back to those awful days and long nights, and his wife's scream confirmed his secret to fear. [...] the SIM had come for the at last. (Alvarez, 2004, 139)

The mother is afraid of her husband – Carlos. He is persecuted by The Military Intelligence Service (SIM), the secret police. Even though they are in the United States, they still feel worry about the particular situation. They cannot forget how civil rights and freedom were not afforded to the citizens during the Trujillo era. In addition to the regime, Dominicans who did not follow the dictator were severely oppressed.

On the other hand, the modification of some facts that Alvarez has experienced are evident as well. Therefore, readers cannot say that the novel is the autobiography of Alvarez. Alvarez's characters in the novel have something in common with the typical Dominican immigrant family, for example experiencing painful memories, dislocation from the Dominican Republic or difficult cultural adaptation. However, it is very important to infer that many immigrants from the Dominican Republic did not come from the privileged

background as the García family in the novel. They belonged to the wealthy members of the Dominican society. In the novel Alvarez portrays the García family employing several maids in their house in the Dominican Republic:

The cake is on its table, the little cousins clustered around it, arguing over who will get what slice. When their squabbles reach a certain mother-annoying level, they are called away by their nursemaids, who sit on stool at the far end of the patio, a phalanx of starched white uniforms. (Alvarez, 2004, 1)

Alvarez wants to show that the privileged families in the Dominican Republic have maids taking care of their children. If they are disturbed by their children, there is always one of the women whose responsibility is to look after children or keeps the house clean and tidy.

Another example of privileged class Dominicans is described in the situation where Yolanda visits her relatives in the Dominican Republic. She is in the house and meets a maid who is looking for the matches. Yolanda's aunt, Tía Carmen, is angry because the maid does not work properly according to her:

A maid peeks out of the pantry into the hall. She is a skinny brown woman in the black uniform of the kitchen help. Her head is covered with tiny braids coiled into rounds and pinned down with bobby pins. "Doña Carmen," she calls to Yolanda's hostess aunt, "there are no matches. Just went to Doña Lucinda's to get some."

"Por Dios, Iluminada," Tía Carmen scolds, "you've had all day."

The maid stares down at the interlaced hand she holds before her, a gesture that Yolanda remembers seeing illustrated in a book for Renaissance actors. These clasped hands were on a page of classic gestures. *The gestures of pleading*, the caption had read. Held against the breast, next to the heart, the same interlaced hands were those of who *pleadeth for mercy from his beloved*. (Alvarez, 2004, 4)

In addition to modification of the facts in the novel, the García family perceives unpleasant condition of life only in comparison to the very comfortable and expensive lifestyle they are used to in the Dominican Republic. The family can afford expensive estates. Even in the United States, the García family can afford private education which is very expensive. In this depiction, the novel does not represent the typical Dominican family

who immigrated to the United States.

4.3 Reverse Chronological Order

The novel itself is divided into three parts corresponding to different periods of time in the life of the García family. The first part connects the present moment and introduces the sisters as women currently living in the United States. The second part traces back to the period of time in their lives when they develop into adults. This part also depicts their cultural and psychological disagreements that they encounter after moving to the United States. The last part deals with the story of their childhood in the Dominican Republic and explains the reasons for their immigration.

Alvarez begins the story in 1989 and ends it in 1956. In the novel she spans thirty three years of life in the García family depicting the relatives in a series of fifteen short stories. These short stories are narrated in the so-called reverse chronological order. It is a method of narrating the story whereby the plot is revealed in reverse chronology. The story follows the lives of the “four girls,” as their mother Carla refers to them. (Alvarez, 2004, 40)

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents looks like a puzzle that the reader has to put back together. The task of the reader is to think about the novel as a complex written piece, which is unveiled after reading the whole novel.

4.4 Point of View

One of the most interesting and typical aspect of Alvarez’s writing is how she works with her own point of view. Simply defined, the point of view signifies the way a story gets told - the mode established by an author by means of which the reader is presented with the characters, actions, dialogues, events and settings which constitute the narrative in a work. (Abrams, 2004, 301) The story is told from the following viewpoints: first person, third person omniscient and the first person plural.

The first person “I” narrative is typical for the characters who do not often talk about their feelings or thoughts. For instance, the Haitian servant named Chuca is given the first person narration. In a similar way, the earliest childhood memories of the girls are narrated in the first person “I”.

Concerning the third person omniscient point of view, Alvarez moves from character to character, episode to episode, and place to place with absolute freedom. She gives herself access to the set of ideas in her characters. This is the point of view that is established in the novel from its inception. The third person omniscient point of view does not require Alvarez to stay outside the story. Alvarez is still free to add words to the text and also able to provide readers with whatever information she deems suitable at a time of her choosing.

First person plural describes the sisters in a “we” voice describing their collective difficulty to adapt to the American society. This point of view can be shared by those who experience the same journey.

Alvarez switches from various viewpoint confusing readers. However, she helps readers to follow the story by providing a subheading after each chapter title. She also supports the reading by listing the name of the main character on the upper right-hand cover of the odd numbered pages. For example, the first chapter *Antojos* is followed by the subheading *Yolanda*, the character telling the story. Yolanda’s name appears above the text on every odd numbered page of the narrating.

Even the subheadings can oftentimes confuse readers. The third chapter of the novel *The Four Girls*, with the subheading *Carla, Yolanda, Sandra, Sofía*, is in fact depicted from their mother’s viewpoint. In this chapter which is narrated by their mother, Alvarez reflects on various tragic, comic and dramatic moments the daughters endure and experience.

4.5 Language Devices

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents deals with the two languages that are simultaneously used through the novel. Spanish and English blends together from the

beginning of the story to the end. Alvarez plays upon the meaning of the words demonstrating to readers that the novel concerning immigrants must be taken seriously. Nevertheless, she uses a humorous style to minimize the serious consequences of immigration.

The novel contains several proverbs that are translated from Spanish to English. These proverbs appear in the novel to delight the reader who understands the Spanish language and the Dominican culture. However, the non-native reader also realizes that these proverbs are not taken from English:

No hay moros en la costa. - No moors on the coast. - This proverb is in the expression for the coast being clear. (Alvarez, 2004, 86)

Con paciencia y calma, hasta un burro sube la palma. - With patience and calm, even a burro can climb a palm. (Alvarez, 2004, 138)

Mi casa es su casa. - My house, your house. - This one is the traditional Dominican welcome. (Alvarez, 2004, 203)

En boca cerrada no entran moscas. - No flies fly into a closed mouth. (Alvarez, 2004, 209)

Another humorous play between Spanish and English occurs when the “four sisters” entertain themselves by translating the names of their relatives. Readers can see how Alvarez narrows the gap between languages using a playful humorous style:

We played with their names, translating them into literal English so they sounded ridiculous. Tía Concha became Aunt Conchshell, and Tía Asunción, Aunt Ascension; Tío Mundo was Uncle World; Paloma, our model cousin, turned into Pigeon, and for spite we surnamed her, accurately, Toed. (Alvarez, 2004, 111)

Alvarez wants to demonstrate that learning English is not easy for immigrants. Even though they study English at school, it is very difficult to adjust to a new language. Translations help them to understand the world around them.

Individual chapters in the novel are given titles in English. The chapter *Antojos* is

the only title in Spanish. Bridget Kevane notes that “it can be translated as “a craving for something you have to eat,” or a person “taken over by *un santo* [a saint] who wants something.” (Kevane, 2003, 22) It is an appropriate title for this chapter representing Yolanda’s craving for a sense of self.

The names of the García family are typical examples of a mixture of different languages. Alvarez uses the expression *Tía* for *Aunt*, *Tío* for *Uncle*, *Papito* for *Father* and *Mami* for *Father*. Even though the girls are in New York, they always named relatives using the Spanish expressions that are strongly rooted to their homeland.

According to Ciria, Alvarez is “decentering, deranging and cannibalizing the linguistic domination of English-the-nation-language of master discourse, through strategic inflections and other performative moves in semantic, syntactic and lexical codes.” (Ciria, 1999, 121) In spite of the fact that Alvarez is a professor of English in the United States she has chosen this style purposely.

Not only words, but manner of speech is also paramount to the story of the García girls. Language, in both its form and its content, is an important issue here. Communication is essential for each member of this immigrant family as they struggle with learning English. They are overwhelmed by strange vocabulary, difficult grammar and incomprehensible voice inflections and intonations.

5 The Use of Symbolism

Symbolism is an essential tool used to convey figurative meaning into literature. In addition, symbols are also evident in everyday life and a common theme of discourse in literary theories. Nevertheless, the term symbolism does not seem to be defined easily. Charles Chadwick defines symbolism as:

The art of expressing ideas and emotion not by describing them directly, nor by defining them through overt comparisons with concrete images, but by suggesting that these ideas and emotion are, by re-creating them in the mind of the reader through the use of unexplained symbols. (Chadwick, 1979, 2)

Another definition is given by Ross Murfin and Supryia Ray, who define a symbol as “a thing, image, or action that, although it is of interest in its own right, stands for or suggests something larger and more complex – often an idea or a range of interrelated ideas, attitudes, and practices.” (Murfin and Ray, 2008, 391) Instead of appropriating symbols generally used and understood within their culture, writers often create symbols by setting up, in their words, a complex but identifiable web of associations. As a result, one object, image, or action suggests others, and often, ultimately, a range of ideas. (Smith, 2000, 467) Furthermore, it is important to mention that the used symbols are not revealed openly or even named.

The symbols used in the novel *How the García Girls lost their Accents* present themselves in the form of words, characters and events. Alvarez deals with these particular images in the form of guava, snow, the kitten, the black bird, the yo-yo and the bottle of wine.

The guava is a favourite fruit for many children in the Dominican Republic. It symbolizes Yolanda’s memories. The fruit defines the relationship between Yolanda and the Island that she left 29 years ago. When Yolanda arrives on the Island, she wants to eat the guavas and irrationally look for them. She hopes that the guavas will remind her the childhood spent in the Dominican Republic. The following excerpt reveals that she is no longer the girl playing with her siblings at home. After spending so many years in the

United States, Yolanda is very much influenced by the social confines of her cultural environment. Desperately searching for guavas, her aunt advises her of the danger of getting lost, being kidnapped or raped. Yolanda does not go back to the Dominican reality but to the period before – to her childhood and memories. This situation is perfectly described in the chapter of *Yolanda*:

“I can’t wait to eat some quavas. Maybe I can pick some when I go north in a few days.

“By yourself?” Tía Carmen shakes her head at the mere thought.

“This is not the States,” Tía Flor says, with a knowing smile. (Alvarez, 2004, 9)

Nevertheless, this excerpt suggests that she never abandons the habits and independence, displayed by her risk-taking when searching for quavas. Additionally, Alvarez concludes this situation with Yolanda getting a flat tire. When two men want to help, she identifies herself as an American instead of a Dominican, which saves her from potential danger. Remembering her aunt’s words that she can be easily kidnapped, Yolanda does not want to risk her life:

The way back seems much longer than the way there. Yolanda begins to worry that they are lost, and the, the way worry sprouts worry, it strikes her that they haven’t heard or seen the other boys in quite a while. The latticework of branches reveals glimmers of a fading sky. The image of the guard in his elaborate flowering prison flashes through her head. The rustling leaves of the quava trees echo the warnings of her old aunts: you will get lost, you will get kidnapped, you will get raped, you will get killed. (Alvarez, 2004, 17)

Although Yolanda can eat guavas again, she realizes that she is not able to return to her former country. She internalizes the situation by creating an analogy expressed through being unable to return to a lost version of her personality. As William Luis explains: “Yolanda does not return to Dominican reality, but to the past of her childhood. [...] She cannot return to the past of her innocence, of Eve in Paradise, but to a life after that origin. Eve’s apple is the equivalent of Yolanda’s guavas.” (Luis, 2000, 846) If the apple forces Eve from paradise the guava allows Yolanda to return to the past of her memory, which

initiates her voyage to her origin.

Being in the United States, Carla, Yolanda, Sandra and Sofia experience new things concerning clothes, food, music, culture and even weather. Another symbol which is mentioned in the novel is snow. The girls attend their new school in New York where Yolanda is taught what an atomic bomb is, as well as how to protect in the event of an atomic catastrophe: “I heard new vocabulary: *nuclear bomb, radioactive fallout, bomb shelter*. Sister Zoe explained how it would happen. She drew a picture of a mushroom on the blackboard and dotted a flurry of chalkmarks for the dusty fallout that would kill us all. (Alvarez, 2004, 167)

One day the white snowflakes fall from the sky. Yolanda becomes confused due to the similarity between the unfamiliar powdery snow falling on the ground and the snow-like ash that blankets the ground long after a bomb is dropped. Yolanda screams the word “BOMB”, scaring classmates and the teacher. Ciria similarly concludes that: “It was December 1960 and after triumph of the Cuban Revolution, the menace of a war against the communists was in the air. That is why, Yolanda confuses the snow-something completely unknown for a Carribean-with a bomb.” (Ciria, 1999, 114) She describes in lyrical terms her vision of the streets and buildings covered by the white powder: ““Snow,” I repeated. I looked out the window warily. All my life I had heard about the white crystals that fell out of American skies in the winter. From my desk I watched the fine powder dust the sidewalk and parked cars below (Alvarez, 2004, 167) Alvarez shows readers that such a new thing can be terrifying for Yolanda when recognizing the snowflakes as an atomic bomb. Finally, she realizes what a delight it is: “Each flake was different, Sister Zoe had said, like a person, irreplaceable and beautiful.” (Alvarez, 2004, 167)

Alvarez mentions the theme of snow intentionally. Each snowflake is unique just like the people all around the world. She tries to compare Yolanda and her sisters to snowflakes trying to demonstrate the differences between American and Dominican culture.

The black bird represents Yolanda’s feelings in connection with a psychiatrist, Dr. Payne. Yolanda is in the mental hospital after ending the relationship with a man called John. Yolanda and John are not able to live together because of the fact that Yolanda does

not understand how John speaks using different vocabulary. The gap in communication leads not only to the breakdown of their relationship but also to the mental collapse of Yolanda. Alice Trupe similarly concludes that: “Hospitalized because of her consonant, compulsive speaking in riddles, and quotations, she has an allergic reaction to certain words, including “love” and her own name. (Trupe, 2011, 24) Experimenting with the words that cause her allergic reaction, she ends with an outpouring of words that “rumble of distant thunder, taking shape, depth, and substance. [...] “Doc, rock, smock, luck,” so many words. There is no end to what can be said about the world.” (Alvarez, 2004, 85)

Yolanda’s parents decide to take her into hospital where she falls in love with Dr. Payne. Eventually, she is not able to understand him because of the fact that he evokes sadness and anger. Trupe point out that: “As she watches Dr. Payne, her own pain gathers at a point in her stomach and bursts forth as a black bird, like Poe’s raven, which escapes through window and attacks the doctor, leaving her heart an empty nest.” (Trupe, 2011, 24) Alvarez depicts the picture of Yolanda seeing the black bird flying out of her mount:

She tries to laugh, but instead of laughter, she feels ticklish wings unfolding like a fan at the base of her throat. They spread her mouth open as if she were screaming a name out over a great distance. A huge, black bird springs out. (Alvarez, 2004, 83)

The black bird coming out her mouth symbolizes Yolanda’s unpleasant emotions when thinking about the language. The black bird moves without being controlled just as Yolanda’s speaking when being in the hospital.

The symbol of kitten refers to the scene in which Yolanda enters the coal shed with her drum finding kittens behind the barrel. She considers whether to take a kitten from the mother’s litter. Not being certain if she can touch the kitten, Yolanda decides to discuss this problematic situation with a hunter who goes around the coal shed:

“Can you play with a brand-new kitten or will the mother abandon it or blind you if she catches you and by when can you take a kitten from its mother to keep as a pet?” “Well!” the man said, looking at me closely but with friendliness in his eyes. “About drumsticks, eh? Well, just as your drumsticks belong with its mother, and no else will do.” [...] “To take it

away would be ...” The man considered words. “To take it away would be a violation of its natural right to live.” The man saw I did not understand him. “It would die,” he said plainly. [...] “You must wait until that kitten can make it on its own. (Alvarez, 2004, 284-285)

Like the kitten, Yolanda is also removed from her childhood spent in the Dominican Republic. It is a reminiscence of the shocking trauma she endured when being taken from her natural environment. Yolanda spends the rest of her life searching for the origin to her past. Similarly, Luis depicts the coal shed as “the origin of memory and the story, which motivates Yolanda to return to the island, possibly to stay forever.” (Luis, 2000, 840) The novel is an attempt to understand memory, the past and the era when the Garcia sisters lost their innocence and accents.

Regarding Yolanda, who is caught between the two worlds, Alvarez demonstrates the symbol of the yo-yo. As Christopher David Ruiz Cameron notes: “As a Spanish-speaking immigrant, she spends her girlhood struggling to reconcile the concepts she understands in Spanish with the new ones that she is learning in English.” (Cameron, 1997, 1371) She is called: Yolanda, Yo in Spanish, Joe in English, Joey, Yosita and Yoyo. Returning to the Island, she decides to stay there in order to find her identity changing into the American Joe from the Dominican Yolanda. As critic Pauline Newton point out: “Joey” and “Yoe” are names that her “monolingual” husband likely would use, whereas her family calls her “YoYo” or “Yo,” and these different names confound her understanding of herself.” (Newton, 2005, 59)

As mentioned above, one of her nicknames is YoYo which symbolizes a toy going up and down, moving from one side to the other. Yo-yo characterizes the movement from one culture to the other just like Yolanda’s bicultural identity. As Juan Rivera claims, the symbol of the yo-yo “oscillates between her Dominican identity and American one. It can be joyful as well as painful.” (Rivera, 2010, 128)

The last symbol in the novel represents a bottle of wine in connection to the character of Yolanda. Her first boyfriend, Rudy Elmenhurst, affects her as a woman. He tries to seduce her but she is afraid of getting pregnant. Moreover, she is not able to have sex with someone who appreciates only her physical appearance instead of her personality. Five year later - after their separation – Rudy Elmenhurst calls Yolanda asking whether he

can visit her. She agrees and so he comes over in the evening bringing the bottle of expensive Bordeaux. Shortly after the arrival Rudy Elmenhurst offers Yolanda to have sex. Even though Yolanda has become sexually active, she still refuses him as a lover. After Rudy Elmenhurst leaves, Yolanda tries to open the bottle of wine which symbolizes her sexual release:

I put the bottle between my legs and pulled so hard that not only did I jerk the crumbled cork out but I sprayed myself with expensive Bordeaux. [...] I held the bottle up to my mouth and drew a long messy swallow, as if I were some decadent wild woman who had just dismissed an unsatisfactory lover. (Alvarez, 2004, 103)

6 Bicultural Identity

This part of the diploma thesis deals with the question of bicultural identity. First, it is necessary to think a bit more about identity and concepts that are in relation to this topic.

The issue of identity has a history. At one time it was taken for granted that a person had a 'given' identity. According to Madan Sarup, the debates around it today assume that identity is not a basic part of a person but that it arises while interacting with others and the focus is on the processes by which identity is constructed (Sarup, 1996, 14).

Identity provides immigrants with the means of answering the following questions: *Who am I?* and *How should I live?* These questions cannot be considered in isolation from each other. Understanding who I am is extremely important to understanding how I should live and understanding how I live is crucial to understanding who I am. As Kim Atkins states:

These early life experiences set up psychological, affective, physical, agential, and moral structures that tie us inextricably to others throughout our entire lives. For this reason, questions about who I am and how I should live need to be addressed in the context of an interpersonal, cultural, and historical setting. (Atkins, 2008, 1)

Our lives are constantly entangled with the lives of others. This is demonstrated within interpersonal relations as well as the authenticity that human beings are embodied and come into existence through the bodies of other human beings. The survival of them depends upon the most intimate human interactions. After relocation to the American culture, the development of the García family goes through a process of adaptation to the new environment. They are not influenced only by their dominant cultural values, ideals and attitudes, but also by their original cultural habits.

Adaptation of the García family is a very complicated process. The girls and their parents need to reconcile two cultural environments: the original culture in which they were born and the host culture in which they find their new home.

Each of the characters in the novel can be described as a collection of various identities. These identities can be defined from a personal or social point of view. Personal identity is typical for its social role that the person performs. On the other hand, social identity is defined as the individual's knowledge that belongs to certain social group together with some emotional and value significance (Abrams and Hogg, 1999, 462). Additionally, the social identity refers to persons or social groups that are distinguished by various characteristics on the basis of gender, religion or language. Sarup claims that:

When considering someone's identity, there is necessarily a process of selection, emphasis and consideration of the effect of social dynamics such as class, nation ethnicity, gender and religion. [...] When asked about our identity, we start thinking about our life-story. (Sarup, 1996, 15)

Sarup thinks about identity as a social construction and as a process of interaction between people and institutions. According to him, identity is a result of socializing. When mentioning some of the parts of the construction of a socio-cultural identity, Sarup says that every nation has its own story and its own culture, which provides self-awareness of individuals. (Sarup, 1996, 131) The issue regarding identity is not considered being solved at all. Instead of thinking of identity as an accomplished feat, this issue should be taken as action that is never completed and always in process.

As was already discussed, the identity is shaped by a number of social, environmental and cultural factors. Each new experience and change has the ability to redefine the concept of self. With each new change immigrants balance their existing self concept with the new ones generated as a result of new experiences. The concept of existing and building a new identity is the primary component of the bicultural identity where the immigrants are active at the point of conjunction of two cultures. Nancy Goldberger summarizes the concept of biculturalism in her research on the minorities in the United States as:

These stories touch on the pain and anger and confusion that accompany acculturation; on the power of dominant cultures to impose ways of being and ways of knowing on individuals from minority cultures and immigrant

groups; on the paths of resistance or accommodation to assimilation forces; on what it means to be “an American”; on the personal losses and the gains as one learns to take on new culture, different language, alien mores; on what it feels like to live as a bicultural individual with dual consciousness, dual realities, and dual allegiances. (Goldberger, 1996, 337)

Bicultural identity is a very important construct helping us to better capture the diversity of the cultural environment. Each society in the world consists of a group of people that differs from mainstream society. The issue of bicultural identity is examined from various perspectives which are analysed in the following parts of this diploma thesis.

6.1 Language

One of the crucial components of culture is the language. In the words of Peter Sedgwick “there are many approaches to language. From a common-sense standpoint, language might be taken as a vehicle for the communication of thoughts. Hence, meaning and its transmission is essentials to a definition of what language is. (Sedgwick, 2002, 205)

It is generally considered that the relationship between language and identity can be very complicated for immigrants who come from a different background. Deborah Plant offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for examining the language:

The self is constituted by language. Language precedes identity [and] language is what grants humans the self-reflexive dimension of their consciousness and their ability to interact with others, thereby developing their own subjectivity. In other words, without language, human beings cannot develop their own subjectivity. So, if a person is stripped of his language, he is unable to interact with other human beings, and unless he creates a new language, the language becomes dead, and does the spirit of that culture and its people. (Plant, 2010, 192)

For the García girls who speak Spanish, learning a new language is a very arduous process, especially if learning English needs to be acquired as quickly as possible. The girls have to struggle with several problems which are accompanied by their new life in the United States. An interesting idea concerning the position of immigrants is written in the

book *Immigrant America* by Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut. They point out that learning to live in the two social worlds is a requisite of immigrant adaptation. In a world so different from one's native land, much has to be learned to cope – especially regarding the new language. Newcomers unable to speak English in the Anglo-American world face enormous obstacles. Learning English is a primary step enabling them to participate in the life of the majority, getting an education, finding a job, obtaining a driver's license, and getting an access to health care and social services. Language has often been cited as the principal initial barrier confronting immigrants (Portes, 2006, 206-207). As critic John Hoffman summarizes the aspect of the novel:

Not only words, but also the manner of speech is significant to the story of the García girls' coming-of-age in America. Language, in both its form and its content, is as important unifying agent here, every bit as essential as the strong family connections throughout this loosely woven work. Communication is of fundamental concern for each member of this immigrant family as they struggle with the strange vocabulary, difficult grammar, and incomprehensible voice rhythms of their newly acquired English in order to tell their stories.” (Hoffman, 1998, 22)

The García sisters are all enrolled at the Catholic school one block away from the house they live. All four sisters are put back a year when they arrived in the United States. One of the sisters, Carla, is recommended to stay in the sixth grade instead of advancing to the seventh grade. At the age of twelve, Carla is at least a year older than most of her classmates. As Alvarez describes in the novel: “she felt mortified at the thought of having to repeat yet another year.” (Alvarez, 2004, 152) Carla has a chance to practice her English but simultaneously she does not want to be in the same grade as her younger sister, Sandi.

Children of immigrants need to speak English in order to fit into their peer group at school. Generally speaking, English makes them feel emboldened at school while Spanish makes them feel safe at home within their families. Carla as the oldest daughter has great difficulty fitting into social and cultural environment relating to the habits, traditions, beliefs and language. This is concerned also with her inability to understand signs properly:

Carla soon knew her school route *by heart*, an expressions she used for

weeks after she learnt it. First, she walked down the block by heart, noting the infinitesimal differences between the look-alike houses: different color drapes, an azalea bush on the left side of the door instead of in the right, a mailbox or door with a doodad of some kind. Then by heart, she walked the long mile by the deserted farmland lot with the funny sign. Finally, a sharp right down the service road into the main thoroughfare, where by heart she boarded the bus. (Alvarez, 2004, 152-153)

Carla is confused by signs written in English which signify a particular meaning. She rather uses her orientation instead of her ability to read. Of course she can read, but she is not able to deduce the accurate meaning. As Trupe similarly concludes, Carla's fragile self-confidence while finding her way through the streets of New York City suffers a setback. The referred incident occurs on her long walk along a stretch of empty land, fenced off a "No Trespassing" sign that Carla at first interprets as a reminder to be good, remembering the phrase from *The Lord's Prayer*. (Trupe, 2011, 26) In her confusion, the mother explains Carla what the sign stands for: "Mami laughed. Words sometimes meant two things in English too. This trespass meant that no one must go inside the property because it was public like a park, but private. Carla nodded, disappointed. She would never get the hang of this new country. (Alvarez, 2004, 151)

This situation happens at the beginning of their new life in the United States. The novel reflects on Carla's frustration with both the foreign language and bizarre culture of the host country. She feels alone and certain that she will always be an outsider without a home in the United States. As Sirias mentions, at this point in the narrative, when Carla is feeling most vulnerable and alone, Alvarez introduces the exposure incident to reinforce the hostility that at times underlies the Americanization process. It is a testimony to Carla's strength of character and to her intelligence that she goes on not only to master the language, but also to earn a doctorate in psychology. (Sirias, 2001, 32-33)

After some time Carla starts to acquire the second language, English. When Carla arrived into the United States together with her family, she was just a little girl. Following the plot, readers are informed that Carla (thirty-one years old) improved a lot when considering her language. It is important to mention that all of the four García sisters have to struggle with acquiring English.

Another example of Carla's difficulty to understand and produce the language is the situation when she returns home from school. She has been attending the school about a month when she is followed by a car on her mile walk home from the bus stop. In the car is a man and waves at her to come closer:

The men smiled a friendly smile, but there was something wrong with it that Carla couldn't put her finger on: this smile had bruised, sorry quality as if the man were someone who'd been picked on all his life, and so his smiles were appeasing, not friendly. He was wearing his red shirt unbuttoned, which seemed normal given the warm Indian-summer day. In fact, if Carla's legs hadn't begun to grow hairs, she would have taken off her school-green socks and walked home bare-legged. The man spoke up. "Whereyagoin?" he asked, running all his words together the way the Americans always did. Carla was, as usual, not quite sure if she had heard right. (Alvarez, 2004, 156-157)

Even though Carla does not understand his English, she is able to conceive what the man is doing. In fact the man is naked from the waist down. As Carla holds her schoolbag tightly in her hands, her mouth hangs open. After Carla gets home, her mother calls the police. When the officer asks whether she would like to file charges, the mother does not understand: "well, ma'am, if you want to file charges, we have to talk to her." "File charges? What does that mean, file charges?" (Alvarez, 2004, 159) There is a sigh of exasperation. A too-patient voice with dividers between each word explains the legal procedures as if repeating a history lesson Carla's mother had learned long before she troubles the police or moves into this neighborhood. Even the police officer, who is called to help them, makes Carla and her mother feel unwelcome. His behavior and the tone of his voice gives them a clear message: if you want to live in the United States, you have to learn English. When Carla is asked to describe what happened to her, her attempts to find the right words are useless. Carla does not know what can be the name of the man's genitals. She came to the country before she had reached puberty, so a lot of the key words are missing in her mind. She studies English in a Catholic classroom, where nobody mentions the words she is searching for. This is a very stressful situation for her.

Two all-American-looking, gun-bearing policemen examine Carla and ask whether she remembers the model of the car. Her difficulties in reporting take the following forms.

Firstly, she does not know enough about American cars to identify the model. Secondly, she lacks appropriate English words and knowledge to describe the entire situation. It is even demanding for her to realize and comprehend what happened to her.

“Could you describe the vehicle the suspect was driving?” She wasn’t sure what a vehicle was or suspect, for that matter. Her mother translated into simpler English, “What car was the man driving, Carla?” “A big car,” Carla mumbled. As if she hadn’t answered in English, her mother repeated for the officer, “A big green car.” “What make?” the officer wanted to know. “Make?” Carla asked. “You know, Ford, Chrysler, Plymouth.” The man ended his catalogue with a sigh. Carla and her mother were wasting his time. “¿Qué clase de carro?” her mother asked in Spanish, but of course she knew Carla wouldn’t know the make of a car. Carla shook her head, and her mother explained to the officer, helping her save face, “She doesn’t remember.” “Can’t she talk?” the gruff cop snapped. (Alvarez, 2004, 161)

After meeting the naked man in the car, Carla is also forced to cope with the torment of the police officer who makes her feel embarrassed and humiliated: “there was no meanness in this face, no kindness either. No recognition of the difficulty she was having in trying to describe what she had seen with her tiny English vocabulary.” (Alvarez, 2004, 162) Soon after the incident, the interview ends. The police officers take the notes and give Carla and her mother a salute of farewell. Afterwards, all she wants is to return back to the Dominican Republic.

The next excerpt focuses on Yolanda and her difficulties emerging from Yolanda’s adaptation to the language. She has to use a dictionary very often in order to understand the meaning:

Back in those days I had what one teacher called “a vivacious personality.” I had to look up the word in the dictionary and was relieved to find out it didn’t mean I had problems. English was then still a party favor for—crack open the dictionary, find out if I’d just been insulted, praised, admonished, criticized. (Alvarez, 2004, 87)

Although Yolanda is able to react without translating the vocabulary, she is not able to articulate thoughts in descriptive and longer sentences. Alvarez mentions the situation when Yolanda is invited for lunch by her classmate and first college love – Rudy

Elmenhurst:

“Can we have lunch sometime?” [...] I had nothing in my vocabulary of human behavior to explain him. [...] “How about tomorrow before class?” Rudy said. “We don’t have class tomorrow.” “That gives us time for a long lunch,” he answered. [...] “Okay,” I said, shaking my head. “Tomorrow, lunch.” (Alvarez, 2004, 92)

Throughout the novel, Yolanda starts to rely on the language assisting her to form an opinion about her personal choices. She hopes that putting the events into words will clarify her own decisions. She has communication barriers with language in a relationship with Rudy Elmenhurst who tries unsuccessfully to seduce her. Yolanda and Rudy Elmenhurst are raised differently and this fact also affects how they interact socially. She has a traditional father who does not allow anything what is not in accordance with the social norm. Yolanda was raised in a more traditional upbringing that did not allow any drugs or alcohol and premarital sex was considered taboo. On the other hand, Rudy Elmenhurst is a young man from a liberal family in the United States. He also has to adapt to American culture but he is not raised so strictly as Yolanda. The way of life affects how he interacts in social situations. Alvarez points out how Yolanda and Rudy Elmenhurst work on the sonnet for the class together:

We spent most of the weekend together, writing it, actually me writing down lines and crossing them off when they didn’t scan or rhyme, and Rudy coming up with the ideas. It was the first pornographic poem I’d ever co-written; of course I didn’t know it was pornographic until Rudy explained to me all the word plays and double meanings. “The coming of the spring upon the boughs,” was the last line. That meant spring was ejaculating green leaves on the trees; the new crocuses were standing stiff on the lawn on account of they were turned on. I was shocked by all of this. I was a virgin; I wasn’t one hundred percent sure how sex worked. That anyone should put all of this into a poem, a place I’d reserved for deep feelings and lofty sentiments! (Alvarez, 2004, 93)

This excerpt examines how they deal with the pornographic sonnet. Whereas Rudy Elmenhurst writes what he wants in order to get attention and to be noticed, Yolanda follows the instruction of the teacher how to write the sonnet. Rudy Elmenhurst explains

her the sexual double meaning within images of nature. Yolanda is a virgin and does not understand his strategies of flirtation and the language. She can be characterized as quiet and shy person. On the other hand Rudy Elmenhurst is loud and likes to be the center of attention.

Yolanda and Rudy Elmenhurst speak different languages, figuratively and literally. His native English and personality gives him a way of behaving that Yolanda does not understand. She notices that he is more comfortable with the language. In comparison with Rudy Elmenhurst, Yolanda cannot use English casually. She worries about the terms he uses for sex:

“What do you mean, *don't say it that way*? [...] Perhaps if Rudy had acted a little more as if lovemaking were a workshop of sorts, things might have moved more swiftly towards his desired conclusion. But the guy had no sense of connotation in bed. His vocabulary turned me off even as I was beginning to acknowledge my body's pleasure. If Rudy had said, *Sweet lady, lay across my big, soft bed and let me touch your dear, exquisite body*, I might have felt up to being felt up. But I didn't want to just be in the sack, screwed, ballet, laid and fucked my first time around with a man. (Alvarez, 2004, 96-97)

Yolanda complains that Rudy Elmenhurst fails to understand the importance of connotation and varied vocabulary in bed. He is not able to analyze that *screwing* is different from *making love*. Due to the fact that every word choice can alter the meaning, Yolanda and Rudy Elmenhurst are not able to live together harmoniously.

Bilingualism is another issue that deserves to be analysed within the framework of the novel. Cultural context in which bilingualism flourished needs to be considered as well. “This is typically in culturally plural societies, where the process of acculturation is underway.” (Berry, 1992, 168) The core of bilingualism is defined as: “the ability of persons or communities to meet [...] the communicative demands of the self or the society in two or more languages in interaction with the speakers of any or all of these languages.” (Berry, 1992, 169)

The importance of learning English has a lot to do with making sure the child will have a career that has no limits. Having a child who speaks fluently two languages will not

only open the doors in the United States, but anywhere else. Every child who emigrated should be able to have two languages (De Anda, 2004, 121). Parents usually support their children to study the target language in the country to which they emigrated to. They try to motivate them by using their own experience of discrimination and prejudice. The parents of García sisters see bilingual education as a way which can help their daughters to emphasize the economic, social and psychological benefits. They also see it as a chance to improve the quality of their children's lives. The mother of the García sisters wants the girls to attend school every day. She does not allow them to miss any lessons at school in order to learn as much as possible. Even though the girls sometimes have problems at school, their mother always persuades them to go and to study. Alvarez mentions the situation when the girls want to go to the city instead of going to the school:

Her daughters would seek her out at night when she seemed to have a moment to talk to them: they were having trouble at school or they wanted her to persuade their father to give them permission to go into the city or to a shopping mall or a movie – in broad daylight, Mami! Laura would wave them out of her room. “The problem with you girls...”[...] “You girls are going to drive me crazy!” she threatened, if they kept nagging. “When I end up in Bellevue, you’ll be safely sorry!” (Alvarez, 2004, 134-135)

Having some troubles at school, the girls do not want to go there. Their mother is strictly against missing the school realizing how difficult it is to express her own opinion in English. She took some English courses in the town but it is not easy for her to deal with the language. Alvarez describes her language skills in the example of her reaction to daughters missing school in order to visit the city: “she spoke in English when she argued with them. And her English was a mishmash of mixed-up idioms and sayings that showed she was “green behind the ears,” as she called it.” (Alvarez, 1991, 135) The girls try to correct her but she stands by her statement: “Remember that time we took the car to Bear Mountain, and we re-ah-lized that we had forgotten to pack an opener with our pick-a-nick?” (Alvarez, 2004, 137) Even though her pronunciation is poor, the mother does not care about it too much.

Research, conducted by professors at the University of Southern California, discovered links between language and acquisition which now gives us greater

understanding of the role of acquiring language in correlation with learning a new language. One of the outcomes of this research is that young learners are exceptionally good at acquiring languages. (Krashen, 1982, 179) In accordance with this research the García sisters are able to speak English without any problems while their parents will not become successful as their daughters.

The García girls stand at a crossroads between two different languages which are connected with their identity. “Here they were trying to fit in America among Americans; they needed help figuring out who they were.” (Alvarez, 2004, 138) Yolanda struggles with finding her own place in the new country which is linked to finding her own identity. Simultaneously, as she tries to fit into her new life, she becomes interested in writing. She learns English through writing poems in order to feel at home in her new environment, in order to fill the gap opening between her and the people around her. In the ninth grade, Yolanda is chosen by her English teacher, Sister Mary Joseph, to deliver the Teacher’s Day address at the school assembly. Alvarez depicts her progress in acquiring English and in the learning process itself:

Back in the Dominican Republic growing up, Yoyo had been a terrible student. No one could ever get her to sit down to a book. But in New York, she needed to settle somewhere, and since the natives were unfriendly, and the country inhospitable, she took root in the language. By high school, the nuns were reading her stories and compositions out loud in English class. But the spectre of delivering a speech brown-nosing the teachers jammed her imagination. At first she didn’t want to and she couldn’t seem to write that speech. She should have thought of it as “a great horror, “as her father called it. But she was mortified. She still had a slight accent, and she did not like to speak in public, subjecting herself to her classmates’ ridicule. (Alvarez, 2004, 141)

This excerpt shows that Yolanda does not like studying. As mentioned above, there is not a single person who persuades her to study in the Dominican Republic. Everything changes while she is in New York. Considering the character of Yolanda, readers can see that her attitude towards English is not a positive one. Her English pronunciation is poor. For detouring the English language itself she uses the expression ‘that speech’. Attending the school, she starts to realize that the only way how to communicate is through writing. One

of Yolanda's tasks is to write a speech to be given to her class. She is very nervous before the speech in front of her classmates and teachers. Her following success with the speech signifies that she finds her true voice in the new language, thus becoming a confident person:

The weekend before the assembly Monday morning Yoyo went into panic. [...] Laura tried to calm her down. "Just remember how Mister Lincoln couldn't think of anything to say at the Gettysburg, but then, bang! *Four score and once upon a time ago*," she began reciting. "Something is going to come if you just relax. You'll see, like the Americans say, *Necessity is the daughter of invention*. I'll help you." [...] That Sunday evening, Yoyo was reading some poetry to get herself inspired: Whitman's poems in an old book with an engraved cover her father had picked up in a thrift shop next to his office. I celebrate myself and sing myself ... *He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher*. The poet's words shocked and thrilled her. She had gotten used to the nuns, a literature of appropriate sentiments, poems with a message, expurgated texts. But here was a flesh and blood man, belching and laughing and sweating in poems. *Who touches this book touches a man*. That night, at last, she started to write, recklessly, three, five pages, looking up once only to see her father passing by the hall on tiptoe. When Yoyo was done, she read over her words, and her eyes filled. She finally sounded like herself in English! (Alvarez, 2004, 142-143)

Focusing on the language from the opposing point of view, parents usually do not realize the danger of losing their mother tongue. Many of them wrongly assume that since their children learnt Spanish as their first language, they will keep it without any problems even after the acquisition of English. As Alejandra Rodriquez-Galindo points out:

Since many [Latino parents] learn their second language as adults when they are not at risk of losing their first language [...] It is not readily apparent that the situation for their children is quite the opposite. [...] The preeminent status of English in schools and in the larger society, together with the social pressure to become "American" (i.e. speak English), is a tremendous pressure facing Latino children that makes it very difficult for them to maintain their native language (Rodriquez-Galindo, 2006, 58)

Some parents send their children back to their home countries in order to live with their relatives for some time, in attempt to prevent the loss of Spanish. The García family

also sends the daughters to the Dominican Republic so that they will not lose ties with their native country. Their relatives encourage them to speak Spanish instead of English. The girls sometimes find themselves unable to answer their questions. As Alvarez comments on: “our Spanish was full of English. Countless times during a conversation, we were corrected, until what we had to say was lost in our saying it wrong. More and more we chose to answer in English even when the question was posed in Spanish.” (Alvarez, 2004, 32)

When speaking about the loss of language, Alvarez depicts Spanish of the García family in the situation when they are invited to the Spanish restaurant with their friends in New York. Fifi wants to order dinner but she is not able to understand the menu written in Spanish: “How about some paella, girls, or *camarones a la vinagreta*. [...] “Mami,” Fifi whispered, “what’s *pastolone*?” “*Pastelón*, Cuca.” (Alvarez, 2004, 179)

The last excerpt examines Yolanda who is sent back to the Dominican Republic for the whole summer. Spending the holidays with her aunts, uncles and cousins, her relatives are happy about Yolanda’s return. Even though Yolanda is a native-speaker, she was not in touch with her mother tongue for a long time. Readers can notice that cultural background has the influence on the language itself:

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’ll be back into her native tongue, the aunts insist. Yes, and when she returns to the States, she’ll find herself suddenly going blank over some word in English or, like her mother, mixing up some common phrase. (Alvarez, 2004, 7)

As another experience can be exemplified during the evening when Yolanda is asked how she would like to spend her time in the Dominican Republic. Her relatives want to hear her plans: “any little *antojo*, you must tell us!” Tía Carmmen agrees. “what’s an *antojo*?” Yolanda asks. See! Her aunts are right. After so many years away, she is losing her Spanish. (Alvarez, 2004, 8)

The loss of Spanish is a frequent and threatening phenomenon affecting Latino children. The problem has to be taken seriously from the very beginning. While the

acquisition of the new language needs to be supported, enough space has to be dedicated to practicing the native language. Since Latino children deal with pressure promoting English and Anglo-American culture at the expense of maintaining Spanish, sufficient positive value must be actively attached to retain the Latino heritage.

6.2 Sexuality and Gender Roles

Another important issue in terms of identity is the problem dealing with sexuality and gender roles. In the novel, Alvarez depicts the fundamental differences between women and men both in the Dominican Republic and the United States.

The Dominican Republic is described as a country with a typical patriarchal society. In the opening section of the novel, Alvarez introduces the patriarchal order of the upper-class García family. At first glance it appears that Yolanda García's rich aunts and cousins do not lack freedom and socioeconomic power. Alvarez describes the relatives as "cousins and women with households and authority in their voices." (Alvarez, 2004, 11) In fact, the reality of their independence is different. Even though the women of the García family are part of the upper-class having access to privileges of education, these privileges are controlled by their husbands. When Yolanda returns back to the Dominican Republic she meets her extensive family. While welcoming Yolanda home, she meets her cousin Carmencita explaining to her that education is the priority of men:

"Carmencita!" Yolanda cries out. "I wasn't recognizing you before." "Older, not wiser." Carmencita's quip in English is the product of her two or three years away in boarding school in the States. Only the boys stay for collage. (Alvarez, 2004, 6)

Alvarez accurately depicts Dominican's education and notices the difference between a male and female access to higher education. Yolanda is very surprised regarding the fact that women have limited position in the Dominican culture as opposed men. As the critic Manuela Matas Llorente points out: "Life on the island is linked to patriarchal domination. There is complete separation between men and women." (Llorente, 2001, 71)

The other difference that is evident in the novel is the fact that Dominican women are conservative and one of their social roles is being dependent on their husbands. In the words of Sirias “women’s voices have been silenced, their stories receive little or no attention. Women and female qualities are relegated to secondary status.” (Sirias, 2001, 44) Despite the fact that they are not forced to do housework, women from the upper-class reflect typical gender roles with respect to governing over their household. They also do not have any objection against mistresses taken by their men. This is described in the situation when Yolanda recognizes the social background in her homeland:

After cake and *cafecitos*, the cousins will disperse down these paths to their several compound houses. There they will supervise their cooks in preparing supper for the husbands, who will troop home after Happy Hour. Once a male cousin bragged that this pre-dinner hour should be called Whore Hour. He was not reluctant to explain to Yolanda that this is the hour during which a Dominican male of a certain class stops in on his mistress on his way home to his wife. (Alvarez, 2004, 6)

Yolanda hears from one of her cousins that it is normal to have mistress visiting the husband on the way home. This excerpt shows the deceptiveness of female authority. Similarly, Sirias depicts women’s role as “that of wife, mother, and mistress of the house, nothing more.” (Sirias, 2001, 50)

This novel addresses the problems concerning a social class system by focusing on issue of a hierarchical society. This assuredly contains gender conditioning as inferred by the articulation of patriarchal dominance. Even though the García’s women do not experience oppression in the patriarchal society due to a certain amount of economic power, they are still under the pressure of male dominion. Their economic distinction is usually recognized by their wealthy fathers or husbands. It gives them an affirmation of male authority and prestige as well. For example, one of the Yolanda’s aunts is “the head of the clan and so hers is the largest house.” (Alvarez, 2004, 7)

Despite what has been formerly discussed, the upper-class women enjoy this relative power. Tía Flor belongs to the upper-class, affording her to behave in an arrogant way to the men who are parts of the lower-class:

“The chauffeur was driving me to my novena yesterday. Suddenly, the car jerks forward and dies, right there on the street. I’m alarmed, you know, the way things are, a big car stalled in the middle of the university *barrio*. I say, *Cécar, what can it be?* He scratched his head. *I don’t know, Doña Flor.* A nice man stops to help, checks it all – and says, *Why, señora, you’re out of gas.* Out of gas! Can you imagine?” Tía Flor shakes her head. “A chauffer who can’t keep a car in gasoline! (Alvarez, 2004, 5)

Alvarez demonstrates not only the position of women from the upper-class society but also the position of women who serve in the house of the García family in the Dominican Republic. The maids in the García family clearly suffer a subordinate status.

The novel emphasizes the patriarchal system in a society that seeks to manipulate the false consciousness in order to maintain its own authority. It provides the illusion of female power in the domestic space while keeping male dominion in the social sphere. Alvarez unveils the limitation of female power even within the domestic space of wealthy housewives. She offers readers an interesting view of the impediment of gender roles through the mother of the girls. While being in the United States, Carla understands her position within the García family. Alvarez focuses on the situation when Carlos reads the Dominican newspaper considering whether the family should go back to the Dominican Republic or not. Laura on the other hand likes her new position in the American society:

Into the master bedroom where Carlos was propped up on his pillows, still awake, reading the Dominican newspaper, already days old. Now that the dictatorship had been toppled, he had become interested in his country’s fate again. The interim government was going to hold the first free elections in thirty years. History was in the making, freedom and hope were in the air again! There was still some question in his mind whether or not he might move his family back. But Laura had gotten used to the life here. She did not want to go back to the old country where, de la Torre or not, she was only a wife and a mother (and a failed one at that, since she had never provided the required son). Better an independent nobody than a high-class houseslave. (Alvarez, 2004, 143-144)

Being cognizant of her limited position in the Dominican Republic, Carla’s role as a mother and a wife is totally different from the position of women in the United States. She likes the idea that women are treated as adequate and equal members of society.

Not only Carla, but also the girls identify with the concept of independence. The girls begin to enjoy American life due to the freedom. Alvarez gives readers a lot of background information on the lifestyle of American society. Therefore, the story is very effective. She describes the atmosphere at the time as: “The Beatles or Bob Dylan or The Mamas and the Papas blasted from stereos. [...] There were the heavy rooms for dropping acid or taking mushrooms. [...] It was a decadent atmosphere.” (Alvarez, 2004, 95) The girls begin to adapt into American society, however, their parents are not fully appeased by their newfound freedom. For that reason, the parents send them every summer to the Island to prevent them from taking advantage of this new liberty.

While being back in the Dominican Republic, Laura finds a bag of marihuana in the room of the girls. Sofia takes the blame for it and she is given the choice of staying on the Island for the following year or returning to New York where she is forced to attend a local catholic school. She chooses to stay on the Island where she begins to date a man called Manuel Gustavo. When the other girls return to visit her the following summer, they discover that she begins obeying Manuel Gustavo’s tyrannical commands about what she can do: “Fifi can’t wear pants in public. Fifi can’t talk to another man. Fifi can’t leave the house without his permission. And what’s most disturbing is that Fifi, feisty, lively Fifi, is letting this man tell her what she can do and cannot do.” (Alvarez, 2004, 120)

The reader must notice the concept of machismo and how it relates to Dominican society. Although the term originated in the study of Latin-American society, the concept has now extended into studies focusing on male power structures. In addition, they highlight relationships in which a man exerts an inordinate amount of control over women’s behavior. In essence, when referring to the concept of machismo, which has *macho*, Spanish for “male gender,” as its root, it connotes strength, bravery, power and importance. These qualities are viewed as those the ideal man possesses within a patriarchal society. Thus, in such a society, machismo becomes institutionalized. The man has the power and the authority to make decisions for the women under his protectorate. Men also attempt to control women’s behavior. (Sirias, 2001, 44)

Alvarez draws a picture of Manuel Gustavo who perfectly represents the concept of machismo in the novel. Focusing on his relationship to Sofía, Alvarez shows how the

man's behavior influences Sofia's life. This excerpt is taken from the part of the novel when the girls visiting the Dominican Republic find one of their sisters under the influence of Manuel Gustavo. One day Sofia, who rarely reads anymore, becomes absorbed in one of the novels. Her boyfriend arrives, and when no one answers the door, he comes in the back way. Sofia sees him and her face lights up:

She is about to put aside her book, when Manuel Gustavo reaches down and lifts it out of her hands. "This," Manuel Gustavo says, holding the book up like a dirty diaper, "is junk in your head. You have better things to do." He tosses the book on the coffee table. Fifi pales, though her two blushed-on cheeks blush on. She stands quickly, hands on her hips, eyes narrowing, the Fifi we know and love. "You have no right to tell me what I can and can't do!" "*Que no?*" Manule challenges. "No!" Fifi asserts. One by one we three sisters exit, cheering Fifi on under our breaths. A few minutes later we hear the pickup roar down the driveway, and Fifi comes sobbing into the bedroom. "Fifi, he asked for it," we say. "Don't let him push around. You're a free spirit," we remind her. But within the hour, Fifi is on the phone with Manuelito, pleading for forgiveness. (Alvarez, 2004, 120-121)

The excerpt describes Manuel as a tyrant who discourages Sofia from reading because women are not supposed to develop their intellect. As mentioned above, Sofia is very much influenced by Manuel Gustavo. Even though Sofia lives in the United States for a number of years, she acculturates to the Island's way of life accepting Manuel's dominance with little or no resistance. As Melissa Ames explains "it is (at least outwardly) for a person to adapt to a culture and become part of it. But just as important, and seemingly contradictorily, the person may revert back to the earlier cultural prescriptions." (Ames, 2011, 129)

Additionally, Yolanda's sisters do not understand Manuel's behavior. They live in the United States where the relationship between man and woman is completely different. They are worried about Sofia who is not the same person anymore. Instead of being independent she relies on her boyfriend. Just like her aunts dealing with the position within the family, Sofia accept this way of life: "Look at me, I'm a queen," [...] "My husband has to go to work every day. I can sleep until noon, if I want. I'm going to protest for my *rights?*" (Alvarez, 2004, 121) Sirias sees the function of machismo in a similar manner:

“The problem is that Fifi and the women around her believe in the prevailing order. Thus, they comply with their mates’ demands, however unreasonable and outmoded they may seem to the contemporary mind.” (Sirias, 2001, 45)

Manuel’ machismo and Sofia’s acquiescence nature is what the other sisters are not able to accept. Their desire is to rescue Sofia from his dangerous influence. One of the sisters, Carla, talks to Manuel Gustavo trying to explain that Sofia is an independent woman. She is a child psychologist viewing the problem from her professional point of view:

“Manuel, why do you feel so upset when Fifi is on her own? Carla’s manner is straight out of her Psych 101 textbook. “Women don’t do that here.” Manuel Gustavo’s foot, posed on his knee, shakes up and down. “Maybe you do things different in your United States of America.” His tone is somewhere between a tease and a taunt. “But where does it get those *gringas*? Most of them divorce or stay *jamona*, with nothing better to do than take drugs and sleep around.” [...] “Manuel,” Carla pleads. “Women do have rights here too, you know. Even Dominican law grants that.” “Yes, women have rights,” Manuel Gustavo agrees. A wry smile spreads on his face: he is about to say something clever. “But men wear the pants.” (Alvarez, 2004, 122)

According to Hernández and Torres-Saillant, among the features that distinguish between the Dominican experience in the United States and the Dominican experience in the country of their origin belong the heightened visibilities of women. The authors point out that: “the immigration shows an awareness that men do not have monopoly over the task of forging a destiny for the community.” (Hernández and Torres-Saillant, 1998, 141-142) One positive change women experience in the United States is the shift from the reproductive role to the productive one. There is a collective belief that the Dominican Republic is a country for men and the United States is a country for women. This notion currently pervades the psyche of immigrants today. The theme of women and men’s varied experiences and perceptions is evident especially within the domestic sphere. Progressive liberty that women have been afforded in the United States challenges the patriarchal institution that is still heavily present within the Dominican Republic.

After revealing Sofia’s relationship with Manuel Gustavo, Alvarez depicts other

incidents with men. As Newton accurately states, “Alvarez depicts at least two crucial incidents with U.S. American men in which Yolanda investigates single-handedly.” (Newton, 2005, 58) Yolanda reflects on the challenges of her first serious relationship in college:

When I went away to college, my vivaciousness ultimately worked against me. I’d meet someone, conversation would flow, they’d come calling, but pretty soon afterwards, just as my heart was beginning to throw out little tendrils of attachment, they’d leave. I couldn’t keep them interested. Why I couldn’t keep them interested was pretty simple: I wouldn’t sleep with them. By the time I went to college, it was the late sixties, and everyone was sleeping around as a matter of principle. By then, I was a lapsed Catholic. [...] Why I didn’t just sleep with someone as persistent as Rudy Elmenhurst is a mystery I’m exploring here by picking it apart the way we learned to do to each other’s poems and stories in the English class where I met Rudolf Brodermann Elmenhurst, the third. (Alvarez, 2004, 81-82)

Rudy Elmenhurst repeatedly pressures Yolanda to have sex but she continually resists until he finally retorts, “I thought you’d be hot-blooded, being Spanish and all, and that under all the Catholic bullshit, you’d be really free, instead of all hung up like the cotillion chicks from prep schools. But Jesus, you’re worse than a fucking Puritan.” (Alvarez, 2004, 99) As Newton point out, “although Yolanda admits that this experience haunted her sexual awakening, what is worse, she realizes what a cold, lonely life awaited her in the United States.” (Newton, 2005, 59) Yolanda is afraid that she will never find someone who will understand her peculiar mix of Catholicism and agnosticism, Hispanic and American styles.

During her second relationship, Yolanda repeatedly expresses her frustration with men who imagine her as a hot-blooded Latina and who become fed up with her chastity, or insensitive to her cross-cultural ways. Newton summarises her position as “struggle with a subjectivity fractured by cultural, racial and gender influences that she must learn to recognize or somehow to control.” (Newton, 2005, 59) Additionally, Alvarez points out the attitudes and feelings that Laura experiences during her adaptation:

It’s possible that Mami had her own little revolution brewing. [...] Recently, she had begun spreading her wings, taking adult courses in real estate and international economics and business management, dreaming of a bigger-

than-family-size life for her. (Alvarez, 2004, 116)

As immigrants, Laura and Carlos do not share the same opinions and experiences about the return. It is evident that Carlos has aspirations of relocating back to the Dominican Republic. He is afraid of being surrounded by independent women. Alvarez describes an example when Carlos is afraid of the independency of his daughter and wife:

But now, Carlos was truly furious. It was bad enough that his daughters were rebelling, but here was his own wife joining forces with her. Soon he would be surrounded by a houseful of independent American women. (Alvarez, 2004, 145-146)

When discussing his daughters' rebellion, it is important to mention that Carlos is being protective of his daughters. The father of the García sisters performs the role of a possessive male highlighting the necessity of girls' obedient submission to male authority. Alvarez conveys another example of his authoritative behavior in the situation in which Carlos does not want to allow Yolanda to read her speech in front of her classmates and the teacher. He tears the speech into several pieces, prompting Yolanda to pronounce that he is like the dictator of the Dominican Republic: "Chapita! You're just another Chapita!" (Alvarez, 2004, 147) Getting angry she blames her father for not being on the Island: "This is America, Papi, Ameica! You are not in a savage country anymore!" (Alvarez, 2004, 146)

Carlo's behavior can be well conceived when regarding the example of how on the "four girls" traditionally gather every year to celebrate their father's birthday. They come singly leaving their boyfriends and husbands at home. Their father wants the family to celebrate his birthdates in the family circle:

Even after they'd been married and had their own families and often couldn't make it for other occasions, the four daughters always came home for their father's birthday. They would gather together, without husbands, would-be husbands, or bring-home work. For this too was part of tradition: the daughter came home alone. [...] "When's he going to realize you've grown up? You sleep with us!" (Alvarez, 2004, 24)

Alvarez demonstrates Carlo's attitude towards his daughters throughout the whole novel. During her youth, Sofía goes on vacation to Colombia with her boyfriend.

Unfortunately, they break up after a very short time. While staying in Colombia, Sofia falls in love with Otto, a German tourist. After she returns home, her father becomes suspicious. He searches through her drawers for some “nail clippers.”

First chance he got, he went through her drawers. [...] “What is the meaning of this?” The father shook the letters in her face. [...] “Give me those!” she cried, lunging at him. The father raised his hand with the letters above both their heads like the Statue of Liberty, with her freedom torch, but had forgotten this was the daughter who was as tall as he was. She clawed his arm down and clutched the letters to herself as if they were her babe he’s plucked from her breast. [...] “It’s none of your fucking business!” she said in a low, ugly-sounding voice like the snarl of an animal who could hurt him. “You have no right, no right at all, to go through my stuff or read my email!” Tears spurted out of her eyes, her nostrils flared. The father’s mouth opened in a little zero of shock. Quietly, Sofia drew herself up and left the room. (Alvarez, 2004, 29-30)

Unfortunately, he discovers her love letters from Otto. This leads to a terrible argument in which Carlos only worries about how the situation might affect him. Carlos accuses Sofia of trying to ruin his good reputation and name: “Has he deflowered you? That’s what I want to know. Have you gone behind the palms tree? Are you dragging my good name through the dirt, that is what I would like to know!” (Alvarez, 2004, 30) As a result of the hostility from her father, Sofia gets angry and runs away from home.

This dispute between the father and the daughter represents a clashing scenario of two opposing interpretations of gender roles. An emerging critical consciousness begins to arise within the García girls while simultaneously rejecting the long-standing traditions of female subordination. Alvarez emphasizes that the girls’ adaptation to the United States is a product of their inherent longing for independence to explore the flux of their evolving selves.

At the same time, Sofia’s conflict with her father symbolizes a struggle for the control over her sexuality. Protecting a woman in the Dominican society is the father’s honor and is part of Dominican cultural values. In American society, a woman is able to control her life and sexuality. The conflict between Sofia and Carlos is the result of the gap of these two cultural differences.

When covering the subject of sexuality, the girls have to adapt to American culture and to their maturing bodies simultaneously. Carla is twelve years old when the García family moves to the United States. She has problems with the adaptation to the majority due to the fact that her relation to her homeland is very strong and irreplaceable. Aside from enduring pain of leaving her extended family and the difficulty of transitioning to a new county, she also faces the trauma of adolescence. For example, on the playground and in the halls of the school, a gang of boys chases after her. One of them standing behind her come closer and pull her blouse out from her skirt when it is tucked in and pull it down:

“No titties,” he snickered. Another yanked down her socks, displaying her legs, which had begun growing soft, dark hairs. “Monkey legs!” he yelled to his pals.” “Stop!” Carla cried. “Please stop.” They were disclosing her secret shame: her body was changing. (Alvarez, 2004, 153)

Sandra is an additional character in the novel who perceives sexuality even though it is not explicitly discussed. The García family is invited to the dinner by Dr. Fanning who arrange their arrival to the United States through a fellowship. Helping Carlos to get a job and pass the medical exam, he also realizes that the García family has little money and wants them to visit a luxury restaurant in New York City. Dr. Fanning comes with his wife and gets completely drunk in the restaurant. As dinner continues, Sandra flirts with a handsome waiter who continually fills her glass up of water until she has to go to the bathroom. Carlos leaves the table with Mrs. Fanning and as they are about to enter the bathroom, Mrs. Fanning tries to kiss Carlos:

Sandi and Mrs. Fanning found themselves in a pretty little parlor with a couch and lamps and a stack of perfumed towels. Sandi spied the stalls in an adjoining room and hurried into one, releasing her bladder. Relieved, she now felt the full and shocking weight of what she had just witnessed. A married American woman kissing her father! (Alvarez, 2004, 181)

Sandra is confused and upset by the incident that offers a frightening glimpse into the world of sexuality she is not used to. While waiting for the adults, Sandra realizes that she has to survive in the new hostile country.

The theme of sexuality is also related to the character of Sofía using this concept as

a tool to rebel against her father and traditional Dominican values. Celebrating Carlo's birthday, the García family decides to play a party game that might amuse them. Carlos is blindfolded and one of the women kisses him on the cheek. He begins by guessing his wife and then his three daughters. Carlos does not mention Sofia's name and she feels hurt by father's behavior. Every time her father takes a wrong guess Sofia laughs loudly. Soon, she notices that he will never guess her name. After all her hard work while organizing the party, she is not included in his daughter count. Sofia wants him to know without a doubt that she is the one kissing him: "Quickly, she swooped into the circle and gave the old man a wet, open-mouthed kiss in his ear. She ran her tongue in the whorls of his ear and nibbled the tip. Then she moved back." (Alvarez, 2004, 39) After the kiss, Carlos gets angry and humiliated by the inability to mention the name of one of his daughters. Additionally, Sofia shows her sexuality to the family members knowing that sexual contact between father and daughter is considered to be incest. Even though Sofia is a married woman with two children, she still stands in need of drawing attention around her sexual behavior.

6.3 Culture Clash

Expanding on previous discussion, culture plays a vital role in the adaptation to the host country. The novel *How the García girls lost Their Accents* begins with the departure of the García family from the Dominican Republic in 1956 and concludes in 1989. Between these two points in time, readers discover several cultural elements emerging when previous traditions are left behind and the new culture is discovered on the mainland. The characters in the novel experience their contradictions within both the private and in public sphere, which is demonstrated throughout the entire novel.

As immigrants, the members of the García experience an initial conflict between two different cultural systems and a subsequent alienation from both the new world represented by the United States and the old world which is left behind. Thus, they have to become, in essence, revolutionaries living on the margins of mainstream society. Renée Marie Rasmussen views the position of the García family as: "Suddenly, they are swept up

in the freewheeling American culture of the 60s (then, the 70s and 80s) with its dizzying choices and challenges. Somehow, they have to try to straddle this life with their Island/Latino culture.” (Rasmussen, 2007, 11) Readers can see that the family is caught between their old world and the new world represented by American culture. They try to reconcile the challenges of how to blend their traditional values with the more independent and rebellious American environment. Regardless of the choices they make, readers can perceive how challenging it is for an immigrant to balance two polarizing worlds. Choosing to retain elements of their Dominican culture, their American friends doubt about their adaptation. Likewise, when rejecting Dominican values and replacing them with American ones, disapproval from their family member is inevitable. The following example shows how Yolanda is perceived by her cousin Lucinda after spending a long time in the United States: “Like a missionary, her cousins will say, like one of those Peace Corps girls who have let themselves go so as to do dubious good in the world. (Alvarez, 2004, 4) The example illustrates how her cousin Lucinda describes her clothes and appearance of a hippie, a member of the decade of the 1960s. Lucinda also calls her “Miss America” judging from what she can see: “You look terrible,” Lucinda says. “Too thin, and the hair needs a cut. Nothing personal.” She is the cousin who has never minced the words. (Alvarez, 2004, 4-5) While living in the United States, Yolanda dramatically changes her appearance. Her cousin Lucinda is not used to the style which is considered to be ordinary among the American population in New York City. Similarly, her aunts think that Yolanda and her sisters have lived abroad for a long time:

“Fife years,” Tía Carmen says, sighing. “We’re going to have to really spoil her this time”- Tía cocks her head to imply collaboration with the other aunts and cousins-“so she doesn’t stay away so long again. “It’s not good,” Tía Flor says. “You four girls get lost up there.” Smiling, she indicates the sky with her chin. (Alvarez, 2004, 7)

The loss of homeland, relatives, family, house and clothing cannot be easily replaced. When speaking about the family, the social status of the García family is depicted by Alvarez as well. In contrast to other immigrants, the García family does not approach the United States looking for a new beginning but for a temporary shelter escaping political

uncertainty under the Trujillo dictatorship. As elite members of the upper-class in the Dominican Republic, their social background is perceived as stable. Their status is saved due to the fact that they have a particular surname that associates respect and “acknowledgement” which “had come to her automatically in the old country from being a de la Torre.” (Alvarez, 2004, 139) In contrast, the United States has nothing to offer: “We didn’t feel we had the best the United States had to offer. We had only second-hand stuff, rental houses in one redneck Catholic neighborhood after another, clothes at Round Robin, a black and white TV afflicted with way lines.” (Alvarez, 2004, 107) As another example of the status of the García family is mentioned the situation when the family is invited to dinner. One of the girls is aware of the reality that the position of the García family is not the same as it was in the Dominican Republic where they once lived in a luxurious house including personnel:

Sandi realizes with a pang one of the things that had been missing in the last few months. It was precisely this kind of special attention paid to them. At home there had always been a chauffeur opening a car door or a gardener tipping his hat and a half dozen maids and nursemaids acting as if the health and well-being of the de la Torre-García children were of wide public concern. (Alvarez, 2004, 174)

Being cognizant of contemporary social status, the girls try to advance their position in American society. Alvarez explains the problematic situation of the family on the character of Sandra. Even though Sandra is just a little girl, she is able to differentiate whether the family belongs to the upper-middle class or not. Especially for a child from the de la Torre family who is spoiled by her family’s wealth and social position, it is difficult to adapt into the world where her family does not have any particular respect. If the social situation of the family does not improve, Sandra will sell her charm bracelet with the windmill that always catches on her clothing. “She would even cut her hair and sell it – a maid back home had told her that girls with good hair could always do that. She had no idea who would buy it. She had not seen hair for sale in the big department stores.” (Alvarez, 2004, 173) In the case that the social situation of the García family does not improve, Sandra wants to be adopted by Dr. Fanning and his wife:

Tonight, she thought, with the rich Fannings, she would present herself as the daughter willing to make these sacrifices. Maybe, they would adopt her, and give her an allowance like other American girls got, which Sandi would then pass on to her real family. Provided she could see them periodically, that would not be a bad life, being an only child in a fine, rich, childless American family. (Alvarez, 2004, 173)

The issue of class also creates obstacles for her family members. Their father is ashamed of his inability to provide his family with the same wealth and prestige that the family enjoyed on the Island. Alvarez concisely characterizes Carlo's feelings about his position in the United States: "But what could he do in this new country where he did not even know if he had enough cash in his pocket." (Alvarez, 2004, 189) Carlo's desire to adapt into American culture leaves him unprepared for dealing with unexpected situations. Moreover, the García family cannot even afford to buy presents for the daughters when speaking about their meeting with Dr. Fanning and his wife: "They could not afford extras, and they did not want to put their hosts in the embarrassing position of having to spend money out of largesse." (Alvarez, 2004, 188) When offered a little Barbie doll dressed as a flamenco dancer to Sandra, she ignores her mother's warning not to ask for extra presents. The doll is a perfect replica of the beautiful dancers, dress in a long gown with a pretty tortoise shell comb in her hair. On her feet are tiny strapped black heels such as the dancers wear: "Her mother reached over and took the doll from Sandi's hands. "Absolutely not, girls." She took her head at the dancer, who had since reached in her basket and extracted three more dolls." (Alvarez, 2004, 188) Alvarez gives readers the examples of the García's poverty throughout the novel. On the character of Carla readers can see that the family has little money to spend on frivolous things. Carla constantly asks for a pair of red sneakers. A nice lady who lives down the blocks gives Carla a pair of white sneakers but she only wants the red ones. The father suggests that he will paint the sneakers with her mother's nail polish. These are steps the García family takes in order to save some money.

In the novel Alvarez draws attention to the immigrants who experience culture shock and deal with the problems of assimilation into a foreign culture. The girls have problems especially at school where they have to cope with several problems concerning

their classmates. Alvarez gives readers an example of how Sandra wants to try a tampon: “Some girlfriend of Sandi’s got her to try a Tampax, and Mami found out. Stuff like that, and soon she was writing away to preparatory school (all girls ones) where we would meet and mix with the “right kind” of Americans.” (Alvarez, 2004, 108) When speaking about the school environment, Yolanda is not pleased during an incident where one of her classmates introduces her to his parents. He is also an immigrant and his parents want him to meet other classmates who will help him to adjust to the school climate. What shocks Yolanda is the attitude of his parent. He tells them that “he was seeing a Spanish girl, and he reported they said that should be interesting for him to find out about people from other cultures.” (Alvarez, 2004, 98) The response of his parents bothers Yolanda. After this incident, she feels “like a geographic lesson for their son.” (Alvarez, 2004, 98) Because of these shocking events mentioned above, the girls are sent to boarding schools in order to avoid these kinds of American problems. Moreover, their classmates suppose that the girls are wealthy and come from a privileged background:

Anyhow, we met the right kind of Americans all right, but they didn’t exactly mix with us. [...] We had our own kind of fame, based mostly on the rich girls’ supposition and our own silence. García de la Torre didn’t mean a thing to them, but those brand-named beauties simply assumed that, like all third world foreign students in boarding schools, we were filthy rich and related to some dictator or other. (Alvarez, 2004, 108)

In the United States, the García girls continue to receive the best education as they received in the Dominican Republic. They experience life from a different point of view not being protected by their family relatives as in their homeland. They are victims of discrimination both inside and outside the school. Carla experiences rejection when a gang of boys follows her throwing stones and yelling: “Go back to where you came from, you dirty spic!” (Alvarez, 2004, 153)

The experience of the García family in United States inevitably involves a desire for returning to their homeland. When they are away for one year, they have a celebration at dinner. Laura bakes a nice flan and sticks a candle in the centre of the table. They close their eyes when Sofia blows out the candle in the middle of the flan. The mother wants the

family to make a wish. She becomes inquisitive and asks Carla what she is dreaming about. Alvarez puts emphasis on Carla as the character who expresses the opinion about returning back to the Dominican Republic: “Dear God,” she began. She could not get used to this American wish-making without bringing God into it. “Let us please go back home, please,” she half prayed and half wished.” (Alvarez, 2004, 150)

Although the García girls have problems with the adaptation into American society, they accept the new culture. According to Luis: “They are caught in the midst; that is, between the tick and the tock, something and nothing, Genesis and Apocalypse, past and future, or between North American and Hispanic cultures.” (Luis, 2000, 842)

The parents do not adapt to the American culture and treat their daughters as if they continue to live in the Dominican Republic. In contrast to their parents, the daughters are more liberal and open to accept American society. In contradiction to their parents, they are not so strictly bound to the Island. If they have to stay in the United States for the rest of their lives, they must adjust to the majority culture. The most important idea of the generational conflicts in the García family is defined in the chapter *A Regular Revolution*. The problem between the sisters and their parents is connected to the fact that younger generation wants to become American and the elders would have none of it. Additionally, Sirias points out that: “However, among immigrants, the differences in cultural perceptions can become magnified, and at times heated, as they adapt to the different values and standards of conduct of their new homelands.” (Sirias, 2001, 37) Clash between the first and the second generation is a universal theme of identity and immigration. American culture plays an important role in the rebellion of the García girls. Considering the fact that they live surrounded by American neighbors, classmates and friends, the girls do the thing that Alvarez highlights as the rebellion behavior. Sofia smokes in the bathroom running the shower “as if smoking were a noisy activity whose hullaballo she had to drown out.” (Alvarez, 2004, 110) Carla experiments with hair removal cream. The mother is strongly against this behavior saying “that one you got on that road, there was no stopping-the hairs would grow back thicker, uglier each time. She made it sound like drinking or drugs.” (Alvarez, 2004, 110) Yolanda brings a book called *Our Bodies* into house. There are no men in it but surprisingly there are the pictures that “celebrated women and their bodies, so

it wasn't technically about sex as she had understood it up to then. But there were women exploring "what their bodies were about" and a whole chapter of lesbians." (Alvarez, 2004, 110) Finally, Alvarez characterizes the personal revolution of the character of Sandra as "visiting aunt and uncles dropped in for a visit at college early Sunday morning. She wasn't back yet from her Saturday night calculus tutorial." (Alvarez, 2004, 111)

7 Conclusion

In recent years, the theme of identity has been considered among the central concepts of literary studies. The issue of bicultural identity is often a central topic of many works focusing on immigration, culture clash and adaptation into new society and culture.

This diploma thesis deals with the situation of the Dominican immigrants in the United States, which is based on the novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez. The aim is to describe and analyze the theme of bicultural identity of the main characters - Carla, Sandra, Yolanda and Sofía. Like any other immigrants, they are confronted by the question of how much they will adapt to the new country and its culture while keeping their own traditional values.

Dominican immigration is considered within the context of the era of the Trujillo dictatorship being the dark spot in Dominican history. Under his reign, thousands of people were violently murdered. As a result, a great number of Dominicans came to the United States. At that time, the United States becomes an increasingly multicultural country providing the immigrants with the opportunity to adapt into new social background.

The García family emigrated from the Dominican Republic, where the political situation is instable. The emigration preserves the family from subsequent crisis. Life in the United States allows the members of the García family to afford a better life style with the higher opportunity to realize their dreams. On the characters of the novel is shown how Dominicans deal with new, unexpected and unimagined issues.

In the novel, Alvarez covers the main elements traditionally accepted as the theme of immigration. She locates her story into New York City, where the main characters live, work, study and start their new lives. They have to cope with the arrival in the United States and living conditions. The author simultaneously offers views of Dominicans through the characters of Yolanda and her sisters, when they struggle with their destiny. Alvarez depicts the life of the bilingual and bicultural family. At the same time, she emphasizes the act of writing and the power of language to express notions and feelings about the world. To bring the reader closer to the adaptation into American society, she

uses Spanish words and phrases, deliberately choosing expressions that have a marked emotional, ironic and satirical impact on the story. The language devices allow the reader to experience the Garcías' socio-cultural dualism and the richness of their heritage as well. Although, readers are not able to share the same cultural background, it is very easy to identify with the main characters of the novel.

Thus, the reader is taken into the center of the immigrant family. Alvarez tries to depict the terror of separation as they are obliged to leave behind everything that is important to them. Throughout the entire process of adaptation, the sisters experience the normal pains of growing up, which are accentuated as they struggle with a new, different social environment.

In *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, each sister of the García family has at least one chapter that helps to define her. When reading the novel, readers can see the development of the sisters from their childhood to adulthood.

In the United States, the García sisters continue to receive the best education as in the Dominican Republic where they are raised in the privileged social background. But the events changed, they experience life in the United States from a different point of view, not as a member of wealthy family, but as common Dominican immigrants.

As the sisters adapt into American culture, they suffer the same problems associated with the mainstream citizens. Yolanda does not get on well with her boyfriend and she is under the health care of a psychiatrist with whom she falls in love. She goes back to the Dominican Republic in order to find her lost identity. Instead of being happy, she is confused because her identity is a mixture of Dominican and American aspects. Carla is a psychiatrist who has difficulty to fit into cultural background relating to the habits, beliefs and language. Sandra is aware of the reality that the position of the García family is not the same as it was in the Dominican Republic, where the family lived in comfortable and expensive house. The last character of the novel, Sofía, represents the rebellion against her father. She challenges her father's authority and runs away to Germany to marry Otto. The father is not able to understand why his daughter does not follow the traditional behavior typical for the woman in the Dominican Republic. The conflict between the father and the daughter is a typical example of the culture clash opposing interpretation of gender roles.

The reader is able to realize that the García girls reject the long-standing traditions of female subordination. Alvarez emphasizes that the girls' adaptation to the United States proceed from their need to ensure more independence and affirmation for their evolving selves.

8 Resumé

Cílem této diplomové práce je analyzovat život dominikánské rodiny žijící na území Spojených států. Rozbor je proveden na základě románu Julie Alvarez *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, která v kombinaci s fakty ze sekundární literatury nastiňuje obraz života dominikánské menšiny v americké majoritní společnosti.

Diplomová práce je rozdělena do několika tematických částí, které propojují literární teorii s románem. Ústředním tématem jsou konkrétní osudy rodiny García a jejich společenská pozice v majoritní společnosti. Rodina prochází složitým procesem adaptace a otázkou zachování tradic a věrnosti své národní kultuře.

Hlavními postavami románu jsou Carla, Sandra, Yolanda and Sofía. Hrdinky jsou popsány z hlediska různých identit. Tyto identity lze definovat z osobního nebo sociálního hlediska. Osobní identita je typická pro jejich sociální role, které vykonávají v životě. Na druhou stranu, hrdinky jsou definovány také z hlediska identity sociální, která představuje fakt, že patří k určité sociální skupině sdílející emoční a významové hodnoty.

V úvodu je čtenář seznámen se základními rysy dominikánské migrace do Spojených států. Přestože většina lidí vnímá Dominikánskou republiku jako místo, které je zajímavou turistickou destinací, ne vždy tomu tak bylo. V letech 1930-1961 stál v čele Dominikánské republiky diktátor Rafael Trujillo, který se zasadil o vytvoření totalitní společnosti, která neměla možnost uplatňovat právo svobodného projevu a demokracie. Následkem jeho kruté vlády se někteří obyvatelé rozhodli zemi opustit. Následovala vlna dominikánské migrace do Spojených států, která se dá charakterizovat jako migrace z politických a ekonomických důvodů. Dominikánští přistěhovalci se usadili především v následujících místech: New Jersey, Florida, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Pensylvánie Connecticut a New York City.

New York City je zároveň ústředním místem, kde se odehrává samotný děj románu. Je zde koncentrován největší počet dominikánských přistěhovalců, kteří žijí ve Spojených Státech. Manhattan se stal lokalitou, kde se odehrává každodenní střet dominikánské a americké kultury.

Přítomnost dominikánské menšiny ve Spojených státech vytvořila velké množství autorů, kteří zažili odchod ze země svého původu a byli nuceni přizpůsobit se novým životním podmínkám společně s odlišnou kulturou majoritní společnosti. Téma dominikánské migrace bylo transformováno do románů, z nichž ne všechny byly literárními kritiky nejprve uznávány. Julia Alvarez a její tvorba představují počátky nového přístupu v literatuře, kdy na rozdíl od autorů, kteří píšou o emigraci povrchně, sama zažívá a následně předává čtenářům své pocity a zkušenosti z odchodu z vlastní země a následného začleňování do nové společnosti. Julia Alvarez je považována za průkopnici dominikánsko-americké literatury, která spojuje dvě odlišné kultury.

Román *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* je semiautobiografickým románem autorky, která se narodila v New Yorku, avšak následně odjela zpět s rodinou do Dominikánské republiky. V důsledku nepříznivých podmínek a zapojení jejího otce do odboje proti krutému politickému režimu, rodina emigruje do Spojených států. Díky vlastním zkušenostem a pocitu, že nepatří do žádné společnosti, jelikož stojí na pomezí dvou odlišných kultur, začíná psát svůj román. Julia Alvarez využívá během svého psaní střídání vypravěčů a vypravěčských úhlů pohledů. Zcela netypicky příběh začíná v roce 1989 a končí v roce 1956. Úkolem čtenáře je tedy propojit informace z celého románu v jeden celek. Aby román působil věrohodně a nebyl pouze jen povrchním dílem, autorka využívá znalost anglického a španělského jazyka. Autorka tak schválně narušuje plynulost románu a propůjčuje mu důvěryhodnost přistěhovalecké literatury. V díle rovněž využívá symboliku, která spojuje hrdinky románu s problémy, které zažívají během adaptace do nového prostředí. Symbolika jednotlivých peripetií je vyobrazena v podobě tropického ovoce jménem guava, sněhu, kotěte, černého ptáka, hračky jojo a lahve vína.

Guava symbolizuje vzpomínky hlavní hrdinky Yolandy. Toto ovoce definuje vztah mezi Yolandou a Dominikánskou republikou. Ve snaze najít roztržitou podstatu svého bytí se vrací zpět na ostrov, aby našla samu sebe. Doufá, že guava jí pomůže s návratem ztracené identity. Až později si uvědomuje, že vzpomínky jí mohou pouze připomenout návrat do jejího bezstarostného dětství, nikoliv však do její proměněné podstaty, která se formovala po příjezdu do Spojených Států. Po dvaceti devíti letech strávených v New Yorku je do značné míry ovlivněna sociálním a kulturním prostředím majoritní společnosti.

Dalším symbolem, který je v románu zmíněn, je sníh. Román je zasazen do doby, kdy Spojené státy mohou být napadeny atomovou zbraní. Ve škole jsou dívky učeny, co mají dělat v případě, že na New York bude svržena atomová bomba. Jelikož předtím žily v Dominikánské republice, kde panují příznivé klimatické podmínky, znají pojem sníh pouze z doslechu. Když ho uvidí poprvé, jsou zmatené a pletou si ho s atomovým nebezpečím. Julia Alvarez uvádí téma sněhu záměrně. Každá sněhová vločka je jedinečná stejně jako lidé po celém světě. Na této symbolice se snaží ukázat rozdíly mezi americkou a dominikánskou kulturou. Černý pták představuje Yolandu a její pocity v souvislosti s jejím pobytem v psychiatrické léčebně, kde se dostává v důsledku ukončení vztahu se svým partnerem Johnem. Yolanda a John spolu nejsou schopni žít, protože oba pochází z rozdílných kulturních prostředí. Yolanda nerozumí tomu, co John říká, není schopna pochopit jeho dvojsmyslnosti. Její jazykové nedostatky vedou k rozpadu jejich vztahu a k duševnímu zhroucení. Další symbol odkazuje na scénu, v níž Yolanda nalézá malé kotě. Není si jistá, zda si ho může ponechat a proto tuto situaci diskutuje s lovcem, který jde kolem. Stejně jako kotě, i Yolanda je vytržená z bezstarostného dětství stráveného v Dominikánské republice. Kotě symbolizuje trauma, které zažila, když musela odejít ze svého přirozeného prostředí. Autorka se snaží pomocí této symboliky o pochopení minulosti v důsledku akceptování přítomnosti. Hračka jojo je charakteristickým znakem Yolandy, která se ocitá mezi dvěma rozdílnými světy. Ve Spojených státech ji nikdo nenazývá jejím pravým jménem, všichni používají zkratky jako YoYo, Yoe nebo Yosita. Jak již bylo zmíněno, jedním ze jmen, kterými je oslovoována je YoYo. To charakterizuje pohyb z jedné kultury do druhé, stejně jako její bi-kulturní identita. Posledním symbolem románu je lahev vína. Yolanda prožívá svůj první vztah, ve kterém však není spokojena. Její partner ji vnímá především jako dívku, která pochází z exotického prostředí a představuje si ji jako temperamentní ženu. Snaží se ji svést, ona má však strach z otěhotnění. Navíc není schopna navázat intimní kontakt s někým, kdo ji přijímá pouze jako předmět sexuální touhy. Po pěti letech ji její bývalý partner navštěvuje v domnění, že tentokrát jeho nabídku neodmítne. Opak je však pravdou. Yolanda zůstává opuštěná s lahví drahého Bordeaux, který její bývalý partner zanechává v bytě. Rozhodne se lahev sama otevřít a vypít. Otvírání lahve symbolizuje její sexuální uvolnění a uvědomění si, že

dokázala vyhrát nad svými problémy spojenými se stereotypickým vnímáním imigrantů.

Jak čtenář může vidět, téma bi-kulturní identity se prolíná všemi částmi románu. Mezi hlavní témata typická pro tento román ve spojitosti s adaptací bylo zařazeno a analyzováno pojetí jazyka, sexuality, genderových rolí a střet kultur.

Jazyková adaptace představuje nejdůležitější článek úspěšného začlenění do americké společnosti. Není důležité znát pouze jazyk samotný, ale také pochopit význam, který je jednotlivým situacím přikládán. Dívky se dostávají nejen do střetu dvou kultur, ale i dvou odlišných jazyků. S přibývajícím dobou strávenou ve Spojených státech jsou schopny reflektovat dění americké kultury a naopak ztrácejí kontakt se svým mateřským jazykem.

Téma sexuality a genderových rolí je zde čtenáři předkládáno na pozadí sociálního statutu rodiny García, která v Dominikánské republice žila obklopena luxusem a služebnictvem. Ve Spojených státech se však stávají řadovými občany. Dominikánská společnost je ryze patriarchální a staví ženy do pozice matek a poslušných dcer. S tímto problémem se setkávají všechny čtyři sestry. V důsledku adaptace do nového nevázaného prostředí nechápou jednání otce, který se řídí tradičními hodnotami vyzdvihující patriarchální společnost.

Kultura hraje důležitou roli v adaptaci hlavních postav románu. Julia Alvarez poukazuje na kulturní prvky, které navazují na předchozí tradice a novou kulturu, která obklopuje imigranty po celou dobu jejich pobytu ve Spojených státech. Postavy románu prožívají strasti nejen v soukromé, ale i veřejné sféře.

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