

DISCUSSION AID #4: WALD ON OUTBREAK NARRATIVES

This information will serve us both in discussion as reminders and reference, and later (potentially), in your subsequent writing and projects.

Ideas & Topics

- ✓ **outbreak narrative** (33): Wald analyzes the rise of the conventional "outbreak narrative":

"The outbreak narrative fuses the transformative force of myth with the authority of science. It animates the figures and maps the spaces of global modernity. It also-accrues contradictions: the obsolescence and tenacity of borders, the attraction and threat of strangers, and especially the destructive and formative power of contagion. It both acknowledges and obscures the interactions and global formations that challenge national belonging in particular"

"The outbreak narrative is a powerful story of ecological danger and epidemiological belonging, and as it entangles analyses of disease emergence and changing social and political formations, it affects the experience of both."

- ✓ **expertise & visualization** (37): Wald provides commentary on how "expertise" is construed and constructed in outbreak narratives: "Typically, outbreak stories convey that expertise as the ability to make the unseen world appear. Visual technologies, from electron microscopes to epidemiological maps and charts, are an important part of the outbreak narrative."
- ✓ **contagion** (37): "Contagion, that is, charts social interactions that are often not otherwise visible, and the manifestation of those contacts and connections is another important feature of outbreak narratives."
- ✓ **vengeance of oppressed vs. vengeance of Nature** (45): Emerging infections become, in these accounts, phantasms of consequences and, with the attribution of motive, revenge, but where one might expect the vengeance of the impoverished and oppressed, it is instead displaced onto the obscene goddess, Nature herself."
- ✓ **"germ theories of history"** (48+): Wald notes the limitations and depoliticization of history by attempts to account for populations and civilizations as biological events
- ✓ **imagined communities** (51+): Wald adapts Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities to discuss and theorize how outbreak narratives relate to idea of community and populations
- ✓ **community & stranger/carrier** (57): The community articulated through disease is balanced precariously between its fear and exclusion of strangers and its need for them, poised anxiously between desired stasis and necessary flux. The outbreak narrative demonstrates the incorporation of the stranger / carrier in some form into the community. That incorporation is often conceived as a communal sacrifice; it shows the power of the agents of transformation, and it can be performed in different ways"

"If epidemiologists map the imagined community of the global village, charting infectious diseases as they cross national borders, the depiction, as much as the management, of those diseases reinforces the boundaries. The use of disease to imagine as well as regulate communities powerfully enacts the most anxious dimensions of national relatedness. The inextricability of disease and national belonging shapes the experiences of both; disease assumes a political significance, while national belonging becomes nothing less than a matter of health. With their powerfully defining ambivalence, those terms mandate the dangerous necessity of the stranger and the representational technologies by which that stranger is brought into the community." (67)