Diversity and Precarity in the Workplace
How Location Matters for both Individuals and Organizations

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Résumé :

This paper discusses how young workers engaged in mediated employment relationships overcome their territorial disadvantage in a French context. I contribute to theory development on the interrelationship of work and employment processes with the way disadvantaged persons challenge Labor Market inequalities. I draw on two life stories collected from a workplace's ethnography to illustrate how location plays an important role in both the creation and the lack of opportunities. Whereas the initial residential location constrains the possibilities for the educational attainment in France, the client's workplace enables external workers to demonstrate competences even with mediated employment relationships. My study contributes to research on critical diversity by showing how these disadvantaged young people achieve to get high status jobs in a context where higher education diplomas are required. Through mechanisms including the negotiation of challenging missions in the client's workplace and competences development, external workers may take advantage of a work situation despite their precarious employment status. However, other diversity-related attributes such as gender and ethnic origin hamper the capability of stabilizing in a high status job for the educational background disadvantaged. This study offers some potential development in the critical research on space and territoriality in strategic management.

Mots-clés : territorial disadvantage, workplace, critical diversity studies, mediated employment relationships

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INTRODUCTION

In the past ten years, companies have been dealing with diversity in the workforce, trying to encourage so-called minorities to be hired or promoted in workplaces. Minorities have been defined with regards to the standard of a white, western, middle/upper class man (Zanoni, Janssens, Benshop, and Nkomo, 2010). Now, some conclusions stemming from the critical diversity studies call for a better understanding of the relationships between work processes and diversity construction (Zanoni, 2011). To date, the diversity studies have focused on employees of the company managed through organizational HR processes (Zanoni, Janssens, Benshop and Nkomo, 2010). However, companies' current situation shows a significative blending of regular employees and external workers such as temporary workers or contracted workers (Kalleberg, 2000, 2009). However, by looking at the so-called minorities among regular employees, we are not accounting for external workers belonging to the same minorities. Thus, taking a critical agent-centered perspective on diversity and precarity appears as a promising way to tackle both the employment status and the standard employee defined by the diversity literature. Since Dubet (2003) recognizes the juvenile experience as the expression of the most profound tensions in our society, I suggest looking at how young people being different from the standards access to education and then find a job using intersectionality as a key method. The initial residential location appears as a critical dimension in the educational attainment. Two narratives embedded in the ethnography of a workplace make us understand how these two persons achieve to get a high status job without having the required diploma. Whereas one of them managed to reach a career pattern 'integration into stable employment' (Roulleau-Berger, 2003b), the other lost the high status job to join the career pattern 'adaptation to precarious employment (Roulleau-Berger, 2003b). The negotiation of interesting missions in the client's workplace and competences creation

allow these young persons to overcome disadvantages related to their educational background. However, individual differences appear depending on the diversity-related features. The intersectional approach describes the interplay between gender, social and ethnic origin and residential location. The paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, I present the theoretical background articulating critical diversity studies with the literature on nonstandard work. In the second part, I display the methods I used to collect and analyze the qualitative material. In the third part, I present the findings according to a chronological order: the educational background, the way to learn how to deal with mediated employment relationships and the competences gained while being a long-standing external worker. The fourth part discusses the mechanisms revealing first the importance of the location in both the disadvantages' construction and the opportunities creation. Second the other diversity-related features may explain the adoption of a career pattern based on the adaptation to precarious employment.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The way employers deal with the flexibilization of the workforce has led to dramatic consequences both in the Labor Market with the growth of precarious work (Kalleberg, 2009) and inside companies with the blending of permanent workers and outside workers (Kalleberg, 2003). In addition to this, women and minorities are more represented in the Labor Market but despite some progress they still suffer from segregation in low-level, undervalued positions (Kalev, 2009). Critical diversity studies have focused on the diversity management in companies and develop theory about disadvantaged employees' struggle for better opportunities (Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, and Nkomo, 2010). This literature thus offers an opportunity to bridge inequalities issues in the Labor Market and the way workers with diversity-related features evolve in the workplace.

1.1. TO BE OR NOT TO BE… A WHITE, WESTERN, MIDDLE/UPPER CLASS, ABLED MAN EMPLOYED WITH A STANDARD WORK ARRANGEMENT

Two standards underlie today's representations of the employee in a company. The first one is discussed in the diversity literature. It states a majority of white, western, middle/upper class, abled men by contrast with persons lacking one of these features (Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, and Nkomo, 2010). Gender, ethnic origin, disability, social origin, educational background and residential location are the features studied in the diversity literature. A second standard is discussed in the literature tackling the issue of work and employment. The

standard employee is supposed to work full-time under the direct supervision of his employer with a permanent contract (Kalleberg, 2000). According to these two literatures, the standard employee is then a white, western, middle/upper class, abled man with a standard employment arrangement. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the critical diversity studies by investigating one of the core aspects of organizations (Zanoni, 2011) embedded in the employment relationship. It has shifted from the generalization of a standard, bringing security and certainty after World War II, to a variety of situations (Kalleberg, 2000). The precarious employment represents the downside of the workplace flexibility (Kalleberg, 2009). If everybody agrees to state that minorities are more likely to experience precarious employment, no empirical studies in management have linked the challenge of inequalities and the employment relationship. Moreover, Janssens and Zanoni (2014) raise the issue of the employment relationship as an important setting to improve equality in the workplace.

1.1.1. Learning from so-called minorities in the workplace : how they can create opportunities despite their disadvantages.

Critical Diversity Studies bring a counterpoint from Diversity Management Studies in three fundamental ways: the demonstration of an implicit standard, the recognition of the context's role in shaping the meaning of identities and the contestation of the power issue avoidance (Zanoni, Janssens, Benshop, and Nkomo, 2010). The standard on which is based the diversity management creates a standard employee as being a white, heterosexual, western, middle/upper class, abled man. Moreover, these categories are taken for granted with pre-established identities such as man/woman, western/people of color, abled/disabled and so on. Minorities are defined by these identities leading to categories such as women, ethnic minorities, Black people, Maghrebi-an people, the Disabled, the Homosexuals, the Muslims and so on. Critical Diversity Studies bring back the role of the context in the meaning construction of these identities. For instance, Zanoni and Janssens (2007) studied how ethnic minority employees react to material and discursive controls in their workplaces. They show how some employees find opportunities of micro emancipation in the workplace. Then, as the diversity management avoids tackling the power relations that exist between the majority and the minority groups, the critical management studies highlight new kinds of power dynamics between them.

To date, the critical diversity literature lets quite unaddressed the issue of the diversity in nonstandard work arrangement. The flexible organization of the workplace has led to both the rise of nonstandard workers (Kalleberg, 2003) and the generalization of team work instead of

segregated jobs (Kalev, 2009). Kalev (2009) predicts thus some positive consequences for disadvantaged employees due to their participation into work team: "People collaborate and cooperate rather than give and accept assignments. Previously invisible and undervalued workers now voice their opinions on important issues or perform tasks no one thought they could. New types of relations between advantaged and disadvantaged groups are more likely to evolve under these conditions. We need to think about how to structure relations at work in a way that will disrupt the reproduction of stereotypes and group boundaries." (Kalev, 2009:1631). If standard employees with diversity-related features may expect opportunities in the flexible workplace, I suggest raising the issue for nonstandard workers. According to Kalleberg (2003), nonstandard workers find some stability and career opportunities depending on their individual control over skills and their autonomy in performing tasks.

The way nonstandard workers may create opportunities in the flexible workplace encompasses at least diversity-related features and skills management. O'Mahony & Bechky (2006) studied how contractors built their career in external markets. They suggest the career progression paradox as a central phenomenon for both standard employees and contract workers. This paradox is defined as the gap between current skills and expected ones to get a new job allowing career progression. O'Mahony & Bechky (2006) demonstrate how workers cope with this paradox by doing 'stretchwork' in order to bridge proven skills with new ones. The authors pointed out that the regular employees could be observed by their employers in the workplace and be given a job for which they don't have the required skills yet. They can be detected as valuable for advanced jobs and helped by the life-long training programs of the company. However, contract workers perform far from their employers' eyes. They need to develop tactics to do stretchwork such as differentiating competences, acquiring referrals, framing and bluffing and discounting.

1.1.2. The disadvantaged are more likely to experience precarious employment

The second standard shaping the representation of the employee relies on a full-time, permanent employment relationship in which the work is done under direct supervision of the employer (Kalleberg, 2000). The use of nonstandard work arrangements has increased since the eighties taking a wide variety of situations from part-time work and fixed-term contract to mediated employment relationships and independent work. Part-time work and fixed-term contract both imply being employed by the company and working for it. Mediated employment arrangements such as temporary help agency work or contracted work mean for the employee to work in a company which is not his employer but his employer's client.

Mediated employment relationships have a strong impact on the work experience of the employee. First, these arrangements imply working at the client's workplace and so collaborating with the client's employees. Second, there is generally a fixed-term period of time defined by the contract with the client company. These two characteristics lessen the possibility of stability and future's predictability. In this sense, the mediated employment relationships are often related to precarious employment. As Kalleberg (2009) stated, "The proportion of temporary workers [in the US] remains a relatively small portion of the overall labor force, but the institutionalization of the temporary help industry increases precarity because it makes us all potentially replaceable" (Kalleberg, 2009:8). Morever, the precarity is stronger for certain part of the workforce. The young workers are particularly exposed. In the European Union, 40% of the wage workers under 30 are temporary worker either with fixed-term contracts or in temporary help agencies (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working conditions, 2012).

The different national Labor regulations show some commonalities despite the strong differences in the Labor Laws (Kalleberg, 2000). In all western countries, the Temporary Help Agency employs temporary workers to have them work in a client company. The employment relationship exists only between the agency and the worker and usually is a fixed-term contract. The Temporary help agency has a commercial contract with the client company. Contract work includes all the companies proving services such as IT support, facilities management, usually described as periphery functions. These companies have commercial contracts with their client companies. These contracts include bringing the workforce in the client's workplace.

External workers are part of the flexible workforce in the way companies displace the employer's responsibility on a third company –either a temporary help agency or a contract company. Kalleberg and Marsden (2005) call the external workers those who they are performing day-to-day tasks side-by-side with regular employees but are not employed by the company. So, all the workers who don't have a permanent contract with the company in which they work are external workers. As such, they are not in the scope of the Human Resources management of the company and thus are not selected, promoted and rewarded in the same way as regular employees are.

In terms of diversity management, the companies usually focus on their regular employees, hiding then a growing population of external workers. As said before, mediated employment relationships are often seen as more precarious than the standard employment relationship.

6

So, disadvantaged persons are more likely to find such employment arrangement than a standard employment contract. The young workers are more and more dependent of their educational backgrounds (Kalleberg, 2009). In France, the National Labor Statistics Organization (INSEE) stated in 2011 that more than 25% of non-graduates were unemployed, whereas more than 10% having professional or baccalaureate-level diplomas were unemployed. The unemployment rate decreases for young people having higher education diplomas. The young workers appear as a disadvantaged group in the Labor Market especially for non-graduates. In this way, Dubet (2003) suggests that studying how the young people deal with the tensions of the Labor Market gives insight to its whole functioning: "contemporary juvenile experience in France today may be analyzed in the expression of the most fundamental tensions in our society […] youth experience may be seen as the products of what our societies have the most fundamentally to offer under the dual aspect of cultural liberalism and economic liberalism." (Dubet, 2003:41).

1.2. **STUDYING YOUNG WORKERS' INTEGRATION IN THE LABOR MARKET**

The literature shows that educational background, age and social and ethnic origins are major sources of inequalities in the Labor Market (Dubet, 2003;Kalleberg, 2009; Roulleau-Berger, 2003). The case of France is interesting because there are both public policies helping young people to enter the Labor Market (Roulleau-Berger, 2003a) and a barrier for nongraduates to get high status jobs (Lopez and Thomas, 2006). In term of ethnic diversity, Noiriel (2004) studied the various waves of immigration in France. He states that one French person out of three has at least one foreign ascendant. Among the EU countries, France has an average percentage of persons born outside the country but differs strongly regarding the proportion of French born from at least one migrant parent. Among people with French nationality aged from 25 to 54 years old, approximately 14% have at least one parent born abroad, making France the first EU state in terms of mixing. Since Lopez and Thomas (2006) demonstrate that the educational background matters more to get a permanent job than the social and ethnic origin, having a weak educational background is a disadvantage even for people from the white, middle/upper class group. Conversely, the most important difficulty encountered by young people from disadvantaged social origins is to reach a good educational background in order to access stable employment (Bourdieu&Passeron, 1990; Dubet, 2003). Then studying the whole process of education, Labor Market integration and workplace interactions for young people allow grasping mechanisms leading to both disadvantages and opportunities creation.

Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction describes how the education system sustains the reproduction of the existing social order (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In France, the obligation to enroll children in the school nearest to the parent's residence has led to an urban structuring based on school's reputation. As a result, middle and upper class neighborhoods adjoin the best public schools. On the other hand, schools located in poor neighborhood become bad schools because the economic difficulties of the families pervade the school system as well (Fack & Grenet, 2010). According to other studies, some evidence has been found supporting that a similar pattern may exist also in the US and in Europe (Epple & Romano, 2003; Figlio & Lucas, 2004).

My research question is then how the social construction of differences interplays with the employment issues in the person's life and in the workplace? My aim is to show how educational background disadvantaged persons may challenge inequalities to enjoy greater opportunities in their jobs. Following the call made by Zanoni (2011), I suggest using an agent-centered perspective to better understand the constraints experienced by nonstandard minority workers and the opportunities they achieve to find despite their disadvantages.

2. METHODS

2.1. LIFE-STORIES TO NARRATE DIVERSITY AND PRECARITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Studies on the intersectionality of the diversity features for nonstandard employees hardly exist. Following the call made by Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop and Nkomo (2010), "Applied to organizations, intersectionality allows connecting multiple work identities to wider social phenomena, leading to a more fine-grained analysis of processes of identity construction and the underlying power relations […] Although the importance of intersectionality is widely recognized, relatively few empirical studies have applied this concept to organizations." (Zanoni et al., 2010: 16). Therefore, an explorative approach is applied in which life-stories of nonstandard workers who consider themselves different, are our starting point for our knowledge. Ethnographic accounts of the narrators' workplace bring some external material to put into perspective the narration.

Using life stories in addition to ethnographic accounts is a classical but controversial method in anthropology (Peacock & Holland, 1993). Moreover, the use of life stories for themselves has been varied in the social sciences (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984). Bertaux and Kohli (1984) take a basic definition of the life story as a narrative of someone's life or relevant parts of it. They suggest three important dimensions to specify each life story approach: the number of life

stories, the orientation toward subjectivity or objectivity and the researcher's claim related to the use of the life stories. In my approach, I used two life stories embedded in a fieldwork conducted in the headquarters of a French company. Only two stories were excerpted from the whole field data because they represented an extreme case where nongraduate nonstandard workers achieve to get high status permanent jobs. As this achievement contradicts previous findings (Lopez & Thomas, 2006) and theories (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), it justifies the interest of deepening a few numbers of stories instead of multiplying them. The subjective orientation is used to restitute the person's own narration detailing long excerpt of interviews and summaries written by the researcher to help the reader understand. My claim as a researcher is in line with the Critical Management Studies' tradition aiming at making some voices heard by the general public (Fournier & Grey, 2000). As the critical diversity studies have focused on regular employees and not external workers in the workplace, I contribute to shed light on individual trajectories traditionally hidden.

The empirical material includes some accounts from an ethnographic study and specific interviews conducted recently. I first came in contact with the persons during a participant observation in a large French company. From 2009 to 2011, I did a two-year and a half participant observation at the facilities department located in the company headquarters. The initial study focused on the collaboration between the regular employees and the nonstandard workers. However some of my observations stated the issue of diversity management as one important project for the company, in the corporate communication at least. I was surprised to observe how the company was considering the diversity management only for its regular employees. As the department in which I was participant observer counted several external workers, I stated that these people were much more 'diverse' than the regular employees. If only 30% of the regular employees were women, they were more than a half of the temporary workers. The contract workers performing the cleaning and the catering were a majority from African and Maghrebi-an origin.

2.2. DATA COLLECTION AND SELECTION OF TWO LIFE STORIES

For the previous study, I collected data on individual trajectories of external workers. I studied the evolution in the company of five temporary workers, six contracted workers and five students having apprenticeship contracts or internship agreements. Among them, two persons were feeling different from the other external workers. They expressed forms of disadvantages and their will to create better job opportunities. Both of them were nongraduates. A young woman felt different because despite her social origin of Métis living

in a stigmatized neighbourhood of the North Urban Periphery of Paris, she was fighting to get a permanent job. A young man expressed his difference by coming from the poor countryside of the Paris' region and by being self-educated in IT. These two paths are of particular interest because they achieved at one point to get a high status job. So, I came back to them in April 2014 to interview them and build their life story.

In a similar way as Essers and Benschop (2009) did, I paid attention to the narratives' coproduction by my former colleagues and me as a researcher. As we met in a professional context, we share some common meanings of the company and we spent some times having breaks together. The two informants knew each other but they didn't keep in touch. I shared some events and lunch with them. Our relationships are thus friendly. This proximity and knowledge about the workplace's context allowed me to first, better understand their experience of working there and second, to be able to triangulate some information. The various dates and periods were checked with the employment contracts in one case and with the CV in the second one.

2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

I used the framework defined by Roulleau-Berger (2003a, 2003b), to cross the diversity-related features in an intersectional approach. The author studied how young people integrate into the Labor Market in France. She suggests four organizational principles explaining differentiation and individualization of young people's career: the alternation principle, the disjunction principle the superimposition principle and the reversibility principle (Roulleau-Berger, 2003a, 2003b). The alternation principle is the succession and linking of various forms of work. Roulleau-Berger (2003a) stated that this principle is more dominant for young men of European origin than young women of Maghrebi-an origin. The disjunction principle describes the types of jobs and the eventual gap between the forms and nature of atypical employment. The superimposition principle appears when there are various forms of work and employment simultaneously. The reversibility principle acknowledges the repetition of change in the situation from precarious work into unemployment and vice and versa. Roulleau-Berger (2003a) found it was the most dominant pattern for young men of Maghrebi-an origin.

These principles help defining some types of career for young people in France (Roulleau-Berger, 2003a, 2003b). I used two types in particular to analyze the narratives: "insertion into stable employment" and "adaptation to precarious employment" [author's translations]. The career pattern "insertion into stable employment" (Roulleau-Berger, 2003b) includes strong

alternation and superimposition principles and weak disjunction and reversibility principles. This means that the young people have consecutive atypical contracts such as fixed-term contracts or temporary agency contracts for equivalent jobs. So they can gain some work experience and hope to build competences that can be rewarded by a permanent contract. The superimposition principle plays here as a competence enhancer for young people involved in the non-profit sector for instance. While being volunteers, they develop some skills that can improve or value the skills they need in their jobs. The second career pattern "adaptation to precarious employment" includes a strong alternation principle and weak superimposition, disjunction and reversibility principles. Roulleau-Berger (2003b) precised this pattern is relevant for either undergraduates or young people with a professional background. The young people experience multiple short period of unemployment, consecutive "slave's jobs" mixed with middle status jobs. They practice associative and cultural activities on an irregular basis beside precarious work. These definitions helped me analyze the two life stories to find mechanisms associated to one or the other career pattern.

2.4. THE FIELD CONTEXT: A LARGE FRENCH COMPANY USING EXTERNAL WORKERS IN A POST-MERGER SITUATION

I call the company Gamma Sigma in the text. The company was newly merged. Gamma was a former energy state-owned company and Sigma was a holding specialized in the energy sector. Once merged, Gamma Sigma became one of the leading utilities in the world. The post-merger context leads to some important reorganizations and relocations of buildings which impacted at least the facilities and the IT departments. During this period, lots of nonstandard workers worked at Gamma Sigma. One of the causes was the hiring freeze put in place by the top management especially for the periphery functions such as HR, accounting, finance and facilities management.

The French employment norm is a CDI standing for Contrat à Durée Indéterminée which is a permanent contract preventing companies to lay off employees without 'real and serious cause' (Rebeyrol, 2014). All kinds of arrangements differing from the CDI are called "atypical contracts". The Labor Law is really strict regarding the use of temporary help agency and contractors. Inside companies, the difference between regular employees and atypical workers appears clearly. Here is why; they are called external workers and are often distinguished through different badges, uniforms, office location and access to the company's facilities (Jacob, 2013).

I was myself an external worker integrated in a team with regular employees and other external workers. Temporary workers and contract workers represented the most part of the external workers. In France, the temporary worker has a fixed-term contract with the temporary help agency for a duration equivalent to the time given by the client company for the mission. The fixed-term contract is called CDD which stands for Contrat à Durée Déterminée. Contract workers are employed by a contract company which has a commercial contract with a client company. The commercial contract usually defines a service which is provided by contract workers in the client's workplace.

3. FINDINGS

The presentation of the narratives follows a chronological order and is divided into three parts: the initial school path related to the residential location, the insertion period into the Labor Market and the long employment period at Gamma Sigma as an external worker. Thomas is now IT engineer in a consultancy firm. His current client is one of the leading banks in France. He comes from the countryside in the Paris' region and doesn't have higher education diploma in engineering. He defines himself as a self-educated. His achievement is all the more striking in France because the IT consultancy firms are likely to hire master's graduates or IT engineer. Sarah got a consultant's job in office management with the same status as her counterparts who graduated from master's degree. She got into trouble with both her employer and the corporate client for different reasons. In the end, she was dismissed. Interestingly, she applied to another consultant job and was rejected because of her lack of educational background. Looking back, this unexpected consulting experience was a rare opportunity.

3.1. THE MAKING OF DIVERSITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INITIAL RESIDENTIAL AREA IN THE SCHOOL PATH

Thomas is 33. He was born in 1981 in a middle-size city, 70 km far from Paris (43 Milles). His parents were part of the biker community. He grew up in a village and moved to a neighboring city, when he was 15. His parents separated and Thomas lived with his mother. The description he makes of this High School years shows his construction of a different identity:

> At the time I was in high school, it was a shit situation. The guys from the cité next door went down to my town to shatter people with iron bars. They fight between rivals cités […] There were lots of tensions especially among all the subcultures: the young hard rock fans, the punks and so on. […] As for me, I was by the metalheads. […] I have been in there since I was 13. […] Being a metalhead, at that time, implied

lots of things like being a "blouson noir" in the 50's in France. So we weren't disturbed. We weren't so many but they knew it was not a good idea to bother us. […] My parents were bikers, so I was used to [certain subcultures]. [The Metal is] a subculture with some codes. After, I have always lived that as a way to be respected. Because, you must know that contrary to what is often said, the metalheads environment seems to be very messy but there are fundamental rules which were extremely [strict]… half of them acted as they were knights. There are some excess but it's seldom. The honour was important as a principle and a value.

In his free time, Thomas finds that reading is essential. Reading is for him a mean to learn. He said: "I am a self-educated, huh at 100%, at 200%. I assembled and disassembled fridges at the age of 8. […] I read a lot. I read the Divine Comedy at 13." Nevertheless, Thomas chose a scientific direction for his education because "I have a grand uncle who is chemistry engineer. I liked science so I decided to do that". He achieved to get his scientific high school diploma but with average grades:

> It was a huge joke. I wanted to enter a "prepa" [preparation to the competitive exam to integrate the best French schools] and graduate from an engineer school, the classical curriculum, huh. It happened that my grades were too low. I thought I would redo the last high school year and so I didn't prepare the exams. […] When I came to get the results, there were those who were happy and those who were crying and as for me, I came and "holly shit, the idiots gave it to me". […] After this, it has been very difficult to find a prépa because of my average grades. I finally achieved to find one in the main city of the county, physics, chemistry, and engineer science. It was a small prépa that was not known. I spent one year there which was extremely chaotic. It ended with a final point for me when I broke my arm. I didn't finish the first year program. […] I had not so good grades and psychologically, I had trouble with being at the dorm. There were lots of things at that time. Psychologically, I was not made for that. I learnt the course very easily but I always had the blank page's terror. It's the thing that has always killed me in exam. [I didn't have friends there] because socially speaking, it was extremely rare to see young people from my town going in prépa. I was out of luck, as I registered at the end [of the inscriptions] I was not in the same dorm as my classmates. As a result, I was with another group, all this didn't work in my favour and it was not made for me. A posteriori, I am very happy to have flunked when I see what the outcomes of engineer schools are. By the way, I believe it was at that time, I decided to become an engineer without graduating from an engineer school. At the beginning, I wanted to pass the exams but no, it's not fast enough.

In Thomas' situation, the initial ambition was to become an engineer because he liked science and his grand uncle was a chemical engineer. Belonging to the subculture of the Metalheads nourished his desire to read more about Metal-related knowledge and more generally to learn about topics he likes such as IT, mechanical and electronics. According to him, it was a way to be respected by and protected from the other young people either parts of other subcultures or coming from the cités. Among his metalhead friends, reading was encouraged, as they considered important to grow their knowledge contrary to the guys from the cité who hanged

out and did nothing "seated at a bus stop". Thomas was well aware of the classical curriculum of engineer studies, and he knew that he needed to apply to prépa after high school, which would not be possible without excellent grades. That is why he was willing to repeat his final year to get better grades in order to increase his chances to enter a prépa. He finally got the French high school diploma without great difficulty and entered a prepa close to his home. He experienced a failed a class and quitted the program but didn't give up his professional project. This event sustained his identity claim of being a self-educated and his project to become an engineer without graduating from an engineering school. The difference here lies in the educational background and a self-identity inspired by the metalhead subculture. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), Thomas lacked from social support given by his family and his school to succeed in prépa.

Sarah is 30. She was born in 1984 when her mother was just 19. They both lived in a house for single young women having a baby. Her mother was of Spanish origin and gave her family name to the baby since the father was living in Algeria. He died a few years after her birth. She was told he died in a car crash but she learnt when she was a teenager that in fact he died of a drug overdose. Her mother married with another Algerian man. They had two children. Sarah calls them "my brother and my sister" even if they have only the same mother. Same goes with the father in law, Sarah calls him "my Dad". She speaks about "my family" to describe the relationships she has with them.

> I feel, we are [like] gypsies, except that gypsies have their community to support them so they keep in touch. I stopped talking to my [natural] grand-mother because after I was violently assaulted by a guy from the cité, she told me I was a shame for my family. My friends from the cité, they were muslim, they now wear the headscarf and have their husbands either in prison or lazing at home. The more time passed, the lonelier I felt. Today, my friends are colleagues with whom I have sympathized.

When it came to choose a high school, Sarah expressed a feeling of confusion:

> I felt so lonely when it came to choose what kind of high school and orientation I would do. I wanted to join a normal high school and therefore I chose a specific option in order to avoid the high school of the cité which was the worse high school in France. Once I went to high school in a city 15 km far from home, it was really hard for me because they did not have the same level. I was in the worse school of France before that and having good grades there didn't mean having a good level. I had very bad results in the first quarter. I worked like crazy. I felt very bad during that time. I achieved to improve my results and to pass the next step. I worked harder and harder. I attended all the remedial teaching. This period made me change my project. I wanted to study law after but I took the decision to follow a technical orientation by default. My friends told me that it would be easier to have good results. We moved to the South [of France] with my family. I did the first six month of the Terminale [final year of High School]

over there. Likewise in the Seconde – they had a high level. The teachers gave lots of homework to do with a computer. I didn't have a computer at home. My parents didn't have enough money to buy one. I spent lots of time at school to work. […] There was a good dynamic, we helped each other […] I achieved to quickly get an average of 12-13 [it means a "quite good" level in the French system]. Six months later, because of deceases in my family, we all moved back to Paris. Everything was going quite well. [But] we came back to the cité. We had no apartment, my family was decimated [they were separated and lived in different locations].

She came back in her former high school and got difficulties to follow the class. She worked by herself with the annals of the baccalaureate [French High School Diploma]. As she wanted to get her diploma "mention" [a specific distinction when the grades average is higher than 12/20], she decided to register right away for the next year in another high school in a city next to her home:

I really wanted a "mention". I registered at Rousseau [name of the high scool] for the next year. Finally I got it [the diploma] the first attempt; I don't know how I did it. With 10.16, the shit! I'd rather not having it. I know exactly that it [the grades] was important to enter schools. I was betting everything on this diploma to get higher opportunities.

Sarah finally opted for a two-year technological program specialized in office assistant functions. It was a constrained choice regarding the few options she had. This program was taught in a school close to her home. Her parents finally found a flat outside the cité and she lived at their place. During her studies, she started working for a company as an intern, allowing her to experience on the field theory she was leaning at school [In France, the system of "alternance" is widespread and includes part-time education at school and part-time working in a company]:

At the beginning, it went very well, my tutor was fantastic. He didn't have time [to give me work to do] so he let his assistant deal with me. She made me do a lot of photocopies. Every time she was out of office, I reorganized the work but each time she came back, she made me go back to the former organization. For school, I had to prepare homework related to the company and she refused to let me do the actions I needed to do for school. I warned the main professor and she went to see them [the company]. When she left, the assistant told me "your assignments, you're doing them all alone!". Then the assistant went crazy, she threatened to leave [the company] if I didn't leave. She had spent thirty years in the company. Her colleagues told me the same thing happened with the former intern. I was sick and tired so I wanted to leave the company. Ma main professor told me that the company was too important for the school, then if I quitted the company I quitted the school…

She stops her education in 2003. She is 19. She has the French high school diploma "baccalaureat".

Sarah's narrative reminds us of the issues faced in the French cités which Loïc Wacquant has studied for more than twenty years (Wacquant, 1993, 2007). He suggests the concept of territorial stigmatization as a territorial infamy hampering the school and job opportunities for the inhabitants (Wacquant, 2007). The territorial stigmatization appears in Sarah's narrative with the bad quality of schools and the violence in the relations. Her school is "the worse school in France". After she was violently assaulted by a guy from the cité who was close to her family, they decided to move to the South of France. It was a nice period for Sarah but unfortunately the family is called back to the cité to solve issues with their relatives. It is like they can't escape from the cité.

In the youth of our informants, some dynamics of inclusion and exclusion appear related to belongings to specific groups stemming from the urban space called 'la cité'. If Sarah grew up in a cité, Thomas witnessed the violent outcomes of its young inhabitants. Thomas' belonging to the Metalheads' subculture appear as a choice among several subcultures and as a way to be respected by the others and especially by the 'guys from the cité'. Sarah was excluded by her grand-mother once she was assaulted by a neighbor. She was ashamed and her parents decided to move the family in the South to start a new life.

3.2. EXPERIENCING PRECARITY: LEARNING THE GAME OF THE MEDIATED EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIPS

Both Thomas and Sarah started their professional lives with nonstandard work arrangement. In their particular cases, they experienced many fixed-term contracts and temporary agency contracts. They got used to mediated employment relationships and to work at their client's workplace.

Thomas spent five years at the university studying first physics and then Japanese. He failed to get a degree.

> At that point, I was fed up with the university, I gave up. I did what I wanted. I had a reflection time. I realized my skills in IT would allow me to find a job. I tried to join an IT program offering both theoretical and practical knowledge with some time spent in a company but it was such a mess at this time. They told me "you're too old" [24 years old] I gave up the idea.I was lucky, someone related to my family works for an insurance company. He was in charge of the IT support and said to me "you tell me what you can do and banco let's start". I met the contractor's CEO. The guy says "banco" [OK, let's start], "we hire you, you will earn the minimum wage" [around 900€ a month in 2005]. I did a six-month contract there. The idea was to have my first experience, to start and to find another job. After that I have a two-month unemployment period. I manage to get a small temporary help agency mission. I work for

ALPHA (an IT contractor) by the EPSILON client (leader in the electricity sector). The agency is happy [because the client is satisfied with my work].

Thomas then got then several missions with the temporary help agency. From 2005 to 2007, he did five missions with various clients and various outcomes:

> The agency calls me back for a longer mission by Gamma at its headquarters: users' training. I know nothing to this stuff. "I know you now, you will learn rapidly" the agency employee said to me.

Thomas kept working for the same temporary help agency. The agency employee knew him and found him a mission that suited him well. He started working for Gamma as a temporary worker. His first mission is to conduct users training session.

> The six weeks go smoothly. After several adventures, the agency calls me back to ensure the IT support at Gamma's headquarter for ALPHA.

To sum up this part of the story, Thomas decided to quit the education after several years spent at the university and starts looking for a job. Thomas realized that if he had not been supported by a person, he would have never found a job in IT. Without diploma and without prior experience, it can be challenging to gain trust from the recruiters, especially in France. Thomas did several jobs with fixed-term contracts or temporary assignments. He did not have a good feeling about that. He described it as a shitty period.

Sarah got lots of nonstandard employment contracts especially fixed-term contracts and temporary help assignments from 2003 to 2008.

> I worked for Air France [the French Airline company] after my Bac [High School Diploma]. They proposed me a permanent contract but I refused in order to continue my education. I was part of the hospitality staff in the company's staff restaurant. When I called them back [after having left higher education], they did not have a job for me at that time. So I took a contract with a supermarket as a cashier. […] I stopped because I didn't like the job and Air France finally proposed me a fixed-term contract. It was very nice. I learnt a lot from the organization. In the restaurant, if you are not organized, you miss the lunch. Most of the time, I was cooking the desserts and after, I worked at the cafeteria, behind the bar, I was very organized. I loved it. The company's restaurant was bought by an important catering company and they couldn't cumulate fixed-term contracts anymore. As for me, I had to move on. I hadn't work for three months. I had left to go to the South [of France]. I wanted to live over there. I was with my boyfriend, we were engaged. My wedding was cancelled; I heard he cheated on me. I went back to my parent's home. I was unemployed. So I decided to go to the local help center to do a skills' assessment. For one month, I went there every day to pass tests and all that. At the end, I was quite disappointed because the best job for me was radio presenter. I was very disappointed. I cried. Then I got some information on training for radio presenter, they were all private and very expensive! […] I went to the maison de quartier [association to organize leisure activities for the inhabitants in her parent's town] to see my friends who were animators. I had been a volunteer from 13 to 17 years old. They proposed me

to do the tutoring. I joined the cityhall with a contract of twenty hours per week. [After 4 months] there was an announcement for a job position in the housing service. I was only 19 and they fear to put me in front of a very difficult audience. They finally trusted me… I have worked for one year with a fixed-term contract. They proposed me a permanent job, [but] I was fed up. It was too difficult. I was hit in the face by a man because he was angry of the decision made. We welcomed lots of undocumented persons. Then they proposed me a job in the childhood department. I worked for 22 schools to deal with the facilities expenses. I found it awesome. My colleagues were mean to me. They were very old. When I wanted to show them how to work better, they rejected me. I was happy to leave [this job]. Then I replaced a person in maternity leave at the maison de quartier. This was the end of my contract. It meant that I earned the city hall unemployment insurance during 700 days, I earned 850 euros a month. Right after this, I worked as a temporary worker. I went back to Air France for a short mission. I found a temporary help agency close to my place, I worked as a teleoperator for an office equipment company. They proposed me a permanent contract, I had planned to go back to the South [of France], so I left again. […] [Once in the South of France] I found a seasonal contract in a libertine sauna at a naturist camp. It was hard work but I met people from the elite and a porno star. I had a problem there because my boss heard from my colleague that I was an arab. He relied on my Spanish sound name and was so disappointed to discover my Algerian origin. He suspected me to be a thief. […] I did a second season working in a beach shop. My contract was 10 hours a week and I did 35. The unemployment insurance was about to stop and I missed my family. In September 2007, I was back in Paris starting a temporary assignment in a Vocational Training office. They called me back to hire me with a 11 months fixed-term contract. After that, my temporary agency sent me at Gamma Sigma.

Sarah started in the Labor Market by calling back a previous employer. They remembered her and found her a job with a fixed-term contract. She learnt how to be "organized" and spent seven months there. She keeps good memories from this time. She got an opportunity to have a first part-time fixed-term contract at her parents' hometown city hall. She has been working for the city hall for more than two years and she knew four job positions. She then benefited from the public unemployment pension and went back to the South of France. She has been working as a seasonal worker for two years. She went back to Paris for the third time. She did one year as a temporary then fixed-term worker in a company before joining Gamma Sigma.

3.3. BEING A LONG-STANDING EXTERNAL WORKER: OPPORTUNITIES CREATION AND ACHIEVEMENTS

3.3.1. The same context: being an external worker at Gamma Sigma

Gamma Sigma was in a post-merger situation. In the peripheral activities such as IT and facilities management, the company had outsourced most parts of the activities. As a consequence 50% to 70% of the workers in these departments were external workers. Depending on the job, some external workers collaborated with regular employees of Gamma

Sigma or not. Thomas did the IT support where he was in contact with the users to solve their problems. Most of the time, Thomas was involved in the supplier-client relationship. He sometimes collaborated with other external workers but was never involved in a team. On the contrary, Sarah was hired as a temporary worker to join the team in charge of Gamma Sigma's building safety. She was supervised by a regular employee and called him "the boss". During day to day tasks, she behaved as she was a regular employee being involved in the company's project. At certain points in time, she had to deal with her temporary worker's status especially for the administrative duties the status implies and to negotiate further assignments.

The context of the post-merger brought lots of projects to organize all the changes needed to converge to a single company. Since the top management prevented from hiring new regular employees, the department managers were asked to use temporary workers and contract workers to staff their projects. Thomas and Sarah worked at Gamma Sigma during the period where external workers were hired and affected on projects because they were the only flexible human resources.

3.3.2. Thomas' experience at Gamma Sigma

After several missions as a temporary worker, Alpha, an international large IT contractor, hired Thomas through the temporary agency. He had worked for Alpha as a temporary worker for one year before getting a permanent contract in 2008. In total, Thomas had worked as an external worker on Gamma Sigma's workplace for four years. The first year he was a temporary worker employed by Alpha and the three next years he was its permanent employee. He did several jobs related to IT. As an external worker at Gamma Sigma, he was assigned to missions related to the company transformation. When Gamma Sigma set up its headquarters, Thomas was sent to perform the IT support:

> I was the only guy to ensure the IT support. I worked 10 hours a day. At the beginning I had 20 users then 200. Six months after, they [Alpha] came to me saying "we can't add a new temporary help contract, we would like to hire you". As I increased my wages progressively with the missions, I wanted to earn the same thing as with the temporary agency: 1400 euros after social charges a month.
>
> There were so many adventures. I did all and nothing. I always tried to get missions which interested me. I did the project P. because I was one of those who knew the Gamma Sigma environment the best. I went everywhere in half the region. I had 50 calls a day, I was the only support in France. In front of me, my two colleagues supposed to help me did nothing.

In 2011, he comes back to basic IT support in Gamma Sigma's new headquarters. There are fewer challenges after that time and Thomas has another project in mind. He decides to try his

luck in China. Thanks to his good relationships with his managers at Alpha, he got benefits to leave the company. He insisted several times on the importance of the relationship with his bosses to get a good mission or what he wanted. All his experience at Gamma Sigma allowed Thomas to get an important reference. The company is one of the first firms of the main stock index in France.

3.3.3. Sarah's experience at Gamma Sigma

Sarah started working at Gamma Sigma's workplace in November 2008:

> When I came to the facilities department, they paid me as if I was unqualified. I got discussions with my supervisor about the wages and [the job with was] the badges' organization. He got me total freedom and I reorganized all the processes. I made my colleagues work, they weren't used to it. There were issues with another building where contractors were doing a bad job. Afterwards I understood that I saved their jobs [by giving them a better way of doing]. I came during the merger [between Gamma and Sigma]. My organization was quite sustainable, everything was going well.

Sarah spent ten months working in the security teams of the facilities department. She had a good relationship with her direct supervisor. She had been unemployed for four months before being called back by the manager at Gamma Sigma. She didn't trust him a lot but she liked working with the direct supervisor. She started working again in the badges' entity at her previous position in November 2009. Then, the new headquarters' project included the installation of a security system based on badges' control. The current team was overwhelmed by the severe issues on security management. The manager asked Sarah to change position and join the project team in the new headquarters.

> At the beginning, we didn't know who would be in charge [of the badges management in the new headquarters]. One month before, we were told that we would be in charge. We didn't know the software. The colleague in charge was not really working. Our manager, the bastard, each time my contract was ending [he was promising me a permanent contract]… […] he himself came down to see me. [...] He proposed me to go reframe the new headquarters and to save the situation. It is really difficult to manage contractors when you are a temp. I expected a CDI before going to the new headquarters. "You don't have the choice, I ask you to go. Your contract ends the 31st of March, I ask for an amendment". He told me I would be hired after the mission.

The manager lost his managerial position in the new headquarters and decided to leave the company. Sarah wasn't hired after her mission but her temporary contract was extended. She still worked in the security team with a new manager. He wanted first to make her hire but failed. They had a conflicting relationship and opposite views of the job.

> The mission at Mach 1 was really different because we had to buy the service instead of making it. […] I was too involved. I gave too much. I heard I will leave the day before. One of the managers who have

worked with my manager, he dealt with logistics, he said in front of me my departure was damageable. I was seated and behind my back, my manager said he has done everything to keep me. I went to the toilets to cry. I met a colleague who asked me why I am crying. She has dinner with her father [who works as well at Gamma Sigma] that evening and told him my story. His father says that he just needs someone to replace a woman during a maternity leave. He calls me the day after to meet a manager. Everything goes well. I was hired by the manager as a temporary worker to deal with office IT tools.

In January 2011, Sarah changed her temporary agency because her new manager is used to work with this one. She had worked as a temporary worker in this new department of Gamma Sigma for eight months. She developed skills in office tools' management and was effective in her new job. As the legal duration of the temporary mission came to an end, her manager asked one of his contractors to hire Sarah in order to keep her working for his activities. Sarah said:

I owe him everything. If I became a consultant it's thanks to him.

She achieved to be hired with a permanent contract as a consultant in office management. This is a high status job in France and her current educational background doesn't allow her to pretend for this kind of job in the Labor Market. It was a huge opportunity for her and she was more than happy to have it. One year after, she was asked by her supervisor and other external workers to leave her employer for another one. She signed a new permanent contract, earning 1000 euros a year more than her previous contract. Unfortunately things went worse both at Gamma Sigma's workplace and with the new employer. She accused the Gamma Sigma's supervisor of harassment and alcoholism in the workplace. She heard some colleagues advised her to sleep with the supervisor to keep her position. A posteriori, she explains:

I didn't have the experience of being a consultant. My supervisor at Gamma Sigma wanted to stop working with my previous employer and my new ones only wanted to have the contract and to fire me before the end of the probationary period. It was their plan and I was so stupid not to have understood it before. I'd rather stay with my first employer. They told me when I left 'you screwed up Sarah'. And I really did it.

At the end, Sarah spent eleven months working for the first contractor and then six months for the second one. During this period, she enjoyed a high status job. However she points out the status know-how by saying "I didn't have the experience of being a consultant". She achieved to know very well how the system of temporary help agency employment actually works. She got strategies with the agency staff to be sure to have good missions. However she failed to develop suitable strategies to keep a job in the IT consultancy. Now "I'm out of this sector" she said.

Thomas is now an engineer in an engineering firm. He earns junior level salary but he would like to be rewarded for his professional experience. He has spent two years at a large French Bank to deal with the IT process reorganization. He has now the choice to have a career in IT engineering. He told me about all his friends from his parent's place, they are unemployed. Sarah got a job of consultant but failed to keep her position. Afterwards, she applied for a similar position in an IT consulting firm but during the job interview, the recruiter ended the process when she realized that Sarah haven't got a master degree. She is now temporary worker in the training sector.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Studying both diversity and precarity in the workplace unveils the importance of the location in the mechanisms of Labor Market integration. Looking at two stories of external workers feeling different from the other external workers, allow grasping the diversity-features at stake in their paths. The residential location constrains the opportunities for educational attainment because the poorer the neighborhood is the worse is the school (Eppel & Romano, 2003; Fack & Grenet, 2010; Figlio & Lucas, 2004). The reproduction pattern is sustained by the education system because the educational attainment strongly determines the job opportunities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The integration into the Labor Market depends more on the diplomas than on the social and ethnic origin in France (Lopez & Thomas, 2006). However, the social and ethnic origin are related to the residential location with some urban areas stigmatized by poverty and exclusion (Wacquant, 1993, 2007) and a countryside hit by unemployment and desertification (George, L'Horty, Sari, 2012).

Critical diversity studies have focused on the regular employees and how the human resources' processes were reproducing inequalities regarding gender, disability and ethnic minorities (Zanoni, Janssens, Benshop, and Nkomo, 2010; Zanoni, 2011). However, my study shows that ethnic and social issues are strongly intertwined in the individuals' residential context. This context strongly determined the opportunities for educational attainment. The two life stories show how the persons are aware of this situation and how they try to get a better school or a better education system. The struggle to reach a standard begins from the secondary school and the step of higher education seems crucial to the way the young will integrate the Labor Market.

Precarious employment is likely to touch nongraduates (Roulleau-Berger, 2003a). However, career patterns vary along the magnitude of four principles which are alternation,

superimposition, disjunction and reversibility (Roulleau-Berger, 2003a, 2003b). The two life stories show how the mediated employment relationships may allow some continuity in the employment contracts and thus foster the alternation. Thomas achieved to get a permanent contract with the IT contractor of Gamma Sigma and spent three years on challenging missions in Gamma Sigma's workplace. Sarah's temporary assignment to Gamma Sigma was asked again and again for a total duration of three years. The two stories tell how it is important to invest on the relationships with both the employer and the client. Garsten (2008) already noticed it to explain how temporary agency workers achieved to have some power and control over their work and their missions. The two stories show that in the French context, temporary work and contract work don't imply the same mechanisms of control. Whereas in the temporary work, Sarah and Thomas try to use the agency in order to get the missions they wish, in the contract work, the relationship with the employer includes more than the lobbying for challenging missions. It appears that Thomas demonstrated his value for the company related to the contracts he can hold and Sarah not. Once she was hired by the second employer, the contract with Gamma Sigma was signed and the employer stopped the employment contract with Sarah to put another employee working at Gamma Sigma's workplace. Sarah explained this failure by her lack of experience as a contractor and by relations' problems that appeared with the Gamma Sigma's supervisor. She asked her new employer to change her mission but they took advantage of her problem to dismiss her. The conflict with the client was the motive of the dismissal.

Taking the organizational perspective, the company workplace appears as a location where workers from various organizational affiliations and with different background collaborate to sustain the business activity. The company's space is used by individuals to get work experience and by organizations to achieve flexibility in the workforce. Further development could enrich the literature about critical perspective on space and territory in management by looking at how organizations take advantage of precarious workers in the workplace.

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