

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES



Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra



UNIVERSIDADE DE
COIMBRA



Organização
das Nações Unidas
para a Educação,
a Ciência e a Cultura



Universidade de
Coimbra - Alta e Sã
inscrita na Lista do Património
Mundial em 2013



PROGRAMA OPERACIONAL COMPLEXIDADE E INOVAÇÃO



UNIÃO EUROPEIA

Fundo Europeu
de Desenvolvimento Regional



Fundação
para a Ciência
e a Tecnologia

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Editor

José Reis

Publisher

Centre for Social Studies
University of Coimbra

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

Editorial Assistant

Rita Kacia Oliveira

Design and Pagination

André Queda

December, 2020

This work is funded by ERDF Funds through the Competitiveness Factors Operational Programme - COMPETE and by National Funds through the FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology within the UIDB/50012/2020 project.

The data and opinions included in this publication are the exclusive responsibility of its authors.

ISBN

978-989-8847-28-7

FIGHTING DYSTOPIA

Rui Bebiano

While utopia provides an ideal of organisation, happiness and harmony applied to collective life, dystopia draws an imaginary place where life is lived under extreme conditions of oppression, despair and conflict. In relation to objective reality, utopia is a realm of desire and hope, while dystopia is a place of suffering and desolation, conditioned by a transformation of nature stemming from bad choices in human intervention. In *Dystopia: A Natural History*, however, Gregory Claeys calls for a positive reading of the concept, given that it reveals a set of “natural” fears (gods, monsters, calamities) or “social” fears (oppressive technologies, labour exploitation or totalitarian systems), through which communities are confronted with scenarios they have in no way desired and must reject.

Addressing the human landscape that may result from the current COVID-19 pandemic, geographically the vastest and one of the deadliest in history, only surpassed by the Black Death and the Pneumonic Plague, ongoing reflections put forward dystopian configurations for societies in the near future. Measures such as imposing social distance, restraining events of a collective nature, monitoring citizens and their private lives, controlling households, abruptly readopting closed borders, limiting human movement and presence in public places, recording health conditions regularly and in detail, carrying out surveillance on people, compulsorily extending the remote working regime, electronically controlling in-

dividual activity, making unemployment completely flexible, the very limiting of freedom of assembly and protest, as well as promoting heavier intervention through State, law and police mechanisms, announce, in the name of an indispensable health safety – as in the dystopian novels of Zamiatine, Huxley and Orwell – a normality dominated by numerous restrictions.

The drama that this list reveals may be tempered by the intervention of public opinion and of democratic forces, institutions and movements, as well as the development of a better informed and collaborative collective awareness. However, the negative landscape it reveals cannot be seen as a mere nightmare that will disappear when we wake up. The dystopian scenario announced by the response to COVID-19 should help us to better measure, with a clear and intelligent perception of benefits and damages, each of the steps taken towards the rapid transformation of social practices and habits. In the post-pandemic landscape, there can be no incompatibility between preserving public health, defending human rights and ensuring individual freedom. The example of China, where the ostensible effectiveness of the fight against the pandemic, supported by hypervigilance, is being carried out to the detriment of citizens’ autonomy and freedom, must not be allowed to spread. It is imperative to scrutinise the outlines of the “new normal” and prevent the materialisation of dystopia.