

Undoing the Nation-State: Configurations and Contestations

Historical and sociopolitical approaches to knowledge creation and sharing are both mediated and constrained by the geopolitical and temporal bounding of the institutions, policies and actors (academic and otherwise) and their relationship to the nation-state (Strathern 2021). Similarly, a response to universalizing histories (or stories) of science and technology is often a turn to a more localized historiography that utilizes the discursive category of the nation-state to show the provincial contours of such universalistic narratives. This epistemic move is not always decolonial, although it might be claimed otherwise, since it localizes history by tethering it to the framing of the nation or the nation-state as the center of the analysis (Abraham 2006). Such histories of science and technology can easily be appropriated for nationalistic purposes to reify hegemonic imaginations of the nation – a fetishized idea of “national history” becomes a conduit for global forces of capitalism, imperialism and neo-colonialism.

In the current climate of resurgent nationalism, this panel wants to propose a turn towards undoing this discursive, analytical and geopolitical category of the nation-state to ask the following questions: How is the nation and/or the nation-state co-constructed as well as contested within scientific and technological histories of practices, discourses and institutions? What are the histories of collaboration between and within nations that lend legitimacy to, and translate logics of, imperialism and nationalism? How do these processes, policies and histories intertwine with capitalism and neoliberalism in the empires and the colonies, as well as the colonies of the post-colonies? How do we unpack the role of teleological narratives of scientific and technical practice that are entangled with the processes of extraction, colonization and dispossession? What is the role of media, religion, culture and arts in the processes of scientific and technological nation-building?

We invite submissions for one to two papers and a Chair/Discussant for this session. If you're interested in presenting, please share a one-page abstract (250 words maximum) and a short bio (300 words maximum) with current contact information. Please send these materials to Palashi Vaghela (pvaghela@ucsd.edu) or Nithyanand Rao (nnrao@ucsd.edu) no later than December 13, 2023. If you'd like to be a discussant, please reach out to us too.