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Special Issue:
COVID19 and Redefining Human Security

Edited by Nergis Canefe

Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security



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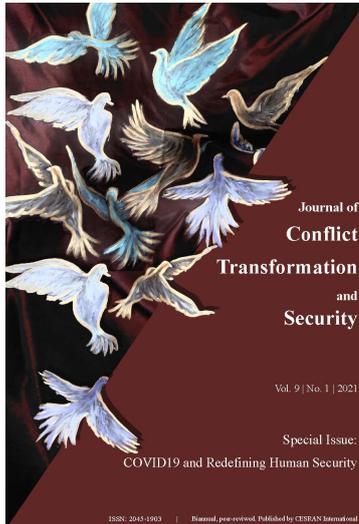
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The Journal of Conflict Transformation and Security (JCTS) provides a platform to analyse conflict transformation and security as processes for managing change in non-violent ways to produce equitable outcomes for all parties that are sustainable. 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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INTERVIEW

Interview with Susan McGrath and Jennifer Hyndman

By Nergis Canefe

Nergis Canefe: *I would like to invite you to a conversation based on themes of law and justice in the context of the COVID 19 related global crisis as it affected and continues to differentially target refugees and forced migrants. What would be your general sense of what needs to be done in building sustainable systems, in reshaping social practices and imaginaries, and in creating new possibilities despite the pandemic conditions for the dispossessed and displaced of the world?*

While refugees and forced migrants have always faced difficulties in trying to re-establish themselves whether in camps or the urban centres of host states, COVID-19 has made these sites more dangerous and deadly.

Susan Lee McGrath is a Professor Emerita in the School of Social Work at York University and former director of York's Centre for Refugee Studies. Her work was recognized by the Social Sciences and Humanities Council with the 2015 Impact Award for Partnership. McGrath is also appointed a Member of the Order of Canada for her contributions to research and policy on refugee rights.

Jennifer Hyndman is a Professor and currently serves as Associate Vice-President of Research. She is also Past Director of the Centre for Refugee Studies at York. Hyndman's research focuses on 1) conflict, human displacement, and the geopolitics of humanitarian response and refugee protection; and 2) refugee settlement, participation and social inclusion in Canada.

COVID-19 accentuates power differential and vulnerabilities, so the poorest and those with the most precarious legal status and housing will be most adversely affected. Hence those displaced from their home countries, without permanent status in their state of refuge, will be most at risk. The vast majority of refugees live in protracted conditions of exile; there are a lot of different contexts of displacement: in camps, in cities where makeshift housing may be the only option. Those who can afford to rent will do so, but we know from existing research that overcrowding is common— a risk factor for COVID-19 if even one household member has to work outside the home. COVID exacerbates inequality, uncertainty, and likely death among those without homes and governments to protect them.

In his policy brief on COVID-19 and people on the move, UN Secretary General António Guterres identified three crises: health, protection, and socio-economic. With high population densities that can be 1,000 times that of the surrounding communities, refugee camps are often crowded, unsanitary with high levels of food-insecurity. In terms of protection, access to asylum for refugees is extremely limited with 99 countries not allowing asylum seekers to cross their closed borders. The result has been detention, forced returns, deportation with migrants stranded. Rising unemployment, loss of livelihoods, and declines in remittances have made life miserable for refugees and migrants. Over half of the refugees surveyed by UNHCR in Lebanon reported having lost their already meagre livelihoods and it is estimated that remittances will drop by a total of USD\$109 billion in 2020 due to COVID-19. Most refugee camps have

been locked down meaning the refugees are unable to pursue employment opportunities outside the camp. Camps are more like squalid jails. Secretary-General Guterres has called for a global response: “COVID-19 is menacing the whole of humanity – and so the whole of humanity must fight back. Individual country responses are not going to be enough”.

The pandemic has also caused what Canadian journalist Doug Saunders has described as the largest “reverse migration” in modern history – that is, a move from cities back to villages and rural areas. The hundreds of millions who live in dormitories or shared rooms or shacks, and who make up the lion’s share of labour in the world’s cities are returning to their villages as they lose their jobs because of COVID-19. In India, the vast exodus of poor urban labourers back to their originating villages – often hundreds of kilometres away – is the second largest mass migration in its history after the Partition of India in 1947 when 14 million were displaced. This exodus has no doubt contributed to the high incidence of COVID-19 in India.

Nergis Canefe: *Although this crisis foregrounds the present, it also allows us to look to the past and to the future. As scholars, we have a special role in re-imagining our societies and institutions. We can also contribute to a multi-faceted understanding of global crises, which opens new and different entry points to old problems. As an internationally recognized scholar and advocate of forced migration, what would be your suggestion for the younger generation of scholars working in this field in terms of how to approach such an unprecedented situation, which aggravated the difficulties faced by displaced populations to an unimagined level?*

Re-imagining the world of forced migration is a huge task. First, we must wrestle with the relevance and baggage of the international institutions we have to address the challenge. While the UNHCR is the best we have, it was born out of WWII conditions in Europe. Its three durable solutions have not changed, and yet we need to change to create change for those who have no access to these solutions,

namely return, local integration where they are, or resettlement to a third country like Canada.

Likewise, the competence and authority of the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN organization in charge of coordinating and monitoring health standards globally, have been challenged by COVID-19. As the only real international organization focused on health *across* world regions, it still – we think – plays a vital role in thinking about *international responses* in a moment when so many countries have retreated to their respective borders and politics. One example is the COVAX initiative, which aims to create an equitable distribution system for an eventual vaccine.

Academics have long been reimagining alternative visions to the dismal conditions of most refugees and forced migrants. Professor Jennifer Hyndman organized a workshop of international scholars in 2018 that resulted in a statement *Humane Mobility: A Manifesto for Change* signed by scholars from around the world. It is critical of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) that was subsequently adopted in December 2018 by the UN General Assembly as a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing by states. The Manifesto criticizes the “exclusionary drafting and decision-making processes” that led to the GCR. It argues that mobility is caused by deep inequalities and violence as well as the militarized, racist, xenophobic and exclusionary responses to this displacement. It calls for refugees and forced migrants to be central to all decision-making processes, requiring a fundamental reordering of current global, regional and national migration governance norms, structures and practices.

Academics have also responded with a series of principles in response to COVID-19 and its impact on migrants. The Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility in collaboration with Colombia and Cornell Universities has issued a statement signed by over 1000 academics. They noted how many States have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with harsh measures against migrants, refugees, and other displaced persons including: border closures, quarantines, expulsions, lock-downs of migrant worker communities and refugee camps, and exclusion from health and well-being

programs. They have proposed fourteen principles derived from international treaties and instruments, customary international law, decisions of UN treaty bodies, and guidelines widely accepted by the international community to guide State action, to assist international organizations, and to provide a basis for advocacy and education in response to the pandemic. They argue that COVID-19 is being used to suspend the rights of forced migrants and call for their rights under international law to be recognized including their right to health, protection, movement, labour rights of workers.

New and emerging scholars have been active in these collaborative advocacy strategies and are organizing themselves in the generation of knowledge. The network of Emerging Scholars and Practitioners on Migration Issues (ESPMI) encourages engagement and interaction between emerging scholars, practitioners, policymakers, journalists, artists, migrants, and all those involved in forced migration and refugee studies. Their aim is to encourage and develop meaningful work and professional connections, as well as to produce new research and new interest in these important issues. They have multiple strategies to engage with their peers and senior colleagues; they recently released the fourth edition of their online journal *Refugee Review*.

The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) brings together academics, practitioners and decision-makers working on forced migration issues. Under the current President, Professor Christina Clark-Kazak, it has developed a Research Code of Ethics to help protect the rights of refugees and issued a Statement against Xenophobic and Anti-refugee Discourse and Practice.

Nergis Canefe: *Concerning the issue of health, how does the condition of being displaced contribute to the racial and economic inequities in exposure and morbidity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic response? Could you talk about the most marked regions where death and dispossession overlapped?*

As before, the poverty and displacement both deepen exposure to and death by COVID-19.

Strong leadership and governance in a poor state may help outcomes but less for people in precarious, crowded housing than for those with good incomes and secure housing.

As COVID has spread, advanced economies have become more insular focusing on the needs of their own residents and have spent \$11 trillion according to the Hon. Bob Rae of Canada who is now Canada's Ambassador to the United Nations and author of *A Global Crisis Requires a Global Response*. Much needed funds to support developing countries has not been forthcoming resulting in serious health and social consequences: food shortages reaching famine proportions, exponential increase in sexual and gender-based violence, and cuts to vaccination programs for diseases such as polio, measles, cholera and malaria. It is expected that there will be more deaths from these diseases than from COVID-19. There are serious concerns about access to the COVID-19 vaccine whenever it is produced and that "vaccine nationalism" will mean that it will not be available to low-income, developing countries for some time.

Rae reports that Latin America and the Caribbean is currently the global epicentre of the pandemic. The result has been a deterioration of basic needs, exacerbating existing inequalities, violence against women, food insecurity due to interrupted global supply chains, loss of income and climate change. There are 5.2 million Venezuelan refugees in the region. In Central America, there have been high instances of violence, extortion, rape and sexual assault, murder, and disappearances along the irregular migration route.

The largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh has a population of around one million Rohingya. The difficult humanitarian situation there (trauma, impact on women and girls, lack of education, the lack of access to meaningful economic opportunities, tensions between refugees and the host community, security challenges, intractability of the parties involved to address these issues) has deteriorated as a result of COVID-19. International law concerning refugees is relevant to the health and well-being of those displaced, such as the Rohingya in Bangladesh. Teemu Ruskola and Martin Jones both refer to

'legal orientalism' as an assessment of the law of countries considered 'other' (i.e. global South, of the Orient) as inferior. In this vein, Hyndman and Reynolds (2020) observe that states that are not signatories to the euro-centric 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol are likewise orientalized in a legal sense because they did not adopt this major treaty on refugee protection. They are largely excluded from the architecture and framework of the recent Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), and none of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) country cases for the GCR included a country outside the Convention and Protocol.

Moira camp on the island of Lesbos in Greece, the largest refugee camp in Europe, intended for 3,000 people had 13,000 by 2020. For months, the medical charity Doctors Without Borders had repeatedly called for the urgent evacuation of the Moira camp because of the overcrowding and poor conditions and concern about COVID-19. It reported that there was just one water tap for every 1,300 people and no soap available. There were concerns about the health of children. In March the camp was put under lockdown because of concerns about COVID-19. In early September, COVID was detected in the camp and this was followed by a fire that destroyed it. Local communities refused to accept the fleeing refugees; they were left sleeping in the open on the road without food. The presence of COVID-19 among some of the refugees is being used to justify keeping the entire refugee population isolated from the surrounding communities. There is a lot of fear and anger among the people of Lesbos and Greece but actions taken to control the spread of the virus must be consistent with international human rights.

There has been a completely inadequate response to the fire and humanitarian emergency by EU states. While 400 unaccompanied minors were moved to the continent, the focus is containing the refugees on Lesbos in a local closed camp. Despite the opposition of humanitarian actors and a demonstration by 3000 people in Berlin claiming "We have room" and condemning Moria as a "camp of shame", the new camp promises to be as bad or worse than the original. Europe is failing to meet its

responsibilities under international law to protect refugees.

Some regions are managing better than others. The large Dadaab camp in Kenya has reported relatively few cases of COVID although there are concerns that may change and the lock down of the camps that helped to discourage transmission has taken a toll on the mental health of the residents. The refugees have been mobilizing in response to the threat from the virus. In the Za'atari camp in Jordan, built in 2012 to house Syrian refugees, the women quickly started making soap from natural ingredients to help families protect themselves from COVID-19. The refugees are collaborating with researchers to produce reusable PPE for the camp and the local population in Jordan. Masks, shields and gowns are being made from locally available, low-cost materials that can be recycled thus creating jobs, reducing plastic and keeping people safe.

Nergis Canefe: *In your opinion, what is the role of international law and international institutions as well as INGOs in facilitating reparation of the suffering endured by people on the move during the pandemic? Could you provide us with some good news at all in terms of measures introduced or strategies developed since March 2020?*

There is not much good news. As others have noted, the pandemic has spread quickly given the connectivity among countries that defines the world order, but responses to COVID are decidedly national and distinct, depending on where one lives. The WHO has proven controversial to the US government of President Trump, but even setting those politics aside, an international organization – or even a treaty – has little efficacy in this moment when states are struggling to manage the spread of the virus by closing borders, both international and local, restricting the movements of their residents, and closing down public spaces and businesses. The sovereignty of states is boosted by COVID-19, and they try to maintain the trust of their electorates by keeping their people safe, or in the case of the US, duped that the pandemic is a

conspiracy, a biosecurity attack from China, or some other such strategy.

The geopolitical race among governments for a vaccine continues, but the response must also be multilateral involving INGOs, nation states, local governments and the engagement of refugee populations at each level of effort to address the impact of COVID-19. Academic researchers and research institutions have been providing analyses and direction along with UN leaders including the Secretary General and the High Commissioners of Human Rights and Refugees as noted elsewhere here.

The response to the global crisis of COVID-19 must be at once local, national and global as argued in the report by the Honourable Bob Rae as he concluded his term as Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Canada on Humanitarian and Refugee Issues. Rae calls on the Canadian government to provide leadership in the response to the COVID-19 crisis with a series of recommendations including allocating additional resources as part of a broader effort by OECD economies to address the global, financial, social, and economic impacts. He calls for Canada to provide political leadership by creating complementary mechanisms for dialogue between major refugee-hosting states, major donor and resettlement countries, and refugee leaders to support the political dialogue necessary to draft and realize solutions with and for refugees. Canada's continued leadership in the resettlement of refugees including its model of private or community sponsorship remains important.

Canada is an early contributor to the WHO led initiative COVAX Advance Market Commitment which will use official development assistance funds to incentivize manufacturers to ensure sufficient global capacity is in place before vaccines are licensed. In theory, it will then procure vaccines and assist in delivery in low income and lower middle-income countries. Combined, these countries account for nearly half of the world's population. Nonetheless, the question of which countries will pay for this remains.

Brazilian researcher Jubilut notes that while special measures are of course needed to face the pandemic, these must take into account existing frameworks of protection (such as

international refugee law and international human rights law) to ensure that the least rights-intrusive options are chosen. She argues as others do that the needs of refugees must be balanced against the interests of States so that adequate measures against the pandemic can be secured at the same time as refugees are protected. Responses to the pandemic must not result in rights violations and/or increased vulnerability for an already vulnerable population.

Nergis Canefe: *In terms of geographies of displacement, we are all aware that the majority of the movement in terms of forced migration not only emanates from the Global South but also remains within the Global South. What kinds of challenges this phenomenon poses for the well-being and survival of displaced masses? Is this something nation-states could take care of themselves alone, which has become a de facto necessity due to measures isolation introduced by the pandemic?*

A leading Brazilian researcher Lilita Lyra Jubilut has documented the geographical challenges to refugee protection in the time of COVID. Refugees face increased protection issues in their country of origin, at the borders, and in countries of asylum. In their country of origin, refugees may face a greater risk of human rights violations and persecution with heightened discrimination and 'emergency' pandemic measures enabling crackdowns on democracy. At the same time, restrictions on freedom of movement may make it impossible for people to leave in search of asylum and border closures may prevent them from crossing in search of protection. In countries of asylum, refugees may face a number of challenges, including access to (adequate) refugee status determination procedures; documents; services (especially health care); livelihoods; and assistance/stimulus packages, and the fear of forced returns. As noted above, nation states are largely ill equipped to respond to the impact of COVID-19 on forced migration on their own. A multilateral institutional approach is needed that will simultaneously address local, national and global issues.

Nergis Canefe: *Could you talk about life in refugee camps at a global scale while COVID 19 continues to spread? Do you have any future projections regarding the treatment of refugee camps if the pandemic continues unabated? Will the camps become the new points of global perjury in terms of how we choose not to deal with human suffering?*

As noted above, conditions in the camps are generally deteriorating under COVID-19 and there is little evidence of a global commitment to turn the situation around. Of course, not all refugees live in camps, and much less visible dispossession and risk of getting COVID-19 may be occurring in cities harboring asylum seekers in precarious housing conditions. And

A recently released UNHCR report describes the COVID-19 pandemic as a ‘force multiplier’, increasing the needs of the displaced population, including refugees in many countries, while also making those needs more difficult to address.

Brazilian researcher Liliana Lyra Jubilut has written that as creations of the nation-state international architecture and one of the most vulnerable groups of people within it, refugees and forced migrants are among the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Migrants, refugees, and other displaced persons have been excluded from programs adopted by States to secure the health and economic well-being of those within their borders. While there is no doubt that governments need to react swiftly and decisively to limit the spread of COVID-19, all measures must be “non-discriminatory, provided for by law, and be reasonable, proportionate and necessary to protect public health”.

Jubilut calls for the international community to raise awareness to include refugees in responses to the pandemic, and to ensure that actions are designed and implemented in accordance with the most protective standards possible. She notes that the challenges to refugee protection in the time of COVID-19 are multilayered, affecting different territories and different actors of movement, thus impacting the geographies and subjects of refugeehood and of refugee protection. All of these challenges and variables need to be mapped

out and diagnosed in order to be addressed, so as to ensure the integral protection for refugees.

In September 2020, UNHCR reported that it had so far received just 49 per cent (US\$4.5 billion) of the \$9.1 billion required for its global operations in 2020. The consequences of this funding gap are particularly devastating in low- and middle-income countries, which currently host more than 85 per cent of the world’s refugees. In many such countries, the pandemic has destabilized economies, exacerbated internal displacement and reduced access to asylum.

The underfunding is exacerbated if not promoted by increasing discrimination against refugees and forced migrants. In March 2020, Michelle Bachelet and Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioners for Human Rights and for Refugees respectively, expressed their concern over the proliferation of racism and xenophobia related to COVID-19 including harassment, hate speech, discriminatory stereotyping, and conspiracy theories.

They too identify the globalization of COVID-19, arguing that the health of every person is linked to the health of the most marginalized members of the community, that preventing the spread of the virus requires outreach to all, and ensuring equitable access to treatment. This means overcoming existing barriers to affordable, accessible health care, and tackling long-ingrained differential treatment based on income, gender, geography, race and ethnicity, religion or social status. There are serious concerns about the increase in gender-based violence.

Our capacity to ignore the human suffering in camps is facilitated by the lack of surveillance as INGOs are withdrawing their staff and the global media their journalists in the face of violence and COVID-19. The responses to the virus have resulted in increased isolation, insularism and nationalism that make it easier to ignore even the profound needs of others.

States are passing legislation that is inhumane and contrary to international statutes. About 4000 refugees granted visas to settle in Australia have remained stranded offshore since March, when Prime Minister Scott Morrison sealed the borders. The EU’s

proposed new legislation to control migration, the Asylum and Migration Pact, demonstrates the lack of change in the underlying EU strategy on asylum and migration; it remains based on preventing arrivals regardless of protection needs and regardless of the consequences. Borders, detention and deportation remain the order of the day.

Susan Martin, the founding director of Georgetown's Institute for Studies in International Migration, has documented the US history in refugee resettlement with recommendations for a post-Trump administration. Under President Trump, travel bans, border closings and extreme vetting of refugee applications, have drastically reduced the number of refugees admitted to the country, with a ceiling of just 15,000 resettled refugees for 2020-21, down from more than 100,000 five years ago. Martin has provided a guide to the new government to rebuild the American refugee resettlement program.