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# THE CRITICAL STAGE. YOUNG VOICES ON CRUCIAL TOPICS



**No. 2**

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***Génération Précaire – A Burdened Generation  
Calling for Collective Responsibility***

The *Indignados* (Outraged) and Occupy movements from 2011 made one thing very clear: a lot of people are not happy with how they are being treated. Movements and associations emerged across Europe, all of which shared the same fundamental ideas: ‘Look at us and listen to us; we have ideas; we are the people of tomorrow; do not leave us behind, for we bear the burden of the mistakes of the past.’ The *Geração à Rasca* (Lost Generation) from Portugal was moved by the song *Parva que Sou* (Fool That I Am) by Deolinda, which relates the story of someone only good enough to get internships, unable to pay off his own car; someone who has realised that having a family is impossible, for his studies have left him broke and unemployed.

In September 2012, the Benetton Group launched its ironic but very hyped-up campaign ‘Unemployee of the Year’,<sup>1</sup> based on the fact that youth unemployment rates in the 27 member states of the EU are regularly about twice as high as unemployment rates for all ages.<sup>2</sup> Let’s remember that in the 1980s, Benetton was speaking out about Aids in its marketing campaigns. The shocking issue today is youth unemployment, a trend that is emblematic of the current decade. Unless Benetton has entirely lost its knack for spotting current developments, youth unemployment is certainly the weak point of today’s Europe. Its marketing campaign, which is clearly very effective, reveals the core crisis of an entire generation, a generation of unemployed people who are supporting both the generation that came before it and the one that is coming after it – who are in fact supporting society in its entirety.

We thus find ourselves in a new social configuration: a global situation where financial burdens rest primarily on the shoulders of one section of society, which is in turn increasing the generation gap. The youth remain unemployed, even as they are expected to pay for economic crises and massive debt, and to do so willingly and happily. But while assessing the impact of this financial overload, which is leading to social conflict and difficulties within the labour market, we must not forget that generational issues are issues that affect the entire society, and that responsibility should be taken by all of society.

## 1. The Emergence of the ‘Precariat’ and Generational Unemployment

It is said that the youngest and the oldest are always the first victims. The emergence of a ‘precariat’ began in the 1980s with liberalisation and new ways of managing industry. But the ‘generational precariat’ did not emerge until the mid-1990s. At that time, newspapers declared that the young people of France were sacrificed because they had degrees but no jobs. It was just the beginning of a new loss of con-

1 Cf. *Benetton Group*: Unemployee of the Year Contest, in: Unhate Foundation, 21.11.2012; <http://unhate.benetton.com/unemployee-of-the-year/unemployee-of-the-year-contest> [21.01.2014].

2 Cf. *Eurostat*: Unemployment Statistics, in: European Commission, 1995-2011; [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Unemployment\\_statistics](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics) [21.01.2014].



trol: after years of strengthening civil rights, healthcare, and social laws, the notion of silently cutting back on social protections started to make progress. But if taking away people's rights has proven difficult to do because, as everyone knows, the French are always willing to go on strike, it was somewhat easier to create a new generation of people who are able to work but are told there are no jobs available for them, and who are thus excluded from labour laws.

This was the beginning of internships. This trend actually began 30 years ago with when Prime Minister Raymond Barre created internships to allow young people to go to companies and discover the 'real world',<sup>3</sup> but back then it was mostly a way to foster ties between schools and industry. The young interns only came to the companies for a week or so, and left feeling more certain of their career plans – or not.

Back then, internships were not supposed to compete with traineeships as they do today. In 2008, there were 427,650 trainees (or apprentices)<sup>4</sup> as opposed to more than 1.2 million interns in France.<sup>5</sup> While the number of traineeships has remained stagnant for years, the number of internships has increased. The number of interns rose from 800,000 in 2005 to 1.2 million in 2008<sup>6</sup> and 1.6 million in 2012.<sup>7</sup> Today, three out of every four jobs in the private sector are short-term contracts.<sup>8</sup> Rent in big cities like Paris has tripled in the past ten years, and you need a long-term contract in order to secure a flat. But you cannot get a long-term contract if you are less than 28 years old.<sup>9</sup> That means that you have to wait ten years between the day you

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- 3 Cf. *TF 1*: Une mesure du gouvernement Barre contre le chômage: Le pacte national pour l'emploi des jeunes, television news report, 11.05.1977; video available at <http://fresques.ina.fr/jalons/fiche-media/InaEdu01109/une-mesure-du-gouvernement-barre-contre-le-chomage-le-pacte-national-pour-l-emploi-des-jeunes.htm> [21.01.2014].
  - 4 Cf. *Ministère de L'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche*: La croissance de l'apprentissage marque une pause en 2008 et 2009, in: Note d'Information, No. 1, 2011; [http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/2011/53/5/DEPP-NI-2011-01-croissance-apprentissage-2008-2009\\_167535.pdf](http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/2011/53/5/DEPP-NI-2011-01-croissance-apprentissage-2008-2009_167535.pdf) [21.01.2014].
  - 5 Cf. Groupe de travail sur les stages et la professionnalisation mis en place par le Ministère de L'Enseignement Supérieur, quoted in *Béatrice Barbusse/Dominique Glaymann*: Les stages offrent-ils une réponse pertinente aux défis de la professionnalisation des études supérieures?, in: Journées scientifiques du CPN, 2009; [http://largotec.u-pec.fr/servlet/com.univ.collaboratif.util.LectureFichier?ID\\_FICHER=1259768696994&ID\\_FICHE=214193](http://largotec.u-pec.fr/servlet/com.univ.collaboratif.util.LectureFichier?ID_FICHER=1259768696994&ID_FICHE=214193) [21.01.2014].
  - 6 Cf. *ibid.*
  - 7 Cf. *Jean-Baptiste Prévost*: L'emploi des jeunes, in: Les Avis Journaux Officiels du Conseil Économique, Social et Environnemental, 03.10.2012; [http://www.lecese.fr/sites/default/files/pdf/Avis/2012/2012\\_16\\_emploi\\_jeunes.pdf](http://www.lecese.fr/sites/default/files/pdf/Avis/2012/2012_16_emploi_jeunes.pdf) [21.01.2014], p. 27.
  - 8 Cf. *Agence Centrale des Organismes de Sécurité Sociale*: Les salariés du secteur privé en 2011, in: *Acosse Stat*, No. 162, 2012; [http://www.acoss.fr/dmdocuments/acoss/Acosse\\_Stat\\_162.pdf](http://www.acoss.fr/dmdocuments/acoss/Acosse_Stat_162.pdf) [21.01.2014]; and *Radio France*: Les CDD de plus en plus nombreux dans les entreprises françaises: Témoignages, radio feature, 04.10.2012; audio and transcript available at <http://www.france-info.fr/economie/le-plus-france-info/les-cdd-de-plus-en-plus-nombreux-dans-les-entreprises-francaises-temoignages-757285-2012-10> [21.01.2014].
  - 9 Cf. *Camille Peugny*: Jeunesse: Merci de bien vouloir chômer, et en silence!, in: *Alternatives Économiques*, 19.10.2010; <http://alternatives-economiques.fr/blogs/peugny/2010/10/19/jeunesse-merci-de-bien-vouloir-chomer-et-en-silence> [21.01.2014]; cf. *ibid.*: Le déclassement, Paris 2009.

turn 18 and have the right to vote, and the day you truly become an adult, i.e., someone who can afford to be independent and have their own flat, pay for their own food, and pay off their student loans.

Although the struggle for civil rights has always existed in France, the emergence of collective lobbying and youth awareness due to the French internocracy is a recent development. The previous social revolution of 1968 was about big issues, or rather, big 'ideas'. The students involved in the Paris uprisings of May 1968 were outraged by the society of the late 1960s. They were fighting for hope, love, peace, charming ideas that were meant to construct a new society based on solidarity, the absence of unnecessary rules, equality, and respect of the young. It was hard to notice then, but some of the core ideas from that movement were those of pleasure and self-confidence, yet without much concern for what was to come next for society and its children. As the May 1968 generation grew older, they were still upset with the situation and still wondering why their world was in such a sorry state, but they were no longer doing anything to change it. They were in fact passing the problems on to the following generation, at a time when various crises emerged: Aids, unpaid work, massive debt, and an ageing society.

Forty years on, the youth of 1968 have of course grown older. They have changed, in both good ways and bad. They want to work; they want to stay young; they want money and retirement; they never admit they are wrong or that they might have been wrong. We are part of a society where these citizens have absolved themselves of all responsibility. The new management laws have created barriers between the top management and the teams below, between the CEO and the intern. The CEO is accountable to only one body: the board of directors. But if a mistake is made, you will invariably hear the following: "It's all the intern's fault." A few decades ago, the manager was responsible for his or her team. Our generation does not know what a manager is actually responsible for. It is always the fault of the younger, of the lesser paid, of the one who has less to lose.

Today when a young intern (20 to 25 years old) asks to be paid, the manager tells him that when he was his age, he did not ask for money, he was more sensitive. The manager says that people nowadays are mercenaries, fools looking for iPhones, shoes, and other material goods. These managers should understand that the world has changed, and the youth too. Young people do not have their parents anymore. "Where are the parents?" they ask in *Detachment*, a 2011 drama film about the high school education system.<sup>10</sup> The parents divorced, or moved away, and in general cannot afford to help their children even if they want to. Most children grow up with only one parent, which means only one source of income. Children who grow up with divorced parents and only one source of income know very well that, as the slogan of *Jeudi Noir* (Black Thursday) says, "Pour pouvoir rêver il faut savoir où dor-

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10 Kaye, Tony: *Detachment*, drama, United States 2011.

mir” (We have to know where to sleep if we want to dream).<sup>11</sup> And you cannot sleep anywhere if you do not have parents who provide for you, or if you do not have a long-term work contract.

A further point: in the past, people could secure a job even if they did not have a degree. Today, the very same employers tell you that they do not care about degrees, that there are more efficient ways to use your time. But the reality is that they *do* care about them. Do not even think about applying for a job at a big company if you do not have a degree from a top-ranked university or business school or from a regional institute. If you are from a wealthy family and have been educated in Paris, you hold the keys to success. And of course there is the fact that nowadays it is very trendy to simply refuse to respond to people applying for a job. In France, the human resource managers are always complaining because they are, in such times of crisis, practically inundated with people looking for work. But do not expect too much in France: those managers do not believe they owe you anything, even if you did spend hours applying for the job, or if you showed them a specially made piece of work. This situation has led to outrage and rebellion among France’s unemployed youth.

## 2. *Génération Précaire*: A New Kind of Social Movement

The *Génération Précaire* (Precarious Generation) movement was founded in September 2005. It was not created because someone died or because of a sudden crisis, but rather because Cathy,<sup>12</sup> a 31-year-old woman, realised, as she was signing up for her ninth internship, that she was basically being hired to train her own boss for free, a boss who was paid even though he did not know what job he was actually asking her to do. The young people of Generation Y (those born between 1980 and 2000) are working for free, doing the very same things their parents were paid to do, ages ago, when people knew nothing about economic crises, unemployment, or Aids. Cathy realised that for the past ten years, she had been agreeing to destroy her own job by accepting to work for free. A minority of interns are actually hired on as full employees at the end of their internship. As Cathy said, at the beginning it is

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11 *Jeudi Noir* is the action group of the so-called ‘housing slaves’; cf. <http://www.jeudi-noir.org>. The group took its name from the Black Thursday crisis in 1929, and decries the speculation on property and real estate in France’s big cities. It first raised attention for this issue by visiting expensive flats that have been over-priced. These visits took place in large groups wearing wigs, playing disco music, and throwing confetti. The group, which was founded in 2006, then began illegally occupying empty buildings to bring attention to the vast amounts of vacant property in Paris. They have squatted at high-profile locations such as in the Place des Vosges and near the Elysium Palace, and always leave when the owners show that they have a real plan to make use of the buildings again. Some of the squatters are currently facing trials, as well as large debts to the property owners and their lawyers. Those owners keep their buildings empty for the sake of long-term speculation, rather than renting the places out and making money in the short term.

12 The name ‘Cathy’ is an alias that the initiator of the *Génération Précaire* movement uses to hide her identity from current or potential employers.

just like prostitution in Thailand: you think you have to stay in it and stand the awful working conditions because you know someone or you heard a story about someone who one day married a client. And because of that you believe you might, one day, do the same. You know your personal situation is bad. Of course you know that. But you keep accepting it. You complain about it, but you still accept the situation, including the so-called ‘gifts’ your parents gave you: unemployment, debt, retirement funds to pay, and a lack of heroes to believe in.

Cathy wrote on numerous online forums and websites, calling for a massive intern strike (which was of course a kind of joke, as interns do not have the right to strike, since they are not incorporated into the labour law). Dozens of people answered the call, and *Génération Précaire*, which hesitated for a while to be called ‘Cassandra’ – after that priestess who always spoke the truth in her prophecies but was never trusted –, was born.

The first move was to have a distinct visual identity: since interns have no rights and no money, and since they are always being replaced by other interns, the use of white masks – the same neutral masks used in theatre productions – seemed like the perfect way to go, for you *have* no identity as an intern. You are just ‘the intern’, no matter who you are. Using white masks to symbolise the absence of rights in traditional strikes was a very media-centred idea. The older generation organises massive demonstrations with thousands of people, taking to the streets to ask for protections and change. *Génération Précaire* launched a new mode of communication and mobilisation – one with only 30 people and 30 white masks – and coupled this with effective online mobilisation.

Only three months after its founding, the action group met Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin; and two months later, in March 2006, a law was passed that guaranteed a modest payment to interns of the private sector. Six years on, three further laws have already been voted in, creating more protection for interns. A European charter on internships has been signed, with *Génération Précaire* as its spin doctor. *Génération Précaire* has become an influential lobbyist in social movements, as well as in government ministries, and it also offers consulting services to companies. Furthermore, it frequently hits companies that have bad labour practices with flashmobs. Many banks and consulting groups have been targeted, in addition to the cosmetic and fashion industries, and most of the time they are disposed to make changes in how they deal with their human resources.

### **3. Generational Issues in Need of Collective Responsibility**

Is outrage a generational question? If you asked someone from *Génération Précaire*, *Jeudi Noir*, the *Indignados*, or the *Repubblica degli Stagisti* (Republic of Interns) in Italy, they would all say yes. Because today, the generational question is all about making big changes in societies that show no consideration for their youth, but

rather ask them for more and more without ever giving them the rights that usually accompany such demands. And even though everyone in society is complaining, some groups have more legitimate complaints than others.

Of course, parents constantly tell their children, “You have to, it’s life.” But 30 years ago, parents were working for meagre salaries and poor working conditions that were *improving* over time. Today, however, young people are having to put more energy, time, and money into degrees that lead to unemployment or temporary work, and also to living conditions that are worse than ever. The drop in status is clear to see. This phenomenon arose with the sub-prime crisis, and everyone now agrees on one thing at least: the situation has to change. But there is disagreement too, namely, over the following question: Who is going to bear the cost of these changes?

We can fight the fact that outrage is a generational issue, and we can do so concretely. Simply saying “Let’s love the young and the old and all live happily ever after” does not help the situation – concrete action is needed. We need to understand that unpaid work has huge consequences on people’s behaviour at work; and that asking young people for so much in a country full of divorced people adds to their burdens. Young people under 35 should be represented in parliament, in government institutions, in the private sector, and in the media. They should be given the chance to participate in decision processes in private-sector companies. In 2012, French parliamentary deputies were predominantly between 50 and 70 years old, whereas 30 years earlier they were, on average, 20 years younger than that – this is not a natural or positive development.<sup>13</sup> If the youth situation is bad today, the young must certainly not be the only ones held accountable for it. We must encourage, by legal means if necessary, different generations to work together to solve these problems.

A recent article in Germany, *Generation Erblast* (Generation Burdensome Inheritance),<sup>14</sup> addressed the topic of the elderly supporting the younger generation. The article pointed out how unfair it is that people in their twenties and thirties have to shoulder so much responsibility in an ageing society. Is it really that difficult to expect the elderly to play an active role in trying to improve the situation of the younger generation?

The children of Generation Y are caught in the middle of the current global situation. As so many of them are desperate for jobs, they strain themselves to have flawless resumes, and resign themselves to the prevalent drop in economic and social status. And by accepting unpaid jobs, after finishing their last degrees thinking that they will have a proper job opportunity the following year – they are destroying

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13 Cf. *Assemblée Nationale*: Liste des députés répartis par âge, 19.06.2012; <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/qui/xml/age.asp?legislature=13> [21.01.2014].

14 Cf. *Kerstin Bund*: *Generation Erblast*, in: *Zeit Online*, 06.09.2012; <http://www.zeit.de/2012/37/01-Generation-Erblast> [21.01.2014].

their chances. For companies have come to understand that there is no need to pay young people if they are so very desperate to prove themselves on the job market, in the hopes of eventually succeeding and managing to pay for not their own retirement, but that of their parents. According to the 2010 report *Jeunes, une génération précaire* (Youth, a Precarious Generation) by Secours Catholique (Caritas France), young people are massively unemployed: 25% are looking for a job, and 20% are living below the poverty line.<sup>15</sup>

Is precarity a generational issue? Yes. But does precarity affect only the people that are subjected to it? No, of course not: both the elderly and the youth are affected by it. The task of the youth right now is to convince society that when young people are allowed to fall below the poverty line, others will be dragged down with them. The many suicides that France has recently seen in large companies are one example of this. One person who killed himself just before the outrage demonstrations wrote a suicide note. He wrote that he could not stand to be threatened anymore – every day his manager was warning him that he would be replaced by an intern if he did not increase his productivity.

If Generation Y remains alone and simply plays the victim card, then no changes will occur, or only those changes that Generation Y itself manages to accomplish all on its own. The idea, rather, is to go beyond antagonism, to show to the older generations – parents, institutions, and managers – that they should trust us. By educating and listening to each other, day after day, we may find some common ground.

#### **4. Generation Y and the Generation of 1968 – Different Ways of Living, Working, and Protesting**

Is rebellion a generational issue? “Of course not,” is what the older generation of May 1968 will say. Those people seem to think that the old ways of mobilisation have to stay. But the younger generation does not care for throwing bricks and insulting the police. Their rebellion is much more sophisticated, for theirs is a digital rebellion; and their way of showing disagreement is not out in the streets, but rather in the ways they accept their slavery. A common saying in the Soviet Union was: “The state is pretending to pay us, so we are pretending to work.” It seems that globalisation is in fact performing a few ‘miracles’, for this saying now often holds true outside of the Soviet Union as well.

Generational rebellion is not a rebellion against the older generation, but rather merely a cry for help, for new ways of working, of envisioning society – an attempt to explain that we cannot continue to degrade a whole generation without consequences. It is also, ironically, a way of speaking with some of our ancestors, such as Jean-Baptiste Colbert, the French Finance Minister under Louis XIV, who planted

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Secours Catholique*: Statistiques d'accueil 2010. *Jeunes, une génération précaire*, dossier de presse, 07.11.2011; [http://www.secours-catholique.org/IMG/pdf/Dp\\_Stats2010-2-2.pdf](http://www.secours-catholique.org/IMG/pdf/Dp_Stats2010-2-2.pdf) [21.01.2014].



trees in France, saying that they would be useful in two or three centuries. Nowadays, speaking for future generations is completely unthinkable, at least in France. In Japan, after the Fukushima disaster of 2011, World War II veterans volunteered to repair the nuclear facility instead of the young workers. “Young people,” they said, “should not pay for mistakes we made in the past.” Is it mere coincidence that Japanese society also shows more consideration for the younger generation when it comes to working conditions? In Japan, you never work for free, even if you are young and inexperienced.

When we again ask the question “Is rebellion a generational issue?”, it becomes apparent that the answer to this question simply changes depending on your age. Generation Y has to convince the older generation with their own weapons, with new ways of taking decisions, of working, and of expressing discontent. Thanks to the 2008 financial crisis, parents now know that you can work very hard and still not find a job. They know that you have to earn multiple degrees, and have at least five years of experience, and already have had a job abroad, and also be willing to work for free. If you are less than 28 years old in France, you know that the chances of finding a long-term employment contract are slim.<sup>16</sup> The parents of Generation Y have begun to share in the outrage, but in a different way. They still think the street is the best place to show their discontent. The revolution of Generation Y however is a more silent one. Instead of going on strike, they go to work. They express their outrage in how they go about their work, with the awareness that global change begins on a smaller scale, with the everyday life of the individual.

Do companies understand this outrage? No, in fact they seem to be wondering why you would not be honoured to work for them for free. In general, if you are called in for a job interview, and are then told that it is actually an internship, and if you dare say you came for a job (which is not easy), they will not spare you: there is a good chance you will be laughed at, because, as they will tell you, there are at least ten other people ready to jump at this opportunity. And the awful thing is that they are right. The young unemployed person’s greatest enemy is himself, his willingness to accept bad job offers with either very meagre income or no income at all – his willingness, in other words, to sabotage his own situation, and degrade the way he thinks about labour.

Today, Generation Y has become a marketing hot point. Human resource managers understand that you have to be careful with the youth. Although those managers are not always on good terms with trade unions, the two groups do have one thing in common: they still have not found the key to Generation Y. These young mercenaries are not interested in trade unions, because the unions excluded them by requiring long-term contracts in order to join, leaving them entirely on their own during years of internships or short-term contracts. This explains their lack of enthusiasm for the trade unions. Neither does Generation Y feel indebted towards the

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16 Cf. *Peugny*, 2010; *ibid.*, 2009.

companies they are working for. They are not paid well, so when another company contacts them and offers them more money and better opportunities, they do not feel guilty about leaving their current employer. Human resource managers and trade unions now understand that industry will not survive if an entire generation of workers is willing to move so freely and quickly from one job to another. And hiring practices are already beginning to change, creating more space for the mercenary generation. The managers understand that if the youth live differently and work differently, they also buy differently. We can see the emergence of a market dedicated to people who cannot afford anything, and who therefore represent a very unique pool of consumers.

Of course, now that Generation Y has become a concept, a lot of prejudices are emerging too: young people cannot concentrate; they are unable to focus on a single project; they think they are always right; for them, standing up for yourself simply means sending a tweet. Of course, if you want to be heard, outrage has to be more than merely tweeting, more than only wearing masks in flashmobs. Outrage also means creating new ways of communicating with the people around you: your family, colleagues, managers, boyfriend, girlfriend, and so on. The current atmosphere of precarity has created new life situations for the youth: young women know well that if they do not get a job before the age of 28, they will have to wait to get promoted, and waiting has consequences on whether or not they can manage to have children of their own. It also has consequences on matrimony: you cannot really consider having a long-term relationship with someone if you do not know where you will end up working, and hence living. Precarity's impact extends from the family into many other aspects of social life. There is more to Generation Y than merely being immature and overly connected to the web: this generation has its own social issues to resolve, and it is still working on decrying injustices and proposing changes. Action groups such as *Jeudi Noir* and *Génération Précaire* are indeed crying out against injustices, but they are also always proposing concrete action as well, both on the national level (via legislation) and the local level.

We have seen that the current situation of precarity has a huge impact on the way young people work. Managers today wonder why Generation Y seems so mercenary, why they tweet while on the job, why they are constantly multitasking, why they seem to lack respect for the management, why they are not attached to their own companies, and why they always ask 'why?' when they are asked to do something. Maybe all of this is the case because Generation Y is tired of being used. For years, human resource managers assumed that unpaid work would do no harm to the economy, but this assumption has proven to be false. These hiring practices have changed the way millions of young people consider the private sector. For years they were promised that they would be hired, but then they were not. They entered companies full of respect for their elders, and trying to find heroes, people they could trust. But how can you trust someone who asks you to go by the name of 'Stéphane' if your name is in fact 'Pierre' just because it is easier for the client to

deal with the same name on the phone? How can you trust someone who asks you to hide the fact that you are an intern with no rights, paid 400 euros a month, from the clients? Can you trust someone who yells at you if you are not on time, and yet arrives a full hour later than you every morning? Can you now see how this kind of situation, if perpetuated, might have detrimental effects on the way Generation Y views the world?

## 5. Conclusion

The level of outrage regarding the situation of the younger working generation in Europe is indeed alarming, and has revealed a generational issue that needs to be addressed in a global manner. This new situation, this new mode of living, is above all else a collective problem. If it is the case that the younger generation no longer fully respects the older one, it is also the case that that generation is still very conscious of the fact that they will not be able to survive through solely antagonistic means. The youth of today see how difficult life can be from a global point of view, but they are, at the same time, very optimistic when it comes to individual matters. They know that their individual situations cannot be improved without collective action – action that comes from within their own generation, but also from their parents' generation, one that must be willing to start thinking differently about their children.

The younger generation – the children – are ready. The Precarious Generation has managed to make ends meet by photoshopping the documents needed to rent a place, by switching from one short-term job contract to another, and so on. And if it is true that they get on Facebook during working hours, it is the older generation that has made them act like that. Now the Precarious Generation is laughing, because it is adaptable, because it is able to survive in a world it did not create, but that it *does* understand. The older generation, meanwhile, is still holding forums and having breakfasts with human resource managers to try to figure out the key to Generation Y.

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**Ophélie Latil**, born in 1983, is an online activist and spokesperson for the French group *Génération Précaire* (Precarious Generation). In 2001 she began studying political science at the Institut d'Études Politiques in Aix-en-Provence, with a focus on business administration and a thesis on human rights and religious conflicts in Russia. In 2006 and 2007 she earned Masters degrees in intellectual property law and management. She has interned at the Institut Français in Saint Petersburg, among other places, and has worked for human rights NGOs such as Amnesty International. Latil garnered international fame through the activities of *Génération Précaire*, where she is chiefly responsible for events. In addition to this, she is a spokesperson for the organisation *Jeudi Noir* (Black Thursday), a campaign to combat the housing shortage in Paris, and *Sauvons les Riches* (Save the Rich), an ironically named movement campaigning to implement salary caps for CEOs and fighting back against the impunity of the wealthiest in society.

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# THE CRITICAL STAGE. YOUNG VOICES ON CRUCIAL TOPICS

Ever since the outbreak of the revolutionary movements that in Europe have come to be known as the “Arab Spring”, diverse forms of protest seem to be on the increase worldwide. At their core, these protests are driven by citizens’ calls for more social participation, more democracy, and – above all – more transparency in individual states. Young people in particular are at the forefront of these protests, as has been exemplified by the Occupy movements in New York, Frankfurt, and elsewhere. A further defining feature is that most of the protesters belong to a well-educated middle class – a middle class that refuses to accept the prevailing social imbalances and the resulting lack of opportunities, most notably with regard to employment.

The international series “The Critical Stage. Young Voices on Crucial Topics” deals with these developments and poses questions such as: Can this growing level of resistance be defined as a homogeneous global phenomenon? Or are these protest movements more regional in nature, and determined by the respective state systems within which they are located? What specific demands can be identified, and how could these demands be incorporated into political decision-making processes? Does the underlying reasoning extend beyond the political sphere to other areas as well?

Designed as an ongoing online publication, “The Critical Stage” aims to bring together the various standpoints of protest movements from around the world. The series gives a voice to representatives from a wide variety of individual movements. Young journalists, film directors, artists, researchers, and members of diverse protest groups share their views on the inequities in many of the world’s political systems, and on the various modes of resistance that are being formed in response to these conditions.