



**alice**<sup>®</sup>  
STRANGE MIRRORS  
UNSUSPECTED LESSONS

## Invitation

Invitation to social movements and organisations in Europe fighting against social exclusion caused by colonialism, capitalism, sexism and other forms of discrimination to write a letter to Europeans and to share amongst themselves and with us the resulting messages and reflections

Dear leader or activist

I am sending you an invitation which you may find surprising. Allow me to explain. I am engaged in a research-action project (Alice Project: [www.alice.ces.uc.pt](http://www.alice.ces.uc.pt)), based on the following idea. Europe as it is today (and I am not referring only to the current financial, political and social crisis within the European Union) has little or nothing to teach the world. Moreover, it does not even have a socially acceptable and fair solution for its own domestic problems. It would be advantageous for Europe to learn from the experiences of the rest of the world, yet five centuries of colonialism seem to have made it incapable of learning from those it has always considered inferior. This is the tragedy of Europe and also a tragedy for the world, given that a Eurocentric ideology still predominates worldwide. What has to be done to overcome this situation? If Europe could learn from the experiences of the rest of the world, which specific lessons would be most useful for it?

No one individually has the answers to these questions but I believe that collectively we can make an important contribution by sharing our reflections on these two questions. Hence this invitation.

I am inviting you to take part in an initiative that involves writing a “letter to Europeans”. The message, critique and learning suggestion that you present may be addressed to Europeans in general or to someone in particular. It may be sent to Europeans or certain groups of Europeans, political or social leaders, parties or

trade unions or any European institutions, entities, organisations or movements you consider appropriate. The letters from the representatives of all the movements that accept this invitation will be assembled and made publically available via Alice Project, which will organise debates based on the contributions presented by movements and organisations.

This invitation is extended to you as a representative of a movement or organisation fighting within Europe against exclusion, discrimination, exploitation and oppression. I hope that you will accept it because you are as convinced as I am that it is important to initiate a debate on learning through different experiences worldwide, including those based in Europe which, due to the prevailing ideology or interests, are not well known or recognised as important.

Gathering together examples of experiences, suffering and resistance, criticism and suggestions for possible and necessary learning will enable us to identify, discuss and systematise the knowledge that Europe and Europeans lack, and will contribute towards creating an alternative way of thinking



about alternatives, or the notion that alternative views will enable us to perceive other alternatives, thus broadening the possibilities for transformatory political action.

Your message should contain no more than 3,000 words and the subject is completely open.

The Alice project is structured around four themes which may be relevant to your reflections: (i) the deep-seated reform or even reformulation of the modern state, which up to now has been a capitalist and colonialist state, a theme which appeals to the struggle for a transformative constitutionalism; (ii) democratising democracy, or the struggle for new and more democratic forms of collectively constructing participatory political processes; (iii) other economies and alternative forms of producing, exchanging and consuming, based on values such as solidarity, reciprocity and gift, whilst respecting Mother Earth and refusing wholesale commodification and market hegemony; (iv) finally, human rights, seen from an intercultural perspective, as a means of recognising the validity of non-European concepts of human dignity.

I am aware of the limitations of this list and would therefore like to reiterate that the subject of your message is entirely a matter for your own judgement. Please choose what you consider to be particularly relevant

Your message should be sent to [bsantos@ces.uc.pt](mailto:bsantos@ces.uc.pt) and [alice1@ces.uc.pt](mailto:alice1@ces.uc.pt) by 30 October.

I am entirely at your disposal to answer any questions or clarify any doubts you may have.

I sincerely hope that you will accept my invitation.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Warmest greetings

Coimbra-Portugal, 07 September 2012

*Boaventura de Sousa Santos*

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