

THE EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION OF SEPARATED MINORS¹: A COMPARISON OF THE SITUATIONS IN FRANCE AND QUEBEC

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This article proposes to investigate the educational experiences of thirty-two separated children (unaccompanied minors seeking refuge) in two different regions: the Ile-de-France (Paris) region of France and the province of Quebec in Canada. It allows for a better understanding of the role and the actual place that education has in the integration process of these vulnerable young migrants.

Keywords: endangered children, immigration, unaccompanied minors.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR) states that half of the displaced persons and refugees in the world are minors. They are children as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and, as such, they are vulnerable. "The most vulnerable group is represented by those who are in a foreign country [...] and separated from their parents or legal or customary primary care-givers," emphasizes the Council of Europe². France has welcomed approximately 8,000 of these "isolated children"³. North America is confronted with this population as well. In Canada, according to estimates based on the numbers from Immigration

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¹ As a matter of convenience, we shall use the term "separated children", which is also used by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This expression, in addition to the term "unaccompanied minor", is largely used in Canada and Quebec.

² COUNCIL of Europe. *Recommendation 1703(2005) on the protection and assistance for separated children seeking asylum.*

³ This is a literal translation of the French term "*mineur isolé*" used to describe these children. In this article, this term will be used to refer to the specific population of separated children in France so as to distinguish them from those in Quebec.

and Citizenship Canada, unaccompanied children number between 2,500 and 3,000⁴.

In order to better accommodate these young migrants that the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is meant to protect, the HCR and Save the Children⁵ have established guidelines to protect them. Concerning their right to education, and drawing on articles 28 and 32 of the CRC, the two institutions recommend that

separated children should have access to the same statutory education as national children. Schools need to take a flexible, welcoming approach with separated children and provide second language support. (...) Vocational and professional training should be available to older separated children. It is likely to enhance their life chances if they return to their home country.

But what access to education is, in reality, made available to separated children? To provide some kind of response to this question, this article proposes to investigate the educational experiences of thirty-two separated children in two different regions: the Ile-de-France (Paris) region of France and the province of Quebec in Canada. In both countries, there are regional differences in the ways in which separated children are accommodated. However, a monitoring of thirty-two children over the course of two years, as well as eleven interviews conducted with former separated children, allow for a better understanding of the role and the actual place that education has in the integration process of these young migrants⁶.

Links between official statutes, immigration control and education

In Quebec, separated children who show up at the border are treated as persons seeking asylum or refuge, whereas, in France, separated minors

⁴ It is important to note the difficulty that national authorities have in determining the number of separated children in their country with any kind of certainty.

⁵ UNHCR/ Save The Children. *Separated Children in Europe Programme. Statement of good practice.*

⁶ Thirty-two life stories and experiences were recounted for the two countries through interviews with social workers specializing in the area of welcoming immigrants (Specialized welcome centers for Paris, Programme régional d'accueil et d'intégration des demandeurs d'asile (PRAIDA) and Centre Jeunesse for Montréal). The data collected in Quebec is more fragmented and the monitoring of the group in question is confined to a shorter period, due to the fact that the structures put in place for the accommodation of separated children are not as important to these children since they enjoy the support of extended family members. This is generally not the case for the group of children in France. Furthermore, the care of separated children ceases at 18 years of age in Quebec, while in France it may continue up to 21 years of age in cases of extensions authorized by social services. Of the semi-directed interviews, three were conducted in Quebec and eight in the Paris region, a geographical inequality that reflects the difficulty in retracing the steps of the young people in Quebec.

are dealt with according to child protection laws. As a matter of fact, unlike young people in Quebec, the majority of isolated children in France cannot count on the presence of a family member or an acquaintance. If the French authorities do not take responsibility for them, the youth can face the very real dangers of homelessness, marginalization, delinquency, prostitution, and exploitation. The isolated minors in France may be, like those in Quebec, sometimes sent abroad by their parents, but they are less likely than their peers in Quebec “entrusted” to a third party who has already successfully immigrated. The monitoring of the groups in the Paris and Montreal regions indicates that in Quebec, only five of 32 separated children did not have someone waiting for them, compared to 21 in France. Furthermore, of the 11 who were accompanied or had someone waiting for them in France, eight were forced to flee these adults who took them in, in order to avoid prostitution, modern slavery or mistreatment.

The populations of separated children in France and in Canada do not experience exactly the same realities. Confronted with a particularly vulnerable population, France has put permanent structures in place, such as specialized welcome centers. Indeed, recognized isolated minors benefit, in theory, from governmental protection; whatever their methods of entry into France (with or without a visa) and whatever the reasons for their migration.

Unlike their Quebec counterparts, separated children in France are not necessarily seeking asylum or refuge, far from it. Only 3 out of the 32 isolated children had asked for it and of those three, only one actually received it. The reverse situation is true in Quebec, where only three of the separated children did not obtain asylum or refuge after requesting it.

Whatever the reason this youth immigrates, the French government is not able to reject these children and adolescents on arrival if they prove to be minors. However, action can be taken later, when these immigrants turn 18 and are no longer protected by endangered children protection laws and must sort out their legal situation as adults. In order to be legalized at 18 years of age, young immigrants must obtain a residency permit which is dependent upon their linguistic, educational and/or socio-professional integration. School and educational achievement therefore come to play important roles in their future. Specifically, to receive a residency permit indicating either “student”, “for private and family purposes”, or “working” (the three principal permits requested by separated children at the age of majority), educational integration constitutes an essential requirement.

It can, therefore, be said that in France, the vital challenges of legalization extend to the issue of educating separated children, something which is not

the case in Quebec. In these two contexts, education most definitely plays an essential role concerning the linguistic, socio-cultural and socio-professional integration of young immigrants, but in France a challenging burden has also attached itself to the issue. Integration is no longer simply a sociological process gradually occurring over time as the immigrant finds their bearings in the host country. Rather, it becomes a *sine qua non* condition, evidence that must be provided in order to be able to stay legally in France.

The importance of the necessity to integrate appears all the greater when coupled with a sense of urgency. While the sociological process of integration presupposes an important reworking of identity and is therefore a lasting process, the separated children in France have only a few years, perhaps months, before they have to deal with the question of legalization. Since their average age was 16.5 years when data were collected, they had, in theory, only 18 months to deal with this issue, although in fact eventual judicial appeals may allow them to gain several extra months or years.

However, these several months or years during which the isolated minors must overcome the challenge of educational integration may appear insufficient considering the fact that these young immigrants have to fit in an educational system that does not necessarily take into account their particular profile. A large proportion of them arrive in France without being able to comprehend even one word of French and some of them were undereducated in their country of origin and do not know how to read or write.

Education may therefore be seen as a stimulant which facilitates integration, but in the case of French “isolated minors”, it appears to be equally tainted with challenges that can strip of its meaning. It also comes close to being a policy of control put in place later on in the immigration process (after a residence period of several years in France) compared to the immediacy with which this policy of control is applied in Quebec (where those seeking asylum or refuge are interrogated on arrival as to the legitimacy of their stay).

Access to the education in question

Through interviews conducted with former separated children and social workers, the main events of these adolescents’ educational experiences become clearer. This research allows greater insight into the factors that influence educational experience.

Are educational structures adapted to this public?

Before going into detail about the educational structures designed to accommodate separated children, it is important to first address the profiles

of these adolescents. The background of individuals arriving to France and Quebec tend to differ significantly.

Educational Profiles

The differences noted do not have much to do with age or gender (since they are both overwhelmingly masculine populations) as they do with that of their and their families' status in their countries of origin, which in turn influences their educational ambitions.

Globally speaking, the young people in Quebec are described by social workers as belonging to a relatively elevated social category in their country of origin, with the exception of those adolescents from certain underprivileged countries such as Haiti or from situations of war where the adolescents are directly threatened, for example by enrolment in the Tamil Tigers army in Sri Lanka. Of the three youths interviewed in Quebec, two of them, one from Angola and one from Burundi, explain that they completed all their studies in the preferential *curriculum* of the French school system in Africa. Furthermore, the fact must be noted that none of the five social workers met in Montreal remembers monitoring any young people who were either undereducated or uneducated and who had any serious educational gaps. Globally speaking, the population in Quebec was therefore mostly made up of young people from modest to elevated social environments where they generally had access to regular or higher quality education.

In France, the isolated minor's population appears to be different, even though there still certain heterogeneity exists in the profiles and stories recounted. The principal motivation that explains the migration is economic (around 60% of cases), with the desire to create a better future for oneself. Coming from high poverty zones with lower income and higher risk backgrounds, the isolated minors in France globally possess a lower educational level than their Canadian counterparts. A third of the youth in the sample declare themselves to be either undereducated or uneducated in their country of origin, and therefore, upon arrival in their host country, in a situation of illiteracy. Some of them had never even held a pencil in their hands, except on those rare occasions when they had attempted to draw.

When taking the educational profile of these young people into account, it is important to distinguish between allophones and Francophones, as the latter do not need to learn the language of the host country. Although the statistics from the different welcome centers in Quebec and France are not available, the monitoring of the groups seems to indicate that the population in Quebec consists of more Francophones than the population in France.

In the Quebec sample, 23 of the 32 are Francophones compared to only 15 in the French sample⁷. The relatively large proportion of Francophones is explained by the fact that French is the official language of France and Quebec as well as by the origins of the young immigrants. In these two contexts, there is a high concentration of adolescents from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Guinea, as well as youth from Burundi and Haiti in Quebec and from Mali in France.

It is evident that the French and Quebec populations may have similarities as well as differences but it must be kept in mind that within each group, there is also a strong heterogeneity with several distinct profiles, implying different specific needs.

To what extent are these profiles taken into consideration and to what extent is the proposed education adapted to the levels, needs and ambitions of each individual?

Access to Adapted Programs

National policies exist in each country to deal with non-French-speaking students and with students previously un- or under-educated, whether they are separated children or children of immigrant families.

In Quebec, all separated children with specific needs related to French language acquisition, seven out of the sample group of 32, were directed toward French-learning classes. Only one of them experienced difficulty in later in rejoining regular classes, in this case due to learning difficulties.

In France, on the other hand, of the 17 allophone minors, in the national school system, only six were offered courses adapted to their linguistic needs. And only two of the ten students with literacy challenges were provided a specific class designed for under-educated students. In the absence of sufficient placements within the national school system, socio-educational welcoming centres become the default mode for this fundamental learning, with internal courses being implemented. This palliative solution has had to be adopted even though, according to Schiff⁸, isolated children appear as priorities on educational institutions' waiting lists. A deplorable lack of placements for immigrants with specific needs over 16 years of age, when education coverage is no longer obligatory, is therefore a reality.

⁷ The term "Francophone" includes those individuals who do not necessarily have French as their mother tongue, but who have learned it as a second language and attained a relative mastery.

⁸ SCHIFF, Claire. *L'institution scolaire et les élèves migrants: peut mieux faire.*

After an average of only 10 months' schooling in the specialized welcoming centre in France, almost all of the isolated children succeeded in gaining admission to training programs. Only seven of the youth in the French sample did not succeed in entering the regular educational system or a diploma-granting French training program, four of whom only had access to courses offered within the welcome center. In certain cases, the fact that a spot was not made available to them can be explained by the students' own inability to focus on their education. In others, behavioural problems linked to addiction (alcohol or drugs) or psychological disorders are added in. In one way or another, specific personal experiences seem to have interfered with their learning and education according to the explanations provided by their educators: difficulty in adjusting to the host country due to their involuntary departure from their country of origin, difficulty in taking responsibility for their lives due to the blurring of social boundaries, reliance on a dependency in order to satisfy a loss or avoid facing past, present or future ordeals, or the stigma of trauma experienced in the country of origin.

In the Montreal group, on the other hand, none of the separated children was denied education at school. However, it must be noted that a large number of adolescents under 16 years of age (and therefore assumed to be schooled) are included in the sample. Only two of the youth, who displayed learning difficulties or behavioural problems as well as one of whom had serious addiction problems, were directed toward particular training programs in order to prevent them from dropping out of school.

Finally, for those over 16 years of age who would not be accepted to regular schools in Quebec, the option of being educated in the alternative public system of adult education is also available. This is often suggested by social workers, as C. Montgomery stated in his study published in 2002⁹. Nevertheless, in our study, only one person attended this type of school with only one other also having the intention of doing so. The other separated children over 16 years of age educated at the secondary or postsecondary level were registered in the regular school system.

France also has programs designed to help such students take up their studies (evening courses, correspondence courses, etc.), in which those older than 16 years of age can register, but these courses are generally not considered to be realistic alternatives. These programs would not appear to be well adapted for the separated children population in France, a group with a low level of education and minimal expectations in terms of certification.

⁹ MONTGOMERY, Catherine. *Young refugee seeking asylum: the case of separated youth in Quebec*.

These programs demand, generally speaking, a maturity, self-discipline, and above all, a certain confidence in one's abilities as well as work habits that are not necessarily accessible to people who are unfamiliar with academic learning.

Consequently, isolated children over 16 years of age who are not able to be assigned to a school in the regular education system turn mostly toward short integration programs. These programs are aimed at people between the ages of 16 and 25 who are at risk of dropping out, in the hope of preventing them from leaving the educational system without a diploma. They certainly constitute an alternative to the absence of any kind of education, but it is important to note that these programs are normally destined for youth who are at risk of failing and dropping out due to learning difficulties or behavioural problems. However, if isolated children are in danger of dropping out, or if they struggle to integrate into the educational system and must turn toward these programs, it is above all due to the fact that no educational placement was made available to them in the form of either specific or regular classes.

These different programs do, however, allow youth to acquire basic language and educational abilities and facilitate the integration of a professional training. These specific programs most often orient participants toward short professional training, where school courses alternate with placement periods in industry. This training corresponds perfectly to isolated children profiles, but access to these programs is limited due to problems with legal status. In addition to the problem of insufficient placements in the French school system to accommodate immigrants over 16 years of age, the challenges of legalization represent the principal obstacle in the education of separated children in France. This problem of professional training will be developed further in conjunction with a discussion of the principal obstacle to education found in Quebec, namely that of the cost of studies.

The Question of Cost versus the Question of Papers: The Principal Obstacles to Accommodation in Quebec and France

For the majority of separated children in France, the possibility of undergoing a short professional training program is the one most adapted to their needs insofar as it relies less on their acquired knowledge and academic abilities and more on their professional abilities or potential. It also prepares these young people to enter the workforce quickly. The students who decide on this path are less handicapped by their eventual linguistic and academic gaps. They are able to capitalize on the experience acquired in their country of origin where they were able to work even if they had not

gone to school. Being able to work quickly is particularly important, due to the fact that at 18 or at best at 21 years of age¹⁰, they must be financially autonomous. A quick chance at a job is also essential if they are to respond to the defined criteria for obtaining a residency permit at the age of majority.

Professional training can be provided by two distinct institutions through different processes: a vocational school or an alternating training center (CFA¹¹). In the first case, the student undertakes unpaid practical training several times within the school year. In the second case, training is provided by the CFA and the school year is strictly divided between weeks of courses and weeks of work. Consequently, they are no longer “students” but rather “apprentices”, signing a work contract with an employer. The apprentices are thus paid throughout their training, which explains separated children’s preference for attending the CFA rather than vocational school. Nevertheless, insofar as the apprenticeship contracts are a particular type of work contract, this presupposes that the people hired have the right to work, which is not the case for foreigners whose legal situation has not yet been finalized. Young immigrants may request special permission in the form of a work permit dispensed by the appropriate authority. However, in January 2005, a report from the Inspector General of Social Affairs stated that “*the rarity of obtaining work permits prohibits ipso facto [isolated children’s] access to professional training*”. In other words, this would appear to contradict established educational and socio-professional integration objectives by interfering with the granting of residency permits. In reaction to this, two bills were drafted, in January and October of 2005¹², to facilitate the issuing of work permits with the goal of concluding apprenticeship contracts. However, these bills support only those requests made by isolated children or young adults who were under the care of social services as children under the age of 16. In other words, educational and professional integration is facilitated for a minority subgroup of isolated children, those who arrived earlier on in life and furthermore, who have already earned the right to legalization. It excludes the others, those who arrived and were protected after 16 years of age. It thereby establishes a distinction in direct contradiction with the mandate of protecting endangered children that it has nevertheless endorsed.

It must be stated that these legalization and work-permit challenges for foreigners create obstacles for the educational and socio-professional

¹⁰ Social protection may be extended to 21 years of age, depending on the youth’s situation.

¹¹ This is a translation of the French term “centre de formation en alternance” (CFA).

¹² Article 28 of the law n°2005-32 January 18, 2005 and official memo n°452 from October 5, 2005 DPM/DMI2.

integration of isolated children. In June 2008, during a conference held in Paris¹³, it was noted that the issuance of work permits took place on a case by case basis and in an extremely diverse manner in different departments. Around Paris, where the welcome center providing the present data is located, authorizations of temporary work permits are issued with clemency. None of the young people who submitted an application for a dispensatory work permit was refused and all were able to start professional training. All they had left to do was to find an employer willing to get involved despite the more complex hiring procedures that the employers could avoid by taking on either a French apprentice or a foreign one who had already been legalized.

In Quebec, on the other hand, separated children's access to the educational system is based strictly on the same criteria as for any foreigner seeking asylum, refuge or residency. Contrary to the situation in France, the primary obstacle to education there is not linked to status, but rather to the cost of study, which is very expensive in Canada.

Secondary studies (up until approximately 16 years of age) are covered by the Ministry of Education and separated children do not have to worry about financing them. The only downside: the Montreal school boards flatly refuse to reserve a place in the schools for students without proof of residency in Montreal, as well as immigration documentation ("brown paper") indicating that the school boards will be paid the cost of their education. However, the granting of this document by Immigration Canada is a relatively quick process that does not usually pose any problems.

It is at the post-secondary level that financial obstacles can become substantial for young immigrants. If they are not yet refugees or permanent residents, they must pay the tuition asked of international students, which is much more costly. However, if they are refugees or permanent residents, both former and current separated children, just like all other Quebecois, not only pay the domestic fees but can also take advantage of the loan and scholarship programs that exist for the financing of post-secondary studies¹⁴. The accelerated procedure of seeking for asylum or refuge makes the evaluation of separated children's requests a priority and reduces the waiting period to around seven

¹³ Conference organised by the *Défenseure des enfants* on June 20, 2008 at the *Maison du Barreau* in Paris: *Mineurs étrangers isolés, vers une harmonisation des pratiques dans l'intérêt supérieur de l'enfant*. The conference presentations can be viewed on the website: <www.defenseurdesenfants.fr/pdf/Actes_MEI.pdf>.

¹⁴ Post-secondary institutions in Canada usually charge non-citizens and permanent resident international student fees.

months¹⁵. This is essential as it also allows separated children to obtain a status granting them faster access to post-secondary studies.

In this way, the Quebec system grants the unaccompanied minors the same rights as the general immigration population. The French system, on the other hand, by refusing to select isolated children upon their arrival in the name of endangered children protection and by deferring this selection until young immigrants reach the age of majority, engages in a complex game where measures of protection and restriction alternate without any apparent justification or consultation. It is up to the isolated children to navigate through the rather ambiguous net of legalization. This state of affairs can also be found at another level of education, that of educational and professional orientation.

The Question of Educational Choice: Course of Studies and Orientation

Like all adolescents aged 16 and 17, separated children must deal with the issue of their professional orientation, a process which is complicated by their discovery of a new educational system.

For the youth in Quebec, the representatives from PRAIDA or Youth Centres may help them with their choice of program. However, the separated children interviewed in this study pointed out the particular importance of their network of family and friends in receiving advice, as the information obtained elsewhere does not necessarily relate to their specific needs and situations.

In Canada, the degree equivalency system for comparing studies completed in the country of origin to those completed in Quebec institutions is actually very complex, but essential for gaining entrance into post-secondary education. For example, Ana, a brilliant young girl from Peru who arrived at 16 years of age, explains that she almost attended a secondary school specific welcoming class, based on the advice given to her by her social worker, even though she had finished her secondary education in Peru and agreements between her country of origin and Canada allowed her to go directly to university. It was due to the advice of her cousin, who had herself immigrated several years earlier, that she successfully avoided adding several years to her time spent in school. During the interviews, the youth in Montreal also highlighted the importance of their social network in their orientation, in understanding the educational system or in discovering courses of study in which they might be interested.

¹⁵ MONTGOMERY, *op. cit.*

The young adults interviewed in Paris pointed to the role of their educators as well as to specialized programs in educational and professional orientation towards which they could be directed. Sometimes surprised by the level of difficulty in their studies, they stressed the importance of the work experience they completed as part of their studies, or through informal opportunities provided by the welcome center. These work experiences appear to be key factors in the choice of an educational direction: they allow the individual to understand the reality of the profession that perhaps does not exist in that particular form in their country of origin and that the youth had not necessarily thought about.

This question of orientation reflects the real difference between the young immigrants in Quebec - more literate, less isolated, more reliant on their network in finding ways to embark on an educational path more or less already decided upon before leaving their country of origin - and those in France whose educational plan is constructed on a step-by-step basis with the support of the educational resources at their disposal at the same time as their migratory path is being determined.

De facto, the issue of educational choice imposes itself upon isolated children in France through the issue of legalization, given that educational and socio-professional integration depends in part upon the granting of a residency permit at the age of majority. Certain isolated children find themselves more or less constrained to a certain model of integration in the hopes of obtaining their papers. This is what Tomàs, a young Romanian resistant to studying, explains, stating that *"not everyone who works in construction needs a diploma"*. Instead, he points to the importance of his years of experience. At 14 years of age, he worked in construction at different building sites in order to repay his smuggler. However, when he *"was told he would be better go to school or return to Romania"*, he chose to take a course and *"wait"*, in the hope that his registration in a school program would allow him to receive his papers, which actually turned out to be the case, even though he was never able to obtain a diploma.

Rajiv explains how, according to him, his educational path has been in part contingent upon a new development in his legalization process. After receiving his diploma as a house painter, he is trying to continue on with his studies, despite having very poor relations with his employer:

I knew that I needed my papers, I stayed with him all the time. [...] I thought that when I received my [diploma] or when I received my papers, I would stop. But for now, seeing as how I need to, I have to go... I have to continue you know! [...] I

asked my boss if I could begin [a higher diploma]. Because I still hadn't got my papers!

Moreover, it is important to note that the fear of having to interrupt one's studies, and thus compromising one's chances of obtaining a residency permit, sometimes leads isolated children to complete their apprentice training under conditions bordering on professional harassment or exploitation. Rajiv talks, almost ashamed, of the insults and humiliations inflicted upon him by his boss, which he was forced to endure for fear that he might not find another employer, as he had experienced difficulties in finding an apprenticeship supervisor. He also explains how, for more than two years, he worked every Saturday morning without ever being paid: *"He knew that I needed a contract, and it was for that reason that he suggested it to me and I was forced to accept"*.

In the same vein, certain young people in France sometimes find themselves in situations of having to undertake studies in a educational program that they had not chosen, as one youth indicates: *"Retail, why did I choose it, because I had no choice! Because I wasn't legal yet! I didn't have definitive papers! But I had to have training in order to get my papers. Or continue on with my studies."* In this case, Yash had studied in this professional sector due to the fact that the first employer willing to take him on as an apprentice was in retail. Certain technical programs are under-enrolled, and rather than taking the risk of not being accepted into their program of choice and ending up outside the educational system, students prefer to accept the places in less desirable careers.

Globally speaking, the professions to which isolated children are directed in France are above all technical, with little study time involved: construction work and the restaurant industry for the boys and nurse's aide or cashier for the girls. In Quebec, the young people seem to gravitate more toward professions requiring diplomas, such as working in a bank or bookkeeping, and in the case of the three interviewed, nursing, social work and other caring professions relating perhaps to the trauma endured as refugees.

Lastly, it must be noted that the separated children in the French sample, less educated in their country of origin, demonstrate, globally speaking, a definite satisfaction with the opportunity that they were given to go to school and learn. In the interviews, a certain pride in what they have accomplished shows through, as Ladji illustrates:

When I arrived [at the welcome center], they [showed me my written name] and asked me 'this is your first name?' I said "yes", but I didn't know that it was my name, that it was my first

name! I didn't know! But now, I first learned to speak French [at the welcome center], to write, to read, then go to school. [...] I was never educated in my country. After arriving in France, I went to school, received my electrician certification, and that's a huge success for me! [...] I would never have imagined before that I would get to that point!

More educated, the separated children in Canada are more likely to experience the feeling of loss of social status that emerges, as H. Eckert¹⁶ indicates, from *"the incapacity [among individuals whose familial and social paths had been interrupted] to maintain, in the social sphere, those positions that they had acquired and the advantages that come with them"*. This phenomenon is regularly investigated among adults and individuals with degrees seeking asylum who must, in the host country, come to terms with the non-recognition of their professional experience and accept a job for which they may feel over-qualified. This feeling of loss of social status can be found, in a different form, among the adolescents who, like adults, arrive in the host country and sometimes must accept being placed in a lower grade level at school. Placements in welcoming classes, even if they are necessary for learning French or for addressing certain gaps, may also be felt as painful experiences due to the fact they place students on the margins of the regular school system. For example, Mike claims to have "wasted time in going to welcoming classes" for a two-year period, a "stupid" requirement according to this youth who, in Angola, was educated in the privileged and elitist context of the French secondary school system.

The social workers in Montreal also agree that these young people had difficulty accepting placement in a class at a lower level than the one they had reached in their country of origin. This required them not only to repeat material, but also to work alongside classmates who were several years younger than them. This is confirmed by a separated child interviewed by C. Montgomery¹⁷. It must be pointed out that the obligation for immigrants to be educated in the French language, as required by Bill 101, puts young Anglophones, or those coming from countries like India where English is commonly used, at a disadvantage. If they so desire, they may register in an English program at the postsecondary, but they are required by law to learn in a French environment at the secondary level.

What separated children go through in Quebec, in terms of the educational experience and educational orientation, is nevertheless part of a "classic" immigration experience, while their counterparts in France must,

¹⁶ ECKERT, Henri. *Le déclassement des jeunes sur le marché du travail, du concept à sa mesure*.

¹⁷ MONTGOMERY, *op. cit.*

according to them, acquire strategies for obtaining the proof of educational and professional integration that they have to provide once they reach the age of majority. But what the two populations share are time and calendar constraints, even if the repercussions are not at all the same for one group as they are for the other.

Educational temporality: constraints

Two distinct calendars regulate the educational experiences of separated children, whether in France or Quebec: on the one hand, the particular calendar of the different schools and establishments and on the other, the calendar of the legalization process. For these young people, the challenge is to harmonize these two calendars.

Within the Montreal group, the issue of timing is addressed mainly once the youth intends to register to post-secondary education. At the secondary level, enrollment may occur throughout the year, when the adolescent, once settled and living in the host country, contacts the school board in their area. It is at the post-secondary level that the calendar for the immigration process is superimposed on the schedule of the academic calendar.

In order to become students, Ana and Doriane had developed diverse strategies with the goal of finding an optimal convergence of the two calendars. At the end of November, after having just left the welcome center where she was staying, Ana was going to apply immediately to a university for a September start date, acting on information learned while attending an open-house at the institution. Her appearance before the Immigration and Refugee Board was to take place in September and she did not know at that moment whether or not the university would accept her or, above all, whether she would be able to attend university, as only refugee status would grant her the possibility of receiving financial aid. In order to optimize her chances of integration and successfully conforming to the selection criteria, this young woman made her way into a school for adults in order to take some French courses and work on her English at home. As her appearance before the Immigration and Refugee Board was then rescheduled to an earlier date, she was able to register in university the following September as a permanent resident and could then benefit from scholarships and bursaries. For Doriane, who arrived in August, everything happened very quickly and she began her studies at the beginning of the following year thanks to the date of her audience being moved forward, but above all due to the risk she took in applying for university without being sure that she would be able to afford the international student fees. This was a calculated risk as this

young woman only registered in two courses in order to be certain that she would be able to pay for them. For both of them, juggling their calendars was remembered as an important stress factor.

For the youth in France, the main worry was not about compromising their studies due to financing, but rather about compromising their stay due to not being able to coordinate their academic calendar with the legalization process. These teenagers only have approximately 18 months after arrival before they reach the age of majority (eighteen); however, the data exposes that it commonly takes them twelve months to find them a placement in a technical program adapted for non-Francophones or for un-undereducated students. Most often, they must wait while taking courses provided by welcome centers. These courses do offer the opportunity to learn French and to return to an educational environment, but they are in no way comparable to formal education. During this time period, the legalization date also approaches.

Rajiv's tale of his educational experience illustrates this state of affairs and emphasizes some of the obstacles he encountered:

[When I arrived,] the first thing I was told to do was to learn to speak French. I took some courses [at a welcome center]. Then, I wanted to get work painting because I had already done this type of work in India. [...] First, I passed a placement exam for high school. And they told me "There is no spot for you here. Because you are 17 years old, we can't give you a spot right now." After this, I passed [another] exam [in a training center]. I was accepted, but I didn't have an employer [which is a requirement of the program]! And therefore, I was forced to return [to the welcome center]. I stayed [at the welcome center] for another year. [...] That next year, I passed the entrance exam for the painting program. This time, I was able to take the program because a social worker [from the welcome center], she found an employer for me. [...] When I began my training, I received my work authorization. [But for the resident permit], the first time, it was negative. So I told myself I had no luck. [...] We appealed [which technically allowed him to stay legally in France while waiting for the answer]. It didn't work. Then we made an appeal before a court. It took two years. [...] I got my diploma. [...] But I didn't have my papers. I couldn't sleep. [...] I didn't stop. I continued on each time. I asked my boss if I could start a [higher diploma] because I still didn't have any papers! And the papers, finally, my papers came January 21!

In a true race against time, Rajiv received his residency permit two weeks before his social service coverage, the only real support on which he could count in France, ran out.

For those young people who had good marks in school, the end of social coverage also signals the end of the time dedicated to education. Issa, who arrived illiterate, regrets that he was not able to continue his education, particularly since he was found to be very bright: *“I ask myself ... because my contract was coming to an end with the [social assistance], well I started working but I wondered why I didn’t get another diploma, [a higher one]. I would have liked to be supported long enough to get this higher diploma”*.

In Quebec, the young immigrants that we have met count on the support of their host family, as Doriane’s older sister, who is responsible for her, explains. While she takes care of her youngest sister’s material and financial needs, all that she asks of her is to work and succeed in her studies. Just like everyone, her young sister has *“the right to make mistakes”* and to doubt about the direction that she is taking; her hesitations are being fully accepted by her supporting family.

Failures and successes

How, after several years in the host country, does the education of separated children end? The data collected does not allow us to establish a complete comparison of these two regions in France and Quebec. However, it does allow for some possible answers to come to light.

According to the social workers in Montreal, almost all of the youth monitored obtained “good” educational results, or at least received a normal education according to their ability. Of the 32 participants, only three were identified as having difficulties in school due to a lack of motivation and one youth was not able to successfully complete his studies due to a severe addiction problem. Of the three young people interviewed, two had completed their university year and the third was not able to receive his high school diploma after accidentally losing his immigration documents. In spite of the absence of data on this subject, one can expect the results of separated children to be comparable to the results of the immigrant population as a whole.

Within the French sample on the other hand, there is a high failure of completion rate. Indeed, among the 25 youth who had access to training, only twelve received their diploma. More than half of the young people therefore did not manage to complete their professional training, while the national average for successfully obtaining this type of diploma is more than 80% (2012). This significant failure can be explained not only by the families and social situations of these young people, namely the particular quality of the life they live, but also by an important discrepancy between, on the one hand, the initial level of education of the young immigrants, of

whom a number are allophones and/or have serious educational gaps and, on the other hand, the level they are supposed to attain a very few years later. Considering the profile of young immigrants, their experience and level attained corresponding to the level that must be attained by Francophones educated in France, the rate of success on exams, although weak, indicates a significant effort to integrate educationally.

Whatever it may be, the “success” or “failure” of these young people should not be evaluated according to whether or not they received their diploma. Some of them demonstrate pride in their accomplishments, taking pleasure in being “like everyone else”, in learning how to read and write, in working and paying rent. For Tomas, who never managed to enter a formal program, and instead “clung to” the courses offered by the welcome center, success is learning how to take advantage of the social services that allowed him to escape the delinquency of his youth and avoid returning to prison. For him, this is all part of growing into being a responsible citizen.

To conclude

The right to education and the right to equality of opportunity are two of the rights both Canada and France have committed themselves to by signing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, these rights are clearly in conflict with immigration rights. In Quebec separated children are more quickly granted (or refused) status. While a more rapid response time than France allows them to more fully invest emotionally in their new life in Canada, it remains that the onus is on the unaccompanied minors to carve out a life. This is not easy for any teenager with very few family supports in place. Ana points out that she felt “*all alone not knowing where to start*”, in spite of the assistance provided by social workers and her host family.

Isolated children in France are equally alone with their responsibility, even if all stress the devotion of the educational teams that surrounded them in the welcome centers. However, contrary to their Quebec counterparts, they must be aware of the fact that their societal integration in the host country is essential and conditional in part on their right to legally stay in the host country. They must therefore zigzag between helping and hindering factors which intertwine in a complex pattern around them, reflecting the tension between the antagonistic policies of help, integration and protection on the one hand, and immigration control on the other.

Whether they made the choice to settle in France or Quebec, and whatever the obstacles met along the way, all talk about their gratitude towards the host country, which, according to them, appears to be particu-

larly protective, especially when compared with their country of origin. Rajiv's comments praising France in spite of the substantial difficulties associated with legalization and education that he met are particularly eloquent:

[This country] gave me everything! It helped me! And, it's not my country, but it accepted me. Like when I arrived, I was all alone. It accepted me like family, wow! Back home, it's not like that. This country has done more for me than my parents, you see! It helped me every time!

This study, nevertheless, only deals with the experiences of those youth who, in one manner or another, succeeded in seizing the outstretched hand of social services, a feat which is not accomplished by every separated child in France and Quebec. Some of them remain on the margins of a system they do not trust, while others distance themselves and do not find adequate support.

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Resumo

A integração escolar de menores separados: uma comparação entre as situações em França e Quebec

Este artigo se propõe de investigar as experiências educacionais de trinta e duas crianças separadas (menores não acompanhados em busca de refúgio) em duas regiões distintas: a região Ile-de-France (Paris) da França e da província de Quebec, no Canadá. O estudo permite uma melhor compreensão do papel e do lugar que a educação tem no processo de integração destes jovens migrantes vulneráveis.

Palavras chave: *crianças em situação de perigo, imigração, menores não acompanhados.*

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