

Knowing, fighting and treating Leprosy: actors, networks, knowledge, practices and territories

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Abstract

The understanding that exists of a disease in a given moment of history and social sphere sets narratives, determines practices and ways of acting. The knowledge and practices in different territories were not occurring in isolation and disconnected from what was happening in other empires/contexts, which shows that the various health actors acted within a network that worked on different scales: national/colonial, imperial, inter-Imperial. Several practices were implemented, from exploration and isolation to instituting new and effective therapies, sanitizing the social space. It also considered the voice of the Other belonging to a social/cultural context and where they form their views, representations and narratives built around the disease. Leprosy, either in its conception or in its struggle, polarizes deep symbolic resonances and proposes contributions of medicine, dynamics of colonial power and legal provisions.

In Portugal, the fight against leprosy [Hansen's disease] developed in the metropolitan context [National Leprosarium Rovisco Parents, founded in 1938] and in the different contexts of colonial territory [Cape Verde, Guinea, Angola, Mozambique, Goa and Timor mainly]. Leprosy has emerged as one of the most pressing health problems of the Empire.

In Brazil, since the mid-eighteenth century, the fight against disease was carried out discreetly and ineffectively, aiming mainly the protection of patients through the assistance of charitable institutions. From the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, measures were introduced aimed at better understanding the disease to better fight it, according to the precepts of bacteriology and scientific knowledge. Government actions since then have focused on the establishment of control measures aimed at the compulsory isolation of patients in leprosaria and their separation from the social environment. This way, the authorities have set public health policies in order to know, combat and treat the disease.

This panel seeks to attract research on leprosy, particularly in the Portuguese colonial and Brazilian space at different times, promoting the analysis and discussion of the diversity of responses to its existence. We intend that the different regional contexts and interpretations (historical, anthropological and others) can promote analysis and discussion, pointing as possible covering topics: the rationality of dialogue;

endogenous-colonial medicine knowledge, concerns, political and colonial practices, discourses and narratives, uses and colonial interests of leprosy and its combat, exploration of experiences, development of public health policies, among other relevant topics on this subject.