INED Population Studies 4

Catherine Bonvalet
Céline Clément
Jim Ogg

Renewing the Family: A History of the Baby Boomers

ined
INSTITUT NATIONAL
D'ÉTUDES DÉMOGRAPHIQUES

Springer

Renewing the Family: A History of the Baby Boomers

INED Population Studies

Volume 4

This book series is devoted to publications of international relevance in population studies and demography as promoted by the French National Institute for Demographic Studies (INED, Paris). As one social science among many, demography is interlinked with related disciplines including sociology, anthropology, history and linguistics, and continuously explores its boundaries with neighbouring disciplines, ranging from epidemiology and biology to economics. The studies published in the series are based on solid empirical research and firm methodological foundations. Particular attention is paid to long-term and collaborative surveys. Guided by its distinguished Editorial Advisory Board, the INED series aims to provide international visibility to works of high academic standard recognized in the French-speaking scientific community. The series supports an internationally acknowledged style of demographic research, championed by INED for more than half a century and rekindled in such fields as the study of demographic situations around the world; the relationship between demographic conditions and development; international comparisons; migration, identities and territories; family studies; gender studies and sexuality; ageing, health and mortality; trajectories, mobility and social networks

More information about this series at http://www.springer.com/series/11579

Catherine Bonvalet • Céline Clément • Jim Ogg

Renewing the Family: A History of the Baby Boomers

Springer

Catherine Bonvalet
INED
Paris
France

Céline Clément
Université Paris Ouest Nanterre
Nanterre
France

Jim Ogg
CNAV
Paris
France

ISSN 2214-2452 ISSN 2214-2460 (electronic)
ISBN 978-3-319-08544-9 ISBN 978-3-319-08545-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-08545-6
Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014946613

Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

Foreword

The post-war baby boom phenomenon is still a source of enigma today, even for demographers. Do baby boomers really represent a homogeneous and specific generation? To what extent have they contributed to the drastic family transformations of the last five decades? Do they bear some responsibility for the current social problems regularly raised by politicians and the media, such as youth delinquency and violence, negative impacts of divorce, weakening of social links, decline of authority and respect, loss of references, etc.?

Baby boomers arouse questions and ambivalence. On the one hand, the fertility recovery which occurred suddenly after the Second World War in most industrialized countries was received as a wonderful promise for hope in the future and even in some countries, like France, as a miracle after a long period of low fertility and strong pro-birth movements and policies; but on the other hand, this baby boom was progressively understood as a source of small revolutions and new claims in the sphere of private life, contributing to dismantling the previous social order and centrally the male breadwinner gender contract. Ambivalence between innovation and promises of gender equality, on the one side, and individualism and fear of egoism, on the other. Nowadays, baby boomers are looked through the lens of a new collective "problem": the papy boom.

Catherine Bonvalet, Céline Clément and Jim Ogg's book is the perfect tool to understand this process of change in private life. When following the succession of generations, that is to say, historical and sociological generations (people born at the same period, who have witnessed the same events at the same age), but also generations as we consider them in kinship (people situated between ascendants and descendants), one can understand concretely what these changes mean as an experience for the actors. The authors propose from the outset a distinction in this large generation between a first wave, born between 1946 and 1954 and a second one, born between 1955 and 1973. The famous year 1968 represents a turning point for this distinction as it is certainly different to experience this historical event at 13 or 14 years old or between 18 and 22. But the main argument refers to the gap in terms of socialization and living conditions: the first wave experienced the postwar frugality, scarcity, rationing and resourcefulness, whilst the second grew up in a context of economic growth and prosperity and enjoyed greater social mobility and a much better quality of life during the "Thirty golden years".

Among its numerous qualities, this book gives us a complete state of the art of academic discussion concerning the baby boom, its understanding from a demographic but also sociological point of view. It presents the main relevant results of large national and international databases, underlines the crucial role of the gender variable to understand social changes, so much it is true that women were frequently the main actors of the process of transformation during these decades. It also provides a very useful comparative counterpoint when looking at the differences between France and the United Kingdom. However, the book does not offer a systematic comparison between these two countries, but more a qualitative and in-depth study of the cultural differences, since many very close economic and sociological indicators could let us expect more similarities.

But the main contribution of this book is certainly the angle, the perspective put forward by the authors, which is also a framework following the life cycle of the first baby boomer wave: childhood, adolescence, family foundation, professional trajectory with the challenge of work-family balance and finally the current phase of caring tasks for elderly parents. Following this group's trajectory, the reader has access to a quasi-complete life cycle.

The first section, dedicated to the baby boomers' childhood, is a wonderful demonstration of the baby boom's complexity and enigma. The main arguments to explain this phenomenon generally refer either to macroeconomic performance (reduction of unemployment from 1941 onwards relayed by the Marshall Plan after 1947, which gave work opportunities to the parents of baby boomers) or to the role of French family policy to support fertility since 1938. But the authors argue that it is more useful to look back towards the two previous generations of mothers and grand-mothers to understand the conditions and possibilities of this demographic boom.

This is one of the major lessons of this essay: to understand to what extent a generation is the result of the previous ones. Contrary to a mainstream understanding, it is less a question of social reproduction, and more of change. Thus, grand-mothers of the baby boomers (generation 1880–1910) who formed their families during the inter-war period after the trauma of the "Grande Guerre", adopted a Malthusian position, refusing the burden of many births, a position that the authors qualify as "a child's refusal". The numbers are very clear indeed: the fertility rate fell from 6 children per women in 1870 to 2.3 in 1915. The gap is huge with the profile of their daughters, mothers of the baby boom, who also accepted the male-breadwinner gender contract, meaning a strict division of labour, with men as providers of goods and women as housewives and care-workers available for their children. Everything suggests that the challenge for each generation of women was not to suffer the fate of their mothers. And the process continues afterwards for the daughters of baby boom mothers whose challenge was to obtain birth control, access to contraception, abortion and women's rights.

To explain the new attitude of the baby boomers' mothers, the authors insist for example on the role of youth movements which have clearly contributed to this "voluntary domestic home confinement". But they underline mainly a double-bind: on one side, wonderful promises of development in a context of economic growth,

overcoming housing challenges, improvement of the welfare state, access to a consumer society and, on the other, strong social control and normative pressure in private life and gender roles. The baby boom family reminds us of the US family of *Revolutionary Roads*, Richard Yates' novel that describes finely the mixture of conformity and desire for emancipation, the promises of marriage and family happiness coupled with domestic confinement, which produce double-bind and chaos.

With this global angle, the authors take us back into the post 1968 revolution atmosphere, with its main issues and rhetoric: anti-institutionalism, anti-psychiatry, anti-conformity, anti-family, social struggles and political radicalization. They also sum up the (new and resounding) revolution imposed by baby boomers to the family, with all its indicators: fertility and marriage rate decline, increase of cohabitation, divorce and births out of wedlock, etc. But the main point in this process of change is undoubtedly the gender issue. As indeed, the real driver of these changes is the access of a generation of women to wages and "salariat", which means at the same time greater autonomy, the potential emancipation from marriage dependency and an individual protection through labour law. The model of the active mother supplanted that of the housewife, as the dual-earner family replaced the male-breadwinner.

Nevertheless, it has to be said that first, this driver is probably not only the result of new feminist claims but also the impact of the "Great transformation"—to use Polanyi's terms—which has to do with the development of the service sector of economy and feminization of the workforce; and second, that the reality is far from its promise as this individualization strengthened gendered and social inequalities. New social risks and social problems have emerged through this process which shifts the entire process of Welfare building: problems of work/family balance, lone parent's and child's poverty, economic dependence and precariousness of youth, growing demands and needs of care for the elderly. After offering a new set of values for the global society, like autonomy, choice, self-determination, freedom, here is part of the main baby boomers' legacy for the next generation. Terrific challenges, indeed.

Rennes
April 2014

Claude Martin,
sociologist, research professor at the CNRS

Authors' Notes and Acknowledgements

This book is the result of a research project financed by the Plan Urbanisme Construction Architecture (PUCA), *Ministère de l'Ecologie, de l'Energie, du Développement durable et de la Mer*, EDF, l'Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques (INED), and the Centre de recherche Populations et sociétés (CERPOS), *Université de Paris-Ouest* in France and The Young Foundation in England. Numerous colleagues have helped us at various stages of the research. In France, Anne Getzler, Dominique Godfard, Olivia Lelong; Marie-Odile Perucca helped with the interviews and transcriptions and Sabrina Aouici participated in the analysis of the interviews. We are grateful for their input. We would also like to thank Arnaud Bringé for the data analysis of the Biographies et Entourage survey; Géraldine Vivier for helping to identify the Paris sample of interviewees; colleagues Francine Benguigui, Anne Gotman, Yves Grafmeyer, Eva Lelièvre, Serge Paugam, Magali Pierre, Sylvie Renaut for their constructive remarks. In Britain, we are especially grateful to Belinda Brown and Geoff Dench, who helped us enormously with the organisation and undertaking of the London interviews as well as offering helpful comments on the content. Our thanks go out too to Geoff Mulgan and David Edgar of the Young Foundation who have encouraged and supported the research in many ways. Our colleagues, Chris Phillipson, Rebecca Leach, Simon Biggs, and Anne-Marie Money also have provided valuable comments that have helped to shape the research.

A French version of the book was published by *Les Presses Universitaires de France* in 2011—*Réinventer la famille: L'histoire des baby boomers*. We are most grateful to Elizabeth Wiles-Portier for the English translation that forms the basis of this English edition. Although the two editions are very similar, we have reoriented this edition slightly in anticipation of the English readership.

Finally, our main thanks go out to the 90 people who participated in the research and talked frankly to us about their family and professional lives. We have changed their names and other factual details, but their narratives remain verbatim. We are very grateful to them all for the time they gave to complete the interviews.

Contents

Part II Baby Boomers Against the Family

Part III Baby Boomers in Alternative Families

Chapter 1
Introduction

In demographic terms, the family never seemed to have had it so good as it did in the immediate aftermath of World War II and the two ensuing decades. Demographers had not expected to see such high birth rates again, while marriage rates soared and family breakdown was a rarity.[1] A seemingly unshakeable institution, protected and nurtured by a nascent welfare state, the family appeared to enter a golden age. Young couples felt happy and confident about the future, and unlike their parents and grandparents, did not think twice about having two, three or even four children. France gradually ceased to be a "country of old people and childless households" (Veyret-Vernet 1950, p. 193), and a couple living independently with several children became the archetype of the modern family, representing the final phase in its evolution, as described first by Emile Durkheim (Durkheim 1975) and later by Talcott Parsons (Parsons 1955). Within that couple, the roles were clearly defined, with the husband the sole breadwinner, responsible for supporting the household, and the wife doing the housework and childrearing. This initially bourgeois model of the housewife had gradually percolated through to the working classes, where women abandoned their factory or clerical jobs as soon as their husbands' income allowed them to do so (Bard 2001).

Sixty years on, the picture was very different. The total fertility rate had fallen to below two children per woman, and the divorce rate had risen to 50 %. The role of "housewife" had been ousted by the active mother striving to reconcile work and family life. Parenthood today is now desired and planned according to the stability of the prospective parents' relationship and their respective careers. Marriage is no longer the gateway to becoming sexually active, living together and starting a family, such that more than half of all births take place outside wedlock. The strength of these changes is reflected in shifts in our vocabulary, where age-old, negatively connoted terms indicating departures from the family norm have become obsolete. *Living in sin* has been replaced by *nonmarital cohabitation*, and *illegitimate birth* by *birth outside marriage*, while children *born of adultery* are now just the same as any other children, enjoying exactly the same rights. Above all, the linear progression from childbearing and childrearing to child-launching is no more, as the ease

[1] With the exception of 1946–1947 (Pressat 1962).

C. Bonvalet et al., *Renewing the Family: A History of the Baby Boomers,*
INED Population Studies 4, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-08545-6_1

with which marital links can be severed has given rise to far more chaotic trajectories, characterised by alternating periods of living alone and living together, and extended step families. Thus, the one-size-fits-all family model has gone plural, and a new set of adjectives (*nuclear*, *single-parent*, *recomposed*, *same-sex*) has emerged to describe its many and various forms.

1.1 The Family Renewed

More than half a century separates these two highly contrasting images, with supposedly novel family forms on one side and the traditional stable family on the other (Sirinelli 2003). The surge of optimism that gave rise to such high marriage and fertility rates back in the 1950s was certainly not a foregone conclusion, as France had just emerged from 6 years of war, and people still had vivid memories of the Great Depression. For researchers of the day, the family of the 1950s above all represented a triumph over the revolutionary ideas of the mid-nineteenth century, as well as over the threat posed by capitalism. Henceforth, the working-class family thrown into chaos by the mother going out to work in the factory was a thing of the past, and so, too, was the bourgeois family with a single son and heir (Maitron 1954).

As it happened, the revival in the birth rate eventually petered out (Desplanques 1988b), and the avant-garde ideas from the turn of the century soon re-emerged. "The feminist movement expanded, confident in the knowledge that it was combating primitive relics from the past, while cohabitation came to be viewed as a social right to be fought for, just like the weekly rest period or the right of association" (Sauvy 1954, p. 11). Pre-conceived notions of motherhood being equated with the provision of cannon fodder or with old women living in shoes began to disappear. Indeed, as early as 1954, Alfred Sauvy wrote that the family increasingly resembled "an outworn institution, a relic", defended chiefly by "conservatives and reactionaries":

> If you close your eyes for a quarter of a century, then open them again, you will discover a very different situation from the one that is being predicted. What it has lost in cohesion, the family will have gained in strength and vigour (Sauvy 1954, p. 13).

Clearly, then, the family is subject to cycles of ebb and flow, as Claude Lévi-Strauss postulated:

> It may well be that such is the inventivity of the human mind that it conceived and laid out virtually all the modalities of the family institution at a very early juncture. What we take to be evolution is therefore simply a series of choices from a finite number of options, as we move in different directions within a network that has already been mapped out (Lévi-Strauss 1986, p. 13).

These cycles correspond to different generations, some carrying on from where their parents and grandparents left off, others making a more or less clean break with them, but each nonetheless helping to transform the institution of the family. The twentieth century saw several such breaks, the first being with a society

in which the family was primarily a chain of generations, a lineage that had to be perpetuated, with a sovereign moral person that imposed obligations on its members and oversaw the transmission of knowledge. It was against this same traditional idea of the family that the Enlightenment philosophers had rebelled, as is evidenced by the definition of the family contained in the French *Encyclopédie* of 1765 (Lannes 1954, p. 4):

> The family is nothing but the group formed by a man or a woman and the children born of their union, and marriage but the voluntary marital union of man and woman contracted by free persons for the purpose of having children.

As Isaac Joseph (1977) reminds us, the family is a skilfully constructed artefact, patiently engineered by hygienists, social philanthropists and doctors, as well as by priests and schoolteachers (Donzelot 2005). There was therefore also a break in the way that children were brought up. From then on, they were to remain at the heart of the household, instead of being farmed out to wetnurses, left to their own devices or, worse still, abandoned. Finally, the emancipation of women, leading to a new conception of the couple and family bonds, brought about a break with the single-family model that had stood resolute against the avant-garde ideas about cohabitation espoused in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It would be wrong to think that the development of the family was restricted to a change in form, with a move away from complex households to nuclear families and thence to the current multiplicity of family configurations. For these different forms mirrored more profound changes, described by many family sociologists. As François de Singly (2009) puts it, "contemporary modern families are derived from a process of individualisation whose seeds were sown in the political sphere by the French Revolution". For this author, the emergence of the modern family took place in two waves. The first wave of modernity, when the person-centred, nuclear family first started to gain ground, coincided with industrialisation and urbanisation, while the second, beginning in the 1960s, corresponded to an accelerating process of individualisation and changes in the nature of family ties, especially marital bonds[2]. With regard to women, if the first wave was driven forward by the strength of marriage as an institution, due in part to the secondary role they played as wives and mothers, the second was characterised by their inclusion in the process of individualisation. Henceforth, they, too, had a right to live as themselves, and better education, changes in the labour market and the advent of the contraceptive pill transformed gender relations. The radical nature of this upheaval was eloquently expressed by Ulrich Beck (2008), who wrote that "by earning 'their own money', women could at long last relinquish their status as a 'kitchen unit endowed with speech'" (p. 172). Thus, "while not totally renouncing their previous conventional identifications, women could lay claim to a degree of autonomy and recognition outside the social framework of the family" (Samuel 2009, p. 122), and could take on multiple identities. However, just as it did for men, the right to be treated as

[2] Ulrich Beck (2008) refers to this period as *second modernity*, whereas Anthony Giddens (1996) prefers the term *late modernity*.

individuals came with the duty for women to fulfil themselves, sometimes at the cost of their couple's stability.

According to some sociologists, this movement towards greater individualisation, set in train in the late eighteenth century, was reflected in a distancing from the notion of kinship. Alexis de Tocqueville, one of the first to develop a sociology of family relations, concluded that the democratic system in America, being free of the trammels of kinship and birthright, favoured a brand of individualism where each citizen could aspire to be the master of his own destiny, relying wholly on his own abilities. This resulted in a weakening of intergenerational relations and, above all, in a dissolution of kinship ties, where "the family presents itself to the mind as vague, uncertain and indeterminate" (de Tocqueville 1835, cited in Cicchelli-Pugeault and Cicchelli 1998, p. 42). Taking his cue from de Tocqueville, Emile Durkheim (1975) also noted the independence of the marital family from its extended kinship structure, that is, from previous generations, commenting that "there is nothing to recall the state of perpetual dependence that formed the basis of the paternal family". The idea that relations within the contemporary family no longer had an intergenerational dimension was taken up by Talcott Parsons in the 1950s, and it has influenced most of his successors, for despite the groundbreaking study by Michael Young and Peter Willmott (1957) and subsequent research demonstrating the strength of family ties (Bonvalet and Ogg 2006; Ouelette and Dandurand 2000), the strength of kinship relations in a postmodern society remains subject to debate (Déchaux 2010).

The problem is that "the spiral of individualisation has not been kind to the family, where societal issues have even increased two-, if not threefold" (Beck 2008, p. 161). Norms are less strong, the family has become deinstitutionalised, and the values of personal autonomy have come to the fore, inducing a paradigm shift whereby, instead of the individual being at the service of the family, the family is now at the service of the individual, with a duty to ensure the self-fulfilment of each of its members (Segalen 2010). How, in this context, can family obligations and the values of autonomy be reconciled? How can the new commandment "thou shalt fulfil thyself"—this need to be totally in charge of one's destiny—and the "cult of achievement" that brings with it a "fatigue of being oneself" (Ehrenberg 1991, 1998) fit in with the demands of adult children and ageing parents? Have family norms really disappeared? Some authors, such as Claudine Attias-Donfut (1995a), have managed to square the family circle. According to Attias-Donfut, the process of individualisation, where the emphasis is placed on autonomy and elective relations, means that we are willing to recognise our obligations towards people with whom we are close, especially if they arise out of relationships built up over a lifetime, rather than norms imposed from on high. The intensity of this mutual aid will therefore vary according to the quality of the bond and the amount of time spent together during the younger person's childhood (Attias-Donfut 1995a). But can we really view all the changes that the family has undergone solely through the prism of invididualism? Is there not, perhaps, something else happening, in terms of transmission, as Durkheim postulated?

1.2 Did the Baby Boomers Really Transform the Family?

One way of getting to grips with the revolution that has taken place within the family, and all the attendant issues is not to close our eyes in 1946 and only open them again in 2006, as Sauvy would have us do, but instead to track one or several generations across this period, analysing the changes at work as and when they emerged or, at least in the case of cohabitation outside marriage, re-emerged. The question then is which generations to choose.

We decided to focus on the cohorts born between 1946 and 1954, which correspond to the first wave of a baby boom that was to last in France until 1973. Why these particular generations? First of all, because of their sheer size: there were 200,000 more births in 1946 than there had been in 1945, and between then and 1973, annual birth cohorts systematically topped the 800,000 mark, with two peaks—one in 1949 (869,000 births), the other in 1964 (878,000 births). This demographic tsunami created a bulge as it moved up the population pyramid from early childhood, and in 2006 it was reaching 'the Third Age', provoking debates on postponing retirement and financing long-term care. It was the earliest cohorts that were mainly responsible for the demographic shockwave. Extra housing units had to be built—and fast; municipalities needed more infants' schools, then elementary schools, then high schools; after which new universities were required to cater for the massive influx of students. It is no accident that the changes instituted by national pension reforms in France (Fillon Act 2003) started to be implemented in 2006, when the first of the postwar generations arrived at age 60.

As well as being notable for their size, the birth cohorts of the late 1940s and early 1950s are also special because of the historic events they witnessed or even had a hand in bringing about—starting with the civil unrest of May 1968 that has come to symbolise them. Moreover, they were the protagonists and instigators of normative change both within the family and in society at large. For this reason, they are viewed with a mixture of fascination[3] and mistrust, as attested to by the number of books referring to them in shorthand fashion as the "68 generation", the "gilded" or "blessed" (Chauvel 2002; Clerc 2010; Hamon and Rotman 1998; Sirinelli 2003) generation and even the "lyrical generation" (Ricard 1992), while at the same time decrying them and describing them as "spoiled brats"[4].

A further characteristic of the baby boomers is that they were raised in families presented as a model of happiness and stability, in a context of hope and faith in the future following the 1929 Wall Street Crash and World War II. Postwar children were the object of every attention from their mothers, prompting Yvonne Knibiehler (1997) to use the term "maternal revolution". This new relationship between parents

[3] Especially in the English-speaking world, witness the far larger number of books and articles on the subject.

[4] According to Patrick Artus and Marie-Paule Virard (2006), baby boomer parents ruined their children, thus paving the way to a war between the spoiled *grandpa-boom* generation and their children.

and their children was based on "tenderness and attention" (Sirinelli 2003), as Louis Roussel confirmed in his analyses of behavioural changes among the baby boomers' parents:

> In all probability, these young people experienced a different model of socialisation from their elders. The families that raised them entertained new attitudes towards the institutions and the symbolic systems that legitimised them, which naturally affected the children. Such that the changes really date back to around 1940, rather than 1965. In any event, a generation effect was surely inevitable (Roussel 1987a, p. 444).

The period of prosperity (1945–1975) referred to in France as the *Trente Glorieuses*, or Thirty Glorious Years, contributed to this particularly protective environment. It also meant that these generations witnessed the emergence of the consumer society, duly becoming its chief beneficiaries. Even so, for Martine Segalen, the generations born in 1946 onwards were:

> Subverters of the family… children of peacetime and the consumer society of plenty. Insulated against harm by the welfare state, and by a wage-earning society that bestowed economic independence on each and every man and woman, they turned into adults in search of autonomy (Segalen 2010, p. 261).

The post-1975 period remained one of peace, albeit marked by recession. For it is important to stress that the French generations born after 1945 were the first not to experience war as their parents had done in 1939, their grandparents in 1914 and their great-great-grandparents in 1870. They can also be said to have been privileged, for unlike the preceding cohorts (1932–1942), whose childhood was scarred by WWII and their young adulthood by the Algerian War (Bantigny 2007), they experienced the urban, social and technological revolutions that characterised the second half of the twentieth century. There was the revolution in transport—they grew up with the motor car, the "figurehead of mass consumption" (Montulet 1996)—, as well as the introduction of new technologies, such that having witnessed the development of information technologies and the explosion of the Internet, they are now learning to grow old gracefully with new technologies of information and communication (NTIC), in what François Ascher (2001) has dubbed the "hypertext society". They were also present at the birth of the global community, and helped to shape a youth culture based around music and new values in the leisure society that came to the fore in the late 1960s. Although the baby boomers' parents were present at the changes that took place after 1945, they were passive bystanders, and it was the baby boomers who actually pioneered them[5]. In this respect, according to Louis Chauvel (2002), they do indeed appear to form a *gilded generation*, compared with both their predecessors, marked by the war, and their successors, deeply affected by the years of recession.

For all these reasons, the baby boomers must surely meet the conditions needed to form a generation as defined by Karl Mannheim (1952), who made a distinction

[5] As Marie-Hélène Bacqué and Stéphanie Vermeersch remind us, "the literature of the 1970s referred to a *new class*, or *alternative class*, or *everyday adventurers*. Pioneers of transformation and culture, free from doubts about either their future or that of their children, these social groups were at the heart of a dynamics of social transformation" (Baqué and Vermeersch 2007, p. 7).

between *potential* generations, formed on a purely biological basis, and *actual* generations, whose members are the agents of social change. For while the fact of being born after the war gave them a demographic identity, it did not automatically give them a social one. Belonging to the same birth cohort creates a generational situation akin to a social situation, and certain historical events, be they wars, revolutions or student protest movements, can turn this generational situation into what Mannheim called a "generational unit", especially if its members are protagonists in those events. This participation stirs a generational consciousness within them, in much the same way that class consciousness is kindled in militants. As such, the social unrest in France during May 1968 may have been a truly decisive moment for some of them, possibly even marking a crossroads in their personal trajectories, as they found themselves drawn towards what Mannheim called a "new destiny".

For her part, Claudine Attias-Donfut (1991) has identified four possible definitions of the term *generation*. The first one is synonymous with *cohort*, which refers to a group of people who all experience the same demographic event (e.g., birth, marriage or divorce) the same year. For example, everyone born in 1946 belongs to the 1946 birth cohort—or generation. The second definition is the logical follow-on of the first one, in that it comprises individuals who are all the same age. Here, however, the emphasis is on the sharing of common historical experiences, which takes us back to Mannheim's generational unit. *Generation* can also signify the span of 25 or 30 years that generally separates a parent from his or her child, such as when we talk about things happening in *the space of a generation*, or *a generation later*. The fourth definition refers to intergenerational relations within the family, each generation seeing itself in relation to the others. This is the "genealogical generation" referred to by Olivier Galland (1997), to denote the bonds between parents and children, and, more particularly, to issues of transmission. This latter definition is regarded by Louis Chauvel (2002) as the most relevant of the four. It was in this sense that Margaret Mead (1970) used the term *generation*, when she made the distinction between a *postfigurative* culture, where children learn primarily from their parents and grandparents, in a context marked by tradition and past experience, a *cofigurative* culture, where both children and adults learn from their peers, in contexts of change brought about by migration or technological revolutions, and a *prefigurative* culture, where parents learn from their children, as knowledge can no longer be handed down from generation to generation, owing to the rapid pace of technological change, such that the world inhabited by the children is totally foreign to their parents. In this situation, each generation lives in its own separate world:

> At this breaking point between two radically different and closely related groups, both are inevitably very lonely, as we face each other knowing that they will never experience what we have experienced, and that we can never experience what they have experienced (Mead 1970, p. 125).

For both Margaret Mead and François Ricard (1992), "the baby boomers clearly constitute a generation that emanated from a *prefigurative* culture and introduced a new cofigurative culture" (Olazabal 2009, p. 30). Ignace Olazabal, however, distances himself from—or rather nuances—this view of intergenerational relations that emerged in the early 1970s, a period dominated by student uprisings in the

English-speaking world and which was still feeling the shockwaves of May 1968. According to him, the generations born after the war cannot be said to form a homogeneous group. Not all of them broke with their parents' *postfigurative culture*, nor did they necessarily adopt a *cofigurative* one. Rather, in line with Chauvel, he suggests that the baby boomers can be divided into three separate sets of generations: 1946–1955, the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the late 1960s and earlier 1970s. Intergenerational relations were also more complex than might first appear, depending not just on the family climate in which the baby boomers were raised, but also on the events they witnessed or played an active part in during their youth, as well as their individual and family trajectories. Olazabal stresses the need to differentiate between the children of the *demographic* baby boom (i.e., all those born between 1946 and 1973) and the *sociological* baby boomers. The first category refers to the generational situation and encompasses all the postwar birth cohorts, while the second category is actually a subgroup of the first, made up of individuals who lay claim to the identity of *baby boomers* (Olazabal 2009). As Stéphane Dufour, Dominic Fortin and Jacques Hammel emphasise:

> The baby boomers are postwar children who took up the slogan "who learns, earns". It is important to make a distinction between baby boomers and baby boom children. The baby boomers are those members of the baby boom who hold university degrees, the expression par excellence of this modernisation (Dufour et al. 1993).

Lastly, within the first set of generations, we also need to dissociate those who were born immediately after World War II, that is, between 1946 and 1950, and those were born between 1950 and 1954, as those who were aged 18–22 years in May 1968 experienced the events in a very different way from those were aged 14–17 years. The same goes for the French liberalisation of contraception in 1967, for while it often arrived too late for the first few generations, it allowed the younger ones to avoid the unwanted pregnancies and shotgun weddings their elders had suffered.

Like Olazabal, we can ask whether the generations born after 1946 really did "produce an entirely new social sense and meaningful cultural models that set them apart from the generations of their parents born in the 1920s and their elders born in the 1930s" (Olazabal 2009, p. 40), and whether they did indeed initiate a *cofigurative* culture with which some of their members identified, especially in their younger days. If they did, then what remains of that culture? What has been their experience of the seven ages of life so far? Have they genuinely subverted the conventional stages of family life? And if so, which ones? Certainly according to Olazabal, when it comes to retirement and grandparenthood, baby boomers fit fairly neatly into the postfigurative mould of their parents and grandparents. It may be that different individuals have adopted different types of behaviour over the years—*postfigurative* for some, *cofigurative* or *prefigurative* for others. Then again, such is the strength of transmission that family relations may have remained *postfigurative*, while marital relations have become either *cofigurative* or *postfigurative*. This is a particularly relevant question, as many baby boom children are encountering an entirely new demographic situation where longer life expectancies mean that for many their parents are still alive. They are therefore expected to cope with the old age of

their ascendant relatives, all the while being forced by the harsh economic climate to help their children gain a foot on both the job and housing ladders. But can the baby boom generations meet their family obligations without reneging on modern social values, such as freedom and personal fulfilment, based on individualism?

To answer all these questions, we chose to track the cohorts born between 1945 and 1954. We referred to them indifferently as *baby boomers* or as *baby boom children*, for only once we had completed our analysis would we be in a position to tackle the sociological notion of the baby boomer and determine whether or not these birth cohorts can be said to form an *actual generation*. Like Sarah Arber and Claudine Attias-Donfut (Arber and Attias-Donfut 2000), we decided to use the term *generation* to refer either to a historical and sociological entity, made up of a set of individuals born in the same period and who have lived through or witnessed the same events at the same age, or else to family members *sandwiched* between ascendant and descendant relatives. We reasoned that the norms and values handed down from parent to child in the course of primary socialisation, as described by Bernard Lahire (1998), are key to grasping changes in sociodemographic behaviour. They provide the stock onto which the behavioural patterns learned during secondary socialisation are grafted. We therefore paid particular attention to life stories, all the while attempting to set them in a broader historical, sociodemographic and geographical context.

1.3 A Comparative Approach

It would not have been informative to study the generations born after 1945 uniquely in the French context, given that similar demographic and sociological changes were sweeping across all industrialised countries at the same time. The very term *baby boom* was coined in the United States of America (USA) to describe the wave of births that began as early as 1943, prompted by economic recovery powered by a burgeoning arms industry. This recovery led to an increase in purchasing power that held up after the war had ended, encouraging couples to have an extra child (Olazabal 2009). Probably more so than their French counterparts, American baby-boom children grew up in a climate of affection and freedom, as advocated by Dr. Spock, to the point where they were nicknamed the *Dr. Spock generation* (Sirinelli 2003). According to some experts, this more relaxed style of parenting contributed to the emergence of student activism in the 1960s, by opening up a generation gap. Lewis Feuer[6] claims that this gap resulted from the previous generation's loss of legitimacy, but for Bruno Bettelheim, it arose from the contradictory and irrational exercise of parental authority, creating the need for an authoritarian father Figure (or, if we are to believe Edgar Morin, the desire to live in a less repressive world). Whatever its origin, the revolt against family and society found a formidable vector in the music that crossed the Atlantic via transistors and records, as well as

[6] For a discussion of Feuer's, Bettelheim's and Morin's theses, see Granjon 1985.

in fashion (jeans, miniskirts, etc.). Throughout the 1960s, the effects of student movements originating in the USA rippled across the pond to the United Kingdom. Brought up in a consumer society that promoted hedonism, British and American youngsters rejected the *hedonism of having* in favour of the *hedonism of being*, driven by a need for freedom and a quest for truth. As a result, the sexual revolution and women's liberation began far earlier in Britain and the United States than they did in France[7]. This wave of protest profoundly affected the institution of the family in these two English-speaking countries, prompting an understandable fascination with the baby boom generations, as witnessed by the many academic studies, not to mention the plethora of popular science books and articles[8].

In this context, we decided that the most relevant approach to tackling the family history of the baby boomers would be a comparative one. This approach would allow us to step back from the situation in France, put the events of May 1968 into perspective and thus avoid the temptation of reducing all the postwar generations to this one movement, especially since, as Jean-François Sirinelli (2003) reminds us, although May 1968 tends to be equated with the baby boomers in our collective memory, their elders also played an important role. Indeed, it was not so much the events of May 1968 that marked the postwar children—many of whom took no real part in them—as their spirit, which was to linger throughout the 1970s. In this sense, they represent a "necessary point of reference" according to Jean-Pierre le Goff (2007), separating a *before 1968*, dominated by conformism and relations of authority within the family, at school and in the workplace, from an *after 1968*, with its values of autonomy, freedom, and negotiated relations within the various institutions. Furthermore, May 1968 undoubtedly propelled French society towards modernity, following in the wake of British and American society.

We soon realised that we needed to compare the situation in France with the one in Britain. The two countries have several points in common when it comes to demographics, including roughly similar population sizes and mortality rates. There are also a number of notable differences, including attitudes to marriage, with a higher total female first marriage rate in Britain, at least until the 2000s, as well as a higher divorce rate (Sardon 2006). Further differences concern women's employment and childcare. Sociological change also tends to occur in Britain several years, if not decades, before crossing the Channel. Examples include early feminist movements, women's suffrage (granted in 1928), the contraceptive pill, which first went on sale in 1961, and the legalisation of abortion in 1967, which resulted in young French women travelling to abortion clinics in England. Change began to rock traditional British society as early as 1955 (Bédarida 1990), and it soon came to be regarded as an eldorado by baby boomers everywhere—the crucible, like the

[7] Examples include women's suffrage, feminist movements and contraception.

[8] In Britain, a research project was conducted between 2005 and 2008 by the Institute of Life-course Studies at Keele University specifically to explore the baby boomers. It was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of the *Cultures of Consumption* programme. See Biggs et al. 2007.

USA, of a youth culture symbolised by the Beatles, and the home of a seemingly more permissive society.

British and French baby boom generations grew up in very different socio-economic contexts. According to Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1991) typology, France has a conservative, corporatist regime[9], while Britain forms part of the liberal system, along with the USA and Canada. The two countries boast the contrasting family cultures of northern and southern Europe, leading to different relationships between age groups and generations. This was clearly demonstrated in Cécile Van de Velde's research on how young British and French people enter adulthood, which revealed different conceptions of the family and its role (Van de Velde 2008) dating back to the pre-industrial period. According to Emmanuel Todd (1990), the "absolute nuclear family" model, an "individualistic model par excellence", prompts children to leave home early, in order to escape from parental authority. Henri Mendras (1997) has described Britain as the country of "extreme individualism", a society which is more individualistic and liberal than French society, where the norm of independence has less of a hold. "Ideological structures" therefore continue to "shape Europeans' family lives".

But how far are these contrasting family cultures reflected in the life stories of the generations born between 1945 and 1954 in France and Britain? Did British baby boomers distance themselves more from their parents, in line with the process of defamilisation, and build individualistic families in which the members were individually responsible and family solidarity was reserved for the youngest and most destitute (Masson 2007)? And how did French baby boomers reconcile their aspirations for freedom and autonomy with the cultural model of family solidarity?

1.4 A Combination of Methods

It soon became obvious that the only way to address these two questions was to use a combination of methods and data sources, taking advantage of the fact that the baby boom generations are of interest not only to demographers, on account of their size, but also to sociologists, as the purported engineers of family transformations, and to historians, insofar as their arrival coincided with the postwar era, the emergence of the consumer society, and continued modernisation and individualisation.

Census and civil registration data allowed us to look back across the two previous centuries in France and Britain and pinpoint the sudden breaks that occurred against a backdrop of gradual change. Secondary sources, such as the joint INSEE-INED *Family situations* survey, conducted in France in 1985, provided us with a sociodemographic framework and, importantly, allowed us to compare and contrast the baby boomers' behaviour with that of the generations that came immediately before and after them. Lastly, INED's *Event histories and contact circle* survey of 2001, tracing the family and occupational histories of the generations born between

[9] Even if France seems difficult to categorise. See Martin 1997.

1930 and 1950, as well as those of their parents and children, lent our analysis a longer-term dimension, setting it on a family generational timescale.

In the first semester of 2006 (see Appendix 1), we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with 30 children of the London baby boom and 60 of their Parisian counterparts. These were directly inspired by the *Event histories and contact circle* survey, and can be viewed as its qualitative extension, inasmuch as they focused on one specific generation—the baby boomers. We asked our respondents to describe their occupational, residential and family histories, and to say how they differed from those of both their parents and their children. We also sought their opinions about the changing nature of families and about baby boomers and what made them so special, in terms of May 1968, the permissive society, and so on.

In order to understand what they were saying and put it in context, we drew on the work of historians, sociologists and demographers—in particular the many demographers who were active at the time of the baby boom and shortly after. In contrast to Britain, family sociology had been regarded as a very minor research field in France in the 1960s. To borrow Louis Roussel's (1999) neat turn of phrase, media interest in the subject back then was *restricted to the lonely hearts column*, with the result that most researchers felt it was beneath them. The 1970s, however, saw a renewal of interest and, indeed a sense of urgency (Kellerhals and Roussel 1987b), with the slightest clue being subjected to minute scrutiny. Demography played a key role in this revival of family sociology, thus confirming Durkheim's belief in its importance for understanding families, households and domestic life. The research undertaken by the demographers of the day, and the questions they asked about the events unfolding before their very eyes, reveal very different perceptions of changes that today seem obvious to us, with the benefit of hindsight. For instance, it comes as a surprise to discover that, in 1950, Alfred Sauvy, the leading French demographer of the day, did not believe there would be a sustained increase in the postwar birth rate and only "belatedly and half-heartedly acquiesced" (Rosental 2003), and that Louis Roussel (1978) initially dismissed the fall in marriage rates, opining that cohabitation among young people was above all premarital.

We also drew heavily on data yielded by three research programmes. The first of these, funded by the Urban Development, Construction and Architecture Plan section of the French ministry for housing (PUCA), focused on the residential and geographical histories of 30 baby boomers in London and 30 in the Paris region, and gave rise to a book entitled *Les* baby boomers*: une génération mobile*, published jointly by INED and Editions de l'Aube (Bonvalet and Ogg 2009). Funding from EDF enabled us to supplement the 30 original Parisian interviews with a further 30, resulting in the drafting of a joint EDF-INED report (Clément et al. 2007). The third and final research programme was financed by the French Ministry for Research as part of its "Terrains, Techniques, Theories" concerted incentive action (ACI), and examined the family histories of 60 baby boomers—again, 30 in Paris and 30 in London (Bonvalet and Ogg 2008).

The chapters in this book therefore offer a range of different approaches, and are ordered according to the chapters in the baby boomers' own lives, starting with childhood, then adolescence, and proceeding to look at family formation, professional life, and current family relations.

The first section, entitled *Baby Boomers in the Family*, explores the baby boomers' supposedly gilded childhood through their own words, portraying the subject from a new angle and highlighting the housing conditions and general socio-economic context of those postwar years. It also emphasises how changes in the family model meant that children occupied a more central place. Through its exploration of the baby boomers' youth, the second section *Baby Boomers Against the Family* tells the story of the 1960s protest movements in Britain and North America, and how they gave rise to a more permissive society. It also recalls the major transformations that were initiated—or, in some cases, revived—in marriage and family life. Given that the 1970s saw such profound shifts in the place of women, the third section, entitled *Baby Boomers in Alternative Families*, examines the professional lives of the women respondents and the choices they had to make, and describing the apparently new family configurations. The fourth and final section, entitled *Baby Boomers with the Family*, looks at the baby boomers' family relations today, caught between helping their children to move into adult life and their ageing parents who in many case require care.

Only once we have completed this true *journey of a lifetime* do we attempt to establish—such is the complexity of the issue—whether the baby boomers do indeed form one specific generation that clearly stands out from those before and since, breaking free of their parents' norms but at the same time instituting new ones with their children and attempting to preserve some of the values of their youth, not least freedom and autonomy. One thing is for sure: their desire for personal fulfilment, which may at times have led them to strain against the bonds of marriage, coupled with their wish to forge close relationships with their parents and children has led some of them at least to *renew the family*.

Part I
Baby Boomers in the Family

Chapter 2
The Baby Boom Phenomenon

Population—especially fertility—moves in mysterious ways (Le Bras 2007), the postwar baby boom being a case in point. Although flagging birth numbers classically recover in the wake of a conflict, the revival is generally short-lived. This makes the baby boom surprising on two counts, for not only did the birth rate start to rise while France and Britain were still gripped by war, but it remained high for several decades.

In a postwar context characterised by low agricultural and industrial production, as well as by the widespread destruction of buildings and the transport infrastructure, the baby boom threw up several challenges, the first being to recognise it for what it was (it was to take Alfred Sauvy a good 5 years to do so). The question was whether it was a *one off* that would simply peter out after a few years, or a lasting change, for as Rosental (2003) explains, "people still remembered how birth numbers had briefly surged at the end of the First World War, as a result of women catching up with the childbearing they had postponed until after the conflict". This issue was of interest not just to academics, but also to politicians, as the baby boom was to have a long-term impact on societies, as we can see only too clearly today, with the current problems brought about by an ageing population and the debates on pension reform. Even after all these years, the sheer intensity and duration of the baby boom continue to surprise and astonish, and many questions remain unanswered.

2.1 The Unexplained Recovery in the Birth Rate

2.1.1 What Was the Baby Boom?

There are intriguing similarities in the changes in fertility that occurred both during and immediately after World War II in France and Britain. In 1942, for instance, a reversal of the prevailing downward trend was observed in both countries, with a return to levels last seen in the early 'thirties. This was followed by a rapid acceleration, resulting in figures that had rarely been recorded in the twentieth century.

C. Bonvalet et al., *Renewing the Family: A History of the Baby Boomers,*
INED Population Studies 4, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-08545-6_2