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**Patterns of individual occupational histories with regard to immigration in France and
gender specificities**

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Abstract

Immigrants' participation in the French labor market has been a salient research topic, often depicted as a major criterion for assessing the integration process within the host society or as a pointer for various types of discrimination. Based on such conceptualisations, many studies revealed important dissimilarities between immigrants and other population categories regarding their employment/unemployment rates, their occupational status, or their promotion chances. However, the trajectories leading towards the labor market participation as observed at one single point in time have rarely been studied, due to limited availability of longitudinal data. Consequently, this study uses data from the French "Histoire de vie" survey to compare - for women and men - immigrants' occupational histories to those of non immigrants. It then restricts the analysis to the immigrant sample and examines occupational transitions experienced at migration, comparing the labor market trajectories lived before and after arriving in France.

1. Introduction

Immigrants' participation in the French labor market has been a salient research topic for the past decades, often depicted as an essential dimension in defining the complex integration process within the host society or, more recently, as a pointer for various types of discrimination. Such understanding entailed widespread comparison between immigrants and natives, and also accounted for the focus on the labor market only in the receiving country.

Based on these conceptualisations, many studies (for e.g. Dayan, Echadour and Glaude, 1997; Thave 2000; Meurs, Pailhé and Simon, 2006; Tavan 2006; Mikol and Tavan, 2006) revealed important dissimilarities between immigrants and other population categories (as natives or "second generation migrants") regarding their employment/unemployment rates, their occupational status, or their promotion chances. Furthermore, some results showed gender and national origin as being two main indicators for predicting variation within immigrant communities (see also Fougère and Safi, 2005; Algava and Bèque, 2008 etc.). Among the last, the most disadvantaged appeared to be immigrants from North Africa, other African countries or Turkey; while Portuguese or Spanish immigrants "succeeded" in the French labor market as well as natives. Other overall evolutions from one observation moment to another were observed, especially an increasing economic participation of immigrant women in France (Borrel and Boëldieu, 2001; Tavan, 2005).

Although the above mentioned studies shed important light on the differential participation in the French labor market according to gender and the migratory experience, they often fail to assess the temporary versus long-standing character of their findings. They also provide no information on whether the overall evolution from one point in time to another is due to changes in individual occupational pathways (for the same individuals) or to the continuous transformation of the labor force in France. These limits result from the kind of data utilized which is mainly derived from cross-sectional surveys due to limited availability of longitudinal records for France area. The cross-sectional approach thus allows the description of occupational distribution at a specific point in time, but gives no indication on the progression leading to what observed at that precise moment.

As the economic participation of individuals in general, of immigrants in particular, is one of the evolving processes all along individuals' working life time, a longitudinal analysis is more suitable, "useful" or even "essential" (Piché, 2004). This is precisely what we intend to explore here by analysing the individual occupational histories with regard to immigration in France and gender specificities.

To begin with, this research is designed to purposely compare immigrants' occupational trajectories to those of non immigrants¹. Although immigrant and non immigrant populations could have been divided in more detailed categories according to their migratory experience (namely according to the age at migration, by separating the so called 1.5 immigrant generation² from other immigrants) or their migratory background (by distinguishing for instance second generations of migrants), we have decided to limit our analysis to the basic distinction between individuals who experienced immigration in France and those who did not, so that to clearly comprehend the influence of this migration. The resulting comparison between immigrants and non immigrants regarding their occupational histories is only possible within the French labor market.

Subsequently, our analysis restricts to the immigrant sample and examines occupational transitions observed at migration, in terms of employment and occupational statuses. It then compares the overall labor market participation before and after arriving in France for immigrants whose occupational trajectory took place in several countries to those of immigrants that lived their occupational histories only in France.

As all these trajectories have different temporalities and consistency for women and men, the entire analysis is led separately by gender.

Our hypothesis addresses the differences in momentary labor market participation between immigrants and non immigrants - by gender - as a result of a complex progression over time. More to the point, we suppose that these dissimilarities originate at the beginning of the occupational trajectory in France and, though reducing over time, they still persist to a certain extent at the end of the observed trajectory in France.

2. Data and measures

In order to test this hypothesis, our study resorts on data produced in the French *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* survey, carried out by the National Institut for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) in 2003. The survey's sample consisted of 8,403 individuals of whom 1,147 were immigrants. Although no prior selection by national origin was done, the immigrant sample has a similar profile – by gender, age and occupational status - to the whole

¹ *Immigrants* are defined here as people born in another country than France, whose parents are also foreigners. *Non immigrants* is the preferred term to name the rest of the considered sample.

² Immigrants who arrived in the receiving country before 10 years old (Meurs, Pailhé and Simon, 2006).

immigrant population living in France as observed at the 1999 Census. More important, this is one of the rare surveys in France that allows recounting the individual family, residential or employment complete³ histories, in a retrospective manner, and includes a relatively large sample of immigrants.

The occupational histories described here start at the end of the schooling years or after the military service when this one follows immediately after. They end at the effective retirement for those having completed their working live. For those not retired and not employed at the upper current legal age of retirement in France, their trajectories are observed up to 65 years old, age after which the probability of getting employed or returning to work is minimal. When right censoring due to the observation moment, the trajectories are necessarily observed until 2003, independently from individuals' age at that moment or from the length of their trajectories. In short, the occupational histories have variable duration among respondents, most of them being unfinished or in progress at the survey's moment, although observed entirely. In addition, for immigrants having started their occupational history before migrating, the arrival in France split their trajectory into two parts: the first experienced on other labor market(s) than the French one, the second experienced in France.

The data allows us to construct occupational histories based on the following criteria: the employment status, along with the socio-professional category, the status⁴ and the qualification of each profession. A change occurred by one of these criteria leads to a new episode within the trajectory. In this paper, we restrict our analysis to a maximum of six occupational episodes experienced in France, beyond this number few individuals being still concerned. We also retain only two criteria to characterize individuals' occupational histories, namely the employment status and the occupational status.

The employment status comprises four categories:

- employment (in a stable job, i.e. whose duration is superior to one year, with no distinction between part-time and full-time jobs)

³ From the birth until 2003.

⁴ The so called "status of each profession" in our data summarizes employment relations along with the public versus private sector of activity. It includes the following main categories: being employed in the public sector, being employed in the private sector, self-employed or employed by his/her partner, non employee (family help without being paid) and employer.

- instability (employment and inactivity alternately, or several short jobs one after another, for more than two years)

- inactivity (military service, return to education, “housewife”, maternity leave and other forms of inactivity for more than one year)

- unemployment (with or without an allowance, also for more than one year).

The occupational status or the socio-professional category refers only to the employment situation. Every job was at the beginning an open question collecting each profession as declared by the respondents, then coded according to the French occupational classification into 34 categories. Our classification retains the most representative situations in terms of adequate education/training, work conditions and social prestige (Peugny, 2007; Amossé and Chardon, 2006; Chardon, 2002):

- unskilled workers, - unskilled employees

- skilled workers, - skilled employees

- middle executives

- professionals and entrepreneurs

- craftsmen and retailers

- farmers.

Unskilled workers and unskilled employees are considered to be at the same hierarchical level. The same convention was adopted for skilled workers and skilled employees. In all, four hierarchical levels are applied in the case of six categories, from the “unskilled workers or employees” (at the bottom of our hierarchy) up to the “professionals and entrepreneurs” (at the top of our hierarchy). The occupational transitions bringing to “craftsmen and retailers” or “farmers” are not considered to be an upward or downward mobility, but an “independent destiny” for each episode.

To characterize individuals’ occupational histories, we use the following measures:

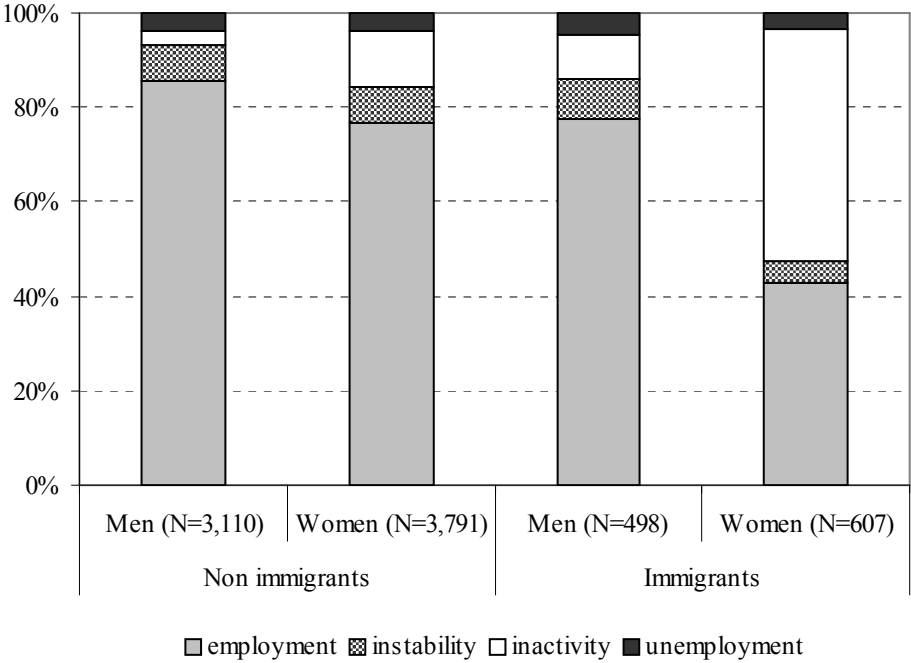
- a) Distribution according to the employment status for six episodes in France.
- b) Distribution according to the occupational status for the first and last job in France.
- c) Occupational transitions for each episode to another in France or as observed at the migration time, in terms of occupational mobility when the case is.
- d) The average part of each employment status along the trajectory experienced in France and on other labor market(s) for some immigrants.

3. Results

Differences by gender between immigrants and non immigrants regarding their occupational histories in France

The first year of their occupational trajectories in France (figure 1), a majority of non immigrant men (around 85%) and women (less than 80%), along with immigrant men (around 80%) have already acceded to the French labor market. This is not the case for immigrant women who experience to a larger extent (more than 50%) the situation of inactivity. Non immigrant women and immigrant men are also more likely to be inactive than the non immigrant men at the beginning of their trajectories in France, but much less than the immigrant women.

FIGURE 1. Employment status at the beginning of the trajectory in France

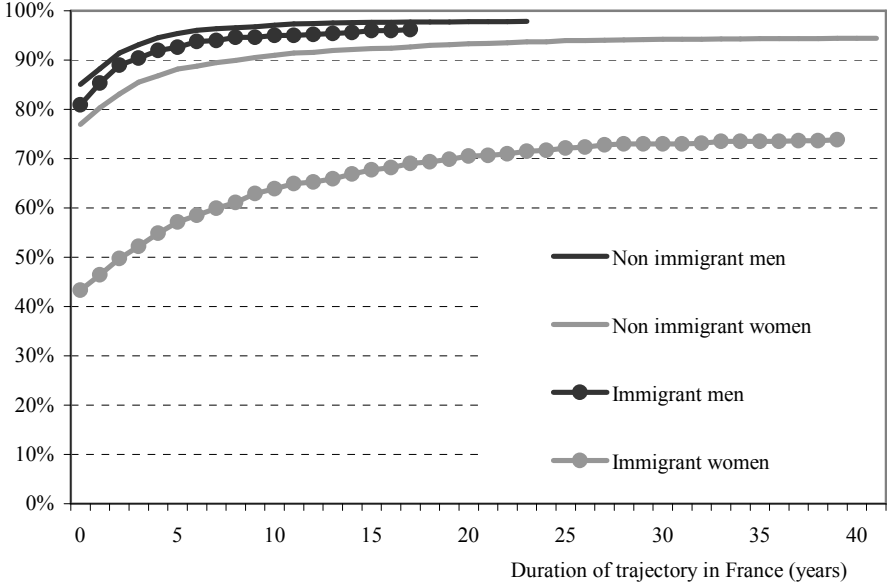


Source: *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* Survey, INSEE, France, 2003.

The following years our respondents continue to enter the French labor market (figure 2), although it takes time until this attainment is stabilized. In all, the timing of access to a first stable job is comparable between non immigrants, men and women, and immigrant men. The final share of those who attained the French labor market is relatively similar between the

three groups and not very far from 100%. On the other hand, immigrant women, despite an acceleration of their employment attainment in France, remain more frequently (25%) outside the French labor market until the end of their observed trajectories.

FIGURE 2. Share of individuals who entered the French labor market, according to the duration of their trajectory in France (%)



Source: *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* Survey, INSEE, France, 2003.

Many individual characteristics play an important role in explaining the variable chances and time of access to a first job in France, among which particularly the birth cohort, the educational attainment and the family situation for women - both immigrant and non immigrant (results not presented here).

For those who obtained a first stable job in France, the occupational status is more dissimilar between men and women than between non immigrants and immigrants (table 1). Men are more often workers – unskilled and skilled -, immigrant men even more. On the contrary, the category of employees is highly representative for immigrant women, as within the general population, although immigrant women are more frequently unskilled compared to non immigrant women. Other occupations, such as middle executives, professional and entrepreneurs, or farmers are more common among non immigrants, then among men. Within “craftsmen and retailers” category, immigrants are as well represented as non

immigrants. In total, immigrant men accede to the French labor market mainly through worker professions, while immigrant women especially as (unskilled) employees.

TABLE 1. Occupational status of the first stable job in France (%)

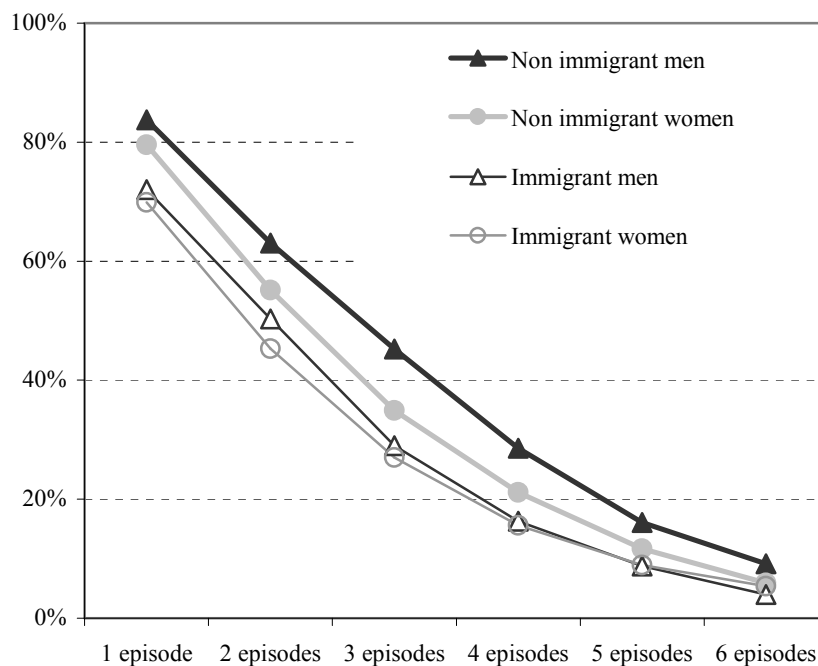
Professional category	Non immigrants		Immigrants	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
unskilled workers	26.9	11.6	37.6	9.7
unskilled employees	4.7	21.9	6.8	46.5
skilled workers	20.8	4.9	29.3	8.0
skilled employees	11.7	28.0	5.9	19.4
middle executives	16.1	17.2	9.2	9.1
professionals and entrepreneurs	8.7	5.5	6.1	3.1
craftsmen and retailers	1.7	3.1	3.1	2.2
farmers	6.5	5.0	0.8	1.9
unknown profession	2.8	2.8	1.2	0.1
Sample	3,043	3,580	479	448

Source: *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* Survey, INSEE, France, 2003.

Many explanations can be proposed to account for these dissimilarities between immigrants and non immigrants. On one hand the explanations refer to individual characteristics (the human capital), on the other hand to more global features (as social and economic circumstances). Regarding our respondents, it is true that at the beginning of their occupational trajectory in France, immigrants – both men and women – are in average older, with a lower educational attainment and more involved in couple/ parental circumstances than non immigrants. An early age at arrival in France may thus imply greater investments in human capital before becoming “employable” in the French labor market, along with a better understanding of it. The national origin is also a bearer of different forms of social capital, more or less transferable to France, but not always detectable at an individual level. The French labor market – to a certain extent segregated by gender and by ethnic criteria - can also create inequalities, if not discriminations, sometimes independently from individual characteristics. All these factors, and many others, contribute together in explaining the observed differences between immigrants and non immigrants.

Although very important for the rest of the occupational trajectory, the entry in the French labor market represents after all one episode in individuals’ working life. A multitude of other episodes follow to it (figure 3), even if less and less individuals experience them. Our choice was to observe six episodes after a first stable job in France that account for the whole trajectory of more than 90% of individuals who entered in the French labor market.

FIGURE 3. Episodes following the first stable job in France (% of those entered in the French labor market)



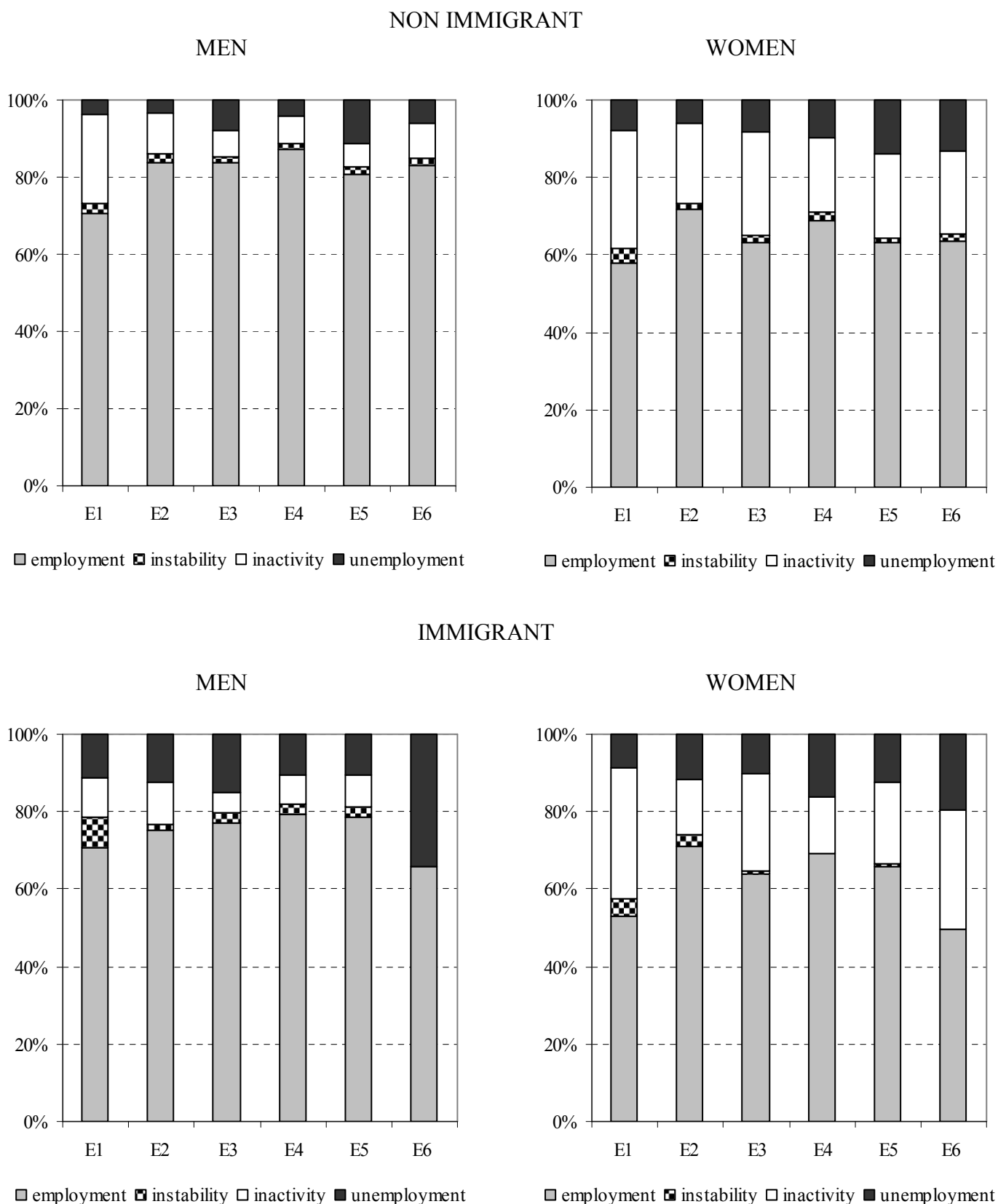
Source: *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* Survey, INSEE, France, 2003.

All along the six episodes (figure 4), men and women, both non immigrant and immigrant, have a very similar distribution according to the employment status.

Women are slightly more often unemployed than the men. The inactivity affects both immigrant and non immigrant women and mainly consists - especially during the first episodes - of being “housewife”, a category that also includes long maternity leave, although it is impossible for us to distinguish the two situations. This sustains the idea that family trajectory interferes with women’s occupational history, and requires, for the future, to go further into the analysis.

As for men, immigrants show by far the highest unemployment rates during each occupational episode observed here. They are also less inactive than non immigrant men particularly during the first episode following a stable job in France. But for immigrant men inactivity at this stage of their occupational trajectory is often represented by the military service, while for immigrant men it does much rarely. Consequently, the percentage on non immigrant men in employment at each occupational episode is the highest among the four groups, followed by that of immigrant men.

FIGURE 4. Employment status during the episodes following the first stable job in France (%)



Source: *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* Survey, INSEE, France, 2003.

For those employed at two consecutive episodes, we analyze the occupational transitions thus occurred (figure 5). We remind that a change within the same socio-professional category is considered to be immobility, while a transition bringing to “craftsmen and retailers” or “farmers” is defined as an “independent destiny”.

If the immobility rate is the highest among all rates for each of our four populations, the upward and downward mobility varies from one group to another. In a general way, the upward mobility occurs to a higher extent for men than for women, for both immigrants and non immigrants.

As for immigrants, their socio-professional transitions are less linear, which may be due to a reduced sample for the last episodes or, in other words, to very specific cases. For the first episodes, where their number is higher, the trend seems relatively similar to that of non immigrants, but very differentiated by gender with regard to the upward and downward mobility. As for the independent destiny, it occurs more frequently for immigrant men.

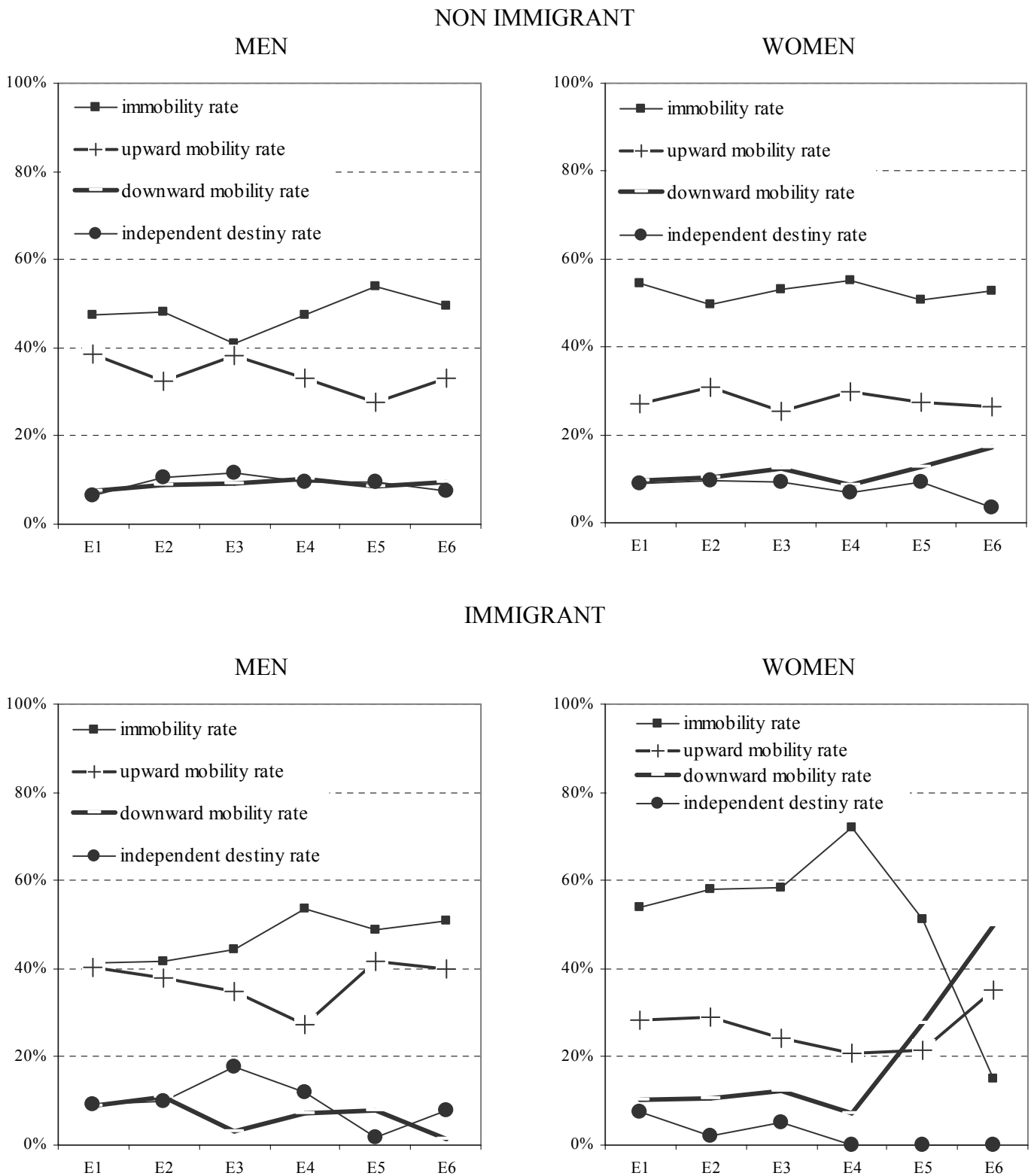
In all, according to the occupational status, the transitions from one episode to another seem to be more gendered than differentiated between immigrants and non immigrants. Men were more often employed; they also seem to accede more frequently to upper professional categories.

After integrating all occupational changes (even those not presented here), we obtain the distribution by the occupational status of the last job in France (table 2). For non immigrant men an important reduction of unskilled workers goes with a significant increase in the share of middle executives, professionals and entrepreneurs, craftsmen and retailers. The same trend is observed for immigrant men, unlike that the final categories are more often represented by “skilled workers” and “craftsmen and retailers”.

For women, both immigrant and non immigrant, the decreasing part of unskilled professions is significantly less stressed, although the proportion of professionals and entrepreneurs, along with that of craftsmen and retailers, is slightly increasing for them too.

The increasing proportion of individuals who become “craftsmen and retailers” has already been depicted in the case of immigrants as a way to avoid unemployment or to face economic crises, such as the crisis in the mid-1970s (Bruno, 2006). In a more general way, individuals’ mobility depends on the contextual evolution and needs to be examined more in detail.

FIGURE 5. Occupational transitions during the episodes following the first stable job in France (%)



Source: *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* Survey, INSEE, France, 2003.

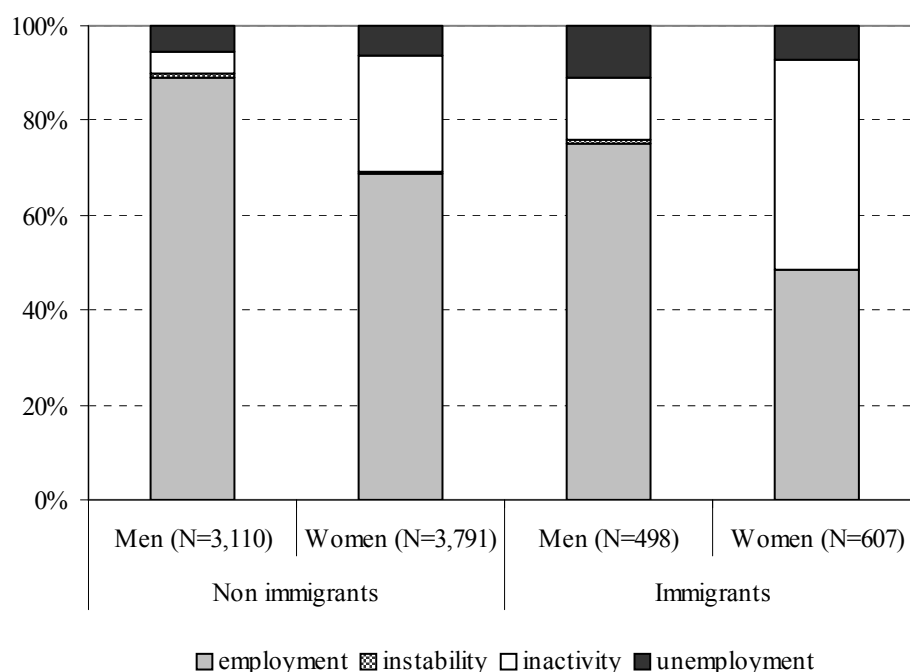
TABLE 2. Occupational status of the last stable job in France (%)

Professional category	Non immigrants		Immigrants	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
unskilled workers	9.3	7.3	18.6	10.0
unskilled employees	2.0	18.4	3.7	36.8
skilled workers	22.9	5.5	38.1	7.9
skilled employees	9.0	26.5	6.3	19.9
middle executives	22.9	19.6	13.8	10.9
professionals and entrepreneurs	19.3	9.5	9.8	8.2
craftsmen and retailers	7.7	6.4	8.6	4.0
farmers	6.8	6.0	1.1	2.2
unknown profession	0.1	0.9	0.0	0.2
Sample	3,043	3,580	479	448

Source: *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* Survey, INSEE, France, 2003.

When observing the last employment status in France (figure 6), it appears that the instability situation – more characteristic at the beginning of the trajectory, even if at a relatively low degree – gives its place to unemployment or to inactivity, for all the four groups considered here.

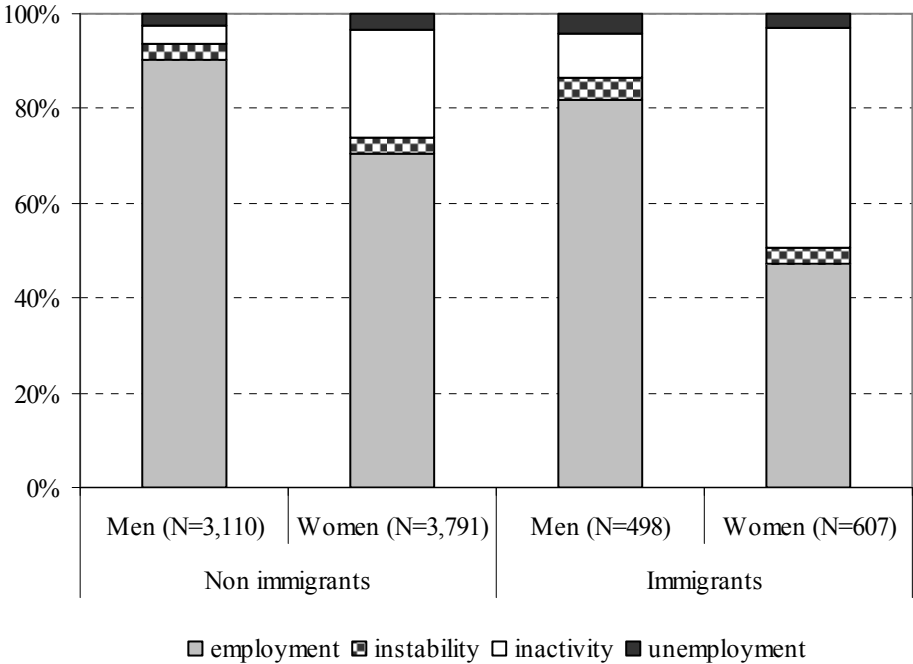
FIGURE 6. Employment status at the end of the trajectory in France (%)



Source: *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* Survey, INSEE, France, 2003.

In order to summarize the average distribution according to the employment status along the whole trajectory in France, we calculated the percentage of each duration spent in employment, instability, inactivity and unemployment in the total duration of the trajectory in France (figure 7).

FIGURE 7. Average part of each employment status during the trajectory in France (%)



Source: *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* Survey, INSEE, France, 2003.

In total, the unemployment represents a small proportion of the occupational trajectory in France for all four populations, although more immigrant men were in this situation during the different episodes. On the contrary, the inactivity lasts in average around 20% for non immigrant women and more than 40% for immigrant women of the total duration of their occupational trajectories in France. In this respect, the differences between women and men are more important than those between immigrants and non immigrants. Although women’s occupational trajectories are more continuous nowadays, an important gap still persists in comparison to men.

3.2 Migrating in France: a turning point for immigrants' occupational histories?

As for immigrants who started their trajectories before arriving in France, the transitions experienced when migrating vary according to the employment status before the migration. (table 3). Those employed before are also more often employed after the migration, compared to immigrants who were in a situation of instability, inactivity or unemployment before coming to France. Nevertheless, 78% of immigrant men and only 43% of immigrant women employed before the migration maintain themselves in the same occupational status the year of their arrival in France.

TABLE 3. Employment transitions when migrating in France (%)

Occupational status	the year...of...migrating in France				Total	Sample
	employment	instability	inactivity	unemployment		
Immigrant men						
...before... employment	78,5	4,5	12,6	4,5	100,0	203
instability	52,4	39,2	3,6	4,7	100,0	27
inactivity	60,5	4,9	34,6	0,0	100,0	25
...unemployment	41,4	0,0	40,9	17,7	100,0	8
Immigrant women						
...before... employment	42,7	1,1	53,2	2,9	100,0	165
instability	24,7	33,5	41,9	0,0	100,0	14
inactivity	18,6	0,8	80,2	0,4	100,0	167
...unemployment	0,0	0,0	4,8	95,2	100,0	5

Source: *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* Survey, INSEE, France, 2003.

In terms of occupational transitions experienced when migrating (table 4), most immigrant men remain at the same socio-professional level, except for skilled employees, professionals and entrepreneurs. Upward mobility occurs especially for those who had a low occupational level at the departure. For upper categories, especially for professionals and entrepreneurs, downward mobility seems unavoidable since they don't maintain themselves in the same professional category. On the other hand, immigrant women seldom experience an upward mobility or remain in upper categories as middle executives or professionals. This raises the question of human capital transferability from one labor market to another along with the job availability in the receiving country.

When comparing (figure 8) the trajectory lived before the migration to that experienced in France, in the case of immigrants who stated their career before migrating, we notice a smaller part of instability and a greater part of inactivity (especially for women) on the French labor market, which can be partially due to an age difference.

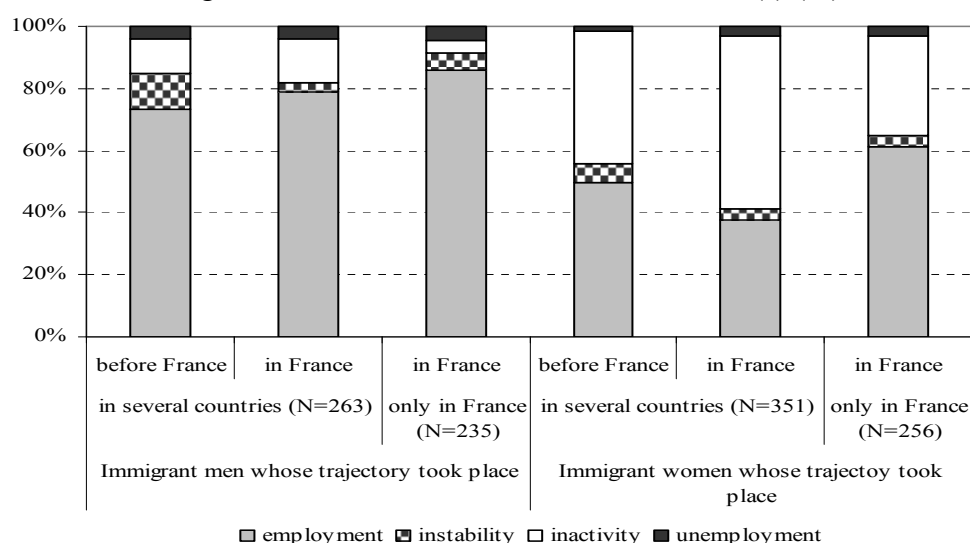
TABLE 4. Occupational transitions when migrating in France (%)

Professional category	the year...of...migration in France									Total	Sample
	UW	UE	SW	SE	ME	PE	CR	F	UP		
Immigrant men											
unskilled workers (UW)	65,2	10,4	23,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,9	0,6	0,0	100,0	66
unskilled employees (UE)	84,6	8,6	6,8	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	9
skilled workers (SW)	26,2	0,0	70,6	3,2	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	28
skilled employees (SE)	11,9	0,0	0,0	36,5	51,6	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	4
middle executives (ME)	0,0	0,0	15,7	0,0	77,7	6,6	0,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	13
professionals and entrepreneurs (PE)	0,0	0,0	15,5	0,0	27,1	39,6	17,7	0,0	0,0	100,0	14
craftmen and retailers (CR)	60,3	0,0	16,9	22,8	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	11
farmers (F)	86,4	0,0	7,8	0,0	0,0	0,0	5,8	0,0	0,0	100,0	23
unknown profession (UP)	80,5	0,0	19,5	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	4
Immigrant women											
unskilled workers (UW)	83,0	8,4	8,7	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	11
unskilled employees (UE)	5,0	82,4	0,0	0,0	9,6	0,0	0,0	3,1	0,0	100,0	25
skilled workers (SW)	0,0	41,2	58,9	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	3
skilled employees (SE)	0,0	21,4	0,0	78,6	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	9
middle executives (ME)	0,0	28,6	14,7	2,8	44,0	0,0	9,9	0,0	0,0	100,0	11
professionals and entrepreneurs (PE)	0,0	64,7	0,0	0,0	0,0	35,3	0,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	6
craftmen and retailers (CR)	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	2
farmers (F)	14,1	41,6	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	44,4	0,0	100,0	6
unknown profession (UP)	75,9	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	24,1	100,0	4

Source: *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* Survey, INSEE, France, 2003.

Immigrants who lived their occupational trajectory only in France are situated at an intermediate level between immigrants who experienced it on several countries and non immigrants, regarding the trajectory on the French labor market.

FIGURE 8. Average part of each employment status during the whole trajectory of immigrants, in France and on other labor market(s) (%)



Source: *Histoire de vie – Construction des identités* Survey, INSEE, France, 2003.

4. Conclusions

To conclude, we may notice – at an exploratory, descriptive level – that dissimilarities between immigrants and non immigrants observed by gender on the French labor market originate at the beginning of the occupational trajectories in France and evolve all along individuals' occupational histories.

These dissimilarities firstly result in a reduced share of immigrant women who accede to the French labor market in comparison to the three other population categories considered here. The timing of access to a stable job in France is less variable between them.

Then, for those who obtained a first stable job in France, not only the socio-professional category is dissimilar between men and women, between non immigrants and immigrants, but men – both immigrant and non immigrant - are more often employed during all following occupational episodes and experience more frequently an upward mobility.

If unemployment affects a larger proportion of immigrant men during each occupational episode in France, it finally represents a small part in their whole trajectory. On the contrary, the situation of inactivity takes up an important part of women's occupational histories in France, for both immigrants and non immigrants.

For immigrants who started their occupational trajectories before arriving in France, these differences not only come from what precedes the immigration in France, but become more pronounced at the migration time, especially for women. In this respect, immigration in France may be considered a turning point in individuals' occupational histories. Consequently, immigrants who lived their occupational trajectory only in France benefit from a career more frequently in employment or less frequently in inactivity (particularly for women), being situated at an intermediate level between immigrants whose trajectory took place in several countries and non immigrants.

Finally, the differential participation in the French labor market between immigrants and non immigrants, between men and women, as observed at one single point in time, is at least partially the result of a complex and unequal process evolving over time.

If this study systematically compared occupational histories by gender and migratory status, it is necessary for further analysis to integrate many other individual characteristics (especially the birth cohort, the educational attainment, the couple/parental situation) along with some migration conditions (namely the age at migration, the national origin) in order to better understand the employment and occupational transitions leading to the observed occupational distributions all along individuals' careers.

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