

## *The Global Politics of Health* by Sara E. Davies

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Despite the current economic crises and geopolitical uncertainty, global healthcare remains reassuringly at the heart of legislative plans both locally and internationally. Sara E. Davies's book, *Global Politics of Health*, is a timely and important study of global healthcare: its origins, struggles and future. Davies is a post-doctoral researcher at Griffith University and is currently Chief Investigator of an ARC-funded project on the role of the World Health Organization. It is clear that such work has helped shape the focus of this book. In terms of scope, *Global Politics of Health* is highly impressive, covering a range of complex issues related to global health including armed conflict, migration and the commercialisation of medicine in developed and developing nations alike. The book endorses the global 'right to health' by returning to the rhetoric on healthcare espoused by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). However, the book's ambitious aims remain unresolved within the text itself.

The main strengths of *Global Politics of Health* lie in its research-specific focus on current crises relating to health. For example, Davies's chapter on armed conflict and health presents a powerful analysis of numerous conflicts and the subsequent fallout in health terms for the regions concerned. Davies uses her research on

the Bosnian conflict to good effect here by reconsidering existing knowledge on mass rape and genocide from the perspective of long-term health problems for the population. A similar section on the healthcare fallout from the Rwandan conflict is also used to good effect. Arguably, greater use of specific health crises such as these would have helped explain the book's objectives more clearly.

Throughout the book Davies calls upon politicians, philanthropists and social researchers to look beyond the parochialism which pervades many health authorities and to engage with global healthcare within the wider debate on globalisation. *Global Politics of Health* constructs a series of binary oppositions, under the headings 'statism' and 'globalism'. For Davies, healthcare is not a statist issue, or at least, it cannot be confined to the concerns of individual states. Beginning and ending her book by citing the SARS outbreak in 2002-2003 she underlines the tremendous potential of state health agencies to share knowledge and work together in the fight against disease. However, while this book is undoubtedly ambitious and well-researched, both expert and lay readers alike will inevitably expect more of it than perhaps a single volume of this kind is able to achieve given the complexity of its subject matter.

Davies reluctantly acknowledges the problematic breadth of her analysis, recognising that 'when we extrapolate upward to the international realm, the number of relevant agents and contexts expands dramatically' (p.11). Much to its credit, this book engages well with many of these global agents and contexts, and, because of its breadth of focus, the book absorbs many of the key questions in global health today, relating to healthcare aid, governance and treatment of infectious disease. There is, for example, a particularly

illuminating chapter entitled 'Global Health Actors', which examines a range of different organisations' contributions to global healthcare, including the World Health Organisation (WHO), UNAIDS, UNHCR, the Global Fund, the Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. All too often though, it is the WHO which sustains Davies's primary focus at the expense of the other actors. While Davies cites, for example, the accomplishments of the Global Fund, there is very little discussion of the fund's strategy or the current geopolitical framework which exists across a number of non-governmental organisations to provide healthcare for developing nations. There is no doubting the breadth and depth of Davies's research into global health, but the book is somewhat limited in that its emphasis is on the history of global healthcare in the aftermath of the Second World War and the foundation of the UN/WHO. While it is laudable to address the aims of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its intention to provide healthcare for every person, in every nation, the book often fails to reconcile what Davies acknowledges as a 'distant dream' of universal healthcare access with the contemporary debates taking place on healthcare practices across different nations, not to mention the radically different needs of each nation, in terms of funding, political intervention and ethnic diversity among populations.

*Global Politics of Health* should be considered on two levels. There is the conceptual discussion Davies invokes concerning global health as a fundamental problem of globalisation, beset by statist limitations. Beneath this lies an examination of personal responses to failed global healthcare strategies, gleaned from research data on warfare, migration and studies of infectious disease across the world. While it will appeal to a range of different specialists working in

sociology, medicine and international development, it is best-suited to students new to the subject who are interested in obtaining an overview of global health.

Given the book's ambitious reach, it is somewhat surprising that its conclusions on global health are rather generic and unresolved. Davies essentially argues that global health has now become 'an issue' in the sense that it has begun to stimulate a consensus between governments and charities as to how international healthcare is managed. However, many of the issues she addresses in her book are far from new, including, for example, health tourism (especially prevalent in the early AIDS years). Davies underlines the collective need to better understand the relationships between the health strategies of different nations and global health actors. The book is innovative in that it extracts case studies of specific health crises which are frequently overlooked; for example the direct relationship between war and disease. Davies's book endeavours to look beyond the array of statistics and legalese available in other summaries of global health and attempts to incorporate testimonies from those directly afflicted by the most lethal global diseases into her analysis of geopolitical solutions to such health problems. Somewhat frustratingly, much of the book belies the fact that there is already a good awareness of these problems at the level of international government, and in the philanthropic response to healthcare. Potentially, what is called for is a more detailed and nuanced analysis of some of the crucial issues raised in her book, especially related to global conflict as a threat to health. However, while its conclusions are rather generic, this book amounts to a worthy attempt at engaging with global health as an opportunity for change and it

undoubtedly enriches the wider debate surrounding the global funding and management of healthcare.

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