

# 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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# BIODIVERSITY

Rita Campos

In the vast majority of human societies, an anthropocentric view of the world dominates, placing the human being at the centre of the universe and, as such, giving precedence to human needs over the needs of other species and the balance of ecosystems. The current patterns of production and consumption in a markedly capitalist global system are based on a premise of accumulation and require intensive extraction of the planet's natural resources. But these resources are not infinite, nor is this extraction done without causing massive, and often permanent, imbalances in ecosystems, endangering the survival of species or causing them to become extinct. Human activities are thus strongly associated with this "biodiversity crisis", which is also inherently a crisis that threatens humanity – because we depend on other species for survival – and accentuates social imbalances – because not all people are being or will be affected in the same way.

A complex problem will have no simple alternatives. Let us think of three, which imply profound changes in the way we look at the world and live our daily lives. The first: identifying the place of humanity in nature. We are humans, primates, mammals, animals, living beings; we deserve no more of this planet than any other species, we have no business exploiting, destroying or drastically altering ecosystems. This ecocentric vision of the

world, obliterated in many human societies, brings people and nature closer together and helps rethink the local and global impacts of the current environmental crisis. To recognise ourselves as part of biodiversity is to realise that our health is intrinsically associated with the health – balance – of ecosystems. Disturbances to that balance endanger human health. The COVID-19 pandemic appears as a result of these disturbances and forces us to reflect on the multiple causes of the origin of the disease. And this reflection leads us to the second alternative: reducing consumption. Our actions have social and ecological impacts; individual actions can be taken as collective and political acts. Consumerism seems to be widespread and seems to be something innocuous: in many cases, it occurs in clean and appealing stores or on digital platforms. But the production chain is not innocuous, it is strongly associated with climate change and severe social injustice. We must therefore stop and define how much is enough and how much is too much, or excessive. The third alternative is linked to this issue and calls for a change in consumption habits. Thus, the appeal is for conscious consumption, within the limits of what is considered necessary. Only consume what has been produced with minimal social and ecological impacts, respecting the health (and well-being) of people and the environment along the production and distribution chain.