

Editorial

Mette Louise Berg, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Johanna Waters

To say that working on this issue of *Migration and Society* has been a challenge would be an understatement. For all of us, from the members of the editorial team to our guest editors, contributors, ever-important reviewers, and the publishing team, 2020 has brought significant barriers. We have feared for the safety of our loved ones; grieved unbearable losses, often from afar; faced different forms of containment; and sought to, somehow, find the time and energy to care for our loved ones, our selves, and one another while navigating unsustainable work commitments and responsibilities.

In what have ultimately been untenable times, early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, *Migration and Society* decided to press “pause” on our normal working practices: like colleagues at other journals and other institutions, we maintained that continuing “as usual” would be both untenable and unethical.

For many of us, these have not been propitious times for writing and considered reflection. As COVID-19 spread across the globe, our work lives changed dramatically as we were expected to move our teaching online, sometimes from one day to the next, provide pastoral support to our students, while also educating our children whose schools were closed, and somehow continue producing new knowledge and insights. After many months of struggling individually and collectively to adapt to new spaces and rhythms for our work, it is thanks to the flexibility, commitment, and generosity of the community of contributors and reviewers that underpins this journal that we are able to publish an issue that includes two guest-edited themed sections on “Stakes of Sanctuary” and “Religion and Refugees” respectively. The issue includes a total of eleven research articles, as well as two interviews with academics and artists, from Morocco and Bangladesh respectively, both critically engaging with diverse ways of understanding, conceptualizing, and “seeing” displacement. As a whole, the pieces contribute to urgently needed reflection on different facets of the relationship between migration and society, and help place contemporary challenges and responses to them into broader historical context.

In effect, on the one hand, 2020 will long be remembered as a year of intersecting emergencies, one in which processes of and responses to both migration and mobility and their corollary immobility and containment have been hyper-visible. The fear of the “spread” of the virus led not only to restrictions on international travel, the institutionalization of border closures, and labeling migrants and refugees as “vectors” and transmitters of disease, but also to localized curfews and prohibitions on leaving one’s city, town, neighborhood, or camp. And yet, while these responses have appeared to be extraordinary and shocking for many people around the world—with many defying such restrictions—for millions of people such closures, classifications, curfews, and confinements are a continuation of pre-existing racialized and racist structural inequalities. In essence, it has been increasingly recognized that the pandemic has accentuated existing racialized inequalities of mobility, health, and access to care; and equally, that the specter of coronavirus has been mobilized in the public and political sphere to justify the extension and deeper entrenchment of these inequalities.



At the same time, 2020 will also be remembered as a year of solidarity and mutual aid, of caring for neighbors and strangers alike through direct and indirect means; naming and challenging such inequalities; and lobbying and campaigning for the development of responses that support, rather than undermine, individual and collective wellbeing and access to diverse rights. Indeed, as the contributions to the two special themed sections included in this issue of *Migration and Society* demonstrate, there is a long history of activism and other acts of solidarity around the world in support of migrants and refugees, ensuring that people have access to sanctuary. The first special themed section on *Stakes of Sanctuary* takes a rich and wide-ranging look at some of these initiatives specifically, as the name suggests, in relation to the issue of sanctuary. Guest-edited by Patti Tamara Lenard and Laura Madokoro, the section comprises a series of articles that in different ways explore how the concept of sanctuary is symbolically and practically linked to wider social and political processes. The diverse meanings of the oft-used term “sanctuary” are explored from both historical and contemporary perspectives. What lies at the heart of these contributions is an exploration of what is at stake in deploying and pursuing the notion and practice of sanctuary. An introduction, written by Lenard and Madokoro, outlining the aims of the section, is followed by a short collectively written piece called “Sanctuary Says.” Then follow six substantive articles: Michael Blake’s “Two Models of the Sanctuary City”; Audrey Macklin’s “Working against and with the State: From Sanctuary to Resettlement”; Vinh Nguyen’s essay on “Representing Sanctuary: On Flatness and Aki Kaurismäki’s *Le Havre*”; Beatrix Hoffman’s piece “Sanctuary or Danger: Hospitals and Health Care in the United States”; Rebecca Schreiber’s “Performing Sanctuary”; and Alexandra Délano Alonso on “Sanctuary in Countries of Origin: A Transnational Perspective.” Together, these pieces offer different disciplinary and thematic takes on the stakes of sanctuary in relation to migration and wider society.

In turn, as outlined by Benjamin Boudou, Hans Leaman, and Maximilian Miguel Scholz, the guest editors of the second special themed section on Religion and Refugees, “religious institutions and religious claims have shaped the ways that societies have responded to refugees, especially at the local level” (Boudou, Leaman, and Scholz, this issue). Noting that religious principles have often been historically linked to the politics, practices, and spaces of sanctuary, and further developing the critical discussions of hospitality and hostility toward migrants explored in the inaugural issue of *Migration and Society*, their introduction provides important historical context for the relationship between religion and refugees, highlighting the significance of “religious structures for welcoming,” the role of religion in “interactions of welcoming,” and diverse “religious reasons for welcoming” (this issue). This tripartite framework lays the foundation for the subsequent articles in the section, which examine the role of religion in relation to political and legal responses to asylum-seekers, refugees, and migrants in the United States (Elizabeth Shakman Hurd), France (Aurélia Bardon), and in the broader Mediterranean region (Gilad Ben-Nun), in addition to investigating refugee-led, faith-based, and southern-led responses to displacement in Uganda (Karen Lauterbach) and South Africa (Tinashe Chimbidzikai).

Following an innovative article by Stephanie Silverman, which traces the potential routes out of detention of the composite character Amir, the People and Places section includes an interview by Sabina Barone with academic Mehdi Alioua reflecting on the politics of labeling migrant groups in Morocco and Alioua’s academic work of “accompaniment observation” (this issue), an explicitly anti-racist and politically engaged form of scholarship.

The theme of seeing and accompaniment resonates with the contributions to the Creative Encounters section. These examine the relationship between photography and “co-seeing” displacement, first through an interview between Yousif M. Qasmiyeh and the critically acclaimed photographer and film-maker Saiful Huq Omi (whose striking image embraces the cover of this issue) vis-à-vis the (in)visibility of Rohingya refugees, and then a series of poetic fragments by

Qasmiyeh, reflecting on Omi's arresting image from the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. The issue closes with a series of book reviews edited by Gunvor Jónsson and Agnieszka Kubal.

Together, the contributions remind us of the long and diverse histories of and struggles for migrant rights and mutual care, and the entanglements between scholarship and activism. The coronavirus pandemic has graphically exposed the precarity of migrants' lives across the globe, and made visible the contributions of migrants in health care and hospitality. In the UK, where the editorial collective is based, migrant and black and minority ethnic health care professionals have been disproportionately affected and killed by COVID-19.¹ As migration scholars, we are not at the frontline of fighting COVID-19, but as the pandemic has laid bare entrenched, racialized inequalities of societies across the world, scholarship that addresses precarity, racism, and the violence of borders, is more necessary than ever. We will continue to provide a space for critical voices from the Global South as well as North that connect migration, mobility, and wider social dynamics.

■ **NOTES**

1. See a memorial to them here: *The BMJ*, "Remembering the UK doctors Who Have Died of COVID-19." <https://www.bmj.com/covid-memorial> (accessed 1 February 2021).

