

## **CFP: Reframing Disease Reservoirs: Histories & Ethnographies of Pathogens & Pestilence**

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Type:

Conference

Date:

February 28, 2021

Location:

United Kingdom

Subject Fields:

Animal Studies, Anthropology, Environmental History / Studies, History of Science, Medicine, and Technology, Architecture and Architectural History

### **Reframing Disease Reservoirs: Histories & Ethnographies of Pathogens & Pestilence, 27-28 May 2021**

1st annual conference of *The Global War Against the Rat and the Epistemic Emergence of Zoonosis*;

Online Conference, Department of Social Anthropology, University of St Andrews

27-28 May 2021

The idea of disease reservoirs - that particular animals, people, or environments harbour or distribute disease - has profoundly shaped human relationships to nature. From plague-stricken rats and trypanosomiasis-harboursing zebra to bats as suspect reservoirs of COVID-19 or Ebola, animals have been central to epidemiology and disease management since the end of the nineteenth century. Creatures bearing the label of 'reservoir' have been cast as reviled pests to be eliminated, managed as potential risks through new forms of sanitary intervention or mapped with curiosity about the diversity of their species. Moreover, entire environments have been denounced as 'diseased' or 'unhealthy' or in need of 'cleansing' through vast sanitary campaigns. Marginalised humans, likewise, have been stigmatized as reservoirs of disease and, at times, such thinking has been deployed in justification of segregation and discrimination. With its range of meanings and uncertainties, the concept of a disease reservoir has been epistemologically fraught, taking on different meanings amongst different groups of people in different periods. What constitutes a reservoir, and which animals, plants, or environments are reservoirs of disease? How and where did this concept emerge and why? What is its intellectual lineage? Which other medical concepts intersected with the idea of the disease reservoir throughout its history?

Bringing together perspectives from the humanities and the social sciences in dialogue with the life sciences, this online conference seeks to understand the past and present of disease reservoirs. In so doing, it aims to elucidate the historical construction of the concept of a disease reservoir, its epistemological complexities and ethnographic realities, and to examine how it has shaped relationships between humans, animals, space, wilderness and the environment. Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Intellectual histories of the scientific concept of a disease reservoir and related concepts.
- The different spaces in which knowledge about disease reservoirs was produced.
- Indigenous and vernacular conceptions of animals, peoples, and environments as sources of disease.
- How various concepts of disease reservoirs have shaped relationships between humans and animals.
- The agency of the reservoir: histories of animals and environments deemed reservoirs of disease.
- How have ideas of diseases being harboured in specific peoples, environments, or regions produced or naturalised concepts of racial difference?
- Anxieties and uncertainties over the definition of a reservoir of disease in past and present.
- The transnational or global movements of disease-harboring species such as rodents, mosquitos, African “big game”, bats, or primates.
- Transnational and global circulations of knowledge pertaining to disease reservoirs
- How disease reservoirs have shaped or challenged environmentalist movements.
- The relationship between disease reservoirs and nature reserves.
- Disease reservoirs and colonial legacies: decolonial or postcolonial approaches.
- Economic histories of disease reservoir management.
- The relationship between disease reservoirs, racism, discrimination, and public health.
- How the management of disease reservoirs has shaped architecture, urban planning, engineering, and sanitation.

Prospective participants are welcome to send an abstract of the presentation (approx. 200 words, in English) and a short biographical note to [wwrat@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:wwrat@st-andrews.ac.uk) by the 28th of February 2021. **We kindly ask applicants to include “WWRAT Conference 1 Proposal” in the email subject line.**

**Convenors:**

Matheus Alves Duarte da Silva (University of St Andrews)

Jules Skotnes-Brown (University of St Andrews)

Oliver French (University of St Andrews)

In collaboration with Frédéric Keck (CNRS - Collège de France - EHESS)

For more information regarding the Conference and the project *The Global War Against the Rat and the Epistemic Emergence of Zoonosis*, [click here](#).

Contact Info:

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