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Young Individuals as microcosmos of the Portuguese Crisis

Abstract

The Portuguese crisis affected the collective identity of the country. But the timing of life in which it strikes individual lives is significant. Quantitative figures show that young people were particularly affected by this crisis. A long run and qualitative approach provides, however, a multilayered and rather complex view of what this crisis is embedding in young people's lives and minds. In a qualitative research on "middle class" transitions to adulthood carried out in 2009, 52 young adults were interviewed about their educational, residential, occupational and romantic lives. In a follow-up study, these individuals' trajectories, plans and expectations are now updated; their past and present put in confrontation; and effects of the crisis on their lives questioned. The discussion is held in a critical approach of the theories of individualization and goes to the heart of the 'generation in itself' vs. 'generation for itself' and 'biographies of choice' vs. 'discourses of choice' debates.

Young Individuals as Microcosmos of the Portuguese Crisis

The economic crisis in Portugal can be seen as an historical landmark that affects the route of a country's collective and generational identity (Nico, 2013), but the timing of life in which is strikes also changes significantly the effect it might have in people's trajectories and understandings of those trajectories. Young people, or people at the edge of leading adult lives, have always been particularly vulnerable to any distresses in the labor market dynamics, and this crisis was no exception, quite the contrary. Young people and young adults were thus particularly and negatively affected by the crisis and more specifically by the austerity measures taken on its behalf in the past recent years. This is as far as static quantitative figures have been able to inform us about unemployment rates, about the increase in young NEETS category, and about the duration and persistence of precarious ways of living and working. But long-run and qualitative accounts of this same reality give a both more accurate and more complex view of what this crisis might be embedding in young people's lives, minds, ideals, and dreams (Nico, forthcoming).

A qualitative and biographical research on the - rather wide - "middle class" transitions to adulthood carried out in 2009 was somewhat surprised by these historical circumstances. 52 young adults between their 26 and 32 years of age were interviewed about their educational, residential, occupational and romantic lives in an attempt to map and typify transitions to adulthood as a socially stratified phenomena (Nico, 2011). The crisis itself did not play a protagonist role in the interviews and trajectories at this point. As a concept the crisis acquired in 2009 only abstract contours. The effects of the crisis were not yet felt or imagined, and its effects were merely speculated but not yet concretely experienced. This serendipity effect of the crisis, of the Troika intervention and of the measures taken by the government on its behalf inspired a follow-up study that, mobilizing a multiplicity of life course research instruments (biographic interview, life calendar, focus of control exercise, past reality checks), carried out a re-interviewing process to the participants in 2009. This has been developed during 2016, seven politically dense years after the first interviews, in a new political context. New compared to the previous one – lead by center right wing party PDS (social-democratic party) that many would characterize as conservative when coming to values and neo-liberal when in comes to the economic and welfare understandings-, and also compared to the last three decades since it has taken this long, from the April 25th revolution towards democracy that the center left wing parties have agreed to agree on important social issues related to inequalities, poverty, and the population's well being.

Focusing mainly in the second part of this ongoing study, this article will then departure from a presentation of the research design, methodology and data used as a means to advocate for life course methods eclectic and macro nature as one of privileged way of collecting qualitative data of real people on their real lives. The view of Thomas and Znaniecki is here subscribed when they state that "the superiority of life records over every other kind of material for the purpose of sociological analysis appears with particular force when we pass from the characterization of single data to the determination of facts for there is no safer and more efficient way of finding, among the innumerable antecedents of a social happening, the real causes of this happening than to analyze the past of the individuals through whose agency this happening occurred" (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1984 [1918]: 294-295). This is done by attempting to recover the "historically of the individual" (Abbott, 2005) and by looking at the individuals as "microcosmos" of societal phenomena (Bertaux and Delcroix, 2000) or historical landmarks. Individuals are the walking crisis; they are the crystallization of the crisis in the time-space axis. This attempt is valid for both the first as the second part of the research, but made in contrary direction of the post-modern approach to narratives, where "any intention of interpreting society 'as it really is'" is abandoned, "shifting to post –modern or narratives approaches in which the interview text replaces society as the focus of study" (Thompson, 2000: 238).

In the intersection of youth with the importance of temporality in the research design, and in the framework of this research, there are three studies of note. One of these was an absolute pioneer in longitudinal research, which combined historical time with individual time, analysing the social trajectories of individuals from their childhood during the Great Depression until they reached adolescence 'tracing step by step the ways in which deprivation left its mark on relationships and careers, life styles and personalities'. In this work by Elder (1994) we find the theoretical and methodological sustenance for the study of individual trajectories as bearers of national history, just as we seek to do with this study (although with a much shorter interval, although, according to Rindfuss (1991), much more demographically dense: that of the transition to adult life). The other two projects named, which are also on a large scale and which attracted much attention, are also Anglo-Saxon. Despite being longitudinal, these studies are more contemporary both theoretically and methodologically, differing from that of Elder mainly in respect of their theoretical stance. While the work by Williamson (2004), which after 20 years revisits a group of troubled youths in a Welsh community, is admittedly 'grounded theory' and a 'personalised' investigation as a consequence of the relationship the researcher developed and maintained with the participants, the study "Inventing Adulthoods" took place over a period of ten years within a territorially dispersed project undertaken by a large and dedicated team and followed strong theoretical direction both in the hypotheses formulated and in the analysis developed (Thomson, 2009; Henderson et al, 2009, Thompson et al., 2002).

Following this presentation of the details and argument of the research design and instruments, two sets of results will be discussed. On has to do with the most relevant changes and continuities in the values and practices of these individuals across the past seven years, how do they identify and perceive their "strategic adaptation" (Giele and Elder, 1998: 9-10, Elder and Giele, 2009: 14) to economic and political circumstances. This was achieved by the use of the whole life calendar, of the biographic interview and, specially, of the innovative "past reality check" instrument of collection and production of data. The aim was to analyze the process of subjective and objective life course change, and the main result showed us how very little the work ethics and life values are affected, in the sense of corrupted, by the unfavorable economic scenario. The second has to do with their recent life story and the how it relates with the crisis, to what extend to individuals see their life events as satellites of the contextual crisis. This is done by using the updated life calendar, the biographical interview and the innovative "locus control" exercise instrument in which the interviewees are able to identify key moments in life and correlate them to a determined extend with the crisis. Counter-intuitive results were found in relation to the ahistorical understandings of their biography.

The conclusion will sum up these results, calling attention to how qualitative understandings to highly quantifiable phenomenon – as financial or economic crisis – are necessary to grasp the nuances of a historically situated biography, which vary and oscillate from the identity to the explanation natures of narratives, or put in other words, between "realist" and "neo-positivist" approaches to life stories (Miller, 2000:13).

Methodology and data

Although using new data collected through different instruments of collection and co-production of data, the follow-up of the project developed in 2016 comes in natural continuity of the epistemological premises taken into account in the 2009 research. The 2016 methodology design follows this very epistemological statement, as it goes to the heart of the qualitative and longitudinal concerns and debates about the collection, interpretation and validity of data at specific historical moments. Its

instruments are deeply grounded in the four well- established principles of life course research, namely agency, linked lives, timing of lives, and cultural and historical location (Elder, Kirkpatrick and Crosnoe: 2002; Elder, 1985; Giele and Elder, 1998; Elder, 1974); it combines elements of qualitative and biographical approach with quantitative-oriented instruments of inquiry and co-construction of life stories such as the life calendar (Nico, 2015b). Most of all, it advocates for the need to resort to qualitative data to fully understand what and how much of a/the crisis is embedded in young peoples' lives and minds, and to longitudinal data capable of putting past and current interpretations of the courses of lives into confrontation and comparison. Only by doing so can sociological flesh be put into the statistical bones produced by statistics institutes and used and abused by the media and political discourse.

The first part of this research followed the premise that transitions to adulthood are a moving target, especially vulnerable to rapid social change and severe economic oscillations; and also that as an object of study, transitions to adulthood are particularly vulnerable to the biographical turns in the social sciences as well as to the acritical affiliation with some theories of individualization (namely Beck, 1992) that some authors have been calling our attention to (Roberts, 2012). Trying to avoid some of the "fetishism of the present" connected to this vulnerability, in which "youth as a concept prompts researchers to often focus only on the 'here and now' rather than taking a longer-term process view" (Goodwin and O'Connor, 2005: 39), the research approach was more easily integrated in life course perspective than in youth studies as such, highlighting and using more the concept of generation that age group. The latter thus became an operationalization tool more than a thematic in itself.

An important argument of the research was based in a critical approach to the theory of individualization. This is frequently used as a "package", where all contemporary changes in the life course such as desintitutionalizatioon, destandardization, pluralization and differentiation are understood as moving in the same direction or at the same pace independently of social and geographical coordinates where the individuals are situated (Brückner and Mayer, 2005; Nico, 2015a). For that reason, in the 2009 and in the 2006 project, the different dimensions of the life course are, as much as it is possible, analyzed through different lens, avoiding the results to be self-contaminated and reciprocally biased (Nico, 2013; Nico and Caetano, 2015).

In the first part of this project, which field work was developed during the course of 2009 – before the effects of the crisis (and the austerity measures taken on its behalf) were concrete and visible in people's lives – 52 biographical interviews combined with life calendars were applied to the "missing middle" class young people in Portugal (Roberts, 2011). This set of individuals encompassed a significant variety – but not statistical representativeness – when it comes to educational attainment, residential status and family social background. The sample was also gender balanced. The major concern was to identify and map different trajectories towards adulthood as well as the social backgrounds and contexts that shape and determine these trajectories (Nico and Alves, forthcoming; Nico and Caetano, 2015).

The second part of this study, still ongoing, recovers the contacts made in 2009. The approach is direct and the acceptance to re-participate has been total. Attrition effect is so far non-detectable, and 13 adults, now with 32 to 38 years of age, have been already interviewed. All the interviewees so far have been pleased to be re contacted and consider the exercise of confronting past with present very entertaining and useful, showing also a relative eagerness to share how their life turned out and a relative curiosity in knowing about how the researcher's life has also turned out 7 years later. It is overall an intimate and informal conversation with a "known" stranger. This has again allow for the researcher to be perceived as a 'particular kind of confidant, the kind that disappears after the interview' (al least for 7 or more years), and to whom secrets can more easily be told, making him the 'receptor of words to which not even those the closest to us have access to' (Lahire 2004 [2002]: 33).

The next table provides the variety of life course instruments used in the 2009 and 2016 sets of research (table 1). Both research use the combination of the life grid with the biographical interview

to improve the qualitative and subjective data collection and analysis, being simultaneously concerned with maintaining the actual order of the events narrated, therefore escaping Bourdieu's ''biographical illusion'' (Bourdieu [1997] 1994). (Nico, 2015b). The 2016 research, in an attempt to make the most of the new, updated and re-reflected material on the 2009-2016 window of observation, used two new methods of collected and co-production on data: the "past reality check" and the "locus control exercise".

Table 1. Life course research methods used: a summary

	Recruitment of participants	Collection and co-production of data			
		Biographical interview (transversal to all collection of data)	Life Course Calendar[1]	Past Reality Check	Locus Control exercise
Round 1- 2009	*Intermediated by shares friends, co-workers or acquaintances*	*Conversation about time and timing of events, relation between the events, understanding and explanation of the course of life.* *Aspects related with locus control exercise (only in 2016) and with the chronology of the events respond to a more rigid script, contrary to the rest of the co-produced interview.* *Interview is recorded, transcript to word files, and subject to content analysis.*	*Used as the structure script of the interview- from birth to date of the interview.. Analyzed conjointly and separately in vertical content analysis and in holistic form analysis.*	*Selected quotations from 2009 became part of the 2016 script as conversation teasers, ice-breakers, and caricature quotes from the past.*	*Not used*
Round 2- 2016	*Re-contact directly*		*Used as the structure script of one part of the interview- from 2009 to 2016. Analyzed conjointly and separately in vertical content analysis and in holistic form analysis.*		*Table filled in the interview with the most relevant (positive and negative) moments from 2009 to 2016, and the effect of agency, significant others, working and living conditions, crisis and chance on them*

The instrument that I called "past reality check" allows for the adjustment between the 2009 narratives (about values and practices) and the 2016's ones. It consists in selection of polemic, representative, and/or paradigmatic quotes from the 2009 interview, which somehow demonstrates the most representative issues, opinions and/or plans at the time. The goal of using these old quotes is to act as an ice breaker and to set the past as the reference for the discourse, making it harder to completely re-write the (recent) past. The quotations selected so far had, as will be bellow developed, mostly to do with: work and consumption ethics, homeownership and renting, and emotional ruptures cycles.

The instrument that I called "locus of control exercise" is partly inspired in psychology. This instrument allows the individual to situate her/his most relevant life events in a scale from agency to structure (table 2). This scale has almost total correspondence with the life course principles such as agency, linked lives, and cultural and historical location (originally thought as one, here decomposed in two to more efficiently separate the effect of the crisis).

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[1] Data not analyzed here due to small number or second time participants.

Table 2: Correspondence between life course principles and categories in the locus control exercise

Agency	Linked Lives	Cultural location	Historical Location	"unobserved heterogeneity"
Your own choices	Family and close friends events and circumstances	Social and economic situation	The "crisis"	"Chance"

The scale used is thought as departing from a category of *agency*, where the individuals are thought to be completely responsible for their own actions and options[2]; to the category of *linked lives* where it is assumed that there are intra-generacional and inter-generational consequences of each individuals' actions[3]; to a category of *cultural location* where close social context was considered[4], following a category of historical location where the crisis stood alone; to, lastly, a category that could be considered the "unobserved heterogeneity" in statistical analysis which corresponded to "chance".[5] The challenge put to the participants was to quantify, in percentage, the effect of each of these categories in their relevant life events (table 3). A list of the "relevant" life events would be provided by the interviewee immediately before.

Table 3: example of the table showed in the interview

Event	Your own choices	Family and close friends events and circumstances	Social and economic situation	The "crisis"	Chance	Total
Marriage	45	45	10	0	0	100%
Unemployment	0	0	20	70	10	100 %
…						

Emergent concerns and changes: lives and mindset

This set of results in based mainly in the "past reality check" instrument, based on which three emergent trends were found. The first has to do with the levels and values associated to consumption, used of credit and loans, and savings practices or ambitions. Many of the interviewees in 2009 demonstrated a very strong aversion to debt, they will not have or use credit cards, even if it could have helped them overcome some difficulties at the end of each month. Using credit cards or taking up loans was not an option considered even when the bank account was dangerously close to zero. In 2006, however, although for these interviewees the discourse was very similar and truthful to the core values transmitted in the 2009 interview, the practices were slightly adjusted.

This adjustment is socially stratified. On one hand, for those with less qualified and badly paid occupations, the use of the credit card became more flexible. Although it is not used on a daily basis, the credit card is now used to schedule vacations or travels. This is done with the expectation of paying the debt immediately to receiving extra earnings either from vacations or Christmas subsidy, and with the reassurance of being in a common economic partnership (civil union or marriage). In these cases this is done to maintain a certain "young" life style that is more common in couples (still) without

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[2] Explained in the script as "your own responsibility, choices, merit or fault" in a category called "your own choices".
[3] Explained in the script as "events or circumstances of your closes tones" in a category called "family and friends".
[4] Explained in the script as "your social and financial situation: expenses, difficulties, work stability, etc." In a category called "social and economic situation".
[5] Explained in the script as something out of their controle, attributed to change, to luck, good or bad.

children. On the other hand, among the individuals with these conservative financial values that have manage to have an ascendant social mobility trajectory in the past 7 years and enter a consensual union, the adjustment to the crisis is surprisingly higher. Although having the means to maintain or improve a certain life style, these individuals tend to be hyper-conscious of the crisis, changing their consumptions habits to the minimum, and development saving strategies that are used in low-rate low risk investments or to make anticipated payment of housing mortgages.

Summing up, for those with the same 2009 values on consumption, savings strategies and resourcing to credit, (i) the individuals with more precarious occupations and/or worst paid ones adjusted their values to practices oriented towards their daily lives, aiming at improving them and having from time to time a vacation or other "luxury" out of their financial league; (ii) while the ones with more stable and/or well-paid occupations tend to reoriented their consumptions values and practices towards the future by saving money and/or anticipating the housing mortgages payments.

A second emergent trend has to do a dividing issue in 2009: opinions on homeownership and renting. Part of the interviews was strongly against homeownership. Among these, all that were already re-interviewed in 2016 changed both their views and their practices on homeownership. Departing from significant aversion to purchasing an apartment stating that this would create a life-longing debt, that they will constantly live to pay that debt, and that this would be a inhibiting factor for a putative geographical mobility or for a migration project, these individuals are now more tempted to buy an apartment (some already did). The three motivations to buy an apartment are well documented in the literature and apply, autonomously or conjointly, to these cases (Winstanley, Thorns e Perkings, 2002: 815). One set of motivations has to do with the life cycle model in which the change of residence serves the necessity to have more space to accommodate the changing age and sexual composition of the family structure. The second set of motivations has to do with economic rationality, in which these residential changes are treated as the result of economically rational decision-making. Finally, a third set of motivations to change or buy home is the environmental aspect, meaning that people choose to buy or change their residency according to where and near to whom they want to live. All this means that the life cycle effect has maintained certain predominance even in contexts of crisis, leading these individuals to buy apartments near their origin families, and aiming at accommodating their own families in the future.

The third emergent trend had to do with the voluntary and involuntary ruptures. They concern, mainly, professional well being or romantic relationships. In 2009, some participants showed a low tolerance to precarious situations, might them be emotional of professional. They would consider them a rupture as a positive action, as necessary harm, as a long-term investment in happiness. These and other participants show in 2016 this same approach to life, which some distinctions, however, on the sphere of life it refers to. While in 2009, the rupture cycles were more directed at the emotional and romantic trajectories (Nico, 2016), in 2016 these have to do mainly to the professional sphere. In fact, especially for those that started to work very young, before or during their university studies, long term precariousness had reached the intolerable. They have proven to themselves and others they are working class individuals, with early achieved independence and residential autonomy, but they have also gathered information about their rights as workers, about their deserved wellbeing, and the processes towards burnout. They "choose" to say "enough is enough" to this long-term precariousness, falling as a consequence in transitional unemployment episodes. Following quotations illustrate these intolerable experiences of precariousness and the moments of rupture and non-conformity.

Yesterday I heard a guy in the news saying that "it is better to have a precarious job than to be unemployed". Hum, really? Not in my opinion. If you think you can be precarious for 9 years, like me. When I started working there I would cry because of the physical tiredness, I was not used to being on my feet the whole day, I only had one day off per week... But then the mental tiredness came. The work environment is bad, people are unhappy working there and I would arrive home some times in a really bad mood (for my daughter). And I thought; I don't want this for me, I need to get out, need to leave this environment. And you know? It is a relief, to have the possibility to start something new.

Julia, bachelor's degree, unemployed from fashion shop, rented apartment, civil union, one child

There are many ways of non-dignifying work, and people have to know about that. Me and everyone else from Architecture knew that. It was fantastic: we had to have our own car, computer, two languages, Autocad, of course. "Come here, I'll let you work here!". I found that statement about being "better to have a precarious job than to be unemployed. I though "yes, it is also better to have hepatitis B that aids, but the best it to have none of this right?!".

Jorge, almost graduate, bank manager, single, homeowner

Serendipity: contractions and red flags

There are some counter intuitive results emerging from the analysis of the locus of control exercise, specially having into account that it came at the very end of each interview, in an attempt to summarize and information shared immediately one to two hours before. The information analyzed here, although concerning the same 13 re-interviewees, refers to 66 relevant life events listed by them. These were, after the interview, coded as to their impact (positive/negative/ambivalent), their dimension of life (family, work, school, health, home, other), and their occurrence (relevant events/ relevant omissions of events[6]).

The list of relevant events of life in the past seven years is the first source of surprise. Transition to adulthood is in fact a demographically dense period of life (Rindfuss, 1991). But some spheres of life are denser (more events per period of time) than others. Given that, on one hand, there is a delay for entering in conjugality in Portugal, a high age at the first child, and a very low birthrate; and that, on the other, precariousness and informal labour market in Portugal is characterized by a contractual instability; aspects that were, moreover, emphasized during the period of the crisis; one could expect that, at least due to this matter of proportion, most of relevant life events were work-related. Data shows, however, a big gap between number of work related events in one's life and the number of work related events considered relevant. Almost half of the events of life found relevant are family related: romantic relationships – beginnings or breakups- , parenthood, marriage, divorce, etc., whereas only about ¼ of all the events found relevant are work related. The "persistence of the family life cycle" (Elchardus and Smits, 2006) is thus resistant to the economic crisis, to an extent. In a way, it's the events that have least to do with the crisis that are considered relevant, that are part of the biography of identity that these individuals choose to embrace and share. There is, in the discourses, a denial of the crisis as central for their identity. The crisis does not define them.

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[6] For example not having got pregnant, not having been promoted, etc..

When it comes to the effect of the crisis, you can write down "zero" for everything. The crisis did not have any influence on my decisions and career. I even think I grew in those periods of alleged crisis.

Ricardo, graduate, cars salesman, homeowner, married, one child

The financial crisis does not have any merit in my career. If it did, it would have ruined it.

Jorge, almost graduate, bank manager, single, homeowner

A second source of counter-intuitive results has to do with the fact that between school, family and work, the latter is actually the one that has a lowest proportion of negative impact. Unemployment is the event most responsible for this, and it two fashions: one, by not even being mentioned as relevant (compared to other life events); and second, by being mentioned as a "positive" event (at a long-term). The stories shared demonstrate how these unemployment events can be seen as positive. The reason has to do, again, with long term precarious situations in the labour market, that after several years reach the point of unbearable, and "demand" from the individual a pause in the road to burnout or depression. Having the capacity to "pause", interviewees later see this as a positive action, necessary to break dangerous cycles of long-term precariousness, of decrease of emotional wellbeing, of conformism and identity marasmus.

A third set of unexpected results can be seen at table 4, where the distribution of the mean percentage attributed to the effect of the different categories of the agency-structure scale on relevant life event s is displayed. We can see that in a general matter, the impact tends to decrease on the agency-structure scale. This means that in a general matter the individuals believe it is their own agency (48,6%), followed by their families and friends (26,7%), their social context (11,2%), and only then the crisis that determine their life events (7,1%). "Chance" is the only predictor considered as frequently low as the crisis. This might mean that predictors for meaningful life events that fall way out of the individuals' control may be left out of the narrative accounts about their trajectories, regardless of the actual impact they might have had in shaping their life course.

Two other aspects to note are concentrated on the column "the crisis". In fact, according to the individuals' views, of all the influence that the professional trajectory may have suffered, the crisis in the least important (3,7%). In the discourses interviewees tend to individualize the explanation of their trajectories: their actions, their bosses decisions, their co-workers attitudes. Even the negative work related events count with a sort of asocial reading, as if the crisis provided not a context but an interpretative vacuum. On the other hand, the effect of the crisis on "other" events is significantly high (18,9%). The crisis belongs to the "others". Unemployment of parents, bankruptcy of a relative, migration of a best friend, the examples are numerous. Interviewees displayed a somewhat bipolar approach to the crisis: they are bystanders of the effects of the crisis in the "other" people in their lives, and they are (or fell) immune to the crisis themselves.

Table 4: Importance attributed to different life events (agency-structure scale) (mean percentage)

	Your own choices	Family and close friends events and circumstances	Social and economic situation	The "crisis"	Chance
Family	53,83	29,17	7,33	5	5
Work	53,33	12	16,33	3,67	8,33
School	60	0	40	0	0
Health	40	60	0	0	0
Home	36,67	40	20	0	3,33
Other events	35,71	29,29	12,5	18,93	2,14
Total	48,56	26,74	11,21	7,12	4,77

Conclusions

Through this follow up study, the trajectories, plans and expectations of Portuguese young adults were now not only updated, but past and present were literally put in confrontation in a co-production interview. At a certain point in the interview they were asked to specifically reflect and quantify the effects of the crisis on the several dimensions of their lives in the past seven years. Results go the heart of the discussion of a distinction between 'biographies of choice' or 'discourses of choice' (Nico and Caetano, 2015). This is so because the presence of the crisis, that in 2009 was slightly present in the discourses but absent in the actual trajectories, has now in 2016 been inverted. Although it is clear the presence of the crisis and its many effects at the micro-individual level in the 2006 interviews, where the events and conditions in the labor were identified, described and sequenced; it is also evident that this protagonism is lost when the interviewees are challenged to interpret their life events as satellites of the crisis. This apparent asocial reading of their life trajectories, that is not equivalent to lack of political literacy or political participation, reinforces the concern with the "epistemological fallacy of the late modernity" as Furlong and Cartmel have eloquently put it by stating that "blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, young people frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure" (Furlong and Cartmel, (2007 [1997]: 144). This fallacy seems now to be a political result of neo-liberal discourses that "we are what we choose to be"[7], that helps to produce a generational discourse that denies the context of it own biography, neglecting its historical location and interpretation.

These conclusions would not have been possible without a wide window of observation and a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to life stories. "Time matters" (Abbott, 2001). Phenomena like long-terms precariousness in the labour are invisible in the statistics collected about young people. And phenomena such as this are the responsible for the apparent contradictions in young people's discourses and biographies and apparent lack of agency and action. People are indeed capable of providing an explanation for their actions and in that show lay our, social scientists and citizens, concerns. "If men define a situation as real, it is real in its consequences" (Thomas theorem).

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[7] Title of the former Prime-Minister autobiography.

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