

## *Book Review*

# **Reflections on the complexities of the Covid-19 pandemic: Perspectives from the Global South**

*Shadrack B. Ramokgadi and Mbekezeli C. Mkhize (eds)*

---

Stellenbosch: UWC Press  
2022, 340 pages  
ISBN 978-1-991201-92-8

In *Reflections on the complexities of the Covid-19 pandemic: Perspectives from the Global South*, Ramokgadi and Mkhize critically examine the Covid-19 pandemic from multiple angles, including public health and socio-economic effects across international, regional, and national levels. The primary goal of the authors was to assess and discuss government responses, scrutinise public health strategies, and understand societal reactions. Their aim was to provide a nuanced understanding of how the pandemic exposed systemic vulnerabilities and ignited demands for public health as well as economic, governance, and civil–military reforms.

Ramokgadi, a researcher at the Centre for Military Studies (CEMIS) in the Faculty of Military Science at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, adopted a solid analytical approach grounded in his extensive experience in military and developmental research. Mkhize, an associate professor in International and Diplomacy Studies at the Thabo Mbeki African School of Public and International Affairs, University of South Africa (Unisa), contributed with his deep understanding of international relations and diplomacy. Their collaboration resulted in a comprehensive analysis of the diverse effects of the pandemic on the Global South. It is worth noting that the book also features contributions from various recognised scholars, each offering a unique perspective on the consequences of the pandemic.

An interdisciplinary approach was taken, utilising various sources, such as academic research, policy documents, and firsthand accounts. The methodology adopted by the authors was rooted in critical analysis, offering a balanced evaluation of different responses to the pandemic. The writing is accessible, making complex concepts clear to a wide audience while maintaining academic thoroughness. The originality of the work lies in its ability to weave together diverse themes into a cohesive discussion that highlights the complexity of the pandemic.

The book covers a wide range of themes, with one central argument being that the Covid-19 pandemic was not merely a health crisis but also a catalyst that exposed

and magnified existing global and societal weaknesses. The authors argue that, while some governments responded effectively, many failed to protect their most vulnerable populations. The analysis spanned multiple levels – international, regional, and national – providing a thorough examination of varied responses and consequences of the pandemic, with a particular focus on Africa.

The first section of the book effectively sets the stage for the broad analysis of civil–military relations by delving into how Africa managed the pandemic through the lens of securitisation. Chapters 2 to 5 emphasise the role of military organisations in responding to the pandemic, asserting that Covid-19 posed a threat to international peace and security. The theoretical exploration of the militarisation of health was examined through case studies, including Botswana, illustrating how African defence structures adapted to this unconventional security threat. The chapters suggest that, while securitisation may be contentious, it was a necessary response to the unprecedented nature of the pandemic.

The second thematic focus explores the changing dynamics of civil–military relations during the pandemic, as discussed in Chapters 6 to 9. The deployment of military forces in South Africa and other parts of Africa led to new tensions and debates about the role of the military in civilian life. The chapters report on these tensions from legal and policy perspectives and introduce the concept of civil–military partnerships as an emerging approach to crisis management. This shift from traditional civil–military relations towards partnership highlights the collaborative efforts needed to combat such widespread health emergencies.

The third major theme of the book is the ripple effects the pandemic had on society, politics, and the economy. Chapters 10 to 13 detail how lockdowns and other measures disrupted economic activities, exacerbated political tensions, and strained the defence industry. Case studies from South Africa, Namibia, and Latin America illustrate the global nature of these challenges. The analysis in these chapters is robust, linking the consequences of the pandemic for broader theoretical frameworks, such as rational choice theory and organisational theory. The discussion also suggests that the pandemic has opened new avenues for research on civil–military relations and partnerships.

The penultimate section of the book focuses on the multifaceted challenges posed by the pandemic, particularly in Africa. Chapter 14 highlights the health security crisis that emerged on the continent, emphasising the need for improved emergency procurement systems. The effect on education, referring to a “lost generation”, is especially concerning, with long-term implications for both primary and secondary education and development (Horton, 2021). Chapter 15 focuses on corruption, particularly in South Africa, where irregular procurement practices undermined efforts to combat the pandemic. These chapters provide critical insights into how the pandemic exposed and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities in African governance and development.

The book concludes by synthesising the thematic insights, and offering recommendations for future research and policy. The concept of civil–military partnerships emerges as an important action point, advocating for a more integrated approach to managing

complex emergencies. The authors argue that the pandemic has not only challenged traditional security paradigms but also prompted a rethinking of how military and civilian institutions could collaborate more effectively. This integrative approach is supported by a comprehensive review of the literature, providing a solid foundation for future studies on public security in the context of global health crises.

Positioned within the broader literature on global crises and pandemics, the book contributes to ongoing debates about the effectiveness of international cooperation and national responses. It complements other works on Covid-19; such as *The Covid-19 Catastrophe: What's gone wrong and how to stop it happening again* (Horton, 2021),<sup>12</sup> and *The pandemic century: A history of global contagion from the Spanish flu to Covid-19* (Honigsbaum, 2020) – by offering a holistic analysis that links public health to socio-economic and political dimensions. Compared to other books in the field, *Reflections on the complexities of the Covid-19 pandemic: Perspectives from the Global South* stands out for its interdisciplinary approach and critical analysis. While other works may focus solely on the health aspects of the pandemic or case studies from specific countries, this book provides a wide-ranging overview, making it a valuable resource for scholars and policymakers alike.

The authors succeeded in achieving the purpose of the book by offering a well-rounded assessment of the public health systems, governance structures, and socio-economic policies in the Global South as well as the after-effects of the pandemic. The strengths of the book lie in its broad scope and insightful analysis, although a potential limitation is that generalisation in some areas could have benefited from more detailed case studies. For example, the discussion on the economic consequences of lockdowns across Africa could have been enriched by in-depth analysis of specific countries, such as Kenya or Nigeria, where unique challenges and responses could provide a more nuanced understanding.

In conclusion, this book is a timely and thought-provoking work that significantly contributes to understanding the far-reaching effects of the pandemic. Its implications for future research and policymaking are profound, making it essential reading for those interested in global health, governance, and socio-economic resilience. The book is accessible to a wide audience, including academics, policymakers, public health professionals, and anyone interested in the broader implications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

---

**Mashudu Mathoho** 

*Department of Military Geography, Stellenbosch University*

---

<sup>12</sup> A notable work by Richard Horton that examines public health failures.

## REFERENCES

---

Honigsbaum, M. 2020. *The pandemic century: A history of global contagion from the Spanish flu to COVID-19*. New York: Random House.

Horton, R. 2021. *The COVID-19 catastrophe: What's gone wrong and how to stop it happening again*. Hoboken: Wiley.

