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Charlotte Dany and
Annalena Groppe

Peace and the Pandemic

International Perspectives on Social
Polarization and Cohesion in Times
of COVID-19

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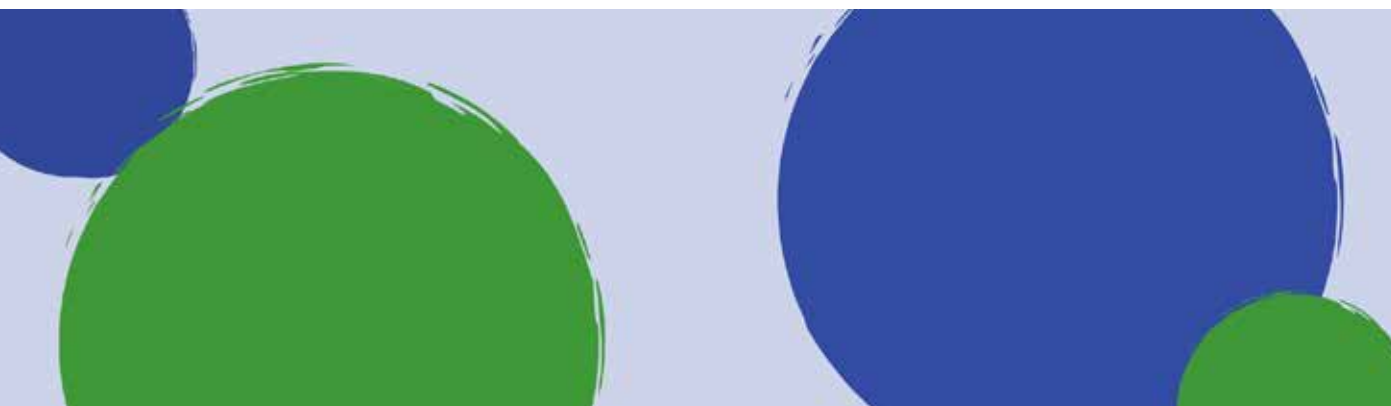
The Peace Academy Rhineland-Palatinate (Friedensakademie Rheinland-Pfalz) is a peace and conflict research institute at the University of Koblenz-Landau. It further seeks to promote and strengthen strategies of crisis prevention and civil conflict management, inspire the political discourse and train those that are

faced with potentials for conflict and violence in their professional or volunteer work. As a unique interface institution, it promotes the mutual exchange between academic research and civil society actors.

Introduction

International Perspectives on Social Polarization and Cohesion in Times of COVID-19

Charlotte Dany and Annalena Groppe



As if under a magnifying glass, the global COVID-19 pandemic renders global inequalities, as well as conflicts within societies, more visible. Countries around the world are severely affected by this health, economic and political crisis. While all seem to be affected, not all are affected equally. It is particularly the marginalized, weak and vulnerable groups in societies—as well as poorer countries in general—that most bear the burden of the pandemic. Therefore, more often than not, existing inequalities are reinforced and societies become more polarized in this situation. At the same time, the crisis might create increased attention and, therefore, opportunities for more solidarity and social cohesion.

This first edition of PEACE PERSPECTIVES—the new working paper anthology of the Peace Academy Rhineland-Palatinate—takes this observation as a starting point for observing the consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic. It gives a broad survey of how the pandemic is affecting social polarization and cohesion. This is observed in certain countries: in Germany (*Groppe*), Belgium (*Bouchat, Kesteloot, Renard & Rosoux*), Northern Ireland (*Nolan*) and Kenya (*Renner*), as well as in those parts of Brazil, Peru and Bolivia comprising the South-Western Amazon region (*Froese, Pinzon, Schönenberg & Schilling*). Other chapters assess it with regard to issues that we focus on in our research: humanitarian aid (*Dany*), environmental policy/forest conservation (*Alusiola*), peace education (*Hussak*) and Shared Societies (*McCartney*). All contributions were written by members of the Peace Academy Rhineland-Palatinate

at the University of Koblenz-Landau, as well as its close international network on Shared Societies that the Peace Academy leads, together with the Peace and Conflict Management program at the University of Haifa and *The Center for a Shared Society* at Givat Haviva.

While emphasizing different aspects and focusing on various countries, a few common threads can be observed that run through all these chapters. Unsurprisingly, most of the effects are evaluated as negative and conflictual: severe economic losses and inequalities, closed borders and schools, increased authoritarianism and police violence, societal unrest in reaction to measures to contain the virus, growing risks to mental health, and the suspension of international programs such as on deforestation or refugee protection. This negative impact explains observations of increasing societal polarization: when conflicts over measures escalate, or when coronavirus disproportionately affects and further disadvantages already poor and marginalized groups.

Does this situation leave any room for strengthened social cohesion? Calls for national and international solidarity have become loud. However, there still unfortunately seems to be a long way to go in this direction; the means to achieve solidarity—particularly across borders—are rather restricted. Nevertheless, there are also some signs of hope: the situation of crisis seems to indicate the value of local knowledge, civil initiatives and global cooperation. Some of the contributions emphasize the need for better and more trustworthy relationships among people living in one society and even across borders, as well as towards political leaders. So-called Shared Societies seem better prepared to react to the pandemic. Moreover, peace education is more relevant in this time of crisis, as it shows the potential for facilitating competencies for conflict transformation and strengthens reflection on one's position within global interconnections.

This leaves us with a mixed picture, but at least also with a few hints of how we can learn from the pandemic and probably make societies better prepared for the future. While the case studies certainly do not allow for a systematic analysis, we can assume, based on the available anecdotal evidence, that certain characteristics better prepare societies to deal with such crises. Further research should examine the conditions that make societies more resilient to crises such as the current global pandemic.

Peace Education in Polarizing Conflicts over Democracy

The Example of 'Corona Protests' in Germany

Annalena Groppe



Introduction

Physical and verbal attacks on the police and the press, comparisons with resistance fighters from the Nazi era, and antisemitic narratives in the name of fundamental rights: at the so-called 'Corona protests'—organised by the *Querdenken*¹ alliance, among others—the social potential for violence in reaction to COVID-19 pandemic contact restrictions becomes apparent. Many of these positions are not new: in Germany and in other countries, symbols, places and institutions of democracy are increasingly becoming the focus of conflicts of interpretation. Hence, when demonstrators refer to the concept of 'democracy', they give it nationalist, authoritarian and populist meanings. This has been criticised as 'undemocratic' by all governing and opposition parties except the Alternative for Germany party (AFD) (Parak & Wunnicke, 2019).

Here, as in many other areas of society, the pandemic magnifies and intensifies existing lines of conflict. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for peace researchers who investigate conflicts over democracy, as well as for peace education, which has the task of dealing didactically with such conflicts. While the relevance of their core concepts and didactics is apparent, they also need to reflect on their own approaches. Mere moralisation about the actors can even perpetuate populist victim narratives and,

1 The group *Querdenken* (lateral thinking) is the main organizer of protests over COVID-19 policies in Germany.

as will be shown, disregard relevant dimensions of the conflict. In order to prevent this, it is helpful to analyse the ‚Corona protests’ multi-dimensionally through the lenses of peace studies and peace education.

The analysis presented here is a snapshot, based primarily on media reports and comparisons with the preliminary findings of a research project on the potential of peace education in polarising conflicts over democracy. It shows that the ‚Corona protests’ reproduce populist narratives with broad social appeal, reinterpret democratic concepts as well as history, and engender social resistance. Moreover, they make strong references to conspiracy theories and the Nazi period, thereby receiving quite some attention in the media. In what follows, the framework for understanding peace education will be explored and further developed using the example of the ‚Corona protests’ in order to enable a reflective approach to these conflicts in educational practice.

1 The lens of peace education

The quite differentiated field of peace education draws on the concepts of peace, violence and conflict. Non-violent transformation of conflict is largely understood as a continuous process and as a potential for mutual learning (Jäger, 2010). Johan Galtung’s (1998) triangle distinguishes between direct, structural and cultural violence and provides a helpful basis for reflecting upon pedagogical approaches, since peace education is oriented towards the specific forms of violence relevant for each context (Salomon, 2002). As shown in Figure 1, Norbert Frieters-Reermann uses Galtung’s triangle to classify the approaches of (1) *violence prevention* as a tool for restraining personal violence, (2) *critical peace education*, which exposes structures of vio-

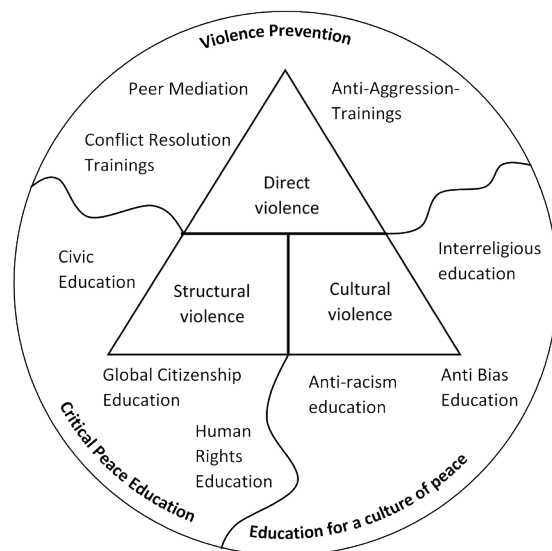


Fig. 1 Frieters-Reermann's approaches of peace education in relation to Galtung's forms of violence, own representation.

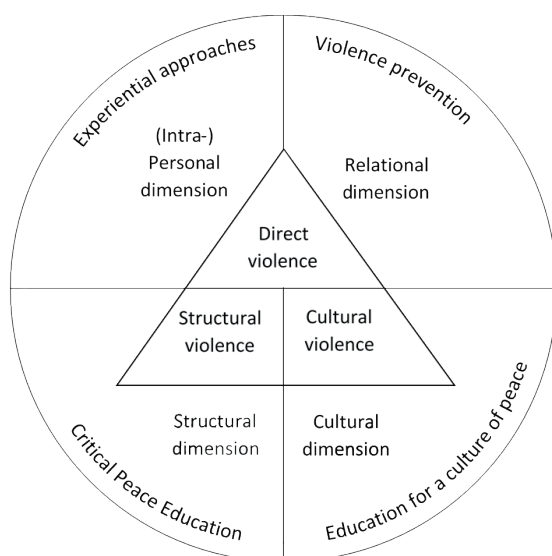


Fig. 2 Typology complemented by Lederach's conflict dimensions and experiential peace education, own representation.

lence, and (3) *pedagogy for a culture of peace*, which deconstructs discourses that legitimise violence (2019, p. 153).

John Paul Lederach distinguishes four dimensions of conflict, which largely correspond with Galtung's understanding of the forms of violence (cf. Figure 2). His concept of conflict enables a descriptive rather than normative view of phenomena; it thus permits a constructive exploration of steps towards possible transformation. Lederach further classifies the directly physical aspects of violence into *relational* and *(intra)personal* dimensions (Lederach, 1997, p. 82f.). Frieters-Reermann's typology of peace education approaches can thus be extended beyond Galtung: the *(intra)personal* (e.g. physical, emotional and spiritual)

needs of learners are also increasingly acknowledged in the current discourse of peace education (Cremin et al., 2018; Koppensteiner, 2020). This paper summarises them as (4) *experiential approaches* to peace education.

Such a typology of approaches to peace education is helpful in studying polarising conflicts over democracy because the different dimensions of conflict and forms of violence can be specifically addressed. Furthermore, the range of conflict issues becomes apparent, as well as the associated potential for transformation. Practitioners can use the analysis of the 'Corona demos' to gain insights into suitable entry points. Last but not least, the identification of different dimensions of conflict counteracts the dualistic reproduction of images of 'we against them' and, therefore, polarisation.

2 Relational dimension

In the relational dimension of conflict, the direct physical violence that is visible at the 'Corona protests' is striking. Non-compliance with distancing rules, contact restrictions and the obligation to wear face masks at large demonstrations not only endanger the physical integrity of vulnerable groups but also the entire population, in view of the capacity limits of hospitals. In addition, there are physical confrontations with police, threats against politicians and attacks on journalists (Geisler, 2020; Meisner, 2020; Spreter, 2020).

Criticism or resistance are not, by definition, relationally violent, as often sweepingly condemned in the context of the 'Corona protests'. Even intense emotions—anger, sadness and fear—can contribute to lively political debate (Langeder, 2019). However, in the context of the 'Corona protest', anger and fear are projected mainly onto 'the others' and are expressed as aggression and accusatory denial; these block communication and transformational spaces. For example, protesters do not criticise policies but instead call for a court martial of political figures (Stolz, 2020).

Approaches to violence prevention in peace education are very widespread and often take the form of social-skills training and dispute-mediation programmes. They teach skills such as de-escalation methods, communication models, joint decision-making skills and common group rules in order to provide a toolbox for constructive conflict management. Standing alone, however, these approaches tend to overburden the individual's responsibility in collective structures of violence (Wulf, 1982).

Nevertheless, approaches to learning relational security—supplemented by perspectives from other conflict dimensions—offer practical modes for action. This not only applies to 'Corona protesters' but is also helpful for those taking a pluralistic and solidarity position in polarising conflicts over democracy. For instance, moralisation, homogenisation, infantilisation and pathologizing can also be observed in counter-protests. This moralising reaction to relational violence in turn reinforces the victim narrative of the participants (Jörke & Selk, 2017, p. 157ff.).

Therefore, the concern is not equalisation or comparing the 'intensity of violence'. Peace education does not aim to justly 'balance out' violence but to create learning spaces which allow to transform underlying conflicts. It is particularly relevant here that moralising homogenisation prevents a differentiated structural critique (e.g. of growing social inequality as a result of the pandemic) as well as self-reflexive engagement with the cultural roots of conspiracy theories (e.g. antisemitism). Both are reproduced every day in society as a whole and affect everyone.

That is why possessing skills in violence prevention is of great importance for society in times of crisis and increasingly polarised conflicts. Peace education prevents relational violence by creating learning spaces to enable competence in constructive conflict management and explanatory political communication that can take people along. For example, debate training, mediation or de-escalation can offer

tips on dealing with public refusals to wear masks, as well as with a *Querdenker* in the family (Redaktion Kultur, 2020; Vieth, 2020).

As indicated before, approaches to relational security do not stand alone but require didactic interaction with other dimensions to compensate for blind spots.

3 Structural dimension

The structural dimension of conflict around the ‘Corona protests’ is within the framework of critical peace pedagogy, which examines violence in institutional frameworks. It is particularly relevant in this case study that a growing number of people in Germany do not feel seen by the existing democratic decision-making processes that aim to contain the COVID-19 pandemic (Mullis, 2020). The pandemic has been described as the catalyst of a postulated “post-democracy” in which actual opportunities for participation are dwindling, despite democratic institutions (Crouch, 2017; Jörke & Selk, 2017, pp. 160–166). Contact restrictions exacerbate the lack of participatory spaces, from the closure of cultural institutions to limits on work in political initiatives (Bethke & Wolff, 2020). Political rhetoric regarding a lack of alternatives intensifies in the crisis situation, and the political parties focus on unity in the grand coalition.

The ‘Corona protests’ imply a rejection and disregard for both the legally mandated protections against COVID-19 and the institutions that determine these. The protests are united by populist narratives in which the ‘common people’ are portrayed as victims of a ‘corrupt elite’ (Hirschmann, 2017). Division is inherent in this dualism, further reinforcing polarisation.

Critical peace education relies on a more reflexive stance here. It opens learning spaces for critical engagement with postcolonial and neoliberal structures in the context of *glocal* interconnections:

[I]t is necessary to recognize the connections of global capitalism including neoliberalism with the imperial way of life of the Global North and to make them the content of a critical [Human Rights education] and [Peace education]. The colonial patterns of thought and action have inscribed themselves into everyday cultural practices and have solidified themselves in institutions. They are based on inequality, power and domination and often on violence, which they also generate. (Gruber & Scherling, 2020, p. 23)

It is thus important in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic to make growing inequalities visible: in this working paper, for example, Charlotte Dany highlights the precarious situation of refugees and Julia Renner describes the devastating effects of the lockdown in Kenya (cf. *Dany* and *Renner* in this volume). These offer differentiated perspectives of critique and transformation. Breaking down the barriers of academic language and increasingly starting with local experiential knowledge are challenges that the ‘Corona protests’ rightly reveal.

Therefore, it is also important to address the common global education crisis. For example, in June 2020, over 95% of children worldwide were affected by school closures (Frieters-Reermann, 2020). This weakens peace education structures *everywhere*. That is why structural measures are also part of the response to the ‘Corona protests’: digital tools can be used to create spaces for learning, dialogue and participation, often with a global reach (Lang-Wojtasik, 2020). There are already projects to teach critical media skills for dealing with digital hate speech (Love-Storm, 2020). Nevertheless, it remains a challenge to focus and remove the barriers to digital learning (Groppe, 2020).

It is difficult for demonstrators that propagate ideological nationalism to connect with critical-postcolonial approaches—stronger interconnections with culturalist peace education are therefore necessary.

4 Cultural dimension

Peace education responds to the cultural dimension of democratic conflicts by examining the collective beliefs that drive the narratives behind the ‘Corona protests’. This enables us to understand their modes of action, demarcation and counter-positioning as well as self-reflexivity.

The protesters construct citizens as a homogeneous *Volk* with the same interests (Hufer, 2018, p. 32). Minorities are thereby systematically denied equal status, resulting in cultural violence. The protection of the lives of people who are particularly affected by the pandemic is rejected as ‘excessive’ or even ‘unnecessary’. This could include the previously ill and the elderly, but also people who are exposed to high risk of infection due to social factors. The latter, as the death figures show, also follows racial and class-based criteria—for instance, due to the limited possibilities for maintaining personal distance in precarious jobs (Cassidy, 2020).

The conviction of the degradation of these groups is legitimised above all by conspiracy theories infused with antisemitism. This is also reflected in the monitoring report of the Federal Association of Research and Information Centres on Antisemitism, which reports an increase in antisemitic myths about the emergence and spread of the virus as well as about state protection measures, especially through the internet and at demonstrations. Antisemitic references to National Socialism are most common, although explicit accusations that Jews caused the pandemic are rarer. Very often, however, antisemitism appears in conspiracy myths without explicit mentioning of Jews and is instead directed against, for example, Bill Gates, the ‘New World Order’ (NWO) or ‘élites’ (Bundesverband der Recherche- und Informationsstellen Antisemitismus e.V., 2020).

Self-victimisation such as wearing a Jewish star with the inscription ‘unvaccinated’ or comparing oneself with Anne Frank and Sophie Scholl relativise the Shoah, reverse the role of victims and perpetrators and often go hand in hand with guilt defence and aggression against Jews (Burghardt, 2020). This is part of an explicit strategy that the New Right calls “metapolitics” to consciously influence social discourses politically (Hufer, 2018). The aim is to trivialise National Socialism in order to make its concepts, such as an exclusive *Volk*, once again connectable and ultimately realisable in the present (Salzborn, 2017, p. 109).

The reinterpretations fall on the fertile ground of the collective repression of perpetration during the Holocaust (Salzborn, 2017). Cultural peace education can work on these collective discourses of legitimisation. Extensive experience exists from memorial education as well as anti-racist education (Schimpf-Herken, 2008). For example, the Anne Frank Educational Centre in Frankfurt offers workshops that bridge the gap between historical and current antisemitism (Bildungsstätte Anne Frank,).

As rational arguments rarely affect supporters of conspiracy theories, the personal-emotional and communal dimensions are increasingly being considered in peace education, such as in the #vrschwrg project (Berghof Foundation, 2020). Here, young people jointly develop interactive learning media that, in addition to imparting knowledge, also strengthen conflict skills and tolerance for ambiguity. We will now take a closer look at the latter perspective.

5 (Intra-)personal dimension

On the (intra-)personal dimension, many people in Germany have been exposed to great uncertainties and increasing experiences of powerlessness as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, health concerns, economic fears, loneliness and insecurity due to the dynamically changing pandemic situation are increasing.

Fears of losing one's social status, identity crises and the feeling of not being heard are common factors that explain populist attitudes (Jörke & Selk, 2017). Importantly, the experience of perceived relative deprivation is reinforced by the pandemic, especially among the middle class. Despite upward mobility narratives, skilled workers and academics experience adjustment challenges: digitalisation, temporary employment contracts and declining prestige due to changing role models (e.g. of masculinity) are examples.

Political scientists differ in their assessment of whether self-perceptions as 'losers from the crisis' correspond to an actual socio-economic change or whether the experience of relative deprivation is rather the result of resentment and resulting fears of possible status losses (Nachtwey, 2016; Salzborn, 2017, p. 140). A prime example is the outrage over the coverage of basic needs during the COVID-19 lockdown by the unemployment benefit II (Hartz IV) (Sperber, 2020). In this case, the perception of social descent is not primarily based on material hardship (which is cushioned by the financial support) but on cultural resentment towards the unemployed. On a personal level, these experiences are, however, associated with disappointments and identity crises (Nachtwey, 2016). In that respect, authoritarian tendencies enable a sense of control to be regained (Bangel, 2020).

A special issue regarding peace education during the COVID-19 pandemic increasingly reflects the (intra-)personal dimension: it asks for spaces to learn to live with ambivalences, a "security of uncertainty" (Lang-Wojtasik, 2020, p. 20). Sensitivity to (collective) trauma (Jäger & Kruck, 2020, p. 15) and an "alphabetisation of the body" (Frieters-Reermann, 2020, p. 12) are demanded. For example, practitioners draw on approaches from psychology and personal development, mindfulness exercises and body-based practice.

Interestingly, the 'Corona protests' are also attended by those pejoratively described as 'esoterics' who argue exclusively on the (intra-)personal dimension and who also ignore concrete physical (infection) dangers, discriminatory structures and authoritarian ideology. The danger of focusing only on one conflict dimension becomes strikingly clear with this example. Peace education has the potential and great responsibility of connecting different dimensions of conflicts over democracy and making them mutually fruitful for transformation. Further exploration of the relationships of these dimensions is urgently needed so that the core concepts of peace education—violence, peace and conflict—do not absorb authoritarian and excluding meanings.

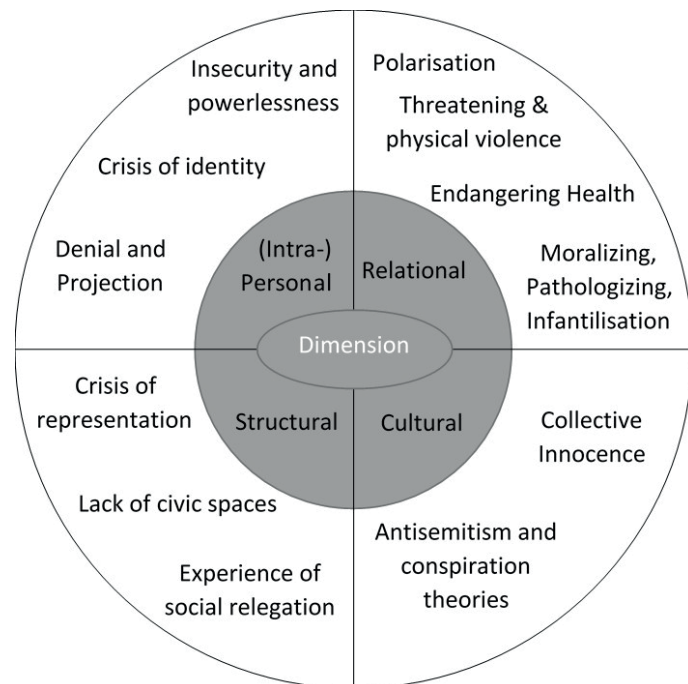


Fig. 3 Dimensions of conflicts over democracy in the case study of 'Corona-protests' in Germany.

6 Potentials and challenges of peace education

Analysis of polarising conflicts over democracy on the basis of the ‘Corona protests’ shows that the political measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic are a point of reference but not the sole object of the conflicts (cf. Figure 3). Contact restrictions which undoubtedly serve an epidemiological function have catalysing side effects on structural inequality and (intra-)personal experiences of insecurity. These fall on the fertile ground of relational moralisation and a culture of antisemitic projection. This analysis of the ‘Corona protests’ suggests that such conflicts will not disappear post-COVID-19.

Thus it is all the more urgent for peace education to reflect on suitable educational approaches in such polarising conflicts over democracy. This case study indicates that the mutual influence of all conflict dimensions, and also in educational practice, cannot be considered in isolation. They follow context-specific conditions and the experiential knowledge of local actors (Jäger, 2010). In a dynamic time of pandemic, this is a potential for a “pedagogy in real time” (Frieters-Reermann, 2020).

However, this does not relieve academic peace education of its responsibility to provide reflective tools to identify blind spots in the perception of conflict. The differentiation between conflict dimensions makes it possible to identify the dominant and marginalised perspectives and corresponding approaches that peace education can offer to balance. These considerations vary according to the background of the institution, the professionals, the funding and many other factors and require examination of one’s own position in the conflicts described.

At this point in the ‘work in progress’, only a brief prospect can be given on what such a positioning might look like. For example, *elicitive conflict mapping* takes the subjective perspective of peace workers as the starting point for identifying next steps that aim not at a universalistic (peace) ideal but at a situational, dynamic balance of plural, subjective and imperfect peaces (Dietrich, 2015).

The transfer of this method to the field of pedagogy is still at its beginning. In view of the complexity of polarising conflicts over democracy, it is clear that possible transformative pedagogical approaches can complement as well as contradict each other. Learning spaces that provide orientation in this diversity can help to make context-specific ways of using a multi-layered potential. This text offers a first step in this direction.

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Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Belgium

HOW CAN WE FAVOR SOCIAL COHESION IN TIMES OF POLARIZATION?

Pierre Bouchat, Chantal Kesteloot, Juliette Renard, Valérie Rosoux



Introduction

Belgium has the world's highest COVID-19 death rate.¹ The country of 11.5 million people has some of the best public hospitals in Europe, yet could not contain the coronavirus. The objective of this article is to investigate this problem and the impact of the current health crisis by focusing on one question: did the coronavirus pandemic lead Belgium towards polarization rather than cohesion? In addressing this question, it is useful to examine the results of a recent survey of the reactions of Belgians towards infringements of their fundamental freedoms. This was a substantial online survey of 1148 Belgians (66.5% women) within the first days of the March lockdown; it tries to understand whether the unprecedented dimension of the epidemic threat in Belgium led to greater support for authoritarian measures or for greater social cohesion.

1 On 12 December 2020, the number of deaths related to the COVID-19 in Belgium totaled 17,692 (which corresponds to 1524 deaths per one million residents). This rate is the highest in the world. By way of comparison, the rate is 260 in Germany, 581 in the Netherlands, 881 in France, 933 in the UK, 912 in the USA, 103 in India and 846 in Brazil (sources: *Worldometers*, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>). At 20 January 2021, the figures were 20572 cases, 8874 of whom had died in an old-age home, <https://covid-19.sciensano.be/sites/default/files/Covid19/Derni%C3%A8re%20mise%C3%A0%20jour%20de%20la%20situation%20%C3%A9pid%C3%A9miologique.pdf>).

The article consists of three parts. The first focuses on the most relevant features of the Belgian context. The second presents the theoretical and methodological elements at stake in the survey, as well as its results. The last part attempts to go beyond our observations to suggest a series of recommendations that favor social cohesion in times of polarization.

1 Belgian Context: the historical evolution of intergroup relations

To understand the elements at stake when discussing social cohesion and shared values in Belgium, it is useful to consider the country from a historical perspective. Created in 1830, the Belgian state has always been considered a divided society. Nowadays, the most striking conflict that characterizes the country is the tension between Dutch- and French-speakers. However, the situation is far more complex than this basic distinction.

Three layers of division

During the 19th century, three layers of tension succeeded and overlapped one another. The first opposed Catholics and liberals, who fundamentally disagreed on the place of religion and the church in society, and particularly in the field of education. With the industrialization of Belgium and the emergence of a working-class, a new division emerged between left- and right-wing political parties. In addition, by the end of the 19th century, the linguistic division between French-speaking and Dutch-speaking people had become increasingly dominant (Kesteloot, 2013).

At that time, the elite spoke French while the vast majority of the population spoke a dialect (either one of the Dutch dialects in the north of the country or one of the Walloon dialects in the south). Consequently, the linguistic fracture was, above all, a social one. The gap between the French and Walloon dialects was smaller than between French and Dutch ones, so it is not surprising that the transition between the Walloon dialects and French was easier than between the Dutch dialects and French.

This situation led to the creation of a Flemish movement to recognize the value of both the Dutch language and Flemish culture. The progressive importance of the Flemish movement triggered the development of a Walloon movement; thus, both movements originally had no anti-Belgium character. Their perspectives on the country were admittedly different but did not imply the creation of two separate states. However, both movements evolved and gradually became more radical (Lamberts, 2009).

Fragmented memories

During the 20th century, additional dimensions made the situation even more complicated. In this regard, the First World War (WWI) is a turning point in the history of Belgium. It is often depicted as one of the foundational myths of the Belgian state and, therefore, as the triumph of Belgian nationalism. However, it also provoked the emergence of a new type of nationalism: Flemish (Van Ypersele, 2015). The Second World War (WWII) reinforced the linguistic division and led to simplified but durable stereotypes about each side of the country—Walloon resistance fighters versus Flemish (nationalist) collaborators (Gotovitch et al., 2002). However, this representation is only partially true. On the one hand, resistance movements were indeed more developed in the French-speaking part of the country as well as among the French-speaking minority in Flanders. Nonetheless, collaboration movements also arose in Wallonia as a result of the Rexist Party (political collaborators) and the Walloon Legion (military collaborators). Each region cultivated a dominant specific memory of the war. In Flanders, former collaborators were often considered at the end of the war to be victims of repression rather than perpetrators. The

repression policy launched by the Belgian state was thus perceived as a means of discrediting the Flemish movement. In contrast, most former collaborators in Wallonia attempted to disappear from public view (Aerts & De Wever, 2012; Gotovitch et al., 2002).

Beyond the fragmentation of the memories of WWI and WWII, the legacy of the colonial period was also differently represented in each region. This evolution was reinforced by the progressive federalization of the state and, therefore, by the absence of a strong national narrative. After 50 years of political reform, Belgian society is fundamentally diverse. These reforms have also affected political parties, which are no longer organized nationally—the political landscape is shaped by *two* socialist parties, *two* liberal parties. Moreover, as in other European states, successive waves of immigration have contributed to the emergence of a multicultural society. Belgium is now a country divided between Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels, with Brussels being one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world.²

Political instability and the COVID-19 crisis

When COVID-19 struck Belgium, the country was in a phase of political uncertainty.³ On December 9, 2018, the five N-VA (New Flemish Alliance, a Flemish right-wing political party) members of the federal government (Michel I) resigned.⁴ This event was followed by a long political crisis. The inability to constitute a new federal government explains why Belgium was governed by a federal caretaker government. In May 2019, European, federal and regional elections were held; it was hoped that the election results would enable the formation of a coalition government. However, the election results revealed a reinforced ideological polarization between the main political parties north and south of the linguistic border. Moreover, they showed the weakening of the traditional political parties in Belgium. Time went by with endless negotiations to form a federal government. During that period, the country was still in the hands of the minority caretaker government.⁵

As the pandemic could no longer be ignored, an emergency government was installed on 17 March 2020.⁶ A majority in the Chamber of Representatives expressed their confidence in this government; a week later, special powers were delegated to the government for three months (renewable once) to deal with the crisis. It soon became clear that there was a need for cooperation between various political entities. Therefore, the Ministers-President of the federated entities (regions and communities) were associated with the National Council of Security, and the presidents of the ten political parties that voted their confidence in the government were invited to the *Kern*⁷ meetings. This was the situation during the first wave of the epidemic.

That summer, political negotiations resumed and, finally, at the end of September, a majority coalition

2 In Brussels one can find around 180 nationalities, 100 languages spoken, and two out of three residents being born abroad (Araujo, 2020).

3 This section is based on Faniel and Sägerser (2020), *La Belgique entre crise politique et crise sanitaire*, and on a press review.

4 The federal government was in place since October 2014 and comprised the following parties: N-VA, CD&V (Christian Party) and Open VLD (liberal Dutch-speaking political parties) and MR (French-speaking liberal party).

5 The political parties that comprised this government only represented 38 out of the 150 seats in the Chamber of Representatives.

6 Composed of the same members as the caretaker government and with limited powers (to deal with the crisis only).

7 This structure is a restricted version of the Council of Ministers.

was agreed upon. The new government (coalition *Vivaldi*) took office in October 2020, almost a year and a half after the federal elections. This is not the place to comment on the way in which the COVID-19 crisis was and is still being addressed. Nevertheless, it is crucial to point out that the period between March and October 2020 was not one of peace and unity between the various political factions of Belgian society. The fracture between political parties was observed at various levels (i.e. lockdown exit strategy,⁸ double contradicting discourses). Furthermore, the recent political evolution demonstrates how hard it has become to agree upon a governing coalition at the federal level since the election results expressed a strong polarization in preferences between north and south. It is in this context of very strong division that the COVID-19 crisis emerged and had a strong impact on Belgium.⁹ The next section explores the impact of this crisis on social cohesion in Belgian society. What solidarity mechanisms have been implemented? What are the values highlighted? Do Belgians show solidarity with ‘others’ and, if so, who are these ‘others’? Are Flemish/Walloon people in solidarity only with Flemings or Walloons? What about Brussels? In other words, are deep linguistic and cultural divisions reflected in the population’s reactions to this crisis?

2 Survey on Perceived Threat, Authoritarianism and Social Cohesion¹⁰

This section concentrates on three main aspects of the survey, conducted in March 2020 during the first wave of the pandemic. The first considers the theoretical debate related to the survey; the second explains its methodological background while the third highlights its main results.

State of the Art

The link between exposure to a threat and authoritarianism is supported by a vast literature: based on the results of the World Values Survey and the European Values Survey, Inglehart shows that existentially threatening conditions (physical and economic insecurity) lead to an increase in xenophobia and authoritarian policies (Inglehart, 2018). Furthermore, Jost and colleagues showed a significant association between subjective perceptions of threat and conservatism (Jost et al., 2017). According to them, exposure to objectively threatening circumstances was linked to a “conservative shift” at the individual and collective levels (Jost et al., 2017). This data is supported by a series of studies on archival material that show that conditions of political and economic threat are linked to the election of right-wing leaders and policies (Jost, 2006). Finally, research stemming from an approach called “parasite stress” shows that societies with high levels of infectious diseases are characterized by more authoritarian regimes (Morand & Walther, 2018). This relation between threats from infectious diseases and authoritarianism is also supported at the individual level (Taylor, 2019).

Nevertheless, many real-life examples show that, far from provoking support for authoritarian measures, major threatening situations are linked to important expressions of solidarity. For instance, numerous European citizens have hosted Syrians in transit during the migratory wave of 2011, spontaneous demonstrations of solidarity erupted after the 2015 attacks in Paris, and restaurant owners have provided

8 Not all political parties agreed on how to exit the first lockdown.

9 As said before (see Footnote 1), on December 12th, 2020, the number of deaths related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Belgium was 17,692 (corresponding to 1524 deaths per 1 million residents).

10 This section is based on a larger manuscript submitted for publication: Bouchat, P., Rimé, B., & Rési-bois, M. (2021). *When Emotional Synchronization Predicts Populist Opinions*.

food and drink to health-care workers during their fight against the coronavirus pandemic. How can this paradoxical effect be explained?

Part of the answer lies in the emotional dynamics caused by the perceived threat. A series of studies show that, when groups are confronted with threatening events, they tend to develop an intense emotional communication (Garcia & Rimé, 2019; Pelletier & Drozda-Senkowska, 2016; Rimé, 2009). This emotional effervescence in turn leads to a form of emotional fellowship. This effect, described by Durkheim in his observations of social rituals (1912), increases the sense of social cohesion and solidarity among group members and fosters their adhesion to the values shared by the group (see also Páez et al., 2015). The presence of this effect can explain why the perceived threat from COVID-19 might lead groups of individuals to endorse both authoritarian measures and greater solidarity. In the remainder of this article, we will test whether this hypothesis holds in the Belgian case and develop the implications of such mechanisms for Belgian intergroup relations.

Methods

To test our hypothesis, we¹¹ ran a large online survey within the first few days of the lockdown in Belgium. Our bilingual questionnaire (French and Dutch) was widely distributed through newspaper websites, a university webpage and to participants of a previous study on intergroup relations. Participation was voluntary and feedback was given at the end of data collection. Between March 25 and April 8, 2020, 1148 individuals residing in Belgium completed our questionnaire (women = 66.5%). As well as demographic questions, it was composed of the following items.

- *Perceived threat linked to COVID-19* was measured by using an indicator of perceived anxiety and eight themes that tap into three main aspects of threat: survival (e.g. exposure to death or risk of death), economic (e.g. a financial loss), and social (e.g. reduction in contact with relatives, family). Participants had to rate all aspects on seven-point scales ranging from 1 (= not at all) to 7 (= very much). The aspects were aggregated to form a single indicator of perceived threat linked to COVID-19.
- *Socio-political opinions* were appraised using two sets of items that addressed specific types of opinion:
 1. *Solidarity* was evaluated using two items introduced by the following sentence: “Please indicate, for each value or principle, the extent to which it is important for you in the Belgian context”: “Solidarity between individuals” and “In a country, resources must go first to those who need them most” ($r = .45$).
 2. *Authoritarianism* was assessed using three items that were rated in light of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belgium: “I agree to limiting the number of elections if it can help in a situation like the one we are experiencing”; “I am willing to limit my democratic rights if it can help in a situation like the one we are experiencing”; “I think that having a strong leader is an asset in a situation like the one we are experiencing” ($\alpha = .71$). All items were rated using seven-point scales ranging from 1 (= “not at all”) to 7 (= “very much”).
- *Political orientation* was measured using an adaptation of Conover and Feldman’s (1981) single-item measure of liberal versus conservative political orientation. The question, which was explicitly stated as not mandatory, asked participants to rate their political orientation on a scale ranging from “1 = far-left” to “7 = far-right” (4 = center).

11 Pierre Bouchat, Dario Páez and Bernard Rimé.

Results

Sample characteristics and the mean level of our main variables are available in Table 1. To begin with, descriptive statistics show that the mean level of perceived threat was moderate ($M = 3.69$; $SD = 1.12$ on a scale ranging from 1 to 7). It is also evident that the level of support for restricting democracy is lower than the level for solidarity (see Table 1).

Table 1. Sample's Characteristics and Main Variables

Measures	$N=1148$
Gender	66.5% women
Age	46.48 (16.72)
Diploma	Master's (37.9%)
Mother language	French (80.4%), Dutch (13.9%), Bilingual (3.3%), Other (2.4%)
Political orientation	3.33 (1.27)
Perceived threat and anxiety	3.69 (1.12)
Strong leader	4.57 (2)
Solidarity	6.20 (1.02)

Note. Values in brackets are either percentages or standard deviations. The question of political orientation was not mandatory.

We hypothesized that the perceived threat related to the COVID-19 pandemic would be linked to both the endorsement of authoritarian measures and to greater solidarity. To test the relation between perceived threat and the indicators of socio-political opinion, we ran linear regressions controlling for gender, age, language (Dutch vs. others), level of education and political orientation. The results of these regressions show that, beyond demographic variables, the perceived threat and anxiety related to COVID-19 predict both solidarity and backing a strong leader (see Table 2), confirming our main hypothesis. The results of the regressions also show that, while socio-political opinions are both positively linked to perceived threat, this is not the case for political orientation. Left-wing orientation is highly positively linked with greater solidarity while right-wing orientation is linked with a stronger endorsement of authoritarian measures. This result shows that, in addition to perceived threat, political orientation is a strong predictor of polarized socio-political opinions.

Table 2. Results of Linear Regressions

Predictors	Dependent variables			
	Solidarity		Strong Leader	
	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>
Age	.068	.030	-.092	.003
Language	-.126	.000	-.041	.187
Gender	-.142	.000	-.119	.000
Diploma	-.037	.228	-.086	.005
Political Orientation	-.258	.000	.328	.000
Threat and anxiety	.074	.018	.069	.027
Global fit	.123	.000	.139	.000

Note. *b* represents standardized regression weights.

3 Recommendations for action

This survey does not address all questions related to the impact of COVID-19 in Belgium. Thus, more research is needed to better understand how the pandemic has affected existing inequalities.¹² However, we can hardly deny that the pandemic led not only to higher levels of solidarity but to greater polarization. Beyond this observation, what can be done? Are there strategies to reverse this trend and favor more cohesion? These fundamental questions go far beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, it seems useful to stress three particularly critical categories of actor.

Firstly, the role of official representatives is paramount. In choosing to emphasize a unifying—not separatist—discourse, official representatives can stimulate creativity and solidarity between all segments of society. Despite the political division of the country, Belgians from all origins and generations are in the same boat. In the long run, no single community can be completely rid of the others' difficulties. In

12 If we consider the data collected by the National Bank of Belgium, the public service *Economie* and by the National Institute of Statistics on income inequality, the wealthiest 20% of households share 44% of total income. At the level of wealth, the discrepancy is even more unequal: the wealthiest 20% hold 59% of the net wealth of all households. For further information, see <https://www.institut-solidaris.be/index.php/inegalites-aujoudhui/>.

extreme circumstances or times of deadlock, ways out can be detected much more easily if political representatives take this interdependence seriously.

Secondly, the media play a decisive role as well—towards either fragmentation or cohesion. Rather than provoking constant competition between regions and political parties, journalists and analysts could pay systematic attention to initiatives that strengthen social cohesion. One emblematic example of this kind of initiative is the grass-roots solidarity campaign launched by Belgian academics to help disadvantaged school children. In September 2020, the 1000 × 1000 action was started with the hope of reaching at least 1000 colleagues who would agree to collect 1000€ each. The aim of the initiative was to improve the educational opportunities of children who have difficulty keeping up with the school regime during COVID-19 crisis, partly due to limited access to e-learning.¹³ The promotion of joint projects such as these would probably stimulate the population in a much more convincing way than the presentation of sterile soap-opera-like polemics.

Thirdly, as the previous example suggests, experts and academics also have a role to play. Various issues merit rigorous rather than simplistic scrutiny. Among these issues, the deconstruction of conspiracy theories is the priority. Already in May 2020, the Belgian State Security Service warned that extremist organizations in Belgium were leveraging the coronavirus pandemic to flood social media with fake news to turn the country's populations against each other.¹⁴ Beyond this specific issue, all education actors can contribute to collective awareness and mindfulness. The reinforcement of a *Shared Society* is based on an open-ended learning process at all levels of society (from kindergartens to universities, from local associations to big companies). In a multicultural country like Belgium, the valorization of this objective is not just an option but an imperative. Taking care of your own group or community (be it Walloons, Flemings or even 'the Belgians') may seem like an effective tactic in the short term. However, it will lead to long-term failure. At the end of the day, broadening the picture rather than privileging one's own group arises from one single premise: life in society is not a zero-sum but a win-win game (Faniel & Sägerser, 2020).

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13 On 5 February 2021, the initiative brought together 1336 Belgian academics from both sides of the linguistic divide, <https://1000x1000.be/fr/>.

14 See the report of the Belgian intelligence agency: <https://vsse.be/sites/default/files/corona-uk-batpdf.pdf>.

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Silent Regime Change

COVID-19 and Lockdown Measures Strengthen Authoritarian Regime in Kenya

Julia Renner



Introduction

According to figures from the World Food Programme (WFP), more than 250 million people will suffer from acute hunger by the end of the year due to the effects of COVID-19 (WFP, 2020b). On 21 April 2020, WFP chief David Beasley told the UN Security Council that 300,000 people could die every day over a long period—not from a virus but from hunger (WFP, 2020a). Furthermore, according to the International Labour Organization, 81 million people lost their jobs due to COVID-19 (International Labour Organization, 2020).

The majority of international and civil society organizations are not only worried about the economic and social effects of the lockdown and curfew measures on the people's daily lives but also about COVID-19's division of the political landscape—especially a polarisation of the ruling class versus its opposition. The political leadership in Kenya, but also in Uganda, Ethiopia and Myanmar, have used states of emergency and have introduced COVID-19 measures to strengthen their authoritarian leadership, to suppress and arrest political opposition and to restrict media freedom ahead of upcoming elections (2020 to 2022). Elections in Kenya are very often overshadowed by massive violence. Thus, the implementation of COVID-19 measures between March and June 2020 is Janus-faced. On the one hand, the measures try to prevent the spread of the virus. On the other hand, Kenya's leadership have used the COVID-19 measures to amend the constitution ahead of presidential elections in 2022. This article discusses how COVID-19 measures have affected the socio-economic situation in Kenya while the gov-

ernment uses the measures to undermine opposition, to instrumentalize the police and, finally, to clear the path to electoral victory in 2022.

The article starts with a brief description of the COVID-19 measures that have been imposed to inhibit the spread of the virus. It will then analyze the economic and social impacts of the obligatory measures to prevent contagion and the proliferation of the virus. This is followed by a discussion of how police and media are being instrumentalized to oppress the opposition. The article closes with an outlook on the ambivalence of the COVID-19 measures for upcoming political rallies ahead of the presidential elections.

1 COVID-19 measures in Kenya

The government's curfew order to curb the spread of the coronavirus was challenged as having been abusively imposed because it circumvented Article 58 of the Constitution, where declaring a state of emergency is subject to legislative and judicial oversight (The Constitution of Kenya. art. 58, 2010). Legal petition No. 120 of 2020 (COVID 025) brought before the High Court of Kenya in Nairobi described it as "illegal, illegitimate and un-proportionate" as it is "blanket in scope and indefinite in length," limiting rights and prescribing penal consequences without any legitimate aim (Petition 120 of 2020 (Covid 025), 2020).

Firstly, the curfew order was established under the *Public Order Act*, Cap. 56, although public health emergencies should be governed by the *Public Health Act 2012* (Laws of Kenya, 2012). The curfew order fails to provide for written permits and thus penalizes vulnerable persons who venture out to perform essential services, obtain essential goods or services, or seek emergency, life-saving or chronic medical attention. As a result, persons performing or seeking essential services were arrested or criminalized. Secondly, the curfew was not "reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom" as required by Article 24 of the Constitution (The Constitution of Kenya - 24. Limitation of Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 2010).

2 Economic and social effects of COVID-19

Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth has slowed from an average of 5.7% per annum (2015–2019) to 1.5% in 2020 (The World Bank, 2020c). The protracted global recession may undermine Kenya's export economy, its tourism sector and inflows of remittances, disrupt domestic economic activity and lead to fiscal delay.

The government-imposed measures to control and slow the spread of COVID-19 disrupt agricultural value chains and food systems. While the government has declared the movement of agricultural products essential under the COVID-19 containment measures, the stay-at-home advice and travel restrictions mean that traders have logistical difficulties, leading to supply delays and post-harvest losses. Furthermore, these measures have resulted in farm-labour shortages, especially for high-value crops and for share cropping farmers. Lastly, labour shortages, due to the stay-at-home policies, have impacted production and food processing, especially for labour-intensive meat and dairy-processing plants (FAO, 2020). This has led to loss of employment and the decline of small-scale businesses—particularly in the tourism sector—and an increased burden of care on households. Given traditional gender roles and the responsibilities assigned to women during times of emergency, including caring for the sick, children and the older members of society, rural women have endured the greatest brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has further enlarged the number of income-earning opportunities for the poor, thus reducing their purchasing power; this includes unpaid labour that supports on-farm planting or harvesting activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed 2 million Kenyans into poverty and taken a toll on the government's finances (The World Bank, 2020a). According to the World Bank, the pandemic has increased poverty in Kenya by 4 percentage points as incomes dropped and people lost their work—both in the formal and informal sectors. The unemployment rate increased sharply, approximately doubling to 10.4% in the second quarter of 2021 (The World Bank, 2020b). Kenya's total debt increased by 3% to 66.3% (Statista, 2021) of the GDP in June 2020 from 62.1% a year earlier, as reported by the World Bank, as the fiscal deficit widened. This raises the need for debt relief offered by richer nations to free up liquidity that would have gone into repayments.

Many of the recommended practices to control the spread of COVID-19, including isolation or quarantine, social distancing and handwashing, present particular challenges for those living in poverty. Many Kenyans in rural areas live in single-room homes in isolated settlements; those living in densely populated informal urban settlements, such as Kibera in Nairobi, find it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain social distance. International observers and social organizations have argued that it is almost impossible to comply with the curfew because 82.7% of Kenyans work in the informal sector and live from hand to mouth.

Although some professionals are able to work from home, many people earn a living through casual jobs or work in the markets or on construction sites, earning as little as \$1 to \$3 per day. The poor public transport system does not allow most Kenyans to work, get essentials and be home by 7.00 pm. The curfew was amended subsequently but the order threatened rights of health and life. It also did not contribute to the primary objective of the scientific response to the COVID-19 outbreak of stopping human-to-human transmission of the virus and caring for those affected. For those without the luxury of bank savings, the lockdown and other social distancing measures pose an existential threat. The majority of the population is also unable to buy food in advance or to store it as they lack the financial capability and space.

3 Police brutality

Although the Constitution of the Republic of Kenya explicitly guarantees its citizens the right to adequate food, no aid has yet been provided. Therefore, many people would rather disregard the law than stay at home and starve. Reacting to that, the government is using the police to enforce lockdown and curfew measures. Police brutality and intimidation is particularly evident in the context of the pandemic.

Right at the outset of restrictions in March, human rights activists protested killings by Kenyan police officers and also accused officers of using the situation to extort bribes. Police in various locations were recorded caning people who defied the curfew, while videos and photos also featured the police lobbing teargas canisters and clubbing people with batons in the city of Mombasa to clear the streets in advance of the curfew (ACLED, 2020). Massive public uproar led by civil society has resulted in an investigation by the Kenya Police Internal Affairs Unit (IAU) in May 2020 into incidents of police brutality committed while enforcing the COVID-19 curfew (IPOA, 2020).

On 8 May 2020, hundreds of people—including the Housing Coalition, an alliance of non-governmental organizations—protested against the government's demolition of the homes of more than 7,000 people in Kariobangi, a poor informal settlement in Nairobi. The Kenyan government ignored a court order that barred it from evicting the slum residents until their case arguing their right to live on the land is determined. The demolitions took place at a time when the government was urging people to stay at home to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Medical professionals and health workers who were on their way to and from work were among those teargassed and assaulted by the police. The police also violently assaulted vulnerable persons such as

pregnant women, bludgeoned providers of exempted services such as watchmen, supermarket workers, and food truck drivers who were on the way to or from work, and recklessly congregated large crowds contrary to advice by the World Health Organization on the need for social distancing in order to avoid coronavirus infection

Following a series of instances of police brutality, Kenyan citizens fear that the government is using COVID-19 to monitor the opposition, restrict media freedom and use the security apparatus as a tool of intimidation and repression (Kishi, 2020).

4 Media freedom threatened

The Kenyan government is a signatory to treaties like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and is therefore required to protect media workers from threats by state and non-state agents. However, crimes against media workers in Kenya are widespread, typically prompted by coverage of elections and corruption cases. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed more of the state's intolerance towards journalists in their line of duty (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1976).

The police began harassing journalists reporting COVID-19 related police brutality. By October 2020 there were at least 48 reports of violations against journalists reporting on the pandemic. Twenty-two of those cases occurred within six weeks of the first case of COVID-19. The violations included physical assault, arrests, verbal threats and online intimidation.

Although journalists were listed as essential service workers and exempted from curfew restrictions, there are reports of journalists being harassed in the line of duty. At least ten journalists and social media influencers have been arrested or threatened with prosecution under the *Computer Misuse and Cyber Crime Act 2018*. They were accused of publishing and spreading false and alarming information on social media about the new coronavirus. At least ten others were arrested under the *Public Order Act* for allegedly flouting the curfew (The Global State of Democracy Initiative, 2021).

Journalists have not always been supported by the media houses for which they work. Some employers have used the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext for enforcing staff layoffs and salary cuts. According to the Kenya Editors Guild, more than 300 journalists have lost their jobs in the past nine months. The suspensions are a pretext for both staff layoffs and salary cuts. Furthermore, suspensions have also been politically motivated to enforce loyalty and political streamlining within news coverage. Some suspensions were even notified via text message. This is made possible by the wider culture of impunity, unfavourable laws and media ownership associated with the ruling elite (Kenya Editors Guild, 2020).

Blogger Robert Alai was arrested on 20th March 2020 for posting false information about the virus. Alai had claimed that the government was concealing crucial information about the spread of the virus and that its impact was far greater than the government was acknowledging. He was accused of contravening the *Computer Misuse and Cyber Crimes Act 2018*.

The media has also been prevented from monitoring the movement of police officers and journalists assaulted while covering the operation (AFEX, 2020). The police have not effectively investigated threats and attacks against journalists. There is no evidence to suggest that any police officer has been prosecuted for attacks or threats against journalists since the pandemic began.

The government uses such incidents to camouflage its inefficient handling of the coronavirus crisis and corruption accusations against the Ministry of Health. Consequently, this has led to civil unrest in Kenya, against which the government reacted with violence. Furthermore, in the slums of Nairobi and Mombasa, criminal gangs possess small arms to react to the violence. During violent clashes, these small groups were manipulated for political purposes to intimidate the opposition. Due to the upcoming elections, these groups can again be manipulated for political purposes (as happened during presidential

elections in 2007/08 and 2016) and will be used by local politicians to out-manoeuvre rivals or carry out ethnic 'cleansing'.

Although domestic politics and the social order have not yet been shaken to their foundations by this unrest and rioting, it is nevertheless clear that social peace is fragile. Political interference, lack of proper security oversight and high levels of corruption, as well as technical and organizational deficiencies within the police force, are the main reasons for this fragility. The 'peace' between the ruling parties (Kenyatta and Ruto) is only peaceful on paper. This is evident in the now divided and largely defunct Kikuyu based Mungiki sect, as well as relatively small groups in the slum areas of Nairobi and Kisumu. These replace law and order with a de facto alternative order based on violence and fear of Ruto. In rural areas and informal settlements, the police have failed to curtail armed banditry. A massive fresh recruitment of police officers has improved the police citizen ratio from one officer for 1,150 citizens in 2009 to 1,450 in 2017 (the total police force is around 100,000). The increase in the police forces reveals that the police reform has been deliberately delayed in order to use the police to more easily quash protests.

5 Conclusion

Despite the declared lockdown and other preventive measures imposed by the government to curb the spread of the coronavirus, political activity has continued in Kenya. Large political rallies in support of or against a constitutional referendum bill concerning the Building Bridges Initiative led by President Kenyatta were held as soon as lockdown orders were lifted in October (Special Issue Kenya Gazette Supplement No.71 (National Assembly Bills No.11), 2020). Consequently, infection rates increased and another lockdown was declared. The country's next elections will be held in 2022 before the scheduled constitutional referendum. All political and roadside gatherings have been banned due to their potential to exponentially spread COVID-19. Kenya intends to hold the constitutional referendum by June 2021: the pandemic is among the hurdles facing the plebiscite, despite state-driven support in initiating the referendum (Kiruga, 2020). The constitutional changes will re-introduce the positions of a Prime Minister and two deputies—who will be appointed only by the President.

As ordinary Kenyans battle the aftermath of the pandemic, Kenyatta has signaled his favour of rotating political power to his own political class and thereby expanding the executive branch of government to back up those currently in power. The ambivalence of the government's COVID-19 measures indicate that media restrictions, police brutality and the repression of the opposition are being used to bypass the nomination of Deputy President Ruto as new president. The COVID-19 measures have thus been used by the president and his community to facilitate the political power transition for the benefit of his cronies and co-ethnics.

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Coronavirus and the Return of Borders

The Case of Northern Ireland

Paul Nolan



Introduction

The global pandemic has upended relationships within and between states, but while that generalization is easily asserted it is important to ask: in what particular ways have tensions been heightened? This article will explore how the virus has infected the *body politic*, understood as a return of borders across Europe, beginning with a brief *tour d' horizon* of European states and then focusing on Northern Ireland as a particular case study.

Perhaps a good place to begin an examination of the social chaos introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic is the Zeeman clothes store in the municipality of Baarle-Nassau, right on the border between Belgium and the Netherlands. The border between the two countries runs through fields, streets, and houses and right down the middle of the Zeeman store. In March 2020, when the global pandemic began, the owners had to create a barrier dividing the shop into two zones.

The half that is in Belgium was closed and shuttered off in line with the lockdown introduced by the Belgian government. The other half was able to continue to sell clothes, having only to conform to the lighter social distancing measures brought in by the Dutch government (Boffey, 2020). Both countries are in the Schengen zone, and in theory that means there should be no barriers of any kind in travel or

trade between the two countries. The Schengen Agreement of 1985 is an international treaty that requires all 26 member states to function as a single jurisdiction for these purposes.

Coronavirus has played havoc with that idea. When northern Italy went into lockdown Austria moved quickly to seal its border to prevent a spillage of the infected population. Germany closed its border with France; Spain and Slovakia then sealed all their borders. On 11th March 2020 Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, made a video address to express solidarity with Italy, which was making increasingly desperate appeals for help: “Italy is part of Europe, and Europe is suffering with Italy. At this moment in Europe we are all Italians.” (Cami, 2020). The response was less than she might have hoped for. It turned out that being like Italians was exactly what people did *not* want. Across the 27 member states a new form of ‘COVID nationalism’ took hold. Barriers shot up across the continent like dominoes in reverse. The nation state was back with a vengeance. Surveying the scene across Europe Professor Jan Zielonka wrote in an article in the journal *Social Europe*:

From Madrid to Paris, Berlin to Warsaw, the nation-state seems to be experiencing a striking renaissance. Borders are back, and with them national selfishness. [...] Virtually overnight, national capitals have effectively reclaimed sovereignty from the European Union without asking either their own people or Brussels for permission. (Zielonka, 2020)

International solidarity was quickly set aside. France and Germany decided to ban the export of face-masks, including to Italy which was entirely reliant on imports for this vital supply. Serbian requests for medical supplies were refused as Serbia is not a member state, and in order to conserve medical supplies the EU placed a ban on exports of certain medical equipment.

Predictably, the far right saw cause for jubilation in the upending of European and international solidarity. Interviewed on Sky News Australia, Nigel Farage declared the end of the EU project, saying “There is no way back for Brussels” (Bet, 2020). Sky News host Rowan Dean responded, “It has taken just one nanoparticle, one virus, to expose how utterly useless the EU is” (ibid.). The president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, bitter from the EU’s rejection of his request, said: “European solidarity does not exist. That was a fairy tale on paper” (ibid.).

Rumors of the death of the EU turned out to be exaggerated. While the European Commission’s actions were initially slow and arthritic, a marathon 90-hour negotiation session in July 2020 led to the announcement of a 750 billion coronavirus relief fund and a commitment to using all possible ‘flexibility’ by, for example, setting aside state-aid rules. In addition to money some gestures of reconciliation were required. “Too many were not there on time when Italy needed a helping hand at the very beginning,” Ursula von der Leyen told the European parliament. “And yes, for that it is right that Europe as a whole offers a heartfelt apology (Lee, 2020). This was followed by a 3 billion support package to eastern European countries. Announcing the fund, Paolo Gentiloni from the European Commission said: “European solidarity must not stop at the borders of our Union. Because in this global crisis, we stand or fall together.” (European Commission, 2020).

There was never any alternative to international cooperation. In a connected world, there is no other option. The fantasy of the far right, of billiard ball states as self-contained entities is just that, a fantasy. This crisis which began with a bat in a street market in Wuhan resulted in skating rinks being used as mortuaries in Italy and Madrid. Globalization has flattened both time and space and the national borders of the 21st century are inescapably porous, allowing for the fast transmission of goods but also of viruses. The dangers of the 21st century can only be mitigated by more, not less, international cooperation. That said, the response of most people was to look to their own government first to deliver protection from the virus.

1 The increase in nationalism

It must be recognized that the reinforcement of the nation state was a wholly understandable reaction to a threat that seemed able to overpower all defenses. At times of crisis people circle the wagons and for most of the world's population their home country provides the *imagined community* - in Benedict Anderson's words- that offers security (Anderson, 2016). The pandemic intensified that need to belong, but the division of the world into national territories also provided a way of tracking the impact of the virus. It appeared natural to describe its spread from China to Italy or from France to Spain, and because policy responses were directed by national governments it seemed natural also to differentiate between the approaches taken in Sweden, South Korea, Brazil as national differences. The effect was to further naturalize existing borders between people, and inevitably the new investment in national identities also acted to reinforce us-and-them distinctions. Hard borders offered security but also increased fear of the outsider.

This is a familiar syndrome in the history of plagues: from the 'French' pox to the 'Spanish' flu to the 'Yellow Peril' to the 'Wuhan' virus. The Coronavirus crisis has increased fear of the foreigner: the rolling global survey on populism led by Matthijs Rooduijn at the University of Amsterdam has shown that in all of the 25 countries surveyed there has been an increase in the feeling that immigration should be reduced 'a little' or 'a lot' (Rooduijn, 2019; Henley & Duncan, 2020).

The antagonisms aggravated by the coronavirus pandemic are not just against those from outside the borders of the state, they are also directed at 'others' within states. In countries across the globe the most obvious scapegoat was the Chinese community, though that has broadened to include almost anyone of Asian appearance, and hostilities have been fanned by President Trump's repeated characterization of the virus as 'the Chinese flu'.

In some countries ethnic antagonisms have widened more familiar fault lines. In India the Muslim community was already fearful because of the rise to power of Narendra Modi, a politician who throughout his career has flirted with Islamophobia, and the arrival of COVID-19 acted as the trigger for a wave of anti-Muslim attacks. A cartoon published in the newspaper *The Hindu* depicted the virus dressed in Muslim attire and pointing an AK-47 at the earth (Harichandan, 2020).

The conflict observatory, *Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project* (ACLED) has been monitoring the increase in violence across the globe and reports that violence against civilians increased by roughly 2.5% in the period from mid-March to the end of June. Mob violence, where crudely armed groups launch spontaneous attacks have also risen: ACLED records over 1,800 mob violence events across dozens of countries in the 16 weeks across dozens of countries following the pandemic declaration by the WHO, an 11% increase.

The problems have also affected those conflict societies which were trying to heal divisions. Cyprus, for example, had begun a reconciliation process in 2003 when the crossing points along the Green Line dividing north and south were reopened. In 2017 a UN-sponsored conference held in Switzerland attempted to boost cooperation on new territorial borders and power-sharing between the Greek and Turkish communities. In March 2020, when introducing measures to contain the coronavirus, the Cypriot government closed four of the nine crossing points, sparking protests in Nicosia. "With different circumstances, or desires, this disease pandemic could have led to enhanced north-south co-operation and joint efforts to contain the virus," Andromachi Sophocleous, a political analyst and activist, told the *Financial Times*: "It has instead led to the strengthening of nationalists on both sides — and the promotion of an idea of partition that is evidently working on the psyche of Cypriots" (Peel, 2020). The idea of a united island now looks more remote than ever.

2 The case of Northern Ireland

The border that separates Northern Ireland from the rest of the island is a 500 km version of the line that runs through the Zeeman store. Below the border line lies the Republic of Ireland, an independent and sovereign state. The north east of the island is partitioned off and, along with Scotland, Wales and England is a constituent part of the United Kingdom. Coronavirus regulations differ in the two jurisdictions in a range of different ways - some significant, some insignificant. The virus, which doesn't recognize the border, has free movement across the two territories. Thus, when infections began to skyrocket in the northern city of Derry in October 2020 they peaked in exactly the same way in neighboring Donegal, which happens to lie on the other side of the border in the Republic of Ireland. Since the island of Ireland is for all intents and purposes an epidemiological unit there were calls for an integrated all-island policy response. For nationalists in Northern Ireland whose imagined community is Irish this makes perfect sense; for unionists in Northern Ireland whose imagined community is British it does not. Unionists feel themselves to be British and wish to align themselves with the government of the United Kingdom and to work within its policy framework.

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 had proposed a solution to this which was to establish a power-sharing government which could accommodate all shades of political opinion. To understand the improbability of this arrangement you have to imagine a government in Tel Aviv where Benjamin Netanyahu and Mahmood Abbas sit down each week to plan the provision of health, education and welfare across Israel/Palestine, or where Donald Trump and Joe Biden agree to job-share the presidency. It is, you might say, a big ask, but that is what the Good Friday Agreement asks of the main nationalist and unionist actors. Hardly surprising that the Northern Ireland Assembly has collapsed six times to date; more surprising that it has continued to reconstitute itself and make the peace deal work.

When the pandemic began the parties in the Assembly made a pledge to work together to keep people safe. "We must not let this virus divide us" said the unionist First Minister. The arrangement held well for the first couple of months. It helped that both Northern Ireland and the Republic had comparatively low rates of coronavirus. Even though their policies for containment differed, the factors that really mattered lay beyond the scope of government policy: Ireland is an island and like New Zealand and Singapore had low rates of international traffic. Plus, there are high rates of rurality and very little of the urban overcrowding that helped power the virus elsewhere. By 1st July 2020 there had been 4,880 cases in Northern Ireland, or just 1.7% of the UK total of 283,7000 cases, while if it had been in proportion to population the Northern Ireland total would have been 3.0%. The ruling Executive could take justifiable pride in its handling of the crisis, and in the social solidarity that ensured such relatively low rates of infection.

The problems began with a funeral. The regulations announced by the power-sharing Executive put a limit of 30 on the numbers attending a funeral, something that caused considerable distress for many bereaved families. In June one of the IRA's leading commanders, Bobby Storey, died following an unsuccessful lung transplant operation, and in tribute to him there was a mass turnout of republicans. The numbers in attendance were in clear breach of the regulations, but more significant was the fact that among those attending the funeral was the Deputy First Minister, the Sinn Féin politician Michele O'Neill. Only weeks before she had stood side-by-side with the unionist First Minister to announce the regulations and explain their necessity. Her flagrant and very public breach of those regulations was seen as a statement that loyalty to a 'tribal rite' trumped adherence to restrictions binding on the whole community.

A second controversy erupted in October as the second surge began to sweep over Northern Ireland. As elsewhere, there was a debate over whether there should be a new lockdown, and the political forces aligned on each side of that debate followed a near universal pattern. The libertarian right resisted the closure of businesses; the communitarian left placed more importance on protective health measures. In

Northern Ireland unionists lean to the right and nationalists lean to the left, and so nationalists wished to see further restrictions while unionists expressed more concern about the economy. The spirit of compromise prevailed and on 14th October 2020 it was announced that a new package of measures had been agreed. Just when it appeared that the unionist and nationalist parties were once again singing in harmony a discordant voice was heard. The unionist Minister for Agriculture, Edwin Poots, said that lockdowns should only be applied in nationalist areas as that was where the virus was. He claimed that the data showed a six-to-one incidence ratio for coronavirus cases when nationalist areas were compared with unionist areas. Health authorities were quick to point out that these figures were inaccurate, but Poots was rehearsing a familiar trope that associates disease with a subordinate group. A cartoon on a political website showed Poots standing at a flipchart with a page with a dividing line down the middle. On one side is an image of the familiar spiky COVID icon, coloured green (for nationalist) and on the other side the same image in orange (for unionist). “We mustn’t let this virus unite us” is the message in Poots’s speech bubble.

Despite Poots the people of Northern Ireland have in the main struggled through the crisis with more unity on display than division. The lead has been set not by politicians so much as by nurses and doctors on the front line whose exemplary public service is underpinned by an explicit commitment to a *Shared Society*. There has been a shift of authority from politicians to health professionals and, as elsewhere, those determining public policy feel they have to justify their decisions by saying they are ‘following the science’. This narrows the space for identity-driven politics. It would be premature though to say that the tensions of national identity have been contained. The pandemic still has a long way to run.

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Local Actions against Global Dynamics

COVID-19 as a Catalyst of Social Transformation in the South-Western Amazon?

Rebecca Froese, Claudia Pinzón, Regine Schönenberg and Janpeter Schilling



Introduction

In a quarantined world, global interdependencies become particularly tangible when value chains and entire economic sectors collapse—eroding livelihoods and intensifying inequalities. At the same time, the empowering value of locally rooted structures and knowledge treasures such as indigenous and traditional forms of self-organization raise hopes for constructive pathways to a post-pandemic world. In this article, we examine the direct health impact as well as the economic, environmental and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the south-western Amazon, particularly the border region of the three states of Madre de Dios (Peru), Acre (Brazil) and Pando (Bolivia)—also known as the MAP region. We have selected this region due to its roughly homogenous economic and environmental setting while, at the same time, being highly socially diverse and embedded in different societal histories. This analysis is structured along four impact lines which depict the interdependencies of the MAP social-ecological system. We start with a brief description of the direct health impact and governmental responses in the three countries. We then analyze the indirect economic, environmental and social impacts of the obligatory measures for preventing contagion and the proliferation of the virus. The article closes with an outlook on the transformational potential of the pandemic and raises questions for further research.

This article considers the question of how the pandemic has affected social-ecological dynamics in the south-western Amazon. Social-ecological dynamics can be understood as the interconnections between environmental, economic and social processes (Folke, 2006). Particular interest is paid to the impact of these processes on social cohesion and inequalities. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics and to listen to local voices in times that lack field research possibilities, we organized an online

focus-group discussion in September 2020 (PRODIGY BioTip, 2020), seven months after the pandemic reached the south-western Amazon. Residents, scientists and NGO representatives from each of the three states in the MAP region participated in the focus-group discussion. In addition, we conducted a structured literature review on the impacts of COVID-19 in the three countries. Further, this article is enriched by information from local and regional news outlets, other online articles and personal communication with partners in the MAP region.

1 Health impacts and governmental responses: Closed borders and a quarantined population

The MAP region has had ambivalent experiences during the pandemic. On the one hand, the region's remoteness prevented the early spread of the virus when the pandemic was gaining momentum. On the other hand, less governmental support of healthcare and preventative measures not only raised feelings of abandonment among the population but also increased their distrust in the government (UCSP, 2020).

Before the pandemic, the region was dominated by generally high poverty rates, a lack of access to basic services, political instability (Bolivia) along with right-wing populism (Brazil), and high levels of corruption (UCSP, 2020). Soon after the World Health Organization (WHO) characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11 March (WHO, 2020), the Peruvian government declared a national quarantine as of 16 March (Decreto Supremo N° 044-2020-PCM, 2020), which included the closing of all borders and the suspension of international flights. The Bolivian government followed with a national quarantine on 21 March (Decreto Supremo N° 4199, 2020). In both countries, people were confined to their houses to practise isolation and physical distancing. Permission to leave their houses for necessary matters, such as grocery shopping, doctor's appointments or going to the pharmacy, was granted according to the last digit of a person's ID number, indicating that people were to leave the house on only one day of the week. Strict curfews at night and during weekends were imposed during the first weeks of the national quarantine in Bolivia and Peru. These rules led to a paralysis of almost all economic activities in both countries. The Brazilian government, however, followed a less strict approach: it closed borders to neighbouring countries but continued international aviation services and did not impose a national quarantine (Government of Brazil, 2020). In all three states of the MAP region, government communication about the pandemic often reached rural areas more slowly than unofficial, unverified and often contradictory information from social media.

Strong deficiencies in public health systems had already been reported across the MAP-region before the pandemic. These included infrastructural deficiencies in the number of hospitals that were attending an increasing quantity of people, particularly since other diseases such as dengue are still very prevalent due to the 2019 dengue epidemic (PAHO, 2020). In addition, inadequate or unavailable equipment such as ventilators or oxygen, as well as necessary personal protective equipment for clinic personnel stress, the overburdened health system in the south-western Amazon. The Bolivian government declared the treatment of COVID-19 in public hospitals to be free of charge, eliminated customs tariffs on medical supplies and equipment and provided incentives to health care workers to increase their work hours by proportionally increasing payments (UNDP Bolivia Office, 2020). In Brazil, indigenous people have particularly poor access to health care and preventive supplies such as masks and disinfectants. In many cases, the Brazilian government has failed to extend the health care system to often remote regions and has left this to private initiatives, such as the joint crowdfunding campaign *People of the Forest against COVID-19* (details below) (SOS Amazônia, 2020).

2 Economic impacts: Disrupted value chains and lost harvests

The economy in the region largely depends on the extraction of timber and, in particular, non-timber forest products (NTFP) such as Brazil nuts and açai. While timber exports from Bolivia, for example, were a major contributor to the local economy in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Brazil nut exports surpassed the value of timber in 2010 (Cámara Forestal de Bolivia, 2020). Before COVID-19, the extracted and produced goods were exported to North American and European markets (CIPCA, 2020). After the rubber boom at the beginning of the twentieth century, rubber lost its economic importance and many extractivists substituted their losses with other forest products or with cattle ranching (Acre and partly Pando) and mining (mostly Madre de Dios and partly Pando). Since the 1990s, eco-tourism in Madre de Dios is booming, creating millions of dollars in revenue (Kirkby et al., 2011). In addition, rural small-holders produce vegetables and cattle for local markets in the economic centres of each state.

The collection and harvest of non-timber forest products, particularly those that are not cultivated by agroforestry, requires high physical effort. Extractivists often have to travel to their forest concessions by boat first and then continue on foot. They often stay several days to weeks in the forest during the harvest time between December and March. Due to the quarantine, extractivists in Peru and Bolivia were not able to collect their harvest. While their products are essential economic activities in the MAP region, extractivists only contribute marginally to each of their national gross domestic products (Cámara Forestal de Bolivia, 2020). This makes the regions less economically important for the national governments; these regions thus receive lower priority in the recovery from the pandemic.

The economic situation before COVID-19 was already under stress due to generally low international demand for Brazil nuts and concomitantly low prices. This led to reduced pre-COVID-19 family income of 50–60% in all three states which are particularly dependent on Brazil nut production. The Bolivian government responded to the social unrest of the extractivists in reaction to low prices with a price agreement of 140 soles per *caja* (ca. 23 kg). However, this price still did not meet the demands of traditional and indigenous peasants and led to further street blockades accentuated by measures taken by the government to restrict the contagion of COVID-19.

The pandemic arrived in the MAP region during the Brazil nut collecting season. The national quarantine delayed this harvest's activities for about two to three months, accentuating the effects of low income from Brazil nuts during the months of quarantine (PRODIGY BioTip, 2020). In addition, the delay led to an overlap with the açai harvest and a consequent lack of workers. Enforced import and export regulations due to closed borders further hindered, and therefore reduced, the export of Brazil nuts to international markets. While the exported volume in Bolivia reached 4848 tons and a value of \$30 million between January and March 2019, the exported volume for the same period in 2020 was reduced to 4166 tons with a reduced value of \$22.5 million: a reduction of 14% in volume but 25% in value. As one of the respondents pointed out: "These numbers do not appear very significant, but the situation in the villages is critical"—this income being the only monetary income for the year for many families.

Another indirect impact of the pandemic is disrupted supply chains to the remote regions of the MAP region. Due to the quarantine, truckers faced severe difficulties—such as a lack of restaurants and service facilities along the roads—in transporting supplies of agricultural production (PRODIGY BioTip, 2020). Due to the lack of transportation options and limited export opportunities, some processing facilities limited their production or closed completely, leaving producers fearing that their primary products would remain with them. In response, and due to the lack of food supply, families diversified their agricultural production and prioritized the production of food and non-timber forest products for self-consumption and the local markets. In these markets, the demand for local products increased not only due to the lack of imported goods but also due to the increasing appreciation of their nutritional value. In addition, the benefits of Brazil nuts, açai and honey in strengthening the immune system have been

recommended by local doctors. This increase in demand and the exploration of new (local) markets has somewhat counteracted the economic crisis. Furthermore, some Brazil nut and açai associations in Pando and Madre de Dios concluded direct contracts on small and medium fixed purchase quantities, providing extractivists with guaranteed income but not overloading them with high demands that they could not fulfil. Some international companies bought up large amounts of products, stimulating local associations to acquire certification for sustainable forest, organic and fair-trade production in order to explore these new market opportunities. The rubber tappers in the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve (RESEX Chico Mendes) further acquired a contract with a local company to increase the local value creation of rubber. This contract has been perceived as a valid alternative to cattle production in a time of crisis, with the received value reaching 60% of the payments for ecosystem services. This attracted extractivists and former rubber tappers to increase their production of rubber and join local cooperatives.

3 Environmental impacts: Deforestation for cattle, timber and gold

The increased appreciation of rubber in some parts of the RESEX Chico Mendes led to a decrease in deforestation and less involvement in retailing parts of their production units by rubber tappers (PRODIGY BioTip, 2020). This is a positive development during the pandemic. Nevertheless, the general decrease in revenues from non-timber forest products and the overall economic slowdown, as well as restrictions of most informal activities due to quarantine measures, led extractivists and informal workers to search for alternative sources of income, such as cattle raising, timber extraction or illegal mining. Such increased illegal exploitation of resources and deforestation remained while most controlling authorities were forced to work from home instead of patrolling the forest. Such structural inequality and impunity led not only to accelerated criminal exploitation of nature but also to an increase in the assassination of environmental activists, in particular indigenous people who had no other choice than to patrol to safeguard against land grabbing. Illegal trespassers, even from outside the MAP region, have also extracted timber and used fire to clear the forest for agriculture, mining and cattle farming. Some Brazil nut associations in Madre de Dios encouraged their members to search for alternatives to timber extraction from their Brazil nut concessions during the pandemic in order to protect the standing forest on the concessions.

4 Social impacts: Self-organization and soup kitchens

The quarantine restrictions preoccupied civil society organizations and associations because some of their core activities, such as meetings, networking and assemblies of people to discuss action, were no longer possible. Nevertheless, individuals and civil society organizations were among the most active throughout the pandemic in supporting people in their basic needs, communicating relevant information about the pandemic and taking governance actions and structuring self-organization in the absence of the state. Whenever possible, civil society organizations have organized themselves virtually.

The results of a survey among households on the effects of the emergency measures against COVID-19 in the northern Bolivian Amazon have shown that families with diversified incomes have had fewer difficulties than families living in rural areas or those that depend on only one product (Araujo Cossío, 2020). Similar results have also been reported from Madre de Dios and Acre. Families with diversified products were not only dependent on Brazil nuts but had small scale agricultural and agroforestry systems which fostered resilient conditions to balance the impacts of COVID-19. However, large parts of the rural population depend for their income only on Brazil nuts. These were particularly affected by quarantine measures and depended on bonuses from the government or support from other institu-

tions, especially NGOs in the region. Even though bonuses were given to different groups of Bolivians, they had an immediate impact. Considering the situation of extreme poverty of 10.8% of the Bolivian population who live on less than \$3.20 per day (UNDP Bolivia Office, 2020), such bonuses have been a significant support and inspired confidence in the reaction of the government (PRODIGY BioTip, 2020). In addition, civil society organizations provided humanitarian aid through the provision of food baskets to families and native and rural communities at risk. Others also provided seeds for annual cultivation or other means to increase families' food security.

In the absence of monetary income, communities reinforced ancestral practices such as trade exchange. After the quarantine was loosened, production surplus was also sold on local markets. This particularly strengthened the food system in urban areas, especially in Cobija. To assist families in urban areas who did not have access to land for food production, the community organized common pots and pans and soup kitchens. These activities of solidarity and communal governance strengthened communal networks and served as communication and information platforms on health and production topics or for the exchange of traditional knowledge on how to treat the symptoms of COVID-19. In addition, social control based on communal norms fostered the implementation of physical distancing measures.

Extractivist communities developed strategies to strengthen their local cooperatives and associations in the face of rising social inequality and the lack of public policies and support by state and federal governments. As well as needing to diversify their products in order to react to unstable markets, civil society organizations in Acre saw the need to organize campaigns to attract global attention in the absence of national government assistance to the needs of the population. One example is the joint campaign of the NGO SOS Amazônia, the National Council for Extractivist Populations (*Conselho Nacional das Populações Extractivistas – CNS*), the Chico Mendes Comité and the Commission for Indigenous People in Acre (*Comissão Pro-Índio do Acre*). The campaign called *People of the Forest against COVID-19* is a global campaign to support extractivist and indigenous people in Acre. Such organization of civil society actors has provided indigenous people with access to basic items for protection against COVID-19. Many indigenous people are already experienced in organizing themselves and supporting each other due to poor government attention over recent decades. Specific protection mechanisms in the current crisis include running their own education and information campaigns on social media, such as podcasts on behavioural recommendations or asking communities to share their actions via video under *#CombateCoronaNaAldeia* (Fight Corona in the Village).

Some civil society organizations in Madre de Dios joined forces with all and any relevant bodies, including regional and local governments or even the national government to develop and disseminate information. However, civil society organizations criticized the slow decision-making processes of government entities. These organizations thus joined forces to develop communication products to inform people about COVID-19, to sensitize the population and to limit fake news spreading through unofficial social media channels. Printed materials, with information about the spreading dynamics of the virus and preventive measures against contagion—such as hand washing and social distancing—were distributed and translated into different indigenous languages. In addition, the digital divide of access and knowledge about technology created a perception of a 'double quarantine': being confined at home without the ability to at least 'go out' virtually. This has been a particular disadvantage for youth in the region.

5 Conclusion and Outlook: The transformational potential of a virus

Our impact analysis has shown that marginalized social groups, such as rural smallholders, indigenous people and those without a fixed income, were particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic. In a politically and economically peripheral region, increasing risk of socio-ecological conflicts call for a potential-oriented approach to global connectedness, the importance of solidarity, and a lively democratic discourse fostering social cohesion. Civil society action have been an essential strategy in the fight against COVID-19, not just in the health sector but also in the economic, political, social and cultural realms. It can be concluded from the preceding paragraphs that the pandemic not only brought social distancing but also an alliance of the people of the forest who untied with environmentalists, NGOs, researchers and artists to strengthen trust and thus increase social cohesion regionally.

The re-focusing on strengthening local value chains and local value production while engaging with global civil society through supportive networking campaigns provides a glimpse of what Goffman (2020) calls “a new kind of glocalization” in which people value the local while strengthening global awareness, or, as Wernli et al. (2020) put it, appreciating the benefits of a globally connected world while avoiding the systemic risks that arise from globalization. Further research could systematize the impact description given in this article and further analyse potential feedback loops between impacts and response. Such an analysis could foster a better understanding of the complex reaction of the MAP social-ecological system to the transformational potential of the virus and potentially indicate post-pandemic governance measures for life-sustaining regional development.

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Humanitarian Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Towards Global Solidarity?

Charlotte Dany



Introduction

Europe and the United States have, for many months, been struggling with particularly high COVID-19 infections and deaths. In contrast, poor and conflict-ridden countries seem relatively less affected by the pandemic, at least at first sight: Yemen and South Sudan seem mostly coronavirus-free, and Syria and Somalia report only very moderate numbers of infections, as do many other countries associated with violent conflict, hunger and underdevelopment. There may be many reasons why these countries are apparently less affected: the lack of data might be deceptive about the extent of actual infections. Furthermore, generally-low life expectancies might account for the impression that infection rates are low in some countries, as infections of younger people remain more often unreported. It also seems that West-African countries that were hit by the Ebola epidemic in 2014/15 learned important lessons and subsequently improved their health system and crisis response mechanisms, better preparing them to defend themselves from an uncontrollable spread of SARS-CoV-2 (Maltais, 2020). Irrespective of the actual infection rates, however, the impact of the pandemic is felt most existentially by people and societies in greatest need of development aid and humanitarian assistance. The poor and conflict-ridden states of the Global South are prone to suffer strongly from measures to control the virus in the short- and long-terms. In many developing countries, a rise in poverty, unemployment and hunger due to containment

measures, as well as a lack of attention to other deadly diseases (HIV, tuberculosis, malaria), cause great harm (cf. Renner in this volume).

Refugees and people on the move are a particularly vulnerable group of people in this situation. Not only do they obviously lack the opportunity to protect themselves from infections—for example, in overcrowded refugee camps—and are thus exposed to additional health risks, but mobility restrictions in the COVID-19 pandemic have further limited these particularly vulnerable groups (Etzold, 2020, p. 17). The virus has been used as an excuse to prevent refugees from entering the European Union (EU), either by further limiting the admission of refugees to the EU or by impeding search and rescue operations on the Mediterranean Sea (Ärzte ohne Grenzen, 2020). Due to the pandemic, the situation of displaced people has significantly worsened, taking from them further opportunities for work or education (Etzold, 2020, p. 13). Thus it is again the most vulnerable that suffer the most. According to United Nations *Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* (OCHA) estimates, coronavirus crisis has accounted for a 40% increase in humanitarian needs in 2020 (OCHA, 2020). As a consequence, existing inequalities are exacerbated. Coronavirus increases the divide between rich and poor countries, between donors and recipients of aid, between privileged mobile elites and precarious low-income labor migrants and refugees, a divide that is further constraining their life prospects.

Against this background, earlier comments that had presented the coronavirus pandemic as a chance to enhance international cooperation and global solidarity should be re-evaluated. In March, a development expert interpreted the exchange of medical equipment and expertise between countries as the beginning of a “new approach to international cooperation” (Prizzon, 2020) that would break down the traditional roles of donors and recipients. Another expert from the *United Nations Development Program* (UNDP) saw the COVID-19 UN Global Response Plan and the resulting strategies for crisis management as an opportunity for “positive peace” (Scott, 2020), even beyond the fight against the pandemic. Even as 2020 has drawn to a close with particularly high infection rates in many countries across the world, UN Secretary-General António Guterres depicted coronavirus as a chance for fundamental change if it would only lead to more global solidarity and international cooperation (UN News, 2020). Solidarity has become the authoritative national and global guiding concept for seizing the opportunities offered by the pandemic (von Lucke, 2021, p. 7). This should indeed be welcomed as a goal; however, the current situation and developments since the coronavirus outbreak are at odds with solidarity—as will be explained below.

Nevertheless, the idea that global solidarity could be achieved through the delivery of humanitarian aid has gained new ground during the pandemic. For example, the German foreign minister and the *European Commission's Department for Humanitarian Aid* are of the opinion that humanitarian aid would be one way to express solidarity with those most in need (Auswärtiges Amt, 2018, 2020a, 2020b; ECHO, n.d.). Since March 2020, big humanitarian donors have stepped up their spending on aid. Germany increased its humanitarian aid budget to €2.1 billion in 2020. Humanitarian organizations have tried to maintain their projects as best as possible, although they face particularly high challenges—for instance, travel restrictions have reduced access to certain countries (Bandsom, 2020). Despite these highly important efforts in the field of humanitarian aid, it is questionable whether solidarity can be achieved by these means. While they share some common ground, ‘humanitarianism’ and ‘solidarity’ should be differentiated and not used synonymously. Solidarity is more than spending money on humanitarian aid. There is, moreover, a basic tension between humanitarian aid and solidarity, suggesting that the latter can be undermined relying on a purely humanitarian approach.

1 Why humanitarian aid and solidarity are strange bedfellows

The aim of *humanitarian aid* is to address immediate needs to save lives and reduce suffering. It provides relief goods and medical care, ideally in the short-term, in the context of disasters and conflict. The ethical basis for humanitarian aid is found in *humanitarianism*, which is based on compassion for those in need and the will to save lives and reduce suffering wherever it is found. This constitutes the basic principle of *humanity*, which guides humanitarian aid organizations. While *solidarity* also includes compassion for others in need and the will to reduce suffering, it is more ambitious and more political than humanitarian aid.

‘Solidarity’ has many meanings in everyday language, and as a theoretical and philosophical concept. Its core meaning is as a morally binding obligation within communities. It arises through the identification of relevant commonalities (Derpmann, 2020, p. 2). Therefore, solidarity is not only a moral obligation but also a political demand (Derpmann, 2020, p. 3). It targets inequalities and seeks to enhance the common good by standing side-by-side with others as equals in a reciprocally supportive relationship. The context of humanitarian aid demands the expression of solidarity across borders; this is particularly hard to achieve because communities and commonalities are harder to define internationally. Solidarity might draw on the common idea that all humans deserve a life of dignity and integrity, giving it some common ground with humanitarianism. However, apart from humanitarian aid, solidarity also requires reciprocity, a sense of community, and working towards a common goal (Wagner, 2019, p. 89). For this reason, a tension between humanitarian aid and solidarity arises, especially regarding the political connotations of solidarity.

Humanitarian aid is strongly based upon neutral, impartial and independent appearance. These principles ought to ensure that humanitarian aid is perceived as ‘apolitical’. To be sure, most scholars and practitioners of humanitarian aid would admit that this is an ideal which cannot possibly be fully achieved—and which, in some situations, is not even desirable. Indeed, humanitarian actors often operate in contexts of high conflict; thus, humanitarian aid has political connotations, even if unintended. It often requires positioning by the actors, simply by deciding whether to stay and deliver aid goods or to withdraw from a certain context—for example, due to high security risks. Nevertheless, the humanitarian principles that are intended to ensure that humanitarian aid is delivered independently of any political interests do remain highly important for the ethics of humanitarianism. It distinguishes humanitarian aid practice from development cooperation, from human rights advocacy, from military interventions for human protection purposes—and from solidarity. The latter requires action that protects against the factors that cause harm and suffering, including, for example, street protests. Solidarity further requires governments and agencies to work together with refugees and migrants as equal partners. Although some humanitarian organizations do try to embrace these goals, humanitarian aid still focuses on life-saving medical and other support, while leaving the rights of refugees aside and abstaining from political engagement (van Dyk, 2020, pp. 44–45).

Therefore, humanitarian aid has been criticized for establishing unequal and patriarchal relationships (Ticktin, 2014, pp. 278–279). Following this line of reasoning, existing inequalities are reinforced through the narratives of ‘victims’ who need to be redeemed by ‘rescuers’, and through suppressing the voices and identities of those in need (Barnett, 2020, p. 15). This acts to stabilize and perpetuate existing inequalities and runs counter to the idea of solidarity, which is expressed through reciprocal connectedness between equals. A merely humanitarian response can, therefore, be counterproductive to achieving solidarity. Furthermore, demands for solidarity might compromise the apolitical aura of humanitarian aid. It is therefore important to distinguish each concept from the other and to carefully examine how they relate in practice.

2 COVID-19: Impact on the humanitarian response to refugees?

Can a more solidarity-based humanitarianism towards refugees be implemented by humanitarian organizations? Some have argued that there were signs of a more solidarity-oriented approach to humanitarian aid in the heyday of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in Greece in 2015–16. As unprecedented numbers of people in need reached Europe, new actors (volunteers and search-and-rescue organizations) joined with traditional humanitarian organizations in organizing help in refugee camps, along the refugee routes and on the Mediterranean Sea. Some have argued that this established—at least in a certain time and place—a more egalitarian, anti-hierarchic and less institutionalized humanitarian response at the European border: “solidarity humanitarianism” (Rozakou, 2017, p. 99). To be clear, the reaction of the EU and its member states in this situation, and their treatment of refugees, could hardly be called humanitarian. Nor did states show great solidarity with refugees or with one another. Rather, most states put national interest first most of the time and focused on defending their borders. The so-called ‘EU-Turkey deal’ of 2016 is a case in point, as it mainly assisted EU states to send back refugees to Turkey in exchange for cash compensation, with the ultimate goal of discouraging refugees from entering the EU. Precisely due to this situation, some humanitarian organizations realized that it was not sufficient to simply provide relief to refugees on the move or in refugee camps. Big humanitarian organizations, among them MSF, withdrew from refugee camps in Greece and followed a more politicized and solidarity-oriented approach of openly criticizing EU and national policies, engaging in search-and-rescue operations in the Mediterranean, and trying to generate more attention to the refugee’s situation and to what they found to be an inhumane reaction by political decision-makers (Dany, 2019).

The situation of refugees has further worsened since March 2020. Coronavirus was certainly not the cause of closed borders, violence, human rights violations, overcrowded refugee camps and insecure routes to (often) European countries. Nevertheless, it served to further inflame conflicts over the admission of refugees and over their often inhumane situation—literally, when flames engulfed the Moria refugee camp after a coronavirus outbreak (Etzold, 2020, p. 10). This situation reinforced calls for solidarity with refugees, but also with those EU border countries coping with particularly high numbers of arriving refugees. Among others, the EU itself made proposals for a solidarity-based approach to refugees in response to the coronavirus situation. In September 2020, the EU Commission called on member states to show solidarity by dealing with refugees in a long-term and solidarity-based manner. Member states were to implement programs for safe escape routes to Europe and resettlement in safe environments (Europäische Kommission, 2020, p. 1). However, in the same document, the Commission bemoaned that the current pandemic has put new constraints on emerging EU programs that were established to achieve such goals (Europäische Kommission, 2020, p. 4). Solidarity with refugees is still patently absent, particularly during this pandemic.

3 Global solidarity through humanitarian aid?

This brief contribution has discussed whether humanitarian aid is a suitable tool for expressing global solidarity during COVID-19, using the example of current developments in the context of migration and refugees in the EU. The answer is mixed: humanitarian aid and solidarity are, principally, different things, hardly comparable and, at times, even contradictory. Some developments in the response to the ‘refugee crisis’ can be interpreted as one step towards a more solidarity-oriented humanitarianism; however, the Coronavirus pandemic has hampered cautious developments in this direction. To make humanitarian aid a real tool for expressing global solidarity, one would have to regard refugees as equals and strengthen

their agency, as well as that of local and grassroots organizations in the most affected countries (home, transit and receiving countries).

The demand for solidarity in the current pandemic could indeed be a chance to achieve this end by further strengthening the localization agenda which has shaped discussions since the 2016 UN *World Humanitarian Summit* in Istanbul. Localization requires humanitarian assistance to be increasingly delivered by local and grassroots organizations or by the affected people themselves, as their actions are better accepted and they can better anticipate the effects of their actions through local expertise. International humanitarian NGOs, on the other hand, which often have their headquarters in the Global North, should limit themselves to funding, support and coordination services; they could even preferably move their headquarters to countries in the Global South. This would mean giving up the dichotomous narrative of ‘rescuers’ and ‘victims’ for the sake of strengthening the agency of affected people, local organizations and initiatives in organizing to provide aid to themselves and others. International and local organizations understand themselves as working towards a common goal, which would be to reduce the inequality between donor and recipient countries during coronavirus crisis – and beyond. Although many humanitarian organizations are increasingly working with local partners who are particularly experienced in crises, there is still a long way to go.

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Funding for Forest Conservation

Trends during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Rowan Alusiola



Introduction

The article highlights the contribution of forests to the environment and people's livelihoods and elaborates the perceived impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the forestry sector in developing countries. It examines funding trends in the last decade and the impact of the pandemic on this funding. There is therefore an emphasis on forest conservation through the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) initiative, which highlights the role of conservation, sustainable forest management and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries. The article concludes by proposing recommendations and potential opportunities for a sustainable future.

Forests have a positive contribution to adapting to and mitigating climate change. It is estimated that global forests that have not been affected by land-use change remove an average of 8.8 Gt CO₂ per year from the atmosphere (Pan et al. 2011). Additionally, the use of wood products has a high mitigation potential, as well as afforestation and reforestation (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014) that

can contribute to carbon sequestration. Forests also help prevent desertification and land degradation by reducing soil erosion, floods, and landslides. Furthermore, forests facilitate ecosystems in several ways, including biodiversity restoration and conservation. In addition, they provide food, clean the air, filter groundwater, and provide opportunities for recreation, education and cultural enrichment. Globally, it is estimated that between 1.095 billion and 1.745 billion people depend to differing degrees on forests for their livelihoods; furthermore, about 200 million indigenous people are almost fully dependent on forests (Chao, 2012).

However, the future resilience of the world's forests and their globally significant environmental contributions—including (i) provisional services such as food, (ii) regulating services for example climate and water, (iii) supporting services including soil formation and retention, nutrient cycling and, (iv) cultural services for example spiritual enrichment and recreation—are increasingly under threat from human activities, especially now, during the COVID-19 pandemic and enforced lockdowns. Several studies have indicated that there has been dramatic forest loss since the onset of COVID-19 in parts of Africa and South America, compared to average losses between 2017 and 2019 (Rainforest Alliance; 2020, Winter, 2020). Deforestation rose by 150% in March 2020 compared to the 2017–2019 average for the same calendar month. Indonesia lost more than 1,300 squares kilometers, the Democratic Republic of Congo about 1,000 square kilometers and Brazil 950 square kilometers of forest (Winter, 2020). Deforestation has economic causes, among others.

Due to the loss of informal income sources in developing countries, many people have migrated from urban to rural areas and increasingly cut down trees to secure their energy and nutritional needs. REDD+ was supposed to allow developing countries to participate in global climate change mitigation through the sale of carbon credits for reforestation—thus avoiding deforestation—and through forest conservation programs.

However, several forest conservation programs, including REDD+, have been halted due to COVID-19. This has negatively impacted the progress of forest conservation as environmental governance officials have been unable to enforce existing forest conservation regulations. After increasing investment in REDD+ over the last decade, funding has been reduced during the COVID -19 pandemic. The following section will describe how funding has been affected by the pandemic and illustrate the consequences. This is crucial for deeper planning of future economic stimulus funding for protected areas to provide both short- and long-term economic benefits that will support vulnerable communities and address policy needs in developing countries.

1 Financing REDD+

REDD+ is an international climate policy framework with the goal of generating incentives to protect and improve management of forest resources by establishing an economic value for enhancing forest carbon stock (Corbera, 2011). This initiative initially focused on avoiding deforestation (RED). It later addressed avoiding forest degradation (REDD) and finally became REDD+ by embracing sustainable management of forests, enhancement of carbon stocks and improved forest protection. REDD+ activities have enabled developing countries to contribute to climate change mitigation. It creates a system where these activities create certificates that are sold to mobilize finances. In the past decade, REDD+ has so far mobilized significant financial resources from the international community and the private sector (Angelsen& McNeill, 2012). Approved REDD+ activities have amounted to USD 2.4 billion since 2008—USD 260 million in 2018 alone (Watson&Schalatek, 2019).

International public financing for forests, including official development assistance (ODA), has significantly supported resources for sustainable forest management. It is estimated that over the last two

decades, ODA has supported the forest sector with US\$ 400 million to US\$ 1.2 billion per annum (see Figure 1). Between 2010 and 2018, foreign direct investment into forest conservation, agriculture and fisheries ranged from US\$ 1 billion to US\$ 5.5 billion. Funding from public sources has dominated the contributions, including bilateral agreements between Norway and Indonesia for REDD+ activities at US\$ 1 billion, multilateral funds such as the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility with US\$ 1.3 billion in contributions and commitments, and the United Nations REDD Programme¹ with approximately US\$ 307 million (FCPF, 2018; Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, 2008).

Much of this funding is aimed at REDD+ readiness to assisting countries in preparing, developing and implement carbon mitigation measures. In contrast, funding for early pilot initiatives has come mostly from the private sector through voluntary carbon funds (Cerbu et al., 2011, Streck & Parker, 2012). Such funding is expected to lead to the long-term protection of forest ecosystem goods and services as well as an increase in social and local livelihoods, including improvements in living and benefits from other environmental services. This will contribute to the Paris Climate Agreement's commitment to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and undertake measures that will restrict temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.

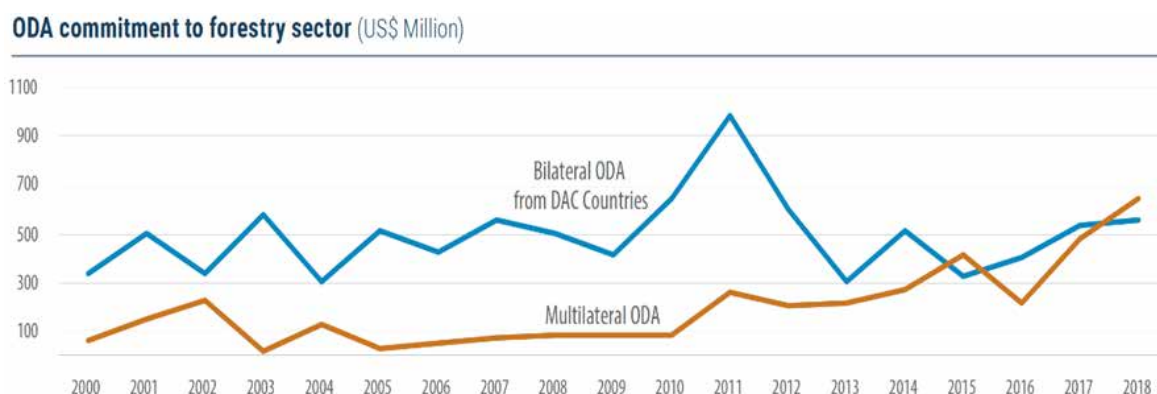


Fig. 1 Global Funding Trends for the Forestry Sector, Source OECD 2020

2 How has the Pandemic changed funding towards REDD+?

The pandemic has had devastating impact on the global economy. It has delayed two critical UN meetings that were destined to progress the conservation dialogue. The 26th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was postponed to 2021 and the 15th COP of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was also postponed, with a tentative postponement to May 2021. COP is the apex decision-making body of UNFCCC, comprising 197 member states as of 2019. COP members meet annually to decide on the measures which the parties to the Convention will take to reach their climate targets. The delays have limited the opportunity for stakeholders to showcase progress and share knowledge, expertise, and experience in addressing the challenges posed by climate change. This has resulted in national governments only being able to meet online, which could potentially limit the opportunity to fully assess current progress or to make or renew conservation commitments for REDD+, the Paris Climate Agreement or other related frameworks. This is threatening the progress on funding trends and toward long-term sustainable development (Fagan, Reid, Holland, Drew, & Zahawi, 2020).

¹ <https://www.un-redd.org>

The private sector has been adversely affected by the pandemic, leading to massive economic disruptions and business closures. This has resulted in a reduction of the resources available for forest conservation. foreign direct investment has also experienced a downward trend during the pandemic (FAO, 2020). The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) forecast a global foreign direct investment decline of 40% in 2020, with a further 5% to 10% in 2021, before an expected recovery later in 2021. It is expected that developing economies are to be impacted most (UNCTAD, 2020).

Additionally, governments worldwide have cut expenditure on forest conservation, enforcement of environmental and forest regulations and other incentive programs (e.g., Phillips, 2020). For example, governments have reduced or suspended payments for ecosystem services (Paz Cordona, 2020). In addition, rippling economic shocks will also affect conservation projects that depend on travel, including sites funded by nature-based tourism or by voluntary carbon offsets, such as those paid for by airline passengers (Galatowitsch, 2009). However, reduced air traffic (especially in the short term) has uncertain effects and does not systematically tackle climate change in the long run. The downturn in disposable income means that tourism will be slow to recover, and it will be harder to raise funds for conservation from individual donors (UNSDG, 2020).

Reduced funding combined with restrictions on transportation and closure of borders have significantly affected the forests and lives of forest dependent communities. People have lost jobs and income from both the formal and informal sectors in both timber and non-timber forest industries. For example, Madagascar—known for its forest-based tourism—expects that the pandemic will cause an estimated 80% loss of tourism business, affecting 44,000 direct and more than 300,000 indirect jobs. Collectively, reduced conservation efforts have led to lower demand for seeds and seedlings, which in turn negatively impact native plant suppliers. These interruptions lead to increased vulnerability amongst forest dependent communities; this in turn increases their reliability on forest resources which leads to increased deforestation and forest degradation.

3 The Way Forward

In concluding, it is important to note that conservation measures are not only necessary for avoiding potential negative post-COVID realities but for creating resilience for possible future pandemics. Therefore, funding should be continued and stepped-up.

In the last decade, tropical forest countries have made significant progress in improving forest monitoring, governance, transparency, tenure security, gender equality and stakeholder engagement. This has been supported by initiatives like UN-REDD, the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI)² and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF)³. However, these achievements risk being reversed if appropriate action, such as full enforcement of environmental regulations, are not undertaken.

Moreover, several questions have arisen about REDD+ funding in the past decade. For example, will REDD+ mainly be funded by international or voluntary carbon markets, or predominantly through international development assistance? Should REDD+ be considered a program or does it need to be implemented in stand-alone projects? Furthermore, to what extent should REDD+ be based on bilateral or multilateral cooperation? Will REDD+ be most effective on a national or subnational scale (Romero et al. 2013)? These are important questions that ought to be addressed as new funding strategies are designed by governments and concerned institutions.

2 https://www.cafi.org/?sc_lang=en

3 <https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/about>

Post-COVID-19 recovery has been at the centre of discussion for many countries, with stimulus packages topping the list. Adequate financing for conservation programs is a key component of resilient recovery. It is crucial that aid and stimulus packages are designed in such a way that appreciate and build on the already existing frameworks that countries have put in place for conservation and strengthen existing forest conservation initiatives. It is important to tailor policies and shift fiscal policies to reflect the REDD+ framework at national, regional, and international levels to incorporate existing concerns. Further increasing the involvement of the most vulnerable people, including those who have lost jobs and moved to rural areas and continue to contribute to climate, can aid mitigation. Additionally, recovery measures and investment should be aligned with ambitious national commitments towards a low emission and sustainable world for both people and nature, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Performance-based payments for forest conservation and restoration should be scaled up and the price of forest carbon through REDD+ should reflect the costs of policies and other measures for avoiding deforestation. The capacity of forest-dependent communities should be strengthened to effectively engage in REDD+ and other conservation activities. Additionally, forest monitoring efforts should be given priority for quality forest data, reflecting a correct forest status that can be used to push for better objectives for forests and the climate. It is, however, crucial to engage with local communities, which are remarkably effective in protecting and restoring forests when their value is recognized (Rasolofoson et al., 2015). All the above-mentioned measures have the potential to lead to win-win situations for local job creation, forests and the climate.

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Peace Education and Process

The Transformational Potential of COVID-19

Melanie Hussak



Introduction

The outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 virus have clearly demonstrated that, in our existing global social system, we are interconnected both on a physical and social level. What began as a health crisis one year ago has had massive social, political, economic, ecological, cultural and mental health impacts in recent months due to the long-lasting restrictions on movement and contact imposed worldwide. In addition to these direct consequences of COVID-19, there are often personal and specific challenges and insights during this time of pandemic that have a strong impact on people, such as their networks of relationships or their personal ability to cope with crises. Due to this externally-imposed situation, many people have adopted new processes of reflection and perception: they are faced with the question of what the situation means to them and how they will cope with the transformation processes that have been triggered and initiated by the pandemic. There is also a broad diversity of reactions at the macro level. These range from nationalist responses to health goods and financial reconstruction aid, and exploitation of the crisis for repressive purposes by autocratic regimes, to the call for a more prudent treatment of our planet and a stronger awareness of the well-being of all in the form of a sustainable, solidarity-based lifestyle and economy.

As everyone seems to be in the same boat, the global dimension of the COVID-19 crisis is enabling a forum to emerge for all the perspectives arising from this single 'event', situating themselves around it. Peace and conflict researchers and peace educators should grasp this opportunity.

I argue here that reflection on the conceptual foundations of the discipline is needed before specific methods are proposed. Therefore, I seek to explain how learners' processes can be reflected by peace educators to shape learning settings that can support people in overcoming this multi-layered crisis. I thus

propose three aspects that must come to the fore: a particular process category in peace education approaches, the interweaving of individual and collective processes, and a stronger consideration of emotions in conflict dynamics. I will firstly explore which conflicts are emerging, forming or intensifying as a result of COVID-19, focusing on two phenomena in these dynamics: accelerating in deceleration, and situatedness. I will then address peace education approaches and the need for a distinct process category. In the third section, I will illustrate aspects of process and emotions on the basis of *Worldwork*. This process-oriented conflict transformation method equally considers individual and social dynamics and provides a conceptual foundation for analysing and ‘processing’ current conflict complexes as a form of transformation. I will conclude by discussing the potential emerging from my reflections for strengthening social cohesion during COVID-19 and beyond.

1 New, old conflict dynamics: Responsibilities for Peace Educators

The COVID-19 crisis has far-reaching implications for core topics of peace research and education: overcoming multiple forms of violence, analyzing current lines of conflict and dynamics at different systemic levels, and identifying and outlining peace potential. The current situation thus requires drawing attention to intensifying as well as marginalized conflicts (cf. *Dany, Renner & Froese et al.* in this volume), but also to identifying peace potentials and partnering with people in their current adaptation processes. I would like to highlight two phenomena that seem relevant in the current situation: *accelerating in deceleration* (I) and *situatedness* (II).

(I) Conflicts not only (re)constitute themselves but accelerate due to deceleration caused by restrictions of movement and contact. I assume, in particular, an increase in conflicts that were already inherent in their basic structures and became more acute and evident due to the effects of the pandemic. Stress and pressure situations, such as financial difficulty or cramped living space, can strongly drive dynamics and situations that were already imbalanced. This acceleration is also because typical conflict reactions, such as escaping from a situation through short-term spatial separation, are denied for a long period of time.

In the personal sphere, this externally induced slow-down creates more distraction-free time for some people, thus creating more space for perceiving one’s own needs and emotions as well as reflecting on one’s life and relationships. For others, however, it is precisely this external deceleration and these restrictions that create a dynamic acceleration, overburdening many areas of life. This is especially true for people who are doing care work along with their jobs. Both phenomena could lead to a greater awareness of the need for change and therefore exacerbate conflicts. Restrictions in setting transformational steps could lead to increased violence. This observation about a dynamic intensification of existing conflicts is related to my second point of *situatedness*.

(II) By situatedness, I understand both a spatial-geographical categorization as well as a personal one with reference to one’s own position in life, as well as in the social system. It is based on biographical, family, social, job-related, economic and/or health-related (including mental health) preconditions and experiences. Situatedness is central to the question of how and to what extent a person is affected by the crisis and their available freedom of action to react to it. This is also true for states and other social formations.

Personal and social situatedness are intricately linked to structural and epistemic violence, which are deeply embedded in our social system. Structural and epistemic violence are among the internalized forms of violence that maintain existing orders based on social and political power relations. The former includes institutions that reproduce social and economic inequalities, such as in the essential field of health care, that are manifest in the pandemic—e.g. racist discrimination. Epistemic violence refers to that violence that emanates from knowledge and science itself. In the current situation, this raises ques-

tions such as who has interpretive and leading authority in the crisis. In other words, whose voices are being heard and are currently able to assert themselves?

On a physical level, the health risk of the COVID-19 virus concerns all people but different groups within society experience varying impacts from the pandemic. As cultural scientist Susan Arndt points out, it is not the virus that discriminates “but the human responses that adapt to the capitalist grammar of social inequality. [...] Causes are solely man-made orders of social inequality.” (Arndt, 2020; translation by the author). Based on these initial considerations, peace education must now make a contribution that addresses these aspects of situatedness and of accelerating in deceleration.

2 Peace Education and Process

The objective of peace education is the pedagogical encouragement and accompaniment of reflective individual and social processes with the aim of transforming conflicts in a non-violent way. Those processes are intended to critically examine individual and social behavior, attitudes and socio-political structures. Accordingly, the pedagogical concepts of peace education have a “process-oriented, personality- and relationship-building” character (Jäger, 2014, translation by the author).

Although *process* appears to be a key part of peace education (at least in the wording), most common approaches nevertheless follow a threefold didactic concept of knowledge, attitudes and action. *Peace knowledge* means knowledge about the causes, course, dynamics and forms of conflicts, violence and peace on a cognitive-analytical level. *Peace capacity* as a self- and social competence includes the individual capacity for peace, including personality development and the development of prosocial emotions such as compassion—as well as team—communication, and conflict skills. *Peace competence* aims at competently acting in one’s own environment as well as in the socio-political context to promote a non-violent way of dealing with conflicts. The individual components are mutually seen as dependent and complementary (Jäger, 2014).

In the peace educational learning process, the second dimension of personal and social capacities is of great importance and often seen as the dimension that determines the objectives and direction of a conflict event. But since it cannot be presumed that this learning process is automatic, it is worthwhile taking a closer look at *how* these processes can unfold. This question has only recently received increased attention (Frieters-Reermann, 2010). Elicitive peace education, for example, is dedicated to the discovery of connection and common ground (Dietrich, 2015; Cremin et al., 2018).

Another useful model is the process-oriented conflict method *Worldwork*. In what follows, I examine this approach to consider *how* it shapes the character of the process element in connection with the interrelation of individuals and the collective. This will be done in greater detail on the basis of *Worldwork*’s field concept and in relation to the current crisis. I will also discuss the related and special significance of emotions.

3 Process-oriented field dynamics

Worldwork, conceptualized by Arnold Mindell, considers the interconnectedness of individual and societal dynamics as a conceptual foundation for dealing with societal conflict situations. According to this approach, the facilitation of groups involves both the internal dimension of individuals and external occurrences. The theoretical concept of *Worldwork* assumes that individual, interpersonal and collective processes are interrelated to the extent that the structures thereby manifest or repeat themselves on different levels.

This thought becomes more intelligible through the concept of an “imaginary field”. In this field, individuals relate to other individuals and groups, interact with each other and are also moved and structured by them. The field “includes the subjective experience of [...] all factors that shape behavior, thought, action and feeling” (Hauser, 2015, 46; translation by the author).

In their everyday experiences, people are formed by primary and secondary processes. By *process*, Mindell understands the flow and exchange of information as well as a perception based on the interconnected signals in the field. According to Mindell, the *primary process* is their habitual identity and way of thinking. A *secondary process* is understood to be those unconscious elements that ‘send’ signals and impulses to the individual, which often have little capacity to emerge in everyday routines or are sometimes perceived as conflicting and disturbing. These parts are processed in *Worldwork* seminars, allowing them to become aware of these unconscious signals and information (Mindell, 1991, 202).

These processes at the individual level are shaped by *channels*, which comprise people’s perceptual capacities. Through them, information is received and expressed: in addition to the basic channels of *seeing* (visual), *hearing* (auditory), *body feeling* (proprioceptive) and *moving* (kinesthetic), there are the mixed channels of *relationship* (encounter with and reference to another person based on the basic channels) and *world* (reference to the social environment and occurrences) based on the basic channels and the relationship channel, among others (Mindell, 1991, 201).

As with other approaches to conflict transformation, *Worldwork* assumes that conflict, as a natural interpersonal phenomenon, indicates a need for change. Facilitators understand them as an opportunity and a starting point for reshaping relationships, structures and social reality. Thus, any behaviours, attitudes and structures can be seen as phenomena that arise through (inter-)active processes of persons or groups but can also be shaped together through appropriate processing and accompaniment.

This is also the crucial point in the current crisis: through the lens of *Worldwork*, processes within peace education are shaped by a deep interconnection of individuals, groups and surroundings through different channels that represent forms of both individual and relational perception. A person is regarded as both an individual with his or her own processes and in connection with surrounding structures and world processes. Collective processes are influenced by external occurrences (e.g. the emergence of a virus) as well as by intra- and interpersonal processes and actions. These factors need to be considered while planning the educational setting. This might require exercises beyond individual cognition that involve sensing and perceiving all channels.

4 Emotions

Emotions are connected with this perception of the channels. Despite differences in conceptual definitions of emotion, there is widespread agreement in the literature that emotions consist of a subjective (often understood as feeling), a physiological, a cognitive and a behavioral component. Emotions can arise from extraordinary as well as everyday events. In many cases they arise in interactions with other people (Brandstätter, 2018, 10 & 12). As Christoph Starke and Annalena Groppe observe, “Emotions [...] are a link between local-personal and global-political peace building” (Starke & Groppe, 2019, 40; translation by the author). This finding is also apparent in the field model of *Worldwork* as emotions influence the different field dimensions (intrapersonal, interpersonal and collective processes) through the relationship and world channels, relationally and interactively.

It is essential to consider emotions as having strong physical effects in the body. This effect especially belongs to the emotion that currently affects many people: anxiety. Anxiety about health, money, employment, existential fears and helplessness—just to name just a few—have developed or intensified in some due to the impacts of the pandemic. It can render the body in a permanent state of alarm. The

reporter Petra Ramsauer, who mainly writes about situations of violent crisis, points out that, once a state of anxiety is triggered, it can be long before pleasant emotions are experienced again in full joy. Diffuse fears, which now pose a particular danger, make people susceptible to scapegoating and fake news (Ramsauer 2020a, 43 & 47). She also emphasizes that, precisely because many people are usually oriented towards risk minimization, “the fear muscles of our souls are [...] untrained”. (Ramsauer, 2020b). This makes the crisis even more challenging.

Anxiety could—if it remains unreflective and unprocessed—be a driver of tensions. Compassion, mostly categorized as resonance capability, has the potential to decrease tensions in conflicts as mutual understanding and connection are strengthened. Peace education has so far considered the capacity for empathy as one of the key competencies to be strengthened. However, recent studies in social neuroscience distinguish “empathy as feeling *with* another person” with *self*-related feelings, and “compassion as feeling *for* another person” with *other*-related feelings. Experiments have shown that empathically sensing the emotions of others can be overwhelming and that people consequently risk experiencing empathic stress; withdrawal and inaction can then be the unintended consequence. In times of crisis, when people are confronted with many uncertainties and troubles, it is important to stay connected to oneself and avoid unconsciously taking on the emotions of others.

Thus, in a state of compassion, one is better prepared to distinguish one’s own emotions from the other’s, not taking on those of the person who is suffering. Recent studies show that compassion does not lead to denial of suffering but, rather, enables us to become active in helping much more readily. Emotional exhaustion can be avoided because it is possible to perceive oneself as the person on whom the suffering is not inflicted (Bornemann & Singer, 2016).

According to neuroscientist Tania Singer, compassion can be trained by activating one’s own resources. With her team, she developed the *ReSource* model of compassion that includes components of presence, perspective and affect. *Presence* describes the awareness of the present moment, both mentally and in relation to one’s own physical sensations. *Perspective* is introspective awareness of one’s own thoughts as well as developing perspectives on one’s relationship with others. *Affect* includes the component of turning towards oneself and others in a benevolent manner, dealing with emotions mindfully, and cooperative and prosocial action. The examination of oneself and the knowledge of one’s own perspectives, feelings and bodily awareness leads not to egoistic behavior but to more self-compassion. Moreover, it has a positive effect in understanding others’ beliefs, thoughts, emotions, intentions and perspectives (Singer & Bolz, 2016). These insights could provide valuable incentive for emotion-sensitive peace education, whose potential for social cohesion I now discuss in conclusion.

5 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences can allow a new and deeper perspective on aspects of people’s life as being interwoven into social occurrences. Within a reflective learning process, shaping positive ways of human interaction is supported when old perceptions and conflictual structures no longer hold.

Complexity in the current conflict situation could be addressed from the perspective of the field concept. The focus on interconnectivity and emotions thereby illustrates further potential, especially for the abovementioned current conflict dynamics of *accelerating in deceleration* and *situatedness*. Firstly, the conceptual awareness of everything interacting in the field is strengthened, helping us to understand and shape the current processes in which individuals, collectives and external occurrences are intertwined. This means that individual emotions and processes influence the field just as larger external processes influence individuals and groups. Moreover, the approach also considers that immediate

external occurrences such as the COVID-19 crisis encounter pre-existing experiences and perceptions, which can interrupt habitual ways of living and thinking and thereby trigger deep processes. This can reflect one's own life, relationships or job situation. However, external deceleration might also bring up emotions such as repressed fears. Practices of self-compassion support in times of physical distance allow individuals to take a step back from their own emotions and meet themselves with appreciation.

Secondly, this interrelatedness indicates that individual as well as collective processes hold the potential to transform societal systems. A stronger global awareness could be a common attitude in times of pandemic, as everyone is in the same boat. Not only are one's own processes perceived but people also reflect their own contributions to world occurrences. This process can be supported by considering channels of 'relationship' and 'world' within educational settings. It thus has the potential for learning global ways of thinking, which can also have effects on the levels of structural and epistemic complexes of violence. The crisis could be a source of shared experiences of interconnectedness. For example, current experiences of instability can create more compassion for people who are constantly exposed to insecurity because of their situatedness. Methods of peace education can refer to this.

Thirdly, similar and shared emotions allow feelings of belonging and strengthen social cohesion. A body-oriented approach and processing is important—for example, through breathing exercises or elictive approaches such as dance and theater—to reduce anxiety and strengthen compassion. Such approaches address the different channels suggested by *Worldwork* and thereby consider different human means to process conflicts.

In this phase of physical isolation and beyond, the implementation of the above points requires offering (digital) spaces for communication and relationships: in schools, at work and in circles of friends. These create room for compassionate resonance and for reorientation during the crisis, offering the potential for communal growth and for processing lived and shared experiences through dialogue in which every voice is heard.

The broad scope I have opened in this paper makes it clear that peace education not only can make a great contribution to overcoming the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis but that the current crisis also shows how peace education can rethink its theoretical foundations.

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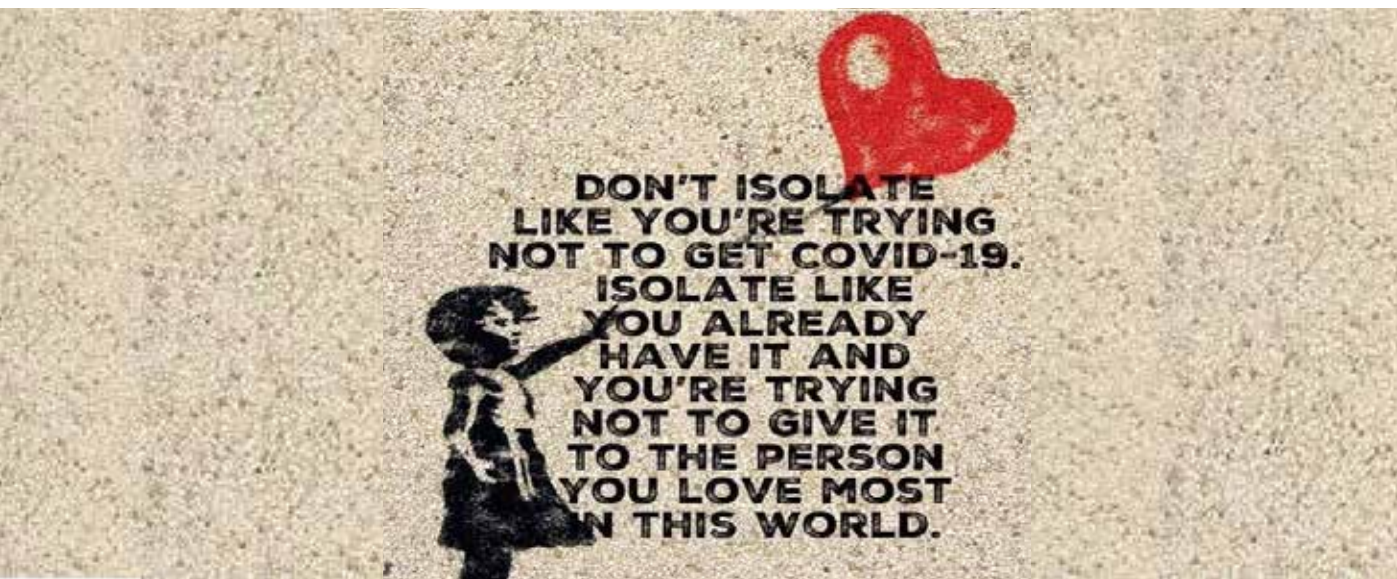
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An Enabling and Resilient Society in Response to Crisis

Lessons from COVID-19

Clem McCartney



1 COVID-19 as an opportunity for comparative study and learning

The way in which attitudes are formed, the determinants of behaviour and the ways in which the individual is connected to the wider social group are major interests in the social sciences. It is a primary concern in implementing social policy and community development, as both rely on the wider public to participate in achieving society's goals. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the challenges social systems face in responding to it, have shone a fresh light on these questions. It is an amazingly rich source of comparative information on how different communities function in unusual situations.

Interestingly, it was a challenge to build consensus on the best response to the virus, because the nature of COVID-19 created great uncertainty and there was no clear indisputable strategy for dealing with it. However, that in itself provides fruitful material for analysis of the way strategies were communicated and promoted. Initially there was limited understanding of the virus and for the first year there was no known cure or vaccine. It was quickly realised that it is infectious but not very infectious, and that it is virulent but not very virulent. If it had been as infectious and virulent as Ebola, there would have been no doubt that very robust limitations on social interaction were needed; if it had had comparable rates of infection and death to influenza, it would have been clear that such limitations were not justified especially as they would damage the economy and social life. Further we were not clear about the implications of social distancing on the economy, social life and mental health, as it had never been attempted before on such a scale. Therefore, it was difficult to explain to the public why a strategy for responding to the virus

was being introduced by government, and gain their support, which is a problem because the effectiveness of any strategy depended on willing public engagement.

For a society to be resilient in the face of uncertainty, people need to take personal responsibility to act in ways which protect themselves and others over a sustained period in a situation in constant flux. Ideally the society already encourages long-term, committed self-motivation and thoughtful involvement by the wider public. At the same time, it is possible for a divided society to come together, as we have seen in responses to crises such as war and natural disaster, as well as pandemics. Positive leadership can strengthen it, through the way it makes decisions and adopts and communicates its policies, but equally, this kind of social solidarity can easily be lost, particularly if the government does not connect to and stimulate the population's willingness to work together for the common good. The concept of a *Shared Society* (McCartney, 2020, pp. 1–5) offers one framework for a resilient pro-active society and this paper examines the responses to the pandemic through that lens of a *Shared Society*.

Most of the information on the impact of leaders on public support for the official strategy is anecdotal, but nonetheless important for identifying the phenomena that will need further study. The observations in this paper mainly relate to the period up to July 2020 and are more fully discussed in an earlier paper (McCartney, 2020, p. 12 ff.). Since that time, the wealth of material and changing policies and behaviours make analysis more difficult, but the trends described here are still evident.

2 A shared, resilient and sustainable society and crisis management

A *Shared Society* is characterised as one where those living there feel they belong, are at home and have a sense of stewardship. They have confidence that their leaders and the rest of the community are open and fair with them. This comes about when everyone is treated with respect; their dignity and human rights are protected; everyone has equal opportunity; diversity is valued; the ways of life, culture, values, customs and practices of all sections of society are appreciated provided they respect others. Importantly, this applies at the local, national and global levels. The materials on Shared Societies indicate the steps that need to be taken to build such a society, both through dedicated policies and, equally importantly, through the way that decision makers and the whole community communicate and treat each other. Thus, during the pandemic the way governments related to the society was as important as the actual policies they were introducing.

To look first at the overall policies, there have been three main responses to the pandemic, often reflecting the country's culture and norms: rule based, with greater or lesser levels of enforcement and coercion, public engagement, and laissez faire/libertarian. These strategies are not mutually exclusive and societies have used a mixture of approaches, influenced in part by the perceived level of threat. Nevertheless, it was evident that care needed to be taken in mixing strategies to avoid confusion and weaker public commitment. In this sense, governments could have been more effective in explaining the nature of risk assessment and how they had developed their strategy in the light of that assessment. Most of the public debate sees risk in terms of absolutes, not realising that there is a gradation of risks.

A public engagement approach lays out the information available and gives guidance on the best course of action. It then relies on the public to take responsibility and judge the appropriate action to meet the guidelines laid down. It is predicated on active informed citizens who are ready to accept responsibility, which is a characteristic of a *Shared Society*. Additionally, this approach also encourages the development of a *Shared Society*, creating a virtuous cycle.

The rule-based approach has been effective, especially in countries such as Vietnam and Taiwan (Leng & Lemahieu, 2021), that already value conformity and compliance, and systems such as test, track and trace were readily accepted, even though they involved intrusion in personal life. But even here, openness

and transparency increase public support and commitment, and may also ensure continued compliance after an initial phase of co-operation.

Countries that adopted a *laissez faire* approach saw increasing protests and public disagreements and a number of countries that adopted this approach are among those with the highest rates of infection and mortality. It was not always clear why some leaders chose this approach. Some denied and minimised the significance of the virus. Others may have decided to accept the risk in light of the economic risks and the risks to social health and personal wellbeing.

3 Salient factors in building public support and engagement in responses to COVID-19

In tackling the pandemic, the governments of all states, even the most totalitarian, need the support of the public and their willingness to take personal action to protect themselves and others from infection. Any governmental strategies need some level of consent and co-operation from the whole population.

In this context, political leaders, behavioural scientists, and other influential people in society played important roles in shaping the strategy to build community solidarity and consensus. They relied heavily on ideas on how to influence behaviour drawn from psychology, social psychology and behavioural economics. These approaches have become increasingly sophisticated and nuanced, but they are all rather mechanistic and potentially manipulative. They encourage tapping into and harnessing basic instincts of fear, disgust, and withdrawal on the one hand, and empathy and generosity on the other, to encourage desired behaviours, without individuals really being aware of what is influencing their opinions and behaviours.

So, there are moral and ethical concerns about these approaches, but they are also limited in other ways. Their techniques can be moderately effective in influencing specific behaviour over a short period of time. The result may be willing compliance with rules laid down, or grudging resentment at having to comply. Furthermore, there may be unintended consequences: one can gain greater compliance in the short term but weaken personal responsibility in the longer term. Persuasion or coercion are of limited relevance if the issues that the community is facing require active involvement and commitment by everyone, and their willingness to make informed difficult decisions for the wellbeing of the whole community: going against existing assumptions; postponing immediate gratification or self-interest; making careful assessments of risk; and taking into account the needs and concerns of people beyond one's immediate reference group. The community needs to be able to challenge preconceived attitudes and ideas, and evaluate false rumours and conspiracy theories.

The gap in theory and practice is the tendency to treat the group or the community to which the individual is situated as a given, and not to consider the nature of the community and how the individual relates to it or wants to identify with it. It is not sufficient to tell people what to do if they do not feel that they and their actions matter or that they are part of a shared effort. Consequently, they leave open the question of what are the qualities and characteristics of a community which influence the type of instinctive and visceral responses - empathetic and caring or fearful and defensive - that govern the individual and the collective, and may galvanise and motivate people to sustained engagement in one direction or another.

The Shared Societies Concept does address these questions and indicates that people are more trusting and responsive to those who treat them with respect and trust. It identifies those dynamics in a society which, when present, engender the individual's confidence and self-respect: people need to feel that they matter; that they are respected; that they are treated fairly; that they are consulted. The result is outward, positive, and supportive engagement, thus creating a virtuous cycle. In the absence of these dynam-

ics, the society is divided and individuals feel insecure, uncertain, and resentful, which is expressed in self-protection and suspicion and antagonism towards others, in this case creating a vicious cycle. There is a limit to how much a society or nation can expect from its members if they are apathetic, disempowered, disgruntled, or angry.

There has been much discussion of the importance of public trust in leaders and their policies; however, trust is a two-way process. Less attention has been given to the trust *by* leaders in the public, based on respect and consideration. The nature of the society and the individual's relationship to it is not only important in that it enhances or diminishes the wellbeing and self-fulfilment of everyone, but as a consequence, it also makes the society more resilient and effective in responding to the challenges it faces, be they inter-community tensions or natural phenomena such as floods or earthquakes or pandemics. We can see how this has played out in the interactions between political and other influence leaders and the wider public.

Faced with the pandemic, many governments recognised the importance of communication with the public and introduced regular public briefings, which helped to reinforce the gravity of the situation. In this context, the messenger was important, and in some countries, medical and scientific experts were at the forefront, with limited involvement from political leaders. These briefings were low-key, careful, and detailed. In contrast, in other countries political leaders were in the lead, sometimes supported by experts, and their briefings were sometimes low-key and careful, but, in other cases, less precise and less connected to the scientific evidence, with more rhetoric and vague generalisations, which were sometimes exposed as inaccurate under questioning, or by subsequent events. It has regularly been argued that women leaders have been more successful in managing COVID-19¹; possibly they are more empathetic and respectful of different opinion and are less likely to be bombastic.

Experience during the pandemic suggests that public commitment and trust in the strategy and policies are influenced by a number of the ways in which leaders behaved:

- *Consistency*: Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the World Health Organisation, has said, “Mixed messages from leaders are undermining the most critical ingredient of any response: trust” (WHO, 2020). Nevertheless, the situation has been changing rapidly, requiring changes in the information being given. It is easier to be consistent if the overall strategy is clearly explained, rather than focusing, as some leaders did, on specific restrictions needing constant adjustments, especially if they were very detailed.
- *Fairness*: Policies need to be seen to be proportionate and applied equally to everyone. Governments lost credibility when they did not follow their own advice or made exemptions for themselves. Here, the effect can be long-lasting (Fancourt et al., 2020).
- *Clarity*: It was difficult for political leaders and experts to be clear and consistent in their statements when there was little understanding of the virus and how it was spreading. In the initial stages, governments often said they were ‘led by the science,’ which seemed to offer clarity, but it soon became apparent that strategies were also considering political considerations and the impact on social and economic life. If the public is uncertain of the motivation of the government, it provides a fertile ground for distrust to grow.

1 It has also been suggested that a female leader may be a signal that a country has more inclusive political institutions and values which, as this paper concludes, is the best basis for tackling the pandemic. See, for example, “Why Are Nations Led by Women Doing Better?” New York Times, May 16, 2020, Sec. A, page 4.

- *Decisiveness*: Speed is of the essence because the spread of the virus has been changing rapidly and the timing of preventative measures to mitigate the impact of restrictions is critical. Many leaders were reluctant to introduce major restrictions or relief measures, but ambivalence and hesitancy could be dangerous and undermine confidence.
- *Transparency*: Kang Kyung-wha, Foreign Minister of South Korea, noted that “full disclosure about what a government is doing or not doing in the midst of a crisis may be difficult, but it is all the more critical, for this is the only way to win the public’s trust, which is the most important ingredient in effective crisis management” (Kyung-wha, 2020). She went on to say that her government acknowledged what they didn’t know.
- *Sensitivity*: Some governments attempted to show their understanding of the difficulties that were being imposed both on individuals and organisations and took steps to ameliorate the situation, for instance, with cash payments. Others have shown scant regard for the circumstances of their citizens.
- *Building trust and confidence that the disease could be defeated*: One approach was to say that everyone would have to make sacrifices, but if everyone pulled together the disease could be overcome. Others, mainly more populist demagogues, tended to claim that the country was exceptional with *world beating* talent and systems and they would succeed in the same way they had overcome other threats in the past. The latter approach did not emphasise that everyone had to play their part in overcoming the virus.
- *Governance competence and effectiveness*: The qualities outlined above are all features of good leadership and good governance. In this regard, the ultimate test of a government is whether it is able to govern effectively and competently. Even with competent leadership, the reality is that many states do not have the resources to manage a crisis and their services have been stretched beyond their capacity to cope. Some states, both in the developed and developing world, do not have a public health system that can respond in a co-ordinated way. For many years, there has been a lack of will nationally and globally to identify and make available the necessary investment in resources to establish effective systems to deal with shocks.
- *Managing Dissent*: Gaining the good will and support of the public is difficult in any situation but it is much more difficult if there is dissent. Initially opposition was muted, and there was no focus for dissent. The pandemic developed so quickly that it took some time for the rumour mill, conspiracy theories, and trolling on social media to catch up. So, for some time it was easier to manage dissent in a measured way, without hostile voices making reasoned discussion difficult. As the pandemic progressed, however, and critical voices gained traction and reinforced each other, greater polarisation emerged, damaging a country’s capacity to deal with the pandemic. Those criticised compound the problem by directing the blame at others, not at the virus. Some have blamed other countries or inter-governmental agencies. Some blame colleagues and experts within the administration or at other levels of government (Hughes et al., 2020). Refusing to take responsibility for decisions undermines confidence. All sides have to be prepared to listen and be open to genuine concerns, and show their commitment to a collaborative approach.

In summary, to quote Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the World Health Organisation, the three key requirements for controlling the disease and getting on with our lives are “a focus on reducing mortality and suppressing transmission, [...] an empowered, engaged community that takes individual behaviour measures in the interest of each other, [...] [and] strong government leadership and coordination of comprehensive strategies that are communicated clearly and consistently” (WHO, 2020).

Inner self-confidence is needed to communicate the necessary qualities and attitudes and engage with the public in an authentic way, sharing uncertainties and vulnerabilities. Importantly, when it has been done, the response has often been positive.

4 Lessons

The experience of responding to COVID-19 to date reflects and confirms many aspects of the *Shared Society* Concept as applicable to COVID-19 and to other challenges such as climate change, inter-group conflict prevention, etc.:

- ✓ A *Shared Society* is more resilient.
- ✓ It demonstrates the importance of respecting the dignity of others and ensuring that everyone has a sense of agency and voice, not only as a principle, but in building social solidarity; and shows ways in which that has been conveyed through good leadership.
- ✓ Those with influence at all levels can undermine social solidarity and personal commitment to the community by the way they express their opinions and by their behaviour if they do not ensure that they are demonstrating respect and commitment to a *Shared Society* in which everyone can make a full and active contribution.
- ✓ Some cultures seem imbued with qualities and attitudes which lead to a willingness to contribute to a *Shared Society*. Nonetheless, these characteristics are not fixed and impervious to change and can be lost, if leadership is insensitive but equally good leadership can encourage and develop them.
- ✓ Divisive, as opposed to constructive, management of dissent within the authorities gives permission for dissent within the community, lowering public confidence and the willingness to comply with restrictions. It gives momentum to a vicious cycle, in which the society becomes more polarised and the capacity to deal with the challenge is undermined.
- ✓ In relation to climate change, the current situation is proof that the state can, when it wants to, act quickly and radically, when there is clear evidence that existing systems, structures, attitudes and relationships are clearly not fit-for-purpose in new circumstances. Furthermore, the majority will comply with sudden change when there is a clear, scientific case for action, and an urgent need to protect those things that people value.

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Authors

Rowan Alumasa Alusiola is an Environmental Specialist with 10 years of practical work experience in developing, managing, and monitoring programs and policies within the East African Region. Her proficiency is in areas related to environmental conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, food security and community engagement. Currently, she is an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow for International Climate Protection at the Peace Academy Rhineland-Palatinate, University of Koblenz-Landau.

Pierre Bouchat (Ph.D.) is a researcher in social psychology and an assistant professor at the Université de Lorraine. His current research focuses on the role of collective memory in intergroup relations. He is also interested in collective emotions and their impact at the individual, intra- and inter-group levels.

Charlotte Dany (Dr.) is Managing Director of the Peace Academy Rhineland-Palatinate at the University of Koblenz-Landau. Formerly, she was a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at Goethe-University Frankfurt and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Bremen. Charlotte Dany is an expert on humanitarian aid, development cooperation, information and communication politics, as well as on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in global governance.

Rebecca Froese is a research fellow at the Institute of Environmental Sciences in the Research Group Landuse Conflicts and at the Peace Academy Rhineland-Palatinate at the University of Koblenz-Landau. Her research focuses on human-environment interactions, climate and environmental change, and environmental governance.

Annalena Groppe is a research fellow at the Peace Academy Rhineland-Palatinate at the University of Koblenz-Landau. She works on peace education approaches in polarizing conflicts over democracy.

Melanie Hussak is a research fellow at the Peace Academy Rhineland-Palatinate at the University of Koblenz-Landau. Her research and projects focus on peace processes of indigenous communities, peace education and Shared Societies.

Chantal Kesteloot (Ph.D.) holds a doctoral degree in contemporary history and is in charge of public history at the Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society (CegeSoma)/State Archives. Her main areas of interest are the history of Brussels and Belgium, the memory of war, and issues of nationalism and national identities.

Clem McCartney (Dr.) is an independent consultant and policy analyst from Northern Ireland. From the mid 1980s his main interest has been in conflict resolution, mediation and peace building. From 2007 until 2019 he was Policy and Content Coordinator for the Shared Societies Project of the Club de Madrid.

Paul Nolan (Dr.) is an independent researcher based in Belfast. He has monitored the Northern Ireland peace process and has published on issues relating to ethnicity and conflict.

Claudia Pinzón holds a BA in Political Science and History from the University of Heidelberg and is finishing her MA in Latin American Studies at the Free University of Berlin. Her current research focuses on the impact of pressures on nature and land use change on civil society structures and migration.

Juliette Renard is a Belgian Fund for Scientific Research Ph.D. candidate in social and political sciences at the Institut de la décision publique of the University of Liege. Her research topic is how young people construct identity in deeply divided societies (in Belgium, Cyprus and Northern Ireland).

Julia Renner (Dr.) is a research fellow at the University of Koblenz-Landau. From 2021 she will hold a position as a postdoctoral research fellow at Westfälische-Wilhelms University Münster. She is further an Associate of the Peace Academy Rhineland-Palatinate at the University of Koblenz-Landau. Her research focuses on water-related conflicts, sustainability and the impact of climate change and economic projects on resource shortages.

Valérie Rosoux (Prof. Dr.) is Research Director at the Belgian Fund for Scientific Research (FNRS). She teaches International Negotiation and Transitional Justice at the University of Louvain. She has a Licentiate in Philosophy and a Ph.D. in Political Sciences. Her research interests focus on post-war reconciliation.

Janpeter Schilling (Jun. Prof. Dr.) holds a Klaus Töpfer Junior Professorship for Landuse Conflicts at the Institute for Environmental Sciences at the University of Koblenz-Landau. He is also the Scientific Director of the Peace Academy Rhineland-Palatinate. His research focuses on conflict, resources and resilience.

Regine Schönenberg (Dr.) is a political scientist and works at the Latin America Institute of Free University of Berlin. She has decades of experience in the Amazon region and conducts research on structures of organized crime, land use conflicts and social cohesion.

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Address

Peace Academy Rhineland-Palatinate

University of Koblenz-Landau

Kaufhausgasse 9

76829 Landau in der Pfalz

Germany

Tel +49 6341 280 38550

Email friedensakademie-rlp@uni-landau.de

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PEACE PERSPECTIVES

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edited by
Charlotte Dany and
Annalena Groppe

Social polarization and cohesion in the COVID-19 Pandemic

As if under a magnifying glass, the COVID-19 pandemic renders global inequalities, as well as conflicts within societies, more visible. It is particularly the marginalized, weak and vulnerable groups in societies—as well as poorer countries in general—that most bear the burden of the pandemic. Therefore, more often than not societies become more polarized in this situation. At the same time, the crisis might create increased attention and, therefore, opportunities for more solidarity and social cohesion. This first edition of PEACE PERSPECTIVES takes this observation as a starting point to look at the consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic from the perspective of Peace and Conflict studies. It gives a broad survey of how the pandemic is affecting social polarization and cohesion.

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PEACE ACADEMY RHINELAND-PALATINATE

Academy for Crisis Prevention and Civil Conflict Management

Universität Koblenz-Landau
Kaufhausgasse 9, 76829 Landau in der Pfalz, Germany
Tel +49 6341 280 38550