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COVID19 and Redefining Human Security

Edited by Nergis Canefe

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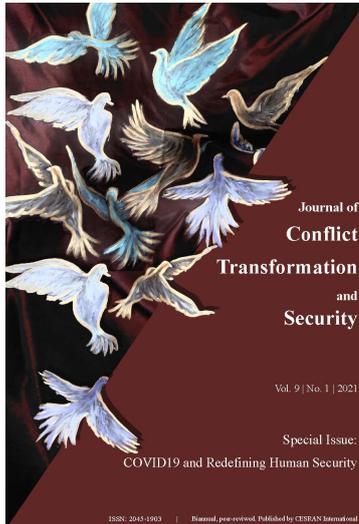
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INDEXING & ABSTRACTING



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The Journal of Conflict Transformation and Security (JCTS) provides a platform to analyse conflict transformation and security as processes for managing change in non-violent ways to produce equitable outcomes for all parties that are sustainable. A wide range of human security concerns can be tackled by both hard and soft measures, therefore the Journal's scope not only covers such security sector reform issues as restructuring security apparatus, reintegration of ex-combatants, clearance of explosive remnants of war and cross-border management, but also the protection of human rights, justice, rule of law and governance. JCTS explores the view that by addressing conflict transformation and security holistically it is possible to achieve a high level of stability and human security, requiring interventions at both policy and practitioner level. These would include conflict management, negotiated peace agreements, peacekeeping, physical reconstruction, economic recovery, psycho-social support, rebuilding of primary services such as education and health, and enabling social cohesion. Other macro-level governance issues from constitution writing to state accountability and human resource management also need to be considered as part of this process of change.

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Editor's Introduction to the Special Issue on COVID 19 and Redefining Human Security

Nergis Canefe - Co-editor

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a vast array of social, economic and legal implications, necessitating us to critically revisit the notion of human security. In addition to political and civil rights such as liberty and privacy being curtailed in relation to public health measures, social, economic and legal responses to the pandemic continue to have a far greater impact upon populations who are marginalized, who are on the move, as well as displaced communities and refugees, in radically unequal ways. The dimensions of specific populations' subjectification to unequal measures are related to their nationality, legal status, race, gender, disability, vulnerability and social class. In particular, interventions and resort to extreme measures cause further hardship in the plight of temporary and migrant workers, asylum seekers, internally displaced peoples under COVID-19 governance regimes.

In order to deepen the public understanding of the socio-political and economic dimensions of the current crisis related to the COVID 19 Pandemic in a global context, this special issue of JCTS addresses:

- Global differences in public access to healthcare;
- The situation in conflict zones, refugee camps, border areas, marginalized communities concerning the differential effects of the Pandemic;
- Exclusion of vulnerable communities, non-status peoples, minorities and precarious labour from the networks of protection put in place in relation to the Pandemic;
- Comparative analyses of social justice issues associated with COVID 19;
- Global forms of precarity that this Pandemic makes more visible;
- Regional and national effects of health care cuts or insufficient access to publicly funded medicine;
- Long-term implications of the Pandemic on our perception of human security.

The special issue includes three full articles, a commentary, and a lengthy interview. The proliferation of narratives on COVID 19 measures makes it much harder to make sense of the prevailing cacophony and to engage in critical reflections to such an unstable landscape of policy, politics and law, as pointed out by our authors. As an alternative to this chaotic and panic-ridden environment, the authors contributing to our special issue discuss how they see COVID affecting specific communities in relation to the larger society as well as developments in their area/region of research in relation to the global context. The contributions as a whole also identify potential transformative outcomes arising from the Pandemic, and share with us the ongoing work required to build those outcomes. As such, we invite our readers to think above and beyond the politics of exigency that continues to silence critical debate on uses and abuses of power in the name of redefining human security under pandemic conditions as part of the global response to COVID 19.

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Pandemic Through The Food System Lens

Mustafa Koç*

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that social and political crises such as the coronavirus pandemic of 2019 show us the interconnections among many of the social, environmental and political problems we suffer. In the middle of a global public health crisis, the paper examines the linkages between poverty, working conditions, food insecurity, homelessness, poor health and climate change. Overall, this commentary piece looks at the relations between the coronavirus pandemic through the food system lens.

Keywords: Food Security, Poverty, Global Public Health Crisis, Food Insecurity, Food Systems

Biographical Note: Professor Mustafa Koc is a faculty member at Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada. His current research focuses on food security among refugees, food policy and civil society and immigration as well as diasporic foodways in Toronto. He has also been involved in various national and global debates on globalization, food security, and peace. Professor Koç is also a frequent commentator on social change and politics in Turkey.

Social and political crises such as the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, show us the interconnections among many of the social, environmental and political problems we suffer. In the middle of a global public health crisis, I am hoping that people can clearly see the linkages between poverty, working conditions, food insecurity, homelessness, poor health and climate change. In this paper I will look at the relation between the coronavirus pandemic through the food system lens.

The modern food system is the most productive, efficient and profitable food delivery form, since the advent of agriculture. It is now an estimated 8 trillion-dollar economy equal to 10 percent of the global GDP (Eliaz and Murphy, 2020). The global-industrial food system has commodified food and has been moving these commodities around the world where they can make the biggest profits. Its primary motivation is not the nourishment of people, providing decent working conditions for producers and workers or the health of the consumers, animals and the environment. Its critics question its sustainability and capacity to address the social, environmental and health problems that we are facing (Lmag, Millstone, Marsden, 2020; McMichael, 2020).

Today, nearly 1 billion people are struggling with hunger, while another 2 billion people suffer from health problems caused by malnutrition. Millions of unemployed, landless, poor, displaced people have to live with various chronic diseases as a result of unhealthy diets. The most profitable sectors of the food system such as chocolate, confectionery, soda drinks, snacks and fast food industries are behind the global health and environmental problems. Modern food system is a waste economy that neglects human health for profit, destroys produce that do not meet the standards for cosmetic reasons, fills oceans with micro-plastics, destroys tropical rain forests and natural biodiversity to turn oil seeds and grains into animal feed and bio-fuel.

Environmental pollution caused by modern agriculture, livestock and fisheries enterprises and long supply chains, poses serious threats to human, animal and environmental health. Soil, water and air pollution are at their highest levels. We have to use more fuel, more

chemicals and more poisons to produce more products. Global oligopolies reduce the bargaining power of small producers and developing countries, while also preventing measures to control environmental and community health risks and develop sustainable, independent agriculture and food policies. Habitat loss and decline in biodiversity, climate change, destruction of the ecosystem, destruction of meadows, pastures and forests, removal of regulatory arrangements with neoliberal practices and long supply chains create favorable conditions for the spread of pathogens such as viruses and bacteria. In the food sector in North America, COVID-19 cases have been highest among workers in meat processing plants, migrant farm workers, food retail and delivery workers (Schlosser, 2020).

Since the beginning of the 21st Century, we have been hearing about the threat of various viruses. Several of these such as Cholera, Ebola, Deng fever, Yellow fever and Zika were happening in far way lands in Africa, Asia or Caribbean and South America. Until the latest virus story, they seemed to cause less of a concern for the Western public with the exception of those who planned to visit some of these countries for business or leisure. We kept hearing about more viruses with names we could not decipher such as H1N1, H1N2, H2N1, H3N1, H2N3, H5N, H7N9, H7N3, H9N2 or SARS and MERS. They grabbed the attention of the media until their novelty would dissipate. Even HIV/AIDS that infected an estimated 76 million people around the world and killed about 33 million people between 1980s and 2019 was almost forgotten as it was mostly a threat for people of Sub-Saharan Africa.

American epidemiologist Rob Wallace in his book *Big Farms Make Big Flu*, says that “anyone who aims to understand why viruses are becoming more dangerous must investigate the industrial model of agriculture and, more specifically, livestock production. At present, few governments, and few scientists, are prepared to do so.” You cannot understand the source of these pandemics we have been experiencing for years without understanding the level of corporate concentration in the meat processing industry, the conditions of industrial farming and the effects it has on the animals and working conditions in processing

plants. Figuring out the source of the pandemic in bats or pangolins sold in a wild food market in Wuhan is quite a feat for epidemiologists. But what no one tells what happened to Smithfields, the biggest pork processor in the US, owned by the WH Group since 2013, owned as the Shuanghui Group at the time of the purchase for \$4,72 billion US. Smithfields has operations in the United Kingdom Poland, Romania, Germany, and Mexico. The Mexican facilities were in the news in 2009 accused of being the source of the swine flu pandemic (H1N1). A lawsuit claimed that the disease originated from one of the subsidiaries of Smithfield operating in the city of La Gloria. The swine flu killed close 400 people in Mexico.

Raised with industrial feeds and antibiotics, living with the stress of confined spaces, these industrial farms have been reported as time bombs.

The global food system and the agricultural commodity trading companies are all interconnected; Cargill, COFCO, ADM, Bunge, Wilmar and Louis Dreyfus control the lion's share of procuring, producing, processing, transporting, financing and trading grains, food, fibre, meat, livestock, and sugar globally (ETC, 2020: 15). From agricultural inputs to retailing, the agri-food sector is dominated by a few transnational corporations that get bigger by the day through mergers and consolidation. In 2018 the global market shares of four companies (CR4) in agrochemicals was 65%, animal pharmaceuticals 58%, seeds 50% and farm equipment 45% (Hendrickson et al, 2020). In the US, CR4 reaches to even higher levels where sometimes, the same company is dominating within multiple different sectors. In cold cereal (CR3) controls 83% of the market, soft drinks (CR4) 82%, soybean processing (CR4), 80%, beef processing (CR4) 73%, pork processing CR4 67%, and chicken processing CR4) 54% (ibid). In Canada more than 95 percent of beef comes from 3 plants owned by two companies: Cargill and JBS. The CR4 rate is used as an indicator of concentration level in a market, when the CR4 rate is above 40% that market is considered no longer competitive. This trend has been going up since the 1980s. For example, in 1975 the CR4 in corn seeds in the US was 59%, by 2015, the CR4 went up to 85% and two of these, DowDuPont and Bayer, alone controlled 78% of this market (IATP,

2020). Companies such as JBS, Tyson and Cargill are in the CR4 in more than one market such as broilers, turkeys, beef and pork slaughter. Farmers, and consumers are price takers in these oligopolistic markets.

Concentration in the food system is not just limited to corporate control of the input and output markets. Increasing concentration of land in the hands of fewer and fewer farmers, some of which are also owned by agri-business corporations also result in marginalization of smaller farmers, exploitation of farm workers and provide lesser choice for consumers. Feedlots that used to be owned by family farmers are increasingly controlled by meatpackers. Feedlots by JBS and Cargill can have over 18,000 cattle at a time (IATP, 2020). *Uneven Ground* (Nov. 2020), a report by the Land Inequality Initiative reported that 1% of farms that are integrated into the corporate food system operate more than 70% of the world's farmland. Over 80% of farms, in contrast are smallholdings that are generally excluded from global food chains. The report associates land inequality, with changes in agricultural practices, healthcare, and the spread of disease, pointing out that COVID-19 was the latest zoonotic disease to emerge from a combination of unsanitary animal farming and pressure on land and wildlife populations.

Coronavirus is a potential health threat for everyone, but the pandemic has been hurting primarily the most vulnerable among us; the elderly, the poor, the homeless, the indigenous peoples, racialized minorities and workers who had to work under unsafe working conditions. People living in overcrowded ghettos, in shanty towns, refugee camps, the malnourished have been the primary victims of viruses. As jobs disappeared due to business closures, especially in countries with no social programs to provide supports to the unemployed, food insecurity rates increased dramatically. Closing of school meal programs added an extra burden on families operating in the margins (Adams et al. 2020). Although closing of many of the institutional food outlets, such as university cafeterias created huge surpluses in the food system, inflexibility of the current structures of food chains that have been designed to feed institutions and households separately, and problems with just-in-time delivery systems resulted in dumping of

millions of litres of milk, tens of thousands of eggs, and produce to garbage instead of making them available to food banks (Jha, Parija, Alake, 2020). As we already know from past pandemics, it is often the poor, and the powerless who suffer the brunt of these disasters. One of the deadliest pandemics of the 20th Century, the 1918 Spanish flu killed an estimated 17-50 million people around the world. The Spanish flu killed an estimated 250,000 people in Britain, and 500-850,000 in the US. But in the British Raj in India, the death toll was estimated as 13.88 million (Chandra, Kuljanin and Wray, 2012).

The social consequences of the latest pandemic were as devastating as the effects of the virus. Pandemic is global, but the consequences are not evenly shared everywhere. In many parts of the World, wars and civil wars continue. UNHCR estimates that at least 79.5 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes in 2019. Among them are nearly **26 million refugees**, around half of whom are under the age of 18. On April 21, 2020, the United Nations World Food Program announced that if emergency measures cannot be taken, there will be a famine next year and 265 million people will face acute food failure. Many countries are accumulating huge debts in their attempt to deal with economic slowdown due to the pandemic.

Closing of markets, restaurants and small businesses, shrinking of the tourism sector are a bigger threat for workers, small producers, artisans, artists, and the poor. Even those who continued to work, healthcare workers, workers in the food retail sector, migrant farm workers, workers in processing plants faced the biggest brunt of the pandemic. Many workers in processing plants, retail outlets had no choice but to continue to work even when they were just recovering from the virus.

Governments around the world have designated certain processes and jobs that are considered crucial for preserving life, health and basic societal functioning of essential services. Workers who deliver essential services and functions are expected to continue to do their jobs provided they have no symptoms of COVID-19 virus. While some of these are health care workers and government employees, still, many workers in the food

system are also considered as essential. As early as My 2020, Centre for Disease Control reported that in 115 meat and poultry processing facilities in 19 states 4,913 COVID-19 cases and 20 deaths were observed (Dyal, et al. 2020). Working on the assembly lines where social distancing rules could not be followed, sanitation rules are often violated, workers in the meat processing plants continued to suffer virus infections. In response to the rising meat processing plant closures due to coronavirus, on April 28, citing his authority under the Defense Production Act, President Trump declared an executive order that "it is important that processors of beef, pork, and poultry ('meat and poultry') in the food supply chain continue operating and fulfilling orders to ensure a continued supply of protein for Americans" (Grabel and Yeung, 2020). In an article titled, *America's Slaughterhouses Aren't Just Killing Animals*, Eric Schlosser was referring to a case by a worker at a Smithfield plant in Milan, Missouri who was demanding a court order to force the company to follow public health guidelines for coronavirus. On May 5, 2020, rejecting the case, Judge Kays said, "No one can guarantee health for essential workers—or even the general public—in the middle of this global pandemic" (Scholsser, 2020). Several news stories from the US, Canada, EU, Brazil indicate that these were not random events but systematic on a global scale (Dreyden 2020; Nack, 2020; Phillips, 2020).

One of the common problems was due to finding seasonal farm workers in many parts of the world. In the US, Canada, EU border closures and quarantine requirements set limitations on the numbers of seasonal farm workers who used to come from the global South and work in the farms in the North. Workers who could manage to come, soon find that they were confined to the farms they had to work. Living in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, unable to keep distancing rules at work, and had very limited access to health care, farm workers were among the biggest victims of COVID-19 infections. A report by the University of California, Berkeley reported that California's agricultural workers had contracted COVID-19 at nearly three times the rate of other residents in the state. In Canada and the EU the death rates from COVID-19 reported to be higher in counties with large

populations of seasonal farmworkers. Workers in grocery stores, delivery workers of the mega gig industry were also among the workers suffering from COVID-19 (Seville and Kaplan, 2020). With huge unemployment, many people try to survive as just-in-time delivery workers, often risking their lives to reach their destinations in their bicycles or motorcycles around the world (Zhou, 2020). Delivery Platforms such as Uber Eats, GrubHub or DoorDash, are not only risking the lives of the precariat (Precarious proletariat) but also reported to be taking huge cuts reaching up to 30% from small restaurants who are trying to survive the pandemic (Cerullo, 2020).

Except the COVID-19 deaths, none of these problems I summarize in this review are unique to the pandemic. Food system's normal has been unjust, unhealthy, unsustainable. If COVID-19 did something, it provided further evidence that "the king has been naked" or normal was abnormal.

Search for Solutions:

To understand where we are heading require an awareness of how we came here. The neoliberal policies, that brought us to this point have attacked the concept of public good and creative commons. As agriculture and industry concentration accelerated, unions and civil society associations were suppressed, in the agri-food sector workers, producers and consumers were left at the mercy of global monopolies.

Similar destruction has rendered international governance institutions and mechanisms, especially the United Nations, inoperable. In April 2020, the US Administration cut the payments that it had to make to the World Health Organization in the midst of a global pandemic. Effective collaboration of all types of governance mechanisms, from local to national and international, is needed to get rid of this global stalemate. However, strategic competition between superpowers, market priorities of global oligopolies, conflicts between nation-states, hinder effective cooperation.

In many parts of the world the fear of disease is leading to the fear of others, to increasing isolationism, nativism and xenophobia. Pandemic, on the other hand is also showing

the need for global cooperation and solidarity. Only through a global sense of unity and solidarity we can overcome many of the problems we are facing, care for humans regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion and nationality, care for nature, and all life forms, instead of seeing them as "resources" to be exploited. Instead, we now live in a scary world of social isolation, with increasing restrictions on our mobility. We interact with each other through communication tools that are monitoring and recording our private conversations, collecting data on where we shop, who we contact and which web sites we visit. We read news that are provided to us by the algorithms of the corporations that get richer by monitoring and marketing our information. This is not the globalization we wished to have.

Crises periods are the best times to think about why we are here and to learn from our old mistakes. In recent years, we have been observing that many countries have developed national food policies or strategies to address food system problems. We can assume that these policy searches will intensify in the coming years. However, by looking at the past crises, I can imagine any critical insights we may gain during this crisis will likely to be forgotten, and sources of our problems would soon be celebrated as the problem solvers. Some of those who would not even consume canola oil because of the fear of GDOs are lining up for genetically engineered vaccines and are not even questioning how much money going to be spent to their producers with the hope that they will protect us from this virus.

In the struggle to find an effective vaccine against the coronavirus, world nations are competing to make deals with big Pharma. While the richest nations such as the United States, the European Union, Britain, Norway, Switzerland, Japan, Canada, Australia are lining up with big vaccine orders, they are also opposing a proposal made by India and South Africa to the World Trade Organization (WTO) to exempt member countries from enforcing some patents, trade secrets or pharmaceutical monopolies under the organization's agreement on trade-related intellectual property rights (TRIPS) to make these vaccines as universally accessible to save lives around the globe (Prabhala, Jayadev and Baker, 2020).

Already a report by Swiss bank UBS and accounting firm PwC indicated that between April and July 2020 the wealth of global billionaires increased by 27.5%. *Riding the Storm* report shows that increase was in double digits across every sector, with the highest in technology (36%) and health care (44%) sectors.

For the measures taken to be effective, trust in public institutions and governance mechanisms are needed and the principles of public sphere and social benefit should be respected (Bui et al. 2019). Advocates of food democracy and food sovereignty defend access to food as a basic human right, a sustainable agriculture and food system, protection of small and medium-sized enterprises from corporate pressures, and local and regional solutions and prioritizing human and environmental health in global agreements. And, of course, food sovereignty and food democracy cannot be possible without true sovereignty and democracy.

The report prepared by IPES-Food, the International Panel of Reliable Food Systems Experts in April 2020, states that "COVID-19 revealed the helplessness of global food systems against natural shocks". The proposed measures to be taken include the protection of people in need; building durable agro-ecological food systems, regional markets and short supply chains; establishing a new agreement between the state and civil society while regulating the deteriorating balance between economic power and public good; and the reform of international food governance mechanisms. In participatory democracies, effective policies require cooperation between institutions and the participation of private sector, producer and consumer cooperatives, unions, non-governmental organizations and democratic mass organizations.

We need flexible food and agriculture policies that consider not only material returns but also employment, local economic development, social welfare and nutritional requirements, and national, regional and global social priorities.

It is certain that in the struggle against these problems, we will not reach a place with short-term solutions such as food imports, with production and technological reductionism

that dominated the last century. A just, healthy and sustainable food system requires structural and long-term solutions. Food security is not an issue to be considered independently of other social problems and responsibilities such as health, environment, housing, transportation, economic development. For this reason, commissions consisting of universities, non-governmental organizations, chambers, tradesmen, producers, trade unions and industry representatives and management staff responsible for the implementation and supervision of laws and regulations on this issue are required.

The complex structure of the agriculture and food sector requires cross-sectional reforms in all sectors that shape economic and social life. We cannot imagine a sustainable food system without ecological agriculture and alternative clean energy resources. We cannot talk about food sovereignty without breaking the dominance of multinational monopolies and global finance. And food security cannot be possible without agriculture and land reforms, cooperative organizations and social welfare institutions without reassuring the functions of agriculture and land reforms, cooperative organizations and social welfare institutions are re-established, and public housing, public transportation and labor policies are reorganized for the benefit of the employees.

In order for these efforts to be successful, trust in public institutions and governance mechanisms and the principles of public sphere and social benefit must be respected. In participatory democracies, massive support of these positive developments cannot be possible without a democratic space.

The crisis we are experiencing is also a final warning for us to question the social problems we face and the development models we have implemented. It is impossible for us to establish a just, healthy and sustainable civilization without questioning increasing social inequality, environmental pollution, distorted urbanization, unplanned growth, wasteful consumer economy, capitalist mindset that sees nature and human labor as a resource to be exploited, reductionism that tries to solve all of our social problems with technology, and oppressive regimes that leave us no choice.

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