



SOKA UNIVERSITY OFFICE OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS PRESENTS

Disease and Disease Control in Eras of Globalization Conference

Friday | Sept 22 | 4:45 - 7:00 PM
Saturday | Sept 23 | 9 AM - 1 PM
Soka University of America Athenaeum

Edward Lowe: *Suicide Epidemics, Neoliberal Development, and the Image of the Recalcitrant Native in Oceania*

Abstract

In this paper, I am interested in how the formation of expertise aimed at the problematizing of and intervention into epidemics can be an important arena for the formation of post-colonial governance. In this case, I am specifically interested in the suicide epidemics that have been well documented for the Pacific Islands of Fiji, Samoa, and the various island polities of Micronesia in the 1970s and 1980s. Through this documentary analysis, I aim to explore, first, how a common set of long-established epidemiological technologies of documentation and representation were appropriated to stabilize and represent the suicide problem and establish it as an urgent crisis requiring intervention at that time. Second, I document how members of the network drew on established causal theories that related modernizing social change to societal vulnerabilities for suicide in addition to fashioning somewhat competing post-hoc rationalizations that aim to stabilize a causal narrative for the epidemiological patterns. In my discussion of these causal narratives, ideas about indigenous culture and the purported recalcitrance of some local peoples – particularly those who held offices of traditional authority such as parents and local chiefs and clergy -- to give up the cultural logics that authorized their power over others -- particularly over adolescents and young adults -- in favor of more liberal democratic (i.e., “civilized”) forms of local governance, interpersonal relations, and social mobility.