

The Ethnography and Social Theory Colloquium Presents

Anthropology and Medical Humanitarianism in the Age of Global Health Education: A Case Study from Sierra Leone



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Department of Anthropology
10 Sachem Street, Room 105
11:30 am – 1:00 pm
(Refreshments served)

As global health is consolidated as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry and intervention, mental health researchers and professionals have been working to carve out and advocate for the place and importance of what they have taken to calling “Global Mental Health,” conducting large-scale mental health surveys and arguing that mental illness constitutes a “hidden epidemic” in poor countries. The growth of interest and investment in Global Health and Global Mental Health dovetails with a boom in new academic global health programs and the rise of a new generation of students driven to engage with global health disparities on an unprecedented scale. My recent work is an effort to understand these trends and transformations together within the same frame and fieldwork project. I have been studying a small, precarious medical humanitarian organization that I call “Global Alliance for Health” that operates in a rural area of postwar Sierra Leone. I describe the experience of including small groups of undergraduate global health students in my summer trips to Sierra Leone and engaging them in collaborative field research according to their disciplinary backgrounds and interests. Through the story of a controversial psychiatric program based at Global Alliance’s small community healthcare clinic, I consider some of the moral dilemmas and unintended consequences generated by the convergence of Global Mental Health agendas, medical humanitarianism, and evolving forms of global health education.

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