Chapter 7

Using a Cohort Survey to Track the Entry into Adult Life of Young People from Immigrant Backgrounds

Emmanuelle Santelli

7.1 Introduction

Comparative studies in Europe show how much the transition into adulthood meets specific societal norms and arrangements. Van de Velde (2008), in her book on the comparative sociology of youth in Europe, highlights four models. From southern to northern Europe, different types of coming-of-age experiences increasingly justify the logic of individual emancipation. On this scale, France can be situated between southern and northern Europe: the young have a ‘(...) form of experience of youth which is linked to social integration, (...) caught between the desire for personal development and the constraints of a social structure which strongly links potential employment to their initial training’ (Van de Velde 2008: 16).

Current social conditions, coupled with a greater diversification of practices, have led to a rethinking of the ‘family model of settlement’ (Battagliola et al. 1997). The thesis on the extension of youth (Cavalli and Galland 1994) has highlighted the complexity of the transitory states which precede the crossing of thresholds (symbolized by starting work, becoming a couple, leaving the parental home) and the indecision which henceforth characterizes this life stage. The great uncertainties which weigh heavily on the world of work (unemployment, precarious contracts, deskilling) and the increase in the number of years of education all help to explain in part this social transformation (Dubet 2001; Nicole-Drancourt and Roulleau-Berger 2002[1995]). Van de Velde’s (2008) analysis stresses, moreover, the link to be established between the provisional and reversible nature of the frontiers of youth and the entry into adulthood, which is, first and foremost, ‘a fundamentally progressive process of individualization’. It expresses the evolutions in contemporary individuality: ‘The extension of youth’ refers essentially to a deep and qualitative transformation of

E. Santelli (✉)

Centre Max Weber, Institut des sciences de l’homme, Lyon, France

e-mail: emmanuelle.santelli@ish-lyon.cnrs.fr

pathways to adulthood. If places are no longer definitively allocated, and if social links are set up more selectively, becoming an adult is no longer considered only as a status to be gained but also as a way of life to be lived on a meaningful pathway' (Van de Velde 2008: 7). She concludes that the representation (of adulthood) has changed, transformed 'from a material independence to be acquired into an autonomy to be constructed' (Van de Velde 2008: 9).

Nevertheless, Van de Velde also specifies that this tendency weakens in differentiated ways depending on social and gendered cleavages. Aware of the difficulties encountered by young immigrants, and the resultant social inequalities in terms of the level of studies achieved, the unemployment rate, and the types of work contract, we would expect this life stage to proceed in a particular manner for this population (Hamel et al. 2011). It is therefore with the aim of understanding these differentiated ways of coming of age that a survey was carried out with a cohort of young French adults of North African origin.

In this contribution I discuss the methodology of cohort analysis used for this survey in which was employed a two-pronged approach – quantitative and qualitative. The interest in using a mixed-method approach in any study of the transition to adulthood of young people of immigrant background will then be developed in order to highlight the virtues of such a cohort approach. These latter will be illustrated through a short presentation of the principal findings resulting from this survey tool.

7.2 A Cohort Survey to Determine the Future of Young People of Immigrant Background

Apart from already existing differences with the majority group (i.e. French citizens not of immigrant background), my earlier work had led me to observe the disparities amongst a group of youngsters of immigrant origin. More generally, this research was motivated by the desire to take a different perspective on the issue of 'suburban youths' and, in order to achieve this, to employ a methodology which would allow me, on the one hand, to cover the diversity of their life courses and, on the other, to understand socialization processes and their impact on the formation of these French North-African-origin youngsters' trajectories. Constituting a cohort¹ of French youngsters of North African background who shared the same environment at a given period in time seemed to be the most appropriate way of breaking with the presupposed relative homogeneity of this group of young people – it enabled me to consider as a whole all those young people who grew up in the same neighborhood.² It was thus not a question of carrying out a survey amongst 'neighborhood youths' who happened to be there, outside the blocks of flats, but to find all those youngsters who grew up in

¹ The word cohort is a demographic term defining those individuals who have experienced a similar event in the same time period; here, the 'event' consists in their common upbringing in the same neighborhood, a process which they all shared.

² For a more detailed account of the survey's development, the neighborhood selected and the findings, see Santelli (2002, 2007a).

the same neighborhood, at the same time, in order to understand their life courses, and the ways in which they were different but also similar... In this way the different profiles of the young people in the cohort can be analyzed, with the aim of getting a more detailed understanding of the impact of growing up in the suburbs. This approach, necessarily retrospective, also had a longitudinal aspect. The idea was to understand this transition phase to adulthood – looking in particular at their entry into the labor market – and how this experience of growing up in the suburbs played a role.

This survey, which was carried out in 2003 from a case-study perspective, involved all those young men and women who had grown up in the same working-class suburban neighborhood,³ regardless of whether or not they had already left the area by the time of the survey. All the youngsters, aged 20–29 at the time of the survey, had parents who were both originally from one of the three North African countries; they themselves are French citizens (94% had French nationality at the time of the survey). The list of those young people born between 1974 and 1983, whose home address was within the area of the selected neighborhood and whose parents had North African-sounding names and surnames (in order to exclude mixed couples), was drawn up from the registers of all primary schools in the neighborhood. The main limitation of this methodology was the difficulty in finding participants for the sample, as several of them could have moved. If the sampling frame was relatively easy to obtain – once administrative permission had been granted and checks carried out on the origins of the patronyms – the follow-up and contact with potential participants turned out to be very complex. In fact, I was working with a list of around 500 names whom I had to find a way of contacting (through an address, a mobile phone number or an intermediary). Not knowing who I was going to find still living in the neighborhood and who had already left, it took many attempts to find them in order to invite them to participate in the survey. Fulfillment of the survey implied my almost-total immersion in the neighborhood, as it was the only way I could gain the trust of those youngsters with the greatest number of problems, and who were the most critical about a survey the interest of which they could not comprehend. The other youngsters were all more or less happy to participate – seeing in the survey a way to justify their existence – as they feel that the press gives a distorted vision of youth in these neighborhoods.

In total, of the 473 youngsters who were suitable, 393 were ‘available’ to participate in this study.⁴ Of these, 200 were met with and surveyed through a questionnaire which included questions centered on the main themes of their biographical trajectories (family environment, relationship with the neighborhood, educational trajectory, occupational integration, autonomy etc.). The aim of the retrospective questionnaire was to collect data on the life course of the respondents – details of

³ Situated in the old industrial periphery, the area was a working-class neighborhood in the south-east of Lyon, made up of social housing in tower- and low-rise blocks. In the last 10 years or so, the neighborhood has benefited from the town’s social housing policy.

⁴ The others had either been impossible to trace (for 55, in spite of my efforts, I was unable to find any information whatsoever) or were living in a situation where an interview was not possible (this was the case for 22 of them who were either in hospital or living abroad etc.) and three were deceased.

their everyday lives and life events – and to gain their perspective on the succession of their different life stages, as well as to measure the social position reached in the different domains of life. For example, in the domain of education, respondents were asked about how they lived their schooling, whether or not they had benefited from help during this schooling, and the highest qualification they had obtained. Factual questions allowed me to identify their social status while other, more open, questions asked them to express, briefly, how they felt about the life events they had experienced. These latter aspects were investigated in more depth in the qualitative interviews, some of which were, however, carried out before the distribution of the quantitative questionnaire in order to finalize this aspect of the survey. The other interviews (the vast majority) took place after the quantitative survey in order to investigate some responses in more depth and better understand the processes which came to light on the questionnaire (notably the transition phase between the end of a participant's schooling and his or her entry into the world of work). Whereas the questionnaire provided factual data – age on leaving school, time taken to find regular work etc. – the interview facilitated a description of this stage – how it was experienced, which people had intervened and in what way etc.). Some of the interviews were conducted with young adults who had responded earlier to the questionnaire.

In the end, almost one person in two in the cohort was questioned. The selection was carried out in two ways, either through their keenness to participate or from the need to diversify the families chosen. Effectively, these 393 youngsters usually had siblings – i.e. they had at least one brother or sister, and often more, who were also part of the sample.

Around thirty biographical interviews were also undertaken in order to cover every dimension of the different life stages (familial, relational, educational, professional, residential and conjugal). The sampling of these two procedures (questionnaire and interview) took the gender balance into account, together with the place of residence and social situation of the youngsters on the list of 393 individuals.

7.3 A Mixed Qualitative and Quantitative Approach

My methodological approach is characterized by the combined use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach is relevant to our understanding of a social process such as this transition in the life course – the transition to adulthood – for a twofold reason. Firstly, it enables a reconstitution of any decisive events, the context in which the transition takes place, the people with whom these young adults are in contact, and the action they take. The approach considers both the diachronic and the synchronic dimensions of events, focusing particularly on socialization processes, and on the way in which the passage of time determines the actions of individuals.⁵ Secondly, through combining the two methods it was possible to (1)

⁵In the sense used by Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1988: 23), 'The idea, although evident, that a life course can be much more easily determined by the transmission of a *resource* than by the imposition of a *constraint* gives to the concept of determination a whole new meaning'.

build a statistical framework, identify patterns and reveal explanatory factors (the explanatory approach) and (2) examine the most salient points in greater detail, enter the social world of the interviewees and see all the dimensions of the reasons behind their actions (the interpretive approach). It is heuristically useful to allow the two methods to interact, rather than to address them successively. I propose to briefly illustrate this point with some of my survey findings which should confirm the interest of such a cohort study.

7.3.1 *A Sociology of Social Pathways*

Realizing a sociology of social pathways implies consideration of the longitudinal dimension and the different areas of life. The underlying hypothesis is that all action, every social position (in this case young people from the suburbs on the threshold of adulthood), is understood in relation to the way in which they have traveled their life course, through the social dynamics associated with it. Thus we cannot understand this passage to adulthood without grasping the modalities of which it is constituted: their earlier school career, and the qualification achieved on leaving school (the level of the diploma, the subject, the lived experiences during the pathway with their peers, and their relationship with the educational institute...), the entry into the professional workforce (means of obtaining their first job, the first experiences in the multi-dimensional world of work), relations with their peer group, with members of their family and with those close to them and any associated practices etc.

All this implies the need to carry out the survey (through interviews and/or questionnaires) from the perspective of gathering information on the current *and* past situations, retrospectively reconstituting each participant's life course. I borrow from Zimmermann (2011: 87–88) her definition of a *parcours* (life course) which 'puts the accent on a plurality of possible roles and identities, on eventual transitions between different life domains (domestic, professional and institutional in particular) and the secant positions between them. (...) If a *parcours* is not limited to a succession of events but integrates their interstices and the production of continuity, then its analysis owes much to a hermeneutics and a phenomenology of experience which articulates different times – professional, familial, social, and institutional – during the time span of the biographical narrative. In such a perspective, the notion of *parcours* summarizes the two qualities, historical and relational, of the sociological individual, in order that this latter is not reduced to its subjectivity but that he or she is considered as a person becoming, intrinsically both relational and historical'.

The survey on the coming-of-age of these young French people of North African descent gathered together narratives which set the scene as much for life within the family as for relations with the youngsters' peer group and interactions with the surrounding social world, along their educational, and professional trajectories and then in the work situation. The diversity of these trajectories was thus revealed in all its breadth: the cohort showed itself to be a heterogeneous group, totally removed from standard representations of 'suburban youth'.

This approach implies – at the very least – biographical interviews which would allow me to ‘probe’ more deeply into what I consider to be the most important points. The retrospective approach has the advantage of revealing the most crucial moments in the interviewee’s life history, while connecting them to collective processes (such as the political/economic context). This type of survey enables us to understand how individuals, who initially have several points in common (due to their migratory history and their belonging to a working-class milieu and to their North-African Muslim culture), can stand out so much on their transition to adulthood. Each person’s environment is very different and is built around their respective experiences.

7.3.2 From One Survey Technique to the Other and Back Again

Interview and questionnaire surveys have their own advantages when seeking to understand the experiences and the situation of these young people. In order to take full advantage of the analysis of their life courses, I deemed it relevant to cross-tabulate the data from the questionnaires with those from the interviews. But this intertwining of methods corresponds less to a successive recourse to the two techniques than does the methodical management of the to-ing and fro-ing from one technique to the other, of the same surveys where possible. It is this circular movement which provides the greatest meaning, as it enables the interviewer, during the meeting, to go back over the responses given in the questionnaire, either to gather more details and complete them or, on the contrary, to substitute other factual information or means of interpretation for those obtained from the questionnaire.

It is therefore less the utilization of the two investigative methods which I highlight here but, more specifically, the comparative aspect which it is possible to establish between the ‘responses’ obtained by each of the two methods, i.e. the way in which each participant recounts his or her life course, the way they act and think and how they represent social reality, their own reality, which can differ, go counter to or be completed depending on the approach used. This way of proceeding enables the extraction of a uniform representation of these youngsters. The result is a very detailed appreciation of the phenomena under study: the life courses of these youngsters and their family reflect a multiplicity of facets which become more noticeable when coming at them from different angles.

Continuing with the example of the transition from school to work, the interview offers the possibility to put on record a narrative which describes the different stages and how they were lived, especially during difficult times such as the loss of or being turned down for a job, or a feeling of being discriminated against etc., but also the overlapping situations which make it possible to obtain a regular job for example. The questionnaire, on the other hand, is ideal for drawing up a statistical framework of the situation of these young adults and revealing the distinctions which appear depending on the level of qualification, the gender and the place of residence etc.

The way in which each of these young people subjectively lives this transition phase is only comprehensible through the medium of the interview, as this is the best ‘tool’ with which to get to grips with a process – i.e., any phenomenon which, as Mendez (2010) explains, takes place over time, unfurls progressively and changes as it advances. ‘A process modifies the elements and the living conditions of the object at each moment of his or her course, but also transforms its own dynamics at each reached stage’ Mendez (2010: 5). The interview intrinsically provides all the necessary material with which to understand the processes at work at this stage of the young adults’ life course.

As for the completion of the questionnaire by 200 youngsters (one in every two young people of North African descent belonging to this cohort were surveyed, in order to ensure representativeness), it allowed us to get to know their situation in its entirety. In this ZUS (*Zone Urbaine Sensible*, a term which translates as ‘sensitive urban area’),⁶ we began to understand the distribution of these young people depending on their work situation, their level of study etc. Implementation of the survey methods favors the respective analysis of events, which enriches the ways in which they can be interpreted: the statistical findings shed light on, reinforce or, on the contrary, relativize the elements gathered during the interviews. This approach mixes together the temporal dimension with the multiplicity of social spaces (residential, professional, relational and conjugal situations etc.), revealing the diversity of the young people’s social life courses. Additionally, the diachronic dimension, through its focus on intergenerational processes, helps to complete and enrich the biographic study. Here we see a type of connection which links the subjective experience with the social characteristics of these young adults. Thus their life courses are understood through the different elements of which they are composed and the tension between, on the one hand, their situations and social characteristics in a given economic context and, on the other, the way in which the projects, representations and choices adapt to these objective data.

One way of reconciling these different dimensions during fieldwork has been to progress the analysis by merging a quantitative approach – capable of discerning statistical regularities and, thus, social factors – with a qualitative approach, in order to understand the singularity and the significance of the individual and family trajectories.⁷ If, today, the debate appears to have lapsed between the partisans of one

⁶A ZUS or sensitive urban area is an urban territory defined by the French authorities as a prime target for town policy. According to their definition under the law of November 1996, the ZUS are ‘characterized [in particular] by the presence of housing estates or run-down neighborhoods and by a marked imbalance between housing and employment’. There are more than 700 ZUS spread throughout the whole of France, inhabited by more than 5 million people and also known as ‘problem’ or ‘sensitive’ neighborhoods (Avenel 2004). The rate of unemployment in a sensitive urban area is almost two and a half times higher than elsewhere: 22.7% compared to 9.4% in 2011. Since 2008, the gap between the rate of unemployment in these sensitive urban areas and that in the conurbations where they are sited has widened.

⁷In this contribution, I concentrate essentially on the qualitative data, as the typology I present here was based on the in-depth interviews. For a description of the statistical findings, see Santelli (2007a, b).

or other of these approaches, credit is due to the number of studies which have demonstrated the relevance of linking qualitative and quantitative approaches.⁸ On the other hand, there are fewer studies which, for the same individuals, have combined the two methods. Yet it would be in the interests of our sociological discipline to develop this approach, as expressed by Marpsat (1999: 17): 'Implementation of this approach seems particularly fruitful in the case of surveys in little or not well known domains, but the interest of the association of different methods is genuine for most statistical surveys and the ritual opposition between quantitative and qualitative must be overcome in order to make progress in our knowledge of the phenomena under study'.

7.4 A Typology of Pathways to Professional Integration Amongst the Cohort

The pathway to the professional integration of these youngsters, during their transition to adulthood, is characterized by their position as 'employees of insecurity', combining their dissatisfaction with the work and the instability of the employment (Paugam 2000). Several studies have also shown that the insecurity of these suburban youths (living in spaces qualified as ZUS or sensitive urban areas) was particularly strong. The figures given by the cohort (200 questionnaires out of 473 youngsters who make up the parent population) confirm this finding. The in-depth biographical interview helps us to understand how they feel, what they have experienced and how their pathway was constructed, at the intersection of, at the same time, the multiplicity of decisions taken (on the direction to take, for example), the social logics (in terms of the hierarchy within their networks) and the structural contexts (such as the opening up of education to the masses and urban ghettoization).

In terms of the survey, five types of pathway to socio-professional integration can be highlighted. This typology has been drawn up following analysis of the qualitative material collected during the biographical interviews,⁹ with the aim of describing the means by which professional integration occurs from the perspective of the global trajectory. Based on each participant's employment situation at the time of interview, I tried to identify which could be the explanatory elements of the position obtained, which appeared to be mainly the fact of whether or not the young person lived in the neighborhood at the time of the survey, and his or her level of education and gender. Whichever type they may be, these characteristics combine in different ways and thus appear as so many factors contributing to the orientation of these socio-professional trajectories. While the first three types are made up by a great majority of both men and young adults with no qualifications or a very low level of education, the other two types, on the contrary, are made up mainly of women and young qualified – mostly

⁸For example, the works of Battagliola et al. (1993), Weber (1995) and Bidart and Cacciuttolo (2012).

⁹When subsequently applied to the questionnaires, the statistical analysis confirmed the existence of five main types of socio-professional integration.

graduate – adults. These types are strongly gendered but the levels of education contribute in different ways to explanations of how professional integration occurs (notably between the last two types). Whether or not they live in the neighborhood also helps to explain the phenomenon while, at the same time, characterizing their family situation: moving out of the neighborhood implies that these young adults have access to a certain number of resources. The characteristics of the family environment also appear tangentially in the description of the school career path.¹⁰

The five types – the *Excluded*, the *Emancipating proletarians*, the *Invisible proletarians*, the *Insecure intellectuals* and the *Securely employed*¹¹ – describe the individual motivations; they enable us to immerse ourselves in their respective worlds in order to understand the link between the young adults' individual and social characteristics and their type of professional integration. We should bear in mind that the quantitative findings described below are from the statistical analysis of 200 questionnaires and that each type represents roughly a fifth, except for the *Emancipating proletarians* (less than a fifth) and the *Securely employed* (slight more than 20%).

At the time of the survey the youngsters could have been in any one of three situations: they could still have been at school (the case for almost a quarter of them), have had a job (nearly half) or been unemployed (just over a quarter). The analysis here is on those who had left school, and for whom their situation was still marked by insecurity: almost two-thirds were in a situation of relative insecurity (20% for whom the situation was highly unstable).

7.4.1 The *Excluded*: Between Hardship and Rejection of and by the World of Work

In this type, made up almost exclusively of men, all lived in the neighborhood and were aged between 20 and 25 years old. Two-thirds of them had no qualifications at all – in fact, men were largely over-represented amongst this survey's unqualified population.¹² Only one in five had a job at the time of the survey, as an unskilled

¹⁰ Pathways are now evident in which families are resources to be drawn on. However, the family situation for these young adults is irrelevant because only a little over a quarter of them had a partner at the time of the survey and it was mostly the young women who were part of a couple.

¹¹ For a more detailed description see Santelli (2007a). I should say that the terminology of the types has been modified slightly following publication of my later article (Santelli 2012). Finally, note that the typology corresponds to the analysis of the situation at a given moment in time. In no case does it indicate a permanent state: the pathway of these youngsters may at any moment correspond to a different typology due to age, or to the improvement in their living conditions, which may be linked to personal strategies or resources but also to structural conditions (drop in the unemployment rate, policies favoring the young...). The analysis is based on the three-quarters of youngsters who had left the educational system at the time of the survey.

¹² The level is 25%, which rises to 34% when we look only at those individuals who had left school at the time of the survey. If this figure matches that obtained in other sensitive urban areas (see the

laborer, and only on a temporary contract (short fixed-term). No young person in this group had had a job which lasted for more than 3 months since leaving school: socialization in and through the world of work cannot take place under these conditions. Failure to achieve at school is often just the first in a line of exclusions, the result of which is the development of a feeling of permanently living life on the fringes of society.

They symbolize ‘neighborhood youth’ – those very visible on the streets who spend the majority of their time outside, with their pals. Confronted with the need to be resourceful, the neighborhood becomes their point of reference, the gang their base: their pals in the neighborhood are an invaluable support, but they are also very aware how fragile this link is, as their friends are as impoverished as they themselves are and may up and leave at any moment. Meanwhile, they have some good times together, trying for a moment to forget the hopelessness of their situation (Dubet 1987) and trying to keep their problems to a minimum. Their pathways reveal how they combine their different experiences of symbolic (and sometimes physical) violence, social and personal problems, all of which are intensified by the obviously unstable economy, and creating a vicious circle from which it is, at the time, impossible for them to escape.

For these young adults, the absence of any career and personal perspective (no stable job, when will they ever be able to move away from home?) leaves them feeling that they have been abandoned by society, as a result of which they withdraw a little further still into themselves and their neighborhood. Through a lack of any other reference points, they feel more at home with the norms of the neighborhood, which they themselves have helped to establish,¹³ and find themselves deprived of other practices. Without resources, constrained by a residential framework which reinforces their stigmatization, they are but one outcast of a salaried society.

7.4.2 The Invisible Proletarians: Between Professional Stability and Neighborhood Life

This type, again mostly masculine, also comprises the young living in the neighborhood. They live there because their parents do, or because they have left their parental home but preferred to remain in the vicinity. However, they are different to the other young men due to their ‘invisibility’ in the neighborhood: they have no relationships therein, their friends, their reference points, their leisure activities all being situated outside the neighborhood. They live a sort of double life in which they keep the two social worlds (within and outside the neighborhood) strictly separate.

ZUS Observatory, a research center monitoring the situation in sensitive urban areas), it is, nevertheless, much higher than the national average.

¹³They do, however, maintain a certain moral order which limits the presence of young women in the outside areas (see Santelli 2010).

If, again, the majority has no qualifications, they stand out due to their professional stability: they all have fixed-term contracts, mostly as laborers though, for some of them, as (highly) skilled workers. Their professional integration was relatively quick on leaving school; however they have since undeniably acquired professional experience and qualifications which act as protection on the labor market. In landing a fixed-term contract, they have also gained stability in the labor market and feel accepted.

These young adults have also benefited from a familiar and more structured environment within their family circle and through relations with social workers, teachers and counselors within the socio-educational system. These interactions are the milestones along their path to adulthood and they have made full use of them. In spite of two disqualifying characteristics – having few, or no, qualifications and being ‘young suburban youth’ – their successful professional integration makes them a special case. In fact their pathway remains relatively marginal in the sensitive urban areas as the majority of young men of North African descent are unemployed or subject to a repeatedly unstable situation (moving between odd jobs, temporary and fixed-term contracts and unemployment).

7.4.3 *The Emancipating Proletarians: Drawing on Coping Mechanisms*

This type, also male, differs from the preceding type due to the fact that all the youngsters live outside the neighborhood. They are also all older: one in two is aged between 26 and 29. Another significant difference is that just over half have already managed to gain a qualification (generally the *Certificat d’Aptitude Professionnelle* – literally the Certificate of Professional Competence, or the *Brevet d’Enseignement Professionnel* – Professional Training Certificate).¹⁴ Similarly, half of them were in employment at the time of the survey, mostly as temporary workers.

Although their schooling and entry into the world of work were very similar to those of the *Excluded*, their trajectories were more often crowned with success. They have, notably, been more regularly employed, in spite of very difficult working conditions. Faced with these difficulties, they are today trying to improve their professional position by taking on a work-related project (training in order to obtain a more skilled and valued job, or setting up their own business). With access to a more concentrated network of social relations, they dispose of (notably family) resources which enable them to undertake this professional about-turn. However, they still remain vulnerable on the job market.

Having left the neighborhood following their family’s move, they still maintain links with it and continue to go there regularly, as nothing has replaced the relations they have in the neighborhood, and what these connections do for them. In the

¹⁴ This level of study is equivalent to secondary-education vocational training.

absence of other options, the rhythm of life in the neighborhood and their circle of friends there continue to be important, and to influence their daily lives. If the youngsters can justify no longer living there, they do not denigrate life there in any way. Coming across them in the neighborhood, nothing really distinguishes them from youngsters in our first type (the *Excluded*), a category to which they themselves probably belonged before, thanks to various occurrences, managing to extract themselves from the hardship they had known there. Today their professional position is still unstable, but allows them to hope for an improvement in their lives, the achievement of their personal projects and professional recognition.

7.4.4 The Precarious Intellectuals: The Desire for Upward Mobility

This category, of whom the majority are female, lives in the neighborhood. They stand out from the other three groups due to the level of study they have reached. All the young adults in this type have gained a qualification, two-thirds of them having taken their *baccalauréat* (usually following a professional or technological stream). Equally, three-quarters of them were employed, usually as office workers, although almost half only had temporary contracts. Although these youngsters believed that their schooling would ensure their upward mobility, they today find themselves in an insecure situation and underqualified in the labor market, which leaves them feeling very frustrated. They match the profile of Beaud's (2002) '80% in their *baccalauréat* ... and then what?' youngsters, which corresponds to the massification of upper-secondary-school and higher education which took place in 1985. Their deception is the greater because, having been influenced by their parents' dreams of upward mobility, they truly believed that they could achieve this through educational success. However, once they find themselves taking degree courses at university (in Law and Economic and Social Administration in particular), after having followed a technological or professional curriculum at school, they fail. Some 'stick at it' but only gain a lower qualification, leaving them still in subordinate professional positions.

This loss of social position is felt all the more strongly because they have to go on living in the neighborhood: insecure, they have to continue living with their parents. They entirely reject the neighborhood, with its norms and practices, and its inhabitants who contribute to its degradation. The only way to avoid being subject to these 'harmful effects' is, on the one hand, to spend as little time as possible there and, on the other, to make oneself as invisible as possible when obliged to be there. As with the second type (the *Invisible Proletarians*), they live a double life: all their activities and their friends are outside the neighborhood. Being 'in' and being 'outside' the neighborhood represents two split social worlds – where one is tolerated, the other represents their aspirations. An end to their professional insecurity would enable them to succeed in accessing this new way of life, far from the neighborhood. They possess all the resources needed for this – qualified, experienced, they

develop a hyper-conformity to the dominant norms, but find their path blocked by an economic context which is hardly conducive to upward mobility and themselves subjected to urban ghettoization.

7.4.5 The Securely Employed: A Successful Integration into Employment

This type, again mostly female, stands out from the previous ones because these young adults all live outside the neighborhood, and most are well qualified. They are nearly all employed – nine out of ten times on fixed-term contracts or as civil servants. Their professional situation is thus stable and also evidences a relative upward mobility – one third have posts in intermediate professions. Whereas their first job on leaving school was equally unqualified, in little time they have managed to considerably improve their terms of employment. The rewards for gaining these qualifications for this type is high, contrary to the way in which things turned out for those in the previous group – they sat the general *baccalauréat* and then pursued professional or technological studies. They also benefited from family resources and could count on the help of their parents, who had always clearly expressed their aspirations for upward mobility. Leaving the neighborhood and finding a home on their own falls within this perspective.

The break away from the neighborhood is definitive and any links maintained with it and its inhabitants are episodic at best, with little seeming to keep them attached to the place (when the parents have also moved away). Their whole life now takes place away from the neighborhood. However, unlike the previous type, these youngsters believe that life in the neighborhood provided a solid foundation on which to build the rest of their lives. Well accepted in their daily and working lives, they are well placed to make such a judgment, as they appreciate what this singular experience has brought to their lives. If everything distinguishes them from the image of ‘suburban youth’ they still, nevertheless, recognize how difficult it has been to access to their current position, unlike other young people of their own age in a similar situation who had not lived in a suburban neighborhood. Thus, in spite of undeniable advantages (family support, and large and far-reaching social networks favoring integration into social worlds outside the neighborhood) their pathways are also specifically influenced by their upbringing in the suburbs.

7.5 Conclusion

My findings on these five types of professional integration reflect well-known analyses of the young (Pottier 1992). However, the diversity in these trajectories is less known in the case of suburban youth. The methodology employed and the

constitution of a cohort have allowed me to demonstrate this. The interest lies, on the one hand, in better understanding the singular difficulties which these young people face and, on the other, in demonstrating the complexity of social dynamics and their long-term effects (for example concerning the two stages of their schooling and their working life – the way in which the transition from one to the other takes place, and the difficulties they encountered on the labor market are probably as much the result of inequalities during the first phase and the discrimination to which they are subjected in the second). The combination of interview and questionnaire surveys enabled me to shed light on these processes. Implementation of them allowed me both to quantify the phenomena and the jobs held, and to deepen my personal knowledge of the lives of these young people, their uncomfortable identities and their hopes and dreams – in other words, how they would wish to live in our society and be completely accepted as citizens there.

From this perspective, study of the transitions to adulthood of young people of immigrant descent is vital; it will allow us to understand their social mobility – *in fine* the place they hold in their respective societies. What is more, it is necessary if we wish to understand what it is which specifically sets them apart from other young people. The issue of inequalities is crucial here as, apart from the differences which they can explain, inequalities play a much broader role on conditions of individualization. The cohort study allowed me to highlight such inequalities by showing the many differences between these suburban youngsters.

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