May '68

Whittaker, Vicki, Whittaker, Presses de la Fondation Nationale de Sciences Politiques, Pagis, Julie

Published by Amsterdam University Press

Whittaker, Vicki, et al.
May '68: Shaping Political Generations.
Amsterdam University Press, 2018.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/66525.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66525

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2360961
The roots of participation in May ’68

Where do “68ers” come from and how did their experiences prior to May ’68 shape their activism? All the participants in this study were involved in one way or another in May ’68; however, they were not all involved in the same way, or for the same reasons. This chapter sets out to explore the determinants of their participation in May ’68, and to understand how their dispositions towards activism were formed in the years leading up to the events. It argues that the origins of this activism must be sought in the socialisation of these future militants (familial, educational, and religious), and that their politicisation has its roots in the structural transformations of the institutions that ensure social reproduction (such as the family, the school, the church etc.).

Based on a cross-analysis of questions asking respondents about the agents of their political socialisation and about the narratives of their youth, we observe four major matrices of involvement in May ’68, which challenge some of the most common interpretations. Contrary to psychanalytic readings that see May ’68 simply as young people rebelling against their parents, this study provides evidence of the importance of family transmission between generations (political for the first matrix, religious for the second). Among researchers, the dominant interpretation has long attributed May ’68 to a crisis in opportunities for university graduates.¹ The structural depreciation of university degrees and the threat of downward social mobility were thus seen as being the foundation for the “collective dispositions for rebellion” (Bourdieu, 1984b). These dispositions would indeed occur more frequently among students from the upper classes enrolled in the disciplines that were the most insecure in terms of their professional outlook (sociology, psychology, education sciences, and humanities). In emphasizing the relative absence of this “downward mobility” profile among the participants, this study contributes to the empirical refutation of this “schema of downward social mobility.”² In fact, it sheds light on a profile that is diametrically opposed to this, which associates upward mobility with political involvement in

¹ These different interpretations, hastily subsumed into a single schema of downward mobility were mobilised by researchers as different from each other as Raymond Boudon, Raymond Aron, Edgar Morin, Pierre Bourdieu, Antoine Prost or Bernard Lacroix (Gobille, 2003, p. 78 et seq).
² The validity of this schema has already been questioned, both in terms of statistical relevance and in terms of the (non) perception of structural downward mobility at the end of the 1960s (Gruel, 2004, p. 23-66); but it has also been challenged in terms of the problematic links between discontentment and open protest (Gobille, 2003, p. 89-112).
May ’68 – we will call this third matrix the “politicisation of first-generation intellectuals.” Finally, the fourth matrix is specific to the students of the 1960s, in particular the women, for whom the anti-institutional mood was politicised through the events of May ’68.

These four matrices were developed using a statistical approach which will be the first focus of this chapter. Yet it is through the analysis of key individual trajectories, representative of each one of them, that we are better able to understand the origins of these propensities for (political) activism. The chapter therefore moves on to look at the family origins of these transmissions, before finally also looking at the impact of the structural transformations of the school system and the conditions of women.

The matrices of participation in May ’68

One of the open questions on the questionnaire proved particularly useful for providing an overview of the different forms of politicisation prior to 1968. It was worded like this: “Who are the people (name three) who have been very or quite important in the formation of your political choices (whether they are part of your family, your friends, your peer group, other adults or educators, political figures etc.)?”

The statistical analysis of the textual data associates the terms used by the participants, in reference to the agents of socialisation who marked their political development, with the characteristics of the participants using them. It thus enables us to establish correlations between the various politically influential figures and the categories of the respondents referring to them. For example, men attribute more influence to well-known political figures, whilst women more often refer to parents or members of their family. Participants from left-wing families refer more frequently to their parents and grandparents in explaining the development of their political decisions, than those with right-wing parents. For the latter, it is teachers, fellow students, or partners who play a decisive role. Participants from working-class families tend to refer more to primary school teachers than those from middle and upper classes, who instead tend to refer more to political figures.

Multiple correspondence factor analysis was a valuable tool in taking the analysis further and identifying relatively homogenous sub-groups of respondents who experienced similar paths of politicisation. This method

3 The textual statistical analysis was conducted using the program SPAD.
allowed us to construct a concise representation of all the responses in a single space (the factorial plane) which connects the major agents of political socialisation to the sociological characteristics of the respondents who refer to them.4

The terms used by the participants to describe the people who influenced their political preferences are projected onto the factorial plane produced by the analysis (see Figure 1). In order to understand the meaning of their positions in a particular sector of this plane, we must first understand how the two axes structuring the space are constructed.

The horizontal axis distributes the respondents according to variables relating to family socialisation.5 It therefore sets the future ’68ers who inherited left-wing political traditions, whose parents participated in the Resistance (on the left side of the plane), against those who are not aware of a family political tradition, and whose parents were practicing Christians and “neither left-wing nor right-wing” (on the right of the plane).

The vertical axis is structured by variables relating to the accumulated resources and experiences of activism. In the upper quadrants, we see the respondents who were already activists before 1968, whilst the lower quadrants situate those who had no militant experiences before 1968 and who say they were less active participants.

It is difficult to interpret the terms used in isolation; their meaning lies in their relationship to each other, in the distance that separates them on the factorial plane, and in their proximity to the different categories of the active variables. Four clear sub-groups emerge from this plane (encircled in Figure 1). The constant exchange between the statistical results and the analysis of the interviews allows us to confirm that these four groups indeed correspond to the major matrices of participation in May ’68. We will present each of them briefly here before moving on to look at them in more detail.

On the left of the plane, slightly above the horizontal axis, is a group of participants whose political consciousness was structured in the family sphere via the family transmission of dispositions towards activism. In this group, we find those whose parents were left-wing, non-practicing in

---

4 The active variables included in the factor analysis are: sex, age, political orientation and religious affiliation of parents, social background, the existence of a political tradition in the family, the parents’ participation in the Resistance, activism or not pre-1968, the degree of involvement in May ’68, the status (student or employed) at the time of events, and the political position in 1968.

5 This axis contributes 12.9% to the total inertia of the cloud of points, and the vertical axis contributes 10.2%. Given the number of active categories included, the combined percentage of these two first axes is clearly satisfactory.
religious terms, and who in some cases participated in the Resistance during the Second World War. They have inherited a family political tradition, transmitted to them by their parents or their grandparents, the figures most frequently cited by this group (see the position of the words “father,” “mother”). Later on in the chapter, we will look at the children of Jewish communist families separately from the other children of activists, because their family history plays a very specific role in this transmission.

On the opposite side, on the right-hand side of the plane, we can see a population characterised by religious education, parents who were either “right-wing” or “neither on the left or the right,” and the lack of a political family heritage. In describing their political influences, these respondents do not refer to their parents, but rather to their “priest,” their “environment” and their partners (see the terms “wife” and “husband”), or to political figures (see “Michel Rocard”). On this side of the plane it is often religious organisations (see “JAC activist” on the far right of the figure) and unions (particularly the CFDT, the French Democratic Confederation of Labour) which play the same politicising role that the family plays in the first group of respondents. Later in the chapter we will distinguish working-class actors from upper-class actors within this matrix of the politicisation of religious commitments, based on the comparative analysis of certain representative trajectories.

A third sub-group is situated in the upper right quadrant and brings together those who were already activists before 1968. Most of these respondents are from working-class families, and they make references to well-known intellectuals involved in the events (Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Althusser), militant leaders (see “Alain Krivine,” “Robert Linhart”) or intellectual figureheads (“Friedrich Engels,” “Karl Marx”) in the formation of their political choices. They are often the first in their families to obtain their baccalaureate or “bac” (high school diploma). This politicisation of first-generation intellectuals is closely linked to their upward social mobility and to their ambivalent position in the social space regarding their class of origin. Three sub-profiles can be distinguished here, depending on the age of the respondent (and thus the date at which they began their university education) and the kind of activism they were involved in (extreme-left,
Communist Party, student unions). Finally, in the lower left quadrant of the factorial plane, we can see a more feminine sub-group. This group is younger and made up of respondents who had no militant experiences prior to 1968. Here it is primarily the peer group (see “friends,” “friend”) and the student context (see [University of] “Vincennes”) which play a central role raising political awareness. These young adults are characterised by the statutory incoherencies (Chamboderon, 1985) matrix; they experience a profound disconnection between their condition (as women, as students) and the ways in which they continue to be (dis)regarded. The central example here is that of women who experience an increasingly untenable misalignment between the objective evolutions in their conditions (access to higher education, economic independence through the labour market and sexual independence) and the inertia in representations and mores.

In projecting all the respondents into a single two-dimensional space, factor analysis is particularly effective in revealing the heterogeneity of those who participated in May ’68. It therefore throws into question the overly simplistic explanations of the determinants of this involvement, and revives a sociological reality that is much more complex than the various previous interpretations of the events had suggested. It nonetheless requires a complementary analysis of the biographical interviews, in order to reveal the processes that predisposed these actors to refuse the social order in which they grew up.

Politics and religion: a family affair

The first two matrices both show the importance of family transmission in primary socialisation. It is impossible to ascertain the exact proportion of interviewees concerned by the family transmission of dispositions towards activism given that the different matrices are not mutually exclusive. It is important to specify however, that half of the interviewees identify their parents as left-wing, that 43% respond in the affirmative concerning the existence of a political tradition in their family, and one third are children of former Resistance members.

8 An individual can thus be characterised by several matrices (we will see that this is particularly true for the case of first-generation intellectuals whose first experiences of activism were religious)
Having left-wing parents is not enough for children to (automatically) inherit dispositions for activism, but a quarter of the interviewees mention one of their parents or grandparents among those who were influential in the development of their political preferences. Many of these interviewees share a family history shaken by the Second World War – either because family members were deported for being Jewish, or because their parents participated in the Resistance (particularly in the Communist networks). Here, both family history and the feeling of belonging to persecuted minorities contributes to the early politicisation of these activists, often as early as secondary school: in the *Jeunesses communistes* (JC, Communist Youth), *Union des étudiants communistes* (Union of Communist Students, UEC) or anti-fascist committees.

In terms of the transmission of religious beliefs, 40% of interviewees were educated by parents who engage in regular religious practice, and almost the same percentage participated in Christian scout groups.9 They often began their militant careers within religious youth groups such as the JAC (*Jeunesse agricole catholique*, Rural Catholic Youth), the JOC (*Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne*, the Young Christian Workers), or the MRJC (*Mouvement rural de jeunesse chrétienne*, Rural Christian Youth Movement) in the working classes, and the JEC (*Jeunesse étudiante chrétienne*, Young Christian Students), in the upper-middle classes. The over-representation of young activists socialised within religious communities raises the question of religious interests (Bourdieu, 1971) that might have motivated later political involvement. To move beyond the limits of the simple analogy between commitment to a cause and commitment to faith, between devotion and dedication, between messianism and revolutionary utopia, this analysis will look at the nature of the dispositions and the practices acquired during religious socialisation, that would be then imported into the political sphere.

---

9 This is also true for many humanitarian workers (Siméant, 2009, p. 109).
Family transmission of dispositions towards activism

The over-representation of participants with activist parents from Jewish backgrounds in the corpus\(^\text{10}\) raises the question of whether the feeling of belonging to Judaism constitutes a motivation for activism. Or, perhaps, on the contrary, the feeling of being Jewish is in fact discovered through early experiences of stigmatisation and humiliation. Simon’s trajectory constitutes an interesting individual case to shed light on this first matrix.

Simon: heir to family history that is both “Jewish and Communist”

Simon was born in 1942 in Auvergne. His father, a Ukrainian Jew from a family of Rabbis, grew up in Poland and then in Germany, before arriving in France in 1925. Of his children, Simon was the only one who broke with Judaism and who married a “goy”; he was disowned by his parents. Simon’s mother, the daughter of a notable in Volvic, studied architecture, was active in the Communist Party, and participated in the Association des écrivains et artistes révolutionnaires (Revolutionary Artists and Writers Association, AEAR). In 1942, Simon’s maternal grandmother was an atheist and a feminist and she hid several Jewish families in her house in Auvergne. In 1942 Simon’s parents took refuge there too: “The family house was in the main street, and it was filled to the brim, with families living in the rooms; my parents lived in a bit at the very top, and there were also lots of Jews from central Europe; and they also housed quite a few members of the Communist Party who came through, including important leaders, there were weapons, I still have a revolver…”\(^\text{11}\)

His father fell ill very young and could no longer work; his mother therefore had to provide for the family. After working as a primary school teacher during the war, she later became a professor of industrial design in Paris. From 1945 to 1949, they lived in artists’ workshops around Alésia in Paris, with other Jewish Communist families. Simon was taught to read by his mother, and he spent most of his time with her or with his grandmother, with whom he spent all his holidays up until he was thirteen. These women, both Communists and feminists, thus influenced his early political socialisation. After 1949 they moved to Gentilly, where Simon grew up in a highly politicised Communist environment:

\(^{10}\) They represent at least 17% of the population interviewed (several respondents refused to answer this question).

\(^{11}\) The quotes in this section are all from an interview with Simon that was conducted on 18 August 2005, at his home.
In Gentilly there was the lower school where I was, and there was the upper school where the rich went... I remember having a discussion at the canteen with a policeman's son at the time of the big workers' demonstrations, with the SNECMA\(^{12}\) nearby, there were barricades in our street, there were workers' movements that were extremely violent. I think I was around eight years old... and our conversation was – who is the strongest? Of course, for him it was the cops, they have weapons etc. I remember that as if it were yesterday. After I'd put in everyone I could think of, I was running out of arguments and I remember having thought I'd won, in my mind at least, I'd found the right argument: yes, but there's China! He couldn't beat that! So, it's true that in the family, at school, it was politics all the time, all the time...

In seventh grade Simon joined a “Jewish group” set up by a friend. But, unlike the latter, he says that he in fact suffered more from anti-Communism than he did from anti-Semitism, particularly in senior secondary school:

In 1956, I was at Louis-le-Grand:\(^{13}\) it was the search to help the poor Hungarians, there was the sacking of the *Huma*\(^{14}\) offices; I was a pariah, it was violent, there were two or three of us communist families that resisted, but we really felt surrounded and it was a shock! [...] My mother always said: if it turns bad we'll go to Israel, there was always that fear... When in fact, I think the most violent reactions were anti-Communist more than anti-Semitic. Gentilly was really the [Communist] stronghold, but whenever I went to the Latin Quarter, it was the opposite.

This extract shows how feelings of belonging to persecuted minorities – here Jewish and Communist – are articulated and intertwined, and how the transmission of family histories (along with objects, such as the revolver Simon has kept) is behind this. In the interview, Simon talks at great length about the history of his paternal family, which echoes that of the central European Jews “liberated by the Communists in 1917,” and he emphasizes this dual identity – “not Jews, but Communist Jews.”

---

12 SNECMA was the national society for the study and construction of motors for aviation. At the time, this manufacturer was experiencing a protest movement among its workers.
13 Louis-le-Grand is one of France's most prestigious secondary schools, situated in the Latin Quarter in Paris.
14 The Huma, short for *l'Humanité*, is the newspaper of the French Communist Party (PCF).
The humiliation and insults from his classmates gave rise to feelings of injustice, which would soon take on a political dimension in the context of the Algerian War:

Political involvement, that was really with the Algerian War, and UNEF\textsuperscript{15} as a very militant activist, and I sympathised with two or three groups including the \textit{Groupe action résistance} (Resistance Action Group), and the \textit{Front universitaire anti-fasciste} (Anti-fascist University Front), and in front of the \textit{Lycée} Saint Louis, we were constantly fighting with the guys preparing the entrance exams for Saint-Cyr!\textsuperscript{16} And I had an English teacher whose name was Goldring, who was a militant Communist, a member of the Central Committee, who[se house] had been attacked... It’s crazy how politicised we were, even in the classroom! Some people wrote “Ben Bella” on the blackboard, others “Victory to the OAS,”\textsuperscript{17} and they fought it out...

Among all the interviewees born to Jewish Communist parents either during or shortly after the Second World War and who grew up in Paris, we observe this early politicisation that structures their identities as high school students. It is accompanied by stories of physical confrontations in the school setting, during the events of 1956 in Hungary and then during the Algerian War, as well as by intense political activity. Their engagement is part of a family history marked by the Resistance and often by militant Communism in their countries of origin. This is the case for Geneviève who became involved in the group \textit{Lutte Ouvrière} (Workers’ Struggle, LO):\textsuperscript{18}

the Trotskyist groups were full of Jews, to say the least! Me, my father was a Communist in Poland, and one of the reasons he left, apart from the lack of work and the anti-Semitism, was the repression of Communists, and me, I sort of had the impression I was carrying on his activism in a way. And I think that for my generation, activism was kind of a response to the collaboration, it was the need to show that France was more than

\textsuperscript{15} French National Student Union.
\textsuperscript{16} Saint-Cyr is the most prestigious military academy in France.
\textsuperscript{17} The OAS, “Organisation de l’armée secrète” (the Secret Army Organisation) was a right-wing para-military organisation, fighting against Algerian independence during the Algerian War.
\textsuperscript{18} Born in 1944 in a Jewish Communist family who ran a small business in the Marais, Geneviève became an activist with Voix Ouvrière (Workers’ Voice, the predecessor of LO) in 1960 during the Algerian War.
that... But of course, being Jewish probably contributed, even if we weren’t aware of it then.

These parents, who were both Jews and Communists, transmitted an ethic of responsibility (Weber, 1963) to their children, through their family history. This contributed in the formation of a predisposition for action, to be a part of the course of history. Simon thus explains that “it was not by chance” that, later, he named his party cell “Manouchian.” He later added: “basically all my involvement was based on one central idea: that should never happen again, and that, that meant a new war, the camps, Nazism, all that, and the only way to avoid that, for me there wasn’t any other, was to establish Communism everywhere.”

These comments reveal the inextricability of Jewish origins and Communist aspirations in a socio-historical context that marked the primary socialisation of numerous ’68ers. Returning to the social and migratory trajectories of the parents, to their practices, and their religious and political orientations, allows us to take into account the social heterogeneity of French Judaism (Spire, 1995). It also enables us to avoid falling into the trap of essentialism, unlike many attempts to explain the over-representation of activists with Jewish origins in left-wing factions – particularly explanations in terms of messianism, in which Communism is depicted as the messiah of “secular Jews” (Kriegel, 1977; Goldmann, 1978).

Children of Communists
Let us now focus on some of the key traits shared by the other interviewees who inherited a family political tradition. Born in the post-war period, for the most part they are children of French Communist Party (PCF) members, often the children of CGT (General Confederation of Labour) unionists. They grew up in an environment that was highly politicised, in which political discussions were part of the everyday routine and in which parental political opinions were openly displayed in the family sphere. Louis, born in 1947 to a train driver and a waitress, recounts this formative anecdote:

At the time of the referendum on French Algeria, there was a joke in my family. Every time General de Gaulle talked about “auto-détermination” [self-determination], my father would go “broom broom” [he makes the sound of a car, an auto in French]. So we all went “broom” […] after seeing

19 There is a striking parallel here with humanitarian involvement and the figure Bernard Kouchner (Dauvin et Siméant, 2002, p. 49-50)
my father jeering at de Gaulle, well naturally I said to myself that he must have had good reasons for not liking him.20

These memories are frequent in the interviews; children observe their parents taking a stand in front of the radio or the television, and particularly commenting on current affairs. These moments, which are ideal for the internalisation of parental preferences, provide an early structure for the formation of an individual’s first political tastes. These take the form of dichotomies: goodies against baddies, good against evil, voting yes or voting no. Robert, the son of Communist activists, emphasized that, “at home, all the referendums on the Algerian War, knowing whether to vote yes or no, the putsch in Algiers on the TV, all that, I remember everything, my parents' discussions in front of the set! We were immersed in it on a daily basis.”21

The idea of political tastes is relevant here in a literal sense: children begin by interiorising parental preferences in affective terms, and come to understand, through everyday discussions, whether their parents “like” or “dislike” a particular politician. Although these daily rituals participate in the family transmission of political attitudes, they are not enough in themselves to explain the formation of dispositions towards activism – Louis’ sister for example would not go on to become an activist. However, it was to Louis, and Louis alone, that his father recounted his past experiences and stories:

That film [Un weekend à Zuydocoote, 1964] was the opportunity for [my father] to tell me his story, what he’d seen... He told me about his captivity in Poland, the Russians who liberated him and his odyssey to return. [...] He told me he had been a bag carrier for the FLN,22 I didn't understand at the time, but that's pretty impressive in terms of commitment! [...] And before that, during his military service, he punched a Colonel in the face and had to go before the war council and at the same time he became an anti-militarist, to the point where as a child I was never allowed guns or even tin soldiers!

Louis was thus the receptacle for a strong family memory of activism, and the fact that his father chose him as the main heir for this transmission participated in generating dispositions for activism. Indeed, the preferential

20 The quotations in this section are from an interview conducted with Louis on 8 February 2006 at his home in the area around Nantes.
22 The “Front de Liberation Nationale”, the Algerian National Liberation Front, was the main organisation fighting for Algerian independence in the Algerian War.
transmission of militant memories to one child in particular, leads them into specific forms of identification, and situates them within a family legacy of militancy. 23

The politicisation of religious commitments

The denominational foundation of anti-imperialism has been relatively well documented (Agrikoliansky, 2005), and anti-colonialism has been analysed as one of the sources of May ’68 (Bertrand, 2008). However, no studies seem to have examined the processes by which dispositions for activism were requalified, from early religious commitments to political participation in May ’68. More specifically, although the politicisation of Christian activists within the religious sphere has been the subject of research in the sociology of religions (Fouilloux, 1992; Rousseau, 1995; Donegani, 1977), we have less of an understanding of how dispositions interiorised in religious youth organisations were reconverted into the political sphere. Yet this has been an important contribution to the emergence of historically situated forms of activism – particularly anti-imperialist and far-left forms – during the 1960s in France.

The analysis of individual trajectories tracing the politicisation of religious commitments allows us to show how these different relationships to religion are structured, notably depending on social background. After providing a detailed profile of young Christians from rural working-class backgrounds, we will look at the profile of urban Christians from the upper-classes, socialised to virtuoso religiosity. 24

Social mobility, Third-Worldism: the politicisation of rural Catholics

Christiane was born in 1941, as the youngest child in a working-class Catholic family. She is representative of the collective profile of rural, upwardly mobile young people from working-class backgrounds, born in the 1940s and educated in Catholic institutions. 25 Christiane’s father worked at the SCNF train company, and was a CFTC unionist, and her mother was a housewife.

23 On this question of the transmission of family histories, see Billaud, Gollac, Oeser and Pagis (2015)
24 Max Weber makes an opposition between virtuoso religiosity and mass religiosity; between the “virtuoso” prophets (members of religious status groups who strive for perfect virtue in their religious practice, such as ascetics and monastic groups), those who have a “musical ear for religion” on one hand, and the “masses” of the faithful (followers of the Church) who are religiously unmusical (Weber, 1920).
25 See Pagis (2010) for a more detailed discussion of the generational and social differences within this profile.
Together they raised their six children in a rural town in Normandy. “I’m from a very Catholic family, really, socially, my father was a member of Catholic Workers Action (Action Catholique Ouvrière, ACO), but my mother found it too political…” Christiane was subject to the powerful inculcation of familial religious practices (Suaud, 1975, p. 15), which was reiterated through scouting. As she was a very good student, her teachers encouraged her to attend the Lycée. At that time, for young people from rural working-class backgrounds, being able to continue their education meant boarding at a Catholic secondary school in a neighbouring town. These students were therefore doubly displaced – both geographically and socially. Surrounded by mostly upper-class and upper-middle-class adolescents, Christiane was confronted with the experience of social injustice throughout her studies and experienced the stigma of being from a family of workers: “I was always marked by my social origin, even in the Lycée, I felt a bit… from a poor background, well, all the time. It made me uneasy, sometimes I was ashamed of my parents, that they weren’t dressed better, things like that.”

Christiane became an active member of the JEC after a disappointing experience as a Scout (she had trouble with the hierarchy), and she remembers obtaining a veritable intellectual education thanks to the chaplains in this organisation. For Christiane, like for her future husband Jean (the son of Catholic farmers involved in the JAC), the Catholic action movements provided a frame through which they could interpret their experiences of social shame in the light of injustice. It also gave them a “new ethic, making the need to commit and be an activist or a militant an aspect of religious practice” (Berlivet and Sawicki, 1994, p. 112). At the end of the 1950s, these organisations therefore provided new “salvation goods” that responded to the aspirations of these young people, out of

---

26 The ACO was an organisation that aimed to bring Christianity to the working classes, it was founded in 1950.
27 Christiane’s comments quoted here are taken from an interview conducted at her home on 15 November 2005.
28 At the time, secondary school and in particular the Lycée were reserved for the elite, mostly drawn from the middle and upper classes. For more discussion about this, see Box 2.
29 Jean’s own trajectory is presented later in the chapter.
30 For Max Weber, “salvation goods” (Heilsgüter, sometimes translated as “salvation benefits”) are given to the faithful by religious officials (i.e. priests, those who “work” for the Church), and they can pertain to either this world or the next. “The salvation benefits of all the religions, whether primitive or cultivated, prophetic or non-prophetic, belong very much to this world.” (Whimster, 2004, p. 66).
step with their families’ conservative vision of their faith because of their upward social mobility.

If, for Christiane and her future husband, religious commitment was an accompaniment to their upward social mobility and indeed helped them to understand it, for others it quite simply made this mobility possible. Mathieu, for example, saw the Minor Seminary as way of continuing his studies up to the baccalauréat; a place of social salvation, given that his parents were not able to fund his secondary studies.31

*Third-Worldism: a “bridge cause” between the religious sphere and the political sphere*

The war in Algeria played a central role in changing the way these young activists saw the world. For Christiane, it was a catalyst in her politicisation; for Mathieu, who was then at the seminary, it was a source of indignation:

> For us [at the seminary], it was war, even though the term was not often used, so, as such, it was not acceptable […] It’s true that it was very strong, everything to do with helping those in need, the disadvantaged. Justice for oneself but also for others, so, sharing – which today I consider to be the realm of the social. So political, and so not just religious, as we had learnt when we were children32

The Third-Worldist cause constituted the main bridge by which religious activities could be requalified as political activities: sensitivity to otherness, instructions to “put oneself in someone else’s shoes, far away,”33 the importance of social commitments as a Christian requirement for self-realisation. These are all dispositions acquired within religious youth groups, which constituted the breeding-ground for anti-colonialism. Christiane remembers that, as an adolescent, during the first events, she said to herself, “if I was Algerian, I’d be for the FLN; and the same for Dien Bien Phu…”

Although they did not lose their faith during this period, the contradictions that the interviewees experienced between their anti-colonialism and the dissonant positions of their parents or the Church contributed to the

---

31 Mathieu was born in 1944 to small-scale farmers in Vendée, both right-wing and practicing Catholics. He was the seventh of twelve children and the only child in his age group from his town to graduate from high school.

32 This is an extract from an interview conducted with Mathieu in his home on 7 February 2006.

33 Cécile Péchu adds that for these “Christocentric” Catholics, “foreigners” have a special privileged place among the “poor”, with whom they must show solidarity. (Péchu, 2001, p. 81)
erosion of their primary belief systems. The inevitably political dimension of their stance against the Algerian War put them in a position of contestation regarding the institution. However, we need to consider these individual tensions within an organisational context: the Catholic action movements did indeed become politicised with the Algerian War and took positions opposed to the religious hierarchy, which was weakened by the recruitment crisis it had been experiencing since the 1950s (Béraud, 2007). In the context of the preparations for the *aggiornamento* of the Church (Vatican II, 1962), they mobilised for a Third-Worldist position and for a politically active Catholicism.

Political radicalisation from follow-on effects

Christiane and her husband, the first high school graduates in each of their families, began their studies at the University of Caen in the middle of the movement against the Algerian War. It was in this context that their commitment to anti-colonialism and their awareness of social injustice came together and were progressively reformulated within a Marxist and internationalist interpretative framework. Jean explains it like this: “there was the movement against the Algerian War, which I was already involved in [...]. Then, after the Algerian War, there was the Vietnam War, Latin America, May ’68... there was also Che Guevara then [...] They were events that followed on from each other and that meant we took positions: anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist.”

These Catholic students became radicalised through contact with young left-wing political activists from other social and political backgrounds. The humanist criticism of capitalism, which they had acquired via the personalism of Emmanuel Mounier, was progressively abandoned for a Marxist critique of capitalism. These follow-on effects were capable of provoking genuine conversions, associated with a decisive break from the primary belief system, as was the case for Christiane and Jean who became militant Trotskyists.

We must therefore consider the articulation of macro-sociological (the contexts of the war in Algeria and anti-colonialism), organisational (the Third-Worldist positions of the Catholic action movements in the early 1960s) and relational (the humanist and Marxist critiques) factors that contributed to the radicalisation of these Catholic students.

---

34 Hervé Serry observed a similar process a few years later during the Vietnam War (Serry, 2008, p. 51).
35 Christiane and Jean joined the JCR through their involvement against the Vietnam War. After having participated very actively in the events of May-June ’68, they joined the LCR where they were activists throughout the 1970s.
1960s) and individual (social and geographic mobility) factors. Together, they all contributed to the quest for salvation goods being shifted from the religious sphere to the political one. Although Christiane’s case represents an ideal type, the profiles brought together in this matrix vary according to age, sex, and social trajectory – all of which are factors that influence the catalyst points and the ratchet effects that are behind this conversion36 (see Box 1 below).

**Box 1  Michèle, from the JAC to Maoism, via Algeria**

The case of Michèle reflects a slightly older profile among the interviewees; those who did not benefit from the democratisation of education.

Born in 1927 in Rouen, Michèle never knew her father. She was raised by her mother, who was a typist. Quite resistant of the social hierarchy, she pursued her education at the Lycée for Young Ladies in Rouen, where she was eventually expelled in Year 10. Because of the dramatic situation of Rouen at the beginning of the war, Michèle and her mother left for employment on a large farm in the countryside around Caux. Her mother died in 1944 and Michèle became, at age 16, the farm’s “maid.” She joined the JAC a few years later, encouraged by her employers who saw this as a place for meeting other young people in a supervised environment. Michèle rapidly took on responsibilities at the departmental level and then the regional level, and became a member of the national team in 1952. This upward progression was part of the collective history of young rural Catholics who had suffered the traumatic consequences of the Second World War – through the loss of one of their parents (Berlivet et Sawicki, 1994). In religious activism, they found both a “second family” and a path for upward social mobility.

Between 1952 and 1957, Michèle was employed by the JAC at the national level to travel around France to “listen and understand the lives, the problems of young famers and farm workers.”37 The contact with social deprivation and injustice, as well as the connections she made during these encounters, provoked increasingly strident contradictions between her grassroots actions and the clerical injunctions demanding these laymen “keep their distance from temporal concerns [in order to] keep to their apostolic missions” (Serry, 2008, p. 52). These

---

36 For example, Mathieu’s indignation regarding the Algerian War structured a left-wing political conscience, but did not lead to militant action (particularly because he was not connected with the student milieu). He questioned the traditional Church, broke with his path to the priesthood by leaving the Seminary, became involved in the MRJC, and then in the “Vie Nouvelle” (New Life) movement with his wife, but he did not break with Catholicism itself.

37 Extract from her questionnaire.
tensions fed a crisis of consent regarding the religious institution and a progressive shift of her worldview from a religious register to a political one.

In 1957, Michèle returned to her studies (without having graduated from high school), with the support of a teacher she met during her training at the JAC (she left the national secretariat this same year). She was awarded the EHESS Diploma in rural economics in 1961. Her social mobility through religious activism led her to the Parisian university movement in the late-1950s, and through her contact with them she became further politicised during the Algerian War. Michèle was a member of a support network for the FLN and left for Algeria just after independence, to participate in agrarian reform there with her husband. They returned in 1966 and found in the Vietnam War a new cause in which to invest their anti-imperialist dispositions. This is how they “became Maoists,” in Michèle’s terms. In their neighbourhood Vietnam Committee, they met militants from a Maoist group founded by Alain Badiou, which they joined.

The combination of biographical factors (loss of parents, upward social mobility via religious activism), organisational factors (working-class laymen leaders distancing themselves from the Church) and contextual factors (the Algerian War and then the Vietnam War and politicisation of Parisian intellectual circles in the 1960s), is the foundation for the conversion of Michèle’s religious commitment into revolutionary Maoist activism.

From virtuoso religiosity to Maoism: politicisation of upper-middle-class Christians

The trajectories of politicisation of young Christians from the bourgeoisie are analysed here through the case of Jacques, who was born in 1941 to a Protestant bourgeois family from Nîmes.

Jacques’ father was a lawyer and a member of the Conseil d’Etat (French Council of State) in the early 1930s. His mother, from the bourgeoisie in Lyon, which Jacques described as “classic conservative right-wing,” did not work. An only child, he received a Protestant religious education.

---

38 Michèle completed a doctoral thesis a few years later and became a researcher at the EHESS (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales).
39 Alain Badiou is a prominent French philosopher, whose vision of Marxism was influenced by Louis Althusser. After the events of 1968 he was one of the founding members of the Marxist-Leninist group, UCFml (Union des communistes de France marxistes-léninistes).
40 This trajectory was chosen because it combines several aspects that are of interest here, which are observed in more diffuse form in various other trajectories. Colette’s trajectory will also be mobilised as a point of contrast.
41 The French Council of State acts as legal advisor to the executive and supreme court for administrative justice.
42 Jacques’ comments come from an interview conducted with him on 18 August 2005.
(religious practice at Temple, Sunday school, scouts). He was taught at the Cours Hattemer,\textsuperscript{43} according to a strategy of elitist schooling: “In Paris in the 1930s and 1940s the Cours Hattemer was the ENA of nursery school! [...] Rocard, Chirac went there, among others [...] I learnt to read very early, I started to devour books at the age of 4 years old, and at 7, I was reading like a child of 14.”

Jacques has “no memory of tenderness from [his] parents,” and as they did not solicit him often, he took refuge in his books and in the Protestant scouting movement. He was a brilliant student at Lycée Condorcet in Paris, and progressively distanced himself from his parents because of his father’s history (his father collaborated with Pierre Laval\textsuperscript{44} and was appointed Prefect at the end of the 1930s). Jacques was admitted to Sciences Po Paris in 1958, and was active in various Protestant youth groups before joining the “Fédé”\textsuperscript{45} of Protestant students. He was then still hesitant about his professional direction: “I didn’t know if I wanted to be a pastor or not... then I dropped it when I went to the UEC later. But let’s say that after my bac, I was between Protestantism and politics, and I came to politics through Protestantism in a way.”

Jacques had a highly intellectual relationship with religion, close to what Weber called a virtuoso religious practice. His investment in religion seemed to be part of a quest for identity, linked to the impossibility of identifying with or adhering to his father’s vision of the world (his father having participated in the Vichy regime). This crisis of affiliation is more broadly characteristic of the collective history of a generation born during or just after the war which inherited a family history of collaboration. This unspeakable heritage was indeed a genuinely heavy burden and contributed to a widespread break in allegiance from parental authority (Gruel, 2004, p. 164-165). Jacques’ comments also emphasize the competition between two forms of salvation goods in this crisis of affiliation – Protestantism and politics.

\textsuperscript{43} The Cours Hattemer, the Hattemer Academy, is a private school providing secular education between nursery school and the baccalaureat. It was founded in 1885 by the educator Rose Hattermer. It caters to the elite, hence his description of it as the “ENA” of nursery schools, in reference to the highly prestigious administrative school that trains a large part of France’s political elite.

\textsuperscript{44} Pierre Laval was one of the principle actors in the implementation of the Vichy regime’s policy of collaboration with Nazi Germany. He was the head of the Vichy government between 1942 and 1944.

\textsuperscript{45} French Federation of Christian students’ associations.
Becoming a revolutionary: avant-gardism and the quest for identity

How did Jacques, who had considered becoming a pastor, convert to revolutionary activism? How did he go on to become one of the leaders of the Union of Communist Marxist-Leninist Youth (Union des jeunesse communistes marxistes-léninistes, UJCml), and the national organiser for the Rank-and-File Vietnam Committees (Comités Vietnam de base, CVB)?

Anti-colonial struggles were decisive in changing these young Christians from “missionaries to activists,” as we have already seen above. Jacques became politicised through his contact with student movements during the Algerian War:

In my second year at Sciences Po, I lived in a residence for Protestant students, in a very left-wing area, so I got involved in protests against the war in Algeria and that was when I went to my first demonstration, my first time in police custody – we were staging a sit-in on the Champs Elysées. My real politicisation was the Algerian War.

For Colette, who was born in 1946 into an upper-class Catholic family in Marseille, it was also a Third-Worldist cause that led her to convert to Maoism, but because of her age, it was the Vietnam War (in 1966) rather than Algeria:

It was the situation of the Vietnamese people that got us going [...] the result was [ultimately] political, but not originally. In the beginning, it was – we don’t have the right, the small cannot be crushed by the large, and that’s written in the Bible! [...] When you had Johnson who was reinforcing the B52s and you could see ten Vietnamese who were running away, who had nothing... It was that anti-imperialist awareness, rather than a matter of a [political] party or current.

Jacques joined UNEF, then the UEC, where he was initially close to the heterodox Trotskyists, before eventually turning towards the future UJCml: “In the UEC, the discovery was Althusser: it was through an intellectual approach that I found myself at the UJCml, because I read Althusser. He was someone who influenced us a lot, and it was a whole, he was at the Ecole Normale Supérieure as well...”

47 Colette’s remarks are taken from two interviews conducted with her on 12 and 13 November 2005.
In the highly politicised Parisian intellectual sphere of the mid-1960s, the Church went through a genuine crisis of legitimacy (Pelletier, 2002, p. 21 onwards). As a result, it found itself out of step with the avant-garde intellectual world, in spite of the recent aggiornamento. This was the time that Claude Lévi-Strauss was publishing *La Pensée sauvage* (1962), Lacan was founding the Freudian school in Paris (1964), and Louis Althusser was publishing *Pour Marx*, and *Lire le Capital* (1965). Christian humanism, even in its post-Vatican II socially committed version, thus found itself devalued by the theoretical anti-humanism of the structuralists.

These strategies of affiliation must also be seen in light of the symbolic returns resulting from the “distinguished Marxism of Rue d’Ulm [the street of the prestigious *École Normale Supérieure*].”48 Colette joined the UJCml in a similar way – in her case it was the priest at her elite business school (*HEC*) who provoked her conversion. She explained this choice through her “comrades at *Normale Sup*” and by the fact that “we were real intellectuals, you know.”

She was one of the first Maoist activists who left to become an *établili*49 in a factory (in 1967). The tale that she tells of her political task as part of the *établili* movement is cast in a prophetic register, and the six years she spent as a proletarian activist can be described as a “missionary prophecy”50 that she dedicated to “educating the masses” for revolution. “We had to improve mentalities […] to moralise people, tell them that there was an ideal.” Where Jacques emphasizes the political origins of the Maoist *établis*,51 and sees them as quite opposed to “worker-priests”, Colette’s description of her militant practices reveals the convergences between the two repertoires of action (Dressen, 2000).

Like the prophets proposing new and subversive salvation goods, this profile of interviewees emphasizes the innovative aspect of the activism they then practiced. Jacques, for example, says:

> We reinvented this type of mass, grassroots, activism in connection with Vietnam. We went to the public housing estates, door-to-door, we reinvented

---

48 As Gérard Mauger recognises in his social self-analysis, (Mauger, 2006, p. 184).
49 This movement saw young, often bourgeois, students stop their studies to take up work in factories (“*s’établir*” translates as “to establish oneself”) in order to experience proletarian life and to help bring about the revolution (Dressen, 2000). Those who made this shift into factories were known as “*établis*”. See Chapter 4 for more discussion about this movement.
50 In her commentary of Max Weber, Florence Weber describes this as a prophecy that “pushes the virtuosos to lead the masses to revolution, a radical transformation in the daily lives of everyone” (Weber, 2001, p. 76).
51 Jacques was one of the leaders of the UJCml at the time that the “*établis*” strategy was decided on. He sees it as being founded on Mao Zedong’s instructions that intellectuals “get down off the horse” and go and investigate “among the masses”.
agitprop [...] and we, we had this rank-and-file Maoist thing. We reinvented the fact of going to the metro exit, selling the *Vietnam Courier*, making huge signs that we hung over the markets that the Communist Party (PCF) activists had progressively abandoned. So, we reinvented a certain style of political action.

Spreading the word, enlightening the masses, proselytizing, converting others; so many militant practices that do not seem quite so innovative if we shift our gaze from the political domain to the religious domain. By becoming involved in the UJCml, these activists managed to preserve a virtuous (distinctive) relation with their engagement. In so doing, they legitimised the practices they had acquired through religious activism, and contributed to the depreciation of competitive political offers on the left, and that of the PCF in particular.52 This confirms the hypothesis put forward by Claude Grignon that the appearance of left-wing anti-communism was the result of the political emergence of agents whose *habitus* was formed within religious organisations (Grignon, 1977, p. 30).

A simple overview of the trajectories analysed here would conclude as to an initial involvement in religious groups, in keeping with the socialisation received in the family environment, followed by a significant break due to a shift into the political sphere. However, I hope to have shown that if we look at these militant careers from a longitudinal perspective, religious commitments in fact appear to be more of a transitional space, an antechamber. In other words, they allowed these young Christians to progressively break away from their family environments, whilst furthering their social mobility, to ultimately become involved with atheist left-wing activists. Depending on the perspectives we adopt and the life spheres we consider, these processes of conversion may appear to be genuine breaks (in world view) or instead seem to be continuities (in practices).53 It is therefore important not to overestimate the break ascribed to the trajectories of those who converted from religion to activism. But nor must we assume that this conversion is based on a simple

---

52 The homology between the sects described by Weber and the extreme-left factions such as the UJCml is heuristic here. The Church, in which the faithful experience a “mass” religion, corresponds to involvement in the PCF in the political sphere.

53 The ethos of dedication and solidarity with those less fortunate continues until today through literacy activities (Christiane is an activist with the militant housing group “DAL”, “Right to Housing” at the time of this study) and the participation in different refugee support networks (Michèle is a member of the network Education without Borders, RESF in French). Alternatively, participating in agrarian reform in Algeria (Michèle), or being involved in the anthropology of development (Jacques lives in Africa for part of the year) are other ways of converting anti-colonialist dispositions into the professional sphere.
The roots of participation in May ’68 transfer; to do so would underestimate the amount of remodelling required for internalised dispositions to be actualised in a new form of engagement.

The transformations of conditions for students and women

Whilst the two first matrices are linked to family transmissions of beliefs and dispositions for activism (political and religious), structural transformations – of both the school system and the condition of women – provide the foundation for the second two.

When upward social mobility makes activists

The various interpretations of May ’68 agree on the importance of the transformations within the school system that preceded the events. Antoine Prost, for example, writes that the events of May ’68 “find their source in those transformations that destabilised […] the academic institution, after having made it massively unsuited to its public and its new functions” (Prost, 1981, p. 28). The population that we are studying here was thus exposed to the generalisation of secondary schooling – and later tertiary education. This took place between the Liberation and the 1960s, through an exponential increase in the number of students, and provoked a number of reforms. The Berthoin reform (1959) made changes to a system that had not been altered since the Liberation; in particular it made schooling compulsory up until age 16. Christian Fouchet, the Gaullist Minister for Education from 1962 to 1967, during the Fourth Republic, then introduced two further fundamental reforms. In 1963, he created the first secondary colleges (called CES, collèges d‘enseignement secondaire). His second reform, in 1966, targeted higher education, creating technical universities (IUTs, instituts universitaires de technologie) and reorganising studies in arts and sciences.

Box 2 Evolutions in the French school system
In the 1950s and 60s, most children attended primary school between age 6-11, at which point working-class students either went on to obtain the Primary Studies Certificate (Certificat d’études primaires, CEP) at age 13 or 14, or attended “com-

This progression accelerated from the end of the 1950s: “in 1960-1961, there were 214,700 students, compared to 123,300 in 1945-1946. Then there was an explosion: 30,000 students more in 1961, 40,000 more in 1962, and as many again in 1963 and 1964. In five years, the university population had doubled.” (Prost, 1981, p. 306).
plerimentary classes” for the most academic among them. Middle and upper-class students on the other hand attended the “lycée,” which took students from age 11 up to the final exams or baccalauréate.

The hitherto impenetrable barrier between these two parallel school systems – primary for the working classes on one hand, and the lycée for more privileged students on the other – began to break down with the reforms of the early 1960s to generalise secondary education, through the establishment of the Collège d’Enseignement Secondaire (1963).

Secondary school was then (and still is) divided into two cycles, college (equivalent to middle school) and lycée (the three final years, equivalent to senior school). However, in the 1960s people often used the term lycée to refer to the whole secondary school system, by contrast with more vocational education or those who finished school after the CEP.

At the end of the lycée students have to pass the baccalauréat or “bac” exams to complete their qualifications. Whilst many working-class students went no further than the CEP exams, many privileged students continued on to higher education. The vast majority of these students went on to university, but a small elite attended preparatory classes called “prepa” (held at the lycées) which prepared students for the prestigious “Grandes Ecoles.”

In addition, there was a special stream for trainee teachers, who were recruited at age 14 to study at the Ecole Normale d’Instituteurs, after completing the collège. During their studies, these students received a salary from the state in anticipation of their future role as teachers in public primary schools.

However, these evolutions in the school system gave rise to diverging interpretations as to the profiles of the students who participated in May ’68. Surprisingly, the long-dominant55 explanation was one based on downward social mobility, even though these academic transformations produced a multiplication of first-generation intellectuals (i.e. individuals who were the first in their families to receive higher education). Their experiences of resistance to the university system, just as they entered it, as well as their own position as outsiders, provided fertile soil for the growth of critical dispositions regarding both the university system and the social order more generally.56 In order to further develop this matrix, we will begin by

55 It would be 30 years before the reverse schema would be put forward by Louis Gruel, himself a first-generation intellectual (Gruel, 2004, p. 69–70).
56 On this point, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron wrote: “It is when the perfect attunement between the educational system and its chosen public begins to break down that the ‘pre-established harmony’, which upheld the system so perfectly so as to exclude all inquiry into its basis, is revealed” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970, trans. 1990, p. 99).
focusing on Jean’s trajectory, before explaining why these “class migrants” are particularly receptive to critical sociology. In particular, we will look at how the reception of *Les Héritiers* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964, published in English as *The Inheritors* 1979) participated in their politicisation.

*Remaining faithful to one’s origins through activism*

Jean was born in 1939 in a small village in Lower Normandy, where his parents were farmers. Like many villagers, they rented their land from the village Baron, who was also the Mayor, and a practicing Catholic. Jean, who had been singled out by the town priest for his academic abilities, was encouraged to continue his studies. At age 11 he went to boarding school in a Catholic secondary college and then to the lycée; he was the first of his family to complete secondary schooling. This experience made him an outsider at a time when the “symbolic barrier that had been erected in order to maintain social order” (Pudal, 2008, p. 64), between the primary and the secondary system, was only just beginning to crumble. In the early 1950s, the children of peasants only made up 7% of students in sixth grade and, for Jean, the gaze of his more affluent classmates provoked shame and a feeling of social illegitimacy:

> At the lycée the others were mostly from petit bourgeoisie or bourgeoisie, so for the son of a peasant, it was pretty strange, sometimes I was ashamed ... [of what for example?] Well the way of doing things, all that, being a bit awkward, like a peasant you know! Dress, yes, all that, the little signs... For example: my father took me [to school] in the cart, in 1953-1954 it was quite an identity marker to arrive in a cart... That’s what makes its mark [...] you become aware of class differences...

Like Jean, these “class migrants” were exposed to contradictory injunctions: although their social mobility was the pride of their parents and family, it also bore with it the threat of rejecting their social origins. Indeed academic acculturation and contact with other social circles leads to the – at least partial – internalisation of other people’s judgments on oneself. Hence the feelings of identity dissonance, and of being in double bind, are at the root of

---

57 I thank Paul Pasquali for his informed advice to use “class migrant” as the translation for the French term “transfuge de classe”.

58 The comments quoted in this section are taken from an interview conducted with Jean, at his home on 24 January, 2006.

59 On this threat of rejection, see the novels by Annie Ernaux and the sociological reading proposed by Gérard Mauger (Mauger, 2004).
complex and ambivalent feelings of fascination and rejection regarding the bourgeois milieu. At lycée, Jean had not yet translated the social otherness of the “scholarship student” (Hoggart, 1957) into political terms.

As an excellent student, Jean was accepted into hypokhâgne\textsuperscript{60} in Caen. At the end of the second year, he was received at the Ecole Normale de Saint-Cloud, which gave him access to the IPES.\textsuperscript{61} He thus continued his university education, with a stipend, and enrolled in history and geography at the University of Caen in 1959. It was here that he became more political:

I wasn’t particularly left-wing when I was at Catholic secondary school... we had to do public speaking competitions against communism – no, really! [he laughs] So in that respect, I don’t remember having had political ideas other than those of that sphere. But then, as a student, yeah, because there was the movement against the Algerian War, and I think I had a class consciousness really, and the two things became connected.

It was thus through the student movement and in the context of the struggle against the Algerian War, that his feelings of uneasiness about being the son of peasants, which up until then he had experienced as socially shameful, took on a political dimension. Moreover, the fact that he had himself had his conscription for the Algerian War deferred, was also in contradiction with the idea of accepting the world as it is. Jean became active in the fight against the Algerian War, through UNEF initially, and then within the group “Socialisme ou barbarie” (Socialism or barbarianism).

It is no easy task for these first-generation intellectuals to conceptualise their social position and their role. They do not have any models that can help structure their relationship with the social world and with the future, neither in their families, nor in the institutional past of the school system. Their political affiliation with the extreme-left provides them with a framework through which to read the feelings of incongruity and disparity that they experienced throughout their schooling, in terms of class struggle. Moreover, it provides them with a means of conciliating their parental mandate for social mobility, and their mandate of loyalty towards the working classes. The question of how to be faithful to oneself and to one’s family therefore

\textsuperscript{60} First year preparatory classes for the “grandes écoles” (elite higher education institutions) in France.

\textsuperscript{61} Preparatory schools for secondary school teachers, “Instituts de preparation aux enseignements de second degré.” These schools brought together student teachers, who were paid, generally for a period of 3 years, to prepare the teaching qualification exams. They were abolished in 1979.
runs through all studies on these displaced people: “the [class] traitor must restore justice to his father: whence the allegiance to the cause of the lower classes who pledge allegiance to the cause of the father [...] can be understood as attempts magically to neutralize the effects of the change in position and dispositions separating the individual from his father” (Bourdieu, 1993, trans. 1999 p. 510) These attempts to “reconcile the irreconcilable” (Pudal, 1989) are often the motivation of communist or far-left intellectuals.

Activist networks thus allow these young students to use their erudite dispositions to serve their class of origin, whilst still facilitating their acculturation into the student milieu (through the education, transmission of knowledge and sociability that it provides). As Jean says:

When I arrived in Caen, I didn’t understand much about politics, I have to admit [he laughs]! It was quite difficult actually... But I went to demonstrations, to meetings: there was a sort of shack near the Uni, it was the UNEF place, there was a bar, and all the lefties hung out there, all the students [...] there was the journal Socialism or Barbarianism, I read that, and there were meetings, discussions [...], there were lots of things I didn’t know compared to someone who had been there since they were 14 or 15 years old, so it was little by little... an education in a way...

This training in activism, which conveyed rhetorical and discursive skills (Ethuin, 2003) thus supported their trajectories of upward social mobility.

In 1966, the context of the anti-Vietnam War movement led Jean and Christiane (see above) to become involved in the Communist Revolutionary Youth group (Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire, JCR). As a geography and history teacher, Jean was transferred to Troyes in 1967, and together he and Christiane founded the local branch of the JCR there. They were also among the main leaders of the May ’68 movements in that town. Jean was also involved in the “Ecole émancipée”62 movement, within the Federation for National Education (Fédération de l’éducation nationale, FEN), and became a union representative at the national level in the 1970s.

The Inheritors, read by first-generation intellectuals
Most of the class migrants interviewed here evoke the importance of Pierre Bourdieu’s writings for their intellectual and political progression. Jean, for example, says:

62 L’Ecole émancipée (the Emancipated School) is a union movement that promotes school reform for equality, and brings together several extreme-left activists.
Bourdieu, he's not just anyone. He had a big influence on me... he helped me a lot, for school particularly... *The Inheritors*, it was really a book that was very important for all the people who were connected to these stories, it was fundamental... he played such an important historical role in that respect, in terms of the critique of the bourgeois school system. Ultimately, he was the one who said the most intelligent things. [...] For the Maoists, the school was essentially a repressive apparatus that spread ideology: that was too much in contradiction with what the school system had given me for example [...] so I absolutely couldn't be a Maoist *[he laughs]*!

Trajectories of significant upward social mobility lead to this kind of affinity with Bourdieu's own trajectory, and more broadly with the sociology of *The Inheritors*. These affinities are explored by the writer Annie Ernaux, herself originally from the working class. In an interview about her approach to writing, Ernaux said “what I had to say – basically, the shift from the world of the oppressed to the world of the oppressors, via education – I had never seen it expressed in the way that I felt it. And one book allowed me, in a way, to bring myself up to speed. One book pushed me, as no so-called literary text had done before, to dare to confront this history. And that book was *The Inheritors* by Bourdieu and Passeron, which I discovered in the spring” (Ernaux, 2003, p. 87).

This social self-analysis is also present in the comments made by Jeanne, born in 1943 to a chauffeur and a cleaning lady. She was encouraged by her primary school teacher to go on to secondary school, even though “[her] destiny was to pass the primary school certificate and become a hairdresser or a dressmaker.” She says, “I read *The Inheritors* when it came out [...] it was very important for me: [it had] a strong impact, strong personal resonance. It said, with supporting figures, tables and analysis, what I had felt – as a child and a teenager, in my family, my friends and my neighbourhood, or as a student teacher, during my teaching placements.”

Reading *The Inheritors* provided these first-generation intellectuals with a collective explanation of the dissonance they had experienced on a personal level, and more generally provided a scientific analysis for the social basis of their feelings and their frustrations. The revelation of the role of the education system in the reproduction of social and cultural...
hierarchies was thus a kind of liberation. Aline, born in 1946, describes how her social mobility made her receptive to the politicising effects of this critical sociology of education:

I had a lot of experience with the savagery of the system, in the way it selects and excludes, so ruthlessly. I felt like I was a survivor, for having had to defend my place [...] And afterwards, I tended to condemn the illusion of promotion through education, the exceptions who prove the rule [...] And I think that in the 1960s, Bourdieu and Passeron’s books showed that people in the lower classes who succeed were, you know, exceptions and that they were put forward as kind of the watchdogs of the system [...]. The Inheritors was an important moment: they showed, in black and white, the myth of equal opportunities. These books were so beneficial because they provided an explanation for the difficulties that came from not having an intellectual family culture: it was important in feeding our political thought.\(^\text{64}\)

These class migrants constituted a particularly receptive audience for this critical sociology of education, to the extent that, unlike the “excluded” and the “inheritors,” they overcame the various obstacles linked to their social origins, and experienced the symbolic violence of acculturation to the school system.

Finally, the scientific project that aimed to unveil the implicit norms that structure the school system provoked numerous affinities with the militant project condemning the role of the school in social reproduction, and provided it with substantial symbolic weapons. The militant use of The Inheritors to feed the political debate therefore most likely contributed to its wide reception in the late 1960s, among the groups interviewed here (Masson, 2005).\(^\text{65}\)

**Upward social mobility and politicisation**
To conclude this matrix, we can summarise the main biographical sequences that, in their succession, contributed to political awakening and the birth of dispositions towards extreme-left activism (see Figure 2 below).

\(^{64}\) Aline is the daughter of an assistant accountant (with a primary school certificate) and a dressmaker who became a teacher in a vocational learning centre (vocational certificate). This extract comes from the first interview, conducted with her on 27 January 2005, at Vitruve school where she taught from 1969 until she retired.

\(^{65}\) On similar political reappropriations of Pierre Bourdieu’s work, but in the 1990s-2000s see Pasquali (2007).
Through their unlikely social trajectories, these class migrants found themselves doubly displaced: both in relation to their class of origin, and their class of arrival. On one hand, they faced the threat of rejecting one's origins. One the other, this social shift exposed them to various experiences of stigma and humiliation, which led them to be particularly sensitive to questions of injustice. Moreover, they are all the more disposed to believe in the possibility of social change because their own trajectories “have shaken the foundations of the social order by weakening the borders between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Mauger, 2004, p. 197). Their trajectories serve as a kind of symbolic weapon for the revelation of a forbidden truth – that the social order is not immutable. In the second half of the 1960s, extreme-left activism allowed these young students to fight for their class of origin, whilst ensuring their integration into the student milieu. It thus offered a ‘place’ for these ‘displaced’ people, but also a response to the question of the (existential) meaning of this place, through militant rhetoric.

However, explaining the origin of these dispositions for rebellion does not enable us to account for the ways in which they were activated; ways which were also largely due to local contexts and conjunctures. Although Jean was among the very first cohorts to benefit from the generalisation of secondary education, the phenomenon had become widespread by the time Aline went to university. Student unionism thus provided her an opportunity for activism that did not exist ten years earlier, and she invested her dispositions for protest in it.66 The opportunity for local political activism was also decisive for many. In south-west France, Jeanne joined the PCF in 1961, because in that area it was the most militant body in the anti-colonialism movement. By contrast, the PCF’s position on the Algerian War was prohibitive for Jean who joined the group “Socialisme et barbarie” which was more locally adapted to his concerns. In other words, this shared matrix led to very distinctive forms of political participation that differ primarily according to age (i.e. the year of entry into university), but also gender (Lagrave, 2010). They also differ according to the kinds of activism undertaken (extreme-left Trotskyism, PCF and student unionism).

66 Aline went to the Sorbonne to study psychology in 1965, was a member of UNEF as well as of the Federation of Humanities Study Groups (Fédération des groupes d’étude de lettres, FGEL). She soon became the general secretary of FGEL and shared an office with Brice Lalonde (then president of the FGEL, who would later become an environmental activist and a presidential candidate for the Greens in 1981).
When personal crises resonate with political crises

The final matrix of participation in May ’68 is specific to the youngest of the interviewees. These individuals experienced an increasingly large gulf between their personal aspirations and the constraints linked to the gender and generational relations that dominated before 1968, which they had difficulty accepting.

Alongside the transformations of student life, the condition of women underwent a profound evolution over the course of the 1960s in France. Access to higher education, as well as the rise in female employment gave women the means to access economic independence (Baudelot and Establet, 2006). On a legal level, legislative evolutions in sexuality – particularly the 1967 Neuwirth law authorising contraception – contributed to the development of sexual independence. These structural changes in turn had an impact on feminine roles. Whereas before 1968 these roles were limited to daughter, wife and mother, expected to be respectively chaste, faithful and submissive, access to sexual and economic independence completely changed things. However, representations of femininity – and masculinity – did not evolve at the same rate, which led to increasing incoherencies. More than half of the interviewees say that the condition of social mores prior to 1968 was a source of suffering for them, yet this figure obscures a gender gap, because more women than

67 The question was formulated as follows: “Did you suffer from the state of mores before 1968? If yes, give one specific example.”
men responded positively to this question. Some of the specific examples given by the young adults in their questionnaires include: “major difficulties in sexual relations outside marriage;” “no easily accessible contraception;” “illegal abortions;” “fear of pregnancy.” One respondent wrote, “I was chased by the concierge and threatened with eviction when a man came to visit me.”

Similar discordances in the university sector led to tensions and a feeling of unease among students, which became heightened over the course of the 1960s (Prost, 1981, p. 311 onwards; Pudal, 2008). One of the first demonstrations of what would be later described as an anti-institutional mood was born of the conjunction of these gaps (in mores and in the school system). The movement in opposition to the internal regulations in university residences emerged due to student overcrowding and the challenge to the principle of single-sex dorms. This movement, which began in Antony, in the southern suburbs of Paris, as early as 1965, reached Nanterre in 1967 and became very popular due to the “Cohn-Bendit episode.” When the Minister for Youth Affairs, François Misoffe, came to Nanterre to inaugurate the new swimming pool, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, then a student in sociology, challenged him on the question of young people’s sexual problems, not covered in the Minister’s white paper. Less anecdotally, these discordances were responsible for many personal experiences of incoherence and tension between the condition of women and the university housing rules, or the position of young women as students and their status as legal minors. There was also an ongoing tension between the official offer of university education and housing, and the new radically larger and qualitatively different student population. These phenomena of hysteresis, this “delay,” contributed to a diffuse and increasing feeling of hypocrisy that was unbearable for some. Talking about her lycée in the mid-1960s for example, Aline says:

It was horrendous, that girls’ school! It was the era of Brigitte Bardot with petticoats. There was a control at the school gate, and we couldn’t have

68 Daniel Cohn-Bendit was a student leader during May 1968 and vocal in demanding greater sexual freedom for students on university campuses, specifically allowing male students to access female dormitories. This attracted a lot of support from fellow students, nearly had him expelled from university and led to more protests in his defence. He was a key figure in the organisation of the 22 March movement at Nanterre. He is now a European politician for the Greens party.

69 In other words, “phenomena of discrepancy, delay, in representations anticipations and expectations, with regard to the actual state of “objective” structures” (Dobry, 1986, p. 244).

70 We mentioned Aline’s case above regarding the matrix of first-generation intellectuals. Once again, we see here that the different matrices are not mutually exclusive.
more than one petticoat or they could take one off us! If a student arrived with makeup on, they sent her to wash her face, in the basin, we weren’t allowed heels over four centimetres, we had to wear the school smock with your name embroidered in red, things like that! The school rules began with “a student at Sophie-Germain is a well brought up young girl, she should not stand out, either in her conduct, or in her comportment...!” I remember a girl in my class who had a book confiscated, it was far from porn... And the principal came into the class to explain that the book was so filthy that an unmarried female supervisor, who was on the disciplinary council, had not been allowed to read it! And she said that this girl, who had been our class representative, couldn’t be the representative anymore [...] Well, there was a whole system to make us toe the line [...]. It was things like that, which had already started to make me... even though I was really quite shy.

Aline’s trajectory is typical of the generational ensemble made up of the first baby boomers, born after the war. She was brought up in the “illusion that the baddies were all Germans and a few rare French people, but all the others were Resistants,” by parents who wanted to “turn the page” of the war (her father refused to discuss it when he returned from captivity). She has the feeling of having grown up in a post-war period founded on numerous illusions – which became a source of future disillusions:

Anyway, they lied to us about the war all through our childhood [...] and in the 1960s [...] now we can see that the system was a sham, officially maintained, and that those who really fought were in fact a tiny minority! [...] We opened our eyes and we realised that we had grown up in a kind of euphoric haze but behind it all, there were so many false pretences.

This discourse is typical of the first generation to not live through a war; baby boomers who grew up in a “sort of protective bubble, in historical weightlessness, and far from the strong swells of the 1950s.” The “disconnection with the reality in which the public authorities had confined them” (Sirinelli, 2008, p. 117) fuelled their indignation.

The experience of injustice in both gender and generational relations provided rich fertile ground for the development of anti-institutional
sensibilities and for the later emergence of feminist movements. The close analysis of two cases, both representative of this matrix of *statutory incoherencies*, will shed further light on this.

*Breakdown in allegiances with parental, academic and religious authority*

Maëlle was born in 1948 in a left-wing family of white-collar employees. After the Second World War, her father, who had made his career in the army, was redeployed into a civil service position at the port of Nantes, and her mother, the daughter of shipyard workers in Lorient, was employed in an office. As their eighth and last child, Maëlle received a “very authoritarian” and pious upbringing, and attended religious education classes at the public school for young girls, where she was enrolled from her first year at primary school. Whilst still quite young, Maëlle developed an oppositional disposition that challenged her parents, the school (she was held back a grade several times), and religion: “I ran away a few times... Religion, I dropped it when I was a teenager, well, probably out of opposition and provocation, Mass didn’t interest me anymore and faith neither. I dropped out at that point... in relation to my parents who were very authoritarian at the time, both of them...”72

Mathilde was born in 1946 in Bordeaux into a family of artisans. Her father was an electrician, born in Vendee, a royalist and a practicing Catholic; her mother worked at home, raising their four daughters, “[my] mother was more than a practicing Catholic, [she was] a bigot... she managed to discourage and disgust her four children; we all had an overdose of religion.”73 She also emphasizes the lack of freedom that she suffered from as child, and her rejection of religious morals a few years later when she was at a religious boarding school: “my mother had the nasty habit of sending us long letters on morality, you know – four to six pages, it was awful! [...] At one point, we’d just look at the envelope and say, it’s that again, and off it goes in the bin!” Like Aline, Mathilde stresses the hypocrisy of the moral order in the mid-1960s:

...in my high school, there were post-secondary classes, and there was a girl whose boyfriend used to wait for her, and they kissed, and the headmistress sanctioned her, saying “Mademoiselle, that was a conjugal kiss!” You have to imagine the mood! We called it the “ideology of Aunt Yvonne,”

72 Maëlle’s comments are taken from the interview conducted in Nantes on 7 February 2006.
73 Mathilde’s comments are taken from the interview conducted at her home on 26 January 2004.
after Yvonne de Gaulle who had had a female announcer sacked because she showed her knees: there was the most unbearable prudishness!

The two young women, both resistant to parental authority, used different means to try and break free; Mathilde by an early marriage, and Maëlle by a series of runaway attempts.

Mathilde
I got married, before I went to university, to the first man I’d ever kissed. It seems unbelievable now, I hadn’t even slept with him, I did afterwards, that’s how taboo it was in my family! It was also a means of breaking away...

Maëlle
My brother came to England to get me. I have to say I was really really rebellious at the time, but against my parents, not against society. My parents were older, I was the last child... I had the impression that they didn’t understand anything, about my adolescence, or what was happening in life!

Having parents that were markedly older than those of her classmates contributed to Maëlle’s feeling of not being understood. For Mathilde, freed from parental authority by marriage, the mismatch between her new condition as a student (in Bordeaux, then in Paris from 1967) and her role as a young wife was increasingly large: “I felt like there was something wrong with Frank, something off... so when we left for Paris, university for me, it made the gap between my relationship and my student life even bigger [...]. I had more and more difficulty, between my commitment to Frank and my commitment to my new milieu, where I was beginning to meet people on the left.”

The increasing disconnection between Mathilde’s status as a student and the way she continued to be discredited by her parents, her husband and her parents-in-law (who pushed her to become a mother very young) reinforced her feeling of unease. Maëlle on the other hand, rebelling against the academic order, felt isolated in her family sphere where nobody shared her aspirations. According to the historian Jean-François Sirinelli, the baby boom generation is more generally characterised by “reciprocal misunderstandings between age groups,” which “historically banal, became more heightened here” (Sirinelli, 2008, p. 114). In the cases of Mathilde and Maëlle, however, these misunderstandings led them to break their allegiance to the authority of their parents or the school system. This breakdown initially led to feelings of guilt (Mathilde would wait several years before filing for divorce).
The role of crises in politicisation
The identity crises of these two young women, who both had intimate experiences with various statutory incoherencies, would soon resonate with the political crisis of May ‘68. This provided them with collective and political frameworks through which to interpret what they had previously understood and experienced on a personal level:

**Mathilde**
Those events revealed something that I had felt for several years but which I kept quiet, that I wouldn’t have been able to express in fact [...] because it was revolutions everywhere, internally: you have to see what French society was like just before... You can’t imagine the earthquake it was for young women from good families, like me! (she laughs) [...] I can say that I was born in 1968... intellectually, I woke up from a sort of slumber in which I was nothing more than my education, my constraints, all the guilt that had been put in my head... Maybe I’m magnifying it too, but for me, it’s, it would stay the most important event in my life [...] it is life, you know, that’s where it started...

**Maëlle**
In 1968, I was 20 years old, I was still living with my parents, I had repeated one or two years of school and anyway, there was no question of leaving home before 21 in those days! I was already opposed to my parents, but let’s say that in May ’68 I found a more general opposition in fact. It gave me a reason to rebel, but in a more grandiose way because it wasn’t just in the family sphere. I could rebel against all parental figures (she laughs), from de Gaulle, who represented the father of the nation, or the bosses – it was all authority. Oh, it was marvellous!... It was a bit like transcending my teenage rebellion; it was the right time for me [...] it was the perfect moment.

At that time, the age of legal majority (21 years old) was one of most striking statutory incoherencies for these young adults. More generally, these extracts emphasize the crucial importance of age – within a few years – in this matrix of participation based on the conjuncture between crises of allegiance to authority relations, and a political crisis like May ‘68. Bernard Pudal’s description of the main characters in Georges Perec’s novel *Les Choses*74 – who are “looking for a way out of the crisis,” and who were born “too early” to be concerned by this matrix – provides an enlightening illustration of

---

this: “if they had been students a few years later [...] their anxious search could have been fulfilled in these left-wing positions” (Pudal, 2011, p. 228).

Born “at the right time,” Mathilde moved towards anarchist far-left student movements in the months that followed May ’68 at the Sorbonne, where she was studying literature. Now a young mother, she divorced shortly afterwards, and with others she founded the alternative crèche at Censier. In the years that followed she became actively involved in the feminist movement. For her part, Maëlle enrolled in history at the University of Rennes, at the beginning of May ’68, but she dropped out to become a primary school teacher – inspired by Freinet – “because if we want to change society, we have to start with the education of young children.” She thus converted her disposition for rebellion into a critique of the school system and became a unionist with the Ecole Emancipée.

The statutory incoherencies matrix thus concerns this generational ensemble that was already in conflict with the different forms of authority on the eve of May ’68. The events of May-June brought a political charge to their diffuse individual feelings of rebellion and gave them the right to express themselves, as well as providing various collective frameworks for interpreting the crises they had previously experienced. It is in this respect that we can talk about an “awakening of political consciousness,” due to an effect of conjuncture in the alignment of multiple personal crises with the events of May ’68. Indeed, this critical moment provoked the questioning of everything that was habitually taken for granted, and the gender and generational relations did not escape this profound challenge. Indeed, it was predominantly raised by the youngest sub-group of the corpus – who were students in 1968 and who are mostly women – (situated in the lower left quadrant on the factorial plane, see Figure 1 above). These young female

---

75 This crèche and others like it were known as “crèches sauvages” (wild crèches). These crèches were often run by groups of activist parents according to alternative models of education, and countercultural values (free, co-educational care, new pedagogies, involvement of parents, anti-authoritarian etc.).

76 In May 1968, Mathilde was pregnant and her daughter Corinne was born in the months that followed. The remainder of her trajectory, representative of the utopian communities of the 1970s is discussed in Chapter 5.

77 Later Maëlle would become a storyteller, manage a social centre, work as a tour guide and also breed donkeys.

78 For Bourdieu, the “prise de conscience”, translated into English as awakening of consciousness, is “the progressive discovery of what class habitus encloses in practice, the appropriation of oneself by oneself, the recovery, through coherent explanation, of everything that, unconscious and uncontrolled, is exposed to a deviation of meaning and mystification” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 79-80)
activists then turned their criticism towards the various forms of authority relations, which had been politically recast in terms of domination, and thus participated in the redefinition of women’s roles and the situation of students in the early 1970s.

Conclusion

This exploration of the social, political, religious, academic or generational roots of May ’68 thus contributes to invalidating the idea that there is a single “generation ’68.” The four principle matrices revealed here produce distinct generational ensembles, depending on the contexts in which militant action was first undertaken.

Table 2  From the genesis of dispositions for protest to their activation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The formation of dispositions for protest</th>
<th>Political events triggering activism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family transmission of dispositions for activism</td>
<td>Algerian War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicisation of religious commitments</td>
<td>Anti-imperialism (Vietnam War, Latin American struggles, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicisation of first-generation intellectuals</td>
<td>May ’68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory incoherencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, we can try to account for the primary determinants of participation in May ’68 by developing a higher order matrix. This would subscribe to the idea of a progressive erosion of consent in the context of “sectorial crises of authority relations” (Damamme, Gobille, Matonti, and Pudal, 2008). Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s these crises affected the main institutions responsible for ensuring social order (family, school, the church etc.). The structural evolutions of French society in the 1960s (generalisation of higher education, evolution of the situation of young people, access to sexual and economic independence for women, aggiornamento in the church) indeed led to a modification in the recruitment of a certain number of institutions which were obliged to provide access to populations for which they were neither suited nor prepared. This has been discussed at length for the school system, but the disruptions in the Church in the 1950s and 60s is not unrelated to the evolution of social recruitment in religious youth groups (Serry, 2008; Pelletier, 2002). The army was also affected and experienced
The roots of participation in May ‘68

historic discredit linked – among other things – to its role in the Second World War, Petainism, and colonial wars – particularly in Vietnam. This led to growing dissatisfaction among certain young people with regard to military service (Gruel, 2004; Bertrand 2008). The list of these sectorial legitimacy crises (crises in psychiatric institutions, youth institutions etc.) could go on and on. However, what needs to be remembered is the recurrence of a certain profile of actors, with unlikely trajectories, who found themselves in the position of outsiders, which gave them a critical perspective on the institutions to which they belonged. Thrown into social roles to which they were not fully suited, these young people often occupied what Bourdieu called “dominated dominant” positions (first-generation intellectuals, young women from higher classes, leaders of religious youth groups etc.). As outsiders, they played an important role in spreading beliefs and representations that challenged the legitimacy of the political regime, the social order, the family order and the religious order, in the years leading up to the crisis. We now turn to the question of where and when their individual and collective trajectories crossed, and how this contributed to the spread of the crisis in May and June of 1968.