WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC:
A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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PEACE SUSTAINABILITY

Paula Duarte Lopes

Positive peace includes, in addition to the general absence of physical violence, the absence of structural violence, that which creates inequalities, discriminates, stigmatises, gives different opportunities to each person. Most so-called democratic countries live in positive peace, for they have normative and institutional frameworks that protect their entire population in terms of fundamental rights and promote equal individual opportunities. This context of positive peace is all the more sustainable when it is resilient, i.e., when it can absorb changes, even the most drastic and rapid ones, without jeopardising the protection of these fundamental rights and the promotion of equal opportunities. In other words, peace sustainability is tested in times of exception and its fragility becomes apparent when social and economic imbalances and inequalities are exacerbated. In the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, people with precarious jobs that require their physical presence, who barely survive in the informal economy, who live in overcrowded or unhealthy housing, who do not have access to the equipment and technological networks necessary to remain productive while in lockdown, are the most affected. Peace sustainability has been constantly questioned during this pandemic, given that the most legally unprotected groups, the most economically fragile and the most socially marginalised, have been the ones most disproportionately affected.

Thus, the positive peace in which we allegedly lived – or think we live – is not sustainable. And without sustainable positive peace, what happens is that negative peace, i.e., the absence of widespread physical violence, may, in time, also suffer structural challenges.

Passing legislation and creating institutions to protect the fundamental rights of all people is an important first step towards the co-construction of a more just, sustainable and peaceful society. But it is essential that these values are institutionalised as social practices, which requires a structural commitment to Peace Education at all levels and in all fields. Peace Education must be structurally included in the training of security forces, as well as health and justice professionals; in the training of professionals in the trade and service sectors; in the training of teachers and educators; and in basic and higher education itself, including technological and artistic education, the humanities and social sciences, and the so-called exact sciences. Peace Education must be internalised in all training, qualification and education programmes, not merely as a subject to be taught, but as a way of teaching, training and educating. Without the structural transformation of society promoted by Peace Education, so as to embed positive peace and foster cultures of peace, the sustainability and resilience of peace will always be illusory, precarious and temporary.