

Department of Liberal Studies Interdisciplinary Conference on Epidemics:

The



Socio-Historical, Artistic and Political Expressions and Epidemiologies

of Global Disease

February 24 & 25, 2017



Friday, February 24

All Sessions in Steven G. Mihaylo Hall 1308

8:00-9:00

Registration/Coffee

9:00-9:15

Welcome and Introduction

Margaret Garber and Andrea Patterson

9:15-10:15

Plenary: Navid Madani

Harvard Medical School, Department of Global Health & Social Medicine
Introduction by Maria Linder (CSUF, Biochemistry)

35 Years of HIV/AIDS: What the Pandemic has Taught Us About Biology and Humanity

10:15-10:30

Coffee

10:30-12:00

Session I (*Chair, Emily Bonney*)

Epidemics at the Intersection of Race, Gender & Sexuality

- Andrea Milne, The Radical Politics of the World's First AIDS Ward
- Jorge Fontdevila, Sexual Meanings and HIV among Latino Gay and Bisexual Men
- Michelle Teti, Critical Perspectives of HIV Prevention and Treatment

12:00-1:00

Lunch

1:15-2:45

Session II (*Chair, Jim Hofmann*)

Evolving Epidemics: Susceptibility, Resistance and the Role of Social Systems as Agents of Disease

- María Soledad Ramírez, Superbug: Evidence of Super-fast Evolution, What Can We Do?
- Parvin Shahrestani, Evolution of Infection-Resistance in Large Populations
- Joshua Yang, Health in Modernity: Capitalism, Neoliberalism and Epidemics

2:45-3:00

Coffee

3:00-4:15

Keynote: Jonathan David Katz

New York State University at Buffalo, Department of Art

How AIDS Changed American Art

Saturday, February 25

All Sessions in Steven G. Mihaylo Hall 1406

8:00-8:30

Registration/Coffee

8:30-10:00

Session III (*Chair, Saul Tobias*)

Contagion Around the Pacific

- Ian Read, Tragedy at the Tropic of Capricorn: Nineteenth Century Globalization and Epidemiological Change on Two Sides of South America
- Michael Weiner, An Imagined Epidemic: Leprosy and Leprosy Control in 20th Century Japan
- Ted Lowe, Suicide Epidemics, Neoliberal Development, and the Image of the Recalcitrant Native in Oceania

10:00-10:15

Coffee/Bagels

10:15-11:45

Session IV (*Chair, Mark Fischer*)

Death and Epidemics of “Choice”

- Terri Snyder, Was there an Epidemic of Slave Suicide? A Perspective From Eighteenth-Century British America
- Eliza Noh, Terror as Usual: The Role of the Model Minority Myth in Asian American Women’s Suicidality
- Jochen Burgtorf, Joining Hands Around the Grave: The 'Dance of Death'

11:45-12:00

Coffee

12:00-1:00

Plenary: Monica Green

Arizona State University, Department of History

Re-learning Epidemics Past: What Plague Can Teach Us Now

1:00 -2:00

Lunch

2:00-3:00

Roundtable (*Moderator: Kevin Lambert*)

This conference made possible by a generous donation from Ronald E. Clapper and with support from the Department of Liberal Studies and the Center for the History and Philosophy of Science, Technology and Medicine (CHPSTM).

ABSTRACTS

Keynote Jonathan David Katz: How AIDS Changed American Art

In place of AIDS' familiar role as a tragic tangent to the development of American culture--as a literal dead end—Dr. Katz argues that AIDS has in fact been one of the most powerful shaping forces in American art since the 1980s. Of course, we have repressed AIDS' role in the making of our culture in keeping with our longstanding repression of AIDS in general. But repression, as we know from psychoanalysis, is the sign of great power. In this talk, Katz illustrates how AIDS has fundamentally shifted the American cultural landscape, exploring not only the manifold losses AIDS has inflicted, but also how, in response to both AIDS and the prejudice it engendered, a plague has rewritten both the form and content of American art.

Jonathan D. Katz, State University of New York at Buffalo, Department of Art

Plenary Navid Madani: 35 Years of HIV/AIDS: What the Pandemic Has Taught Us about Biology and Humanity

The scourge of the HIV virus has left no part of the world untouched. 35 years after the onset of AIDS, scientists and health care professionals are still struggling to find an efficient and strong preventive modality to halt this devastating epidemic. There have been many challenges along the way and also tremendous successes; the main one being the transformation of an acute disease to a chronic one through years of scientific discoveries. Dr. Madani will share what has been learned about the biology of the virus and its host, as well as a discussion of the social and philosophical questions that have arisen during the AIDS era.

Navid Madani, Harvard Medical School, Department of Global Health & Social Medicine

Plenary Monica Green: Re-learning Epidemics Past: What Plague Can Teach Us Now

The field that now calls itself “global health” is a strange marriage of academic interests and public activism, biomedical science and social knowledge, public health practices and political maneuvering. These forces that have coalesced in the latter half of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first have roots that extend back far more deeply in time. The global community is learning anew that epidemics (and even the threat of pandemics) are not a relic of the past, but an eventuality we must prepare for as we look into the future. Dr. Green examines what the past can teach us through an examination of evolutionary histories of *Yersinia pestis* (the bacterial agent of the Black Death and successive plagues of Eurasia and Africa) that have been constructed using molecular genetics. Her talk provides insights into where epidemics (and even pandemics) come from, and also how human communities dealt with them before the antibiotic revolution of the mid-20th century.

Monica Green, Arizona State University, Department of History

SESSION I: EPIDEMICS AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF RACE, GENDER & SEXUALITY

1. The Radical Politics of the World's First AIDS Ward

The Ward 5B's creation, and the intimate labor performed by its nurses, must be understood as radical political activism. In the context of a highly stigmatized epidemic, the nurses' nontraditional approach to patient relations was as much a form of political messaging as forms of care and empathy. Informed by a queer, feminist ethic, the ward was already a politicized space, as was the model of AIDS care that its nurses pioneered. Milne will discuss how the space the nurses

created—and the kind of care they provided—was contingent on the patient population, and representative of larger social and political stratifications within the City of San Francisco.

Andrea Milne, University of California Irvine, Department of History

2. Sexual Meanings and HIV among Latino Gay and Bisexual Men

Epidemics do not exist in a vacuum and structural and cultural factors can be more significant to the burden of disease of a population than the disease's pathogens. Sexual stigma and discrimination are considered social determinants because they are linked to access to resources that affect and perpetuate health disparities among sexual and gender minorities—including barriers to HIV care and treatment, family rejection, and job or housing denials. In such unequal contexts, men who have sex with men remain the US population most affected by HIV/AIDS. Moreover, African American and Latino men are even more disproportionately impacted. Dr. Fontdevila will share his ethnographic research among Latino gay and bisexual immigrant men in Southern California, and show that different cultural meanings during sex may partly facilitate HIV transmission in these populations. Thus effective HIV prevention strategies require deep cultural knowledge and engagement in the lived worlds of those affected by the epidemic.

Jorge Fontdevila, CSUF, Department of Sociology

3. Critical Perspectives of HIV Prevention and Treatment: The use of Photovoice to Create a Blank Canvas for Patient-Driven Questions & Solutions

HIV is a significant public health problem among vulnerable populations at the intersection of income, racial/ethnic, sex/gender, and sexual orientation-based disparities. To improve the health of people with HIV (PWH) and decrease HIV transmission, HIV/AIDS public health initiatives emphasize linking PWH to care and medications and encouraging safe sex and drug using practices. Experiences like stigma, homelessness, and violence often leave them unable to follow such directives. Dr. Teti will discuss public health HIV prevention and treatment messaging, and describe how she uses Photovoice to better align public health messaging to respond to patients' questions. By giving PWH an opportunity to think critically and creatively about their lives, they can express their needs and inform public health messages and solutions that fit their lived experiences.

Michelle Teti, University of Missouri, Department of Health Sciences

SESSION II: EVOLVING EPIDEMICS AND NEW CHALLENGES

1. Superbug: Evidence of Super-fast Evolution, What Can We Do?

Over the last few years, the number of antibiotic resistant bacteria prevalent in clinical settings has risen—alarming both scientists and government agencies. President Obama issued an executive order stating that antibiotic-resistant bacteria “represent a serious threat to public health and the economy” and declared antibiotic-resistant bacteria a “national security priority.”

Among these dangerous pathogens, the “ESKAPE” group of bacteria is of profound concern, as these microorganisms cause the majority of hospital infections and effectively “escape” available treatments. Resistance to all commercially available antibiotics has been reported, making the treatment of these infections even more difficult. Dr. Ramirez discusses the genetic basis of antibiotic resistance, how bacteria can evolve rapidly towards pan-drug resistance, and what we can do to try to stop this massive spreading of resistant superbugs.

María Soledad Ramírez, CSUF, Department of Biological Science

2. Evolution of Infection-Resistance in Large Populations

Individuals in populations vary in their susceptibilities and resistances to pathogenic infection. This variability can result from both environment and genotype. In order to understand the genetic differences in infection-resistance and the evolution of infection-resistance, Dr. Shahrestani used *Drosophila melanogaster* (fruit fly) and exposed it to pathogens (fungus *B. bassiana*). Comparisons of whole-genome sequence data from resistant and susceptible populations revealed that there are hundreds of genomic regions involved in immune defense against *B. bassiana*. Populations which evolved resistance to one fungal pathogen also became resistant to another fungal pathogen, but did not become resistant to bacterial pathogens. Results show that infection-resistance is genetically complex, potentially involving hundreds of genes. Moreover, by changing the frequencies of pre-existing genetic variants, genetically diverse populations can evolve in just a few generations to become resistant to some pathogens.

Parvin Shahrestani, CSUF, Department of Biological Science

3. Health in Modernity: Capitalism, Neoliberalism and Epidemics

Infectious disease epidemics have existed as long as people have lived. The modern period, with its emphasis on rationality, democracy, and capitalism, has seen advances in medicine and public health which have helped to ease the threat of infectious diseases worldwide. Yet, an emerging wave of death and disability from non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, pulmonary diseases, and cancer, is now responsible for over two-thirds of deaths worldwide, and has been referred to by the WHO as an emerging epidemic. Capitalism is the dominant system of economic organization, but a neoliberal political rationality has also infused political and other spheres of society, including public health. Dr. Yang explores the relationship between non-communicable diseases and neoliberalism, and he challenges prevailing notions of epidemics to consider the role of social systems as vectors and agents of disease and illness.

Joshua S. Yang, CSUF, Department of Health Science

SESSION III: CONTAGIONS AND CONFIGURATIONS FROM THREE EDGES OF THE PACIFIC

Definitions of what constitutes an "epidemic" varies widely because it can reflect as much a change in the perception of and cultural meaning attributed to a changing environment or human behavior as a change in the physical environment or human action. This panel seeks to explore the ever-shifting line between physicality and cultural meaning in epidemiology. The three presentations by faculty of Soka University of America, will discuss 1) the arrival of a more "fertile" epidemiological environmental in South America in the 19th century; 2) Leprosy in Japan in the 20th century; and 3) an "epidemic" of suicides in Micronesia in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. By reflecting on contagion over three centuries and from three important edges of the Pacific Basin, Drs. Read, Weiner, and Low seek to explore epidemiological disruptions and continuities over a period when the Pacific transformed from a barrier into a gateway.

1. Tragedy at the Tropic of Capricorn: Nineteenth Century Globalization and Epidemiological Change on Two Sides of South America

Ian Read, SOKA University, Department of Latin American Studies

2. Leprosy Control in 20th Century Japan: Confinement and Criminalization

Michael Weiner, SOKA University, Dept. of East Asian History & International Studies

3. Suicide Epidemics, Neoliberal Development, and the Image of the Recalcitrant Native in Oceania

Edward Lowe, SOKA University, Department of Anthropology

SESSION IV: DEATH AND EPIDEMICS OF “CHOICE”

1. Was there an Epidemic of Slave Suicide? A Perspective From Eighteenth-Century British America

Dr. Snyder explores early modern perspectives on suicide epidemics among enslaved men and women. European observers of the slave trade were often shocked at the resolve and numbers of captive Africans who killed themselves. Slaves were particularly at risk to die by suicide during transport across the Atlantic and in the initial 3-4 year period of adjustment to plantation labor. Enslavers viewed slave suicides as infectious, particularly when slaves killed themselves serially (one after another) or collectively (simultaneously). Today researchers study epidemics in relationship to biological causes affecting unsuspecting persons, the choices that lead to the spread of deadly disease, and the social consequences of pandemics. Slave suicide, however, raises a different question about epidemics, one that is well worth considering. When the context of the slave trade produces a conscious longing for death, can we understand suicide among slaves as an epidemic of choice?

Terri L. Snyder, CSUF, Department of American Studies

2. Terror as Usual: The Role of the Model Minority Myth in Asian American Women's Suicidality

Dr. Noh examines the influence of the model minority myth on the formation of suicidal tendencies among Asian American women, by attempting to reveal its dynamic connections to social, economic and political factors, which create limited choices and practical pressures for Asian American women. She examines the contradictory, tragic consequences of a social stereotype that praises Asian American success and, at the same time, contributes to the self-destruction of many Asian Americans. Based on Asian American women's suicide narratives, her research illustrates how 1) the pressure to succeed creates unbearable stress for individuals, particularly within racist and sexist “cultures of terror” that are structured to hinder success; 2) the dissimulation of the myth as a social fact influences Asian American women to blame themselves, if they are unable to succeed; and 3) the image of model success contributes to Asian American women becoming over-looked in the distribution of needed help and resources, further exacerbating their suicidal conditions.

Eliza Noh, CSUF, Department of Asian American Studies

3. Joining Hands Around the Grave: The 'Dance of Death'

Dr. Burgtorf addresses representations of this genre in visual arts, literature, and music in late medieval and early modern Europe.

Jochen Burgtorf, CSUF, Department of History

Epidemics play an increasingly urgent role at the intersections of human rights and global public health efforts. The example of HIV/AIDS has shown that epidemics impact not only health providers and patients, but alter social and political landscapes, and influence artistic expressions. This conference examines how prevention and treatment are connected to issues of race, gender, and sexuality. It also investigates what we may learn from epidemics of the past, such as the plague or leprosy, and how we might prepare ourselves for newly emerging epidemics as a result of antibiotic-resistant superbugs. Finally, the definitions of what constitutes an “epidemic” are explored in the context of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, or contagions of suicide as a response to social conditions, such as slavery or stereotyping.

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