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# SELECTIVE ASSIMILATION
# AND
# PERSISTENCE OF ETHNICITY

The Case of Hispanics in the U.S.

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CATANIA 2010

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**INTRODUCTION**

The increase of migratory flows as a result of the globalization process has brought about the emergence of cultural diversity in the contemporary societies that have been straining in the attempt to conciliate the cultural diversity with the social cohesion. The main instrument nations used in the past to face the diversity was the assimilation, most of the times forced, of the minorities into the national mainstream, making overlap in that way the cultural and political boundaries and creating a high degree of consensus. Today, besides the ethnocentric forces, which still exert a certain influence, the demand of acknowledgement of the ethnic minorities' rights has emerged; the denial of diversity is considered unacceptable and dangerous because it exacerbates the conflicts and its acknowledgement, not only in the private sphere but also in the institutional sphere, has

become an urgency. Intermediate solutions have been searching to avoid the extreme consequences that lie ahead of the two approaches: the denial of diversity in the case of a strong assimilation policy, and the risk of separation and non-communication among ethnic groups in the case of a strong multiculturalism. However, it is important to distinguish the policies with the integration processes occurring in the daily life; these latter, in fact, often are unintentional and can take different directions from the institutional directives.

Going beyond the political and institutional aspect, the present research starts positing a question: what happens when people from different ethnic backgrounds meet? Specifically, the main interest here is the condition of migrants, people who for several reasons leave their home country to settle in a new social and cultural environment. Therefore, interethnic relationships in this case are not exactly symmetric, rather connoted, especially at the beginning, by conditions of subordination, as relationships between ethnic minorities and dominant culture. Furthermore, a particular attention is focused on the ethnicity and its function in the integration process of immigrants. The ethnicity, in fact, was, and continues to be considered, a negative element that confines people to a condition of marginalization; nevertheless, according to new studies it might reveal a functional instrument of social integration.

Choosing the United States as context and the Hispanic group as sample this work has the following objectives: a) to provide a deeper understanding of the integration processes of the immigrants into the host society through the review of the theories that have been developed over time; b) to describe the current trends that interest Hispanic immigration to the U.S., being the Hispanics the largest minority group; c) to demonstrate that ethnicity is a substantial reality, not a symbolic dimension, effecting interethnic relationships in the United States and that it exerts a positive role in the integration process of minorities.

In the first chapter, the assimilation theories developed since the first waves of immigration in the United States will be presented and compared. It will be showed as the classical assimilation theories, based on ethnocentric assumptions, have been overcome by new assimilation theories that interpret the assimilation as a multidimensional process whose effects change depending on the ethnic groups and the circumstances under consideration. The second chapter focuses on the immigrant settlement patterns and its effects on the integration process of the newcomers. Using U.S. Census data, the movements and the main trends among the Hispanic group are described in order to draw some conclusions about their modes of incorporation in the host society. The economic aspect of the Hispanic integration is instead investigated in the third chapter through the analysis of the ethnic entrepreneurship, phenomenon which has been increasing

lately with relevant consequences not only for the economic incorporation of the immigrants, but more in general for their broader social integration. Finally, in the fourth chapter the receiving context of immigrants is described and assessed by utilizing new data coming from a national survey conducted recently on the social climate on Hispanic immigration in the United States.

# CHAPTER 1

# ASSIMILATION THEORY OVER TIME AND DIFFERENT WAVES OF IMMIGRATION

Since the early waves of immigration from Europe to the USA, scholars have been speculating on what happens when people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds meet. Do the minority groups assimilate totally to the mainstream? Do the different cultures melt creating a new cultural unit? Or, do the different cultural groups keep to themselves? These three possible outcomes embody three different philosophies that have been taken on to understand and explain this phenomenon.

**1.1 Interethnic relationships: three perspectives**

In the social and political context of colonialism, the conceptual pattern used by Social Sciences, Anthropology particularly, in order to analyze the relationship between western industrialized societies and 'other cultures' was the *ethnocentrism*. The ethnocentric perspective is based on the assumption that one culture is better than another; as a consequence, the only way to create a social cohesion is the denial by the minority group of its cultural peculiarity to completely incorporate into the majority group. By the second half of the twentieth century, the process of globalization, involving the world-widening of the capitalistic economy, the development of information and communication technologies, and the growth of migration flows, has lead to an acceleration of the social changes in the contemporary western societies. The basic idea of ethnocentrism to deny cultural differences through a process of cultural standardization seemed not to be proper anymore because the "others" do not live in far away worlds, but in the countries of immigration participating in everyday social life. Hence, two new perspectives of *melting pot* and *cultural pluralism* have emerged. The melting pot denies the superiority of one culture over another; according to this model, when two cultures come in contact both of them are affected and the result is their blend and the birth of a new cultural unit. The cultural pluralistic perspective claims that each culture

has its own value which has to be recognized. While it shares the same premises with the melting pot perspective relative to the denial of the superiority of a culture over another, the outcome of the intergroup relationship changes. According to this approach, different ethnic groups tend to keep to themselves, to retain their cultural characteristics, while sharing common areas within the society.

The three perspectives exposed are encompassed in that line of studies, labeled 'assimilation theories', that have been developed in the United States to explain the intergroup relationships and in particular the process whereby immigrants have integrated into the American society. Although the term assimilation was associated at the beginning with an ethnocentric perspective, the researchers over time have been used this term for describing very different situations falling even the other two perspectives of melting pot and cultural pluralism. It has to be pointed out for instance that the term «assimilation in American sociology (as in the 'segmented assimilation' proposed by Portes and Zhou 1993) […] is similar to what is meant by integration in Britain»[1]. Throughout the years and the different typologies of groups who have entered the USA, more complex and articulated definitions of this concept have been proposed. The long experience and research has shown that assimilation can take place at different levels and it can be divided in many sub-processes. Moreover,

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[1] Modood T., *Multiculturalism*, Polity Press: Cambridge, 2007, p. 47.

assimilation can have positive or negative effects depending on the ethnic group and the outcomes under consideration. Therefore, in the following discussion about the assimilation theories we will see how the concept of assimilation will change dependently on the different historical and political contexts, and how it is in line with the contemporary debates around the relationships among culturally different groups. The concept of assimilation rescued from its negative light, as a process of forced incorporation of minorities into the mainstream, has been reconsidered in recent years: it has been conceived as a spontaneous and unintentional process that does not threaten the ethnic diversity, rather helps its integration into a mainstream whose peculiarity is to be «a *composite culture* evolving out of the interpenetration of diverse cultural practices and beliefs»[2]; there has been «a shift from organic understandings of assimilation, focusing on an end state of complete absorption, to abstract understandings of assimilation, focusing on a process of becoming similar (in some respect, to some reference population)»[3].

In the interpretation of the assimilation process the level of the analysis taken on in this research is the ethnic group or community; therefore, the focus is not on the individual characteristics of the migrants

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[2] Alba R., Nee V., *Remaking* the *American Mainstream. Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003, p. 10.

[3] Brubaker R., "The Return of Assimilation? Changing perspectives on immigration and its sequels in France, Germany, and the United States", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 24, n. 4, July 2001, pp.531-548, p. 542.

and their human capital, but on the social structures in which people shape their personal and cultural identity and the social capital created within them. From this perspective, the ethnic network besides being considered negative for it creates processes of ghettoization and closure toward the host society, it is also valued as a better means of achieving integration.

## 1.2 The ethnic group

Giving a definition of ethnic group is complicated because it introduces the complex and debated category of what is *ethnic*; issue that anthropological and sociological studies continue to debate in the attempt to provide an adequate definition.

First of all, just to make a primary distinction, it seems interesting the contribution of A. Kłoskowska who distinguishes between two kinds of ethnic groups: the *primitive* or *traditional ethnic groups*; and the *partial ethnic groups*[4]. The two typologies are located at the extremes of a *continuum* within other intermediate forms of collectivities can take place. The primitive or traditional ethnic group is a small community tied to its territory, which has both a practical and a symbolic significance for its members, and characterized by direct and habitual relationships. The

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[4] Kłoskowska A., *Alle radici delle culture nazionali*, Edizioni Diabasis: Reggio Emilia, 2007.

culture in the primitive ethnic group is popular, folkloristic, and uniform for the entire community, and subject to very small changes. Its members make up a very compact community due to their common history, close relationships and, as a consequence, very similar behaviors. On the other side, the partial ethnic group is not connected to a specific territory, although the immigrants in the USA for instance tend to concentrate in some areas, and it is characterized by its contrast to a dominant culture. The culture within these groups is not uniform, since its members do not have face to face relationships that reinforce their ethnic belonging, and their contacts with the dominant culture often can question the basic values of the traditional ethnic group.

The primitive ethnic groups correspond clearly with the definitions given by the anthropologists who used this concept referring to the tribal populations described as very close groups with specific and homogeneous biological and cultural elements. Naroll defines ethnic group as a population which: a) is largely biologically self-perpetuating; b) shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms; c) makes up a field of communication and interaction; d) has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order[5]. It is evident the emphasis placed on objective factors, and moreover the idea of the

[5] Naroll R., "On Ethnic Unit Classification", *Current Anthropology*, 5, 4, 1964, pp. 283-312.

correspondence between culture and ethnic units, the assumption that each ethnic group has a separate culture maintained through geographical and social isolation. Naroll refers to a classic conception of culture conceived as a close, adherent system of elements and beliefs that gives significance to people's life, determines their behaviors, and is transmitted from one generation to the following one. People belong only to one culture and own only one cultural identity.

The partial ethnic groups, instead, are object of the current sociological studies that analyze their relationship with the dominant culture. Clearly, the naturalistic and essentialist vision of culture described above does not fit properly with these typologies of groups. According to new approaches, the culture, instead of being considered a natural fact that determines individuals' thoughts and behaviors, is conceived as a continuous process of social construction involving actively individuals. Culture continuously changes and transforms itself due to the contacts among people and groups. This aspect was underlined by Barth who, going beyond the Naroll's view, argues that a common culture is not something that *a priori* defines or characterizes the group; rather it is the result of a process of social interaction, and ethnic distinctions do not depend upon an

absence of social interaction, but that social and cultural systems persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence[6].

Besides being culturally rooted, the ethnic group has another central component that characterizes it: the subjective dimension. According to Barth self-ascription and ascription by others is even the main feature of the ethnic group. Before Barth, Weber had emphasized this aspect, stating that ethnic group is one whose members «entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration»[7]; «it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists»[8], Weber adds. The subjective dimension is expressed in the development of group solidarity that implies not only the recognition of some distinction between people inside and outside the group, but also a consciousness of something that is shared by members and requires their mutual cooperation.

Taking under consideration the mentioned contributions, in this research the ethnic group is considered: 1) a community, a group of individuals who share a common culture, conceived as a product of continuous interactions among people and groups and as such not static; 2) a group that believes in a common descent, which creates sense of belonging and social solidarity among its members; 3) a group

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[6] Barth F., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Differences*, Universitets Forlaget: Bergen-Oslo, 1969.
[7] Weber M., *Economy and Society*, Bedminster Press: New York, [1922] 1968, p. 389.
[8] *Ibidem.*

characterized by a specific condition, that is its contrast with a dominant culture.

Given a definition of ethnic group, what is even more important is to comprehend the significance and the role of ethnicity in the contemporary society. The most common view of ethnicity, found in the assimilationist approaches, has a negative connotation. Ethnicity is strongest among socially disadvantaged groups and indicates a condition of cultural, economic, and political subordination[9]. Another function attributed to ethnicity regards its relation with politics. Especially in USA, ethnic groups have become interest groups, as they represent and reflect the interests of many similarly situated individuals, and ethnicity is inscribed in a strategy of power and access to those resources the government distributes within the preferential policies for minorities. Furthermore, it has been used the expression "symbolic ethnicity"[10] that «is concerned with the symbols of ethnic cultures rather than with the cultures themselves, symbolic ethnicity makes few and intermittent demands on everyday life and tends to be expressed in the private domain of leisure-time activities»[11]. Finally, according to another stream, ethnicity plays a crucial role in the

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[9] Gans H., *The urban villagers: Group and class in the life of Italian-Americans*, Free Press: New York, 1982.

[10] Gans H., "Symbolic ethnicity: the future of ethnic groups and cultures in America", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2 (January), 1979, pp. 1-20.

[11] Alba R., *Ethnic Identity. The Transformation of White America*, Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1990, p. 306.

incorporation process of people into the host society[12]. Ethnic groups provide social capital for its members supporting them in their access to resources, in their participation in wider social networks and in their construction of identities. The ethnic belonging is perceived as an important value to save and to be recognized, it becomes one of distinctive and basic traits of the personal biography. To perceive themselves as fully integrated to a social context today it is believed necessary not to be treated equally like any other, but to have recognized his/her own specificity, which is also identified with the belonging to a particular group that is supposed to share a common descent and history. The ethnic difference, rather than a constraint to be overcome for a full social and economic inclusion, is seen as a resource. The organizational forms of the ethnic groups, as associations or residential concentrations, cannot be still considered as expressions of folklore or as a sign of a deficit of integration, but they acquire their legitimacy and functionality in a more and more culturally diverse society[13].

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[12] Portes A., "Children of Immigrants: Segmented Assimilation and its Determinants", in Portes A. (eds), *The Economic Sociology of Immigration*, New York, Russel Sage Foundation, 1995, pp. 248-279.

[13] Zanfrini L., *Sociologia delle migrazioni*, Editori Laterza: Bari, 2007.

## 1.3 Classical assimilation theory: a one-way process

The American context has played a decisive role in shaping relationships over time; moreover, different ethnic groups have experienced different processes of adaptation depending on their own characteristics. The issue at the beginning was focused on the newcomers and their modes and strategies of adaptation to the new context. In the traditional literature, in fact, the assimilation process is seen as a one-way process by which the minority groups become more and more similar to the dominant group. Until the 1880 immigration from western and northern Europe was predominant, attended by the so-called "great wave" of immigration from eastern and southern Europe that took place until 1920, when restrictive laws on immigration were enforced. While the meeting between northern and western Europeans and Americans did not create any concern, due to their similarity in language, religion, and culture, the second wave from eastern and southern Europe was seen as a threat to the American way of life. These new groups were considered "inferior because they were "foreign", awkward, and ill-adapted to the social environment"[14]. The assumption of their racial inferiority was the base for a strong movement of Americanization that took place in the USA with the aim to make the newcomers as similar as possible to the Americans, along Anglo-Saxon

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[14] Cole S. G., Cole M. W., *Minorities and the American Promise. The Conflict of Principle and Practice*, Harper and Brothers: New York, 1954.

lines. The movement was expression of the Anglo-conformity ideology based on the main idea that assimilation of immigrants to the American way of life was an unavoidable outcome. Over time and after generations the minority groups would have lost their cultural traits, taken on the dominant group's language, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and incorporated into the social, political and economic American institutions.

How was this process explained by sociologists? Since at the time Chicago registered a massive migration that rose its population to more than 2 million people, it was a good place where to observe the experience of immigrants. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by W. I. Thomas, and F. Znaniecki represents a classic work in immigration history and at that time became a model for the Chicago School research. It does not simply describe the characteristics of the polish community in Poland and America after their emigration, but provides a pattern of assimilative process that can be generalized and applied to any immigrant group. Their original life stories method, based on collecting letters, documents, interviews, allowed them to identify a common line of life development for those who emigrated to the United States between 1880 and 1920 looking for better life conditions. The ties with the old country tend to weaken over the time as well as the old values and attitudes to be substituted for the American ones. The final result is the establishment of a new community that incorporates and adapts the old cultural background into the new social

and economic structure[15]. In fact, their arguments will be formalized later by sociologists such as Robert E. Park, E. Burgess into what is known as the "ethnic cycle" of adaptation and absorption. The belief in cultural assimilation as the last step of an "apparently progressive and irreversible"[16] cycle dominated their studies. The term assimilation in its early definition has been thought as a uniform and unilateral process in which immigrants over time become more and more similar to the host community and "can participate, without encountering prejudice, in the common life, economic and political"[17]. Park provided one of the earliest explanations of the assimilation process by using his *race relation cycle* model. According to his theory, the development of racial relations tends to follow the same pattern that comprises four steps: contact/competition, conflict, accommodation and assimilation. After the initial contact, groups experience competition as they want to gain advantages over one another; then, accommodation takes over and more stable but unequal relationships are maintained. Assimilation is the eventual and irreversible step that groups achieve when they resolve their conflicts and restructure relations of power and status; ethnic differences eventually tend to disappear.

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[15] Thomas W. I., Znaniecki F., *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Eli Zaretsky (eds.), University of Illinois Press: Urbana and Chicago, 1996.

[16] Park R. E., *Race and Culture*, The Free Press: Glencoe, Ill., 1950, p. 150.

[17] Park R. E., "Assimilation, Social" in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Edwin R. A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson, (eds.), The Macmillan Co.: New York, 1930, vol. 2., p. 281.

The idea of an unavoidable and irreversible assimilation process involving the newcomers, posited by the Chicago School, was reinforced through a study carried out by Warner and Srole. The two authors describe assimilation as an essential part of the movement of immigrant groups into the American middle class. Specifically, it consists in an unlearning of immigrants' cultural traits, considered as "inferior" by the host country, and the consequent learning of "the new way of life necessary for full acceptance"[18]. The ethnocentric perspective still emerges in Warner and Srole's theory that sees immigrants as people who will not be successful in the new society if they do not give up their "inferior" cultural characteristics. On the other side, a new element comes out from their work: each new generation achieves a higher step in the ideal scale of the assimilation process. Furthermore, the process is more or less fast depending on other factors as the skin color, the language, and the religion: the more ethnically and culturally similar to the dominant culture immigrants are the faster is their process of inclusion into the mainstream. In this way for instance they could justify the not yet achieved integration of black people whose assimilation process would have required more time.

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[18] Lloyd W., Srole L., *The Social System of American Ethnic Groups*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 1945, p. 285.

Another notion that stems from Warner and Srole's idea is the one proposed by Herbert Gans[19] called the straight line assimilation which sees immigrants becoming more Americans over the generations or depending on the length of residence in the host country. As immigrants assimilate into the American middle class they overcome their cultural disadvantages, otherwise they are fated to converge into the underclass.

### 1.4 Assimilation as a two-way process

Next to the conception that the movement of the assimilation process goes to a one-way direction that sees minority groups giving up their cultural values and taking on the majority's ones, another perspective has competed with it from the eighteenth century onward: the idea that assimilation is a two way process whereby both the minority and majority groups as a consequence of their interaction are modified, and the result is the birth of a new group which is culturally and biologically different from its originary roots. It will prove to be just an ideal interpretation of the intergroup contacts in the United States, better known as the melting pot model.

It first appeared in the 1908 as title of an Israel Zangwill's drama which was very successful at that time. The melting pot idea is represented

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[19] Gans H. J., *More Equality*, Pantheon Books: New York, 1973.

in the Zangwill's drama as an ideal model of inter-ethnic relationship that sees peoples from different cultural and racial backgrounds blending together into a new unit.

> America is God's crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming!. Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won't be long like that, brothers, for this are the fires of God you've come to –this are the fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians – into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American.[20]

In his ideal model Zangwill does not make any difference between races as the ethnocentric view does; he sees all races, even black and yellow ones that many considered inassimilable, gather together, give equal contribution in the creation of «the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God»[21].

A similar description of the melting pot model, even if the same term was not used, was given about a century before by the writer St. Jean Crèvecoeur who was himself an immigrant from France to New France in North America. In his volume of narrative essays entitled *Letters from an American Farmer* he describes the life on the American frontier and explores the idea of a blending created from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

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[20] Zangwill I., *The Melting Pot*, The Macmillan Co.: New York, 1909, p. 37.
[21] *Ivi*, p.199.

What then is the American, this new man? He is either an European, or the descendant of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. *He* is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great *Alma Mater*. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world[22].

Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that at that time the most immigrants came from Northern and Western Europe; they were culturally and physically similar from each other and they fit perfectly with what later will be defined by Alexis de Tocqueville as the U.S. identity, that is constituted by a white Anglo-Saxon inheritance[23], the conception propagated in the Americanization movement.

Therefore, beyond these idyllic visions, the concept of melting pot has always been characterized by ambiguity. One of the reasons for this ambiguity is the lack of empirical studies and, as a consequence, the absence of a systematic delineation of the idea. It has even stated that the melting pot actually has never existed[24]. The same concept of melting pot, although it was conceived as a perfect blending of all ethnic groups, in its practical application meant clearly to Americanize immigrants. According to Desmond King, the fact that « the melting pot was neither an open nor an

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[22] De Crèvecoveur M. G. J., *Letters from a Farmer*, Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1986/1782, pp. 69-70.
[23] De Tocqueville A., *Democracy in America,* vol. 1, Vintage: New York, 1945.
[24] Bourne R., "Trans-national America", *The Atlantic Monthly*, 118, 1, 1916, pp. 86-97.

inclusive process was first formally demonstrated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of the 1882. By the end of the 1920s, the melting pot norm was tarnished. The discriminatory system enacted in that decade, which was formalized in the national origins regulations, was designed to limit immigration to certain groups already assimilated into American identity. Immigrants were to be selected on the grounds of their cultural, racial, and eugenic compatibility with the dominant conception of the U.S. political culture and its people, an Anglo-Saxon conception. More fundamentally, the melting pot historically and institutionally had no room for African-Americans»[25].

As the term melting pot is still today employed in debates about immigration and U.S. policy, it is important in order to better comprehend the phenomenon to be aware of its vagueness and imprecision, and in particular of its common use as synonymous of 'assimilation'.

## 1.5 Assimilation as a multidimensional process

The metaphor of melting pot within different ingredients melt together giving birth to a unique flavor has gradually turned into another metaphor, the salad bowl within each ingredient saves its own peculiar

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[25] King D., *Making Americans. Immigration, Race, and the Origins of the Diverse Democracy*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2000, p. 16.

flavor and color. The new model seems more appropriate for describing the contemporary society where the main issue is the coexistence of different cultural collectivities. The new immigrants instead of rapidly assimilating to the dominant culture want to maintain their ethnic heritage and participate within a society that more and more is becoming multiethnic and multicultural.

### *Gordon's model*

By the middle of the twentieth century, the concept of assimilation begins to lose its distinctive elements that had related it with the ethnocentric perspective. The first significant contribute came from Milton Gordon who elaborated a multidimensional concept of assimilation[26]. He felt the need to clarify the concept of assimilation that had been employed to describe very different situations creating a large amount of confusion and ambiguities. Exploring the previous definitions of the term assimilation he noticed how the scholars emphasized one or another factor depending on their interpretation of the process; hence, he selected some of these variables and did a rigorous analysis of the assimilation process using these variables and suggesting their characteristic relationships. Specifically, Gordon broke the assimilation process into seven subprocesses: *acculturation*, or behavioral assimilation, it consists basically of a learning

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[26] Gordon M., *Assimilation in American Life. The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*, Oxford University Press: New York, 1964.

of the English language and American behavior patterns; *structural assimilation*, or access to societal institutions, it means inclusion into the groups and institutions of the core society as a member of them; *amalgamation*, or marital assimilation, it occurs when people from different cultural groups marry; *identificational assimilation*, that is the development of a sense of belonging to the host society's core group; attitude receptional assimilation, or the absence of prejudice; behavior receptional assimilation, or the absence of discrimination; and civic assimilation, or the absence of value and power conflicts. Furthermore, he hypothesized two ideal situations that represent the outcome of the assimilation process: the total and complete assimilation of the minority group into the host society through the acceptance of the core group culture, the participation to the institutions and primary groups, and the absence of conflicts that threaten the social unity; and the mixture of the two groups or a melting pot, that creates a full integration and social cohesion between the two groups as well. Putting in relation the assimilation variables with these two ideal situations, which are used methodologically to measure what is the actual reality, and applying this model to the study of four selected groups in the United States (Negroes, Jews, Catholics, and Puerto Ricans), Gordon noticed: a) cultural assimilation is the first step that more or less each group achieves; it can be successfully achieved but it does not imply neither the access to the primary groups of the core society nor the removal of

prejudices and discriminations; and finally it may be the only stage of assimilation that occurs; b) structural assimilation is highly related with the marital assimilation, and once it occurs the following types of assimilation will occur as well. Besides the total assimilation to the core culture and the melting pot models, another analytical model that Gordon took under consideration in his analysis was the cultural pluralism: he thought one interesting issue could have been for instance putting in relation the variables of attitude or behavior receptional with the acculturation and see whether the removal of prejudices and discriminations may occur at the level of cultural assimilation even if the structural assimilation has not occurred yet. Eventually, Gordon concludes his analysis stating that with regard to the intergroup relations the dominant sociological condition in the United States is a structural pluralism: ethnic groups are like subsocieties within which intimate primary group relationships among their members occur, while contacts between ethnic groups take place in the area of secondary group relationships. He also argues that «structural and cultural pluralism in moderate degree are not incompatible with American democratic ideals»[27], so it should be legitimated and made relevant in the public consciousness. It means that structural pluralism is desirable insofar it does not create separateness among groups, rather is supported by institutional actions that promote intergroup contacts at the level of

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[27] *Ivi*, p. 239.

secondary group relations. With regard to the decreasing of prejudices and discriminations, it depends on the level of separateness among these structural unities: if it is excessive attitudes of prejudice and behaviors of discriminations tend to rise; on the other hand, if a moderate level of exchanges and contacts among groups is maintained a social and civic cohesion can be achieved.

While, as R. Alba and V. Nee's critique[28] underscores, Gordon is still tied to the old assimilation theories with regard to two elements, the idea of the straight-line assimilation, which envisions a more complete assimilation over generations, and the idea of acculturation as a unidirectional acceptance of the wasp model, his analysis of the assimilation as a multidimensional process approaches the philosophy of cultural pluralism, although he makes a distinction between the structural and the cultural pluralism: cultural pluralism implies the structural pluralism, but not vice versa.

*Alba and Nee's perspective*

In the age of multicultural democracy the idea of assimilation as a linear and unilateral process of adaptation of the immigrants to the American society appears outdated and even offensive, for it disregards the value and the contribution of each culture. Despite its negative connotation,

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[28] Alba R., Nee V., *Remaking* the *American Mainstream. Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003.

Alba and Nee in the book *"Rethinking the American Mainstream"* choose to employ this term to explain the current experience of immigrants in the USA. They believe that the assimilation process continues to shape the immigrants experience, but in a different direction: the end point is not the wasp model, conceived as the core culture of American society, but the multicultural model, which is a peculiar condition of the contemporary societies. As a matter of fact, the demographic figures in the United States, especially after the Immigration Act of the 1965, which abolished the national origins quota, show a more and more multiethnic and multicultural landscape; in some States, such as California, the number of Hispanics, for instance, has even overcome the number of Americans, a fact that cannot be underestimated anymore. In reconsidering the process of assimilation Alba and Nee take into account this shift in the composition of the American population and what basically changes in their interpretation of the assimilation process is the nature of the mainstream. While they maintain the old formulation of the assimilation, given by the Chicago School, as a process that takes place often independently of the involved individuals' will and that sees immigrants over time merging into the mainstream, it is just the nature of the mainstream that has changed. According to them, the American mainstream is not made up of the white Anglo-Saxon protestant middle class anymore, as many assumed in the past and others[29] continue to

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[29] See: Huntington S. P., *La Nuova America. Le Sfide della Società Multiculturale*, Garzanti:

assume today, rather it has to be seen as a *composite culture* that «refer*s* to the mixed, hybrid character of the ensemble of cultural practices and beliefs that has evolved in the United States since the colonial period[30]». Unlike the multiculturalist perspective that consider the ethnic groups as separate cultural units with a low level of interaction, according to this theory the ethnic boundaries tend to fade over time due to the interpenetration of values, beliefs, and behaviors coming from the contact among different cultural units. This contact produces changes not only in the minority groups but also in the mainstream that receiving new cultural elements accommodates its boundaries and becomes more and more multicultural. Assimilation, however, does not imply the disappearance of ethnicity but the attenuation of its relevance in the intergroup relationships; the ethnic group keeps on representing an important point of reference for its members but the interaction with the mainstream or with other minority groups makes individuals more and more similar insofar as the change occurs in both sides and the individuals do not feel a rupture with their own cultural models.

Assimilation, nevertheless, is not an inevitable outcome otherwise we could not explain the ongoing ethnic conflicts around the world; it varies in time and extent depending on other mechanisms that interact with

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Milano, 2005.
[30] Alba R, Nee V., *Remaking the American Mainstream. Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2003, p. 10.

each other. First of all, forms of capital brought by migrants play an important role in the assimilation process: it is evident that while labor migrants, who lack of cultural and economic resources, tend to close within their ethnic group, where they find help and support, slowing down the assimilation into the mainstream, immigrant professionals, who own a high cultural and economic capital, have the means to ease their social mobility and are more open to mix with groups from different cultural backgrounds, as a consequence their process of assimilation will be faster. Furthermore, the institutional context has a certain influence in shaping segregating or blending processes: institutional structures can create processes of exclusion of some groups, as it happened at the time of Jim Crow Laws, as well as they can favor the access of groups previously excluded into the mainstream. Therefore, forms of capital brought by migrants combined with the institutional context determine the extent and the form of assimilation that remains for the authors a central process involving the new immigrants in their path of adaptation into the US society. In conclusion, while Alba and Nee employ again the term assimilation, they depart from the old negative marks that characterize it such as a unidirectional, inevitable and irreversible process of inclusion into the white Anglo-Saxon middle class and reinterpret it as a complex and multidimensional process involving both the minority group and the mainstream making the latter more and more multicultural. What is then the

future of the ethnic group if it is assumed that its boundaries are going to disappear over time? Back in 1990, in his study on the ethnic changes among white Americans, descendents from European immigrants, Alba R. strongly favors the presence of a symbolic or situationally specific ethnicity, reduced to a subjective significance and interest, and concludes stating that «there is good reason to believe that ethnic identities will continue among Americans of European ancestries, even as they become increasingly detached from ethnic structures of any sort, which are slowly succumbing to the powerful, incessant tide of assimilation[31]». The contemporary immigration, however, is very diverse and assimilation for some groups cannot be considered the prevalent process as it was for the descendents of European immigrants. For many migrants, especially the low-skilled worker, the reliance to an ethnic social structure may strengthen the ethnic belonging and confirm the pluralist mode of incorporation, as data about the persisting residential segregation show. Moreover, ethnic stratification is unlikely to disappear and pattern as the segmented assimilation, which envisions the assimilation of some segments into the underclass, can also be a future reality.

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[31] Alba R. D., *Ethnic Identity. The Transformation of White America*, Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1990, p. 318.

*Portes and Zhou theory*

The concept of segmented assimilation rises from a series of observation and analysis of the second generation immigrants, unlike the past research that focuses primarily on the first generation that is adults coming to the US looking for better living conditions. By the 1965, in fact, immigration does not involve just single individuals coming for temporary jobs but entire families and communities; as a consequence the issue of children immigrant adaptation has become central. Research on second generation has shown that the old assimilationist approach was not able to fully explain the complex process of immigrants' adaptation that has been taking on various forms and modes. Furthermore, the segmented assimilation theory diverts from the old theories of assimilation basically because it takes into account two main changes occurred in the contemporary immigration: the provenance of immigrants and the economical context of reception. The new immigrants are mostly from Asia and Latin America, unlike the old ones who came mainly from Europe, and they also bring along diverse socio-economic status, although the most are low-skilled worker. It suggests that depending on the starting socio-economic condition the path toward the incorporation to the new context will vary, and consequently a single model of assimilation is not longer appropriate to comprehend such a variety. In terms of context, the American economy during the period of the European immigration, 1880-

1920, was growing even because of the immigrants who were employed in the labor force. This condition promoted a faster acculturation process and a final and complete assimilation process throughout the generations. Moreover, Europeans were advantaged by the racial and ethnic similarity to the dominant population. Since 1965, the decrease of job opportunities and the more marked difference in racial and ethnic characteristics of the newcomers have influenced negatively their opportunity of integration and social progress.

In a study of today's second generations, Portes and Zhou show as the process of assimilation of new immigrants and their children has become segmented: «one of them replicates the time-honored portrayal of growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middle class; a second leads straight in the opposite direction to permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclass; still a third associate rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and tight solidarity[32]».

The classical path, already widely discussed, that foresees the merging of immigrants into the American middle class through economical success and social integration over the years, still occurs.

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[32] Portes A., Zhou M., "The new second generation: segmented assimilation and its variants", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 530, 1993, pp. 74–96, p.82.

However, another form of assimilation toward an opposite direction has been identified, the so-called downward assimilation. According to this theory, the changes in the context of contemporary US has affected a lot this kind of assimilation toward the underclass rather than the middle class. First of all, the impoverishment of the inner cities, where the most low-income immigrants converges, has influenced the creation of concentrated poor neighborhoods[33] that inevitably become the context in which people, especially young people, shape their expectations and their values creating a culture of opposition toward the mainstream American society by which they feel excluded. Even schools within these neighborhoods are characterized by poor and deprived environments and are source of negative attitudes toward educational achievement and consequently the academic failure. In addition to that, the racial factor still constitutes an influential determinant: in fact, the most immigrants coming from Latin America undergoes through racial discrimination because of their skin color. Oropesa and Landale[34], using the Census data, showed that the poverty rates among the second generation immigrants, despite had dropped down for all racial groups, decreased less for non-Latino African Americans and Latino Americans than for non-Latino European Americans

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[33] Massey D. S., Denton N. A., *American apartheid: segregation and the making of the underclass*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1993.

[34] Oropesa, R.S., N.S. Landale . "In Search of the New Second Generation: Strategies for Identifying Second-Generation Children and Understanding Their Acquisition of English." *Sociological Perspectives* 40, 3, 1997, pp. 429-455.

and Asian Americans. The situation appeared even worse among the third generations. According to the segmented assimilation theory, racial and class factors associated with the creation of residential isolation typical of the inner cities constitute the conditions that bring immigrants toward a downward assimilation mobility.

On the other side, some research has shown that, despite a low socio-economic status or a dark skin color, immigrant children succeed at school and do not encounter significant difficulties in their integration process. In this case, the ethnic factor has been indicated as the determinant explanation. Some ethnic groups, in fact, putting particular emphasis on the educational achievement and on the respect for the authority put pressure on children school success avoiding their assimilation into the underclass[35]. The ethnicity, then, has been counted as relevant as the socioeconomic status and the race; in particular, the social capital embedded in the immigrants' family and community has been demonstrated to play a positive role. If the ethnic community is characterized by a network of relationships well developed and tight integrated, it provides its members with both social control and social support, limiting the possibilities for them to take deviant paths and strengthening indeed positive attitudes and behaviors that promote their adaptation within the new context. As we can

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[35] Ogbu, J. U., Cultural boundaries and minority youth orientation toward work preparation, in D. Stern & D. Eichorn (eds.), *Adolescence and work: Influences of social structure,labor markets, and culture* (pp. 101-140), Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1989.

notice, this third path, contemplated by the segmented assimilation theory, revalues the importance and the real existence of the ethnic group reduced according to other perspectives to a subjective dimension or a symbolic element in the American immigrants' experience. The deliberate cultivation of ethnicity reinforces values and behaviors shared in the community, constitutes a firm basis for the individuals identity's formation, and provides strategies for a better economic and social adaptation in the US society.

## 1.6 The role of ethnicity in the assimilation process

Going back to the very first question of this chapter, that is 'what happens when people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds meet', and after a detailed review of all theories that have been developed about this topic over the years in the US, it will be tried to identify what is the theoretical pattern that today better answers to the question. First of all, it has to be kept clear that when we talk about meeting among different racial and ethnic groups we refer to the migration movement, conceived as a social process involving people and communities, that already belong to a culturally defined system, moving to places with new social systems and living, as a consequence, a condition of transition from one status to the next characterized by ambiguity and precariousness, defined also as liminal

stage[36]. Then, inevitably the relationship between the immigrant community and the host community is not symmetric: the immigrant community often, especially at the beginning of its settlement, experiences a condition of subordination that may keep permanent or may turn into a suitable condition of integration. For this reason, the focus is on the immigrant groups and the way they adapt to the new environment not leaving out, however, the host society since it shapes their adaptation process and it is shaped itself.

Second, we consider that processes of adaptation are not simply resulting from the macro-structural framework or the micro-individual choice. They are rather the result of complex and dynamic interaction between institutions, individuals and intermediate institutions. The latter, nevertheless, is the center of attention in the present work and it is identified as the ethnic network whose organizational form, as many studies have proven, plays a crucial role in the adaptation process of immigrants.

Reviewing the theoretical models discussed above, it seems that the segmented assimilation theory better answers to the posed question since it provides for more options depicting the complexity of the migration phenomenon.

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[36] Kaczyński G. J., *Processo Migratorio e Dinamiche Identitarie*, FrancoAngeli: Milano, 2008, pp. 138-162.

The classical assimilation theories are clearly unidirectional, seeing the immigrants as the ones who have to become similar to the host community giving up to all those cultural characteristics that differ from it, thereby avoiding conflicts and promoting their upward mobility toward the wasp American middle class. From this point of view, the ethnicity that distinguishes immigrants is supposed to disappear since it is conceived as an impediment in their way toward the assimilation.

The first tempt to elaborate a more complex and multidimensional theory of the assimilation process was made by Gordon. He shows a multi-level assimilation process model and takes under consideration a large range of variables participating to the process, but his analysis presents two main limits: the identification of the core American culture as the wasp; and the focus on the old immigrant groups, which differ considerably from the contemporary immigrants. However, the conclusion he draws is very interesting and might be applied to our times: Gordon argues that the dominant sociological condition in the United States is a structural pluralism (which does not mean cultural pluralism) recognizing the real existence (not symbolic) of ethnic groups forming sub-societies within a wider socio-economic system to which they participate through a net of secondary relationships.

Alba and Nee propose a multidimensional approach to the study of intergroup contacts as well; they are aware of the changing American

landscape and recognize that the core American culture is no longer the wasp culture but a *composite culture* resulting from the contacts among the various ethnic groups. Nevertheless, they conceive the assimilation to the core American culture as the main process foreseeing the disappearance of the ethnic structures and reducing the ethnicity to a mere symbolic value.

The segmented assimilation model, instead, tries to catch the complexity of the migration experience presenting all the possible paths immigrants may take and, overall, revaluing the importance of the ethnic groups seen as social structures that, on the one hand, keep the culture and the way of doing things of the old country alive and, on the other hand, facilitate the incorporation of new elements coming from the host country's culture, avoiding negative consequences. In particular, the selective acculturation path may be the prevalent one because it would be favored by the geographical concentration of the ethnic groups, favored by the constant influx of new immigrants, and the increase of ethnic entrepreneurship. These conditions will be described in the next chapters taking as sample the Hispanic ethnic group, which is the largest minority group in the United States today.

# CHAPTER 2

## SPATIAL ASSIMILATION AND NEW SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

The old notion of assimilation is often associated with another concept: the spatial assimilation. Spatial assimilation, rooted in the work of Park and Burgess and Wirth, within the studies of Urban Sociology, argues that immigrants tend to live in ethnic enclaves, conceived as places with high concentration of impoverished immigrants, due to economic, human and social capital constraints, but once they become more assimilated into the American society and improve their socioeconomic condition, things that are strictly related with their length of residence in the United States, they tend to move to better neighborhoods that are supposed to be less ethnically concentrated and richer.

Actually, this model reflected well the settlement pattern of European immigrants at the turn of the 20th century, but as many scholars have argued it is not able to depict the current immigrant experiences. An interesting research carried out by Logan, Alba and Zhang shows that since the characteristics of the contemporary immigrants differ increasingly in terms of socioeconomic positions, market positions and acculturation, some immigrant groups choose voluntarily to live in ethnic communities not because of their economic constraints.

Given that socioeconomic mobility may not necessarily lead to the process of spatial assimilation, the transitions of immigrants and the second-generation out of ethnic neighborhoods may differ from what earlier theories might predict. Further, others suggest that among ethnic groups who encounter still discrimination and poverty in ethnic neighborhoods movement out of such settings may be hindered in ways not considered in the spatial assimilation model. Waters writes of West Indian immigrants in New York, "Even people who try to move to better neighborhoods seem to be followed inexorably by a cycle of neighborhood resegregation and economic decline"[37].

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[37] Waters M. C., "West Indians and African Americans at Work: Structural Differences and Cultural Stereotypes", in Frank Bean and Stephanie Bell Rose, eds., *Immigration and Opportunity: Race, Ethnicity and Employment in the United State*, Russell Sage Press: New York, 1999, pp. 194-227.

## 2.1 Beyond the spatial assimilation theory

Research on the spatial location of ethnic groups began in the Chicago School through the work of Robert Park and Ernest W. Burgess. The importance Park gives to the space in the assimilation process of immigrants appears clear when he states that "social relations are so frequently and so inevitably correlated with spatial relations;…physical distances so frequently are, or seem to be, the indexes of social distances"[38]. Burgess followed up with his concentric zonal theory, a model based on settlement expanding in concentric circles away from the city core[39]. He argued that incoming ethnic populations would settle in older, less desirable housing near the core, move in the next generation to ethnic working class neighborhoods, and eventually disperse outward as they could afford to. Park and Burgess emphasized the socioeconomic basis of spatial differences but viewed spatial dispersion and assimilation as inevitable. Another important contribution to the study of urban ecology was given by Wirth, a Park's student, who analyzed Jewish neighborhoods in Chicago. He noted as new immigrants first joined the *ghetto*, a community, usually placed in the inner city districts, where the Jewish culture and traditions

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[38] Park E. R., "The Urban Community as a Spatial Pattern and a Moral Order", in Burgess E., eds., *The Urban Community*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1926, p. 18.
[39] Burgess E. W., "The Growth of the City: An Introduction to a Research Project", in R. E. Park, E. W. Burgess, R. D. McKenzie, eds., *The City*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1967.

were preserved; consequently, the second generation left it for «the more modern and less Jewish area of second settlement»[40]; finally, some moved on again to a third settlement depending on the degree of assimilation achieved into the predominant Anglo-Saxon pattern of the country. Then, the ghetto became an intermediate zone between the ethnic community and the slum.

Douglas Massey, continuing the ecological tradition of the Chicago school, keeps on asserting that new immigrants initially concentrate into ethnic enclaves, but the ethnic concentration should be temporary and once their socioeconomic status rises they should eventually merge into the residential mainstream by moving to a better, less segregated, neighborhood[41]. Then, he drew to the conclusion that the process of residential succession was usually accompanied by a decline in ethnic/racial segregation. A logical extension of Massey's theory, according to Alba and Logan, is that, thanks to the improved economic conditions, immigrant families would be willing to buy or build their house, passing from tenants, which is a condition that usually characterizes their housing in the ethnic enclaves, conceived as poor rental zones, to homeowners. This latter

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[40] Wirth L., "The Ghetto", in *On Cities and Social Life*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1927, p. 96.

[41] Massey D., Denton N. A., "Spatial assimilation as a socioeconomic outcome", *American Sociological Review*, 50, 6, 1985, pp. 94-106.

condition becomes a status symbol that would lead families to repel the previous neighborhoods[42].

Most researchers believe that spatial assimilation theory was able to describe the residential pattern of the European immigrants a century ago. Nevertheless, more recent studies have shown that suburban residence may not necessarily be related with the spatial assimilation: if in the past immigrants formed ethnic enclaves in central cities, today they may do so directly in suburbs. Spatial proximity to the white ethnic majority is thus not guaranteed by suburban residence, nor is it necessary to move to white neighborhoods in order to access the residential amenities of affluent suburbs. Furthermore, now, in an era of global communication, where racial minorities constitute a plurality of US immigrants, it is not a prerequisite that immigrants are poor or uneducated or even ignorant of American culture. Contemporary immigrants own often high levels of education and professional skills; as a consequence, they are more likely to choose higher quality housing in better neighborhoods. At this point the high correlation between the acquisition of both cultural assimilation and financial resources and the moving to better housing, predicted by the spatial assimilation, weakens.

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[42] Alba R. D., Logan J., "Assimilation and Stratification in the Homeownership Patterns of Racial and Ethnic-Groups", *International Migration Review*, 26, 4, 1992, pp. 1314-1341

At the time of European migration, in fact, the key factors predicting whether immigrants would move out of inner city enclaves comprised length of time in the United States, ability to speak English and socioeconomic status. But even with those indicators controlled, ethnic differences remain[43]. As demonstrated by several studies, segregation in ethnic enclaves continues through the first and second generation. Often it has been noted that children of immigrants are more likely to live near the city core if their parents had a low socio-economic status[44].

The ecological model evidently predicts that moving to the suburb is crucial to spatial assimilation. The Burgess hypothesis of concentric circles, in fact, foresees that higher-status people regularly move to the peripheral part of the city because housing and amenities there are more desirable than those at the center. But urban settlement is not represented exactly by the concentric circles. Moreover, studies examining the suburbanization of immigrants have shown mixed results. Massey and Denton[45] argue that acculturation and improved socioeconomic status are two necessary variables that predict suburbanization, but according to Zhou and Logan[46] their results, calculated with aggregate-level data, do not confirm a positive

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[43] Lieberson S., *Ethnic Patterns in American Cities*, Free Press: New York, 1963.

[44] Guest A. M., "The Suburbanization of Ethnic groups", *Sociology and Social Research*, 64, 1980, pp. 497-513.

[45] Massey D. S., Denton N. A., "Trends in the Residential Segregation of Blacks, Hispanics and Asians: 1970-1980", *American Sociological Review*, 52, 1987, pp. 802-825.

[46] Zhou M., Logan J. R., "In and Out of Chinatown: Residential Mobility and Segregation of New York City's Chinese", *Social Forces*, 70, 1991, pp. 387-407.

correlation. Another study conducted by Alba and Logan, using individual-level data, while on the one hand confirmed that the process of immigrant suburbanization generally follows the ecological model of residential dispersion, on the other hand found elements of a stratification model that sees immigrants move not uniformly to the suburbs because many suburbs are very close toward them. The researchers concluded «if diversity exists in the process of attaining residence in the suburbs, there is also good reason to suspect diversity in the kinds of suburbs that different minorities are likely to enter»[47]. By that reasoning, the status variation among suburbs undermines the use of suburbanization alone as a determinant of spatial assimilation.

## 2.2 Immigrant Enclave *VS* Ethnic Community

Through the work of Logan, Alba and Zhang for the first time was made a distinction between immigrant enclaves and ethnic communities. While the immigrant enclave model remains the prevalent pattern in cities with the larger groups of immigrants, the ethnic community model is wide-spreading as an alternative to the old residential patterns.

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[47] Alba R. D., Logan J. R., "Variations on two themes: Racial and Ethnic Patterns in the Attainment of Suburban Residence", *Demography*, 28, 1991, pp. 431-453, p. 449.

As fully explained previously the immigrant enclave model represents the old stream of thought according to which newcomers would settle temporarily in poor inner city neighborhoods, where they would however find support from people belonging to the same ethnic group, to shift location in better quality neighborhoods once achieved more material resources and a sufficient level of acculturation to the American ways of doing. The underlying assumption is that first immigrants live a condition of segregation within their ethnic group because of their economic constraints, afterwards, once the assimilation process to the American culture is occurring, and it is just matter of time, they are ready to well integrate into ethnic mixed neighborhoods without encountering obstacles. Besides this model, another kind of settlement has been emerging since the post-1965 migratory movements. Some immigrants would directly settle in desirable neighborhoods with good amenities, located in suburban areas, and inhabited by co-ethnics. That is however feasible for people who have got an higher socio-economic status and can afford it, but at the same time implies a different path that does not lead to the assimilation, as traditionally conceived, rather to the voluntary preservation of the ethnic group identity. According to the formulation of Logan, Alba and Zhang «the ethnic community, as we define it here, is formed through a different social process than is the immigrant enclave. It is grounded in motives associated more with taste and preference than with economic necessity, or

even with the ambition to create neighborhoods that will symbolize and sustain ethnic identity»[48].

Logan, Alba and Zhang carried out a research on 15 groups of ethnic residents in New York and Los Angeles, the two states with the larger number of immigrant groups. The two places differ in the suburbanization process which has been significant in Los Angeles, and almost absent in New York, and also in the immigrants presence that dates back 100 years in New York, while is fairly recent in Los Angeles. Using census data and thanks to new progresses in spatial analysis, they were able for the first time to identify and distinguish through two indicators, level of concentration and spatial clustering, ethnic and non-ethnic neighborhoods. The aim of their investigation was to study the residential patterns of immigrant groups in order to state whether an ethnic neighborhood could be classified as ethnic enclave or ethnic community; and to accomplish that two sets of indicators were used, the first set related to nativity and language, and the other to economic status. In line with the different suburbanization process, the first evidence coming out is that the ethnic neighborhoods in New York are located mainly in the inner cities while in Los Angeles they are placed in suburbs. But the main issue remains whether ethnic neighborhoods are just poor locations inhabited by new

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[48] Logan J. R., Alba R. D., Zhang W., "Immigrant Enclaves and Ethnic Communities in New York and Los Angeles", *American Sociological Review*, 67, 2, 2002, pp. 299-322, p. 300.

immigrants with low socioeconomic status and scarce English language skills, following the ethnic enclave model, or desirable neighborhoods inhabited by people who have higher economic resources and are good English speakers and despite that chose to live in an ethnic neighborhood, following the ethnic community model. With respect to the 'nativity' variable for all groups both in New York and Los Angeles, urban ethnic neighborhoods comprise a high percentage of new immigrants and for this reason they look like ethnic enclaves; the same happens with respect to the 'language' variable since immigrants in these places speak mostly their native-language. Nevertheless, in some other suburban neighborhoods for some ethnic groups there are «cases in which the percentage of all residents in ethnic neighborhoods who speak only English is greater than is found in non-ethnic city neighborhoods, but that nonetheless have the highest shares of group members who speak their native language: Indians, Filipinos, and Koreans in New York…Koreans and Vietnamese in Los Angeles. These suburban zones are ethnic neighborhoods, but they do not appear particularly "immigrant"- unlike their city counterparts»[49]. Considering, furthermore, the 'socioeconomic' variable they noticed many variations from the ethnic enclave model in city areas as well as in suburban ones: «the city neighborhoods of Afro-Caribbeans in New York and Vietnamese in Los Angeles are *more affluent* than the nonethnic neighborhoods where

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[49] *Ivi*, pp. 312-313

group members live, and there is little difference for Indians and Filipinos in New York or for Japanese in Los Angeles. Even in the city, the economic standing of group neighborhoods sometimes corresponds to what would expected of ethnic communities»[50].

The main findings of this research, in sum, confirm the predominance of the ethnic enclave model, but show also divergent experiences and, consequently, pose the urgency of creating alternative model of comprehension. The ethnic community model seems to explain some of the cases analyzed. A furthermore significant element emerged is the effect of the suburbanization process that appears to affect the formation of ethnic neighborhoods in line with the ethnic community model. Lastly, it has to be clear that the ethnic neighborhoods in both connotations are not static and fixed realities, hence in any single neighborhoods it is possible to find individuals who live it as a ghetto, others who consider it just a temporary place, and others who see it as a desirable and permanent place where to settle down.

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[50] *Ivi*, p. 314.

## 2.3 Recent immigration movements and settlements.

Where recent immigrants decide to go and what determines their decision are fundamental questions in the study of settlement patterns and more profoundly of their assimilation process.

Today as in the past, the main factors affecting immigrants' destination choice are the proximity to the home country, the labor demand, and the preexistence of ethnic communities receiving them. As a consequence, if we trace a map of immigrant settlements in the United States we can notice that few States host large concentrations of immigrants and immigrant nationalities are spatially clustered. At least this is the main trend, although there is also a dispersive movement that leads people to other destinations.

Portes and Rumbaut using data from U.S. Census and Office of Immigration Statistics draw a portrait of immigrant distribution in the United States, showing that since 1967, year after year, destinations of the major immigrant groups are repeated with regularity[51]. The data have been updated here to 2008 to verify whether this trend continues to occur.

The first five states that have traditionally had the largest concentration of immigrants are California, New York, Texas, Florida and Illinois. Looking at 2000 U.S. Census with regard to the destinations of the

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[51] Portes A., Rumbaut R. G., *Immigrant America: a Portrait*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 2006. See table 5, pp. 56-57.

twelve largest immigrant groups, it is apparent that the choice goes, as every year since 1967, to the same states. California constituted the first choice for nine of the twelve groups, absorbing almost 30% of the more than 31 thousand immigrants who entered U.S. in 2000, New York counted 12.4% of all entries, and Texas 9.3% (Table 1). Almost the same happened in 2008, when the most immigrants admitted went with a similar percentage to the same states: California (21.5%), New York (12.9%), Texas (8.1%)[52]. Furthermore, within these states immigrant nationalities, as 2000 data show, are spatially grouped: Mexicans (42.8%), Salvadorans (44%) and Filipinos (48.5%) in California; Cubans (73.5%) in Florida; Dominicans (59.4%) in New York (2000). And, at a distance of eight years, in 2008 the main groupings are repeated: Mexicans (38.4%), Salvadorans (34.7%), and Filipinos (41.5%) in California; Cubans (80.8%) in Florida; Dominicans (47%) in New York[53]. The comparison between 2000 and 2008 data shows a very similar pattern, the choice of the first destination is still the same after eight years for each nationality, and the percentage of group concentration is very close, although there is a 4% of decreasing for Mexicans, a 10% for Salvadorans, and an 8% for Filipinos. This shift is not fortuitous but is a clear consequence of a series of change in the economic context that will be seen afterwards. Analyzing more in detail the data at

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[52] Office of Immigration Statistics, *2008 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, supplemental table 1.
[53] *Ibidem.*

urban area level and comparing the 2000 and 2008 data, it appears that Mexicans continue to concentrate first in Los Angeles maintaining, moreover, almost the same percentage of entries in the city (14.1% in 2000 and 13.7% in 2008), Chinese even increase their concentration in New York (from 17.1% in 2000 to 31.4% in 2008), Indians maintain their number in Chicago and increase their concentration in New York up to 18.7% in 2008. The first metropolitan area for Filipinos is still Los Angeles even if there is a change of destinations as second and third city over eight years; and finally the case of Cubans skips to the eye with an increasing concentration in Miami (Tables 2a and 2b).

The data observed demonstrate that the preexistence of an ethnic network in a specific place is still a prominent element in the selection of the destination for newcomers. Of course these data are not able to predict the path next generations might take, whether they will keep staying within their ethnic network or will disperse throughout the country melting with the mainstream. The classical assimilation theory and in particular the spatial assimilation support the latter option foreseeing the disappearance of ethnicity over time; nevertheless, the constant flow of immigrants and the persistent concentration of certain immigrant nationalities within a specific space suggest a different scenery. These places are distinguished by their ethnic characterization and there are no elements suggesting a full absorption to American culture.

In the last decades, actually, a shift in the distribution of immigrants has occurred, as it will be discussed longer in the next paragraph, but the movement does not imply the dispersal of immigrant groups, in fact, as highlighted by Portes and Rumbaut, «when an ethnic group moves en masse from its traditional area, it does not become necessarily dispersed but often regroups in another region[54]».

The spatial concentration of ethnic communities, although is often seen as dangerous because creates segregation and non communication with the largest American society, in some cases has proved to be a valuable resource in the adaptation process of their members to the American society.

## 2.4 A closer look at the Hispanic group

Today the Hispanics represent the largest minority group in the USA and its population is expected to increase in the next years. According to the Pew Hispanic Center in 2008 Hispanics were almost 47 million which is more than 15% of the total US population; moreover, Hispanic population is projected to grow up to almost a quarter of the total U.S.

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[54] Portes A., *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

population by 2050[55]. Among all Hispanics, Mexicans account for two-thirds, followed by Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Salvadorans, Dominicans, Guatemalans, Colombians, Hondurans, Ecuadorians, and Peruvians[56].

While traditionally, much of this growth has been in the West, Hispanics have migrated in large numbers to Midwest in recent years. From 1980 to 1990, as well documented by demographers Aponte and Siles, Hispanics besides to flowing toward traditional destinations, have experimented new destinations increasing the Midwest population over the 56% with Mexicans accounting for the three-quarters of all Latinos in the region, and Chicago becoming the second preferred destination after Los Angeles [57]. As well as the Midwest, also some southern states have changed their traditional demography due to the Hispanic arrivals. Elisabeth Grieco marks down that between 1990 and 2000 the highest percentage change in foreign-born Mexican population was recorded in eight southern states with Tennessee at the top[58]. A more relevant issue is that new destination places are not longer big urban areas, such as Los Angeles or New York, but rather medium and small towns often situated in rural areas.

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[55] United States Census Bureau. *U.S. Interim Projections by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin.* 2004. Available on-line at http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/.

[56] *Country of Origin Profiles*, The Pew Hispanic Center, 2008.

[57] Aponte R., Siles M., *Latinos in the Hearthland: The Browning of the Midwest*, The Julian Samora Research Institute, Research Report n. 5, November 1994.

[58] Grieco E., "The Foreign Born from Mexico in the United States", Migration Information Source, Migration Policy Institute: Washington, October 1 2003.

What is the reason for such a change? First, policy on immigration has had a certain influence through a series of measures taken to control and contain the undocumented immigrants flowing to California: IRCA (immigration control and reform act) in 1986 prescribed sanctions for employers who hired undocumented immigrants, put more money on the border patrol to increase the controls on the border between Mexico and U.S., legalized about 3 million of people; Proposition 187 in 1994 prohibited public social services, including schools, for undocumented immigrants; Operation Blockade since 1993 reinforced more strongly the border control to avoid undocumented people from passing it. Such a policy brought about first the saturation of the California job market, primarily as effect of the 3 million immigrants' legalization, and as a consequence the shift in the choice of destination toward places offering more job opportunities and better quality of life. Simultaneously, some economic forces have facilitated this process. The decline in employment in California has been matched by a growth in labor demand in southern and midwestern states. In fact, the industrial restructuring, consisting in a process of decentralization of production to rural areas with lower wages rates, has attracted low-skills immigrants who are willing to perform low-paid, non-unionized jobs unlike the native workforce.

At this point, in line with the aim of the present research, the important question that has to be addressed is whether this change of

destinations has led to a dispersal of immigrants throughout the country or ethnic concentration has still occurred. Massey D. S. *et al*[59] classify immigrant destinations in 'big five'(California, New York, Texas, Florida, and Illinois), 'second tier' (New Jersey, Massachusetts, Washington, Virginia, and Maryland) and 'new destinations'; referring to this classification and using U.S. Census data for the years 1990, 2000 and 2008, it was compiled a table describing the resident Hispanic population in these new areas of destination to verify if the new ethnic groups established since 1990 have been growing over time (Table 3).

Looking at the table, it is apparent that Hispanic population in these new areas has grown since 1990: Arizona, among new destinations, is the state with the largest number of Hispanic counting almost 2 million of people in 2008, which is about three times more than the number in 1990; its proximity to the US-Mexico border has surely affected that rise in its Hispanic population. However, most surprising is, for instance, a state as Georgia where Hispanic population grew from 108 thousand in 1990 to 777 in 2008 with an extraordinary change of 619%, or North Carolina with an 801% of change, and also Tennessee with a 621%. The trend is even more pronounced if we look at the metropolitan areas data that show a growth of Hispanic population in the city of Nashville, Tennessee, of 228% between

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[59] Massey D. S., *New Faces in New Places: The Changing Geography of American Immigration*, Russell Sage Foundation: New York, 2008, p. 38.

2000 and 2008, and an exponential increase in the city of Atlanta, Georgia, where the Hispanic population reaches a number of 520, 158 in 2008 from a number of 18,720 presences in 2000[60]. It means that of the total Hispanic population in Georgia about the 67% is concentrated in the city of Atlanta, and more generally that even in the new destinations people from the same ethnic background tend to cluster together.

**2.5 Settlement patterns among Hispanics**

The descriptive analysis made above, although shows a regular and constant increase of Hispanic population within the new destinations and let us suppose to a persistent preservation of ethnicity due to the spatial concentration of Hispanic population, it does not say much about the assimilation process that interests these groupings.

Going back to the distinction between ethnic enclave and ethnic community models the question to be addressed is whether the communities formed by Hispanics present characteristics of ethnic enclaves or ethnic communities. If we take into account the socioeconomic status of Hispanic immigrants moving to the new destinations, that is people with little education and limited economic resources, as we learn from some

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[60] U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Redistricting data and 2008 Metropolitan Statistical Areas Population by Race and Hispanic Origin.

studies, we would say that such communities are just transitory places that people will leave once their assimilation, both economic and cultural, to U.S. society is complete. On the other side, numbers about the exponential growth and concentration of these communities make us think that there is not dispersal and maybe there is a voluntary choice in living within their own ethnic group. Moreover, the increase of that population does not depend only by migration flows coming directly from Hispanic countries, but what has much contributed recently has been the increase of births and the movement of Hispanic people that have already lived in the traditional destinations for some years, phenomena that suggest more sedentary settlement patterns. Some qualitative research, in fact, shows that Hispanic-born people are likely to leave impoverished and dangerous neighborhoods in the traditional destinations, where the job market is saturated and the quality of life is getting worse, to settle in new destinations, which are mainly small towns that offer a wider job opportunity, the possibility to purchase housing at a lower rate, better services and safer environment for a family[61]. Moreover, an important finding has been highlighted in recent studies that contradict the common view that describes immigrants going to the new destinations as a homogeneous group of unskilled and low-educated people. Hispanics to the new destinations would rather be a

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[61] Hernández-León R., Zúniga V., "Making Carpet by the Mile: The Emergence of a Mexican Immigrant Community in an Industrial Region of the U.S. Historic South", *Social Science Quarterly*, 81, 1, 2000, pp. 49-66.

miscellaneous group made up also of people who have accumulated experience in the U.S., and have a higher socioeconomic status, and overall it would be families willing to settle down[62]. Furthermore, even when the human capital of individuals is low, the ethnic network plays a crucial role, especially when it is not saturated as in the traditional cities of immigration, because compensates this lack and produce earnings benefits through its mediation[63]. Another sector that has been researched is the education attainment of Hispanic children in new destinations. On the one side, many concerns emerge relative to a lack of experience in receiving Hispanic students, discrimination barriers and several other challenges to face with; on the other side, research on the educational attainment of Hispanic students has shown that Hispanic children achieve better outcomes in new destinations than in traditional ones. Possible explanations may be a less hostile receiving context and a strong co-ethnic network[64].

According to these considerations, the ethnic community model appears more likely to reflect the condition of Hispanics living in the new areas. Rather than a denial of the ethnicity as a negative element that keep people segregated from the rest of the society, as ultimately the ethnic

[62] Leach M. A., Bean F. D., *The Structure and Dynamics of Mexican Migration to New Destinations in the United States*, in Massey D.S. (eds.), *New Faces in New Places: The Changing Geography of American Immigration*, Russell Sage Foundation: New York, 2008.

[63] Aguilera M. B., Massey D. S., "Social Capital and the Wages of Mexican Migrants: New Hypotheses and Tests", *Social Forces*, 82, 2, 2003, pp. 671-701.

[64] Stamps K., Bohon S. A., "Educational Attainment in New and Established Latino Metropolitan Destinations", *Social Science Quarterly*, 87, 5, 2006, pp. 1225-1240.

enclave model affirms, Hispanic people rely on the ethnic community and on the cultural values shared by its members, and thanks to that their adaptation process to the American system is facilitated.

The ethnicity is not a symbolic dimension and is not even disappearing; on the contrary it is continuously renewed by the constant flow of new immigrants.

In such a context, according to the segmented assimilation theory Hispanics may follow the path of selective assimilation, preserving their cultural identity but integrating successfully to the American economic and social system. Although it is a reasonable hypothesis, taking into account the very recent presence of Hispanics in the new destinations, we may wait for the following years and decades to see the mode of incorporation that will prevail.

**Table 1**. States of principal settlement of the twelve largest immigrant groups, 2000.

| Country of birth | N | % of total immigrants | States of principal settlement | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *First* | *%* | *Second* | *%* | *Third* | *%* |
| Mexico | 9,163,463 | 29.4 | California | 42.8 | Texas | 20.4 | Illinois | 6.7 |
| Philippines | 1,374,213 | 4.4 | California | 48.5 | New York | 5.2 | New Jersey | 5.0 |
| India | 1,027,144 | 3.3 | California | 19.5 | New Jersey | 11.7 | New York | 11.5 |
| China | 997,301 | 3.2 | California | 33.2 | New York | 23.4 | New Jersey | 4.1 |
| Vietnam | 991,995 | 3.2 | California | 42.5 | Texas | 10.9 | Washington | 4.1 |
| Cuba | 872,716 | 2.8 | Florida | 73.5 | New Jersey | 6.4 | California | 4.7 |
| Korea | 870,542 | 2.8 | California | 31.3 | New York | 11.6 | New Jersey | 5.9 |
| Canada | 820,713 | 2.6 | California | 17.6 | Florida | 11.8 | New York | 6.8 |
| El Salvador | 815,570 | 2.6 | California | 44.0 | Texas | 12.2 | New York | 9.2 |
| Germany | 705,110 | 2.3 | California | 14.1 | New York | 9.8 | Florida | 9.2 |
| Dominican Republic | 685,952 | 2.2 | New York | 59.4 | New Jersey | 12.8 | Florida | 9.3 |
| Former USRR | 618,302 | 2.0 | New York | 29.3 | California | 16.1 | Illinois | 6.0 |
| **Total foreign-born** | **31,133,481** | **100.00** | California | **28.5** | New York | **12.4** | Texas | **9.3** |
| **Total native-born** | **250,288,425** | **100.00** | California | **10.0** | Texas | **7.2** | New York | **6.0** |

*Source:* 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, 5% Public Use Microdata Sample.

**Table 2a**. Metropolitan areas of principal settlement of five immigrant groups, 2000.

| Nationality | Metropolitan Areas of Destination | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *First* | *%* | *Second* | *%* | *Third* | *%* |
| Mexican | Los Angeles | 14.1 | Orange | 5 | Riverside | 4.7 |
| Chinese | New York | 17.1 | Los Angeles | 8.6 | San Francisco | 7 |
| Indian | Chicago | 7 | New York | 5.7 | San Jose | 4.6 |
| Filipinos | Los Angeles | 12.4 | Chicago | 5.3 | Honolulu | 4.6 |
| Cuban | Miami | 64.1 | Tampa | 3 | Jersey | 2.9 |
| Vietnamese | Orange | 10.8 | Los Angeles | 8.1 | San Jose | 7.8 |

*Source:* Office of Immigration Statistics, 2000

**Table 2b**. Metropolitan areas of principal settlement of five immigrant groups, 2008.

| Nationality | Metropolitan Areas of Destination | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *First* | *%* | *Second* | *%* | *Third* | *%* |
| Mexican | Los Angeles | 13.7 | Chicago | 5 | Dallas | 4.7 |
| Chinese | New York | 31.4 | Los Angeles | 10.5 | San Jose | 7 |
| Indian | New York | 18.7 | Chicago | 6.1 | San Jose | 5.5 |
| Filipinos | Los Angeles | 16.2 | New York | 7.8 | San Francisco | 4.6 |
| Cuban | Miami | 64.1 | Tampa | 3 | Jersey | 2.9 |
| Vietnamese | Los Angeles | 16.5 | San Jose | 8.1 | Houston | 7.8 |

*Source:* Office of Immigration Statistics, 2008

**Table 3**. Resident population by race, Hispanic origin, and state (1,000).

| New Destinations | 1990 | 2000 | 2008 | Change % 1990-2008 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arizona | 688 | 1295 | 1956 | +184.3 |
| Colorado | 424 | 735 | 997 | +135.1 |
| Connecticut | 213 | 320 | 419 | +96.7 |
| Georgia | 108 | 435 | 777 | +619.4 |
| Hawaii | 81 | 87 | 112 | +38.2 |
| Indiana | 98 | 214 | 332 | +238.7 |
| Kansas | 93 | 188 | 255 | +174.1 |
| Louisiana | 93 | 107 | 148 | +59.1 |
| Michigan | 201 | 323 | 414 | +105.9 |
| Minnesota | 53 | 143 | 217 | +309.4 |
| Missouri | 61 | 118 | 190 | +211.4 |
| Nevada | 124 | 393 | 669 | +439.5 |
| North Carolina | 76 | 378 | 685 | +801.3 |
| Ohio | 139 | 217 | 302 | +117.2 |
| Oregon | 112 | 275 | 416 | +271.4 |
| Pennsylvania | 232 | 394 | 594 | +156 |
| Rhode Island | 45 | 90 | 122 | +171.1 |
| Tennessee | 32 | 123 | 231 | +621.8 |
| Utah | 84 | 201 | 329 | +291.6 |
| Wisconsin | 93 | 192 | 286 | +207.5 |

*Source:* U.S. Census Bureau 1990 and 2000, and Annual State Resident Population Estimates 2008.

# CHAPTER 3

## ETHNIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Ethnic entrepreneurships, expression of the diversity that more and more characterizes our societies as a result of migration flows, constitute today an important aspect of the economic life of many countries. The main function they accomplish, especially in the first stage of their establishment, is to meet the economic and social needs of the ethnic community. However, they gradually integrate into the broader market becoming a significant part of the national economic context. Furthermore, what is more relevant here is their contribution to the economic mobility and assimilation process of the ethnic communities. Recent research shows that immigrants are more likely to set up a business than native people, and the reasons can be found in their own status of minority: to establish and develop a business might be a means for enhancing their own socio-

economic status and being recognized and accepted within the new environment. On the other hand, the persistence of marginal and informal businesses in low-profit sectors and the exclusive orientation toward ethnic networks may hamper the socio-economic integration into the wider society.

## 3.1 What is an ethnic entrepreneurship?

A significant increasing of ethnic groups in the labor market in recent years has given rise to the interest of defining the ethnic entrepreneurship in order to understand its value and potentiality within the global market on the one side, and within the ethnic group in terms of integration opportunities on the other side.

Waldinger defines the ethnic entrepreneurship as «a set of connections and regular patterns of interaction among people sharing common national background or migration experiences»[65]. The ethnic group, therefore, has been the focus of attention in the study of the characteristics and dynamics of an ethnic entrepreneurship. Moreover, the United States has been the privileged context for studying it as immigrants

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[65] Waldinger R, Aldrich H., Ward R., "Spatial Dimensions of opportunity structures", in Waldinger R, Aldrich H., Ward R. (eds.), *Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies*, Sage: London, 1990, p. 3.

have established their own business since the early1880[66]. Ethnic entrepreneurship is usually based on small businesses within a niche market; it grows, therefore, in less formal economic conditions but relies on strong ethnic networks. The relationship between ethnicity and entrepreneurship has been investigated since the classical works in sociology: the idea of the stranger as trader[67], the influence of ethic and religion of an ethnic group on the economic activities[68], are two important examples that have affected the following research on this topic.

One of the first theories was the *middleman minority theory[69]* that interprets the ethnic business as a reaction to market closure from the host country. At the beginning, immigrants in the United States were required to fulfill temporary and low-skilled jobs, and as a consequence they were continuously replaced over time by new immigrants. The main objective of the sojourners was to make money in an easy and fast way in order to bring them to their country. For this reason, they looked for self-employment in sectors where the initial costs and competition were low, and involved hardly themselves and family members in order to make more money in the shortest time. According to this theory, since the aim of migrants is to go

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[66] Barret G., Jones T., McEvoy D., "Ethnic minority business: theoretical discourse in Britain and in North America", *Urban Studies*, 33, 4-5, 1996, pp. 783-809.

[67] Simmel G., "The stranger", in K. Wolf (eds.), *The Sociology of George Simmel*, Free Press: Glencoe, 1950.

[68] Weber M., *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Scribner: New York, 1930.

[69] Bonacich E., "A Theory of Middleman Minorities", *American Sociological Review*, 38, 5, 1973, pp. 583-594.

back home, one main consequence is the lack of interest in socializing with the locals and, in turn, the locals perceive migrants as people who are just exploiting their resources. Middleman minorities are distant from the local citizens but deeply embedded in their ethnic group, developing a strong solidarity.

Another interpretation of the ethnic entrepreneurship comes from the *ethnic market niche theory*[70], named also *interaction* model because makes depend the business outcomes on the interaction between opportunity structures and ethnic group characteristics. According to this theory, immigrants seek self-employment to avoid the traditional unappealing jobs reserved to them. The opportunity structures encompass the market conditions and the institutional framework, thus whether the market is open or close to the ethnic initiatives, whether the legal and institutional framework enhances the conditions or impedes the establishment of an ethnic business. Market conditions comprise both ethnic and non-ethnic markets. Co-ethnics constitute, generally, the first consumers since the business usually starts to respond to ethnic needs not satisfied by the local market. Ethnic market is often characterized by intensive labor and low income, but offers opportunities of employment for new immigrants. Besides the ethnic market, entrepreneurs may have the opportunity to enter the broader market: that happens in case of abandoned markets, or low

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[70] Waldinger R., *Op. cit.*

income activities, or when natives want to relocate their business and sell the old one to immigrants. The ethnic group characteristics also affect the development of an ethnic economy. First, the intrinsic aspects such as the language barriers, the low educational level, and the lack of professional skills limit the access to the local market and lead immigrants to turn to their own ethnic community, whose further characteristic is the spatial concentration, and start up their own business. Second, the ethnic resource mobilization facilitates the establishment of a business. The social ethnic networks, sharing common value systems and cultural practices, develop strong feelings of solidarity, trust and loyalty; as a consequence, the ethnic enterprise is more likely to success receiving the co-ethnic support despite adverse conditions of the alien environment. In fact, in order to survive hostile conditions entrepreneurs implement ethnic strategies, like involvement of family members and community members to reduce costs, increasing of work hours, and informal financing of business investments. The ethnic dimension, of course, does not always exert its influence in the same way. It varies depending on the degree of discrimination the entrepreneur is subjected to, the diversity between the host country and the ethnic group, the level of integration the ethnic group has achieved.

A further theory, called *ethnic enclave economy theory*[71], explains the ethnic entrepreneurship from a labor market perspective. According to this theory there are two kinds of market, the primary and the secondary. The primary, which is mostly occupied by natives, encompasses high wage jobs that require high levels of education, experience and skills. The secondary, toward which immigrants and minorities converge, is a low economy market easily accessible as does not require specific skills and experience. The ethnic enclave, however, does not fit in the first nor in the second market; it is, instead, an alternative path that consists in a spatial concentration of ethnic businesses providing goods and services for both the community and the broader market. Within the ethnic enclave entrepreneurs have easy access to human, social, and financial capital in order to expand their business, and in turn it provides employment for family and co-ethnics members.

## 3.2 Social capital and ethnic entrepreneurship

As widely discussed, the ethnic networks appear in each theory the focus around which the ethnic entrepreneurship develops. Entrepreneurs need many resources to make their business feasible: information and

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[71] Wilson K., Portes A., "Immigrant Enclaves: An Analysis of the Labor Market Experiences of Cubans in Miami", *American Journal of Sociology*, 88, 1980, pp. 295-319.

knowledge, resources to produce and deliver goods and services, financial aids, personnel to hire just to mention a few. The sources where they get all these resources from are the social networks, which in turn make available social capital that helps entrepreneurs in their business. The social capital, in fact, following Coleman's definition, is the product of interpersonal resources people have that help them achieve their goals[72]. In the case of entrepreneurship, people who want to set up a business involve family or co-ethnics for support; moreover, the community itself creates opportunities for business through associations of individuals who know and interact with each other developing feelings of trust[73] that are the basis for a productive business. Indirect ties, links with other firms are also important because they widen the entrepreneurs' social network that the larger and stronger is the more will contribute to the entrepreneurship success. Obviously, social networks need to be activated in order to become social capital; trust and sense of membership have to be maintained and recognized over time for guaranteeing a future to ethnic economies. Portes, indeed, defines social capital as «the capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structure. ...The resources themselves are not social capital; the concept refers instead to the individuals' ability to mobilize them on

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[72] Coleman J. S., "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital", *American Journal of Sociology,* 94(supplement), 1988, pp. S95-S120.

[73] Putnam R. D., *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1993.

demand[74]». Granovetter[75], with his concept of 'embeddedness' has highlighted that economic action, as all kinds of actions, can be comprehended and explained only within its social context. The economic action and its outcomes does not depend on individual factors but is embedded in networks of personal relationships. Portes[76] will develop the Granovetter's concept of embeddedness making a distinction between *relational* embeddedness that comprises people's direct relations with one another where norms, sanctions, reciprocity and expectations are involved, and *structural* embeddedness that encompasses wider scales of social relationship where many others take part beyond those actually involved in the economic business.

After these few considerations, the ethnic enclave appears as the ideal context for entrepreneurs from the same ethnic background who are willing to begin an economic activity. The presence of a large co-ethnic population spatially clustered increases contacts and sharing of information within and outside the community, also among earlier immigrants and newcomers, promoting in this way entrepreneurship. Furthermore, ethnic enclave assures a protected market; in fact, people within an ethnic enclave have strong ties based on trust and mutual support and are likely to help

[74] Portes A., *The Economic Sociology of Immigration: Essays on the Network, Ethnicity, and Entrepreneurship*, Russell Sage Foundation: New York, 1995, p. 2.
[75] Granovetter M., "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness", *American Journal of Sociology*, 91, 1985, pp. 481-510.
[76] Portes A., *Op. cit.*

entrepreneurs with their business, also because this latter is usually a small and easy to start activity that does not require large financial capital. Ethnic enclave theory, in fact, speculates that immigrants benefit from working in ethnic enclaves. The first study, which generated the ethnic enclave economy theory, was realized among Cubans in Miami by Wilson and Portes in 1980. Cuban community was a highly spatial concentrated community that established a series of institutions and enterprises able to provide goods and services for their own ethnic group as well as for the local population. The most employees working in the Cuban firms were from the same ethnic background and the firms became a kind of 'training system'[77] that, through tight ethnic ties based on trust and solidarity, created the basis for the establishment of new businesses. It was found to be one of the most successful examples of ethnic enclave economy with a high rate of self-employment that produced wealth and socio-economic mobility. Subsequently, Zhou and Logan[78] studying the case of New York's Chinatown found a high correlation between ethnic enclave and immigrant entrepreneurship, highlighting the economic relevance of entrepreneurs to their ethnic community. Being the Chinese community traditionally concentrated by choice not because of discrimination from the natives, it represents a source of start-up capital for the developing of Chinese

[77] Bailey T., Waldinger R., "Primary, Secondary, and Enclave Labor Markets: A Training System Approach", *American Sociological Review*, 56, 1991, pp. 432-445.
[78] Zhou M., Logan J. R., "Returns of Human Capital in Ethnic Enclaves: New York City's Chinatown", *American Sociological Review*, 54, 1989, pp. 809-820.

businesses as well as the recipient of goods and services provided. The same pattern emerged for Koreans in Los Angeles in a research carried out by Min and Borzogmehr: ethnic business and ethnic group solidarity were found to have a high connection within the large and concentrated Korean community[79].

Despite these positive examples, some research has found negative correlation between working in ethnic enclaves and achieving economic success. Sanders and Nee[80], for instance, have pointed out that a distinction between employers and employees need to be made; in fact, the latter would work in disadvantaged conditions and would experience segregation because their contacts outside the enclave are limited. Nevertheless, Portes responds to this critique claiming that ethnic enclaves, despite require big efforts from employees at the beginning of their career, can be considered as «entrepreneurial incubators»[81] producing future opportunities of self-employment for them. Tienda and Raijman[82], researching the Hispanic entrepreneurship within a highly concentrated Hispanic neighborhood in Chicago, called Little Village, found out that although the growth of ethnic

[79] Min P. G., Bozogmehr M., "Immigrant Entrepreneurship and Business Patterns: A comparison of Koreans and Iranians in Los Angeles", *International Migration Review*, 34, 3, 2000, pp. 707-738.

[80] Sanders J., Nee V., "Limits of Ethnic Solidarity in the Enclave Economy", *American Sociological Review*, 52, 1987, pp. 745-773.

[81] Portes A., Shafer S., *Revisiting the Enclave Hypothesis: Miami twenty-Five Years Later*, Princeton University, May 2006. CMD Working Paper, The Center for Migration and Immigration and Development, Working Paper Series, Princeton University.

[82] Tienda M., Raijman R., "Promoting Hispanic Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Chicago", *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, 9, 1, 2004, pp. 1-21.

businesses was continuous and dynamic due also to the steady increase of the Hispanic population, the quality of these activities was low and precarious mainly because of the scarce education and economic resources. However, they found also a high rate of informal economic activities: most immigrants, in fact, begin informal business aside from their wage-earning job, and the informal business most of the time represents a path toward a formal activity once they have acquired experience, skills, and confidence with the market.

## 3.3 Hispanic entrepreneurship

With the increasing number of Hispanic population in the U.S. comes an increasing impact on U.S. future labor market, along with a rise of business opportunities. The large size of Hispanics, for instance, may convert in wider markets for ethnic entrepreneurships; moreover, Hispanics once entered the labor force and accumulated experience, skills and social networks may be facilitated to become entrepreneurs. On average, the Hispanic income and, consequently, their buying power is lower than the other groups' income and buying power in the U.S., and this condition is linked to the low educational level widely documented among Hispanics. In 2009, 69% of Hispanic young adults aged 25-29 completed high school against the 88% of Whites; the gap is more apparent for higher educational

attainment where the rate of Whites who gained at least a bachelor's degree is 32% against the 12% of Hispanics[83]. While progresses to decrease such an educational gap are slow, the increasing of Hispanic business ownerships appear to be higher and faster than other groups. The number of firms owned by Hispanics in the U.S. has growth recently; it passed from 1,573,464 million in 2002 to 2,260,309 million in 2007, recording a growth of 43.7% against the 14.5% of growth of non-Hispanic firms (Table 4). Hispanic business concentration follows the population concentration, then they are intensively concentrated in few states: according to the 2007 Economic Census, California (566,567), Florida (450,185), Texas (447,486), and New York (193,248) are the states with the higher number of Hispanic-owned firms, with a growth rate of respectively 32.5%, 68.8%, 40.1%, and 18.1% from 2002 (Table 5). How to explain, therefore, the lack of human capital, which is positively correlated to successful businesses, on the one side and the increase of Hispanic entrepreneurships on the other side? Despite Hispanics have documented a higher number of businesses compared to the non-Hispanic population, research has shown mixed results about the quality and success of Hispanic entrepreneurships.

Hispanic businesses are often connoted by more precariousness and challenging conditions than other groups' business, mainly because of the

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[83] Data from: Child Trends Calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, Educational attainment in the United States, March Current Population Survey 2009.

low educational level. Hispanic entrepreneurs are often less educated and more dependent on their ethnic group than other entrepreneurs and such a condition may influence negatively the economic activity: education, in fact, can be a determinant factor in entrepreneurship because may increase the likely to start-up a business and improve the business performance[84]. Furthermore, Hispanic businesses face significant barriers in the United States: issues relative to access to financial capitals, networks, labor pools sometimes discourage entrepreneurship development. As the U.S. Department of Commerce reported, «minority entrepreneurs continue to have difficulty obtaining the capital needed, whether debt or equity, to start and grow their businesses»[85]. In addition, even if these barriers do not impede entrepreneurships to establish and operate within their ethnic community, they can have consequences in limiting ethnic entrepreneurships to enter the broader labor market and, consequently, to achieve a good level of efficiency that makes them competitive.

According to some other research, however, Hispanic entrepreneurships, especially in places where the rate of unemployment is high, produce wealth, social mobility and processes of incorporation; it has been proven that entrepreneurs have higher income than their non-

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[84] Reynolds P. D., Carter N.M., Gartner W. B., Greene P.G., Cox L. W., "The Entrepreneur Next Door", Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation: Kansas City, MO, 2002.
[85] United States Department of Commerce, "Expanding financing opportunities for minority businesses", 2004, p.2.

entrepreneurial counterparts[86]. Support of entrepreneurship producing higher earnings than wage-jobs is given by Fairlie[87] as well. Moreover, high ethnic concentration may be the main argument to answer the dichotomy between the low Hispanic human capital and the growth of Hispanic businesses: ethnicity provides the basis for membership that, in turn, offers support within the market uncertainty and creates a favorable environment for entrepreneurship to start and develop. The ethnic group, as previously discussed, is both source of social capital and destination market for ethnic entrepreneurships. Family, also, is another important element promoting entrepreneurship as basis of both psychological and practical support for entrepreneurs. Family involvement has been found to be a good predictor of entrepreneurship success, especially within the Hispanic community where families are larger than the average American family[88]. It has been even found that Hispanics often have not benefited of financing governmental programs because they prefer being independent and rather relying on family support[89]. Moreover, Hispanic immigrants have been found to be able to face the adverse environmental conditions adopting various

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[86] Morris M. H., "The power of Ethnic Entrepreneurship", *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, 5.2, 2000, p. V.

[87] Fairlie R. W., "Does Business Ownership Provide a Source of Upward Mobility for Blacks and Hispanics?", *Entrepreneurship and Public Policy*, eds., Doug Holtz-Eakin, MIT Press: Cambridge, 2004.

[88] Chrisman J. J., Chua J. H., Stair L. P., "The Influence of National Culture and Family Involvement on Entrepreneurial Perceptions and Performance at the State Level", *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*, Summer, 2002, pp. 113-130.

[89] Torres J., "The Rise of Hispanic Businesses from 1980 to 1994", CELCEE *Kauffman Center Digest*, 97, 3, 1997.

pathways; for instance, the informal self-employment has been a way to improve the disadvantaged initial condition[90]. Finally, the growth and the importance Hispanic entrepreneurship is gaining has been proven by the rising of governmental programs for promoting small business, creation of indexes that track the status of the main Hispanic businesses, such as the HBSI (Hispanic Business Stock Index), and foundation of business magazines, like the *Hispanic Business* magazine that reports an annually list of the most successful Hispanic entrepreneurships.

## 3.4 Hispanic entrepreneurship in new destinations

As shown in the second chapter Hispanic immigrant destinations have changed recently. By the 1990, in fact, Hispanics have migrated to areas that had never experienced migration before, such as the Midwest and the South, impacting both their racial and ethnic composition, traditionally made up by Blacks and Whites, and their institutions that had to adjust themselves to incorporate the newcomers. However, despite the difficulties immigrants have experienced in the new destinations, research has shown a relative good level of adaptation to the new environment. Hispanics keep

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[90] Raijman R., "Mexican Immigrants and Informal Self-Employment: A Case Study in the City of Chicago", *Human Organization*, 60, 1, 2001, pp. 47-55.

on clustering and form ethnic communities and this condition seems to ease their process of economic and social integration.

Accordingly, the more Hispanics are spatially concentrated the more the number of ethnic entrepreneurships increases. Although the largest number of Hispanics businesses is in the traditional states of migration, above mentioned, new destinations have recorded higher growth rates from 1990 to 2008: North Carolina has experienced the higher increasing of Hispanic-owned firms with a rate of 135.5%, followed by Pennsylvania (106.8%) and Tennessee (102.9%) (Table 6). Evidently, the economic dynamics of these areas of new destination have been impacted through the increase of Hispanic entrepreneurships. In particular, there is a factor that more than others has influenced the rise of owned-firms among Hispanics. The increase of Hispanic population in new destinations has been due not only to external immigration from South America to the United States but also to internal migration of Hispanics who had already resided in places of traditional destination, such as Los Angeles, Miami or Chicago. These latter have accumulated experience and social capital whose redeployment affects positively their settlement and incorporation in the new areas. Social networks, then, widen involving connections between new and old destinations within the United States, besides connections between countries of origin and places of destination. Such a new dimension in the migration process has been highlighted in some research that analyzes

Hispanic communities in the South and Midwest. It is the case of the Mexican community in Dalton, Georgia, studied by Hernández-León and Zúniga[91]. This Mexican community, in fact, is composed mostly by secondary migrants, people who have already lived several years in traditional city of immigration before moving to Dalton. The effects of this condition are described by the authors looking both at the collective and individual levels. At the collective level they found out a phenomenon that they called 'compression of the migratory cycle', meaning an accelerated process of settlement and formation of ethnic community compared to the relative small number of years of residence in Dalton. Such a phenomenon is demonstrated by the presence of a large number of families with children that make up the 51% of the school population in Dalton, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, the creation of associations that give political voice to the community, and even the formation of a Mexican soccer league which has been recognized to have a relevant sociological and political significance. At the individual level, the social capital accumulated during the past years of migration is even more evident with the presence of more than 60 small and medium size businesses owned by Hispanics. They cover various sectors and serve both the Hispanic and local communities. What is important to notice is that entrepreneurship has been a path of socio-

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[91] Hernández-León R., Zúniga V., "Mexican Immigrant Community in the South and Social Capital", University of California, Working Paper 64, December 2002, The Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California.

economic mobility for many; in fact, some entrepreneurs had never had experience in running a business before settling in Dalton, but they started as employees in other Hispanic businesses to set up their own after gaining experience and skills. Others, instead, started a business after previous work experience in earlier places of settlements in the United States relying on networks linking old and actual places.

It is, however, important to underline that not all Hispanic communities experience the same success in the new destinations; there are in fact multiple conditions that interact each other to determine good achievements. Another research conducted still in Georgia, but in different counties, makes a distinction between two Hispanic communities placed in Gainesville and Vidalia, which are respectively an urban and rural area, and highlights the different conditions that conduct to different outcomes. These areas have in common the impressive growth of Hispanic population in recent times; nevertheless, Gainesville has a larger Hispanic population and is very close to a big city, unlike Vidalia that is a rural area with a smaller share of Hispanics. Taking under consideration the self-employment rate among Hispanics, in Gainesville there are almost 300 Hispanic-owned businesses while in Vidalia fewer. Entrepreneurships in both places present similar characteristics, such as the dependence on their ethnic group and the lack of financial resources. Nevertheless, Hispanic entrepreneurships in Gainesville achieve better outcomes thanks to the support of a larger

community, and the proximity to a big city that envisages wider market solutions.

## 3.5 Ethnic economy and assimilation process

The growth of ethnic entrepreneurships over the last decades has definitely contributed to put in discussion the old assimilation theory that predicted the progressive disappearance of ethnic elements and the complete fusion with the American mainstream. The ethnic networks, instead, tend to grow, to gain strength through mechanisms of spatial concentration and economic initiative. However, the issue about the social integration remains open because besides the positive effect of the ethnic economy in the settlement and adaptation of minorities, other research points out that ethnic economy, as it tends to be a niche, is conducive to slowing or hindering a full participation into the wider society.

Among the literature that argues a negative effect of the ethnic economy on the social integration of minorities, one of the main causes indicated is the low level of human capital[92] (education, language) that would reinforce the reliance on the ethnic group and, as a consequence, limit the relationships with external members. People who participate in ethnic economy, therefore, are more likely to have a lower level of social

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[92] Massey D., "Dimensions of the New Immigration to the U.S. and the Prospects for Assimilation", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 7, 1981, pp. 57-83.

integration than people who work outside. A further element has been identified in the discrimination that the labor market exerts toward minorities that are most of the time confined to the least desirable jobs. According to this perspective, ethnic economy is seen as a means for material survival; groups that are discriminated against tend to rely only on the co-ethnics support, avoiding contacts with other people or groups[93] and hampering in this way their social integration.

On the other side, research has shown as ethnic economies play a positive role for migrants who encounter difficulties of finding employment in the mainstream labor market[94]; they would, instead, provide opportunities for both entrepreneurs and ethnic community decreasing the rate of unemployment and social discrimination, enhancing the challenging job condition of young people in the ethnic segment, raising living standard of the entire ethnic group.

In line with the premises of the present work, with regard to the central role ethnic group exerts on the process of immigrants' incorporation, ethnic enclave theory, which is linked to the segmented assimilation theory, helps to better interpret how ethnic economy gives an important contribution to the immigrants assimilation process. The labor

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[93] Light I., "Disadvantaged Minorities in Self-Employment", *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 20, 1979, pp. 31-45.
[94] Logan J. R., Alba R. D., Stults B. J., "Enclaves and Entrepreneurs: Assessing the Pay-Off for Immigrants and Minorities", *International Migration Review*, 37, 2, 2003, pp. 344-388.

market, according to the ethnic enclave theory, is made of the primary and the secondary sector. The primary sector comprises prestigious and well-paid jobs, they are usually precluded to immigrants, unless a process of upward assimilation occurred and people entered successfully into the economic and social mainstream. The secondary sector, instead, is the one where many new arrivals converge into, it is made of unpleasant and low wage jobs that only people with few skills and low educational level are willing to do. The convergence into the secondary market coincides with a process of downward assimilation toward the disadvantage segments of the society. The third option of ethnic enclave, conceived as the alternative path immigrants may take to obtain economic success is associated to a process of selective assimilation that implies the economic integration into the host environment on the one side, but the preservation of ethnicity on the other side.    The benefits of the ethnic enclaves do not involve only the entrepreneurs but the entire community that, besides having access to goods and services not available in the mainstream economy, takes advantage of a wider employment opportunity. The ethnic enclave, therefore, besides being an alternative economic path is also a means of social advancement and integration for immigrants[95].

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[95] Zhou M., "The Role of the Enclave Economy in Immigrant Adaptation and Community Building: The Case of New York's Chinatown", 2004, in Butler J. S. and Kozmetsky G. (eds.), *Immigrant and Minority Entrepreneurship: The Continuous Rebirth of American Communities*, pp.37-60.

**Table 4**. US firms by Hispanics and non-Hispanics.

|  | 2002 (number) | 2007 (number) | Change (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| All Firms | 22,974,655 | 27,110,353 | +18 |
| Hispanic Firms | 1,573,464 | 2,260,309 | +43.7 |
| Non-Hispanic Firms | 20,793,392 | 23,803,242 | +14.5 |

*Source:* US Census Bureau, 2007 Survey of Business Owners and 2002 Survey of Business Owners

**Table 5**. Hispanic owned-firms by traditional destination states.

| Traditional Destinations | 2002 (number) | 2007 (number) | Change % 2002-2007 |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Big Five* | | | |
| California | 427,678 | 566,567 | +32.5 |
| New York | 163,588 | 193,248 | +18.1 |
| Texas | 319,340 | 447,486 | +40.1 |
| Florida | 266,688 | 450,185 | +68.8 |
| Illinois | 39,539 | 56,552 | +43.0 |
| *Second Tier* | | | |
| New Jersey | 49,841 | 68,377 | +37.2 |
| Massachusetts | 15,933 | 19,411 | +21.8 |
| Washington | 10,261 | 17,809 | +73.6 |
| Virginia | 18,987 | 28,580 | +50.5 |
| Maryland | 15,353 | 25,742 | +67.7 |

*Source*: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 Survey of Business Owners and 2002 Survey of Business Owners

**Table 6**. Hispanic owned-firms by new destination states.

| New Destinations | 2002 (number) | 2007 (number) | Change % 2002-2007 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Arizona | 35,104 | 52,667 | +50.0 |
| Colorado | 24,054 | 33,762 | +40.4 |
| Connecticut | 9,408 | 14,049 | +49.3 |
| Georgia | 18,310 | 32,575 | +77.9 |
| Hawaii | 3,095 | 4,384 | +41.6 |
| Indiana | 5,482 | 8,567 | +56.3 |
| Kansas | 4,176 | 5,775 | +38.3 |
| Louisiana | 7,645 | 11,088 | +45.0 |
| Michigan | 9,841 | 10,763 | +9.4 |
| Minnesota | 3,984 | 5,011 | +25.8 |
| Missouri | 3,652 | 6,177 | +69.1 |
| Nevada | 9,741 | 18,029 | +85.1 |
| North Carolina | 9,043 | 21,297 | +135.5 |
| Ohio | 7,109 | 9,726 | +36.8 |
| Oregon | 6,360 | 11,339 | +78.3 |
| Pennsylvania | 11,023 | 22,797 | +106.8 |
| Rhode Island | 3,415 | 5,764 | +68.8 |
| Tennessee | 4,301 | 8,728 | +102.9 |
| Utah | 5,177 | 9,220 | +78.1 |
| Wisconsin | 3,750 | 5,625 | +50.0 |

*Source*: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 Survey of Business Owners and 2002Survey Business Owners

# CHAPTER 4

## RECEIVING CONTEXT AND ASSIMILATION PROCESS

The migrants' experience is inevitably shaped by the receiving context. The host community, in fact, responds differently to the various migratory groups, hampering or promoting their chances of integration. The context is defined by the institutional framework, the labor market and the social climate pervading the host society toward immigrants, in terms of prejudice and discriminatory behavior. As A. Portes and D. MacLeod have underlined, «immigrants who are granted legal status, receive resettlement assistance, and are not subject to widespread discrimination are expected to

experience both faster economic progress and a smoother process of social and psychological integration»[96].

## 4.1 The U.S. context

The American society today is increasingly heterogeneous and offers such a variety of alternatives that is not a simple operation to foresee the path immigrants will take as well as it was possible in the past. The classical course leading earlier European immigrants toward a faster acculturation and an eventual and complete assimilation process into the American society throughout the generations is not the main option today because of the changes occurred in the economic sector, in the immigration policy and in the social climate.

The American economy in the age of mass migration from Europe, 1880-1920, was growing even because of the immigrants who were employed in the labor force. It was a period of industrial expansion that allowed immigrants with low education and skills to achieve steady jobs in the manufacturing sectors[97]. The interwar period was characterized by economic and political instability that brought about a decrease of the

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[96] Portes A., MacLeod D., "Educational Progress of Children of Immigrants: The Roles of Class, Ethnicity, and School Context", *Sociology of Education*, 69, 1996, pp. 255-275, p.257.

[97] Hatton T. J., Williamson J. G., *The Age of Mass Migration: Causes and Economic Impact*, Oxford University Press: New York, 1998.

migration flow, which reinvigorated again after the war in 1945, a new period of prosperity and stability in the global economic system. Over the last few decades American economy has experienced an industrial restructuring[98]: international competition and technological innovation has jeopardized the power of the old industrial companies that controlled many sectors of manufacture and distribution of goods. That has caused a shift of production to low-wage countries or to rural areas within the United States. The result of this operation has led to a dominance of labor subcontracting, to a widespread informalization of labor relations[99], and in turn to the decline of job security. The consequences for immigrants integration are clear: while in the past a 'pyramidal economy' allowed them to access the American middle class through a fast process of social mobility, the contemporary economy, for which has been used the analogy of 'hourglass economy'[100], has caused the shrinking of the middle class strata making harder for contemporary immigrants the upward mobility.

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[98] Kasarda J., "Industrial Restructuring and the Changing Location of Jobs", in *State of the Union: America in the 1990s*, ed. Reynolds Farley, Russell Sage Foundation: New York, 1995.

[99] Portes A., Sassen S., "Making It Underground: Comparative Materials on the Informal Sector in Western Market Economies", *American Journal of Sociology*, 93, 1, 1987, pp. 30-61.

[100] Portes A., Zhou M., "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants", *Annals*, 530, 1993, pp. 74-96.

The policy on immigration adopted by the United States has also contributed to shape immigrants' experience and ethnic relationships[101]. After the first wave, 1880-1920, immigration suffered a drastic reduction as a result of a series of acts that raised quota barriers against southern and eastern European and blocked the entries of Asians. The ethnic communities already settled in the United States saw their ties with the home countries weaken over time, condition that led to a faster assimilation process of these groups into the American society. The Immigration Act of 1965, instead, represents the pivot of the current immigration policy. It abolished the National Origins Formula and gave priority to family reunification over occupational skills, resulting in a tremendous increase of immigration and in a shift from European to Asian and Central and South American immigrants. It was further supported by the following Immigration Act of 1990 that increased the number of legal immigrants allowed into the United States per year. The recent attempts to control the immigration flow and in particular the increasing number of undocumented immigrants, through policy that penalizes employers hiring undocumented immigrants, denies social services for these latter, hardens the border enforcement, have not had the expected effects of shrinking contemporary immigration. The current ethnic groups, unlike those of European

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[101] King D., *Making Americans. Immigration, Race, and the Origins of the Diverse Democracy*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000.

immigrants of the past, are likely to grow over time, maintain their culture and rather renew it through the steady arrival of new immigrants, hindering in this way the classical assimilation process into the America culture[102].

Furthermore, the social climate which encompasses ideologies, attitudes and opinions American society holds toward immigrants is another variable that influences the integration process of newcomers. First of all, an aspect that has always characterized the history of the United States is the racial discrimination. Although formal regulations have been enforced in order to eliminate this social plague, the black-white color line remains a landmark that defines social relationships within the American society[103]. Racial features in the United States are not an individual peculiarity, rather a contextual feature of the host society. The most immigrants may have never experienced prejudice and discrimination in their home country, it is a condition related to the new environment where the differences are viewed as a threat to the national culture and, therefore, immigrants become object of marginalization. Europeans, especially those coming from northern and western Europe, were advantaged by their racial and ethnic similarity to the dominant population; the more marked differences in racial and ethnic characteristics of the newcomers, instead, have influenced negatively their opportunity of integration and social

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[102] Alba R., Nee V., *Remaking the American Mainstream. Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003.

[103] Lee J., Bean F., Batalova J., Sandhu S., "Immigration and the Black-White Color Line in the United States", *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 31, 1, 2003, pp. 43-76.

progress. Second, the ideological framework concerning ethnic and cultural diversity if, on the one hand, shows signs of change toward a total acceptance of people and groups with a different ethnicity, on the other hand it still posits some barriers. In the period of European and Asian immigration, a strong Americanization movement enforced a series of interventions on American institutions, involving in particular the school system, in order to spread the Anglo conformity model, the dominant cultural pattern in the American society at that time. Today, the contemporary immigrants experience a less pressure to assimilation due to a shift in attitudes and ideologies toward diversity, advocated by movements as cultural pluralism and multiculturalism. It was the philosopher Horace Kallen in 1915[104] to introduce the cultural pluralism idea: Kallen observed the tendency among the various ethnic groups to keep to themselves and to preserve their cultural heritage even participating to the economic and political life of the nation; he emphasized the value and the contribution of each community and was against the policy of Americanization toward immigrants. The idea of imposing the Anglo-Saxon conformity was strongly opposed, rather recognizing the value of each cultural group would have been the best expression of the democratic

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[104] Kallen H. M., "Democracy *Versus* the Melting Pot", *The Nation*, February 18 and 25, 1915.

ideals on which the American society is based[105]. Nevertheless, one limit of Kallen's idea was not to consider the African-Americans as having the same claim to be part of the United States: reproducing a common stereotype he refers to them saying «the degenerate farming stock of New England, the 'poor whites' of the South»[106]. Since the early sixties the cultural pluralism regains strength with the multiculturalism: «the key difference is that cultural pluralists ignored African Americans' interests in the U.S. polity, a concern that has been at the forefront of multiculturalists' initiatives policies that starting from the same assumptions take distance from the cultural pluralism because include African American interests in the U.S. polity»[107]. The sixties, indeed, are the years of the ethnic revival: African-Americans start the civil rights movement against the racial discrimination and, to follow, other groups of European origins ask for the recognition of their difference as well. Everywhere, even in Europe, the recognition of difference, not only ethnic but also religious, behavioral and sexual is emphasized. Denying it is not acceptable anymore both because it continues to exist and because its denial brings about feelings of hostility jeopardizing the social cohesion. Claims of group difference became central to a new politics in the United States called multiculturalism: although assimilation had taken place, it should have not been required and

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[105] Kallen H. M., *Culture and Democracy in the United States*, Boni and Liveright: New York, 1924.
[106] Kallen H. M., *Op. cit.*, p.193.
[107] King D., *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

immigrants would have been free to maintain their culture while participating to the social and economical life in the new country.

That American society today is more tolerant than in the past is a fact, but the extent to which it is tolerant is not equally clear. Several surveys on social climate toward immigration have in fact shown controversial issues in this regard. Many Americans are willing to accept cultural diversity insofar as it does not contrast with their own culture and it is confined to the private sphere.

## 4.2 Survey on Hispanic Immigration

Here, in order to draw possible implications coming from the context of reception with regard to the assimilation process of immigrants, the focus will be on the social climate that American society holds toward Hispanic immigration, since primary data from a recent survey[108] are available to analyze.

*The 2009 Social Climate Survey for Hispanic Immigration in the United States* is a national survey produced by the Social Science Research Center in collaboration with researchers from Department of Political Science and Public Administration of Mississippi State University, along

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[108] Cosby A. G., Rosas Gutierrez M. A., Valenzuela Salazar N., Matta M. S., Neaves T. T., *The 2009 Social Climate Survey for Hispanic Immigration in the United States*, Executive Report, July 2010, Social Science Research Center, Mississippi.

with the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Mexico, and the Dipartimento di Processi Formativi of the Università degli Studi di Catania[109], Italy. The study was designed in order to depict the current and future social climate for Hispanic immigration, which has become an urgent and controversial issue in the United States. The survey instrument was developed by utilizing a number of questions and scales applied for the first time and existing questions from other survey instruments, which included work conducted by *The Gallup Organization*, *The Pew Hispanic Center*, and *Polling Report*. It provides a wide range of data about the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs American citizens hold toward Hispanic immigration in the fields of law enforcement, national economy, and social integration. These latter were assumed to be the three domains that characterize the social climate for Hispanic immigration in the U.S. population. Firstly, law enforcement issues comprise border security, crime, public health, and safety. Second, national economy issues include opposed thoughts such as immigrants bring talent and labor force to fuel the economy or they take jobs away from American workers threatening the U.S. economy. Finally, social integration issues encompass the public perception about the social and cultural contribution of immigrants, in particular whether they should maintain their culture or should blend

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[109] As referent of the Dipartimento di Processi Formativi I personally was involved in the survey project. My participation covered the different stages of the research project, from its design, developed during the fall 2008, to the preliminary analysis of the data collection, completed in March 2009.

completely in the American culture. Furthermore, these three social climate domains are classified according to a heuristic classification scheme that assesses the level of societal attachment. Precisely, the most relevant survey items have been classified within this model as *Universal* if they are fully supported and accepted (85-100% of respondents), *Predominant* if they are mostly supported but there is a small number of people who reject them (65-84%), *Contested* when the public is divided and opinions and beliefs are very different, *Marginal* when they are supported by only a small share of people (0-34%).

The data was collected by Wolfgang Frese Survey Research Laboratory of the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University between February 10 and March 11, 2009. Telephone interviews were conducted with adult respondents from households from across the United States. The household telephone numbers were selected using random-digit-dialing sampling procedure. The data was weighted based on ethnicity, age, gender, and education to ensure the representativeness of the sample. Interviews were completed with a total of 1,505 out of 1,842 eligible respondents (81.7 % cooperation rate). The CASRO response rate was 53.8 %.

**4.3 Major findings**

Through a descriptive analysis of the data provided by the survey it is possible to depict a complex picture that shows how controversial the Hispanic immigration issue is in the U.S. today. As above mentioned, three are the main domains on which respondents express their opinions, attitudes, or behaviors: law enforcement, national economy and social integration. Some of the major findings on the three domains are presented using the heuristic classification scheme that, as already explained, shows the degree of societal attachment.

*Law enforcement*

The recent policy on immigration is based on a series of measures that have the aim to control and contain immigration flows, in particular the illegal immigration. These proposals were listed in the survey questionnaire in order to assess the degree of agreement or disagreement of respondents. The main finding shows that U.S. population widely supports those laws that have the objective to strengthen border controls and limit as much as possible the illegal immigration. Proposals like *putting additional money into the border patrol*, *passing laws to penalize who employ undocumented immigrants*, and *increase raids, arrests, and deportations* meet the agreement of an high percentage of respondents, respectively the 80.9%, 82.9%, and 73.3%, making fall them in the predominant category of the heuristic classification scheme. The contested category, instead, contain

proposals like *building a border fence*, *not allowing children of undocumented immigrants to attend public schools*, *illegal immigrants should be given legal status if they are willing to enroll in the military*; it means that on these issues public opinion is divided.

| Law Enforcement | |
|---|---|
| **Universal 85-100%** | None to report |
| **Predominant 65-84%** | Passing laws to penalize those who employ undocumented immigrants (+82.9%/-17.1%)<br>Putting additional money into border patrol (+80.9%/-19.1%)<br>Requiring immigrants to speak English before they are granted any type of legal status (+75.7%/-24.3%)<br>Increasing raids, arrests and deportations (+73.3%/-26.7%) |
| **Contested 35-64%** | Giving illegal immigrants legal status if they are willing to enroll in the military (+59.8%/-40.2%)<br>Building a border fence (+53.5%/-46.5%)<br>Immigrants significantly increase the crime rate (+43.5%/-56.4%)<br>Not allowing children of undocumented immigrants to attend public schools (+42.2%/-57.8%) |
| **Marginal 0-34%** | Most immigrants are documented (+30.5%/-69.5%)<br>Permitting state governments to issue driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants (+14%/-86%) |

### *National economy*

The national economy, as showed in the first paragraph, has experienced a shift over the last decades. The process of industrial restructuring, in fact, has brought about a decrease of the average wages and an increasing informalization of labor relations. Such a condition has

been favorable to immigrants who are willing to perform these jobs unlike the American workers. As a matter of fact, the main findings in this domain show a predominant agreement of U.S. citizens with the item *Hispanics are taking jobs that Americans will not perform* (76.7%). On the rest of economic issues subjected to the respondents' opinions there is not a general consensus: Hispanic immigrants are seen both as threatening and enhancing the U.S. economy. The most items, therefore, are classified in the contested category meaning that the economic issue is currently very controversial. In addition, the survey was conducted in a time of job loss and high unemployment, as a consequence of the economic recession; hence, the social climate may have been influenced negatively. On the threatening side, there was the following distribution: 48.2% view that *they often end up on welfare*; roughly more than half (57.2%) see that *Hispanic or Latino immigrants are taking jobs that American workers will perform*; 40.7% determines that *the US Economy is threatened by Hispanic immigrant's presence*. Overall, a majority of 68.2% say that *they do not pay their fair share of taxes*, and 55.4% believes that *Hispanics decrease the average wages and salaries of native-born American workers*. On the enhancing side, 64.7% agrees with the item *Hispanics have a great deal to offer to the U.S. economy*, and 69.3% recognizes that *Hispanics strengthen our country due to their hard work and talents*.

| National Economy | |
|---|---|
| **Universal 85-100%** | None to report |
| **Predominant 65-84%** | Immigrants are taking jobs that Americans will not perform (+76.7%/-23.3%) <br> Immigrants strengthen the country due to their hard work and talents (+69.3%/-30.7%) |
| **Contested 35-64%** | Immigrants have a great deal to offer the economy (+64.7%/-35.3%) <br> Immigrants do not pay their fair share of taxes (+62.8%/-37.2%) <br> Immigrants are taking jobs that American workers will perform (+57.2%/-42.8%) <br> Immigrants decrease the average wages and salaries of native born American workers (+55.4%/-44.6%) <br> Immigrants often end up on welfare (+48.2%/-51.8%) <br> The economy is threatened by immigrants' presence (+40.7%/-59.3%) |
| **Marginal 0-34%** | Some of their family members lost a job to a Hispanic or Latino immigrant (+8.2%/-91.8%) |

*Social integration*

The climate resulted generally positive with regard of social integration domain. When opinions about Hispanic values and culture were asked, respondents demonstrated a high consensus. They think *Hispanics have strong family values* (92.9%), *they do well in school* (70.7%), they *should maintain their culture* (69.8%), and they actually *enrich the cultural life in the US* (72.9%). Also, there was a high support on social integration in school, although an interesting observation comes from the comparison between two items: *Spanish-speaking children benefit from interacting with English-speaking children in school* (94%), and *English-speaking children*

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*benefit from interacting with Spanish-speaking children in school* (79.4%). Almost a 15% of variation locates respondents in two different levels of agreement, universal and predominant, highlighting a possible sign of ethnocentric attitudes of U.S. citizens towards Hispanic or Latino immigrants. Another item results interesting in the assessment of the climate on social integration, that is *American society should become more accommodating to immigrants*. The public opinion in this case was divided demonstrating the controversial character of the issue. In fact, 42% of respondents agrees with the item, against the majority that believe American society should not be more accommodating than it is already toward immigrants. Finally, the opinions are clearly defined within the distinction between legal and illegal immigrants. If, on the one hand, there is a **universal** belief that *Legal Hispanic or Latino immigrants in the US should have the same opportunities as Americans*, on the other hand there is a **marginal** belief that *undocumented Hispanic or Latino immigrants should be allowed to benefit from welfare programs* (18%), and *healthcare benefits should be provided to immigrants regardless of their immigration status* (33.2%).

| Social integration | |
|---|---|
| **Universal 85-100%** | Spanish-speaking children benefit from interacting with English-speaking children in school (+94%/-6%) Immigrants have strong family values (+92.9%/-7.1%) |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Legal immigrants should have the same opportunities as Americans (+92.3%/-7.7%) |
| **Predominant 65-84%** | Schools should acknowledge diversity and promote cultural differences (+80.9%/-19.1%) English-speaking children benefit from interacting with Spanish-speaking children in school (+79.4%/-20.6%) Immigrants enrich the cultural life in the United States (+72.9%/-27.1%) Immigrants do well in school (+70.7%/-29.3%) Immigrants should maintain their own culture (+69.8%/-30.2%) |
| **Contested 35-64%** | American society should become more accommodating to immigrants (+46.6%/-53.4%) The government should allow other immediate family members of immigrants to join them if more than one immigrant has already migrated (+42%/-58%) |
| **Marginal 0-34%** | Healthcare benefits should be provided to immigrants regardless of their immigration status (+33.2%/-66.8%) Undocumented immigrants should be allowed to benefit from welfare programs (+18%/-82%) |

## 4.4 Ideological climate on ethnic and cultural diversity

The overview of the major findings gives a general idea on the social climate for Hispanic immigration in the United States. What emerges is certainly a receiving context that is divided into contrasting attitudes and opinions about the impact that Hispanic immigrants have on the U.S. political, economic, and cultural life. Specifically, this work intends to linger on the divisions that occur in the American public opinion in reaction to the increasing cultural diversity and extensive Hispanic immigration. As mentioned above, the ideological context has widely changed since the first wave of immigration in the United States. While in the past the societal

expectations about the assimilation of the ethnic groups were high, today new approaches as the cultural pluralism and the multiculturalism, highlighting the value of the difference, have contributed to smooth the ethnocentric attitudes; however, the question to be addressed is 'to which extent such an ideological change has occurred'.

Indeed, taking under consideration the strong position against immigration of some Americans, it seems that such a change has not occurred yet. One of the most influential, yet criticized author in the contemporary debate is Samuel Huntington[110] who firmly believes that immigration, especially the Hispanic immigration, is a threat for the cultural and political unity of the American nation. The American identity, defined according to Huntington by the WASP culture, is severely undermined by a copious and steady Hispanic immigration that is gradually changing the geography and the demography of the United States. Moreover, Huntington sees the future scenario worsened by the impossibility of assimilation into the American culture as well as it occurred in the past; Hispanic immigrants, in fact, show evident trends in clustering together, through residential and economic enclaves, and maintaining their cultural traditions alive.

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[110] Huntington S., *Who are we? The challenges to America's National Identity*, Simon & Shuster: New York, 2004.

Looking at the survey data, it is clear how a consistent section of the public opinion is in line with the concerns expressed by Huntington about the preservation of the traditional American identity, whereas another section expresses a more multicultural vision emphasizing the promotion of cultural differences. Some of the items utilized in the survey were useful instruments to verify these two opposed attitudes toward Hispanic immigrants and their social integration in the American society: *Hispanic or Latino immigrants should blend into American culture*, *Hispanic or Latino immigrants should maintain their own culture*, *Hispanic or Latino immigrants enrich the cultural life in the U.S.*, *American culture is threatened Hispanic or Latino immigrants' culture*, *American society should become more accommodating to immigrants*. The first two in particular are respectively expression of the traditional assimilation stance and the multiculturalist stance. When the respondents were asked whether 'Hispanics should maintain their own culture', the 69.8% manifested agreement, making assume that the same share would have disagreed with the opposite item 'immigrants should blend into American culture'; nevertheless, the 77.5% unexpectedly agreed with this latter. Although the discrepancy seems nonsense, it actually reveals a deeper attitude: the most Americans are willing to support cultural diversity insofar as it is stated in general terms and is referred mainly to a symbolic dimension than to a substantial cultural difference. Also, a high percentage (72.9%) thinks that

American culture is enriched by the Hispanic immigrants' culture, confirming the general tendency to appreciate the cultural diversity. In fact, the strong position that sees Hispanic culture as a threat to American culture, which also coincides with Huntington's stance, meets only a small, but not insignificant, share of agreement (34.9%). Finally, the public is divided with regard to the item 'American society should be more accommodating': a slight majority does not agree, probably because believes that immigrants have to change in order to incorporate into the American society and not the contrary; on the other side, the 46.6% agrees with the American society to modify itself in order to meet immigrants' needs.

In sum, American society seems to be divided between those who support the maintenance of traditional American culture and the necessity that Hispanic immigrants blend into the American culture, and those who recognize the multicultural character of the American society and consider the diversity a value to defend. Despite such a division, it appears that high polarization on both sides is not expressed. Only one third of respondents manifests a strong position perceiving Hispanic presence as a threat; those who may be labeled as multiculturalists are not expression of a strong multiculturalism if they think that Hispanics 'should blend into American culture' and at the same time should maintain their own culture'. Such a dichotomy, as already underlined, suggests what Glazer indicated as

'American  ethnic pattern', that is group distinctiveness is tolerable insofar as it is limited to the private sphere, within families and communities, and does not contrast with the institutional sphere toward which is required a commitment based on ideals shared by all American citizens, regardless their ethnic belonging[111]. The ideological framework with regard of cultural diversity has securely changed compared to the past; however, a strong multiculturalism that aims to an institutional acknowledgment of ethnic groups' rights is not shared by the majority, rather most Americans could be defined as 'soft multiculturalists', as emerged from some research, that means they believe to a compatibility between cultural assimilation and cultural pluralism, «endorse the motto of *e pluribus unum* and the idea of sharing a common culture that evolves as newcomers add elements of their cultural heritage to the American way of life[112]».

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[111] Glazer N., *Affirmative Discrimination*, Basic Books: New York, 1975.
[112] Citrin J., Lerman A., Murakami M., Pearson K., "Testing Huntington: Is Hispanic Immigration a Threat to American Identity?", *Perspectives on Politics*, 5, 1, 2007, pp. 31-48, p. 43.

# CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis on the assimilation theories had ultimately the aim to improve the understanding of the dynamics that shape interethnic relationships in a multicultural context, meaning with multicultural the mere descriptive dimension, that is the coexistence of groups with different ethnic backgrounds within the same territory.

The very first question that introduced this work, indeed, was 'what happens when people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds meet?', referring specifically to the condition of people who migrate to places with institutional and social structures already settled. To answer the question the American context was chosen, given its multicultural reality and, overall, its historical tradition of immigration; moreover, this study chose a meso-level analysis, opting to interpret the phenomenon through the

structure of group life, not because the individual characteristics of the migrants are considered irrelevant, but rather because of the conviction that individual identity is rooted in the social structures and cannot be entirely understood  without a reference to them. Also, the macro-structural perspective tending to see migrants as passive subjects, moved by economic or institutional forces, was left out, because of the belief that the migratory decision is voluntary and rational.

Therefore, the study focused on the role that the ethnic group plays on the interethnic relationships and on the process of newcomers' incorporation into the new environment. The ethnic group was defined as: a) a community, a group of individuals who share a common culture, conceived as a product of continuous interactions among people and groups and as such not static; b) a group that believes in a common descent, which creates sense of belonging and social solidarity among its members; c) a group characterized by a specific condition, that is its contrast with a dominant culture. The ethnicity, from this work's perspective, is not a constraint to be overcome for a full social and economic inclusion, as the old assimilation theories stated, nor a symbolic value reduced to a subjective dimension; it is rather a resource that helps people and groups in their process of integration within a more and more culturally diverse society. The process of assimilation has become segmented; it means that besides the classical path of assimilation into the American middle class,

there is an opposite form of assimilation toward the underclass, and a selective assimilation process in which the ethnic group plays a double function of keeping the culture of the old country alive and facilitating the incorporation of new elements coming from the host country culture.

The role that ethnic networks play was widely documented through the reference to the Hispanic ethnic group, which is the largest minority group in the United States today. By studying the copious literature on the Hispanic immigration and conducting a descriptive analysis of recent Census data, the classical theories explaining the process of assimilation of the minority groups in the U.S. were questioned.

First, the spatial assimilation model, better known as concentric zonal theory, elaborated by Burgess, argues that immigrants would initially settle in ethnic enclaves, placed in the inner cities and characterized by poor living conditions, to move as the assimilation process is taking place toward peripheral zones, less ethnically concentrated and richer. It is clear, according to this approach, how the ethnicity is negatively valued, as an element that impedes the upward mobility of immigrants and the assimilation is an unavoidable outcome. Differently from this view, recent studies show a different residential path, emerged since the post-1965 migratory movements. Some immigrants settle directly in desirable neighborhoods located in suburban areas and inhabited by co-ethnics. The new pattern, identified as 'ethnic community model' opposed to the 'ethnic

enclave model', implies a different path that does not lead to the assimilation, as traditionally conceived, rather to the voluntary preservation of the ethnic group identity, as described in the selective assimilation process. The descriptive analysis, using the U.S. Census data on traditional and new places of principal settlements of immigrants, in particular of Hispanic immigrants, despite highlighted a new destination pattern that would lead to think to a dispersal of immigrants throughout the American country, actually showed a constant trend of choosing destinations where ethnic networks already exist. Furthermore, the characteristics of the new destinations described as suburban and rural places denote the willingness to avoid impoverished and dangerous neighborhoods of the inner cities and look for better living conditions and more sedentary settlements. Therefore, the ethnic enclave model, which considers the ethnic neighborhood as a transitory place to leave in order to accomplish a successful assimilation to the American society, seems to be replaced with the ethnic community model according to which living within their own ethnic group is a voluntary choice made by immigrants who do not want to give up their ethnicity rather utilize it as a resource to ease their integration process in the new environment.

Second, besides the ethnic concentration another trend has emerged among immigrants, especially Hispanic immigrants: the increase of ethnic entrepreneurships. Ethnic entrepreneurship demonstrates the active

initiative of migrants, unlike what the macro-structural perspective claims, and the relevance of the ethnic networks. The ethnic enclave theory elaborated by A. Portes states that ethnic enclave, defined as a concentration of ethnic businesses providing goods and services for the community primarily and also for the broader market, represents an alternative path to the primary market made up of high wages jobs and occupied mostly by natives and the secondary market comprising a low economy where minorities converge. Such an alternative path is made feasible by the reliance on the ethnic group that provides individuals with the social capital functional to the development of the economic business. The U.S. Census data on Hispanic entrepreneurships showed that self-employment is an increasing alternative that immigrants take, not only in the traditional destinations but also in the new destinations where communities have been growing. Although Hispanic businesses are connoted by more precariousness and challenging conditions, they also produce wealth, social mobility and processes of incorporation especially in places where the rate of unemployment is high. The ethnic entrepreneurship represents a further evidence that ethnicity is not disappearing, as foreseen by the classical assimilation theories; the ethnic networks, instead tend to grow, to gain strength through processes of spatial concentration and economic initiative. The ethnic enclave option is associated to a process of selective assimilation that implies the economic integration into the host

environment on the one side and the preservation of ethnicity on the other side.

Finally, some considerations on the recent social climate in the U.S. toward Hispanic immigration were made. Through a descriptive analysis of primary data from *The 2009 Social Climate Survey for Hispanic Immigration in the United States*, emerged an ideological context widely changed since the first waves of immigration in the U.S. with respect to the increasing cultural diversity. The societal expectations on assimilation of ethnic groups were high in the past whereas today the diversity is considered a value to defend and promote. Americans showed a general tendency to appreciate cultural diversity; nevertheless, it appeared that group distinctiveness is tolerable insofar as it is limited to the private sphere and does not contrast with the institutional sphere toward which is required a commitment based on ideals shared by all American citizens, regardless their ethnic belonging. This attitude was defined as soft multiculturalism and seems to be compatible with the process of selective assimilation that interests today the Hispanic community in the United States and maybe other ethnic groups. Hispanic groups, indeed, if on the one side want to preserve their cultural background, which is further kept alive through the continuous flow of immigrants from the home countries, on the other side are willing to participate to the American institutions and achieve a social integration that reduce social conflicts.

The claims and conclusions extrapolated in the present research are based on a careful study of the American literature on the assimilation theories and the Hispanic immigration. The descriptive analysis through the use of the Census data, although is not sufficient to deeply depict all variables underlying the integration process of immigrants, provides useful information to understand the general trends of migratory movements and processes of settlement. Fully aware that not all Hispanic immigrants in the United States share the same experience, the scenario coming out from this work show that the main process involving the Hispanic groups in their incorporation to the host society is the selective assimilation and that the ethnicity is a substantial element of this process, not simply a symbolic and subjective dimension.

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