TOWARDS A EUROPEAN YOUTH AGENDA

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Youth in Crisis

Solving the Trilemma – the Collapse of the Future, War and Climate Emergency

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Abstract

In this article, I address the trilemma currently afflicting the European youth: the end of utopia that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the current war in Ukraine and the climate emergency. This set of challenges particularly affects the youth in Europe. First, as the first post-1989 generation, the sub-35 European population is the first generation to have come of age after the end of utopia. Second, this generation will face the brunt of the consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the major military conflagration in Europe since 1945. Third, climate change is disproportionally affecting this generation. In this article, I tackle this trilemma from the perspective of youngsters themselves, whose political, social and cultural rights are increasingly under threat. In particular, I ask: How does the trilemma end of utopia-war-climate emergency facing Europe today looks like when seen from the eyes of its younger members?

Key words: Europe; Youth; End of Utopia; War in Ukraine; Climate Emergency

Introduction

The youth in Europe today is in crisis. This crisis has three interrelated aspects, each deeply felt by Europe's younger members – the collapse of the future as an optimistic and rational project; the return of large-scale warfare in the continent; and the growing effects of climate change. In a world where utopia no longer has the same cultural resonance as before and where the whole spectrum of war's realities is now a part of our reality again, climate change acquires catastrophic undertones that need to be taken seriously. In this article, I discuss this trilemma with reference to the latest Policy Paper "TOWARDS A EUROPEAN YOUTH AGENDA", of the Spanish Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030.

Before I begin, however, two words of caution are needed. First, one should avoid falling in the fallacy of believing that the present age is somehow unique and entirely different from previous epochs. In fact, there is much to be learnt from the past, even if the present is indeed different; there are always points in common shared by us in the here and now and our ancestors, including those who lived millennia ago or in a slave plantation somewhere in the Caribbean. Visions of apocalyptic futures have long been a means by which subaltern groups have conceptualised the world. From the millenarian peasant movements of early modern Europe to the rise of Rastafarianism in the postcolonial Caribbean, accounts of the end of the world critique the injustice of actually existing society and posit an emancipated society in the future. Second, this historical rooting of our thinking should be complemented with an appreciation of the complexities of the present age. For instance, one cannot ignore the fact that while in Europe youngsters are a sort of species under the threat of extinction, in other continents, namely Africa, the opposite is true. Hence, the need to carefully qualify our remarks and observations.

In Europe, there is a youth in crisis. This is partly because of its dwindling numbers. If in other parts of the world, the future belongs to the younger generations because of their demographic advantage, in Europe few of our youngsters are of the opinion the future belongs to them.

Who can blame them? In fact, for most of the nineteenth century and well into twentieth, most of us in Europe grew up believing the world would be a better place in the future. Faith in progress is an inextricable part of the humanist European ethos. As long as one would apply the tools of science and reason in the resolution of problems – economic, but also of political and social – the road ahead was open and bright. For anyone born in Europe after 2000, this sounds not only unfamiliar but outright naïve – how could *they* believe in such fairy tales? The fact is that they did, at least until the Berlin wall came down in October 1989.

The Collapse of the Future

The fall of the Berlin wall, and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War, paved the way to the present age of globalisation. With it all the fairy tales about rational control of nature and history were thrown into the dustbin, alongside with ideological projects of realising utopia on Earth. The future collapsed onto itself; no longer an unimpeded road, the future is now short-term if not apocalyptic. In the last decade, the cloud of climate apocalypse has settled on the cultural consciousness. Bleak visions of a future world of wild weather, scorched earth and flooded cities are becoming increasingly widespread. One only needs to look at the titles of some recent popular non-fiction books on climate futures to get a sense of the contemporary pessimism. Whether it be Bill McKibben's *Falter: Has the*

Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out? (2019) or David Wallace-Wells's *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2019), the future appears to offer, at best, a brutal struggle for survival and, at worst, the possibility of human extinction. Now, in one sense, this is nothing new. The environmental movement, from George R. Stewart's (1941) pioneering ecological novel on the perfect storm and Rachel Carson's (1962) vision of a silent spring, has long been enlivened by a keen sense of the catastrophes on the horizon (Cassegard & Thorn, 2018; McNeish, 2017). However, the emergence of Anthropocene discourse in the last decade has granted apocalyptic narratives renewed charge. In an important sense, as Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2016: 22) declare, the 'Anthropocene is the Apocalypse'. It marks the end of one world, the relative climatic stability of the Holocene era, and the beginning of a new one, where old expectations and narratives are rendered obsolete (Simon, 2020). In Bruno Latour's (2018: 17; emphasis in original) words, with the 'earthquake' of the Anthropocene, 'another ground, another earth, another soil has begun to stir, to quake, to be moved' (Davidson and Silva 2021: 2).

There are two problems with this apocalyptic discourse, however. Talk about apocalypse often translates into defeatism and passivity. For instance, there is a fear that the production of images of a ruined planet induces what Andreas Malm (2021, pp. 140–141) calls 'climate fatalism', an 'anti-political' position that declares that action to avert the climate apocalypse is pointless (see also Swyngedouw, 2010). As we shall see below, this is often not the case with Europe's youngsters who tend to be participatory and pro-active, albeit in unconventional ways that are not always given due recognition. On the other hand, as the Policy Paper "TOWARDS A EUROPEAN YOUTH AGENDA" rightly acknowledges in its section on intersectional discrimination (p.15), the apocalyptic framing of climate futures reproduces and

reinforces racist and colonial assumptions. This claim builds on a broader desire to 'socialize the Anthropocene' or to demonstrate that the environmental crisis is the fruit not of the undifferentiated figure of the human but instead unequal relations of capital, power and knowledge (Clark & Szerszynski, 2021, p. 49). Responding to previous adaptations of the Anthropocene, most prominently the Capitalocene (Moore, 2015), that highlight the role of capitalism in producing the looming climate catastrophe, a number of terms have been proposed, including the racial Capitalocene (Vergès, 2017), the white supremacy scene (Mirzoeff, 2018) and the Plantationocene (Davis et al., 2019), that ground its emergence in the relations of colonial domination and racist violence that have enveloped the globe since 1492. While these accounts primarily focus on the historical causes of the Anthropocene, notions of racial capitalism, white supremacy and the plantation system are also relevant to its apocalyptic consequences. For instance, there is a false universalism to recent apocalyptic discourse. In declaring that the end of the world is the fate of everybody everywhere, the fact that the climate crisis is having, and will have, its most serious consequences in the Global South is elided (Mitchell & Chaudhury, 2020). Furthermore, the climate apocalypse serves as a cipher 'for deep-seated anxieties of racialized Others "taking over" the planet' (Gergen et al., 2020, p. 93). Whether this be accounts that foreground the environmental dangers of high birth rates in the Global South or images of climate refugees breaching the boundaries of the Global North, racially oppressed peoples are positioned as the forces of collapse. (Davidson and Silva 2021: 3)

This is, in short, how our present age presents itself to its younger age cohorts – sceptical if not desperate about its future prospects. It is a present without a future,

at least not with a future as confident, wide and controllable as the future of our ancestors. The future is not what it used to be.

Putin's War, or the end of our innocence

2022 made the future look even shorter.

Europe's youngsters were suddenly and quite unexpectedly confronted with images of war in the continent. What used to be a reality confined to faraway lands, such as Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria, it is now part of our European reality. Millions of Ukrainians have sought refuge in Europe, including hundreds of thousands of young children and teenagers. In addition to the reality of a wave of internal migration unseen in decades, the Internet and traditional news media are saturated with images and reports of the war in Ukraine.

War has long been considered one of the most traumatic experiences humans can encounter in their lives. First, there is the existential threat only a war and few other experiences can confront us with. The threat of imminent loss of life – of our own lives, or of the lives of others – is a terrifying prospect that often accompanies one for the rest of their lives. This traumatic experience has a dual character. On the one hand, trauma is a deeply personal and subjective event. First-person testimonies of Ukrainian refugees are excellent illustrations of what a traumatic experience looks and feels like for those who had to endure it. On the other hand, a trauma is also a cultural process. A cultural trauma, as opposed to a subjective one, involves the whole of society often over several generations (Alexander et al. 2004). Consider the example of the Spanish civil war. It directly caused trauma – physical, psychological – upon millions of Spaniards in the 1930s. Their bodies and minds were traumatized

by the civil war and its brutal consequences. Yet Spanish society as a whole has been culturally traumatised in a related but different sense. Spain's cultural trauma refers to the ways in which successive generations of Spaniards collectively processed the meanings of the civil war. Why was there a civil war? What resulted from it? How are we today supposed to deal with that reality? The answers to these questions are inherently contestable, and a significant part of Spanish politics today still reflects this contestation. Trauma, then, either personal or cultural, is a deeply human experience. Europe's youth is in crisis today also because it is faced with a once-in-a-generation trauma – war between two European countries.

The choice of a 70-year-old dictator, Vladimir Putin, of waging war against Ukraine is putting an entire generation of European youngsters before a daunting prospect: How to navigate a life-course of choices that has suddenly became less predictable, more dangerous and no less apocalyptic than the most vivid fiction novels? The humanitarian consequences of Putin's choice are there for everyone to see. By bringing war back to Europe, Putin has confronted Europeans with a reality most of us believed would never have to face. Especially for those who are now coming of age, this scenario of a European military conflict is likely to have an enduring impact upon their upbringing.

A crucial component of this altered state of events is the current energy crisis. What had been taken for granted since the 1960s – cheap and abundant supply of gas and oil – is now out of the table, possibly forever. The turn to renewable sources of energy, hitherto a necessary but gradual project, is now indispensable and urgent. The war in Europe, with all its terror and destruction, has brought with it another unpleasant change – Europe's energy infrastructure, upon which our entire lifestyle and economic model rests upon, needs to be transformed. What could take years of

study and deliberation to produce, now needs to be made within weeks under intense pressure from the energy markets and national public opinions. This is a task whose completion will fall upon the shoulders of the next generation of Europeans. For now, European youngsters are only seemingly preoccupied but also motivated to change. Behind their motivation lies climate change, to which I now turn.

Climate emergency

The last axis of the trilemma currently affecting Europe's youth is climate change. Due to anthropogenic factors, the world's climate has been changing in a perhaps irrevocable way. In the era of the Anthropocene, humankind's footprint on the planet is likely to be as deleterious as irreversible. And yet not all of humankind is likely to be affected by climate change. Poorer regions, namely coastal areas, will be more affected than more affluent ones. Older Europeans are likely to be less affected than their offspring. The crisis affecting Europe's youngsters is overwhelmingly the result of choices made years, if not decades, ago. And yet it is them who are likely to suffer the brunt of those choices made by others.

Perhaps the most conspicuous of the consequences stemming from climate change is the right to a healthy and sustainable environment. Living in a natural environment that is propitious to human and nonhuman life is one of the most basic of all human rights, on par with the right to life itself. If war threatens life, climate change is a threat to the very natural conditions for life to exist in the first place.

As the Policy Paper "TOWARDS A EUROPEAN YOUTH AGENDA" rightly notes (p.49), European youngsters are seemingly very aware of this. Their rights

consciousness, that is, the extent to which they are aware of their rights and incorporate them in their daily lives and political claim-making, is notorious.

I have been talking about rights of various kinds, but what is a right exactly? A right is not individualistic and adversarial. Neither is it something a priori. Rather, a right is a mutual relation, an institution made of political claims involving at least two individuals. As in any other social institution, a right is not simply a social construction of omnipotent agents. To have a right socially constitutes individuals into citizens and, as such, enables as much as it constrains action. But a right is a special sort of social institution. It refers to entitlements, liberties, powers or immunities that have been codified in international covenants and declarations, as well as in national constitutions. Instead of proposing a foundational principle common to all human rights struggles that empirical analyses should then try to uncover, my approach to rights aims at the reconstruction of the iterative processes of meaning-production and institutionalization within which rights were imagined, conquered, implemented and sometimes denied. I thus endorse the criticism of the liberal notion that rights and identities are formed prior to political struggles in the public sphere. 'Rights' need then to be conceived of as historically contingent, whose meanings emerge and evolve in the context of the political struggles regarding their institutionalization (Silva 2013: 2).

Yet as political actors are able to (partly) constitute the rights they enjoy, they are also always faced with the possibility of being deprived of them. Far from being a progressive expansionary tale, the history of human rights is as much a history of creation and implementation as it is a history of retrenchment and denial. From my point of view, one should focus more on how the relational and reflexive character of rights is affected by political processes of rights retrenchment and, especially, rights

violations as these entail profound consequences for citizen identity. A similar point, of course, has already been made by Axel Honneth, who suggests that the 'denial of rights' can be conceived of as a type of 'social pathology' amenable to empirical analysis through 'group discussions' and 'deep interviews', on the premise that these have a 'consciousness-raising effect' (interviewed in Petersen and Willig, 2002: 268–9). Perhaps even more interesting is the growing literature on cultural trauma mentioned above, whose strong constructivist bent is very much in line with my argument here.

From this perspective, the right to a healthy and sustainable environment is contested, reflexive, relational. The meaning of the right to nature lies in concrete patterns of political interaction, whose institutionalization is as much a symbolic as it is a material process – bills of rights, constitutions, and the state derive much of their power and legitimacy from their fictional character, a power that, for that very reason, often makes itself felt all too tangibly in people's lives. For European youngsters, the challenge ahead consists upon contesting, reflecting upon and establish relationships with one another, as well as with nature itself, as to what the right to a healthy and sustainable environment actually means.

Solving the trilemma

Given the challenges of climate change, war and the end of utopia, Europe's youngsters have been active in dismantling the old order and establishing a new one. Consider political participation. Voting and participation in general politics has declined in many countries since the 1980s, as has been widely reported. But barely noted is the rise of the arts and culture in these same years, even though some

World Values Survey items suggest massive increases in arts and culture participation in various countries.[1]

The more established "high" art like classical music concerts, opera, and museum attendance show stability or decline in many countries. This has led to a sense of crisis in many arts organizations, like the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts which commissioned multiple studies. Many showed the classic decline of the "benchmark" high arts, but Novak-Leonard and Brown (2011) showed high participation and growth in some nontraditional activities. And the French Ministry of Culture studies document this pattern with more detail, growth in media related film, music, and more, especially among young persons who create personal entertainment libraries. These have often been missed as they are not classic benchmark items, but many are captured in the World Values Survey item which permits the respondent to include all arts and culture items in which she participates (World Values Survey 1999–2004 wave).

As noted in the Policy Paper (p.47), the rise of arts and culture, far from being an anomaly, is part and parcel of a much broader and deeper set of changes in an emerging form of politics lived by many, especially younger persons. It is a strategic research site where our litmus test results flag much broader and deeper changes, if we look. Culture can be about politics as well as personal identity. It can be part of one's job, but is more likely part of consumption—in a world where political candidates in their campaigns and actions stress consumption issues increasingly.

[1] Data from World Values Survey of national samples of citizens in each country. Question: A066. "Please look carefully at the following of voluntary organizations and activities and say...which if any do you belong to? Education, Arts, Music or Cultural Activities." In Canada, a study on citizens' preferences regarding federal spending points in the same direction, by finding that one of the few items that show significant change between 1994 and 2010 is support for "arts and culture," which climbed from 15 to 30 %. See http://www.queensu.ca/cora/_files/fc2010report.pdf

Arts and culture may have some direct economic implications, but is more generally about meaning and value. For some in a secular but idea and image-driven world, music and books and their related activities replace the church and god and the functions of religion in earlier eras. For youngsters, breaking with their families and religious and work backgrounds, a charismatic singer like Madonna or Bruce Springsteen is more than entertainment. A reading group discussing Nietzsche, Marx, or Baudrillard can transform its members' thinking.

Underpinning this is my understanding of democratic politics. Much civil society research has developed under the influence of Robert Putnam's well-known jeremiad (1995): civic participation is said to be in decline since the 1960s, with serious implications for the health of democracy. I suggest that this decline covers only part of what has happened in the last half a century. Another part of the change is a structural differentiation of political participation patterns accompanying the generational shift, societal value change, and socioeconomic modernization in dozens of countries around the world since the 1960s. Political repertoires of younger cohorts are larger than those of their predecessors (e.g., Tilly 2006, pp. 30–59). This stress on expanded democratic repertoires joins the structural differentiation to overcome a narrow and conservative understanding that informed part of the communitarian revival of Tocqueville in the 1990s. For example, even Welzel, Inglehart, and Deutsch's influential study of elite-challenging repertoires shows a bias towards protest activities. Strikes, which enjoy constitutional protection in virtually all consolidated democracies, are excluded from their model under the grounds of their alleged "violent" nature (Welzel et al. 2005). By contrast, I believe one needs to keep an open mind to youngsters' new and creative ways of joining the democratic conversation.

From this perspective, political participation among the European youngsters cannot be said to be declining. Instead, it is the very understanding of what counts as political participation that European youngsters are contesting and redefining on a daily basis.

Here lies, I think, the solution to the trilemma.

Let me bring this essay to a close with a few concluding remarks. The first concerns how a crisis is perceived in the first-person singular: How *I* see a crisis. The second refers to how a crisis is perceived in the first-person plural: How *we* see a crisis. The third and final remark will explore the third-person plural: How *they* see a crisis. By bringing all these perspectives together I hope to shed some useful light into what is at stake here.

Let me begin with the case of Pablo, an imaginary example of a 25-year-old Spaniard, studying abroad, and whose girlfriend is from Ukraine.[2] Pablo is very clear about his views on each axis of the trilemma. “My entire life changed overnight with the war. It affected my girlfriend’s hometown, family, friends and her own mental wellbeing.” Pablo’s testimony, however imaginary, runs true to millions of Europeans that were directly or indirectly touched by the war and its implications. “I managed to finish my degree”, Pablo remarks, “but my plans for the future have now changed. I no longer wish to do an MBA; instead, I am considering doing an MPhil in alternative sources of energy and launching my own company.” There are millions of Pablos in Europe today, each of them affected in slightly different ways by the trilemma end of utopia-war-climate change. From the perspective of each European youngster, the future is now more uncertain than it has been for several generations. “My plan for

[2] This example draws upon years of experience of teaching undergraduate students. As noted in the text, it is an entirely fictional account with no reference to any one student in particular.

the future is…" is something very few of them venture to say nowadays, as the very notion of planning ahead is seen with suspicion and profound disbelief. What is notable, however, is the way Pablo and his age-cohort peers seem to be willing to fight back. It is the issue of redefining what political participation entails I alluded to above. But it is also, and perhaps more fundamentally, about assuming a position of leadership in an intergenerational conversation about social values, the economy and the future of the planet. Pablo leaves little doubt about what this represents. "It is a once-in-a-lifetime challenge, one that if we miss the entire planet will suffer as a result. We simply cannot afford to err", he concludes. Indeed, who can reasonably disagree with Pablo's deeply personal and committed judgement?

Pablo, however, is far from being alone in thinking that it is up to him/them to save the planet. This suggests the need to have into account a more collective sense of what the current trilemma means. For a myriad of groups of youngsters across Europe, indeed for an entire generation that was born around or after 2000, solving the trilemma is a matter of collective action. I have already noted the rise in cultural participation above among younger persons in recent decades. "We, the European youngsters", however, go well beyond the realm of culture and the arts. Their claims can be heard right across the education system, workplace, and even in institutional politics, including national parliaments and the European Parliament (Katsarova 2014). From a second-person plural perspective, the claims made by collectives of youngsters reverberate across society as a whole. "We demand a clean and sustainable environment", or May 68-inspired slogans such as "Be realistic – demand the impossible" are now increasingly common. This often entails alliances between organisations based in different countries or from different sectors. Collective coordination, in turn, demands clarity as to the group's values and

strategy. The key difference between the first-person singular and the first-person plural, then, seems to reside in the particular sort of insight the latter requires from the group. “We, the European youngsters” make claims and coordinate action in ways that are fundamentally different from what our imaginary Pablo would ever be able to. Yet when many Pablos come together, things change fundamentally. For one, the very idea that youngsters in Europe have something in common that is worth fighting for arises precisely from that sort of collective insight. European youth is a construct partly made by youngsters themselves working in tandem. In addition, their rights consciousness is also a product of their collective intersubjective experience. The idea that European youngsters can do something about the trilemma end of utopia-war-climate change is equally something that is only available once that collective insight occurs. “We, the European youngsters” see the intricate and interrelated dilemmas confronting the world today from a fundamentally different way than that available to any of them, individually considered. And, no less important, “We, the European youngsters” are able to act upon that insight and make things happen.

In order to make things happen, however, “they” must be convinced that the trilemma is real and requires urgent measures. But who are “them”, exactly? Greta Thunberg, in a recent op-ed for the *Guardian*, gives us a clear and persuasive answer. To begin with, “The climate crisis is not something that “we” have created.” She then turns to the third-person plural in order to clarify who, in fact, is responsible: “Beyoncé was wrong. It is not girls who run the world. It is run by politicians, corporations and financial interests – mainly represented by white, privileged, middle-aged, straight cis men” (Thunberg 2022). A mixture of disillusionment and angry blaming permeates Great Thunberg’s text. This is partly explained by the lack

of answers by “them”. “They” consistently underreport the actual figures of greenhouse gases, “they” systematically fail to put long-term environmental considerations before short-term electoral or financial gains, “they” stubbornly refuse to take responsibility for their actions with regards the climate crisis and act accordingly, namely by changing their lifestyle and ways of thinking. There are, of course, exceptions to this. The very fact that an otherwise unremarkable Swedish teenager suddenly became a global icon of the climate crisis movement is surely a sign that they, or at least *some of them*, are listening.

But is it enough?

Conclusion: Redefining Europe

Let me conclude this essay with a brief discussion of what solving the trilemma may look like.

The first step involves recovering the future. By this I mean a very specific thing. The future will never be what it used to be, that is for sure. But equally it does not need to be reduced to catastrophe or passivity. Recovering the future means learning from lost possibilities in the past and make them linchpins for new, creative and ambitious future pathways. Note that talking about future pathways is fundamentally different from talking about the future. There is an intrinsic plurality to pathways that respects both value pluralism and the possibility for failure. But a pathway is a road to somewhere, and that is something worth fighting for. For the youngsters currently living, studying and/or working in Europe, the building of future pathways is a matter of personal choice, collective coordination of action and intergenerational debate.

The second step involves living through war and planning for its aftermath. As I write this essay, no one knows how long the war will last. Or, given the nuclear threats from the Russian dictator, whether Armageddon is indeed a fast-approaching scenario. Assuming the war will end eventually with no nuclear disaster, the aftermath is likely to be a Europe that is fundamentally different from the Europe of the post-1945 epoch. How to guarantee peace and stability in the continent will be the foremost challenge for Europe's youngsters of today, who soon will be asked to begin preparing for the war's aftermath. As noted, the energy framework is key to this in more ways than one. It plays a central role in securing peace, but it is also a crucial component in addressing climate change.

This brings me to the third and final step. Climate change is like to affect European youngsters in different ways. This means taking action to mitigate or revert climate change consequences requires personal commitment and collective coordination. The former is partly a matter of identity formation. Indeed, the identity of our imaginary Pablo is structurally different from that of his parents and grandparents. Yet there are shared aspects that traverse generations that one should not overlook. Families and local communities play here a big role. Collective coordination, then, is partly a product of individual choice and partly a result of social choice. The climate movement, for instance, is but an instance of this. It will play a key role in addressing climate change in Europe insofar as it can help shape public opinion and help steer political decision-making. Joining a demonstration or a strike, signing a petition or voting, boycotting certain products whilst consuming others, are all legitimate democratic expressions oriented towards solving the climate emergency.

In sum, solving the trilemma end of utopia-war-climate change requires the nurturing of an attitude of insubmission. Insubmission towards domination by systems of

oppression, including patriarchy and racism. Insubmission is here an aspect of a broader commitment to democracy and its values. Yet insubmission is also insubmission to nature, of which the human species is a part. The reference to nature is integral to the politics of insubmission. Anthropocentrism must be avoided, of course, but this should not be confused with downplaying the responsibilities our species, namely certain individual and collective members of our species, have had in this respect.

The source of this idea of insubmission is the African intellectual and revolutionary leader, Amilcar Cabral. Despite his African roots, Cabral spends part of his youth years in Lisbon where he trains as an agronomist. It is as an agronomist that Cabral defines insubmission for the first time in an otherwise unremarkable technical report on soil erosion in Portuguese Guinea. Dated from 1954, the passage in question reads:

> *What distinguishes man from other animals is, principally, man's insubmission to Nature, of which it is part*. Analyzing this reality, one could say that Nature has in the human being the realization of its own antithesis. From this circumstance, results a conflict. Its solution is in the basis of all human and scientific progress. (…) It is no exaggeration to claim that science's most general goal is the conscious integration of man in Nature, of which it is a part. Erosion is one of the most deleterious consequences of said conflict. It results from profound disturbances in the natural complex soil-life-climate, which originate in the need to obtain from the land the satisfaction of a requisite essential to life: food. (1988: 214; author's translation)

When Cabral writes this passage, he is yet to become a revolutionary leader. It is as a professional agronomist that Cabral first outlines the contours of his political theory

of the human-nonhuman boundary. The key concept is that of insubmission. The human species is presented as the antithesis of nature itself. This is the only animal species that rejects submission *to nature, of which it is part*. A partial solution to this inescapably contradictory condition is science, namely the knowledge of laws that rule nature. Yet, as climate change shows, this is always insufficient. Hence the inescapable nature of the conundrum. Perhaps more than other luminaries of the anticolonial movement such as CLR James or Frantz Fanon, Cabral is an important source of insights into the Anthropocene era. Solving the trilemma will be made much easier if only we are able to learn from him.

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