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Rethinking Inter-Generational Inequality

Camille PEUGNY
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Abstract. This introduction attempts to pave the way for a renewal of the sociology of inter-generational inequality, through an examination of its emergence, contribution, and current limitations. The first part examines the emergence and development of the concept of “generation” in sociology throughout the twentieth century. Before being seen through the prism of “inequalities,” generation had been defined primarily as a motor for social and cultural change, seen in terms of “consciousness” in the work of Mannheim, and then “values” in the studies of the 1950s and 1960s. The second part takes the rise of inequality between generations as its theme, driven by the great reversal of the 1970s that has lastingly affected the conditions under which young people enter the labour market. Beyond these growing difficulties in the economic field, younger generations seem excluded from the dominant positions and levers of social change, which feeds the discourse around the existence of a “lost generation.” While stressing the importance of learning from this work, the third part explores its limitations and calls for the opening of new research fronts: to re-think the relationships between several generations in order to avoid the opposition between two generations, the first being those of the baby-boomers, and the second those born in the 1960s; to consider inter- and intra-generational inequalities in combination; to relate social inequality and familial solidarity between generations; to pose questions about a possible generational consciousness and its political outcomes. The introduction concludes with a presentation of the articles in the special issue, which contribute new evidence to the scientific discussion.

Key words. GENERATION–INEQUALITY–YOUTH–CONFLICT–SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Since the 1990s, many studies by economists and sociologists have emphasised the importance of taking inequalities between generations into account in the process of social stratification. Inequalities were highlighted in terms of pay, access to managerial employment, career mobility and even inter-generational mobility, at the expense of the cohorts reaching adulthood from early 1980s. Although the difficulties faced by the younger generation in the economic field have been documented in most other Western countries, the discussion of inequality between generations has been particularly polemical in France. Scientific debate about the extent of this inequality has unfortunately too often given way recently to accusations about the responsibility of the baby-boomers in the increasingly bitter public debate about the reform of pensions and the increase in the national debt. This special issue of the *Revue Française de Sociologie* proposes a return to scientific debate and to open up new areas of research on these issues, by going further in the sociological measurement and analysis of the structure of social inequality

Translated by Peter Hamilton.

between generations and in particular by opening up the question to international research, plurality of methods and enlargement of the temporal focus in measuring inequality.

The very notion of “inter-generational inequality” is far from sociologically neutral: it signifies the conceptual link between two concepts—“inequality” and “generations”—emerging from what have been up to now deeply divided sociological fields that have not had an obvious point of contact. This approach is in fact built on legitimation and systematisation of “generation”—rather than age—as a tool for analysing social structure, constructed in the same way as other more traditional variables, such as sex, social class, income, etc. It calls into question the usual time scale for the analysis of inequality, introducing the comparison of the course and *destiny* of several generations over the same life stages, but at different periods. Supported by the diffusion of large-scale data that have enabled an unparalleled temporal depth, it refers to the historical and generational configuration of recent decades, those marked by the “economic crisis” which extended the so-called “post-war boom” and which led to the emergence of the social image of young people who have been “downgraded” from a socio-economic perspective.

From generational consciousness to intergenerational inequality

The inequality between generations approach marks a paradigm shift in generational perspective, which throughout the twentieth century was more focused on the creation of a generation as a driving force of political, social or cultural change. As in history, it is a variable geometry concept, and one influenced in its construction by the various paradigms that hover above it. A short genealogy of sociological work on generations shows it moving through three main stages: from *consciousness* to *values* and then *inequality*. In an essay originally published in 1928, Karl Mannheim influenced the sociology of generations by the emphasis on the “consciousness” of generation and the stratification of generational “experiences.” After a long hiatus, the use of the concept of generation experienced a revival in the 1950s and 1960s, in the wake of the social youth movements that marked these decades. The vantage point of analysis was then displaced towards counter-generational values and their potentially political implications: the generation became particularly associated with age and the potential power of youth protest. It was at the end of the twentieth century that the concept of generation began to be thought of as the basis of new social inequalities, and approached through the differences in socio-economic fortune between the baby boomer generation and its younger siblings.

What makes a generation: Experience and consciousness

What makes a “generation”? Under what conditions do birth contemporaries form a “generation” in the sociological sense? Although this question was raised at the end of the nineteenth century, it was ultimately the theory of the German sociologist Karl Mannheim that provides the classical definition of what is—or is

not—the sociological unit of a generation, despite its quite recent and capricious reception in France (Mauger 2011). It is no coincidence that recent research studies into inequality between generations have involved the rediscovery of this seminal essay: for their authors find in it the aim to go beyond age class alone in order to approach the generation as something formed by young people through shared social experience, as well as examining its potential influence on the formation of a common sense of belonging—even though it is difficult to operationalise the concept of “generational consciousness.”

According to Mannheim, a generation is defined as a “unit” and an “intensity of relationship” that cannot be reduced solely to the contemporaneity of birth. This movement is embodied in the passage from the “potential generation” to the “effective generation,” that is to say between the first two levels of generation that are the “generation status” and the “generation as actuality.” The same “generation status” brings together those who are born at the same time. This first level forms a potential generation, because although it creates *a priori* the conditions of participation in shared events and experiences, this is not sufficient to guarantee the existence of a generation in the sociological sense. To form a “generation as actuality,” which corresponds to an effective generation, linking processes need to occur, such as “participation in the common destiny of this historical and social unit” and, most importantly, the “consciousness” of shared life prospects. These elements are supported by a phenomenon of “stratification of experience,” which differentiates reception of the same experience according to age, and that can lead to the “great similarity in the data making up the consciousness of its members” (Mannheim [1928] 1952: 304) within a generational unit. This process is based on what Mannheim considered to be the critical role played by the first impressions and experiences of youth in the formation of consciousness, both individual and collective. According to Mannheim, the “consciousness” of a generation is thus forged very early, from the experiences of young people, and is accentuated in times of social instability or social change. This is what helps the emergence of generational movements, ensuring the social and cultural change necessary for the renewal of society. In the leading role given by Mannheim to “stratification of experience” based on the period of youth, we find some foundations for those theses that put forward the idea of a “scarring effect” at the entrance into adulthood that has become central to the generational inequality approach.

Adolescent counter-values and youth social movements

Without totally abandoning the question of “what makes a generation,” the sociology of generations of the 1950s and 1960s was more explicitly restructured around issues of values, conflict and social protest. This revival was not unrelated to the many youth social movements that characterised these decades, and their wider international resonance marked the resurgence of the “problem of generations” (Falargau 1990).

Generation was then treated as primarily an age group and in terms of the construction of an internationalised and autonomous “youth culture.” This is shown by the large number of studies during this period on the birth of adolescent culture, on deviance or the construction of “youth groups.” They led to the problem of the

integration of these numerous and educated age classes, considered as a “generation” in the sense of a social and political actor: it is this perspective that underlies for example the book *From Generation to Generation* that appeared in 1956, in which the generational term is used by Samuel Eisenstadt to offer what is in effect a comparative analysis of social youth movements depending on the type of societies and forms of social integration they propose. In 1969, the year after the multiple youth movements of 1968 and their international echoes, Margaret Mead described the emergence of a “generation gap” which she says had widened in the post-war decades. She pointed to a process of reversal in the process of transmission between parents and children during the second half of the twentieth century from one that had initially been downwards, towards one that had become primarily upwards (Mead [1969] 1971).

“These children are going to be getting themselves heard, not just about their needs, but soon it will be about their ideas and their actions.” (Sauvy 1959: 250). When the French sociologist and demographer Alfred Sauvy announced “The Rise of Youth” in 1959, he relayed similar questions about the new values held by these large age groups and their potential for generational rupture (Sirinelli 2003; Bantigny 2007). The generational problem of “youth revolt” found strong echoes within French sociology. The same perspective on potential conflict is present in Edgar Morin’s 1967 monograph on Plouzévet which analyses the “latent energy” of a teenage dispute with the adult generation. In his chapter “Young and old,” he reveals the existence of an “adolescent society” marked by autonomous values, the development of its own activities, games and codes, and carried by a rising generation.

Rising aspirations: Towards generational frustration?

In the late 1960s the main questions moved on to the social effects of the rising aspirations that were being driven by the democratisation of education. The emphasis was on the aspirations of newly educated generations, and their possible future social frustration. The image of a generation of young people with educational qualifications, who were disappointed or “disenchanted” in the words of Pierre Bourdieu (1978) then emerged, an image which is now a cornerstone of the approach in terms of generational inequality. In his book *The Disillusionment of Progress (Les désillusions du progrès)*, Raymond Aron evokes the possible dissemination of a feeling of downgrading within these newly educated generations: “These graduates (*diplômés*) will tomorrow hold jobs they would deem unworthy of them today.” (Aron 1969: 146). He sees this as one of the tensions of the “dialectic of socialisation” and raises the question of the future allocation of social positions. A possible mismatch between educational investment and social perspectives is the bearer, according to him, of a destabilising force for the social order in the younger generation: “The still unexplored relationship between the qualifications given to the students and the jobs they are to perform involves the stability and the organisation of society as a whole.” (*ibid.*). Even though these are forecasts made in a context of growth, one can see the beginnings of a broader analysis of the emergence of a “generation syndrome.” Generation remained at that point, as it had been throughout the twentieth century, something primarily approached through the experience of youth.

Generational inequality and the “lost generation”

The great turnaround of the 1970s would contribute to changing the approach towards this potential generational frustration, and lead the sociology of generations from a paradigm of sociocultural conflict to one of socio-economic inequalities between generations.

The continuing deterioration of youth employment

By the mid-1970s, the issue of integration of young people into the labour market was emerging as a major concern. The continuous and rapid rise in unemployment that accompanied the end of the period of strong growth in the post-war boom weakened the transition between the end of formal education and employment. From this point of view, publications of official statistics illustrate the growing awareness of the difficulties faced by young people. Established in 1973, the “training and employment bulletins” of INSEE had as their first objective that of filling in the gaps in forecasting training needs and thus to consider the renewal of occupations. In fact, the results of this initial assessment, published in 1976 but concerned with young people leaving education in 1973, did not identify unemployed youth as a separate category. There were too few of them, so they were grouped with those not in active employment. Four years later in 1977, the second bulletin instead identified unemployment as a major risk faced by 17% of young men and 24% of young women. The training and employment bulletins then saw their goal transformed: it was henceforth to study the employment of young people (Join-Lambert 1994). From that point the articles published from INSEE data can be summarised quite simply: the situation of young people on the edge of the labour market was deteriorating continuously. In the special issue of the journal *Économie et Statistique* in 1981 entitled “The Entry of Young People into Working Life,” Joëlle Affichard thus highlighted the tripling of the share of the unemployed among individuals out of initial training for less than a year between 1973 and 1979, when 33% of the young people concerned were deprived of employment. Seven years later, in the introduction to an issue on a new analysis of this “entry of young people into the workforce,” Olivier Marchand subtitled his introduction to the journal with a lapidary “later, harder”: “because of the crisis, intermediate situations [between school and the world of work] multiply and extend just like periods of unemployment” (Marchand 1988: 23). Finally, nine years later, in 1997, an article in the same issue of the journal devoted to “youth trajectories” was entitled “Starting Working Life in the Mid-1990s: A Deteriorating Situation” (Ponthieux 1997). This indicates how the two decades following the oil shocks of the 1970s were marked by a continued deterioration in the lives of young people. Indeed, it was not just unemployment that had come to affect the beginning of the working careers of young people, but more generally the casualisation of employment and the labour contract. By the mid-1990s, 20% of young people were in temporary employment. Moreover, young people were increasingly trapped in the part-time jobs they faced, with half of the young people concerned then expressing their wish to work more (Meron and Minni 1995).

In addition to these studies published within the area of official statistics, the difficulties related to youth employment were also the source of many monographic and

ethnographic works. In a context where the increasingly complicated process of entry for young people to the labour market was lengthening the period of youth itself (Galland 1984), some research dealing with the most disadvantaged groups of young people from the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s describe a “youth without a future” facing failure at school and job insecurity (Pialoux 1979; Lagrée and Lew Fai 1989). More generally in this context, it was mainly young “people from the suburbs,” “housing estates” or “working class neighbourhoods” that were placed at the centre of attention, in order to portray the tough conditions experienced by young people (Dubet 1987) facing social exclusion in “exiled neighbourhoods” (Dubet and Lapeyronnie 1992). Unemployment and job insecurity played a major role in the experience of young people locked for example into an “interim status” (Beaud 1993). The rise of targeted measures to support these young people in casual employment would emerge in parallel with the issue of “insertion in the labour market” and give rise to longitudinal studies based on the life histories of this “other youth” (Dubar 1987; Demazière and Dubar 1997) and the production of this category by institutions (Nicole-Drancourt and Roulleau-Berger 1995).

Unequal generations

While the increasing difficulties faced by young people from the standpoint of their employability and social integration were being measured, described and analysed in the late 1970s, it was not until the mid-1990s that the topic of inequality between generations actually emerged. As the period of “crisis” begun during the 1970s was prolonged, the disadvantage of younger generations compared to the cohorts of first-born baby boomers began to appear ever more forcefully. For quantitative sociology, this emergence was reflected by the need to try to distinguish what was an age effect from a generation effect. It was thus a matter of how to compare the fate of successive cohorts of equivalent age to try to bring to light the dynamic involved in the succession of generations.

It was more precisely pay which was the first dimension analysed by sociologists and statisticians. From 1988, Guillotin studied the career pay of successive cohorts and showed that beyond cyclical fluctuations or those by socio-economic category, there remains “a specific generation effect belonging to pay” favourable to “the generations that entered the market in the immediate post-war period and continuing to the beginning of the sixties,” who were “favoured in comparison with previous and subsequent generations” (Guillotin 1988: 13). In the mid-1990s, other analyses confirmed this conclusion. Although the standard of living of French households grew by 60% between 1970 and 1990, not all cohorts have benefited from the increase in the same proportions (Legris and Lollivier 1996). All cohorts born until the early 1950s saw a general increase in their standard of living, but for those who have sought entry to the labour market since the early 1980s, this progressive movement seems to have stopped as the youth of the 1980s do not have a higher standard of living than their parents twenty years earlier. More importantly, for the generations born after 1950, poverty has increased. This was when the issue of the *ascenseur social* (upward social mobility) appeared and it began to be questioned whether this was rising as fast as it had done previously. Despite using other data, Baudelot and Gollac found similar results. Measuring profound changes in the relationship between age and the level of pay since the 1960s, they highlighted

a widening gap between age groups, at the expense of the youngest groups and to the benefit of older employees. Thus, “there was a difference of nearly 50% in 1993 between the remuneration of those in their thirties and those of the highest-paid age group while the difference had been more than two times lower in 1970” (Baudelot and Gollac 1997: 17). This age effect is accompanied by a generation effect, linked to the stagnation and then to the decline in starting pay on the one hand and then to a slower increase in pay over the course of careers on the other. In the long term, wage and salary inequality between cohorts is structured as follows: average wages and salaries increase between cohorts born in the 1910s and those born in the mid-1940s, then decrease for those born in the 1950s and early 1960s. The negative trend continues for more recent cohorts: among women born in 1956 and those born in 1976, the average annual salary reduces by 7% and by 4% for men (Koubi 2003a).

Beyond pay or income inequality, inequality of access to the most privileged social positions constitutes a second field of investigation for sociological analysis. These two dimensions are obviously linked. Thus Baudelot and Gollac stress that during the period 1975-95, “the expansion in the number of managers has mainly benefited the higher age groups and positions of authority, which we know lead to the fact that, all things being equal, substantial salary rises are increasingly concentrated in the older age groups” (Baudelot and Gollac 1997: 19). Measuring the proportion of managers and intermediate occupations in successive cohorts, Chauvel shows that it does not increase among 30-35 year olds between 1980 and 2000, although it increased significantly among the oldest, so that “essentially the expansion of managers is being increased [nowadays] by the dynamics of those in their fifties.” Compared to the cohorts born between 1945 and 1950, “who remained located throughout their career on the crest of a rising wave of managers who fell by the wayside in favour of their younger colleagues,” the cohorts born twenty years later would experience a much less enviable fate (Chauvel 2002: 40-1). This finding is all the more worrying in that it is also the rate of access to managerial employment that is modified. If the cohorts born in the 1940s were in a significant proportion given access to these jobs by seniority, until relatively late in their career, this is not the case for cohorts born in the early 1960s for which access to managerial jobs is mostly before the age of forty, indicating that the qualifications obtained at the end of formal education are becoming increasingly central in access to better jobs, which effectively limits the occupational mobility of the most recent cohorts (Koubi 2003b). Finally, since access to managerial employment and more generally to posts located towards the top of the social structure has slowed down for cohorts born in the early 1960s, it is not surprising to observe a degradation in the social mobility prospects of the latter. Compared to their counterparts born immediately after the end of World War II, the children of fathers with managerial or intermediate occupations often become employees or manual workers, while working-class children have less frequent access to managerial jobs (Peugny 2007).

Rigorous measurement work done over the years leads to results that leave little room for doubt: individuals born fifteen years after the first-born baby boomers are facing a sharply deteriorating economic situation: with unemployment, casualisation of the employment contract, salaries and wages on a downward trend, more difficult access to employment at the top of the social structure, all weighing on the career development of recent cohorts. These phenomena observed in the economic

and social field thus shape the contours of the shared experience of individuals and make them into a “generation” in itself, and not just a juxtaposition of “cohorts” composed of individuals who have only the fact of being born in the same year or the same period in common. It is this thesis that Chauvel defends in a study that marks the end of the 1990s and is a major source for the analysis of inequality between generations. What unites individuals born in the 1960s is the shared risk of being a victim of the breaking of the “law of generational progress”: it is the first time in peacetime that a generation has experienced a worsening of its standard of living compared to the one before (Chauvel [1998] 2010). This particular experience structures the “generation location” as described by Mannheim ([1928] 2011), the latter based on a three-way dynamic that involves “the economic decline of youth,” a deterioration in the outlook for social mobility and the symbolic and political exclusion of young people (Chauvel 2002: 38). This third dimension is very central as it tilts the analysis from a simple description of inequality in the economic field towards a questioning of the balance between generations.

A “lost generation”?

Indeed, pay and nature of occupation are only indicators of the social status of individuals and cohorts. The denunciation of the fate of more recent cohorts goes further than this: some work questions the hold of older cohorts over positions of power. Although Baudelot and Establet concede that “the exercise of power and authority always goes with age,” they state that “the age pyramid coincides today more than ever with a status pyramid.” Because now, “the older age groups tend to monopolise positions of power and wealth” from which young people are excluded, they evoke the advent of a “gerontocracy” threatening the stability of society (Baudelot and Establet 2000: 61). Among these power functions is the exercise of an electoral mandate. Taking the example of French deputies, Chauvel highlights the severe decline of those in their thirties within the National Assembly: while the latter contained one deputy under 40 for one aged 60 or more in 1981, the ratio was 1 to 9 by the 2007 elections (Chauvel 2007). The marked under-representation of younger generations amongst elected representatives is thus a symbol of the place that an ageing French society refuses to concede to its youth. Individuals born in the 1940s were young in the 1960s and 1970s and played a central role in the “middling” of French society described by certain studies. So when Mendras (1988) referred to the emergence of a “vast central constellation,” he particularly stressed the importance within it of the “innovative cores” made up of the new employees of educational, cultural or medical-social sectors, whose number increased very rapidly in this period of expansion in the service sector of the economy. If these new jobs are so important it is because their holders embrace values which would gradually spread throughout society, “more focused on the concepts of the freedom and fulfillment of the individual” and characteristic of a booming “cultural liberalism” (Schweisguth and Grunberg 1983). However, these newly emergent jobs were mostly occupied by young people who thus played a central role in the process of social and political change. Bidou (1984) showed that these “new salaried middle classes” occupied the suburban areas and quickly took over municipal power within them. Again, if these cohorts born in the 1940s constitute a generation, it is not only because they joined the labour market in a context of strong growth and full employment, but also because they occupy

a central place in society. In the same way, the margins of society to which the youngest cohorts are confined feed into the shared experience of the younger generation. Ultimately, the generations born since 1960 will face a double jeopardy, confronted on one side by a growing insecurity in the economic domain, and on the other side by being kept away from positions of power and the levers of social change. These two facts are at the origin of the idea of a “lost generation” which has had great success in public debate. It is important to note here that questions about the fate of younger generations are also emerging in other countries. In the United States a similar generational dynamic has been highlighted by sociologists. Faced with the same casualisation of work in the economic field, the cohorts born in the 1960s have thus followed very different “paths” from those of their parents (Bernhardt *et al.* 2001) and have seen the door close on the “American dream” that in reality only concerned the generation born immediately after the war (Newman 1993). Moreover, the increasing delay in gaining access to autonomy for young people (especially their return to the parental home) is observed in societies as different as the United States, Japan, Italy and Spain (Newman 2012). The specificity of the French approach perhaps lies in a greater propensity to create competition between social inequality and generational inequality, sometimes by describing generations as conflicting social groups. In American sociology, the introduction of a third variable complicates the frame of interpretation, much more frequently than it does in France: the consideration of inequality based on ethnicity—between whites and blacks—highlights divisions which occur within generations (Avery and Rendall 2002). The fact remains that sometimes heated debates exist within the English-language literature, as in the 1990s in *The British Journal of Sociology* with two competing approaches, one being the inevitable conflict between generations (for access to the jobs, power or welfare resources monopolised by baby boomers) the motor that drives the process of social stratification (Turner 1998), the other preferring to emphasise the existence of strong inter-generational bonds to compensate for these inequalities (Irwin 1996, 1998).

Towards new research approaches

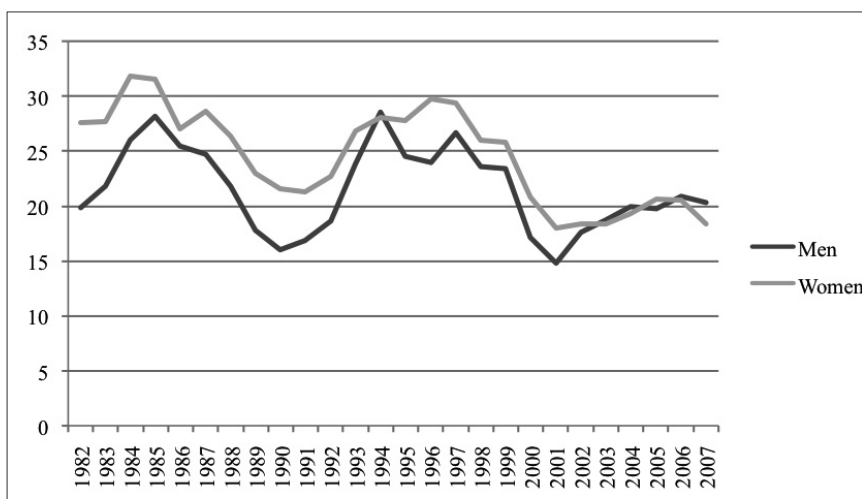
Many empirical studies undertaken in the 1990s questioned different dimensions of social stratification. Whether they were measuring exposure to unemployment, casualised employment, salaries and wages, access to better jobs or positions of power, all concluded that there was a sometimes significant level of inequality between generations, to the detriment of the generations born in the 1960s compared to those born in the 1940s. The finding is important and provides a fruitful interpretive grid for reading the dynamics of French society. Nearly two decades after this pioneering work, it still seems necessary to reflect on the way in which the question of inequality between generations should be posed and thus to make a critical review of the concepts and conclusions of this “first generation” of research.

Conceptualising several generations

Firstly, the work done up to the early 2000s questions the situation of cohorts who were born in the 1960s, and are now mainly in their forties. Thus the data do

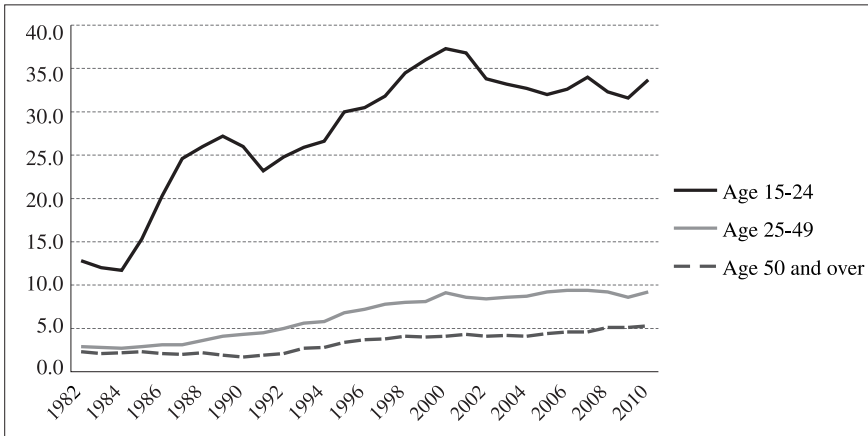
not cover the most recent cohorts born since the late 1960s. The first challenge is thus a challenge to refresh data and results. The question arises as to the possible continuation of generational dynamics: will the tendency to reduced salaries and wages at the same age and the scarcity of access to employment in the top of the social structure continue, or has there been some catching up? More generally, the coming-of-age of more recent cohorts should lead to a recognition of the limits of a debate that compares only two generations. In addition, “the advent of mass unemployment concentrated on young people” which Chauvel sees as the founding event of the “generation location” (2002: 38) of cohorts born in the 1960s obviously continues today. What can we say about the contours of a “generation” that covers both young people born in the 1980s and also those close to their fifties, born in the early 1960s?

FIGURE 1. – *Unemployment rate 1 to 4 years after end of schooling*



Source: “Emploi” Surveys 1983-2010 (INSEE).

Those cohorts seeking entry to the labour market in the early 1980s already faced a high unemployment rate for young workers (Figure 1). Between the early 1980s and early 2010s, the unemployment rate for those who had left school between one and four years previously was certainly sensitive to the economic situation (it fell in the late 1980s and late 1990s during brief periods of growth), but it remained above 15% throughout the period. Looking at this at a family level, young people born in the 1980s faced a very poor situation, but one no worse than that facing their parents born in the 1960s and making up the cohorts coming on to the labour market in the early 1980s. However, since the early 1980s, casualised youth employment has steadily increased, the share of such jobs (*CDD [contrats de travail à durée déterminée—fixed-term contracts]*), temporary work, state-aided contracts) having almost tripled in a quarter century (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. – *Proportion of casual employment according to age*

Source: “Emploi” Surveys 1983-2010 (INSEE).

Nevertheless, from the point of view of the state of the labour market, the most recent cohorts seem to constitute the second generation of the economic crisis. Thus, as long as economic difficulties persist, it seems that the perspective on inequalities between generations must be corrected. It is certainly possible to continue to compare the fate of the cohorts succeeding those born in the 1940s, but as time passes, the important fact is that all cohorts who reached adulthood since the early 1980s face a sharply worsened situation. Therefore, the generation of people born in the 1940s appears to be “exceptional” in the statistical sense of the term, having benefited from both the first educational explosion (Thélot and Vallet 2000) and the mass distribution of middle and upper earners that accompanied the post-war boom period.

Widening the analytic prism to cover recent cohorts seems even more fruitful as the debate about inequality between generations has spilled over from the academic field and drifted, in the context of public debate, to the staging of an artificial opposition between two generations, and more generally to the indictment of the first born baby boomers, accused of being responsible for some of the difficulties of the cohorts born after them. The theme of a generation—the baby boomers—which lived “beyond its means” and monopolised positions of power is a very active one in the debates that regularly animate the French media. Such an opposition constructed between two generations, of which one is a victim of abuse by the other, seems excessive especially because it leads to artificially unifying generations and erasing other affiliations of the individuals who compose them, and ultimately to simplifying and caricaturing social reality. In fact, although we referred earlier to a large number of areas where on average the cohorts born in the 1940s experienced more favourable conditions than the cohorts born from the early 1960s, these cohorts and generations are very heterogeneous. In the same way that the statistician cannot be content simply with measures of central tendency to describe a distribution and must also measure dispersion parameters, the sociologist must

pay attention to the inequality that persists or increases within generations. Thus, if the consideration of inter-generational inequality has advanced the analysis of the process of social stratification, it must not obscure the study of intra-generational inequality.

Considering intragenerational and inter-generational inequalities together

The divisions that criss-cross youth are multiple (social origin, ethnicity, status, gender, territory), but in a society in which educational qualifications have a very strong hold on the entire life cycle (Couppé and Mansuy 2004; Duru-Bellat 2006; Dubet, Duru-Bellat and Véréout 2010), the main divide is the one that runs between those with educational qualifications and others (Cahuc *et al.* 2011). The former may experience real difficulties in entering the labour market, especially for a first job at the appropriate level for their qualification (Giret, Nauze-Fichet and Tomasini 2006), but a few years later, they will also be most frequently those that occupy a stable job more in line with their qualifications. Conversely, young people who leave school without qualifications (between 15 % and 20% of the most recent age classes) are facing mass unemployment (over 40% among those who left secondary education without the *baccalauréat* since the financial crisis of 2008) and more generally seem to alternate between casual jobs and periods of unemployment according to the vagaries of the economy, mainly because of the weakness of continuing education in France, which means that those with qualifications gained from secondary education continue to have better chances of finding a secure job (Dupray and Recotillet 2009).

More than ever before, an educational qualification has become a central weapon for dealing with a difficult economic situation (Maurin 2007; Poullaouec 2010). Since the 1950s, mass education and increasing enrolment rates at all ages have transformed French society. In 1962, only 55% of children entered *sixième* (first year of secondary education), and the proportion was less than 40% for children of manual workers (Girard, Bastide and Pourchet 1963). The application of the Berthoin law passed in 1959 that extended compulsory education until the age of sixteen opened up the first cycle of secondary education for children of the working classes from the late 1960s, and then the goal of bringing 80% of an age cohort up to the *baccalauréat* level set in the early 1980s opened up the *lycée* to them. Between 1960 and 2010, the number of secondary school students increased sevenfold, going from 300,000 to more than 2.3 million, of whom 11% have a manual worker father and 12% a clerical employee father. *Mass education* is undeniable, even if one should not exaggerate its significance.¹ Yet a number of recent studies suggest that we should not overestimate the scope of the educational *democratisation* movement induced by this increase in enrolment. Although working-class children have benefited from a significant increase in their average duration of schooling, this has also been the case for children from more

1. Thus, amongst young people who are children of manual workers born between 1983 et 1987, only 49% have a *baccalauréat*.

favoured backgrounds. Moreover, the growing streaming of different levels of the education system results in a “segregative democratisation” (Merle 2000; Duru-Bellat and Kieffer 2008). Thus, if we take into account the different streams of the *baccalauréat*, access to it has not been democratized (Ichou and Vallet 2011), and in higher education the social separation between the variety of subject specializations is even more marked than between those of the *baccalauréat* (Sautory 2007).

Furthermore, it is possible to show that the importance of social origin in the probability of graduating from extended higher education has tended to increase over the past two decades (Peugny 2013). The example of competition for qualifications emphasises how generations remain riven by deep social inequalities.² The need to consider inter- and intra-generational inequalities together is the first challenge in a renewal of the sociology of inequality between generations.

Connecting “social inequality” and “family solidarity” between generations

Even though it is in many respects a privileged observatory of these inequalities—inter-generational and intra-generational—and their connection, the family remains relatively ignored in the sociology of inequality between generations. This focuses on the comparison of birth cohorts based on primarily socioeconomic indicators, and the structuring of social relations between generations within a society. The individual and family experiences of these inequalities remain poorly integrated into the analysis, as does the role of intra-family aid and transfers on their structure. However, the recent deterioration in the economic outlook is already reflected in many Western European societies, by increasing family transfers or residential cohabitation, especially from parents to young adults (Eurostat 2013). This invites the sociology of inequality between generations to take better account of the evolution of these aids and their differentiated effects on social pathways.

As early as 1920, François Mentré had insisted on making a distinction between “social generations” and “family generations.” Almost a century later, it is clear that this divide has become a profoundly structuring one within the sociology of generations, which has problems in connecting these two scales of generational analysis. Although approaches in terms of social generations lay stress on differences in their perspectives and the inequality that they involve, those focused on family generations put the attention on the parent-child relationship, emphasising instead the intensity of the financial transfers, material aid and services flowing between generations at the family level. They then include not just two but several generational levels supposed to embody the different generations in contemporary families—from grandparents to the youngest children—and try to identify flows and exchanges between them. These flows, ascending or descending, are grouped under the term “family solidarity”, and their analysis is deliberately defined as within the perspective of a “rediscovery” of family support within what are now

2. This increase in inequality within generations can be observed in other areas, such as access to home ownership. Since the early 1990s, the ownership gap between managers and intermediate professions on the one hand, and the workers and employees on the other increased by 7 points among 25–34 year olds and 10 points among 35–44 year olds (Clerc *et al.* 2011).

conceived of as “multigenerational” societies, contradicting those theories formulated in the 1960s and 1970s which announced the death of the economic function of the family, or its narrowing into a nuclear unit (Attias-Donfut 1995).

“Social inequality” versus “family solidarity” between generations: these two perspectives have mainly been built up as opposites, two contrasting visions of the relationship between generations and their development. When confronted by the thesis of the accentuation of “inequality” between the baby boomers cohorts and their younger counterparts, this approach based on family “solidarity” passing down through the generations emphasises the role of *compensation* within the family. Some comparative work on flows and transmission between generations in Europe embodies this perspective, and is titled *The Myth of Generational Conflict* (Arber and Attias-Donfut 2000). Conversely, the sociology of inequality between generations has instead laid stress on their role in *increasing* inequality between generations: these same intra-family flows were here interpreted as aggravating factors for both interand intra-generational inequality. At the inter-generational level, prolonged maintenance of financial transfers and cohabitation between parents and young adults have become symptoms of a “family dependency” imposed by economic difficulties, and thus seen as an additional vector of the dysfunctionality of French society. The profound inequality of these opportunities for family support has been highlighted at the intra-generational level, leading to the increasing influence of the family of origin on social mobility within the younger generations, and to the “return of the inheritors” (Chauvel 2006; Baudelot 2011).

But beyond these interpretative divisions, several surveys on the evolution of these forms of family support within French society reveal their complex and nuanced effects on inequality, according to social group, as well as other variables such as age, gender, occupational status or even geographical location (Lafferrère 2005; Déchaux and Herpin 2006). In addition, several comparative studies have recently highlighted the profound interweaving of social and family relationships between generations at the societal level. The illuminating triptych “liberty, equality, fraternity” developed by André Masson makes it possible for example to distinguish between different modes of imbrication of these cross-links: liberal thinking promotes—in the name of individual freedom—both relatively low family *solidarity* and strong social *inequality* between generations, whose fate is rendered sensitive to changes in economic conditions, whilst “social-democratic” thought advocates the protection of social *equality* between the ages and generations, combined with a strong limitation of family *solidarity*; and finally “multi-solidarity” thought promotes the value of “*brotherhood*” between generations and tends to favour a double interdependence between young and old—ascending to the social level through the pension system, descending to the family level through family support—and, de facto, to promote both *inequality* and *solidarity* between generations, as in France (Masson 2009). Finally, several sociological studies on the modes of entry into adulthood show that the same “family solidarity” may refer to particularly contrasting individual and generational experiences: their individual and family “prices” relate in particular to the world of norms that make them more or less legitimate and acceptable (Van de Velde 2008).

However, the economic “crisis” stimulates both the scientific and social challenges of a more detailed interpretation of these interrelationships, and raises the

question of the potential consequences of a “return” of the family to the protection of younger generations. Such a familialisation of individual pathways is likely to induce a reorganisation of social inequalities between generations, but also within younger generations themselves. While the Nordic countries are still relatively less affected, the rise of these inter-generational “solidarities” is particularly noticeable in the liberal and pro-family social models, in which the cost of education and housing has increased rapidly. American and British sociologists thus “rediscovered” the existence of these forms of family involvement, and discuss for example the emergence of “boomerang kids” returning to the parental home (Newman 2012). These developments invite a more dynamic interpretation of the combined effects of rising inequality and inter-generational solidarity on the relationships between the age groups.

Experience of generational consciousness: A return to the “problem of generations”

In the same context, the formulation of a broader theory of inter-generational inequalities invites us to go beyond their statistical objectification alone and to refine the relationship between the *experience* of inequality, generational *consciousness* and feelings of *justice*—or of injustice—between generations. The aim would be to extend Mannheim’s problematic of “making a generation,” by putting the supposed transition from sharing a common destiny to the emergence of a consciousness of social and political generation to the test.

If such a junction could not hitherto be applied at the empirical level, it has now become possible to identify how and under what conditions and for whom the very experience of “inequality” is likely to structure a sense of—even infra-generational— belonging to common political attitudes or encourage the formation of a generation as a political actor, by using large-scale qualitative or statistical data. Some studies have questioned how links can be forged between generational downgrading and political attitudes: they thus highlight a possible movement of values to the extreme right among certain sections of the “underclass” and stress at the same time, by using qualitative interviews, the emergence of a specific “lost generation” rhetoric among young adults (Peugny 2009). More recently, an extensive survey on the perceptions of inequality highlights that a divide between “young and old” is seen as a structural factor within French society, and that it is the thirty-year-olds on the one hand, and those from the “peripheries” on the other who are most sensitive to it (Forsé, Galland, Guibet-Lafaye and Parodi 2013).

The recent emergence in social discourse of the topic of “generational injustice” calls for further analysis of the dynamic structure of this consciousness and its many political manifestations. From when, and for whom has the experience of “inequalities” changed to being an explicit sense of “injustice,” or even a defence of the generations thus identified? In addition to philosophical work on “inter-generational equity,” the sociology of inter-generational inequality would gain by identifying the carriers and points of “crystallisation” of the experience of generational inequality among young and old, and by empirically identifying inequalities deemed “excessive” and therefore perceived as generational “injustices” (Dubet 2006). Such a “grammar of inequality” would identify the issues on

which a generational rhetoric articulating the explicit consciousness of a common destiny is currently being constructed, but one that is also differentiated from that of other generations present in the social realm.

New analytical paths have begun to emerge in the light of some recent work, going beyond the “classical” and known indicators, and suggest how to move beyond the economic prism alone for understanding the crystallisation of generational inequality. It appears that, for example, a sense of inequality is now forming transnationally around the semantic triptych of “debt”—economic and symbolic—of “inheritance,” and “economic crisis.” “We will not pay your debt”: a generational “we” has thus emerged among young Spaniards—especially those in their thirties with educational qualifications—and Mediterranean youth more broadly, around the perceived injustice of a sudden change in the “rules of the game” (Van de Velde 2011), and it resonates with the widespread generational discourse among students in English-speaking societies which have recently increased the price of education, which focuses on denouncing the injustice of crisis management that results in the transfer of public debt into private student debt, as in the United Kingdom (Casta 2010; Charles, 2013). In a completely different field, the rhetoric of generational inequality in respect of the environment has formed around the issues of “debt” and the burden of a generational “legacy.” This denunciation of inequality between generations is part of a wider generational chain, including past, present, and also future generations: it is in this case not merely young adults who are seen as the most penalised but mainly those of future generations. There are other subjects that deserve to be explored—such as the spheres of work, housing, health, and the future—and all are challenges to the decompartmentalisation of this sociological field, but these two examples are enough to argue for both a temporal and spatial extension of the scales from which generations are formed, by examining on one hand their potential internationalization beyond the national framework, and by expanding on the other the generational chain to more generations.

Introduction to the articles

The new research areas mentioned above are ambitious ones. It is obviously not within the remit of this special issue to exhaust or even to initiate them all. However, the four papers proposed below introduce questions that may help to renew and rethink generational inequality.

Louis Chauvel’s paper brings two important elements to the debate on the nature and intensity of inequality in the economic domain. Firstly it updates the data. While the work done previously presented data that allowed comparison of cohorts born in the 1940s to those born in the early 1960s, the surveys used here extend the measurement to those born in the 1970s. More importantly Chauvel’s paper provides an initial response to a key issue in the debate about the nature of inequality between generations, that of a possible “scarring” effect. Indeed, whereas the work done up to the early 2000s highlighted the difficulties faced by the cohorts born in the 1960s, the latter were then still relatively young, or at least in the first part of their life cycle. This raises the question of the persistence of these inequalities: were these accumulated difficulties simply a passing event whose effects would

gradually be erased by a subsequent catching up process, or did they instead form a lasting scar, affecting the entire life course of cohorts? Based on a methodological advance that overcomes the limitations of APC (Age-PeriodCohort) models, the results presented by the author are in line with their being a real scarring effect: the intensity of standard of living inequality between generations does not seem to decrease over time. Finally, a comparison with the much more varied American situation stresses the role played by welfare regimes in the structure of inequality between generations.

By focusing her lens on the transfer of household wealth within families Sybille Gollac's paper embodies this new generation of research by a de-partitioning of methods and objects of investigation, and lifts the veil on issues concerning hitherto little known generational inequality. It illuminates a form of structural inequality that tends to escape macro-sociological analysis, namely one that persists even among siblings in the transmission of family wealth. This demonstration is based on several epistemological givens: a methodological corpus linking ethnographic observations and statistical data from the INSEE 2003-04 "Patrimoine" ("Household Wealth") survey; an extension of the coverage from two to three generations; a widened concept of household wealth so that far from being concerned here only with inheritance it is also opened up to include financial transfers, transmission of parental businesses or family housing, as well as to social status and educational qualifications. This makes it possible to explore the transmission of family wealth and social status as the point of intersection of interand intra-generational inequality and to understand the attribution rules between brothers and sisters, over several generations. The article shows the non-exclusive significance of a double order of rank and sex even among siblings, both between older and younger siblings, and also between men and women. Although elder siblings—especially men—are preferred over younger ones in the transmission of social status and family property, younger siblings should not be considered as systematic "losers" in these principles of transmission, as they benefit from financial transfers earlier in their lives.

As for the article by Vincent Tiberj, it underscores the contribution of cohort analysis when applied to political sociology. By using a long data-series (Eurobarometer surveys conducted between 1970 and 2009), it highlights the contribution of the cohort in the explanation of a number of processes running through voting behaviour in France. Two results are discussed at length. Firstly, while political science has long demonstrated the effect of age and socialisation in the construction of political attitudes, Tiberj shows that there are also "cohort effects" in the sense that some of them are characterized by specific behaviour. Thus, the cohorts born from the early 1960s are significantly more favourable to the left in politics than previous cohorts. Beyond the cyclical effects related to the events that shape political life, there is a real "ideological future" for each cohort, in the words of the author. The second result concerns the relationship more generally maintained in respect of politics and its development and its evolution. The advent of an "economic electorate," the rise of a distrust of politics, the emergence of "political" abstention on the part of individuals who are not without economic or cultural capital—all of these developments have been noted for some time by political scientists. Tiberj demonstrates that generational renewal plays a major role in the process of transition from "citizenship as a duty" to "citizenship as

a commitment.” Finally, this article suggests that if the increasing casualisation of rising generations results in them having their own particular experiences and political attitudes, then the emergence of a “committed” citizen of this sort is probably one of the salient features.

Finally, Annalisa Lendaro’s paper invites the reader to follow the occupational and social integration of two successive generations of immigrants, and thus illuminates the scope of the use of life histories in the analysis of generational inequality. Generational comparison is not based here on birth cohorts, but on two cohorts of working immigrants defined by the date of their migration experiences, occurring respectively in the 1980s and 2000s. This deliberate choice of periods makes it possible to focus the analysis on developments over two decades in the role of public policies and integration conditions affecting the lives of migrants to France. The six “selected” biographies are reconstructed in their temporality and their bifurcations, from their situation at arrival to potential stabilisation. The article thus highlights the relative tightening of the conditions surrounding the integration and stabilisation of migrants between the 1980s and the 2000s, through the cumulative effects of both integration and immigration policies. Between these two periods, immigration policies have increasingly controlled access to rights to the stabilisation of employment, even though occupational integration has become more discontinuous and reversible. The labour market has lost its original role in stabilising conditions for effective social integration. So what could be solely a “period effect” associated with changes in public and labour market policies, has also become a “generation effect,” as it appears that these criss-crossing developments have had a lasting impression on the course of collective life. The life histories make it possible to understand the profound impact of these changes in public policies and labour markets on individual and generational trajectories. They open up a dialogue between sociology of immigration and sociology of generations, and encourage a wider use of the demonstrative potential of comparative biographies in the analysis of generational inequality and social change.

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