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# Generation of 'Immigrant' Generations*

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**Abstract**

In addition to the age factor and the way in which the passage of time and history can be seen as a succession of generations, the concept of generation must also be thought of as a mode of classification that is necessarily contested. Immigration poses a question of generation that is special in that it, firstly, involves the addition of an external factor in the evolution of a society and, secondly, involves the creation of a new type of generational identification within that society. The social milieu of immigrants therefore represents a laboratory where all the latent meanings engendered by the relationships between the individuals and the group and between the different generations may be studied.

## 1. About (social) generation in general...

At a time when eugenics is making a strong comeback[1], the term *generation* risks serving as new ground for socio-biologism. The temptation and appeal of relating social differences to genetic factors is strong and will always remain so. There is reason to fear that the current major progress in biology and genetics might reinforce previous eugenics by providing it with a kind of 'pseudo-scientific halo' capable of explaining, justifying and legitimising social

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[1] To paraphrase the title of Troy Duster's book, *Retour à l'eugénisme*, Paris, Kimé, 1992, 303 p.

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inequalities with the authority – so it is argued – of a science, thus at the same time justifying and legitimising in an objective manner (i.e. unknown even to the proponents of these theses) all racist prejudices. It is particularly through the mediation of notions such as filiation and age groups that, whatever we do, the category of generation is linked with the biological model. Despite all the precautions that can be taken precisely in order to establish the more properly sociological meaning of generation, and which consist in qualifying it, on the one hand, as *social* generation, in contrast with family (or animal) generation, and, on the other hand, as *historical* generation (as opposed, perhaps, to natural generation), we can never be sure of having completely and definitively broken with the biological temptation that still haunts sociology and at which, more generally, all the social sciences 'squint'. While they are fundamentally social in nature, the problem of age and, with it, the problem of the duration of a generation (as artificial and conventional as the latter may seem) tend to lose their properly sociological significance as soon as they are periodised and the notion of life cycle is introduced (i. e. being born, growing up, living, and dying). This metaphorical scheme is not only peculiar to the 'naturalist' way of thinking, but remains close to the heart of many renowned intellectuals who think about society in terms of physics or social dynamics, all of whom are, of course, theorists of progress. We will never cease to uncover all the pitfalls of biologism and to unmask all the forms of thought associated with it, and it is not through opposing sociologism, another similar pitfall, to biologism that the solution can be found.

An even truer and more significant reflection of the ever-present link with the biological is the perceived need to base all forms of social belonging and all social systems on genealogical constructs, that is, on the superimposition of a succession of generations laid one on top of the other over time, like sedimentary layers, of which in this case filiation is the archetypal model, the paradigm of all social ties. This is also attested to by all the founding myths that are the basis of all genealogies, whether they be family, parental, tribal, village, city, national or other kinds of genealogies. According to this logic (or chrono-logic), the whole of humanity is nothing but an uninterrupted succession of generations, like an endless chain of which each generation would be a ring; any break in continuity would be unthinkable. Historical time itself, if it has any place in the cyclical conception of time implicit in the notion of generation, would then be no more than an indefinite repetition of generations from some *founding father*.

Continuity or break? Here lies the entire problem of the generational phenomenon: the notion of generation calls into question the very meaning of history, and even the possibility of history itself. It collides with two other notions associated with it, *contemporaneity* and *simultaneity*. A single generation

includes all *contemporaries* in a given situation and at a given time; this is the common definition given by all dictionaries. But we still have to agree on what we mean by the term contemporaries. What contemporaneity is it? What might its content be? This is one of the major questions posed by the notion of generation, and, as we add complementary questions to it, all of which are interdependent, derive from each other, and are linked to each other in a relationship of mutual dependence, questions which revolve around: 1) the relationship between the conception of generation as a *total abstraction* and the conception of generation as a *concrete group* effectively circumscribed within limits of its mode of production and its mode of functioning; 2) the relationship between *continuity* and *discontinuity*, which are two contradictory realities, but both of which are necessary in order to be able to distinguish separate generations which succeed one another, extend one another, and stand behind each other in the continuous flow of human time; 3) what constitutes the proper *unity* of a generation (and whether this unity is intrinsic or extrinsic, which is another aspect of the debate) or, better still, of the generational whole as a particular and localised moment in the unfolding of history and in social becoming; and 4) many other problems, such as the conditions for conservation over the generations, for transmission from one generation to the next, for reception and invention, or for the reinvention and reinterpretation of heritage or cultural capital by each generation – it is no surprise that the sociology of generations is above all the sociology of knowledge, or at least forms part of the sociology of knowledge. This is what we discover when we try to do the sociology of this area of sociology which also has its own social history - and we end up to broadly identify the essence of what the sociology of generation covers. What also contributes to the confusion is, on the one hand, the relative polysemy of the word generation and, on the other hand, its deployment on two axes and in two dimensions, a vertical dimension and a horizontal axis. Indeed, as is often the case with vocabulary naming social mechanisms or dynamics, movements in time and space and, more broadly, with vocabulary that might be called operative in the sense that it describes an action that is performed and so expresses practices, the word generation has come to designate both the process that generates or produces a generation and the result of this process, the product generated, the *modus operandi* and the *opus operatum*. Another example of this semantic mechanism is the word immigration – which is not unrelated to the notion of generation – which, in its own way, also means, firstly, the mechanism underway, the very process by which one immigrates, secondly, the result of this process, i.e. the social situation engendered by this process as well as the position or positions that result from it, and finally, and increasingy often, the population or populations concerned, involved as they are in the immigration mobility, which would be devoid of any

real content and meaning without them. Furthermore, and this is partly a consequence of that, the notion of generation encompasses two complementary and dialectically linked conceptions. On the one hand, there is a diachronic conception, along a longitudinal axis, in which the stakes are set at the origins and relate to the longest, oldest and, above all, most continuous anteriority, a continuity that is firmly guaranteed and deemed unresolvable. Here, as elsewhere, the vocabulary [of generation], especially the vocabulary of *genealogy* or the *genealogical schema,* permeates the whole representation we have of ourselves and, correlatively, of the other, and thus attests to this desire for an original anteriority[2] and to the continuity of a 'we' that is the result of a great legacy, a 'we' that is all the more vigorous and all the more 'authentic' the more the legacy it claims is ancient and continuous. This is the meaning attached to the whole vocabulary of the 'souche' ('native French', as they declare themselves), of the 'racines', the vocabulary 'of blood and soil' (le *jus sanguinis*), which seems to be a more popular and common variant of the heraldic and aristocratic vocabulary of noble birth and 'quartiers' (of nobility). On the other hand, there is a synchronic conception, along a transversal axis, whose overall interest is the present time, and therefore concerns the volume and degree of cohesion of the mass of all contemporaries who want to or claim to descend from the same origin and participate in the same history. To complete this table of correspondences between diachrony and synchrony, longitudinality and transversality, anteriority and simultaneity, and so on, according to each of the two points of view set out, we would sometimes have a dynamic vision of the generational movement, and we would speak of *intergenerational* relations, and sometimes, on the contrary, a static vision of the state of a generation at a given moment in time, calling into question the unity and cohesion of the generational whole and *intragenerational* relations. The paradigmatic models of the relationship postulated respectively by the first and second conceptions, both of which are present in every group's self-image, is for the first, *ancestrality,* and the second, *fraternity*. The first founds and legitimises the second, which is thus seen as devoid of all otherness and free from promiscuity and inauthenticity; in turn, the second, founded and legitimised in this way, at every moment constitutes the ceaselessly repeated actualisation of *ancestrality,* which continues through it, and which is remembered by all of us as the living embodiment of the same origin, the origin we refer to. This is what genealogies and genealogical constructions are used for in all places and at all times; and the broader the

[2] Marc Bloch provides a superb illustration of this tendency to trace the emergence of a 'national consciousness' further and further back into the past, finding glimpses of national feeling as far back in time as the Germanic invasions: cf. *La société féodale*, Paris, Albin Michel, coll. "Évolution de l'humanité", 1939 (reprinted) p. 600 ff.

synchronic basis that requires firm integration, the further back into the past we reach for an ancestor, to the point of mobilising our most distant ancestors and their history, thus summoning up the powerfully integrating power of this reference and this mobilisation.

To use Pinder's phrase, 'the non-contemporaneity of contemporaneity', what, in the phenomenon of generations, particularly in the history of art in Europe[3], has been of most interest to the aesthete and the historian – is a fitting characterisation of one of the fundamental properties of the problem of generation in the broadest sense of the term. To understand what contemporaneity and, correlatively, non-contemporaneity could mean in this context, or, if we prefer, 'the contemporaneity of what is not contemporary' and, conversely, 'the non-contemporaneity of what can be contemporary', it is necessary to dissociate the truly sociological meaning of 'being-contemporaneous' from its literal and more natural and immediate meaning, of simple simultaneity in the ordinary sense of the term, in the sense that simultaneous things are linked to one another only because they are situated in the same chronological interval, and for no other reason, although admittedly being in the same chronological interval is no small thing. It is not sufficient to share the same chronological time to be sociologically contemporary. People who live simultaneously in the same epoch can belong to different social generations, insofar as they have been engendered by different social conditions, which is a particular form of contemporaneity; conversely, people can be contemporaries and not be simultaneous – and, on a human scale, this is fairly common – people who are separated in time by chronological gaps that are sometimes quite large, but who are the products, at different points in time, of the same mode of generation, of the same social conditions of generation, or of what we call the same social generation – which is another form or definition of contemporaneity.

In a previous text that sought to explain the genesis of Algerian workers' emigration to France – as well as the changes that occurred in the history of this emigration and in the system of its attitudes, partly as a result of this emigration itself, changes which have ensured its continuity – we gave a practical and entirely empirical definition of generation, based on the idea that individuals can be led to act and react in a similar way as a result of shared social conditions; these individuals, engendered by a condition and themselves engendering a similar response to the condition that generates them, form a single generation or a single 'age', another name for what Mannheim calls the 'being-together of

[3] This is the title of W. Pinder, *The Problem of Generations in the History of European Art*, Berlin, 1926.

a socio-historical kind[4]'. The definition of generation that is implicitly proposed and actually implemented is that it is a particular class of social conditions *generating* a particular class of individuals with characteristics that give them a certain unity, which in turn *generates* a particular class of behaviours that are specific to them in the context in which they are situated. Thus a particular class of immigrants, when placed in a situation of immigration, would produce a particular class of immigrants[5] and, through it all, ultimately, a particular class of respective behaviours, those of the emigrant and, correlatively, those of the immigrant, both perfectly coherent with each other and relatively well adapted to the situations that generated them here and there. This mode of generation and, consequently, the generation that is produced by it, do not emerge in the same way, with the same intensity and, above all, at the same times in all regions (geographical and social) and in each strata of the same society. The emigration of Algerian peasants to become part of the wage-earning class in France, towards the only possible form of proletarianisation, an invention mainly, if not exclusively, of the mountain populations (and of all the mountain populations of the East and West, of the Aurès, partially of the Ouarsenis, of the Lala Maghnia mountains, etc. and not only of Kabylia, as is often repeated) gave rise to this first generation [of emigrants] at the beginning of this century. This mode of generation would not occur elsewhere, in the High Plains area for example, until much later, at times even two decades later, when, *mutatis mutandis*, the same conditions of generation (or similar conditions, homologous with previous ones) extended to other territories and other populations and thus generated new emigrants and immigrants. Therefore, decades apart and in separate places, the same class of factors, the same series of causes, produced the same generation of emigrants who can be considered contemporaries in this respect, despite the time lag. 'Situation of class and situation of generation are homologous', wrote Gérard Mauger in his commentary on Mannheim's *The Problem of Generations (op. cit.)*, adding that to every 'situation (of class or generation) corresponds, in Mannheim's own words, a "tendency towards a mode of behaviour, a determined way of feeling and thinking"', 'a tendency inherent in each situation, definable on the basis of the specificity of the situation itself[6]'. Do we belong to one generation or another, in the same way that 'we are proletarians, entrepreneurs, income earners, and so on', why not, emigrants or immigrants (or the children of emigrants or immigrants)? If we know very little about the passage from a *class* situation (a situation in which we

[4] In the original text this note is blank (translator's note)

[5] In the original text this note is blank (translator's note)

[6] This is what Gérard Mauger writes in his 'sociological reading' in the afterword to his translation of Karl Mannheim, *Le problème des générations, op. cit*, p. 45 and p. 99.

are involved without knowing that we are involved in any situation whatsoever) to *class consciousness,* is the same true, by analogy, about the problem of generation? When, and as a result of what, under what conditions, would we pass from a generational situation to generational consciousness? However, to continue the analogy, whereas the class situation, which does not necessarily imply class consciousness, nevertheless helps the latter to emerge and, by the same token, helps to create the particular character deriving from this emergence, there is no guarantee that the situation of generation also leads, in similar conditions, to a 'generational consciousness' which is the equivalent of 'class consciousness'. When does a new generation know that it is a generation, when does it become aware of itself as a generation? And what are the effects of this awareness on the generation that becomes aware of itself? Doesn't awareness have the effect of dissolving the phenomenon of generation? In fact, the very nature of what we call the generational group is at stake in this type of question. There seems to be two ways of understanding generation: firstly, as a pure abstraction – which, incidentally, would give rise to a sociology aiming for a 'pure theory of generation'; secondly, as assuming actual, objectified forms in and through concrete groups that are well-defined and well-situated in space and time. But as a social construct, the generation we are dealing with is neither a pure abstraction, nor a simple concrete group or set of concrete groups. And if it can contain concrete groups which can be mutually identified on an empirical basis constituted by the social traits and social position they share (place of residence, especially when it is a place of seclusion like the ghetto, .; ethnic origin, especially when it is denounced as foreign, exotic, still too recent and is strongly devalued and stigmatised; and, in association with all this, many other social characteristics), a particular generation could be reduced to the set of groups for which it serves as a formative foundation. A generation is neither a 'concrete group' of any kind, whether natural or contractual, nor a shapeless, fragmented scattering of individuals linked only by their classification in the same age group – a generation is not an age group. It is not a *generational movement* either, as some have argued, although it is similar to it, more similar to it than an age group is – the generation is an ensemble and that is all it is, it cannot be anything else. It is thus an abstraction and, as such, only comes to life and is only embodied through scattered islands of actual groups, but it cannot be the sum of these groups and, here as elsewhere, the whole (i.e. the generational whole) seems qualitatively superior to the sum of its parts. So, what is the unity of this whole? Without being fully aware of the role it is called upon to play, and more as a unifying principle than a unitary entity, a generation cannot know what it is, and cannot even know what it contains within itself, until it is given the opportunity to do so, that is, until it is given the opportunity to put into practice, here and there, even partially and locally, this same principle about,

necessarily, smaller units. What, then, is this form of unity that constitutes generation and each generation in isolation? What is the social bond that weaves together a generation so that it appears as unified and is treated as such in its own time and not, as is easier to do, only after the fact, by means of a retrospective reconstitution? How, then, is this bond – which is necessarily spiritual because it has never been experienced concretely, empirically and at the level of the whole – produced, so that a generation is not simply an aggregate of individuals, and nor does it need to take the form of an effective group or concerted association? On what does a generation base its cohesion and unity in order to be *a* generation? To be the generations we're talking about: the 'pre-war generation', the 'post-war generation' (but which war?), the 'paid leave generation', the 'Algerian war generation', the 'pill generation', the 'baby boomer generation', the "68 generation', and also, later, the 'unemployed generation' or the 'AIDS generation', etc.? We believe it is necessary for a generation to be identified, qualified and named by what is most essential and distinctive about it, by what is most emblematic about it. Is the unity of a generation really intrinsic, or is it largely extrinsic, i.e. determined by some external factor? How and why is it that, in certain circumstances, a generation is raised to the level of consciousness? But if not through self-consciousness, how is the identity of a generation constituted? Are common conditions of existence enough, in themselves, to give rise to the essential identification of some people with others, an identification that takes place mainly on the basis of shared experience of shared life conditions, an identification, moreover, recognised by all, both by those directly concerned and by the observers of those conditions, and also by the reactions they provoke? The identifying, or rather integrating, power of commonly shared conditions – helping to reinforce the presumed unity of a generation and helping to bring about an awareness of that unity – seems all the more effective when these conditions are experienced as discriminatory, and its attributes as specific, or even exclusive, and stigmatising. But is the shared awareness created, firstly, by the discovery of the sharing of unjust living conditions, and secondly, by the repercussions that this discovery has on the entire generation or fraction of a generation that has to endure these conditions, sufficient to confer true unity on that generation? More broadly, what does it mean, beyond this particular case, when an identity is based solely on criteria that are apparently entirely negative, thus an identity that is defined only negatively as a sum of traits expressed solely in terms of a lack, as defects, which in practice act like stigmas. These stigmatising traits include: the fact of being children of immigrants; ethnic and/or national origins, even when the subject is very distant from this origin; belonging, even if only of a theoretical or symbolic kind, to a particular language, religion or culture, which in this case are dominated languages, religions and cultures, because they

are the languages, religions and cultures of societies that are dominated from every point of view, with emigration being, ultimately, the effect, illustration, and proof of this domination – this is true regardless of one's relationship, in this case, with these languages, religions and cultures, and even when they are totally ignored or forgotten (it is not surprising that this happens when there is nothing in the situation of decontextualisation in which they find themselves that can reactivate them); all related to each other, the spatial and social segregation of suburban housing, a segregation that is always in danger of appearing to be 'racial' segregation; in reaction to this, the violence of these suburbs and of immigrants in these suburbs, crimes which are, in this case, denounced all the more vehemently because they are associated with immigration, and therefore appear to be 'exotic', so violence and crime multiplied, which is doubly reprehensible because fundamentally illegitimate; failure at school, which is seen as another form of delinquency, being represented as such in the social imaginary, which is also a national imaginary – 'we give them schooling, we educate them and they're not even able to use it!'; unemployment which, takes on a different meaning and assumes a symbolic value [in the context of immigration] that it does not necessarily have elsewhere because, although it is endemic [across the whole population], it is particularly associated in this context with the vague accusation hanging over it and over its victims, whom are accused of laziness, malignity, deliberate and sought-after idleness and of an intrinsic vice - and they say 'idleness is the mother of all vices' – instead of considering, which is fairer and truer, the effect of one's own social difficulties and unfavourable or, worse still, prejudicial social positions [on employment possibilities; ; lack of technical qualifications, which only exacerbates failures at school and the blame attached to that failure; and the list goes on. While all this might help to constitute the unity of a group, we must not confuse this unity and whatever positive or negative factors might give rise to it with the unity of a generation, even when the group in question is said to belong to the same generation identified by the conditions of its genesis and by the social position common to all its members, that is, by everything that contributes to ensuring that, in the socio-historical becoming of the entire generational whole to which they belong they are given the same shared possibilities (a whole in the morphological sense and as a moment in the unfolding of time).

## 2. ...to 'ordinal' generations (first, second, etc.) of immigrants

Before dealing with the concrete case of certain populations to whom we primarily, and, we think, too easily, apply the word 'generation' – probably for

lack of an appropriate term for judiciously naming an 'unnameable', unclassifiable population and situation – it was of course necessary to go through this digression, in order to give a vague idea of the extremely complex meaning of the phenomenon of generation. It would have been nice to have been able to write this paper and properly address this issue without having to speak of the 'first', the 'second', or the 'umpteenth' generation (if the umpteenth were not contradictory or incompatible with the very idea of generation), and even less so of the 'zero generation', even though this is the starting point of everything, and a starting point not just of a chronology, of an ordinal series and a bio-ordered series, but above all of a line of reasoning that believes it can base its validity on serially attested data (the successive flows of immigration) and, consequently, on an event-based conception of the different generations (in the sense of filiations) that punctuate the time of immigration and the succession of immigrant populations. As a kind of spectacle that is open to observation and to being counted by the society that watches it unfold, immigration can easily be broken down into stages, sections of populations, and generations. Time, and a lot of it, has to pass for the counting of generations to be forgotten (which is why a 'degree zero generation', the original generation, is impossible). 'We are all the more interested (in generations) when there is a generation deficit, and therefore a deficit of confirmed historical precedence', explains François Mentré[7]. Meanwhile, the notion of social heredity is fading away, thus losing its relevance (there is no longer a heredity of professions, offices, or even, strictly speaking, of belonging to any order whatsoever, whether it be a class or a caste). Is this why the problem of generations arouses greater intellectual interest in the United States, a country where there is little 'confirmed historical precedence', a country in search of a national tradition, and where greater attention is paid to eugenics, which remains a constant temptation[8]? Because immigration is an *externality*, an influx of people from outside a nation's borders, it can be easily tracked. Furthermore, we do not know whether 'generations' (if we can speak of such a thing) means successive waves of immigrants – and how to distinguish one wave from another apart from through national origin, especially when the immigration movement is continuous over a fairly long period – or if we are talking about generations in the strictly family sense of the term, that is, a generation of immigrants who are merely the posterity of the generation of their immigrant parents. As if by a curious coincidence, we don't talk about this generation of immigrant parents; or at least, we don't talk about it as a *generation* (or generations).

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[7] See François Mentré, *Les générations sociales*, Paris, Bossard, 1920, 470 p.

[8] See *American and English Genealogies in the Library of Congress,* Washington, 1910, 805 p., quoted by François Mentré, *op. cit.* p. 9.

Unlike the societies of the 'New World' which are all, until relatively recently, or even to this day, made up of nothing but immigrants, and which have been constituted through successive waves of immigration, the ordinary representation of immigrants in old and already fully constituted 'state-national' societies is a representation entirely consistent with our way of thinking about the State (and, moreover, through immigration and the way of thinking about immigration, it is the State that thinks of itself by thinking of immigration, that is thought according to the 'thought of the State') and prevents talking of immigration as an intrinsic reality, and thus does not envisage it and think of it as an *endogenous* fact, forgotten and stripped of its character of exteriority (or otherness), as well as of all that is linked to this exteriority and which makes up the specificity of immigration's presence within a *national* ensemble, within a universe that only exists *nationally* (i.e. in a *nationally* defined territory, under the authority of *national* sovereignty, in compliance with *national* public order, and for *national* citizens[9]). The advent of language about immigration in terms of generations could reflect a change of perspective in the way we look at the phenomenon of immigration, a change related to the end – some two decades ago – of the era of mass, mobile immigration apparently only of workers in order to work, as if immigration for work did not over time require permanent residence and immigration of settlement. And so, with the relative but belated realisation of the reality of immigration as a presence destined to become permanent (and not just long-term), the need arose to speak of immigration in terms of generations. This need primarily concerns, of course, the 'generation' that was born into immigration and has grown up and been 'socialised' in a situation of immigration. It is this generation that has imposed a change in the way immigration in general is viewed, at the same time as it is also – as an autonomous generation, which is the subject of an overabundant discourse and that, to a certain extent, exists only through this discourse – the product of this change and of the discourse that attests to this change. This certainly explains the surprising reversal of the logical order of things: as if through a chrono-

[9] The characteristics of the 'immigrant' presence are, to a large extent, the effects of our categories of thought; social categories and political categories are also mental categories. Thus, even though reality blatantly contradicts the usual representations we have, in accordance with national orthodoxy, of immigrant and immigration, we continue to think of both as being responsible for a presence which, ideally, should be, in law and in theory, 'temporary' (even if it is allowed to last indefinitely), subordinate to some reason other than itself (in this case, work), and politically neutral (an 'apolitical' presence, politically neutralised even though it is fundamentally political). For all these requirements of our (national) way of thinking about the political and social world, and the necessary illusions it imposes, see our book, *L'immigration ou les paradoxes de l'altérité*, Brussels, De Boeck, 1992, 330 p., especially pp. 49-77 and 291-311.

logical challenge to chrono-logical reason, we paradoxically agree to call this generation the 'second generation' which, through the ordinal adjective associated with it, brings into existence, *a contrario et a posteriori*, the 'first' generation that did not previously exist, or these other 'first' generations that had been forgotten and were not talked about; it's as if, in a total reversal, it were up to the 'children to make the parents exist', to 'give birth' to them in wider public life, to confirm them as residents in the full sense of the term, and to rehabilitate them in their total social and political identity[10].

There is undeniably a break between one generation and another; there has to be a break for us to be able to talk about a new generation that differs from the previous one. And everything we can say about it consists precisely in marking this break and exploiting it according to the arguments we can find for it. Some of these arguments are, of course, highly relevant, but others are much less so, being simply the result of a desire to discriminate between one generation and the next. These less relevant arguments are simply add ons, being the product *a posteriori* of an artifice of thought, of a mode of reasoning based on the model of the sorite: one truly distinctive trait (trait A) may contain within it or be identified with another trait that is less distinctive (trait B), and that might be identified with another that is even less distinctive (trait C), and so on. This process of purely formal associations leads to crediting the whole series of traits (traits B, C, and so on) with the truth recognised in the initial trait (trait A). This explains the insistence on finding characteristics in the generation of the children of immigrant families which, rightly or wrongly, are intended to be sufficiently distinctive and which, whether or not they are well-founded, are meant to authorise the specification or autonomy we assign to this generation of 'immigrants', which differ so greatly from the generation (or generations) of their parents. The confrontation is not just between two generations, as the

[10] Insofar as they are a foreigner to the nation, the immigrant worker has no identity throughout their life other than that of worker and has no real existence other than that conferred by work, that is to say an existence which takes on meaning and significance and which has its raison d'être only through work, for work and in work, an existence entirely confined to the sphere of work, the sphere of activity, and the sphere of understanding. There is no better illustration of this astonishing reversal with regard to the status of immigrants and the civil status that the law has defined for them, than the hesitation that the public authorities have with regard to immigrants who are fathers and mothers of children born in France and who, therefore virtually or actually have French nationality, and whatever the method of acquisition of this nationality, while as immigrants they are legally subject to deportation, as parents of French children they can escape deportation. Thus, in the eyes of the law, the children act as guarantors for their parents, who owe them this significant change in their status and, consequently, a large part of their legal existence, not to say their very existence.

language of the 'second generation' implies, but between three partners, the most important of which is that which is unnamed, namely immigrant society. The real relationship is played out against the background constituted, in this case, by French society: what is fundamentally at issue is the reciprocal relationship that each of the two forms of immigration has, in its own way, with French society as a whole and with all its structures and bodies. One of the first manifestations of the change that is taking place in this way can be seen in today's overabundant language of *integration*: integration here is not just the integration of people 'outside' French society – even though they have taken their place in it, made it their actual living space, because their integration in fact begins from the very first moment of immigration, or even before immigration, when the need and therefore the idea of *emigrating* first arises (integration [in their country of origin] into this form of economy that has given rise to monetarised wage labour, integration from below, in an imposed manner rather than a chosen one) – but that of the phenomenon itself, with immigration itself being 'repatriated', 'internalised', even 'interiorised', thereby losing much of the representation we had of it as pure 'exteriority', as a reality that is totally and definitively 'external' to society even as it is introduced and captured within society. The current dominant discourse on immigration confirms this. And the tendency towards rupture in this discourse is not only a rupture between successive generations considered in their mutual relations of continuity and discontinuity, but it is also and even more so the rupture in the reciprocal relations between them and French society: in the same way that one generation is 'excluded', kept at a distance and keeping itself at a distance from everything, confined to a quasi-instrumental life[11], so the next is the object of an intention

[11] A direct *reflection* of power relations as they occur in practice and, ultimately, as a *tool* at the service of the interests of the dominant (instrumentalism thesis), this is the conception that the jurist Hans Kelsen, head of the Vienna School, developed of law and especially of jurisprudence in his attempt to found a 'pure science of law', in the same way that Saussure did for linguistics by separating 'internal linguistics' and 'external linguistics', or Durkheim for sociology as an 'autonomous science of social facts', which is not to be confused with law – the latter has to *prescribe* (which is the object of legal policy or political philosophy) whereas the former has to *describe* – because jurisprudence would be divided between, on the one hand, an 'internal legal science' which would have its own foundation in the very principles of its understanding, which would be like a closed system autonomous from social reality, and whose development would obey a kind of 'internal dynamic' (the formalism thesis), and, on the other hand, an 'external legal science' which has to take account of a whole series of data outside the law (historical, sociological, psychological, cultural data, etc., and also data from case law and legal practice). For our purposes, we know that Kelsen considers the usual opposition between the *national* (subject to the jurisdiction of the state to which it

to recuperate, of a commonly shared desire for annexation as an endogenous (rather than indigenous) by-product. We can see evidence of this even in the ambiguity surrounding the classic notions (classic in terms of the strictly legal tradition in which they are defined) of *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*: if *jus loci* is unthinkable and therefore something irremediably excluded for all forms of immigration, past as well as present – we are talking about real immigration, i.e. immigrants who have previously emigrated from elsewhere – then it is up to today's *jus soli* to become tomorrow's *jus sanguinis*, just as today's *jus sanguinis* may in many cases have been yesterday's *jus soli*. The whole object constituted by generation, as well as the use made of this notion, seem to owe their existence to the thinkers in charge of making the new generation, of bringing it into being, of calling it into existence. The object [of the generation], reflects here, as in many other places, the appearance of agents with an interest (and often a personal interest) in this object and in the appropriation of it. The discourse on generation is necessarily a *performative* discourse, that is to say, a discourse aimed at making legitimate the distinction it seeks to impose. The act of categorisation – a generation is nothing more than one social category among others – exerts a power of its own when it is recognised and taken up almost universally, including by those it 'categorises'. As in the case of 'ethnic' categories, 'regional' categories and, more broadly, categories of kinship, the categories of generation institute a reality by making use of the power of objectification, of construction and of revelation that all discourses have; without a discourse able to gild and bring into being what it apparently only enunciates, the object of this discourse would have remained buried, ignored by all, merely virtual. But the effectiveness of discourse, an act of social magic as such, which consists in calling into existence the named thing, in this case the designated group, is not only based in the fact that the discourse announcing to the group its own identity is founded in the objectivity of the group to which it is addressed – in the objective social, economic and cultural characteristics common to the group, and in the recognition and belief accorded to it by the members of the group. The power

belongs, enforceable against other states) and the *non-national* (subject in different ways to the jurisdiction of the state to which it does not belong, and subject to the jurisdiction of that foreign state on whose territory it is present solely by virtue of that presence, thus in a purely material sense) as a purely accidental opposition, one that is entirely arbitrary (in the logical sense of the term as not necessary) and completely decisive, thus excluding the state from being the legal expression of a community (cf. Hans Kelsen, *Théorie pure du droit*, Neuchâtel, Éd. de la Baconnière, 1988, 288 p.; and also *La démocratie: sa nature, sa valeur*, Paris, Economica, 1989 (original ed. 1929, 130 p.). See also J. Bonnecasse, *La pensée juridique de 1884 à l'heure présente, les variations et les traits essentiels,* Bordeaux, Delmas, 1933, 2 volumes.

that this authoritative discourse exercises over the group has the ability to reveal the relationship between all the objective properties commonly shared by the group, and by stating these properties, and above all the systemic effect that they all form together, contributes to their recognition and, for the people concerned, to identify themselves in them. There is an unending debate about the respective place, in the definition of identity, of so-called 'objective' properties (such as ancestry, ethnic or national origin, territory and site, language, religion, economic activity, and even physical features and name, etc.) and so-called 'subjective' properties, such as a sense of belonging and the way in which each of the objective characteristics is worn and behaved. In other words, the latter are representations that social agents make of all the divisions that make up society and, above all, of the divisions that involve them personally, individually or collectively – this 'subjectivism' is always viewed suspiciously by the social sciences, which are usually more at ease with objectivism, despite being also suspicious of too much objectivism even when they refuse it[12]. We have proof of the power of nomination – saying and creating the name of a group, also creates the group itself – thus of the power that the discourse on the group, which constitutes the group, exerts on the group, through the expression by which an entire generation, the 'beur' [see footnote 13] generation, is metaphorically identified in an emblematic way. Once the break has been made, the question arises as to what name should be given to this distinct generation, cut off from the continuous flow of which it is a part and, in this case, from the succession of generations of immigrants. This question is posed as much by observers of the new generation, who are also, in a way, the real craftsmen, as by those who are directly concerned, the immigrants like no others, who haven't emigrated from anywhere, who are emigrants and immigrants on the inside. How do you name the unnameable? The status of this whole *sui generis* generation needs to be defined, delimited in relation to the dual environment in which it finds itself, the 'natural' environment of society natural members among whom it is not (or not yet) to be found, and the extraordinary traditional environment constituted by immigrants of which it is no longer an integral part. So, what name should be given to this very real *artefact*, a kind of representation of reality which doesn't necessarily believes in the reality of this representation? As a division of a continuous reality, confirmation of this division's own reality is required. The

[12] On all these issues and the struggles to assert all forms of identity (national identity, regional identity, minority group identity, linguistic identity, religious identity, etc.), see Pierre Bourdieu, 'L'identité et la représentation, éléments pour une réflexion critique sur l'idée de région', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, no. 35, November 1980, pp. 63-72.

coining of the term 'beur' comes at just the right time. And it takes all the benevolent and condescending attention of the thinkers of 'generation' (and of *that* generation) to try to give this denomination a kind of local authenticity and to sign this expression with the mark of the production of the 'verlan': the product of popular language, the slang of the suburbs, the territory of assignment offered to this 'generation'. There is no more *verlan* here in the first sense than in the second: neither in its simple form, as a direct inversion of the word 'Arab', nor in its double or triple inversion or reversal to the square or cube, or to the nth power...[13] It's well-known that derision is the weapon of the weak; it's a passive weapon, a weapon of protection and prevention. It's a technique that is well known to all the dominated and relatively common in all situations of domination: 'we, the Negroes...'; 'we, the *Khourouto*...[14]', in this case we, the Arabs...); 'we, the Nanas...'; 'we, the common people...'; 'we, the miserable peasants' and so on. It is in keeping with the paradigm of '*black is beautiful*'. Black American sociology and colonial sociology teach us that, as a general rule, one of the forms of revolt – and undoubtedly the first form of revolt against stigmatisation that is socially true, that is generic and that, in so doing, collectively characterises an entire group, and does so over a long period of time – consists in publicly claiming the stigma that has become an emblem, claims that often result in the institutionalisation of the group, which then

[13] The expression *Beur*... might simply be a distortion in the sense of a francization, or a word play based on a colloquial interjection such as *boukh*... which, in women's vocabulary in particular, means something unimportant, negligible, less than nothing, total insignificant, which those concerned adopt to describe their position in French society. The symbolic balance of power is so subtle that, unable to escape the stigmatisation, the hetero-stigmatisation that we know is inevitable because it is part of our social position, we take the side of derision: rather than giving people something to laugh about, and in order not to give them something to laugh about, to prevent others from laughing at us because we know that we are ridiculous; rather than lending ourselves to mockery, to denunciation, to stigmatisation, and in order to dissuade them all, it is better to laugh at ourselves, to make fun of ourselves, to denounce ourselves, to anticipate stigmatisation, and so on. . It's not simply a matter of announcing that we're not fooled by everything we're exposed to socially, but, more than that, it's about changing, or at least trying to change, the relationship that is at the root of all depreciation, each more pejorative than the last, that we're forced to endure.

[14] We also know the Arabic verb *kharat*, a slang term, which means to ramble, to rave, to dream, to indulge in thoughts, ideas, images, and attitudes that are completely dreamlike, which precisely describes the typical relationship of the most dominated to the social and political world. This has given rise, for example, to the common and almost insulting expression: *kharat à la rouhak*, which means to dream, joke, and be as mad as you want (i.e. at the expense of yourself).

becomes inseparable from the stigma attached to it and by which it is identified, and also from the economic and social effects of stigmatisation.

*'Confrontation and opposition (...) are inherent in the production of a new generation which, in order to exist, must become autonomous and differentiate itself from the previous one. This is how the first outlines of a generation's social image take shape. Its reference or counter-reference is provided by the previous generation, the one it is taking over from and which is, consequently, pushed to clarify and complete its own image*[15]*'.* Two ways of thinking, two main themes come together in the particular case of the study of generations in relation to immigration. This concerns the stages of life and the relationship between generations, which when juxtaposed with the problem of immigration are posed in completely different terms. The work of separating generations, of distinguishing one generation from another, and of making one generation autonomous from the other – and it is through this work of redefinition (*re-definition* in the sense of delimitation, 'drawing borders in straight lines[16]') that the unity of a generation is constituted – never seems to be fully accomplished, is never brought to a conclusion. It is only tendentiously and rather confusedly so. Even its formulation remains rather vague, positing neither a radical break in which the new generation is a spontaneous creation, appearing to be without antecedents and separate from all past legacies, nor a seamless continuity and complete fidelity in which the 'daughter generation' identically repeats the 'mother generation'. This situation is the condition for an intermediate situation between two poles: either total identification with French society, with no time for *integral* self-realisation (here we return to the vocabulary of integration), or a radical separation from it and even total incompatibility with it (this is what a certain discourse on Islam says) and, consequently, the almost fatal return, in the mode of generic fatality (this being more powerful and more decisive than history), and also in the frankly racist mode of irrevocable belonging to the race, to (racial) 'origins', a reconnection that is desired and imposed, which is, at the same time, a way of denying any kinship or, even, historically and sociologically developed and attested proximity (through immigration and all history prior to immigration) with French society. Thus, without being clearly aware of the contradictions to which we are exposing ourselves, we are divided between two totally antithetical conceptions and readings of this generation, which, by its very nature as a generation, is doomed to ambiguity, and also between the different interpretations we have

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15 See Claudine Attias-Donfut, *Sociologie des générations, l'empreinte du temps*, Paris, PUF, 1988, p. 10.

16 This is the definition given by Emile Benveniste on the etymology of the word *regio* (region), from *regere fines*, the act of "drawing borders in straight lines"; cf. *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, Paris, Minuit, 1969, t. II: *Pouvoir, droit, religion*, p. 14-15.

of its position, which, to say the least, is difficult to identify and classify within French society. Undoubtedly, all the discomfort experienced in the face of such a situation and also, partly as a result of it – which is experienced to different degrees of intensity by the people directly concerned – stem from this difficulty in classifying and being classified, in identifying and being identified, in defining and being defined, and, to put it simply, in naming and being named. The 'generation gap' is not simply the differential effect, which is fairly common, between two generations separated in time and by systems of interests which, while not totally identical, do not fundamentally diverge; it is here of another nature, we want it and we do it of another nature. It is the result of a social change that is the outcome of a veritable operation of social surgery and a laboratory experiment. We understand the *objective* interest – an interest that is not acknowledged as such – in as much as possible distancing *immigrant* parents, that is to say people from another time, age, place, history, culture, morality, extraction, world and vision of the world, from the "children of immigrant parents" who would then, according to a convenient *representation*, have no past, memory, history (apart from that which they actualise through their own person), and so on, and, by the same logic, would be a complete blank page, easily moulded, and ready to accept any assimilationist endeavour, however old-fashioned, archaic, retrograde or, in the best of cases, well-intentioned, driven by a kind of 'chauvinism of the universal'. Of course, this representation includes a whole series of clichés, commonplaces, and 'fallacies' that can be found in the description given of the relations of 'children of immigration' with French society on the one hand, and with the 'other society' that is their parents society on the other, even in academic language – and probably here more than anywhere else, since the language of scientists is given the authority accorded to science. For instance, on the one hand, there is the celebration of the 'integration power' of French schools, and specifically of French schools in particular (as if they had greater power in this respect than schools in other places or times). This celebration takes place even if it means invoking, with a logic closer to that of myth than to that of demonstration, some previous examples, in particular that of the 'third republican school' that everyone thinks of as a reference model and guarantor of 'French-style integration'. Whereas, by way of antithesis, it could be said, without any exaggeration or insult to French schools and society, that La Santé, Fleury-Mérogis or Les Beaumettes [they are all prisons] could play the same role, or, in any case, would demonstrate the same role. In a way, they would 'integrate' more than schools and in a different way from schools, insofar as all these places of incarceration, the objectification and symbol par excellence of violence, delinquency, and criminality, attest to another form of 'integration', integration through crime to be sure, but integration all the same. For it certainly takes a certain kind of

audacity, an audacity that is at the same time incongruous, and is drawn from the situation at the time and from the type of relationship we have with the social order (that of immigration) and with ourselves (as immigrants or children of immigrants), to grant ourselves the authorisation (or licence) to to act criminally when we might think we are not 'at home' but 'in someone else's house'. *Politeness* and also politics (i.e. ethical neutrality, which is also political neutrality) dictate that we act *politely* (which is also a way of acting *politically*) 'at other people's houses', which is what 'other people' themselves expect of those who are at their houses and in their company. It is also the discourse on 'failure (or success, depending on one's point of view) at school', a discourse which can reveal the impatience for social promotion which everyone expects from school, opinion in general and the opinion of those concerned (immigrant families or young people themselves who express their opinions most often in retrospect, leading them to 'take revenge' on school... or, on the contrary, to praise it excessively). The belief that underpins this stance is inseparable from the social philosophy, and the vaguely evolutionary conception, that is, basically, the idea of *progress* that is contained in the notion of a generation: each generation makes 'progress' on the one that precedes it, meaning in this case the 'progress' of the 'second generation' in relation to previous generations. When it comes to social objects, it's not easy to rid yourself of ethnocentrism! It is also, in part, the discourse on religion (in this case, Islam) and on the external signs of belonging to this other religion (an 'immigrant' religion), and above all of a membership that is not ordinary, banal, and discreet, that is to say *polite,* if discretion is even possible in this area, but is necessarily militant and that sometimes wants to be so – this is the subterranean function, and therefore the real function, of denouncing Muslim 'fundamentalism' (or 'Islamism'). All signs or indices that are henceforth constituted as *signum* – the best example of these being the 'Islamic headscarf', as is said in all conviction, that is to say without anyone thinking it completely unthinkable in the current state – raise the question about the process by which a garment, but not just any garment, becomes an emblem at the end of a work of over-investment in which everyone participates[17]. It is also, to add to the list, the discourse on 'Arab', 'North

[17] No-one has ever mentioned the suffering endured by the all-too-famous Moroccan family from Creil, forced to barricade themselves behind the windows of their council flat against the constant assault of the television cameras of the 'western world', shocked at what they 'could have done to God to deserve such punishment'. Their daughters had always been dressed in the same way since nursery, before discovering one day that they were wearing Islamic headscarves. It is surprising, to say the least, that it is secular schools, and 'secular in the French way', resulting precisely from this, that have been bent on 'Islamising' and confessionalising what is, after all, no more than an item of

African' or 'Muslim' women, whether immigrants or not. This discourse on the social status of this category of women is nothing more than a variant of the discourse on Islam, a privileged field of its application that guarantees a high social pay-off. Finally, it is everything that is said and heard about *citizenship* (in its traditional form or as 'new citizenship'), about modes of belonging to French nationality, which is not only legal, especially in the case of the children of Algerian immigrant families, where the combined effects of (current) immigration and (former) colonisation mean that they are 'born French', they are given French nationality in the cradle (at least for now, until the specific effects linked to colonisation cease). This is what is known as the 'double fact of birth', the 'double fact of soil' (two generations have been born on French territory, on condition that they agree on the nature and limits of this territory). So much has been said about this (unorthodox) way of being French, which is always open to suspicion! The Gulf War and its real or supposed repercussions led to a large number of admissions.

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clothing that should have been treated as such from the first. Instead, its symbolic value was stressed and made sacred, to the great satisfaction of all concerned: the interested parties who can only recognise themselves in this recognition; and the censors who find in it a reason to denounce the dangers that republican values, as they are called, run in these circumstances. The latter argue that decorum, civility, and good manners, all of which form part of the cultural tradition of a society, are enough to require pupils to take off their head coverings in class – and this at a time and in social circles in which berets and caps were worn and fezzes elsewhere, and where women covered their heads when they were inside a church, and, no doubt, these two contradictory obligations are inseparable from places that history has for a long time constituted as opposing poles – and the school would have fulfilled its normal role if it had known how to turn this practice into simple barbarism, a grammatical behavioural error, a civil impropriety, and thus, exercising only its educational function, had contributed to desacralising and secularising a practice which objectively (i.e. *in spite of itself*) has religious value, instead of adding, as if in defiance, to its distinctive and discriminatory significance, turning what would have been a mere sign into a real *signum*. What makes a head covering (the Breton head covering, for example) or a dress that goes down to one's feet or a blouse with sleeves to the wrists – which of course are not fashionable – 'Islamist'? In this sinister circular game of hatred and provocation, although we don't know which has triggered which, and also without wishing to play the role of provocateur, or of the evil prophet or the purveyor of (bad and murderous) suggestions, isn't there a risk that, following the same logic, but in a total reversal, *a contrario*, we will come to the point – as a reaction to and a reflection of a siege mentality, which is also an admission of alienation – of declaring the wearing of bras ungodly and any Muslim woman or any woman reputed to be Muslim who adopts its use as relapsed. This is the way in which the outward signs of religiosity are made and unmade and, more significantly, the bodily manifestations of obedience and allegiance to religious orthodoxy.

On the other hand, in terms of the relationship with the parents' generation, there is a contradictory attempt, sometimes to accentuate all the signs of break – which is the logical price to be paid for the rapprochement with French society that we like to celebrate or promote – and, at other times, reveals all traces of 'cultural heritage' (so-called 'cultural' heritage, 'ethnic' heritage, which are euphemisms to avoid having to say 'racial') or denounces them because they are understood as being nothing but detrimental to a thwarted 'proper integration' and in general detrimental, one might think , to the real interests of the new generation. And even if we agree to praise the 'multicultural' benefits that would result [from this integration], we do it only half-heartedly and in the manner of the homage that vice pays to virtue (but in this case, it is a constrained homage to 'virtue', because of the position and dynamic in which virtue is engaged, which takes the place of 'vice'). This contradictory attempt leads to clichés on the 'loss of authority', the 'resignation', and the 'inferiorisation' of the father who becomes 'outdated', 'disqualified' by a history that no longer belongs to him and that he no longer has control over – a theme that has had some success because of the 'psychoanalytical halo' surrounding it – or on the types of quasi-incommunicability between the generations. These generations do nothing more than cohabit or, more accurately, 'coexist' in the same family space, but 'without having anything in common', not even the rhythms of daily life, 'without dialogue', 'without links' and 'without having the common code' necessary for proper transmission, 'without having a common language' in the double sense of the word language. Language in the literal sense of the term – the parents speaking their language and the children theirs, the latter of which is obviously French (so we communicate and understand each other using different registers and against a background of misunderstandings) – and language in the metaphorical sense of 'culture' (we don't just speak the same language, but speaking the same language we also 'speak' the same culture), and therefore they also coexist 'without speaking' and 'without having to speak' ('having nothing to say', as we say) to each other, and in this case, it is, of course, the parents who have no words (hence the importance of the alibi of the 'illiteracy' characteristic of the immigrant generation, as opposed to the schooling of their children's generation) and who, as a result, are 'children' (*infans*). And to sum up all these differences, of which language is just one, it is often said that there are two completely different cultures, the parents' culture, which is totally foreign, and the children's culture, which is an approximation of French culture. The real or fictitious distancing between parents and children appears, in everyone's eyes (i.e. in the eyes of the social and political orthodoxy, which is also a national, even nationalist, orthodoxy), as the most reliable guarantee of the effectiveness of the social mechanisms specific to the social and national order, thus of the effectiveness of socialisation processes, and also

as the most obvious illustration of this effectiveness. It is pushed to the point of creating, in both, not just a kind of 'sociological splitting' and relativisation of sociologically differentiated cultural dispositions, all of which are conducive to mutual understanding, but a truly schizoid atmosphere. Adapting here necessarily means disadaption there; integrating here necessarily means 'disintegration' elsewhere or somewhere within oneself – when this has not already happened before 'integration'; assimilating or being assimilated (we rarely use the active form, which would be to say that the assimilated person is not only assimilated but assimilates in order to be assimilated), means 'de-assimilating' and being 'de-assimilated'; 'indigenising' necessarily means 'allogenising' elsewhere, 'de-indigenising' from where one was formerly indigenous; and so on. But even more serious than all the ideological presuppositions at the root of this discourse and the representation of the social and political world of which they are evidence, is the fact that we can ignore everything (or pretend to ignore everything) about the rules and mechanisms of cultural transmission, whether through the mediation of conscious and explicitly elaborate work, or through that of ordinary inculcation, in a practical manner that is almost unconscious of its forms and effects. It also means that we can pretend that the new generation does not have its 'feet' planted in the old, that it has not grown up immersed in inherited behaviour, feelings, and attitudes; it also means that we can dismiss any question about *social memory*. All these considerations, and many more, call for a reflection on the notion of generation.

Thus, over time and across generations, all the problems relating to the inexhaustible debate on social change continue, problems at the origin of and problems resulting from the observed change.