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IMMIGRANTS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN NEW
YORK CITY:
AN ANALYSIS ON THEIR INTEGRATION PROCESS
AND THE ROLE PLAYED BY ETHNICITY

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Abstract

L'analisi oggetto della presente tesi riguarda la realtà di integrazione delle comunità di immigrati nel contesto di New York City. In prima battuta verranno descritti dettagliatamente quattro quartieri etnici (Manhattan Chinatown, Bronx Little Italy, Russian Brighton Beach e Mexican Sunset Park), la cui osservazione deriva da un'attenta analisi sul campo effettuata mediante l'approccio conosciuto come Sociologia Visuale; tale metodo consiste nell'ispezione e nel raccoglimento di informazioni circa una realtà urbana e sociale tramite un supporto fotografico.

La ricerca procederà poi analizzando il livello di integrazione degli immigrati nella società newyorchese; vivere all'interno di un quartiere etnico comporta svantaggi ai relativi residenti? Può essere considerato causa di discriminazione ed isolamento? Oppure abitare tra persone della propria etnia e cultura costituisce un vantaggio per gli abitanti di questa metropoli provenienti da altri paesi? Questo elaborato cercherà di rispondere a tali quesiti, tenendo in considerazione diversi aspetti. Innanzitutto, è fondamentale precisare che New York presenta una realtà unica al mondo data dalla sua particolare condizione di *gateway city*, che ne determina una particolare esperienza di immigrazione, struttura e composizione etnica e sociale. A differenza delle altre metropoli, *gateway* e non, New York presenta un'elevatissima percentuale di abitanti dal recente passato di immigrazione, se non addirittura immigrati essi stessi; le numerosissime comunità etniche presenti all'interno dell'area metropolitana hanno dato vita ad altrettanti quartieri ed enclavi etniche, favorendo lo sviluppo di un panorama urbano e sociale senza eguali. Avere origini culturali diverse da quella americana, essere

“etnici”, costituisce pertanto non un’eccezione, bensì quasi una norma a New York, dove le diverse origini vengono addirittura esaltate attraverso manifestazioni, parate e festival. Tuttavia, come risulterà dall’osservazione delle dinamiche di interazione tra la società americana “dominante” e i diversi gruppi etnici, è possibile affermare che tutt’oggi le connotazioni razziali ed etniche esercitano ancora un ruolo fondamentale e sono frequentemente causa di pregiudizi e discriminazioni.

Relativamente alla presenza dei quartieri etnici e all’integrazione dei loro abitanti nella società newyorchese, il presente lavoro di tesi esaminerà poi la contrapposizione tra l’approccio assimilazionista e quello multiculturale, oggetto di numerosi dibattiti. Mentre in passato era possibile riscontrare una realtà maggiormente assimilativa, in cui gli immigrati, una volta giunti negli Stati Uniti, venivano sottoposti a programmi di Americanizzazione, nelle scuole, luoghi lavorativi o mediante organizzazioni locali, con lo scopo di acquisire i valori e lo stile di vita promulgati dalla società americana, oggi è possibile riscontrare una situazione piuttosto differente. Sempre tenendo presente che l’attenzione dell’elaborato si rivolge alla realtà peculiare di New York City, si può osservare come venga ora attribuita maggiore attenzione alle diverse tradizioni e culture che caratterizzano le numerose etnie che compongono la società newyorchese, dove le differenze etniche vengono non solo accettate, ma addirittura esaltate. In un tale contesto sempre più multietnico, risulterebbe perfino difficile stabilire su che basi potrebbe avvenire un processo assimilativo, data l’estrema complessità e ricchezza culturale che caratterizzano la città in questione e la sua società. Allo stesso tempo, però, non si può affermare che New York City abbia adottato una politica prettamente multiculturale, in quanto essa sarebbe caratterizzata dall’assenza di un’identità comune e di valori che unifichino le diverse comunità etniche. Un contesto multiculturale, infatti, prevede la coesistenza di diversi gruppi etnici, culture e modi di vivere relativamente autonomi ed

indipendenti l'uno dall'altro, condizione che potrebbe avere risvolti negativi per quanto riguarda la creazione di un senso di appartenenza e coinvolgimento in un'unica società. Tale realtà non è però riscontrabile a New York City, dove le diverse comunità etniche, pur avendo la possibilità di mantenere numerosi aspetti delle proprie culture, sono comunque legate le une alle altre da un'identità comune. Pertanto, la realtà che caratterizza New York oggi viene descritta da molti studiosi con il termine di Pluralismo Culturale, condizione che può essere collocata tra l'approccio assimilazionista e quello multiculturale; essa infatti prevede sia l'affermazione delle diverse culture, e quindi la possibilità da parte delle comunità di immigrati di mantenere le proprie tradizioni e promuovere diversi aspetti delle proprie origini culturali, ma allo stesso tempo è caratterizzata anche dalla presenza di valori comuni e di un'identità condivisa da tutti gli abitanti della metropoli, non importa se nativi, immigrati o appartenenti a minoranze etniche. Tale identità, come verrà analizzato dettagliatamente, piuttosto che americana va definita come newyorchese, proprio per sottolineare la peculiarità di questa realtà.

Ulteriori aspetti che necessitano di essere considerati per quanto riguarda l'analisi dell'integrazione delle diverse comunità etniche, consistono sia nella distinzione tra nuove e vecchie etnie (dove i gruppi più recentemente arrivati comprendono prevalentemente asiatici, sud-americani e West Indians, mentre le comunità di "vecchia data" sono costituite per lo più da immigrati provenienti dall'Europa meridionale e orientale) sia nell'individuazione dei diversi gruppi generazionali che compongono le comunità etniche, ed osservarne le diverse attitudini, necessità e modi di vivere ed interagire con la società circostante. Come risulterà da tale analisi, si possono riscontrare notevoli differenze tra la condizione degli immigrati di prima generazione e quelli, invece, di seconda generazione. I primi, giunti negli Stati Uniti in età adulta, sono chiaramente più propensi a stabilizzarsi presso comunità di connazionali, dove godono

della possibilità di mantenere vive le proprie abitudini, tradizioni, modi di vivere e perfino la propria lingua nativa. Degno di nota è il fatto che, in alcuni casi, vivere all'interno di un quartiere etnico permette agli immigrati di comunicare mediante la proprio lingua non solo quando interagiscono con familiari e conoscenti, bensì spesso anche nei luoghi di lavoro, in ambienti pubblici e nel tempo libero trascorso all'interno di tali aree, senza quindi la necessità di sviluppare un'elevata conoscenza della lingua inglese. La situazione è invece significativamente diversa per quanto riguarda i figli degli immigrati, definiti anche "seconda generazione"; essendo nati e cresciuti a New York, manifestano comportamenti, necessità ed attitudini molto diverse rispetto a quelle dei propri genitori. Frequentano scuole americane, dove interagiscono con ragazzi di altre etnie e culture, assimilano i valori e il modo di vivere condiviso dalla società americana; ovviamente, a differenza dei genitori, la lingua attraverso la quale comunicano quotidianamente è l'inglese ed in alcuni casi gli immigrati di seconda generazione presentano notevoli difficoltà a comunicare nella lingua delle loro famiglie. Risulterà evidente che, data la loro condizione "americanizzata", a differenza dei loro genitori prediligano stabilirsi in quartieri maggiormente multietnici o perfino nei suburbs, aree residenziali abitate prevalentemente da membri della *mainstream society* (la società "dominante", composta da americani bianchi, così definiti in contrapposizione agli immigrati di diverse origini etniche), in quanto, frequentemente, i figli degli immigrati considerano i quartieri etnici dove magari sono cresciuti o hanno trascorso del tempo per diverse ragioni, come ambienti che li "opprimono" con i loro valori tradizionali, i quali contrastano notevolmente con quelli americani di cui essi si sentono portatori. Pertanto, vivere all'interno di un'enclave, potrebbe essere considerato dagli immigrati di seconda generazione come un freno per un'efficace integrazione nella società newyorchese, fattore che spesso li spinge a trasferirsi altrove.

La condizione degli immigrati di seconda generazione è particolarmente degna di nota, e sarà oggetto di un'attenta analisi nel presente elaborato. I figli degli immigrati si trovano infatti in una particolare condizione di *in-betweeners*, "nel mezzo di due mondi" spesso molto distanti tra loro. Mentre da un lato sono profondamente influenzati dai valori e dal bagaglio culturale trasferitogli dai propri genitori e membri della comunità etnica (soprattutto per quanto riguarda coloro che sono cresciuti all'interno di essa), dall'altro, si fanno portatori dei valori e del modo di vivere tipicamente americani, acquisiti grazie alla loro integrazione nella società newyorchese ed all'interazione con persone appartenenti ad altre etnie ed alla *mainstream society*. Di conseguenza, anche la definizione della propria identità e personalità è oggetto di ambivalenza per gli immigrati di seconda generazione, e particolarmente degna di nota è la relatività con cui percepiscono se stessi, in base alle persone con cui si confrontano. Ad esempio, rispetto ai propri genitori essi tendono a definirsi "Americani", sottolineando le differenze che caratterizzano la propria personalità e il modo di pensare, solitamente molto diversi rispetto a quelli delle loro famiglie. Allo stesso tempo, però, il confronto con i nativi newyorchesi, o americani, cioè coloro che sono nati negli Stati Uniti da genitori nativi anch'essi, li porta invece a percepirsi diversi, "etnici", ancora fortemente legati ad un'altra cultura. Pertanto, si può affermare che i figli degli immigrati siano allo stesso tempo *insiders* e *outsiders*, a seconda del contesto con cui si confrontano.

L'elaborato procederà poi con l'osservazione delle differenze esistenti tra le diverse etnie, per quanto riguarda il processo di integrazione, sempre tenendo presente la specificità che caratterizza la realtà newyorchese. Infatti, data la condizione di pluralismo culturale ivi presente, è importante sottolineare il particolare significato di tale concetto. Integrazione non significa entrare a far parte di un unico gruppo culturale dominante, assimilandone i relativi valori e stili di vita, bensì inserirsi e diventare parte di una società

multietnica, all'interno della quale è possibile continuare a mantenere legami con la propria cultura, in virtù della presenza delle molteplici comunità etniche alle quali gli immigrati appartengono, ma allo stesso tempo sentirsi anche accomunati a persone di diverse origini grazie ad un'unica identità, precisamente quella di essere newyorchesi. A questo punto sarà necessario ampliare il campo di analisi prendendo in considerazione anche le minoranze etniche native, cioè le comunità etniche che, pur essendo presenti negli Stati Uniti da generazioni, ancora non sono considerate parte della *mainstream society* e sono spesso oggetto di discriminazione ed esclusione, prima fra tutte quella composta da afro-americani.

Il presente lavoro di tesi esaminerà come la comunità afro-americana continui ad incontrare difficoltà ed ostacoli in diversi aspetti della vita odierna, dalle aule scolastiche, ai luoghi lavorativi o negli ambienti pubblici, dove l'interazione con membri della *mainstream society* è spesso ostacolata da preconcetti. Questa realtà, inoltre, caratterizza anche alcuni gruppi di immigrati, soprattutto West Indians o africani, i quali, date le affinità fisiche che li accomunano agli afro-americani, vengono facilmente identificati con questi ultimi, e discriminati soprattutto perché considerati appartenenti a comunità relativamente povere, con livelli di istruzione piuttosto bassi e caratterizzate da criminalità diffusa.

Degna di nota è la differente situazione che riguarda invece alcune comunità di immigrati, ad esempio i cinesi o, ancora meglio, i russi, i quali, grazie alle loro caratteristiche somatiche che li accomunano ai membri della società americana bianca, non riscontrano particolari ostacoli o discriminazioni, e già dalla seconda generazione possono facilmente essere considerati parte della *mainstream* stessa.

E' pertanto possibile affermare che l'etnia e le diverse origini svolgono un ruolo fondamentale e fanno sì che gruppi di immigrati stabilitisi recentemente a New York

godano di prospettive e condizioni di vita migliori delle minoranze etniche native. Tuttavia, è necessario sottolineare che alcune comunità di immigrati costituiscono un'eccezione a tale realtà solitamente positiva; verrà infatti analizzata la condizione di un altro gruppo di immigrati (Arabi, Sud-Asiatici e Musulmani) che recentemente, in seguito agli attentati del 9/11 sono stati vittima di significative discriminazioni ed episodi di razzismo, a causa delle caratteristiche somatiche, culturali e religiose che li accomunano agli estremisti islamici.

Le conclusioni a cui giunge il presente lavoro di tesi sottolineano l'eccezionalità della realtà sociale, etnica e culturale di New York City. E' un dato di fatto che gli episodi di discriminazione e i pregiudizi caratterizzino ancora negativamente l'interazione e le relazioni tra diversi gruppi etnici, e colpiscano soprattutto le persone di fenotipo africano e coloro che praticano la religione islamica. Allo stesso tempo, però, l'atmosfera multietnica caratterizzata da tolleranza, solidarietà e rispetto reciproco che si può respirare a New York, contribuisce a mitigare le tensioni e i pregiudizi, favorendo la creazione di una società unica al mondo, dove "essere etnici" è la regola, non l'eccezione, dove interagire con persone provenienti da contesti culturali diversi dal proprio è all'ordine del giorno. Tale particolare realtà porta gli abitanti di questa metropoli a sentirsi accomunati da un'unica identità, ovvero quella di essere newyorchesi prima che americani e sentirsi portatori di una ricchezza culturale senza eguali.

In un tale contesto, dunque, anche abitare all'interno di un quartiere etnico non si rivelerà poi essere oggetto di particolari discriminazioni o esclusione, essendo una realtà estremamente diffusa.

1. Introduction

Multicultural societies, even though composed by many different ethnic and cultural groups, denote all the same a shared sense of community and belonging. Obviously, this reality does not take place in the same way everywhere and for every society, since several elements, such as the social context and composition, the historical vicissitudes and the cultural landscape, deeply affects and influence the dynamics of every specific society. However, it must be also underlined, that multicultural environments are characterized by tensions and conflicts between the different ethnic groups as well, due to the coexistence in close proximity of very dissimilar cultures, traditions and lifestyles, and often these negative ingredients seem to prevail over the sense of cooperation, tolerance and integration.

This paper is going to focus on a peculiar reality, namely that of New York City, the multicultural city par excellence, where people from all around the world live in close proximity to one another in a condition of general tolerance, respect and mutual solidarity.

As I am going to demonstrate, discrimination, prejudices and even episodes of violence due to racial and ethnic reasons still take place in New York as well, but the atmosphere that prevails is characterized by a shared sense of community and acceptance of the Other, at an extent that would be rather difficult to observe elsewhere worldwide. The

singular condition of New York City is the result of its peculiar history, its connotation of gateway city and, thus, of its immigrant experience. The latter in particular, shaped the structure of the social and urban landscape of the city, making it that “gorgeous mosaic” that it is possible to observe nowadays.

Thus, New York presents a multicultural reality, in which it became almost impossible to identify one unique and leading identity. Therefore, the most common questions that emerge, when analyzing the phenomenon of integration in New York City, are: is it still possible to talk about assimilation? And if yes, assimilation into what? What defines the true American (New Yorker) identity? Or does such a category even exist? And is it the right choice to do, or it would be better to preserve one’s own identity? Starting from the analysis of some of the biggest immigrants’ communities in New York City and the situation of second generation immigrants, this paper is going to try to give, where possible, answers to these research questions.

Before examining these particular aspects, I will briefly describe the exceptional context of New York City and focus on the analysis of four ethnic neighborhoods, resulting from a field study in those specific areas of the city. The ethnographic part of my work consisted in the exploration and observation of the ethnic enclaves, their population and the cultural features that distinguish the one from the other. I collected data both through field notes and through the approach of visual sociology, which consists in the documentation of urban and social landscapes by pictures and short videos; this work includes some of the most significant photos, in order to better represent and describe the realities object of my analysis. After conducting ethnographies in the four neighborhoods that I am going to describe (Manhattan Chinatown; Manhattan and Bronx Little Italies; Russian Brighton Beach; Mexican Sunset Park), I decided to

focus my attention on certain aspects that in my opinion most characterize the enclaves, such as the type of stores and commercial activities present within them or the people populating them and their habits.

The second part of this paper, instead, takes into analysis the questions that I have previously mentioned, also relating to the ethnic neighborhoods described, and for what concerns this section I have grounded my work on secondary sources, in particular the works of Philip Kasinitz and John H. Mollenkopf.

1.1. Definitions

In order to properly comprehend the complex composition of the New Yorker society, and the dynamics of the interactions between its various members, it is important to clarify some concepts and definitions that will be fundamental for the analysis in this paper.

First of all, in a multicultural reality such as that of New York City, it is important to identify the different kinds of components of the society, in order to analyze and understand how intermingles and integration take place. The prevailing group of a society is usually defined as the *mainstream*, and it is most often constituted by *natives*, namely people born in the United States from native parents.

While among the American society in general, talking about the mainstream usually means referring to white people, being it composed almost exclusively by native Whites,

in New York the situation is not the same. It is true, that the great majority of this social group is constituted by white people, but a relevant percentage of it is composed by natives belonging to different ethnic groups. What is more, also the white portion of the New Yorker mainstream society presents relevant differences from that of the American society in general; while the latter is composed mainly by white people of rather distant immigrant origins, usually Anglo-Saxon Protestants, the greatest part of the mainstream in New York is made up of white natives, usually of more recent immigrant past, who most often have Irish, Italian or other South-Eastern European origins. In addition to that, in contrast with the general trend of the American society, the New Yorker mainstream is prevalently Catholic rather than Protestant.

Furthermore, it must be highlighted, that native people in the United States are not only those, who constitute the mainstream society. As a matter of fact, there are people born in the States from native parents, who, due to their belonging to determined races and ethnic communities, are not considered to be part of the mainstream, rather are regarded as members of *native minorities*. The two main of them are the African American and the Puerto Rican communities. The first one, in the course of the time, has experienced different types of persecution and mistreatment, from slavery to segregation, has been the victim of prejudices and discrimination. Even though these attitudes and practices have been defeated thanks to the Civil Rights movements and mobilizations, often African American people are still victims of harassment, prejudices and even violence due to racial discrimination.

This paper is going to analyze the major role that ethnicity and race still play nowadays, affecting in a negative way the life not only of African Americans, but of black people in general, most often preventing them from being part of the mainstream society and to access different aspects of it as, instead, people belonging to other ethnic groups are able

to do. What is more, the usual conditions in which African Americans live, are characterized by rather high levels of poverty and unemployment, and the school achievements are quite lower than the average performances; often, also as a consequence of this situation, within African American neighborhoods it is possible to observe higher levels of criminality as well. All of these features may foster the already diffuse prejudices and discriminatory practices that affect black people in the United States.

The other large American native minority is the Puerto Rican one. This community presents a rather peculiar condition; as a matter of fact, Puerto Rico is technically part of the United States, thus, Puerto Ricans are officially recognized as American citizens, even if born in the island. This particular condition reveals both a positive and a negative side. On the one hand, the fact of being American citizens allows them to move to the United States without the need of a visa, and to access the same services enjoyed by the American society. On the other hand, however, this reality might disclose also negative aspects; island-born Puerto Ricans, even though American citizens, share a different cultural heritage than that of the mainstream society, speak a different language (Spanish) and grew up among different traditions and values, but once in the United States they do not enjoy the immigrant status, aids and services that other immigrant communities might count on. What is more, they are often victims of prejudices as well, usually because of the poor conditions in which they live, element that prevent them to integrate successfully into the mainstream society.

Because of all these particular features, as the analysis in this paper is going to highlight, most often immigrant communities do better than native minorities, even if present in the United States for a shorter period of time.

The American society, the New Yorker one in particular, is composed by an extremely high number of immigrant groups coming from all around the world, who migrated, and continue to migrate, to the United States in search of a better life. As I have already mentioned, the American society is the multicultural society par excellence, since the great majority of its members are characterized by a more or less distant immigrant past and ethnic origins. Obviously, as this paper is going to analyze, every period of time has experienced the immigration of different ethnic communities coming from different regions of the world, and every one of them has settled in the American cities following different dynamics and practices. I will analyze the particular reality of ethnic neighborhoods and their impact both on the American society and on the very immigrant communities; but before examining this peculiar condition it is important to individualize the various characteristics of their own members.

Among every ethnic group, it is possible to observe different attitudes, lifestyles and ways of thinking according to the period of time its components have spent in the United States, where they were born, grew up and attended school. Usually those differences are related to the diverse generations of immigrants: *first generation immigrants* are the ones, who were born and grew up in their native countries, and immigrated to America at an adult age. Consequently, this category is composed by people deeply tied to their own culture and traditions, who often do not even speak English when they arrive in the United States. First generation immigrants are the most likely to establish their households within the ethnic neighborhoods, where their co-nationals live, both to enjoy the support of the community, who can help them to better start a new life in America, through organizations, institutions and by providing different types of services, and in order to avoid cultural barriers as well, such as language, which might constitute an

obstacle for their integration into the American society, preventing them to find a job or to interact with people belonging to other ethnic groups.

The other generational differentiation concerns *1.5 generation* immigrants, namely the people born in a foreign country, who immigrated in the United States as children or teens. They find themselves in a sort of in-between condition, since they were born in their native country as they parents, where they spent the first years of their lives, thus they speak their native language and acquired specific values and cultural features of their own culture. However, by moving to the United States at a young age, and attending American schools and universities, they also develop an “American personality”, made up of the values, lifestyle and attitudes promoted by the American mainstream, which often collide with those of their parents.

Finally, the generational group that is most worth of attention for the aims of this paper, is that of *second generation immigrants*, defined as *children of immigrants* as well; for what concerns this particular aspect, of fundamental importance are the works by Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, where the two authors analyze and describe the peculiar features of the American society, its immigrant legacies and, in particular, the condition of second generation immigrants. They are the children of first generation immigrants, born in the United States from immigrant parents; this group of people denotes a even more particular condition than that of 1.5 generation, since they can indubitably be considered as *in-betweeners*. Being born in the United States leads them to interact and intermingle with the American society at a significantly higher level than their parents, thanks to attending American schools and colleges, spending time with peers in public spaces and also performing jobs outside of the ethnic economy, in contrast with their parents’ usual habits. All of these features make them feel as Americans, lead them to assimilate the values and lifestyle shared by the American

society, and develop a particular attitude towards life that might be rather different from that of their families. At the same time, however, they had been raised by immigrant parents and in many cases even within the ethnic community, thus among the values, traditions and beliefs characterizing their native culture. Consequently, most often second generation immigrants see themselves as inhabiting two different worlds at the same time, with the resultant difficulty to determine their own identity, and the risk of feeling part of neither the two realities.

One of the aims of this paper is precisely to analyze the condition of second generation immigrants, to assess whether belonging to two different worlds at the same time constitutes a disadvantage or a source of richness, and how they exploit this particular connotation when interacting with the mainstream society or people belonging to other ethnic groups.

I will then focus on the observation of the *ethnic enclaves*, in which most of the first generation, but also many 1.5 and second generation immigrants live. Ethnic enclaves might be neighborhoods, a portion of them, or even just single streets, inhabited by people belonging to the same ethnic community. New York City presents an extreme richness of such areas, where it is possible to observe ethnic restaurants and delis, grocery stores selling typical products coming directly from the native countries, newsstands, bookstores or CDs and DVDs store where people are able to find information and entertainment materials, that allows them to be in touch and keep ties with their own culture and home country.

It is important to highlight, that most often within ethnic enclaves it develops an “ethnic economy” that is usually rather independent from the mainstream one; it is run by the very members of the ethnic enclave and provides jobs and services to the whole

community. For this reason, it is not rare to observe situations in which inhabitants of ethnic neighborhoods do not feel the need to integrate into the mainstream society, having the possibility to work and find everything they need within the enclave; it must be precised, however, that this condition concerns exclusively first generation immigrants, since 1.5 or second generation feel to be part of the American society at a much higher level.

Part of the analysis in this paper, is an attempt to understand how much ethnic enclaves and neighborhoods influence the integration process of immigrants into the American society. I will try to consider the advantages and disadvantages of living in such areas, and the impact they have in shaping children of immigrants' personality. This analysis will then lead to the question of second generation immigrants' condition, and the outcomes of their particular connotation of in-betweeners, also for what concerns the influence they might have on the mainstream society. As a matter of fact, second generation immigrants do become part of the mainstream, thus, their cultural richness, their particular way of perceiving life and the Other, and their multicultural perspective will most probably affect also the other members of the society they interact with.

Another aspect my inquiry is going to focus on, regards the often debated issue concerning every multicultural society, namely the adoption of an assimilationist approach or of a multicultural one. Until a few decades ago, it was possible to denote the predominance of an assimilationist attitude towards immigrants, which had the aim of homogenizing the society through the diffusion of American values and lifestyle. This practice fosters the development of a common identity and strengthen the ties between

people of different origins, but leads them to dismiss certain habits and traditions belonging to their native culture in order to follow the American way.

At the other end of the spectrum, the multicultural approach presents an opposite connotation, since it emphasizes the cultural differences and gives more importance to the maintenance of ties with one's own culture rather than to the creation of a sense of common identity, that might have an unfavorable effect on the single cultural heritages. As this paper is going to highlight, New York City presents a peculiar reality, a sort of mixture of these two approaches, that is referred to as Cultural Pluralism; this particular condition sees many different cultures living in close proximity to one another, maintaining most of their traditions and lifestyle, but contemporaneously tied together by a sense of belonging to the same society, and by sharing a sole identity that, in this case, consists in being New Yorkers.

The analysis will then focus on another aspect concerning the shaping of one's identity and the relevant role played by ethnicity and race. It is important to distinguish between these two categories that are often being mistaken and confused one with the other. "Ethnicity is usually self-asserted, whereas race is usually assigned by others" (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, & Waters, 2004, p. 362); the latter concerns the physical features and characteristics, and is most often employed by people as a means to judge and categorize others. Ethnicity, on the other side, comprehends traditions, cultural and historical elements that tie together members of a community, thus it is a way for people to identify themselves in contraposition to the cultural Other.

This paper is going to highlight the frequent practice of misjudging others just on the basis of their physical appearance, by taking into account only their race and not their ethnic belonging. This precise attitude may have adverse consequences for people of

different ethnic origins, since it consists in a generalization process that fosters prejudices and affects negatively the shaping of people's identity.

2. New York City's Exceptionalism

Migrations, intercultural and interethnic contacts have always characterized, even if at different levels, every society and country. The coexistence of different peoples living in close proximity leads to relevant changes for every one of them, and is often characterized by hostilities and different types of problems. The aim of this paper is to analyze the phenomenon of immigration and integration into the host society through the lens of the country that best represents it, the United States, particularly focusing on New York City, one of the greatest gateway cities worldwide. The peculiarity of the Big Apple is that, even though people coming from every country in the world live in close proximity to one another, the atmosphere is relatively peaceful and characterized by tolerance and mutual respect. However, as I will demonstrate forward, tensions between different ethnicities, discrimination and even issues related to racism still take place.

I decided to focus on New York City's reality, since it shows a unique panorama like no other worldwide. The empire city¹ had, and continues having, a long and peculiar history of immigration of people from all around the world, a phenomenon that has deep consequences not only for the social and urban landscape of the City, but also for its society and culture.

Let's start by briefly describing the structure and urban landscape of New York. The City is divided into 5 boroughs: Manhattan; Brooklyn; Queens; the Bronx and Staten Island.

¹ Nickname designating the city of New York, deriving from the definition "empire state" which refers to the State of New York, due to its size and wealth.

Manhattan is the “heart” of the city, where most of the social, financial and economic life takes place; the other boroughs are mostly residential, however a lot of commercial activities are present there as well. In every borough it is possible to note the presence of many ethnic enclaves, which may be entire neighborhoods or even just streets, and can be populated either by people belonging to just one ethnicity, or by different nationalities in close proximity to one another.

This paper is going to focus especially on four ethnic neighborhoods, which have been chosen on the basis of their impact on New York City, its society and culture, thanks to their dimensions and therefore the high percentage of people belonging to these cultures that became part of the empire city.

- **Manhattan and Bronx Little Italies:** Little Italy is one of the oldest and most well-known ethnic enclaves of New York City. As many other American cities, New York experienced a massive immigration of Italians, the greatest wave took place between 1880s and the first decades of 1900, that initially settled in Manhattan Little Italy, also known as Mulberry Street. Subsequently, as a consequence of social and urban changes, Italians started to move to other parts of the city, in more peripheral areas, where new ethnic neighborhoods began to develop. In New York there used to be up to ten different Little Italies and, even though many of them have now disappeared, it is still possible to find a few Italian ethnic enclaves in the city. I will analyze Bronx Little Italy, a still rather authentic ethnic neighborhood, and compare it to Mulberry Street, which has now turned into a mere “theme park” (Krase, 2006), a touristic place that continues to attract

many tourists looking for a “real” Italian pizza or pasta but where almost no Italians live today.

- **Manhattan Chinatown**, as Little Italy, is just one of the several Chinese enclaves present in New York City; however, in contrast to the neighboring Mulberry Street, this is one of the most populated and, of course, the most famous Chinese neighborhood in New York City. Noteworthy is the continuous expansion that characterizes this area, which is even “conquering” former Little Italy’s streets.
- **Brighton Beach** hosts a Russian Jewish community. It is located in South Brooklyn and is highly populated by ex-Soviet-Union-citizen immigrants and their children. As I am going to analyze later on, this is an authentic ethnic neighborhood, where people confer a very high value and importance to their own origins and culture.
- **Sunset Park** is a multiethnic area located in the eastern part of Brooklyn, where Asians, Latinos, and many other nationalities live in close proximity. I will focus on the Mexican part of the neighborhood, which has known a sudden expansion starting from the 1980s, and represents now the larger ethnic group of this multiethnic community.

Another feature that characterizes New York City’s urban landscape and that is worth of note, is the process of ethnic succession, according to which the different waves of immigration lead to periodical cycles of inhabitation of an area, making one ethnicity get the upper hand on the other(s) that previously occupied that particular space. On the one hand, one of the best example is the case of Little Italies, where Italians were replaced by

Chinese in Manhattan Little Italy, and by Hispanics in East Harlem. On the other hand, the opposite phenomenon is represented by Chinatown, that not only succeeded in maintaining its own space, but is even growing and incorporating what previously were Little Italy's streets. It is also important to underline, that in many of these ethnic neighborhoods it is possible to find not only people coming from one country, but, even though with different proportion, almost every ethnic neighborhood hosts multiple ethnicities.

One of the questions I am going to focus on, is whether living in such environments has positive or negative consequences for the inhabitants. Of course, there are both favorable aspects, such as the support that a community sharing the same culture and traditions can provide, most of all for newly arrived immigrants, and negative ones, for example the risk of being ghettoized and isolated from the mainstream society, causing in this way discrimination and obstacles to upward mobility. Being these the premises, one of the aims of this paper is to analyze different cases and try to understand whether integration is possible and takes place, and if these ethnic enclaves can provide the resources to favor this process. There is another aspect, partly related to this issue, that is worth of attention, namely the importance assigned to ethnicity, skin color and origins. In fact, it is common to think about American society as the most egalitarian, where freedom, respect and equality reign; at a first and not accurate glance, New York City could be considered as the ultimate representation of this reality. Even though it is true that the empire city is characterized by an atmosphere of tolerance and is an example of multicultural success, it is also true that phenomena of discrimination, prejudices and even racism still happen on a daily basis. I am going to demonstrate how much ethnicity still counts in the contemporary American society, and how it affects relationships and effective integration

in several environments, such as work, school and public life in general. I will also compare the situation of native minorities, such as African Americans and Puerto Ricans, to that of immigrants of second generation², and as this paper is going to demonstrate, surprisingly the latter group is almost always doing better than the natives.



Figure 1 This map of New York City highlights the four ethnic neighborhoods analyzed in this paper.

² It is important to distinguish between first and second generation immigrants. Of course, new comers must adapt to the host society in the best way possible, trying to get over several barriers, such as language, culture, values etc. Often, therefore, it is not easy to reach upward mobility, but it is interesting to observe how much the second generation succeeds in taking advantage of the possibilities provided by their parents and exploit them to reach higher levels on the social ladder.

2.1. **“Everybody here is from somewhere”**

As I have mentioned before, New York City represents a unique case worldwide, and its exceptionality deeply affects, positively, the way in which immigrants integrate into the American society and the coexistence of multiple nationalities and cultures. Noteworthy is the fact that New York City is an “happy island”, that differs not only from all the other immigrants-receiving cities in the world, but also from the other regions and cities of the United States; therefore, even though many features, laws and practices tie in the Big Apple with the country to which it belongs, many others characterize just this city and are hardly traceable elsewhere. Hence, it is very important to keep in mind that when we analyze the phenomena of immigration and integration in New York City, the issue is not applicable to the United States in general, also because, in contrast to other countries like Canada, the U.S. has not endorsed official multicultural policies (Foner, 2007).

New York is a multicultural city, it is even possible to say that it is THE multicultural city par excellence, since not only a great part of its population is composed by immigrants, but even a very high percentage of native born people boasts an immigrant heritage. This peculiarity is well described by the statement “Everybody here is from somewhere”, that is very commonly heard on the city’s streets; noteworthy is the other common practice of always asking “Where are you from?” when introduced to somebody for the first time. The frequency with which people in New York recur to this question denotes the incredible intermingling and plural nationalities that constitute this unique society.

2.2. Immigration in New York City, a brief history

New York City has been characterized by immigration and multiculturalism since its foundation. The first man who entered the New York harbor was the Italian navigator Giovanni da Verrazzano, in 1524. Exactly a century later, in 1624, the first settlers, from the Netherlands, arrived in the newly discovered territories, and were immediately followed by many other immigrants coming from European countries. The exceptionality of New York City emerged immediately, as a matter of fact only a few years later, precisely in 1643, so many as eighteen different languages were identified in the recently born colony (Saywack, s.d.). But the greatest wave of immigration took place between the first decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, when millions of Europeans came to New York in search of a better life. This huge migration flow took place with two different waves, first the Irish and German arrived in the New World and established themselves in the new society, and later they were joined by Central and Southern Europeans, mostly Italians and Russian Jews, but also Greeks, Poles and Hungarians (Saywack, s.d.). At this point, one of the major issues that I will analyze in my paper began to emerge: namely, the different way in which the “new” immigrants were approached, considered and treated by the former ones, who had already acquired higher status in the society. There was a commonly shared idea, according to which people coming from Eastern and Southern European countries belonged to a different culture and shared different values and beliefs than the Northern Europeans; even more interesting is the way southern Italian immigrants and Jews were considered, not black but nor even white, therefore they suffered for a relatively long time from discrimination

and ghettoization (Cannistraro, 1999). To favor the integration of the newcomers and, therefore, the creation of a society as homogeneous as possible, several programs and projects of Americanization were instituted and divulged through schools, public institutions etc. The aim of these initiatives was to spread the American values among the newly arrived, making them become “true” Americans, in most cases paying the price of losing one’s own native culture. As will be highlighted in the following parts of this essay, this phenomenon does not happens nowadays, since much attention is given to multiculturalism and the importance of different identities.

The principal reason of this dramatic shift in the immigrants’ integration process, is the extremely high variety of cultures, nationalities and identities that started to characterize the New York society, mostly beginning from the second half of the twentieth century. As a matter of fact, up to the 1920s and 1930s the majority of immigrants were Europeans, and even though they came from different countries and shared different values, traditions and even religion, there was still a common root which they could refer to in the shaping of a new American identity; for what concerns the subsequent waves of immigration, however, new dynamics emerged. Groups of people coming from literally everywhere in the world reached New York City, where little by little new communities of Asians, West Indians, Africans, South Americans and many more, not only became part of the existent society, but influenced and contributed to modify it with their various cultural features. Every period of time experienced the immigration of one or more particular ethnic groups, at first mainly from Europe and then from all the other regions of the world; between 1970 and 2000, the percentage of European immigrants dropped from 64% to 19% (NYC Department of City Planning, 2012). Nowadays the biggest immigrant community is composed by people coming from the Caribbean countries; “the government has no accurate count for how many residents of Caribbean descent are

living here” (Evelly & Senatore, 2009), however, the 2009 Census states that 20 percent of foreign-born New Yorkers were born in the Caribbeans, in addition to the numerous people of Caribbean origin living in the city.

3. Ethnic Neighborhoods

Ethnic enclaves are a constitutive feature of New York City. It would not be possible to think about the Big Apple without taking into consideration all the different cultures and nationalities that populate it and constantly influence this city and its society. As Jerome Krase states in his essay “Seeing Ethnic Succession in Little Italy: Change despite Resistance” (Krase, 2006), ethnic neighborhoods might be considered as “third spaces”, or in-between spaces, where the ethnic culture and traditions both influence and are influenced by the mainstream society; ethnic enclaves are places where “things such as ethnic identity are being created and then negotiated” (Krase, 2006, p.81), since immigrants live between two different worlds, characterized by different values, ways of living and thinking, and must figure out which is the best compromise for the shaping of their identity. What is more, their greater importance is given by the extremely high percentage of people populating them; as a matter of fact, sixty percent of residents of New York City live in ethnic neighborhoods or in one that was previously an Asian or Hispanic enclave.

One of the main questions I will consider in my work, is whether living in an ethnic neighborhood constitutes an advantage for immigrants, helping them to feel part of the society when arriving in New York City, and little by little favoring the integration into the mainstream society, or if living within ethnic enclaves prevents immigrants from establishing real and meaningful relationships with people belonging to other nationalities. One of the best ways to talk about and understand the phenomena of integration/ghettoization and the differences between ethnic enclaves and mainstream

society, is to analyze specific realities. In this paper I am going to describe four ethnic neighborhoods that, with their population, culture and economy had and still have a considerable influence on the New Yorker society. As I have mentioned before, these neighborhoods are Manhattan Chinatown, Bronx Little Italy, Russian Brighton Beach and Mexican Sunset Park. New York City hosts high percentages of people belonging to these particular nationalities, consequently, therefore, their impact on the City's life is of extreme high value.

3.1. Manhattan Chinatown

Every big American city is characterized by the presence of a Chinese ethnic neighborhood, almost everywhere known as Chinatown. As a matter of fact, a peculiar feature of the Chinese people consists in the common practice of living in close proximity to each other, intermingling less than other groups with the mainstream society; this attitude is clearly detectable not only in the United States but also in many European countries. It must be affirmed, however, that obviously not all of the Chinese people live within the ethnic enclaves. As I am going to analyze more in depth in the next sections, often people belonging to different social classes choose to live in different environments; in the case of New York City, working class Chinese tend to settle in Chinatowns, while upper-middle-class Chinese usually prefer to establish their household in the suburban areas, populated mainly by white native Americans.

The peculiarity of the Chinese community in New York City consists in the fact that they established not only one, but several Chinatowns, to the point that in some boroughs such as Brooklyn it is possible to find more than one Chinese ethnic enclave. This is due both to the extremely high number of Chinese living there and to the massive dimensions of the city, that facilitated the creation of multiple communities. The one I am going to analyze is Manhattan Chinatown, the most famous and the oldest Asian enclave in New York City, but also one of the oldest and biggest Chinese communities worldwide, outside of China. Once this was the first and only arriving place in New York City for all the Chinese immigrants, most of whom settled there, thanks also to the easiness of finding a job within the ethnic economy; others instead, benefitted from it just as a first shore and then moved to other American states, as it often happened also for other ethnic groups. Nowadays, Chinatown is still a strongly immigrant neighborhood; according to a 2000 census, more than half of the population is foreign-born³ (Data derived from analysis by the Asian American Federation Census Information Center). The main reason to cause this phenomenon is the barrier constituted by the language diversity: often newly arrived immigrants do not speak English, or are not fluent at it, thus it would be rather difficult for them to find a job in the mainstream economy and fully integrate in the American society. Hence, ethnic enclaves constitute a safe environment in which immigrants can settle and start a new life.

In the last few decades, however, Manhattan Chinatown began to be not the only main Chinese community, which people can rely on. Mostly as a consequences of the rise of

³ This data might find two main explanations: first of all, the high percentage of foreign born inhabitants denotes the massive quantity of immigrants that continues to arrive in New York City. The second reason consists in the fact that, usually, second generation tend to move out of the ethnic enclaves and establish in the suburbs or in more multiethnic areas of the city, thanks to the successful integration in the mainstream society, therefore the majority of people remaining in Chinatown will always be first-generation, foreign born immigrants.

rent prices that affected the whole borough of Manhattan, and of course Chinatown as well, many decided to move to other communities, such as Brooklyn Chinatown or Flushing Chinatown, in Queens, which is today the second largest Chinese neighborhood in New York City. The largest one, obviously, is Manhattan Chinatown.

This neighborhood might ideally be divided into two areas: the one situated East of the Bowery⁴, the more “authentic” one, and the one on the West side of the Bowery, which is more “touristic”, but still a real ethnic area. I use the definitions “authentic” and “touristic” only to underline the slight difference between the two areas, difference that may be noticed just by a very careful eye, since both parts are extremely densely populated by Chinese people, and the biggest dissimilarity consists in the presence/absence of tourists and stores and other commercial activities aimed at attracting tourists or just non-Chinese people in general.

The analysis and description of Chinatown I am going to provide, as the ones concerning the other ethnic neighborhoods, are the result of a personal observation on the field.

The analyzed section located East of the bowery is delimited north by Delancey street; East by Allen street and South by East Broadway. Walking on its streets, it is not hard to understand where we are: all the people I have encountered during my trip were Chinese or at least Asian Americans, and the absence of tourists or people of any other nationality was striking. This area is characterized by a relatively quietness in respect to the more traditional streets of Chinatown, where, because of the high quantity of people populating the streets, the surrounding atmosphere is characterized by loudness and hurry. Here, instead, life seems to proceed at a slower pace, it is common to observe children playing

⁴ The Bowery is both a street and a small neighborhood located in Downtown Manhattan, in correspondence to Chinatown. In this case, I am referring to the Street, which constitute a sort of watershed between the two parts of Chinatown.

in the streets, people talking outside of the stores and restaurants or even hearing Chinese music and radio programs coming from the shops or the stands on the streets.



Figure 2 Chinese women hanging out in a public park. Manhattan Chinatown, New York (2012)

Not surprisingly, only Chinese is heard while exploring this neighborhood, and when asking for information, it is not rare to run into people who speak and understand English with relevant difficulty. This peculiarity is confirmed also by the 2000 Census, according to which 57 percent of the people residing in Chinatown have Limited English Proficiency (Data derived from analysis by the Asian American Federation Census Information Center), and the percentage grows even more if we focus on a sample of elderly people, 65 years old and older, reaching 71 percent of the inhabitants. It may be assumed that this is due to the fact that most of the Chinese inhabitants of this ethnic enclave, most of all the older ones, are foreign born, and when they arrived in the United States they settled in Chinatown, where the knowledge of English is not always

necessary. This peculiarity leads to another striking feature traceable in the neighborhood, namely the absence of English writings on stores' windows, restaurants and other commercial spaces. Such a pattern might be analyzed through a cause-consequence schema: on the one hand the practice of using only the Chinese language may be a result of the absence of non-Chinese speaking clients, therefore there would be no need to recur to a language different from the native one. On the other hand, however, the mere use of Chinese might be the cause of this absence, making people belonging to other ethnicities to go shopping or eating in other parts of the neighborhood. Interestingly, it is possible to observe even a particular attitude of Chinese people living in this area, different from the behavior of those populating the West part of Chinatown. As a matter of fact, most of them are very private and reserved, and this may be misinterpreted by a not-attentive eye as a sign of disrespect or rudeness, since it is not rare to observe scenes in which sellers do not even greet customers. Again, it is possible to assume that this behavior derives from the lack of contacts with people that do not belong to the Chinese community, in addition of being a feature of their very culture.



Figure 3 Example of bilingualism in Chinatown’s daily life. Since an high percentage of people living here have limited English proficiency, it is necessary to communicate in both languages. Subway station on Grand Street, Manhattan Chinatown, New York. (2012)





Figure 4, Figure 5 In the eastern part of Chinatown it is very common to observe signs and writing only in Chinese. The English language is utilized very rarely. Manhattan Chinatown, New York. (2012)

An additional peculiar element that contributes to recreate an authentic Chinese atmosphere in this area, alongside the popular music, is the typical smell of Chinese food coming from the restaurants, grocery stores and stands. Noteworthy is also the fact that the stores, in this neighborhood, sell mainly Chinese products, accentuating in this way the feeling of being in a very Chinese city.



Figure 6 Chinese grocery store. Manhattan Chinatown, New York. (2012)



Figure 7 Chinese grocery store. Noteworthy is the absence of English tags. Manhattan Chinatown, New York. (2012)



Figure 8 Chinese restaurant. The signs and the type of clients suggest that commercial activities in this part of the neighborhood are predominantly addressed to Chinese people. Manhattan Chinatown, New York. (2012)

The section located on the West side of the Bowery highly represents the Chinese culture as well, and even though this area hosts an authentic Chinese community, as the eastern part does, it is possible to observe several differences from the latter. The part of the neighborhood that has been analyzed is delimited North by Spring street, South by East Broadway and West by Centre street. Here the attention is immediately drawn by the massive stream of people walking on the streets, and even if the nationalities that prevail are Chinese and more in general Asians, here in contrast to the eastern side of the neighborhood, it is possible to notice people belonging to different ethnicities. This area attracts not only many tourists, especially in the streets where Chinatown mingles with Little Italy, but also a lot of New Yorkers, who take advantage of the cheap shopping and grocery stores. The commercial activities here display signs and writings both in Chinese

and in English, making it easier for non-Chinese-speaking people to know where and what they can buy; it is possible to assume that, unlike the eastern side, west of the Bowery Chinese are used to the presence of “foreigners”, therefore it comes natural to expect this sort of double identity to develop.



Figure 8 and Figure 9 In this part of Chinatown it is usual to observe stores' signs written both in Chinese and English. Manhattan Chinatown, New York. (2012)

Another pattern that supports this peculiarity is the very different attitude of Asian sellers in this part of the neighborhood. While, as I have mentioned before, on the eastern side they seemed to be reserved and sometimes even rude, here it is possible to observe a much more open and friendly attitude, with people working in the stores not only greeting costumers, but even inviting them into the little shops to have a look at their products.

It could be argued that this two different parts of the same neighborhood stand for two different levels of integration; while the eastern side is much more close, highly ethnic, and seems to be a Chinese city outside of China, the western part looks more integrated into the American society. However, it is also possible to affirm that this integration is rather “superficial”, meaning that even though it is true that this area is frequented by different ethnicities, and therefore subject to intercultural relationships, and even if also the level of English proficiency here is higher because of this intermingling, it is also true that Asian Americans living in Chinatown still lead a very private lifestyle, working and living within their ethnic community, usually sending children to Chinese schools located in the neighborhood, and taking part in local ethnic organizations and festivities. It must be specified, that being Chinatown a prevalent immigrant neighborhood, the majority of the people taking part in the most traditional spheres of life are foreign born, while, as I will analyze later on, second generation usually tend to intermingle at an higher level with the mainstream society.



Figure 10 This is an emblematic picture representing the phenomenon of partial integration in New York City's ethnic neighborhoods. On the one hand, it is possible to notice one of the greatest symbols of American contemporary society; on the other hand, however, it is interesting to observe how the local community "assimilated" this element of the American culture making it look like a traditional Chinese restaurant. This picture well describe the condition of ethnic neighborhoods as in-between spaces. Manhattan Chinatown, New York. (2012)



Figure 11 Chinese Middle School. Many parents prefer to send their children to Chinese schools located in Chinatown, where they can grow up among co-ethnics and learn better about their traditions and language. Manhattan Chinatown, New York. (2012)

Little Italy

Even though this paper focuses mostly on contemporary immigration and the relative ethnic groups, I decided to analyze the Italian neighborhoods and immigrant history as well, because of the meaningful vicissitudes they experienced. Even though there are still many Italians that emigrate to New York City⁵, or the United States in general, they do not constitute anymore one of the principal groups of people who come to the New World looking for a better life. However, New York experienced a massive immigration wave of Italians from the last decades of the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century, and the analysis of their history can be considered as an eloquent example of immigration, integration, and finally ethnic succession.

As we have already seen for what concerns Chinese communities, also Italians established several ethnic enclaves in New York City, and even though today many of them are now populated by non-Italian people, in the past decades it was possible to find as many as ten different Little Italies within the empire city. The oldest and most well-known of them is located on Mulberry Street, in South Manhattan, and was inhabited mainly by poor Southern Italians, while Italians coming from the northern regions set up a community near Washington Square, (in the Greenwich Village) on Bleecker, MacDougal and Sullivan Streets. Both Southerners and Northerners lived in Little Italy located in East Harlem, which in the 1940s was the biggest Italian community in New

⁵ It is important to underline how Italian immigration changed throughout time. While in the past, up to the first half of the twentieth century, Italian immigrants were mostly families coming to the United States in search of a better life, recent waves of immigration see as protagonists mainly (young) Italian men and women, who decide to leave their home country to pursue their studies or look for a better job.

York. Finally, there was another Little Italy located in Manhattan, around 9th Avenue and 59th Street. But also the other boroughs that constitute New York City accommodated several Little Italies: in Queens there were Long Island City and Ozone Park, in Brooklyn Italians colonized a Southern and a Eastern part of the borough and settled in Williamsburg; and finally in the Bronx, were Southern Italians established on Haight and Arthur Avenues, area also known as Belmont (Krase, 2006).

All of these smaller and larger Little Italies were founded to welcome the numerous groups of Italians, who arrived in New York City mostly between the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century; striking is the sudden increase of Italian population that between 1900 and 1930 grew from 219,000 to 1,511,800 (Krase, 2006). Italians, as all the other ethnic communities, strongly influenced the urban landscape of these neighborhoods, not only with “temporary” elements as commercial activities (which have often been subject to the process of ethnic succession later on), but also through the establishment of more permanent features, such as churches, that still today constitute an important testimony of the Italian past in these specific areas. While the majority of Italian people do not leave in the ethnic neighborhoods anymore, Roman Catholic churches still represent one of the main places where they aggregate and have contacts with co-ethnics, and it is important to underline that in many churches masses are still celebrated in Italian, sign of the importance that Italians still assign to their origins. However, it is possible to trace a radical and progressive change within the Italian communities and in the way Italians “celebrate” their own origins. Throughout the twentieth century, Italian traditions and festivities, such as San Gennaro, were widely known and attracted numerous people, who reached Little Italy in order to attend these famous celebrations. Walking on Little Italy’s streets

it was then usual to find not only Italian restaurants, as it happens today, but also many other commercial and service-providing spots, such as barber shops or grocery stores selling typical Italian food. But what is most important to underline, is the fact that all of these activities were once owned exclusively by Italian people, while nowadays it would not be a surprise to discover that a restaurant or a pizzeria boasting an Italian name and a rich menu of typical Italian dishes, is owned and managed by non-Italian people, usually Balcanics such as Albanians or Croatians, or even Mexicans. This new feature that characterizes more and more New York City's Little Italies stands for the progressive ethnic succession that has taken place in almost all of these neighborhoods. This process sees one or more ethnic groups taking the place of a previous one within an ethnic enclave; it is possible to trace this phenomenon by observing the typical ethnic stores or restaurants changing names⁶ and owners, and obviously the products they sell; or by paying attention to the languages spoken in the streets and the ethnicity of people populating them. It could be argued that little by little the "new" group replaces the identity created by its predecessor by exerting its own influence on that space.

For what concerns New York's Little Italies, almost every one of these neighborhoods experienced the phenomenon of ethnic succession, and now it is possible to detect diverse nationalities populating the former Italian enclaves. Starting from the oldest one, on Mulberry Street, it is evident that this neighborhood is not a real Italian community anymore; not only its size is constantly reducing, but little by little this area is becoming part of the surrounding Chinatown. East Harlem is now populated mostly by Hispanic people, while the Greenwich Village has experienced the phenomenon of

⁶ Stores' and restaurants' signs and plates are one of the principal elements that highlights the neighborhood's identity and culture. Visual sociology pays important attention to this particular feature when analyzing an ethnic enclave, since through the observation of names, writings and signs it is possible to gain major information about the culture, ethnicity and also history of that specific area.

“gentrification”, which consists in a progressive replacement of low-income or working class people living in a specific area by upper-middle-class wealthier groups; it usually comes with a renewing and rebuilding of the neighborhood. In Greenpoint, Brooklyn, tensions between different ethnicities started to emerge, leading many Italians to move to other parts of the city, while in Bensonhurst, located in Brooklyn as well, Chinese and Russian families have now taken the place of almost half of the Italians living there up to a few decades ago (Krase, 2006).

Even though the majority of Italian immigrants and their descendants now live among the mainstream American society, it is still possible to detect traces of the Italian past and influence in New York City. I will briefly describe the most famous Little Italy, on Mulberry Street, and then focus on a relatively more “real” Italian community, namely Belmont in the Bronx.

Little Italy as an Ethnic Theme Park

As I have already mentioned, Little Italy located on Mulberry Street, in South Manhattan, is the oldest and most famous Italian community of New York City, well-known around the world as well. Millions of immigrants coming mostly from the southern regions of Italy found in this neighborhood their new home, jobs and the fundamental resources needed to start a new life. As all the others ethnic neighborhoods, Little Italy was both a residential and a commercial area, where immigrants could keep their traditions and culture alive and live and work among co-ethnics. The contemporary situation is pretty different; there are almost no Italians who live in this neighborhood, a lot of their commercial activities are now owned by non-Italian people, and even spots

that once could have served as meeting places for co-ethnics, such as restaurants, bars and pizzerias, are now exclusively touristic attraction, where people go to taste the “authentic”⁷ Italian cuisine.

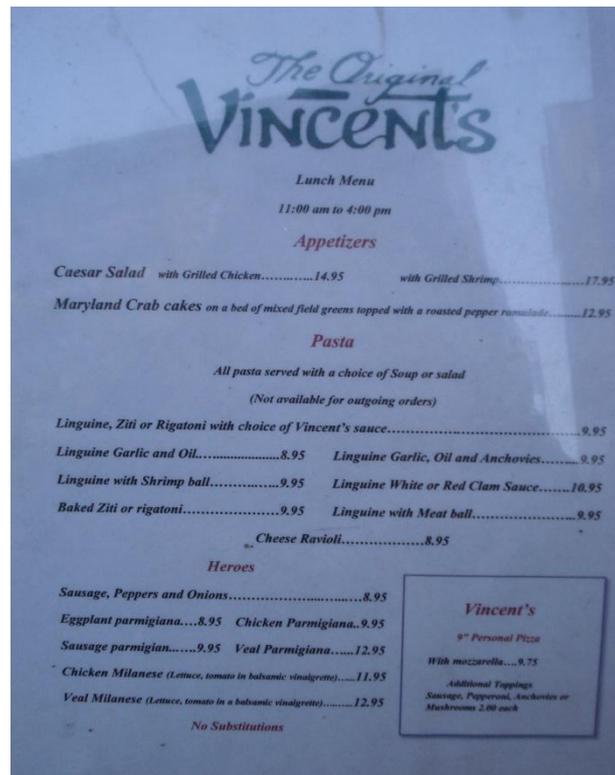


Figure 12 Menu of a restaurant in Little Italy. Even though the food selection is quite typical of the Italian cuisine, it is interesting to observe that everything is written only in English, and even the very name of the restaurant is not Italian. The difference is striking if compared to other ethnic neighborhoods’ eating places, where not only communication happens in the native language, but sometimes it is even hard to find writings in English. Clearly, this is a proof of the deep change that took place within Little Italy, where the majority of people who populate the streets are now non-Italians. Mulberry street Little Italy, New York. (2012)

On the streets, it is usual to meet Italian-Americans, who invite the people passing by into their restaurants, greeting them in Italian, usually recurring to

⁷ It must be precised, that, since many restaurants are now run by non-Italian people, or by Americans of distant Italian origins, often the products sold are not so authentic; behind typical Italian names we can find dishes and food that result from a long interaction between Italian and American traditions.

stereotypical expressions such as “Ciao Bella”. This habit, in addition to the multiple ornamental features and objects that it is possible to notice while walking on Mulberry and the neighboring street, recreate a sort of ethnic theme park, that displays a stereotypical and sometimes even unreal image of Italy. Thus, it can be argued that Mulberry Street Little Italy is not an authentic ethnic neighborhood anymore, but pretty much a touristic attraction with a faded hint of “Italianità”.



Figure 13 Italian restaurant. Emblematic picture representing the contemporary status of Little Italy as a theme park, where everything seems to revolve around one of the most well-known features of Italian culture, food. Here it is possible to observe several typical (but we can also say *stereotypical*) elements of Italian cuisine that may attract tourists to this restaurants. Mulberry street Little Italy, New York. (2012)

It is now important to investigate the main reasons, that led to the dramatic change in Little Italy's configuration. First of all, when Italians began arriving in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, they were one of the first groups of South Europeans to reach the shores of the New World. The majority of the population in New York was still composed by Dutch, German and Anglo-Saxon people, ethnic groups sharing similar cultures, religion and even physical features; thus, it is no wonder that Italians, as Jewish, Greeks and other South-Eastern Europeans, faced prejudices and discrimination. Noteworthy, is the fact that

“Italian immigrants were regarded as neither White nor Black, but as a category somewhere in between the two races. Popular images generated by sensationalist newspaper portrayed Italians as prone to instinct, violence, and vengeance and fueled a mythical association between Italian immigrants and forms of systemic crime – first the extortionists of the “Black Hand” and later the “Mafia”.”(Cannistraro, 1999, p. 6)

Nowadays, this statement might be striking and sound unrealistic, but if we think about many immigrant groups arrived more recently in the United States, we may find very similar, if not even identical, situations. Italians were discriminated because of their physical appearance, traditions, religion and what is more, often identified indistinctively with the negative stereotypes of criminality. Today the same phenomenon is taking place towards other ethnicities, and it is possible to argue that sometimes the very Italians, now undoubtedly regarded as White Americans and perfectly integrated into the mainstream society, are the agents of such discriminatory practices. As the “new” immigrant groups do nowadays, Italian immigrants not only preferred, but also needed to live within their ethnic enclaves in order to avoid discrimination; in addition to that, it was very difficult

for them to find a place to live among the New Yorkers, since laws and real estate market were discriminatory towards them. Now that Italians are well integrated into and part of the New Yorker society, they do not need to live and work within the ethnic neighborhoods anymore, thus they have gradually left their place to other ethnic groups. This process has been facilitated also by the predisposition of Italian people to intermingle and mix with the mainstream society, often by abandoning their own traditions in order to fit better into this new reality, in contrast with other nationalities, such as the Chinese, who usually prefer to live among co-ethnics and preserve their own culture. In the case of Little Italy on Mulberry Street, this is another important reason that led to the progressive reduction of the Italian enclave; the surrounding area of Chinatown is growing more and more, due to the numerous Chinese immigrants, who continue to reach New York City, but also by the willingness of many Chinese people to live within the ethnic community . Hence, Chinatown is expanding its borders and gradually taking over the “little” Little Italy. Interestingly, in addition to the progressive decrease of residents in Little Italy, (of which only 5% are Italian-Americans) the number of Asian-born people populating this neighborhood is constantly growing, to the point that in 2011 it reached 90% of all the foreign born living there, while not even one of them was born in Italy (Caretto, 2011). This phenomenon is more and more clearly visible and is having an important impact on New York City’s urban landscape; the city administration has even decided to unify the Italian and Chinese ethnic neighborhoods under the name of “Chinatown and Little Italy historical district”. It is possible to observe this deep change also in traditional aspect of the neighborhood’s life, such as festivities: a striking case is the Feast of San Gennaro, an annual tradition of Manhattan Little Italy that attracts thousands of people⁸. Lately, however, the Chinese event organized on the occasion of

the Lunar New Year is overshadowing the Italian feast, and there has even been the suggestion of substituting the latter with a new, interethnic event, the “Marco Polo Day”. The aim would be to unify the Italian and Chinese cultures and people through a festivity that commemorates the Italian historical character, who explored and narrated about China (Caretto, 2011).

To breathe a little more authentic Italian atmosphere, it would be more proper to explore other Little Italies, that today are all located outside of Manhattan.

“The Italian Soul Is Here, but It Is Disappearing”⁹: Bronx Little Italy

The second Little Italy of New York City is located in the borough of the Bronx, precisely on Arthur Avenue, 187th, 188th 189th Streets, Hoffman Avenue and Belmont Street, which does also give the name to this neighborhood. Walking on its streets, it is immediately possible to notice a completely different environment compared to that of Manhattan Little Italy. The most striking difference is the quietness that reigns on the streets and the absence of the numerous groups of tourists, who crowd Downtown Little Italy. Obviously, as any other area of New York City, also Belmont attracts tourists, but for several reasons, such as the distance from Manhattan or the fact that this area is less known, it is improbable to run into many people, who want to visit it. Another impressive

⁸ The Feast of San Gennaro is a worldwide-known event taking place every year in Manhattan Little Italy. It was instituted 86 years ago as a faith celebration in honor of Patron Saint of Naples, but soon turned into a folk festivity that displays some of the most traditional Italian foods and typical articles.

⁹ As stated by Nick Santilli, a resident of Bronx Little Italy. (Krase, 2006)

dissimilarity, not only in contrast to Manhattan Little Italy, but with New York City in general, emerges while walking on Belmont's streets on Sundays. Unlike the majority of the Big Apple's stores, that are open seven days a week, here almost every Italian shop is closed, with the exception of a few souvenirs little shops and, of course, of the restaurants and pizzerias. This peculiarity emerges even more when walking just outside of the Italian enclave and noticing that already on the adjacent streets all the commercial activities are open as well on any other day. Thus, it would be possible to argue, that some aspects and habits belonging to the Italian traditions and culture are still present and alive in Bronx Little Italy.



Figure 14 Arthur Avenue on a Sunday. In contrast with the majority of the stores in New York City, here numerous commercial activities are closed on Sundays, with the exception of some restaurants or souvenirs shops. Bronx Little Italy, New York. (2012)

The feeling of being in a common Italian city, is given also by the multiple eating places situated along the streets; in contrast with Mulberry Street, here the majority of the people dining are not tourists but Italian-American families or little groups of men, hanging out and drinking a glass of wine at the trattorias, just as it commonly happens in Italy. This is one of the most authentic Italian aspects of Bronx Little Italy, since besides the typical touristic restaurants, there are numerous trattorias, namely characteristic Italian eating places that serve traditional, often homemade, dishes, and that are often the meeting places preferred by many Italians. Noteworthy, is the absence of such diners on Mulberry Street, connotation that confirms the now intrinsic touristic nature of that area. It is also very interesting to observe the people, who dine at the restaurants, especially on Sundays, since an attentive observation may lead to meaningful considerations. First of all, it is possible to hear many of them talking in Italian, usually with a strong southern accent and, obviously, with a perceptible English inflection; this to highlight that many of the people populating the neighborhood are “true” Italian-Americans and not just tourists visiting the city. Then, as it is usual in Italy and in contrast with the reality of New York City, eating places host large multigenerational groups, most presumably families, usually elegantly dressed; probably several people meet after the church service¹⁰ to enjoy together the Sunday meal.

Other two characteristic elements that contribute to recreate a typical Italian atmosphere, are the smell of traditional Italian dishes, such as pasta with seafood, lasagna or pizza, that is not so common to detect for example in Mulberry Street, where it is rather frequent to taste dishes inspired by the Italian cuisine but mediated by the American

¹⁰ Another important element that needs to be considered when analyzing an ethnic neighborhood, is the presence of churches and the type of services they celebrate. While on Mulberry Street it is now very difficult to assist to a Catholic mass celebrated in Italian, in Bronx Little Italy there are still several churches that perform mass using the Italian language. This is a clear sign that denotes the presence of many people of Italian origins who still live in the neighborhood.

habits; and then the songs played by numerous stores or eating places, both inside and on the streets, usually dating back to the 1950s and belonging both to the Italian tradition, such as “Nel Blu Dipinto di Blu” by Domenico Modugno, 1958, but also to the Italian-American history, with classic such as “That’s Amore” by Dean Martin, 1952.

At a deeper analysis, a rather different reality emerges though. Even though Belmont denotes much more authentic Italian features than Mulberry Street, at the same time it is possible to individuate many other elements that makes it appear quite different from other ethnic neighborhoods, such as Chinatown, where ethnicity and tradition seem to play a much more important role. For example, while it is true that the songs played by the stores and restaurants recall Italian culture, they belong to a past dimension rather than to the present; they evoke the golden age of Italian immigrants in New York City, the 1950s, when they were not only one of the most numerous immigrant groups but they were beginning to achieve an higher social status and integrating at a major level into the American society. The fact that it would be very rare to listen to a contemporary Italian song on the streets of Belmont or of any other Little Italy, denotes the present situation of Italian neighborhoods, populated by Americans of distant-Italian origin, rather than by second generation Italian-Americans, whose cultural habits date back to a few decades ago. Their longer permanence in New York City and therefore the higher level of integration into the American society, in respect to other ethnic groups, might be perceived also by the language chosen by commercial activities to communicate with their clients. As I have already mentioned, eating places in Belmont can be defined as much more authentic than the ones on Mulberry Street; nonetheless, if compared to other ethnic diners, such as the ones of Chinatown, they may seem less rooted into the original culture. Even though the name of most of the restaurants and stores are typical Italian

names, the majority of the writings appear in English, as the menus of the eating places and the signs on many shop windows. Clearly, this denotes the progressive Americanization of the Italian immigrants and their descendants, to the point that there is no need, and may it would not even be suitable, to recur to the Italian language, since many Italian-Americans of distant-Italian origin do not even speak or understand Italian.



Figure 15 Italian restaurant. As in the majority of cases, menus of Italian restaurants are written only in English, and the only Italian words are usually the names of the eating places or of the dishes they serve. This picture displays also two of the most common stereotypes of Italian immigrant history in the United States: the cheerful cook and the most famous dish, Spaghetti with meatballs. Bronx Little Italy, New York. (2012)

Another significant observation for what concerns stores and restaurants, is that even though many of them may look like real Italian places, run by Italian people, when talking to the people working there clearly emerges that it is not so. Many of the owners of Bronx Little Italy's commercial activities, as on Mulberry Street, are not Italians, but usually Albanians, Croatians or from other Balkan countries. Interestingly, the majority of these people used to live and work for a little time in Italy, where they learned how and what to cook (in the case of eating places) and most important, they learned to speak Italian; thus, an unprepared tourist, or even a New Yorker, while visiting Belmont might easily mistake them for Italian-Americans and have a rather distort perception of the neighborhood.

A final aspect that makes Bronx Little Italy appear a little less “authentic” than other ethnic neighborhoods is the presence of numerous Hispanic and, as I have mentioned before, Balkan people, who populate its streets and own stores and diners. Interestingly, walking on Arthur Avenue and the neighboring streets, it is more common to hear Hispanic or Balkan languages than Italian, sign that, probably, an ethnic succession is taking place here as well.



Figure 16 Albanian Restaurant on Arthur Avenue. What was once the heart of this Little Italy, is now experiencing a gradual process of ethnic succession in favor of new immigrant groups. Bronx Little Italy, New York. (2012)

As a conclusion, it is possible to affirm that Bronx Little Italy represents an in-between place, where ethnic culture and tradition are still present to an extent, but at the same time are subject both to a process of Americanization and where an ethnic succession is going to happen in a not too distant time. What is certain, however, is that a scent of “Italianità” is still present in the air, and as we cross the imaginary borders of the neighborhood and go back to the regular streets of the Bronx, it immediately disappears.



Figure 17 Italian Pastry Shop. This window well represents the in-between condition of many ethnic neighborhoods; on the one hand it displays traditional Italian chocolate, that cannot be found in any American store, while on the other hand there are some cupcakes, typical American cake that does not exist in Italy. Bronx Little Italy, New York. (2012)

Russian Brighton Beach

Brighton Beach is an oceanside neighborhood located in South Brooklyn, known as a touristic site thanks to its quiet beach and the proximity to the famous Coney Island's amusement park. However, what really characterizes this area is the presence of the biggest Russian community outside of Russia. To be more precise, though, it must be specified that the people living in this ethnic neighborhood come not only from Russia, but from almost all of the States, that belonged to the former Soviet Union. Thus, the population in this neighborhood is composed by Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Georgians, Armenians and many other former Soviet nationalities. The majority of the community is composed by Jewish Russians, however there are also numerous people who do not belong to this religion but made of Brighton Beach their new home in New York because of the presence of a Russian speaking community. Even though most of Russian Jews and, more in general, Russian immigrants, did settle in this area, many others live in Queens, Staten Island, Long Island and New Jersey as well; as the 1998 Census data report, New York City hosts more than 300,000 immigrants coming from the former Soviet Union (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

Notwithstanding the relative recent formation of this community (most of the Russian Jewish immigrants arrived in New York between the 1970s and the 1990s), it is already possible to observe a successful integration within the mainstream society, in contrast with the situation of many other immigrant groups. There are several reasons that facilitated this process and constituted an advantage for the immigrants of Russian origins. First of all, a very high percentage of them came to the United States as refugees, therefore they could take advantage of the benefits granted by social and financial aids,

that provided newly arrived immigrants with the necessary tools to establish themselves within the New Yorker society and start a new life an edge over the other immigrant communities, who do not enjoy any kind of privilege. What is more, former Soviet Jewish citizens, as Jewish people in general, belong to wealthy and stable families and have an higher level of education than many other ethnic groups. Hence, they are much more advantaged than the majority of the immigrants, since already the foreign born, first generation immigrants can aspire to high-paid and high-skilled jobs, accelerating in this way the integration process, while the greater part of the first generation belonging to other nationalities, as I have analyzed in the case of the Chinese enclave, usually needs the support of the ethnic community and economy to take the first steps into the new world. A final, and probably the most meaningful consideration, concerns their ethnicity. Russian Jews belong to the Caucasian ethnic group, as the majority of the mainstream American society, thus are highly advantaged for what concerns integration; as a matter of fact, not only are they not subject to discrimination or racism once they arrive in the United States, but as soon as they learn the English language and, even better, lose their native accent, they perfectly integrate into the New Yorker society and may even be considered as “real” white Americans (Kasinitz et al., 2004). As this paper is going to analyze later on, ethnicity is one of the main, if not even the most important, obstacles to integration, and not only second generation immigrants, but also native minorities, constantly have to deal with prejudices and discrimination because of their ethnic origins. If former-Soviet Jews are subject to any form of discrimination in New York, or in the United States in general, in most cases it is not because of their ethnicity but on the basis of their religion and their cultural traditions. This ambivalent identity, ethnicity on the one hand and religion on the other, is a relevant feature that must be considered when analyzing the Russian Jewish community living in New York City, since immigrants

belonging to this group have to deal not only with the problem of a double identity, which deeply affects second generation immigrants, but also with a third type of nature. The complexity of this condition is due to the different meaning attributed to the concept of Jewishness by Jews coming from Russia from the way American Jews regard it; often it is not perceived as a mere religious sphere, but as a whole world of traditions, holidays and festivities, food, way of living and, more in general, culture. As a matter of fact, an high percentage of Russian Jews are not church-goers, but highly integrated into the Jewish community they grew up in, and consider Jewishness just as an ethnic and cultural world which they belong to. What is commonly considered a religion, therefore, in this case is seen as a prevalent ethnic feature, as several Russian Jewish second generation immigrants report:

“For me, it is primarily ethnic and cultural. [...] It doesn’t extend to religion for me. I think that you can be just Jewish without being religious at all.

[...]

I still associate myself with the Jews and the heritage and background and what Jewish people have gone through, and my family, and so, yes, I definitely feel a sense of belonging. It’s just the religious aspect that I don’t partake in.” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 352)

One of the reasons that makes this sense of belonging even stronger, and that explains the ambivalent perception of Jewishness, is that in the former Soviet Union Jews were persecuted and could not openly perform and celebrate their religion. This condition led to two opposite consequences; on the one hand, some Russian Jewish immigrants, once arrived in the new and freer world, felt finally free to practice their own religion, to be active members of a Jewish community, attending celebrations, manifestations and

religious festivities. On the other hand, however, many Jews were not used to the condition of church-goers, since they grew up in a world that forbade them to do it, therefore even though they decided to settle in a Jewish community because of the linguistic and social advantages they could have, they kept on perceiving Jewishness only as a cultural and historical world which they belonged to. This attitude complicates even more the process of identity-shaping for second generation Russian Jewish Americans, since not only they feel in an intermediate position between Russians and Americans, but cannot even identify properly with the Jewish American community, because they do not share that deep sense of religiousness which characterizes the latter. Jewishness, however, is the very feature that brought all of the former Soviet Union citizen immigrants to Brighton Beach. In the 1920s this section of Brooklyn began to host Jews escaping from Europe, and later concentration camps' survivors, who set up a fervent Jewish community. When the greatest wave of Russian Jewish immigrants reached New York City, this neighborhood constituted a safe harbor for them, with its Jewish schools and organizations, and with several services that helped new comers to become part of the American society. Therefore the Jewish people coming from Russia settled here, establishing one of the most vibrant ethnic neighborhood of New York City. Clearly, also other immigrants coming from the Soviet Union followed this trend, taking advantage of the common linguistic and cultural roots, so Brighton Beach experienced a sudden growth between the 1970s and 1990s, and still today it hosts one of the main immigrant groups that compose the New Yorker society.

In contrast with many others ethnic neighborhoods, Little Odessa¹¹ might be defined with no hesitations as a “real” ethnic enclave. Getting off the elevated train that conducts

¹¹ The other denomination of Brighton Beach, which refers to the Ukrainian city on the Black Sea.

to this oceanside area, the first impression is that of having arrived not only in another city, but even in another country. Brighton Beach Avenue, the main street which constitutes the heart of the neighborhood and where the neighborhood's life takes place, is plastered with Cyrillic alphabet signs and writings, that may immediately convey a feeling of alienation to a non-Russian speaking person. The commercial activities located along this Avenue are almost all owned and run by 'Russians', and comprehend every kind of service necessary to the community.

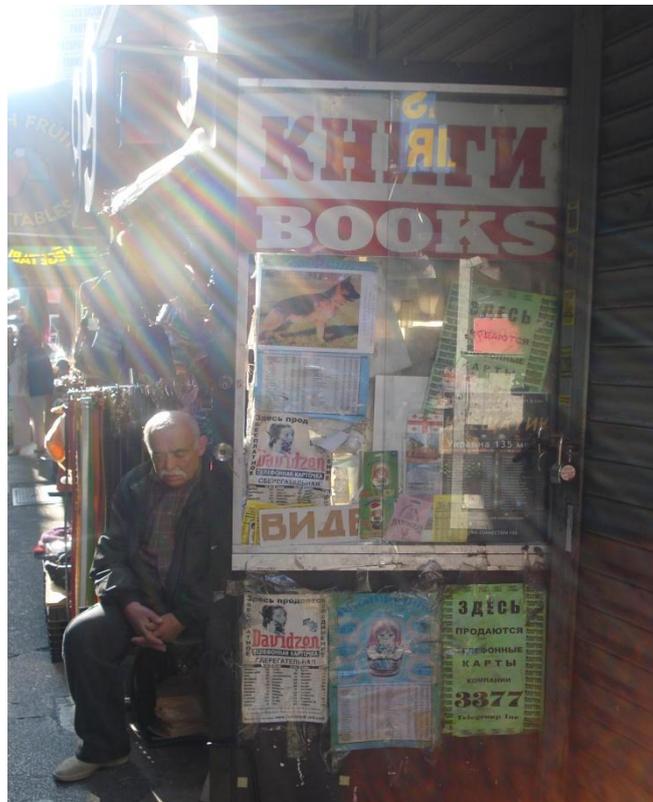


Figure 18 Russian store on Brighton Beach Avenue. Brighton Beach, New York. (2012)



Figure 19 Brighton Beach Avenue. Tags signaling offices that provide legal, bureaucratic and medical services. Brighton Beach, New York. (2012)

Besides the delis, traditional Russian restaurants, grocery and clothing stores, there are travel agencies, offices providing health and legal assistance, banks, drug stores and many others, and it is interesting to observe that all the people working there are rigorously Russian, or at least Russian speaking and of Russian/ex-Soviet origins. The local book stores and kiosks sell Russian books, magazine and newspapers, and Russian movies and music CDs are easily findable everywhere; on the neighborhood's streets it is possible to observe numerous posters advertising shows, musicals, theatrical plays and concerts, all performed in Russian and by Russian artists. This community enjoys also a local music industry, and on some television channels it is possible to watch Russian sitcoms, talk shows and news.



Figure 20 Posters advertising Russian shows and concerts. On the upper right corner, there is a poster of Dima Bilan, one of the most famous contemporary Russian singers. This is a clear evidence, that Russian immigrants in New York are still tied to and follow the trend of their original community back in Russia. Brighton Beach, New York. (2012)



Figure 21 Mosvideofilm, store of one of the main Russian film industries. Brighton Beach, New York. (2012)

All of these elements favor the retention of a strong sense of Russianness, making Russian immigrants feel part of a community with which they share common linguistic, cultural and historic roots, and, for the people who work and live within this ethnic enclave, making it unnecessary to conform to the mainstream American society.

Striking, are the responses to an interview conducted on the very sea side of Brighton Beach, where a Russian journalist asks to several Russian people living in the neighborhood, whether it is necessary or not for inhabitants of Little Odessa to know the English language¹². Apparently, this might seem a meaningless question, since even though it is true that this is an ethnic neighborhood, still it is located in New York City and is part of the American society. However, half of the people interviewed said that speaking English is not a necessary skill for those who work and live in Brighton Beach, since all the neighborhood's activities and life go on between Russian people, and, obviously, in Russian. Remarkable is the answer of a middle-age woman, who tells that after having lived in Little Odessa for fifteen years, the only two English words she knows are "Hi" (even the pronunciation of this word is not correct, but influenced by the Russian practice of replacing the letter "H" with the sound of the letter "G") and "Bye"; she also stresses the usefulness of speaking English in this neighborhood, since "magazines are in Russian, at the restaurant everything is written in Russian, in the healthcare offices they speak Russian, in the drug stores and in the bank as well"(YouTube, 2010). Immediately after, however, she underlines that the situation is different when it comes to their children, the second generation Russian immigrants, who aim to be part of the mainstream society, working and interacting with Americans, and for whom it is obviously necessary to speak English. Anyhow, she plans on continuing

¹² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uLG2Cem74s&feature=related>

living in the “маленькая Россия” (Little Russia) and does not need to learn other languages.

As a matter of fact, when walking on Brighton Beach’s streets, it may be noticed that literally everybody talks in Russian, and it would be an exception to run into someone who is talking in English. While during the summer the situation might be slightly different, because of the presence of tourists coming to the seaside, in wintertime the people populating Little Odessa are almost all belonging to this community, to the point that people working in the stores or in the kiosks on the streets, address clients immediately in Russian, switching to English in the (rare) case they did not understand.



Figure 22 Brighton Beach Avenue. Next to an job inquiry, on the right an announcement advertises lessons of “spoken” English. This is a clear evidence that many of the people living in Little Odessa are not proficient in English. Brighton Beach, New York. (2012)

Everywhere on the streets it is possible to identify evidence of Russianness: stores’ windows and signs, that are however written not only in Cyrillic characters but also in

English, since Brighton Beach is also a touristic site; advertisements of products or of cultural events; traditional popular or contemporary Russian music coming from the stores; typical smell of Russian food and traditional Russian dishes served by the numerous eating places, which, as in the case of Little Italy, Chinatown and all the ethnic enclaves in general, represent one of the most preferred meeting point for local residents. What is more, every grocery store, deli or restaurant of this area can provide original Russian products, facilitating in this way the maintenance of the traditional cuisine and eating habits, which constitute one of the most important aspects of a culture.

Another aspect worthy of note is the type of clothes people wear. By observing most of the women (mainly middle-age and elderly ones, presumably first generation immigrants) on Brighton Beach Avenue, it is possible to notice a relevant difference with the way people living in other parts of the City dress. Russian women in Little Odessa recall the Russian style and mode much more than the “American”¹³ one, and an evidence of this difference is provided also by the clothing articles that local stores sell.

A final consideration that denotes the independence of this ethnic enclave from the surrounding society, and at the same time the successfulness of this community, is the presence of people of Russian origins performing high-skilled jobs, such as lawyers or doctors, within the neighborhood. By observing the names written on the tags outside the offices or buildings, it stands out that all of these people belong to the Russian and/or Jewish community.

After observing and analyzing all of this features of Russian Brighton Beach, and comparing them to other ethnic neighborhoods, it could be argued that this ethnic enclave

¹³ It is not really appropriate to talk about an American style, since it would be impossible to generalize over this aspect (as many others) of the American society. However, I recurred to this expression to underline the striking difference between the general trend on the one hand and the Russian one on the other.

represents one of the most authentic, auto sufficient and genuine ethnic communities. However it must be précised that, being part of New York City, it has also contacts and relationships both with the American society and with other immigrant groups. While Brighton Beach Avenue and the neighboring streets are strictly Russian, immediately outside of the imaginary borders there is plenty of commercial activities belonging to other ethnic groups, such as Mexicans and Turkish. What is more, even though, as I have already mentioned, many Russian residents of Little Odessa speak little or even no English at all, living in New York City, within the American society, has obviously influenced not only their traditions and way of living, but also their language. It is not rare to run into Cyrillic signs that are mere translations of English words, not present in the Russian dictionary, but that little by little have become part of the Russian-American lexicon, often taking the place of the original Russian words.



Figure 23 Eating place on Brighton Beach. The sign reports: 2 pizza slices + coffee or soda. Interestingly, they use the word “slice”, transliterated into Cyrillic alphabet and declined according to the Russian grammar, even though it does not exist in the Russian language. The same happens for the word “soda”. Brighton Beach, New York. (2012)

A Multiethnic Ethnic Neighborhood: Sunset Park

Unlike many ethnic neighborhoods, which host prevalently one ethnic group at a time, Sunset Park might undoubtedly be described as a multiethnic enclave, since it has always been populated by several different immigrant communities at the same time. This neighborhood is located on the eastern part of the borough of Brooklyn, and it has been named after the park that overlooks it.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the first immigrants who settled in Sunset Park were Europeans, as it happened in all the other areas of New York City, and precisely Irish, Scandinavian and Polish. Their legacy is still visible today, since the majority of the white people living in this neighborhood are fourth or fifth generation Norwegians. Later on, these North European communities were joined and soon substituted by Italians, around the 1890s, and at the beginning of the new century, by Puerto Ricans. Then, the neighborhood started to be inhabited also by Indians, Yemenites and Muslims of different nationalities. The latest waves of immigrants, who established their homes in Sunset Park, saw as protagonists Asians and Hispanic people; among the first group, the nationality that prevails is Chinese, as a matter of fact, 8th Avenue in Sunset Park hosts one of the biggest Chinatowns of New York City, but there are also numerous Vietnamese, Malaysians and Koreans. Among Latinos, it is possible to identify Dominicans, Ecuadorians, Nicaraguans and Mexicans; the latter is the most numerous and the most recently arrived community.



Figure 24 Multiethnicity in Sunset Park; Chinese restaurant and Mexican street seller. Sunset Park, Brooklyn, New York. (2012)

It must be stated beforehand that Mexicans represent a rather high percentage of all the Hispanic people living in the United States; the majority of them settled in Miami, Los Angeles, Texas and New Mexico, while in New York City the largest Hispanic communities are Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. However, subsequently to the depression that took place in Mexico in the 1980s, the City experienced a relevant wave of Mexican immigration, mostly of people coming from the region of Puebla; as a consequence, the Mexican community of New York City experienced a sudden increase, growing from 6,700 people in 1980 to, according to the U.S. Census, 170,000 in 2010. It must also be underlined, that the Census takes into account only the legal immigrants, but considering all of the undocumented ones as well, this number increases more than twice (Carnes, 2010). Once arrived in New York, some of them settled in Queens, in the Bronx, and a small percentage in Manhattan, but the great majority of them established in

Brooklyn, mainly in the multicultural area of Sunset Park, where they reside on 5th Avenue.

Even though part of a bigger multiethnic neighborhood, and therefore subject to many different cultural influences, the Mexican section of Sunset Park might be described as an authentic and fervent ethnic neighborhood, just as the previously analyzed Russian Brighton Beach. Along 5th Avenue almost all of the commercial activities and services are run and provided by Mexican people, or in a few cases by people belonging to other Hispanic ethnic groups, such as Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. Likewise the Russian neighborhood, here as well it would be very rare to hear somebody talking in English while walking along 5th Avenue, since the language that is commonly use in the daily communication process is obviously Spanish; not surprisingly, even the local newspapers reporting the community's news are edited in Spanish. This is made possible thanks to the ethnic composition of this part of the neighborhood, where the people who live and work are almost all of Mexican and Latino origins. This feature stands out when exploring this area, since it is evident that besides the great majority of Hispanics, there are just a few White or Black non-Hispanic people in the neighborhood; in addition to that, it would be rather unusual to run into tourists while walking on Sunset Park streets. Not only, as I have already mentioned, are all of the stores, delis or restaurants run by Mexicans, but also the clients and the workers share the same ethnic origins. It is therefore natural that the communication process takes place in the native language, and there is no need to switch to English. Obviously, also the stores' and restaurants' windows show clear evidence of the local identity, boasting signs and plates written in Spanish. However, as in many other ethnic neighborhoods, usually they are positioned next to the relative English translation.



Figure 25 Mexican diner. Sunset Park, Brooklyn, New York. (2012)



Figure 26 Traditional Mexican eatery. Sunset Park, Brooklyn, New York. (2012)

Evidence of the ethnic origins of the neighborhood's population are also the products that delis and grocery stores sell, that denotes their Central or South American provenience; the music reaching the streets, coming from open windows and stores, and the numerous Mexican restaurants and diners, serving traditional dishes and functioning as meeting places for the local community. At a first superficial observation, all of these feature might just be considered as typical elements that give to the neighborhood a folkloristic connotation; however, it is necessary to stress the importance that they have within an immigrant enclave. Immigrants, most of all newcomers, often experience alienation when entering into contact with the host society for the first time and have to create a new life in a foreign country; so, settling in an ethnic community, which provides service in the native language, products coming directly from their home country, food that belongs to their original culture, represents a meaningful help and sustain for them, helping them to integrate little by little into the new world, avoiding a sudden cultural shock.



Figure 27 Mexican grocery store and Mexican restaurant. Noteworthy is the almost exclusive use of the Spanish language. Sunset Park, Brooklyn, New York. (2012)



Figure 28 Mexican store, detail. Sunset Park, Brooklyn, New York. (2012)

Other signs witnessing the culture and origins of this community, are the numerous Catholic churches located in this part of the neighborhood, and the several posters advertising Mexican shows and concerts that take place in this area.

There is one final aspects that characterizes Mexican Sunset Park that needs to be analyzed, and this is probably the most worth of note. All of the immigrant communities keep contacts and relations with their home country, some in stronger and others in less strong ways, depending on many factors such as distance, technology, or culture. But the Mexican community living in Sunset Park stands out because of the special ties, that entangle it to the Mexican region where the majority of these people come from; a meaningful example is the weekly appointment between some of the recently arrived immigrants in New York City and the people still living in the Mexican villages they

come from. They debate about the decisions that must be taken in occasion of the village council, through phone conference calls (Carnes, 2010). What is more, “Their vacations are planned to coincide with their village festivals to help them to maintain their identity” (Carnes, 2010). It is therefore possible to argue that for this specific Mexican community ties and relationships with the home country are very important, and fundamental is the maintenance of their identity, culture and traditions, which may lead them to feel part of their native community almost at the same degree as it used be while still living in their home country.

This specific aspect draws attention to the particular reality of “transnational migration”, namely the phenomenon according to which, immigrants belong to two different worlds at the same time. Even though they migrated to another country, where they work and establish their new households, they continue to live in consonance with the set of norms and values belonging to their original culture. This is made possible by the presence of ethnic communities, where immigrants have the possibility to live among co-ethnics, speak their native language and practice their religion as they were used to in the home countries (Levitt, 2004).

Ethnic Neighborhoods: an advantage for immigrants or an obstacle to integration?

When people leave their own country in search of a better life, and settle in a new place, it is a common practice to seek the support of co-nationals' communities abroad. This might mean establishing within an ethnic enclave, where the inhabitants belong to their very nationality and culture, or just benefitting from the services and help provided by the local ethnic institutions and organizations. Thus, it can be argued that ethnic enclaves are characterized by a positive connotation, since they represent an effective support for new comers and favor their integration into the host society, by making this process more gradual and letting immigrants keep contacts with many aspects and features of their own culture. At the same time, however, they might also slow down or constitute a sort of obstacle to the very process of integration, that in many cases is just apparent. As a matter of fact, while living within an ethnic enclave undoubtedly helps immigrants to be able to maintain continuous contacts with their own culture, language and traditions, there is the "risk" of creating a self-sufficient community that does not require people living within it to integrate effectively in the mainstream society. In addition to that, ethnic enclaves might also lead to the much more negative results of ghettoization and discrimination, but, interestingly, this phenomenon concerns native minorities at a much higher level than immigrant communities. What is more, interactions and relationships that take place among ethnic communities often influence and play a major role in the life of their components, deeply affecting their decisions and way of looking at life. The

structure and organization of both immigrants' and native minorities' ethnic neighborhoods have a profound impact on the people who live in there; obviously, those who live in poorer neighborhoods, where maybe the level of criminality is higher and the quality of public schooling is worse than the average of New Yorker schools, have less possibilities and aspirations towards an upward social mobility. As Philip Kasinitz and other scholars thoroughly analyze in the book *Inheriting the City*, this is particularly true, for example, for neighborhoods inhabited by native minorities, such as African-Americans or Puerto Ricans; even though the people belonging to these two groups are not immigrants, but "real" American citizens, and have been part of the American society almost since its formation, it is still possible to detect a rather negative condition that affects the areas where they live.

"These conditions [danger, criminality, lack of services] were worst in the Puerto Rican and native African American neighborhoods, almost as bad in the Dominican neighborhoods, not as bad in the West Indian and South American neighborhoods, and noticeably better in the Russian, Chinese, and especially native white neighborhoods." (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, *Inheriting the City*, 2008, p. 124)

Many scholars argue that the dynamics taking place on the neighborhood level deeply affect not only the behavior of its inhabitants, but also their attitude towards the future, their aspirations and goals. When children grow up in wealthy neighborhoods, where they can benefit from several organizations and services, and live among people who perform high-skilled jobs and achieved high-level education, it will be more natural for

them to follow this particular path and have important aspirations for their own future. In addition to that, it must be underlined that parents, families and other people, who play a crucial role in the youth's life, exercise strong influence for what concerns the choices about their future: "The highly educated Russian and Taiwanese parents pushed their children firmly toward college education. [...] and the children knew they would be seen to have let down the family if they did not go to college." (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 148).

Social networks represent one of the main connections to the external world, and if they are made up of highly-educated people, successfully integrated into the mainstream society, and therefore who have several contacts and relationships also outside of their enclave, they will easily give the youth a push towards upward mobility. Vice versa, children growing up in neighborhoods, where the level of school-education is lower, where dropping out of school is a rather common practice, and therefore where most of the people perform low-skilled jobs and are more secluded within their community, will be influenced in an opposite way, with less aspiration for the future, often even with the only perspective of surviving. This is due also to the lower resources which they might count on, feature that leads youth to leave school early in order to earn the money they need and often also to contribute to the family's expenses; hence, they foster the condition of social immobility, or worse, downward mobility. What is more, often people populating these neighborhoods live and work exclusively in these spaces, limiting their contacts with the mainstream society or other ethnic groups, contributing in a way to their own ghettoization and accentuating the practice of discrimination. This attitude is very different from the predisposition of people raised in more mixed environments, who develop much more easily relationships with different ethnic communities.

For what concerns immigrant ethnic neighborhoods, it must be precised that there are important differences between the attitude of first and second generation immigrants, and

also the way they perceived the ethnic enclaves is rather dissimilar. As I have already mentioned, ethnic communities constitute a relevant support for new comers, starting from one of the very first and urgent problems faced upon arrival in the United States, namely the language barrier; without the presence of ethnic neighborhoods, where communication usually takes place in the native language, both at work and in the stores or other service-providing activities, newly arrived immigrants, who are not proficient in the English language, would be prevented from taking the most important steps towards a new life, such as finding a job, being an active part of the city's society and therefore integrate into it. Thus, for first and 1.5 generation immigrants, ethnic neighborhoods represent a vital space in which they can establish their households, work and live among co-ethnics often, as I have analyzed in the case of Chinatown and Russian Brighton Beach, even without the need of learning English or relating with people belonging to other nationalities in their daily life. However, the discourse radically changes when considering the condition of the second generation. Even though many of them were born and raised in an ethnic neighborhood and grew up mostly among co-ethnics, by attending New York public schools, colleges, and interacting with other boys and girls of different nationalities they developed a rather different way of thinking and set of values compared to the ones of their foreign born parents. Of course most of second generation are still deeply influenced by the native culture and still regard ethnic neighborhoods as a place where it is possible to maintain contacts with traditions, co-nationals and enjoy services addressed specifically to them; however, at the same time, an high percentage of second generation immigrants prefer to move out of the ethnic enclaves, which are sometimes perceived as being too much traditionalist and too less American, and intermingle at an higher level with the rest of the New Yorker society. It must be also precised that, in contrast with their parents' needs, second generation usually does not need the support of

the ethnic community to pursue their goals, since children of immigrants are real American citizens, and are one of the most active component of New York City.

It is thus possible to argue, that ethnic neighborhoods are characterized both by positive and less positive connotations; they might be seen as a reassuring environment by first generation immigrants, who usually prefer to settle in there, be part of their own community and maintain their traditions and culture alive. Ethnic neighborhoods provide an essential support to immigrants, assisting them in everyday's life and helping them to feel a little less alone and alienated while living within the host society; these enclaves often witness the presence of a strong sense of community and solidarity between their inhabitants, feature that probably would not have emerged among the same people within the context of their home country. In addition to that, ethnic enclaves usually provide several services, that allow immigrants to be in touch and keep contacts with their families back home, such as businesses providing shipping of goods, special phone cards, etc. Easily, one can understand the relevance of such facilities for a newly arrived person in a completely different world (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

On the other hand, however, ethnic neighborhoods might also be a sort of obstacle to integration; this is so, because the communities that develop within them are sometimes so well-structured and self-sufficient that are able to provide almost every service to their inhabitants, who do not need to turn to the "external" society for most of their needs. Being it so, first generation immigrants may be left aside of the integration process, and just keep on living among their own culture.

The same positive and negative aspects affect second generation as well. On the one hand, ethnic neighborhood makes it possible for children of immigrants to know better their origins and maintains contacts with co-ethnics and their own traditions; for instance,

in the case of some ethnicities, such as Chinese, where the native language is rather difficult, ethnic community might be a resource, helping second generation to keep their native language alive. On the other hand, however, second generation are at the same time Americans and children of immigrants, and even if ethnic neighborhoods might constitute a source of richness for them, by providing contacts with their own culture, at the same time living among the ethnic community may be a source of struggle for them, since they need to find a compromise between their parents' culture and their being American, and often ethnic enclaves do not include the latter feature.

Another relevant observation concerns ethnic neighborhoods that host native minorities. Their condition is more peculiar, since even though people populating them are Americans and belong to the American society and culture, they are rather attached to their community and often quite isolated from the other ethnic groups and the mainstream society. While the positive connotation of immigrant ethnic neighborhoods concerns the ties with the native culture, in this case it may be represented by the support provided by the local community and the sense of solidarity that develops among people. However, the negative aspects seem to prevail, since often this practice leads to the isolation from the external society and to the lack of perspective to better one's condition. What is more, in contrast with the immigrant groups, who, after evaluating various aspects of the urban landscape, autonomously decided where to settle, poor people belonging to ethnic minorities find themselves to live in a condition of "imposed economic, political and social marginality" (Krase, 2004, 8), which might easily entail the development of a feeling of frustration and resignation, but it may also lead to a push for improvement, mostly through the institution of services for the community (Krase, 2004).

A final remark relates to the changes ethnic neighborhoods have experienced in the last period of time, and the different ways according to which immigrants settle in the New York City's urban area. Clearly some patterns remain the same throughout time, and

“[...] in order to find new immigrants and ethnic enclaves we still must take into account the same factors that have always been part of location formulas such as public transportation routes, proximity to work, rental rates, ethnic markets, and ethnic institutions.” (Krase, 2004, 4)

As a matter of fact, all of these elements play a major role in the immigrants' decision-making process about where to establish their own households; ethnic markets and institutions, as I have mentioned before, constitute a relevant support for new comers, and the proximity to public transportation is essential in big cities like New York. At the same time, though, if in the past it was possible to detect many well-defined ethnic enclaves, and immigrants would undoubtedly settle among their own ethnic community, nowadays the situation is rather different. On the one hand, several areas that used to host ethnic enclaves have experienced the phenomenon of gentrification, (which consists in the revalorization of an urban area, that consequently starts to be inhabited by wealthier people) causing higher rental rates and, consequently, forcing immigrant groups to leave the neighborhood. On the other hand, in several cases “newer immigrant settlements follow no pattern whatsoever” (Krase, 2004, 4) since people migrating from other countries might establish their households not only among co-ethnics, but in different areas of the city as well, according to their needs, such as they place they work at, the presence of good schools or the trends of the housing market. Thus, it is more and more

common to notice that contemporary immigrants often do not settle within the ethnic enclaves, but live among people belonging to other nationalities, contributing, in this way, to create a less fragmented, more mixed and interacting multiethnic society.

Multiculturalism versus Assimilation

Nowadays, almost every country around the world is home, even if to different extents, to a multiethnic society. Undoubtedly, the presence of many different cultures and ethnic groups that live in close proximity to one another is a source of richness and mutual growth; at the same time, however, problems about integration, tolerance, respect and civil rights are rather common issues that must be taken into account very seriously, in order to avoid unpleasant consequences and to grant a positive coexistence.

Clearly, even though the American society represents one of the most successful examples of multicultural intermingle, there have always been several problems as well, especially when it comes to define what are the “right” values, which is the group that has to be followed, and who the most recently arrived immigrants should take as an example to conform to.

Throughout time, the debates about which was the best path to follow, led to the formulation of different theories and practices for what concerns the integration of foreign-born Americans. The two main approaches, that still today are subject of wide debate, are Assimilation and Multiculturalism. The latter assume that the different ethnic groups, who compose the community, should maintain their native culture, traditions and

even language, in order to preserve their origins and “protect” their own identities. Such a society may result to be less homogeneous, culturally speaking, but grant every single ethnic group the possibility to retain their own identity. “The multicultural approach attempts to create unity through difference, holding that although a nation's subcultures are diverse, those subcultures share common values.” (Debate: Multiculturalism vs. assimilation, 2011). Although multiculturalism faces numerous oppositions, as assimilation does too, it must be stated that it finds also several supporters. Many look at this approach as the winning formula that a multiethnic society should adopt in order to succeed and to grant the well-being of its citizens.

This opinion is well-expressed by an African-American New Yorker, who asserts the favorable consequences of this precise approach:

“I see America as more of a salad bowl¹⁴, allowing each individuals to maintain their own presence and uniqueness, yet still contributing to the overall goodness of this nation as a whole. The dynamics within the concept of diversity alone provides unlimited potential to how great this nation can truly become.” (Biller, 2010)

In order to preserve the richness and advantages that may derive from the coexistence of different identities, some countries have instituted special multicultural policies, that grant people belonging to diverse nationalities the same status and, in some cases, protect ethnic minorities with special measures. Canada, for example, is one of the first countries

¹⁴ Rather than a Melting Pot. The definition of these two concepts are going to be analyzed in the next chapter.

that promulgated a multicultural act, recognizing two official languages, English and French.

The United States, instead, have usually been closer to the Assimilationist, or better the Cultural Assimilation, approach, particularly between the second half of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, when that was considered inevitable; this attitude began to be object to oppositions starting from the 1960s (Kasinitz et al., 2004). In contrast with multiculturalism, it consists in the absorption of the various immigrant groups or ethnic minorities into the mainstream society. The purpose of this particular approach is the constitution of a more homogenous and unite society, sharing unique values and identity; of course, it implicates the loss of many features of one's own culture and tradition, in order to assimilate to the mainstream identity and lifestyle. Usually, assimilation is promoted by the very government of a country, through various activities, educational and social programs. Many supporters of assimilation, assert that multiculturalism is a threat to a country's national identity and for the development of a sense of community, since the various ethnic and racial features would contribute to exalt differences between the diverse groups and mine the constitution of an homogeneous society.

Assimilation, therefore, leads people belonging to different ethnicities and cultures to partly renounce to their traditions and lifestyles in order to melt with the mainstream society, becoming part to what is often, rather erroneously, defined as a Melting Pot.

Melting Pot or Salad Bowl?

The American multicultural society is often described as a Melting Pot, as a way to picture the several ethnic, racial and cultural groups that intermingle together and form a unique homogeneous community. This expression appeared in the United States at the end of the eighteenth century and has been used to portray the practice of assimilation, which immigrants were subject to. Once arrived in the United States, people coming from the European countries assimilated to the American society, giving up several features of their own culture, in order to become part of the Anglo-Saxon mainstream and embrace their lifestyle and values. Schools and organizations would institute educational programs with the aim of “Americanizing” the new citizens, and favor the constitution of both a common national identity and an homogeneous American society. This phenomenon took place especially starting from the arrival of first waves of Southern European immigrants, such as Italians and Greeks, and Jews, whose cultures, traditions and religions were rather different from the WASP¹⁵ lifestyle, thus needed greater efforts to become “true” American citizens.

The aim of the Melting Pot would be to “melt away all the differences leaving one homogenous social stew”(Evans, 2009), since several features of the immigrants’ cultures, such as bilingualism, or particular ways of dressing, would be a threat to the unity of the American society (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

¹⁵ White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. This term refers to the first settlers of the English colonies in America and their descendants; usually it is not applicable to working-class Whites, but to wealthy English-speaking white people.

However, it must be précised that even though European immigrants went through this process, it was not exactly the same for people belonging to other ethnicities. Chinese, for example, experienced several difficulties and obstacles for what concerns their integration, especially in the nineteenth century¹⁶, condition that led them to live among co-ethnics in Chinatowns and prevented their integration into the mainstream society.

In addition to that, another element that does not support the Melting Pot image, is the experience of African Americans. Even though they have been part of the American society almost since its foundation and were taken to the New World against their own will, their traditions and cultural connotations are not considered to be part of the American lifestyle; what is more, even after slavery was abolished, African Americans went through discrimination and segregation, and still today it is quite common for them to be victims of prejudices and racism, condition that does not fit into the picture of a “melted” society. Hence, it might be argued, that “Assimilation meant becoming *white* Americans, and those who could not do so remained in some ways “forever foreign” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 5). In this case, the risk is the development of a phenomenon called *segmented assimilation*, according to which, when non-white immigrants face the impossibility to integrate into the mainstream American society, they identify with native minorities. This might happen, for instance, for what concerns West Indian or African immigrants, who, in several cases finds it easier to empathize with the African American community, where they will not experience prejudices or discrimination.

Recently, the new image that has been used by some scholar to represent the multiethnic and always-changing American society, is that of a Salad Bowl. In

¹⁶ In 1882, it was even promulgated the Chinese Exclusion Act, according to which Chinese people were not allowed to enter the United States for 10 years.

opposition with the Melting Pot, this picture portrays a society composed by different and autonomous elements, every one of which maintains its own features and characteristics, but still united all together in order to constitute a unique reality. While the Melting Pot image may be associated with the assimilation approach, multiculturalism might be described as a salad bowl. The different ethnic and racial groups, who form the society, are not required to renounce to their traditions, to substitute their values and lifestyle in order to adopt the one promulgated by the mainstream society; on the contrary, it is important to maintain the peculiarity of every culture to form a successful multicultural community.

The multicultural approach is usually regarded as favorable by immigrants, who can preserve their own heritage and culture, even though living in a foreign country. This opinion might be shared most of all by those, who felt excluded from the melting pot that in the past has interested almost exclusively the white European people:

“But I do not believe there is any real melting pot in America. I feel as though white America will never accept Hispanics as true Americans, and I think that is because of stereotypes and beliefs that we have all come here illegally.” (Biller, 2010)

With this statement, a second generation Hispanic-American woman expresses her dissatisfaction with the way white Americans act towards immigrants belonging to other ethnicities. At the other end of the spectrum, though, a different kind of discrimination might be perceived by some immigrants, who feel forced to renounce to many aspects of their own heritage in order to assimilate to the mainstream society.

It is evident, that the choice between the assimilationist and the multicultural approach is not easy at all, and it keeps being object of fervent debate. Even though the multicultural approach is often regarded as positive, since it allows immigrant groups to maintain their own culture and traditions, the constitution of a society according to the model of a “salad bowl” is sometimes regarded as unfavorable for the society itself, since this approach might strengthen ties and closeness within the single ethnic groups, exalting in this way the cultural differences between them and, as a consequence, mine the cohesiveness of the whole. Thus, in order to establish a successful national community, a country might need to help its own citizens to develop a common identity and share the same values. At the same time, however, also the condition of the melting pot may appear as unfair to many immigrants, especially to those whose origins and culture differentiate considerably from the ones of the mainstream white American society; as a matter of fact, they might be required to adopt a type of lifestyle completely different from their own, in order not to be excluded.

Hence, both approaches are characterized by positive and negative aspects; the best solution would be to find a compromise between them, and the American society, in particular the New Yorker, seem to have reach a condition rather close to this arrangement. The former melting pot is progressively giving place to a “tossed salad” (Evans, 2009), namely a society composed by numerous ethnic and racial groups, every one of them characterized by its own culture and traditions and maintaining, even though to different extents, several features of their lifestyle, but contemporaneously united and

tied one to the other, sharing the same values and ways of living common to all the American citizens.

This particular condition is made possible on the one hand by the greater attention rose in the last decades about the importance of preserving one's own culture and heritage without the fear of being discriminated (Evans, 2009); at the same time, the unity and intermingle between people of different cultural background is favored by several features, such as technology, which introduced a new way of communicating through social networks and the new common language they established, but also by the consumer culture that, with its trends and styles contributes to making uniform and standardizing people's tastes, especially for what concerns the youth, no matter what nationality or ethnicity they belong to (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

The success of this formula is witnessed also by the growing percentage of intermarriages between people of different ethnic groups and the fact that, in opposition with the past trends, numerous immigrants decide not to live within ethnic enclaves anymore, but settle in more mixed neighborhoods. This latter feature is due to another element as well, namely the progresses in the communication and transportation fields, which allow immigrant to maintain contacts with their home country much more easily, condition that makes the need of living in close proximity with co-ethnics rather less impelling.

Assimilation in the Empire City: New York Exceptionalism

New York City enjoys a unique status worldwide; not only its features cannot be traced in any other city around the world, but it is also an exception within the very United States of America. One must be aware that talking about New York does not mean to talk about the United States, and vice versa.

The empire city is often referred to as the “capital of the world”; clearly, this is so because of its economy, financial and services sectors, but also because it is home of people and communities coming from all around the world, like no other city.

It is important to analyze the main reasons that push so many immigrants to make of New York their new home. First of all, in contrast with the policies instituted by other American cities and States, the government of New York City grants various benefits and services at the social, health and education levels, element that constitutes an important advantage for newly arrived immigrants; noteworthy, is the institution of CUNY (City University of New York), which is the largest public university system in the United States, and, interestingly, forty percent of its student are foreign-born immigrants (Foner, 2007). In the City it is also possible to denote the presence of many non-governmental organizations, religious institutions and labor unions, that act a major role for what concerns the integration process and the support of new comers.

Another notable feature regards ethnic politics, practiced in order to favor the numerous immigrant groups; this kind of politics push people to engage in the social and political life, condition that would otherwise be rather hard to achieve. Thus, in New York City immigrants have the possibility to live among co-nationals, rely on the support of ethnic

communities and keep their traditions alive, but at the same time feel part and be active components of the New Yorker society as well.

Finally, the twenty-four-hour transportation system enables people living in all the neighborhoods of the City to reach with particular easiness museums, movie theaters, concerts, clubs and other amusement sites, making them part of the cultural life of the city, and, therefore, favoring their integration into the New Yorker society.

Interestingly, maybe thanks to some of these peculiar features as well, in New York City the immigrant groups are doing significantly better than the native minorities, such as Puerto Ricans and African Americans; they succeed in getting better jobs, achieve higher education levels and even intermingle more with the mainstream society (Kasinitz et al., 2004). Striking is the case of most of second generation Chinese and Russian immigrants, who not only enjoy better life conditions than the native minorities, but at college and university achieve better results even than the native whites, sign of their dedication and commitment. It is important to underline, though, that there are tangible dissimilarities between second generation immigrants who work within the ethnic economy and those who work, instead, among the mainstream society. For example, Chinese who practice jobs in “white” work sites, may earn even more than native whites; while Chinese working in the ethnic enclaves earn significantly less, almost as native minorities, such as Puerto Ricans, who are one of the ethnic groups characterized by higher levels of poverty.

The majority of New York City’s inhabitants belong to minority groups, and may be immigrants, their children or native minorities; thus, when analyzing the phenomenon of integration in this city, it is first of all necessary to try to understand into what should

assimilation take place, how and according to what criteria we can identify the mainstream society in such a multicultural reality, and, finally, what it takes to become “Americans” in a city like New York.

In New York City, as a response to the massive arrivals of immigrants, multiculturalism has developed in what may be defined “a particular New York way” (Foner, 2007, 1000), a peculiar condition that makes the city fragmented and homogeneous at the same time, where millions of people of different cultural backgrounds live in close proximity to one another rather harmoniously, and are still able to preserve their own culture. This has been made possible at a large extent by the structure of the City; even though there are many ethnic enclaves, they are not divided by defined boundaries, but most often they overlap one over the other, making contacts between the different ethnic groups inevitable. This peculiarity is made even stronger by the dense public transportation system, that grants easy transfers between the various neighborhoods of New York.

What is more, the fact that the population of the city is composed by so many nationalities and ethnicities, allows the interactions between people of different cultural backgrounds to be much more spontaneous and “occur along an ethnic continuum, not a sharp boundary between nonwhite immigrants and native whites” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 62). It must be also précised, that one of the most important elements granting this peaceful condition, is that even though the city hosts more than 3 million immigrants (according to the 2000 census), not one or two ethnic groups dominate over the others, permitting in this way a true, and peaceful, multicultural reality. This particular condition, allows to avoid unpleasant tensions and rivalries between the different ethnic communities, as it commonly happens in other American cities, where nowadays one the most common disputations takes place between African-Americans and Latinos. The latter are constantly increasing in number, and in many regions of the United States have

even outnumbered black natives. The cause of their clashes, might most often be traced in the “competition for representation on school boards and city councils and other arenas of power” (Foner, 2007, 1013), where, thanks to civil rights movements and other interventions, African-Americans finally managed to acquire controlling positions, and do not look with favor the more and more frequent attempts by Latinos of taking their places. As I have already stated, this kind of rivalries is easily avoidable in the City, given the presence of such numerous different ethnic groups.

Interestingly, only half of New York City’s non-Hispanic Whites are natives, and almost often with an Italian or Irish heritage; accordingly, in contrast with the majority of the other States, in the City the most professed religion by white people is Catholicism, while Protestants are almost not present (Foner, 2007).

Another peculiarity, that distinguishes New York from the other areas of the country which it belongs to, is the different perception and definition of race. As a consequence of the presence of multiple ethnicities and races, that compose this “gorgeous mosaic”, as former Mayor David Dinkins used to define it during his term of office in the 1990s, clearly the common distinction of races between Blacks and Whites, is not applicable here. It is possible to detect a thousand nuances in between these two, elsewhere, “fixed” categories, fact that leads to a complete rethinking of the racial labels as well. What is more, even the definition of Whites and Blacks here is different from the other American cities. For what concerns white people, they are usually considered to be all the white non-Hispanics of European origins; while elsewhere in the United States, this category comprehends almost only natives, whose immigrant history dates back to several generations before their birth, and who most often belong to the upper middle class, in New York City the situation is rather different. Many white Europeans living in the city nowadays are first generation immigrants, coming mostly from eastern European

countries such as Russia or Poland; consequently also their social statuses are various and many of them belong to the working class.

In some cases, also Hispanic whites and certain Asian ethnicities are considered to be part of the “white” category, mostly when compared to Blacks; but in the majority of cases, they are signed under the ethnic labels “Hispanics” or “Latinos” and “Asians”.

Also the definition of “Blackness” acquires a different meaning in New York City, and this phenomenon is starting to appear in other cities, such as Boston or Miami, as well.

Usually, the people composing the group of “Blacks” in the United States are African-Americans, native born from native parents, most often descendants of slaves and, therefore, deep-rooted in the American history and society. Recently, however, Black New Yorkers began to be also West Indians, who constitute an important percentage of black people in the city, and Africans.

Hence, it is clear how immigrants not only contribute to change the urban landscape¹⁷ and society of the empire city, but act also at a deeper level, influencing the perception of the Other, and of what once were resolute ideas, such as “Whiteness” and “Blackness”.

¹⁷ Interestingly, in addition to the establishment of ethnic neighborhoods, is possible to observe the impact of immigration also on the names of the Streets populated by immigrant communities. In the last decade, more than one-third of the laws issued by the City Council, regarded the re-naming of streets, squares, parks and other urban components, after heroes and historical figures belonging to the ethnic community’s heritage (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

“You’re different, and I’m different. You’re okay, and I’m okay.”¹⁸

The peculiar history, structure, and social composition of New York City favor positive interactions, intermingle and successful intercultural communication between the various ethnic groups that inhabit the metropolis. As I have analyzed previously, the presence of such a wide variety of cultures, religions, and ethnic backgrounds favors rather easier interethnic relations than what usually takes place in the majority of the American cities. Of course, also New York is often scene of discriminations, disputations and tensions between people of different origins, as it is normal in any place where diverse cultures coexist in close proximity, and the probability of coming at odds with one another is understandably high. However, the atmosphere that floats over New York City is one of tolerance, mutual respect and even solidarity.

As the immigrants themselves recognize, living in the empire city constitutes a real advantage for them, it helps them to feel part of the society and feeling “okay” because their being different constitutes just one of the million different connotations of this multiethnic reality. They are aware, that the favorable condition they enjoy in New York, would not be possible in any other city, where their origins and cultures would make them experience discrimination and alienation much more easily:

¹⁸ (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 99)

“In New York City, my respondents¹⁹ say, being of Chinese descent is nothing out of the ordinary. By the same token, they were conscious that New York is a very particular case and that their experiences might be different elsewhere. [...] Even Chinese who had grown up feeling part of the predominantly white communities were uncertain of their welcome in other places where people would not know them as well.” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 99)

As the passage highlights, immigrants understand the exceptionality of New York, where not only people with different cultural backgrounds are used to live in close proximity and interact with one another, but even the mainstream society, the native Whites, are part of this multicultural environment and intermingle with immigrants and minorities in an extremely natural way, in a continuum of interethnic relations. What is more, it is a common attitude of the New Yorker white society to exalt its own immigrant past, getting closer, in a certain way, to the copious immigrant population.

Of course, it would not be even possible to imagine this type of scenario in other contexts, where the majority of the population is white and, therefore, people of foreign origins are regarded as “different”, and intercultural contacts do not take place on such a spontaneous and frequent basis. It must be precised, that the particular attitude of the mainstream society in New York, is also favored by several programs, measures and events, that help people to better know and understand their neighbors’ origins and cultures, to learn their traditions and lifestyle; throughout the year, the City hosts ethnic parades and manifestations, such as the Chinese New Year’s parade, Saint Patrick’s parade, the Caribbean festival and so on, attended not only by the people belonging to

¹⁹ The respondents interviewed are second generation immigrants belonging to different ethnic groups, who live in New York City.

that specific ethnic groups, but by other immigrants, natives and minorities' members as well.

Within this multicultural context, where “being ethnic can be taken for granted as part of being an American New Yorker” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 286), the process of integration is relatively easy, it comes rather natural for immigrants and their descendants to feel part of the New Yorker multi-faceted society, in contrast with the obstacles and difficulties that their co-nationals often experience in other cities. It is also fundamental to underline, that when asked whether they considered themselves as Americans, the majority of the immigrants living in the empire city affirm to be American New Yorkers or, simply, New Yorkers. The New Yorker identity mirrors all the multicultural dynamics, experiences and richness that distinguish it from the mainstream's one; that is why to immigrants it comes much more natural to think about themselves as characterized by the New Yorker identity rather than by the American one. This feature underlines the difference between not only New York and the rest of the United States, but also between their relative societies; at the same time, it also denotes the different way immigrants perceive the New Yorker inhabitants on the one hand, and the more general white-mainstream society, which is usually referred to as American, on the other (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

Who are the “Americans”?

It is now very interesting to analyze who the “Americans” happen to be, and how much this definition appears to be relative and dependant on the context taken into consideration.

When talking to second generation immigrants, it is rather common, or even usual, to hear them describing themselves as American in contraposition to their immigrant parents; being born and raised in the United States, even if within an ethnic enclave, makes them feel as true members of the American society, closer to the American values and lifestyle than to those of their families. This opinion is often reinforced by occasional visits to their home country, where the immigrants’ children become even more aware of the cultural gap between their own lifestyle, way of thinking, goals and habits, and the ones of their co-ethnics in the home country; for many of them this is the epiphany that makes them realize how distant they are from that traditional world, and fully realize their American identity (Kasinitz et al., 2008).

At the same time, however, they recur to the term “Americans” to describe the white mainstream society, or, better, the idea they have of it, since in the majority of cases, they do not even have ever personally met people that fit into this category:

““American” was for the kids we used to see on TV, the little blond-haired, blue-eyed white girls playing with their Barbie and their Barbie play-house in their big houses, not the little dark-skinned girl playing with some old doll in a small house while their parents are struggling to make it.” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 17)

This opinion of a second-generation West Indian immigrant, highlights the perception shared by many immigrants, about who the “real” Americans are, namely the upper-middle class white people, who talk perfect standard English, with no accent or inflection. Interestingly, however, these people are most often described as the ones you can see on television, or just occasionally in offices or public places, but not people that play major roles in the immigrants’ lives. Sometimes, even second generation immigrants perceive the “real” Americans as a sort of caste they are not included in, and, mostly non-white people, feel they will never be part of it, because of their different origins.

It is also important to affirm, that the perception about what means to be American depends on one’s own origins and ethnicity as well. Many immigrant groups may consider as “Americans” people belonging to native minorities, as West Indians do when talking about African-Americans; while, at the other end of the spectrum, the very African-Americans and other members of minority groups consider as “real” Americans the components of the white mainstream society.

Notwithstanding all these different ways of perceiving and understanding the “American” category, it is possible to detect a general attitude of second and even 1.5 generation immigrants consisting in considering themselves as *American New Yorkers*.

But what does this peculiar identity involve? The opinions of a young Russian Jewish American woman seems to explain it rather significantly:

“I would definitely identify myself as an American New Yorker. [...] I can have incredible Ethiopian food for lunch and then have a wonderful Korean dinner. And that what’s being an American is. With all the liberties to express how you feel about that, as you wish....All discarded into a disposable plastic bag.” (Kainitz et al., 2004, 358)

A West-Indian American college students adds:

“Me and my friends are like a tiny United Nations up in here [...] Everybody thinks their country is better than everybody else’s, but it’s all love. We teach each other about where we’re from, and then we’re brand new.” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 295)

What unites the two statements and appears to be the main element that qualifies a New Yorker, is the cosmopolitan dimension s/he is absorbed in. Being an American New Yorker means being “international”, having, for instance, the opportunity to try different types of food, learn about new culture, but most importantly, interacting and building relationships with people of different cultural backgrounds. Even though a sense of patriotism is still present for the second generation immigrants, as New Yorkers it comes natural to them to take their being “different” for granted, and live with one another in a condition of “all love”. What in my opinion is particularly worth of note, is their ability to learn about one another through a never-ending cultural interaction, that not only enriches them, but contributes to create their “brand new” identity.

Interestingly, the image of the “disposable plastic bag” introduced by the Russian American girl, denotes the importance of the consumer culture, both as a constitutive feature of being a New Yorker, and as a bond between the numerous ethnic groups, that contributes to smooth out all the differences and makes the society appear much more homogeneous. Finally, another element that is perceived as characteristic of the American identity, is the possibility of expressing one’s own opinion freely, condition that for many immigrants represent an important element of change.

It is thus possible to affirm, that in multicultural cities such as New York, being American is a completely relative concept. People belonging to two or more different cultural backgrounds perceive themselves at the same time as Americans and non-Americans, depending on who they are compared with. A second generation Dominican girl significantly affirms: “I tell him [her Dominican uncle] I’m not American...But it’s true, you know, I am...compared to him.” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 61), underlying the profound ambivalence of her identity.

Ethnic Neighborhoods and Assimilation

To be an American might have several meanings and interpretations, depending on the context and on what this particular identity is compared too. As we have previously analyzed, usually immigrants, most of all second generation, share an ambivalent perception about this identity; on the one hand it makes them feel as insiders, Americans

and active parts of the American society, mainly when confronting their experience with their parents' or other first generation's ones. On the other hand, though, they might develop a consideration about themselves as outsiders, if they associate the fact of being "American" with the white mainstream.

While this latter feeling may be noticed more commonly among first generation immigrants, especially those who grew up in their home country and arrived in the United States at an adult age, and therefore usually keep on living according to their culture and traditions, it would be rather unusual to learn about second generation immigrants, born and raised in New York, who do not consider themselves as Americans.

New York City, of course, constitutes an exception; thanks to its multicultural environment and multiethnic society, it is much more easy for immigrants, mostly for second generation, to consider themselves as part of that society and as "real" New Yorkers. In a city like this, where diversity is taken for granted, it comes rather natural for people to feel part of it, even for those who live within ethnic neighborhoods and appear to be more isolated. That is true most of all for second generation or members of 1.5 generation, who arrived in the United States at a very young age; often, they consider ethnic enclaves as "a comforting heaven for parents", who can preserve their culture and traditions, but "a stifling ghetto" for themselves (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 345), since they feel oppressed by the overwhelming presence of co-ethnics, who judge their lifestyle and choices on the basis of the values of their native culture. Indeed, children of immigrants, by attending American schools, spending time in public places, and especially by interacting with other New Yorkers of many different origins, absorb values, lifestyles and ways of thinking that are often quite dissimilar from their parents' ones. As a consequence, they start to develop a new identity, that seeks to mediate the two worlds

which they belong to and their relative features; most often, however, their being American New Yorkers prevails, and, even though the ties with their family and ethnic community will not disappear, they do get weaker, making the immigrants' children feel part of a different social group and realize the cultural gap between them and their parents.

This may even result in rather negative situations, such as a lack of communication within families, especially where language constitutes a barrier. First generation Chinese immigrants, for example, usually are not proficient in English, while their children, who speak English on a daily basis, find it rather difficult to communicate in Chinese; consequently, the communication process might experience several obstacles (Kasinitz et al., 2008). In addition to that, as soon as immigrants' children grow up and are about to start their independent lives, often they prefer to leave the ethnic enclaves where they were raised, in order to settle in a more "American" environment, where they do not feel hindered by ethnic traditions and lifestyle. Obviously, this might be a positive push for immigrants' integration, but at the other end of the spectrum it may also lead to a less favorable result: while living and working within the ethnic economy may grant immigrants and their children an important support at various levels, such as finding a good job, often in the family business, leaving this "safe" environment and settling in a "foreign" world, might result in more obstacles and even in a downward mobility.

Notwithstanding these possible negative outcomes, integration in New York City reveals to be rather smooth in most cases and this is witnessed by the fact that most second generation immigrants lead a lifestyle, which is rather similar to the one of most native

Americans; they are able to find the same types of jobs natives perform, in contrast to their parents' disadvantages caused by the very condition of being immigrants²⁰.

This condition is also favored by the peculiar features of the city and its society, as previously analyzed. Immigrants themselves, even though usually deeply aware of this condition, experience the relevant difference between New York and the other cities, when moving to other American regions, as a Chinese American college student reports: "I'm so used to the city being diverse enough that people are not staring at you just because you look different. But at Vassar, only two hours away, it was a whole different scenario." (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 166). The young woman then affirms how she experienced alienation and prejudices, since her college-mates in Vassar would think she was a foreigner, not an American just like them, and interacted with her according to the common stereotypes related to the Chinese culture. Eventually, she decided to go back to New York City, where she could feel as a "real" American.

Also because of that reason, in the majority of cases immigrants decide to settle in New York City on a permanent basis, knowing that in the other American cities it would not be so easy to integrate at such an higher level into the local society. Interestingly, the percentage of inhabitants, who were born, raised and live in the empire city is mainly composed by immigrants and their children, while natives tend to leave in order to attend college or look for jobs in other cities; at the same time, numerous natives populating New York come from other regions of the United States and reached the City in search of a job (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

²⁰ First generation immigrants, although attended college in their home countries, often see themselves forced to turn to the garment or food businesses in order to earn a living, since barriers such as language prevent them from practicing the job they are prepared for.

It must be precised that, for what concerns assimilation and identity, often one's ethnicity and racial features weigh a lot more than the place where one was born and live. As a matter of fact, while, for instance, for Russian Jewish immigrants might be rather easy to integrate into the mainstream society, thanks to usually high education level, wealthy families and their being white, the same process may result to be much harder for an African-American native person living in an ethnic, and often segregated neighborhood, even though born and raised in New York City, by native parents. As a matter of fact, usually these enclaves have the worst public schools, element that makes it harder for students to enter good colleges and universities; consequently, also the youth's parents often do not achieve high levels of education, and work within the neighborhood's economy. In addition to that, contacts with the white mainstream and other ethnic groups are rather infrequent, due to the highly isolated environment, leading to a much more difficult integration into the New Yorker society.

It is therefore possible to argue that the integration of immigrants into the mainstream society depends not only on the place they live in, since ethnic origins and families' background play a major role. Most often, already second generation immigrants are significantly integrated into the American society, share values and lifestyles promoted by the mainstream, and are aware of the cultural differences that exist between them and their parents. Even though living within an ethnic enclave, immersed in their native culture and traditions, the contact and intermingle with other ethnic groups are inevitable in a city as New York.

The reality is rather different for their parents, first generation immigrants, who tend to spend most of their time within the ethnic community, among co-ethnics, and frequently work within the ethnic economy. As a consequence, they have very few possibilities to

enter into contact and build relationships with people belonging to other cultures; what is more, living in an ethnic environment allows them to speak their native language not only at home but also in public spaces and even at work, therefore it would not be rare to run into first generation immigrants, who do not speak English even though living in New York City.

First versus Second Generation Immigrants

When first generation immigrants have children, they struggle to raise them according to the values, habits and traditions of their culture. This might mean talking to them in their native language, sending children to after-school programs and courses where they can learn more about the parents' culture, be among co-ethnics, and so on. However, the more immigrants' children grow up, the more American they feel. Even though they spend time among people of their very ethnicity, maybe even live within ethnic enclaves and interact continuously with the ethnic community, it is inevitable that contacts and intermingles with the mainstream society and people of different cultural origins happen on a daily basis. This, in addition to the education they get at school and the very fact of living in the United States, contributes to shape their identity in conformity with the American lifestyle and values. Unavoidably, second generation immigrants soon become aware of the several dissimilarities between the parents' culture, lifestyle and way of thinking, and those of the American society, which they are assimilating; in contrast with their foreign-born families, they consider themselves as Americans.

As an Italian American educator stated a few decades ago, "We were becoming Americans by learning how to be ashamed of our parents" (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 8), expressing the feeling of uneasiness that many children of immigrants may experience towards their parents' different way of behaving. For example, often second generation express their disapproval towards their parents or other first generation immigrants, who, even though living in the United States, do not speak English because their life takes

place mostly among the ethnic community; the majority of their children believes that it is important to preserve one's own culture, but at the same time it would be important to integrate more into the American society.

Interestingly, they assimilate the American values and lifestyle, to the point that they often replace the habits they learned from their parents while growing up, with the ones they apprehend from the American society; this might mean adopting different family models and even different religions. That is mostly true for many Chinese Americans, who become Christian and in many cases try to convert their co-ethnics (Kasinitz et al., 2004); while this is unmistakably a sign of their successful integration, it is also the cause of several disputes between second generation immigrants and their families. Parents, as a matter of fact, are afraid of the change their children experience, they fear that by becoming "Americans" they will lose relevant features and values of their own culture.

An interesting outcome of the integration of second generation into the New Yorker society, is that also the roles played within immigrant families are subject to significant alterations: the very children perform the part of "teachers" for their parents, considering that they instruct their families on how to best integrate into the American society.

The American youth of immigrant origin has also to find a compromise between what the families expect from them, and what the society they live into does. Often, first generation immigrants wish to transmit their values and tradition to the children, to orient them towards their personal aspiration and to what they think is best for their children's future. While trying to satisfy their parents' expectations, second generation must also face the judgment of the society, which include schools, work or simply relationships with other people, and to find a meeting point might sometimes be rather difficult. For example, second generation females, especially if belonging to certain ethnic group, such as South Americans or Chinese, experience a particular protective attitude from their

parents, that makes it hard for them to attend social events, spend time outside, even just studying at the library, at late hours (Kasinitz et al., 2008). Of course, this might not only be an obstacle to a successful integration, but often causes disputes and clashes between parents and children. What is more, many immigrant parents do not approve too “American” behaviors, and are afraid of what the co-ethnics may think about their “Americanized” children.

It is interesting to analyze how these conflicts take place also for what concerns the education and decisions about what college to attend. In some cases children decide to follow their parents’ desires, maybe against their own will, as a Korean American second generation young man affirms: “Ever since I was a little child, they ingrained in my brain I was going to be a doctor” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 161), and even though he was interested in anthropology, he finally decided to study medicine, in order to go along with his parents’ wishes. Other times, they opt to chase their own dreams, contrasting the family’s aspiration; in this case, it is not rare to encounter feelings of guilt towards their parents, for having taken an individualistic and, therefore, more “American” decision.

“How to Inhabit Two Worlds at the Same Time”²¹: Second Generation as In-betweeners

Children of immigrants who live in New York City might find the integration process relatively easy. They can enjoy the advantage of being part of a multicultural society, where differences are not only tolerated, but even celebrated; where being “ethnic” is the rule, and even white people are usually not referred to as “white”, but as Italian, Irish, Jewish American and so on, highlighting the immigrant past that ties together the majority of New York City’s inhabitants (Kasinitz et al., 2008). As it has been previously analyzed, the structure of the City, its efficient system of public transportation, the several recreational and entertainment sites and activities, and the special policies and programs instituted by the City’s government, favor the access of immigrants to every aspect of the public life, at a rather higher extent than what happens in other cities. Consequently, it comes natural for second generation immigrants to feel as an active part of the society and, thus, as Americans.

At the same time, however, they are still subject to the influence of their native culture and the related values and lifestyle; this is mainly true for those people, who live, or have been raised, within an ethnic enclave. But also second generation immigrants that do not live among co-ethnics are partly influenced by their origins, since the education and the values transmitted by their parents are obviously mediated by their cultural backgrounds and ethnic identity.

²¹ (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 401)

Hence, it is evident that the children of immigrants live in an in-between condition, with a foot on their parents' ethnic world, and the other in the American New Yorker one. While this condition might be characterized by extreme cultural richness and opportunities, it may also lead to relevant problems, such as the risk of feeling part of both and, at the same time, neither of these two worlds, and as a consequence the difficulty of shaping one's identity by trying to find a compromise between the two realities (Kasinitz et al., 2004). But before analyzing how this peculiar condition influences the perception that second generation immigrants have of themselves, and what kind of identities result from it, I believe it is important to describe what does it mean to be "in-betweeners" and if this condition leads to clashes with both the American society and people belonging to their original culture.

First of all, the in-between condition of second generation may be noticed in the sphere of work. Children of immigrants are doing significantly better than their parents; the latter, usually work within the ethnic economy and are self-employed, mostly in the garment and food sectors, while second generation, thanks to their American education and to attending college, are able to find better jobs, in most of the cases professional occupations and not entrepreneurial jobs as their parents, and reach better life condition. At the same time, however, they might also experience hardships in achieving their original goals and reaching earning levels equal to those of native whites. In addition to that, sometimes second generation immigrants feel disadvantaged, since they perceive to be discriminated on two fronts, for example when applying for high positions at work, falling in a condition that may be referred to as "ethnic trap": on the one side, American firms tend to privilege native whites for what concerns managerial roles; on the other, "ethnic" firms usually prefer to assign those particular positions to first or 1.5 generation immigrants, since they deal with the home country and thus need people, who have a

perfect knowledge of the language used for businesses and of the customs and practices of that specific culture (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

The hardships experienced when looking for a job may also be the consequence of a more disadvantaged education path: often children of immigrants attend public schools that do not offer a proper instruction, because of several factors, such as their location, in ethnic and segregated neighborhoods, the composition of the student population, in some cases constituted mainly by immigrants, including the several who are not proficient in the English language, and finally by the frequent episodes of discrimination that may prevent young people from focusing properly on their studies and even push them to leave school earlier. In addition to that, frequently immigrants' children cannot count on considerable financial resources as most native Whites do, and have to work part-time in order to contribute to their family's expenses. Thus, it is clear that the time and efforts they can dedicate to their studies are significantly inferior to those of average white people. Unfortunately, therefore, many of them have to renegotiate their aspirations, confirming in this way their in-between condition.

Second generation immigrants have to deal with their parents' culture and aspiration on the one side, and with their own goals and their more American way of thinking on the other. This may lead to disputes and contrasts, and often make children take certain decisions not according to their own will, but to satisfy their family's wishes. It is often possible to observe this phenomenon in the educational and professional sphere, since in many cases immigrants' children follow determined professional paths because of the pressure of their families, and, in the case they followed their own desires, it is not rare to observe them facing feelings of guilt. This is true most of all for certain ethnic groups, such as the Chinese, who usually favor particular professions, such as the ones in the

medical or law fields, and when a young person decides to follow a different path, this choice may be seen as a refusal to conform to the Chinese traditional habit in favor of a more American, and individualist, one.

Interestingly, the in-between condition of the second generation might be noticed also in the religious sphere. As a matter of fact, many children of immigrants do not feel comfortable to be part of a strictly traditional ethnic church, where the only language spoken is their native language, which in some cases they do not even know at a proficient level, and where they should adhere to traditional values that often do not conform with their American identity. At the same time, however, they still feel the need to be part of a community composed by co-ethnics, by people sharing their very backgrounds and similar experiences; consequently, it is possible to observe the formation of numerous religious communities and churches made up of second generation immigrants belonging to the same ethnicity, where they can interact with other persons, who share their double identity, American on the one side, and immigrant on the other. This way, they do not have to give up the ties to their original culture, and simultaneously do not feel oppressed by its imposing norms.

Another interesting point, at which second generation comes at odds with their parents, is the perception of the Other and of race. Being born and grown up among the American society, it comes much more natural to immigrants' children to look at people belonging to other ethnic groups, just as Americans, as New Yorkers, and not considering them as "different" persons, as their parents may do. What is more, while it is not rare to observe conflicts or prejudices between first generation immigrants belonging to the same ethnicity but coming from different countries (for example between Trinians and Jamaicans, who are both West Indians; or between Colombians and Ecuadoreans), usually on the basis of past national events, it would be rather unusual to notice this kind

of behavior among their children, who do not give any importance to one's origins (Kasinitz et al., 2004). At the same time, however, by interacting with people of different origins and ethnicities, children of immigrants might experience discrimination and prejudices, and are deeply aware of the major role ethnicity can play in everyday's life; their parents, on the other hand, are often stranger to this phenomenon, since they grew up among co-nationals in their home country and their new life in the United States happens mostly within ethnic environments, among people of their very cultural group. Consequently, it may be rather frequent to denote feelings of frustration among second generation, who do not feel understood by their parents when denounce the episodes of racism or discrimination they might experience at school or in other aspects of their life. At the same time, they realize that "[...] due to their immigration status, the first generation were "learning" race right along with their children" (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 297), and were, thus, experiencing these peculiar phenomena for the first time.

It is important to underline, though, that the perception second generation have about race and ethnicity is different from that native Americans commonly share, confirming once again their belonging to both and neither world at the same time. A striking example regards the condition of West Indian Americans; due to their dark skin and African traits, they are often considered as African-Americans by the mainstream white society; this opinion is not shared by the African-American community though, who proclaims the cultural and backgrounds dissimilarities. For what concerns the very West Indians, it is possible to distinguish two different ways of thinking about their identity; on the one hand, first generation manifestly declare their specific origins and identity, and tries to transmit this sense of pride also to their children, affirming that they must be proud of their identity, in opposition to that of African Americans, who they often consider as "lazy, unwilling to work, and not placing enough importance on education."

(Kasinitz et al., 2004, 298). On the other hand, second generation affirm to be both African-American and West Indian at the same time, identifying with their natives peers. (Kasinitz et al., 2008).

Hence, it is possible to argue, that the condition of second generation immigrants is rather peculiar and needs particular attention. On the one side, they feel Americans, they share the values and lifestyle of the mainstream society, and know they have the prerogatives to achieve better life conditions than their parents; but along this condition of *insiders*, there is also the one of *outsiders*, since children of immigrants are aware that their origins and ethnicity may prevent them from achieving the same successes as white natives.

Being part of two different worlds is definitely a source of richness, not only for themselves, but also for the people they interact with and the influence they have for the American society. As many children of immigrants affirm, belonging to two cultural realities constitutes an advantage and a resource that needs to be exploited; it allows them to better understand the society they live in, letting them perceive the surrounding world from two different points of view. In addition to that, being bicultural constitutes a relevant advantage, since it makes children of immigrants able to discern the best features and values of both cultural heritages, and unite them, shaping a new identity and way of being.

The risk, however, is that of feeling part of neither the two realities, of considering themselves as different from both the American mainstream and the immigrant community. As a matter of fact, while being born in the United States, and raised as Americans among Americans, often children of immigrants are still considered as foreigners because of their cultural heritage and their belonging to a different ethnicity; at

the same time, as a consequence of their very education and personal experiences, they do not fully identify neither with the ethnic community their parents belong to, since they consider themselves as Americans. Thus, it is important for children of immigrants to intermingle with people experiencing their own reality, element that may help them to better understand their origins, present condition and identity. Inevitably, the outcome will be the renegotiation of the existent, “fixed” identities, resulting in the creation of a new, innovative one, as a second generation South American young man affirms: “They taught me the same ones [values] but I’m going to take my own type of values” (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 337).

Shaping a New (Yorker) Identity

The most probable outcome of second generation's integration into the American society is the affirmation of a "new" personal identity, different from both the one of their parents and that of the mainstream society. As previously analyzed, children of immigrants have to find a compromise between the two worlds they inhabit, and try to amalgamate the habits and values learned by their parents with the ones they apprehend by living among and interacting with the New Yorker society. In addition to that, they are divided between their parents' desire for them to preserve their cultural heritage, including their native language and traditions, and the surrounding society's requirements, that in most cases clash one with the other.

A significant problem concerns the language used by second generation immigrants; when interacting with co-ethnics, and most of all at home, they usually speak their native language, both because often parents are not proficient in English, and because the latter believe it is important for their children not to lose such a distinctive feature of their own culture. Sometimes, second generation immigrants themselves feel the need to recur to their native language when interacting with co-ethnic peers, as a means to preserve and celebrate their ethnic identity, or simply because it comes easier to them to communicate in that way. At the same time, however, rather often children of immigrants experience discrimination and are hindered at this practice by teachers at school or by bosses at work sites. In many public schools, it is forbidden to talk in any language other than English; the message that such a measure may transmit to children of immigrants, is that their

origins are not something they should display, they see their own culture devaluated, and, what is worse, they might perceive their cultural heritage, and in this case their language, as a barrier that must be overcome in order to integrate successfully into the American society. What is more, they realize rather soon the major role that their ethnic and racial origins play, and how much these features will affect their relationships and achievements in life; as a matter of fact, already at school, second generation immigrants learn that, according to the racial category they fit into, they are treated and considered in different ways. While children of European immigrants, who in the last decades are mostly Russians, do not encounter significant problems and discrimination, thanks to their being white, the situation is fairly different for students of African phenotype, who often have to go through prejudices. This reality is even worse for Spanish-speaking black students, since, in addition to the racial discrimination, because of their limited English proficiency they are also inscribed into the “deficit model” (Kasinitz et al., 2004). Peculiar, instead, is the condition of second generation Asian immigrants; thanks to their usual attitude and successes in their studies, mostly in the science fields, they are regarded as the “model minority” (Kasinitz et al., 2004). On the one hand, this perception may be positive and favor their school results and integration into the work environments, on the other hand, however, the practice of judging a member of the Asian community only on the basis of this common stereotype is undoubtedly a racial practice, and may be perceived as oppressive by the people of this ethnic group. All of these prejudices and attitudes are often regarded as natural and irrelevant, but their impact on the identity-formation process for second generation immigrants, and minorities’ members as well, is striking. As a consequence of the discrimination and obstacles experienced because of one’s own origins or ethnic features, many may be pushed to deny their cultural heritage in order to try to assimilate to the white mainstream.

Notwithstanding these possible negative outcomes, the reality of second generation immigrants in New York City is overall positive; the multicultural environment, the presence of people from all over the world, the perpetual celebration of ethnic diversity through manifestations, festivals, parades or just simply at school, church and at work, makes it inevitable for people to be aware of their own and other's ethnic identity, and at the same time look at it as something absolutely normal.

A relevant element that must be taken into consideration when analyzing the way second generation immigrants perceive themselves and their identity, is the environment, where they grew up and live. It is possible to denote substantial differences from those, who spent a significant amount of their life within an ethnic neighborhood, among people sharing the same cultural background and traditions, and those who grew up in the prevalently white suburbs or in more multi-ethnic neighborhoods (Kasinitz et al., 2008).

While second generation in general consider themselves as Americans, or in the case of the empire city, as New Yorkers, it is possible to notice, that children of immigrants, who grew up in ethnic neighborhoods have stronger ties to their parents' culture, speak better their native language and are more inclined to be an active part of the immigrant community, by working, hanging out and engaging in the activities of the ethnic group (Kasinitz et al., 2008). Thus, it is possible to argue that they develop a sort of double identity, both American and ethnic, usually finding a compromise between the two and highlighting one or the other depending who they are interacting with.

The situation is different, instead, for second generation who were born or spent great part of their childhood in a different environment; the perception they have about themselves is just that of Americans, still children of immigrants but whose connection to the native culture is rather weak. It is also important to underline, that this particular condition is due also to their parents' situation: usually, first generation immigrants, who

do not live within an ethnic enclaves, most of all those who settled in the white suburbs, have usually achieved a higher education level, practice professional jobs, and also have less occasions to interact with co-ethnics; these particular elements, in addition to the fact that children growing up in the suburbs attend better schools and have therefore easier access to prestigious colleges, significantly favor a successful integration of second generation immigrants into the mainstream society.

Notwithstanding these variable attitudes towards the perception of oneself, the multicultural environment of New York City leads second generation to identify ethnically, obviously at different extents. In a society where everyone is from somewhere, it is natural to think about oneself in terms of ethnicity, to be proud of one's own origins and cultural heritage, regarding it as a peculiar sign, that distinguishes every single person within the more and more multiethnic society; what is more, thanks to the contemporary innovations of technology and communication, it is much easier to keep contacts or even establish new relationships with family and other co-ethnics still living in the home country, and thus keeping alive particular features of the native culture.

It must be precised, however, that the attitude of second generation towards ethnicity, is rather different than that of first generation immigrants. The latter, being born and raised in a foreign country, usually do not perceive themselves just as American. They have a strong ethnic identity, tend to keep their cultural traditions and language alive, and usually have fervent relationships with co-ethnics. Second generation, on the other side, most often consider themselves as real Americans and assume an American way of being, which significantly differs from the one of their parents. Of course, children of immigrants are still characterized by relevant traits of the ethnic identity, they grew up within immigrant families who transmitted them their native culture and values. Frequently, though, the American side of their being gets the upper hand over these

features, and the ethnic identity results to be more “symbolic” than real, limited to superficial aspects rather than constitutive parts of their personality (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

The question of identity in a city as New York do not concern only immigrants and their children, but native minorities and even the white mainstream as well. The more and more multiethnic society determines a continuous reshaping of the social and ethnic landscape, making it impossible to think about fixed and permanent ethnic identities and definitions. Interesting, for example, is the condition of black people, who until a few decades ago were mainly African Americans; their organizations, institutions and social events were run and constituted almost exclusively by the very African Americans, and would focus on their specific history, identity and needs. Today, however, this reality has completely changed: African Americans are just one of the several black groups present in the empire city, and even not the majority of them anymore; the other two main black communities are Latinos and most of all West Indians. Obviously, this deep change of the ethnic landscape determines a re-thinking of what being black means; it does not mean anymore only being African American, with everything that comes with it, such as to descend from the slavery experience, and frequently trace one’s origins in the South of the United States (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

Latinos and West Indians bring with them completely different experiences, cultural heritages, backgrounds and history; in most of the cases, first generation immigrants did not experience discrimination and segregation in their home countries, since they come from prevalently black States, where the ruling class and the main authorities are of black ethnicity as well. When establishing in the United States, mostly in the case they settled within an ethnic enclave, they may still not feel isolated from the mainstream society for

the only reason that their interaction with it is rather limited, and most of their daily life and relationships take place among co-ethnics. Therefore, it is not surprising that they even have difficulty in feeling their children struggle and believing that discrimination and prejudices are still rather common practices in several public schools, and even in some work sites (Kasinitz et al., 2004). In addition to that, another element that is cause of concern for second generation black immigrants, is the frequent attitude of members of other ethnic groups, and most of all of the mainstream society, of taking for granted the fact that they belong to the African American community, without even considering the possibility of them coming from a foreign country and belonging to a different cultural tradition:

“It was not until I went to high school that I realized that I was different. The African American kids thought that I knew about grits²², and the teachers thought that...I knew all about black history, so I should be able to tell the white kids about it...I hated [it]...I wanted to go around with a sign saying, “I’m Jamaican, I’m not from this country”, even though I was born here and had been here my entire life. I was just different.” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 298)

This consideration, expressed by a second generation Jamaican man, underlines several interesting issues concerning the condition of second generation black immigrants, West Indians in particular. As I have already stated, it is rather usually for them to be mistaken for African Americans, both by the very African American people, and by the white mainstream or other ethnic groups; this happens owing to the fact that most often people tend to judge the Other just on the basis of their physical appearance, without trying to go

²² Grits is a kind of food made of corn, typical of the Southern part of the United States and usually associated with black cultural heritage.

deeper under the surface. That is exactly the reason why teachers or schoolmates expect West Indians to know about black history, black culture and habits²³, but that is a completely stranger world for them, as it would be for Chinese or Russian immigrants. As a consequence, Black immigrants struggle to affirm their own peculiar identity, in opposition to that of African Americans, but find it particularly difficult to go beyond the common way of thinking and perceiving the Other, performed by many people.

It is also important to underline, that the perception of immigrants about themselves as “different” starts to appear when they come closer to an adult age, when contacts and interactions with people of different ethnicities and cultures become more and more intense, making them realize and getting aware of their own identity through the comparison process with the others. While on the one side this may be positive, since they become aware of the peculiar features of their own culture and heritage, on the other side the risk is that of feeling part of neither the two worlds they belong to. For example, in the case of the second generation Jamaican man, he still feels to be Jamaican, but nobody seems to understand that and consider him as an African American; at the same time, while being born and raised in the United States, he does not feel totally as an American, because his parents come from another country and he himself grew up among different habits, traditions and values than the ones of his peers.

Worth of note is also the usual tendency of West Indians to affirm their own peculiar identity in opposition to the one of African Americans, and would rather not be associated with them, because of the common rather negative opinion the mainstream society has about the latter; as a matter of fact, while African Americans frequently

²³ When talking about black history and culture in such a context, it refers to American Black tradition, that is African American history. This category includes the tragic experience of slavery, segregation, civil rights movements and the diaspora from the South to the Northern States, owing to which, the majority of African Americans populating, for example, New York, are descendants of the African slaves. But the black tradition includes also a rich cultural world of music, customs and food, which black immigrants, as all the other immigrants, do not know much about.

belong to the poor-working class, West Indians are more likely to practice professional jobs and be part of the middle class (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

Interesting is the ambiguous attitude people of black ethnicity have developed towards the concept of Blackness: on the one side, many West Indians prefer not to be categorized with this specific label, since it commonly refers to African Americans and does not take into account their different identity, culture and history. On the other hand, however, there is the common attitude, mostly of second generation immigrants, to describe themselves as Blacks, as part of that larger black community that is constituted by several different groups (Kasinitz et al., 2004). This particular practice, helps them to identify with a large part of the American society, and favor the formation of a feeling of community, solidarity and pride of their own race. What is more important, is that this may also lead to a more successful integration into the American society, and constitute a push to take part in the racial struggle in order to achieve better social conditions.

Defining what identity is in New York City is a rather complex task. People have to ponder their immigrant, racial, ethnic and American identities, and find a compromise between all of these different categories. As a consequence, it is sometimes rather difficult to choose just one among all of them, and the result is that the best way to define one's identity is by interacting with other people; according to who a person is relating with, s/he expresses her/his own identity. In addition to that, the probable outcome of the coexistence of many different cultural features is the creation of an "eclectic" identity, which is composed by a bit of every single ethnic and cultural connotations, and may, therefore, be described as the fusion of many identities at the same time.

Another significant outcome deriving from the coexistence of different ethnicities within close proximity is the creation of “pan-identities”: the presence of so numerous cultures and ethnicities from all around the world, often very different between one another, leads to a particular form of closeness and solidarity between people belonging not only to the very same nationality but between immigrants coming from a wider geographic area, yet still sharing common, or at least similar, traditions and lifestyle (Kasinitz et al., 2008). Thus, it would be not rare to observe the creation of pan-South American, pan-African or pan-Asian American identities, which may constitute a greater possibility for immigrants to feel part of a wider community and overcome, little by little, some of the barriers present between the different groups and, hopefully, facilitate in this way a successful integration into the American society. It is important to highlight the significant role that colleges and university play for what concerns the formation and the shaping of one’s identity; first of all, they offer courses specialized in ethnic studies, such as Asian studies, African studies and so on, allowing second generation immigrants to learn more about their cultural heritage, their parents’ home country’s history and realizing the main differences between their families’ lifestyle and the one they assimilated by growing up in the United States. This is mostly true for second generation children, whose childhood took place in the white suburbs or in a multiethnic neighborhood, making them less likely to intermingle at an high level with co-ethnics. In addition to that, various activities and organizations at college, favor the interaction of second generation with other children of immigrants of the same ethnicity and culture; this might be a positive thing not only because they can have contacts with people sharing their own cultural background, but also because, being all second generation, they understand each other’s condition as no one else does:

“[Being Korean Americans] means that a lot of my friends won’t be able to relate to certain things that my parents do [...] I find that a lot more of my Chinese and Korean friends can relate better: “Oh, I understand. My parents are like that too”. Whereas a lot of my American friends, they don’t get it. They don’t understand it at all.” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 325)

As this Korean American student affirms, often cultural barriers prevent people from understanding one another and the choices they make; but between second generation co-ethnics that is easily avoidable, since not only they have been raised according to similar values, but they also know what it means to live in-between two worlds and try to find a compromise between them.

Thus, as I have already stated, defining what one’s own identity is, might be rather complex. There is even someone, who defines it “The million-dollar question” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 351), highlighting the “dramatic” side of the problem, since it may be rather alienating not to be able to define one’s own identity. But there are also people, who look at this particular condition with a positive perspective, regarding the presence of several cultural connotations as an advantage, that permits them to choose which identity to adopt depending on who they are interacting with. People belonging to different cultural worlds at the same time perceive their identity as hard to define, yet as unique and a source of inestimable richness.

Living in New York City surely favors the perception of this cultural complexity as an advantage, and leads to the creation of a unique, multicultural New Yorker identity, which, interestingly, does not affect only immigrants but also natives and minorities, whose life takes place within this multifaceted mosaic.

What is more, even though the general attitude of the American society privileges the condition of being white, most of all if native, this particular status has been experiencing a recalibration, especially in contexts as the city of New York. The concept of identity is, therefore, subject to an important reassessment, and in opposition to the former categories of defined and fixed identities, it has now developed a much more fluid and interchangeable identification attitude, and it is possible to talk about a new way of perceiving oneself and the others, within a new category that may be defined as a cosmopolitan identity (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

Ethnicity Counts

The multicultural environment of New York City surely constitutes an advantage for immigrants and minorities who populate it, since it helps them to feel part of the society, to consider themselves as one of the numerous pieces that form this multicolored collage, within a context not only of tolerance, but of celebration of the various different identities and cultures.

Notwithstanding this general condition of tolerance and mutual respect, it is still possible to learn about phenomena of discrimination, segregation and even racism. While, in some cases, these problematic situations may concern all of the people coming from a foreign country and thus belonging to a different ethnicity and culture, than that shared by the American mainstream, it is possible to observe that usually the ones, who most often experience discrimination are native minorities, such as African Americans and Puerto Ricans, and immigrants belonging to these very ethnicities, such as Africans, West Indians and many South Americans.

This chapter is going to analyze several aspects of the everyday life, in which such discriminatory practices may emerge, highlighting the importance and influence of one's ethnicity for what concerns the interactions with others and the achievement of one's goals.

First of all, it must be underlined, that in the United States the lengthy experience of slavery, segregation and isolation has had, and is still having, significant influence for the relationship between the white mainstream and the African Americans, and has affected both the way white people perceive them, and how Blacks perceive themselves. Surely worth of note, is the “one-drop rule” that, impressively, in many cases still affects the way American society looks at people of African ancestry. According to this “rule” people are considered to be black, no matter how they perceive themselves, even in the case they have just one drop of “black” blood, and their blackness is thus barely perceptible; still, they may be subject to discrimination. Interestingly, the attention is focus on the presence of the element of blackness, even if at a minimum proportion, and not at the percentage of whiteness, that, in most cases, is the feature that prevails. As a matter of fact, throughout the past history, in the United States “Color, not ethnic differences, was the key distinction” (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 301), and this particular way of judging and interacting with the Other on the only basis of their skin color, without taking into account all of the other features that characterize a person, is still a rather common practice.

It is interesting to quickly analyze the impact that the election of President Obama has had on the American society for what concerns the condition of black people and the perception of race. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2010, one year after Barack Obama took office, great part of Blacks considered their own condition as better than the previous years, and looked at the future with optimism. Note of worth, is the fact that black people expressed also a feeling of satisfaction towards local communities and thought that the election of the first black President played a major role for the improvement of race relations, which were regarded in a much more positive way (Pew Reaserch Center, 2010).

However, two years later, in 2012, things reveal to be rather different from the previous expectations: “African-Americans still take pride in President Barack Obama’s election — but four years later, they’re also still looking for results” (Epstein, 2012). Rate of joblessness among black people nearly doubles that of Whites, and many African-Americans affirm that it has not been done enough for black communities (Epstein, 2012). What is more, also for what concerns race relations things do not seem to have improved, according to some Americans they have even got worse, as these two persons living in Florida report:

“As a 68-year old white male living in the South, I have never before heard such a constant, daily stream of ugly and overt racist remarks as what I now hear every day from other whites. It is scary just how much so many whites just flat out HATE Obama and his family, and by extension, virtually all other blacks.”

“[...] I'd have to say that in the long run, Obama's presidency may speed up the natural evolution and improvement of race relations. But in the short run, it's been just plain ugly here in the Deep South. The open racism since 2008 has been jaw-dropping. Almost like it came back into vogue” (Cafferty, 2012)

As it emerges from these statements, now race relations might even appear to be worse than before President Obama’s election, since the (political) dissatisfaction of many white people towards him may affect the black community in general; hopefully, though, this condition will disappear in the long-run, paving the way for a much more peaceful situation. It must also be stated that, even though African Americans may not have

experienced the expected changes from President Obama's political initiatives, he still represents a reason of pride for the black community, a symbol of hope and success that encourages African American to hope and engage for a better future (Epstein, 2012).

However, to this day, it still happens that, due to their African American or, more in general, black ancestry, people might be subject to certain forms of discrimination or prejudices. This condition is often denounced by the very black people, who feel prejudiced and racialized rather often in their everyday life. Many of them, for example, affirm that it is rather common for them to be followed and watched over by sales-clerks while shopping:

“When you go to department stores to buy stuff, they constantly have people watching you. No matter what store you go to...All of a sudden they have to fix what is in your aisle. I love that one. Sometimes we will make jokes. ‘Did you put it in your pocket?’ Jokes like that. It’s not funny, but it is so true.” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 11)

As this second generation West Indian woman living in New York City reports, prejudices are still a rather common issue that affects relationships and interaction within the American society. Immigrants belonging to other ethnic groups usually do not denounce similar types of discrimination, thus it is possible to affirm that the prejudices

that the white mainstream applies to the Other, are often based just on the race and of the assumed provenience of the people.

As a matter of fact, a great part of the African Americans, and also West Indians even though at a minor extent, who populate New York, live in poor and sometimes segregated neighborhoods, where the level of criminality is, or better, used to be, rather high; consequently, it may come quite natural for the mainstream society to stigmatize people according to the most common beliefs and assumptions (Kasinitz et al., 2004). Striking, however, is the fact that the majority of the people subject to discrimination and prejudices, are the most better-off, who practice professional jobs among Whites, maybe even live outside of the poor neighborhoods, and therefore intermingle and interact with the white mainstream and other ethnic groups on a regular basis. On the other hand, those who live in the so called “ghetto”, work there and spend most of their time among co-ethnics, are clearly more likely not to experience such unpleasant reactions, as a consequence of the isolation from Whites.

Another significant field, in which people are likely to be discriminated, is the housing market: strikingly, “Although racial segregation is no longer codified by law, it persists in federal redlining guidelines and practices among mortgage lending institutions” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 32); thus, in several cases Blacks still encounter obstacles when looking for a home in the most well-off areas of the city; this condition might affect them negatively in several ways. First of all, it prevents their effective integration into the mainstream society, and favors the restriction of specific urban areas to only certain ethnic groups; what is more, in this way black students are less likely to attend the best public schools, located in these neighborhood, since they would need to travel every day for an large amount of time. This condition explains, thus, the much more rapid and successful integration and upward mobility of certain ethnic groups, such as the Chinese

or the Russians, who encounter almost no obstacles when looking for a house in every part of the City, in opposition to the disadvantaged situation of other immigrant communities, such as West Indians and Dominicans, and even native minorities.

Noteworthy is also the discrimination and prejudices black students do experience at school, even if attending public schools in their ethnic neighborhoods. Most often, hostilities do not take place when interacting with fellow students, since almost the totality of them are Blacks²⁴, but between students and teachers. As a matter of fact, frequently, also in prevalently black neighborhoods, where the 99% of students in public schools are Blacks (Kasinitz et al., 2004), the majority of the teachers are white. This fact may be the cause of significant incomprehension between the two groups, since they come from different “worlds”, have different cultural backgrounds and way of approaching life. In addition to that, often white teachers consider the students just in the basis of their physical appearance, and, being the latter almost all Blacks, the professors are likely to perceive them as a unique cultural and ethnic group. This practice has negative consequences for the shaping of one’s identity, since many students might feel that their cultural background and identity are devalued or even ignored, and they are expected to know about historic and cultural elements belonging to traditions different from their own, that they have never experienced in their own life.

What is more, there is also a widespread assumption shared by the white staff in public schools attended mainly by black students, according to which “low-income youth, who are racialized as Latino and black, especially young men, are prone to aggression” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 38); this prejudicial attitude towards students leads to unpleasant and contradictory outcomes. First of all, since they are suspected of bringing weapons or

²⁴ The composition of students is quite variegated, and comprehends African Americans, Africans, West Indians and people coming from other Caribbean islands or from South America. Even though conflicts based on ethnicity and different culture might take place, usually the relationships between students lack prejudices and discrimination.

other dangerous objects at school, they must undergo special security controls and, sometimes, even body search before entering the buildings. These practices might be humiliating for the very students, who may feel accused and suspected often with no reason; what is worse, is the fact that the continuous racialization and wrong assumptions about the students' bad behavior, eventually lead them to act in the way they are thought of behaving, thus favoring violence and aggressive attitudes both at school and outside. As this paper is going to analyze later on, also the attitude of the police and the authorities is often prejudicial and humiliating towards the majority of Latino and black people, especially men, who become in this way deeply aware of their racial stigmatization.

But phenomena of racism and discrimination take place also in more mixed public schools, where black and Latino students constitute just two of the many ethnicities present in the institute. In this case, they might experience discrimination both from their peers and the teachers, who sometimes explicitly privilege other students over them, or obstacle their educational progresses, as a Trinidadian guy affirms:

“[...] the teacher not calling me for the answer even though I was the only one with my hand up. I know that she saw me...I mean, how could she have missed me, there weren't that many other black kids in the class. So after a while I stopped trying to answer any of the teacher's questions.” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 296)

In front of such an attitude of the teacher, students realize that they are treated differently from their class-mates not because of their abilities or commitment at studying, and start

to become aware of the relevant role played by their race and ethnicity. Another relevant element that needs to be underlined, is the fact that often teachers perceive the foreign origins of students as a demeaning feature that needs to be overcome and defeated, in order to completely assimilate into the American society. Strikingly, “teachers often held students back a grade because they felt they were uneducated, owing to their West Indian accents.” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 296). The negative consequence of such practices, in addition to the feelings of discrimination and devaluation of one’s own identity that children may experience, is the fact that they surely demotivate them to apply themselves at schools, achieve good results and pursue their goals. Consequently, it is no wonder that the highest percentages of students, who drop out of school, are widely constituted by Blacks and Latinos, affecting in a clearly negative way not only their own future, but also that of the community they belong to. Strikingly, at the other end of the spectrum, it is possible to observe the completely different attitude of public schools’ teachers towards members of other ethnic communities, such as Chinese; not only is it rather infrequent for them to experience discrimination, but they are even encouraged by the school staff to achieve better results. As a matter of fact, while Blacks and Latinos are usually regarded to as disadvantaged groups, and often dejected, Chinese, and Asians in general, are identified as a model minority, who apply themselves at school and easily reach excellent results. Frequently, this contrast is due not to the students’ personal attitude and efforts in their studies, rather to their familiar conditions, lifestyle and resources, and even the place they live in plays a major role in the shaping of their own way of approaching life. However, all of these features are often underestimated by teachers, who often base their judgments only on the most common stereotypes and prejudices.

Thus, since their first years at school, black and Latino students realize that their own condition is rather different from that of other communities, and that they start from a disadvantaged situation that makes it more difficult for them to achieve what others might accomplish in a much easier way. They are aware that, even though they put all their efforts in trying to accomplish something, their background and ethnicity constitute a disadvantage for them:

“Latinos have to invent their way, you know? Not like other people who get everything handed to them [...] I mean, we have all these extra things to deal with, and then we have to go to schools that are not so good...” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 73)

The statement of this second generation Dominican student highlights the consciousness that children of immigrants belonging to certain communities, but also native minorities, have about their own condition. In opposition with their white peers, both native and children of immigrants, who are more likely to attend private or good public schools, have easier access to professional jobs, where they are able to reach high positions with less difficulties, and might therefore strive for better life condition, Latinos and Blacks have to deal with a more complicated reality. In addition to the prejudices and discrimination that they are probably going to face in the outside world, the neighborhoods where they grow up usually constitute a disadvantaging starting point for their adult life; poverty, bad public schooling, and most often lack of support from their families due to complex familiar situation, make it harder for them to focus on their studies and accomplish their goals.

At the other end of the spectrum, it is possible to observe the completely different condition of white students, both native and immigrants. Thanks to their being white, the usually better life condition of their families due to the higher education level of their parents, and consequently high skilled jobs, surely constitute an advantage and favor them in the achievement of better school results and the admission to prestigious colleges. Interestingly, when, during an interview, young adults were asked about their goals and desires for their future life, only white people seemed to be concerned about “inner” and personal goals, such as finding happiness, being a good person or making an impact on the world, elements that do not require any attachments to the material aspects of life. People belonging to other ethnic groups, on the contrary, expressed different kinds of needs, mostly related the economic sphere, achieving better life condition or even just being able to survive (Kasinitz et al., 2008).

Hence, it is possible to argue that being white and wealthy is the optimal condition for children of immigrants to best integrate into the American society and soon become part of the white mainstream. Instead, this process results to be much harder and rich of obstacles for immigrants belonging to other ethnic groups and even for native minorities, often isolated and discriminated by the mainstream.

But there is also another element that is surely worth of note: being “ethnic”, with all the consequences that this categorization may include, affects black and Latino people much more than the white ones, since that is a feature that they cannot hide and reveal according to their wishes. A black or a Latino person is easily recognizable as such, and even though it might be harder to guess which precise ethnic community s/he belongs to, their racial connotations are rather explicit. It is important to underline, though, that among Latinos it is possible to denote different ways in which they are regarded and treated by the American mainstream. On the one hand, dark-skinned South Americans

are often mistaken for African Americans and regarded as Blacks before than Latinos; as a consequence, it is no surprise to learn about their experiences of discrimination by the white mainstream. On the other hand, numerous light-skinned South Americans report to have been often identified as Italians²⁵, element that constitute an advantage for them and prevent them from being victims of discriminatory practices.

At the same time, white people of non-American origins, such as European immigrants and their descendants, might easily be mistaken for white Americans, and have therefore the possibility to conceal their identity or reveal it depending on the situation; a pertaining example may concern, for instance, European Catholic immigrants, who are now a constitutive part of the mainstream society, but still reveal their own cultural heritage on certain occasions, as it might be the parade on the St. Patrick's Day. It is not possible to affirm the same for what concerns black and Latino immigrants, who, in addition to the impossibility to hide their own origins, they must also relate with more than one identity. West Indians, for example, might be associated with the African American identity, which usually stands for poor and working-class people; with the immigrant identity, that relates them to recently arrived, and thus not yet integrated immigrant; and finally with an "ethnic" identity, which associate them with ethnic neighborhoods that differentiate them from the white mainstream (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

Notwithstanding the possible negative outcomes deriving from being ethnic, especially if a member of certain racial groups, it must be precised that ethnicity and race, even

²⁵ The fact that many South Americans are often mistaken precisely for Italians, and not for people coming from other European countries, denotes the still significant presence of a common stereotype, according to which Italian immigrants are usually rather dark-skinned, in contrast with other European peoples. This prejudice clearly derives from the past history of Italian immigration to the United States, which concerned at an high extent Southern Italian people.

though still relevant, do not play such a major role for immigrants in New York City as they used to do in the past. Once, immigrants struggled to be identified as Whites, even when that meant denying one's own ethnicity and origins, in order to avoid discrimination and favor the integration process; that is so, also as a consequence of the minor importance that used to be attributed to ethnic identities and cultures, and the common attitude of pushing for the assimilation of the white mainstream values and lifestyle, instead of maintaining the native traditions and culture (Kasinitz et al., 2004). The people, who were explicitly, sometimes even by law, considered as non-white, used to experience major discrimination and segregation, and were conscious of their impossibility to achieve the same life conditions of the white part of the society; while the children of European immigrants successfully assimilated into the white American society, the same did not happen for what concerns non-white immigrants' descendants. Throughout the last decades, however, this reality has deeply changed, and, in addition to a more diffuse multicultural approach rather than an assimilationist one, it has also developed a different attitude towards ethnicity: not the denial of one's own origins anymore, rather the celebration of ethnic and cultural diversity, which constitute an undeniable element of richness for the City and its inhabitants. It is important to underline, though, that this more favorable condition, open to cultural and ethnic differences, is a peculiarity of New York City (Kasinitz et al., 2004); in the other regions of the United States, instead, due to the different settings and societies, even if the boundaries of identity and ethnicity are experiencing a significant reshaping, the American mainstream society might still privilege members of the white community.

The importance of Race over Ethnicity

“Being a black man – it’s the hardest role that you can wear, to me, in this society. [...] From a black man’s perspective, every time I walk out the door, I feel I’m pretty much judged every conceivable angle. People from other cultures might say they figure I might want to rob you or shoot you and take whatever. You know, just basically being a damn nigger, and very ignorant, maybe from a white man’s point of view – some people might feel – look down on me like I am nothing but pure animal [...] And when I try to do something for me, and shatter this image, it’s so much pressure on you to succeed.” (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 324-325)

This dramatic statement of a second generation West Indian young man, effectively denounces the condition of discrimination, and sometimes even racism, which many black people undergo on a daily basis. They feel judged by others not on the basis of their personality, of who they really are and what they do, but just according to their skin color and racial features. These connotations are associated with determined stereotypes and prejudices, that affect people in a negative and humiliating way; very often, Blacks are considered as violent and aggressive, as a consequence of the rather high level of criminality present in the neighborhoods inhabited mainly by African Americans. In addition to that, often they are also regarded as ignorant, since many of them do not perform well at school or even drop out of school. The reasons hidden behind these problematic behaviors, as I have previously analyzed, are complex and are deeply rooted way back in time, but too often are not taken into any consideration by people of other

ethnic groups, who tend to judge this particular reality just looking at the appearance. What is worse, is the fact that this determined way of judging and approaching the Other, black people in this case, constitutes a limitation for the latter, since it obstacle them in the attempt to make progresses and better one's own condition. As the West Indian man affirms, even though he tries to find a solution to improve his life, the "pressure" and judgment of the surrounding society are so strong, that they make it harder to achieve the desired result.

But one of the most important aspects that needs to be highlighted, is the fact that he never identifies himself as West Indian or talks about ethnicity, rather, he emphasizes the condition of him being black and the difficulties deriving from belonging to this particular race. As a matter of fact, usually, when people approach and judge the other, tend to generalize, taking into consideration only the racial features and associating it with the concerning most common stereotypes, and do not investigate a little deeper, practice that would be essential in order to understand better the other person and their behaviors.

Not taking into account people's different ethnic origin might also have negative consequences for what concerns their identification process, since they have to deal not only with the ambivalent condition of being American on the one side and ethnic on the other, but also with the condition of being black, with all that comes with such a categorization.

The mainstream society tend to disregard the members of the African American community, because of the poverty, criminality and low level of school education that characterize them. Hence, even though West Indians may come from much more advantaged conditions, lead a different lifestyle and share different values, the common

attitude of identifying them just as Blacks constitutes an imposing obstacle for their achievements.

The fact that people, often, are judged just on the base of their race, is well represented by the condition of Latinos. As I have previously analyzed, South Americans in the United States present rather contrasting life conditions and are regarded in different ways from the mainstream society accordingly to their skin color and physical features. Usually, light-skinned Latinos do not encounter many difficulties in the integration process; not rarely they are mistaken for European immigrants²⁶, are more likely to live in the suburbs or in other areas of the City, that are not ethnically characterized, and their children have, therefore, the possibility to attend good public or private schools that favor their actual integration into the mainstream society. On the other hand, however, it is possible to observe the completely different condition of darker-skinned Latinos; they usually live in much more segregated neighborhoods, both as a consequence of the discrimination they might face in the housing market and, sometimes, the availability of less resources that leads them to recur to public housing or other lodgings in rather devalued areas. Consequently, their children are more likely to attend worse public school, and the higher criminality of these neighborhoods might affect their future in a negative way. In addition to that, dark-skinned Latinos often report to have been victims of discrimination and even racism, and is rather common for them to be mistaken for African Americans just on the basis of their physical features (Kasinitz et al., 2004).

²⁶ In many cases, they actually are descendants of European people emigrated to South America.

Hence, it is possible to argue that very often ethnicity is not taken into serious consideration when relating to people of different origins. Judgments and prejudices are commonly based exclusively on racial features and the ideas generally associated with a specific community.

Even though the reality of New York City is different from the rest of the United States, much more favorable for the integration and tolerant towards people of different cultures, it is still possible to denote a particular attitude of judging the Other and dividing the society according to the “color line” that for centuries has characterized the American society.

The Stop-and Frisk Business

The discriminatory practices that affect people of certain ethnicities, especially Blacks and Latinos, happen on different levels. They might take place when interacting with peers, with strangers, at the work sites and so on, but what is worse, is the fact that often the very authorities are the ones, who promote such attitudes. Authorities are considered as all of the people, who are supposed to grant the order, security and righteousness of the social life in all its various aspects, as teachers at school or police officers in the streets. As I have already stated, often teachers not only do not take into account

students' ethnicity and cultural background, but it does even happen that they discriminate some students because of their belonging to a certain community and of the common prejudices and assumptions related to them. This practice might humiliate and easily demotivate students, leading them to consider schools as a place where their ethnicity or race is an obstacle and sometimes even pushing them to drop out of school.

Unfortunately, these discriminatory attitudes affect also wider aspects of the ethnic communities' life, and are often promoted by the people who should grant, instead, righteousness and justice, such as police officers and similar types of authorities.

In New York City, an high percentage of Blacks and Latinos, mostly males, report to have been victims of what is known as the "Stop-and-Frisk" practice, namely the process of stopping a person who might look like a suspicious individual and frisking them to make sure they do not carry any weapon or other illegal articles. It differs from an arrest in that it does not take as much time as the latter does, and police have the possibility to question suspicious people on the streets, without the need to take them to the police station. While on the one hand this may be a successful practice for the prevention of crimes and violence, on the other hand it reveals to be a sort of limitation to the liberty of people, who might get stopped with a much more intense frequency and while carrying out daily activities, such as on their way to do some shopping or even while throwing out the garbage (Levin, 2012); striking, is the fact that people might get stopped and frisked on the premises of their own habitations. What is more, this practice is often perceived as a violation of people's rights, as U.S. District Judge Shira Scheindlin affirms: "[The NYPD's] cavalier attitude towards the prospect of a 'widespread practice of suspicionless stops' displays a deeply troubling apathy towards New Yorkers' most fundamental constitutional rights" (Pereira, 2012). Only in the first three months of 2012, 203,500 New Yorkers have been stopped and frisked, and just 9% of them were Whites;

strikingly, 80% of the people being stopped did not commit any crime (Pereira, 2012). These data highlight the prejudices and lack of evidence on the basis of which the stop-and-frisk practice most often takes place.

The neighborhoods of the empire city where this phenomenon takes place at the most are Harlem, East Harlem and the Bronx, the higher black and Hispanic areas, that are still rather segregated, even though important adjustments have characterized them in the last years, especially for what concerns Harlem. This area, an historical black neighborhood, has lately experienced significant changes, similar to the previously analyzed phenomenon of ethnic succession. The difference is that, in Harlem, the African American community did not move to other part of the city, but it is being joined more and more by people belonging to various other ethnic groups, and even by members of the white mainstream. This is so, thanks to the progressive requalification of the area, that is not as dangerous anymore, as it used to be in the past decades, and also thanks to the higher accessibility of the housing market, which offers lower prices than the other neighborhoods of Manhattan. Even though the majority of the population of Harlem is still composed by black people, more than 15% of them are foreign-born, coming most of all from the Caribbean islands and Africa (Roberts, 2010).

East Harlem and the Bronx, instead, are still rather segregated ethnic neighborhoods, with lower percentage of white non-Hispanic inhabitants and higher levels of poverty and also criminality. In East Harlem, the majority of the population is Hispanic and the second large group is constituted by Blacks; in the 1990s the white inhabitants of this area were only 7% of the total, and now this percentage is even lower. This neighborhoods presents lower income rates than the rest of the city, and also the levels of education and employment are below the average (Demographic & Social Economic

Profile, 1999). The Bronx presents a similar condition, where the two largest groups are respectively Hispanics and Blacks, but here there is an higher percentage of white non-Hispanic inhabitants; as East Harlem does, this neighborhood is characterized by higher unemployment and poverty than the rest of New York City, and significantly higher levels of criminality (Bronx, New York, 2012).

Living in these highly ethnic neighborhoods may constitute both an advantage and a disadvantage for Blacks and Latinos. On the one side, those who live, work and spend much of their time within this environments are less likely to experience discrimination, be victims of episodes of racism and prejudices, since the greatest part of the population belongs to their very ethnicity or race. On the other side, however, there are also several negative implications. As a result of the condition of higher poverty, children might need to renounce to pursue high level of education, in order to work and help their families out with expenses and bills; clearly, this reality leads also to practicing low-skilled jobs with low-income rates, element that bridle the chance of an upward mobility. What is more, by spending most of their time within these ethnic areas, people do not have many possibilities to interact and integrate with other ethnic groups and the mainstream society, fostering the condition of segregation. In addition to that, living in these neighborhoods do not prevent people from experiencing discrimination and prejudices; what is worse, is the fact that most often such practices are promoted by the police. As a matter of fact, the perception of “low-income youth of color as potential criminals” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 47) still constitutes one of the most common approach of the police officers towards black and Latino people; interestingly, the New York City Police Department recurs to the use of public junior high schools’ and high schools’ yearbooks as a means to combat crime (Kasinitz et al., 2004), element that highlights the presence

of prejudices and stereotypes towards students, and a lot of other people, who live in these precise neighborhoods. Interestingly, all black or Latino individuals, males in specific, tend to be considered as suspicious and potentially dangerous by the police, who usually do not take into consideration their class and ethnicity, simply generalizing on the bases of race and physical appearance. While this attitude surely has a negative connotation, it has also led to a positive outcome, namely the molding of a common sense of solidarity and brotherhood between people of different ethnicities and cultures, but who share the same, or similar racial connotations; in this way, there is a push for the development of a sense of community that might be absent in other areas of the city, and that surely constitutes an advantage for the local people.

But the negative aspects of the situation seem to prevail. The so much widespread prejudices, according to which black and Latino persons are very likely to be involved in the criminal sphere, might lead police officers to act toward them in a, sometimes, unrighteous way:

“I would ask them why they are harassing me, but I know that they need very little motivation to shoot me. Giuliani has showed us over and over again that police have the right to shoot black men in open daylight for no reason and that they can get away with it.” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 305)

The words of a second generation West Indian man significantly highlight the attitude of the police towards blacks; as a matter of fact, he does not talk about African Americans or West Indians or Africans, but includes all of these ethnicities under the common categorization of Blacks, the racial element that reveals to be the basis of discrimination.

From this statement, it is possible also to learn that, often, the stop-and-frisk practice do not take place on the basis of a real suspicion or threat, but just on the assumption of the policemen about the involvement in criminality, due to the suspect's race; what is more, authorities seem to be allowed to act in a rather more aggressive and impulsive way when relating to black people, element that would not be so much acceptable in an interaction with white people. Striking, is also the assessment of the easiness which police "can get away with it", fact that underlines the frequency that these practices happen with, and the lack of astonishment they cause.

Black immigrants in these highly ethnic neighborhoods might experience discrimination from a double perspective; on the one hand they are usually associated with African Americans, thus identified as likely to be involved in crimes, aggressive and even dangerous individuals, hence are often victims of prejudices and, clearly, of the stop-and-frisk practice as well. On the other hand, their very condition of immigrant, most of all for first generation, constitutes a further element of preconception. As a matter of fact, among the American society, as it happens in most of the times, it is rather common to denote a diffuse assumption, according to which immigration and criminality are two strictly related spheres, and the latter is assumed to be a consequence of the arrival of numerous groups of people from foreign countries. Notwithstanding this conventional stereotype, studies and researches show that reality is quite different from what it is thought to be. The percentage of immigrants breaking the law is very close to that of natives, and additionally "an influx of even poor immigrants is often accompanied by a *decline* in urban crime" (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 187); what is more, during the 1990s New York City experienced a significant downfall for what concerns crimes, and contemporaneously that specific period of time was characterized by important

immigration waves. These facts show how much stereotypes and prejudices might be distant from reality, but still affect people's life in a dramatic way.

It is also important to underline, that often criminal behaviors are influenced by police practices that, when too aggressive or repressive, may lead to opposite outcomes (Kasinitz et al., 2004); for instance, when mayor Giuliani, during his office in the years 1994-2001, instituted a "zero-tolerance" regime towards crimes, characterized by very strict and hard measures, criminality experienced a significant downfall but, at the same time, the oppressive practices of the police incremented a general attitude of violence, aggressiveness and rebellion. This condition was fostered also by numerous facts of brutality committed by the police officers towards black people, often immigrants or their children; these episodes concerned different kinds of mistreatments or even turned out in the killing of the victims (Kasinitz et al., 2008). The fact that these behaviors not only got away unpunished, but were even publicized in order to threaten people and try to prevent criminality, arose a sense of rebellion toward the police and negative perception of the authorities. This condition aggravated especially after the killing of Amadiou Diallo, an immigrant coming from Black Africa, shot dead by members of the police department, who thought he was about to draw a weapon from his jacket, while his true intention was just to reach for his wallet; striking, is the fact that police officers did not undergo any type of punishment.

This episode took place several years ago, in 1999, still under the era of "zero-tolerance"; however, it must be highlighted that such facts, even though not so much frequent anymore, still take place in the American cities, and in New York City as well. At the beginning of 2012, precisely on February 2nd, in the Bronx, Ramarley Graham, a eighteen-years-old Jamaican American boy, was killed in his own house by a policeman (Santos & Garcia, 2012). The latter, as it happened in the case of the killing of Diallo,

thought that the young man was carrying a weapon, chased him up to his house and, once inside, thinking that Graham was going to draw a weapon from his pocket, shot him dead. However, as it emerged later, the boy was unarmed, thus it would have been not even necessary to shoot him. In both the episode of 1999 and the one of 2012, as in numerous other cases, the victim was killed as a consequence of a misjudgment, condition that underlines the power of stereotypes and prejudices, that may lead to irreversible outcomes. It is also important to underline, that arrests and other kinds of measures against black people affect their lives in a much more powerful and negative way than they might do for Whites, since their criminal records will reinforce the stereotypes and prejudices about people of color as dangerous, violent and outlaws.

The fact that police officers and other authorities are the ones who often promote prejudicial and racist behaviors, is denounced both by the black people, but also by Whites as well. An African American man, who spent a period of his life in prison, reports that

“The police in there [prison], they were the biggest racists. They are the biggest gang in there. [...] I was in facilities upstate where guys have black babies hanging on nooses on their arms and stuff like that. And saying, “Die niggers” or “A happy nigger is a dead nigger” and all types of crap.” (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 288)

As a consequence of these diffused mistreatments and offenses, it will be quite natural to observe the development not only of a sense of distrust, but even of repulsion towards police and all the other authorities that should grant justice and the respect of people's rights. This condition favors a widespread skepticism in the functionality of the system as

well, element that might easily lead to the lack of involvement and participation in the public life.

Interestingly, white people as well are aware of the unrighteous attitude that often police officers have towards African Americans and Blacks in general. Even though native Whites and members of white immigrant communities, such as Russian Jews, are the biggest supporter of the police, they do denounce the dramatic reality that affects people of color, the beatings and the murders that often police commit, even with no reason, just on the basis of prejudices or of a misjudgment. What is more, they share the same belief of most black and other immigrant people, according to which police tend to be more well-disposed toward Whites and favor them even though they are not on the right side²⁷. A final element that is worse of note, and that supports the theory, according to which in many cases judgments and decisions are made just on the basis of stereotypes and appearance, is the significant role played by one's attire; several black people highlighted the different attitude of police toward them depending on what they were wearing. During their free time, when they are not wearing working attire, they were much more likely to be stopped and frisked by police officers, because they fit better into the stereotype of the dangerous black man. They affirm that the same thing happens when they drive a nice car, in this case they might be stopped because the police may easily think they stole it (Kasinitz et al., 2008).

All of these discriminatory practices and attitudes are often likely to affect negatively the victims' life and their way of looking at the system and the surrounding society. This is so mostly because when discrimination comes from police officers or other people,

²⁷ This conviction is not only shared by black people, but also by members of many others ethnic communities, such as Latino or Chinese. According to them, in the occasion of disputes, accidents or other critical circumstances, police officers often tend to assume that white people are those who are right, on the only basis of prejudices.

who should, instead, grant justice and be perceived as reference figures, the consequences are surely going to be a lot worse. Being mistreated by the authorities can easily convey the message of not being accepted by the whole society, mostly when the victims are African Americans, who throughout time have already undergone dramatic segregation, discrimination and injustices, thus it would take very little for them to feel prejudiced. In addition to that, another negative outcome is not only the lack of confidence that people might feel towards the police, but even the fear of what they may do and of their possible violent attitudes.

However, observing the present state of things, it is possible to presume that, little by little, things are changing and that there is a hope for the improvement in the relationship between police and citizens. The number of people detained under the stop-and-frisk process, even though still rather high, has lately experienced a drop of about one-third (Stop-and-Frisk in New York City, 2012), sign that, probably, police are now selecting more thoroughly the people to investigate.

Another significant change concerns the different attitude of authorities towards police officers, who commit murder or mistreatments lacking evidences. In contrast with the easiness they could go away with until not too many years ago, nowadays the situation is starting to change. For instance, in the case of the murder of Ramarley Graham, the NYPD officer who shot him dead was accused of manslaughter, deprived of his gun and assigned to desk duty (Prokupecz, Dienst, & Siff, 2012).

“The events of September 11th did not only affect me on that day but they still affect me today because of the ignorance of so many Americans.”²⁸: The Post 9/11 Reality in New York City

Discriminatory attitudes, as previously analyzed, usually take place mostly towards people of color and Latinos, and are often a consequence of racial prejudices. However, there is another element that, in addition to ethnicity, might easily lead to prejudicial judgments and stereotyping, namely the religion that one professes and the particular traditions and lifestyle that come with it. Discrimination because of religion might be subtler than that based on race, and usually derives from historical facts and particular episodes.

An eloquent example, concerns the condition of Muslims and people of Arab and South Asian ethnicities in New York, and in the United States in general, after the 9/11 attacks to the World Trade Center.

The title of this chapter reports the words of a young Hindi woman, whose experience stands for the common reality that affects Arab, South Asian and Muslim people's lives after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Prejudices, discrimination and stereotypes became features that they must face every day in the most different ways.

It is quite hard to estimate precisely the percentage of Muslims present in New York City; according to a survey did by the New York City Commission on Human Rights in

²⁸ (Discrimination against Muslims, Arabs and South Asians in New York City since 9/11, 2003)

2003, the estimated number of Muslims amounts to 600,000 (Discrimination against Muslims, Arabs and South Asians in New York City since 9/11, 2003). This survey investigate the consequences of 9/11 for the daily life of Muslims, Arab and South Asians people living in New York City. 69% of the respondents affirmed to have been victims of discrimination, harassment and mistreatments, consequently to the terrorist attacks, because of their religion and ethnicity; this kind of incidents would characterize several aspects of their life, as a matter of fact they affirm to have experienced discrimination from teachers, store clerks, different types of authorities and even civil servants; for instance, in medical facilities, offices and other service-providing sites, they were made wait unnecessarily for a rather long time, or even publicly criticized.

In several cases, discrimination affected also the housing market. Numerous Muslim people affirm of having been subject to discrimination while looking for a house, because of their very religion: “Some of the building owners said we don't want Muslims to live in our buildings. So we asked the reason, but they just said 'because you are a Muslim.’” or even threaten by their neighborhoods: “Someone left a paper at my door to leave the building and find somewhere else to live.” (Discrimination against Muslims, Arabs and South Asians in New York City since 9/11, 2003).

In addition to these episodes, respondents denounced the difficult coexistence with people belonging to other ethnicities in public spaces, as in the subway, in the streets and so on. On these occasions, verbal insults were the most common type of harassment reported by numerous Muslims, Arabs and South Asians; because of their physical features, attires and other symbols that people learned to notice after 9/11, they were immediately associate to the terrorists and fundamentalist people, through the common practices of generalization and stereotypation, that identifies every individual with what is commonly thought about their community, especially after tragic events as the one

taken into consideration, without realizing, that every person is a unique individual and that the actions of a few extremists cannot be poured out on the whole community. Arabic people affirm to have been directly accused for the terrorist attacks: “I got yelled at in the subway, 'Why do you have to kill me and my children.'” (Discrimination against Muslims, Arabs and South Asians in New York City since 9/11, 2003), or experienced violence at school: “Punched by other students in the nose and nose was broken. One student said, 'we should burn all Muslims.’” (Discrimination against Muslims, Arabs and South Asians in New York City since 9/11, 2003).

What is worse, is the fact that prejudices could affect people’s life also at a deeper level, with more relevant consequences: immediately after the 9/11 attack, many Arabs, South Asians and Muslims were fired from their jobs, and many others were victims of harassment and discrimination. Even in the following years they reported of having been discriminated and hindered when looking for an employment, just on the basis of their Arab names, background and origins.

All of these negative outcomes and discriminatory behaviors led people of certain ethnic communities to avoid contacts with the mainstream society, taking refuge in the ethnic enclaves and interacting almost exclusively with people of their own culture.

After 9/11 numerous people, even if not Muslims, but characterized by South Asian and Arab physical features, denounced harassments and discrimination. Interestingly, these episodes affected also Indo-Caribbean immigrants, who, because of their physical aspect, are often mistaken for South Asians; in the period of time immediately following the attack to the World Trade Center, it was rather common for members of these ethnic communities to experience discrimination and prejudices. At school, children of immigrants were often misjudged because of their turbans, while on the streets this very feature would even cause them to be suspected of terrorism. These episodes of

discrimination would take place especially in widely white neighborhoods (Kasinitz et al., 2004), and have significant consequences for the victims: by perceiving part of their own identity as devaluated and cause of humiliation, they would often emphasize the other cultural aspect characterizing their personality, the one that makes them closer to the black immigrants coming from the Caribbean islands; for young adult this might mean adopting “urban black cultural styles” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 375) such as the hip-hop style.

For those, who explicitly affirmed the fact of being Muslims, the additional misjudgment would be of being considered as fundamentalist and potential terrorists, condition that negatively affects the integration process.

Noteworthy, is the fact that most of the victims of discrimination and harassment did not report their negative experiences to the authorities, or turned to civil rights association in search of help. There are many reasons that prevented them from expose their own uneasiness: some affirm of being afraid of losing their visa and be forced to leave the United States; others did not know who to contact or how to report what had happened; several people affirmed of being scared about an even worse reaction by the police, and even of “being killed” (Discrimination against Muslims, Arabs and South Asians in New York City since 9/11, 2003). But the most common explanation for not seeking help, is the complete mistrust in the authorities. As a matter of fact, there is a diffuse conviction, according to which police officers and other kinds of authorities share the same beliefs and prejudices than the majority of the American society, thus, in addition to the lack of help and comprehension of their condition, the risk would be of suffering discrimination and harassment even from them, as many Muslims, Arabs and South Asians already have. They also underline the fact, that also mass media and the

news highlight the negative connotation of their own culture, religion and background, thus it would be not of much help to denounce their discriminated condition.

It is interesting to note that recently, several years after the terrorist attack, this reality seems not to have improved. Rather, according to the statistics, Muslims suffer from discrimination even more than immediately after the 9/11 attacks; the cases of reported discrimination in 2009 were 60% more than those of 2005, and they were related most of all to the work sphere. Arabs and Muslims complained of having been insulted by co-workers, who would call them “Osama” or “terrorist” or by bosses, who did not allow them to take prayer breaks or wear traditional attires (Greenhouse, 2010).

Work sites are not the only places in which such mistreatments take place; often, as I have previously analyzed, they face similar hostile attitudes in various aspects of their public life, such as at school or in the streets. This reality denotes the adversity that numerous Americans feel towards Islam and its followers subsequently to the tragic terrorist attack and the Afghan and Iraqi wars, fact that seems not to attenuate, but even to get worse. Strikingly, even though Muslims represent just 2 percent of the total American population, their complaints about religious discrimination constitute circa one quarter of the total (Greenhouse, 2010). This is a clear sign that tensions do not show any sign of stopping, and this reality is confirmed also by another element, namely the opposition that the establishment of mosques and Islamic religious centers continue to find among the public opinion.

Hence, it is possible to state that, even in tolerant and peaceful environments such as New York City, often prejudices, misjudgments and generalization are difficult to extirpate, most of all if deriving, as in this case, from tragic historical facts.

This condition is fostered also by a more general reality, which concerns the much more restrictive immigration policies and citizenship criteria that have been instituted after the 9/11 attacks; while on the one hand these measures led to the regulation of many undocumented immigrants, on the other hand they made it a lot more difficult for foreign people to immigrate in the United States and settle there.

For what concerns determined immigrant communities already present in this country, it has been observed a significant worsening of their marginalized condition; for instance, their ties to the mainstream society and economy and their social networks have experienced a relevant reduction, and their labor force is concentrated in determined sectors (Krase and Hum, 2007), usually the most marginal ones, due both to cultural barriers such as language, and in some cases also to prejudices and discrimination.

Conclusions

This paper analyzed the condition of immigrants, their children, and ethnic minorities in the exceptional contest of New York City. This unique metropolitan area is characterized by an extreme richness of cultures, traditions, ethnicities and nationalities, like no other place in the world. Consequently, also the dynamics through which daily life and interactions between people take place, is completely different from what it is commonly conceived.

New York City is composed by numerous ethnic enclaves and neighborhoods, some characterized mostly by only one community and others inhabited by a more mixed population. But also the non-ethnic neighborhoods of the empire city present a rather mixed composition, where people of different origins and cultures coexist in close proximity, in a condition of general peace and tolerance. As a matter of fact, the empire city, thanks to its particular features, structure and most of all history of immigration (to the point that the great majority of New Yorkers have an immigrant past), favors the formation of an atmosphere of not only acceptance of the Other and their cultural heritage, but even promotes the celebration of ethnicity.

The exceptionality of New York City is also highlighted by the fact that, there, categorizations such as ethnicity and race are perceived differently than in the other places. The common identification of people, on the basis of the white-black color line is not even thinkable in an environment as that of the empire city, since it is home of people

from all around the world, of so many ethnicities and variegated racial connotations, that it would be impossible to classify them just as Blacks or Whites, as it usually happens, instead, elsewhere in the United States. What is more, also the concepts of Whiteness and Blackness are characterized by a very different connotation in New York: under the category of Black it is possible to find not only African Americans, but West Indians, South Americans and Africans as well. Also the category of whiteness has a different meaning here; Whites do constitute the mainstream society, as it happens almost everywhere else in the United States, but a great part of them have an immigrant past, usually European origins, often not too distant in time. Interestingly, this group comprehend also first generation immigrants, such as Russians and other east Europeans, who, thanks to their ethnicity and to their cultural backgrounds, might easily be considered part of the mainstream society. This situation, however, would not be possible for immigrants belonging to other ethnicities, most of all if of African phenotype, since, as it has been analyzed, prejudices and discrimination still play a relevant role within the American society. Consequently, also children of immigrants and even native minorities go through hardships and discrimination in their daily life.

Thus, it is possible to argue that ethnicity still influences rather significantly people's life; it affects their choices, their personality and their attitude towards the society they live among. As a matter of fact, being prejudiced and discriminated might push people to prefer to live isolated, prevalently among co-ethnics, negatively influencing the process of integration. What is more, this condition might get even worse when mistreatments are practiced by the authorities and all those figures, who should, instead, grant justice and respect. In such cases, the result may be even worse, since the victims might develop a

sense of distrust in the whole system and consequently refuse to be involved actively in the social life.

As it emerged from the analysis of this paper, nowadays episodes of discrimination still take place, as the common tendency of judging the Other on the mere basis of the physical appearance, prejudices and stereotypes. What is more, multicultural environments, such as New York City, might constitute favorable settings for the development of tensions and rivalries between different ethnic communities, due to opposite traditions, lifestyle and values.

However, it is possible to argue that things are changing and starting to follow a better path. Even though various forms of discrimination are still present, people belonging to different ethnic communities and native minorities might enjoy better social condition, and have more opportunities to achieve their goals. To give an example, only a couple of decades ago it would have been rather improbable for African Americans to hold office as CEOs of American corporations; nowadays, instead, several people of color fill that specific position (Kasinitz et al., 2004), not to mention the even more significant reality represented by the election of President Obama in 2008. These changes and improvements surely represents an hope for the future enhancements of the minorities' condition.

In addition to that, as this paper tried to highlight, the empire city presents a unique and exceptional reality for what concerns interethnic relationships and favorable possibilities for its inhabitants. In this multiethnic and multicultural reality, even though tensions do clearly still take place, peace and tolerance are the rules; New Yorkers, both natives and immigrants, share a sense of solidarity, cooperation and mutual aid, that made of this metropolitan area an "happy island". In every single moment of a New Yorker's life, from school to work sites, at church, in the stores or just while walking in the streets, it

would be impossible to avoid intercultural and interethnic contacts, to the point that interacting with people of different origins, and even being “ethnic”, becomes normal and obvious.

This peculiar reality enriches people’s life, since it becomes easier for them to learn about other cultures and traditions, to notice the unique contribution that every ethnicity gives to the City and its inhabitants, and most of all to realize the positive outcomes that might derive from intercultural interactions. It is therefore possible to argue, that people who live in the empire city, both those who were born and grew up there and the ones who migrated from other parts of the world or of the United States, develop a particular and unique identity, and rather than Americans it would be more appropriate to define them as New Yorkers, to underline the different features that characterize them, their personality and lifestyle, in contrast to that of the American society, since “A New York identity reflects the dynamic cultural creativity familiar to them, but not necessarily the larger white society” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 17). This very condition is confirmed by the City’s inhabitants themselves, who affirm to be New Yorkers and not Americans (Foner, 2007); New Yorkers are all the people who populate this metropolitan area, not only the white mainstream, but the immigrants and the people belonging to the various ethnic communities as well. All of them are tied by a unique way of perceiving the surrounding society, of interacting with others and building relationships with people that might come from totally different backgrounds and worlds.

Being New Yorkers means developing a new type of identity, that might be defined as hybrid: a mixture of the features and lifestyle that characterize the American society, and of all the different cultural patterns present in the City, the ethnic connotations and the multicultural lifestyle.

Another aspect that emerged from the observation and analyzes of the New Yorker context, is the “impossibility” to talk about assimilation for what concerns immigrants and newcomers that settle in this specific environment. As a matter of fact, in contrast with the other American cities and regions, here there is not only one main culture and lifestyle, which people could and should assimilate to; instead, the city represents a mosaic of cultures, values and identities, which perfectly mesh together, shaping the best example of a multicultural society.

Therefore, rather than assimilation, it is possible to affirm that the condition of New York City is best definable as multicultural. Nonetheless, it must be precised, that, as many scholars assess, multiculturalism depends on the context and in the specific case of New York it is possible to talk about a Cultural Pluralism, namely a sort of mixture between, on the one hand, a multicultural society, where every ethnic community maintains its own cultural features, tradition and even language, and where, as a consequence, it might be possible to observe a weak sense of community and unity between all the different groups, and on the other hand an assimilated reality, where people “renounce” to several aspects of their own cultural heritage, in order to adopt the main ones of the society they settle into. In a condition of Cultural Pluralism, it is possible to observe both the coexistence of different cultures and lifestyles, and the presence of common values that ties the diverse ethnic groups together.

The condition of the New Yorker society is peculiar, and presents elements of both these realities; it allows immigrants and natives of immigrant past to maintain significant ties with their cultures, thanks to the presence of ethnic enclaves and communities, organizations, ethnic parades and manifestations. At the same time, all of these different ethnic communities are not isolated one from the other, but they interact, intermingle and build new relationships on a daily basis, fostering the sense of belonging and inclusion to

a only and unique reality, namely that of being New Yorkers. Interestingly, also the way which the American, or more specifically the New Yorker, society used to be represented significantly changed: until a few decades ago it was common to talk about a Melting Pot, namely a society in which all the different ethnic groups intermingle together and form a unique homogenous society, substituting the characterizing features of their own culture with those of the mainstream society. Lately, however, in order to better represent the different dynamics that developed within this multiethnic society, the new image that came into use is that of a Salad Bowl, a reality composed by distinct and independent elements that at the same time are also strictly tied to one another.

As this image suggest, rather than assimilation it is possible to talk about integration into a multicultural society; a further element that supports this condition, is the peculiar characteristic of the American society as multiethnic, its immigrant past and, thus, its intrinsic multicultural connotation, that provided the shaping of a society where the very mainstream is the result of a commingling of people of different origins.

Part of the analysis of this paper focused on the reality of ethnic neighborhoods and enclaves, namely peculiar areas of the city, where immigrants usually tend to settle when they first arrive in New York. The population of these neighborhoods is most often composed prevalently of first generation immigrants, who can enjoy the advantages of continuing being part of their ethnic community, even though living in a foreign country; the benefits, even though relevant for every newly arrived person, are most meaningful for the immigrants who have to face challenging intercultural barriers, as language might be. Living within an ethnic enclave facilitates their integration process, allowing them to perform jobs or build relationships without the need to dip immediately into a complete different world; thanks to the networks, resources and services provided, ethnic

communities, thus, constitute a “port of entry” (Krase and Hum, 2007) for newly arrived immigrants.

As it emerged from the analysis of ethnic neighborhoods, while sometimes living within such enclaves might prevent a successful integration into the mainstream society or with other ethnic groups, in the majority of the cases they provide an important push for the integration of immigrants, thanks to all the service and assistance new comers may enjoy in these particular environments. Even if living within an ethnic enclave, immigrants and their children are nonetheless able to successfully integrate into the New Yorker society; however, it is important to keep in mind, that the reality of New York City is quite peculiar, and the positive outcomes that take place there might not happen in other cities and regions of the United States.

This successful reality of integration may be represented by a peculiar phenomenon, namely ethnic succession, that consists in the transition from one ethnic group inhabiting a certain area, to another. Usually, when an immigrant community starts to integrate into the mainstream society, its members are more likely to move to wealthier or more multiethnic areas of the city, gradually leaving the less desirable ones to newly arrived, and often disadvantaged, immigrant groups. This reality represents the successful integration that immigrant communities achieve after a certain period of time, even if living within ethnic enclaves. An eloquent example concerns the condition of Italian immigrants; even though some of them still live in the ethnic neighborhoods established by their ancestors, the majority of the Italian Americans are now a constitutive part of the American mainstream society, living and working outside of the ethnic enclaves, which, as it emerged from the previous analysis, nowadays may be considered as “theme parks”, having a more touristic connotation than a residential one. What is more, in the course of

the latest years they have experienced a relevant transformation and ethnic succession, and it is now possible to notice the presence of other immigrant groups, such as South Americans, populating the areas that previously belonged to Italians. Most probably, in a few decades, the same change will concern these more recently-arrived immigrant communities, who, once integrated into the mainstream society, are going to “give up” their spaces to new immigrant groups, and be the “new Italians”.

It is also important to underline, that, even in the case when the phenomenon of ethnic succession did not take place, and the same ethnic community has inhabited a particular neighborhood for many decades as it happened in the case of Russian Brighton Beach and Manhattan Chinatown, it is still possible to observe a successful integration into the American, or better New Yorker, society. In this case, this reality emerges when confronting the condition of first generation immigrants with that of second generation. Most often, ethnic neighborhoods are populated prevalently by the first category of people, who come to the United States at an adult age, often do not speak English and encounter several obstacles determined by clashes between different cultures and traditions. For these reasons, establishing their households within an ethnic enclave constitutes the best solution that allows them to start a new life. Thus, as it stands out from the observation of Manhattan Chinatown or Little Odessa, often it is not possible to talk about an effective integration for what concerns first generation immigrants, who spend most of their time among co-ethnic, live and perform their jobs within the ethnic community, and have, therefore, no need to try to integrate at a deeper level with the mainstream society.

However, a completely different reality concerns second generation immigrants; they live between two worlds, their life is influenced by their parents’ culture and values, but at the same time they grow up among Americans, interact with them and people of other

ethnic origins on a daily basis, get an “American” instruction at school and assimilate the mainstream’s values, lifestyle and way of thinking. Children of immigrants, when comparing themselves with their parents, notice the striking differences that exist between them, and affirm to be “Americans” in opposition to their immigrant families. At the same time, their lives are affected by their cultural heritage as well, and this connotation emerges when relating with the mainstream or other ethnic groups, occasions in which children of immigrants, rather than Americans, feel to be “ethnic”. Notwithstanding their in-between condition and the consequent complexity in defining one’s own identity, it is possible to affirm that current second generation immigrants, as it happened for the previous ones, are gradually becoming the new New Yorker mainstream. As a matter of fact, as a consequence of intermingling with the American society, attending American schools and colleges, and thus being likely to perform high-skilled jobs, children of immigrants are little by little conquering their place within the mainstream society. In addition to that, because of their different ethnic origins, cultural traditions and heritages, they play a significant role in reshaping the New Yorker society both culturally and socially, and in redefining determined categories, such as those of whiteness and blackness, and the very concept of what mainstream society means.

The presence of immigrants and their children is, therefore, an element of extreme richness for the New Yorker, and more in general, for the American society, since thanks to their belonging to two worlds at the same time, they can look at reality from a double perspective, catching the positive and negative aspects of different situations, and transmitting this peculiar attitude also to the people they interact with. Being in-betweeners is not a penalizing condition, but a favorable one, since “they are not lost between two worlds, but move easily between them and among each other. They do not

strive to be American, but feel that they are American just by being who they are.” (Kasinitz et al., 2004, 402).

Clearly, as this essay has highlighted, the favorable and relatively “easy” condition of immigrants, and especially of their children, who live in New York City, does not reflect the general reality of the United States. The New Yorker exceptionalism, made up of its extraordinary multicultural environment, the presence of people from all around the world, numerous ethnic neighborhoods and communities, and the consequent celebration of the very condition of being ethnic, surely favors a unique reality, in which having foreign origins and cultural heritages is the rule, as interacting and intermingling with people belonging to different ethnic groups. New Yorkers “take it for granted that one should have friends of many races and backgrounds and think contacts with people different from oneself enriches one’s life” (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 22); what is more, being used to live in such a multicultural environment, people do not focus their attention on ethnicity or race when interacting with others, but rather “look at them as persons” (Kasinitz et al., 2008, 229).

The hope for the future, is that, being New York City the cultural capital of the United States, which deeply influences the American lifestyle and, to different extents, affects the whole American society’s way of thinking and behaving, the extremely positive connotation of interaction between different cultures, tolerance and peace that characterize the empire city will expand to the wider American society. This way, interethnic conflicts would be prevented and solved much more easily, and immigrants and their children, but also native ethnic minorities, would be facilitated in the integration process and interact more successfully with the white mainstream.

As a conclusion, it is possible to affirm that, as the United States represents a hope, an ideal of freedom, equality and redemption for immigrants, who choose to make of it their new home, in the same way New York might represent the model American city, where different ethnicities, races and cultures coexist in close proximity in an atmosphere of general peace, tolerance and mutual solidarity.

New York City is not perfect, and as it happens in any environment, where different cultural communities live one next to the other, episodes of prejudice, discrimination and segregation still take place, both on the basis of racial prejudices, as it usually happens in the case of native minorities, and to the fact of belonging to a certain ethnic and cultural community, that might be characterized by a negative connotation, as in the case of Muslims, Arabs and South Asians, significantly discriminated after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. However, the empire city, thanks to its peculiar history, structure and dynamics, constitutes a great example of harmony between people from all around the world.

As the United States offer to immigrants what their native countries cannot provide them, and makes them realize that a second chance is always possible, the fragmented and at the same time homogeneous reality of New York City shows that a successful interaction and intermingle between different cultures and ethnicities is not only possible, but constitutes an extreme source of richness.

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