

# ***Viral Worlds***

## ***Researching and Experimenting with the Flesh of the World***

A concern for the reach of pathogenic viral matter into human bodies emerged as a deeply colonial project, with fears over the transformation of endemic diseases into epidemic ones conjoined with cautions of population decline in the colonies and disrupted trade routes. Philanthropocalist organisations, university researchers, and government officers pursued 'public health' through the continuous unfolding of experimental techniques in sites considered the 'home' of viral pathogens. Viral research was valued as offering a safer future even as it sat alongside the structural violence of colonialism manifest in lives truncated by chronic disease, expropriation, and the radical reshaping of rural and urban environments. In the midst of a neoliberal roll-back of primary health care, and a targeted reinvestment in disease-specific programmes and Sustainable Goals, viral research continues to tread this well-worn ground. Certainly, the Zika pandemic outbreaks of 2015-2016 ushered in a by now well-worn anatomopolitics of safe sex and abstinence. Yet, the transgenic engineering of vectors prompted by this pandemic also saw the emergence of something new; that is, an interruption to the way in which viral matter was not only researched, but afforded a tempo that superseded the 'natural evolution' of life. Drawing on specific examples, this presentation maps out the reiteration of colonial tropes on disease ecologies and experimental design in this new set of technological practices. But it also goes on to draw out how transgenic engineering - this new viral tempo - is both a feature of the Anthropocene's 'forcing' of matter, and a proposed solution to the same. The superseding of a natural evolution is a measure of Global North scientists' drive to rise above the flesh of the world, and a reminder of the remaking of the Global South as a living laboratory intended to facilitate this via the provision of viral samples and test subjects. In these viral worlds, what scope is there for decolonisation?

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