

Ethnicity and Belonging in an Inner-City High School, New York



DOMINICAN IDENTITY RECONSIDERED:

Ethnicity and Belonging in an Inner-City High School, New York

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Abstract of the Thesis

This thesis analyzes material from an inner-city high school (ICHS) which is situated in a so-called Dominican community in New York. The students' parents were born in the Dominican Republic, but not all students would self-ascribe as Dominicans. By using the notions of identity by Holland et al (1998), I argue that identities can not be seen as completely durable, and one can distinguish between self-ascribed and imposed identities. I view ethnicity in Barth's (1998) terms; as unfixed boundaries that are upheld by the actors themselves that may be affected by how the larger society's views. I regard ICHS as a site that may affect identity formation, but where students are not passive recipients (Levinson et al. 1996). One of my main findings is that students had a great freedom in choosing between different identities. This flexibility could be constrained by the fact that the students were somewhat stigmatized. This choice of identities may be contrasted to former research on Dominicans where they were regarded more as an isolated group with a common transnational identity. In ICHS Dominican students were in majority, but they did not constitute a homogenous group. Still many students reified Dominican identity to markers like music, flag, festivals, baseball and food. An explanation for this can be that they wanted to show ethnic pride. These markers could also be said to be American creations because by going to e.g. a Dominican parade one could be a part of a community (Waters 1990). Another interpretation is that the markers expressed transnational ties. The students could also choose to withdraw from Dominican ethnicity. How ICHS was organized influenced interrelations between students (Lamphere 1992). I employ Foucault (1995) to describe ICHS as a prison-school. Students were scanned every morning, and were under surveillance. In a class, a teacher tried to impose a Dominican identity by introducing a novel by a Dominican author. Furthermore, the students were organized in different language programs: Bilingual, English as a Second Language (ESL) and English mainstream. These programs could reflect individual strategies. Here I regard Spanish as a marker for Latino ethnicity. Those who spoke Spanish could under-communicate the language in school and outside (Eidheim 1994).

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Chapter One

Introduction



Dilania's World

I come from Manhattan

It's do or die

Dat's no lie

It's struggle everyday 2 survive

I try 2 stay alive

Do u catch ma vibe!!?

I come from the heits'

From a house of six

One sister, 2 brothers, parents 'n me

We make up the "The Ramirez Family"

N we're as happy as can be!!!!!!

I come from a neighborhood

Dat there is not much 2 do

There is lots of noise 'n wild kids 2

The people here are as nosey as can be

There is no such thing as privacy

But dat still doesn't bother me.

I come from Manhattan

But not here 2 stay

Soon am movin'

But wit ma man

N I can't wait 4 dat day

Because it will be far, far away!!

American and Dominican Identity

At 14 years, Dילania shared many characteristics with her fellow students at the Inner-City High School (ICHS) she attended.¹ She was born in the Dominican Republic (DR), arriving in New York City for the first time when she was eight, paying several visits to the DR in the course of six years to see her mother. Today she lives with her father and stepmother. Part of her schooling had been completed in the DR. She spoke both English and Spanish, albeit the former with an African-American accent; she converses fluently in Spanish. Dילania has light brown skin, brown eyes and long black hair that she blow-dries straight. Among her Dominican peers there is a broad range of skin colors, facial features and hair textures (López 1999: 4).

Dילania enjoyed going on excursions in the city. Once we went to the Statue of Liberty with a friend of hers. While we were waiting in line for the ferry, a man said to us; *You didn't come to New York to be serious, did you?* He asked where I came from to which I replied; *Norway*. To my surprise, he pulled out a violin and began playing the Norwegian national anthem. He asked where the girls are from, and I answered, *The Dominican Republic* and without further ado he started to play their national anthem. The girls said nothing, but appeared to be uneasy about the situation. After boarding the boat, Dילania said, *I think we are the only people who live in New York on this boat. I mean, what could I say, that I'm from 181st street?* 181st street is the closest subway stop to Dিলania's home, and this was what she described as her neighborhood in Washington Heights.²

On another occasion, Dিলania, some friends of hers and I were waiting for a train in a Washington Heights subway station. Dিলania and her friends talked and joked with a Latino³ police officer inside the station. He asked them what they were,

¹ The name of the school has been changed.

² The word neighborhood can both refer to street neighborhood, like here, or to the district levels of urban life (Sanjek 1998: 28). I use the word neighborhood when talking about the first level, and district when talking about both levels. Community is a word that covers both levels as well.

³ I will use the term Latino instead of Hispanic since the latter can have conservative political overtones (Romero, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ortiz 1997 cited in López 1999: 2). I will use Hispanic when I refer to works that used that term.

and they screamed, *Dominican, Dominican!* Later, when a Puerto Rican musician on the train asked them the same question in Spanish, they answered: *Dominicanas!*

During the summer holiday year 2000 she went back to the DR for the first time in four years. She looked forward to the trip and saved up money to buy new clothes. But she also had some misgivings; she was afraid her father would not let her return to New York City (NYC) when summer was over. He had caught her talking on the phone with her boyfriend late at night, and wanted to punish her for that. When I visited her in the DR, she complained of boredom and missing her boyfriend. She seemed disappointed in life in the DR, but happy to see her mother again. When we went to a party, a man asked her whether she was American. She said; *No. I'm Dominican (1)*.⁴ Thus, in the DR she did not pose as an American. When the summer was over, she was able to return to NYC after all as her uncle in New York paid for her return ticket.

These trips and random encounters in NYC and the DR were enlightening because I realized that she regarded herself as either Dominican or American, depending on issues like social contexts, constraints and her personal history.⁵ How, in fact, did Dילania feel about the questions of identity and ethnicity? The trips within the city and abroad worked as prisms for reflections on these questions. This is especially true for the visit to the DR. In some situations her ethnicity could be a proactive identity to which she felt emotionally attached. This may be applicable to how she objectified herself as *dominicana* in the DR.

In the tourist space of NYC she considered herself a New Yorker from 181st street, not a tourist from the DR. The playing of the Dominican national anthem did not seem to stir national feelings, which may indicate that she does not consider the DR her homeland. In the composition, which was apart of a school assignment, she states, *I came from Manhattan*, and not from the DR. She also writes that in the future she wants to go somewhere far away. I do not believe that *far away* referred to the

⁴ A number in parenthesis (1) behind a phrase or a word indicates that it was said in Spanish. In the Appendix are the original quotes in Spanish enlisted.

⁵ The notions of Dominican and American are not unproblematic, as they can refer to a wide spectrum of identities, from national identities to more loose cultural affiliation. For now, I will use the word Dominican when speaking of people of Dominican descent, without regarding their self-identification.

DR, instead I believe she was thinking of moving to a better neighborhood where she would enjoy more privacy and a comfortable lifestyle.

Bailey (1999: 31) writes that individual Dominican Americans claim identities from a limited set of options. In the case of a high school in Providence, Rhode Island, he writes that the options included Dominican, American, African-American, White-American and Hispanic, but that these were not uniformly available to all, and that no one can enact all of the options. This limited set of options was also used by Dilania. On the subway, while joking around with other Latino people, she stated that she was a Dominican, and later a *dominicana*, speaking Spanish and an English with an African-American accent. This accent can be significant because it marks that her English has no Spanish accent, and she can therefore defend herself better in the street. In the DR, where she was regarded as an American by one individual, she asserted that she is a *dominicana*, even though she was not prepared to live and continue her schooling there. Thus, Dilania, while in the DR she used the options that were available to her there, as she does when she is in NYC. Since she speaks English and Spanish, she could enact Dominican and American identities across situations (*ibid.*).

The fieldwork I carried out was done in a specific setting; an inner-city high school. The main segment of the fieldwork lasted for six months, i.e., from July 2000 - February 2001. Since I did my fieldwork in Washington Heights, I lived in a neighborhood in the area. I chose the school because the majority of its students are Dominican, like Dilania. I wanted to find out more about the NYC's younger generation of Dominicans, and learn how they felt about identity issues. As in the case of Dilania, many of the students describe themselves as *Dominicans* or *dominicanos/as*, in certain situations. However, in a multiethnic city such as New York, there are many other categories available to them. Half of the students were born in the USA, while most of their parents were born in the Dominican Republic. I use the term Dominican when referring to the students throughout the thesis, despite the fact that many do not always self-ascribe as such. A reason for this can be that they are stigmatized in the larger society. I will use the term Dominican to point to a

group of students who have a common Dominican descent, but at the same time have individual identity projects.

Identity and Ethnicity

Identity and ethnicity are central notions when dealing with the formation of identity among ICHS's Dominican students. I will use Holland et al. (1998) and Barth (1994) to explain how I apply the terms identity and ethnicity. According to Holland et al. (1998: 8), a person is a composite of many, often contradictory, self-understandings and identities, "whose loci are often not confined to the body but spread over the material and social environment," few of which are completely durable. The positions in which one is emotionally attached become the cores of one's proactive identities. The identities that are personal, i.e. (social) identities, are the ones in which people are emotionally involved as an inner essence (ibid: 7). I will regard this as self-ascribed identities.

This form of personal identity has to be distinguished from cultural identity, which may, or may not, be a position that a person regards as their inner essence. The above may be imposed upon a person by, for example, teachers in school, or be a position that one regards as an inner essence. Cultural identity has to be viewed in relation to structural traits in society, such as ethnicity, gender, race,⁶ and nationality (ibid. 7). According to Barth (1994:17), ethnic identity is superordinate to most other social personalities which an individual may assume. His primary emphasis when describing ethnic groups is that they are, "categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people (ibid.10)." Since ethnicity is based on what actors ascribe themselves, ethnicity can not be viewed as a fixed entities (Lewis 2003:6). Bulmer and Solomos (1998: 822 cited in ibid) write that "Race and ethnicity are not 'natural' categories, even though both concepts are often represented as if they were. Their boundaries are not fixed, nor is their membership uncontested."

⁶ When I employ the word race, I do not use it in the "common-sense" definition as a biological trait (López 1999: 7): "Race refers to a socially constructed subject position that is historically variable (Haney-López 1996 cited in ibid.)."

Problem and Scope

Many scholars who have looked at Dominicans have focused on their status as migrants who lead transnational lives, as ‘birds of passage.’ For instance, Sørensen (1998: 242) writes that Dominicans constantly compare life in New York and in the DR. My hypothesis is that Dominican students in a New York high school are less preoccupied with their purported homeland and migratory experiences than their parents are said to be. Indeed, I propose that they feel a greater sense of belonging to their school, neighborhood and city than to the DR.

In ICHS, approximately 85 percent of the 340 students were Dominican, representing a majority in the school. The students were either born in the DR or in the USA; some had had schooling in both countries. Some had never been to the DR, or remember very little of previous stays.

In this context, schools are an example of a mediating site between newcomers and established residents (Lamphere 1992). I use the school as an arena for gathering knowledge, trust and information on what life in general has been like for the students. Thus I have not been limited to typical school data such as attendance, results and teaching methods, but was able to use the school as a site to understand the formation of identity. Ethnographers such as Foley, Wexler and Weis have shown that identity construction is a kind of social practice and cultural production which both responds to, and simultaneously constitutes, movements, structures, and discourses beyond the school (Levinson et al. 1996: 12). I will discuss the influence of the structural markers gender, race, ethnicity and class on the students’ identities (Holland et al. 1998: 7). I will look at the school as a site, “for the formation of subjectivities through the production and consumption of all forms” (Levinson et al. 1996:13f).

How the school is organized: its policies, architecture, schedule and the programs offered by the school can impact and limit interrelations (Lamphere 1992: 2, Goode, Schneider and Blanc 1992 cited in Offer-Ohlsen 2000b: 5). Barth (1994: 1) states that an ethnic group is defined by how the boundaries are maintained. ICHS as a mediating institution can therefore shape the identity formation and how Dominicans maintain ethnic identity in this setting. I want to examine how Dominican students mark their ethnicity. Indeed, this is a central issue of the thesis. I

will discuss to what degree the school influenced the students' description of themselves as Dominicans.

Inner-City High School

The ICHS is housed in 28 red trailers set up temporarily next to the four-story main building. ICHS is part of the Northern Manhattan Educational Campus (NMEC) which encompasses four high schools. While the main building was undergoing restoration at the time of the fieldwork, in the following school year, they moved to the main building with the rest of the campus.

Since 1925, NMEC has functioned as one high school. Former alumni of NMEC include Harry Belafonte, Henry Kissinger, Allan Greenspan and, more recently, Dominican baseball stars such as Manny Ramirez, Alex Arias, Vicente Rosario and Rafael Gonzalez.

Since the 1960's, the campus has struggled with overcrowding, low graduation rates and gang fights. A teacher in NMEC describes conditions 30 years ago, as follows:

They got lots of blacks here at that time, and they had gang fights here all the time, sometimes it was so bad that the police had to close the school, and send the students back home again, that happened for like three years. Then more Spanish people moved to the neighborhood and(sic), the school became more and more Spanish from the 80's and on.

By the mid-1990's, NMEC had one of the highest drop-out rates in the US, and the school operated on 175 percent of its capacity with almost 3500 students. School district 6 in Washington Heights had the worst performance and the highest drop-out rate in Manhattan (Weyland 1998). The principal of ICHS, Mr. Allen, said the school used to be a *dumping ground*. In 1997, NMEC was restructured and divided into smaller high schools, and the total number of students was reduced to about 1400 students.

When the restructuring process began in 1997 more resources were allocated to develop the school. The intention of the restructuring committee was to focus more prominently on "academic performance." In ICHS the focus on academic improvement seems to have resulted in the requirement that students read a large

number of books. In Chapter Four I will discuss how the reading of a book by a Dominican author (Julia Alvarez) was welcomed by the students.

Since many students lived in Washington Heights, NMEC was referred to in Board of Education documents as one of New York's few "community high schools." In the USA community colleges are considered to be less prestigious than ordinary colleges, but I do not know if the restructuring committee meant equal here.

Choice of schools is free, so the school attracted students from other NYC boroughs as well. Of the school's total population of 341, 27 students were registered as residing in the Bronx, three in Brooklyn, and two in Queens. Two students who had moved from Washington Heights to other boroughs were able to remain in ICHS. This may indicate that they felt a sense of belonging to the school.

Most of the students in NMEC were between 13 and 19 years old, some may have been older; their immigration papers may not have an accurate date of birth. One student said this was the case with one boy said to be 16 years, who, he believed, was older.

The graduation rate of NMEC students, that is the percent of entering freshmen who graduated after completing four years, was 44 percent in 2002. This is above the city's average of 38.9 percent in 1995, but nevertheless lower than the US average of 68.8 percent (Citizens Committee for Children in New York 1995).

In 2000, ICHS's subject area passing rate was 70 percent. The overall attendance at ICHS for the school in 1999 had been registered as 87 percent. ICHS has one Dominican aide, Hector, who only works with attendance, here is included visiting students at home because they are absent from school.

In 2003 the number of students in NMEC who received free lunch at the school's cafeteria in the main building, was 91 percent, an indication of a high poverty level.⁷ In the segment on Dominican immigration to the United States, I will give an account of their socioeconomic situation.

⁷ To qualify for a free lunch, a family of four may have a gross income of 10,990 dollars. Many older students fail to sign up for a free lunch, even if they are eligible, so the percentage is less accurate for high schools than for elementary schools.

School safety police guarded the premises, and the students were scanned every morning. As I shall discuss in Chapter Three, the architecture and structure of the school day facilitated the safety police's surveillance.

The students were enrolled in one out of three language programs. English mainstream program was the program for the majority of students, and I label it as such using the terms found in Collier and Thomas (2003) and the restructuring documents. Students enrolled in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes received English mainstream or bilingual classes, dependant of their individual program, and language classes in English. Students in bilingual programs used books in both English and Spanish during their classes; the extent of the use of Spanish depended on the teacher and the students. Students in bilingual program had no shared no periods with the mainstream students; they intermingled only during lunch. As can be seen from the table below, 25 percent of the students in ICHS were in bilingual programs (Spanish and English). ESL students and mainstream students were categorized as monolingual students. The school's goal was to mainstream students, i.e., that students in bilingual and ESL programs would ultimately be transferred to mainstream classes. Some students had to repeat subjects from previous years; they were categorized as repeaters. There were no seniors (12th graders) since the school was new and would have their first graduation in 2001.

Table One: ICHS Students. Gender, Language programs and Grade

Students ICHS	Total	Boys	Girls	Monolingual programs				Bilingual programs			
				Tot.	Boys	Girls	Repeaters	Tot.	Boys	Girls	Rep
Freshmen (9th graders)	192	107	84	156	67	68	22	36	20	16	5
Sophomores (10th graders)	101	48	53	68	35	33	13	33	13	20	10
Juniors (11th graders)	48	15	33	31	11	20		17	4	13	
Total:	341	170	170	255	113	121	35	86	37	49	15

About 92 percent of students were Latino, the majority Dominican, seven percent African-American and one percent white; these were the numbers and categories the school told me. Of the non-Latinos, there were students who came from sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and Middle East. Despite the fact that the student body was overwhelmingly of Dominican origin, a girl in the 9th grade found ICCHS's to be more diverse than her former schools in the neighbourhood. This can imply that the Dominican had a low profile, despite their majority, or that she did have many classes with non-Dominicans.

Yeah, school is nice. Like, being in school with other cultures, like, but like now, like the first time I am, in a school like with, like, like other cultures like African-American and Asian. I've never been to a school like this where you have all cultures, like Asian, or like, or stuff like that, because mostly all schools are like Dominican, Dominican, Dominican.

In ICCHS there were 23 teachers, plus aides, administrative staff and councilors. Furthermore, there were members of the School Safety Police, and the organization named Adelante. The staff represented a mix of ethnicities. As can be seen from the table below, where I defined the ethnic categories:

Table Two: ICCHS Staff. Gender and Ethnic Categories

ICCHS Staff: Gender and Ethnicity	Total	Male	Female	Latino incl. Dominican	Dominican	White	African -Ameri can	Asian
Admin.(prin- cipal, A.P.s)	4	1	3	2	1	2		
Teachers	23	7	16	10	6	10	1	2
Councilors	2		2			2		
Aides, secretaries	6	1	5	5	3	1	1	
Adelante	2	1	1	2	2			
Security	6	3	3	2	1		4	
Total	41	13	26	20	12	16	6	2
% (approx.)	100	32	63	49	29	39	15	5

When it comes to language, most of the Latino staff spoke both Spanish and English. There were three aides and one teacher who spoke no English, only Spanish. Two white staff members spoke Spanish, one AP spoke it fluently while Ms. Smith had

rudimentary Spanish skills. Staff members lived in different parts of the city. Three of the Dominican aides lived in Washington Heights, as did three teachers (two Dominicans and one Latino), and a Dominican Assistant Principal. Other staff members lived in Queens and Staten Island, or in the adjacent state of New Jersey.

The ICHS welcomed parents and other people to their premises. In the afternoon young adults came in for the classes to obtain a GED (General Equivalency Diploma, a non-academic diploma), classes in English, or computer courses. Even though parents were welcome, parent involvement, for various reasons, was limited. At the first parents-teachers meeting, about 25 parents or guardians showed up, and for Open School Days, about 100 parents came to pick up report cards. In Chapter Four and Six I will expand on parents' involvement in school-related matters.

Fieldwork among Dominican High School Students

The first month distinguished itself from the rest of my fieldwork by the fact that the school had not yet started. I used the time to network, getting in touch with people. I wrote letters to schools and organizations before I left, and made appointments when I was there. I got to know the school district 6 and NYC. On my own initiative, I participated in activities, ranging from computer classes for adults to attending political meetings, visiting a young people's day camp, going to fundraising parties, eating at friends', BBQs, playing bingo, listening to outdoor concerts, traveling to the Seven Lakes, taking dance lessons and watching Dominican and Caribbean parades and festivals. I visited the Gregorio Luperón Preparatory School, Alianza Dominicana, the Dominican Studies Institute at the City College (CUNY), and participated in the activities of Dominicans 2000

I was welcomed to all these organizations and institutions, except for one, a Dominican community organization. At the first meeting, I was warmly welcomed, but at the second meeting they said, *This is just for us* (2), and I was asked to leave the room. I had been open about the purpose of my presence, and had been taking notes. Mateu-Gelabert (1998: 169) writes that mistrust is a safety measure in many poorer neighborhoods in New York where unknown people are seen as potential trouble

and a possible threat. Since I was clearly an outsider and was taking notes, perhaps some members became suspicious of my real intentions. They may also have been afraid that I would write derogatory things about Dominicans. According to Torres-Saillant and Hernández (1996: 82), some of the Dominican organizations have strict admission requirements, but in this organization people were encouraged to participate, so I do not think it was their policy to keep people in the community from attending meetings. Chapter Two deals with the district as a context, and I will provide more background information on political life in Washington Heights.

Once classes started in September, I was given permission to do my research in ICHS after a meeting with the Board of Education. On the first morning at ICHS, I was introduced to the principal, Mr. Allen, and an Assistant Principal, Ms. Echeverria. They stood outside the school entrance to monitor the arriving students. I was then taken to the trailer known as *the office*, where I would come to spend some time every day, in between classes, at least in the first half of the fieldwork.

The office was a good place for me to get a feeling of what was going on in the school. The five staff members had their desks here. These included the aides; Herminia and Marco, two Assistant Principals (there were three APs), a teacher: Mr. Steinberg, and a secretary; Ms. Bonilla. Since I speak English and Spanish, I could talk to the people who were there in either language.

The principal provided me with a list of all the periods. Before I went to a class, I asked the teacher for permission. I had a hard time choosing which periods to attend. I was hoping to find a class made up of “representative Dominicans.” Skinstad (2002:151) writes of a similar experience when she studied South Asian students in a high school:

I realized that despite my attempts to steer clear of essentialized ethnic categories, I had done just that; constructed essentialized categories and that I was now looking for people who would fit into my categories.

When I went to classes the first time, I introduced my self to the class and informed them about my research project on Dominicans. I told them that I would write a thesis about them. One girl later recalled this occurrence: *I remember the first day. You were asking everyone what they were, Dominican, Puerto Rican. I had learned*

that this was an unusual question to ask students in front of the whole class. In the office, the secretary offered to show me the name lists and also indicated who was of Dominican origin. This essentialist methodology soon proved unreasonable to me, as I could not find “people to fit my categories”. I discovered that there was no particular class that could be my focus group; as there were many differences between the groups of different class periods regarding their age, how gender roles were outplayed, and practices on language and ethnicity. A focus on one group of students; e.g. from a class period, was no longer an option; I felt that this would limit my understanding of student identity formation in ICHS. I ended up going to different periods to get to know the variety of identities among Dominican students. The students whom I got to know were diverse with regard to age, gender, country of birth and language practices. Some of the older students were more outspoken; perhaps since they had been in the school for a longer time.

I brought a notebook along to classes and wrote down key words and phrases. I later transcribed everything onto my laptop. I used to move around in the schools buildings to catch up with people I wanted to talk to. Since the school day is strictly structured, it was often difficult to find time to speak to them. I usually had lunch in the cafeteria with students. It was stressful to be on the run; there was always a class to attend, people I wanted to see, and activities to engage in. In Chapter Three I describe the busy schedule of the students that describe this part of the school’s organization.

For this thesis, I have selected a number of periods that I will focus on more than others. The teachers of the periods represented different attitudes towards the school’s language and ethnicity politics, and they will be more thoroughly introduced in Chapter Four titled Ms. Smith, and Chapter Six titled Mr. Steinberg and Ms. Reynoso. Mr. Steinberg taught Junior level, i.e., third year, English mainstream students, Social Science. He was Jewish and the students were mixed: African-Americans, Africans from sub-Saharan Africa, Puerto Rican and Dominican. Ms. Smith taught Sophomore, i.e., second year, ESL students English. She was Anglo-American and she presented the students to me as Dominican, Ghanaian, Lebanese and Turkish. Ms. Reynoso taught History to Sophomores enrolled in bilingual program. She was Dominican like most of the students, although one

student was Salvadorian. In these periods I have listed the grade of the majority of their students since it was possible for a Sophomore to take some Junior classes.

I worked on a questionnaire that I distributed among the students of the three teachers mentioned above (inspired by Romo and Falbo 1996). I realized that it was very difficult to label them. I wanted them to mark whether they were Dominican, Dominican-American, Latino, and so on. I asked a Dominican friend what categories I could provide. He contended that; *Many don't know what they are*. I ended up not asking the question, asking instead where they and their parents were born.⁸ This is related to what I wrote above, that the students may be said to have a flexible approach to identities, which may have made it harder for them to define themselves in one fixed category in a questionnaire.

Apart from spending time in the office, in classes and on the premises, I tried to participate in as many activities as possible to broaden my knowledge of school and the students. I went to different types of meetings, e.g., parents- teachers meetings, and for the student body, i.e., assembly. When the school was restructured, the aim was to "Focus on Academic Performance."⁹ Many of the activities in school had an academic content. This content was present, for instance, in trips to museums and theatres and the production of a school newspaper. The ICHS organized a Career Day to which professionals were invited to speak to the students about their careers. Some of the participants were Dominicans, among them the State Assemblyman Adriano Espaillat.

The NMEC arranged a Saturday School. It opened at 8.30 A.M., with a free breakfast in the lunch room. The school was open to everyone, not only to students. Classes were offered for completing the GED diploma, ESL, computer science, drama and photography. The lasted from 9 A.M. - 1 P.M., while non-participating young children were taken care of in the lunch room.

There was also an organization in ICHS, Adelante. It offered scholastic assistance programs primarily for Latinos and African-Americans. Adelante was run by two employees, Laura (21- years-old) and Miguel (20-years-old), both were

⁸ Altogether 80 students answered my questions about their life history, family life, activities, and more, and I will make some references to it throughout the thesis.

⁹ I will not enlist the sources since the ICHS and the NMEC shall remain anonymous.

Dominican college students. Since I was offered a desk in their trailer, I got to know them and their students very well. Throughout the thesis I will refer to students whom I got in contact with in Adelante's office. This organization did not start to function until October, so when they opened I already knew many of the students who came. I can not say that it functioned as a scholastic program, as many students just signed in but were not given academic assistance; it was more of a social club. Miguel said he liked this job since it was easily combined with his schedule in college; to me it appeared as he just regarded it as a job; his motivations were not primarily to assist the students at ICHS in their schooling. Their views and actions were therefore different from some staff members who offered to help students with their school work so they could graduate.

Furthermore, NMEC sponsored sport teams, e.g., baseball, track and field, basketball, and a cheerleading team. In addition, NMEC hosted the US Marine Corps-Navy ROTC which could lead students to their academy after graduation. Baseball will be presented as a Dominican ethnic marker in Chapter Five. The students in ICHS arranged a school party in December 2000 and which I will refer to in Chapter Five and Six. In other words, not all activities were academics-oriented.

I started to conduct formal interviews after two months in ICHS. These were carried out either in the library during a student's lunch period, or in different trailers, after the school day had ended. I also interviewed some of the teachers and parents. Before an interview began, I informed interviewees that they would remain anonymous. At first I asked a lot of students about their life history. However, it became quickly apparent that the students were not used to talking about themselves in that way. I realized that it was easier for many students to talk about close relations such as family and friends. Starting a conversation with questions related to more abstract issues on Dominican transnational identity and generational differences proved unproductive. I also asked students in Ms. Reynoso's class to write essays for me.

I followed up on the students outside the school's perimeter as well, for instance, on trips, but I also visited their homes. I celebrated Christmas, New Year's and Thanksgiving with students from ICHS. One of my key informants was Dilania,

whom I introduced at the beginning of the chapter. Another individual was Damaris (17-years-old). She was ESL student and had Ms. Smith as her teacher. She wrote me a letter on my first week in which she asked why I had decided to study Dominicans; she was very interested in my work. I was invited to her home one day after school, and went back regularly after that.

Apart from doing fieldwork in the school, I continued to socialize with people in Dominican organizations. I participated in conferences on Dominicans that were organized in Washington Heights. I read both Spanish and English papers and watched Spanish-speaking programs on cable television channels *Univision* and *Telemundo* or the local television station *Cablevision*.¹⁰ In my project proposal I had planned to attend a local church, but discovered that I did not have the time to go to church services regularly. There were many Catholic churches in the district which conducted mass in Spanish and English, as well as other centers for religious worship (a synagogue, Greek Orthodox Church) and “botanicas;” shops that sold products for religious and spiritual needs, such as candles, incenses, oils and herbs.

I mostly socialized with my Dominican roommate and her friends during weekends. She had attended computer classes at NMEC and therefore knew the school. During the week she was busy; she worked in the Jewelry District during the day and studied at night.

After fieldwork in New York, I visited four ICHS students in the DR, among them Dilia. This was my second visit there, and it was interesting to revisit the DR and meet the students there. I had traveled to New York and the DR in November 1999-January 2000. After the main fieldwork I returned to New York four times (June 2001, December-January 2002/2003, May 2003 and March 2005). In other words, I did my main fieldwork before the September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre.

My Roles

The fact that I speak Spanish had advantages and unanticipated outcomes. It was necessary to speak Spanish to get to know many of the students in the bilingual

¹⁰ Since 1978 this local television channel in Spanish (channel 41) had been operated by Dominicans (Rodriguez de León 1998: 171).

classes, as well as some of the teachers. The first day I entered the English mainstream classrooms I introduced myself in English and Spanish. When I started to speak Spanish, one of the students said out loud; *Why do you speak Spanish?* It seemed as though he did not understand why I had learned the language, or why I would speak it in the English mainstream classroom. He was acting in a manner similar to what Mohn (1993: 67) experienced in a bilingual primary school in San Francisco. Students would ask her why she spoke Spanish in situations when she did not have to. Throughout the period of my fieldwork, I frequently noticed people's surprise that I spoke Spanish, maybe because I am white and that it was regarded as unusual to hear white people speak Spanish. When I went to an English mainstream class a few months after my first day in school, the teacher wanted to introduce me again. But some students just said; *Her name is Kristin, she's from Norway, and she knows more Spanish than we do!* Damaris also found the fact that I spoke Spanish amusing. She said to a Dominican taxi driver that I was Dominican since I could dance *bachata*, eat plantains and speak Spanish. In Chapter Five I will discuss in greater detail *bachata* and plantains as Dominican markers.

I also registered a variety of reactions when I said that I had been to the DR. I expected my knowledge of the country to be of interest for the students, but it would seem that they were not more interested in getting to know me because of this fact. However, during interviews my knowledge of the DR school system (I volunteered as a teacher there for two weeks), family life, climate and other mundane facts was useful to establishing rapport with students when asking them about their visits to the DR.

Since I was a woman, I seemed to secure key informants who were girls rather than boys. For instance, only girls were represented among the students I visited at home, but I did become acquainted with many boys as well. However, I have chosen to focus basically on individual strategies of three girls in Chapter Six since this was sufficient for the scope of the chapter.

In school there was a teacher/student dichotomy. Teachers were addressed by the students by title, e.g., Ms. Mrs., Miss, Mr., while teachers were on a first name basis with one another. During classes I would sit at a student desk and could

therefore be perceived to be a student, or a person observing the class. This was possible because I had many things in common with many teachers: I was female, white, had been to college and was in my 20's.

In ICHS, some staff members constituted a middle category between students and teachers, as is the case of the security guards, aides and Adelante. Like the teachers, this category was supposed to set an example for the students. When I wanted to cut classes along with the students to see the Yankee parade, Mr. Steinberg said; *No, you can't go, the students cannot see someone from school down there.* Similarly, when I was invited to a party with some students from Ms. Reynoso's class, it was disapproved of by Marco, one of the Dominican aides. He informed me that someone representing the school was not supposed to dance with the students at a party; *It looks bad* (3). But I received support from Ms. Smith, who encouraged me to go to parties and dance with the students and that way learn about what she said was their *culture*. How Ms. Smith viewed Dominicans and Dominican culture will be discussed in Chapter Four.

In the following section I will present a brief historical summary of Dominican immigration, including some notes on their socioeconomic situation in NYC.

Dominican Immigration to New York City

Since the beginning of the 1960's, Dominicans, among other Caribbean immigrants, began coming to the USA, especially NYC. The phenomenon was part of a world-wide flow of labor and capital at the end of the Second World War (Georges 1990: 1). Among the first to arrive were Dominican political refugees after the assassination in 1961 of the Dominican dictator, Trujillo. (Sørensen 1998: 241f). Subsequently, in 1965, there was a popular uprising to restore the DR's first elected president, Juan Bosch. This led to a US occupation (Gonzalez 2000: 118). The 1965 amendments in the U.S. also made it easier for Dominicans to immigrate to the U.S.: Northern Europeans no longer held a privileged status with regard to the immigration to the USA (Lamphere 1992: 7).

The first members of an expanding Dominican population in the US were

members of the DR's elite (Atkins and Wilson 1998: 162). These Dominicans arrived in a city where minorities such as African-Americans, Indians, *chicana*¹¹ and Puerto Ricans had fought in the 1950's for civil rights and human dignity (Rodriguez de León 1998: 238f). Some of these groups and individuals helped the Dominicans to establish themselves in their new surroundings. Furthermore, in the 1950's the Dominican performing artist Johnny Pacheco was leading a musical movement which created salsa. Thus there was a Dominican presence in the city before the 1960's (ibid).

Beginning in the late 1970's; economic, and not political, differences have motivated most of the migration from the DR to the US (Graham 1997: 95). The DR came to be one of the countries in the world most dramatically affected by emigration (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991: 20f).¹² About ten percent of the DR's eight million inhabitants emigrated to the US from the mid-1960s to 1990 (Atkins and Wilson 1998: 161). However, in the US this immigration went largely unnoticed until the 1990's, when Dominicans became the second largest Latino group in the Northeast (Gonzalez 2000: 117f). Dominicans are one of the fastest growing groups in New York City (Hernández and Torres-Saillant 1996: 32). Almost 50 percent are 20 years or younger; it is a youthful population (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991: 163).

The impact of Dominican immigration to the United States is even greater than is suggested by its volume, given the concentration of Dominicans in the NYC/New Jersey area (Pessar 1995: 23). There are probably much more than one million individuals of Dominican origin living in the New York area. An exact number is not available due to the presence of illegal immigrants or immigrants who have overstayed their visas. Many Dominicans also divide their time between the two countries, so it is difficult to give a certain figure. Larson and Sullivan (1989 cited in Hernández and Torres-Saillant 1996b: 31f) show that estimates on the numbers of Dominican immigrants range from 300,000 to 1,000,000. Many are probably US-born;

¹¹ Chicana is a Mexican-American movement, and Chicana people are from regions of the USA that were Spanish-speaking prior to colonization.

¹² That is in terms of legal immigration to the US in 1981 (ibid.)

in the 1990's one out of three Dominicans residing in the US were US-born (Hernández and Rivera-Batiz 2003).¹³

Like other post-1965 immigrants in New York, Dominicans have a mixed socioeconomic background. Compared to the average Mexican or Puerto Rican immigrant, Dominicans are generally better educated, more urbanized, more politically active, and more engaged in business enterprise (Gonzalez 2000: 118). However, Grasmuck and Pessar (1991: 164) write that on an average, Dominicans in US have nine years of schooling, which can explain why they often hold low skilled occupations. The socioeconomic status of Dominicans in New York is one of the lowest in the city; their earnings were lower and their unemployment rate was higher than that of the average New Yorker (Hernández and Rivera-Batiz 1997:4). One reason for this may be that black and so-called mulatto Dominicans has strikingly higher poverty levels than white Dominicans (Pessar 1995: 42). According to Duster (2001: 5f), there is a general tendency for the largest immigrant groups in each country to experience the highest rates of unemployment, and Dominicans may therefore be vulnerable to unemployment.

Dominicans' poverty rate at 32 percent was the highest of the "major racial and ethnic groups" in the city; in 1999, the overall rate was 19.1 percent, for Latinos 29.7 percent (Hernández and Rivera-Batiz 2003). Despite these numbers, the median income for Dominicans rose 16 percent during the 1990's, which give a mixed picture of the Dominican population (*ibid.*).

For Dominicans born in the United States, the numbers give room for optimism since in 2000 almost 60 percent who were 25-years or older had completed some college courses; 21.9 percent had received a college diploma (Hernández and Rivera-Batiz 2003). High school enrollment in NYC is higher for Dominicans than other Latinos, and women are close to the city's average graduation rate (*ibid.*).

According to Fernández Kelly (1995:222, cited in Offer-Ohlsen 2000a: 1) has two great sagas; international immigration and racial polarization left their indelible mark on US cities. More than any other American urban center, NYC is the foremost Caribbean meeting place; in fact, it is the largest Caribbean city in the world (Chaney

¹³ US citizens with a Dominican passport have since 1997 been allowed to vote from abroad in presidential elections (Leon 1998: 209). In New York, this was not put into action until the presidential elections of 2004.

1992:19 cited in Offer-Ohlsen 2000a: 9). Various Caribbean people learn about each other, and organize themselves to combat common difficulties. Caribbean immigrants may be included in a larger pool of ethnic identities, e.g., West Indian, pan-Caribbean, Latino and African-American identities (ibid.). NYC's labor market has been compared to that of an hour-glass: a dual city, the narrow tube separating the two bulbs symbolized the difficulty of movement from the lower to the higher classes (Clifford 1994:311 cited in Offer-Ohlsen 2000b: 4). The understandings of race in the US and the DR will be presented in Chapter Six.

Many of the researchers who have studied Dominican immigration and the group's adjustment to life in NYC, have looked at Dominicans as an isolated social group of individuals which leads transnational lives with strong bonds to the homeland. This body of literature and my views on them will be presented in Chapter Five. I argue that the transnational labels may not apply to all Dominicans in NYC, especially the young who were born in the US and US citizens. A majority of the students at ICHS had a common Dominican descent, and lived in a highly urbanized and multiethnic city.

Plan of the Thesis

Chapter Two: Life in the "Heights" describes Washington Heights as a Dominican community since an ethnic electoral district has been established there. Even though it is a Dominican community, it is neither static nor homogenous. Empirical examples show different views and practices with regard to gender, discipline and aspirations. But they also show an emotional attachment to the neighborhood.

Chapter Three: ICHS: A Prison School deals with school spaces and the daily routines that the students experienced. The architecture, the strict schedule and the physical surroundings were designed in order for the school to keep students under surveillance. The chapter describes the students' resistance, the street ethos in school, and how staff reacted to abnormal behavior.

Chapter Four: Reading Alvarez is an account of how ESL students read a novel by the Dominican author Julia Alvarez. Here a Dominican identity is imposed upon the students. The students' participation reflects on individual experiences, and how

many reject the book as a form to express Dominican identity. This demonstrates that they are not passive recipients. Attitudes to books, the teacher's role and how fiction may be used as ethnography are discussed.

Chapter Five: Dominican Markers were presented to me as Dominican festivals, the flag, food (the plantain), music (merengue, bachata and los palos), and baseball. I discuss whether motivations for Dominican ethnic boundary maintenance are linked to ethnic pride, or if the markers express transnational ties or may be regarded American creations. I discuss theories about the two peak periods of immigration to the US, and existing works on Dominican identity.

Chapter Six; Language and Individual Strategies present three girls enrolled in different language programs in ICBS, and how the school affected their identity formations. I look at Spanish as a marker for Latinos in USA, and how this language can be under-communicated. The strategies reflect complexity of language, race and ethnicity choices that can shape interrelations between students.

Chapter Seven; Concluding Remarks; sums up the main points that I have made in this thesis, and I point to that this study was done on youth in a limited time period. I look at some changes that have happened in the US since the fieldwork, and suggest relevant future studies.

Chapter Two

Life in the “Heights”

To be Latino in Washington Heights is to represent another Spanish country, is to develop cultural diffusion is to see all the different kinds of people doing their daily chores.

It's to see women and men selling sweet beans in their rolling cart with their apron on. A man in the middle of the block in 192nd near the supermarket is with his little rolling cart calling out for seguidilla for the people to come and buy. In the afternoon from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. I see a lot of kids coming out from public schools. With their uniforms on, yellow shirt with khaki pants or white shirts with blue pants.

At the end of the block in the corner I see a man selling “piraguas” and the kids are tugging their mothers dress, begging them to buy ice cream. To be Latino in Washington Heights is to work hard and hold a decent job. Such as working in the supermarket, be the owner of a bodega, where everybody will enter; greet you and do shopping. It's to be a teacher or a dentist.

To be Latino in Washington Heights is to come down from your building, find a friend or neighbour, and start gossiping about other people's lives. It's to cross the street in the red light when you see the car far away from you and to listen to the guys flirting at the young ladies with tight clothes on, showing parts of their body to look sexy.

Also to be Latino is to have all types of restaurants from different countries such as Dominican restaurant, Mexican, Chinese or from El Salvador. It's to listen to all types of music like hip-hop or reggae. It's to use the train or bus for transportation. To be Latino in Washington Heights is to have fun, respect people's religion, ideas and opinions. It's to see another small world with all kinds of cultures combined. It's to be somebody and help each other. To be Latino here is to work hard and decent. This is what to be Latino in Washington Heights is about.

Lulu (15-years-old)

Introduction

Lulu was Mexican and a junior student at ICHS. She wrote the latter article for the school newspaper, entitled “Life in the Heights.”. Even though many Latinos live in Washington Heights, I would label this a Dominican community.¹⁴ Many researchers refer to it as a community on a political and organizational level (Weyland 1998: 179). Ms. Reynoso, a teacher at ICHS, said Washington Heights is a Dominican community since *we have the politicians*. I plan to examine it as such.

Community is a contested concept, and has been criticized by Young (1990 cited in Pieterse 1996:30) for being static and homogenous: “[T]here are more experiences of “ethnicity” than through community (ibid.)” Nevertheless I will still

¹⁴ When I refer to Washington Heights, I include the neighboring areas of Inwood and Hamilton Heights as a part of the community. See Appendix B for maps of the three areas.

describe Washington Heights as a community, but also show through empirical examples that it is complex and dynamic.

Washington Heights consisted of many neighborhoods, blocks and apartment buildings. I will describe the streets, the buildings and some celebrations that took place there. I will present the immigration history of a student, and family reunification and separation. I will point to some generational continuations and discontinuances with regard to aspirations and discipline within families. Reputation and respectability are two parallel values in the Caribbean; the man should maintain his reputation, while the woman shall maintain a respectable behavior (Wilson 1969 cited in Offer-Ohlsen 1999: 7). These values were to a changing degree prevalent in Washington Heights. There were both positive and negative sides of life in the Heights: Gossiping, garbage, noise, gangs and drug dealers were some of the downsides for many people. Despite these things I will show how students felt a belonging to the neighbourhood since many had their network of friends and family there.

Historic Outlines

A history of Washington Heights

The native Indians sold the island of Manhattan in 1626 to the colonists (Washington Heights-Inwood: A very special part of Manhattan). Later, the area which is now Washington Heights was turned into farms, and the Indians were forced to leave. General Washington had his headquarters on the site, but had to surrender for the British in 1776 (Williams 1989: 22f).

Between 1850 and World War 1 northern Manhattan was an attractive place to situate estates. In 1886 saw the founding of Yeshiva University, a Jewish institution for higher learning. At the turn of the 20th century, the Hispanic Society of America and the Museum of the American Indian opened their doors. In the same period the area was connected to the subway network, which led Eastern European, Irish, and German immigrants to move uptown. 30 years into the 20th century, Washington Heights became home to the Presbyterian Hospital, and the George Washington

Bridge was completed (Washington Heights-Inwood: A very special part of Manhattan). All of these institutions and constructions are visible landmarks today.

German and Austrian-Jews, and Puerto Ricans arrived in the 1930's and 1940's, and African-Americans moved in from Harlem and Southern States after the World War 2. Since the 1960's the area has changed from being predominantly Irish and Jewish to one with many Latino and African-American residents (Graham 1997: 109).¹⁵ Puerto Ricans, Cubans and Dominicans were the first Spanish-speaking immigrants, but Dominicans has since outnumbered other groups demographically (Duany 1994: 10). Still there are some parts that have remained largely Jewish or Irish. These neighborhoods are more affluent than the areas east of Broadway where many Dominicans settled (Graham 1997: 109f).

Washington Heights' history may be said to mirror the great multiracial transition and change that Sanjek (1998: 1) writes United States is currently ongoing. In Washington Heights I also observed that in recent years more white people moved into this predominantly Latino neighborhood. One Dominican family I know was offered money from their landlord to move out. By doing this, he could upgrade the building to be able to increase the rent. This family relocated to Florida, but others moved to the Bronx or New Jersey.

Washington Heights houses one-third of people of Dominicans in the US (Pessar 1995: 24). This district is often referred to as the Dominican capital abroad or a close-knit community (Gonzalez 2000: 124f). In the next section I will give an historic overview of the development of the Dominican community.

The Coming of Age of a Dominican Community

There were a number of Dominican ethnic organizations who served the inhabitants of the area, e.g. the **Alianza Dominicana**, and the **Communal Association of Progressive Dominicans (ACDP)**. **Dominicans 2000** organized conferences on such topics as education and youth, while the **Dominican Youth Union** was a school advocacy organization (Torres-Saillant and Hernández 1996: 85). Furthermore, there is the **Dominican Studies Institute** at the City College of the University of New York

¹⁵ Other groups that moved in were Haitians, Cubans, Mexicans, Russians and Koreans.

(CUNY), and the **Casa de Cultura Dominicana** which was ran by the Dominican government. Several of the students attending ICHS had participated in Alianza Dominicana activities, volunteering to bring Halloween meals to the poor, or attending their summer school.

Voluntary associations have existed among Dominicans in Washington Heights since 1945 (ibid: 80). Most of them were affective, as they were networks of friends that gathered (ibid.). In the 1960's some of them started to commemorate important historical dates. In the decade that followed a precursor to Alianza Dominicana was founded: Dominican Center for Orientation and Social Assistance. These organizations were more instrumental than affective, as they offered assistance to the community (ibid.). More political organizations began functioning, and these organizations were often affiliated with counterpart political parties in the DR. The major political parties in the DR had and continue to have branches in New York,¹⁶ and are active in organizing various activities in the community (Weyland 1999: 221).

The current president of the DR, Dr. Leonel Fernandez, grew up in NYC. He is doing his second four-year term for the political party PLD, and this can show that there are strong bonds between NYC and the DR. However, the US continues to oversee presidential elections in the DR, so the US may constrain the sovereignty of the DR (López 1998: 4).

The expanding number of political organizations in Washington Heights resulted in a struggle for a greater say over the schools in School District 6. The ACDP confronted the School Board and Superintendent in 1980 to demand bilingual education and programs for recently-arrived immigrant families (Pessar 1995: 25). Dominicans established a powerful voice in neighborhood schools in Community School District 6 (ibid.). Dominican representation on the School Board led to the construction of additional public schools.

¹⁶ These political parties are *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano* (PRD), *Partido de la Liberación Dominicana* (PLD) and *Partido Reformista Social Cristiano* (PRSC).

In the mid-80's 125 Dominican voluntary organizations existed in the district (Georges 1988). Among them was the committee who organized the first Dominican parade in NYC, in 1982 (Rodriguez de León 1998: 161).

In 1990, the city of New York decided to make it easier for minority candidates to run for election (Graham 1997). This was done by making electoral districts smaller, and expanding the number of Councilmen in the City Council. To create a majority Dominican election district turned out to be easier in Washington Heights than in multiethnic neighbourhoods of Queens and the Lower East Side (ibid: 113). In Washington Heights, several Dominican-led groups presented proposals. When labelling the new election district the focus was on the creation of a Latino district, however, with the accent on the economic role played by Dominicans in the area (ibid: 111). In the end, election district 10 was drawn in an area where 43 percent of the registered voters were Latinos, but a significantly larger percentage, i.e., 75 percent, of people living in this district was Latino (ibid: 113).¹⁷ When the first election for City Council was held in 1991, most of the candidates were Dominicans. Guillermo Linares, who had helped launch the school movement, was elected as the first Dominican City Councilman (Pessar 1995: 74).

In 1992, a dramatic event drew attention to Washington Heights from the mainstream media. Kiko Garcia, a Dominican drug dealer, was shot and killed by a plainclothes-policeman in Washington Heights. Hundreds of residents went out in the streets to protest against police violence (Atkins and Wilson 1998: 213, Rodriguez de León 1998: 205). The event sparked one-week-long riots and looting. From the DR, the President Balaguer appealed to his compatriots to insist on respect for their rights without resorting to violence.¹⁸

In same year a newspaper in the DR, *El Nacional*, started to publish a US version, aimed at the Dominican readership in USA (Rodriguez de León 1998: 171). Movies related to Dominican migration were released in New York in the 1990's. In

¹⁷ The election district 10 (Community District 10) consisted of much of the area above 159th street, east of Broadway, to the top of Manhattan (ibid.).

¹⁸ Derby (1998: 474f) writes that this event was linked to problems in the Dominican Republic. While the country was in a profound crisis; the president Balaguer had built the multimillion Columbus lighthouse, and there was a great controversy on how the Dominican; *el criollo*, should be defined in a transnational context.

1994, active involvement in school politics resulted in the appointment of a Dominican principal to head a high school in Washington Heights (Pessar 1995: 25f).

City Councilman Guillermo Linares kept his position until 2001. He was followed by Dominican Miguel Martinez. But it was Linares who gave parts of St. Nicholas Avenue an additional name; Juan Pablo Duarte Boulevard.¹⁹ Despite this, would most people refer to it as *St. Nicholas*. Additionally, Linares attended graduation ceremonies at NMEC, thus stressing the fact that the campus was a part of the community. Another person who engaged in the political community was Ms. Torres, a Dominican Assistant Principal at ICHS. She participated at the Dominican Roundtable Conference along with an administrator from the Board of Education that supervised NMEC. Ms. Torres also invited many speakers from the Dominican community organizations to participate on the Career Day at ICHS.

Many public schools in the area had been renamed after historical personalities of the DR, e.g. Hermanas Mirabal, Salomé Ureña and Gregorio Lupéron public schools (Torres-Saillant and Hernández 1996).

However, many voices have been calling out for changes in the community: Dominicans 2000 (Conference Summary Report 2000) writes that more young people must be encouraged to participate politically; and called for unity between community leaders. Bodden (Manhattan Times 2000: 3) says the community lacks leadership, e.g., it does not protect parents who are forced to put their children into foster care. Furthermore, Bodden (ibid.) writes that many of the leaders do not live in the community they serve. Rodriguez de León (1998: 164) argues that some people take advantage of their positions and put money in their own pockets. Ydanis Rodriguez was a member of the Democratic Party in the US and ran for City Council in election district 10 in 2001. He said that the city should look into how many youths who live in Washington Heights, and made a plan thereafter (personal communication). He said he had attended to gang meetings where they addressed social issues. At a political meeting he also pointed to the demographic change; Dominicans are moving to the Bronx and New Jersey: *We are being forced to move out from here* (4).

¹⁹ Juan Pablo Duarte is regarded as the founding father of the Dominican Republic.

The Street Scene

The bustling street scene with its people and businesses is a place where much of the area's social life unfolded. Washington Heights is the most densely populated neighbourhood of NYC (Hernández and Torres-Saillant 1996: 34). The over-crowding on the subway stations during the morning clearly reflected, as far as I was concerned, a densely populated neighbourhood in which train capacity was not taken into consideration. This was especially a problem where they had to use elevators to get to the platforms. When I went to ICHS in the morning I could see people who queued up for 10-15 minutes, or more, before they could get inside the operated elevator.

Washington Heights consisted of parallel avenues that basically run north-south through the district, and streets that traversed these. Weyland (1999: 205f) writes that the geographic location of Washington Heights and the DR has made them convenient locations for drug distribution. In Washington Heights drug dealers could be seen on many corners; some parts of the neighborhood had more drug dealers than others.

Visible signs of a Dominican community were the Dominican flags that hung from the poles and the fire escapes on the main avenues. These avenues and streets were filled with an abundance of businesses; some selling high quality apparel and others cheap clothes. Many businesses placed goods like suitcases, detergents, curtains and clothes on the sidewalk in front of their store. The basements were also used for local businesses. Most of the establishments were open every day, and Sundays were as busy as any other day. There were also ambulant vendors that sold pirated CD's, boxes with fruit salads, clothes or perfumes. Furthermore, there were free newspapers that could be taken from boxes on the street corner, like Manhattan Times, in Spanish and English, and *El Especialito* in Spanish.

Music, like *bachata*, *merengue*, *salsa*, *los palos* and *reggaeton* was played in the stores, the restaurants, the passing cars and could be heard from the apartments. Car alarms, and the wailing noises they unleash, went off regularly, as were the familiar melodies of the characteristic ice cream vans of the city. Abel (17-years-old), a bilingual student in Ms. Reynoso's class, said it was a noisy neighborhood:

If you take people from here in Washington Heights to another place, they'll get a heart attack. For instance, in Philadelphia, it's quiet, and if you throw a stone in the street that will make a lot of noise. People will get bored, the Dominicans are like that (5).

Many people in Washington Heights tended to their appearances in local establishments: Women had their nails done professionally as well as regularly straightening their hair. Men got a fade haircut, fixed their eyebrows, and their facial hair made into a goatee. It was popular among the young to have their hair braided in artistic designs, e.g., zigzag patterns on their scalps. Other young men wore afros, or used do-rags (nylons) on their head. Almost all of the boys wore baggy jeans. Abel, the boy in Ms. Reynoso's class, did not wear baggy jeans, so he said people in Washington Height thought he was older (*mayor*) because he wore ordinary jeans. Gold was also in fashion. While men wore gold chains and hoops in their earlobes, women had larger gold hoops with their names on, rings or thinner neck chains with a name plate pendant. A large number of young people had a penchant for brand-name clothes bearing the labels Phat farm, mecca, Enyce and The Northern Face.

To wear lots of jewelry and expensive clothes could be associated with drug dealers, as some of them had an income that could support such a lifestyle. Indiana, a student in Steinberg's class, said to me that it was easy to spot the drug sellers as they smelled good and had nice cars.

Moving away from the busiest commercial areas, it was possible to find small grocery stores, *bodegas*, on almost every block. The bodegas were often owned by Dominicans,²⁰ and the same applied to other types of businesses in the area, e.g., supermarkets, restaurants, convenience stores, and hair dressers (Atkins and Wilson 1998: 215). No yellow cabs cruised on the roads of Washington Heights. The only cab available was the livery type which is ordered by the passengers or waved down in the street; they are operated by a variety of companies (Krohn-Hansen 2005: 80).

Bodegas were patronized by people on the block where these were located. Parents sent their children to shop for groceries, e.g., rice, plantains, meat, phone cards, religious candles, beer, canned beans, candy and more. Many bodegas sold illegal

²⁰ Dominicans owned around 70 percent of all *bodegas* in New York City (Portes and Guarnizo 1991 cited in Torres-Saillant and Hernandez 1996b:33)

lottery tickets. I saw the police temporarily shut down some bodegas for illegal gambling. The bodegas were also an integral part of the local community: When Diliania had trouble with boys that threw snow balls at her, she told the people there. One of them turned out to be the uncle of one of boys and he said that he would talk to them to make them stop.

Some people did not show much solidarity with people in the community. When Damaris' stepmother needed a new part for her car, her mechanic walked around their block, stealing the part needed. Her uncle said to me that this was wrong of her since they all lived in the same community, and should not steal from one another. So not everyone felt that they lived in a warm community: One woman said on a Dominican conference: *The community isn't very friendly.*

Hanging out

Young people would hang out on corners. Carlos, a student from Mr. Steinberg's

English mainstream class, said that he had problems with gangs:

But in my block, we don't like that gang stuff, you can chill with them, but we don't like it when someone puts something up from a gang or something like that. Had problems three times with gangs, once it was because of a girl, and once it was because I was wearing blue, you know because they got these gangs, like Cripps and Bloods who got different colors [...] I mean in my block, you have people of all ages, but we're always together, like when there was this guy from a gang who came to fight a boy in my block, and all of us, from the youngest to the oldest, stood up for him. I really liked that, that all of us stood up for him.

In the summer, he said there had been a big fight when people from nearby blocks came to fight them: *[B]ut everyone was just beating the other because you didn't know who was who, so you were just beating..* Even though he said he liked to hang out, he expressed the fact that he was serious about education:

You know, even though I hang out doesn't mean that I don't go to school, I mean the others I stand with, they have graduated all of them, they haven't gone to college yet, but they all graduated. Just because we like to chill out on the street, doesn't mean that we don't go to school. I mean, there are so many of the guys who say to me, those who are older, and sell drugs, don't do the same as we did. I mean I go to school, I'm gonna graduate. One of my ideals is the basketball player [...], he doesn't forget where he is from. He earns millions and he still gives back.

Bourgeois (1995) writes that inner-city street culture has developed as poor youth from El Barrio, New York, felt culturally assaulted when they ventured outside their neighborhood. This "culture" is described to be

A complex and conflictual web of beliefs, symbols, modes of interaction, values, and ideologies that have emerged in opposition to exclusion from mainstream society. Street culture offers an alternative forum for autonomous personal dignity (ibid. 8).

Carlos' ideal seemed to be a combination of elements from inner-city culture and the larger society. These ideals were not necessarily in conflict as demonstrated by the advice Carlos received. He planned to take education seriously.

Youngsters who hung out could be targeted by the police. A man in his 20's said to me that the police practiced *ageism* since young people often were targeted in the street. The father of a 17-year-old told me he his son had been arrested because he and his friends were standing on the corner in his block. López (1999: 77f) writes that one of her informants said:

[T]hat police officers routinely drove around in his neighborhood looking for criminal suspects. The officers would take snapshot pictures of young people who were sitting on park benches or standing in front of their apartment buildings.

There were also many girls who liked to spend time on the corners. Lucia (15-years-old), which I knew from the Adelante office, said that many people would hang out 24-7. *Yeah, I mean, all those people hanging around.* When loitering, she and her friends made jokes about people's looks, their clothes and hairstyles. Juana, a girl in Ms. Smith's class said that she hung out, but that the other girls were jealous of her brand-name handbags and clothes.

Girls like Lucia and Juana could be said to challenge the so-called feminine traits, like conformity, silence and passivity, because they were out in the public space (ibid: 96). But not all boys were allowed to be outside. At a meeting in a community organization, a woman commented: *My sons are not hanging out on the street corners* (6). She seemed proud when she said this because to her this was a sign that they were hard-working people. Damaris' aunt would supervise her 12-year-old son from the fire escape of her apartment, to see what he was doing. She said to me: *My son likes to hang out with the tígueres in the corner, there are many tígueres here* (7).

In the DR is *tíguere* a notion used to classify and shape different types of male behavior (Krohn-Hansen 1996: 108). The *tíguere* is linked to ambiguous meanings. It can describe a proud, aggressive man who defends himself, or it is used to indicate a sort of trickster (ibid: 109). When Damaris' aunt expressed anxiety about her son idle on with *tígueres*, I believe she was afraid he was consorting with tricksters. The same may apply to comments made by Elizabeth from Ms. Smith's class when she referred to her boyfriend as a *tíguere*: *Sometimes I just sit there with my mouth open when he tells me about everything he has done* (8).

Some men liked to loaf about the streets. They called out to female passers-by, or drank beer, or played dominoes. Of the young men, many walked with a swagger. These ways men could exhibit themselves in public spaces, a masculine ideal among Dominicans (ibid: 113), and perhaps in the inner-city as well. Both girls and boys would hang out on the corners, but as I have shown, not all were affiliated with gangs or drugs; they simply spent much of their social life there.

Family Life

The Apartment Building

Most of the buildings in the area were large brick apartment houses with fire escapes on the front. Most of them were six-story high, containing many apartments with several bedrooms in each one. During the summer time, people in the building sat outside the entrance while children played with water from opened fire hydrants. There were also larger buildings; some of them were public housing projects ran by the City of New York.

Every apartment building had its own *super*, or superintendent, who took care of the building, and who lived on the premises with his family. The superintendent would take care of the garbage bags, leaving them on the sidewalk for collection by the sanitation trucks. The state of the building depended a great deal on the seriousness on the part of the super and the owners. One Puerto Rican super said he had a hard time to keeping the drug dealers away. Others did not feel the same degree of responsibility, as was the case in Diania's building where the superintendent forgot to put oil in the boiler, causing a leak and the development of a thick grey smoke. Diania's stepmother said this was due to the fact that the super was a *drunkard* (9).

The hallways of the buildings often lacked light. The hallway, and the elevator (not all buildings had one), were often dirty and smelled of urine. But as soon as one entered an apartment, the image of general decay changed. The apartments were clean and tidy, even though frequently many people inhabited one apartment. The overall image was of a, "clean, neat, modest but appealing home" (Grossman 2001: 130f). Despite the cleanliness, however, many had problems with rats and

cockroaches. It was therefore necessary to ensure that food was put away and sometimes wash plates and cups before using them. Several apartment buildings were fumigated.

Dilania's apartment was appealing. She lived in a two-bedroom apartment. Her parents used the master bedroom, while the four siblings slept in two bunk beds. Their small living-room was equipped with a TV set, a hi-fi, a leather furniture sofa and chairs, a glass coffee table and one painting on the wall. The room had recently been painted white, and they kept the apartment spotless.

One anthropologist²¹ characterized the styles of many apartments in the area as *Dominican trash-style* because of the tenants' choice of oversized, mock-baroque furniture for the small and dark apartments. In the bedroom, the tendency was to have lacquered bedroom sets with a gold trim, and lace curtains (Valdes-Rodriguez 2003: 284). It was common to have parts of the living-room function as a bedroom, e.g., if the family expanded. This happened to one woman whose ex-husband did not pay the rent, and she moved out to not destroy his *record*. To help out, her sister made a bedroom out of her living-room to which the former moved in.

There were many different types of households in Washington Heights, and different types will also be presented in Chapter Three. One type of household was single-headed female households, which is common in West Indian societies. Damaris' stepfather experienced how hard it was economically to grow up partly without his father in such a household. At a Thanksgiving party, he said:

I bought this box of beer, I inherited 1000 dollars from my father, I checked the money now, and I thought: I better buy beer for this check (he laughed). I didn't have much contact with him, only last summer, no, summer 1999, and then he dies now. You know, he had seven kids with my mother, and four kids with another woman, so we got 1000 dollars each. I gave the rest of the money to my wife.

You know, he left me when I was 12, he left us and our mother with no money (to live in Puerto Rico), so we had to pass through hunger, we were living in this building, then, after ten years he appeared, but then I wasn't interested in more contact with him for what he did to us.

Of the 67 students who answered the question on households from the questionnaire, 22 live with a single parent (mother), 35 live with mother and father

²¹ We were three anthropologists who carried out fieldwork in Washington Heights simultaneously. Mika wrote on how young Dominicans learned to dance (in Japanese), while Ana Aparicio wrote on Dominican community organizations (in English). I have not been able to get their findings, but we discussed our research on several occasions.

(stepparents included), while ten live with mother and another guardian, e.g., uncle, aunt or grandmother. Many of these therefore formed a nuclear family which Soto (1987: 131f) writes predominates numerically and ideologically in the Hispanic population in NYC. This was also how Diliania and Damaris lived. Soto explains this as connected to Hispanic Caribbean family systems and patriarchal orientations: A tenet which prevails in Hispanic Caribbean families is that a wife's duty to her husband predominates over other family loyalties, such as their mothering role (ibid.). However, this is not always the case. I heard of a family in Washington Heights where the wife had decided to take the children and went to live with her sister. The husband worked as a super and had to stay in his apartment. My roommate said to me that this was wrong of the woman: *She is supposed to live with him* (10).

Many men had children with several women, which was a way of demonstrate masculine virtues among the *tígueres* and other men in the inner-city. Men, who had several girlfriends, were also labeled players (*playeros* in Spanish).

Many of the students did not live with their biological fathers, but with a stepfather. The principal of ICHS related that many students do not know who their fathers were. In Juana's case, she knew who he was but had little contact with him. She did, however, visit his mother who lived in Washington Heights. She commented: *I think I'm my father's only child*. This means that many students could possible have biological sisters and brothers they knew nothing of. Juana also said she had an aunt who was a student at NMEC because her grandfather remarried and started a new family. Juana would sometimes talk to her aunt in the lunch room at NMEC.

Social Control and Networks

In some buildings people had known each other for years, which was not only an idyllic situation. One negative aspect was social control. Damaris said she preferred not to talk to people because many of them had known her mother in the DR and called her and gossip. Diliania also had negative experiences. She said neighbours had spread rumours that their beds were dirty, that they had *blood on their sheets*. Diliania and her stepmother were not so happy about that. Ms. Reynoso said that in

her former building there was palpable social control. When she was younger and went out with lipstick, neighbors would tell her to take it off. Another woman said that she did not speak to people in her building. She only did this if she knew that they were serious people, and not into any dubious business. I think it was not unreasonable to be cautious since potentially dangerous situations had arisen in buildings: Richard from Ms. Reynoso's class said that someone had knocked on his aunt's door holding a weapon with a silencer on. The gunman was with a couple of people and when they realized that they had knocked on the wrong door, they left his aunt alone.

On the other hand many people in the buildings helped each other. Lucia said to me that her mother would watch other people's children for free. Damaris' stepmother would relax her neighbour's hair in her kitchen; with products to straighten kinky hair.²² Their kitchen had become a point for frequent gatherings during the week, functioning as a social club. The stepmother felt it was too noisy when people were there, the noise made it difficult for her children to do their homework. She wrote a note and tacked it on the door informing people that people they could no longer hang out in her kitchen. Damaris then had to help her children with their homework.

Students who worked would often contribute part of their earnings to the household. This was Wanda's case; she gave her mother 20 dollars a week. Girls in ICBS who had babies received help from their mothers to take care of their so they could return to classes. Dilia became a mother at the age of 18, but since her mother lived in the DR, she relied on help from other people. She received baby clothing from a Mexican neighbor, and her sister would keep her company after school hours.

Newman (1999: 193) writes that people who work and people living on welfare are like a two-sided coin: They depended on each other to make ends meet, in neighborhoods like Washington Heights. In households with stable incomes, one would seldom find the intensity that knit together poorer family members (*ibid.*

²² In Chapter Six I describe understandings of race in the DR and the US.

192).²³ Not all had these networks; some found themselves using the television set as a baby-sitter. In this way they were assured that their child was not out on the streets. If they had an air-conditioner, the temperature during the hot summer months was cool (ibid. 196, 219). A woman who used TV in this way said it made her 5-year-old daughter stay awake at nights, since she often slept during the day when she was alone.

Parties in the Apartments

Christmas, New Years, Thanksgiving and birthdays were often celebrated along with relatives, friends and neighbours. I will give an account of two celebrations, in Damaris' and Yahira's apartments respectively, as they are highly informative about the life in an apartment building, and how close families were.²⁴ Families also gathered in apartments to play cards and bingo.

I celebrated Thanksgiving in Damaris' apartment. She and her stepmother had prepared the party for a few days. When I came we gathered in the kitchen and talked. I was given a coconut drink *cuquita* made by a Puerto Rican neighbor. Many of Damaris' family members were there: Her stepfather's three sisters with their children, her grandmother with her husband, and her great-grandfather who visited from the DR. A friend of Damaris', who lived in the building, was also there. In the living room people danced merengue, bachata and reggaeton during the party.²⁵ Young and old people danced together to the same tunes, only an aunt complained about the *American music* (11) when they played hip-hop.

The food was a mixed buffet placed in the living-room; people helped themselves when they were hungry. There were two kinds of salads; Russian salad, Tuna salad, then roast pork, chicken, white rice, and a *Dominican lasagne*. The latter they explained to me was done the way they made it in the DR.²⁶ People came and left at different times. To me it felt like this was an open house where everyone was welcomed.

²³ Comas-Dias (1993, cited in Grossman 2001: 301) writes that Latinos in general view the concept of family as an extended clan rather than a nuclear unit. Dominicans can therefore prefer to live close to each other because of family values, not only because of the economy.

²⁴ In Chapter Two I will mention the hooky-parties.

²⁵ I explain more about music and dancing as Dominican markers in Chapter Five.

²⁶ In Chapter Five I discuss food as a Dominican marker.

The other party I want to discuss is Yahira's (16-years) birthday party, whose account is reproduced in an essay below. That is, I asked the students in Ms. Reynoso's class, to complete the following assignment: *Do Now: Write an essay about a person that you admire (a friend or family) or about a special event (12).*



My Birthday

The day of My Birthday which was last Year was a very happy day for me. My Dream was to go to the church so the priest could give me a special blessing for such a special day. My mother made this dream come true she talked to the priest of the church and they made a special mass for me. I felt so enthusiastic and happy when the day I had been waiting for arrived. I felt like I was in the sky the whole family was there and the other people I love the most.

The party was done in a big way. Because it lasted until 6:00 AM in the morning when I no longer could anymore with my body since I was so tired and had been drinking because they let me drink, but not much. The party was not held in a club, because I preferred not to. In a club the thing is that it lasts until the time one proposes or they tell you how long you can stay but I did not want it that way. The party was done in my home and in another apartment next door because they are very close to each other and because the hallway in the building was big, there was no problem. Neither was there any problem with the owner of the building since my cousin's husband is the owner of the building (13).

Yahira's party also show that her family made an effort to welcome people in their homes, as the event was carefully planned for days. One male Anglo-American teacher at the NMEC who lived in Washington Heights, was critical of the parties and other aspects of the way many Dominicans lived.

I live at 168th street, I see they are being sent back there [the DR] as punishment, they're gonna be going back and forth, I see that all the time, they get confused. You see I live in a building, and on weekends they have parties, like Sweet Sixteen, and they dance, it's called ...transnationalism! But they never got a hold on what to do to get an education. When I tell the students that they got the highest dropout rate, they are like, what? And I ask them how many sisters and brothers they got, one says he's got 43!

This teacher viewed the parties as part of the problem, keeping the student's attention away from schooling. The same was true for traveling to the DR. He seemed to think that the students had no sense of belonging to New York City or to DR. Both Damaris and Yahira were doing well in school, and stayed in touch with their families in the DR, so I think it is possible to get *a hold on education* for students like them. But there is little doubt that many students find it challenging to have family in two countries, or to move from NYC to the DR or vice versa.

Family Reunification and Separation

Dilania said that coming to NYC was very hard for her because she missed her mother a lot. She said her eyes got all black from lack of sleep, and that she only ate ice cream. Other students faced hardships when they were sent as punishment to the DR. Santiago from Ms. Reynoso's class said that he was sent to the DR as punishment, and that he did not like it there, he said that it was *wacky*. His aunt had beaten him in order to discipline him. This had left him with a negative image of the DR and he was not interested in going back.²⁷ Others were sent back for protection. Amy (14-years-old), said:

I had a cousin who was with a gang, he didn't do the drugs, but he was with them, once, outside their high school, his friend got beaten up, they beat him with hammers and things like that, so my grandmother got scared, and sent him to DR.

Soto (1987: 133) writes that autobiographical accounts of Latino children in NYC who were sent back or left their home societies often emphasized the crisis aspect. In other West Indian societies it is viewed more as an integral and vital part of a circular movement between migrants and the communities that send them forth (ibid.: 121). Among Dominicans there were different views on this, ranging from the crisis aspect to the view of it being a part of a cycle. When my roommate spoke of a boy whose parents had left him behind in the DR, she said: *He must be screaming all the time* (14), hereby stressing a crisis. My roommate had sent her son to live with her

²⁷ In Chapter Five I discuss some similar aspects of students' relations to the DR.

mother in the DR herself because he had cut classes, and was content with this solution herself. Ms. Reynoso did not view it as ideal to leave a child behind in the DR: *I rather eat from the ground than sending my son over there.*

Other students reported to have difficulties when living with stepparents.

Maribel (16-years-old), a Junior student in Ms. Reynoso's bilingual period, said: *My stepmother says that she doesn't like that men call me at home, then I tell her that they are one of the four friends that she already knows that calls me. She is always there when they call me. My mum is not like that. When I talk to someone on the phone, she won't enter the room. She knocks on the door first, and gets what she needs quick. I can keep my diary open there in the kitchen, and she won't even look at the page (15).*

An Immigration History of a Dominican Family

Mercedes (16-years-old) from Mr. Steinberg's English mainstream class lived with her mother and younger brother in a one-bedroom apartment. She had a little brother on her father's side in the DR. During an interview she gave me an account of her family's complex immigration history. The process of family reunification, also described by Pessar (1995: 11) as the chain, will be exemplified by her family's story. Mercedes said her grandfather was the first to come 17 years ago. He worked and then sent for Mercedes' mother: *My grandmother said it was better for her (for Mercedes' mother), because she was still young, and could go to school here. So she came over, so she could graduate here.* Her mother, who was 33-years-old at the time of the interview, went to a high school in Manhattan. In the end, she never got to graduate because she became pregnant with Mercedes: *Actually, I'm gonna be the first one from my family to graduate,* Mercedes pointed out. She said her grandfather had brought over the entire family. To my query regarding when her grandmother came to the city, she replied that it was in 1980.

Mercedes continued: *And then later came my aunt and my uncle, and then later my grandfather's new wife and the kids.* I was surprised to hear that her grandfather had remarried, and asked: *So your grandfather did take over your grandmother and her kids before he took over his wife?* She said:

Yes, and then my grandmother's new husband came over. My grandmother had different husbands; all her three kids are from different husbands. [...] Yes, I guess he just wanted to help everyone. But you know all of them who came here went back again, they didn't like it here, it's just my uncle who's here now. He's here to work, so he could buy a house over there, to move to DR. My mother is gonna move over there as well, she already bought a house with four, like four bedrooms, because she thought that I wanted to come over as well, but I don't want to. My mother is here now, she's just waiting for me to graduate, because she doesn't want to leave me alone. When I graduate, she's gonna leave the apartment for me. I don't wanna live in DR. I'm gonna be by myself, but she's gonna pay for the rent and everything.

Her story shows how her family helped one another by using their knowledge of immigration laws. Simply with the aid of one person, a number of people qualified to enter the US using family reunification as a reason. This is the way many Dominicans enter. Mercedes had lot of information about her family's immigration history, but this did not echo all students at ICHS; some said they did not even know their grandmother's name.

Generational Continuance and Discontinuance

Discipline

Grossman (2001: 301) writes that difficulties in parent-child communication difficulties are prevalent in families from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, immigrant and non-immigrant alike, but may be exacerbated by years of separation and acculturation issues for immigrant families. Discipline styles can conflict with those accepted in the US. Carolina, a student in Ms. Smith's class, had problems with how her father disciplined her, which in fact is illegal in the US:

Three times have I been kicked out of my house, they beat me hard, me and my brother, with the belt, one time I did not know what to do, so I called the police, they came like in one second, they came fast, when they know there is abuse, they think that some one can kill. They came, and my arm was red, and here in my back also, the police asked me if they could take me to an aunt's house, or something like that, but I said no, because you'll never know if people can change, I said to the police that it was ok, that I could stay. Since that time, my father has never touched me. [...] I always tell my mother to speak out, because I don't like to be hit. What does that help matters? Nothing, one has to talk. My mother, she talks to me, she knows how to communicate with people, but my father doesn't. My mother is in an English class, from eight to ten in the morning, then she goes to work. [...] my father is lazy, he spends the day in bed, the job he does is illegal, he marks a code in a phone on the street, and they pay him five to ten dollars so he can do it, and then you can talk as much as you want, one hour, two hours to Santo Domingo [...] My mother works a lot, until eight every night. [...] (16).

In Carolina's case, the police was called. This did not happen with Yahira. I will use another assignment by Yahira that highlights the following: *Homework: Write an essay based on a conflict you have had at home. Explain how it resolved* (17).

The other day I had a conflict in my home because I went out in the street and my mother was suspecting that I was going to see someone, so my mother was right, I was going out in the street to see a friend who was waiting for me. My friend lives in the same building, thus he was not waiting for me where I was. I went inside his place, but he was alone, only his little brother at six was there. I entered and sat down and we started talking. He gave me a CD which I had lent him. When my mother knocked on the door, my friend did not know what to do; your mother will come and you will get a serious beating. My friend opened the door, and my mother said, ok stupid girl, I do not want to see you in the house until your father arrive and that is how it went. She left me outside half an hour until my father came back. My mother gave me lots of beatings. My father asked her to stop it. I explained that I was looking for the CD in his apartment, and I showed him the CD. My mother did not speak to me for five days because I had to let her calm down. She pardoned me, and I will not do it again (18).

I would say that Carolina differed from Yahira in that she refused to accept the abuse and thwarted her abuser. When I asked Carolina why he behaved this way, she explained it by his personality:

I don't know, he is ignorant, like old people, who don't think. Now I don't speak to him, since he has kicked me out of the house three times, and he is not supposed to do that. So if he tells me to do something, I don't do it. But if my mother tells me to do something, I will do it.

Bourgious (1995) notes that most of his informants in El Barrio, New York explained people's behavior using the same justification as Carolina. He argues that individual pathology has to be understood as the result of structural traits in society; it has to be seen in light of the power relations between Puerto Rico and USA during that time span.

How Carolina stood up to her parents may be compared to Levitt's (2001: 83) observations on Bostoners originally from a village in the DR. Many of the children have started to address their parents using the informal pronoun "tú" (you), instead of the polite form, "usted". Levitt writes that social remittances and cross-border parenting have transformed parent-child relations. A new generation that no longer subscribes to deeply entrenched norms about respect and authority has been produced (ibid: 82f). Still, there are children who continue to find that their parents are strict when it comes to their social life, even though their parents were brought up in the US. Amy stated:

We were all born here, but brought up over there, my mum was born here, but they sent her over to DR. The first of my family to come here was my grandfather's sister; she also went to this school. She always says to me, watch out for the boys, Amy; some of them are very bad. My mother won't let me go out. She says; when I was at your age, I did the same things as you do, so I know it. [...] I had to come to this school, she wouldn't let me go to another because [...] on the trains, it was about all the people being pushed into the track, so she wouldn't let me go somewhere far. [...] I don't like cutting classes, sometimes people would be like, come on Amy, let's go, but I don't want to. I'm scared that my mum will see me. She doesn't work, but my stepfather does, and earns money.

Dilania considered her father, who was brought up in the DR, old-fashioned:

Yeah, I can't go nowhere without his permission, last night I went to a Halloween party at the Alianza Dominicana with a friend, and my father wouldn't let me because he didn't know who the "señora" was, so she said that she would go up and talk with him, so then he said ok. He is like, he think that women should stay home and like that.

Some got around strict parents anyway: Damaris said her cousins left when their mother slept, and knock on the hallway wall so she could let them in again. Or they snuck out, using the fire escapes.

From the examples that I have shown above, I think it is difficult to say that there is a clear divide between the generations. Amy was the third generation from her family to go to NMEC, because her grandfather's sister had been there. Even though her mother had lived in NYC for a long time, she was strict with her daughter. Within the same family there were different attitudes on discipline, sometimes across generations.

Aspirations

According to Grasmuck and Pessar (1991: 159), there exists a Dominican migration ideology that is recognized to be "consistently articulated progress through the concerted sacrifices of a united family." This ideology is reflected in that a girl in a preparatory school wrote that she wanted to graduate in order to fulfill the dream of her parents. Her teacher said:

You have seen this gentleman who sells "pastelitos" in the corner of 181th street, or the lady selling "habichuela con dulce" (sweet beans), who could have been the mother to anyone of us. There is only ten out of hundred Latinos who got a college diploma. This is the awful truth. We are the poor ones here. [...] In the Hollywood movies it is the Latino that is the criminal. [...]. For the older generations before us, the poor ones, the grandparents worked with the soil your parents were workers. You are gonna be the first person with a title. We're gonna make the change. There are other families where the mother is a lawyer, the father an economist, the grandparents architects, these are families Barcelona, Brugal, not of the last names that we got, like Ramirez, poor people's last names (19).

Felix, an ESL-student in ICBS said to me that he wanted to go to college and succeed, so he did not have to take the jobs that Mexicans do. One woman in a Dominican restaurant said that too many do not sacrifice themselves and work:

Look, there are many women who do not work, they are lazy all day, they don't do anything, not even when the husband comes home have they prepared dinner, they spend all day like that, complaining [...]. I think that they should make a law to send back those who don't want to work, and send those who want to work here. Because this is a country to progress, to work, I've always worked, over there I can have a good job, but what I want is to stay here, that's why I work. If I have one day off, I get up early to work at home. Since I've always worked my daughter says that she wants to be like me. Earlier, I used to work during the day, and study at night. But I came over here to make sacrifices, I was married, my husband took me over here, but not everything turns out ok, that's why I divorced, but I continued to work (20).

Mercedes' family valued education and they wanted her mother to emigrate so she could graduate in NYC. But in the end, she failed to do so because of the pregnancy. Weyland (1998: 318) writes that it is the socioeconomic realities that made

many teenage girls become pregnant against their parent's wishes.²⁸ Parents can also put constraints on which colleges the students can go to, one student in Ms. Reynoso's class said his mother refused his brother to study in Massachusetts, as it would be too far from NYC. Grasmuck and Pessar (1991: 205) also add that the migration ideology they described can be challenged by the augmented polarization of the US economy, and that many immigrant children will find themselves limited with regard to enabling social mobility.

Not all of the students in ICHS identified with a migration ideology. Ms. Romero, a teacher in "Spanish as a Foreign Language" for English mainstream students, asked: *Why do we come here (21)?* One girl answered: *I don't know, my mother came here, and I came with her (22)* ". The student had perhaps not reflected on what she was doing here in New York the same way many adult immigrants do. Many immigrants want to succeed economically; to progress. To do this, many families have worked hard. One novel by Junot Diaz (1999) portrays Dominicans as drug dealers, but Mr. Mayol did not agree, saying that this was not the reality for people in Washington Heights: *The truth is that they are working their asses off.*²⁹

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have showed that Washington Heights can be seen as a Dominican community, in that a Dominican district was established in 1991 and that there existed many Dominican community organizations. Many Dominicans lived there, but it was not a homogenous or static community: I have shown through various examples how views and practices on to hang out, have contact with neighbors, belonging to the DR, discipline and aspirations, differed.

For example, when it comes to gender, one can say that Carlos and Yahira led very different lives within the same community. Yahira was basically consigned to stay home, to be respectable, and was punished when she visited a friend. Carlos, on

²⁸ Romo and Falbo (1996) write that having a baby for Mexican-American teenagers in Texas was not necessarily negative for their education, rather the opposite for some of them. By having a child they became motivated to graduate from high school, as they now had someone to take care of.

²⁹ At the time of the fieldwork the movie "El círculo vicioso (the Vicious Circle)" was released, which focused on Dominican drug dealers in Washington Heights. On Univision a Dominican man protested on this movie, which he regarded a shame for hard-working people like himself. This shows that many people were reluctant to being portrayed as living in a drug-infested community.

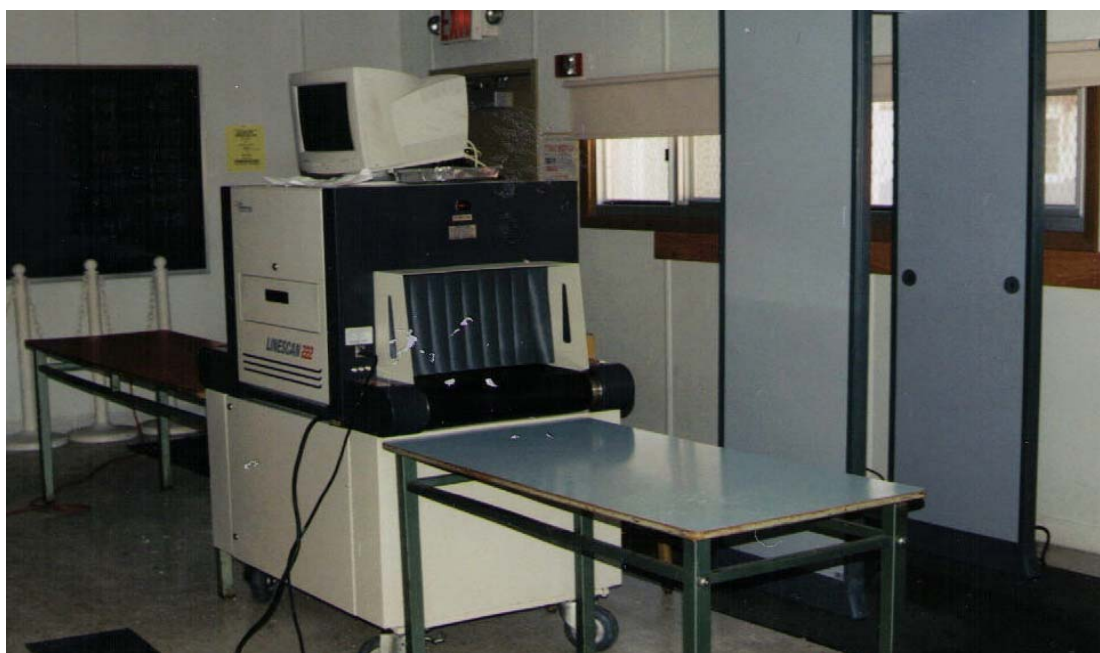
the other hand, spent much time in the streets, and could do what he wanted. Boys were not always allowed to go out, but it was often stricter for girls. Others chose to not hang out to not be affiliated with gangs or drugs, or to avoid social control. Many people were afraid of talking to people they did not know in the community, even though they were Dominicans. Like I wrote in the Introductory Chapter, may this can stem from a general mistrust that is prevalent in the inner-cities (Mateu-Gelebert 1998: 169). Even though living in a community sounds welcoming, it did not feel that way for all of its inhabitants (cf. Bauman 2001). The Dominican community in Washington Heights can change if more people move out if the rents would rise.

In the next chapter I will show how the ICHS through different rituals and their structure attempted to maintain the school as an orderly place, perhaps to protect it from chaotic and less desirable traits of the community.

Chapter Three

ICHS: A Prison-School

They (The Teacher's Trade Union) want to expand the prison-school: It's kind of like here, with Cooper (a security guard) and the metal detectors. Mr. Mayol, English teacher at ICHS.³⁰



Introduction

Every morning the students at ICHS walked through a scanning machine in one of the trailers. This was a ritual that marked a transition from a kind of street state to a school state (McLaren 1986 cited in Levinson 2001). It marked the transition from a neighborhood that can be described as vibrant but troubled, to a *prison-school*. In this chapter I will describe the scanning, the routines, and surveillance in ICHS. One can say that this school context of surveillance is an institutionally constructed way to “attack” the self (Wexler 1992, cited in Luttrell 1996: 94).

According to Ferguson (2000: 53) disciplinary power in desegregated school systems can become a more relevant technique for identity formation than status

³⁰ He said this to some students and suggested them to join him in a rally against this expansion. Last year some students went with him, with banners that stated: *Cops out of schools, NYPD: Hitler would be proud.*

attributed to racial superiority since the students can be individually marked for abnormal behavior. In this chapter I will look at school surveillance, an important part of the ICHS' structure and its impact on Dominican student's identity formation. This encompasses the students' responses characterized by resistance and the prevalence of street ethos in school.

School Spaces and Routines

Since 1998, the New York Police Department (NYPD) has been responsible for the safety measures in public schools (Daily News 2000). Cases which were formerly handled by the Board of Education were automatically registered as police cases (Skinstad 2002: 126f). In ICHS, six staff members worked with surveillance; i.e., three uniformed 'School Safety Police' and three aides. They carried a communication device which connected them to the Security Office on campus.

NMEC used to be overcrowded and this may have been the reason for the tight security (López 1999: 93). Upon conclusion of the school's restructuring in 1997, the number of students was considerable reduced, but this did not apply to security. When a substitute teacher at ICHS asked students to compare the DR and USA, Rudy in Ms. Reynoso's class said, *The schools are always open, it's not closed like here.*³¹

Prison Architecture

The students spent their school days in red trailers surrounded by a tall, wired fence. ICHS had an enrollment of 341 students and 28 trailers, of which 17 trailers were used as classrooms. There was a guarded entrance, the trailers had barred windows and inside the classrooms the tables and chairs were conjoined. There were neither benches nor any outdoor space designed for the students to socialize, and nor did their programs provide time for socialization. In the main building, the entrance was guarded and the elevator operator made sure that only staff used it. The architecture of ICHS thus resembled that of a prison

³¹ The high school I visited in the DR was surrounded by a concrete wall, but there was no security scanning of students or visitors. There were large outdoor spaces around the building.

Foucault (1995) writes that while prisons used to be places for corporal punishment in the “classical episteme,” since the beginning of the 19th century, ‘the modern,’ they have been sites for discipline (Dingstad 1998: 142). The discipline Foucault points to is characterized by surveillance. Ideally, prisons architecture made it “possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly” (Foucault 1995: 173). The prison was built around a central guard tower which held the inmates under what appeared to be constant surveillance. Flood lights and blinds made it impossible for the inmates to see whether there were any guards in the tower; the view was blocked. With this arrangement the inmates knew there was a *possibility* for being observed to the extent that individuals continued to keep themselves under surveillance. The inmates did not know when they were actually observed. Foucault labelled this structure a Panopticon (Dingstad 1998: 156). Although Panopticon is most applicable to prisons, a Panopticon can, in my case study, explain the pervasive gaze the students in ICHS experienced. I describe ICHS as a prison-school, in line with Mr. Mayol’s observation quoted at the beginning of this chapter. That is, the school kept the students under surveillance, scanned them every morning, and its architecture facilitated these measures. I will argue that some students employed a variety of resistance strategies as a means of controlling their time and movements.

The Morning Routine: The Scanning and the Metal Detector

After the students entered the main gate next to a security booth, the students walked a path that was lined by a fence. The first trailer in the ICHS area was used for scanning of all students, every day. A security guard watched as they arrived, ensuring that all of them lined up outside the trailer. Inside the trailer there was one airport-like scanner and a metal detector that served the school’s 340 students. The scanning aimed to strip students for items that were not permitted according to the Discipline Code.³² The school, led by the head of security, seemed to believe that the

³² The Discipline Code stated that measures will be taken if the students fail to adhere to these measures: No weapons, dangerous instruments, drugs/and or alcohol are to be used, carried or brought to school at any time. No beepers and communication devices of any type are permitted on campus. These items will be immediately confiscated. Hats, “do rags,” or any other type of headwear is not permitted and may be confiscated. The students are expected: to conduct them selves in a respectful, safe and orderly manner at all times. This included: Violent acts of any nature, including fighting and intimidation are prohibited. Smoking, gambling, cutting classes or leaving school without

students had to be reminded to take weapons out of their jackets. During an assembly meeting for the 11th graders, i.e., Sophomores, Mr. Heckman; the head of security, said:

Everything you do will be put on your record, if you wanna be a cop, a FBI-agent, they'll call me. We keep records for 60 years. Some students change their minds, when they are out of here, and then it's too late. Check your jacket, that there's no weapon's in it, some say, I got my brother's jacket, I didn't know about it.

Mr. Heckman thus viewed it as necessary to remind them to take out weapons, taking it for granted the students had access to them. The students were also asked to come in before their first period, in order to be scanned. In a letter to the parents, Mr. Allen advised that the students should not arrive after 7.45 a.m. if their classes began at 8:00 a.m. At parents-teachers meeting, he said that many students made excuses:

Every morning I stand to say hello to the students. I don't like them to wear hats, no beepers, no cell phones. No nylons either. [...] Some parents call to say my son is sick, my son will come late; the majority comes on time. Starting very soon they will have to sign in late if they don't have a pass. Some students say: I woke up late, or blame the bus, or the train.

On coming early to school, Lucia, a cooperative 9th grader, who complied with school regulation, said that she would still be late:

Yeah, yeah, Like they telling you to come here more early, and I be coming more early going through the scanning, the scanner, and like it'll be big, [...] and then it rings, like beep, beep, beep, you have to wait till the lady come and scan you with the thing, and I'll be coming early, and even if I come earlier, I'm still gonna be late. When you go there, there are a lot of people.[...] I'll be here at like 7.40 something. And there's a lot of people there. And if I be here like 7.55, there be like not that many people. But I still gonna be late, because I have to go all the way to (the last trailer). [...]It takes a long time. If I run, I'm still gonna be late, cause of the scanner. They'll be calling your name, saying that you'll gonna be suspended. They'll be like, "say like" (23), saying that you have to stay for detention, but they never do that. [...]And I come here on time, it's just like that.

The scanning that Lucia described was strictly organized in order to control the student's movements and strip them for unwanted items. Girls and boys lined up separately, and their bodies were checked by female or male guards respectively. One morning when I was present, the male guard caused the students to come late to class. Cooper, the security guard, went to the toilet twice, within a short period of time, keeping Angel and other boys waiting and nothing was said about it. It

permission is not permitted. [...]Profanity, obscene language, offensive comments and inappropriate gestures (including anything that can be viewed as a slur based upon race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability) are not allowed.

appeared to me as though Cooper wanted to make them wait in line for him, rather than having a real need to use the restroom.

The type of waiting, where one is rendered “motionless for the sake of another,” is what Swartz (1975: 171 cited in Lund 2000) describes as “one of the most humiliatingly radical forms of subordination.” Lund (2000: 17) writes that waiting subordinates and pacifies in that the individual does not have direct control. This may have happened to the boys who waited for Cooper: They were subordinated to the point of speechlessness; in fact the subordination may be an attack on the students’ identities. Amy, a 9th grader, expressed a dislike of the scanning, but was not a passive recipient:

Yeah, I have to go through the security first, and then they’ll check your body, I will ask them, do we look like criminals to you? And they will say; if you knew what people would take to this school! But I don’t like it. But it’s good so no one will take a gun to school.³³

These views are similar to what Skinstad (2001: 123) writes from a East Coast High School: “The preference was to not have a scanning system, but it was seen as a necessity and the least of evils, in the face of what was perceived to be a real threat to personal safety.”

Julissa, from Mr. Steinberg’s class, said that she did not think that anyone of her peers would take a weapon to school: *Just because we’re majority or minority, or whatever we’re called, or whatever that we have, security and all that, they think that we’re into something bad.* Mr. Mayol said that he thought the scanning was a result on how the government viewed Latinos and African-Americans. He explained to me that many people in the US made use of theories from the authors of The Bell Curve. They argue that African-Americans and Latinos are biologically more likely to use weapons. This may also have been what Julissa had in back of her mind when she said that they were viewed as a minority.

In reality, what was most often confiscated were pieces of clothing, such as caps and bandanas, CDs, electronic devices, but not weapons. The former could be items that

³³ During the time of my fieldwork, I never heard that anyone was taken with a weapon in school. According to Public School Reports, were the Suspension rate; 1.4 and the incident rate 3.86 in the NMEC in 2002. The citywide average is 4.5 suspensions per 100 students and 1.0 incident per 100 students. [...] Schools, both large and small, don’t always report incidents; the Board of Education’s collection of data is often inscrutable.

were viewed as coming from the neighborhood and therefore best removed from the students. An example is a girl who came in wearing a blue bandana on her head. She was asked to take it off, probably because it could have indicated gang affiliation. Boys who wore hats were asked to take them off.

The guards said to students who passed the metal detector: *I told you to take out the change in your pockets.* Alternatively they were asked when their book bags were screened: *What have you got in there?* They said to one boy: *Where is your ID? Go and get one today!* The students were expected to carry their IDs and programs at all times, so the guards could check that they were at the right space at the right time. In their program their individual schedule was stated.

The guards and staff would usually refer to the students as *kids*, sometimes in a caring way; at other times in derogatory ways. An example of the latter is how Ms. Reynoso said in class: *I'm sick and tired of kids!* But staff often cared, like one of the female guards who said *sweetie* to girls, and sometimes said things like: *Did you leave your hair wet? Oh, you're gonna get a cold.*

Even though the security guards were busy, they would often keep a conversation going among themselves, over the students' heads. They spoke about current events or other issues. When the guards were talking in that manner, or made the students wait unnecessarily, the guards were treating students as objects on a conveyor belt, rather than experiencing subjects (Lund 2000: 5).

The Four-Minute Routine

Every day; Monday to Friday; the students had the same program. At the beginning of the school year, it took some time for the students to learn where they had to go, but since it was the same pattern every day they soon fell into a routine. Every period lasted 41-minutes, and when the period finished the students had four minutes to swap classrooms. Between periods the security guards screamed: *Move it! Move it!* Or: *Let's get going! Walk and walk!*

Wanda (16-year-old) was a tenth grader in the ESL-program. She had nine periods every day, including lunch.

Wanda's Busy Schedule Monday to Friday

1.	08:03	-	08:45	Global/Pitt Trailer-6
2.	08:49	-	09:31	Spanish/Echeverria T-5
3.	09:35	-	10:20	English/Williams T-13
4.	10:24	-	11:06	Lunch, goodfood main building (lab Thursday)
5.	11:10	-	11:52	Chemistry/Ventura T-23
6.	11:56	-	12:38	Law/Steinberg T-14
7.	12:42	-	01:24	Gym/Thompson main building (girls only)
8.	01:28	-	02:10	ESL/ Smith, T-8
9.	02:14	-	02:56	Math/Ramos, T-22



As can be seen from her program, every period was in different places, but the schedule was the same Monday to Friday, except lab on Thursday. She had to go to the main building twice a day for lunch and gym. The head of security, Mr.

Heckman, mandated students to obey to this structure:

Rules and regulations bring order. You have to keep them in your mind, when you go to gym and lunch. [...]. When the bell rings, you should be inside the classroom. Walk as quickly as you can. Don't discuss it with me if I stop you. I'm here to minimize the problems.

He wrote in a memo that was distributed to all staff members at NMEC:

Everyone and I mean everyone must become actively involved in questioning and challenging students whenever they are in the halls between classes. You must get aggressively involved!

This meant that not only security guards were supposed to get involved with the surveillance, that this was something all staff members should do.

As with the scanning, many students tried to obey to the rules. For instance, when a delivery truck delayed Flavio and me when we came from lunch in the main building, Flavio asked me to confirm to Ms. Smith.

Upon entering ICHS' entrance to the lunch room, the students had to show their ID and program to the security guards. This way they could check that they actually had lunch that period. The guards turned away students who did not have a program, even though they recognized them. The students paid 50 cents in the office for a one-day lunch pass, but sometimes the secretary could refuse to sell them a pass.

At times the guards were rude to the students. For example one of them said to students from ICHS waiting in line to get into the lunch room: *ICHS farmer (24)*.³⁴ In Dominican Spanish it was insulting to say that someone was a farmer, which can be compared to a hick. The guard thus broke the school's Discipline Code. Consequently, the security guards did not always provide a safer environment for the students. One staff member said about the guards: *Those security people are always looking for trouble.*

During the four-minute routine, there were also some male guards who looked at girls or embraced them when there were no teachers to see them. This too was a breach of the student's Discipline Code, which prohibited inappropriate gestures that could be viewed as sexist. As I wrote in Chapter Two, many men in the neighborhood were *players* or *tigueres*, and the security guards in ICHS can also be said to enact these roles.

The same thing could be said about some of the male students. As the students went from ICHS to the main building they had to walk through a tunnel where there were no security guards. Indiana said to me that one day some of the boys had been touching the breasts of a girl there, against the girl's will.

³⁴ Original Spanish quotes are in the Appendix A.

The Classroom

The students had their periods in classrooms that looked much the same. A variety of encouraging slogans lined the walls in classrooms and the principal's office. Some read: "The Sky Is the Limit; Monolingualism Can be Cured, Fight to Learn - Learn to Fight, College Now - Let's Make the Dream a Reality, You Have the Power to Change."³⁵ The decoration of walls with colourful ribbons, maps, marked homework, honor work and honor rolls depended on the teacher's initiative, so not all classrooms were uniform.

Every trailer consisted of two classrooms, each equipped with a unisex toilet. The teacher had a desk and chair, but apart from that, all the tables and chairs were conjoined. When I asked a security guard why the tables had to be attached to the chairs, he said that probably the school used this type of module because they were heavier than single chairs and tables and thus harder to use in a fight. I do not know if that was the intention behind the purchase of the conjoined model, but I noted that the guard regarded them in these terms. That is, that the students could be violent, and the school needed to hold the students in a prison-school to avoid violence.

The periods lasted 41 minutes, and were supposed to be strictly organized. The teachers were expected from their respective Assistant Principals (AP) to use the time efficiently. For example the first five minutes could be used to answer the *Do now's* on the blackboard, followed by ten minutes to do another task, the *Aim*. In Chapter Four I describe the organization of Ms. Smith's ESL-periods.

During class periods, security guards were posted outside the trailers enabling the teachers to call them in. In Ms. Reynoso's period this became a necessity on only one occasion. Flavio slept through the period, resting his head on his book bag. When he woke up, he realized that his stereo, which had not been confiscated that morning, was gone. He accused Luis of taking it, and asked him to return it. Ms. Reynoso asked Flavio to stop, adding that if the stereo was not in Flavio's hands before the bell rings, she would call security. A security guard came in and she called

³⁵ Some of these slogans can be related to what Ortner (1998: 13) labels "the hidden life of class" in the US. In Chapter Five I develop more on this issue.

for additional security on the radio; two more guards entered. Flavio became very aggressive, hitting one of the tables hard. He said that he wanted his stereo back. Then one boy said he could see it in his book bag. The students started to laugh. This shows how minor incidents very quickly can lead to the presence of three security guards in the classroom.

Another example of this interaction happened when a substitute for Ms. Smith was called to fill in. His behavior was very aggressive and when one of the boys took a seat in the corner, putting his book bag and his coat on the table, the substitute said, *So are you not gonna write this essay?* Followed by, *Show me your ID.* When the student could not present one, the substitute asked him to leave the classroom, or he would call security to have him removed. The boy's peers seemed perplexed by the substitute's aggressive attitude, and their surprise showed in their faces. When Cooper entered, the substitute said, *Take him out of here.* Cooper commented, *You again.* The substitute observed, *I don't think he belongs in this class.* At this point I decided to intervene and confirmed that he belonged in the class. Cooper asked him to get a new ID the following day and walked out after a while. Students who came in late asked what he had done. One of the girls responded, *Nothing* (25). From her tone it appeared as though she had no clue why the confrontation took place. This kind of interaction was facilitated by the architecture of the school in which the guards were available for the teachers and could be in the classroom fast.

The Lunch Room

The lunch room was a large space in the basement of the main building. There were no windows which meant that it was dark and the air was often heavy due to the lack of ventilation. The room could serve several hundred students at lunch time. The large number of students meant that it was often noisy. Two parallel walls divided the room into three sections. The tables were large, and could seat ten students. It had benches attached to it, and the tables could be folded and stored away.

In one end of the lunch room was the school kitchen, the serving area and the counter. A separate table was set up for students to buy ice cream. There was one public phone for the students to use. Some posters from the Board of Education

decorated the otherwise bare walls, which also had a small TV screen which showed the latest sports results of the school teams. Vending machines were in the diametrically opposite side of the counters.

Music was played and every so often it was interrupted for announcements made on the public address (PA) system. Because of the noise level, it was not easy to hear what was being said, and not all the students paid attention either.

The students first had to queue to get their food, and then queue to present their lunch ticket at the counter. The food could be described as low-quality fast-food (Skinstad 2001: 118), although the quality could vary from day to day. One girl from Mr. Steinberg's class said she found it *nasty*. The lunch included a main meal, such as a chicken burger, fried plantains, vegetables, plus fruit and chocolate milk.

The fruit could be a pre-packed sliced apple in a small plastic bag. When I asked a former student why they do not serve whole apples instead, he said that the reason could be that they are easier to fight with than sliced apple. This way of thinking can be compared to what the guard said about the conjoined tables and chairs, i.e., that they were designed to avoid violence and fights.

The students, whom shared tables, were often peers who also had the same periods and language program. They used to share food and ketchup with each other. Some used the time to look at pictures in magazines, draw cartoons, do their homework, look at people who walked around, do their make-up or just stare into the air. One male teacher from NMEC walked around, embracing female students, which could also be said to be inappropriate of a staff member.

The guards would stand at one end of the lunch room, giving them the benefit of an unobstructed view down the rows. Occasionally they would ask people to sit down, or to clean the tables after the meal. The head of security, Mr. Heckman, expressed his wish for student behavior at the assembly meeting:

[I]n the cafeteria, most of you have lunch in the fourth period, so you get on line; you get your lunch, sit down with your friends and eat, like other adult people would do in a restaurant. You cannot walk around; you got to stay in one place. I'm not talking about the people who are going to the phone, having a snack; it's the people who stand up. You are the 11th graders; you need to set the culture.

Mr. Heckman is here intimating that the students were adults, but the school held the students in a prison-school as if they were not capable of taking care of their

own movements. However, there were fewer guards and staff members in the lunch room compared with the time spent in class, when teachers were present. A reason for that may be that the layout of the lunch room permitted less staff, as it allowed for keeping a great number of students under surveillance. Thus the lunch period differed from other periods in that students were free to talk with one another. Ms. Reynoso said that her students acted differently after their lunch:
They need a lot of structure, lots of other places [schools] they can have study halls, but not here, they need structure. Here it's like when they come back from lunch they are up there [unfocused]. You need to calm them down.... No, you can't leave them on your own.

In this statement, I feel that Ms. Reynoso was expressing the fact that she was not terribly fond of the unfocused state of her students after lunch. She knew that she had to calm them down in order to get their attention. In her view, it seemed a better option for the students to be supervised with a busy schedule all the time. She also made a distinction between the students in ICHS and students at other schools, who she said may have study hall without the students winding *up there*. Angel from Ms. Smith's class also said he knew the schools were different in other places, out of the city. There he explained to me they had fewer security guards.

“The Punishing Room”

The school office served as “the punishing room.” Ferguson 2000: 34 writes: “The Punishing Room is the first tier of the disciplinary apparatus of the school. Like the courtroom, it is the place where stories are told, truth is determined, and judgement is passed.” This aptly describes what happened in the school office as well. *The troublemakers*, as the principal labeled them, were often sent to the office by the teachers. There they would chat with other troublemakers, and talk to people who worked in the office. Students who tried to leave the school premises, were brought here. One boy said to me: *I'm punished*. He explained:

The police caught me, I went outside to buy lunch, and the police caught me, he had to take me back, I understand that (it's their job), that's what he said as well, I don't like the lunch at school, I get sick of it, so I go outside to buy something, but today I got caught, so I learned my lesson.

He had tried to show a resistance by wandering out in the neighborhood which there is a veritable plethora of restaurants and bakeries, and which the staff was free to enjoy. The boy also expressed an understanding for the necessity of the

prison-school architecture; he felt that the guards had to do their jobs, and that he did not plan to repeat his actions.

According to the Discipline Code the students were not allowed to say offensive statements regarding ethnicity. One of the security guards, Cooper, broke this part of the code one day. He came in to the office with a boy who had attempted to leave the premises. The boy said about Cooper: *He said I was a stupid Dominican*. The boy seemed hurt at Cooper's remark, but no one in the office said anything to indicate an objection. When I told this to Mr. Mayol, he related that the guards took chances when nobody was around. The guards were not subjects to punishment in the same way as the students due to the hierarchical relationship between students and staff. What Cooper said may reflect his attitudes to Dominicans in general.

When Mr. Heckman came to the office to talk to a student, he asked all of us in the room to leave. We went over to the neighboring trailer, and through the door we could hear him yelling about something the students had done last year, which had now been repeated. He yelled so loudly that Hermenia and I became terrified for the welfare of the student. Many students said they did not like Mr. Heckman for his anger.

Resistance to the Prison-School Gaze, Scanning, Architecture and Busy Schedule

During the scanning, the students were stripped for personal items, as the school wanted to achieve a uniform look for the students. Many students bore a resemblance to one another. One white teacher said to me that all the girls in her class had the same hairstyle; a long ponytail, their hair combed away from the face, she labelled it *Dominican-style*. Many of the boys had short, but elaborated hairstyles, and wore baggy jeans. A great majority of the students wore the same black coats, i.e., bearing The Northern Face logo. An exception to the hairstyles described was

the braids and afros.³⁶ One girl said that it was boring that they all were the same; that in her school in NMEC there were two gothic people, but that was it.³⁷

Despite the uniform appearance of the students, there were signs that the students showed some resistance to the stripping of personal items in the course of the scanning, and the constant movement changes they were forced to undertake with regard to their programs. Some students came in with clothes and items they were not supposed to have on their person, and some managed to hide beepers behind the buckles of their belt. During periods, many students kept their coats on and their book bags on their desks, close to their bodies.³⁸ It is possible that they became attached to their belongings because they represented a personal space in school (Levinson 2001: 69).

As I have described, the students were, subjected to scrutiny, i.e., to the guards' gaze during the four-minute-routine. Many students tried to obey by walking as fast they could. One group of Juniors, however, demonstrated resistance by walking very slowly after lunch, talking as they walked. I asked one security guard whether these students always walked so slowly. He laughed and said, *Yeah*. When I tried to keep pace with Carolina; one of the Juniors, she took such small steps that it was hard for me not to get ahead of her. Since she was making slow progress, it was perhaps difficult for the guards to tell her that she was not moving.

In Willis' Learning to Labour (1977 cited in Levinson and Holland 1996: 14) working-class youth developed a way to create their own subjects against the cultural production in school. They created a counter-culture, of which "having a laff" was a part. Students in ICHS also used humor, or minimal participation in classes to have fun: This was done while simultaneously outwardly conforming to school rules and routines as a form for resistance to the strictly organized periods (Giroux 1983 cited in Grossman 2001: 19).

In Mr. Steinberg's class students would sometimes try to outwit him. One time it was at the expense of a teacher, Mr. Pitt, who had been fired. Mr. Pitt had

³⁶ In Chapter Six I will elaborate more on racial understandings and language preferences.

³⁷ McLaughlin (1991: 67) writes that in organizations in the inner-cities which stress ethnic pride and marks of uniqueness European American inner-city adolescents, who were in a minority; "turn frequently to heavy metal or the occult in search of an identity that distinguishes them from the mainstream (ibid.)."

³⁸ There were no personal lockers for the students apart from the ones they used in gym.

physically attacked one *troublemaker* in the presence of teachers, students and me. When Mr. Steinberg spoke about who was going to be their new teacher, Franklin in his class said: *Are you sure you don't want to bring Pitt back in?* This can also be seen as a way of joking about a situation which I think had a negative effect on most of the students, i.e., the assault of a teacher of a student.

When it comes to the joking, Mr. Steinberg often played along. This happened when an AP, Ms. Echeverria, circled outside the classroom to check if they were doing the Do Now's and the Aim students were supposed to accomplish. The students raised their hands; they pretended to answer his questions. To the AP it appeared as they were working efficiently. In another case, Mr. Steinberg was not supportive. A number of students from his class took baby carrots from the lunch room and threw them on the blackboard during their math class. Mr. Steinberg commented: *I know I am laughing now, but please stop it, it's not funny.* The principal and an AP had to oversee the math teacher's classes. Franklin complained to Mr. Steinberg that he could not sleep in math classes anymore because Mr. Allen and Ms. Echeverria were there.

In Mr. Steinberg's class it occasionally happened that students played truth or dare, or observe boys taking a seat behind a girl's desk to stroke her hair or parts of her body. Some girls moved forward to avoid this, complained to the teacher or did nothing. Sometimes boys would bring to class pictures of girls they knew and pass these around. One had a picture of a teenage cousin who was in her bedroom, scantily clothed and assuming an erotic pose.

During classes some students would shout out comments or be preoccupied with about other things, teasing their peers, sleeping, or having fun. Manny teased Juana for her artistic hairdo one day in Ms. Smith's class. He said that it looked like her hair was macaroni or *mofongo*; a Dominican tripe stew, but this could also have been done to get her attention.

Flavio once used the period to express his opinions on understandings of race in the US. Commenting on what Ms. Reynoso had said about President Clinton, Flavio said: *When he was in high school, he was smoking pot and everything. How can it happen? Have you heard about it? If he was black they would have removed him, it's because he's white [that they didn't remove him].* Milén, another student, said: *Imagine, if that*

was one of us (26). Here Milén made the connection that Dominicans or Latinos, had fewer rights than white individuals in suburban high school, as I understand him.

Some students were more passive in their resistance; they could discreetly eat and share cookies during classes, like the girls in Ms. Reynoso's class would do. Wanda, whose program I presented earlier in this chapter, employed various resistance strategies. These made her able to socialize with her friends more. For her and many girls the place they socialized most was actually in school.

After a meeting in the auditorium on the Saturday School, I asked Wanda and her friend what the superintendent talked about. She replied; *I don't know, I wasn't paying attention*. She cut her math class in the last period and stayed in Adelante's office. This way she could cut classes without being caught at the gate for leaving the school too early.

On Thursdays she and a friend had laboratory in the fourth period. They asked me if I wanted to come with them, and I agreed to come along. When we got there, Mrs. Ventura would not let us in. She told me that the two had stayed too long in the lunch room, and had refused to come with her when she came to pick them up at the cafeteria. They had invited me along to "cover," for them, i.e., protect them, for having cut classes.

Other students did not cut periods, but days, engaging in a variety of activities. Diliania said she cut classes with friends, and ordered Chinese food delivered to a basement where they hung out. When the food came, they assaulted the delivery man and took the food. This can be understood as a resistance to school as they did something that would not have been acceptable in school. Others cut classes to participate in hooky-parties. A boy (20-years-old) who graduated from NMEC said that these parties happened during the day and that sometimes girls would get raped there (cf. Bourgeois 1995).

When I went with students on trips, I noted another kind of resistance. One trip was with Ms. Smith's class to a park downtown. The students threw snow balls as we walked to the riverside. She asked them to behave and give a good impression of Dominicans as they were downtown, but they just kept on playing. She said that

they had been complaining and wanted to sit down. Now, all of a sudden, they ran around, screamed and seemed so happy. To me, it looked as though they were enjoying their freedom outside the *prison-school*. Ms. Smith observed: *It's so good for them to come out here and play. [...] They are always stuck in their small apartments, so they don't feel the need to be outside.*

I think Ms. Smith was right in that students were not used to be out in the fresh air and that many of them lived in small, or overcrowded, apartments. Washington Heights is, as I noted in Chapter One, one of the most densely populated areas in the USA and many of the students who lived there were not used to have much space at their disposal.

But one of the consequences of the *prison-school* could also have been that the students were not used to run around freely. Their movements were controlled from the moment they entered the school in the morning. Subsequently, it is likely that when the students went on trips they may have realized a new form of freedom.

Street Ethos and Gangs

In ICHS the students were on guard when it came to being stared at. Diania for instance, said she preferred to not go to the lunch room, since the other girls looked at her. Seeking respect could be achieved by fighting those who disrespected you. Student was prone to a sense of being disrespected if he or she was being stared at, teased for using cheap sneakers or being told that other people had said an individual was a bitch. Lucia said in an interview:

Some of the girls they are like, they wanna like be with you, be up in your business, and stuff like that. [...] They'll be like, like if you're the aim of the week. [...] but like, too much violence, so for any, for anything they'll be up in your face, they wanna fight.

To be stared at could be used as an excuse to fight. This was what happened to three girls who were brought into the office. They said some girls bothered them all the time. One of them had scattered their notebooks and other things on the bathroom floor and in the toilet. Cooper said: *That girl is gonna be out of the school.* Inés, one of the girls who were brought in, said: *I couldn't take it anymore. My mother knows that I'm not the kind of person who makes problems in school (27).* They had to sit down and write their statements. When I talked to Inés later, she said: *She told the councilor that I stared at her a lot (28).* Here Inés said she had retaliated against her

tormentor. She was not afraid of her mother's reaction when the school called because she felt they had a trusting relationship. Inés felt that the girl had used the accusation that she has stared at them as a reason to fight.

A Panopticon could, apart from giving them a feeling of being observed and controlled, have consequences for how the students related to their peers. The Panopticon is a hierarchal structure. In ICHS, I have shown this to be the case by pointing to the way in which the students were less privileged than the staff in many ways, e.g., they could not wear what they wanted, and their movements were controlled, among others. When students felt they were being stared at by fellow students, the power relations between them were different from that between students and staff. The gaze from a student or from a staff was of different character and therefore not immediately related. Even so, some students could have felt the stares from their fellow students to be as invasive as the gaze from the staff. This could make them fight back to gain respect, or stay away from the lunch room to avoid certain people. When they were stared at by fellow students, they could more easily fight back, than if they should be disrespected from staff.

Mateu-Gelebert (1998: 168f) writes that some of the norms that made up part of the inner-city students' habitus are that one should constantly be on guard, seek respect from others, be extremely loyal to friends, and distrust others. In addition, he argued that misbehavior in the high school he studied was not necessarily resistance "but rather a byproduct of street ethos that has harmful consequences" (ibid: 219). In ICHS there were many students who followed the norms described by Mateu-Gelebert. Students like Inés could be dragged into misbehavior even though they were not oppositional to schooling.

Mateu-Gelebert (ibid: 184) also argues that many students saw it as a challenge when the school added more officers. Consequently, it led to more violence. The almost omnipresent surveillance in ICHS may well have made it easier for students to fight, as they felt certain the guards would intervene. Two girls fought right outside the scanning trailer, and Ms. Smith came into the trailer and looked for security to stop the fight. The guards had a lunch break, and the others were unavailable, probably by a mistake. As there were no guards, the fight escalated and the girl pulled out the hair of the other girl. Here the fight began right outside the

scanning trailer, and I believe that the girl who initiated the fight thought there were security guards inside.

Another example of how a fight perhaps was initiated due to the presence of security guards happened in the lunch room. Out loud, one boy said to another, *Why are you talking to me like that?* (29).³⁹ The guards quickly took care of him, and no fight took place. This way it is possible to seek respect and, at the same time, be protected. The students who intended to attack would normally know that security would intervene. However in the case of the girl mentioned above, the fight escalated. On the other hand, spaces that were not controlled by security could be used for fights as well. One girl was attacked by a group of girls in the locker room, after gym. When Cooper heard of it in the school office, he commented: *Oh, they had been waiting for her there.* Other fights happened in the hills below the NMEC after school.

Another result of the prison-school gaze was that many students seemed suspicious of people who asked questions and observed them. When I was doing my fieldwork in ICHS, I found it very challenging in the beginning to get to know the students. They were very busy, but many also seemed suspicious of me. One student asked whether I was going to write something good or bad about Dominicans, and seemed to fear that I was going to use the information wrongly. Another reason may be that they had flexibility when talking of identities, and they were resisting to be put in a fixed entity of Dominicans, like I described in Chapter One.

When it comes to gangs, it is difficult to say to what extent they existed in school. In the course of the scanning, the school stripped students for colored bandanas and other gang-related items. Lulu explained to me that Zulu Nation used green, Bloods' color was red, and Latin Kings signal color was yellow. One of the girls in her class started to wear lots of yellow at the end of my field work, which could have meant that she was in Latin Kings. When Mr. Mayol showed me a Latin Kings crown that students had drawn on his blackboard, he said that it was hard to know what it meant. He was not sure if they were really into gangs or if they were just fond of the

³⁹ Fighting can also be seen as a way to maintain respect in the inner-city, as a way to uphold one's reputation (Ferguson 2000, Bourgeois 1995).

symbols. In Mr. Steinberg's class, Angel said that the next vice-president in the US should be Latin Kings. This could be a way to make resistance in class, to show that he would want that gang to have more power. When I lent him my camera to take pictures of his peers in the classroom, they all made gang signs with their hands for the photographer.

The security guards were afraid of gang fights, and this may be a proof that there were gangs in school. This happened when people involved in fights wore lots of green and blue. Michael, whom I cited in Chapter Two, also spoke of gangs in his neighborhood. When a Dominican boy from Washington Heights had been murdered in the Bronx, the case appeared in The New York Times as a robbery; they had killed him to steal his gold chain. Students in Mr. Steinberg's class talked about it and Angel said it had to do with *gangs*. Thus it would seem that some of the students had knowledge about gang activity in the school and outside.

Staff's Perceptions and Actions upon Abnormality

In ICBS several things, apart from gangs and street ethos, were defined by the staff as abnormality, e.g., absence, violent behaviour, or family problems. Ferguson (2000: 53f) writes that:

A number of studies indicate that placement of kids in high- or low-track groups or classrooms within schools is not simply the result of test scores of student achievement but is influenced by such things as teachers' perceptions of student appearance, behavior, and social background.

Mr. Allen put together a class of students who had failed in the previous year. Mr. Mayol said he was against this because by putting all of them in the same group they were being judged and labelled by Mr. Allen as *repeaters*.

In this case, I cannot tell if they were being put in this period by other reasons than their test scores. But I will give some examples at which students are given advice, or action is taken against them based on the staff's perceptions on abnormality.

Absence was a behavior that was acted upon by the staff. Marco, an aide, worked specifically with this issue. He made phone calls to parents from the office, asking them to send their children to school. The principal mailed letters to the parents where they were asked to contact Marco. He would unannounced visit absent students in their homes to talk to them, with the aim of encouraging them to

stay in school. In the office he talked to one 15-year-old boy who wanted to drop-out, and Marco asked him how he was going to support a family in the future if he had no education. Another boy, who had dropped out of school for some time, was taken by Marco to the Health Clinic to receive counseling.

In addition to absence, the staff noted how the students dressed. Aaron (17-years-old) was known in the office as a *troublemaker* since he often was expelled from his classes and sent to the office. The secretary Ms. Bonilla said: *Last year he turned up with dirty clothes, but this year he started to work, and he looks decent now. I think his parents are Dominicans* (30). Herminia, an aide, said: *Oh, God!* (31). They said that they had tried to call up his mother several times last year, but that she never turned up. His brother had turned up once. Herminia said he had almost hit her as well. In this case it was the clothes who seemed to be one of the strongest markers of abnormality; requiring action to be taken. From Herminia's reaction, it would seem that she felt shamed that a Dominican mother neglected her son by sending him to school in dirty clothes.

When it came to clothes, the students were also likely to scan each other for abnormality in much the same way as the school. Students said to a science teacher that he was wearing the same clothes every day; others said the same about a Jewish teacher. To wear dirty clothes could also have been internalized for some students as being a sign of abnormality. One boy in the office had spilled something on his sweater, and he asked some peers who were present if they had a spare sweater they could lend him. He seemed very uncomfortable walking around with a stained sweater.

Other signs of abnormality could be spotted in essays and during periods. Patricia (15-year-old) from Ms. Reynoso's class was referred to a counselor after writing an essay. In cooperation with Ms. Reynoso, I had given the students a homework assignment of writing an essay which I could use for my research: *Write an essay based on a conflict you had at home. Explain how it resolved* (32). Patricia handed in this work: *In this short essay I want to talk about the conflicts that happen in my house and this is what the essay is based upon. The conflict that I have with my family is that I do not have any rights in my own house. I say this because I cannot do anything, like watch television, not listen to radio, and even less can I use the computer because the others can use it all but I am not allowed. I think that I am a human and got the right to do and see*

what I would like because I also own these things. Teacher, do you not believe that all humans, like you explained to us, that we have natural rights thus me too I would like to have it like everyone else has got it and why cannot I have it (33).

In her essay, Patricia referred to the natural rights (of man) they had learned of in her classes, and applied them to her own situation at home. Ms. Reynoso decided to refer Patricia to one of the councilors, who could ask her some questions to find out whether she was exaggerating or not. In the end, I noticed that Patricia had appointments with the councilor.

Apart from the councilors, The Health Clinic was also getting information on the students. During the school year prior to the fieldwork, Mr. Mayol said the clinic had distributed a questionnaire for the students to answer in class. One of the questions was: *When was the last time you had a gun?* The questionnaire had been returned to the clinic unanswered. Mr. Mayol said that his students refused to answer it since they implied that they had handled guns. The clinic was also accused by a politician (personal communication), Mr. Mayol and the Coalition Against the Violence Initiative of medicating the students, and using them in different kinds of experiments.⁴⁰

In the case of the questionnaire, the students were proactive, demonstrating that they rejected this aspect of the school, and the pervasive idea that they were violent.

The teachers also gave advice to the students in front of the whole class, as Yubenia (15-years-old) from Ms. Reynoso' class wrote in her essay:

In 1999, my parents had decided to go to the Dominican Republic, to end our school year. I, very confused about the situation I commented about it to one Spanish teacher, Ms. Gomez. She, as a result of the long life she has lived and her great intellectual capacity, she advised in front of the whole class to talk with my parents and that I explain to them that in the United States, for its great teachings in English and for its great possibilities which the country offers like; grants, it offers us a great future and a Good Education. I, guided by her great words, commented on this to my parents, but before that the following happened: we discussed it a few hours. I, because

⁴⁰ A flyer from CAVI that was distributed in year 2000 stated: Are too many children being given drugs and a diagnosis of mental illness? The last few years have seen a huge increase in the number of young children being diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity (ADHD), conduct disorders, and other "mental illnesses". The remedy is always a drug like Ritalin or Prozac. We want to know: -Are mental health clinics in the schools run by the Child Psychiatry Dept. at Colombia Presbyterian being used to diagnose and medicate children for these disorders?-Are children being referred for treatment or research at the hospital from these clinics? - Are parents being informed when their children are being evaluated and given the opportunity to refuse assessment or medication? - Is the drugging of children being used as a way to control them rather than improving the education and atmosphere in the schools? [...].

of my great obsession, I refused to some of the norms imposed by my father. To see myself between 4 walls, I referred to what Ms. Gomez had indicated. I never thought that this would be a Good Solution to the problem. But looking at it now, I think it gave a solution.[...] (34).

Yubenia was thus advised by her teacher to remain in the US, and not to move to the DR because her teacher viewed it as better for Yubenia to stay behind.

Similarly, Mr. Ruiz used a Health period to share and receive information on families.⁴¹ The topic was *Family Structures*, and the aim: *What family characteristics do we share and experience?*

He said to the class: *Like me, lots of you are growing up in apartments.* He mentioned different family structures from a book:

Nuclear family: That's the usual family you see on TV, with two kids and a dog running around. Single parent family: Most of us have experienced a single parent family; it doesn't have to be from a divorce either. 50 percent of the marriages end up in a divorce. It could be that a girl got pregnant at a young age, and the guy didn't want to take the responsibility, so he left.

When Mr. Ruiz said the latter, many students said: *Yeah*, as if they recognized this pattern. He continued: *Extended family: You have your uncle, cousin, neighbors, they'll take their goose.* The students laughed at this last point. Mr. Ruiz said: *That's in my country.* One of the students asked: *What if I have two homes, I have an aunt in Brooklyn I used to live with before, now I live with my mother, but I stay with her on weekends.* Mr. Ruiz said that will make an extended family. The last structure was the **blended family:**

If your mother gets married, have kids with another man. You can go through all the structures. Me myself and my brother were first living in a nuclear family. Then they divorced, my father married a woman who had kids, we lived in a single parent family, then my mother married a new man, and they got kids. For a period my grandparents and two cousins were living with us, they came from PR, so then we were an extended family.

In another period, the topic was exercise. When one of the African-American students asked him how often he exercised, Mr. Ruiz said: *No, I don't exercise anymore; I spend the time with my daughter.* I interpret his answer as a way to show himself as a responsible father. In the former period he had referred to boys who do not take responsibility, and by this comment he guided them to be responsible fathers.

Concluding Remarks

The small number of students in ICHS, their busy programs and the architecture made it easier for the security guards and staff to hold them under surveillance and

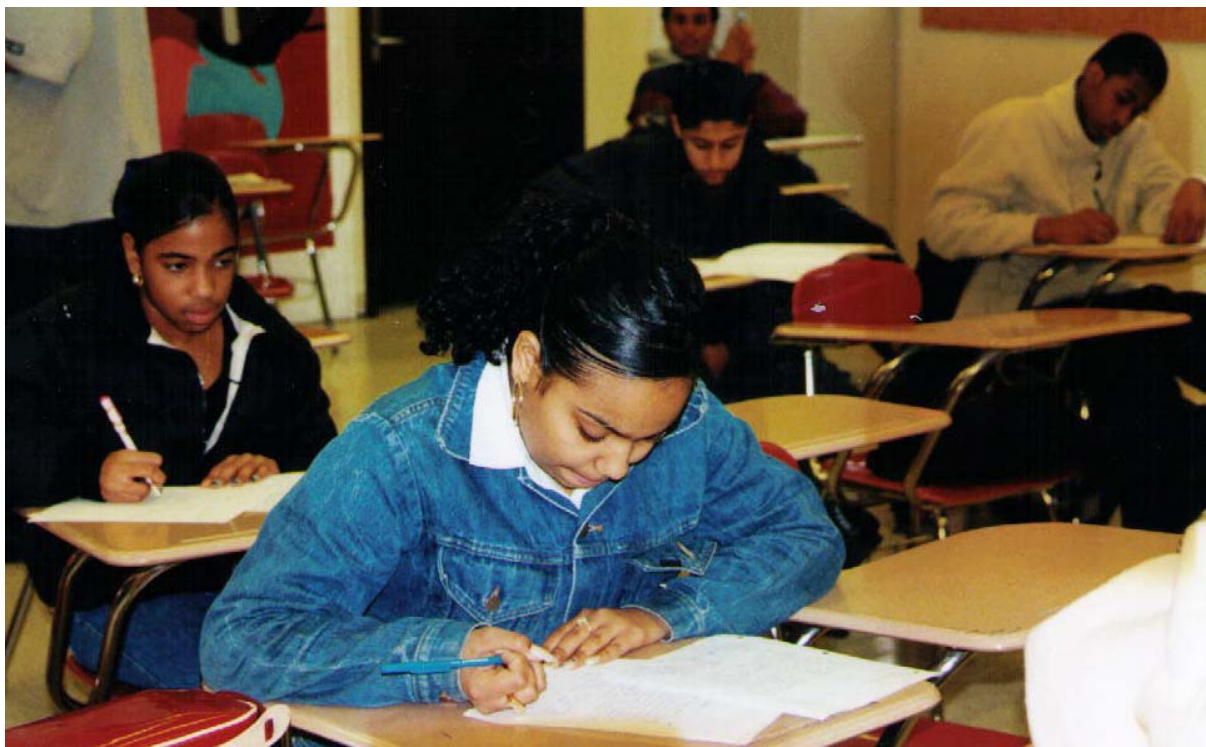
⁴¹ In Chapter Two I referred to the different kinds of households in Washington Heights, which is related to the family structures of Mr. Ruiz.

act on abnormality. These individual differences can ascribe students to troublemakers, independent of class and race, or make them feel like criminals. The prison-school led to some forms of self-governance. Most students tried to comply with the system, even at times when the staff was not visible. Many students participated in different resistance strategies, e.g., they walked slowly, joked during class periods and slept during classes. Some felt uncomfortable when being stared at; the gaze from students could be invasive because they were in a prison-school. ICHS had many traits in common with Foucault's Panopticon.

Given such school experiences, the student's identity formation could be influenced by factors that include a lack of familiarity with moving about freely, or speaking out when they wanted to. This may have led to self-silencing. In the case of the boy who was called a *stupid Dominican*, he told people in the office about the ethnic slur, but nothing was done about it. When I interviewed students, I felt that many were not used to talk about themselves, and this may have been related to the prison-school. Some had internalized that they were inferior to students in other high schools where they had no scanning or security guards. Other students accepted the surveillance, since it felt safer than having none. In the next chapter, I will look at how students; despite being in a prison-school, were active participants in classes, and acted on the school's focus on academics. I will present a class where ESL-students read a book by a Dominican author, and see what that can reveal about Dominican identity.

Chapter Four

Reading Julia Alvarez



Introduction

In this chapter I will limit the scope from the school's premises as a whole, to one class room and the reading of a book. I will take a close look at another aspect of how the school was organized, and the students' responses to it, similar to my approach in the previous chapter. The book was presented to ESL-students by Ms. Smith, and the classroom is good place to see how a text was read in social practice.

Ms. Smith introduced the students to the novel How the Garcia Sisters Lost Their Accents written by the Dominican author Julia Alvarez. The novel focuses on the closely knit Garcia sisters and their aristocratic upbringing. The novel tracks a journey from their "savage Caribbean island (i.e., the DR)" to life in the prestigious schools of New England and on to middle-class existence in the Bronx (Stavans 1995:50). I will examine how the novel was welcomed, read, and interpreted and what this may say about Dominican identity. Archetti et al. (1994) writes on how to

explore the written, and how texts, in some cases, can be read as ethnographic raw material. These thoughts will be used along with the critical concept of schooling called cultural production which has: “[A]n understanding of schools as one of the major sites of struggle for class’s disadvantages by advanced capitalism (Levinson et al. 1996: 3).” I will start by introducing Julia Alvarez, the author. She has another class background than most students at ICHS.

Julia Alvarez: An Elected Role Model

In 1960, at the age of ten, Julia Alvarez came to New York after her father was driven into exile (Sørensen 1998:251). She has been a professor of English and written many books. Her first, highly praised novel is How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents, in which Carla, Sandra, Yolanda and Sofia moved to New York City in 1960. We are witness to the sisters’ experiences, through their own eyes. As though part of their family, we witness them go to college, get married, go on holiday to the DR, and follow the development of their relationship to their parents. Stavans (1995: 50) writes that:

The sister’s experiences with discrimination, linguistic misunderstandings, and difficult marriages illustrate the customary rite of passage of Latino immigrants into the melting pot.

Stavans thus regards Alvarez’ book as possible having a kind of universal appeal to Latino immigrants who arrive in the USA.

On a national level the novel became a US bestseller, and received numerous prizes. The New York Times Book Review named it “Notable Book of 1991.” In 1993, Julia Alvarez was named *Woman of Hope: Latinas Abriendo Camino* (“Latinas Opening Way”) (Torres-Saillant 1999:362). Posters with her picture and biography were distributed to schools and cultural centers in New York. Alvarez was chosen on the suggestion of Torres-Saillant. Alvarez was given the honor of sharing the Dominican experience with people all over the world, because an outcome of the success of her book was that a translation to many languages. Furthermore, he argued that as a literary celebrity she was a better role model for the young than an ambassador, who was also a candidate to be a Woman of Hope. Furthermore, I understand Torres-

Saillant (ibid: 46) to value Alvarez because she represents the opposite values of the negatively stereotyped *Dominican-York*.⁴²

In the neighborhood, I saw one of the posters to which Torres-Saillant made reference in the offices of the ACDP. They organized computer classes in Spanish for adults in a small room filled with old computers. There were no windows; the only decoration was the poster. This was the only place in the community I saw the poster. Now I will look at how Alvarez was welcomed in ICHS, a school in the Dominican community.

Reading in the Classroom

I followed two groups of ESL-students' reading of the book during the course of 18 periods. Reading books may be said to be a part of "A Focus on Academic Performance" which was stated in the restructuring papers of NMEC. Students in ICHS were expected to read many books, and write book reports. As I showed in the previous chapter, there was also a strong focus on a variety of structures that were characteristic for a prison-school. In some ways, it seemed as though the focus on *security* was stronger on academics since there was only one librarian in the whole of the NMEC, while there were about 30 security guards or aides on the campus. This does demonstrate how differently security and academics were prioritized.

Many of the teachers in ICHS kept books in their trailers intended for the students' use. These had often been collected at the teachers' own initiative, i.e., when organizing book drives. Thus the students were not dependent on the single librarian available to them in order to get hold of books while in school.

The ESL-students I followed, were in groups of ten or twelve. In the first group, the majority of the students were Dominicans.

The Presentation of the Book

In the classroom, Ms. Smith wrote the *Aim* and *Do Now* on the blackboard as follows: *How can we familiarize ourselves with How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents while the*

⁴² The latter is a negative connotation of Dominicans in New York, as tangled in crime and drug related activities. People in the DR do often label Dominicans in NYC (or USA) like that if they talk about them in a negative manner.

Do Now asked: *What can we learn from the cover? Who is Julia Alvarez?* She asked the students to take out their notebooks and copy what she had written on the board. Some followed her instructions, but others had to be reminded more than once. One boy preferred to rest his head on the table.

A copy of the novel was handed out, and Ms. Smith told the students that the penalty for losing the book was ten dollars. She said that she knew the book would be difficult reading for them, but wanted everyone to try:

I prefer you to ask questions like why they have a party, for example. If you don't have any questions I will understand that you didn't do your homework, or that you are very smart.[...] (at which the students nodded). Last year I babied you, but I can't continue doing that, since you need to pass the regents. If you don't pass the regents, you have to go to summer school, and can't work during summer, or you'll have to repeat the year, and maybe stay in school until you are 23- years- old.

After these words the students were silent, and I believe that the reason for the loss of speech may lie in what I describe in the previous chapter as a speechlessness emanating from a situation where the students are not treated as experiencing subjects. However, the silence may also be a form of resistance. Among the first things the teacher said to “motivate” the students was that they better read this book now unless they wanted to stay in school until they were 23.

The students started on the first *Do Now: What can we learn from the cover?* The cover of the hardbound book showed a painting of a pink mansion in a sunny tropical garden. When one student read the title, he asked: *What's an accent?* Ms. Smith explained: *When you stay here longer, your accent changes.* One student said people from Puerto Rico have a strong accent, and some laughed. One student said: *Garcia, - they are Latino. They are immigrants, could be from Puerto Rico,* suggested two other students. These answers and questions from the students indicate that they had not heard of the novel prior to this period.

The next *Do Now* task was: *What do we know about the author?* After reading on the back of the cover, Felix said: *Oh, she's Dominican.* To me he sounded surprised. Felix said: *She's Dominican. Maybe she's talking about her own history?* He had thus never heard of Julia Alvarez before. As an answer to the next question, i.e., where the author resided now, Miami was the suggestion of one student. Ms. Smith told them that Alvarez lived in Vermont, a six to seven hours drive north of New York. To find out when the book was published, she showed the students how to find the year.

The next *Do Now* assignment was: *How is the book organized?* Ms. Smith said: *Usually, a book will be organized starting in the past and going up to present, right?* She demonstrated the ordinary book organization by pointing to one hand that represented the past, taking it to the other hand that presented the present. One of the girls nodded. Ms. Smith: *But this novel starts in the present, and works it way backwards, to the past, if you all look at the first part, you will see it starts in 1989, while the last part goes back to 1956.*

The last *Do Now* was: *What kind of incidents do you expect to encounter in this book?* Two students said: *Racism. The people, they may pick on them. And: I think they came to have better life.* These students had thus established an idea of what the book was about, and came up with some ideas that they possibly related to their own experiences.

I told the group that I had read the book before. Flavio asked me how long it took me. I said like a month, and he looked impressed. When the bell rang, I think most of the students had copied tomorrow's homework from the blackboard. Nobody, except for me and the teacher, had heard about Julia Alvarez or the book before its presentation in class. Ms. Smith hoped the book would awaken their interest for reading. But when I told them I had read it, Flavio was more concerned about how long it took me, than finding out what it was about.

In the next part I will narrate the student's reactions to the first pages they read, and describe how they welcomed the text.

Reading the Text: The First Homework

The group I joined the next day was according to Ms. Smith was an *international group*. Apart from Dominicans there were three students that were Turkish, Lebanese and Ghanaian. The students had to prepare a question related to the pages they read. She asked: *How many understood the homework?* Three students (of twelve) said they had not comprehended much. Thereafter she divided the students into three groups. I joined the lot who understood most of the homework which evolved around the 39-year old Yolanda Garcia. The students had also been asked to find a paragraph in the text with the answer to some questions she asked for homework. The first question was: *Where does the scene take place?* One student said: *I think in DR.* A girl said: *I think*

in DR or here. David, a boy from Ghana, argued that it was in the DR: *It was in the cousins' place, there are five candles on the cake, and the cake is shaped as the island.* The five candles symbolized the number of years Yolanda had been absent from the DR, where she was born. The students who had read the text were not sure where Yolanda was, i.e., in the USA or in the DR. That the students were unsure of where she was may be understood that the students do not see a significant difference between the two countries.

When the students were asked to find out what occasion was celebrated, one said: *Welcome-back party.* Felix disagreed, and claimed it had to be a birthday. We looked through the pages, and found it said they sung *Bienvenido a ti* (Welcome to you) to the tunes of Happy Birthday, so Felix was wrong.

The next question was: *What can you infer about the family's social positions?* David said: *They're rich; they say you can borrow one of the cars. They have a house on the beach.* Renzo, who had been to school in the DR for two years, said: *You don't have to be rich to have a car in the Dominican Republic.* David said: *Yes, but they have many cars, not just one.*

On the last question: *What are some of the problems / conflicts Yolanda is facing?* David said: *She has a hard time.* Other students said: *She has difficulties with the language, personal problems at home.* And: *She's more independent.* One girl said: *Yolanda has a hard time, she wants to go out alone, but if she goes alone, something can happen.* Here some of them tried to relate to issues of language and gender that they may know of from their own experience.

When we discussed a paragraph where Yolanda said to her aunt that she wanted to travel north to pick guavas, Felix and Renzo said: *She means the USA, that's to go north.* David said: *She means north in the DR.* I said: *A guava is guayaba in Spanish, and you don't have to go to USA to find them, they are in DR.* They would not believe that she meant *guayabas* when she talked about guavas, but they did not look it up in a dictionary. Many Dominican students related "going north" as traveling to the US, while David, who had read the text better, found it to be within the DR.

On the question of what she found different over there, I selected the following paragraph: *Sitting among the aunts in the less comfortable dining chairs, the cousins are flashes of color in turquoise jumpsuits and tight jersey dresses.* I said: *In the*

Dominican Republic I was sitting on such chairs, here the chairs are more comfortable. I demonstrated how one has to sit on those, with their backs straight. Felix laughed and said: *Those we call backbreakers* (35). Even though there was some confusion on the difference between the US and the DR, it seemed that we had agreed on this point. Renzo, on the other hand, seemed to be against what had been said in class, especially that they were rich and therefore in a higher social class:

I don't agree, I have been to the Dominican Republic, last year to school, I have been there, and it's not like that. They are middle-class, I know because I lived in the DR and I know, we are not rich but we had maids anyway, I have only three years living here.

Renzo is thus showing a resistance to what is being stated in the book, and said that he this was different from his own personal experiences.

When the period was finished, Ms. Smith said about the Dominican students:

They don't do any effort. They do the minimum of what is expected. They don't do anything unless you tell them to. The others are smart, but I've been working with them since last year so I know how they are and what I'm talking about.

The others were the *international* students she introduced me to. Ms. Smith told me that she was annoyed with Renzo; he liked to argue with teachers. He often took the opposite view of hers, and as a consequence she organized a meeting in the office.⁴³ This can be related to how staff acted on abnormality in the previous chapter.

The rest of the semester the students continued to read the novel. Some related tasks were also done; they wrote a letter of recommendation for Alvarez. In the novel they learned about Yolanda (Yo), the sister who went to poetry readings and had had a nervous breakdown, and Sofia (Fifi) whom her father disowned after she had a child out of wedlock. As I pointed to above, Renzo expressed some of his individual experience during the period, even though Ms. Smith did not always welcome his opinion. His response to the novel was that it did not reflect the DR he knew. I will now look at other responses.

⁴³ This meeting found place within the same month with Renzo and another boy from the same group in the office. Ms. Echeverria and I was present at that meeting, and Ms. Smith said that Renzo always argued against her. The boys promised to behave better and to their homework.

Periods as Reflections of Individual Experiences

One example of how students expressed individual experiences was when Ms. Smith said that Papi (the father in the novel) was afraid that Sofia was going to lose her virginity. One student asked what virginity was. *You can't have sex*, one student said. Lolin protested: *Yes, you can, but not all kinds*. Flavio was not convinced, and said that to have sex meant to lose virginity. He asked whether Ms. Smith was a virgin. She laughed and said: *No, I have a child!* Towards the end of the period, Ms. Smith noted how angry Sofia's father got when the boyfriend made her pregnant. Cesar said: *Dominican parents they are like that. They go crazy if you say you're gonna have a child, crazy like you've never seen them before! Why is that?* Joel looked around him, as if someone could give him an answer. One possible explanation could be what I stated in Chapter Two; i.e., that parents who had immigrated had high aspirations for their children. And if their children got pregnant at a young age, some parents might see that as the end of a college education and an improvement of their children's lives. Here Cesar, Lolin and Flavio used the content of the book they were discussing, and related it to their situation.

Felix, whom I interviewed, also related events in his own life to those in the novel. He had been to school in the DR the previous year. I asked him what it was like to be back:

Difficult; it's very different in school there, how we work in classes and all that. Everyone was asking me about here, how is the people here, what is the weather like. Everyone was surprised that I came back. People I didn't know knew my name. [...] I'm like Yolanda in the book we are reading, but for me, I came back after three years here [USA].

He could thus allude to the novel's Yolanda when discussing his own personal experience. Renzo, however, disagreed with most of what Ms. Smith said. Perhaps it was because he was not fond of school and the teacher in general, or because he found that the book's content and the teacher's interpretations were incongruous with his own experiences.

When the subject was on Yolanda's feelings once she finally was on her own, after having been with aunts and cousins all the time, Damaris said: *That's making her crazy*. Ms. Smith asked: *Why does she want to travel by herself?* *She's confused*, said Lolin. Rudy added: *She doesn't know the DR, nothing*. Lolin said: *She wants to learn*

about her country, people, culture. From their comments it seemed as though here too they were using their individual experiences: Damaris knew that people could get on each others nerves. She had related to me that in her family, people would get on each other's nerves because too many people were living in one apartment. Rudy had been to school in the DR to which he had been sent there as a punishment. So it was possible that he had little knowledge of the DR when he went there, and was able to relate to the experience of feeling lost.

A few weeks later, the topic for discussion was Yolanda's relationship to love, and how it led to a breakdown. Apparently, the students had no understanding of what a breakdown was. Ms. Smith linked it to an incident in school: *If a car breaks down, what happens?* One student said: *It stops working.* Ms. Smith continued: *So, if a car stops working, what happens to a person that stops working? A person who has got problems, but gets on with what he or she has to do, some day breaks down. We have just seen it in this school.* Here Ms. Smith referred to Mr. Pitt, the teacher who beat and kicked a student in ICHS, and who was later dismissed to which I referred to in Chapter Three.

In another period we spoke about how Yolanda felt after being in the DR for a while. She had lived in New York for a long time, in an environment with few Spanish-speaking people around her. One student said: *Yolanda is forgetting her Spanish. It's been a long time since she's seen the family.* Anthony said: *She has another lifestyle now.* We read in the text that she was more casual or shabby than many people in the DR. Ms. Smith asked: *Does she feel weird in New York like that?* Some said *yes*, others *no*. In the next period with the other group, Ms. Smith said: *She doesn't care much about her physical appearance, like her cousin does. She's more intellectual. Yolanda probably does have money, but she just doesn't care.* One of the girls said: *There are people like that.* It seemed like she could relate to, but not really comprehend how anyone would wear shabby clothes if they could afford to buy new clothes.⁴⁴

Towards the end of the semester, Ms. Smith was not entirely pleased with the group's progress in reading. She said to me:

Look at Muhammad and David, they do their work, Anthony does not do a lot, but he remembers, he's smart, and look at Damaris and Lolin, they all got 90's, but I'm tired of them now, I wanna get rid of them, next

⁴⁴ Her comment can also be connected to what I wrote in the previous chapter; where the students who wanted to show that they took care of themselves would not wear dirty or shabby clothes.

semester it's all gonna change, I talked to Mr Allen, so he's gonna put them in other classes. They just complain that it's too difficult and all that.

She had commented on Anthony (14-years-old) who she knew was not reading the book, but was nevertheless paying attention during classes. In an interview with him, he said: *I just listen to what she says, so when she asks questions I just say what she said.* Anthony had been living in NYC for two years, and learned to speak an unaccented English. He had obviously learned a method of learning the content of a book, without reading it himself. He seemed more motivated for schooling than some of his peers, who showed a resistance by not paying attention. This may be because some voluntary minorities “maintained a positive frame of reference, comparing their present situation with that in their home countries” (Suarez-Orozco 1987, Ogbu 1995 cited in López 1999: 19).⁴⁵ In Chapter Five I will discuss why students may compare their situation to that of their purported homeland.

I met Ms. Smith on a revisit at the end of the school year 2000. She told me the students gave up on the book halfway, except for Damaris and Lolin. They were interested in the novel, and finished it on their own. According to López (1999:191), girls have to stay at home more, which gives them more opportunities to read books and do school-work. This may account for their finishing the book. Renzo, on the other hand, was a kind of a *troublemaker*, a label that was only applied to boys. Anthony participated during periods, without reading the book.

Damaris had begun developing a liking for books. When I was in Damaris' apartment, we looked at a book she had read in ICHS: When I was Puerto Rican. Damaris said that she liked to keep the books she read. She added:

It's about how it was over there, about her memories from Puerto Rico, from her country [...] I like books that deal with reality, Julia Alvarez, and the other, Kincen, I don't know if she was from there, but she describes that it is the same in all places, that in both places, New York and Jamaica, she has a friend that suffers a lot. [...] The two places are the same (36).

Damaris had thus learned to appreciate books from reading them in school, and had started to build up her own book collection. In chapter Six I will compare

⁴⁵ “[V]oluntary minority groups are those who moved to the United States for a better future but did not experience long-term school performance problems, such as Koreans and Chinese (Ogbu 1974, 1978 cited in López 1999: 18).” López (ibid.) writes that Dominicans and West Indians were included in this rubric in Ogbu and Simons (1998: 164), but that “this categorization conflates the different histories of each of these minority and immigrant groups.”

her to two other students with regard to language preferences and individual strategies. Under here I will include the teachers' impact on them concerning these issues.

The Teacher as a Mediator and Her Concept of Culture

Ms. Smith was Anglo-American, whose interests included traveling and languages. In the near future, she hoped to visit the DR. Ms. Smith had lived in Europe, and spoke several languages. This was unusual for people in the USA whose mother-tongue was English. By selecting this book for the students, she seemed intent on creating a positive Dominican identity, or to introduce the students to a Dominican author who would motivate them to read. Maybe so Julia Alvarez could become the true role model she was intended to at the time of her election.⁴⁶

Ms. Smith might have hoped for the book's content to stimulate recognition, which indeed occurred at some points. But by introducing the novel as something they had to do in order to avoid summer school or stay in school until they were 23-years-old, I think negated her original intentions, i.e., to motivate the students. At the same time as she said it was difficult, she also knew they were ESL-students whose reading levels were below that of readers of The New York Times, where it was praised. Many teachers along with Ms. Smith struggled to get students to do their homework, as one English teacher put it:

Oh, some days I just feel like I should never have become a teacher. Like yesterday, I was like oh, that was one of the worst days I had here ever. They were supposed to do their homework, and only five in 52 did it, and since I was gonna base their grades on their homework, so in the classes we couldn't do what I had planned to do, and I had to make them do the homework.

Ms. Smith may have hoped that by selecting this novel, the students would find it interesting reading and consequently do the homework. When in the classroom, the students not only respond to what the novelist wrote, but also to how the text was presented. Ms. Smith asked many of the questions, and also interpreted the text. The students' discussions were often based on what the teacher said, rather than on what they had read. I wrote in the field notes: *All of this is what Smith tells*

⁴⁶ On Career Day the students of Mr. Steinberg's class were crazy about his journalist wife, and came running after her in the teacher's trailer. They did not care so much about the speakers from the Dominican community. This can imply that the students do not necessarily care about a person only because it is from the community, they have role models from the larger society they look up to as well.

them, she asks good questions, which I think make the text more interesting for them, but I miss more questions from them. I wanted the students to be more active, and ask questions. From the previous chapter I showed how students were in a prison-school, and pointed out that the students were not encouraged to think independently within that structure. Perhaps they had difficulties engaging in independent thinking during classes for these reasons.

I would like to use Barth's concept of knowledge to shed light on how Ms. Smith used the concept of culture. For example, the first period she introduced to the students she said that I was writing about *Dominican culture*. She also encouraged me to dance and go to parties with the students, in order to learn more Dominican culture.

Ms. Smith seemed to have been surprised that the students did not respond to the book as she had expected, even though they were Dominican. Barth (2002: 1) argues that it is preferable to use the notion "knowledge" rather than "culture" since "[k]nowledge is distributed in a population, while culture makes us think in terms of diffuse sharing." Ms. Smith spoke and acted on *Dominican culture*, when she picked out this novel for the students, but her perception of Dominican culture was not welcomed by most of her Dominican students.⁴⁷

According to Barth (2002: 2) the stock of knowledge varies greatly between individuals. Barth cites Russell who writes: 'what a person knows, [...], is dependent on that person's own individual experience (ibid).' As I have shown in the empirical examples, the students could relate some of their own experiences to the book's content. However, the student's individual experiences differed. Based on their knowledge they acted on the book and the content that was presented to them.

Ms. Smith seemed to have a concept of culture, where she stressed a monolithic understanding of culture. One of the problems with this view of culture is that culture is viewed as equally distributed among for instance Dominicans. Issues of class may be overlooked, a matter to which I will now turn.

⁴⁷ One book, published by Teaching for Change (2006): "Caribbean Connections: the Dominican Republic," focuses on the works of Julia Alvarez, among other things (merengue, baseball, migration, DR's relation to Haiti, bodegas, and more), and this can show that it is not only Ms. Smith who might use Julia Alvarez in classes. I heard of Dominican students in another NYC high school who had received Alvarez' novel in much the same way as these ESL-students did.



Attitudes and Use of Books: Issues of Class

In many apartments in Washington Heights books were kept out of view; they were not on display. They were kept in closets or on a shelf in the bedroom. Books were thus not considered cultural capital which is a “kind of symbolic credit which one acquires through learning to embody and enact signs of social standing (Boerdieu 1974 cited in Levinson and Holland 1996: 6).”⁴⁸

For the teachers in ICHS, I think books were considered cultural capital. In the Adelante office, there was a picture of Mr. Ruiz and his wife and daughter in their living-room. When I looked at it with Maribel, she pointed to the bookshelf behind them, and said: *The teachers always have homes like that* (37). She had noted that teachers had a large collection of books on display in their homes. She was obviously not used to see that in other homes. So it is possible that in Washington Heights there were other markers than books that showed good taste.

The lack of books in some students’ homes could put a constraint on them when it came to homework. In Mr. Ruiz class, one girl said that she had not been able

⁴⁸ This was different to how good taste and upper-middle-class lifestyle was marked in an analysis of National Geographic (Lutz and Collins 1993). “A number of people remark on the magazine’s tastefulness, a concept that is proxy for the cultural choices for the wealthy (ibid: 231).” Here the magazines contributed to their cultural capital.

to do the day's homework: *I don't have a biology book, I don't have a dictionary, you can't expect me to do my homework when I don't have the books.* That the students were expected to read many books and use them when doing their homework, may be to viewed as symbolic violence "in which "instruments of knowledge...which are arbitrary" are nevertheless made to appear universal and objective (Boerdieu and Passeron 1977: 115 cited in *ibid.*).” Symbolic violence is said to be done, put in a simplified way, to a social agent that is taking part in the violence (Boerdieu and Wacquant 1995: 153 cited in Aarset 2006: 57). In ICHS one can say that the students' were social agents in the symbolic violence of the school, as they participated in the reading of books. As I have shown earlier, had the students' not been passive recipients of the book or the school's organization, their response was rejecting the book, as a resistance.

Many people in Washington Heights considered books to be expensive. Like Damaris, when I showed her a copy of The Dominican Republic: A National History, by Frank Moya Pons the first thing she asked me was how much I paid for it. I had expected us to have a discussion about the DR's history, but she was just interested in the price. When I showed Laura from Adelante the map book Manhattan: Block by Block, she said: *I would never pay 15 dollars for a book!* She was not interested in paging through it. She was a staff member, but her attitudes were that books were expensive and thus should not be bought. Even though she had taken some college courses, she seemed to have a pragmatic view on education: When Denise (15-years-old) said to Laura that she was tired of school; Laura said that she did not really like to study either but she stayed in order to get a job in the future. Laura recommended to Denise to stay in school, and try coping. I found that it peculiar that Laura, who worked for a scholastic program, agreed with the students' views that it was boring to study but one simply had to cope.

Carolina, who was in Ms. Smith's 8th period, said she would have to quit school for a while as she pregnant, and had to take some time off when the baby arrive. She planned on obtaining her high school diploma later:

Yes one will miss out the fun, to play around (38), isn't that what you like too? That's the only thing,[I will miss],but I don't like school, I don't like what we are learning, not a lot.

Ms. Reynoso expressed her opinion on the issue before a period, when the class, her and me were going to discuss college, education and progress:

It's like, they talk about progress, that they want to progress (39), but they don't know what it is. They want to act like someone who's here, but they don't know how to get there (she indicated a point on the blackboard and then to another, a higher one above it). Like me, none of my parents went to college, so I was thinking a lot what will I do after college. I couldn't see myself in a job. I was the first in the family to go to college. [...] And money, when I say a book is 16 dollars, they don't want to spend so much on a book. But they don't think twice about 50 dollars for a skirt.

What Ms. Reynoso was referring to when she talked about that the students wanted to look like they aspired to higher class than they actually were by wearing expensive clothes. She felt that the students were not willing to do much to go to college and get a career.

One single mother with three children said it was expensive for her to buy the books the children needed in school, but she tried to purchase as many she could afford. Others, like Laura, had the means to buy books, but seemed to prefer to spend the money on other things, such as food, clothes and a home computer. The school's focus on academic performance, which demanded of the students' considerable reading and use of books, seems to collide with the socioeconomic reality and what is regarded as cultural capital in many families.

Many parents were working-class. Most Dominicans worked as drivers, artisans, operators or laborers (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991: 172 cited in Offer-Ohlson 1999). Pereira, Cobb and Makoulis (1993, cited in Massa 1996: 85) write on Latino students at the City University of New York:

[T]he less parents have been exposed to formal education, the more likely it is that students experience disparities between the kinds of teaching and learning patterns encountered in their homes and those used in the college classroom.

Dominicans had on an overall basis, the lowest educational scores in the USA: In 2000, almost half of Dominicans aged 25-years or older had not completed their high school diploma, and about ten percent had a college diploma (Hernández and Rivera-Batiz 2003). In other words many students can experience a great disparity between learning patterns in school and in their homes. As I wrote in the Introductory Chapter, parent involvement was limited compared to the number of students in school. ICHS was satisfied with 25 parents who came to the first meeting, since the previous year it had only been five or six parents coming in. Prior to the second parent-teachers meeting Franklin and one mother said there probably would

not be so many parents this time. The majority of those who came to the first meeting were parents of 9th graders who had never attended a meeting before. The mother's explanation for this was that those first-time attenders wanted: *To see what happens and see that everything is ok, when they know this, they won't come back* (40). Santiago burst out: *Dominican parents!*

Girety, a high school teacher, said to me that many Dominicans parents would tell her: *You're their second mother* (41); *you can do what you want with them*. She said that some even believed that she was allowed to hit them if this was necessary, and that they trusted her to be a good teacher. López (1999) writes that many parents from the DR look at their children as adults when they are in high school. One woman from a Dominican community organization echoed her views: *The school (NMEC) used to have a bad reputation, and furthermore, in high school more than in any other level, the parents won't come, they think they are grown-ups now. It's also important to know the background of the parents* (42).

Another reason why many parents did not come may be their long working days that made it difficult to attend meetings at night.

When the students showed that they were not very interested in the novel, I believe this had something to do with the fact that it was a book. It was the form; the book and the teaching that many of the students in Ms. Smith's periods could not identify with, since it not represented cultural capital among students or their families. Furthermore, this novel was about what can be called a high-class family, not unlike the authors own family. Julia Alvarez lived in Vermont, which may be synonymous with 'North American culture,' into which Sørensen (1998: 252) writes Alvarez and the novel are totally assimilated. Cocco de Filippis (1999:9) writes that despite the fact that no other writer with Dominican roots is as highly recognized as Alvarez, she writes in English, and her work is not known within the Dominican community and in the Dominican Republic. Within the diverse group of Latino writers in USA, Julia Alvarez represents the white bourgeoisie (ibid: 10).

How the students would have responded to books by Dominican authors who have a more class background more similar to the students' own, as is the case in Diaz (1999), Perez (2000), and Baez (2000), has to be seen. If it was the book as a form with which they were not identifying, then any book may be rejected by the students as it is not a form that confers cultural capital among their peers.

Fiction as Ethnography: Limitations of Words

Sørensen (1998) writes on Dominicans in Washington Heights, and describe Julia Alvarez as a “native” to the transnational world. She uses the author and the novel to discuss the negotiations of political and cultural identity among members of Dominican worlds: It takes us “*aqui, alla*, (here, there) but ‘home’ remains uncertain.” The story of the Garcia sisters was a story of a clash between two worlds, as the girls’ struggle to womanhood was inseparable from their struggle to understand their own multifaceted identity. According to Sørensen this identity was not Dominican or American, but both and in-between. Sørensen (ibid:250) suggests that if a transnational identity has not yet been articulated writing might become a place to inhabit as contemporary fiction is increasingly written “from the margins of hybridity and ‘in-between-ness’.”

I think that writing may be a place for the author’s identity project, but as I have shown with ethnography from school, the novel does not necessarily reflect the students’ identities of all students.⁴⁹

Sørensen stresses the novel’s place in Dominican migrants’ public discourse (ibid: 251f). She writes that the novelist’s family is, and was, well-known by Dominican locals and transnationals alike and belongs to “the upper pale layers of Dominican society” (ibid.). I did not get the impression that the novel or the author had a place in the public discourse, as Cocco de Filippis also noted above. Sørensen may have reached that conclusion because she refers to conversations with people who were highly literate, e.g., a lawyer and a female acquaintance.

Sørensen has not looked at who the readers of the novel may be. As my empirical material demonstrates, the students did not know Julia Alvarez before the teacher introduced the novel to them. This is despite the fact that some of the students were transnational in the sense that many of them had recently lived in the DR.

⁴⁹ Cruz’ (1994:2) study about highly literate Dominican American professors revealed that, “like the Garcia girls” respondents used high literacy to arrive at a new awareness of themselves, their heritage, and American society.

I have presented Sørensen who uses the Garcia sisters as ethnography to analyze Dominican identities. There are different views among anthropologists on how texts may be used as ethnography. Hastrup (1995:42) writes of the limitations of words:

Taken by themselves words are only a limited means of entry into this world. We have to observe and analyze how they are put to use, and how their implicit symbolic capital is put into social play.

Archetti (1994: 12f) writes that written texts are heterogeneous, “because behind each text lies a different author with his/her particular public and circuit of consumption.” Ortner (1991:179) concurs with this view, but writes that fiction is not ethnography if the question is meant to imply that in most ethnographies any resemblance to cultures living or dead is purely coincidental.

Sørensen describes the author and some of her readers, but she did not refer to how the novel may reflect the lives of Dominicans in the USA. Nor does she look at how words were experienced by the actors, which is what Hastrup (1995: 42) argues must be emphasized. Sørensen analyzes the text as what Archetti (1994: 17) labels “ethnographic raw material,” and uses it to explain the “in-between” identity of the Garcia sisters. I find her use of the novel as a raw material to present a problem since in this case, the novel did not reflect a Dominican identity. At the same time Sørensen states that Alvarez is totally assimilated to North American culture, and therefore I find it peculiar that the author’s novel is taken as raw material.

On the other hand, Elida, an Alianza Dominicana employee, recommended the novel about the Garcia sisters to me. She said that Alvarez had captured nicely the situation she found herself in, as a 26-year-old living in NYC: *We know we are going back [...]. Dominicans in DR don't think we are Dominican and Dominicans here think we are American. We are stuck in the middle.* She said that one reason why she felt that she was not accepted as a Dominican in New York was that during a meeting in the organization, one woman said she did not understand the racism in the DR.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ In Chapter Six I will present how understandings of race differ in the DR and the USA.

Concluding remarks

Ms. Smith defined Dominican culture to be positive cultural expressions, like this novel. This can be said to be the schools positive definition of Dominican identity. How Ms. Smith wanted to impose a Dominican identity on to the ESL-students were rejected since it was a book. The students were active participants in that they were using the content to relate to individual experiences. Reproductionists such as Boerdieu could have left out the students' agency. The argument could then have been that all students learn middle class values in school and learn about Dominican identity in school. Among the students there were multiple reactions to Alvarez' novel, but nobody had heard of the author beforehand. Only two girls finished the book. This may be linked to gender; girls are said to have more time to read. These conclusions are different from those of Sørensen's because she did not see how the texts were used in social play.

Alvarez has also been imposed as a role model on the community. I think this has failed because she is a novelist and books were not considered cultural capital in many Washington Heights homes. The author has been a US bestseller, reaching audiences other than that of the Dominican community. In the next chapter I will look at what the students themselves define as Dominican identity in school and in the larger society.



Picture Gallery: Dominican Festivals and Parades

On top: A merengue band performing at a Dominican festival in Washington Heights, year 2003. Below: Public watching a Dominican parade along Bergenline Avenue, New Jersey, year 2000. (The photographs in the thesis do not necessarily portray people that are being described in the empirical material.)



Chapter Five

Dominican Markers

KOO: *Do you consider yourself to be Dominican?*
 Indiana: *Of course: I can't live without mangú⁵¹, that's the best thing for breakfast, and other Dominican dishes. [...] I want to show that Dominicans can graduate from high school.*

Introduction

One Dominican sociologist in the DR told me she had visited the NMEC. She said about the students: *They do not know what Dominican identity is. I had to teach them!* (43)⁵². This observation may be compared to the previous chapter in which I examined how a Dominican identity was imposed upon ESL-students by Ms. Smith. In this chapter I want to explore how Dominican identity may be used as a self-ascribed identity by students

As I wrote in the Chapter One, both students and I doubted whether they could be categorized as Dominicans, and what was meant by the identity. According to Barth (1994), boundary maintenance creates ethnicity; ethnic identity is maintained through interaction and negotiation in different contexts. This means that ethnicity changes over time. In ICHS the Dominican students constituted a majority, while in the larger society they were a minority. I want to discuss how Dominican ethnicity was marked in these settings.

I would say that the sociologist stigmatized the students when she said they did not know what their identity was. In this chapter I will show through empirical examples that many students have, to some degree created a stereotypical Dominican identity themselves, as well as self-absorbing it. Due to stigma, some may choose to distance themselves from Dominican ethnicity, while others use it to foster ethnic pride, as is the case of Indiana whom I quoted above. I will compare this ethnicity to “symbolic ethnicity;” a voluntary ethnicity of white suburbans.

⁵¹ Mangú is made of plantains that are boiled until they are soft, then mashed, and mixed up with butter to taste. Served with sweet and sour red onions, and is topped with either fried white cheese or fried salami.

⁵²Original Spanish Quotes are cited in the Appendix.

I will present Dominican markers to which my informants referred. These are: Dominican festivals and parades, the Dominican flag, Dominican music and dance, e.g., merengue, bachata and los palos, as well as Dominican food and the plantain in particular, plus baseball. I will also look at how the markers were gendered. Spanish language, which I will argue is a marker for Latinos in general, is the topic of Chapter Six.

Existing literature on Dominican identity, described in greater detail below, may be divided into two bodies of works, which both are of interest for the theses. In one, Dominicans are viewed as transnational migrants who resist settling for good in USA and is studied as an isolated group; while in the other they have been studied in contexts where they can negotiate social boundaries with other ethnic groups, as in high schools.

I will first introduce the former theories on ethnicity in USA, i.e., what researchers have written on the two peak periods of immigration, and position these according to my views.

Ethnicity and the Two Peak Periods of Immigration to the USA

In the USA, one may speak of two “great waves,” or peak periods of immigration (Foner 2000, Rumbaut 1996: 121). The first peak period was composed of Europeans who arrived from around 1890 to 1925. The second peak period started after 1965, when immigrants from the DR and other countries entered the US (ibid.).⁵³

The vast majority of these are from “parts of the world that were once colonized and subjugated by Europeans [...]” (Bailey 1999: 299). In the 1990 census, most of the new immigrants “reported themselves to be nonwhite” (Rumbaut 1996: 121). The majority can therefore be said to be dark-skinned, and origin from countries that had been colonized by Europeans. The theories that have been developed to describe the experiences of the first group of immigrants have been applied, to a shifting degree, to immigrants of the second peak period even though the contexts were different which I wish to discuss at this point.

⁵³ See Chapter One for more information on the laws that opened for immigration from non-European countries.

Theories on assimilation and acculturation were developed for the first great wave of immigrants. With assimilation, one identifies with the nation, placing that identity ahead of any associated with their birthplace or ethnic homeland (Sahlins 1993: 50). The immigrants of the first group were expected to assimilate fast: The Americanization's "melting pot" pageants, [...] depicted strangely attired foreigners stepping into a huge pot and emerging as immaculate, well-dressed, accent-free "American-looking" Americans (Foner 2000: 182).

Sahlins refers to this process as akin to that of religious conversion (1993:48). That is the case because there is an expectation that the newly arrived, or converted, will be expected to observe the rituals, but beyond that wealth is of no consequence. To be acculturated, on the other hand, means to identify with the nation's culture, in this case the USA. Sahlins (ibid: 58) argues that in the New York Dominican community it is possible to see acculturation without assimilation because the former "refuse to think of the United States as their permanent national home."⁵⁴

Since these theories were developed for the first group, the Europeans, they are not easily applicable to young Dominicans or Dominicans in general, as Sahlins did. Firstly, it is difficult to discern what immigrants and their children should acculturate or assimilate into, since it is unclear what exactly may be defined as American identity or culture (Levitt 2001, Sahlins 1993: 56).⁵⁵ Secondly, when researchers looked at immigration groups in the 1920-30's the impact of the Great Depression on the immigrants' rising mobility was not examined (Gans 1992: 174).

Gans (ibid: 173) believes that the myth of automatic immigrant success fails when it comes to immigrants who arrived after 1965, and one of the causes is economy; e.g. it was easier to find jobs for non-professional immigrants of the first peak period. Gans (1979: 23) predicts that in the future the economic and political conditions may create a need for scapegoats: Under such conditions, some ethnics will try to assimilate faster and pass out of all ethnic roles, while others will revitalize the ethnic group socially and culturally if only for self-protection (ibid).

Another difference between the two great waves is racial discourse (Foner 2000). The immigrants of the first peak period were European, and all came to be regarded as white. Jews and Italians were viewed as "inferior whites" at the time of

⁵⁴ Sahlins cited Guarnizo (1994), which I will introduce in the literature on Dominicans studied as an isolated group.

⁵⁵ It can also have been unclear what American culture and identity was for the first great wave, but at that time the schools had an assimilation mission (Foner 2000: 7): "Public schools [...] put pressure on immigrants to abandon their old-fashioned customs and languages" (ibid: 182).

their arrival, but their racial identities were changed when African Americans moved to NYC from the Southern States (ibid: 167). For the post-65 immigrants, it has been easier for non-black immigrants to prosper, e.g., Koreans. This group have prospered more than Jamaicans, even though both groups value education equally (ibid: 220). This can be connected to understandings of race in the USA, which will be accounted for in Chapter Six.

Most Dominicans are not white, and can therefore face more discrimination than immigrants who are non-black. In the Chapter One I wrote that the poverty levels of black and dark-skinned Dominicans were higher than for the more light-skinned Dominicans, and this can indicate that they are discriminated against. The population of NYC is not static, so race relations can change: Whites, the historical majority, are for example projected to make up less than half of the population of New York in 2010 (Sanjek 1998: 157). I believe that the change in who entails the larger society may change the face of discrimination. As in the case of Jews and Italians who “became white,” other groups’ racial identity may undergo a redefinition either from within or from the larger society. Some people may also choose individual strategies when it comes to ethnicity, which I discuss in Chapter Six.

Individualism has been an important aspect of US society. Toqueville (cited in Fernandez 2000: 150) writes that “in churches and schools Americans learned that only they controlled their own destiny.” Fernandez (ibid: 151) is critical to how individualism appear to work in the USA. In the first instance, it gives the illusion of standing alone, which develops a very limited sense of community. Secondly, it offers no way out of the myth of the self-made American. Finally, because many privileged and powerful Americans prepare “their children for a game that no longer exists” (ibid.). The game he refers may be compared to Ortner (1998), who questions whether the US is a classless society. She analyzes “the hidden life of class” where “classes” are objectively seen as positions in social space defined by economic and cultural capital.⁵⁶ She writes that the hidden life of class has many consequences

⁵⁶ In Chapter Four I pointed to that many of the students’ families were working-class, and books were not considered cultural capital.

(ibid: 13). One of them is that class tends to be the last factor when explaining privilege and power, or poverty and social impotence:

Either we get explanations in terms of race and ethnicity (whether in the mode of credit and blame), or we get explanations in terms of personal initiative, pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps (or the failure to do so), or some combination of the two.

This means that by failure or success, the individual or his or hers ethnicity or race are either blamed or credited. The hidden life of class in the USA may bear consequences for the students if they feel like failures. If an ethnic group is stigmatized it opens up for several strategies: According to McLaughlin and Heath (1993: 222) ethnic identity is not the primary identity for today's youth: "but an additional "layer" of identity that youth-especially youth from minority cultures-can adopt as a matter of pride (ibid.)." Another strategy is withdrawal, and I will discuss this in a separate segment later in this chapter.

The situation for the second wave of immigrants and their children is also different in ways other than described above. According to Foner (2002: 182) transnational connections are viewed more favourable today than in the past.⁵⁷ In the following I wish to examine at how students used their identities in different contexts, in the school and in the larger society. I will focus on how Dominican ethnicity is marked, may indicate that markers express "American" identity, and look at transnational ties.

Dominican Markers in Social Action

In the Introductory Chapter I referred to a trip to the Statue of Liberty with Dilia and a friend of hers. In this context they were in the larger society, and seemed unhappy to be treated as visitors from the DR, or as Dominicans. The Dominican national anthem did not awaken any emotions in them at that time. Dilia expressed that she felt more like she was from 181st street, than from the DR. When I talked to her at her home, she was more interested in talking about Dominican festivals:

Washington Heights is like Latin, like everyone here is Dominican and Puerto Rican, we have a lot of Dominican traditions up here [...].

⁵⁷ There are still many US citizens who view assimilation as incompatible with transnational migration (Levitt 2001: 4).

Kristin O: *Like which Dominican traditions?*

Dilania: (pause) *Like we celebrate festivals, we've got lots of parades, and the National Day.*

Whereas she would not mark herself as someone from the DR in all circumstances, she talked about Dominican, or Latin traditions, in Washington Heights. This can also be because she felt a belonging to her neighborhood, and therefore was open to celebrations there. During Dominican festivals Dominican food was for sale, people waved with Dominican flags, and Dominican music was played. I will start the presentation of the markers with Dominican festivals and parades because they reflect many Dominican markers.

Dominican Festivals and Parades

The Dominican parade on Fifth Avenue in August was a place for Dominicans to interact with the larger society, as this was outside Dominican neighborhoods.⁵⁸ Many Dominican organizations participated, including Dominican police officers in the NYPD, Alianza Dominicana, politicians and their supporters, folkloric dance troops, and others. The cars blared mostly merengues, a white couple who watched began dancing to the music on the sidewalk. One white woman danced merengue on one of the floats. The cars were sponsored by *Presidente*, *Cheesitos*, *MoneyGram*, cereals and *TriCom*, and samples were distributed to the public.⁵⁹ Street vendors sold Dominican flags, and when the parade passed by, I noted that it did not take much to raise the spirits. If just one person in the parade waved the Dominican flag and said *República Dominicana*, people went wild with enthusiasm.

This parade differed from the parades and festivals in the New York City neighborhoods because here there was some interaction with the larger society. When I went with Dilania to a Dominican festival in Washington Heights, two young men rapped on stage. One of them wore a huge Dominican flag on his back: *Yo, Quisqueya*⁶⁰ *the beautiful* (44), *Where are you from*. The rappers were actually questioning which Dominican identity was at play in New York. Other artists on

⁵⁸ The first Dominican parade was arranged in Washington Heights in 1982 on August 15. The date was picked to commemorate the day that the DR restored its independence from Spain in 1865 (Rodríguez de León 1998:143).

⁵⁹ Nájera-Ramírez (1994) thinks that more attention should be paid to the commercial aspects of these festivals and parades.

⁶⁰ Quisqueya is the indigenous name of Hispaniola.

stage screamed at the public: *Dominicans! People from Santo Domingo! People from Santiago! People from the capital!*⁶¹ *Young ladies! Dominican noise!* (45) The public responded by raising their arms and screaming wildly. Dominican artists such as Toño Rosario and Anthony Santos waved large Dominican flags, and the public screamed out loud.

One man talked of the Dominican district: *Now, you have to vote for Miguel Martinez, for the District 10, who would represent the Dominican Republic, our country, here in the United States!* (46). In this way transnational ties were stressed, but there was no applause despite his efforts. A man on stage said it had been hard to get a permit to organize the festival, but that nothing can stop Dominicans: *Never, Washington Heights belongs to us, and they can never take it away from us!* (47). Another man said that Washington Height was the Dominican capital here. This can be related to Chapter Two where I wrote that Washington Heights may be viewed as a Dominican community. One man added that the Dominican festival was also a day to celebrate Latin America, Ecuador, Colombia and Mexico.

Not everyone cared about what happened on stage, they walked around, bought food and watched people. People were generally in a good mood, and laughing and dancing. Most people seemed to have made an effort to look their best, with nice hairstyles, sun glasses and clothes. The festivals lasted the whole day, from early afternoon to late at night, and most people stayed for hours.

In ICHS, half of the students said they had participated in a festival the summer 2000. Festivals could also take the form of block parties, so it is not sure that all had been to a Dominican festival during the summer. In school festivals were not talked about at great length. This may indicate that students did not use festivals as ethnic pride there.⁶² Ms. Reynoso said to me that she found the festivals boring. This was not the point of view of one girl, who said to me in the office that she had been to a festival over the weekend and that she screamed so much that she thought she would not be able to speak afterwards. Noise, which was common heard during

⁶¹ The capital of the DR, Santo Domingo, was often referred to as *the capital*, while the DR was referred to as Santo Domingo.

⁶² In the local television channel 35 a man from Centro Civico Dominicano, a community organization, said: *We have saved many youngsters who were disoriented (pause) culturally* (48). As he spoke, the channel passed images of Dominican festivals and parades, as examples of what young people were “saved” into. This may be compared to the views of the Dominican sociologist.

festivals, was also heard in school, since many students liked to speak loudly in classes (Grossman 2001).⁶³

Festivals as American Creations

Waters (1990) explain how the massive suburbanization that has occurred since the 1940's has led to isolation for the white middle-class in the US. Privileged and powerful Americans have a choice to turn to symbolic ethnicity. The latter is described as a form of voluntary ethnicity among the third generation ethnics, i.e., the grandchildren of immigrants from the first great wave. An emphasis is placed on the use of ethnic symbols and expressive behavior that must have a visible and clear meaning, such as easily cooked ethnic foods; individual holidays; celebrations of an affiliated Saint's Day; or ethnic characters in the mass media (Gans 1979:16f).

Symbolic ethnicity may be a way to get into a community. Waters writes that St. Patrick's Day parties are not necessarily illusory, but are voluntary, personally constructed, American creations (Waters 1990: 166, see also Alba 1990).⁶⁴ Waters describe how symbolic ethnicity can be the answer for people in the suburbs who long for community. Festivals may also be a substitute for a lack of community in Washington Heights, creating a feeling of community, to celebrate Dominican identity. As I referred to in Chapters One and Two, distrust is a common feature of the inner-city but festivals may be a way of getting people out of isolation.

Symbolic ethnicity has its limitations because it is developed to describe a practice for the white middle-class, who is not stigmatized. It is therefore not easily applicable to all post-65 immigrants and their children.

Riesman (cited in Gans 1979: 8) says that "being American has some of the same episodic qualities as being ethnic." On a similar note, Foner (2000: 183) writes that the message today is that it is nothing un-American about expressing one's ethnicity. She notes how the city of New York "actively promoted festivals and events to foster ethnic pride and glorify the city's multiethnic character" (ibid.).

⁶³ According to Grossman (ibid.) one reason that they are loud is that classrooms in the DR often are overcrowded and one has to speak loudly. It is possible that Dominican students who have been to school in the DR can have taken it from there. ⁶³One example of how students made noise in ICHS, was when I was alone in the Adelante office with a group who started to make noise, and run around, until Cooper appeared and asked them calm down.

⁶⁴ Many middle-class Americans who celebrate St. Patrick's Day are not of Irish descent.

When it comes to young Dominicans in the USA, I think Dominican festivals can express American identity for them as Waters describes some symbols of symbolic ethnicity as American creations. The commercial aspects of the festivals may also be seen as reflecting the larger society and may therefore be viewed as an American creation.

Sanjek (1998), who studied the interaction between new and more established residents (among them Dominicans) in the Elmhurst-Corona section of NYC, described festivals as American rituals where European ethnicities survive, and “[b]ecomes the model for assimilating new foreign cultures” (ibid: 371). The festivals’ content, e.g., common neighbourhood interests, clean streets and new parks were made more important than race and ethnicity. Trivial aspects such as songs, sharable food and costumes were prevalent in festivals and rituals of inclusion openly celebrate diversity (ibid). Sanjek uses the symbols of symbolic ethnicity in another setting than that of middle-class suburbans’ described by Waters. He uses them in a working-class neighbourhood with great ethnic diversity. Compared to Sanjek’s (1998) description of ethnic festivals in Queens, the festivals seemed to work differently in Washington Heights. These festivals were not events that celebrated diversity or to stressed neighborhood interests like clean streets.⁶⁵ The Dominican festivals and parades appeared to be solely Dominican due to the people present, the flags, the music and the food.⁶⁶ Despite a Dominican focus, many festivals be said to follow an US tradition since many ethnic groups arranged parades. Other Latino, plus Filipino, Greek and Irish parades were set to the Fifth Avenue as well (Rodriguez de León 1998: 161). Flags were visible in all of these parades. It is as though immigrants and their children from the two great waves have a common a wish for community. One reason for that can be that people in the US are said to be “standing alone” in life (Fernandez 2000), and by participating in a festival one get to partake in a community.

⁶⁵ Some neighborhood interests were expressed when the one individual said he had fought for this festival and because another said that this was also a day to celebrate Latin America, which can be a celebration of diversity.

⁶⁶ Festivals can also be seen as a tradition brought from the DR. Every summer there is a merengue festival in Santo Domingo, in December outdoor concerts are set up, and Carnival is celebrated in February, to name a few events.

I'm really Dominican – can you see my flag?

The Dominican flag was seen everywhere during festivals and parades. Some would even paint the flag on their face, or use bandanas with the Dominican flag on their head. There was also a Dominican dish labeled *the flag* (49); which consisted of rice, chicken or meat and beans. I will elaborate more on this in the section on Dominican food.

The flag was also visible on the Washington Heights street scene, where large flags hung from street lights and poles along the main avenues, as well as from buildings. This marked the area as Dominican to other inhabitants in Washington Heights, and the larger society. The latter may be said to be represented in the community by the Presbyterian-Colombia Hospital, the Yeshiva University, the museums, schools and public libraries.

I went to see a performance by Josefina Baez: Dominikanish. After the show, the director Claudio Mir said to the public: *Many people here are like, I'm really Dominican, can you see my flag?* As he said this, he held up his arm, as if at a parade, waving a flag, and people in the audience laughed. The public consisted of many Dominican college students, who perhaps laughed because they recognized a Dominican identity which is often expressed by using the flag.

In school the Dominican flag was visible. Ms. Torres, a Dominican AP, had paintings of the Dominican flag in her office, but few students entered that space. In the Adelante office they had several CD's used for decoration because they had Dominican flags printed on them.

In the trailer of a white Art teacher, there were many drawings and paintings of the Dominican flag hanging on the walls. Many students chose to paint this theme during his lessons, perhaps since it was a marker they knew how to draw.

On another occasion, students, teachers and I volunteered to paint the trailers on a Saturday. We painted an ocean in one of the unisex toilets. One student decided to paint the figure of Elmo in the sea. When a boy discovered the red, white and blue colors, he decided to paint the Dominican flag. The teacher, Mr. Ruiz, said: *Wow, the Dominican flag in the ocean! Are you proud of being Dominican?* A girl who was there, said: *I am so we can always defend our country when we get older.* Mr. Ruiz asked: *Would*

*you guys go to war against Haiti?*⁶⁷ The girl said: *Yes*. The teacher asked: *Are you sure? Is that right?* One boy said: *They're poorer*. Mr. Ruiz said: *Even though I was born here, it doesn't mean that I defend whatever the government here does. Was it right to go to war with Vietnam?* The students said: *No*, but seemed a little apprehensive. I do not think all of the students had thought about the possibility that the flag could mean going to war. Perhaps it had just been a way of expressing Dominican identity, the way the director pointed to above, when he demonstrated flag-weaving during festivals. Since the flag, as the festivals themselves, may be said to be expressive, I think this way of using flags may also be considered an American creation. Other ethnic groups, representing both waves of immigration, use their respective flags in festivals and in homes. But the American flag may be said to stand above all those, as a key symbol (Ortner 1973). For example, the Colombia-Presbyterian Hospital had an illuminated American flag on top of their massive building in Washington Heights. This flag pole stood literally high above all Dominican flags on the street level. In NMEC the American flag was visible, as they were printed on posters from the Board of Education that hung in the lunch room, and on academically-oriented posters attached to the walls in the classrooms.

According to Ortner (ibid.) the American flag is a summarizing symbol for certain Americans. It stands for "the American way," a conglomerate of ideas and feelings, all in one: democracy, free enterprise, hard work, competition, progress, national superiority, freedom and the like. The national anthem, The Stars and Stripes, encourages a kind of take-it-or leave-it option; either you embrace the flag and all it represents, or you do not. Riesman (cited in Gans 1979) and Foner (2000) write that to be American may be to be ethnic. As I understand them, it does not collide with American identity to use ethnic flags as long as one accepts the values attached to The Stars and Stripes. The values attached to the American flag may be compared to the norms immigrants of the first great wave assimilated in order to become American.

⁶⁷ Haiti shares the island of Hispaniola with the DR. In the Chapter Six the DRs relationship with Haiti will be presented.

Dominican Food: Served in Homes, Festivals and Downtown

Gans describes ethnic food as symbols used by the third generation ethnics: An individual, can if he or she should feel so, feel Italian American by a fondness for opera or a love of Italian cuisine (Alba 1990:24). This can be similar to Indiana who linked her Dominican identity to eat mangú for breakfast. The school aide, Marco, said that the food and the family was important for Dominicans, that is the reason why some hesitate moving to other states in USA: *They don't want to leave the grandmother, the bean stew [...] (50).*

Dominican food is often referred to as Creole food because it is a outcome of influences from the Indian *Taíno*, as well as Spanish, African, Arab, French and US culinary traditions (Duany 1994, Nina 1999). Garlic, onions, coriander, and oregano flavour Dominican, while its basics include red beans and white rice (Bandon 1995: 100). This food is sold in Dominican restaurants all over NYC; not just in Dominican neighbourhoods. Most of these places served the basic fare in simple restaurants, but there were upmarket Dominican restaurants in Washington Heights and other places as well; e.g., “It’s a Dominican Thing” in downtown Manhattan.

In the festivals Dominican food and drinks was sold; chicken, pork, cassava, plantain and mayonnaise-based salads, and piña colada.⁶⁸ In ICHS, the aides would often order food to the office from the nearby Dominican restaurants; such as fried plantains and fried chopped chicken. Some of this food could take hours to prepare and many girls in ICHS knew how to prepare the dishes in their homes.

The meal containing rice, meat or chicken and beans, was nicknamed *the Dominican flag*. On the questionnaire that I handed out to students, one of the questions was: *What did you have for dinner yesterday?* Javier from Mr. Steinberg’s class wrote *The Dominican flag* and showed it to me, hereby marking the food as Dominican.

Josy (16-years-old), who was in Mr. Steinberg’s class, said to me: *White people, you don't use condiments when you cook, so then it's not tasty.* This way she marked how

⁶⁸ In Amsterdam Avenue and on some other spots in Washington Heights food was sold from vans, from these vendors it is possible to buy *chimichurri* a hamburger, and barbecued pork, i.e., ears, hearts, and other parts. *Sancocho*, a yellow-orange stew with yams and other root vegetables, chicken, beef, goat and pork was prepared for parties and special occasions.

food was one way she distinguished white people from Dominicans.⁶⁹ When during one period, Ms. Reynoso spoke on the topic of on chicken, rice and beans as being quintessential Dominican foods, one of the African-American girls in that class protested. She said she ate that food as well, that it is not solely Dominican. While she said this she gave a high five to another African-American girl. Ms. Reynoso said that it is not only a Dominican dish, but that Dominicans have a special way of preparing it, hereby maintaining a boundary.

Many students answered on the questionnaire that they had eaten food they presented to me as Dominican for dinner the previous day; like rice, chicken and beans, and salami and plantains. This distinguished them from white middle-class people who indulged in symbolic ethnicity, who perhaps did not eat “ethnic food” everyday, but more on special occasions, and can indicate that they ate food since they liked it. One girl in ICHS said her mother prepared their meals at home in NYC at the same time of the day they do it in the DR, which can indicate transnational connections.

The Plantain: *We eat a lot of plátano*

The plantain is a green banana that that cannot ne eaten raw; it must be fried or boiled. It was cheap to buy plantains in Washington Heights; six for one dollar was not an unusual price. Chinese restaurants in Washington Heights use to have plantains on their menu as well. On Dominican festivals and parades plantains were used as substitute for flags, and in homes I saw them being used when dancing. In the lunch room plantain chips were served, pre-packed in small plastic bags.

When I had a discussion with Ms. Reynoso’s class about going to college outside NYC, Abel said: *I know one who went to a college upstate, he had to take with him stuff from here, of the Dominican food. He could not even buy plantains there* (51). Some of the girls said: *What?* (52). Later I spoke to Ms. Reynoso about it, who responded: *They are like, no, I can’t go there if I can’t buy Dominican food*, similar to Marco’s quote above.

⁶⁹ On another occasion she complained about the food in the DR; that the food there was *nasty*. Miguel from Adelante said it was the same chicken here as there, but Josy said she did not like the food in the DR, and that the oil was bad. This may mean that what is served as Dominican food in Washington Heights may possibly be prepared with ingredients that are not available in the DR.

Mr. Steinberg would call the Dominican students *los plátanos* in a joking way during class. During a period there were two girls who were hand-wrestling. One student said that one of them was really strong, she had once lifted a car. She denied the story and laughed. When I asked her what made her so strong, she said: *I'm strong because I eat a lot of plátano!* When I asked Marco what made the plantain so special, he said: *Because the plantain you can have for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and it fills you up, it gives you strength, so you can go to work.* He showed me his biceps and said: *Look, this is plantain.*

Dilania, who went to a Junior High School with both Dominican and African American students, said: *That's what they said at my old school if you were Dominican and had little money: Poor plátano, that's what they say about us, because we eat a lot of plátano.* This is similar to Bailey (1999), who writes that plátanos are used as a metonym for Dominicans in a high school in Rhode Island. In Dilania's old school and the high school Bailey writes about, Dominicans were not in a majority, so that can be a reason why the students marked their ethnicity more often. In ICHS they were in a majority, and consequently seemed to mark it more seldom. Even though Ms. Steinberg called them plátanos sometimes, it did not happen everyday. But they were conscious on it the plantain as a marker for Dominicans, and used it in different contexts.

According to Derby (1998: 469f) the plantain has multivalent meaning. On one hand, the plantain symbolizes the peasantry that can explain why it is said to *embrutecer*, to make stupid.⁷⁰ Depending on the context the plantain can index national nostalgia, or gloss the Dominican nation in terms of its masculine virtues (ibid.). This was how students referred to it for me; like the girl who said she was strong. Torres-Saillant (1999:113) writes that the plantain stain is a metaphor that can express intertwined symbols that helps to define the Dominican as such. I think it was also used in an intertwined way to either signal pride or stigma, which can be linked to how Dominicans in the larger society may be stigmatized.

⁷⁰ In ICHS the Spanish word for peasant (*campesino*) was often applied when one talked of stupid people, and this can be linked to that the people in the countryside eat a lot of plantains in the DR. In chapter three I cited a security guard who said *ICHS campesinos*. Another example is from Rudy, who said that if parents would not let their children attend a college upstate unchaperoned, *it's because they are like peasants* (53).

Dominican Music and Dance

Music students presented to me as Dominican markers were merengue, bachata and los palos, similar to the plantain music could be used to express ethnic pride.

Reggaeton, which started as underground rap in Puerto Rico, was very popular among students in ICHS, but I have chosen to not include it as a Dominican marker.

The reason is that reggaeton was not presented to me as a Dominican marker, but rather as Latino music in New York. In the Chapter Six I describe a school party where it was used.

Dominican music and dance could be used to define who was Dominican, and who was not. In a party in a community organization, a man thought I was from the DR since I danced all the *Dominican rhythms* (54). At other parties with the same group I also experienced that men hesitated to dance with me. One reason may be that because I am white they assumed I did not dance. This is similar to what a Dominican white girl experienced; because she was blonde, the men did not engage her at parties. This way I think boundaries were marked against whites. These social boundaries are probably linked to current understandings of race in USA, where membership in a group, e.g., white, may assume that all white individuals inherit the same “nature” (Bailey 1999). I will return to this issue in Chapter Six.

Merengue: Displaced Puerto Rican Salsa in NYC

When I interviewed Denise from Ms. Smith’s class, I asked her questions about her family, life history and everyday life. She seemed to be surprised that I was interested in these things. She asked me: *Is this about me or the Dominican Republic? [...] Aren’t you gonna ask about our culture, like the tropical music? Like we got merengue, I listen to that.* I think her answer shows that she was well aware of what Dominican identity is, or perhaps she wanted to challenge me as I asked personal questions in a prison-school.

In the Dominican parade on Fifth Avenue all the floats played merengue, except for one that played bachata. Elsewhere, merengue was danced in clubs and homes, and it was often men that engaged women to this couple dance. The steps are fairly easy to learn, as there are only two beats. Merengue was used to mark

boundaries at NMEC, and this echoes Castillo (1996), who writes that merengue is what many high school students Washington Heights connect to their Dominican identity. When I attended a graduation ceremony in the auditorium, one alumnus sang The Greatest Love of All by Whitney Houston. There was something wrong with the speakers, and when she waited to start again, she joked and said she would sing *un merengue*. The students, most of them Dominicans, applauded and laughed. This can be a way of expressing Dominican identity in a mainstream event that a high school graduation is.

In Mr. Steinberg's class, Angel (17-years-old) told a story where the use of merengue as a marker was stressed. He stood up in class, and asked me to refer to what he was going to say in my thesis. Carlos continued and said they had been seven people who went to a store owned by a Jewish man. Angel indicated that this man had been treating them bad, since Washington Heights is *blacked out* (in New York) and they are a *minority*. Angel said that after the shop closed, they had opened the fence in front of the store *like a can*. *Then they were standing in a line, passing the stuff, like merengue; Cuca, Cuquita.*⁷¹ Angel showed how they had done it to the rhythm while he sang, everyone laughed: *It's because we are a minority they think they can do what they want*. Mr. Steinberg then asked them to sit down, and started to work on what they were supposed to do. When I asked Angel for more details later, he refused to talk about it. Regardless, Angel used merengue in the classroom to mark that he and his companions were Dominicans, or a minority, and used it as a sort of ethnic pride.

The sociologist in the DR I referred to above said students in NMEC do not know what Dominican identity is, but I think I have showed that many students know have to manage the different identities available to them. The sociologist asked me whether the students listened to Juan Luis Guerra, a Dominican merengue artist.⁷²

My answer to this question was no, his music was not listened to. When I played one former hit by Guerra; Visa para un sueño (literally, Visa for a Dream) in Ms. Reynoso's

⁷¹ This is a merengue hit by Tulile, also known as Manny Rivera.

⁷² Much thanks to him, merengue had its international breakthrough by the end of the 1980's (Duany 1994:65).

class, the students did not appear to have heard it before. The song talks about people from all walks of life, who queue up for hours in front of the US embassy in the DR to obtain a dreamed-of visa. The three students did not have much to say about it. One reason may be that they did not identify with the immigrant's dream of obtaining a visa, or that Guerra's fame had diminished. I played it in a classroom along with Ms. Reynoso; it may have been differently approached in another setting.

Duany (1994: 80) writes that merengue has become a symbol of the Dominican sense of people-hood in the DR and abroad (see also Austerlitz 1997: 130). In the 1980's merengue displaced Puerto Rican salsa at Latin nightclubs and on Spanish-language radio in NYC (Duany 1994:71, Gonzalez 2000:127). Apart from being a marker for Dominicans, merengue played by Dominican artists was popular in other Latin American countries. According to Austerlitz (1997: 133) merengue symbolizes a pan-Latino identity outside NYC, while in New York merengue marks Dominican identity. I think my empirical evidence also points to a similar direction.

Bachata: From the DR's Countryside to a Prison-School

In the neighbourhood bachata can often be heard coming from bars and restaurants from early morning to late at night. Many people who live in NYC come from rural parts of the DR where bachata is popular, and this can be a reason why many people liked it. As with merengue, the lyrics are sometimes vulgar.⁷³ It seemed to be more affiliated with drinking than merengue.⁷⁴ Bachata is danced in couples, where they move either to the side or forward to the first three beats, then taking a half step to the side.

Bachata seemed to be a dance that may define Dominicans in NYC for some people. At a party one Dominican girl said to me that I was *Dominican*, since I danced bachata, and that her boyfriend was not, since he did not dance bachata. She was very assertive on this, even though her boyfriend was Dominican.

⁷³ Miguel from Adelante told me in their office about a man who sang of when he got back home and found his house filled with shoes. What was meant that he had found his woman in bed with another man, the shoes were a metaphor for this.

⁷⁴ Many bachata hits have been turned into a merengue, and vice versa. Bachata and merengue has been mixed into bachatarengue

In ICHS, the security guards put on a bachata during lunch. I was sitting at Lolin's and Damaris's table when Lolin heard the music, to which she raised her container of milk chocolate indicating: *Cheers!* She repeated the cheering toward several of the girls at the table, and they cheered back, laughing. Lolin then had a big sip of her chocolate milk, as if she were drinking beer. I see this as a way of joking and challenging the masculinity of the *tigueres*⁷⁵ which is expressed through the music that men use to sit and drink, while listening to bachata. It can also be seen as offering resistance to the prison-school described in Chapter Three.

Both Damaris and Lolin liked bachata. For example, Damaris would play bachata in her home, listening to the lyrics and relating them to her own life. When there was going to be a school party in the lunch room, Damaris and Lolin refused to go unless bachata and merengue would be played. Lolin said:

I don't wanna go to the party if Kevin's dad is gonna be the DJ, he's black, he's just gonna put on his kind of music, it's better with both, I don't wanna go if they're not gonna put any Spanish music on.

Lolin used Spanish music as ethnic markers to distinguish the music she liked from African-American music. Here she referred to Spanish music, and not Dominican music. In the Chapter Six I will discuss Spanish language as a marker for Latinos, which may reflect the Latino identity students' could use.

In Mr. Steinberg's class, I heard the view of Kevin, the African-American boy Lolin mentioned. He said about the party: *I don't want any bachata.* This show that he looked at bachata as an ethnic marker for Dominicans, and that he, on the same token as Lolin and Damaris, refused to go if certain music may be played.

In the countryside of the DR, it is bachata and not merengue that men listen to when they drink (Krohn-Hansen 1995: 243). The lyrics of bachata "shape masculine passions, deceptions and failures in relationships with women" (ibid.). This can be reflected in how Lolin cheered chocolate milk in the lunch room, as if she was a man.

Bachata was also the music of poorer migrants who lived in the shantytowns surrounding the cities, and the music was for a long time disreputable (Hernandez 1995). Bachata has been more respected in recent years, and bachata performers play at the best clubs in the DR. The dance steps of bachata have evolved as well. During

⁷⁵ In Chapter Two I explained what is meant by *tiguere*.

the time of my fieldwork, a number of English bachata recordings were produced. Later, in 2002, the group *Aventura*, a group consisting of young Dominicans and one Puerto Rican from NYC, made their first appearance, recording bachata in English and Spanish. Their hit *Obsesión* reached well beyond Latino and Dominican audience in New York: I have heard played in Egypt, Oslo, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In 2003, Damaris, who then was in college, wrote about the group as a part of a course on Dominican identity. She wrote a report on their concert in Washington Heights, even though she did not actually go there. This can anyhow show that she regarded the group as representing Dominican identity.

Bachata has gone from being the music of the poor men in the Dominican Republic, to be a marker for young Dominicans in New York. The music has also become popular with mainstream public outside the US.

Los palos: Afro-Dominican Music

In New York, the drumming and chanting of los palos music was played as frequently as merengue and bachata in people's homes. The dancing, however, is very distinct. It is not to be dance in couples, but rather in groups, or alone. Performers of los palos music played at a Dominican conference and at a fund-raising party in the community. In a palos club I went to, the clothing style was much more informal than in merengue clubs, where the dress code was: Dress to impress. The clubs where los palos is played are simple, lacking any fancy lighting. People, danced in groups or by themselves as this is not a couple dance.

In the gym in I talked to Indiana and a number of girls. They said they loved to dance to los palos music, and act as though they were in trance. The palos has a religious aspect to it, as expressing syncretism between Catholicism and African religions. In Lolin's home, she, Damaris and another girl from ICHS danced to los palos by going down on the floor, acting as though they were obsessed and in a trance, by shaking their bodies and scream. Damaris said to me that they listen to los palos more in New York than in the DR. The music was moreover popular among students who did not speak Spanish, who did not listen to merengue and bachata. Indiana was such a student; she liked los palos, but not merengue and bachata. One

reason could be that los palos has African rhythms, and that many students liked music such as R'n'B, hip-hop, rap, and reggaeton, which were not similar to los palos, but some rhythms in common. Perhaps many girls liked the music since they may dance without a partner. I believe los palos can be seen as a way to express how young Dominicans in New York can be more open towards African-influenced music, than what can be the case in the DR. Los palos is an Afro-Dominican music, which captured the interest of a group of anthropologists and others in the DR in the 1960's (Austerlitz 1997: 109).⁷⁶ As opposed to merengue, and later bachata, los palos has not achieved a great commercial success (ibid: 5).

However, los palos' popularity seemed to have waned, thus whether it will have any influence on gender relations remains to be seen. The popularity of reggaeton has increased, and may be said to have replaced los palos; in fact reggaeton might be more popular than bachata and merengue as well. When it comes to gender roles, do reggaeton lyrics and dance express derogatorily views on women.

Abreu (2004: 166f) writes that a new "Latino Dominican" identity has been created in NYC, in which merengue and bachata are mixed with hip-hop. He says this may express how Latino Dominicans differ from other groups in NYC's melting pot. In the segment about los palos, I wrote that many of the Dominican students were not fond of merengue and bachata, and hence is such a Latino Dominican identity not shared by all the students.

Much of what has been presented to me as Dominican music and dance is also used to mark Latino identity. For example, Austerlitz writes that merengue is a Latino marker in the US. When it comes to dancing one may also argue that it is a marker for Latinos to know dancing. Compared to other markers, dancing is less accessible than many other markers, since it has to be learned. Eating Dominican food, listening to music and attending festivals is more easily done as a leisure-like activity than dancing.

⁷⁶ They formed a Dominican-Haitian response to the nueva cancion (lit. new song) -movement in Chile in the 1960's (ibid.).

The last ethnic marker I want to discuss is baseball. Baseball is used like a pride for Dominicans and the NMEC. Baseball is also closely associated with American identity, not unlike parades and the flag.

Baseball: *It's like in our blood*

There were only two students at ICHS who played on the school's junior league baseball team. NMEC's baseball team won the National Championship in 1997, and had fostered many baseball stars. There were three Dominican NMEC alumnus in the Major Leagues, and 20 in the Minor Leagues in 2001, according to the NMEC Athletic Director. In his office there was a poster of the Major League player Manny Ramirez. In Washington Heights there was a local gym who had a poster of Manny Ramirez posted on the wall too. The man who worked at the gym had attended NMEC, and he specifically pointed to the poster and told me about Ramirez. I felt that he looked at Manny Ramirez as a pride for Dominicans, perhaps as a role model. This was different from how I felt that Julia Alvarez was being accepted as role model, which I described in Chapter Three. One reason for that can be that Ramirez had graduated from NMEC and thus had a similar background to that of other people in Washington Heights.

On the poster of him in NMEC, Ramirez had written: *Stay in school*. This can reflect why Felix, one of the baseball players at ICHS, took school seriously. He said:

I play baseball, and it might be possible for me to make a career out of that. Do you know what scouts are? No, they look for new people to the teams. I play at the school team, and I've been playing baseball all summer. The school here has one of New Yorks, no the whole country's best baseball teams.

KristinO: *Lots of people are good in baseball at this school?*

Felix: *Yes, (he smiled), maybe because we are Dominican, and for us it is our sport. Baseball is like in our blood. After October we will practice after school (from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.).*

Javier, who was a student in Mr. Steinberg's period replied, when I asked him: *I've been playing baseball since I was seven years old. My mother used to play baseball as well! But at first it wasn't anything organized, later when I was nine, I started playing organized baseball.[...]After I came here I didn't play it that much at first, I came here (New York) when I was 9, so when I was 13 I started playing it here.*

As the ICHS only had two baseball players, not much was said about the teams, maybe because I was not there during the season. In spring, Indiana said that

she would go and watch all the games on the school's baseball field. In Washington Heights, one could see kids playing baseball in the streets as well, and many who had been to the DR had seen games there: When I visited Diania in the DR, we went to see a baseball game in the neighborhood.

During the World Series, I heard Angel in Mr. Steinberg's class talk about *the Dominican Player*, but that was the only time I heard other students than Felix and Javier relate baseball to Dominican ethnicity.

Baseball is considered a national sport in the DR, even though it is an American game (Torres-Saillant and Hernández 1996: 10f).⁷⁷ In New York baseball is a very popular sport as well, which was reflected in the way the city's population followed the World Series in October 2000. The two NYC teams, the Mets and Yankees, played the final games and therefore it was recalled as the Subway Series. On my street corner, people had sprayed *The Yankees Corner*, and there were Yankees pennants hanging in many windows. In the subway station at 181st street the elevator operators announced that one elevator was for the Mets and the other for the Yankees. During the World Series, the Spanish press frequently wrote with pride to Latino players in the Yankees and Mets. In ICHS the security guard Cooper walked around with a drawing of a man with no brain that said: *This is the brain of a Mets fan*.

When the Yankees won the World Series, the Mayor Giuliani paid for a parade the following Monday. One student at ICHS, said that he would cut classes to see the parade with his cousin, who had worked extra hours to get a day off, as it was important for both to go. This student was not alone in cutting classes, on the parade day; about two thirds of the students were absent.

Felix, who played on the school's baseball junior team, came to school that day, saying that he prioritized school. Even though Felix was serious about school, his attitudes differed from what the basketball coach said about his players; he had to sit down with them before practice to make them to their homework.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Baseball was introduced to Cubans by US seamen in 1890's, who in turn brought it to the DR (Atkins and Wilson 1998:169). Later, during the US occupation beginning in 1916, members of US marines played baseball in Dominican civil teams (ibid.). Since the 1950's has the US Major Leagues recruited players from the DR.

⁷⁸ This made ICHS different from a high school described by Eckert (1989). Here she describes two social categories: Jocks and Burnouts. The Jocks are good in sports and academically strong, while the

One of the most famous Dominican players in USA is Sammy Sosa. He is from a shantytown in the DR, and now plays in the Major League where he holds a number of home run records (Malone 1999: 7). Malone (ibid.) wrote a book about Sammy Sosa, who he said could be a fulfillment of the American Dream. Malone's book was included in the summer teenager reading program in 1999, and he visited schools in Washington Heights (personal communication). He said he wanted the students to know about their cultural and historical identity. His views can therefore be similar to the one expressed by the Dominican sociologist I quoted on top: that they want to teach them a Dominican identity. But in this case baseball is a popular sport in the DR and in the US, and Sammy Sosa was perhaps welcomed as a role model, even though the students might not read the book. Baseball is talked about as America's favorite pastime, which means that baseball is a marker Dominicans share with whites and African-Americans in the USA.

Markers Express Dominican and American Identities

In the Introductory Chapter I cited Damaris who said I was Dominican, since I danced bachata, ate plantains and spoke Spanish. I will argue that she and many of the ICHS students self-ascribed a Dominican identity that is essentialist. This can echo what Comaroff (1996: 166) writes; ethnic identities that are objectified, can take on a powerful salience to those who bear them, to the extent that they appear natural. The students seemed conscious on the markers of Dominican identity. A problem with this reification is that it may downplay the dynamic aspects of identities. Despite this reification, there are actually changes in these markers. For example, los palos was not so popular anymore, and has been replaced by reggaeton, which is performed by Dominican artists as well.

I have pointed to markers that could mark Dominicans as different from white people, African-Americans and to certain extent from other Latino people, but the latter was not marked so often. Many markers can be compared to symbolic ethnicity, like food, music, flags, festivals and parades. These markers were easy to

Burnouts are the opposite. Ortnner (1991) writes that Eckert's social categories would probably not apply to minority schools, and this is also my point of view.

employ, with the exception of dance, and languages. I have also argued that many markers can be linked to the larger society: Baseball, who is a New York sport, and parades and festivals who are American creations. Dominican food is served downtown as ethnic food, and Dominican music have had a commercial success. This means that Dominican identity in many ways can express “American identity,” even though it is not easy to define American identity. Riesman (cited in Gans 1979) and Foner (2000) write that to express one’s ethnicity is not un-American. So even though students self-ascribe as *Dominican*, I believe Dominican identity can not be totally separated from American identity. I did not hear students self-ascribe as Dominican Americans, or second generation Dominicans, which could have been applicable for some of them.

Dilania used Dominican and American identities in different situations. This was also done by other students, such as Angel in Mr. Steinberg’s class: He said to me that he and his peers were *the goofy Dominicans*. In another period, they looked at a picture of the National Archives in Washington DC. Angel said: *They got one fat guard to watch our most valuable stuff!* Here he identified the US National Archives as *our*, like an American identity. When I asked Miguel from Adelante which national team he would go for if the US and the DR should play a game in a national tournament; he said it depended on the sport. If they played baseball he would be on the DR’s side, since they were better, while in other sports he would be on the US’s side. This means that he would change between identities in different settings.

Many of the markers, such as bachata, merengue, Dominican food, baseball, and festivals, can also express transnational connections. They were used because the students liked them, not necessarily for boundary maintenance. These connections are more accepted today than they were for the immigrants of the first peak period, and may be said to be easier to practice because it is easier to travel and communicate with people by using the telephone and the internet. Other differences are related to race and the economy. Symbolic ethnicity has a volunteer aspect, and this form for ethnicity may express individualism and participation in a community simultaneously. It expresses individualism in the sense that white middle-class may choose a voluntary ethnicity they sympathise with. For Dominicans, the volunteer

nature does not work the same way, since they can be said to be stigmatized as a group. This makes the identity project different from white middle-class suburbans'.

Stigma: Pride and Withdrawal

When I talked to Javier in Mr. Steinberg's class about baseball, he asked me to not write anything *bad about us* (Dominicans) *because people always do that*. Other students echoed his views, such as Damaris who asked her stepfather not to tell me *anything bad about Dominicans*. In ICBS, Ms. Ventura, a Dominican teacher, said to me that Dominican students were not so good in school, and made jokes about themselves. One joke she referred to was: *What to do you call a Dominican in college? A janitor*. This means that many students may understand they are stigmatized. A Dominican college student said:

The system here makes it difficult, when my brother went to school he was fighting every day, there were many gangs in school. Dominicans here are different from Dominicans there, and I don't know why. Once I spoke to a woman in college, and when I said I was Dominican she was just like, yeah? She thought I was too smart to be a Dominican. Many Dominicans are aggressive.

When I asked Julissa (16-year-old) whether she considered herself Dominican, she said:

Yes, kind of, like before I didn't do it, but now I do, like other people they always think bad about us, so now I like, I'm Dominican and I should be proud of it. I mean, I'm gonna graduate, I'm gonna show them that I can do that, and be proud to be Dominican.

Her views can therefore represent "ethnics" that will try to revitalize Dominicans as an ethnic group, like Gans (1979) and Comaroff (1996) pointed to. One reason why Dominicans in NYC may differ from Dominicans in the DR, is stigma. For example, when I went to the Statue of Liberty with Dilia, she did not like that I said she was from the DR. I believe a reason is that she was an ambitious student, and wanted to withdraw from Dominican identity in the larger society. In Washington Heights she went on a festival, but she wanted to move somewhere far away. She confessed to me that she did not like the people in Washington Heights, she enjoyed going downtown more. After the fieldwork, she transferred to another high school in Manhattan, which she hoped would be better for her. Like Dilia, many students chose not to mark Dominican ethnicity so often. One reason for that can be a withdrawal for what they regard as a stigma.

Other researchers have also taken the view that Dominicans are stigmatized: Hernández and Torres-Saillant (1996b: 4) writes that Dominicans in New York “are subjected to a series of dehumanizing stereotypes through powerful mass media venues [...]” Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001: 97 cited in Grossman 2001: 192) found that 82 percent of Dominican children of immigrants offered a negative association, such as “useless” and “garbage” when they completed the sentence “Most people think Dominicans are _____.” In comparison 47 percent of Chinese children and 64 percent of Central American children had negative association. This can explain why the students in some situations would play down that they were Dominican, while in other situations they show ethnic pride. How markers were used varied to situations, constraints and personal history. Ethnic pride and stigmatization were in my view interrelated, because the reason why some show ethnic pride can be that they are stigmatized. In the next chapter I refer to Eidheim (1994) who describes how people may act in different contexts when ethnic identity is a stigma. The degree of stigmatization of Dominicans in NYC may change, as many young Dominicans in the US encompass a college education. However, Rumbaut (1996: 167) writes that children of immigrants from the second peak period who perceive that they will be stigmatized regardless of the level of education “remain loyal to a national-origin identity,” implying that Dominicans may choose to hold on to Dominican identity, despite stigma.

The “Homeland” as a Security Valve

A number of Dominicans prefer to measure their success according to their previous situation (Weyland 1998: 185). Pessar (1987 cited in *ibid*) says that Dominicans define themselves as middle-class in the DR because they live in impoverished parts of NYC. For this reason, it is more attractive to pose as middle-class in the DR than a poor person in the USA. Dominican high school students can therefore choose to hold on to their homeland, as a security valve. If things do not go well, they may return, unlike minorities like African-Americans who has no purported homeland (Beyond Language 1986: 96f). A girl told me how huge her house was in the DR; that her bedroom was the same size as the Adelante trailer, and the house had six bedrooms. Here she stresses how nice her house was, and a cause for that may be

that it was probably nicer than her apartment in Washington Heights. A Dominican teacher in ICHS commented on how girls in her class said prior to summer holidays: *I wanna go DR!* This may have been said since they wanted a holiday and see their family. Another explanation is that they wanted to keep ties to the DR as a security valve in the future.

In the questionnaire I distributed in ICHS, I asked the students about their future plans. One girl (out of 80 students) said she wanted to go to the DR for a longer time. Others said that they wanted to study, buy a business, get married; all of which may be done in the DR as well. But my impression was that they planned to remain in the USA, and accomplish their goals there. I discussed with the students their experiences from holidays and schooling there, and visited some of them in DR. I will just briefly make some points from this material before I present literature on Dominican identity. Similar to Dominican markers, the so-called homeland could be used for pride. I say so-called since many had little knowledge of the country, and had not been there much. There was a program every Saturday on the local television channel: *Santo Domingo invita* (The DR invites), which presented beaches and other attractions of the DR. One of the boys in Ms. Smith's class had not been to the DR, but he used to watch it, to learn about what the country has to offer. For some the DR had become a tourist destination, such as for Damaris who said she wanted to go to a resort hotel next time she went to the DR; she added that this was what many people did when they went there. One girl said she would only go there to drink and dance. If the students should choose to go to resort hotel in the DR, they may live a middle-class lifestyle while in the DR. Or they may at least appear middle class: When Dילania was in DR, her father called her from NYC and asked her to wear different clothes every day and use her gold jewelry, in order for the neighbors to see that they had prospered. Consequently, not all the students felt the same belonging to the DR as their parents. When there was a substitute in Ms. Smith's class, one of the girls said that she felt *self-conscious* there: *When I went to DR, everyone was staring at me as if I don't belong there.* Two of the boys nodded, and Flavio said *yes*. Other students said to me in that they felt *lonely* and *homesick* when they were in the DR.

To visit the homeland may also be an activity associated with symbolic ethnicity; as white suburbans' have the time and money to find their ancestors home villages (Gans 1992).⁷⁹ But then the purpose of the visit is not to live a middle class life style, as unlike many Dominicans, they belong to a middle-class in the USA.

I will now describe in greater detail texts written by researchers on Dominican identity in the USA and discuss how their work may be used to enlighten the material I have presented on Dominican markers.

Existing Literature on Dominican identity in the US

Many researchers have looked into Dominican identity over the last 30 years, thus it is not possible to make a complete presentation of all the works. I have therefore chosen to present the works that may present different trends and perspectives on Dominican identity in the USA. Some of these works look at others aspects, e.g., immigration and households, but I have chosen the ones that seemed most relevant to Dominican identity in the USA.⁸⁰

Krohn-Hansen (2005: 75) writes that there is a significant wealth of literature by anthropologists and sociologists about Dominican migration to NYC, but "the better part of this literature discusses Dominican immigrants on an isolated basis."⁸¹ He criticizes that immigrant groups are viewed as separate entities, and not in interaction with other groups. I agree with Krohn-Hansen that little attention has been paid to the studies of Dominicans and their interaction with other groups. I also take the view that much of the literature has put too much stress on ephemeral migration circuits and understates the permanency of migrant settlement (Foner 2000:184f). Despite this, the literature may well be fruitful for my thesis as it can shed light on whether Dominican markers express transnational connections.

⁷⁹ Sanjek (1998: 242) writes of "Joe Frascatti, a Corona Heights resident who had visited Italy twice and traveled there with his mother's sister, a nun who lived in Genoa, spoke warmly of these visits in the language of family and kinship, not of "roots" and symbolic ethnicity." This means that not all third generation ethnics to express symbolic ethnicity, but also talk about these visits in terms of family. In chapter two I referred to family life and how many students were separated from close family, so it is true that many speak of the trips there in terms of family as well.

⁸⁰ In the previous chapter I presented the novel by Julia Alvarez, which is a part of this literature.

⁸¹ Krohn-Hansen writes about identity management, political life and economic strategies, and wants to tell a story of interaction and communication between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in NYC.

Literature about Dominicans Studied on an Isolated Basis

Hendricks (1974 cited in Aponte 1999: 72) describes how Dominican immigrants adjust in the US, while González (1970, 1976, cited in *ibid.*) writes about Dominican immigrants as poor and different perspectives of young immigrants.

Guarnizo (1994) argue that life in Dominican neighbourhoods is a replica of life in the DR, that this reaffirmation of origins is rarely seen among other Latinos (*ibid.*: 80). His view on Dominicans as a “non-assimilationist” ethnic group differs from my thesis, since my empirical material leads to other conclusions. However, he makes an interesting point in stating that the reaffirmation of origins is stronger for Dominicans than other Latinos. One reason for that may be that Dominicans, as one of the largest Latino groups, may be more vulnerable for discrimination (Duster 2001), and therefore want to express ethnic pride.

Duany (1994) writes that there are many visible and audible signs of the transnational identity of Dominicans. For instance in daily life they eat “creole” food, speak Dominican Spanish, shop national consumer goods in bodegas, and practice Catholicism. Many people listen to Dominican music such as merengue and bachata, set up altars at home and place national flags and maps on the walls. Many of these markers have I referred to as Dominican markers as well, which may indicate that the markers in my material express transnational connections.

Grasmuck and Pessar (1991) focus on changes in gender relations and how Dominicans made a transnational community between the US and the DR. They showed that gender relations within the household often change with migration to the US; households in NYC are more egalitarian than in the DR, where the households are more patriarchal (*ibid.* chapter 6 cited in Offer-Ohlsen 2000b). Because of this women were more eager to stay in NYC, instead of returning to the DR.⁸² In this chapter I have looked at some of the Dominican markers as gendered, and pointed to how the dancing styles of los palos may reflect changing gender relations.

⁸² These views were later criticized by Hernández and Torres-Saillant (1996b: 44) for not taking into consideration that “American society can hardly be deemed free of gender oppressing and inequity,” and that women in the DR can stand up for themselves.

Another aspect of transnational Dominicans is noted by Sørensen (1998: 242) who write Dominicans always compare their lives to that on the island, whether they are talking about racism, gender or price levels. Weyland (1998) writes of Dominican women in New York. She describes their dual community identity, maintaining homes in two places, with one foot in each country. These women want to measure their success according to their previous situation in the DR, as I discussed above this may be an alternative for ICHS students too.

Dominican families were described as transnational villagers by Levitt (2001). She followed families from a village in the DR who settled in a particular area of Boston. She looked into social and economic remittances, moreover generational differences and challenges. She report on how life has changed in the DR; women wear boots because US fashion has become popular, and many build their homes with a backyard in stead of a gallery in front to have more privacy. Children, who lived in the DR with their grandparents, often lacked an authority figure. She writes that migrants often use “[t]heir identities symbolically or instrumentally, tailoring them to fit particular settings (ibid: 4).” These identities can be compared to how students use the markers in different settings. Generational challenges have also been looked into in this theses in Chapter Two.

Fischkin (1997) writes about a Dominican family she first met in the DR, and later followed their immigration process. How they settled in Queens, NYC, and how their children cope in school is accounted for. One of the daughters in this family eventually returns to the DR to marry a man there against her father’s will. This may indicate that among youngsters in NYC some may choose to return even though they originally intend to go to college in the USA.

Torres-Saillant (1999: 378) writes on what he believes defines the Dominican identity in the diaspora, i.e., in Dominican communities abroad, as not being the flag, or the rice, beans and meat, but rather the fact that they have lived in a specific place , the DR, for five centuries, and lived through the conflicts and fears in that period. In this thesis my focus is on young people, some of whom have not lived in the DR. For the young who live in a multiethnic city, the historical experience of the DR cannot always be understood.⁸³ Torres-Saillant (ibid: 379) adds that as Dominicans they

⁸³ For example, Elida from Alianza Dominicana did not understand racism in the DR.

have to affirm their identity everyday in the diaspora. This way Torres-Saillant says they will eventually get a conceptual articulation of Dominican identity, and understand Dominicans as different from other Caribbeans, African Americans, Asians and Native Americans. This process and dynamics is of interest to me in relation to the thesis: How students conceptualized Dominican identity vis-à-vis other ethnic groups, for instance.

Apart from this literature, several books have been published on “Dominican Americans” in which the focus is on the Dominican experience of life in the USA rather than on transnational connections (Dwyer 1991, Bandon 1995, Pessar 1995, Torres-Saillant and Hernandez 1996, Rodriguez de León 1998, Torres-Saillant 1999 and Abréu 2004). The anthology Caribbean Connections: The Dominican Republic (Callin et al. 2006) contains many chapters that reflect markers students in ICHS presented to me as well, like merengue, bachata, and baseball.

In most of these books baseball, merengue, and Dominican food were described as symbols or signs for Dominicans, thus reflecting the markers the students in ICHS referred to as well. In general, the foregoing texts that I have presented focus little on how Dominicans relate to others in, for example, mediating connections.⁸⁴

Literature about Dominicans Studied in Mediating Institutions

Another body of literature entails studies conducted in high schools and colleges, where boundary maintenance for Dominican ethnicity may be in focus to a greater degree. These studies were of interest to me because their school contexts made them similar to my own study.

Mateu-Gelebert’s (1998) Street Ethos: Surviving High School. A Qualitative Study of Immigrant and American-Born Students in Inner City High School, explores

⁸⁴ Several of the authors’ perspectives of this segment can be modified, as they propose that Dominican identity for the young can be different. This applies for instance to Duany (1994: 42 cited in Offer-Olsen 2000b: 1) who writes that young Dominicans are more exposed to American culture in local public schools, in mass media and among peers: “[Y]oung Dominicans are creating a new identity by distinguishing themselves from Dominican culture and from other ethnic groups, specifically Puerto Ricans and African Americans (ibid: 37). Sørensen (1993: 78) note that it is an open question whether the transnational practice will continue for Dominicans born and raised in New York, that are second or third generation. Torres-Saillant (1999) writes there are many young Dominicans who do not speak Spanish, and that this indicates a changing Dominican identity.

how students in NYC, among them Dominicans, perceive school and education. Mateu-Gelebert questions Ogbu's (1992 cited in *ibid*) "Cultural Model," which implies that American-born students often develop a oppositional attitude to schooling, in contrast to motivated immigrants who compare their situation with that of their homeland. Mateu-Gelebert found that both groups viewed education as a way to upward mobility, and that the majority did not engage in street ethos behavior. In Chapter Three I used Mateu-Gelebert's term street ethos to describe traits of the prison-school. He does not focus on ethnicity, and this may be a result of that the street ethos was prevalent in his school, and there were other things apart from ethnicity that told students apart. His findings show many commonalities between Dominicans and others, which might prove that ethnicity is not a superordinate identity, as Barth (1994) argues.

López' (1999) Race-Gender Matters: Schooling Among Second Generation Dominicans, West Indians and Haitians in New York City found that both male and female students agreed with their parents that education was important for social mobility. Men and women's schooling experiences were different, as men were often viewed as troublemakers. More women than men graduated. López' focus was not on ethnic identity either, but more on what Dominicans and other students had in common that they were in a similar situation, being stigmatized in racial and gendered terms in school and the larger society. Her work may further illuminate that Dominicans were not the only group to face discrimination; that it may be a problem for many children of nonwhite immigrants of the second great wave.

On a similar note, Morales' (1999) study of five High Achieving Dominican American Students: Portraits in Resiliency in a New York college concludes that these students "identified with their racial minority status rather than their particular ethnic background (Dominican American)" (*ibid*: 292). These students had shown resiliency. Despite growing up as a racial minority in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, they were in a respected college. Many had gone to schools outside their neighbourhoods in order to succeed. They pointed to the value of being in a program at college with other minority students (*ibid*: 293). From Morales' findings, I may assume ambitious students can choose to pass out of "ethnic roles" (Gans 1979), by not identifying with Dominicans. Diania, for example chose to transfer to a high

school outside Washington Heights because she did not like people in the community and wanted to study at a school downtown.

Bailey's (1999) dissertation focuses on the interrelation between language and race among Dominican high school students in Providence, Rhode Island. I referred to his findings in Chapter One, and will also look at his findings in the next chapter, where I discuss language.

Grossman's (2001) dissertation "Soy Dominicano:" The Multiple Worlds of the Dominican Adolescent, is about Dominicans in a high school in a semi-urban Maryland community. "Borders, boundaries or bridges" between their homes, school and peer worlds were identified. There were few Dominicans in the school she studied. Students described that eating together was a bridge in a difficult school day (ibid: 210). Dominican students were said to self-segregate, and sometimes talk about *something Dominican* in the lunch room. Grossman (2001: 300) writes that students pointed out that "their loud, extraverted nature often comes into conflict with other ethnic groups in U.S. schools." Loudness was not marked as a Dominican marker in ICHS, even though the students could be loud. A reason can be that Grossman's contexts were different from mine, since there were few Dominicans in the school. The students' at the school she studied reported that they felt stigmatized by other Latinos. In ICHS I did not hear that this was an issue, but I heard adult Dominicans in Washington Heights said they felt such a prejudice, and Latinos in NYC that spoke derogatorily about Dominicans.

Grossman proposed that a future study should look at Dominican students in New York, where Dominicans are not the "minority within the minority (ibid. 318)." As the Dominican students were in a majority in the ICHS, they were not necessarily so preoccupied with ethnic markers.

Concluding Remarks

I have looked at how Dominican markers are used in the social context of the school and in the larger society. In school the Dominicans were in a majority as a group, while in larger society they were a minority. Dominican markers may express Dominican ethnicity and identity, transnational connections, and American identity.

When these Dominican high school students use markers as an ethnic pride it may differ from white suburbans' indulgence in symbolic ethnicity. While the latter may be motivated by a search for community, the former may use it to accent that they are proud to be Dominicans despite an ethnic stigma.

It appears to me that Dominican identity is not a core identity for the young; it appears more as a layer many use for pride (McLaughlin and Heath 1993: 222). This is different from Barth (1994), who writes that ethnic identity is superordinate for many people. Dominican identity is not what ICBS students were most emotional about, but in some situations they choose or may feel obliged to mark it: When students discussed which music to play at the school party, painted the Dominican flag in the unisex toilet, allowed Mr. Steinberg label them *plátanos*, used the meal "the Dominican flag" as a marker, and said baseball was in their blood.

Students in ICBS have many choices when defining identities; they can choose to relate or withdraw from Hispanics, African-Americans, Dominicans and whites. This complexity can have been over seen by researchers that have looked at Dominican identity. In this chapter I have looked at Dominican identity in social contexts. To show the complexity students' at ICBS handle I will look into individual strategies when it comes to English and Spanish language. Language use was a marker for individual identity projects, and different languages and sociolects were employed to fit particular settings.

Chapter Six

Language and Individual Strategies

I'm not a big Spanish fan

Indiana (17-year-old) a Dominican junior student in English mainstream-programs

Introduction

In this chapter I plan to examine the school's organization when it comes to language programs. This organization may shape interrelations between students. In Chapters Three and Four I looked at the prison-school and the reading books as other aspects of the school's organization. Students were enrolled in one of following language programs at ICHS: English mainstream, English as a Second Language (ESL), and bilingual programs. The schools policies on this could affect their language use, and therefore their identities. I will present individual strategies of three girls, and use cases to show how language preferences marked differences between them.

My point of view is that Spanish is an ethnic marker for Latinos, but I intend to note when Spanish marks Dominican identity (Duany 1994: 15).⁸⁵ How students in ICHS used Spanish may reflect on the degree to which they identified with Latinos. Likewise, preference for English language may mark white American or African-American identities. I will discuss how the school and its teachers affected their language choices, and introduce the importance of language at parents-teachers meetings. I will start by giving a description of Latinos in the USA, before presenting understandings of race in the DR and the USA

Latino Identity in the USA and Spanish Language

Among the language-minority groups in USA, Spanish-speaking households are growing at the fastest rate. Latinos are even projected to outnumber the African-American population in 2025 (U.S. Census Bureau A: 2000). Spanish has become

⁸⁵ For instance, Miguel from Adelante said that Puerto Ricans had a different English accent than Dominicans. Furthermore, there are many Dominican dialects. For some students it was also difficult to understand the Spanish spoken in the DR: one said they spoke *too fast* there.

nearly a semi-official language in New York City and in other states with many Latinos.⁸⁶ The Spanish language is a strong pan-ethnic marker for Latinos, this may be reflected on the large numbers of Latinos that have struggled for bilingual education since the late 1960's, material which I present below.

A Latino identity was transmitted through nationwide Spanish-speaking channels such as Telemundo, Univision 41, and Galavision. These channels were often turned on in Washington Heights homes; a large number of students could watch the Latino identity that was promoted on the channel.⁸⁷ Univision broadcast artists who attempted to impose Latino identities, e.g., Vico-Z from Puerto Rico who sang in Spanish: *It doesn't matter where you came from; here we are Latinos* (55). As I have looked on in Chapter Three and other chapters, does not an imposed identity necessarily imply that the people who watch Univision will self-ascribe as Latinos. This channel also defended Latinos' right to speak Spanish. They made a case out of a Latina hairdresser in Chicago who was no longer allowed to speak Spanish with her clients. At a Latino award show a Mexican singer marked what made Latinos different: *We got God, the language, and the family* (56). Maybe he meant that this made them different from the larger society. Many of the hosts of this channel's shows were white Latinos. When black Latinos figured on these channels; it could be as practitioners of voodoo in a soap opera.⁸⁸ This means that their programs could have an impact on understandings of race for on its public.

National identity in the US, according to Collins (2001), is conceptualized by a race-like triangle. The latter is built on relations between white, black and the natives, but may be challenged by people who do not fit into the triangle, such as the Hispanic population (ibid: 9). The Latino population counts 35.3 millions, i.e., 12.5 percent of the total US population of 281, 4 million (U.S. Census Bureau A 2000), and is changing "the face of America" (Ramos 2000). As I have pointed out in the

⁸⁶ Spanish was a former colonial language in the US, so it was not introduced to the country through immigration (Ovando 2001: 273).

⁸⁷ 23 out of 63 students in ICHS, who marked which programs they watched on the questionnaire, viewed these channels on a regular basis.

⁸⁸ Apart from television channels, there were Spanish-speaking newspapers and radio stations. Furthermore, there were food products who aimed to towards Latinos, like yoghurt with a Latin flavor (*sabor latino*) and coffee for the Hispanic taste (*el gusto hispano*). Latino identity was used for many commercial reasons, but it was also common to use the identity in politics; in presidential elections they talk of the *Latino vote*.

previous chapter, ethnicity is linked to boundary maintenance, thus what is meant by Latino identity in the US may vary from city to city. Many Latinos also self-ascribe themselves as *Spanish*, and are ascribed this identity by others. Latino, Hispanic or Spanish are not unproblematic labels, especially when it comes to racial discourse and language. This point has also been made by Fernandez (2000: 163), who writes that the labels are as incomplete as any of the pan-ethnic labels.⁸⁹

Understandings of Race in the US and the Dominican Republic

An overview of how people in the DR and in the US view race, can give a broader understanding on Latino identity, and how staff and students in ICHS understood issues of race, ethnicity and language. Racial discourses are different in the two countries. For example, African ancestry plays a very different role in social categorization (Bailey 1999: 192). Bailey (ibid.) describes understandings of race in the US by focusing on categorizations between African-Americans and white Europeans: He writes that those perceived to have any African ancestry are assigned to an African-American category, while those who are perceived to have only European ancestry are perceived to belong to the other category (Davis 1991 cited in ibid). Boundaries between the two categories are vigorously maintained; membership “has become popularly associated with language, culture, end even intellectual aptitude and morals, i.e. one’s essential nature” (Bailey 1999: 193). This membership can be compared to what I wrote in chapter three on that students are in a prison-school since they are Latino and African-American.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ For the U.S. Census the category is explained “People who identify with the terms “Hispanic” or “Latino” are those who classify themselves in one of the specific Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the questionnaire-“Mexican,” “Puerto Rican,” or “Cuban” –as well as those who indicate that they are “other Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino.” Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. People who identify their origin as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino may be of any race (U.S. Census Bureau B 2000).”

⁹⁰An example on how individual African-Americans try to challenge these categories is described by Duneier (1992 cited in Offer-Ohlsen 1999). He writes that it is extremists that through media define African-American identity in the USA. Duneier describe a café in a border area between a white university area and an African-American neighborhood, where African-American men who hold stable jobs can participate in the larger society. This way they can show they are respectable, and challenge the prejudiced male African-American ideal portrayed in media.

In the DR gradations in African/European phenotype are recognized, but there is not a division based on African ancestry (*ibid.*). According to Oquendo (1995 cited in *ibid.*) the individual differences in the DR are viewed as *individual* attributes rather than as a membership in a social category. In the DR, an important factor in the making of national identity and understandings of race has been their relations to Haiti and Haitians (e.g. Moya Pons 1995, 1996 cited in Bailey 1999). Dominicans distinguish themselves from Haitians in terms of race, language and religion (Bailey 1999: 199): “Haitians are racialized as the Other; for many Dominicans, the only *negros* are Haitians” (Silié 1989: 170 cited in *ibid.*), so Haitians may be said to be judged by their group membership, not by individual attributes. Krohn-Hansen (1994) says that:

[W]e find a pattern of thought in which African and black features have been given low value; such features are typically projected onto, and viewed as having “penetrated” from, Haiti, the (since the 1920’s and 1930’s poorer and weaker) neighbour (*ibid.*: 68).⁹¹

In the DR to be partly white is to be non-black (Bailey 1999: 198). There is a wide range of Dominican Spanish words to describe the variety of skin tones. Despite the many categories, the DR view itself as more tied to “European descent and to light colour.” That is indeed the fact the majority is “mulatto” (Krohn-Hansen 1994: 68). Many of them are categorized as Indian (*indio/a*); and by being Indian one is considered to be a result of Indian and European coaction (*ibid.*). African ancestry is therefore often played down in favour of European and Indian categorizations among Dominicans. Other categorizations used in Dominican Spanish include *trigueño/a* (darker than Indian), and *prieto/a* (darker than *trigueño/a*).

Despite the transnational immigration from the DR to the USA, does Howard (2001: 112) writes that there has not been created a full re-evaluation of racial awareness in neither countries. Race relations are also subject to change, as Dominican youngsters

⁹¹ In the 19th century the Dominican side of Hispaniola occupied by Haitians twice. During the reign of the dictator Trujillo (1939-1961), his official politics was that the country was White, Hispanic and Catholic, and thus not African (Moya Pons 1996: 22 cited in Bailey 1999). In 1937 thousands of Haitians in the border area in the DR were massacred at his command; “as an act to save Dominican race and nationhood from Africanization and Haitian invasion” (*ibid.*).

who have resided in the US for a long time have a greater chance of classifying themselves as black (Torres-Saillant 1999: 61).⁹²

Language and Ethnicity Policies in ICHS

The school's official goal was to put transfer the majority of students to English mainstream programs, as I wrote in the Introductory Chapter. When it came to ethnicity-related politics in school the AP Ms. Echeverria, told me that I was not allowed to ask students about their ethnicity. Despite this, staff could sometimes say things about people's ethnicity, which I have pointed to in former chapters, and will present below. They could also say degrading things about Spanish language. When a girl asked Mr. Ruiz about the homework in Spanish, he said to her in a joking way: *Speak English, this is America!* She said: *I don't care; in my house we speak Spanish* (57). I also heard other teachers complain about Spanish being spoken in their classes. Mohn (1993) writes that Spanish may be under-communicated in US schools. One boy in Mr. Steinberg's period distanced himself from Spanish by stating: *It's illegal to speak Spanish in my house.*

On the other hand, there were teachers who were in favour of Spanish. Ms. Gomez, who thought Spanish as a Foreign Language to English mainstream students, spoke little English. She had written over her blackboard: *Say yes to Spanish, and no to drugs!* (57). It was as if she thought that the Spanish language and maybe a Latino identity could be an alternative to the drugs and crime in the neighborhood. Some of her students did not know how to read or write Spanish, or were not motivated to learn Spanish.

One of the boys in her class said to me: *I don't know how to read Spanish!* He explained that he speaks Spanish with his mother: *But we don't talk with big words, it's not like in this class.* So he found the Spanish in school different from that of home, which is similar to what I pointed to in Chapter Three, on parents, books and class.

Different forms of Spanish dialects were spoken in school. Ms. Gomez was Ecuadorian, and her Spanish was different from that of the Dominicans. She would ask the students to change Dominican Spanish words like *mascota* (notebook), and

⁹² There are also Dominicans in NYC that self-ascribe as Native Americans, as descendents of the Taíno Indians in the DR. This way they can fit into the US category of Native Americans.

use *cuaderno* instead. She said that in other Latin American countries *mascota* meant a pet.

English also has several dialects, or sociolects. In ICHS I would say one could distinguish between three types of spoken English: African-American, (ebonics), English spoken with a Spanish accent, and the vernacular i.e., American English. The latter was spoken by most of the teachers, while among the students it was more common to hear African-American English or English with an accent. When it came to African-American English, one teacher told students to use what I understood to be American English when applying for jobs.⁹³ This also happened on Career Day: One of the boys in Ms. Reynoso's class said to a white European speaker: *I asked for a job, and they said to me that I don't speak English very well. They said to me: Good morning, and I said: Whassup? The speaker: I say what's up to you guys, but not in work, I say good morning, that's more formal.* This means students were advised to use other sociolects in school and at work than they used elsewhere. This can be compared to how staff acted with regard to abnormal behaviour, described in Chapter Three.

Language as an Important Aspect of Parent-Teachers Meetings

When it came to the parent-teachers association (PTA) meetings, frequently Spanish was the language used. At the first PTA meeting Mr. Allen and the head of campus spoke English. Finally, one mother raised her hand, and said: *We need a translator!* Mr. Allen said: *I forgot about that!* An AP, Ms. Torres, started to translate what the superintendent said, but not what Mr. Allen had said. At the second parent's PTA meeting, there was an election of the candidates for The School Leadership. Ms. Burgos ran for her second term as a president, and most of what she wanted to say was spoken in Spanish, followed by English:

Last year at the first parents committee, we did a fundraiser, and raised 100 and something dollars. You have to vote for the school, so the teachers will be better, so the children keep progressing, only united can we do it (59). We hope some parents; the only way to get things better is to working together.

Another candidate also said what she wanted to say in both Spanish and English, probably since Mr. Allen and one father did not speak Spanish:

⁹³ Ovando (2001: 277) writes that the use of African-American English in school can have negative consequences for how students are treated in school. This can be linked to Ferguson (2000), cited in Chapter Three, who writes that students are often individually marked by teachers, and that these marks are decisive when putting students in classes.

I am concerned not only about my child, but of all the students. Since parent involvement is limited, we have to knock on doors. We have to work, that's it. We're parents, not the president. I am ready to sacrifice on my work hours to participate here. This is the most critical age for them (60). I was planning to call out this school because of its reputation, but I decided to stay. The children of the community, need to work for them.

An African-American father, who wanted to run for vice-president, said in

English:

NMEC used to be the best school, people took their wedding pictures here. I was always there for my kids, not always for my kids only. I want to see the kids trying their best in class. In the community that we live in, we are supposed to be together. I see most parents don't want to participate in school. We must remember we are here, now it's time to give back to our children. The kids want better education, to be somebody, a doctor, lawyer, some they can't be it, because the material is not in the school.

After the candidates had introduced themselves, they voted. The former president was re-elected, even though some were not so happy about the job she had done last year. The African-American father did not get any votes from the other parents, and I suspected that happened since he did not speak Spanish.

At the first PTA meeting, most of what was said was said in English. Then at the next meeting more Spanish was introduced. This also happened on the opening day of the Saturday School. The parents' meeting began with information in English, and continued in Spanish. After the meeting, an African-American mother came up to me. She looked shocked, and said: *I didn't understand half of it, it's all in Spanish!*

Even though many of the meetings were conducted in English, one could say that most parents preferred Spanish, and that language was an important factor in the interaction with school. The choice of languages children may affect relations to their parents. According to Rumbaut (1996: 127) conflicts may increase if children prefer English and has a poor command in their native language. Bourgeois (1995:175) writes that his Puerto Rican informants in El Barrio were ashamed of their Spanish-speaking mother; the authority figure in their lives suddenly transformed into an object of ridicule in front of their kindergarten teacher. The mother was unable to communicate with the educational bureaucracy, and the children's first delinquency was to refuse to answer their mother in Spanish at home. In ICHS students can choose to hold on to Spanish since the school offers different programs, thereby avoiding conflicts between parents and children who want to retain Spanish. As I referred to in the Introductory Chapter, there were many aides, staff members and teachers the parents could speak to in Spanish, thus in ICHS it did not have to feel like a ridicule for the parents to show up in school.

Bilingual, ESL and English Mainstream Programs

There were three language programs in ICHS: Bilingual education in Spanish and English, English as a Second Language (ESL), and English mainstream-programs. For English mainstream students classes were given in English, and they could have Spanish as a Foreign Language. Since many knew some Spanish, they were not beginners in that subject. In ESL programs English as a second language is taught through academic content (Thomas and Collier 2003: 244). ESL students also had classes with mainstream or bilingual students, depending on their individual program. In bilingual programs both English and Spanish were used for instructional purposes. There exist a number of bilingual program types, and in the bilingual classes I followed there was in my estimation a “50-50 transitional bilingual education” (ibid.). According to the AP Ms. Echeverria the students were supposed to be in bilingual programs for five years. To transfer to the English mainstream the students had to pass a test, which Javier from Ms. Steinberg’s class described as *a bit difficult*.

During my fieldwork the necessity and usefulness of bilingual education was often discussed in New York’s English and Spanish print media in New York. One teacher in the main building said to me he thought the bilingual programs could be eliminated, as they *do not work*. Others, e.g., the author Ernesto Quiñones recognized the benefits of speaking two languages. He said at a reading that this way you could be *two people*.

According to Devine (1996: 31), lower-tier schools can implement strategies to attract better students and avoid those with disciplinary problems. The principals can prefer recent “West-Indian immigrants over list-notice students (most of them African-American) by inaugurating new programs like ESL or bilingual programs which attract more West Indians” (ibid: 33). Mateu-Gelebert (1998) writes that there were not so many differences between “American-born students and immigrant students” when it came to motivation, so I am not certain whether the school wanted to offer bilingual or ESL programs for these reasons. There were disciplinary problems among students in these classrooms as well, as I have showed in Chapter Three.

Bilingual education began at about 1967 as an effort to help immigrants, mostly Spanish speakers, learn English (Duignan 1998: 21). Numerous groups have continued to lobby for bilingual education, such as the American Coalition for Bilingual Education, the National Advisory Board for Bilingual Education, and the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (ibid.:7). The Bilingual Education Act of 1994 states that the Federal government had an obligation to offer students with limited English proficiency equal educational opportunities (NCELA Legislation 2006). Furthermore, the US Congress declared it to be US policy to ensure that educational agencies will train the students to meet the same rigorous standards of academic performance expected of all young people (ibid.).⁹⁴

I will now introduce three different teachers and periods in which I had the opportunity to follow. Their views on ethnicity, race and language, could influence the students individual strategies.

Ms. Reynoso; Bilingual Programs in Spanish and English

Ms. Reynoso was Dominican, and born and raised in Washington Heights. In her classes most of the academic content of History as a subject was explained in Spanish, and the English text books were translated to Spanish. Her bilingual classes were two-way, as the students who knew more English than Spanish would reply to her questions in English. She spoke American English and Spanish, and used both languages during classes. Her English was better than her Spanish, and the students would often correct her Spanish. The atmosphere during these periods was relaxed, and I did not get the impression that the students were intimidated and fearful of making mistakes in any language.⁹⁵ I think this made it easier for students to learn English. Still, many of her students had been in bilingual programs longer than the maximum five years. Yahira, for example, had lived in New York all her life, except

⁹⁴ [B] y (1) developing systematic improvement and reform educational programs [...]; (2) developing skills and multicultural understanding; (3) developing the English of such children and youth and, to the extent possible, the native language skills of such children and youth;[...] (ibid.).

⁹⁵ In other classes the atmosphere was tenser. When I was in another ESL class one student was afraid of reading an English text. I think he was ashamed since he could not read English very well, more than he was unwilling to learn the language. The teacher got angry at him for not intending.

for one year in the DR. Abel said that many of the girls were not interested in learning English, unlike many of the boys.

Ms. Reynoso would often refer to the students as *hispanos* (Latinos). In a period about Austria-Hungary, Ms. Reynoso asked: *How many ethnic groups are there in the United States?* (61). The students' burst out: *Ohh!* Ms. Reynoso said: *Chinese, Jews* (62). Maribel said: *Spanish*.⁹⁶ Ms. Reynoso added: *And, within Spanish we can say Dominicans, Ecuadorians* (63). During another period they talked about ethnocentrism. Rudy (16-years-old) said that they were *dominicanos*, and not Spanish. According to Rumbaut (1996: 166,169), a Hispanic self-identification is more likely to be made by females, while boys are more likely to identify by American and national origin. Judging from what Maribel and Rudy said this can apply to them.

When Ms. Reynoso spoke about how Haitians were treated in the DR, most students seemed to be familiar with the issue. Cesar did not understand the problem, he asked: *What's wrong with the Haitians?* As I wrote above, many Dominicans in the DR view Haitians as inferior based on traits such as their racial features and an understanding of Haitians as invaders, among others. As Cesar had lived in NYC for a long time, and spoke more English than Spanish, this may have distanced him from these understandings of race in the DR.

Ms. Reynoso was not only supportive of the Spanish language. When I told her that almost all parents at the PTA meeting voted for the presidential candidate that spoke Spanish, she said: *That's stupid*. Ms. Reynoso attitudes reflected that she was not only supporting the Spanish language, but also English.

Ms. Smith; English as a Second Language

In Chapter Four I wrote in detail about Ms. Smith, and it may be useful to recapitulate some of the main points I made. Ms. Smith was the white American teacher who selected the novel by Julia Alvarez' for the ESL students. I used this to show that this could be linked to her concept of culture. During classes she never explained things in Spanish, about which her knowledge was elementary. She spoke American English. She praised students such as Lolin and Damaris, who had passed

⁹⁶ She probably said *Spanish* in English, since the same word in Spanish would be *españoles*, and was used to refer to people from Spain, not Spanish-speaking people in the USA.

tests to get out of bilingual classes. Of the other students she said to me that she thought it was sad that the girls were more concerned about their nails and boyfriends, than going to museums and read books.

Mr. Steinberg; English Mainstream

Mr. Steinberg was Jewish, spoke American English, and taught Junior Students in Social Science. There were about 25 students in the class. Three of the students were African-American, while the rest were Dominican or Latino. Since he was in charge of student activities, he would use this period to talk to students about upcoming events, like the school party. Mr. Steinberg said in class that he was not so good at including the bilingual students in student activities since he did not teach them. Javier said: *Forget about the bilinguals!* As I will show later, the bilingual students were often excluded from student activities.

The period which I followed the group was in their last period of the day. Mr. Steinberg said he knew the students were tired then, and would often let them sit and talk, instead of giving regular classes. Mr. Steinberg was voted as the most popular teacher in school the year before my main fieldwork. When I asked Michael what made him so popular, he said: *He's likes to play around, like us.* Mr. Steinberg said about the students: *They are crazy kids, aren't they, but they are good.*

The students were aware of his ethnicity, which I noted when the students joked about the Holocaust. Then he mentioned that he had family who died because of that. When they were filling out the questionnaire, the students jokingly asked if he did not have to fill one in since he was *Jew*, hereby indicating that his ethnicity had its advantages. Mr. Steinberg would joke about African-Americans, Latinos and Dominicans as well. When Kevin (16-years-old), an African-American boy entered the trailer with candy bars he sold for the school's basketball team, Mr. Steinberg said out loud: *A black man with a chocolate, he must have stolen it!* One of the African-American girls said: *Why are you disrespecting me and Rita?* But she did not seem to be angry; she seemed to have understood it as a joke. Mr. Steinberg spoke some words in Spanish, which he would in an English American accent. He could say *que bonito* (literally, how beautiful) while doing feminine gestures. In the previous chapter I

also referred to how he said to the Dominican students that they were *plátanos*. As Spanish is connected to Latino identity, I understand this as a derogatory manner of speaking about Latinos. This language use can be compared to what Hill (1995) labeled “Junk Spanish.”⁹⁷

In his classes, students could also mark language and ethnicity. Rosa (16-years-old) and her girlfriends would speak Spanish in classes. She also changed the usual *Do now* and *Aim* (64) on the blackboard to Spanish. During another period she had birthday, and had balloons attached to her chair. Kevin acted as though he wanted to steal them. She said in an angry way: *That’s why we don’t like you!* The students reacted by saying *wow!* In this way she was saying that Latinos, or Dominicans, did not approve of African-Americans.

The teachers in school followed different policies when it came to language use, since the school had different language programs. Ms. Smith only accepted English during classes, while Ms. Reynoso used both languages. Ms. Steinberg used Spanish in a joking way, not to explain the academic content. When the students spoke of ethnicity in his class, it was seldom part of this content either. As there were African-Americans and Latinos who spoke African-American English there were basically two forms of English who were spoken during his periods. Even though the NMEC’s official goal was to mainstream students, and not to ask about their ethnicity, teachers did express their attitudes on ethnicity during periods. This could also be to break to the Discipline Code, which I cited in Chapter Three. Mr. Steinberg expressed US perceptions of race where a membership can put you in a group category, like when he talked about a *black man* and stealing. In Ms. Smith’s classes they did not speak much about other ethnic groups in the same way. One reason for this may be that many of the students had lived in the US a short period. Ms. Reynoso talked about ethnicity to explain the academic content. She referred to Haiti, which students needed to understand racial identities in the DR, but they also used US identities, as Spanish in her classes.

⁹⁷ Hill (1993.) writes that Junk Spanish is accepted to speak in public among American English speakers in USA. This was exemplified by how it is used by politicians, on greeting cards; *Adios*, and by actor Arnold Schwarzenegger; *Hasta la vista, baby*.

I will now represent the individual strategies, and cases taken from the school and the larger society that reflect these strategies. Maribel, Damaris and Indiana were Ms. Reynoso's, Ms. Smith's and Mr. Steinberg's students. I will focus especially on their language preferences and how they were connected to ethnicity and racial identity. Hairstyles, clothes and perceptions of race could also be linked to language preferences.

Individual Strategies

Maribel: A Bilingual Student

Maribel (16-years-old) came to New York from the DR in 1997; three years ago. She spoke Spanish with some English words, e.g., *I know, ready, building, transfer, and library*. She said *frizando*, which meant to be freeze; and this was a mix of Spanish and English. In the DR it is not uncommon to use English words either, but I think she had learned most of these words in NYC.

Her world basically circled around people who spoke Spanish: In ICHS she often talked with the Spanish-speaking aides and teachers in the office. During lunch she would share a table with girls from Ms. Reynoso's class. After school she went to her aunt's apartment, and stayed there until her mother got home. She socialized with four male friends by talking to them on the phone, and invited them for dinner in her apartment, so her mother could meet them. At home she liked to cook Dominican dishes; keep the apartment tidy, and watch Spanish soap operas. When I asked her if she would come to the school party, she said her parents did not allow her to go.

She had learned to read and write English, but did not speak it. She was not necessarily motivated to do so either. Her grades were good; she often figured on the Honor Rolls. In some situations she and her Spanish-speaking friends were in a majority. During a trip with ESL and bilingual students there was a Turkish girl who did not understand Spanish. Maribel said to her she felt sorry for her, since she did not speak Spanish like the rest of the group. On other occasions she was in her situation. Once, during assembly for Juniors the principal spoke about different

student activities, and asked for participants. Nobody asked for translation. When the meeting was finished I asked her if she had understood, and she said no.

In one of Ms. Reynoso's class Maribel talked about *Spanish* people as an ethnic group in the USA. During a period with Ms. Reynoso, the teacher asked whether there exist problems between countries that share borders. Starley answered: *Immigrants*. Ms. Reynoso asked: *Between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, does it create a conflict?* (65). Maribel answered: *Oh, yes, since the Haitians wants to come here* (66). In Maribel's answer she talked as if she was in the DR, and not in NYC, when she said that they want to come over here. This may imply that she had a perception of Haitians as people in the DR have, and she easily related to a national identity of the DR. This could also be seen in that she seemed to be conscious of her skin colour. One day in the office she looked at her neck with a hand-held mirror. She said to me: *I'm dark-skinned here* (67). Her skin tone was light brown, but the skin was slightly darker in her neck. The fact seemed to make her unhappy. She seemed to be conscious of her hair with the same racial understanding that she appointed to her skin. Her hair was naturally kinky, and she straightened it. During one period Flavio sat behind her and tried to touch her. He looked at her neck, and discovered kinky hair that was growing out and said: *And I who thought I had bad hair!* (68). Flavio seemed to be conscious of the racial categories used in the DR where kinky hair is often related to as *bad* hair.

Maribel liked to dress like many Latina girls, i.e., in tight jeans, and bright colours such as pink and yellow. In the lunch room she would put on make-up while looking in the mirror, flirting with boys at the same time. One of the boys referred to her table as a Beauty Parlour. At her table, she told the others of her stepmother, who had lived in New York for 17 years, but did not know English. Her stepmother could only say: *Hello, goodbye, you crazy, and trick or treat!* The girls sighed and, and Yahira said: *Get out of here!* (69). Even though most of the girls did not speak much English themselves, they obviously thought she should have had learned more after 17 years. But many of Maribel's peers knew enough English to defend themselves in classes. This was not always sufficient to defend themselves in situations where street ethos prevailed, as in the case below.

After a day trip, a group of bilingual students and I boarded an express train in lower Manhattan. The train was quite full, but some students and I found seats, while the rest remained standing close to the doors. At the next station, a lot of people boarded the train, including five African-American girls. They started to say things to the students, and acted very aggressively. From what I heard, the African-American girls accused them for talking about them, adding that one of the boys had said something about them. At one point one of the group acted as though she was about to punch him, but the other girls held her back. At first I thought they were going to leave them alone, but their tirade continued as they hurled such obscenities as *We're black, fuck you! Fucking... He was looking at me.*⁹⁸ Maribel stood with her back towards them, and they touched her ponytail which came apart. She went to sit down, but nobody said anything to the girls.

I went over to the group as I worried a fight would break out. I asked one of the students in Spanish to come and sit where I had a seat. The African-American girls noticed that I came over and talked in Spanish; they said things about it and laughed. As it was an express train, the train kept passing stations, and we could not get off. The other passengers seemed to ignore the confrontation, while two passengers seemed to be laughing at the situation. Then suddenly a Latino-looking man walked toward the group, and started talking and cursing to the girls in African-American English. This way the African-American girls seemed to forget about the students.

When we got off at 96th street, the girls stayed behind, but held the doors open to scare us. In the end they did not get off. The boy said: *If she had beaten me, I would have beaten her as well* (70). While he said this, he held up his arms as to demonstrate his strength. Yesenia was laughing at the event, as if she found it funny and not scary at all. Elena said: *The girl said that I was staring at her* (71). I asked them if this had happened to them before, and Yesenia said it had never happened. Elena had only been living in New York for four months, and I asked Maribel later if this had been very scary for her. Maribel said yes; that she had said she would not take the subway anymore. This case shows that language can mark a difference between African-

⁹⁸ In Chapter Three I described how the students were under surveillance from the school safety officers, and how this might have led to students felt disrespected if they were stared at by fellow students.

Americans and Latinos. It was a Latino who interfered and talked in African-American English that made the African-American girls back off.

In this situation Maribel was not able to control the situation. This was different from when she was in classes, in the office, or in the lunch room. When she went on a school trip, she felt sorry for the girl who did not speak Spanish. During the assembly meeting she missed out on what the principal said about participation in activities, as she did not ask for translation in front of all Juniors. Her racial identities seemed to be close to the understandings of race in the DR; judged from that she straightened her hair and how she perceived her skin tone. But this did not apply to all situations; she also talked about *Spanish* identity in Ms. Reynoso's class.

Damaris: An ESL-student

Damaris was 17 years old, and had been living in New York for three years as well. She had English as a Second Language, and Ms. Smith was her teacher. Damaris spoke mostly Spanish with her friends, but they also spoke some English. She spoke a sort of American English with a Spanish accent.

She had attended a Junior high school in Washington Heights where half of the students were African-Americans. She spent much of her time at the school fighting. She said: *I will always fight for Dominicans*. She associated some Spanish words with Dominican identity. She said: *To be Dominican is to say a lot of coño, coño, coño (damn)*. When Damaris and I took a taxi together we discussed language with the gypsy cab driver. We told the Latina driver that we were going to a party in a teacher's home.

The driver: *Is the one who is having the party Latino? (72).*

Damaris: *No, he speaks Spanish, but he is like an American (73).*

Driver: *A big mistake that many Hispanics do here is to not teach the language to the children. They don't want to learn Spanish. [...]. My sister's kids are like that, that they do not speak it. And how can they defend that their children do not know how to speak with their uncles and aunts. One said to me that English is the language here (74).*

Damaris: *English is also an immigrant language, because first came the Dutch people. The language of here is the language of the Indians (75).*

The driver: *What I didn't like was when one said to me "fucking Hispanic". I said to him, you're from here, an American, I'm also that, but you're a mix of different bloods, from Italy [...], I, at least have it clear where I'm from, that I'm a Latina (76).*

Damaris: *Furthermore, in English you can't express your feelings like in Spanish (77).*

The driver: *Te amo, mi amor (I love you, my love) what's that compared to: I love you, sweetheart (78).*

When the driver said *sweetheart*, she said it in an ironic way, like she did not like the sound of that word. In this situation Damaris and the driver stressed the Spanish language as the common denominator of the Latinos. The driver thought badly of her sister whose children did not speak Spanish; that way they could not talk with their family and they missed an important ethnic marker for Latinos.

In Ms. Smith's class Damaris read a novel by Julia Alvarez' about the Garcia sisters. Damaris was one of the few students who enjoyed the book, as I described in Chapter Four. She said she liked to read novels in that genre by Latino and Caribbean writers. Even though the book was written in English, she enjoyed it, and included it is a part of her identity project. Otherwise, she chose Spanish, as she did when she visited the politician Miguel Martinez' office to ask for a job, and who asked which language she preferred. Her reply was Spanish.

Unlike Maribel, Damaris was allowed to go out at night if she wanted. Despite this, she said she often preferred to stay at home or visit friends; there was too much social control in her neighborhood. When she went out with a local police officer, she said that people talked about it. She said police officers demanded respect, and that many did not like them for that reason.

Like Maribel, she liked to straighten her hair. African-American women in New York often straightened their hair as well, but I choose to view the hair-straightening as linked to understandings of race in the DR, because many Dominican would straight their hair more regularly than African-American women. Damaris' skin color was slightly darker than many of her peers. Damaris' friend said that she was dark-skinned (*morena*), but not when Damaris heard it. This Spanish term is also used in the DR, and since her friend did not say it to Damaris' face it may imply that she did not want to not offend her.

Damaris used clothes that were bought in the cheaper clothes stores in Washington Heights, and like Maribel she liked to use clothes that hugged the figure and bright in its colors. One difference between the two was that Damaris liked to

use braids, and braids was not commonly used by Dominicans in the DR.⁹⁹ This can be connected to their living in New York where braids are more fashionable, and African influences may be viewed differently than in the DR. But in the bilingual classes none of the girls would have braids, and this may be because they are using the DR understanding of race, where “African hairstyles”, such as braids, might be associated with Haitians. In the bilingual classes, there were boys who had afros and braids; which may indicate gender differences because the boys in bilingual programs are also more likely to use English during classes.

Damaris’s individual strategy differed from Maribel’s, even though they had lived in NYC the same length. While Maribel seemed content to basically use Spanish, Damaris wanted to move around in the English-speaking world as well. Both self-ascribed to be Latinas, or Spanish. The school’s organization of language programs made it possible for them to choose different strategies. This was also the case the English mainstream student, Indiana. When I describe her I will continue the story of Damaris, as they came to disagree on who should be the president of the student government. The disagreement was based on their individual strategies when it came to language.

Indiana: An English Mainstream Student

Indiana, a 17-year-old, was born and raised in New York. In school and with friends she spoke English with an African-American accent. Her mother spoke and understood some English, so she used to speak English with her. With her father she spoke Spanish, even though her Spanish was not very good. She has basic Spanish skills, and is not motivated to learn more Spanish. When speaking English, Julissa and she throw in a few Spanish words, e.g. like *pero* (but), and *di que* (say that). She used one of the words when she said: *I’m in the student government, pero I failed.*

Indiana and Julissa spoke that way because they wanted to; they knew the word in English. Perhaps they used it to mark a Latino identity. Julissa, who knew a few words in Spanish, said to me that she could no longer talk to her father, as she did

⁹⁹ The same goes for Afros for boys; they were not much seen in the DR.

not speak Spanish anymore. Indiana had Spanish as a Foreign Language, but did not like the teacher nor the subject, so she would sometimes cut those classes. She said:

I'm gonna do a book report, and give it to Miss Gomez, she wants me to type it. She wants the accent mark all in Spanish. She wants everything perfect. I'm not a big Spanish fan. I have spelling issues. I have issues in every class.

Even though she did not like her Spanish classes, in some situations she wanted to pass for a Latina. For instance when Julissa and she had tried to get on the subways without paying:

There was this woman saying that she had seen us jumping over the bars, but to me he (the inspector) looked Dominican or Latino-something, so he could have been nicer to us.

In this situation, she would have liked to the inspector to show like an ethnic solidarity thus helping her avoid paying for the ticket.

Indiana lived in a neighborhood south of Washington Heights where there were many African-Americans, and she used to baby sit for some Haitian neighbors. This means that she knew many African-American and Haitians personally, and was perhaps closer to a US understanding of race, as she never spoke of Haitians in a derogatorily manner. She had long brown hair, was light-skinned and wore no make up. Sometimes she wore green or blue contact lenses, which was common among some of the students. The latter may be said to be closer to a white American look, than a Latina identity.

Compared to the other girls, Indiana liked to walk along the streets. She started talking to boys in the street. She had a job distributing fliers for a nightclub for people under 18, and was used to meeting new people. Since she still was in the student government, she helped organize the school party along with Mr. Steinberg. Indiana and her friends decided what music would be played. Just before the party, I asked Indiana whether she was going to change after decorating the lunchroom, and she said: *Why, it's just a school party!* She wanted more to have fun, and did not devote much time to her looks. This can be different from Damaris, who would think about for days what to wear to a party.

Lots of English-speaking music was played at the party, including R&B, and hip-hop, but also Spanish music, such as, reggaeton, los palos, and one bachata. (See previous chapter). During the party, the students danced on the floor in the lunch room. One student said on the microphone: *I'm Puerto Rican, there are two of us here,*

and Cubans, and Dominicans! When he said *Dominicans*, everyone rejoiced, lifted their arms and jumped around on the dance floor. One of the boys acknowledged people who helped realize the party: *Allen, ICHS, Steinberg, the teachers, and not to forget about the people in blue!* When he referred to the *people in blue*, he pointed at the two uniformed school safety police. The students applauded for each of them, and some of the boys started to dance with the police lady when she walked around. This demonstrates that it was basically the English mainstream students who organized the party. In contrast to their structured school days in the prison-school, they were now in charge.

Indiana labeled students like Damaris who spoke Spanish or English with a Spanish accent for *Spanish*. In this, she seemed to put herself above the others, since she spoke African-American English mixed in with some Spanish words. Another marker she pointed to was the clothes. She pointed out that the Spanish girls wore clothes which did not match in colors, like a *really short pink skirt and a yellow sweater*. Indiana would buy her clothes in quality stores, not from cheap neighborhood stores.

The student government elected a new president at the end of the school year, and Indiana and Damaris were presidential candidates. Other English mainstream students also participated, but none of the bilingual students. I sense the reason was that most of the campaigning was done in English. Damaris was the only ESL student running for president.

Many mainstream students would not allow Damaris to run for president of the student government. Damaris said to me: *They say I don't speak good enough English, and that I'm like a hic, but I don't care.*¹⁰⁰ She made her own campaign, and her own posters. In the end the principal cancelled the elections, since Lolin, Damaris' friend, almost got into a fight because of this. So it looks like the street ethos in the prison-school was stronger than ethnic solidarity among Latinos and Dominicans. Damaris, who spoke American English with an accent, was cancelled out by the English mainstream students; who were a majority. The student who won the election at a later stage was a boy from Mr. Steinberg's class.

¹⁰⁰ Sanjek (1998: 262) referred to how a white teen in Elmhurst-Corona, Queens, derogatorily referred to Hispanics as hics, so the term was used in other parts of the city as well.

Even though Indiana labeled other students *hics*, she also saw that they had a common background. In a setting other than the election, she said that she was a hic herself: *If my mother is a hic, then I'm a hic too!* This may reflect an ambiguity that Indiana and many students with her have to cope with, even though they distance themselves from Spanish students in school; their parents are more often than not, Spanish-speaking.



The Schools influence on Student's Language Preferences

The teachers that I have presented can be said to support the students' individual strategies when it comes to language. The students' language programs may have consequences for their identities since language preferences can affect many aspects of their lives, i.e., friends, relationships to their parents, and what kind of clothes and hairstyles they prefer. Mr. Steinberg, for example, spoke Junk Spanish in classes, and Indiana did not view Spanish as equal to English. Ms. Smith encouraged students to learn English, but also supported what she viewed as a Latino or Dominican identity by reading Julia Alvarez. This way she supported Damaris' identity, as she liked to read books, and her English was good enough to do that. Ms. Reynoso spoke both

Spanish and English, but was more comfortable with speaking English. Despite this, Maribel's individual strategies were supported by the teacher, since Maribel could use both languages in her periods. In school there was also many staff members to whom she spoke in Spanish. Some of the same points may be evaluated on a racial discourse; Mr. Steinberg used US discourse on race in when he talked about African-Americans; Ms. Smith's views may be said to be based on US perceptions as she talked of them as representing Dominicans outside school, as I described in Chapter Three. Ms. Reynoso could use DR perceptions when she talked about relations between Haiti and the DR. These views echoed perceptions of many students in their classes. There were also gender differences between the students, as I referred to in my discussion on bilingual classes. Boys seemed to be more eager to speak English. In Mr. Steinberg's class some of the girls would speak Spanish and write Spanish on the blackboard.

Some of the individual strategies for the students in ICHS were assumed in opposition to the parents. Like Julissa, Indiana's friend who could no longer speak with her father. This shows what consequences their language choice can have on their lives. Lolin's case, not using her parents' language may be viewed as a protest.

Language, Settings and Stigma

In the previous chapter I discussed Dominican identity and stigma, and pointed to the fact that stigma may lead to pride or withdrawal. Some Latinos may feel that the Spanish language is a stigma, and therefore it may affect language practices. I was told by adult Dominicans that they had asked Latinos for help downtown, but they had acted like they did not know any Spanish. Here they asked people in a setting of the larger society, and which was perhaps defined as an English-speaking public space.

How a stigmatized ethnic identity and language can be under-communicated in some settings or contexts has been described by Eidheim (1994). He writes about Norwegians and Coastal Sami (Lapp) people in an area of Northern Norway where the latter "seek to qualify themselves as full participants in the Norwegian society (ibid: 40)." Many of the Sami people are ambiguous of their ethnic identity, and

change it depending on the situation. In a situation which is defined as public, e.g., in the local grocery store, the Sami store owner speaks Norwegian with the Sami clientele. According to Eidheim the reason is that it is defined as a public sphere since Norwegians could enter any time. The other two spheres defined by Eidheim were a Norwegian and a Sami closed sphere. Sami ethnic identity is closely associated with the language, and to some extent physiognomy (ibid. 47). The grammatical syntax of the two languages is different, so Samis often speak a slightly broken Norwegian (ibid: 42). By using the Norwegian language they could appear as Norwegian, and distance themselves from negative stereotyping of Samis as dirty and exclusionary.

Even though the differences between English and Spanish are not as great as between the Norwegian and Sami languages, it was possible to hear that students like Damaris had a Spanish accent and that she sometimes employed Spanish syntax when speaking English.

Like Samis in Northern Norway, would Latinos also under-communicate Spanish language and by doing this, they may be said to play down Latino ethnicity. At the assembly meeting, none of the Junior year students who did not understand English, asked for translations. I think they did not do that since it was a public setting where English was spoken. Another reason could have been that they were not interested in what he had to say, but for Maribel I do not think this was the case as she liked to listen to teachers and school staff. At the parents PTA meeting, a mother asked for translation after several staff member had spoken in English, perhaps a demonstration that it was less of a stigma to ask for that in that forum, where she knew that the other parents did not understand either. In the subway, Spanish and Latino ethnicity was played down, perhaps since it was in the larger society.

Bailey (1999) writes that second generation Dominicans in a high school in Providence, RI, used Dominican Spanish, African-American English, local English sociolects, and syncretic forms of these in different situations. This way they could count as African-American, Dominican, Hispanic or European-Americans, depending on which language they used. Bailey writes that they identified strongly

with their African-American peers.¹⁰¹ Despite this, Dominican students emphasize they are “not Black,” and prefer to identify themselves in terms of language, like “Spanish”. Bailey connects language use with the preferred ethnicity in certain situations, similar to Eidheim (1994).

In Mr. Steinberg’s class Rosa said that Latinos or Dominicans do not like African-Americans. If that is true, i.e., that they do not like them, it is interesting that most students in this class preferred to speak English with an African-American accent. This may be similar to what Bailey described above, that they would prefer to define themselves in terms of language, rather than as African-Americans. I did not hear any of the students self-ascribe as African-American or black. But Laura from Adelante described two Spanish-speaking Dominican girls as *the black girl* and *the white girl* respectively, which means that she used race perceptions from the US to categorize Spanish-speaking Dominicans. These categories, of white and black people, could be said in English, while the remaining of the phrase was said in Spanish. This may be what is recalled as “Spanglish,” but I did not hear students describe themselves as Spanglish-speakers.

In ICHS students like Indiana did not identify themselves as Spanish, as they would label students who basically spoke Spanish as such. She spoke African-American English, with some Spanish words, maybe to mark that she was a Latina. Indiana had neighbours from Haiti, and seemed to have no problems with Haitians, as opposed to Maribel.

Even though Maribel cannot speak much English, it may be possible for her to live as an “American.” According to Gans (1992) this is possible in cities like Miami where there is a big Spanish-speaking population. By being in bilingual programs there is also a greater chance to succeed in school. According to Collier and Thomas (1997) bilingual education give better academic performance in the longer run for language minority students. This may be a reason for students to hold on to their native language, and they may possibly be supported in this by their parents. I think that bilingual education would be difficult to offer to students who are not motivated

¹⁰¹ Bailey (ibid.) points to that second generation Dominicans and African-Americans share a similar structural position characterized by low income, segregated neighbourhoods and schools, and non-white phenotype.

to speak Spanish. As ICHS offered different language programs, the students could choose the program which motivated them and for which they were qualified. Bailey (1999) excluded students in bilingual education from his study, saying that identified themselves as Dominican nationals. This was also true for Maribel in some occasions. But it did not apply to her in all situations, or to all students in her class.

Concluding Remarks

By looking at language programs, one may imply that the school and the teachers supported different individual strategies. The three strategies I presented shows that students can negotiate between different identities. Some of these identities were entangled with different racial perceptions in the US and the DR. Many of the English mainstream students defined themselves as non-Spanish in the election, but stressed that they were Dominicans at the school party.

There were also gender differences, in that apparently more girls preferred Spanish to English. This may be the case since they often spend more time at home, as I demonstrated in Chapter Two.

Language use provides a space for creating identities, but it also has consequences. Some English mainstream students, e.g., could no longer talk to their parents. For Maribel, it implied that she could be afraid of taking the subway on her own. Damaris did not receive support from the English mainstream students when she wanted to be elected president because those involved ascribed to her the label *hica*. This means that even though Spanish is a semi-official language in NYC, it is not equal to English. In other settings, as in the gypsy cab, Damaris used the Spanish language to mark Latino identity as a badge of pride. Many parents preferred the Spanish language, and may therefore also support students such as Damaris and Maribel in their effort to hold on to the language.

Chapter Seven

Concluding Remarks

This thesis began by pointing to how the neighborhood was a complex and dynamic community, and then I narrowed the scope to look at the ICHS as a prison-school. This was followed by a description of an ESL classroom where students read a novel by Julia Alvarez. Then I looked at Dominican markers in school and the larger society. In the last chapter I limited the focus to how school's individual programs, may place the students language choices on an individual level. This has shown that the school's organization and policies may affect the student's description of themselves as Dominicans, and how boundary maintenance was done in school.

According to Erikson (1968 cited in Rumbaut 1996: 123) "adolescence spans a period of identity crisis" as they pass to adulthood, and during this process one's self-consciousness is heightened. For children of immigrants this process can be challenging as they experience more intense conflicts when they try "to adapt in social-identity contexts that may be racially and culturally dissonant" (Rumbaut 1996: 123). In ICHS one could say that many students had to handle different identities, ethnicities, perceptions of race, and languages, and this could be more challenging for them than it is for students in mainstream high schools.

Still, school may be considered to be one of several forces in the young peoples' lives, and therefore not the only thing that affected student identity formation (Levinson 1996). Even though school is one of many forces, Rumbaut (1996: 173) argues that school experiences and outlooks on American society can be closely associated with self-identities in school. This means that the student's experiences in ICHS could have had an impact on their self-ascribed identities in the future.

In the Introductory Chapter I cited Holland et al. (1998: 8) who pointed to that a person can have many self-understandings and identities that can be localized to

different environments and are not completely durable. I think this understanding of identities can reflect much of what I have pointed to in this thesis. I have spoken of student identity formation in school, and followed the students as they moved in the larger society and in the neighborhood. The identities of the students are not necessarily durable, as they were taken from specific settings at a limited period of time (Skinstad 2001).

I have distinguished between personal and cultural identities, where the first is characterized by being self-ascribed, while the latter is not necessarily so. In Chapter Four, I looked at how Ms. Smith introduced a cultural identity to the students, and this was not accepted by all of the students. I agree with Goldberg and Solomos (2003: 6) in that identity cannot simply be imposed; “[i]t is also chosen, and actively used, albeit within particular social contexts and constraints (ibid.).”

Identity construction in ICHS both responded to, and constituted discourses beyond the school (Foley, Wexler and Weis cited in Levinson 1996: 12). Examples of this may be how the school was a prison-school in an attempt to keep negative aspects from the neighborhood away from the school, how racial perceptions and stigma was relevant in interactions between students and staff, and that middle-class value of books as cultural capital were imposed upon the students. Empirical evidence from ICHS and the students’ lives in general may therefore be said to have worked as a prism, as it reflected many discourses beyond the school.

ICHS was a mediating institution since students and staff represented the two peak periods of immigration. Dominican and Latino ethnicity was marked in school, but since they were in a majority it was not always marked. The categories like Latino and Dominican were thus not used uniformly by the students or the larger society, even though there were many that reified and stigmatized these identities (cf. Bailey 1999: 33). In the school party, for example, the students self-ascribed as *Dominicans*, while when I asked them in class the first week they were reluctant to say their ethnicity. At the school party I will argue that it was the students who was in charge, and therefore could show some pride. While when I, as an anthropologist, asked them, some could be afraid that I would write something bad about them.

Individual strategies, like which languages one choose, marked differences between the students, which means that students did not necessarily stick together

based on a common ethnicity. This shows that ethnic identities are not fixed entities, but may be negotiated depending on how a group upheld the boundaries in relation to the larger society.

Mr. Steinberg was voted the most popular teacher in school, even though he was Jewish, and not Dominican, like most of the students. This means that many students may look at non-Dominicans as role models.

Dominican identity was presented to me as markers that appeared as static and common for many of the students. A reason for this may be that many said they felt stigmatized, and thus wanted to show that they were proud to be Dominican by using these markers. Stigma could be a reason why some students would choose to withdraw from Dominican identity, and stigma made these markers different from the volunteer symbolic ethnicity of white suburbans. The Dominican ethnicity did not always have the volunteer aspect to it, and therefore some would try to withdraw from it to pass out of all "ethnic roles" (Gans 1992).

For students, going to Dominicans festivals, using flags watch baseball, and use some of the other markers, could also be said to participate in activities that were American creations, and many other ethnic groups in USA organized. By participation in a parade, one could feel like a member of a community.

Another issue these markers could express was transnational connections. In the Problem and Scope in Chapter One I wrote that my hypothesis was that many scholars have described Dominican identities in the US in as 'birds of passage' and that I think the issues of belonging would be different for the high school students. In the literature on Dominicans studied on an isolated basis, I pointed out that this literature focused much on transnational connections and Dominicans transnational identity. I think my material can reflect that the students have found a belonging and a personal location, an identity, in New York City (Goldberg and Solomos 2003: 6). Many students maintained ties to the DR, and kept in touch with their family there. But this could be viewed as a form for security valve, in case they wanted to return, or that they were proud of their homeland. It seemed like more girls than boys were holding on to Spanish language, and this can reflect that the girls identified more with their parents than the boys did. According to Waters (forthcoming, cited in

Rumbaut 1996: 153) issues of gender identity is related to racial and ethnic identities. Among adolescents of black Caribbean immigrants in NYC she found that the boundaries “between different types of identity are more fluid and permeable for girls than for boys” (ibid.). In my context, the girls can therefore hold on to Spanish to have a greater flexibility when developing identities. As I discussed in Chapter Two and Five a change in gender roles could be noticed. Despite this were girls and boys often confined to different spaces: It was often stricter for girls; and many spent more time at home, while boys passed more time in the streets.

The NMEC was situated in a Dominican community, whose local organizations has come to be more instrumental in helping the inhabitants rather than being sites in which one may express nostalgia to the DR. I think that by talking of Washington Heights as a transnational space (Duany 1994 cited in Offer-Ohlsen 2004: 201), it excludes how the young may feel more belonging to NYC than the DR. In ICHS the students were in school spaces with architecture and a busy schedule they had to respond to. I believe they came to feel a belonging to the site since they moved about there every day. Furthermore, how the school was organized with its language programs and academic content may have affected their identity formation.

NMEC was restructured in 1997, and this led to the school being divided into smaller units, with a stronger focus on academic performance. Even though the school focused more on academics, it is not sure that this made the students perform better. The restructuring also made it easier for the school to hold students under surveillance. This can show that discourses of race in the USA were prevalent in school. This understanding pointed to that one individual may be judged because of his or hers ethnicity, and negative perceptions can be applied to all members. Ms. Reynoso said that the students *need structure*, and other students. I got the impression that there was a general belief among students and staff that they had to be in what resembled a prison-school, so *nobody could take a gun to school*. I believe that most students and staff were aware of that the strong focus on security was justified since the students were Latinos, and African-American. Discourses of race in the USA imply that these students may be said to be attributed a group membership, where certain attributes are said to be explained by their “race.” This is different to

understandings of race in the DR is, where individual differences are viewed as individual attributes (Oquendo 1995 cited in Bailey 1999). An exception to this racial discourse on individual attributes is that many Dominicans in the DR prejudice Haitians as a group.

Skinstad (2001: 102) writes that in the high school she studied, there was a strong discourse of multiculturalism. Still, “the discourse of security and control is more powerful” (ibid). In ICHS aspects of the prison-school, were given a high priority as well. There were many security guards, but just one librarian, even though the school explicitly focused on academic performance. Street ethos, which was a trait from the neighborhood the school tried to keep away by these measures, structured perhaps more of the interaction between students than ethnicity did. High schools with predominantly white European students are not subjected to prison-schools, even though there have been several deadly incidents in such schools.

Ferguson (2000) writes that one cannot do a “quick fix” in schools as if they were separated from the rest of society. As structures in society are reflected in schools, it is not sufficient to change the school. Like in NMEC, the restructuring had not fixed many of the discourses beyond school, like the hidden life of class in the US (Ortner 1998). This hidden class system may blame the individual or the ethnic group if a person does not succeed, without looking into structural causes. In Chapter Three I mentioned some of the slogans that were visible in the classrooms, such as, “The Sky is the Limit.” This may be related to way in which the school tried to tell the students that they can accomplish anything they want at the same time as they controlled their destiny. Were the students to fail, the fact could be explained in terms of race, ethnicity or personal reasons, seldom in terms of class, according to Ortner’s (1998) views.

In Chapter Two I described Washington Heights as a Dominican community, in which NMEC was a part of. Washington Heights do appear to be a community for outsiders, since there were many working-class Latinos and Dominicans living there. But many people, who live there, said they felt insecure. The word community is according to Baumann (1996: 15f) attractive since it appears to value people that

belong to a community. When it comes to ethnic minorities, Baumann writes that a danger is that it can give the impression that they share a reified culture. This can lead to a simplified equation where culture=community=ethnic identity=culture, in addition to that it can have consequences for people who live in troubled neighbourhoods. Throughout the thesis I have tried to argue against such an equation when it comes to Dominicans in Washington Heights. For example, the identities of three girls I compared in Chapter Six differed from each other, even though they were more or less the same age and in the same school. Furthermore, Julia Alvarez as a role model had not succeeded, perhaps because her class background was different from that of many in Washington Heights. The classes to which they belong to may change, in sense of both economic and cultural capital. There are many people there who attend college, and aspire to middle-class lifestyle.

Since I finished the fieldwork in February 2001, there have been major terrorist attacks, accidents and wars in the US and other places that may have affected the identities of the students. The September 11th terrorist attack found place in NYC. Few weeks later, an airplane who headed to the DR from the JFK airport went down shortly after take-off. All of the crew and passengers onboard died. After September 11th the US went to war against Afghanistan and later Iraq. Many Dominicans have fought for the US troops in these wars, and several have died in combat.

On my return visits to NYC, more American flags have been visible in public spaces, such as on subway wagons and large flags hanging in the Grand Central station and on Wall Street. For the high school students, their identities may have been altered by this patriotism. Maybe an American identity is more accessible now; by supporting the US troops and the values inherit in the American flag one can be American. As I discussed in Chapter Five this does not have to imply that Dominicans, for example, have to give up on their Dominican identity.

Which paths the students of ICHS choose when it comes to future identities is an open-ended question. Rumbaut (1996: 123f) suggested three future paths for children of immigrants that are closely associated with different identities. The first one is similar to those of the immigrants of the first peak period; namely to become a part

of white middle-class through “straight-line assimilation.” The second path is downward mobility as one becomes a member of inner-city under-class, while the last one is upward mobility through ethnic awareness in ethnic solidary communities. On a similar note, Gans (1992: 177) suggests a range of positive scenarios. One scenario leading to success applies to “especially talented young people from non-middle class homes, who will do so well in high school that they will be able to go to better-quality colleges, on scholarship or otherwise.” Another positive scenario is improving working sectors, like small industrial businesses and the service sector. Parents who own businesses can hand them down to their children. On the negative side he says that children of post-1965 immigrants may be negatively stereotyped and might not get a job in the mainstream economy (ibid: 173). At the same time, they might not be willing to do the same jobs as their parents and face their economic hardships, so they may enter the drug industry. Gans (ibid: 183) expects rising expectations and frustrations among people that may not see a dream of a middle-class lifestyle come true.

In this thesis I have pointed to some of these paths, especially to scenarios that regard upward mobility either to white middle-class or within the ethnic community, as the organizations and businesses in Dominican community of Washington Heights could support them. Another option is to attend college, and perhaps obtain a middle-class lifestyle, like some of the Dominican teachers in school. When it comes to the inner-city underclass, there may be students who do not get to obtain a better economy than their parents. There were many youngsters in Washington Heights who had dropped out of school, and stayed at home or in the street all day. This category consists of both girls and boys, but girls who had children may be in a more vulnerable situation as they depend more on support from family and friends to continue their schooling.

For a future study, it would be interesting to look at the paths students in ICHS and dropouts have taken. This may also include a focus on the changing situation in the world since September 2001. In Chapter Two I described gangs, and it would have been relevant to make a study of them in Washington Heights, to explore whether they are basically drug-oriented or have a social agenda. There were many students

who went to school in DR either as punishment or voluntarily, and an investigation of these students at a school in the DR where issues of identity and belonging is highlighted is another idea for future studies. Furthermore, research on the parent's attitudes to their children's language preferences and ethnicity may reveal that the parents' views on these issues may differ as much as they do among high school students.

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Appendix A

Original Spanish Version of the Informants' Quotes

1. No, soy dominicana.
2. Esto es para nosotros.
3. Se ve mal.
4. Nos estan sacando de aqui.
5. Si tu lleva gente de aqui de Washington Heights pa´ otro sitio, se le va a dar un ataque de corazon. Por ejemplo a Philadelphia, es bien tranquila, si se tira una piedra en la calle suena mucho. Se aburre, los dominicanos son asi.
6. Mis hijos no estan en las esquinas
7. Mi hijo le gusta estar con los tigueres en la esquina, aqui hay muchos tigueres.
8. A veces me quedo con la boca abierta asi.
9. Borrachón.
10. Ella tiene que ir donde el.
11. Música Americana.
12. Escriba un ensayo sobre una persona que Ud. admira (un amigo o Familiar) o de un evento especial.
13.

El dia de Mi Cumpleaño que Fue el otro Años Fue muy Felix para mi. Mi Sueño era ir A la iglesia para que el padre me dira la vendición para ese día tan especial.

Mi madre me realiso ese sueño hablo con el padre de la iglesia y me hicieron una misa muy especial para mi. Yo me senti muy entusiasmada y contenta cuando llego el dia que yo mas esperaba. Yo me senti en la nube estaba estaba toda la familia y lo seres mas querido.

Mi fiesta se dio bien engrande. Porque duro asta la 6:00A.m. de la mañana cuando yo ya no podia más con mi cuerpo de tan cansada y tomada porque me dejaron vever pero no mucho. La fiesta no la hicieron en un club porque yo no quice. En el club es qye dura asta la hora que huno ponga o ellos digan pero yo no queria. La hicieron en mi casa y el otro apartamento al lado porque quedan bien pegado y cómo el pasillo del building era grande no habia ningun problema. Tampoco habia problema con el dueño del building porque el esposo de la prima mia es dueño del edificios.

Todos me encanto de la fiesta porque se dio como yo queria y como yo lo habia realosado. Me gusteria volver A tener otra igual, pero lo dudo mucho porque cómo se dio esa Fietta no se ba a dar ninguna por Ahora.
14. El tiene que dar mas gritos.
15. -
16. -
17. Escriba un ensayo basado en un conflicto que has tenido en casa explique como se resolvio.
18. El otro dia yo tenia un conflicto en mi casa porque yo Fui Para la calle y Mami estaba sospechando de que yo me iba A ber Alguien pues Mami tenia la Razón

yo iba Para la calle A ver un Amigo Mio que me estaba esperando. Mi Amigo vive en el Mismo Bulding enconse el No Me espero donde yo habia quedado. Yo me entre para la cosa de el pero el estaba solo, solemente estaba su hermanito que tiene 6 Años. yo entre y Me sente y estabos hablando. El me de un CD que yo le habia enpretado. Cuando mi madre toca el Amigo Mio No encontraba que hacer Biene tu mama y te ba a caer A palo. Mi Amigo Abre la puerta Y Mami Me Mira Buena, estúpida no te quiero ber en mi casa esta que tu padre llege y Asi Fue. Me dejo A Fuera como Media hora Aste que mi papa Llegara.

Mi Mamá Me dio Muchos golpe. Mi papa dijo Ya dejela tranquila.

Yo le explique que yo Andaba Buscando un CD A su casa y le enseñe el CD.

Mi Mama duro cinco días sín hablarMe porque la tube que dejar quese carne. y Me perdono y queno lo boy Biera hacer.

19. -

20.

Mira, hay muchas mujeres que no trabajan, que pasa el dia alli de vago, que no hacen nada, y ni cuando llega el marido ha preparado la comida...pasan el dia asi quejandose...yo pienso que deben hacer una ley para devolver a ellos que no quieren trabajar, y mandar a ellos que quieren trabajar por aca..porque esto es un pais para superarse, para trabajar..yo siempre he trabajado, alla yo puedo tener un buen trabajo, pero lo que yo quiero es estar aqui, por eso es que yo trabajo, si yo tengo un dia libre me levanto temprano a trabajar en la casa.Como yo siempre he trabajado, mi hija me dice que elle quiere ser como yo.Yo antes estaba trabajando del dia, y en la noche estudiaba..pero yo vine aqui para sacrificarme..yo estaba casada, mi marido me trajo aca, pero no todo sale asi bien, por eso me divercio de el, pero yo seguia trabajando.

21. ?Porque venimos?

22. Yo no se, mi mama vino, y yo con ella.

23. Di que.

24. Campesino

25. Nada.

26. Imaginete, si fuera uno de nosotros.

27. Mi mama sabe que yo no soy asi que hago problemas en la escuela.

28. Ella dijo a la consejera que yo la miraba mucho.

29. ?Por qué me dices esto?

30.

El año pasado el vino con ropa sucia. Pero este año es puse a trabajar, y se viste bien ahora. Creo que sus padres son dominicanos.

31. Ay Dios!

32. Escriba un ensayo basado en un conflicto que has tenido en casa explique como se resolvio.

33. Es este corto ensayo voy a hablar de los conflictos que suceden en mi casa u de esto se va a basar el ensayo. El conflicto que yo tengo con mi familia es que yo no tengo derecho en mi propia casa. Yo digo esto porque yo no puedo hacer nada, como no ver television, no oir radio, ni mucho menos usar la computadora porque los demas lo pueden usar todo pero yo no puedo usar. Yo pienso que yo soy humana y tengo derecho hacer y ver le que quiera porque yo tambien soy duena de eso. No crees maestra todos los humanos

como usted no explico que tenemos derechos naturales pues yo tambien lo quiero tener como las otra persona lo tienen y porque yo no puedo tenerlo.

34. En 1999, mis padres habian decidido irse para Republica Dominicana, para terminar nuestro año escolar. Yo, muy confundida por la situación se lo comente a una profesora de español, Ms. Gomez. Ella por la capacidad de la larga vida que ha vivido y su gran intelecto, me aconsejo enfrente de toda clase que hablara con mis padres y le explicara que en Estados Unidos por sus grandes enseñanzas del inglés y por sus grandes ofertas que nos ofrece Estados Unidos, como; becas, nos ofrece grandes futuros y una Buena educación. Yo, guiada por sus grandes palabras, se lo comente a mis padres, pero antes de comentárselo ocurrió, esto: discutimos por varias horas. Yo, por mi gran obsesión, me negé a muchas reglas que imponía mi padre. Al verme atrapada entre 4 paredes, le comente sobre lo que indicó Ms. Gomez. No creí nunca, que esto fuera una Buena solución al problema. Pero verlo ahora, creo que resultó.(...)
35. A esos se dicen rompeespaldas.
36. Que habla de como era allá, de sus recuerdos de Puerto Rico, de sus pais... a mi me gusta los libros que hablan de la verdad, Julia Alvarez, y otra, Jamaica, kincen, ella escribe de Jamaica, no se si ella es de allá, pero escribe que es lo mismo todos los sitios, que en los dos sitios, Nueva York y Jamaica, tiene una amiga que sufre mucho.... los dos sitios son iguales.
37. Los maestros siempre tienen la casa así.
38. El coro, el relajo.
39. Que superarse.
40. Para ver que pasa, y ver que todo está bien, cuando lo saben, no vuelven
41. Tu eres la segunda madre.
42. -
43. Ellos no saben cual es la identidad dominicana. Yo les tenía que enseñar.
44. Quisqueya la bella.
45. Dominicanos! La gente de Santo Domingo! La gente de Santiago! La gente de la capital! Las señoritas! La buya dominicana!
46. Ahora, tiene que votar por Miguel Martinez, distrito 10, que va a representar Republica Dominicana, nuestro país aquí en Estados Unidos.
47. Nunca! El Washington Heights es de nosotros, y no nos pueden quitar nunca!
48. Hemos salvado a muchos jóvenes que estaban desorientados culturalmente.
49. La bandera.
50. La abuela, la habichuela..
51. No podía comprar comida dominicana.
52. !Que!
53. Es porque son unos campesinos.
54. Ritmos dominicanos.
55. No importa de que país venimos, aquí somos latinos.
56. Tenemos a Dios, el idioma, y la familia.
57. A mi no me importa, en mi casa hablamos español.

58. "Dile sí al español y no a la droga."

59.

El año pasado el primer comite de los padres, hicimos fundraiser, 100 y algo de dolares. Vote para la escuela, para que los profesores sean mejores, para que los hijos se van pa' adelante, solo juntos lo podemos hacer.

60.

Mi preocupacion no solo es mi niño, pero todos los estudiantes. Como la participacion de los padres es limitada, tenemos que tocar puertas. Es trabajar, punto. Somos padres, no hay presidente. Yo estoy dispuesta para sacrificar mi trabajo para participar. Gane o no gane, estoy aqui 100 perciento. Este es la edad mas critica de ellos.

61. Cuantos grupos etnicos hay en los Estados Unidos?

62. Chinos, judios.

63. Y entre Spanish podemos decir dominicanos, ecuatorianos.

64. "Haga ahora. Objetivo."

65.

?Existe problemas entre paises que tiene fronteras? Entre Republica Dominicana y Haiti, crea un conflicto?

66. Ay si, porque los haitianos quieren venir pa'ca.

67. Soy prieta aqui.

68. Y yo que pense que tenia pelo malo!

69. Andale!

70. Si ella me hubiera dado, yo hubiero dado a ella tambien.

71. La muchacha dijo que yo la estaba mirando.

72. Es hispano el que tiene la fiesta?

73. No, el habla espanol, pero es como un americanito.

74.

Un gran error que hace muchos hispanos aca es no enseñar el idioma a los niños. Los niños no van a aprender el espanol. Los hijos de mi hermana son asi, que no lo hablan y como lo pueden defender que sus hijos no pueden hablar con sus tios. Uno me dijo que ingles es el idioma de aqui.

75.

El ingles tambien es un idioma de inmigrantes..porque primero llegaron los holandeses. El idioma de aqui es el idioma de los indios.

76. Lo que a mi no me gusto fue cuando uno me dijo Fuckin' Hispanic. Yo le dije a el, tu eres de aqui, un Americano, yo tambien soy eso, pero tu eres mezclado de muchas sangres de Italia, yo por lo menos lo tengo claro de adonde soy. Que yo soy latina.

77.

Ademas, en el inglés no se puede expresar los sentimientos como en el español.

78. Te amo, mi amor, que es esto comparado con: I love you, sweetheart.

Appendix B

Maps of Hamilton Heights, Washington Heights and Inwood

Map 21 • Manhattanville/Hamilton Heights



Map 23 • Washington Heights



Not For Tourists™

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Arlanta • Boston • Chicago • Los Angeles • New York City • Philadelphia • San Francisco • Washington DC

Map 25 • Inwood

