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Top of the heap: Noelle Sullivan

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By Hannah Gibson



For this installment of Top of the Heap, I was delighted to work with [Noelle Sullivan](#) who is an Assistant Professor of Instruction in Global Health Studies and Anthropology at Northwestern University.

When first asked to contribute to Top of the Heap, I grabbed my favorite recent ethnographies and sat them in a pile. Then I realized that [Warwick Anderson compiled a stunningly similar list](#) two years ago. To his list, I would add Alex Nading's [Mosquito Trails: Ecology, Health and the Politics of Entanglement](#), as I find his analytic lens of "entanglement" particularly insightful. Anderson's list, with the addition of Alex Nading's outstanding work, comprise my go-to ethnographies in medical anthropology: work that combines brilliant writing with the messiness of place, while grappling in some way with what Didier Fassin called "that obscure object of global health". They have been instrumental in expanding my thinking on my own research in Tanzania, and I have used these books extensively in teaching students to critically analyze the politics of global health, and their own good intentions.

Which brings me to the parts of my heap that I'm just starting to work through, or am planning to revisit. Over the last several years I've been

able to observe and explore how health facilities in Tanzania attempt to innovate around the gaps in donor and government attention, or how they engage with or attempt to stretch targeted and highly-funded donor programs in novel ways. As I've observed the semi-privatization of Tanzanian public hospitals, and hospitals' various attempts to make their institutions marketable to various foreigners (short-term foreign clinical volunteers being the subject of my current work), I find myself increasingly exploring questions at the intersections of market logics, governance, and moral economies within and beyond global health.

In this light, on my list to re-read are Salmaan Keshavjee's [Blind Spot: How Neoliberalism Infiltrated Global Health](#) and Hannah Brown's 2015 article "[Global health partnerships, governance, and sovereign responsibility in western Kenya](#)", published in *American Ethnologist*. Keshavjee's book is outstanding in its ability to trace how neoliberal logics became the presumed means to wider social and moral goods within and beyond global health. Brown's article tackles the prominent principle of "partnership" in global health. What happens to a public hospital when it is infiltrated by a variety of "external partners"? Brown's article, along with Alice Street's [Biomedicine in an Unstable Place](#), and Johanna Crane's [Scrambling for Africa](#), are in my view excellent examples of the productive possibilities of analytical convergence of medical anthropology, economic anthropology, science and technology studies, and anthropologies of the state.

Some of the books on my "to read" list grapple with issues increasingly important to me in terms of making sense of the market logics that I'm increasingly observing infiltrate the hospital worlds where I do my research. These include:

- Andrea Muehlebach's [The Moral Neoliberal: Welfare and Citizenship in Italy](#). I'm highly curious about the role of voluntarism in the absence of state social safety nets, and how morality plays into sentiments of voluntarism in such contexts. I expect reading this alongside a re-reading of Vincanne Adams' [Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith](#) will yield considerable insights.
- Sharon Kaufman's [Ordinary Medicine: Extraordinary Treatments, Longer Lives, and Where to Draw the Line](#). Kaufman examines how industry and insurance inform the American healthcare system, and to what ambiguous or even detrimental ends for patients and the health professionals that serve them.
- Karen Ho's [Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street](#) is also on my list. If we're to understand market logics, we must be attentive to the ways that these may differ based on place and subjectivity. I expect this book will add substantially to my understanding of market logics, which Susan Erikson tackles in relationship to global

health in her chapter in [Metrics: What Counts in Global Health](#).

- Finally, Anna L. Tsing's [The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins](#) is on my list in part because within the healthcare system in low income countries, as well as those characteristic of post-disasters (where humanitarian economies are most prominently visible), “ruins” generate considerable moral and material economies that, in my view, are critical to understanding how global health operates in practice in countries with under-resourced health systems. In this sense, exploring the multiple manifestations of capitalist ruins becomes exceedingly relevant to both global health and humanitarianism. Plus, I have long admired her other work and look forward to delving into her most recently published insights.

[Noelle Sullivan](#) is an Assistant Professor of Instruction in Global Health Studies and Anthropology at Northwestern University. Her research spans two projects, one a longitudinal hospital ethnography in Tanzania tracing the effects of health sector reform and global health governance and funding practices on biomedical institutions; the other an ethnographic study of foreign short-term clinical volunteering in Tanzania, and the wider moral and market logics that inform voluntarism in health care settings in low income countries. Her work has appeared in the edited volume [Volunteer Economies: The Politics and Ethics of Voluntary Labour in Africa](#), [Medical Anthropology, Space and Culture](#), and [African Diaspora](#). Her research on foreign clinical volunteering has been featured in media outlets such as [Al Jazeera's The Stream](#), [The Daily Beast](#), and the [Orlando Sentinel](#).

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