

Global Health and Critique

An International Workshop on the Nature of Critique in Critical Global Health Studies
University of California, San Francisco

A recent, somewhat intriguing trend in the social sciences literature on global health has been the proliferation of the terms ‘critique’ and ‘critical’. Indeed, working under the banner of critical global health studies, a growing number of anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, historians and others have sought to bring a critical perspective to contemporary global health efforts (e.g. Pfeiffer and Nichter, 2008; Fassin, 2012; Biehl and Petryna, 2013; Anderson, 2015). Not surprisingly perhaps, what these scholars understand under critique tends to differ extensively. For many, being critical is about being an activist and committed to social justice. They believe that the historical or ethnographic evidence they collect offers a critical insight into the everyday reality of healthcare in poor countries and the actual concerns of people. This evidence, they suggest, should be used as an ‘empirical lantern’ (Biehl and Petryna, 2013) to challenge and correct the technocratic certainties of global health experts that sometimes hamper effective action against existing inequalities. Other scholars feel more uneasy about such an activist agenda and favour greater scientific and moral detachment. For them, being critical is not about being a ‘global apostle of health’ (Fassin, 2012), but about understanding and tracing the genealogies of the intellectual assumptions, institutional forms and material infrastructures that make it possible to think and do global health today. While such an understanding might well lead to the reformulation of global health problems and practices, it is not necessarily an aim of these scholars.

Jointly organized by the Department of Anthropology, History and Social Medicine at the University of California San Francisco and the Departments of Geography and Social Science, Health & Medicine at King’s College London, this workshop is an opportunity to reflect on these recent efforts to bring a critical perspective to global health. Specifically, the workshop will bring together social and political scientists with global health and biomedical experts to explore the nature, possibility and relevance of critique in the study of global health problems and practices. Among others, the participants at the workshop will discuss some of the following themes:

- Is critique always necessarily aimed at improving or intervening to change global health architectures and practices?
- Does critical knowledge ever stand outside a field of action and purpose like that of global health?
- What are the limits to and advantages of keeping a distinction between the study of global health and global health studies?
- How and where do the methods of critical social science find relevance in global health today?
- How does the field of global health challenge us to change how we do critical theory?

The discussion will be organized around two, pre-circulated papers: Clare Herrick’s ‘The Post-2015 Landscape: Vested Interests, Corporate Social Responsibility and Public Health Advocacy’; and David Reubi’s ‘Epidemiological Accountability: Philanthropists, Epidemiologists and Global Health’. The authors will start by introducing the papers and tease out the different concepts of critique that come into play in their papers and research. Participants will then be invited to react to the papers and reflect on the notions of critique which they encounter and use in their own work.

When? Friday 8 April 2016 | **Where?** Department of Anthropology, History and Social Medicine, University of California San Francisco, 3333 California Street, Laurel Heights, San Francisco, California | **Funding:** King’s College London, University of California San Francisco and Wellcome Trust | **Organisers:** Vincanne Adams (UCSF), Clare Herrick (KCL), Tobias Rees (McGill) and David Reubi (KCL) | **Contact:** david.reubi@kcl.ac.uk.