

# Hope in generations with a bleak future

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## Introduction

**B**ASED ON the Portuguese and European reality, although some of the issues discussed may be considered on the scale of Brazilian reality, this paper proposes a sociological reflection on generations that distrust or fear the future in a time when it is increasingly difficult to predict the courses of life. In fact, data from a recent survey from the European Social Survey (Pais & Ferreira, 2010) suggest that while there is a relative consensus on which stages of life are the most ideal topographies, the paths of life – increasingly subject to uncertainties, ambiguities and anomie – fall under the realm of real topographies. Tropo refers to a situation of “liminality,” a field of possibilities of “juggling existence factors” (Turner, 1981, p.118). This tension or mismatch between societal topos and biographical tropos– or, if you will, between life expectations and paths – can be theorized as a dysrhythmia (Barthes, 2003, p.19) associated with an identity crisis, triggered when imagined futures are denied by reality. This age-related anxiety often deepens the lack of hope for the future. These dysrhythmias occur in different contexts and life stages: among young people, both in relation to what is expected from them and to what they expect from the future, and among old people who are socially disconnected or have a hard time to survive.

Europeans do not deny the influence of traditional models that organize different stages of life chronologically and cause ages to be stratified according to certain statutes and roles (Cavalli & Lalive d’Epinay, 2008). However, the relative standardization in the way that different life phases are ideally represented corresponds to a growing breakdown of life paths. For example, the democratization of education has led to a normative consensus on compulsory education and on a prolonged school life. However, the rising expectations for professional development and social mobility cannot prevent the frustration associated with their failure – actually, it is the contrary. This is to say that the representations of the different stages of human life point to a set of rules that clashes with the lived reality, leading to a dysrhythmia between what is idealized and what is fulfilled due to difficulties in achieving the desired prospects for transition (Brannen&Nilsen2002, p.513-37). We can see that there is an age entropization in several stages of life that results from a heterogeneous or un-

wanted combination of transient and precarious social status (Vieira & Gamundi, 2010).

We can also see that this entropy among young people can lead to social movements inspired by feelings of indignation, such as those taking place in many European countries. Neither the education system nor the labor market seem able to ensure that the aspirations of many young people will be fulfilled. As a result of employability difficulties, they are then beset by feelings of disappointment and disbelief, unable to imagine a future with hope. Some parents invest strongly in the academic lives of their children in the hope that they will find work more easily and become independent. But what we see is that many of them continue to live in their parents' home, unemployed and economically dependent. So while young people are part of the so-called future generation, many of them cannot envision it and end up dragging themselves through the present without any hope for the future. They are then hit by a feeling of relative frustration (Gurr, 1970), a term used to designate a state of tension that results when an expected satisfaction is not realized. Frustration emerges as a negative balance between the recognition and prestige that people enjoy at a given moment and that which they think they deserve. In extreme cases, this feeling of relative frustration can lead to disillusionment, isolation, depression, and loneliness – except when social networks (particularly family-based networks) act as buffers. On the other hand, some old people have spent almost their entire lives trying to make a living, i.e. hoarding up their meager savings with a lot of sacrifice in order to enjoy a peaceful old age. And then what happens? They find themselves compelled to retire later than they previously thought and with a miserable pension. They also often find themselves abandoned, shrouded in loneliness and immersed in this relative frustration that arises when an expected project (quiet old age) is not fulfilled (meaningless life). Under these circumstances, the feelings of fear and anguish can weaken or destroy the hope for the future. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1993) drew an appropriate distinction between these feelings. Fear refers to a specific fact and is always limited and identifiable – e.g. fear of being robbed. In contrast, anxiety does not have a specific precipitating cause; it refers to a widespread and undefined fear of rejection, a fear of existing (Gil, 2005).

### **Outraged youth**

What sociological meaning can we assign to the demonstrations led by the so-called outraged youth that spread across Europe and other parts of the world in 2011? While it has multiple determinants that associate localized cultures (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997) with transnational movements (Hannerz, 2005), the outrage of many young people who took part in these demonstrations seems to point to a mismatch between expectations and rewards (Klandermans, 1984). Posters used during the 12 March Movement in Lisbon clearly showed a frustration over unemployment and precarious working conditions: “Precariousness is my crisis”; “We have no future in precariousness”; “Precarious employers

want us, rebels have us.” Posters carried by university students also revealed feelings of revolt against a proven devaluation of academic degrees: “Qualified and unemployed”; “Degree in slavery”; “Graduate = Unemployed”; “I have a bachelor’s degree, a master’s degree and a boyfriend / I have no job, no marriage and no future.” A similar frustration could be observed among the young people who went to the Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid (15 May Movement): “Workers for sale. “Pitiful salary, undignified conditions;” “Youth with no future, no home, no work, no subsidy, no fear”; So much studying just to be the most qualified in the unemployment line.” The recognition of precariousness is associated with disbelief in the future. Their personal future is not the only thing at stake (“I want to be happy, damn it!”; “We’re tired of surviving! We want to live;”; “We can’t live this way!”; “If things go on like that, I’ll only become a father by the age of 40!”): the country’s future is also at risk (“We want a future for our children and youth”; “The country will be closed for construction”; “And what about our future?”). In his pioneering reflections on social movements, Blumer (1951) identified a specific feature in these outraged young people: a feeling of restlessness and frustration about living conditions, but, at the same time, a small sliver of hope still alive, a desire for change that can be clearly seen in many of the posters in the Puerta del Sol camp: “Occasionally it is necessary to live the dream, and even more so when these dreams can change an entire life;” “They may silence the idealistic but never the ideals”; “Who said that another world is impossible?”; “Be angry! Fight! Act! There are more reasons for moving than for standing still”; “For a new world, the world of the triumph of love over fear. In love with change.” Community-based proposals pointing to a new social order re-emerged in the camps in Lisbon and Madrid – although it is difficult to determine their representativeness. There were lots of people calling for sustainable development, for the production of natural products, organic gardens, and recycled materials. They claimed their “right to seeds,” to take care of the earth, to live in community. What we could see were community-based neo-romantic myths coexisting with the defense of spaces of autonomy, plurality and difference – attributes of contemporary social movements (Cohen, 1985). These have a “critical boundary”, a tipping point that is reached by a (quantitative) accumulation of tensions and a (qualitative) perception of this critical boundary (Melucci, 2001, p.58). The main focus is on how the future is anticipated, on the hope placed in it: “They will not steal our dreams;” “What is utopia for? Precisely for that: to move on;” “If you dream that a better world is possible, if you have hope and fight for that ... then it’s because you’re alive!” Many young people project themselves into the future as if they wanted to play with it, feeding it with illusions. Interestingly, the etymological root of illusion is *ludere* (Latin), which not by chance derives from *ludus* (game). Illusions are thrown into the future when there is the possibility to imagine it. The frustrations felt by the outraged youth are not intended to eliminate hope, even though a bleak future can also trigger feelings of disbelief.

Failing to imagine the future means taking refuge in the present. Take, for example, what happened in the riots and looting that began on the outskirts of London (August 2011) and spread over other English cities (Birmingham, Manchester, Gloucester, Nottingham, Bristol and Liverpool), when hooded youths set fire to cars and buildings, looted shops and threw bottles, stones, bricks and Molotov cocktails at the police. How to explain the destruction and looting of shops, the theft of sneakers, brand clothes, sunglasses, plasma screens, mobile phones and alcoholic beverages? Undoubtedly, a rampant consumerism, bewildered violence and possible feeling of impunity, apart from a lack of future prospects and a deep anger evident in gestures, actions and words of some young people: “Ya, know why we’re doing this? Cause we hate, ya!” There is an important historicity that explains not only these riots, but also those caused by young people from the suburbs of Paris in 2005, when about 8,000 cars were set on fire, and also in subsequent years. The clandestine races in cars stolen by young people in Vénissieux in 1981 were not a simple act of delinquency. This behavior was brought about by a feeling of exclusion, by an inability to anticipate the future, by a despair marked by a social anomie. Therefore, further highlighting this contrast, “the baby boom generation had some privileges not because of its consumption level or its freedom, but because of its confidence in the future” (Dubet, 2011, p.14). And this confidence is what is missing today in some young people who have no hope for the future. The destructive rage that first swept the outskirts of Paris and then some English cities offers no deterministic sociological explanations. Dubet (2011, p.50) identified a “malaise” among these turbulent young people, but then he said that it seemed that the cause of this malaise could be found “everywhere and nowhere.” And, in fact, it could be found in urban segregation, consumption dreams, school failure, destructive violence, unemployment, social inequalities and so on. This cauldron of events is where the “malaise” of these young people, who have no hope for the future and no ability to even imagine it, is boiled.

If we compare the concentrations of outraged young people to the youth riots in London, we can see that there is a “group hyper-referentiality” (Unda, 2011) in both cases, but with a difference. While there seems to be a lack of ideals and societal references in the London riots, this hyper-referentiality among the outraged youth is transitional and manifested in a social dissatisfaction that takes the form of a criticism based on social values and ideals (Castells, 1998). This is to say that, in the London riots, this hyper-referentiality is of an intra-group nature, resulting in an inbreeding exaltation of notably instrumental references, such as gratuitous violence. In contrast, we can see that these outraged young people— who also held demonstrations in several English cities — have a transnational identity centered on societal values and communion symbols, such as the camp tents (“yes, we tent”) or the masks of the self-described Anonymous group. How can we interpret the use of these masks in demonstra-

tions? Just as myths, masks do not explain themselves. To reveal what they hide, we need to solve their puzzles. How? By analyzing the uses that people make of them. We know that young people have appropriated a mask that symbolizes the character of a graphic novel: “V for Vendetta” (Revenge). The comic book series was written in the 1980s by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd, and later adapted into film. The mask represents Guy Fawkes, an English Catholic conspirator who planned to blow up the Parliament with explosives. He was arrested on November 5, 1605, and then executed. The mask appropriated by Anonymous symbolically connects those who wear it, as an identification reference. In seemingly insignificant traits, under these masks there is a circulation of emotional and affective relationships that constitute a community, a “we” whose flag is the mask, an investment in emotional connection.

What both the outraged young people who protested peacefully and those who took part in riots actually did was to announce or confirm the existence of problems within a social structure characterized by significant asymmetries and inequalities. This is why they can be said to play a “prophetic role” (Melucci, 1985, p.797). But there is a difference. Some use violence as a means to imprison themselves in a present without future, without hope, while others use the word power as an announcement of what is to come. Not only the power of sung words, of angry words, of words amplified by megaphones, but also words written in announcements, posters, manifestos or in artfully sprayed graffiti on city walls. Anyway, these words denounce a present to forget and announce a future to conquer. In their own way, these young people are “prophets of the present” (Melucci, 2001) – a present that is the product of a crisis and, therefore, can also produce a future. Here there is room for hope, for it is moved by the power of desire (Bloch, 1977), by concerns that lead to dissatisfaction (Bloch, 1993), by a desire for change (Gimbernat, 1983). This universe can include experiences that point to new societal directions, different ways of living and thinking, innovative interfaces between politics and culture. Only the loss of hope can lead to a denial of the future, a sick and obsessive regression into the present without any decision-making power. As we will see below, old people also suffer from this syndrome, albeit in a different manner, when they find themselves without a dreamy planning – on the road to fatalism.

### **Abandoned old people**

Some old people believe that seeking refuge in religion is a way of giving meaning to life. A typological analysis of data from a Survey on Attitudes toward religion, carried out under the International Social Survey Program (Pais et al., 2000), emphasized a particular group among the Portuguese people surveyed. Accounting for 43% of the population surveyed, this group, which we called the ritualistic, moralist and traditional Catholics, brings together the most significant indicators of religiosity, belief and faith: belief in God and miracles; belief in heaven; belief in life after death and other popular beliefs (amulets bring good

luck; psychics can predict the future; faith healers have divine powers; people's lives can be affected by their astrological signs, etc.). In this group, we found an overrepresentation of old and disabled people and widows from lower social strata and who earned lower wages. It is precisely this group that includes the greatest number of people who say they are disenchanting with life: either because they think "that the world is full of evil and sin" or because they feel that "the future doesn't exist" or that "fate can't be changed." As a matter of fact, in this group we also found an overrepresentation of those who think they are "unhappy" and that life "has meaning only because God exists." In other words, these respondents believe that religion, faith and God are the anchors they hold on to when life seems to have little to offer them.

Data from the European Social Survey (ESS, Round 4 2008-2009) also show that, as opposed to religiosity, sociability among Europeans tends to decline as they grow older. On the other hand, life satisfaction tends to decrease in middle age and then stabilize, while community involvement has greater statistical significance in intermediate age groups. A sociological finding right in the wake of Durkheim's pioneering work on suicide shows that single and married people are more satisfied with life than divorcees and widows. Since sociability is more pronounced among young people, we can say that widows and divorcees have lower life satisfaction because of a weaker social integration. In contrast, and contrary to the old saying that "money can't buy happiness," the survey shows that the higher the income, the greater the life satisfaction. The loss of social ties because of age is by no means inevitable. However, the aging process is associated with a weakening or loss of social networks and locomotion abilities that translate into states of deprivation (Townsend, 1987; Lalive d'Épinay & Spini, 2008). Data from the same survey (ESS, Round 4 2008-2009) show that the elderly are discriminated against on age-related grounds: 32% of respondents over 65 years old said they had been victims of ageism (*âgisme*), a term used for this kind of prejudice (Bizzini & Rapin, 2007). Age-related discrimination is a painful experience. Among Europeans, old people are the ones who have the lowest levels of well-being and a more prolonged feeling of unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life (ESS, Round 4 2008-2009). Thus, age appears as an aggravating factor in social exclusion (Louage, 2002).

The loss of sense of belonging is one of the factors most associated with loneliness and disappointment with life. It is often a decisive step toward symbolic death. Not surprisingly, the risk of death increases during the first years of widowhood (Thierry, 1999) or when one's spouse is hospitalized (Ankri, 2007). The death of social ties precedes physical death. On the other hand, some old people are filled with despair for living adrift in time; or for feeling that they have not lived the past as they should; or for dragging themselves along in a present that is reflected in the mirror of an uncertain future without social support networks (Erikson et al., 1986). In Western Europe in the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries, the dependence of many older women led to family and social tensions that culminated in a well-known “witch hunt.” Old people continue to be mistreated in some families today – which even gave rise to the term “battered grandmother syndrome” – and, when they are dumped in nursing homes or hospitals as “dead weights,” they often become “cases” occupying “chairs” or “beds.” In a survey carried out in nursing homes (Pais, 2006), many old people complained about the lack of visits from friends or relatives. They would occasionally receive one or two telephone calls. While some consider the telephone to be – without any metaphorical connotation – a “cord of life,” others do not think quite that way. An old man confessed to me that he felt uncomfortable talking over the phone because he couldn’t hear it well, even using a hearing aid. Perhaps he also thought they were charlatans for getting in touch with him in such an artificial manner. Most of these old people resort to TV to combat loneliness. Television hosts become part of their family, talk to them daily, smile at them, give them news and updates, and provide a snapshot of what is happening out there – a colorful image that is swallowed by the shadowy existence of a solitary life. Television is elected by old people as their favorite companion to combat loneliness, and yet it ends up amplifying it. TV distracts them, including from themselves, and make them unlearn to look at the world and to think of themselves.

Sometimes loneliness is more acute when it is filled with more memories. Some older persons look back at life and mourn the direction that it has taken. Some blame fate, referring to it as a magical order that outweighs any desire to change it, while others blame themselves, triggering fraudulent thoughts about what could have happened if what happened had not happened. They invoke fate or luck – “luck turned its back on me,” as they use to say – to explain that their helplessness is caused by factors of chance, leaving open the possibility of a change of luck – in case it ever decides to stop “turning its back” on them. They rarely blame their helplessness on the abandonment to which their children expose them. They tend to blame it on the “misfortunes of life,” on meager pensions that are not enough to buy medicines, or on their age, which undermines their ability to “go for it.” Do they ignore the biographical and family factors that determine their situation? But the more they think of them, the more they get worn down. By claiming to be victims of bad luck, they can more easily become beneficiaries of luck, if it deceptively changes one day. For those who believe, luck is fickle and tricky – it goes away and then comes back when they least expect. The fact that some of them bet occasionally on the lottery, reflects a distant hope in this stroke of luck, a numbered hope touted as a desirable “big luck.” Others, however, seem resigned to their bad luck and do not expect good luck to knock at their door. Sometimes they feel depressed and are plagued by “negative thoughts.” Several old people confessed to me that a lot of things had already “crossed their mind” (Pais, 2006). They use this term to refer to nega-

tive thoughts that tempt them to overcome the miseries of life by putting an end to it, as if they were “throwing themselves under a train.”

In the past, death was visible, recognized, ritualized; it used to occur in domestic spaces. People died at home and the funeral was held there, attended by relatives, neighbors and friends. Now people more and more often die in hospitals or nursing homes, away from their family, only in the company of strangers, machines, and loneliness. The “medicalization” of death looks like a disease (Dechaux, 2002, p.254-5); “assisted death” is seen as a model of “good death” (Dechaux, 2001). It is a “civilized” death that silences the manifestation of feelings toward pain, suffering, and death itself. The State and families deal with the “issue” of old people by concealing them. The coordinator of the Lisbon Hospital Center recently commented: “They have been completely abandoned by their families. Their children receive their retirement or disability pensions while they are here” (Expresso, 17 December 2011). In 2011, 17 of the 44 unclaimed bodies that were left in morgues and whose age could be determined were of people over 60 years old.

When people die at home today, the circumstances are very different from those of long ago. Old people have a strong tendency to die alone, abandoned in profound loneliness. According to the latest census of the Portuguese population (INE, 2012), about 60% of the elderly population live alone or in the exclusive company of other old people. In 2011, almost 2,900 old people were found abandoned and dead at home, most of them in Lisbon. Statistics are the only proof of this reality; they are the only record of the loneliness experienced by elderly persons. Socially, they are part of a “country of non-existence” (Gil, 2005, p.15-23); they are only found when they smell like rotting death. As dying individuals, they have fallen into oblivion and are no longer part of the living world. From time to time, firemen break into suspected houses and find old people in need of aid, and others already dead from abandonment.<sup>1</sup> Inês, for example, was one such case. She lay dead in the bathtub for more than three years. None of the five children of the former nursing assistant looked for her. Neither did the neighbors, although the old woman’s mailbox was a clear sign of her absence, as it was filled with mail. Nothing caught their attention, not even the “unbearable smell” coming from Inês’ house – the smell of death, of rotting human flesh. A neighbor thought the smell was coming from the sewage line or from dead rats. To reduce and avoid the smell, another neighbor isolated her door with tape (Jornal de Notícias, 8 April 2011). Christmas bells were still hanging on the old woman’s door, as if everyday was Christmas for more than three years. Bureaucracy acted with the usual diligence of those who treat people as mere “users”: electricity, water and gas had been cut off, but the Social Security Administration continued to pay her retirement benefits (Jornal de Notícias, 8 April 2011). Another old woman, who also died at home, did not escape bureaucracy’s zeal. Since there was an outstanding debt – how could the



dead woman pay it off? – the State put a lien on the house, which was eventually sold at public auction. When the new owner of the apartment inspected it, which required breaking the door, she found an old woman’s body in decomposition. If she was alive she would be 96 years old – nine of which lying in the kitchen. Her only companions were found close to her body: two dead birds in a cage and the skeleton of a dog (O Público, 10 February 2010). We can sociologically question the affectionate relationship that some old people develop with pets. It is quite possible that pets help some of them overcome feelings of isolation or loneliness. That is exactly what I found out when I took an inventory of the tombstones of 1,338 graves in the pet cemetery at the Lisbon Zoo (Pais, 2006). In a universe of 657 names of animals surveyed, I found out that in most cases people use the animal’s name to better express their affection: “Bill / Your owner will love you forever”; “Dear Jane (Little Jane) / Rest in peace / We will be together again one day when God wills it / I miss you.”

### Conclusion

In times of change, discontinuities and uncertainties, the rules that continue to standardize different life stages coexist alongside the recognition of the unpredictability of life courses. There are concerns for the future, sometimes even disbelief. This dimension of *risk* and uncertainty is conducive to regressive forms of closure and avoidance. The fragmentation of experience calls for havens, security anchors that often arise in “refugee communities” (Bauman, 2000), in intergenerational solidarity networks. Eisenstadt (1976, p.32), on the other hand, warned that there can be tensions between generations. And these tensions can lead to the creation of “adjustment mechanisms”, or rather “anormative groups.” Some generational cultures are associated with *anomie* situations when people are skeptical about the future, when essential security and self-esteem needs are not met, and also when feelings of identity and belonging become weaker. Back in the time when Mannheim (1990) produced studies on generations, the central issue of his research was the succession of generations. Today, due to economic and demographic changes, the problem is not only the succession of generations, but also the solidarity-based coexistence between them. In a Europe beset by crisis, an increased life expectancy and lower birth rates have led governments to address the issue of resource allocation between generations, putting solidarity between them at stake.

When faced with skepticism about the future, how will people survive the tension between social intangible normative rules and their repeated transgression, which leads to existential anxiety, without feeling guilty? Paz (1979) and Giddens (1991) developed the idea of *colonization of the future* to explain the “hypertrophy of expectation” that accompanies the progressive reduction of experience spaces (Marramao, 2011). And why is that? Because anticipating the future makes people anxious to achieve it. As the expectation horizon expands, they fall into a situation of *liminality* – a space sandwiched in a present that pur-

sues a future that cannot be attained. The reduction of experience spaces reflects a desperate expectation, a hope that cannot be translated into reality. According to Marramao (1991, p.90-1), it is this lack of hope that can lead to a denial of the future, which in turn brings about a sick and obsessive regression into the present, without any decision-making power. This would then give rise to a kind of “temporal disorder” associated with two types of reaction: the *melancholic syndrome* and the *manic syndrome*. The first type affects mainly those who fall into retentive depression, without any dreamy planning and nurturing a sense of misfortune. This is what happens when people resign themselves to their life’s circumstances: “*it’s life*”; “*fate wanted it that way*”; “*God’s will be done.*” The second type affects mainly those who have no prospects for the future and are unable to leverage past experiences, and thus end up reproducing gestures, habits and present routines in a neurotic way (Marramao, 2011, p.91). Hope disorders can lead, on the one hand, to resignation and fatalism and, on the other hand, to mimetic rituals that may escalate to violence.

We could say that the “voices of imagery” (Laplantine, 1974) sound different in different generations. Older people with a stronger religious affiliation display a spiritually messianic attitude toward life and are more conformed to the present, as if they were just waiting for the future, even if it is projected beyond death in an extraterrestrial life of illusion. Waiting passively for death can also mean denying hope. One can only live fully in time when expectations turn into hope, otherwise there is a kind of retraction of existence, which is increasingly fueled by anxiety – about dying alone, for example. As we have seen, the loss of hope can translate into resignation, i.e. accepting everything that is contrary to the fulfillment of desires and wishes. In this case, the present escapes the future, meaning that it shifts from a “horizon of possibilities” to a haven for apathy (“we are living as God wants us to live...”; “It’s our sad fate ...”) where only the “fear of existing” survives (Gil, 2005, p.121). Among young people, on the other hand, it is more likely that the despair of waiting triggers mechanisms of possession directed to the present – a present that is neither linked to a past that evades memories nor to a future that cannot be anticipated. As well stated by Laplantine (1974), this possession replaces the waiting time with the here and now of ecstasy. However, while possessing the present is just a source of immediate pleasures for some young people, others believe it is a time to create utopias, even though their nature varies between those who nurture the hope of realizing them and those who think that the important thing is not to realize dreams, but rather to have dreams to be realized.

Albeit distinct, the voices of imagery echo mythical temporalities that move between the past and the future. The different matrices of these voices share a similar sense of community that nurtures the imagery of hope (Entralgo, 1978). In the *spiritual messianic matrix*, typical of older generations, hope comes from believing in the “beyond,” in an anticipation of a future whose

non-fulfillment could – though not necessarily – have the effect of nullifying the present. This prophetic belief is associated with distinctive religious rituals that, through prayers and worship services, create a sense of community belonging and solidarity in faith. On the other hand, while some young people display a stronger prophetic-*messianic* attitude – more oriented by political beliefs about liberation (*messianic-revolutionary matrix of hope*) – others practice a sacred and profane regressive mysticism (Berriain & Sánchez de la Yncera, 2010) with reminiscences of an ancestral solidarity that is ritualistically recovered through music, dance, festive events and so on. This is what happens to some urban tribes (Pais & Blass, 2004) when they demand the territorialization of collective memories that echo from the past, as suggested by a Portuguese rapper (General D, 1997) “We are all *ekos* from the past/Past, the absent present is *Kondemned*/ Disguised without knowing which side to take” (“*Ekos do Passado*,” CD, Kanimambo, 1997). Shattered identities can reinvent themselves by picking up their pieces and reviving, in a “memorial speech” (Colombo, 1991, p.124-5), presences revealed by absences – lost, forgotten, remembered or invented. According to Desroche (1973), the *echo* (in the collective memory) and the *viaticum* (in the collective consciousness) intertwine to prevent social disintegration and keep alive the hope born out of collective imagination. The basis of this imaginary recreation can also be prompted by social conflicts that, as with the “outraged” youth, bring about collective actions guided by the hope of new societal directions. Even in a generation with a bleak future, hope can survive when the social ties that give meaning to a community prevail.

#### Note

- 1 The European Union (based on directive 1999/74), however, fined Portugal and twelve other Member States for mistreatment of chickens. As from 1 January 2012, the legislation requires that all laying hens are kept in ‘enriched cages’ with extra space to nest, scratch and roost. The legitimate rights of these active laying hens are not under discussion here. The purpose is only to highlight the contrast with the situation faced by abandoned old people.

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*ABSTRACT* – At a time when many paths of life are characterized by an uncertain and unpredictable future – with frequent age entropies and dysrhythmias – this paper proposes a sociological reflection on generations with a bleak future: from young people who, even with increased education, have no future expectations to old people with longer life expectancy, but skeptical about the meaning of life. Data from international surveys and case studies are used to analyze age-related anxieties caused by frustrations and fears about the future when the present holds no hope.

*KEYWORDS*: Generations, Future, Crisis, Solitude, Hope, Social movements.

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