

gitim(ized)” by market reforms (180): “partnering,” or outsourcing government functions to private firms, and “choice,” or generating options through which health care consumers are made responsible for their own care. Returning to the field in 2006, 3 years after the Medicare Modernization Act further entrenched the private implementation of public benefits in the United States and its territories, she found an aggressive health insurance marketplace in Puerto Rico. Rather than offering choices that were intelligible, useful, and helpful, the market served to overwhelm, frustrate, and take financial advantage of its imagined citizen-consumers. In the concluding chapter, Mulligan posits four explanations for the failings of managed care in Puerto Rico: (1) its prioritization of profit over care; (2) its basis in “asocial and ahistorical understandings” (210) of both beneficiaries and employees; (3) corporate arrogance; and (4) colonial relations of rule. Recognizing that optimism is essential to the neoliberal project, Mulligan concludes her book with a summary statement of the incommensurability between the utopian vision of marketized care and its enactment. Direct and well-argued, this section should make essential reading for scholars and practitioners of health policy, health insurance, and health systems administration. Indeed, it would match well with more popular texts (e.g., Potter 2010).

Mulligan’s skill in marshalling closely observed, conceptually exemplary ethnographic vignettes to expose the contradictions of neoliberal health governance inflects every chapter and, indeed, the book’s seamless arc. While I wish she had elaborated more on performativity of service to converse with other texts outside of medical anthropology and, to a lesser extent, the anthropologies of finance, accounting, and policy (drawing on the anthropologies of the service industry and call centers may have been valuable here), Mulligan’s novel topic and methods, incisive analysis, and excellent writing more than compensate for its subdisciplinary specificity. Mulligan’s other strengths include her constant attention to Puerto Rico’s unique sociopolitical and historical status, her talent for making intelligible otherwise obfuscating industry terminology, and her clearly fraught but beautifully written reflections on her own role within the system. *Unmanageable Care* is a manageable text that makes important contributions not only to medical anthropology, the anthropology of policy, and the anthropology of neoliberal markets more broadly, but also to the medical history of the postcolonial era, studies of global and community health, and even behavioral economics. An apt teaching text, in full, for graduate courses as well as, in selections, for undergraduates, this first-ever ethnographic investigation of a managed care organization will hopefully not be Mulligan’s, or anthropology’s, last.

## References Cited

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- On the Hooghly**
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- Navigating Austerity: Currents of Debt along a South Asian River*. By Laura Bear. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015.
- You are the captain of an enormous container ship traveling down the River Hooghly, a tributary running from the Ganges to the Bay of Bengal that has been a vital artery for trade to South Asia, Europe, and East Asia for 150 years. You are pushing to make delivery before a looming deadline. But these are austere times. The state has cut back on dredging the shipping lanes, and your ship, powering ahead, may clear the riverbed by no more than 10 cm in places. One mistake could run you aground, putting your ship and your livelihood at risk. This vivid illustration of the effects of fiscal discipline on public-sector institutions is just one of many that appear in Laura Bear’s illuminating account of the infrastructures of global trade on the Hooghly. *Navigating Austerity*, an apt title, examines how bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, and river workers on the Hooghly understand acts of labor and entrepreneurship in a time of austerity, short-term speculative planning, and a state debt crisis. Bear draws on archival data collected from a small port library, ethnographic data from participant observation along the waterway, and policy documents produced by the development industry to reveal how debt, circulation, and time work in austerity economies.
- In the opening chapters, having sifted through public records dating from 1880 to 2004, Bear presents a coherent historical narrative of austerity in the shipping business along the Hooghly. This focuses on the quotidian practices of state debt that have dramatically reshaped the governance of labor, property, nature, and technology involved in shipping infrastructure, as public debts turned into commercial relationships with financial creditors (36). The result is the development of a rentier austerity state, increased support for private profit, and unregulated labor, with increase in contractual private-sector workers and a decline in unionized public-sector workers (39). The ethnographic findings that comprise the bulk of the book explore how this shift in state debt policies is experienced and acted upon by the people who work on the Hooghly. Bear focuses on four sites central to the shipping infrastructure along the Hooghly: the docks and the launches; networks of marine officers; the boat men and entrepreneurs linked to the port office; and private ship yards. As well as interviewing infor-

mants at these sites, Bear joined official tours along the Hooghly, attempting to participate in the work of the waterscape economy. The book is written with detail and humility, and it is easy to imagine Bear climbing steep ladders onto the ships; clambering over the decaying wreckage of vessels in disrepair (the “state detritus”; 21) or taking notes in air-conditioned meetings with high-level officials.

Chapter 4, *Governing Speculation*, introduces a savvy waterfront bureaucrat called Vikas Bose. Off the back of his relatively minor official position—licensing and inspecting vessels to protect public safety—Vikas managed to cultivate an impressive network of effective social relations. His influence ranged from the pimps who operated “love boat” brothels to high-level officials and wealthy contractors. Shadowing the work of Vikas and examining the local idiom of *jogajog kora*—the creation of useful friendships—Bear illustrates not only how a man like Vikas can rise to prominence on the waterfront but, on a grander scale, how things actually get done on the muddy verges of the Hooghly, where private interests merge with state infrastructures under austerity capitalism. With an ever-expanding purview, Vikas fixes himself in the operations along the waterfront as friend, promoter, and official inspector of a chain of outsourced businesses. These were seen as simultaneously parasitic and an important source of revenue for the port. The contradictions of austerity capitalism, Bear claims, “are temporarily ‘fixed’ not through large-scale processes but through small, piecemeal ethical solutions that allow circulation to continue” (131). Moving things forward is exactly where Vikas excels. What is fascinating about Bear’s discussion here is that, as well as being an excellent ethnographic exposition of how the state operates, it moves beyond more predictable analysis of strategic alliance (often hierarchical client-patron relationships) and addresses the cultivation of relationships between people of comparatively equal standing, such as entrepreneurs and bureaucrats.

*Navigating Austerity* ends with two conclusions. The first draws on the ethnographic data presented in the previous chapters to argue that work should be considered an act that takes place as part of reciprocal circulations of life. The second utilizes policy documents from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank and the writings of economists to show how sovereign debt, subordinated to the demands of financial markets, underpins the conditions for austerity capitalism. In this state of being, national government credit guarantees the profits of private investors; administrators pursue least-cost, fastest, low-tech solutions; labor conditions become dangerous; and employee rights become precarious. Writing against austerity capitalism, Bear suggests a new public conversation about governing financing that amplifies the “long-term ethical and political aspects of rule and deepens the relationship between citizens and governments” (208).

Bear’s critiques of sovereign debt and austerity capitalism are far more powerful and persuasive when launched from the muddy banks of the River Hooghly than they are in the pages of World Bank policy documents. But her ability to navigate the linkages between local practices and global processes is a particular strength of the book. Her engagement with life and work in the riverine economy renders the effects of the global economy, austerity capitalism, and the financialization of sovereign debt both intelligible and terrifying.

Beneath the surface of a narrative of decay and inventive regeneration under austerity capitalism is a thoughtful examination of masculinity, materials, workmanship and sacrifice. One of Bear’s key insights in this regard is the framing of a particular Bengali masculinity required to survive the unpredictable force of the Hooghly. This was a mental and physical masculine strength, referred to as *shahosh*. Qualities of *shahosh* not only were associated with a masculinity at work, but were also part of the political solidarities of a Bengali nationalism, particularly when river development is thought of nostalgically as patriotic work, “restoring the river to its Hindu origins” (65). The other popular idiom through which workers conceptualized their toils was *shakti* (life force). Ship builders in particular would talk of the loss of *shakti* through arduous labor and the need to replenish it with the right food. As Bear’s informants put it, “When you are old and worn out, and all your *shakti* is gone, then the company will not care. They will throw you away and you will just not be able to work” (169). *Shakti* drained from a person through labor, Bear claims, is transferred to the ship itself. Workers’ labor is a sacrifice that amplifies individual power into a collective achievement. Here, *shahosh* and *shakti* tie together the theme of endurance and regeneration.

In a similar way, Bear illustrates how skills and workmanship are understood within a longer historical narrative of patriotism and the broader notion of Bengali masculinity. Through this, Bear reminds us that “Labor belongs to life” (186). While men and women on the Hooghly labor to the rhythms, timescales, and values of the market, they do so for their families and for themselves. The life force of *shakti* flows through skilled and arduous work into the regeneration of families by securing funds for marriages and into the production of ships and infrastructure, materials that come to stand for regenerating the nation with a distinctly Hindu valence. Workers on the Hooghly consider their efforts against an entirely different scale and ethic of productivity, transforming their labor into legacy. *Navigating Austerity* has given becalmed debates on India’s experiment with economic liberalization a new set of coordinates. By foregrounding the ethical projects that frame economic action, Bear has made a powerful case for the social reckoning of state debt and against the privatization of public interests under the logic of austerity, enriching our understanding of capitalism.