

MASTER DE SPÉCIALISATION EN ÉTUDES DE GENRE

Hegemonic Masculinity and Transclass Mobility

The Academic Migration of Gay Men Residing in Belgium

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University is not made for the like of us. Never forget where you come from. And if you do, they will always remind you.

To my grand-father Jules

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Foreword

The languages of the original sources used to support this master thesis are English and French. A certain amount of translations were needed to make the paper accessible to non-French-speakers. The author of this paper being a translator, all translations in this document are his, unless otherwise stated. Original quotes from the authors are mentioned in footnotes. However, all the quotes from the participants in the study have been left in the original language.

With the aim at protecting the privacy of the participants, some of the names or places have been modified in their quotes.

Some quotes may hurt the reader's feelings either because of the violence of the shared experience or because of an obsolete language – mainly in historical sources with their historical terminology and lack of consideration for inclusive language. For the sake of authenticity and to avoid language anachronisms, choice has been made not to alter these original quotes.

Introduction

My Own Journey to Transclass Mobility

When I was a university student in the 1990s, I was active in a student union and fought against the decree which would establish the merger of colleges in the French-speaking part of Belgium. Our reasoning was simple: the distance between higher education establishments and smaller towns would add a barrier to the already invisible barrier of social reproduction. As a consequence, the geographic concentration of colleges in bigger cities would exclude the working class of (semi-)rural populations even more from higher education opportunities.

Later on, I came to wonder why I and several of my gay friends from the working class had found a way to digress from our cultural heritage through out-of-reach higher education. Which social forces made us outlaws of social reproduction? It appears that for many of us, being gay and coming from a small town seemed a determining factor of transclass mobility. The distance between university and our original towns was a unique opportunity to flee from social control, in search of our personal identities in a new and anonymous territory to discover and freely experiment our sexuality.

It is not that we all had *wanted* to study after secondary school (it was rather unthought of in our environments); it is not that we had *wanted* to flee from our social conditions either. We had just wanted to find a way of emancipating as free gay men. And one path towards our emancipation was migration. But migrating is not an easy option when you are underqualified and without a penny. So, in a country where education fees and student accommodation prices are low or supported by state subsidies, the easiest way – and in some cases the unique excuse for leaving our families and communities – was to register at university. Whatever the field, as long as it took us far from our hometowns.

So, in our conditions, the distance between smaller towns and academic institutions acted simultaneously as an emancipator and class transfer. Had we been heterosexual men, gay men from a big city or gay men from the upper class, our emancipation would probably not have been conditioned by migration. So, it is not because we were men that we migrated; it is not because we belonged to the working class either; and it is not because we were gay. It was because of the intersection of our gender, sexual orientation and working-class background. Or so I thought.

Subordinate Masculinities and The Need for Migration

At the dawn of adulthood, gay men may struggle to find their way into the games and pressures of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexual sociability. Their “subordinate masculinity” (Connell, 2005, p. 78) excludes them from male peer dynamics and pushes them to elaborate tactics¹ to emancipate. In this context, “sexual migration”², may be the only way to escape from heteronormative circles, whether community-based or family-based. In *Réflexions sur la question gay* (Eribon, 1999), Eribon brings to light how being gay helped him in his trajectory. Ten years later (2009), he analyses his trajectory back by suggesting that his initial trigger for emancipation was the shame of his social class, making a clear link between the working-class culture and homophobia. His personal journey, which he later defined as “deviant and ascending”³ (2013, p. 10) was made possible through the highly mingled gay community which gave him access to the high spheres of society.

Class Defection, Class Conversion and Transclass Mobility

Eribon’s work on *class defection* (or *transfuge de classe* in French) brought to light exceptions in Bourdieu and Passeron’s theory of social reproduction, understood as the generational transmission of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capitals, which leads to the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of relations of powers and the interiorisation of the dominated position (Jaquet, 2014, p. 2). Coming from a small town in France, Eribon’s journey to class defection started from the shame of belonging to his social class. Edouard Louis followed his steps by also showing, in *En finir avec Eddy Bellegueule*, a working class of rural towns as the apparent monopolistic territory of homophobia and heterosexism. The way to emancipate as a gay man was, therefore, through class defection and migration to a big city. And academic migration⁴ acted as the mandatory step to class mobility. From this angle, the term *class defection* is adequate as the triggering factor is the shame of one’s social condition and the aspiration to deserting from the working class. Monique Wittig also uses the same term, as well as the one of *fugitive*, to describe the defection from the patriarchy (1980/2018).

¹ By tactics, I am referring to de Certeau’s work, who distinguishes *tactics* (coming from an individual’s agency and resistance to collective powers and privileges) from *strategies*, which he defines as “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 35).

² In this study, sexual migration is to be understood as the internal or transnational “relocation that is motivated, directly or indirectly, by the sexuality of those who migrate” (Carrillo, 2004, p. 58).

³ *déviant et ascendante*. [original text]

⁴ In this study, academic migration is to be understood as the internal or transnational relocation on grounds of studying at university.

G rard Mauger (Mauger, 2013, p. 13) rather uses the term *class disaffiliation* (or *d saffiliation de classe* in French), which does not annihilate the underlying notion of treason or desertion as in the word *defection*. Yet, it neutralises the individual’s agency in his or her journey of class mobility. Shame may not be the triggering factor, let alone the consequence of being perceived as a traitor or a pariah, but the aspiration is still a conscious one: entering the bourgeoisie is the overarching goal and the promised land of any gay man.

In this paper, Chantal Jaquet’s term of *transclass* (Jaquet, 2014, p. 13) will be preferred to *class defection* or *class disaffiliation*. Transclass mobility (or *transclasse* in French) covers all cases of class mobility, whether through a conscious decision of an individual or through other factors, serendipity, or side-effects of other decisions. It also meets the possibilities of a temporary passage, of a fall “between two worlds” (Hoggart, 1988, Chapter 8: University, empl. 3502), of a way back or of subsequent mobility from one class to another.

The object of the present master thesis is an interview-based study on transclass mobility of gay men from working-class families through academic migration, which I conducted in the second half of 2022. All participants in the study have chosen to migrate to university not always out of shame of their social conditions or with the aspiration of class defection or conversion, but with the purpose of escaping from hegemonic masculinity and of searching their personal identities and freedom beyond the stigma of inferiority. As in Plato’s cave allegory (Platon, 2002, p. 358), they mostly did not know what to expect from the outside world. The bourgeoisie was often unthought of and the link between social class and heterosexism was often blinded by ignorance. In these stories, all interviewees have testified of their transclass mobility as a result – and sometimes unintended consequence – of their search for a new and, mostly, anonymous territory to sexually emancipate as gay men and/or to develop their personal identities far from the social control of their families and communities.

This study explores trajectories of gay men⁵ who have seen geographic mobility – rather than social mobility – as that necessary step to sexual emancipation. The common factors with Eribon’s theory are their sexual orientation and their belonging to the working class. But whereas some participants acted as class defectors, the vision of homophobia, heterosexism and subsequent emancipation was, for most of them, not primarily linked to their sense of belonging to the working class. In their case, escaping from their families and communities,

⁵ In this study, the acception of “gay” has been left to each participant’s personal appreciation and subjectivity. One of the online survey respondents preferred to be identified as queer, mentioning that the term “gay” includes a Euro-American centrality and a capitalist signifier.

i.e. from social control, was necessary to penetrate a new territory and a new community to explore their sexuality or to develop their personal identities without endangering their reputation or their families' reputation at home. Moreover, due to their socio-economic conditions, academic migration was the most reasonable tactic to negotiate the idea of migration with their communities of origin. Transclass mobility through academic migration was not guaranteed nor necessarily reasoned but would be facilitated by the transformation of their subjectivity in their new, highly privileged community.

After a necessary review of the literature with a focus on social reproduction, transclass mobility and sexual migration, a framework of analysis will be presented. The methodology of the study and reflexive elements of epistemology will be followed by the empirical results as the last chapter before the general conclusion.

Chapter 1 - Bringing Field Perspective to Eribon's Pioneering work

Migration studies are not new to social sciences, and they have considerably developed since Ravenstein's Laws of Migration (1885). However, it took about a century to "bring gender in" migration research (Pessar & Mahler, 2003, p. 812), especially through the gender lens of the "global care chain" (Hochschild, 2000, p. 131). Based on a transnational perspective and often with heteronormative blindness, they mostly elude queer experiences and internal migration processes. As suggested by Cantù, "sexuality itself influences migratory processes" (2009, p. 21). Queer migrations studies have been emerging over the last two decades, through sociological analyses and ethnographic studies as well as in the philosophical field, still mostly through a transnational perspective.

Transclass mobility has also been studied, both in scientific work and in literary fiction, and has been presented as derogations to Bourdieu and Passeron's theory on social reproduction. If we want to analyse the social mobility of gay men from working-class families, all roads of the current state of scientific literature lead to the "sociological introspection"⁶ of Eribon (2013, p. 11). Yet, this corpus of literature on transclass mobility, queer studies, and gender & migration lacks the analytical and field perspectives of the "gendered geographies of power" (Pessar & Mahler, 2003) with the intersection of class, gender, and sexuality. Therefore, if empirical research appears "necessary to reach a deeper understanding of the nuanced meanings of mobility, gender, as well as sexuality" (Fresnoza-Flot, 2021, p. 13), it appears even more necessary to analyse the gendered relations of power which lead gay men from working-class environments to migrate, whether internally or transnationally.

1.1. Social Reproduction and the Fiction of a Disconnected Self

Referring to Bourdieu and Passeron's theory on social reproduction (1964), this master thesis defines the working class as opposed to the intellectual class through the eliminating factor of higher education, in a society in which "the granting of social privilege more and more

⁶ introspection sociologique. [original text]

depends on the possession of academic titles”⁷ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, p. 253). This “power of symbolic violence ... contributes to giving legitimacy to social hierarchies based on the use of literate language, university culture, exams and graduation processes”⁸ (Dubéchet, 2020, p. 22). The mechanisms of social reproduction are complex and result from the combination of a filtering education system and the internalised “legitimacy of their exclusion”⁹ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, p. 57) by the dominated groups, which entail and are nourished by the class *habitus* in an infinite circle from one generation to the next and the next.

As a “generating and unifying principle of behaviours and opinions”¹⁰ (1970, p. 198), the *habitus* conditions the life of every individual, particularly in the education system through the dominant education authority enforced “by the monopoly of knowledge by the ones who possess previously acquired knowledge”¹¹ (1970, p. 63). The *habitus* is “the incorporation of the social”¹² (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot, 2004, p. 154) by individuals through systems of dispositions,

schemes of perception, appreciation and action [, which] enable them to perform acts of practical knowledge, based on the identification and recognition of conditional, conventional stimuli to which they are predisposed to react; and, without any explicit definition of ends or rational calculation of means, to generate appropriate and endlessly renewed strategies, but within the limits of the structural constraints of which they are the product and which define them. (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 138)

These schemes of perception unconsciously contribute to the reproduction of the social order, through the internalisation and acceptance by the dominated groups of the relations of hierarchical power, whether it be based on class, race, gender or any other categorization of individuals or groups. However, the *habitus* does not lead to sociological fatal destinies. The concept of *habitus* should not be confused with individuals being passive recipients of a social environment. As agents within a culture, individuals can think, influence and act within their *habitus*.

If we take the example of France, the ascending social mobility of women has increased over forty years (in 2015, 40% of women had an ascending mobility compared to their mothers

⁷ l’obtention des privilèges sociaux dépend de plus en plus étroitement de la possession de titres scolaires. [original text]

⁸ “pouvoir de violence symbolique” [...] contribue à donner une légitimité aux hiérarchies sociales, à partir d’une valorisation d’un usage lettré de la langue, de la culture universitaires, de l’examen et du diplôme. [original text]

⁹ la légitimité de leur exclusion. [original text]

¹⁰ principe générateur et unificateur des conduites et des opinions. [original text]

¹¹ aux détenteurs de l’acquis préalable le monopole de cet acquis. [original text]

¹² L’incorporation du social. [original text]

vs. 17% in 1977), whereas it has stagnated among men. In 2015, 28% of men had a – limited – ascending mobility trajectory compared to their fathers’ trajectories vs. 24% in 1977 (Collet & Pénicaud, 2019).

Still in France, young people from urban areas are twice as likely to graduate from university than young people from remote areas (Dubéchet, 2020, p. 29) as it is more difficult for those to access information on academic fields and professional perspectives. Additionally, they are more likely to lack social and economic capital. Again, this distance leads more to self-censorship than to direct exclusion operated by the academic institutions themselves.

In the working class, the effects of the *habitus* keep reproducing social mechanisms of segregation and cultural inequalities through “the intense gregariousness of the working-class family group” (Hoggart, 1991, p. 294). Furthermore, according to Bourdieu and Passeron, “self-discipline and self-censorship”¹³ (1970, p. 56) – the way those who are excluded from the education system “cool themselves out before they are even assessed”¹⁴ (1970, p. 186) or through “giving up enrolment”¹⁵ (1970, p. 187) – “may never have as much symbolic force as when it appears as self-exclusion”¹⁶ (1970, p. 57). The working-class culture,

their class *ethos* (masculinity, preference for manual work, rejection of everything the “education system” would impose...) purely and simply entails the elimination of [their children] ... and establishes and re-establishes, year after year, the strict division between social classes and the brutal distribution of what the dominant and the dominated might access to.¹⁷ (Eribon, 2013, p. 228)

This leads to and is reinforced by the sense of belonging, a group identity which opposes social classes even further. *Them vs us. Our place vs Not our place*. One of the explanations Annie Ernaux gives for the stagnation within the working class comes from a sort of self-protection. When an individual – particularly a child of a working-class family – expresses signs of intellectual aspirations, their parents – or on a broader scale their entourage – live “the fear or maybe the desire that [they] won’t make it”¹⁸ (1983/2021, p. 80), considering that

¹³ de l’auto-discipline et de l’auto-censure. [original text]

¹⁴ s’éliminent avant même d’être examinés. [original text]

¹⁵ renonçant à y entrer. [original text]

¹⁶ n’a peut-être jamais autant de force symbolique que lorsqu’elle prend les apparences de l’auto-exclusion. [original text]

¹⁷ leur *ethos* de classe (virilité, préférence pour le travail manuel, rejet de tout ce que l’“éducation” imposerait...) aboutit purement et simplement à l’élimination de [ceux-ci]. ... et instaurent et réinstaurent, année après année, la stricte division entre les classes sociales, et la brutale répartition de ce à quoi les dominants et les dominés peuvent accéder. [original text]

¹⁸ la peur OU PEUT-ÊTRE LE DÉSIR que [je] n’y arrive pas. [original text]

nothing would be worse than “losing everything to end up back as workers”¹⁹ (1983/2021, p. 39). Working-class populations tend to “perceive the outer world as opaque, impenetrable or hostile and, in any case, out of reach”²⁰ (Mauger, 2013, p. 252). In such context, success to transcend classes is not guaranteed and failures may reinforce the paradigm of social reproduction, as Sorokin bluntly put it from the aristocratic point of view: “If they return something to the lower strata, it is as a rule, only the “degenerates”, the “failures”, the “wrecks”, which do nothing more than contaminate and aggravate the lower classes” (1927, p. 494).

In order to generate social reproduction, the *habitus* has to involve mutual recognition and understanding between individuals. It also implies a sense of belonging and consistency between the social identity and the personal identity, as the *habitus*

is the basis of an implicit collusion among all the agents who are products of similar conditions and conditionings. ... This *collusio*, ... is the basis of a practical mutual understanding, the paradigm of which might be the one established between members of the same team, or, despite the antagonism, all the players engaged in a game. (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 145)

When there is *collusio*, the individuals’ complexions (their unique combination of personal affective dispositions, in Spinozian terms) incite them to adopt strategies to create alliances with others by the assimilation of others’ complexions to their own (Skeaff, 2018). One’s complexion, as it is conditioned by the individual’s environment, is therefore explained “through their aptitude, first physiologically determined, then socially modified, to be affected and to affect, through the affects one is capable of actioning in virtue of their so determined nature”²¹ (Eksen, 2015, p. 186).

1.2. Transclass Mobility

“Social Reproduction is not inevitable, it allows for some play at the margin.”²² (Dubéchet, 2020, p. 22) So, studying transclass trajectories enables us to understand the laws of social reproduction further. Whereas transclass mobility may be perceived as treason or curiosity by the family and entourage of the transclass, some families push their children to be

¹⁹ tout perdre pour finalement *retomber ouvriers*. [original text]

²⁰ percevoir le monde extérieur comme un univers opaque, impénétrable ou hostile et, quoi qu’il en soit, hors de portée. [original text]

²¹ son aptitude, d’abord physiologiquement déterminée, ensuite socialement modifiée, à être affecté et à affecter, par les affects qu’il est capable de dynamiser en vertu de sa nature ainsi constituée. [original text]

²² La reproduction sociale n’est pas une fatalité, elle admet du jeu à la marge. [original text]

“better than [them]”²³ (Ernaux, 1983/2021, p. 74). Overall, the process of social reproduction is still very operating and different social environments lead to different life trajectories, “contrary to the ideology of merit, according to which *When there’s a will, there’s a way*”²⁴ (Dubéchet, 2020, p. 25). In transclass trajectories, we can immediately exclude the illusion of the prodigal son, the ideology of the “natural inequalities, inequalities of gifts”²⁵ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964, p. 103) or the ambitious “self-made man ... for he is not ... a miraculous creation *ex nihilo*”²⁶ (Jaquet, 2014, p. 31). If “individualisation has indeed produced a more autonomous individual”,²⁷ let us not forget “the social process of which the more autonomous individual is the product”²⁸ (Kaufmann, 2007, p. 78). As individuals are socialised, they “internalise patterns of thought and of action”²⁹ (2007, p. 223). Following Elias’ theory according to which the individuals “are part of a natural order and are part of a social order”³⁰ (Elias, 1987/1991, p. 81), de Gaulejac aims at “deconstructing the illusion of the isolated individual”³¹ (2002, p. 347), similarly to Bourdieu, for whom

having the (biological) property of being open to the world, and therefore exposed to the world, and so capable of being conditioned by the world, shaped by the material and cultural conditions of existence in which one is placed from the beginning, [the individual] is subject to a process of socialisation of which individuation is itself the product, with the singularity of the 'self' being fashioned in and by social relations. (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 134)

The meritocratic ideology condones the reality of social inequalities, as if individuals were to start from the same line, regardless of their social and economic capital, family background or other social determinisms: “Everyone is supposed to be able to act, and so is judged on his or her capacity to act”³² (Kaufmann, 2007, p. 244). According to Jaquet and Bras, “merit is an extrinsic individual attribute”³³ (Diallo, 2019, p. 288). Therefore, if the willingness of an individual is a necessary factor for class mobility as “there is no social fact which

²³ mieux que [lui]. [original text]

²⁴ “quand on veut, on peut”. [original text]

²⁵ inégalités naturelles, inégalités de dons. [original text]

²⁶ *Self made man* ... car il n’est pas ... une miraculeuse création *ex nihilo*. [original text]

²⁷ L’individualisation produit bien un individu plus autonome. [original text]

²⁸ le processus social qui produit cet individu plus autonome. [original text]

²⁹ intériorise [...] des schèmes de pensée et d’action. [original text]

³⁰ font partie d’un ordre naturel et ils font partie d’un ordre social. [original text in French edition]

³¹ déconstruire l’illusion de l’individu séparé. [original text]

³² Chacun est censé pouvoir agir, et est jugé sur sa capacité à agir. [original text]

³³ le mérite est un attribut individuel extrinsèque. [original text]

uniformly imposes itself on every individual”³⁴ (Durkheim, 1975, p. 15), it is not sufficient. On the contrary, “non-reproduction emerges from an interconnecting scheme in which the individual cannot be thought of as an isolated being who secedes from their own class”³⁵ (Jaquet, 2014, p. 95). Jaquet concludes that “paradoxically exceptional destinies find their origin in a certain form of ignorance and self-blindness whereas clairvoyance would rather encourage one not to pursue a higher education curriculum”³⁶ (2014, p. 38).

According to Bandura’s social learning theory, “we cannot imitate a model unless we pay attention to the model” (Crain, 2011, p. 212) or, as Bourdieu and Passeron put it, “You don’t need to learn what you know; you can’t learn what you ignore since you don’t know what you need to learn”³⁷ (1970, p. 38). So why would one be willing to transcend their social class and how does sexuality interact with social reproduction mechanisms? As a Bourdieusian disciple, Eribon has largely worked on social reproduction and gay identities. After extending Goffman’s theory of stigma in his groundbreaking *Réflexions sur la question gay* (1999), Eribon explored his own trajectory in his classic *Retour à Reims* (2009), through which the social determinisms and laws of domination are exposed, which enabled his class defection, each step of his *ascension sociale* being contextualised from the working-class *ethos*, the education system, masculinities and sexual identity. In any case, the starting point of individual journeys, as Eribon developed further in *La société comme verdict* (2013), is the social class. If his sexual orientation was one of the triggers of his exceptional destiny, “the ascending trajectory [homosexuality] has enabled or made possible has been defined, to a larger extent, by what was the starting point”³⁸ (2013, p. 36).

However, let us not believe that being gay is a sufficient factor for class mobility. Singular cases of transclass mobility and derogations to social reproduction mechanisms do not find their source in one sole decisive element, whether it be masculinities, sexuality, family values, economic conditions, health, alternative family models, etc. They are rather the product of a “singular conjunction of multiple causes, which result in a trajectory”³⁹ (Jaquet, 2014, p.

³⁴ il n’est pas de fait collectif qui s’impose de manière uniforme à tous les individus. [original text]

³⁵ la non-reproduction obéit à un schéma d’interconnexion dans lequel l’individu ne saurait être pensé comme un être isolé qui fait sécession par rapport à sa propre classe. [original text]

³⁶ une certaine forme d’ignorance et d’auto-aveuglement serait paradoxalement à l’origine de destins d’exception alors que la lucidité inciterait plutôt à renoncer à entreprendre des études supérieures. [original text]

³⁷ ce que tu sais, tu n’as pas besoin de l’apprendre ; ce que tu ne sais pas, tu ne peux pas l’apprendre puisque tu ne sais pas ce qu’il faut apprendre. [original text]

³⁸ la trajectoire ascendante qu’[elle] a permise ou rendue possible est restée dans une très large mesure définie par ce qu’a été le point de départ. [original text]

³⁹ un agencement singulier de causes multiples dont la résultante est une trajectoire. [original text]

96). This multi-factorial mechanism explains how singular cases may emerge from siblings despite a context which may seem similar to all of them.

1.3. Sexual Migrations

Whereas queer studies grow in fertilizing labour studies or migration studies, the intersection between sexuality, gender identity and social class tends to be neglected. However, some authors have studied social and geographical mobilities through the intersection of class, race and sexuality with a queer perspective. Manalansan's case study of Filipina migrant workers (2006) aims at illustrating how migrations may be influenced by sexuality in a transnational context. By his analysis of sexual migration of Mexican gay men to the United States, Cantù Jr. transgresses the academic heteronormative tradition of a fixed notion of sexual identities by showing how sexuality forges migration destinies and how the migration process itself transforms the identities of gay migrants (2009). A similar conclusion was reached by Pande's works on the transformation of masculinities during the migration journey of Bangladeshi heterosexual men (2017). Klapeer and Laskar add the question of identities and the intersection of race and sexuality in a globalized queerness with another illustration of Bourdieu's conflicted *habitus*, demonstrating that "Queers can, due to a marginalised status in relation to heteronormativity, be exposed to a persistent in-betweeness [*sic*]" (2018, p. 533).

Carrillo, who added the HIV factor to his ethnographic research, also studied how sexuality and transnational migration are interlinked (2004). Prior to those works, Parker had studied social factors at play in HIV transmission and prevention, among which sexual migrations, both internally and transnationally (2001). Howe's study on lesbian and gay migration to the United States brought religion in the field of research regarding binational couples and transnational and internal migrations (2007). To this field of research on sexual migrations and gay identities, Lewis and Mills brought a perspective on the labour market, whereby the agency of gay migrants is constrained by the uneven cultures and regulations of sexuality in North America (2016).

Sexual migrations also include asylum rights and the challenges to have gender identities, sexual orientation and their correlated persecutions recognized as grounds for asylum in Western countries, where the conceptions and views on sexuality and gender identities are different from the ones in the asylum-seekers' countries of origin, as Dhoest showed in his study on gay-identifying refugees and associations working for LGBTQ refugees in Belgium (2019).

1.4. Conclusion

The literature offers us several lenses to analyse the mechanisms of social reproduction and how they allow for transclass mobilities, albeit exceptional. If no single factor renders exceptional destinies possible, the need for migration of gay men from working-class environments appears to find its source in the intersection of class, gender, masculinity, and sexual orientation.

This study brings original fieldwork to illustrate Jaquet's theory of transclass journeys with a specific focus on masculinities, sexuality, and gay identity. It also brings to light personal experiences which support Eribon's theory of transclass mobility of gay men. By bringing academic migration – both internal and transnational – in the field of research, the narratives of the participants exemplify Bourdieu and Passeron's theory on social reproduction through the predominant factor of the education system.

Chapter 2 - How Hegemonic Masculinity Can Trigger Academic Migration

As the literature review in the previous chapter shows, there are exceptions to social reproduction mechanisms, and every subject possesses agency within the constraints of their *habitus*, which can lead them to intergenerational social mobility. This does not make the concept of social reproduction irrelevant. On the contrary, a handful of counterexamples do not undermine a system. They can even reinforce it. So why and how do some individuals – in this case, gay men from working-class environments – exceptionally manage to overcome their social destinies? If inequalities cannot be explained exclusively through nature, exceptions to social reproduction are also explained through social powers. So, how do masculinities and sexuality interact with social reproduction mechanisms?

Since *collusio* is the basis of alliances within a community and hence of social reproduction, an individual bearing a social stigma may be excluded from the game. When there is a stigma, this condition of *collusio* indeed collapses, which may lead to exceptional trajectories, which can be explained through a form of rejection *of* the milieu of origin by the individual, and also from the rejection of the individual *by* the milieu of origin. In our case, it may act both ways, through shame and self-blaming on the one hand, and hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, and heterosexism on the other hand.

2.1. Hegemonic Masculinity and the Gay Stigma

Gendered relations of power between men and women have largely been studied. But how about relations of power among men – and, in this case, boys –, between those who belong to and benefit from the dominant system of masculinities and those who are rejected from it or inferiorised by it? How about the “relations of alliance, dominance and subordination” (Connell, 1995, p. 37) between them? As Bandura observed in gender roles, boys are encouraged to develop masculine behaviours and girls to develop feminine behaviours (Crain, 2011, p. 216). So, what happens when boys do not fit these expected roles and traits? Individuals who do not conform to the implicit norm “have no way out to rebuild another conformity elsewhere: they have to socialise in the margin”⁴⁰ (Kaufmann, 2007, p. 203).

⁴⁰ n'ont aucune échappatoire pour reconstituer ailleurs une autre conformité : ils doivent se socialiser en marge. [original text]

Through the categories of masculinities and the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Connell transcends classes and avoids the oversimplification of a framework which would lead one to “think that there *is* a black masculinity or a working-class masculinity” (1995, p. 76). Connell classifies masculinities into four categories: hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalisation. The first three categories are at the heart of this study.

2.1.1. Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Therefore, it is not an individual’s attribute or character type, but a system of gender relations and cultural dynamic “by which a group claims or sustains a leading position in social life” (1995, p. 77).

Per analogy to social reproduction, the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity requires the internalised acceptance of the system by the oppressed, as well as complicity and resignation when facing what may be perceived as the natural order.

2.1.2. Subordinated Masculinity

With the concept of hegemonic masculinity, “just as heterosexuality is part of «being a man», so too is denying the masculinity of gay men” (Bucher, 2014, p. 225), Connell shows that “oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men” (1995, p. 78). Therefore, in a patriarchal society “where hegemonic masculinity is defined as exclusively heterosexual, ... one cannot become homosexual without shattering this hegemony somehow” (1995, p. 162), and

as an organizing principle of masculinity, homophobia – the terror that others will see one as gay, as a failed man – underlies a significant amount of men’s behavior, including their relationships with other men, women, and violence. One could say that homophobia is the hate that makes men straight. (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003, p. 1446)

Since they are seen as a threat to gender differences and consequently as a threat to the gendered relations of power, and since they are considered to be “engaged in some kind of collective denial of the social order” (Goffman, 1963, p. 171), homosexual boys have two options: either they manage to hide who they are, fit the patriarchal ideology and meet all behavioural expectations that go with it along with their fellow schoolmates, or they do not

manage and may be subject to a gay stigma through insults, homophobic attacks or other practices and marks of authority, whether directly pointed at them or not.

2.1.3. *Complicit Masculinity*

Even though the majority of men do not meet the expectations of hegemonic masculinity, most men benefit from the system and from “the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (Connell, 1995, p. 79). Therefore, it is comfortable to passively fit in the system without the guilt of leading the troops. Unfortunately, in any system of oppression, passive neutrality and conformity to the hegemonic norm never benefit the oppressed. It allows the system to keep running.

2.2. Academic Migration as a Condition to Class Defection of Gay Men

In the literature, we can identify two distinct – yet complementary and sometimes intertwined – reasonings to explain the migration of gay men from the working class.

The first reasoning can be drawn from Eribon’s work, as shown in the graph below, for which the term *class defection* is preferred:

Graph 1 - Class Defection through Academic Migration



It illustrates a gay man’s class mobility primarily motivated by the shame of his social origins and aspiration to class defection. In those mechanisms, academic migration operates as a ticket to class mobility, and sexuality adds up as a sub-trigger and a facilitating factor to encounter upper-class men and be introduced to a new social environment. This new territory may entail sexual emancipation as a side-effect of the intended class mobility.

2.3. Academic Migration as a Tactical Move to Escape Hegemonic Masculinity and Homophobia

But as the fieldwork in this study shows, the decision to migrate does not always come from the shame of one's social condition. In some cases, it may even come out of ignorance of the individual's social condition. The need for finding one's true self without social control may also reveal itself regardless of the shame of one's social condition or any aspiration to transcend classes, as shown in the second graph below, adapted from Eribon's theory according to the empirical results of this study. Here, the term *transclass* is preferred:

Graph 2 - Transclass Mobility through Academic Migration



It illustrates a gay man's class mobility primarily motivated by the need to escape from hegemonic masculinity and homophobia, which engenders aspiration to self-realisation and/or sexual emancipation. In those mechanisms, academic migration operates as a ticket to sexual emancipation as a gay man. This new territory, far from social control and where sexual encounters are made possible, may entail class mobility as a side-effect of the intended emancipation as a gay man.

As you will see in the empirical results presented in Chapter 4, this framework of analysis has been made possible through the extensive reading of the literature as well as through the integration of the data collected on the field during this study. The framework of analysis has, therefore, been developed by and with the comprehensive interviews and the critical inductive analysis of the data, as explained in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1. Scope

To analyse trajectories of gay men from the working class who have migrated to university, a sampling of participants were selected through an online survey in the Brussels, Belgium area, followed by comprehensive semi-structured interviews.

The specific realities of gay asylum seekers have been excluded from this study. Their asylum-seeker status adds a fundamental intersecting element to transclass mobility and would therefore deserve a separate study in that respect. Other sexual and gender identities as well as additional elements of intersection such as disability, religion or ethnic backgrounds have not been covered in this study either, even though the diversity of participants may have encountered them.

3.2. Interview-based Case Study

The ambition of this paper, limited in its scope, is not to elaborate a new theoretical concept, to prove that all gay boys from the working class share a same destiny, nor to demonstrate, as Mittleman recently observed in the US, that gay men have the highest rates of graduation (2022). It would require large quantitative data and longitudinal studies. Its aim is rather, through the analyses of field experiences, the “identification of social mechanisms”⁴¹ (Dumez, 2016, p. 147), in this case to show that the agency of gay boys is influenced by the boundaries of a frame of relationships in the doubly-restrictive context of hegemonic masculinity in a working-class environment. Their agency can be translated into various tactics, not always developed with express intention or calculation, one of which being academic migration as a way of developing one’s personal identity and, consequently, of transcending social classes.

A fully inductive analysis is not realistic as it would require longitudinal research with cohorts of participants. Conversely, a fully deductive analysis based on the review of the literature would bring us too far from a necessary “embodied objectivity” (Haraway, 1988, p. 588) and would lead to an “ostentatious theory free from any link with the realities and practical

⁴¹ l’identification de mécanismes sociaux. [original text]

constraints of empirical work”⁴² (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 27). It would also deny the “subjugated standpoints” (Haraway, 1988, p. 584) which are needed to report on the studied social mechanisms and to bring to light new perspectives on the object of the research.

This study, therefore, combines a theoretical approach with an interview-based case study, as an ongoing “research spiral” (Blaxter et al., 2001, p. 10) between facts and hypotheses. A preliminary state of the art enabled the researcher to deep dive into the literature on the relevant topics (social reproduction, transclass mobility, sexual migrations, and masculinities) but voluntarily remained at an exploratory level so that it would not close doors to the expected nuances, surprises, and complexities of life histories. The initial hypothesis suggested in the introduction was to be used to the sole effect of selecting participants and developing a semi-directed interview guide. In turn, the interviews would nourish the preliminary state of the art in a co-constructive manner.

The chosen methodology for this study is inspired by Kaufmann’s comprehensive interview (2011), by Glaser and Strauss’ Grounded Theory as well as by the analytic induction of Znaniecki (Tacq, 2007). This way, the research process did not consist in verifying a theory but rather in an “as subtle as possible articulation between data and hypotheses, a formulation of hypotheses especially generating as it is rooted in facts”⁴³ (Kaufmann, 2011, p. 11).

3.3. Selection of Participants

A first simple online form (see appendix 1) was sent to the target audience through the snowball method: direct e-mailing to personal contacts who would in turn forward the link to their own contacts, etc. The objective of this form was not to produce quantitative data on the object of the research, but rather to identify potential participants “not strictly representative but characteristic of the [target] population”⁴⁴ (Blanchet & Gotman, 2007, p. 50), *i.e.* who possess all the researched attributes for this study. Following Bourdieu’s works on social reproduction based on the parents’ educational backgrounds, participants were selected only if they currently resided in Belgium, identified today as gay men, had migrated to study after secondary school, had graduated from university and if none of their parents had graduated

⁴² “théorie ostentatoire” affranchie de tout lien avec les réalités et les contraintes pratiques du travail empirique. [original text]

⁴³ Une articulation aussi fine que possible entre données et hypothèses, une formulation d’hypothèses d’autant plus créatrice qu’elle est enracinée dans les faits. [original text]

⁴⁴ non strictement représentatives mais caractéristiques de la population. [original text]

from university. The form was as limited as possible in its explanation and preliminary questions so as to avoid confirmation biases.

In this study, 82 persons responded to the online form, among which 41 met all four cumulative criteria; 17 accepted to take part in the field study (see Table of participants in appendix 2). In order to avoid the pitfall of “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003) and to identify in which perspective the mechanisms demonstrated in this study transcend national and cultural borders, the notion of migration has been understood as internal as well as transnational, regardless of the country of origin. As a result, out of the 17 participants, 7 grew up and studied outside Belgium (China, Turkey, Greece, Italy, and France), among which 6 had migrated within the borders of their countries for their university studies, and 10 migrated internally from one Belgian town to a Belgian university. All participants are 26 to 56 years of age, 14 of them finished secondary school at pre-Internet times or did not have access to the Internet at the time. Overall, 12 interviews were conducted in French, 4 in English and 1 in Dutch.

3.4. Interviews

3.4.1. Interview Guide

The interview guide (see appendix 3) for the semi-structured interviews was sent out to the participants beforehand. It did not consist of questions but of themes which would be covered during the interview. The purpose was to revive their memories before the interview. Indeed, it is never easy, if at all possible, to explore unconscious motives and repressed memories. Some participants may never have analysed their own transclass trajectories and their relations to masculinities or never have verbalised their experiences. It was therefore necessary to proceed in two steps with a large spectrum of areas in their life histories.

The interview guide was used both as a script to help me frame the research and to prepare for the interviews, so those could be conducted as smoothly as possible. Just as the preliminary state of the art's aim is to open doors, the first interviews were exploratory. I refined the interview guide to focus more on certain areas of the research in the flow of each discussion so as to avoid obstacles or putting participants in discomfort in the production of valuable data.

3.4.2. Interview Process and Epistemological Elements

All recorded interviews were conducted from 30 September to 7 November 2022 and were set at the participants' chosen places, where they felt safe to speak and were free from potential interruptions.

Even though an apparent hierarchy with a researcher may be perceived by the participants if they are not familiar with such intimate analysis through academic research, the object of the research *de facto* created some mutual recognition and comfort between each participant and myself as we all were transclass gay men and shared a “common referential world”⁴⁵ (Blanchet & Gotman, 2007, p. 73). This was often translated into a *we* or an *us* in our conversations.

Quand tu n'as pas de biens, quand tu n'as pas de titres, quand tu n'as pas de patrimoine, tu peux le créer toi-même. Quand tu en as et que tu pourrais en hériter, c'est d'autant plus difficile. Parce que tu dois renoncer à ton titre de noblesse. On s'en fout, nous ! On n'en a pas ! (Participant 15)

As each interview was much “closer to a conversation between equal individuals than to a top-down inquiry”⁴⁶ (Kaufmann, 2011, p. 47), the complicity during the interviews helped participants feel comfortable in opening the book of their lives. The questions were to come up naturally in the course of the discussion and not as an interrogation in order to “access information which would slip away from an interviewer who would be too « methodical » and who would stick too much to their questionnaire”⁴⁷ (Blanchet & Gotman, 2007, p. 11).

In any fieldwork, the researcher must deal with possible biases, starting from the confirmation bias of their own too closed and hasty hypotheses. So, the questions were not to be directed in a way which would influence the participants' stories or in a way which would elude negative cases, as negative cases are also material for the research.

In four cases, the participant knew me personally or knew someone from my entourage, which might lead one to believe the proximity made the disclosure of information easier. Quite the opposite! Those cases, in a study which digs deeply into the intimacy of each participant, could put both the participant and me in an uncomfortable position. Whereas strangers could unveil sensitive personal stories with a certain degree of confidence (which we can understand

⁴⁵ un monde référentiel commun. [original text]

⁴⁶ plus proche de celui de la conversation entre deux individus égaux que du questionnement administré de haut. [original text]

⁴⁷ accéder à des renseignements que l'enquêteur trop “méthodique” et trop attaché à son questionnaire risquerait de laisser échapper. [original text]

by analogy with their own search of sexual intimacy in an anonymous territory in their migration stories), the fact that some participants had never shared their stories with me prior to the study is not a coincidence. As those stories may entail a moral interpretation and a breach of the required anonymity – at least among us –, it sometimes produced some reservation, which also made me uncomfortable. Yet, in order to understand the experience of the participant, the interviewer must “penetrate the heart of [the participant’s] world ... [and] must manage to cast their moral judgement aside”⁴⁸ (Kaufmann, 2011, p. 51). On the other hand, it made it easier to use humour or to revive shared anecdotes to address certain themes or relaunch the conversation.

There was a clear difference in the development of narratives between participants who had gone through psychoanalysis or psychotherapy and those who had not. With the first group, the difficulty resided in focusing back onto the core subject of the study without breaking the dynamics and the empathetic setting. On the contrary, with the latter group, more frequent interventions were necessary to help participants dig deeper into their memories and extract their interpretations of the related events. The interview techniques improved gradually throughout the interview phase.

Another obstacle to unveil true experiences and representations lies in the implicit or the “masked revelations”⁴⁹ (Kaufmann, 2011, p. 69). In contrast, some participants may find in the interviews a response to a “need of recognition and legitimacy”⁵⁰ (Blanchet & Gotman, 2007, p. 57). In some instances, I had to lead participants back to their own stories and representations of a related context when those participants tended to compare their stories with the ones so famously spread by Eribon or Edouard Louis.

In all cases, all participants had to speak with a retrospective bias, which is inevitable. Their affects and unconscious decisions in their childhood were per definition not possible to collect as “the mind can only imagine anything, or remember what is past, while the body endures”⁵¹ (Spinoza, 1954/1993, p. 371). As George Herbert Mead put it: “All meanings emerge from within particular presents. All pasts are reconstructed from the standpoint of each present” (Darmon, 2008, p. XI).

⁴⁸ pénétrer au cœur de son monde ... doit parvenir à se dépouiller de toute morale. [original text]

⁴⁹ révélations masquées. [original text]

⁵⁰ besoin de reconnaissance et de légitimité. [original text]

⁵¹ L’esprit ne peut rien imaginer et ne peut se souvenir des choses passées que pendant la durée du corps. [original text in French edition]

Furthermore, it was not always possible to understand their tactics as the product of fully expressed intention or rational calculation. What was collected through the interviews is the way participants *today* look back at their childhood to try and identify, through life histories, elements and triggers of their transclass mobility as gay boys from the middle class.

3.5. Qualitative Analysis

The thematic analysis used in this study enabled me to identify tactics and representations which were reflected in singular stories. An initial itemisation of themes had been necessary to build the interview guide, but the exploratory interviews quickly revealed themes that had been overlooked in the first hypotheses, particularly around masculinities and sports at school. The detailed critical analysis of the corpus of narratives contributed to the evolution of the list of themes, which resulted in a bigger focus in the literature, especially on masculinities. As a “stable framework of analysis of all interviews”⁵² (Blanchet & Gotman, 2007, p. 97), it helped form both graphs in Chapter 3, build the structure of the next chapter and develop typologies, such as the one between participants who had received support or pressure from their parents to go to university and those who had not.

The data collected during the interviews were not to be used as raw and mere descriptive material. Each interview was to be analysed and interpreted as a corpus in a comprehensive manner so as to explain social mechanisms, that is to “reconstruct a link between observed phenomena ... and their possible causes”⁵³ (Dumez, 2016, p. 147). In some cases, I was able to identify hidden messages, implicit knowledge or even contradictions within the course of an interview, all of them being useful material for the interpretation of the data and the integration of those messages into the theoretical framework. It was then used to enrich and enlarge the preliminary state of the art.

3.6. Outcome and Key Learnings of the Methodology

As this was my first experience in fieldwork and semi-structured interviews, I apprehended the interviews with the mix of excitement and anguish one might experience facing a brand-new situation. I had no idea how many responses I would receive from the online survey nor if and how many qualifying profiles would result from it. Then would come the

⁵² cadre stable de l'analyse de tous les entretiens. [original text]

⁵³ reconstruire un lien entre des phénomènes observés ... et leurs causes possibles. [original text]

time to contact each willing participant, to schedule the interviews, and to conduct them. Hoping that nobody would drop out of the study in the meantime.

In most cases, the wide spectrum of the interview guide allowed participants to express memories without necessarily realising the direct link between their migration process, hegemonic masculinity and/or their social conditions. It was up to me, in the analysis phase, to extract those common elements and to demonstrate the social mechanisms, as presented in the next chapter.

After the first two interviews, I could already nuance the initial hypothesis, in which the search of sexual emancipation was prominent, to integrate the notions of masculinities and the development of one's personal identity beyond sexual experiments. And that would be confirmed in subsequent interviews. What struck me the most is how fast the research saturation threshold was reached: even though every single story brought extremely worthy singular experiences, the social mechanisms were definitely set after less than ten interviews. This proves the high value and relevance of comprehensive interviews in social science studies when they aim at describing social mechanisms.

Chapter 4 - Empirical Results

What comes out of the field study is how the participants had to weather the storm of hegemonic masculinity in childhood and a heteronormative education, both at school and at home, and how they ended up negotiating their migration journey as a door to develop their personal identities beyond stigma.

During all these years, sometimes as soon as they entered primary school, they used tactics of survival at school, in their families or in their communities. In some cases, climbing the social ladder was their aspiration; in other cases, it was not. But all had academic migration in common as a tactical move. In some cases, sexual emancipation was a side-effect of their social mobility; in other cases, social mobility was the side-effect of their sexual emancipation.

Their academic migration therefore acted as a triple and simultaneous journey: through space, through class and through identity. And through the displacement produced by migration, all participants have been transformed.

4.1. Main Trigger: How the Storm Breaks



4.1.1. *The Gay Stigma*

The gay stigma often marks someone before he can live with his social identity. Most participants have expressed that the insult – whether directly or indirectly pointed at them – acts as a revelation: they were made different by others through that one attribute “even before they [could] be aware of who they [were]”⁵⁴ (Eribon, 1999, p. 90). Consequently, an individual “has thoroughly learned about the normal and the stigmatized long before he must see himself as deficient. Presumably, he will have a special problem in re-identifying himself, and a special likelihood of developing disapproval of self” (Goffman, 1963, p. 48).

Ce qui était très bizarre, c'est que les autres me traitaient déjà de tapette, en fait, tu vois, alors que moi j'avais même pas conscience. (Participant 10)

⁵⁴ avant même qu'ils [puissent] avoir conscience de ce qu'ils [sont]. [original text]

Il fallait se présenter et j'ai dit: "Et moi j'adore jouer avec Barbie et Polly Pocket!" Et ben, pour moi c'était normal, je me posais pas des questions là-dessus, mais je me suis fait saccager! (Participant 5)

Et l'autre souvenir, c'est à 12 ans. ...J'écoutais la radio et je suis tombé sur une émission de Méné Grégoire qui s'appelait : "L'homosexualité, ce douloureux problème." Et j'ai écouté l'émission et j'étais tétanisé. Et je me suis dit: "c'est de moi dont on parle!" Et ce jour-là, je me suis dit: "Je suis homosexuel! Et c'est une catastrophe nationale." ... Alors je... j'ai évidemment... je ne sais pas comment elle a été reçue à l'époque par les homosexuels adultes de l'époque, mais quand on la réécoute aujourd'hui, c'est hallucinant! (Participant 16)

And if it is through the eyes of the others that gay men are inferiorised, it becomes then necessary to disappear or find new eyes. Of course, this need for emancipation is not exclusive to gay men: boys and girls from other minorities and straight boys who do not match the hegemonic masculinity expectations may also face discriminatory practices or segregation. Therefore, they too may need to escape from shame or inferiorisation dynamics. But what is specific to minorities based on sexual orientation and gender identities is the family obstacle and how "fathers play an instrumental role in socializing sons in the ways of hegemonic masculinity" (Bucher, 2014, p. 223), how "a father reinforces his manhood through his sons, to whom he passes on his values of masculinity"⁵⁵ (Louis, 2015, p. 24). The double sentence. That makes a difference with the "tribal stigma of race, nation and religion, these being stigma that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of the family (Goffman, 1963, p. 14).

Ils ont dit : "Mais nous on croyait que c'était une maladie!" Et donc voilà, c'était ...pour eux, c'était une déviance. (Participant 9)

When I came out, one of the things my mom told me, I mean ... if you can't do this, then go back to the US, go to Canada, go somewhere far: no one will hear, no one will see anything. (Participant 17)

This, it is in this context of symbolic violence within hegemonic masculinity that the agency of gay boys must be understood. Their *potentia agendi* is not disconnected from but rather deeply connected to the constraints of hegemonic masculinity of which they are the product, and which provide them with a stigmatised social identity in conflict with one's personal identity.

⁵⁵ Un père renforçait son identité masculine par ses fils, auxquels il se devait de transmettre ses valeurs viriles. [original text]

In the scope of this study, all participants have expressed the difficulty or suffering of staying in the closet – in most cases a “glass closet” (Sedgwick, 2008) as everyone was, to various extents, aware of their sexual orientation much prior to their coming-out – both at school and at home. The pressure and perceived pressure to meet expectations in a heteronormative environment such as the family makes it an obligation to escape from the entire community in order to develop one’s personal identity. For a stigma is less an attribute than a “language of relationships” (Goffman, 1963, p. 13) between a group of oppressors and a discredited or discreditable group of persons. Hence, what makes the stigma operative depends on the possessor of the attribute and their environment, the attribute being “neither creditable or discreditable as a thing in itself” (1963, p. 13). For a gay boy to live with his authentic self and develop his own personal identity, it may take time to understand this language of relationships and to assume that his salvation does not entail trying to change the attribute but rather trying to change the relationships around this attribute. With that perspective, what is more radical for a gay adolescent than to leave the oppressive environment to start new relationships from scratch, in order to find “a community in which there is no biography of him” (1963, p. 88)?

What has then become an obligation to migrate acts as a derogation factor to the law of social reproduction. Why migrate and “why pursue long studies when an honest job is expecting you? Who cares about money and power when your family makes you happy”⁵⁶ (Kaufmann, 2007, p. 244)? For a gay adolescent from working-class families, the difficulty in living his sexuality or masculinity will influence his place on the labour market and the condition in the workplace (Lewis & Mills, 2016) and may, therefore, paradoxically act as a “glass escalator” (Williams, 1992).

J'aurais jamais pensé arriver à ce niveau-là, quand on voit le petit gamin dans son collège de bonnes sœurs qui va peut-être finir sa vie dans les Vosges, je sais pas dans quoi. (Participant 10)

Je me dis que peut-être il y a une raison au but que je me suis fixé, peut-être que je n'y serais pas arrivé si j'avais été normal ou comme eux. Peut-être que ça m'a forcé à me bouger le cul, à apprendre des langues, à dégager de là et ça a ouvert des possibilités. (Participant 12)

⁵⁶ Pourquoi faire de longues études quand un travail honnête vous attend ? Qu'importent l'argent et le pouvoir si l'on sait être heureux en famille ? [original text]

4.1.2. *Tactics of Survival*

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the *habitus* is the basis of an implicit collusion among all the agents within a social environment. At school, collusion with male peers leads to social power and is acquired through a variety of attributes, including being tall, good-looking, with a good sense of humour and... athletic (Way, 2013, p. 208) and “working-class masculinities, for example, are often characterised by embodiment, strength and physical prowess” (Roberts, 2013, p. 673). Also in the media, “working-class masculinity is exposed as tough, violent, machist and homophobic”⁵⁷ (Dalibert, 2018, p. 99).

Therefore, for a gay child to develop a sense of belonging to the group of male peers, there are two options: if he possesses or is able to play with the attributes, he will belong to the dominants; if he does not or cannot, he will belong to the dominated. In both cases, tactics of avoidance or adaptation are required: “It also seems that discrepancies between virtual and actual identity will always occur and always give rise to the need for tension management ... and information control” (Goffman, 1963, p. 164).

Avoidance of Boys and Sports at School. Being successful at sports is the best prevention against being called gay (Way, 2013, p. 208). Yet, team sports are linked with violence and the stigma of inferiority. The norm of masculinity, with “its emphasis on stoicism, toughness, and independence ... [and] the pressure to “man up” (Way et al., 2014, p. 242) is further reinforced through race and class domination, the working-class men and racialized men being “defined as possessing force alone” whereas middle-class men are “defined as the bearers of skill” (Connell, 1995, p. 55).

The “institutionalization of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity in schools” (Kehler & Martino, 2007, 92), notably through sports, spirit of competition and hierarchy through the use of force, “embed the exclusion or domination of women” (Connell, 1995, p. 54) and of boys who are inferiorised by the symbolic violence attached to male domination. As Warren observed in his empirical study in British primary schools, male identities work as hierarchical positionings, made possible by the schooling culture, which plays a structuring role (1997, 207). And that is illustrated by most participants in our study.

⁵⁷ La masculinité populaire s'expose [dans les médias] comme dure, violente, machiste et homophobe. [original text]

Il y avait l'épreuve de sélection de groupes : l'équipe torsos nus et l'équipe avec le t-shirt, où les deux capitaines choisissaient les membres. Et je savais que je serais – enfin – que j'allais être l'un des derniers de toute façon. ... C'était pour moi une épreuve que d'aller en gymnastique parce que je me retrouvais de toute façon avec ces garçons qui me rejetaient en temps normal. ... Je me souviens avoir une connexion – c'est horrible à dire, mais – avec le gros. Parce que lui aussi n'était pas choisi. Ce qui fait qu'en fait notre seul lien, c'était de se regarder et de se comprendre mutuellement. (Participant 12)

J'assimilais l'homme à la violence ... la violence qu'on peut faire aux autres. Et donc voilà j'assimilais effectivement l'homme à la guerre ... les garçons, c'est la violence, c'est... voilà, ça se bagarre et tout ça. (Participant 3)

Self-Containment and Culture of Secret. The first ground of exclusion of a boy is when his masculinity is questioned (Clair, 2012, p. 69). With the tactical avoidance of heterosexual male dominance at school, where “peers are a kind of gender police, constantly threatening to unmask us as feminine” (Kimmel, 1994, p. 132), gay boys may therefore opt for retreat, sometimes with a sense of satisfaction, sometimes out of spite. This was also observed in therapy by Lock: “High school social dynamics support homophobia and make opportunities to develop a peer network difficult” (1998, p. 214). As Way and colleagues have shown in their 2014 longitudinal study in the U.S., boys who neither fit the expected masculine norms nor manage to resist them are the most likely to develop feelings of depression and isolation (2014, p. 245).

Ik had geen vrienden, Ik heb jaren geen vrienden gehad, dus dat was wel zo'n ding. (Participant 13)

Je me suis fermé comme une huître dans sa coquille. ... je me disais qu'il valait mieux mourir que de révéler ça. (Participant 16)

The solitude, the fear of being outed or bullied, the thought of being *the only gay in the village*, the search of “[dissociation] from the ‘species’ to which the social and sexual order wants to bind them”⁵⁸ (Eribon, 1999, p. 115) and the incapacity to fit into hegemonic masculinity group dynamics may be the explanation for a gay boy’s interest in solitary activities such as reading, studying or in drowning himself into culture, even in families with little or no cultural capital.

Culturellement, c'était pas dingue ... j'ai un souvenir de beaucoup de solitude quand même. ... Je n'avais quasiment plus d'amitiés masculines à ce moment-là. Vraiment pas, parce que c'était vraiment, euh... Non, c'était vraiment compliqué. Ma vie était faite, on va dire, d'école, d'intendance familiale, de

⁵⁸ se dissocier de cette “espèce” à laquelle l'ordre social et sexuel entend les rattacher. [original text]

quelques activités avec des amis et surtout de moments solitaires à regarder des films, des séries. À écouter Madonna en boucle et d'autres. Et voilà, c'était ça. (Participant 1)

Je ne voulais pas reproduire le même schéma que l'école en allant soit au piano, soit en allant aux mouvements de jeunesse. Donc je me contentais de rester à la maison, dans un environnement où je me sentais mieux que quand j'étais en compagnie d'autres personnes ..., donc je n'avais pas de hobbies, si ce n'est ce qu'un gosse fait à la maison quand il est... quand il est seul, quoi : dessiner, regarder la télé. Enfin, ce genre de choses. (Participant 12)

Solitary confinement also helps to reduce the pressure from parents, who might want to find in their quiet child a reason not to worry. This is described by Goffman, as the tactic “whereby the discreditable person stays close to the place where he can refurbish his disguise, and where he can rest up from having to wear it” (1963, p. 112). Of course, considering the family obstacle in emancipating as a gay boy, this tactic is to be combined with the culture of secret, in which it becomes very difficult to

find that there are sympathetic others who are ready to adopt his standpoint in the world and to share with him the feeling that he is human and ‘essentially’ normal in spite of appearances and in spite of his own self-doubts. (Goffman, 1963, p. 31)

Aim at Popularity. The compensation for the inferiorisation sometimes resides in the need for popularity through any role, not necessarily as revenge – “against whom, by the way?”⁵⁹, as Xavier Le Clerc would ask himself (2022, p. 115) –, but as a justification for not being like the others and a search for a social status. This popularity may come from being the funny guy, the rebel against the system, the school theatre group leader, being excellent at their studies or even at alternative sports. Through this tactic, they show that, “in spite of appearances they are very sane, very generous, ... very capable of hard physical labour ..., in short that they are gentlemen deviants, nice persons like ourselves in spite of the reputation of their kind” (Goffman, 1963, p. 135).

I did all these things so that I would run away from my bullies. Because then I could say that, I mean: "You're calling me a faggot, but I'm the class president!", "You are calling me a faggot, but look, my medals, I'm a national level swimmer!" So, I think this created the hunger for success, or like a title, even as a kid, that I had to be better than them so that they cannot make fun of me. (...) It worked out like many of my bullies, when they were in the Swimming Championship finals, they just, they were playing

⁵⁹ contre qui d'ailleurs? [original text]

basketball around the area, and they came to visit, and they were fascinated with everything I did. And that day they didn't call me anything. The way they looked at me was different. When I became the class president, I would hear less people gossiping about me and me being so feminine and whatsoever because, you know, you would get less support when you try to talk bad about someone who is in a higher status. (Participant 17)

Self-Transformation. It is not always clear whether harassment of gay boys is based on sexual orientation (or fantasized sexual orientation since sexuality has not been experienced in most cases) and/or on nonconformity to gender roles. Gay boys seem to be at lesser risk of being harassed if they adhere to masculine norms (Heinze & Horn, 2014, p. 66). This leads them to hide or forget who they are, sometimes even to accept the social order or to internalise the homophobia they are subject to. Some would manipulate social interactions as a “tool to relearn [themselves]”⁶⁰ (Louis, 2021, p. 103), to act in public in such a way that their personalities are transformed through gestures, speech, reproduction of insults, avoidance of acquaintances with other perceived gay children – when any. In our study, some of the participants have declared that complicity was part of their tactics of survival. To avoid being perceived as being gay and out of fear of the violence attached to it, some have mimicked straight boys’ practices or have had to lie and to manage information in a permanent roleplay.

Quand je disais que je détestais les gays, en fait, je détestais tout, tout, tout, tout ce qui allait sortir finalement de ce modèle hétéro, famille classique et tout. (Participant 3)

Les gays qui n'assument pas encore le fait d'être gay sont très agressifs, très méchants, avec d'autres gays qu'ils ont pu identifier. Et j'ai été très méchant avec un des gays de l'internat à l'époque. Il y avait une norme : il y avait les garçons, et puis il y avait les filles. Et il y avait un garçon là qui était mis de côté parce qu'il était un peu efféminé, et cetera. Et donc pour moi en plus m'endurcir, bah j'ai fait comme tout le monde ... parce que si tu fais pas partie du groupe qui mène la danse, tu peux être malheureux, quoi. ... Donc voilà encore une raison de plus qui faisait que j'essayais de rentrer dans le rang et peut-être aussi que j'évacuais un peu de ... tu sais, en maltraitant ce garçon à l'internat, et cetera, en évacuant ce qu'on m'avait donné comme haine. (Participant 2)

This roleplay may also be performed through flirting with girls as a “cover” (Goffman, 1963, p. 116), “micro-cowardice, micro-resignations, tiny denials and countless silences, the sum of which forming the experienced reality of domination and its perpetuation”⁶¹ (Eribon,

⁶⁰ Un outil de réapprentissage de [moi]. [original text]

⁶¹ des micro-lâchetés, des micro-démissions, des infimes renoncements et des silences innombrables dont la totalité constitue la réalité vécue de la domination et de sa perpétuation. [original text]

1999, p. 116). In this case, “the dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear as natural” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 35).

Il y a eu des tentatives comme ça. Je me rappelle en 5e et 6e secondaire où je me suis mis avec des filles que je sentais bien que j'aimais pas, mais il fallait qu'on me voie, avec des filles. (Participant 3)

I think I separate completely what was going on in my mind from what I was doing outside with my friends or with my cousins or with my whoever. ... And I was having all the other things with the girlfriends and flirting girls and trying to kiss them and trying to... put my hands on their boobs, on their asses and everything, I was having a straight line. (Participant 7)

Unfortunately, those tactics of survival contribute to the reproduction of the dominant culture and hegemonic masculinity. However, they seem to be a mandatory passage to survive in the first place, and gain freedom to develop one’s personal identity which will, eventually, establish itself in opposition to the dominant culture. This specific highly adaptive experience of gay boys, which “stimulates the stigmatized individual into becoming a critic of the social scene, an observer of human relations” (Goffman, 1963, p. 135), helps them build adaptability skills and a capital which will consequently benefit the ones who have managed their way through and will facilitate the migration process and the subsequent social mobility.

4.1.3. The Shame of the Social Class

Whereas most participants have not expressed a shame of their social class nor have made a correlation between social class and the gay stigma, some have clearly expressed their difficulties or shame associated with their social condition. This is more likely to occur in socially-heterogeneous secondary schools.

Ça me demandait beaucoup de dire le métier de mes parents, je voulais le cacher. (...) Il y avait effectivement très vite des comparaisons (...) dans une école où finalement il y avait une mixité sociale. Mais ça a justement aussi nourri cette comparaison et par conséquent le fait de dire : “Bah! En fait, ma famille, j'en suis un peu honteux. (Participant 3)

4.2. Aspiration: Class Defection and/or Development of Personal Identity



As we have seen in Chapter 1, the working-class *ethos* and the male domination associated with it may lead to the conscious aspiration of class defection.

On était au Mont des Arts et je me souviens qu'on s'est dit tous les deux : "Un jour, on va y arriver, on sera ici!" Donc on voyait aussi Bruxelles un peu comme une élévation sociale ou quoi que ce soit. On s'est dit : "Un jour, on viendra ici, on vivra à Bruxelles! (Participant 3)

J'avais clairement la conscience que je voulais une autre vie que celle de ma famille, clairement, que je voulais pas... je voulais pas être dans une vie ouvrière. (Participant 1)

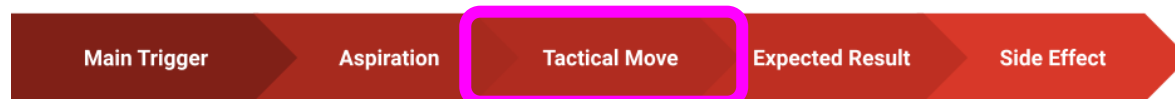
In that case, sexuality will add up and facilitate encounters with upper-class men in the new social environment. Those, in turn, entail sexual emancipation as a side-effect of the intended class mobility.

In this study, most participants rather explained to which extent migration had been motivated by the "conviction of the need for love" (Hoggart, 1988, Chapter 2: Potternewton, empl. 1017). When the escape from the symbolic violence of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative education is not reasoned by the social class, it may lead to the aspiration of developing one's personal identity and/or of finding one's sexual emancipation through migration, in this case on a geographic standpoint, far from social control. This shows how sexuality acts on migration processes. This project may, in turn, entail class mobility as a side-effect of the intended sexual emancipation.

I had the Internet at that time, so I knew that coming to Brussels to do my master degree, there were gay bars, there were [*sic*] gay life present. So that was one of the criteria. I knew that Belgium was one of the countries where acceptance of being gay is one of the best in Europe. (Participant 8)

My first priority was to live away so I can live my sexuality, to fall in love with a man and finally have the chance to do this, whatever it was. ... Since I was a teenager, I knew that Athens would be a first step for my sexuality. I knew that I was feeling citizen of the world. I was feeling like I could live somewhere else easily and everything, and I was craving for that. (Participant 7)

4.3. Tactical Move: Academic Migration



Academic and sexual migrations may be nothing more than a quest to a new territory with all the recklessness and pool of surprises that come with it, a condition to explore one's identity in a territory which would guarantee anonymity in a first instance and the entrance to a new – chosen – community.

Aller en ville où il y a une forme d'anonymat dès le départ, qui fait que y'a personne qui va aller raconter à la boulangère qu'il a vu un tel ou un tel avec un autre dans les buissons, donc ça c'est déjà beaucoup enfin. (Participant 2)

I wanted to go in the capital city where 5 million people live and I can be anonymous between millions of people, millions of people. (Participant 7)

Ce qui me semble clair, c'est que je voulais quitter la maison et que je voulais entrer dans une sorte d'anonymat de la grande ville, ça c'est évident. Je ne pourrais pas jurer que dans ma tête, je voulais être dans l'anonymat de la grande ville pour pouvoir vivre ma sexualité, mais c'était sûrement pour pouvoir être qui je suis sans jugement autour de moi. Ou ne plus devoir simplement subir cette sorte de chose insupportable qui est de se cacher en permanence et de ne pas dire qui on est et de mentir tout le temps. Et c'était peut-être juste pour pouvoir arrêter de mentir, en fait. (Participant 16)

This need for a new territory is not only a question of geographic displacement. It is also a rupture in one's biography, with new friends, a new community. Entering a new world “inevitably means to adapt one's body and mind to explicit and tacit requisites of a universe that has been existing prior to our search for a place there to find”⁶² (Eribon, 2013, p. 113).

As Manalansan argues, migrants possess sexual desires, which “are not limited to migrants' search for material and social advancement but also are often pivotal reasons for the decision to migrate” (2006, p. 243). In some cases, participants had chosen – sometimes as soon as secondary school – fields of studies which would facilitate their migration, whether it be through the learning of foreign languages or through topics such as international relations or diplomacy. As if they had built their own moral career with a clear conscious trajectory from a very young age.

⁶² c'est inévitablement adapter son corps et son esprit aux réquisits explicites ou tacites d'un univers qui a existé avant qu'on ne cherche à s'y faire une place. [original text]

Comment est-ce que dans mon esprit, je pouvais savoir que ce serait dans le supérieur que j'aurais des amis, que ce serait dans le supérieur que j'aurais ma première relation et que ça serait mon épanouissement ? Je ne sais pas d'où je tiens cette information, mais je l'ai depuis longtemps en moi. Depuis, c'est... 13 ans, 14 ans, peut-être même 12 ans. Je sais pas. ... Je me suis très rapidement dirigé vers les langues. ... parce que dans ma tête je voulais changer de communauté hein, et donc ouvrir son esprit à d'autres langues permettrait de rencontrer plus de personnes. Si on parle des langues supplémentaires, on a 2 fois plus ou 3 fois plus de possibilités de rencontrer d'autres personnes d'ailleurs. ... Si je parle le néerlandais et qu'en plus en troisième année, on avait de l'anglais aussi, ben je pourrais un jour quitter l'endroit où je suis, aller en Angleterre, aller aux États-Unis, aller en Australie, aller aux Pays-Bas ou dans le nord du pays. Ça me donnait tellement de possibilités, donc j'avais choisi ça en connaissance de cause. (Participant 12)

J'ai commencé l'anglais en sixième, donc à 12 ans et cette année-là, la première fois que l'école organisait un voyage à Londres et donc je suis parti à Londres et alors là, ça a été le déclic : j'habiterai là, je travaillerai là, je serai prof d'anglais, y a rien d'autre, c'est l'Angleterre! ... Quand je suis rentré à l'université, et que l'université a fait ce premier programme Erasmus avec [Ville anonymisée], je me suis dit, c'est l'occasion! Pour deux raisons, c'est l'occasion d'aller en Angleterre. C'est l'occasion de quitter la maison et c'est l'occasion d'y rester. (Participant 10)

The geographical factor and the social factor of cultural inequalities are interdependent. In some cases, this decision to study after secondary school was not an obvious one and the choice of academic field was also made in the constraints of the *habitus*.

Je pensais que j'étais incapable. Et très longtemps, j'ai cru ça. Même pendant, après mes études et cetera. ... Je me disais : "il faut que je fasse un truc qui ne requiert pas des connaissances scientifiques très poussées", et cetera. ... Donc j'ai toutes ces images aussi en tête qui me ramènent aussi au milieu d'où je viens, qui me disent : "Mais ça sera jamais possible en fait, je ferai jamais... je ferai jamais rien d'exceptionnel parce que je sais d'où je viens." Et donc je rêvassais un peu, sans y mettre non plus tous les moyens, en me disant: "de toute façon, c'est pas possible, quoi!" ... Mais j'étais donc dans cet entre-deux : de vouloir de grandes choses et en même temps d'être rattrapé par la réalité, mais très vite s'est imposé le fait que je ferais des études. (Participant 1)

Some of the participants had no other option as their town of residence was deprived of any access to a higher education institution. In that case, social mobility through higher education had to occur through migration, which constituted a double filter for emancipation. But what is interesting is how some others who did have access to a higher education institution in their town of residence still decided to migrate, considering that migrating was a necessary journey to emancipation.

I am the only one in this community where I lived ... who left the province just to go to university outside of it. (Participant 4)

So why would some gay men opt for academic migration in their quest for sexual emancipation? In Western continental Europe, access to higher education has remained democratic to a certain extent. A lot of European countries support poor families with grants and reduced tuition fees, which facilitates access to higher education institutions. In other countries, access to higher education for poor families is granted through scholarships which require excellent grades in secondary school. However, this economic support through state subsidies or scholarships has very little effect on the law of social reproduction, as Bourdieu and Passeron have shown.

It does make a difference, though, when a young gay man from the working class wants to migrate for his sexual emancipation, as it enables him to find cheap accommodation in this new territory, to keep being supported by his family and/or the state during his studies and to deliver a legitimate reason to migrate in the eyes of his family and friends, who would sometimes see his decision to pursue higher education as romantic utopia. Were he to opt for migration to find a job, not only would he need means of subsistence, but he would sometimes also be perceived as a defector in the eyes of his community. Here, we can distinguish two groups among the participants: those who were encouraged or pressured by their parents to emancipate through education, not necessarily with the perspective of leaving their milieu of origin, though:

Ils nous ont toujours encouragés à faire des études. ... ils avaient cette envie qu'on ait un poste "sécurisé", donc en fait, eux, leur objectif, c'était surtout qu'on soit fonctionnaires. (Participant 11)

So, for them, yeah, the study was a priority. They wanted to see me succeed in somehow... because I could have implication on, having a position... like having a position in the village. Yeah, for them it was quite important. (Participant 8)

and those who were either discouraged or left to their own aspirations without any form of support or pressure:

Dans le milieu dans lequel je vivais, personne n'avait été au-delà des secondaires. Pour ceux qui avaient été jusque-là, quoi. Du coup, j'étais dans une ambiance où on me disait qu'après les secondaires, il fallait travailler, quoi, simplement. ... Ils voulaient qu'on réussisse mais pas trop quand même quoi. ... Ils ne savaient pas ce que c'était, quoi, tu vois, l'unif. Pour eux, c'était abstrait. Pour eux, c'était travailler quoi.

Mon père a commencé à travailler, je crois qu'il avait 15 ans. Ma mère, 16 ans. C'était pas qu'ils ne voulaient pas. Je pense qu'ils ne s'imaginaient pas l'utilité de la chose. ... C'était juste qu'ils comprenaient pas l'intérêt. Pour eux, avoir son diplôme de secondaire, travailler à la poste, c'était une grande... c'était un bel aboutissement! (Participant 6)

Ma mère, c'était vraiment... on se voyait de temps en temps quoi, on habitait sous le même toit, mais elle s'occupait de rien, quoi. Elle s'occupait pas de mon suivi scolaire. (Participant 1)

4.4. Expected Results and Side-Effects: Ascending Social Mobility and/or Sexual Emancipation



Whether their aspirations were based on class defection or on the need for developing their personal identities, all participants were transformed through the confrontation with new norms and social forces.

The structural transitions during a migration may “impact the ways in which identities are formed and reinvented” (Naples & Vidal-Ortiz, 2009, p. 1). And when you add the social class, it increases the acculturation⁶³ effects.

Y a eu un choc des cultures! On était 4 Carolos à arriver en Sciences Po en même temps et, malgré qu'on était issus de milieux différents, le premier cours ... on n'a rien compris à ce qu'il disait [, le professeur]. On ne comprenait pas ce qu'il disait. Et ce qui m'a rassuré, c'est qu'on était tous dans le même cas, donc on s'est dit :”Ouf, on a du boulot, quoi, on a du boulot! ... C'était un défi, oui, mais on a vu un gap énorme. Venant de Charleroi, par rapport à d'autres qui arrivaient d'écoles bruxelloises où clairement, c'est un autre style, quoi. (Participant 6)

Il a fallu créer un tout autre personnage et je suis devenu quelqu'un d'autre, complètement quelqu'un d'autre. ... J'ai changé mon accent, j'ai changé ma façon de parler, comme tous les gays ... qui ... Oui, c'était une nouvelle mue, en fait. Et au pas de charge, hein. C'était physiquement éprouvant! Donc c'était physiquement éprouvant, j'insiste! C'était pas que psy. La mue a été complète. C'est comme un accouchement. T'es dans le ventre et puis tu n'y es plus. (Participant 15)

⁶³ Acculturation is to be understood as “phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149).

Most participants had to bear their social burden with them at university. In this context, the interconnection between students is very limited. Most networks date back from secondary school or are based on geographical origin, religious or political affiliation and mostly on belonging to an upper social class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964, p. 54).

I started to... you know, make friends, have relationships with people that I met there. And then, kind of ... university became part of my life, you know... I really had a gay life outside the university, so for me, Monday to Friday, I was at school. I also had friends, you know... I mean... but I really had two lives. (Participant 4)

La première année, j'étais un peu seul dans ce bazar, dans ce côté un peu inhospitalier et dans une université de gens dont je ne faisais absolument pas partie du monde et la première année a été dure. ... J'avais pas conscience des classes sociales en fait. Et c'est là que je l'ai découvert et je suis tombé sur le cul. (Participant 16)

J'avais l'impression ... d'un décalage avec eux... comme si... C'est peut-être que je me sous-estimais quelque part parce que venant des Ardennes et tout ça, j'étais avec des gens qui vivaient à Waterloo et qui avaient leur voiture ou qui avaient un petit de, ou dont le père ou la mère avait été professeur à l'université. Tu vois? Donc j'ai pas trouvé ma place non plus, vraiment ... Et j'ai rencontré une fille qui venait aussi des Ardennes ..., qui avait un accent ardennais à couper au couteau. Et donc quand je la regardais, je retrouvais mes racines, je retrouvais mes codes. (Participant 2)

In all cases, “the studies, and what they entail, separate from the original world when this world is separated from the world of – legitimate – culture”⁶⁴ (Eribon, 2013, p. 106). When going back to their families at weekends or holiday periods, most participants expressed their need and “time to re-adapt”⁶⁵ (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 120) to their milieu of origin. And after deep transformation, it becomes even more impossible to get back to interpersonal relations with their communities of the past. This challenges their ability to play with different identities, according to the environment they are in, “something like a double biography can develop, with those who knew [them] then and those who know [them] now, each thinking that they know the whole man (Goffman, 1963, p. 99).

Ce qui me déplaisait beaucoup, c'était de devoir apprendre des choses à ma mère. Et ça, ça m'a toujours frustré de me dire que ça devait être l'inverse. Tes parents ne devraient jamais cesser de t'apprendre des choses et moi je me retrouvais dans une situation où je devais expliquer certains mots à ma mère. Et donc là j'étais vraiment très, très mal par rapport à ça. (Participant 6)

⁶⁴ Les études, et ce qu'elles permettent, séparent du monde originel quand celui-ci est séparé du monde de la culture - légitime. [original text]

⁶⁵ le temps que [je me] réhabitue. [original text]

C'est des chocs non-stop avec le milieu d'origine, non-stop. On n'a rien en commun. C'est comme ça, il y en a très, très peu de choses en commun. ... il y a... ces décalages, ils sont à tous les étages: ils sont politiques, ils sont idéologiques, et cetera. (Participant 1)

J'ai décidé de tout doucement m'éloigner le plus loin possible de ma famille et tout ça. ... je les vois, mais je révèle très peu de choses parce que pour moi, ce sont des étrangers... avec un lien familial. ... Les rares fois qu'on se voit – enterrements, mariages, et cetera, et cetera –, en fait, on n'a rien à se dire, on n'a rien à se dire. Et c'est dommage, quoi. (Participant 5)

The shame of the milieu of origin in their new environments, or the “social closet”⁶⁶ (Eribon, 2009, p. 22) was also expressed by some participants.

J'étais gêné de mon milieu vis-à-vis de ma belle-famille. Ça, complètement. Je l'étais complètement. Parce que je voyais... je voyais les différences ... j'étais terrorisé... et j'avais peur... des fautes de conjugaison que pourraient faire ma mère ou mon beau-père. ... dans l'environnement bruxellois, je chahais énormément mes origines, là d'où je venais, et cetera. (Participant 1)

The power of the *habitus* in working-class families is so strong that it generates a power of perpetuation of the hierarchical social order. Succeeding in class passing (Bosa, Pagis, & Trépiéd, 2019) – especially when not intended – does not necessarily mean an individual will feel like a fish in the pond in a new environment.

Les gens vont découvrir en fait que je ne sais rien faire, je ne pourrais rien faire dans la vie. Il va falloir que je trouve des subterfuges pour masquer, pour combler, vraiment... pour être un imposteur. Et ce sentiment d'imposture, il m'a suivi très, très longtemps. Et encore maintenant, parfois très longtemps. Ça m'arrive encore de me dire : “Non, non, mais en fait, je suis pas fait pour ça, je peux pas.” (Participant 1)

Est-ce que je me considère d'un tel univers ? Je crois, par définition, oui. Mais je me sens toujours un peu escroc. Soit *imposter syndrome*, peut-être, ou vraiment je suis pas à ma place. (Participant 5)

Socialement, je suis allé vers des trucs plus alternatifs, plus ci, plus ça, comme si je pouvais pas être dans un appartement, je pouvais pas être propriétaire, je pouvais pas... Voilà, comme si, oui il y avait un décalage. (Participant 3)

Being gay does not necessarily mean living the gay culture, exclusively or not. Most participants have maintained links with the heterosexual world, whether through their families or in their everyday life. On top of this double gay/straight culture comes the question of the

⁶⁶ placard social. [original text]

social class and the “incorporated cultural capital of former generations”⁶⁷ associated with it (Bocci, 2019, p. 111). Transcending classes and migrating to a new environment generate “conflicts which support the acculturation from the dominant culture”⁶⁸ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, p. 44).

This dual experience, this huge gap between a “high academic consecration and a low social extraction”⁶⁹ leads to a “conflicted habitus made of tensions and contradictions”⁷⁰, a “coincidence of opposites”⁷¹ (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 127), and eventually to a “plural actor” (Lahire, 2011), juggling between two classes, two trajectories, two overlapping trajectories. This often leads to a transition period during which the transclass individual has lost their former place without having found the new one.

Once and if the storm is weathered, these adaptability skills will become a force in the old and the new social environment, in which the transclass individual who has “[shifted] from stratum to stratum and the corresponding experiences ... between different social groups ... may evidence a like-mindedness in regard to either one” (Sorokin, 1927, p. 534).

Moreover, even if migration factors and processes among working-class gay men may be similar to those of women or ethnic minorities, gay men can benefit from a male privilege, whether at school, in the workplace or in social and geographical mobility, as they “fall outside normative conceptions of gender, are often presumed childless, and are sometimes thought to be complicit in exploitative structures” (Lewis & Mills, 2016, p. 4). So, “what consists of an obstacle in certain conditions transforms into advantages in other contexts”⁷² (Jaquet, 2014, p. 226).

For all participants, migrating back was not an option. Even though some of them now express they could live in their town of origin, all of them had considered that migrating was a definite project with no way back.

T'es né à Charleroi, ça te poursuivra toute ta vie! ... Je suis content de l'avoir quittée, je voulais la quitter, ne jamais... en fait une de mes hantises, c'est d'avoir été obligé à un moment d'y retourner. Donc, par exemple perdre mon boulot et de devoir retourner vivre là-bas, c'était mon angoisse. Je pense que ça a été un moteur d'ailleurs pour bosser, parce que je voulais surtout pas y retourner. (Participant 14)

⁶⁷ Le capital culturel incorporé des générations antérieures. [original text]

⁶⁸ conflits qui accompagnent l'acculturation à la culture dominante. [original text]

⁶⁹ une haute consécration scolaire et une basse extraction sociale. [original text]

⁷⁰ l'habitus clivé, habité par les tensions et les contradictions. [original text]

⁷¹ “coïncidence des contraires”. [original text]

⁷² ce qui est un obstacle dans certaines conditions se transforme en avantage dans d'autres contextes. [original text]

And I applied for an Erasmus scholarship. And I did one year in Denmark, and there it's basically when I said I'm not going back to Italy at all. (Participant 8)

At some point in the participants' lives, a dissociation occurred between the relations with the family, which remained strong or got reinforced after the transition, and the community of origin, which was to be forgotten, with or without forgiveness.

Quelle chance que j'ai eue de partir de là et d'aller à Bruxelles. Parce que justement parfois je croise des garçons qui étaient avec moi à l'école primaire, où je les reconnais... je les reconnais à peine et ben c'est ma mère qui me dit: "Ah, il a construit sa maison, il a deux enfants et puis voilà, sa femme travaille au supermarché." Enfin, c'est pas que je dénigre, pas du tout, mais je me dis: "à quoi j'ai échappé, franchement!" (Participant 2)

C'est pas une revanche. C'est juste une réconciliation. Voilà, c'est ça : la réconciliation! De me réconcilier avec un milieu qui ne m'a pas fait du bien quand j'étais ado. Maintenant, je me sens réconcilié. J'ai bouclé la boucle. Mais c'était douloureux. Il fallait cette période d'arrachement. (Participant 15)

As Sorokin already observed in cases of social mobility, the "contemporary man more often cuts off the ties which bind him to his native place. ... He becomes less and less attached to anything or anybody. ... He becomes "free", and, as a consequence, lonely as a socially unattached atom" (Sorokin, 1927, p. 523).

Whereas most participants have cut all links with their communities of origin (with the noteworthy exception of the maintaining of some friends from secondary school who ended up coming out as gays or lesbians), a reconnection with their families has been made possible in the long run. Yet, there often remains a gap, a field of misunderstanding on class, culture and gender roles between the working-class families and their gay children, "who place themselves outside the succession of generations"⁷³ (Eribon, 2013, p. 91).

When asked the question of how their parents perceive them now, most participants say their parents are proud. Some would then add... "I guess!"

⁷³ qui se placent en dehors de la succession des générations. [original text]

Conclusion

As this study shows, being gay and coming from a small town appears as a determining factor of transclass mobility. For gay men from working-class families, academic migration serves as the ultimate tactical move to escape from hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative education. The distance between university and the original town is a unique opportunity to search for one's personal identity in a new and anonymous territory, far from social control and away from social endogamy and the determined destinies of working-class boys.

The intersection of gender, masculinity, sexual orientation, and class operates as a derogation to the necessary collusion on which the *habitus* and social reproduction are based.

Following Connell's theory on masculinities, the life histories of the 17 participants to this interview-based case study illustrate the contexts in which the agency is constrained and how hegemonic masculinity inferiorises and excludes those who do not fit the roles they are expected to play. Trapped in the double sentence of the gay stigma at school and the heteronormative expectations from their families, the participants deployed tactics of survival to weather the storm before they decided to migrate to pursue higher education studies. Their academic migration was sometimes supported by their parents; sometimes, the participants had to face resistance to what could be perceived as presumptuous fantasy, utopia, or treason.

Though each story is singular, the social mechanisms mostly operated uniformly on all participants, with the predominant role of the gay stigma – whether directly or indirectly pointed at them – and the institutionalised symbolic violence of a heteronormative education and hegemonic masculinity at school. As a reaction, the participants had to find ways to manage their social identities through, for example, the avoidance of team sports, self-containment, management of information, complicity with the bullies, or through the performance of expected roles.

Once their academic migration projects were initiated, their triple displacement – in class, geography, and identity – enabled the development of their personal identities and sexual emancipation, which contributed to each participant's transformation and acculturation. Whereas the ascending class mobility was the intended aspiration for some of them – in which case the term *class defector* might be preferred —, it rather consisted, for most participants, in a side effect of their intended emancipation as gay men or aspirations to develop their personal identities, which increased the risk of developing an imposter syndrome. In those cases, the

term *transclass* sounds more adequate. All of them were very soon faced with a conflicted *habitus*, which appeared persistent in most cases. Their in-betweenness could then act as an advantage in their professional lives due to their capacity to understand and belong to different worlds, which adds to the male privilege in the workplace.

The objective of this study was not to prove that being gay helps transcend social classes but rather to show the effects of hegemonic masculinity on gay men from working-class families and how they act to survive and find their personal identities through academic migration.

The empirical study has limitations, as the sample of participants exclusively comprised men who identify today as gay and who have graduated from university after opting for academic migration. Consequently, it eludes the trajectories of gay men who have not survived secondary school, of those who have not graduated from university, and of those who have not migrated to undertake higher education studies. This queer perspective on Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction also conceals the effects of hegemonic masculinity on straight boys who do not conform with the roles they are expected to play. Yet, "the fag is not only an identity linked to homosexual boys but an identity that can temporarily adhere to heterosexual boys as well" (Pascoe, 2005, p. 330). Therefore, it means that gender nonconformity may also entail peer victimisation and exclusion of straight men, who also need to use tactics of survival in these mechanisms of male domination.

The results of this study call for further research, not only on the effects of hegemonic masculinity at school on the mechanisms of social reproduction, regardless of gender or sexual identities, but also on the extension of these accepted mechanisms of male domination in the workplace and in the public space. As an example, one could see a clear link between the occupation of the urban space and the occupation of the school playground for boys' collective sports such as football or basketball and the highly institutionalised masculine culture of competition through exclusion and the use of force and violence. Even though this subject transcends all classes, the intersection of class, race, masculinities and gender also operates as an analytical tool to address an issue, which finds its origin in hegemonic masculinity.

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Appendix Contents

Appendix 1 - Online Survey

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Summary

Class, gender, masculinity, and sexual orientation intersect in this master thesis in Gender Studies. Starting from Bourdieu and Passeron's theory on social reproduction, the thesis provides – through a migration perspective – an illustration to Jaquet's concept of transclass and new fieldwork to Eribon's works of sociological introspection.

This study was based on the review of the literature and an interview-based case study of 17 comprehensive interviews, which were conducted in Belgium in the autumn of 2022. The participants, all men originating from working-class families, who identify today as gay and who currently reside in Belgium, narrated their triple displacements – in class, geography, and identity – as an effect of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative education. Whereas some of them had reasoned their need to migrate out of shame of their social condition or with the conscious desire to ascending social mobility, most participants have seen their transclass journeys as a side effect to the initially intended aspiration to sexual emancipation and/or search of their personal identities.

The results of this study open new perspectives on transclass mechanisms among gay men from the working class and call for further research on the social effects of hegemonic masculinity on individuals – regardless of their sexual orientation, sexual or gender identities – who do not conform with the roles they are expected to play at school and in their communities.

Keywords: academic migration, hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, masculinities, sexual migration, social reproduction, tactics, transclass