

# CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND YOUTH ACTIVISM: A CASE STUDY IN LISBON

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## ABSTRACT

The present paper is part of ongoing doctoral research in political science in Brazil. It explores the advent of the Anthropocene as an ethical and political phenomenon, highlighting the transformation of humanity into a geological force and its political and epistemological consequences. We address the key role of young people in climate activism, that is in new movements such as End Fossil Occupy, the Student Climate Strike and Climáximo in Lisbon, Portugal. We hypothesise that the Anthropocene requires its own form of politics. Consequently, the narratives of young people in Portugal contribute significantly to establishing this new political paradigm. The article is, therefore, divided into four parts, in addition to the introduction and concluding remarks. First, we analyse the concept of the Anthropocene and its weaknesses, and Latour's views of this reality, commonly referred to as a war of worlds. This is followed by a brief discussion of climate activism in recent decades, and the description of the research methodology. The field experience in Portugal in October 2023 offers an enriching overview of the active involvement of Portuguese youth in the light of the emerging climate crisis. Finally, we share the field experience and the dialogue between these youth movements in the Portuguese capital. The aim is to provide an overview of the intersection between the Anthropocene, climate activism and the prospects of Portuguese youth.

## KEYWORDS

climate emergency, activism, youth, climate justice, Portugal

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# EMERGÊNCIA CLIMÁTICA E ATIVISMOS DA JUVENTUDE: UM ESTUDO DE CASO EM LISBOA

## RESUMO

Este artigo faz parte de uma pesquisa de doutorado, ainda em andamento, em ciência política no Brasil. O texto explora a emergência do antropoceno como fenômeno ético-político, destacando a transformação da humanidade em uma força geológica e suas implicações políticas e epistemológicas. Abordamos o papel central das juventudes no ativismo climático, como o surgimento de movimentos como End Fossil Occupy, a Greve Climática Estudantil e o Climáximo, em Lisboa, Portugal. Nossa hipótese é que o antropoceno exige um fazer político próprio. Dentro desse cenário, as narrativas das juventudes em Portugal emergem como contribuições significativas para a definição desse novo paradigma político. Portanto, o artigo estrutura-se em quatro partes, além da introdução e das considerações finais. Primeiro, analisamos o conceito de antropoceno, e suas debilidades, e a perspectiva de Latour sobre essa realidade, comumente referida como uma guerra de mundos; depois, abordamos sucintamente o ativismo climático nas últimas décadas; em seguida, apresentamos a metodologia de pesquisa. A vivência de campo em Portugal, durante outubro de 2023, oferece uma perspectiva enriquecedora sobre o envolvimento ativo da juventude portuguesa face à iminente crise climática; por fim, compartilhamos a experiência de campo e o diálogo estabelecido entre aqueles movimentos de juventude

na capital portuguesa. O objetivo é fornecer um panorama da interseção entre o antropoceno, o ativismo climático e as perspectivas das juventudes portuguesas.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

emergência climática, ativismos, juventude, justiça climática, Portugal

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‘The epoch has changed’. That is to say of giving this observation the power to make us think, feel, imagine, and act. — Isabelle Stengers, *No Tempo das Catástrofes*, 2015

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The current paper reflects on what we call the Anthropocene and its political and epistemological consequences. The central idea is to address the Anthropocene as an unprecedented ethical-political event, in which human action becomes a geological force that has the power to reshape the planet. This phenomenon is revealing itself through climate change and ecological collapse, and is claiming a political process of its own.

Therefore, assuming the Anthropocene as an event implies acknowledging that the impact of some current facts such as extreme climate events, which we and the other beings with whom we share the earth are enduring, although not unprecedented in the history of the planet, it is certainly new from the point of view of civilisation. As the current crisis becomes visibly more and more severe, the vision of a stable planet is gradually being replaced by the prospect of a future without human presence. Thus, apocalyptic scenes are becoming increasingly common, such as the flames that devoured Athens in August 2021, or the devastating Pedrógão Grande forest fire in 2017, deemed the largest in Portugal’s history, which ended in 60 fatalities and many injured.

We believe we stand before a new conflict area. On one side, there are those who deny or block all policies to tackle climate change and, on the other, those who are fighting to preserve a liveable planet. In this scenario, climate activism is more urgent than ever in view of the global challenges, which the strong voices and actions of young people are raising awareness of. Young climate activists around the world play an important part in challenging the inertia of the international system and demanding concrete measures to combat the climate emergency. Movements such as Fridays for Future, led by Greta Thunberg, and Extinction Rebellion are known for their interesting approaches and mobilising a generation that is actively seeking to shape its own future. They have also inspired several other climate movements, such as End Fossil Occupy, the Student Climate Strike and Climáximo in Portugal.

In this article, we briefly look into how Portuguese youth is responding to the climate crisis, exploring their approaches to understanding the problem, implementing actions and engaging with the government. Our hypothesis is that this movement is a fundamental part of what we call the politics of the Anthropocene. Furthermore, we highlight the importance of the war metaphor that lends urgency to the situation, establishing a duality between “us” (society) and “them” (states, companies), in a narrative

similar to Bruno Latour's (2002/ 2020a/ 2020b) conception of the war of the worlds. The paper is divided into four parts, in addition to the introduction and concluding remarks. We begin by analysing the concept of the Anthropocene and Latour's views on this reality, commonly referred to as a war of the worlds. Then we briefly address climate activism in recent decades, followed by an introduction of the research methodology. Finally, we share the field experience and our dialogue with climate-related youth movements, namely End Fossil Occupy, the Climate Strike and Climáximo in Lisbon.

## 2. THE ANTHROPOCENE AND THE WAR OF THE WORLDS

In this research, we begin with a critical analysis of the Anthropocene, explaining the reasons for this choice and providing a theoretical framework for the concept. The Anthropocene argument emerged in the 2000s, based on the argument by chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer that we are living in a new geological era, in which humanity has been “a major [acting] geological force for many millennia, maybe millions of years” (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000, p. 18). In other words, the human being acquires the status of a force of nature. Ever since, the timeline of this era and the *anthropos* responsible for so many changes have been broadly discussed.

There are many clear arguments supporting the transition to a new era, while the scientific community itself explores a range of terminology. Since 2009, researchers have identified the “planetary boundaries”, outlining biophysical processes which, if crossed, could trigger non-linear, sometimes abrupt and sensitive changes in environmental systems (Rockström et al., 2009). Climate change, loss of biodiversity, interference in the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, destruction of stratospheric ozone, acidification of the oceans, global use of fresh water, changes in land use and chemical pollution are critical factors that separate a liveable life from a catastrophic scenario for humanity.

However, recently, after almost 15 years of debate, the International Union of Geological Sciences voted against adding the Anthropocene to the official timeline of Earth's history. According to geologists, one of the obstacles to its approval is the difficulty in establishing an official starting date, since they still have to figure out how and where to set it.

The choice of starting date is not a mere scientific formality, it is intrinsically linked to profound political and moral implications. In other words, “the more remote the date, the less the current forms of capitalism are an issue and thus the more responsibilities are diluted” (Latour, 2015/2020a, p. 183). Therefore, deciding on the beginning of the Anthropocene can reconfigure geopolitical dynamics, accentuating vast inequalities or enabling a new configuration in which more vulnerable groups can develop new strategies of struggle. However, regardless of the decision of the Working Group on the Anthropocene, as Lorimer (2017) points out, “the genie is out of the bottle” (p. 7). The concept of the Anthropocene has spread across the academic, political, media and artistic spheres, giving it meaning for a significant portion of society.

Ever since, various debates have also ensued about the nature of this *anthropos* responsible for so many changes, particularly since the climate emergency was not created, nor is it maintained, by humanity in general. Due to such remarks several intellectuals (for example, Latour, 2015/2020a; Malm & Hornborg, 2014; Tsing et al., 2019) question the use of *anthropos* in the narrative of the Anthropocene and note its analytical fragility, and its capacity to drive collective action. There was therefore an academic-political endeavour to demonstrate such a chasm between humans and non-humans, which triggered many other formulations on how to name this new, post-Holocene era. According to Franciszek Chwałczyk (2020), at least 80 to 90 alternative nomenclatures have been put forward. In a disputed political-semantic arena, the Capitalocene (Moore, 2016/2022), Necrocene (McBrien, 2016/2022), Plantationocene (Haraway, 2016) come up, among others.

The heart of the matter is the excessive emphasis on humanity's impact on the Earth, rooted in an alleged unity of the *anthropos* as a subjective and material community (Yusoff, 2018). However, this indivisible and inseparable humanity can overshadow the dynamics of racial capitalism (Robinson, 2018), climate colonialism (Sultana, 2022), climate apartheid (Tuana, 2019) and the many social inequalities caused by fossil fuels. In our view, this idea of the inseparable "human" is also one way of concealing the role of struggles in the larger field of — epistemological and political — disputes that is the Anthropocene. Such different histories of responsibilities can be erased by establishing a standardised 'we'. Certainly one of the greatest challenges of the Anthropocene is its abstraction, which may also be why activism and movements generally speaking, do not use it.

That is why we are involved in a critical engagement with the Anthropocene, because we see some paths that it may open up. On the one hand, the term allows for an interdisciplinary dialogue between natural scientists and humanists, and beyond. On the other hand, the concept hints at the universality of a homogeneous "Human being", whose universal basis for creation was the white, Christian and heterosexual man. Haraway (2016) and Tsing et al. (2019) teach us that by paying attention to this legacy we can discover what is happening on the planet, especially concerning the unevenness of climate and environmental issues. But also because there are other humanities — and their non-human alliances — that are involved in maintaining the planet liveable for all of us.

It is in this context that Bruno Latour, among many other authors, discusses the political and sociological implications of living in the Anthropocene era. Latour identifies this moment as the new climatic regime, with human beings as the geological agents, and nature, once considered mere scenery, as co-protagonist in the narrative. Under this regime, nature can no longer simply be exploited or protected; a wider range of agents and forms of life beyond the traditional dichotomy between nature and culture must be acknowledged.

In the book *War of the Worlds: What About Peace*, published in 2002, Latour discusses how a perceived unity of nature led modern people to the war of the worlds. They

believed the clash could not be seen as a confrontation between worlds, as they defended the existence of a single world. There were two approaches to those who did not share this view: try to persuade them through colonisation, or regard them as others whose beliefs posed no threat to the ruling order.

However, the climate emergency has warned that it is no longer viable to continue with current development policies. Despite this, economic growth at all costs and the accumulation of resources persist as pillars of progress and the well-being of society. The seriousness of the situation takes the dispute between worlds to a new level. In this context, the Anthropocene can be interpreted as a scenario of widespread conflict where many battles will be fought over the configuration of space and climate (Costa, 2017).

By no longer being subject to the unity provided by nature, both sides of the dispute can openly say who they are, what they are fighting for and what the world they want to build looks like, ultimately differentiating between friends and foes. Only after this war between worlds has been acknowledged — that is, when political disputes are no longer governed by the pacifying function of nature — can a truly lasting peace agreement be sought (Latour, 2002).

The new climate regime therefore challenges us politically to abandon the idea of human beings as the epicentre of nature and to learn to coexist with beings that, until recently, we considered only as resources. As Latour points out, on the one hand, humans, the heirs of modernity, who do not find agency in “natural” beings; on the other, earthlings, those who recognise non-humans as political agents actively participating in the construction of the world. Both sides do not share the same territory and define belonging to the Earth differently.

Furthermore, the French philosopher (Latour, 2017/2020b) points out that the perception of the future consequences of climate change, as early as the second half of the 20th century, revealed that there is not enough planet to house modernisation. The elites quickly realised this and embarked on their obscurantist mission to deny and mix up the growing evidence of global warming and its effects on the planet. This is the “they” of the current war of worlds.

The obscurantist elites, as he calls them, have understood all too well that the promises of modernity are not going to be fulfilled, that we are moving at a rapid pace towards a point of no return in environmental catastrophe and that modern utopias will occur in only a few places for a few people, to the detriment of everyone else. This understanding had them consolidate their sovereignty over the resources they needed to preserve their way of life. In other words, they have chosen to double down and continue investing in their political and economic projects, passing on the costs above all to the most vulnerable human and non-human populations.

In this context, political inertia vis-à-vis global warming is not just due to lack of awareness of businesses, government officials and a large part of the population. To assume this would mean believing that there is a humanity that could finally come to an agreement when it realises that nature is in danger. On the contrary, what climate change deniers and the mining industry lobbyists make very clear is that we are facing a project

that instils doubt about the existence of climate change that inhibits social mobilisation around the issue and obstructs the implementation of policies aimed at preventing the problem from getting worse.

It is thus a real war of the worlds, or more precisely, a conflict between those who seek to discover the world — and fight for it — and those who seek to find refuge outside of it. The latter, however, transfers the burden of the “return of the Earth” to everyone else, making others accountable for the relevant costs and challenges.

In this context, according to Latour (2015/2020a), the current limit of the planet implies a fundamental transformation in our approach to “political action”, by establishing a new geosocial political arena in which we seek to combine social and environmental struggles. At the same time as the obscurantist elites, climate activists also readily spotted this new conflict zone. It is no coincidence that they adopt the narrative of war as a mobilisation strategy and as a means of interpreting the present moment.

In the field, we see how activists act and react in the same way as Latour’s provocative statements: “We’re not just facing a global emergency, *we’re at war* [emphasis added]. Every year, governments, companies and institutions created to maintain the appearance of peace kill thousands of people around the world in the pursuit of profit” (Climáximo, 2023). “They” (governments, companies, institutions) have declared war on “us” (ordinary people and non-human beings).

So, recognising the warlike nature of the current situation, where the conflicting forces include not only human actors but also the elements of the Earth itself, it is imperative that we turn our gaze to contemporary battlefronts. In this context, new forms of climate activism are emerging that not only respond to imminent threats, but also seek to reset the groundwork for human coexistence with the environment.

### 3. CLIMATE ACTIVISM AND POLITICS IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Climate change emerged as a global concern in the 1970s, when the international system began fostering conferences and agreements on the matter. International collaboration began with the 1972 Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm and reached its height two decades later at the 1992 Earth Summit (also known as ECO-92) in Rio de Janeiro. During this period, international institutions and new platforms for political and ecological intervention emerged, including Green parties and many civil society organisations with diverse ideological orientations (Svampa, 2020). In this context a consensus on human action in nature was consolidated and validated by the scientific community (Milani, 2008).

The 1980s featured a growing trend in environmental movements across the globe. In the United States, environmental justice claims were raised in particular by the African-American communities affected by industrial activities, in response to the environmental debate of May 1968. Benjamin Chavis coined the term “environmental racism” for the purposes of the relevant political-theoretical analysis (Chavis cited in Bullard, 2019). The concept “environmentalism of the poor” emerged in Latin America (Martínez-Alier,

2007), and sought to connect environmental struggles on various scales (local, national and global) with social inequality and the reproduction of capital (Milani, 2008; Svampa, 2020).

Svampa (2020) reports that Corporate Watch in the US raised the concept of “climate justice” in 1999 to address the causes of global warming, demanding responsibility from companies, especially oil corporations, and commitment to the energy transition. Meanwhile, several movements, such as those of indigenous peoples, rubber tappers, ecologists, green parties, the Movement of People Affected by Dams and the World Social Forum, organised themselves in different ways against global warming, neoliberal globalisation and the impacts of capitalism in Latin America (Milani, 2008).

In 2012, two decades after the 1992 Earth Summit, Rio de Janeiro hosted the Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20, which aimed at upgrading global environmental governance. All the while, the People’s Summit, organised by a broad coalition of civil society organisations, social movements and activists, was taking place. Several topics, including social justice, environmental rights, gender equality and criticism of the prevailing economic model, were addressed throughout the parallel event.

In the last decade, the climate issue has gained further momentum as extreme weather events have become more frequent, social media have provided space for public debate and the phenomenon of climate denial has grown since Donald Trump came to power in 2016 as the president of a global power. Trump’s announcement of withdrawal from the Paris Agreement spread further frustration. The agreement, which came out of the “21st UN Climate Conference” — COP21 — in Paris in 2015, was a milestone in tackling climate change, as major powers, such as the US, committed to taking concrete action from 2020 onwards, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2 °C.

Svampa (2020) highlights the 2014 People’s Climate March in New York as a new stage in ecological-environmental-climate movements around the world. Such “new” movements became the “children of the ecological movements of the 1980s” (p. 286). At the time, slogans such as “there is no planet B”, “forests are not for sale”, “climate change cannot be stopped without stopping the US war machine”, among others, emerged (Svampa, 2020, p. 115). In 2018, Greta Thunberg and Fridays For Future came to the world’s attention, as she stopped going to school on Fridays to protest in front of the Swedish parliament. The “Greta effect”, as Svampa (2020) calls it, materialises in several “climate strikes”, known as the Global Climate Strike, and many other cross-border movements arise, such as the Extinction Rebellion, Jóvenes por el Clima, among others, which demand that governments declare a climate emergency.

#### 4. METHOD

In October 2023 we went into the field with activists from the Student Climate Strike, Climáximo and End Fossil Occupy in Portugal. Our goal was to understand the mobilisation strategies, the challenges faced and the government’s responses to these

movements. We chose participant observation, because it offers an important insight into climate activism in Portugal (Duarte, 2002). Firstly, our choice was inspired by the proximity between activism in Brazil and Portugal, which the language, and the historical and social relations between the two countries can explain. Furthermore, the organic relationship between the occupations in Portugal and the “occupiers” in Brazil in 2015 reinforced this affinity (Medeiros et al., 2019). Secondly, the decision was reinforced by the intensity of European activism, with Lisbon setting the stage for a growing number of demonstrations. During the period of the field research, the movements engaged in calls for civil disobedience, meetings, talks and cultural activities almost daily, in various parts of the city.

During the process, the research faced challenges due to activists’ distrust in the beginning, because the government was intensifying persecution. Recently, the Portuguese government has endorsed criticism of climate activists. This was clearly the case when the education minister questioned the democratic content of occupying schools in Lisbon and the Algarve in May 2023 (CNN, 2023b). During the period concerned, the public police force arrested four climate activists who were occupying the University of Lisbon, raising questions about the violence of police action (CNN, 2023a). In May 2023, during the #MayWeOccupy occupations of schools and universities across Europe, Portuguese youth raised awareness for the actions of the movements studied here. These events were marked by significant online and offline mobilisation, reflecting the effervescence of youth activism in Portugal. Against this background researching climate activism in Lisbon is all the more significant. In addition, we seek to strengthen the relationship between movements on both sides of the Atlantic.

Despite the short period, the material gathered in the field includes experiences in training activities for acts of civil disobedience, in-depth interviews and conversations with active participants in social movements. The personal interviews were recorded with the consent of the activists and the questions revolved around the political objectives, visions, motivations and organising strategies of the movements. The other experiences were recorded daily in the field. To complement participant observation, we analysed public statements, social media and website posts, documents and interviews published in news outlets.

We used the technique of content analysis to process data (Bardin, 1977). We developed categories/themes that capture the main aspects of the field research, such as political objectives, activists’ motivations, organising strategies, challenges faced by the movements, among others. After coding the data, we were able to perceive emerging patterns, trends and relationships between the movements and the activists.

## **5. “THERE WILL BE NO PEACE UNTIL THE LAST WINTER OF GAS”: CLIMATE ACTIVISM IN LISBON (PORTUGAL)**

The youth climate movement in Portugal was sparked by the influential figure Greta Thunberg and leveraged by the 2019 demonstrations that gathered more than 20,000 people.



Our hypothesis is that they challenge the whole system and transcend the street demonstrations, while claiming deeper transformation of the social, political and economic structure (Bringel, 2021). In addition to the dimension of the war of the worlds, which we have also analysed in part two of this article, we believe other four dimensions to these activisms are worth highlighting: a) the relationship between social and climate demands; b) a break with the fossil fuel imaginary (Vindel Gamonal, 2020, p. 3); c) a debate about responsibility for the current crisis; and d) the changes in strategies over this period.

The Student Climate Strike, Climáximo and End Fossil Occupy are distinct but interconnected movements with significant roles in climate activism in Portugal. These movements work together, often collaborating to amplify their messages and raise public awareness of the climate issue. By joining forces, they seek to lobby, foster behavioural changes and hold those who contribute to climate problems accountable. Climate activism in Portugal, driven by these movements, reflects the growing concern of young people about the environment and the search for concrete solutions to global climate issues.

MOVEMENTS	DETAILS	KEY ACTIVITIES	OBJECTIVES
<b>Student Climate Strike</b>	Students encouraging young people in schools and universities to protest against the lack of effective action on climate change	Organising student strikes, demonstrations and events	Demand concrete action from government and society to combat climate change and promote more sustainable practices in the education system
<b>Climáximo</b>	Group of activists focussing on climate justice issues	Protests, direct actions and raising public awareness, including criticising polluting industries and lobbying against environmentally damaging policies	Combat the use of fossil fuels, foster sustainable alternatives and press for policies that address environmental inequalities
<b>End Fossil Occupy</b>	Movement to stop funding of fossil fuel projects and promote the transition to cleaner energy sources	Protests, occupations, raising awareness about investments that are harmful to the environment and advocating against institutions that finance fossil fuel industries	Press for divestment from fossil fuels, encourage more sustainable energy practices and hold financial institutions accountable for their environmental impact

**Table 1.** Summary of Climate Activism in Lisbon (Portugal)

*Note.* Own elaboration based on the analysis of social media and conversations with activists during fieldwork

### 5.1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL AND CLIMATE CLAIMS

The separation between these two claims over the course of the 20th century helped to consolidate a political dichotomy between those supposedly concerned with the working class and the development of productive forces, and the environmentalists, who were considered to be less committed to the lives of the poor and more focused on issues of nature, which was seen as external to the world of life.

This separation resulted in two significant historical failures: the environmental movement in the 20th century was unable to generate significant social support for its

agendas and forms of action capable of tackling the effects of climate change; and the left wing parties, both in the geopolitical North and South, were unable to effectively insert the ecological disaster into their political agendas. The environmental and social divide has trapped environmental and socialist movements, where both catastrophism (“it’s too late”) and the belief in technology as the solution to all problems (“technology will save us”) have become obstacles to effective collective action (Latour & Schultz, 2022).

The thinker Bruno Latour (2015/2020a) argues about the separation between science and politics, where science is seen as a sort of authority that dominates facts and evidence, while politics is the sphere of values, opinions, collective agreements and negotiations. However, as we can see, scientific evidence alone is not enough to stop inertia regarding the climate emergency, especially since the interests of large mining companies often clash with the interests of the people and of the main territories affected by climate change. Thus, the traditional view of science separated from politics is proving inadequate, and some effort to connect these two social dimensions is in order. We believe that the Student Climate Strike, Climáximo and End Fossil Occupy movements have been fairly successful in this.

Climáximo, for example, in its “Disarmament Plan”, with immediate actions to stop the expansion of the fossil fuel industry, puts forward a measure against the evictions of the poorest population and the deportations of immigrants, highlighting the importance of the fight for housing and countering border security as a central issue in conjunction with the climate issue. This fight is even more important given the resurgence of the extreme right party in Portugal. Which is why, Climáximo activists say “a fundamental strategy for tackling the climate crisis is to guarantee housing and documents for all” (Climáximo, 2023). In one conversation, an activist notes that mobilisation on climate issues has been going down since 2019, which she attributes to the rising cost of living in Lisbon (Miranda, 2024). This decline is interpreted by the movement as a natural response to the immediate priorities of economic challenges, and reinforces the need to relate social-economic and environmental issues as part of the same problem.

Activists from these movements also took part in drawing up the report *Empregos pelo Clima* (Jobs for the Climate), alongside several other organisations, which looks into the creation of jobs that respect environmental standards and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions<sup>1</sup>. Historically, trade unions have fought for decent working conditions, wages, benefits and labour rights. As climate awareness grows and the need to tackle climate change becomes more urgent, trade unions have broadened their agendas to include issues related to sustainable employment and green economic development.

We find that the alliance between young activists and trade unionists is a powerful strategy to connect the struggles for climate justice and that of workers, and to devise effective joint policies against the climate and socio-economic crises in a socially just way.

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<sup>1</sup> Find out more at <https://www.empregos-clima.pt/>, accessed on 23 March 2024.

## 5.2. THE BREAK WITH THE FOSSIL FUEL IMAGINARY

Jaime Vindel Gamonal (2020) argues that there is a fossil fuel aesthetic that plays a fundamental role in shaping the social imaginary, especially in understanding the development of industrial modernity. Such imaginary has played a significant role both in naturalising the capitalist form of production and in promoting the productivist concept that goes with it. At the same time, these processes have made us perceive nature as resources available for human progress. The correlation between energy imaginaries, the capitalist form of production and this perception of nature reveals the complexity of the relationship between society, technology and the environment throughout modern history.

This interests us because imagination, creations and world views should not be considered mere abstract or ideal entities, but an essential part of shaping and organising human societies. Such fossil fuel aesthetic is a fundamental part of the problem we need to face today, in which extractive use is naturalised to the point where much of the discussion on energy transition in the context of climate change is based on the use of fossil fuel energy as being fundamental for sustaining the development of alternative energy sources. These features thus play an active part in the construction of social reality, influencing the way people perceive and interact with the world around them. This view underscores the importance of taking into account both material and objective aspects, together with subjective and symbolic aspects when analysing societies and cultures (Vindel Gamonal, 2020).

We believe that the youth climate movements in Lisbon play a fundamental role in breaking with this imaginary by questioning so profoundly the dependence on fossil fuels and the exorbitant profit they generate: “They are profiting at our expense and destroying the planet”, they say. The relationship with inequalities and neoliberalism becomes clear here, since the neoliberal system emerges as “the golden age of greenhouse gas emissions”, marked by an exponential increase in these emissions and the escalation of social inequality locally and globally (Vindel Gamonal, 2020, p. 287). The phenomenon reflects not only the expansion of industrial and economic activities, but also policies that prioritise economic growth at any cost, neglecting environmental and social concerns. For this reason, movements such as the Student Climate Strike argue that the Portuguese government, which “should be planning for the end of fossil fuels and a fair energy transition COMPATIBLE with the deadlines of climate science” benefits an economic elite over the collective well-being and environmental balance “because what drives them is profit” (Student Climate Strike, 2023).

Dismantling this subjectivity is a — personal and collective — learning process, which is consolidated through practice and manifests itself in incorporated habits and in the plurality of actions that seek to break with the fossil fuel imaginary, as climate movements have sought to do in Portugal. Such deep transformation of subjectivity requires a continuous commitment to deconstruct the patterns created by the capitalist system, and seeks to build new ways of thinking, feeling and acting that are aligned with a vision of a liveable life on this planet. This is one way of interpreting the political

situation not only as different groups struggle for power, but also as a clash between different concepts of life or different forms of existence.

### 5.3. ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

From 2023 onwards, the movements, particularly Climáximo, have toughened their narrative of war and confrontation as part of their strategy. The group emphasises the need to break with its own practices, as it understands that the climate emergency demands a complete makeover of its actions and its collective identities. Climáximo activists believe that this radical change is the only option for preventing civilisation from collapse and to promote peace.

One of the most striking actions of this new approach happened on October 3rd, when Climáximo activists hung themselves with ropes from the pedestrian bridge and blocked the Segunda Circular ring road for two hours, in Lisbon. All the while, the activists held a banner declaring that “the government and companies have declared war on society and the planet”.

By doing so, activists held the government and companies accountable for climate change. They underscore that the policies and practices adopted by these entities often prioritise economic interests over the well-being of society and the health of the planet. This suggests that the government and companies take actions that intensify the environmental and social problems.

The war metaphor helps activists to highlight the gravity of the situation and the need to act quickly to prevent such harm. The language of war and confrontation in Climáximo’s narrative calls for a more radical and assertive approach to raising awareness regarding the urgency of the climate crisis. By highlighting the idea of declared war, the group seeks to emphasise the gravity of the situation and the need to take immediate action to address the threats to the climate. The new narrative also reflects a change in the strategies of the climate movements, which have gone from more conventional approaches, such as demonstrations, to more direct actions with greater impact. The war metaphor suggests the willingness to confront and challenge the institutional bodies that the activists believe are responsible for the climate crisis.

O’Brien et al. (2018) introduce a typology for understanding youth dissidence of climate activism. The typology divides activism into three types of dissidence, a) obedient, b) disturbing and c) dangerous, as a way to call attention to the different ways youth express political action within and outside traditional political procedures, to challenge power relations and political interests and foster resilient futures in the context of climate emergency. Not all forms of dissidence and climate action are equally challenging of the *status quo*, just as not all forms of dissidence can be interpreted in a positive manner. Naturally these lines are very blurred, but they do help us analyse the complexity of youth activism in relation to the climate issue. We do believe, however, that youth climate action in Portugal can be perceived as dangerous dissidence.

It is no coincidence that the Portuguese government has been challenged by the complex dynamics of dealing with the Student Climate Strike and End Fossil Occupy activist groups in Lisbon. Authorities are adopting different approaches in the face of growing activity and pressure from these movements. On some occasions the government was open to dialogue and established communication channels with the activists to discuss concerns and proposals. This approach apparently sought to build a more collaborative relationship, and acknowledged the importance of activism as an agent of public awareness raising and change.

There is one event that clearly illustrates the tension: eight activists were detained during the marathon sponsored by Energias de Portugal, although apparently, they had not committed any crime. Furthermore, after blocking the roads activists were taken to court and some of them were fined, which stoked the fire between the movements and authorities. Their response to the fines, holding fund-raising parties, highlights the resilience and solidarity within the movement. Such activities both seek to cover the costs incurred and represent creative and collective resistance against the government's restrictions.

The Student Climate Strike, in turn, was involved in a remarkable event together with the then Environment minister, Duarte Cordeiro. During a conference hosted by CNN Portugal dedicated to green energy, the minister was the target of a protest, which involved green paint thrown on him while he was speaking on stage. Three young activists walked on stage to demonstrate and interrupted the minister's speech. Minister Cordeiro was hit in the face and the live broadcast of the event was interrupted.

Both movements do face much criticism and their actions are misunderstood, for example the episode when members of Climáximo threw paint on a Picasso painting, at the Modern Art Museum in Centro Cultural de Belém. The assessment of the impact of such actions varies, but activists realise that the actions that do not affect people directly are regarded more positively. They believe that such strategy is more effective in giving more visibility to the climate agenda, in raising more activists and interrupting what we call, in line with Latour, the new climate regime. The underlying idea is that, by raising awareness of environmental issues through impacting actions, they raise more public awareness and support. Their intention, according to their own words, is ultimately to restore peace in society, since their actions are regarded as the much-needed response to the urgent climate crisis.

Such strategic approach is suggestive of a conscious choice of movements to balance direct actions that draw attention and create a broader movement, with a view to driving significant changes in environmental and climate policies. The ethics issue connected to the impact of their actions on cultural assets or valuable objects is debatable, but activists say that their goal is to awaken minds and drive stronger action against climate change.

#### 5.4. FROM PROTEST TO DIRECT ACTION AND OCCUPATION

Donatella della Porta and Louisa Parks (2014) analyse the processes of contextualising climate movements. The authors identify a change in those movements, which act on two different, albeit connected, “fields”. According to Della Porta and Parks, on the one side the climate justice movements are guided by direct action, and on the other they join NGOs leading climate change movements. From our work in the field we understand that the Student Climate Strike, Climaximo and End Fossil Occupy are part of the latter.

Generally speaking, differences in concepts and, consequently, actions for guaranteeing effective change can be summarised as follows: “while the climate justice section of the movement sees the root cause of environmental meltdown not merely in humankind, but in capitalist humankind”, the climate change movements, “albeit critical of the global economic system, accepts its existence and seeks to encourage changes in it to mitigate climate change” (Della Porta & Parks, 2014, p. 8).

Realising that protests and petitions were not enough, activists adapted their strategies. They allowed themselves to be inspired by the disobedience protests in England and Germany, and diversified their tactics in Portugal, shifting from protests to more direct action. In the beginning they occupied schools, which effectively caught attention and gathered engagement.

We feel that the more disruptive method is both a form of reflection and a strategy for *changing the world* (Friberg, 2022). We thus agree with Anna Friberg (2022) for whom the actions of these activists seek to shake more than to impose projects. Therefore, the occupations and protests of those activist movements must be understood as methods for enhancing the discussion on the issue and opening the debate about the future. In other words, it is intended to encourage governments to implement more drastic measures against climate change (Marquardt, 2020). Or as Kramcsak-Muñoz (2019) argues, such activist protests symbolise change in current environmental discourse, whereby the group adopts a new radical discourse that does not seek friendly solutions for short-term environmental adaptation inside the neoliberal capitalist system, but fosters a long-term mitigation approach to change the *status quo*.

Some actions, such as blockades at the natural gas port of Sines, illustrate the escalation of protest strategies. Besides occupying the port of Sines, in April 2023 activists also occupied schools and universities led by End Fossil Occupy, which showed the movement’s willingness to take concrete steps to disrupt fossil fuel infrastructure. While participation in the Global Climate Strikes has been declining since its height, activists’ activities remain highly impactful. Recognising the need for more assertive strategies, activists have turned quantity into quality and channel their energy into carrying out actions they consider just as important as mass participation in demonstrations. The changes to the strategies of the climate movement in Portugal reflect on going adaptation needed to address the changing challenges and the need to keep the debate alive in the public sphere. Weaker protest mobilisation does not mean less commitment; it is a change in approach to leverage effectiveness in a complex and dynamic context.

Our experience in the field has taught us that the occupations, led by the End Fossil Occupy movement, are an effective strategy for expanding the climate movement in Portugal. Sharing space for cooking and sleeping together, and taking part in educational activities in schools and universities not only strengthen the bonds between activists, but also contribute to wider awareness-raising and mobilisation. In the occupied schools, activities ranged from lectures and training to moments of relaxation, in addition to daily tasks. The lectures focused on the climate, gathering experts and students engaged in learning about the topic. This educational approach within the occupations reflects a holistic strategy that includes direct resistance and spreading of knowledge and awareness of climate issues.

Lisbon's youth admired the mobilisation of Brazilian high school students in 2015 ("Primavera Secundarista"), which emphasises the international influence on the strategies of the climate movement in Portugal. Portuguese activists express admiration for this Brazilian movement, which was fundamental in bringing me closer to them on the field. They were guided by the Brazilian movement, marked by demonstrations, school occupations and student protests, as they told me themselves. Recognising the strength and impact of this movement serves as an inspiration and example of successful student mobilisation. The screening during meetings and training sessions of the film *Espero Tua (Re)volta* (2019), directed by Elisa Capai, highlights the role of audiovisuals as an educational and inspirational tool. The documentary on the student protest mobilisation in Brazil offers a significant parallel for Portuguese activists. Such is the important role of visual narratives in conveying messages and engaging the public.

Combining direct action, environmental education and references to international experiences contributes to acknowledging young people as key players in tackling climate change, especially in a context where these young people, although most affected by the crisis, are excluded time and again from decision-making and negotiation processes (Malafaia, 2022). Therefore, the occupations and direct actions are an indispensable part of their process of *becoming political subjects*.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present article addresses the concept of the Anthropocene. As the crisis worsens, a wedge between those who deny and obstruct the climate crisis and those who are fighting for a liveable planet widens, a true war of the worlds. Climate activism, especially led by young people, stands out as a mobilising force.

In Portugal, the Student Climate Strike, Climáximo and End Fossil Occupy movements play a key role in raising public awareness and promoting change to tackle the challenges of climate change. Youth insurgence in climate action highlights not only the urgent actions required, but also the search for a fair and sustainable collective vision for the planet, breaking with the fossil fuel and neoliberal imaginary. Such efforts illustrate the vital role of young people in promoting discussions, awareness and concrete measures for tackling the climate emergency. Through their engagement young people

not only claim to be heard and demand agency, but are also determined to actively shape their collective future. This engagement strengthens their political participation and underscores the importance of letting them offer effective solutions to the climate crisis.

Meanwhile, the resistance of some government sectors and the complexity of climate issues demonstrate the continuing need to press for significant changes. We conclude this study by emphasising the importance of continuing to monitor and support climate activism in Portugal. We acknowledge its role in building a more sustainable and resilient future and endeavouring to forge alliances between these movements and Brazilian activists.

**Translation: Traversões, Serviços Linguísticos, Lda.**

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