

Welcome to the **Winter 2017 Speaker Series** of the **Indian Ocean World Centre**

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5:45 pm, Peterson Hall, Room 116

Malaria and Labour Migration in the Indian Ocean World, 1867 - 1938



Several areas of the Indian Ocean World (hereafter IOW) were considered healthy in the early eighteenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, colonial officials had become anxious about the rise of epidemics. Such anxiety coincided with the introduction of railways and steam ships, which had increased human mobility and by extension, the spread of germs and diseases. By the late nineteenth century, fever was raging in Bengal. It was no different in Ceylon where remittent fevers were considered “formidable diseases.” In Mauritius, similar fevers were considered “pernicious.” Fears about malaria gripped the colonial governments in these three regions. More broadly though, malaria struck labouring populations the hardest. Labour migrants recruited in bigger port cities (for e.g., Calcutta) in India or agro-industrial plantation complexes in British colonies (for e.g., Ceylon and Mauritius) were the most susceptible to malaria. The colonial state and its allies (industrialists and planters) often argued that workers were “naturally” feeble and de-emphasized poor working conditions. This paper examines how colonial governments in three distinct nodes of the IOW (Bengal, Ceylon and Mauritius) formulated and implemented policies on migrant worker health, often ignoring other potent contingent factors such as the deltaic environment of Bengal, and physical and topological characteristics of islands such as Ceylon and Mauritius. Picture is from Rockefeller Foundation, “Malaria in Bengal and Calcutta, breeding places, cisterns, ravines, drains,” *100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation*, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://rockefeller100.org/items/show/1716>.



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