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## **HOW BIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCE OF MIGRATION ARE STILL INSPIRED BY *THE POLISH PEASANT IN EUROPE AND AMERICA***

### **Abstract**

Thomas and Znaniecki have shown us how to use human documents to explore the relations between individuals and ‘their’ society. Their inspiring approach allows us to consider migrants as subjects: a whole change of perspective. Working for many years on families of migrants who came from Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) to France, I have studied how such parents try to educate their children to face the difficulties linked to economic instability: unemployment, chronic shortages of money, and (social and ethnic) discrimination. Collecting life stories from parents and children allows an in-depth examination of educational strategies and the dynamics of intergenerational transmissions. These life stories give us evidence of parents’ educational practices and how they organise themselves to try to give their children resources, values and principles. Reciprocally, it is to capture, in the children’s discourses, what they retain from the education provided by parents and, more widely, from the family history as it is related. This method not only gives information about feelings of affiliation – with their fluctuations – but also allows to know how family members interact with each other, and to compare how their affiliations are explained or justified by the different family members. Thus, we can study both the weight of external factors and

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the personal experiences that take part in shaping these claimed affiliations and how they are individually constructed for each family member, based on the family heritage and the life courses and experiences of each person.

**Keywords:** migrant families, family case history, intergenerational transmission, integration, biographical experience

## INTRODUCTION

Thomas and Znaniecki [Thomas, Znaniecki 1998 (1919)] have shown us how to use human documents to explore the relations between individuals and ‘their’ society. Their inspiring approach, and the very fact of working with first-person personal documents in which people appear as individuals with a specific personality, allow us to consider migrants as subjects in their own right: a whole change of perspective.

Working for many years on families of migrants who came from Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) to France, I have studied how such parents try to educate their children to face the difficulties linked to economic instability: unemployment, chronic shortages of money, and (social and ethnic) discrimination<sup>1</sup>. Migrants’ children are aware that their parents have come from elsewhere; but they cannot understand why as children they are treated differently by society; why they are said to be ‘different’.

According to Vincent Tiberj, ‘Durkheim understood integration as a factory for producing future citizens. Today, social convention incorrectly restricts the use of the term ‘integration’ to groups of immigrants and their families. In this sense, the society in question is generally the host society, although in the extended sense of the term, ‘integration’ applies to all newcomers, including children and

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on the results of several research projects conducted (between 1999 and 2019) by Catherine Delcroix and some members of the research group MIGREVAL (Elsa Lagier, Elise Pape, Anja Bartel...) in France mainly and also in Germany. Between 1999 and 2019, for example Catherine Delcroix and Elsa Lagier have worked together on researching participation of inhabitants to the public policy of urban renewal in two French cities: Dreux and Vernouillet. In 2008 they met and interviewed 40 families living in deprived neighborhoods, using the method of crossed biographical interviews presented in this paper. They chose families with similar living situations, and similar problems in terms of migration, work, resources and family life. Our aim was to identify the different types of life paths and diverse profiles of these city families. It is also based on French and German biographical interviews coming from the database MIGREVAL. As a research group we work together to make comparisons between migrant’ life stories, and also between their family histories.

adolescents. Integration is traditionally thought of as involving several successive steps, beginning with economic integration (finding work), learning the language, then engaging in the process of acculturation, through which the entrant is to master the norms, customs and values of the host society, as well as the process of upward mobility in this society' [Tiberj 2014]. It should be added that the success (or failure) of integration does not depend solely on the individual him/herself but also on the society in which s/he lives, and particularly on its racial prejudices [Heran 2017].

Since the 1980s, I have been researching, on a gendered, inter- and intra-generational basis and from a transnational perspective, the biographical life paths of male and female migrants and their descendants. From the outset, my research work has had a comparative European dimension; it seeks to contextualize local and national public and social policies, and thus to provide a better understanding of the impact of policy on different aspects of the lives of migrant families (as regards housing, basic needs, language acquisition, training, employment, health care, and access to civil rights).

Since 2006, I have been working in terms of this approach with German colleagues from Goethe University Frankfurt. In 2015 we created a database of biographical interviews of migrants and their descendants and a research group named MIGREVAL. We use a research methodology known as biographical policy evaluation. It is a form of policy evaluation that is not top-down but bottom-up: rather than considering different policy domains (healthcare policy, education policy, etc.) as separate entities, we assess how these sectors are knitted together in the lives of individuals, affecting their life courses, and we describe the strategies these individuals employ in order to adapt themselves (or resist) to given policies [Apitzsch, Inowlocki, Kontos 2008; Delcroix 2013].

Faced with the integration problem, some parents proceed to tell their children how and why they emigrated, minimizing injustices they had to accept, while pointing out the good sides of the host country (education, healthcare, consumption level, safety...); and/or also try to pass on knowledge about – and emotional connection to – their country of origin, about which very little will be taught at French schools. If, on top of that, there has been a war and military occupation in the past between their country of origin and their host country (as between France and Algeria, or Germany and Poland), the issue of helping one's children to develop their own feeling of national belonging becomes very complex indeed [Delcroix 2009, Inowlocki 1995]. Studying migrant parents' educational strategies has led me to collect case histories of families in various French regions and cities.

Having followed several migrant families in France and in other European countries over long periods as an ethnographic observer and biographical-narrative interviewer, I specifically focused on how migrants try to find ways to fight the effects of stigmatization (or ‘discredit’). Discredit is all pervasive but typically invisible. Because they are located at the very bottom of power relations, one does not perceive from above the innumerable practical difficulties that face each of their initiatives. We do not believe them, we do not believe in their multiple abilities, we do not believe that they are capable of carrying out their projects, and as a result we do not help them. In a word, we do not consider them credible, and therefore we do not give them credit, whether we are a banker or some other social actor. But without the credit that those around us can give us, what could we accomplish? Heavy, very heavy is the weight of discredit; but it remains invisible to all who do not carry it. These people, who are already living in uncertainty about the next day, are suffering from the gaze of others: they are the victims of discredit. They face prejudice and contempt, which often makes their situation worse. They are blamed for their own difficulties. They are portrayed as welfare recipients (this is the ‘poverty trap’ theory, the ‘welfare trap’ that has never been empirically verified). They are accused of being incompetent parents, unable to manage a budget, unable to discipline their children. It is believed that the more they are helped, the more they will settle into a situation of welfare and become passive.

However I discovered during my fieldwork that most parents are continuously adapting their parenting styles and techniques to guide their children’s development. Some of their children face a double bind. On the one hand, the host society asks them to ‘integrate’, which means to enter labour markets and melt into the host country’s ways of life. On the other hand teachers, employers, the police and media keep considering them as ‘different’. This tension is particularly significant in France, whereas it appears easier for migrants to find one’s place in Germany [Wihtol de Wenden 2009, Pape 2012]. But in both countries, migrant parents show tremendous creativity in trying to help their children, boys and girls differently, to cope with this double bind.

Immigrant parents who succeed in migrating from their country, an ex-colony, to the ‘colonising’ European country have to face not only xenophobia but also post-colonial prejudices in both labour and housing markets and also in the contexts of work and everyday life. Nevertheless, the vast majority of migrants are carrying within themselves a project for a better life: for themselves, for their kin at home, and especially for their children, boys and girls; a project that orients, drives, and organizes all their courses of action. But through bringing up and educating their children, these parents become aware of the difficulties of the task.

Most of these families possess neither economic resources nor credentials. But all try to varying degrees to pass down to their children their own 'personal resources', which I have come to call 'subjective resources'. By this I mean, first of all, moral strength, courage, resilience, patience, tenacity, but also reflexivity, imagination, and communicative skills: resources which are developed out of an intense reflexive process on one's own biographical experiences [Delcroix 2000, 2009].

One of the ways in which they transmit these values is by explaining to their daughters and sons their family story, specifically why they have left their country of origin and have come to the host country they live in. Indeed I found that the key element of this process of transmission from generation to generation is through the telling of family histories. As the French psychoanalyst Robert Neuburger suggests, 'Passing down successfully amounts to passing down the ability to pass down' [Neuburger 1997: 15]. Thus the family history, as told by parents to children, is a tool, conveying not only information about the past and tradition, but also about the need for change. And the power of these stories, as Toshiaki Kozakai remarks, rests not on biological parenthood, but on bonding through the sharing of their childhood years [Kozakai 2000].

But this is a hard task. Some migrant parents seem to have difficulties in passing down their own life history to their children. Their history will have been shaped by a twofold series of humiliating experiences. First, and common to everybody, irrespective of whether they were born in France (or Germany or elsewhere) or whether they have emigrated, is the experience of having occupied the lowest jobs in society. Second, and specific to migrants, is the racism that they have experienced. Migrant parents have often had difficult family histories in relation to colonisation, wars... They are sometimes prone to silence, when it comes to admitting what they have been through. But this silence is also a collective phenomenon in which the media play a large part. For example, the French media continue ignoring the history of the French working class (migrants being a significant part of this class) while enhancing the history of the French peasantry as part of national identity.

In our French-German seminar we have worked on this difficulty of passing on family history. We have linked this process of transmission (passing on) to that of socialisation, which is a conscious process carried out by agents who aim to inculcate into children and teenagers the norms of the host society. Peers from the host society play a crucial role in socialising migrant children. As Jean Piaget explains in his book *Le jugement moral chez l'enfant* (The Moral Judgment of Children) [2000 (1932)], one cannot neglect the role of the child

her- or himself as an active participant in this process of (self)-socialisation. He or she adapts him or herself to the environment, but impinges also on it (and first of all, on his or her parents).

Socialisation cannot be reduced to schooling. It is an implicit impregnation. The moments within the family must contribute to giving meaning to the past and present lived experiences of parents and children here (in the host country) and there (in their country of origin). The success (or failure) of this process also depends on how family memory and the public collective history are connected, and how parents are able to legitimate in a dynamic way their own culture of origin, avoiding contradictions and silences. But parents have to find partners (teachers, friends, neighbours, community leaders or family members) to avoid a *guerre des mémoires* (war of memories) [Blanchard, Veyrat-Masson 2008; Bhabha 2007 (1994); Saïd 1994 (1979)]. Colonisation and post-colonialism are difficult subjects to deal with.

The situation is different in France and in Germany. In Germany, because of World War II, self-critical reflexivity about history is much more developed than in France. The sense of belonging of migrant children and their national affiliation depends on the dialogue between migrant parents and the host society. This dialogue, more or less easy to establish, depends itself on the history of the different countries. The importance given to migrants and their own stories also depends on the political system in the host country, which is more or less centralized. And, more specifically, it comes from the different national histories regarding migration, and from the different ways national policies have been dealing with it. 'While France has been marked by its integration model through assimilation, there still exists no clear integration policy in Germany [Simon 2005], [Thränhardt 2009], [Pape 2012: 430]. I shall focus here on the French situation, whose specificities are made clearer through a comparison with the situation in Germany. This comparison comes from our work during the seminar and from the papers of our colleagues.

### **LONGITUDINAL STUDIES OF THE LIFE COURSES OF IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS**

Emigration has always been something of an adventure, and the long process of acclimatization, adaptation, and integration into a new society is filled with the unforeseeable. It is thus to be expected that statistics and sociology (in its theoretical as well as empirical forms) concerning international migration will approach and

understand these phenomena from a longitudinal perspective, in which duration, as well as various other modes of temporality such as turning points, are a central concern. However, this kind of research remains marginal in comparison with all the 'national' versions of sociology, of which there are German and French variants, as well as North American and Latin American versions.

There are some exceptions. For France, Têtu-Delage's [2009] long-term study of several dozen Algerian migrant workers living in Romans, or Laacher's [2007] research on the long voyage of undocumented migrants; or individual case studies such as those of Sayad [1979] or Pian [2016], or again family case histories such as my book on the Nour, a family of two migrant parents from Morocco and their eight children [Delcroix 2013]. There have also been innovative research projects on migrant women (for example Hochschild and Ehrenreich [2003], Miranda [2012], Morokvasic [2011] and Lutz [2007, 2018]).

As for intergenerational issues, French and German sociologists have focused on how families rally together to support their children's school performance, in the perspective of their social achievement. They also work on intergenerational dynamics within migrant families [Brinbaum, Delcroix 2016], [Can 2006], [Delcroix, 1995, 2004, 2009], [Inowlocki 1995], [Nauck, Kohlmann, Diefenbach 1997], [Santelli 2009, 2016], [Tunc 2006], [Zehraoui 1996], [Zéroulou 1988]. Quantitative surveys [INSEE-INED 2008; Attias-Donfut 2006, 2009; Beauchemin, Hamel, Simon 2015] provide a way of grasping mobility flows and the different forms of social mobility at work in these families. But the dimensions of gender and generation, which are interwoven throughout every family, are only rarely taken into account, whether in relation to what I have called 'same gender-transmissions' (between mothers and daughters, or between fathers and sons) or 'cross-gender transmissions' (fathers to daughters, or mothers to sons) [Delcroix 2004, 2009]). One of the main objectives of my research is to study this issue of 'transmissions': what gets passed on between generations within families, be it consciously or not; and how it is passed on.

There are even fewer longitudinal empirical studies in which families are followed for at least two generations: the migrant parents, the next generation of their children, and even the third generation of their grandchildren. It is true that the complexity of these phenomena present real methodological difficulties, which appear insurmountable from a quantitative or statistical perspective and are also difficult to resolve through a case study approach. The latter cannot rely on a single case, but the number of case studies under consideration must be increased until the emergence of at some degree of saturation [Bertaux 2007;



Attias-Donfut 2006, 2009; Brinbaum, Kieffer 2005; Delcroix 2013; Santelli 2016]. A few studies [Tucci 2008, 2013, 2016; Armagnague 2010] have also compared the social becoming of immigrants in France and Germany.

## **THE METHODOLOGY OF CROSS-BIOGRAPHICAL INTERVIEWS**

Before presenting my comments on the subtle processes involved in inter-generational transmission, it is important to discuss the methodology used to collect the data. I have used a process of '*récits croisés*' [Delcroix, 1995], comparing and contrasting data generated through biographical interviews with different members of the same family. I will also explain below how this method both provides a source of rich information, and also circumvents some of the specific difficulties commonly encountered in the study of migrant families.

### **Using life stories within the same family**

In order to study the evolution of feelings of national affiliation of immigrants and their descendants, I have conducted a large number of biographical-narrative interviews in different fieldwork contexts. As Daniel Bertaux argues, the biographical approach allows researchers to study 'a particular fragment of social and historical reality from an ethno-sociological perspective [...] focusing on the patterns of social relations [...] that characterize it' [Bertaux 1997: 7]. Given that there are a number of social and cultural dimensions in any specific context [Schütz 1987], identifying the specific configuration of these dimensions requires a study of chosen cases, with an inductive approach, to capture the social logics that they exemplify. The stories I collected deal with practices, with beliefs and with representations, which are presented in a diachronic narrative structure that gives them meaning and allows one to make connections between them. The goal is to encourage the narration of events, the description of the relations linking them, and the explanation of the representations that social actors develop about those facts. The challenge is to understand potential causal pathways and the meaning they have for individuals, reasoning within the framework of a comprehensive approach.

To investigate how feelings of national affiliation result from intergenerational transmissions of migration history in migrant families in France, I have developed this approach, following the method I have established: that is, the reconstruction of family histories, drawn from life story interviews with several members of each family [Delcroix 2013 (2001–2005)]. The relevance of this methodology lies in



the importance of the family as a ‘micro-environment of inter-subjective relations where [...] emotional, moral and ‘semantic’ (symbolic) relations dominate, that is to say, generate meaning’ [Bertaux 1997:38]. The family members are all ‘significant others’ to each other; and particularly important ones.

I have focused in particular on working-class families originating from Maghreb, facing economic instability and discrimination. In order to reach a better understanding of the experiences of these families and their members, it was essential for me to hear their own, intimate accounts of their lives. This is not easy to achieve, and it requires building first a relationship of trust that will be able to counteract the previous, accumulated effects of stigmatizing discourses that can hinder the desire of these people to share their life story. It was important to explain that I was not there to examine and judge them, but to grasp and describe the efforts they were making to overcome their difficulties.

Thus, I have reconstructed in-depth case studies of migrant families, using an approach combining ethnographic and sociological methods. The ethnographic approach consists in spending as much time as possible with the families, in their everyday life activities or on outings and on holidays, to observe what they do and discuss what they think. The sociological approach seeks to identify different types of life paths and diverse profiles of families, and to analyse the collective processes they are experiencing.

The objective of this method is to locate each of the social actors within the framework of family time and historical time, investigating several generations. Meeting parents and children, talking with them about their lives helped me to reconstruct the general history of the family and discover how each of its members had experienced and understood this shared history. But each family member also brought new information, which allowed me to better situate the family history in a wider temporality.

Parent’s stories offer an opportunity to make connections between past and present. Making them talk about their childhood can also be an occasion to know more about the generation of grandparents. The stories of their children provide links between the present and the future. We have access to their projects and how they are becoming adults by re-appropriating their family history.

Before highlighting the richness of data collected through this methodology, I will now describe why it is that this approach is particularly important to overcome difficulties faced in carrying out fieldwork with migrant families.

### Specific difficulties in the study of migrant families

As Ursula Apitzsch stated in our Franco-German seminar, ‘ethnicity’ or rather, ethnic affiliations intertwine tensions between a potentially stigmatizing ascribed identity and a self-claimed identity. She spoke of the difficult dialectic between both ethnicity as a form of often unwelcome attribution by others, and ethnicity as a form of a conscious self-definition of a given individual within the social context of a community. She added that, paradoxically, the second process tends to transform ethnic belonging into an inheritable social position. But how can we study this ‘transformation’ when claiming an ethnic identity which is seen as ‘other’ in the European host society may result in rejection and the triggering of ‘social sanctions’, such as difficulty in finding a job?

Indeed, migrant families in France and Germany face a major discredit (in practice: social and ethnic discrimination) because of their geographical origin and their cultural practices. They carry ‘discrediting differences’ which have a double effect. Their visibility in the public sphere is subject to negative stereotypes; or they are confined to invisibility. In both cases, their existence is not recognised, or is only recognised with difficulty. This *discredit* tends to make it more complex to understand the actions of migrants and their children, their plans, and their discourses, as soon as they seem to move away from the model to which they are expected to comply: a well-‘integrated’ worker.

This phenomenon is particularly strong in France, because of its republican model that de-legitimises foreign origin and all practices and claims for recognition [Honneth, 2000 (1992)]. The derogatory discourse derives partly from the experience of colonisation that initially shaped the representations of colonised people, and still weighs on their descendants. This is particularly true for Muslims. A good example of this would be the experience of Algerians who, in 1870, were offered French nationality only if they agreed to renounce Islam (Décret Crémieux) [Delcroix 2009].

This public and political discourse has a very tangible impact on the attitudes and discourses of migrants and their descendants. As a reaction, they tend to erase what is perceived in the host country as unacceptable differences in some everyday practices. In the way they present themselves, some seem to deliberately forget their foreign origin, or underestimate its importance. It was only after spending some time with them that they finally began to talk openly with me about that. Others, however, respond by ‘turning the stigma’, as Erving Goffman said [Goffman. 1975:12–13], claiming their identity in a positive way. Such is for example the case of Muslim women who decide to wear the veil. This practice has sometimes been interpreted in France as an explicit political discourse.

Whatever the case, migrants and also many of their children have to deal with multiple identities, some of which might be associated with negative connotations in the host society [Lagier 2011].

Also, from the point of view of the host country the history of a migrant begins when he or she crossed the border. However, all migrants as human beings have had their own history before migrating, before they became ‘immigrés’. And as Abdelmalek Sayad [1999] has pointed out, migrants who left their country of origin considered themselves as ‘émigrés’, while the host society considered them as ‘travailleurs immigrés’ (Gästarbeiter).

However, again from the point of view of the host society, everything about their own past has little meaning and importance; it is not considered by the host country’s institutions as a story worth to be told. Thus, unlike the European families who live in a stabilized environment, migrant families tend to be isolated. When they pass on their history and memory they are not supported by the host country’s institutions, especially schools and the media. They are even discouraged from doing so, on behalf of the idea that integration through assimilation requires forgetting one’s origin [Bertaux, Delcroix 2009].

But these difficulties should not be considered as curbing the study. Instead they are to be treated as being part of the study. To understand the social logics that shape migrant families’ lives, the method of reconstructing family histories is particularly valuable. It gives indeed access to educational strategies implemented by parents, to the dynamics of intergenerational transmissions, to specific gender relations; and to the processes of collective and individual construction of feelings of affiliation to one or several nations. This is what we want to show in the following case studies.

### **Intergenerational transmissions and the children’s choice of a country to work and to live in: the Tahar Family<sup>2</sup> case history**

Mr Tahar is a migrant from Morocco who has a specific strategy. He has five daughters and one son, who is the last child. He came to France with the project of getting his ‘baccalauréat’ (Abitur in German) and continuing on as a university student. But for various reasons he could not do it, and he has been working for the last twenty years as a truck-driver.

He has developed a particular style of parenting which I find quite imaginative: taking his children with him in his truck one at a time when the trip he has to do is only a few hundred kilometres and back. This way, he has been able to develop

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<sup>2</sup> The members of the families who were interviewed have chosen their pseudonyms.

a personalised relationship with each one of his children. All of them consider these trips with their father as privileged moments. *'We talk a lot'*, his elder daughter told us. *'He has been taking me to various French cities, and he has explained to me their history. He has been telling me about cities he has visited in Germany, Italy... It was so interesting. I developed a taste for foreign languages, and now I am studying to become an interpreter, with a focus on German; because, according to what my father says, Germany is a country I would like to live in'*.

Her younger sister told us how much she enjoyed the stories her father told her about the times he was growing up in Rabat. This is where she wants to live. She also took much interest in how her father was driving his truck: changing gears, checking that the engine and other parts function well, taking good care of his truck... *'I watch when he puts on the handbrake. I would love to drive and get my licence'*. Now, at 18 years-old, she knows exactly what she wants to do: to start an international trucking company in Morocco. Still at high school, she has chosen a commercial orientation. She has a passion for trucks and is presently getting her driving license for trucks. Even if her dream does not materialise – it was already the case for her father – this young lady already knows where she wants to go and is busy trying to get there. And it is the same for her elder sister.

A very important point is that this creative strategy has been elaborated together with the mother. The example of this man gave me a first hint about the relevance for migrant children's self-representation, self-esteem, self-confidence and general psychic balance, of whether they knew or not the history of their parents – which is, in fact, their own pre-history. It was clear from what the two daughters explained that, because their father had told each of them, separately, in long informal conversations, who he was and why he migrated to France, they knew pretty well who they were and why they were born in France from Moroccan parents. It gives them a sense of continuity, a set of spatial and temporal markers; in short it helps them build their own identity.

This is only a specific example of a much more general attitude and practice which I have observed in many families: passing on to children the inner subjective resources they need to overcome the handicap of their ethnic and social background, in order for them, whether they remain in France or not, to fully exercise their status of citizen. Mr Tahar has opened the door to future options for his daughters. The elder two sisters do not have to choose between different national affiliations. They already live in a transnational space because their father has been able to give them an idea of the world through his own experiences

of migration and work. He enables them to be open about different cultural and social worlds.

But sometimes it is not possible; this is the case of Mr Mohammed.

### A 'CLOSED FAMILY': THE IMPACT OF BEING AN ORPHAN IN THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

This second case is a typical example of a father categorically refusing to discuss his own experiences with his children. Mr Mohammed is the father of four children. He came from Algeria with his wife twenty years ago. He has just retired from working for a small servicing company that forms part of the French railways (SNCF). For Mr Mohammed, the most important task is to protect his children from the external world, which he sees as threatening. His 16-year-old son describes their relation:

*'My parents, my father, they don't trust me to go... even now to Wilson Square [the city centre]. He has never been to the cinema with me; in fact, I have never been to the cinema at all. During the holidays I do nothing with my parents, with my father... My parents are worried about me.'*

Mr. Mohammed did not want to be interviewed, and his wife explained his refusal in this way: *'My children don't go to their friend's house... The most important thing is to pay the rent first. My husband has just been forced to retire and I don't work. He leaves the house in the morning to go for walks and comes back in the evening... He hasn't had a close friend since he was married. He is a solitary person, like myself'.*

This inward-looking attitude came about as the result of several negative experiences, as Mrs Mohammed went on to describe:

*'When we first came to France, the social worker wanted to send us back to Algeria. She said that the room we were living in was too small. But it was our choice to live in another country, although in coming here in France we are not free. In France, the authorities constantly check us. It is not easy for us... Wherever they go, my children are seen as foreigners. [...] I sometimes feel that we have made a big mistake. You are Arabs, you are foreigners, you are migrants... You go into an office and they make you aware of it all the time. Even my little girl of 6 understands. However, some things are better here than over there: freedom, free speech, and trustworthy persons. But we are still strangers... It is difficult for their father. He never says anything and he doesn't know Algeria [he came very*

young to France and never went back to Algeria]. *At the same time, he doesn't want to change his nationality and he could never live with other Algerians.*'

Behind the silence of this father is a personal history. He never knew his own father. He is an orphan, and therefore had no experience of a father-child relationship. He does not count on the help of anybody in his country of origin to help him in any sense. He does not have an 'ontological security', so that he could feel himself able to act safely [Giddens 1991]. Contrary to common sense, it is essential for parents to have relations based on community belonging to be able to open transnational spaces to their children. Mr Mohammed could not pass on to his children his life story, which according to his wife was characterized by a great deal of courage in the face of adversity. His children do not know to which country they belong. Here we can see how the two processes of family transmission and national belonging are related.

### **CONCLUSION: ACCESSING EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSIONS**

To conclude, the reconstruction of family histories provides a very good access to demonstrating how the object of transmission, as Pierre Legendre [2004 (1985)] put it, is to pass on. Beyond the obvious tautological point of this statement lies the fact that it is the act of passing on something (anything) which is by itself the whole point, more than the content of what is passed on, be it land property, political commitment, or some particular attachment. In families with few or no resources, where there is no objective 'capital' to pass on, there are still the non-tangible assets of moral values and love which, together with the family history, can give meaning to the current situation.

For a long time, these families were considered as having neither the necessary resources nor the necessary abilities to help their children succeed in school. Thus, their forms of mobilization were ignored and seldom studied. In fact, the majority of migrant families do not have either one of the three main types of family 'capital' (economical, cultural and social) identified by Bourdieu and Passeron in their theory of reproduction [Bourdieu, Passeron (1970) 2005]. In this theory, 'capital' is considered essential to the educational success of children. So, it is in the mobilization of other types of resources that has to be sought the understanding of the parent's strategies to help their children succeed at school.

In my research I have proposed to identify several types. The first is made up of the resources of the extended family. The second is, the collective resources

provided in the so-called disadvantaged neighborhoods by the *Politique de la Ville*<sup>3</sup> (like tutoring). And the third one is what I have called the subjective resources of families: in other words, everything which is linked to their capacities for reflexive thinking, mobilization of energies of their members (so the elder siblings help the younger ones), and their capacity for action.

The reconstruction of family histories thus helps us to avoid reification of static identities.

### **A method against the reification of representations and affiliations**

In general, the biographical approach and the use of narrative as a method of inquiry encourage individuals to place their experiences in time, to refer to their past, and help locate the ‘turning points’ in their life courses. Furthermore, through crossed interviews within a family, we have access to their planned action over several generations. This avoids any temptation to reify representations and affiliations since they are grasped in the long term and in their dynamics. Thus, for instance, it is not a question of studying identity but of studying identifications in their plurality and their evolutions. We thus obtain data on the development of feelings of national affiliation of migrant parents and their children, according to the initial migration project and its progressive reconstruction over life courses.

### **Studying the dynamics of intergenerational transmissions**

Additionally, collecting life stories from parents and children allows an in-depth examination of educational strategies and the dynamics of intergenerational transmissions. These life stories give us evidence of parents’ educational practices and how they organise themselves to try to give their children resources, values and principles. Reciprocally, it is to capture, in the children’s discourses, what they retain from the education provided by parents and, more widely, from the family history as it is related.

Moreover, we have information on what is passed on or not, in the private sphere, in a different way for each child, depending on his/her sex, age, sibling position, etc. We then seek to compare the educational projects of the parents with what their children keep, how they build their own family memory, their values and how they make choices from the ‘palette’ of affiliations that is, more or less consciously, offered to them.

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<sup>3</sup> When François Mitterrand came in power in 1981, he set up a specific policy, the ‘*Politique de la Ville*’, oriented towards the young generations living in the disadvantaged neighborhoods of cities.



### **Studying the individual and collective construction of feelings of affiliation**

The method that we use not only gives us information about feelings of affiliation – with their fluctuations – but also enables us to know how the family members interact with each other, and to compare how these affiliations are explained or justified by the different family members. Thus, we can study both the weight of external factors and the personal experiences that take part in shaping these claimed affiliations and how they are individually constructed for each family member, based on the family heritage and the life courses and experiences of each person. In so doing, we are able to analyse the construction of national affiliations as these echo the individual life course and relate to each individual's place within the family, which should be considered a group that is central to the formation of identity and sense of belonging.

Finally, in Thomas and Znaniecki I have chosen an approach that focuses on the life course, in particular as defined by Glen Elder [1998], who has set up its four principal dimensions. Claudine Attias-Donfut has also expanded on this approach: '1) the life course is a long-term human developmental process that interacts with sociohistorical time; 2) the life narratives of close relations (family, friends and those with whom one has significant social relationships) are interconnected; they intersect and mutually influence one another (linked lives), such that, for example, an event that occurs in one such life has repercussions on the becoming of another; 3) the life course is divided into steps that are socially defined, from infancy to old age; lastly, 4) human action, a dimension that is especially relevant in the experience of migrants, involves how each human being actively constructs her/his existence, through the choices s/he makes, the strategies s/he employs, and the projects s/he undertakes' [Attias-Donfut 2006: 7].

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### „CHŁOP POLSKI W EUROPIE I AMERYCE” JAKO (NADAL) ŹRÓDŁO INSPIRACJI DLA BADAŃ BIOGRAFICZNYCH I SPOŁECZNEGO DOŚWIADCZENIA MIGRACJI

#### Streszczenie

Thomas i Znaniecki pokazali nam, jak za pomocą dokumentów osobistych badać relacje między jednostkami i „ich” społeczeństwem. To inspirujące podejście pozwoliło na podmiotowe traktowanie migrantów, co oznaczało zmianę perspektywy badawczej. Pracując od wielu lat nad rodzinami migrantów, którzy przybyli z krajów Maghrebu (Maroko, Algieria i Tunezja) do Francji, badałam, w jaki sposób rodzice starają się uczyć swoje dzieci stawiania czoła trudnościom związanym z niestabilnością ekonomiczną, bezrobociem, chronicznym niedoborem pieniędzy oraz dyskryminacją społeczną i etniczną. Zbieranie historii życiowych od rodziców i dzieci umożliwia pogłębioną analizę strategii edukacyjnych i dynamiki przekazów międzypokoleniowych. Historie życia ukazują praktyki edukacyjne rodziców i sposób, w jaki organizują się oni, aby przekazać swoim dzieciom zasoby, wartości i zasady postępowania. Z kolei w dyskursach dzieci można uchwycić, co zachowują one z edukacji zapewnianej przez rodziców i, szerzej, z opowiadanej historii rodziny. Metoda ta nie tylko dostarcza informacji o poczuciu przynależności – z jego fluktuacjami – ale także pozwala poznać interakcje między członkami rodziny oraz porównać, w jaki sposób ich przynależność jest wyjaśniana lub uzasadniana przez różnych członków rodziny. W ten sposób możemy badać zarówno wagę czynników zewnętrznych, jak i osobiste doświadczenia, które kształtują owe deklarowane przynależności, oraz to, jak są one konstruowane indywidualnie dla każdego członka rodziny, w oparciu o dziedzictwo rodzinne oraz przebieg życia i doświadczenia każdej osoby.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodziny imigrantów, historia przypadku rodziny, transmisja międzypokoleniowa, integracja, doświadczenie biograficzne