SOSTRIS
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UNQUALIFIED YOUTH (CATEGORY IV):
the biographical experience of invisibility and identity conflicts

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1. Introduction: educational trajectories and exclusionary processes

We shall present a biographical analysis of the lives of six young people aged 23 and 24. The fact that all of them were born in 1974 or 1975 – quite fortuitously 1975 was the year of Franco's death which means we can regard our modest sample as the generation of the political transition from Franco's dictatorship to democracy. They are the so-called **'democracy babies'**, and therefore the recipients of all changes affecting political, ideological, economic and social life in Spain's transition towards a European democratic model. The results of this over twenty years of historical change must be carefully examined in terms of this generation, and must above all focus on education and employment.

These young people come from Catalan working-class backgrounds, and what they have in common is that they have abandoned their educational trajectory and are now either unemployed or are engaged in unskilled employment[1]. Mainstream research on these issues has focussed either on school failure *per se* or on youth integration into the labour market. Gradually, interest has shifted towards the relationship between education and employment, and a more recent focus for study has been the transition period as such, and its impact on social

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[1] These features define the fourth category of analysis within the Sostris project.

processes of exclusion[2]. At all events, our methodological approach has enabled us to reconstruct the social field in which to explore this category. The dynamic perspective of our biographical approach (which gives us the context) and the analysis (which provides us with us the core of the case) have caused us to see **the interplay between the school, the family and the neighbourhood as the main social field in which to locate this category.** Within this field, we shall now highlight some contextual and theoretical elements for a better understanding of the biographical trajectories of our interviewees.

The LGE (General Law of Education), which was passed in 1970 and therefore still during the Franco period, set out the general framework for education in Spain. This law established the age of 14 as the final compulsory year of education. Only fifteen years later, the 1990 Law raised this to 16. Since the adoption of the Basic Law in 1978, access to free State education has been democratised. It has been a time when the right has represented the interests of the Catholic sector, and the left has taken on board the demands of neighbourhood movements. There are two other important dates in the recent history of Spanish education: firstly 1983, when the institutional framework for compensatory education and special provisions for 'school failure' were introduced; secondly 1985, when a further General Law was passed: this laid down rights and channels of participation for the education community (e.g. family, teachers and students). The present law on education (LOGSE) dates from 1990; in addition to extending compulsory education to the age of 16, it introduced a Programme called 'Garantía Social' (Social Guarantee) which is intended to provide an opportunity for combining school failure with formal education.

The centralist model inherited from the Franco period has given way to a mixed system of management in which, between 1980 and 1983, seven Autonomous Communities including Catalonia have acquired full control over education. Each of these seven Autonomous Communities has jurisdiction to establish a language policy; in the case of Catalonia, the regional government has opted for Catalan as the compulsory language for all courses within compulsory education. The resulting educational system is therefore not only a process of decentralisation, but also one of deregulation.

In Catalonia, as elsewhere in Spain, there is a **dual system** (i.e. both private and State schooling) which some authors (Bonal, X., 1998) say has produced a structure of educational and social inequality[3]. According to mainstream research, **school success and failure** do not reflect private and State education respectively. However as our interviewees make clear, public perception reinforces the stereotype of private schooling providing 'quality' education. Recent studies show that school failure is mainly located in those schools – regardless of their status – on the periphery. This is confirmed by a trend to be found among parents in suburban areas who reject the peripheralisation of their children's education and send them to schools and

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[2] This is the research perspective used during the 1990s by the GRET (Education and Work Research Group) of the ICE (Educational Sciences Institute) at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

[3] In Catalonia, the State sector gives some support to private establishments if they fulfil certain pre-conditions; this has led to an increasingly extended model of partially-funded schooling, and therefore three types of school. However throughout this report, we shall refer to 'private schools' as those that are mainly financed by means other than State funding. Our use of the terms 'private school' and 'State school' is intended to avoid possible confusion with the term 'public school'. The following terminology used in describing the three main levels of education in Spain and Catalonia may also be useful: the EGB (General Basic Education) – compulsory education (6-16 years of age); Formación Profesional (Vocational Professional Training School) – technical training (16-21 years of age); and BUP and COU – pre-university education (16-18 years of age).

neighbourhoods closer to town and city centres. This allows us to introduce the hypothesis whereby a family's perception of education does not solely depend on the 'private-State' education binomy, but also on 'institution-periphery' binomy.

Recent research in Catalonia shows how compulsory education for all has not been able to integrate historically excluded groups. The persistence of a permanent hard-core of dropouts, or school failures, highlights the limitations of educational policies during the democratic period. Even though school failures fell during the 1980s, the rate has stabilised around 10-20 per cent for each generation during the 1990s. This process is called *stagnation* (Casal, J., García, M. and Planas, J., 1998*).* School failure is defined as an outcome of a wide range of conflictive situations that are not satisfactorily resolved by those concerned. The key point of this definition is the permanent deficit that creates a feeling of inadequacy in students. This perspective links the phenomenon of school failure to future chaotic and exclusionary biographical trajectories. The more reliant on credentials the educational system and society become, the more segregated school failures are (CIREM, 1994).

A recent study of a sample of 2651 students in 71 schools presents a typology of school failure and identifies two types. The first type is defined as those who internalise failure and consider it a personal matter; they are not seen as conflictive students and mainly come from working class and lower-class backgrounds. The second type consists of 'conflictive' students who reject the school system out of hand; they have a more inter-classist profile (CIREM, 1994). From a psychosocial perspective, the phenomenon of school failure prompts us to consider how the socialising process affects the biographical trajectories of young people. At this stage of life, both primary and secondary socialising processes are in operation: whereas the former is more closely linked to emotional bonds (*significant other*), the latter has to do with entering society (*generalised other*). For most young people, the transition from primary to secondary socialisation is not experienced traumatically, although for some this transition might turn into a *blockage* or *conversion* in which a radical re-socialisation process takes place.

By 'blockage' we mean a situation in which individuals find it very difficult to 'construct' or 're-construct' their biographical path. Many youngsters experience a blockage as a paralysis that derives from their failure to gain admission to the labour market and to associated social rights. However the concept of blockage goes beyond the sphere of work and emancipation, and it affects youngsters' understanding of other life dimensions such as family, friendship, community and politics. Our hypothesis of 'blockage' corresponds to what Estefanía (quoted in Póveda, M. and Santos, A., 1998) has conceptualised as 'implosion'. This refers to the individual and social experience of enclosure caused by a general environment of uncertainty and precariousness. This contrasts with the 'explosion' experienced by the previous generation that revolted against social inequalities.

In extreme cases, an experience of blockage may lead to a process of 'alternation' or 'conversion'; by conversion we mean the transformation of subjective reality in a radical way. A similar process to that of primary socialisation takes place, in the sense that the subject re-defines the emphasis of reality: on the one hand, the subject re-elaborates emotional links with socialising agents; on the other hand, he/she is forced to disintegrate his/her previous subjective reality (Berger, P. and Luckmann, T., 1988).

As we have seen, both biographical experiences (i.e. blockage and conversion) are closely related to the social construction of the concept of the 'transitional period'. To adults, the

transitional period to adulthood is defined as provisional. Erikson (1968) uses the term 'psychosocial moratorium' to describe the possibility of young people who exercise a 'postponement' in assuming adult roles; this phenomenon applies mostly to graduates. However those who, like most of our interviewees, have left the educational path as a result of school failure are expected to shorten the transitional period by entering the labour market. This prevents them from 'enjoying' the institutionalised moratorium period that graduates have. In short, the 'social agenda' ascribed to them is characterised by a biographical transition from youth to adulthood via entrance to the labour market. However the precarious labour market conditions faced by young people in Spain makes this transition very complex for those involved. In other words, there is a contradiction between the social expectations and opportunities regarding adulthood.

Most (but not all) unskilled young people in Spain are affected by unemployment, temporary contracts and what is generally an extremely deregulated market. As recent studies have shown, 40 per cent of the active population under the age of 25 are unemployed, and 75 per cent of employed people under this age have temporary working contracts with low pay and poor working conditions (Póveda, M. and Santos, A., 1998). Among those aged 20-24 (i.e. the age group of our interviewees), 87 per cent live with their parents (family dependency) even if they have a job. According to interviewees in this study, 'finding a job' is the issue they value most highly after family and friendship. 97 per cent of interviewees rely on the family more than anything else (El País, 6 November 1998).

When discussing generational relationships within the family, some authors (Flaquer, L., 1998) talk of a 'parental permissiveness' whereby the parents' generation might tolerate delayed emancipation by their children, and 'only' derive emotional/moral compensation from it. However we need to examine this explanation more closely, and ask ourselves whether a more complex 'family agreement' between both generations is taking place.

At all events, we will have to take account of the influence played not only by parents as the main socialising agents for this category, but also by other family members, teachers and peers in the neighbourhood. Given the young age of our interviewees, their emotional links with these agents might carry significant weight when compared with other factors.

2. Main Case Study: Julio

2.1. Biographical data analysis

Biographical details

1960s   Some members of Julio's Andalusian family migrate to different countries. Julio's parents and other family members migrate to Catalonia.

1973   Julio's elder brother is born.

1975   Julio is born in the Valle d'Hebron Hospital, Barcelona, in a suburban neighbourhood of Barcelona.

1980   A younger sister is born. At the age of twelve she becomes diabetic.

First year of compulsory education in a private school.

1981   Julio's father, a bricklayer by trade, loses his job as a result of illness.
Julio moves to a state school.

1989/90   Julio starts taking drugs.
Finishes compulsory schooling and starts 1ºBUP .

1991   Meets girlfriend.
Repeats one school year because of bad marks.
Starts working in a clerical job (through father).

1992   Drops out of school; starts Training School at nights.
Increases drugs consumption with peers in the neighbourhood.

1993   Leaves Training School.
Starts working in a fast-food restaurant at nights and weekends.

1994   Two-week journey to Taizé without drugs.

1995   Purchases a motorcycle.

1997   Starts working as a bricklayer's assistant (with father).
Registers as a military service objector.

Family background: working class and migration experiences

Julio was born in Barcelona in 1976, the second of three siblings. He lives with his parents and sister in a working-class suburb on the outskirts of the city. His family on both sides are immigrants from a small village in Andalusia. Most members of his family have emigrated and are now scattered all over the world (e.g. in Belgium, Brazil and Catalonia). One of his grandparents fought during the Civil War. All of his grandparents are dead, except for one grandmother on his mother's side who lives with his aunt. His father has six sisters and one deceased twin; like his own father, he is a bricklayer by trade. Julio's mother has been a housewife throughout her married life.

The background of a 'typical migrant trajectory of Andalusians' who have settled in Catalonia means we have to underline the impact of **migration** on Julio's family as a pattern of upward social mobility or a combative pattern in terms of economic improvement and/or aspirations for social integration. This was the pattern followed by economic migration flows in the 1960s during the second industrial re-launch in northern regions under Franco.

Both the **working-class belonging** and the **'family clan' pattern** in peripheral neighbourhoods resulting from migration reveal the importance of the extended family as a crucial strategy for survival and solidarity, especially if we bear in mind the context of the Civil War and the post-war period. Both of these factors play a part in Julio's family oral history through his grandfather and parents respectively. The interplay of all these background

elements have impacted on Julio's life in different ways. For example, he may have stuck close to the family and its working-class culture; this would have meant entering adult life by getting a job, but without necessarily completing his formal education, taking out a mortgage on a flat and marrying.

The experience of enclosure within family networks and ghettoisation in the neighbourhood domain may make him feel integrated in the sense that he identifies with the local community and feels protected by it. On the other hand, he may simply reject this cultural model without necessarily finding a substitute. There again, he might identify with an alternative cultural pattern represented by individualistic values coming from the more modern, urban context of Catalan culture; this would imply the destabilisation of family cohesion.

Childhood and adolescence: an uneven educational path and street life

In 1981, Julio's father fell ill and spent some time out of work following an operation. That year, Julio was taken out of the private primary school where he had gone until the age of six and was sent to a state school in the neighbourhood. He spent the rest of his compulsory school years (at that time up to the age of 14) at the same school. In late adolescence, he started taking (soft) drugs with schoolmates and spent most of his time on the streets with peers from the neighbourhood. During this time, his father returned to work as a bricklayer, and since 1987 he has had a stable contract. Julio had to repeat one school year (1ºBUP) as he had not passed any subjects. In 1991, Julio met his girlfriend at school. That year (he was by now 16 years of age), his father got him an unskilled office job, and Julio finally dropped out of school.

The fact that Julio went to a private Preliminary School might indicate how the migrant generation (born during the post-war period) see **private education** as a way of achieving upward social mobility and integrating their children. **State schooling**, especially in peripheral neighbourhoods, is perceived as a devalued institution where 'problem' children go. Working-class parents make enormous efforts to send their children to private schools; Julio's parents were no exception. In this context, it is very likely that Julio's father's unemployment was the main reason why Julio changed school. This event represented a change of social environment and learning standards, but it did not necessarily imply a turning point.

Julio started to get **low marks** and first experiment with **drugs** during his adolescence; this could be interpreted as a biographical rupture. For Julio, living in the environment of a peripheral neighbourhood marked by a substantial incidence of drug-dealing and conflictive relationships in the community, dropping out of school must have been the readiest option. However Julio's school failure is not preventing him from continuing his formal education and trying to pass his 1ºBUP. Julio is not therefore following the 'standard trajectory' of a school leaver or 'problem child'. It is an unusual trajectory for a 'bad student', and might make him look like an 'outsider' both at school and in the neighbourhood. We can hypothesise that Julio has got his own motivation, or else is under pressure to continue along a formal educational path. This may mean a 'loner' strategy as far as his peers are concerned, and involve distancing himself from the community. Meeting his girlfriend at school could be read as a supplementary motivating factor for not leaving once and for all when he had to repeat the school year in 1990.

Julio's father's intervention (i.e. getting his son a job) reproduces a very common pattern of parental generations from working-class backgrounds, that is to say expecting their children to

be successful at school, or expecting them to take any kind of job in the labour market. A moratorium period is neither expected nor accepted[4]. In the end, leaving school for Julio may represent abandonment of his educational trajectory and the beginning of the **market path**. The next question to ask is whether Julio thinks that this change of activity means entering adult life.

Youth: jobbing and drugs

In 1992, Julio started to attend evening classes at a Vocational Training School. At the time, he was 17; he left one year later. In 1993, he started work in a fast-food restaurant preparing hamburgers; he had no holiday entitlement. He stayed there for three years. He continued to take drugs with peers in the neighbourhood.

Although Julio left school, we observe that there is a pattern of his insisting on acquiring skills of some kind within the **formal educational system**, and more specifically, in a 'Vocational Training School'. The 'Vocational Training School' (Formación Profesional or FP) alternative is widely regarded as the only possible path for 'bad students' if they want to get a job. For both Julio and his family, the shift from BUP to FP necessarily implied a change in professional and social aspirations for the future. Although Julio's trajectory so far could be interpreted as an attempt to be integrated within mainstream expectations for the younger generation, leaving FP and his exploitation in the fast food enterprise opened up the possibility of him becoming trapped in the sphere of informal employment. Against the backdrop of the neighbourhood his drug addiction could be directed at a dynamic of **urban marginality**. By urban marginality we mean the reproductive logic that takes place in outlying neighbourhoods where those young people who cannot integrate at school or in the family create their own way of organising themselves as 'urban gangs' challenging the norms that rule mainstream society.

Today: searching for autonomy?

At the age of 19, acting on a proposal from his girlfriend, Julio left Spain for the first time and went to France (without drugs) to spend 17 days in a monastery with other young Christians from different countries. He bought a motorcycle. Five months ago, Julio started working with his father as a bricklayer's assistant, and since then has earned a steady wage. He has free weekends and some holidays during the summer. Julio's elder brother married last year and now has a baby; he works as a security guard at a hospital in Barcelona. His younger sister is the only member of the family to have completed formal education, and she now intends to start her university studies. She has suffered from diabetes since the age of twelve.

Julio's journey to Taizé might imply a need to escape or to **search for an alternative path**, thus arresting the spiral of marginality that characterises drugs. However during this period, Julio seems to have suffered from a lack of resources in finding this alternative path with his own means. It was his girlfriend who encouraged him to leave his social environment in order to know about other people who were also searching. We could hypothesise that Julio's

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[4] This contrasts with the experience of most unemployed graduates (category I), amongst whom a moratorium period is generally expected and even encouraged.

girlfriend might be a significant resource for Julio's future integration, especially as she comes from a different social and family environment with better living standards. Julio's experience in the Christian community at Taizé may indicate a religious escape from the world of drugs and marginality. Purchasing a motorcycle with the money he saved from his job in the fast food restaurant could represent a further step towards autonomy.

All these elements may lead us to consider the hypothesis that he was entering a context of stability and, by separating himself from his peers and neighbourhood, was possibly therefore changing direction towards a more **autonomous path**. In fact, Julio turned to his father for a job as a bricklayer's assistant only recently, thus following the **male family tradition.** This event reveals how parents act as a resource, and shows the kinds of commitment Julio is prepared to accept from his family. More specifically, working under the guidance of his father means he has to accept a set of duties and the role of son, and therefore negotiate his autonomy. As a consequence of this, Julio will probably have a less open route to emancipation. This seems to have been the option adopted by Julio's elder brother who has 'emancipated' in a traditional way – that is to say getting a job, buying a flat next to the parental home and getting married. By contrast, his younger sister may represent a different model of emancipation that takes the route of higher education, and is less linked to the family domain.

Generally speaking, we can see how Julio has undergone biographical experiences in the spheres of both formality and informality. Everything seems to indicate that the journey to Taizé was a turning point in Julio's life. In biographical terms, he seems to have chosen a more 'stable' and 'adult' path that has accorded with the expectations of his parents and of society in general. It could be an autonomous path leading to a process of empowerment and self-responsibility, but it could also be a risky strategy in terms of isolation or non-communication in respect of the micro-social world in which he has been socialised (i.e. if he does not find an adequate environment in which to develop his present role as adult). In this sense, the process of identification seems to constitute a key element of this interview in strategical terms. With whom and with what is he identifying? We shall now see how Julio presents himself in the interview.

2.2. Thematic field analysis

After the interviewer contextualised the research and made introductory remarks about how the exercise would proceed, Julio immediately argued that *normally there are no opportunities to talk like this*[5]. Julio's main narrative is short, and it is presented (in a report style) to the interviewer as a **standard life story** of a boy from El Cañón, the neighbourhood from which he comes and where he still lives. His narratives are structured as follows: he firstly introduces himself by reporting where he was born. This spatial reference includes the name of the hospital and a clarifying evaluation (*everybody in Barcelona is born there*), the name of the suburb and square where he comes from and where he still lives and, finally, the village where his parents come from in Andalusia. He continues his report by introducing what he considers to be a turning point in his life: *I started going to a private school, but my parents had to send me to a state school. From that moment onwards, my life started going downhill*. This is followed by a report on his unstable and precarious educational and professional trajectory (e.g. leaving school followed by a badly paid job) until he introduces his current employment which

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[5] Starting with this quotation, all sentences in italics are the interviewee's own words.

he evaluates as a *decent job.* Julio finishes his main narrative with the following statement: *If you want to work, you have to have connections. Studying, school curricula... the rest is all pointless.* And then: *Do you want me to explain anything else, about my friends, for instance?.*

We could interpret his self-presentation as a way of saying: 'My (standard) poor origins, that is, typical hospital to be born in, typical immigrant family from Andalusia, typical poor suburb, and above all, typically having gone to a State school, have obviously led to my failure at school and bad luck in getting jobs. I've got a good job now through the most common way of getting a reasonable job, namely, good connections.' In other words, the thematical field that flows from his main narration might be as follows: 'Going to the state school in El Cañón means that life is pre-ordained.' In other words, he sees himself as equal with his peers in the neighbourhood.

However if we compare the initial narrative with the rest of the interview, a much more complex picture emerges. Julio responds to the stimulus of the narrative questioning, and adopts a mainly narrative style in order to recreate the world in which he lives. As he states at the end of the main narration, Julio describes his friends and peers in the neighbourhood, and then refers to themes of his origins and family, his jobs and his girlfriend.

Julio then starts talking about the general atmosphere of his **neighbourhood**; this is very different from the old days, mainly because of the drugs scene. *El Cañón today has nothing to do with the old El Cañón. The 'jaco' (colloquial word for drugs) has destroyed the gang, and children in the neighbourhood can no longer play in the streets, as we used to. It is like the Wild West, the bands and all that. I don't dare go near some bars. Many of my former peers are in prison or dead. Those who still live here are totally outside.*

For his **family**, and especially his father, Julio has ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, he is proud of them as hard-working people who have earned a living, and feel attached to their origins, class culture and male family tradition of being bricklayers: *My roots are Andalusian. I can't help it: I'm a Vélez.* On the other hand, he describes with some bitterness the exploitation of his father and his mother, a housewife all her life, the lack of communication between generations, and the lack of stimulus received by his father: *What does a post-war person have in common with an Internet surfer? Nothing. I'm fed up of hearing the same old stories about shortages* or *I've never heard my father sing.* The only person whom Julio seems to admire is his **sister** whom he describes as a *rebel like me*: although her parents have been over-protective (due to her being female and diabetic), she has chosen her own path.

His **educational experience** at the state school is presented as a failure and as a determining factor in his having restricted choice in the **labour market***: First that school and then the fast food slavery; they treat you like animals.* When talking about his **girlfriend**, Julio stresses how different she is from his environment since she comes from another neighbourhood and has different family origins: *She belongs to a completely different world.*

If we take all this into consideration, we could say that Julio is presenting a world with which he cannot identify, and also the people from that world with whom he cannot identify either. This is reinforced by his insistence on presenting how the others see him: *My peers call me a puritan, and for my father and people at work I'm a rebel... Actually, I'm neither.* In contrast to his previous presentation, which seems to follow a more stereotypical picture, the 'self' he presents here reveals more complexity. The resulting thematical field no longer complements the earlier

one, which we have derived from his main narration. Indeed, Julio presents himself as *someone in the middle* between two different models: the marginal/residual and the conventional/traditional. The former might be structured by a past characterised by school failure and the orienting principle of 'experiencing the present'; this basically includes the themes of gangs (peers) and drugs. The latter is structured by a more future-oriented and pre-established pattern that includes the themes of stable job, stable family (represented by the traditional lives of his parents and brother) and motorcycle (symbolising both the dominant consumption pattern and autonomy).

The **neighbourhood** structures Julio's narration as a whole since, when all is said and done, it contains cultural patterns that create a conflict for Julio's identity and characterise many peripheral working-class suburbs in large Spanish cities. Significantly, Julio speaks Catalan as the language of integration and communication in the 'outside world', but he switches to Spanish when he is talking about experiences or events closely related to his world in El Cañón and his family origins. In other words, Julio places himself in the **tension between two different roles**: that of the 'good boy from the neighbourhood' and that of the 'bad boy of the neighbourhood'. 'Good boy' means basically having been a good student and being 'responsible' according to society's understanding of responsibility. For instance, when asked to say more about his childhood, Julio tells a story in which he was on the side of the good ones, while all the time 'being good' was stigmatised by the stronger ones. Being a 'bad boy' means not having worked at school, and therefore being trapped in the logic of survival in the neighbourhood.

Julio presents himself as trapped as a consequence of having opted for the 'bad side' in order not to be stigmatised: *Those who have not studied are still in the ghetto. They live as they can; they can't leave their parents' homes because I can't leave mine.* **However he sees himself as someone who could potentially belong to the other (or at least to another) side**. As he himself states*: I see myself as someone they won't let behave as I want to.* This 'they' refers to all the agents embodied by the neighbourhood. In this sense, his trip to Taizé is presented as a crucial biographical experience in which he could have discovered his real *self* . Yet, when asked about how he felt in France, he answered: *I felt free, nobody paid any attention to me, I was invisible. In the Christian meetings, though, they wouldn't let you think freely.* **To conclude, Julio is locating himself at the core of two competing or conflicting cultures which coexist in the same spatial context of the neighbourhood, yet he does not identify with any of them.**

Finally, Julio is specifically asked about the future, an absent theme in his told life. *I don't see it* [i.e. the future] *as black. I simply don't see it,* he says. His future plans are focussed on the short term, more specifically on speculating about the possibility of a journey to Latin America to do service duty as a substitute for military service. Apart from this vague objective, Julio is reluctant to make any kind of future plans regarding his girlfriend or leaving the parental home. *The only thing I expect from the future is to keep a healthy mind for as long as possible. It's the only thing I own apart from my motorcycle.* Julio strongly values freedom of the mind as something that does not necessarily conform to external constraints. In this final picture, we again confront Julio's dual self-presentation as both 'trapped' and 'potentially free'.

2.3. Case structure

From the thematical field analysis we learned about derive the **conflictive relationship between Julio's belonging to the neighbourhood and his aspirations to develop his own path.** Beneath this conflict, there seems to be a problem of how to reconstruct his identity in a changing environment, and how to find a way of linking up with the outside world. So far, Julio has been unable to convert his resources into real opportunities for finding this way.

In the first thematical field, we could see how Julio located the turning point of his life when he was obliged to change school. According to his presentation, this event caused him to get low marks, obliged him to interrupt his educational trajectory and meant that he was stuck both in a working-class world characterised by precarious jobs, control and exploitation (by his father and by the boss), and in the world of drugs characterised by self-destruction and destruction of the locality (El Cañón). Julio blames the public education system and presents himself as a victim of it. Nevertheless, if we go back to the analysis of the biographical data, there are no clear indications that Julio's educational trajectory was as bad as he says: for example, Julio must have had a minimum of good marks or educational levels to access the BUP and stay at that level for three years. The vast majority of school dropouts leave education much earlier. As the biographical data analysis shows, we see a pattern of insistence on obtaining formal education. Furthermore, Julio has been always very integrated in the neighbourhood. During his childhood and adolescence, his identification with other children from different ages and schools structured his identity. He was (and is) proud of El Cañón, of being integrated in the gang, and of being a Vélez.

The actual turning-point in Julio's life rather seems to have occurred in the late 1980s when Julio was finishing compulsory school; it was informed both by changes that were themselves brought about by the rising levels of youth unemployment that hit peripheral suburbs like El Cañón particularly hard, and by the appearance in the neighbourhood of drugs that transformed and eroded the community's traditional links of solidarity and cohesion. Julio started to get bad marks, and he eventually finally left school and entered the world of unskilled working-class people. From then on, he was confronted with various relationships from this 'typical' social environment – and he felt deeply disappointed. He met old friends who were alienated through drugs, and saw his parents and elder brother alienated by considering themselves 'winners' but, like everyone in El Cañón, were actually being exploited by the capitalist system. In short, **he saw both his peers and his family as 'losers', and did not find any point of reference with which to identify himself**[6]. **Julio's dilemma**, therefore, **was how to find a third way or role** without feeling constrained by the two social roles he had been developing so far: that of the 'outsider' (like his peers) and that of the 'alienated worker' (like his father and brother).

His presentation of the impossibility of distancing himself from both of these roles that coexisted inside the borders of the neighbourhood contrasts with his economic situation. In objective terms, his current wage (as a bricklayer's assistant) would allow him to leave his parents' home and the neighbourhood[7]. If he adopted a more individualised and urban, modern pattern of emancipation, he could try to rent a flat, share it with someone else – maybe with his girlfriend, maybe with a friend. Julio has information and intuition about the world outside El Cañón, especially since his journey to France which was decisive in gaining different

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[6] His sister could have been this model, but her younger age defined his role as that of an elder brother who helped her to get on in life.

[7] Julio mentioned his monthly wage during the interview; it is far higher than the standard wage for a young person of his age and higher, for instance, than the salary earned by the researchers producing this document.

experiences of other people, places and ways of living. However his point of reference is **El Cañón,** since it **still represents a guarantee of some kind of integration and visibility**. Going out of the neighbourhood means there is a danger of becoming invisible; he experienced this during his journey to Taizé. Julio is unable to express his *self* because, at the present time, it is not compatible with his social environment where the channels of communication are very limited.

At this moment, Julio is reproducing a farce in which he consciously plays the specific roles of 'good son', 'good worker' and 'good friend'. His repair strategy consists of postponing his decision; in other words, he is preparing himself for a kind of moratorium period so that he can find a way out for the substitutory service in which he plans to make a journey. He is aware that the journey to Taizé represented something new for him – it was a sign of a potential new way – but the Christian nature of the trip was incomplete in the sense that it could not fulfil his aspirations to understand freedom and autonomy. The same happens with the kind of trip he can have with drugs. Drug dependency does not make it possible for Julio and his friends to become a group; they remain a collective without clear points of reference. Their anger is oriented at the police and bosses, but it is individually experienced. Only when recalling 'old times' from childhood in the neighbourhood does some feeling of cohesion emerge. Solutions, too, are of an individual nature. His present identity split is probably not a very fruitful pre-condition for facing up to this conflict. **The risk of a paralysing situation for Julio is evident if we consider the lack of opportunities that a neighbourhood like El Cañón offers youngsters like Julio in terms of available alternative ways of living.**

3. Other cases

Esteban

Esteban was born in 1975 in a working-class suburb on the outskirts of Barcelona[8]. He has a younger brother, and they both live with their mother. Esteban's parents separated in 1983 when Esteban was eight years old and Esteban's father left home. In 1984, Esteban's mother attempted to commit suicide by taking pills in the bathroom. One year after the beginning of compulsory schooling, and coinciding with his parents' separation in 1983, Esteban started getting bad marks at the state school and began to steal small objects with his peers after school. He first experimented with drugs in 1987, and set up a gang in which he became the provider of different kinds of goods stolen from large stores, and of drugs. In 1989, Esteban did not satisfactorily complete the course for the compulsory school certificate (*Graduado escolar*)[9], and he started the first course at a vocational Training School in 1990. Three months later he was expelled because of an argument with the Director. In 1991/92 (?) Esteban entered a centre (ADSIS)[10] aimed at young people who have failed in the State school system and have

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[8] As in Julio's case, Esteban's family and social background consist of migration by the parental generation, and a very common working class trajectory and family model in which the father has a job as bricklayer and the mother is a housewife. Esteban's mother, however, has been working twice a week as cleaning lady since she began living alone with her children.

[9] The 'Graduado' is the only certificate in compulsory education.

[10] ADSIS is a private foundation sponsored by the local (Barcelona) and regional (Catalonia) governments that was set up in 1981 to provide education and integration facilities for youngsters in the neighbourhoods. This centre is

problems of different kinds. He prepared himself for the exams and got his compulsory school certificate. Since then, Esteban has spent all his free time at the centre working as a volunteer with younger boys and girls from the neighbourhood. In between, he did Military Service for one year in 1994/95. He then got involved in petty theft again and once more created his network of favours and loyalties. On returning to Barcelona, he got his first regular job as a security guard working 14 hours a night. Two years later he decided to leave this job, and in January 1997 he got a job as a doorman in a factory. Esteban left the factory in January 1998, but some weeks later he was offered the same job in the same factory where he still works today, but with better working conditions. Esteban has a girlfriend whom he met at the factory. Esteban's brother has dropped out of school and is unemployed.

From this brief outline of Esteban's biographical data we can distinguish three different phases in his lived life. The information we have on his first eight years of life is too scant for us to make hypotheses on that period. However we may assume that Esteban had a very difficult childhood witnessing, together with his brother, his parents' arguments and probably domestic violence. At the age of eight, a turning point triggered by his parents' separation seems to take place in Esteban's life. Until his expulsion from FP at the age of fifteen, Esteban's adolescence had been characterised by deviant activities on the street as small-time drug dealer, school failure, and economic and emotional conflict at home. Esteban brings home the money he gets from his thefts. This fact at this stage of his life is very significant if we are to understand a pattern that has survived up to the present time: Esteban has the role of family breadwinner. Finally, we can recognise a third biographical period from 1990 up to the present time; this is defined by the replacement of the informal by the formal sphere. This means abandoning his deviant activities, returning to formal education and following a working class pattern of precariousness in the formal labour market. Esteban's mother and brother still depend on him economically.

Given this data, we could easily imagine a self-presentation in which Esteban presents himself as a victim of his parents' separation, poor quality State school, and exploitative conditions in the labour market.

The interview with Esteban was improvised as the interviewer had made an appointment with another young person through the ADSIS co-ordinator. However the boy did not turn up, and the co-ordinator asked Esteban, who happened to be playing Ping-Pong at that moment, whether he would like to do it instead[11]. He immediately agreed and we went to the small library of the centre to get started. After the objectives of the interview were described and the initial question was asked, Esteban started by making sure he understood the contract of the interview: *Well, I suppose I'll have to improvise a bit, won't I?*. He begins by presenting himself as a *good student until 2ºEGB[12]... but due to my parents' separation my behaviour at school changed completely. From being the typical good boy, I ended up organising my own gang at school. At school the teachers sent me out of class every day and I got used to it.* From then on until the end of a very long (main) narration, he proudly describes himself as a '*mafioso', but a good 'mafioso'*. His trajectory as mafioso embraces his school experiences, his

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run by a team of teachers, psychologists and social workers. The rest of the educators are volunteers who are ex-students of the centre, and are therefore young people who come from the same suburb or who are doing substitute military service.

[11] Esteban did not seem to be in a hurry, even though he had not expected to be interviewed. He spends all his free time at the centre.

[12] Second compulsory education year. Esteban was eight years old.

life on the street and his military service; it basically consists of dealing in stolen goods and drugs to get money (and respect) in the neighbourhood: *I started 'buying for free' in big stores, but I soon realised it was much better to order goods.*

As the above narrative shows, Esteban's experience in ADSIS was another turning point in his life in the sense that he abandoned not only many of his delinquent activities, but also started feeling remorse at a moral level: *In ADSIS, I was treated like a person and not as a number, which was what I was used to. I started to wonder about the people who I persuaded to take drugs. However, I was lucky not to take drugs myself.* This last evaluation leads us to detect an overall interpretation that structures Esteban's presentation throughout the whole interview. **As opposed to the hypothesis of a victim's role, Esteban presents himself as a lucky person in a dangerous social environment – as someone who, thanks to his 'luck', has been able to surmount the many hurdles which life has put in his way:** *Luckily, nobody at home asked me to bring good marks;* or, *Luckily, I've never had to ask my mother for money;* or, *Luckily, I've always made the right contacts and met the right people;* and, *Luckily, I've always kept my head on my shoulders.* **A principle of loyalty and solidarity, though, structures his relationship with those who have been less lucky**: *By being at the centre, I realised the many bad things I had done, but you cannot turn you back on your friends like that ... some of them steal from their own families to get drugs, but I'd never betray them just because I've got another kind of life now.*

If we explore this thematical field a bit closer and contrast it with the biographical data, we can see how Esteban has been obliged to develop the family breadwinner role since his father left the home. Esteban is a 'clever' boy and, just as his mother never controlled his trajectory at school, it is probable that she has never asked him where the money he has been bringing home for more than ten years comes from.

Esteban therefore is now **trapped in a dilemma due to his position of responsibility in the family**. Given the lack of institutional support for lone mothers and the typical strategy of most Spanish fathers (like Esteban's father) who normally provide ridiculously low (if any) economic support for their children, Esteban is very aware that his mother and brother still depend on him and will do so in the future. Behind the mask of 'luck', he feels great resentment towards both of his parents, and especially towards his mother for spoiling his younger brother. Esteban has a strong desire to emancipate himself and live with his girlfriend, but the working class he belongs to, one of the most important values of which is family cohesion, impedes him from going. The impossibility of leaving his parental home leads him to develop a **repair strategy which consists of sticking to his peers and developing his adult role in the centre working as a volunteer with young people with problems. The common pattern shaping the generational contract in 1990s Spain is completely reversed in Esteban's case.** Instead of living at the parental home, mainly because it is economically impossible to leave, Esteban reproduces the pattern of former generations in which the children were a strategy of economic survival for their parents. His is probably not a very common trajectory of youngsters at the present time[13], but it dramatically shows the inconsistencies of a large number of institutions and agents who have failed to provide a normative frame for a child; more specifically, it shows the failings of the State school and his own parents.

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[13] Hypothetically, it could become a more common pattern in lone-parent families.

Victor

Victor was born in Valencia in 1975 into a working class family. His father worked as a lorry driver and his mother was the owner of a small bakery. He went to a public school like his older brother and sister. At school he was frequently sent out of class, and he was also beaten by teachers. He used to have bad marks, but sometimes he was included in the more advantaged group of schoolmates. During these years he often stole from small shops in the neighbourhood, sometimes alone and sometimes with his schoolmates who came from a higher social class. In that period, at the age of ten or eleven, he started to take drugs. At the age of 13, he was finally expelled from school. Victor's father helped him to get different jobs, but he left them after a few months, or else he was dismissed. During that period Victor's mother started to drink and to smoke, and Victor's father had a heart attack. Victor's father then left his job and his mother's bakery had to close. Victor's parents decided then to set up a bar in order to employ Victor there. During those years, however, Victor increased his drug addiction and stole money from the bar and the family. The arguments at home got worse and sometimes Victor had to sleep on the street. Even though he went to two different rehabilitation centres, he continued to take drugs with friends until he exchanged cocaine for heroin when he was 16 years old. One day, at the age of 18, he overdosed on heroin and he was unconscious for many hours on the street. After that, Victor and his mother went to visit a friend of his who was in a process of rehabilitation and asked him for help. Victor was then introduced to a rehabilitation community called 'Life' which is inspired by Christian values. For the last five years, he has been living within this community in Barcelona. Since going through the process of overcoming the addiction, he has been integrated into the community's working activities and he is currently working as a guide for other young drug addicts.

Through the biographical data, we see that Victor's history is a story of spiralling drug addiction and its impact on the personal and family domain. The relationship with his schoolmates, who come from a higher social class, seems to be a crucial element. The contrast between his socialisation in a working class family and neighbourhood, and his socialisation in a private school with children coming from families with higher economic and cultural status, could be at the core of his gradual rebelliousness and addiction to drugs. The resulting biographical trajectory is produced in the context of conflict within his family and social environment: the failure at school, at work, and the gradual disruption of family life due to the health problems of his father and his mother's addiction to alcohol. Victor's relationship with drugs could be interpreted as the cause of the family problems, as the loss of his parents' jobs shows. The turning point in his life, that is to say the moment at which he decides to do something to stop the drug-taking spiral, seems to be the shock he experiences following an overdose of heroin. From then on, his active participation in the rehabilitating community can be seen as an outcome of a successful process in which he has been able to overcome drug addiction and to integrate himself in a community project. His involvement in 'Life' can, in Victor's present and future perspective, be the structuring principle of his biographical strategy.

Victor's story is organised from the outset by self-evaluations and argumentations whereby which he presents himself as a very restless person. Taking this point as the organising principle of his narratives, Victor introduces his experience at school as very conflictive. Moreover, he presents this conflict in personal terms: *I was a very rebellious and disobedient child.* This was a period when his anxiety and longing for something exciting was developed. *I didn't want to work, I didn't want to study, I only wanted parties and money*. Essential to an understanding of the spiral of his conflictive and aggressive behaviour is his competition with his schoolmates. As Victor says**,** *I only wanted to show off, to be at the same level of my friends, I wanted to see myself better than*

other people (he is referring to his family). **The experience of 'déclassement' in which he rejects his working class culture and origins could be therefore understood as the central issue of Victor's case**. The most painful feeling he remembers is being humiliated at school. As he points out, *It was the worst thing that could happen to me. I felt they were killing me*. His narratives are embedded in a feeling of inferiority and shame about his family's origins.

Victor explains how he came to drugs and interprets this process as a never-ending search: *I was always searching, searching, but I was never satisfied with what I found.* Sharing the experience of drug addiction with young people who have a lot of money, Victor reached a point of alienation where whatever occurred in his surroundings had no sense or importance. As he points out, *I didn't value anything, anything.* **Victor is assuming the social status of 'drug addict':** *I was labelled a 'yonqui'* (colloquial word for drug addict). *I only see rejection from my family, rejection from society. I had no real friends.* The experience of stigma is therefore combined with the experience of isolation and social exclusion. The shock he experiences with heroin takes place in this context and constitutes a turning point in his life. From then on he changes his attitude. As he says, *When I visited some rehabilitation centres I didn't really want to get cured, but after the shock over the heroin, I realised that I didn't want to die, I wanted to live, I was only 18 years old!* **Entering 'Life' is explained as a revelation, a kind of miracle**: *They broke all my ideas, all my references. Life could be lived without consuming drugs and material goods after all.*

The whole narration could be interpreted as the product of an individualised process of reflection about his personal trajectory with drugs. In this sense, Victor's presentation could be summarised through a thematical field in which **Victor presents himself as a 'converted' person.** He starts presenting himself as an immature, ignorant child and as an adolescent trapped in drugs as if he were a slave. The experience of social exclusion emerges in this presentation. He contrasts this picture of himself as a child and adolescent with a mature Victor who has discovered the truth through the Christian values learnt at 'Life'. Through his experience at 'Life', he becomes free, rehabilitated and liberated from the scourge of drugs. He evaluates the emptiness of his previous life and the mistake of not conforming to the social and economic conditions at home. Victor feels guilty about making his family unhappy. For this reason, Victor is developing a repair strategy for them; he could be symbolically offering his family his rehabilitation. **Victor has found a meaning in life by working as a volunteer helping other young drug addicts. Through this strategy, he is structuring his present and future time probably because he is still in the process of rehabilitation.**

Victor's story is the **story of a conversion** in which a process of 'resignifying' a biography takes place[14]. The world of drugs and consumption are reconceptualised as 'evil' from the present biographical perspective. It is a combination of a religious and a psychotherapeutic conversion as two typically closed explanatory systems. The new system of legitimation allows him to banish all his doubts and contradictions from his previous life. Socialising agents during the primary socialisation (parents and school) are replaced by peers or members of the community with which he establishes strong emotional bonds and identification.

Eva

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[14] See Introduction.

Eva was born in 1975 and is an only child. Her father comes from an extended family in a village of Castille, but early in life he settled in Barcelona with his parents. Eva's grandparents from her father's side had a bar in the village and were well off. With the urbanisation/industrialisation of the village during the late 1950s, the bar had to be expropriated and the family came to Barcelona. Her father is an industrial photographer; he was working for an electricity company until he was dismissed following a restructuring exercise. After two years out of work, during which time he got his compulsory school certificate, in 1985he set up a co-operative with other people. The family origins on her mother's side are relevant to an understanding of Eva's trajectory. Eva's mother is also the only daughter of a couple who actively fought on the Republican side during the Civil War. Eva's mother was born while her father was in prison for political activity. Eva's mother continued her parents' 'progressive' family tradition and was actively involved during the last years of the Franco dictatorship. She rejected a grant to study design in Sweden in order to marry Eva's father. They married at the age of 18. Eva's mother got very involved in the 'educational movement of pedagogical renovation' during the years of political transition and first years of democracy with the Centre Party (UCD) and the Socialist Party (PSOE).

Eva was sent to a State, 'progressive', non-religious school in Catalonia where she spent her years of compulsory education. By the time she completed her compulsory education, she had already had her first experiences of drug taking. At the age of 15, she left this school and went to a state school a long way from her neighbourhood, which is in a central lower middle-class area. In the same year (1990), Eva's mother suffered a serious depression from which she has not yet recovered. Eva started skipping classes, going out in the evenings with a boyfriend five years her senior and increasing her drug consumption. She managed to complete the post-compulsory education until university, but had to leave university after failing in all her first year subjects. Eva has been taking drugs with different boyfriends and friends at nighttime, and fitting in different jobs in messenger companies at the same time. Eva suffers from depressive anorexia. She is now working as secretary in a 'messengers' co-operative' with her father. In 1998, Eva moved with her present boyfriend to a small flat in an industrial city in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona which they bought with help from their parents.

Out of this biographical data we can develop a constellation of hypotheses around the influence of the political trajectory in the family origins on Eva's biographical trajectory. Her parents, and more specifically the family on her mother's side, have been active in different historical periods of change in Spanish society. The decision to choose the most progressive kind of school for their daughter is consistent with Eva's parents' trajectory. Her primary socialisation period, therefore, seems to have been imbued with all the new democratic values that were opposed to the years of Franco's dictatorship. Her educational path, however, seems to have radically changed after compulsory school. It is very likely that the temporal coincidence of an important transition in Eva's life – changing school, which implies having to decide where and what to study in post-compulsory education – with her mother's depression definitively marks the point at which she abandoned her studies and the beginning of a self-destructive period characterised by drugs which is still not resolved. Buying a flat with her boyfriend – given their young age and the precariousness of the labour market which affects both of them – could be interpreted as a decision to follow a traditional path, as opposed to that of her parents. This recent event in Eva's biography could mean a change of direction towards a more stable path.

The first interaction between interviewer and interviewee must be underlined when exploring the told life. Before the initial question was put, Eva interrupted the interviewer to clarify the

contract of the interview, added, *You'll help me if I get stuck, won't you?* and announced that she would focus on school and working experiences. The interviewer invited her to talk about anything she liked, and Eva immediately responded by **defining her life in three phases.**

This introduction perfectly summarises the whole process of the interview, in the sense that she presents herself as someone who is extremely shy, gets stuck and cannot describe much about her life. This is reflected in her very short main narrative and the need to be reminded to speak freely. The lack of fluency and laboured narratives – as the very extended use of the reported type of text shows – strongly contrasts with the amount of information she gives both at an objective and experiential level. One of the resulting hypotheses to emerge from this is that Eva wants to present herself as a shy, insecure person in the presence of someone who might be able to help her. She has prepared herself for the interview as a rehearsal for seeing a psychologist (a piece of information she mentions at the end of the interview): *Actually I had never thought about my life like this, but this is an accurate picture I'm giving you, believe me.*

Following the relevance system of this interviewee, we elicited narratives on each of the three periods in which Eva reconstructs her life. The first lasts from her date of birth until her fifteenth birthday and is described as the 'good phase': *My parents loved each other, I was the only child, we often went out, and school was nice until I had to leave.* The age of fifteen is presented as the end of the first phase and the beginning of the 'chaotic phase': *It was the world of the night, you know – discos, boyfriends, drugs, the typical things you do when you are fifteen ... I just about passed my subjects at school because of my mother. Otherwise she'd have sent me to sell chickens in the market.* During this period Eva links her relationship with her first boyfriend to her bad marks: *I was with him for five years. The only year when I was top of the class was when he was doing military service. As soon as he came back, I lost myself again.* The third phase started two years ago, according to Eva's periodisation, and it is defined as a *more stabilising path with my boyfriend, since we realised we were going too far and too fast.* Eva finishes her main narration with a final evaluation: *We are now on the right path.*

Eva's overall presentation regarding these three phases might be expressed in terms of a **nightmare from which she is now awakening.** As they say, day (e.g. her parents in love, the trips and school) is followed by night (and with it the world of the drugs, etc), but day comes again, and she now finds herself at dawn. Significantly, Eva omits her own illness (depressive anorexia) when presenting the 'third phase'. Eva is therefore still in the process of dealing with the 'second phase', and recognises the need for help by striking a bargain between herself and life. Eva seems to have suffered from the rupture of the two main socialising agents at a very specific moment in her biography: her mother's illness, and consequently the rupture of a reference, and the broken reference of the state school, which does not seem to provide her with a normative frame of reference. Whereas her father is described as a lovely person, but with lack of authority – *He is the one who has been always close to me, but he suffers without understanding anything* – Eva describes her mother as a very intelligent person and herself as middling-to-average: *The doctors say she* [her mother] *has a very high IQ. I've always been average.* However if we look at the objective data we can see how, despite the 'chaos' of her 'second phase', Eva has been able to finish post-compulsory school, have a number of different jobs, have a 'day life' in addition to her 'night life', and not be objectively paralysed. Her **blockage**, indeed, is at a subjective level.

Like her parents, Eva followed an emancipating trajectory at a very early age compared with the Spanish family model of late emancipation and young people's late access to the labour market.

She started working very early. She had a boyfriend when she was still very young and, although she is still young, she has now gone to live with her present boyfriend. However there is a generational gap between the expectations of her parents and her own, and Eva has not followed her mother's aspirations for her in the educational trajectory. Eva has probably never wanted to have the successful career which her mother planned for her. On the contrary, she is following in her mother's footsteps, and even suffers from depression. The central issue of the case therefore might be located in the **tension between a parental model that is not perceived as useful** for her, and the **respect or admiration she professes for her mother as a fighter in the past**. The blockage, and the **impossibility of finding her own way** is the resulting situation in which Eva currently finds herself. However she seems to be starting to rethink those past events in her life; they appear to be crucial if we are to have a better understanding of her present need for help.

Estela

Estela was born in 1975 in a working-class municipality outside Barcelona. She has a brother two years younger than herself. Estela's parents migrated from the south of Spain to Barcelona during the 1960s, and settled with other family members in a working class neighbourhood built during that decade. Her father worked as a bricklayer until he lost his job as a result of a workplace accident. He is now working again after a long period of inactivity. Her mother works as a cleaning lady on a temporary contract. Estela finished compulsory schooling with good marks, and afterwards she did a special training course to go to post-compulsory school; she walked out a few days later. At present, Estela helps her mother twice a week as a cleaning lady. She is also involved in the 'Hermandad Rociera' (a cultural-religious Andalusian association) where she started going regularly with her brother and her boyfriend six years ago. Estela saw a psychologist for the first time last Christmas; the interview took place on the same day as she had her second therapy session. This element will be relevant for analysing her self-presentation.

Leaving school after finishing compulsory education could be interpreted as a trajectory based on a traditional female pattern in which her role would be directed to give support to her family by working at home. Given the fact that her parents work on temporary contracts, this pattern based on material conditions could be reinforced. However an examination of the biographical data might reveal other reasons that could explain Estela's decision to leave school. Estela left school, and never returned, after a successful career with good marks, after doing a preparatory course to go on to BUP courses, and after starting the first BUP course in order to go to University at some point in the future.

Obviously, the main narration contains the core of this surprising event. Her narratives, which are presented under the form of reports and evaluations, offer the picture of a 'normal childhood' in the context of a working-class family who migrated from Andalusia. The first important element is how she starts defining her roots as Andalusian despite the fact she was born in Barcelona. Her experience at the state school and her good relationships with her family – her cousins and brother – are themes that occur in Estela's global evaluation: *In my family we never missed anything – my family, my cousins, my brother, everything was OK*. But this evaluation is used as an introduction to what she presents as the relevant turning point of her

life. As Estela points out: *My childhood, well, it was a normal childhood until until I finished the last course of compulsory school.* This is the starting point that allows her to develop the central chapter of the interview. *I don't know what happened to me but when I started the 1ºBUP course, my world collapsed and since then – I was 14 at the time; I'm 23 now – I haven't been able to do the things that everybody else does.* In reported speech, Estela goes on to explain how **changes in general have had a strong impact on her life**. During the two years after she left school, she was convinced that she would enter the labour market at 16, but she could not overcome her biographical shock. As Estela says: *I couldn't get a job, I don't understand it. Even now, I don't really know what happened to me.*

Estela continues her narration by presenting herself as involved in a process of overcoming her problem through seeing a psychologist. Indeed, it is this extended use of (self)evaluations and argumentations that reveals how open Estela is to a new process of reflexiveness in which she accepts that her situation is not normal. She says that the reason why she got help from a doctor was her boyfriend's proposal of marriage. She insists that she was at the beginning of a process, claiming that she has only been to her psychologist twice. She can explain what she feels, but not why. The new relationship with the psychologist is probably reinforcing her presentation as a kind of therapy in which she is dealing with her problem directly. In this sense, she might be trying to present herself as someone with a problem, but not as someone who is weird or abnormal.

The thematic field seems to be focussed on the **tension between two contradictory worlds of 'normality' and 'non-normality'**. Normality refers to her involvement in the 'Hermandad Rociera' where she was actively participating six years ago. 'Normality' includes the family and the cultural heritage from the south, her social relationships with young people of her own neighbourhood; in short, it is a constellation that represents her feelings of being integrated/included in a communitarian project where people work for an ideal. Her brother, her boyfriend and her best friend are included in this constellation; it is a sphere in which she has clear ideas and clear aims. For Estela, *the Hermandad is like my family, sometimes more than my family.* By contrast, 'non-normality' is linked to her problem and impedes her from facing up to studies or work. This is represented by feelings of non-communication and of not being understood by others and by herself, and it therefore reflects an atmosphere of enclosure and fear towards responsibilities and obligations. As Estela says, *Sometimes I feel very different from other people because I'm not being able to work, but I'm still a person like everybody else.* The two spheres – the association as the public sphere and 'the problem' as the private sphere – could be analysed in terms of inclusion and exclusion: the former is the means or resource for being 'in' and the latter is the status of being 'out'.

It could be hypothesised that, for nine years now, **Estela has been living in a non-understandable relationship with herself and the outer world, since she is unable to accept her situation as conflictive**. This can be seen as the central issue of the case, the roots of which are very difficult to decode. However the field in which this problem seems to take place is the transition to adulthood which is lived traumatically (see Introduction). This period could be understood either as a moratorium in which she has been expecting some kind of natural solution, or as a **blockage** in which she has signed an agreement of silence between her and the world; this leads to a tabooisation of her problem.

Her present strategy for facing this dark and mysterious sphere of her life with the assistance of a psychologist reveals how she is in the process of overcoming her biographical blockage, or nine year silence. It is an attempt to face what she considers to be a normal path. Consequently, this new strategy could be interpreted as a second turning point promoted by her boyfriend and

his proposal of marriage. **From then on, Estela seems to effect a full entrance into society, and this involves a personal commitment to the world of responsibilities symbolised by the sphere of work.** The idea of leaving Barcelona and settling in Seville (Andalusia) to get a job and emancipate herself is a mythified solution which for Estela means it is possible to start from zero after the last nine years of paralysis. In this way, it may be that **migration represents a way of breaking out of a setting perceived as oppressive, and more specifically, breaking away from her role in the family as 'traditional daughter'** and liberating herself from the constraints she has internalised**.**

Trini

Trini was born in Barcelona in 1974. She is the sixth of seven children, five sisters and two brothers, in a gypsy family. Her father, who is currently working part time as a bricklayer, comes from León (central Spain) and her mother, who has been working recently as a cleaning lady, comes from Galicia (north-western Spain). Her parents live in a self-built house in a peripheral suburb of Barcelona far from the nearest urbanised area. During her childhood and adolescence, Trini lived in the parents' home with the rest of the family. She went to school with her sisters and brothers, and they played truant during their last years of compulsory schooling. Trini finished her compulsory education and started BUP courses. During that time, she had a boyfriend and at the age of 16/17 she got pregnant. She was not aware of her pregnancy during the first six months because she continued to menstruate until then. She left her studies and went to live with her boyfriend in his flat. One of her brothers had a similar experience and got married when his girlfriend became pregnant.

After having her baby, Trini started to work as a cleaning lady while her partner spent the nights and days out of home. After some months, she left him and returned to her parents' home. When the child was one year old, Trini went back to her boyfriend. At the age of 19 she became pregnant again. Trini's daughter had health problems and had to spend long periods of time in hospital. During this period, Trini left her job and received assistance from her brothers and sisters. At this time, Trini was in touch with a social worker. The following year, Trini again left her partner and returned to her parents' home. Two years ago, Trini started to receive social benefit (PIRMI), and she now lives alone with her children in a rented flat in a small industrial city outside Barcelona. The children go to a state school near their home. Every morning, Trini goes to social services to take part in training courses. She has recently applied for two different jobs as a cleaning lady and she is now waiting for a reply.

If we look at the most relevant biographical events in Trini's life, we may well ask whether her early pregnancy might have interrupted or strongly modified her trajectory as a 'typical young gypsy woman', like her sisters. If it had not happened, she would probably have left secondary school like her sisters and brother and, like them, she would probably have got an unskilled or semi-skilled job. Running a family would also have been a foreseeable event within the standard female trajectory in her community. As is evident from this analysis, the family of origin seems to be Trini's most important pattern of reference. Her trajectory of leaving school, running a family and working as a cleaning lady does not seem to have been particularly conditioned by her early pregnancy. Her elder brother's similar experience could have a positive impact on the family's attitude to Trini and in this way provide her with a biographical resource.

But what about the community? In a working class community, the stigmatisation of early pregnancy is likely to be more common among 'payos'[15] than in the gypsy community. According to the biographical data, the relationship with her partner is very conflictive because leaving him must have been unbearable. Returning to the parental home reinforces the idea that Trini's family has accepted her situation and is giving her support. **The second failed attempt to live with her partner after her second child is born further highlights that the field of conflict in her biography is located in the constellation of partnership**. Again, family support is a very important resource in enabling Trini to decide to leave him a second time. Her daughter's health problems can be interpreted as a definitive factor in her decision. Since then, Trini has had to deal with her role as a lone mother with two children and no job. If she lived with her parents, she would possibly be able to find a job and help out with domestic and family duties. But the fact that Trini is currently living alone in a flat, and earning her own 'wage' could be interpreted as an **emancipatory strategy for attaining independence and autonomy**. The presence of the social worker, at the very time when she has to deal with her daughter's illness without the partner's support, could play a decisive role in her decisions to leave him, and later on in her decision to apply for the 'social wage'.

Trini's narratives are not at all fluent due to her uncertainty and fear; that the initial contact for the interview was made by a social worker who follows her case might have determined her attitude. Not surprisingly, reported speech dominates the narration, and she combines this with specific evaluations about the most important events of her life. She uses argumentations when comparing her own experiences with those of the rest of society. She starts the main narration presenting her childhood in terms of family and school life: *I'm one of the youngest children in my family. I have always had a very good relationship with all my brothers and sisters, from the eldest to the youngest*. The role played by her brothers and sisters emerges as a key aspect during the rest of the interview. Her eldest brother and sister could be symbolically seen as her parents since they are the main reference when she has a problem. At all events, as is usually the case in the gypsy community, the family is presented as a clan.

School is a presented by Trini as a painful experience closely linked to a risk situation of stigma, and therefore to social exclusion. The main cause is the language conflict she perceives between Catalan and Spanish[16]. Trini constructs a story in terms of 'we' (brothers and sisters): *We felt we were under a lot of pressure because, if you didn't speak Catalan, you were sent out of class and told to go and see the Director. But if you didn't know how to pronounce it properly, it was better not to speak Catalan at all. Otherwise, everybody would laugh at you*. The hypothesis of stigma could be reinforced with Trini's segregation in geographical terms, since she and her family live a long way from the urbanised area where the school is located. Sequentially, we now arrive at the main point of her biographical trajectory: her **'failures'**: *I have had many failures in my life and very big problems ... When I started secondary school, I had a boyfriend like everybody, and then I got pregnant*. She focusses on that event, and on the problems that cascade from it: the absence of her partner and the lack of help and care for her children and herself, not receiving any kind of economic support, having to work hard in order to look after his baby, and lastly being trapped in a second pregnancy. Significantly, Trini justifies all this: *I have no regrets. I don't regret having had my children*. This kind of justification is probably not a regret as such, but a complaint about her misfortunes wherein she

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[15] A gypsy word for the Catalan or Spanish population.
[16] Since the mid-1980s, the Catalan regional government has been encouraging compulsory teaching in Catalan at all levels of state compulsory education. For the Spanish-speaking population, this sometimes creates a language conflict, but it has not yet got out of hand.

presents herself as a victim: *What have I done to deserve this? Everything seems to happen to me. I know other girls have got pregnant like me, but I don't think many women have suffered like me*. The next biographical chapters that Trini presents are characterised by stability, security and empowerment: *I believe that the worst of my life is now over*. The relationship with the social worker could have been decisive in Trini's self-presentation, especially the way she finishes her narrative with a empowered attitude.

We could say that the starting-point of Trini's misfortunes is the fact that she had no indication of her pregnancy during the first six months and was thus unable to have an abortion. However **the structural element in understanding Trini's biography should be located in the breaking away from the traditional family pattern.** The context of the gypsy community adds a further structural dimension to this case: **in gypsy communities, the absence of the male is morally and socially punishable**. In this way, family support is decisive and the family itself acts as a protective clan. However this is not the only resource available to her: the institutional support of the social benefit allows her to adopt the role of lone mother and develop an emancipatory pattern through a child-centred strategy. This trajectory might represent a non-typical pattern within the gypsy community since it is oriented towards a pattern of individualisation, thus blurring the boundaries between 'payos' and gypsies.

4. Comparing the Cases

All of our interviewees (except for Eva's parents) come from a **working-class background and** (in educational terms) **have unskilled parents**. Most of them are children of internal migrants[17] who settled in the peripheral suburbs on the outskirts of Barcelona which were built specially to cope with migration waves. These neighbourhoods have a **'clan and ghetto pattern'** which is reflected in terms of kin networks and territorial distribution. The extended family lives together in the same suburb (often the same street or building) with other neighbours and acquaintances from their villages of origin. These families live in the worst living conditions in terms of job security and housing standards, despite the fact that they are much higher than they used to be. The presence of gangs of youths and the option of deviance (delinquency and drugs) complete the urban landscape. The resulting **social relationships** in the neighbourhood are very **endogamous and segregated** from the outer context, thus reproducing social inequalities at a more structural level.

In Trini's case, the fact that she belongs to the **gypsy community** increases the influence of the previous dimensions. The family clan pattern is stronger, as we can see from the protection that Trini's family gives her each time after she separates from her partner. The ghetto pattern is also clearer if we remember that territorial peripheralisation is more extreme. In Eva's case, a further dimension of analysis must be considered if we are to understand her family and social origins. Although both of her parents are working class, their involvement in the political struggles of pre-transition and transition from the Franco dictatorship to the democratic period means she received various cultural resources from the **hippy community.** These are values which orient Eva's parents in the direction of the leftist middle class model. Their involvement

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[17] 'Internal migrants' are understood to mean those people who came from the southern regions of Spain and the countryside during the 1950s and 1960s and settled in the most industrialised regions like Catalonia or the Basque Country.

in the pedagogical renovation movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s is crucial for an understanding of Eva's cultural heritage compared to the lack of stimuli received by the family in all our other cases.

From a comparison of the *objective biographical data*, we see a **common pattern of school failure and dropping out of school**. Three of our cases (Victor, Esteban and Eva) are expelled from school for conflictive behaviour or bad marks. The rest voluntarily leave school at different ages, most of them after compulsory school. In Victor's case, the failure takes place in the setting of a private school; for the rest, it happens in a state school. Most of them have **experienced going to both educational systems.** As we have seen in the various biographical analyses, Spain's dual educational system plays a significant role in their interpretation of their schooling and life trajectories. All of them (except for Estela who dramatically leaves education and stays at home) have combined their educational experience with **jobbing in the informal labour market**; for this specific collective of unskilled youths, this is especially precarious and exploitative with Julio and Esteban working fourteen-hour shifts, and often at nighttime.

Now that we have contextualised their family, social, and educational background, we can more easily understand the structuring elements of all six biographies. The problem for Julio, Victor and Eva is the **lack of personal identification with the parental and the neighbourhood pattern and the failure to find an alternative path**. In other words, the heritage of these interviewees' family and social origins strongly structures their lives, but in terms of biographical resources it does not in any way help them to fulfil their aspirations. In Julio's case, his self-definition as 'Vélez' (the family surname) demonstrates his adherence to the male family tradition of Andalusian bricklayers. But, as we have seen, he also sees his parents as losers. The strong codes of moral solidarity and friendship between neighbourhood peers structure his life too, but in this setting he cannot develop his own self . For Julio, drugs have been (and continue to be) an escape strategy and a sign of an unresolved conflict. In Victor's case, deviance (theft) and, more especially, drug consumption in the context of the neighbourhood became his aim in life during his adolescence and early youth, until he found an alternative way out through a therapeutic community. This process of resocialisation could be understood as a 'conversion' (see Introduction). In this sense, drug addiction can be regarded as the structuring element of his biography. In Eva's case, there is also a lack of parental identification in the sense that she never understood or internalised her parents' 'hippy' pattern with which she was socialised. Like Julio and Victor, Eva has looked for shelter in the world of drugs. In her case, her mother's depression lasting eight years accelerated her self-destructive trajectory. Eva's blockage since she was 15 shows her lack of personal resources for finding an alternative way, in relation to that of her parents.

Esteban's biography is structured by deviant activities (theft and drug dealing). His has been a strategy of economic survival, given his position as breadwinner for his mother and brother, since his father abandoned them. In fact, Esteban is developing his breadwinner role but is not enjoying it. As the analysis of this case shows, Esteban is trapped in a family constellation which prevents him from emancipating himself. He has been confronted with having to develop an adult and father role at an early age. An interesting contrasting case in the same field of family roles is Estela. Like Esteban, she is the eldest sibling, and they have economic difficulties in her family, too. However, Estela's parents have never forced her to look for a job since she dropped out of school. Since then, Estela has been unable to develop any kind of activity (either compensatory education or a job) and face up to an adult role like Esteban.

Estela has followed a gendered path of doing domestic work and helping her mother, and at the same time being completely blocked as far as her own responsibilities are concerned. Consequently, we might hypothesise that both Esteban and Estela find themselves **trapped in a constellation of conflictive distribution of family roles.**

In both types, the emotional dimension of pressure and crisis lived in the family context (as witnesses of their mothers' attempts to commit suicide, as in Eva's and Esteban's cases, domestic violence in Esteban's case, fathers' working accidents or illnesses leading to unemployment in the cases of Estela, Julio and Victor) constitute a decisive background for an understanding of our interviewees' confusion and the difficulties they face in family relationships.

Finally, we find a different 'central issue' in Trini's biography which is structured by **rupture with the traditional family model.** Trini assumes the lone mother role by becoming a beneficiary of the minimum wage (it involves having to follow educational courses) which she perceives as the basis from which she can develop her children-centred strategy.

At the level of *told life*, a shared element in all cases is the fact that, like their parents, our interviewees are **convinced defenders of credentialist theories.** This means that without any gender distinction, they strongly believe in the role that formal education plays in getting a decent job in the labour market. Interestingly, they do not have close references (e.g. parents, neighbours or friends) with whom to contrast this belief. This sharpens the feeling of stigma they have internalised though a division **between 'good students' and 'bad students',** and which is socially present in the context of the schools. As soon as they assume the stigma of being the 'bad' ones, the male interviewees turn to violence in school gangs where rebellious behaviour is self-reproducing.

At present, however, our interviewees have **ambivalent feelings of being 'middling'** (a categorisation they have acquired during their time at school) **and of being 'clever'** (because they have been able to work up a sense of resourcefulness in work and/or other activities). More specifically, our interviewees blame the state school system for their educational and social failure. Many of the turning points that our interviewees identify in their lives are related to their move from public to state school. The clearest example is Julio's introductory argumentation: *I started off going to a private school, but my parents had to send me to a state school. From that moment on, my life completely changed for the worse.* State schools are seen as a stigmatising agent; private schools are perceived as offering 'quality education', more guarantees of access to higher education, and better access to the labour market.

The feeling of failure that our interviewees express makes them **feel invisible**. As in Esteban's case: *They* [the teachers] *never saw me sitting at the back of the class.* This invisibility is compensated for, as we have seen in the cases of our male interviewees, by being aggressive and deviant. As Victor said, *The main thing is to get noticed.* In the case of our female interviewees, the invisibility is introspective. As Eva emphatically states, *There isn't a single mirror in my house. I can't stand seeing myself.* This invisibility makes it very difficult for them to communicate with the outside world, let alone with their own parents. Certainly, a **lack of communication** can be observed between generations. Our interviewees present themselves as children of parents (and grandparents) who have very little in common with them. As Julio said, W*hat does a Civil War veteran have to do with an Internet Surfer?* This situation is closely

linked to the fact that our interviewees **do not give any real authority to their parents[18]**, and particularly their fathers. As Eva stated: *My poor father didn't understand a thing*. In general terms, they are seen as 'losers'. They are losers because of the exploitative conditions they have to endure. Their fathers are workers in the black economy or are unemployed; their mothers are housewives who often have to assume the breadwinner role, a humiliating constellation for working-class culture. As a result, our interviewees' generation cannot identify with them. The heritage they receive does not constitute a positive resource for developing their own identity: in Victor's case, there is even a feeling of shame for his parents; in Eva's case; her parents' situation could be interpreted as that of 'winners', but Eva cannot take advantage of their alternative model either.

The available options for communicating are reduced to the **relationship with peers** in their own gang, as in the cases of Julio, Esteban and Victor. It is a fairly standardised form of relationship, but it **is highly valued by our interviewees**, as their praise for loyalty and solidarity and friendship demonstrates. This sphere provides them with the easiest way of being visible and socially recognised. However the reproductive logic of the neighbourhood prevents them from knowing other people in different circumstances. Instead, for Estela and Eva, the 'ghetto' dynamic of the neighbourhood is not perceived as having much influence on their everyday lives. They are both trying to communicate, but through their boyfriends or through therapy. By contrast, Trini is the one who has shown fewest problems of communication. The cultural patterns of the gypsy community assume the troubles of one of its members as if they were the problem of the whole community. The roles are clear and, as Trini's case shows, the principles of clan loyalty and authority prevent individuals from feeling excluded. Their **relationship with boyfriends and girlfriends** (which they all have except Trini) **provides them with a framework for stability, and it is also a much used resource for escaping from family pressure.**

Their participation in the (informal) **labour market does not provide them with either personal fulfilment or visibility in social terms.** The kind of work they are developing (i.e. precarious, part-time or simply unskilled) does not constitute a resource for their integration in terms of social usefulness. Unlike their parents, our interviewees cannot identify themselves with the jobs they have. Their jobs are seen as useful only in economic terms and as things that help them aspire to a high level of consumption. As far as consumption is concerned, they look for the dignity and identity they cannot find in the labour market. However some of them (i.e. Esteban, Victor and Estela) have found an activity that does not replace their formal work, but is able to give their lives meaning. In Hannah Arendt's (1995) terms, it is an 'action' that is linked to the political and social dimension and is different from labour and work, which are in turn linked to the economic sphere. These activities are structured by a commitment to the others, and by the development of a collective project. In Victor's case, this is focussed on 'Life' (a centre for rehabilitating drug addicts), in Esteban's case on 'Adsis' (a centre for compensatory education), and in Estela's case on the 'Hermandad Rociera' (a cultural-religious association). Although they are very reluctant to accept unequal power relationships with their bosses, they accept the legitimity of the authority that comes from these activities since they are conceived or perceived in terms of more equal power relationships and 'respect as human beings' (an expression which they use a lot). Interestingly, Eva's formal job in a co-operative is perceived as being very demanding when compared to the time and pay she gets from it. In

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[18] By 'authority' we mean Arendt's (1973) conceptualisation whereby authority (as opposed to power) is characterised by the faculty of legitimising those who are to be obeyed, without using coactive or persuasive means.

other words, a more democratic work organisation does not imply more identification with the job. In Trini's case, she symbolically equates her social salary with a status of being employed. The only commitment she has is attending different training courses.

5. Final Remarks

So far, we have seen a diversity of experiences and trajectories in our interviewees, but there is a common element which unites them all. We refer to the feeling of having been excluded or feeling excluded in the vicious circle of marginality. On the one hand, we have drugs; on the other hand, we have a psychologisation of the problems as two ways of overcoming a **feeling of confusion and nonsense.** These feelings highlight the dimension of 'implosion'[19] that helps us qualify the experience of exclusion. These feelings, as we have seen, come from a lack of identification with existing patterns (as provided by parents or the immediate social context) and from a conflictive distribution of family roles. The biographical moment in which the confusion emerges is adolescence, and is therefore strongly shaped by the experience of school. Furthermore, it often leads to a turning point characterised by school failure. School failure could be seen as one of the consequences of this confusion, but it is clear that it deeply conditions interviewees' personal and social experiences. Actually, **the interplay between education, family and neighbourhood relationships is the field in which this category seems to be located**. School and family as the main socialising agents within the local context represented by the neighbourhood provide the social and territorial scenario where the biographies of our youths develop. In this way, the field of work, in both the lived and the told life, is more residual for this category. Therefore, **the traditional concept of work seems to be of no use for an understanding of the capacity of structuring our interviewees' biographies at an objective and a subjective level.**

As we have seen clearly in two cases, the lack of references available from school and family results in long periods of psychological **blockage** or paralysis. Paradoxically, they have stopped a trajectory without having started one. All of the interviewees are experiencing a kind of moratorium period in which they are trying to find an own way (their *self)* while at the same time feeling totally lost. In most cases, the following of a traditional trajectory (by buying a flat, running a family or having a job) does not prevent them from feeling young and lost. In other words, **even though in terms of their 'social agenda', they objectively enter adult life much sooner than other young people[20], in the lived or subjective dimension they feel they belong to the world of adults**. They are the victims of a contradiction between rejection of available references from their parents or the outer context, and reproduction of a traditional working class trajectory. For them, drugs do not constitute a resource or alternative model, but rather an occasional evasion from which they return to the starting-point.

However the **search for a moratorium period** (in psychosocial terms) is one of the most common ways of finding a better 'adaptation' to society and of having a clearer picture of their aspirations. These aspirations are not presented in a material or economic dimension (for example, in terms of upward social mobility), but are rather focussed on clarifying their personal and social role and identity. Since traditional socialising agents in their working class

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[19] See Introduction.

[20] For example, when compared with graduates.

context are not used by them as biographical resources, the journey, the psychologist, the religious values and the voluntary work in the community are the resources through which our interviewees try to find and produce a meaning for their lives. In the reduced sample, **we find those who tend to individualise and psychologise their experiences, and those who externalise them through aggression in the context of school and neighbourhood**. In our sample, women are those who are stuck in this situation of blockage, and are also the ones who plan to see a psychologist to sort out their problems. From the perspective of school failure, this group would belong to the type of 'non-conflictive students', as defined in the Introduction. However like our male interviewees, they are looking for a strategy to follow in terms of autonomy. Theirs – as could be assumed from a working class culture of unskilled youth – is not a strategy of marrying or looking for a partner as a way of ensuring their future. Our male interviewees have turned to deviance (e.g. theft and drug dealing) to deal with their frustration. This group belongs to the type of 'conflictive students', as defined in the Introduction. It is a gendered pattern, which is not to say that both sexes take drugs and cannot be involved in community work.

To conclude, we could say that **the clash between a discourse based on expectations of improvement and material welfare, and the lack of opportunities for more post-material welfare has strongly shaped the pattern of orientation and action of our interviewees' generation**. This generation is trapped by the traditional values of the community and the family, but neither the neighbourhood dynamics nor the school system offers them resources with which they can live their youth with future perspectives in a meaningful way. The present educational model seems to be mainly based on the equation <education = acquisition of formal knowledge>, with little consideration given to the social setting in which the school is located. As our Introduction shows, the reproductive logic of marginalisation and exclusion in outlying neighbourhoods is particularly affecting those who break away from the formal educational path. In the peripheral and working-class suburbs where our interviewees come from, **if school does not provide an integrated pattern of education and fails to stimulate youth intellectually and socially, families cannot meet the challenge on their own. Links and co-operation between family-school and neighbourhood policies seem to be crucial for a non-stigmatising or excluding socialisation process for young people.**

In a context of historical change **'democracy babies' have been (and still are) the guinea pigs of a state educational model which claimed to be progressive, open, participative and high quality**. After twenty years of democracy, **there is still much residue of social stigmatisation and exclusionary dynamics within state schools**.

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