

# Covid-19 and the Global Poor

## Book Review on Toby Green, *The Covid Consensus: The New Politics of Global Inequality* (C. Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd 2021)

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### I. Introduction

This book provides a detailed yet accessible breakdown of the global impact of Covid-19, resulting from quick decision-making and policy implementation that took place to contain it.<sup>1</sup> It highlights the failures that could have been addressed with the inclusion of advice from the social sciences.<sup>2</sup> Far too much has depended on the “hard science” that led many to blindly follow the policy, causing further life-threatening issues such as the cessation of vaccination programmes across Africa, South Asia, and Latin America,<sup>3</sup> and treatment and prevention regimes for HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria as studied by Hogan and others.<sup>4</sup>

Green’s book is a welcomed addition to the expanding library of academic writing on the virus. It is a refreshing and eye-opening read to the impacts of the response to the virus that have been carefully omitted from daily media coverage.<sup>5</sup> Instead, it modestly critiques the policy decisions without joining the bandwagon of conspiracists and those with an opposing political agenda. With his background of history and economics, Green is able to tackle this controversial issue skilfully, acknowledging the seriousness of the virus, whilst addressing the enormous socio-economic implications that the response to Covid-19 has caused, and will continue to cause globally.<sup>6</sup> However, the focus of this review is on Chapter 3, where Green draws his attention to the Global Poor.

### II. A Shift in Focus

Whilst few have addressed the impacts of the Covid-19 response on those other than the ‘epicentres’,<sup>7</sup> particularly due to media attention, there are still a handful of academics that collectively address the enormity of the problems faced by the Global Poor.<sup>8</sup> The Global South are already in a position of vulnerability and are naturally therefore, to be disproportionately affected,<sup>9</sup> but what mattered was the way in which

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<sup>1</sup> Toby Green, *The Covid Consensus: The New Politics of Global Inequality* (C. Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd 2021) 30, 147-150.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid* 14.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid* 28.

<sup>4</sup> Alexandra B Hogan and others, ‘Potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria in low-income and middle-income countries: a modelling study’ (2020) 8(9) *Lancet Glob Health* 1132. See also Peter Sands, ‘HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria: how can the impact of COVID-19 be minimised?’ (2020) 8(9) *Lancet Glob Health* 1102.

<sup>5</sup> Green (n 1) 9-14.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* 31-2.

<sup>7</sup> Nadjie Al-Ali, ‘Covid-19 and feminism in the Global South: Challenges, initiatives and dilemmas’ (2020) 27(4) *EJWS* 333, 334.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*; Hogan and others (n 4); Sands (n 4). See also Jennifer C. Franco, “‘If the virus doesn’t kill me...’: socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on rural working people in the Global South’ (2020) 37 *Agriculture and Human Values* 575; Jonathan Crush and Zhenzhong Si, ‘COVID-19 containment and food security in the Global South’ (2020) 9(4) *JAFSCD* 149.

<sup>9</sup> Green (n 1) 127.

we addressed this and thereafter make future decisions regarding Covid-19 policy.<sup>10</sup> Green takes this further by addressing head on, the reality of the present decisions made, of which have been driven by panic within the Global North, and how this has essentially had a domino effect directly on the Global South.<sup>11</sup>

The vast majority of the Global North's decisions to lockdown either on a localised or national scale, particularly in Europe, or implement lockdown recommendations to ultimately 'protect the elderly and vulnerable', has come at great, long-term expense to the Global Poor.<sup>12</sup> Green does spend some time discussing the impact of this within the Global North, as undoubtedly there are many poor populations suffering within the developed countries.<sup>13</sup> However, attention must be turned to the long-term effects on the Global South. Green does exactly that by removing the lens from Western stories of lockdown-life and describing the harsh reality the Global South have faced. One of the biggest concerns being restriction of movement leading to loss of trade having a significant effect on the Global South.<sup>14</sup> This is because their work is mostly made up of the 'informal sector',<sup>15</sup> the majority of which are women and this has arguably materialised into another pandemic where globally we have seen the rise of gendered violence with monumental spikes in domestic abuse.<sup>16</sup> The focus to tackle this has quickly shifted to the containment of the virus, placing the needs of desperate and vulnerable women at the back of the queue.<sup>17</sup> This is accentuated within the Global South due to heightened poverty, causing extra strain on domestic environments, coupled with lack of access to resources, of which have been limited further due to the lockdown.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, areas already at heightened risk due to poverty now face an even further reduced flow of income (if not ceased all together) with little or no help from their governments and as Green discusses in some depth, this is likely to setback the work against poverty by some time<sup>19</sup> – especially given that many areas of the Global South are already paying off debt to the Global North.<sup>20</sup> Thus, their indebtedness increases and once again, the Global North will in the long-term, benefit at the expense of the Global South by recouping such debt, strengthening the divide between developing and developed countries.<sup>21</sup>

Green notably balances the two sides and shows appreciation for those suffering within the Global North, but he exposes where the burden of this pandemic will really lie. This has led and will continue to do so, to forced displacement and migration,<sup>22</sup> leading to more people from the Global South having to seek refuge and live in camps, where they are already at a disadvantage with lack of access to resources such as health

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<sup>10</sup> John A. Oldekop and others, 'COVID-19 and the case for global development' (2020) 134 *World Development* 1, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Green (n 1) 147.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*; Daniel Dunford and others, 'Coronavirus: The world in lockdown in maps and charts' (*BBC News*, 7 April 2020) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-52103747>> accessed 14 September 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Green (n 1) 127, ch 2.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid* 127-8.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid* 134. See also Franco (n 8) 575.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Ali (n 7) 335; Green (n 1) 161.

<sup>17</sup> Green (n 1) 128.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Ali (n 7) 334.

<sup>19</sup> Green (n 1) 144-150.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid* 147-158.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid* 123-4, 155-6.

care.<sup>23</sup> This has worsened with the reduction of such limited access due to the burden on health care staff (globally)<sup>24</sup> and meanwhile, strict lockdown rules being enforced by such governments either as *their* response to Covid-19 or from pressure from the response of the Global North,<sup>25</sup> cannot be implemented within refugee camps due to lack of space and access to hygiene products.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the very rules implemented as a response to the virus that forced these individuals out of their homes, cannot actually be enforced within the camps themselves due to their restricted access to already very limited resources, also because of the response to the virus.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it is clear that the response to Covid-19 has significantly accentuated the existing issues within the Global South where many are already living in the worst conditions globally.<sup>28</sup> Devastatingly, as Green demonstrates, they will now do so for some time due to a lack of funding (resulting in the Global South relying on more loans from the Global North)<sup>29</sup> and the attention being focused within each country on their own individual response to Covid-19.<sup>30</sup>

Further, the inequality in access to education is vast and has been painfully highlighted during the pandemic where many children did not have access to a stable internet connection and as a result, have been hugely disadvantaged.<sup>31</sup> Whilst access to these resources is by no means equal within the Global North,<sup>32</sup> one school year missed in the Global South is extremely detrimental to educational development causing a significant impact on future generations that once, prior to the pandemic, had more of an equal opportunity to learn, reducing the chance for ‘social mobility’.<sup>33</sup> Thus, as demonstrated within this chapter, education is another sector where the response to Covid-19 is having a considerable ripple effect, beyond that imaginable of the panic decision-making implemented within the Global North.<sup>34</sup>

### III. A Lesson to be Learned

The message we need to take within the Global North from this book (in particular chapter 3), is that the decisions we make in the future surrounding the management of the virus and in general in regard to universal issues such as health and climate change,<sup>35</sup> must be made with those other than the Global North in mind, considering the monumental and direct impact the Global North’s response to Covid-19 (particularly lockdowns and restriction of movement) has had on those within the Global South.<sup>36</sup> This has not only caused long term, socio-economic damage, but also meant that policies due to be dealt with (i.e. those being viewed as top priority) have been overshadowed by the response to the virus, and as discussed earlier, an example of this being many women now suffering globally as a result of increased gendered

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid* 151; Al-Ali (n 7) 334-8; Crush (n 8) 151.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Ali (n 7) 333-4.

<sup>25</sup> Green (n 1) 131-8, 146-159.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid* 151; Al-Ali (n 7) 334-8; Crush (n 8) 151.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>28</sup> Green (n 1) 155-6.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid* 148.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid* 144, 161-2.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid* 154-5.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid* 94, 154, ch 2.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid* 149-157.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid* 147-149.

<sup>35</sup> Carly A. Phillips and others, ‘Compound climate risks in the COVID-19 pandemic’ (2020) 10 *Nature Climate Change* 586.

<sup>36</sup> Green (n 1) 147.

violence.<sup>37</sup> This can be seen further within the work of Phillips and others, where links are drawn between climate change and Covid-19.<sup>38</sup> Given that climate change was a global priority prior to the pandemic, it has been side-lined due to Covid-19 policy despite knowing that it already disproportionately affects the Global South.<sup>39</sup> It is clearer now more than ever, that such universal issues must be addressed with the inclusion of *all* those affected, meaning fundamental decisions must be made on a larger scale, otherwise the gap will only continue to grow between the Global North and Global South.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, we need to consider the impact our decisions may have. Some sectors of academia are beginning to do this, such as decolonisation taking place within Criminology,<sup>41</sup> but this must expand beyond academic writing. The impact of the response to Covid-19 is a tocsin for us all; our decisions are not localised, the choices we make have an impact elsewhere and often on those already on the backfoot.<sup>42</sup> The response to the virus has made it clear which parts of the globe suffer the most and the power the Global North have to reduce such suffering in its policy implementation, for example, preventing the complete cessation of trade could have reduced the impact the response to the virus had upon informal work within the Global South.<sup>43</sup> Whilst this is specific in regard to the virus, it does cast light on how decisions regarding trade, healthcare, gendered violence, and education, could benefit from being made to include the Global South, as whilst policy implemented is usually intended for those under the imposing government, the effects of such policy do travel further with often devastating consequences.<sup>44</sup> Governmental decisions on fundamental issues must therefore be thought of outside the parameters of the respective country, as the Global North and Global South are not co-operating enough when it comes to universal issues such as health and climate change, as demonstrated by the disproportionate poverty gulf created during this pandemic.<sup>45</sup>

In sum, the response to the virus has taught us that we need to be more inclusive of both the Global South and experts from various fields i.e. the social sciences and humanities, when it comes to policy decision-making and that the Global North certainly does not have all of the answers.<sup>46</sup> It is clear that we act in a self-serving manner which has unfortunately meant that poverty, both within the Global North and between the Global North and Global South, has and will continue to increase.<sup>47</sup> It is therefore important that we take from Green's contribution to this, that we must begin to think and therefore respond inclusively, beyond that of the national level.<sup>48</sup> We are all human, and the Global Poor do not deserve to suffer at the hand of their neighbours', often inward-looking, decisions.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid* 128; Al-Ali (n 7) 333-4.

<sup>38</sup> Phillips (n 35).

<sup>39</sup> *ibid* 586. See also Oldekop (n 10) 3.

<sup>40</sup> Franco (n 8) 576; Phillips (n 35) 588; Oldekop (n 10) 3. See also Monica Malta, 'My journey with COVID-19' (2020) 27 *EClinicalMedicine* 1, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Kerry Carrington and others, *The Palgrave Handbook of Criminology and the Global South* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018).

<sup>42</sup> Malta (n 40) 2.

<sup>43</sup> Franco (n 8) 575; Green (n 1) 134.

<sup>44</sup> Green (n 1) 145, 161.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid* 31, 145.

<sup>47</sup> Franco (n 8) 576; Green (n 1) 155.

<sup>48</sup> Oldekop (n 10) 3.

<sup>49</sup> Green (n 1) 133, 155.