

The Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology

IHPST Colloquium Series

Presents



West African Patients and the Colonial (Psychiatric) Imagination in Senegal and Marseille, c.1900

Speaker:

Prof. Katie Kilroy-Marac

Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto

Wednesday, March 2nd, 2022, 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Zoom Link: <https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/81442724368>

Meeting ID: 814 4272 4368

Passcode: 645890

Abstract

Between 1897 and 1914, the French colonial government transferred more than 140 West African mental patients to Marseille, where they were institutionalized within the *St-Pierre Asylum*. Few of these patients were ever repatriated. Though justified in humanitarian terms, this colonial experiment was a failure on all counts—an act of colonial violence framed as care. In this paper, I examine the transfer at two points. First, I consider how French colonial doctors and administrators in Senegal decided which patients should be sent to Marseille. Here I highlight the cases of three women and the involvement of their families to reveal the provisional and haphazard nature of the colony's approach to the internment of mental patients. I then turn to consider the West African patients' arrival at the *St-Pierre Asylum*, as well as the ideas about race, madness, and civilization that emerged out of the psychiatric encounter between French doctors and these patients. Centering my inquiry upon archival material from Dakar and Marseille as well as a medical thesis written by a *St-Pierre* doctor in 1908, I consider how questions of racial difference—as well as the possibilities and limits of the civilizing process—came to be imagined and articulated within the asylum.