

AusSTS Online Workshop Series

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Thursday 16th July, 10am - 11:30am

PRESENTER: Associate Professor Adia Benton

TITLE: Epidemic projections: Race, risk and capital during a health emergency

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I build on earlier research about infectious disease models developed to analyze and predict Ebola transmission dynamics in West Africa to ask: What kinds of assumptions about people and places, about time, and about danger underlie these projections? What are the stakes of using these models not only to predict disease dynamics and speculate about effective interventions, but also to monetize them for the purposes of generating profit for private investors and delivering financial assistance to cash-strapped governments in the midst of an epidemic? When epidemic models are used to define the parameters of pandemic bond payouts, risk and uncertainty have been harnessed to generate profits and move capital into cash-strapped health markets (Erikson 2015; Sridar and Stein 2015). Formally, proprietary models underwrite the pandemic emergency financing facility (PEF), a financing mechanism developed to rapidly and efficiently fund responses to a select number of epidemics in low-income countries. This financing framework, devised by the World Bank under physician-anthropologist Jim Yong Kim's leadership, raises deep ethical questions about the commodification and financialization of suffering (Erikson 2019). Via a close reading of the instruments' documentation ("the terms"), investigative reporting on its deployment in an Ebola outbreak, and ethnographic interviews with modelers, I recast these ethical questions not through a political economic critique of financialization per se (Erikson 2015; Sridar and Stein 2016) or of theories of biovalue (Waldby 2002; Sunder Rajan 2006), but rather of racial capital and risk ideologies embedded in relationships among international financial institutions, corporatized mathematical expertise, insurers and health organizations (Kish and Leroy 2015; Melamed 2015).

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Dr. Adia Benton is Assistant Professor in the department of anthropology at Northwestern University, Chicago. She is a cultural anthropologist with interests in global health, biomedicine, development and humanitarianism and professional sports. Dr. Benton focuses on patterns of inequality in the distribution of and the politics of care in settings "socialized" for scarcity. This means understanding the political, economic and historical factors shaping how care is provided in complex humanitarian emergencies and in longer-term development projects - like those for health.

Her first book, *HIV Exceptionalism: Development Through Disease in Sierra Leone* (University of Minnesota, 2015), explores the treatment of AIDS as an exceptional disease and the recognition and care that this takes away from other diseases and public health challenges in poor countries.

REGISTER ONLINE: aussts2020-keynote.eventbrite.com.au

SESSION 1

Thursday 23rd July, 10am – 11:30am

TITLE: Participating in research now

PRESENTERS: Jenny Kennedy (RMIT), Kari Lancaster (UNSW), Timothy Neale (Deakin) and Matthew Kearnes (UNSW)

FACILITATORS: Kari Lancaster (UNSW) and Timothy Neale (Deakin)

DESCRIPTION

“Participation has been formatted, proceduralised, scaled-up, and turned into a tool-kit in the effort to spread it everywhere” writes anthropologist Christopher Kelty in *The Participant* (Chicago, 2019). Don’t we all want to participate? For all its problems, participation still has a great public image, in large part due to its associations with self-expression and democratic legitimacy. Meanwhile, the terminology surrounding those who engage with our research projects, and how we as researchers engage in the worlds we act on and observe, continues to shift. Are those with whom we do research perhaps “interlocutors” engaged in a dialogue, or “collaborators” in a kind of conspiracy, or maybe “participants” in our imposed agendas? Are we as researchers “participant observers” or can we not help but to interfere? These questions have been thrown into sharp relief in 2020, as questions about how we engage has been disrupted, triggering new thinking about the forms of participation that have characterised research and how they might be remade. In this workshop, Kari Lancaster, Jenny Kennedy, Timothy Neale and Matthew Kearnes will reflect on the many meanings of participation in their research. Those who attend the workshop will be required to complete a small amount of reading beforehand and submit a question – relating to participation – about a current or possible future research project for small group discussion.

REGISTER ONLINE: aussts2020-sessionone.eventbrite.com.au

SESSION 2

Thursday 30th July, 10am – 11:30am

TITLE: Digital life as archive

PRESENTERS: Celia Roberts (ANU), Adrian Mackenzie (ANU), and Emily van der Nagel (Monash)

FACILITATORS: Courtney Addison (VUW), Declan Kuch (UNSW), and Owen McNamara (ANU)

DESCRIPTION

In this event, Celia Roberts (ANU), Adrian Mackenzie (ANU), and Emily van der Nagel (Monash) will discuss the conceptual possibilities, ethics, and politics of conducting research online. At a time when curtailed mobility has prompted many of us to take our work online, these conversations will consider some of the digital artefacts that avail themselves of STS analyses. While some traditional archives have gone online and other forms of archive are taking shape through the affordances of the internet (Ogden, Halford, and Carr 2019), conceptualising digital life as archive attunes us to the epistemic resources and the power dynamics that guide their aggregation online (Zeitlan 2012). This event comprises three/four ten minute talks on this theme and a subsequent panel discussion, followed by a workshop for HDR and ECRs who wish to engage further in these discussions.

REGISTER ONLINE: aussts2020-sessiontwo.eventbrite.com.au

SESSION 3

Thursday 6th June, 10am – 11:30am

TITLE: Disruption, opportunity and re/arranging STS research

PRESENTERS: Andrea Ballestero (Rice University) and Tess Lea (University of Sydney)

FACILITATORS: Michaela Spencer (CDU), Jennifer Macdonald (CDU) and Kirsty Howey (University of Sydney)

DESCRIPTION

As COVID-19 interrupts travel and irrevocably shifts research plans, is this an opportunity to reconfigure base assumptions about ways of performing research? The pandemic has forced researchers to grapple with new processes and technologies for working together. In doing so, there are many opportunities STS scholars been exploring and confronting. From rethinking the 'business model' of academic research predicated on air travel, to developing new more specifically emplaced research partnerships, prioritising 'studying up or across', reconsidering assumptions about the significance of 'being there', and grappling with 'the ontological affordances/disruptions of screens'. We will explore these ideas through short invited reflections by senior and emerging scholars navigating these times; and consider not just how we stay on track, but possibilities (and challenges) for rearranging STS research in the current moment.

Each Zoom workshop participant will be asked to submit a brief summary of their current research concerns, and some key points on current research challenges and opportunities provoked by the COVID-19 disruptions after they register.

REGISTER ONLINE: aussts2020-sessionthree.eventbrite.com.au