

# WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis  
A collective work by CES



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Centro de Estudos Sociais  
Universidade de Coimbra



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## Editor

José Reis

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## Scientific Review

Ana Cordeiro Santos, António Sousa Ribeiro, Carlos Fortuna, João Rodrigues,  
José Castro Caldas, José Reis, Pedro Hespanha, Vítor Neves

## Linguistic Revision

João Paulo Moreira

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## Design and Pagination

André Queda

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# INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Silvia Rodríguez Maeso, Danielle Pereira Araújo, Luana Coelho, Sebijan Fejzula

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the conditions of inequality that already exist, highlighting systematically denied racist dynamics. The (im)possibility of making these conditions visible stems from the effects of racism itself, which are manifested in the spread of ideas such as that “the virus does not see colour, it is an equaliser.”

In the Portuguese and Spanish contexts, the denial of racism became clear from the lack of ethnic-racial data, from the legitimising of differentiated treatment in access to basic services, or still from the increase in surveillance of the racialised body, which is now not only *dangerous*, but also *contagious*. Anti-Gypsyism, Islamophobia and anti-Blackness create “permanent states of exception” that normalise and justify the violence of safety strategies before, during, and after the pandemic. In Portugal, the *Bairro das Pedreiras* – a ghetto built to rehouse Romani families in Beja – has been the subject of news coverage highlighting the vulnerability of these families to infection by COVID-19, as they live in extremely poor housing conditions. One of the measures implemented to monitor compliance with lockdown measures was the presence of security forces in the access routes to the neighbourhood.

Publications in the media and social networks continued to reproduce racist imaginaries. In Spain, in March 2020, rumours circulated on social networks about the Roma population in the city of Haro, stating that “the Roma were doing as they pleased without the Police being able to control them.” A number of newspa-

pers published news focused on “non-compliance” of lockdown measures in social housing estates, dehumanising the Roma population.

The emergency policies created by the States with a focus on migrant and Roma families illustrate how governments see and treat racialised populations. The pandemic has shown that racialised people are overrepresented in precarious jobs, such as those in the domestic service sector. With the loss of these jobs and the numerous requirements needed to access public assistance, these people are left unprotected – which produces more precariousness and revictimisation.

In a context of precarious State assistance, antiracist organisations and grassroots associations in several Portuguese and Spanish cities have mobilised their solidarity networks to support black and Roma families. They have exposed the fallacy of the “democratic virus,” as well as the State-sanctioned denial of basic rights in an anti-Black and anti-Roma Europe.

In Spain, anti-racist associations have seen an increase in the number of complaints of police violence since the state of alarm was decreed, and have sought to spread a counter-narrative: this increase is not merely circumstantial, but shows that the bodies of racialised people have been historically treated as a permanent threat to the democratic State.

While white people wish to “return to normality” after the pandemic, racialised people are problematising the meaning of this “normality”.