



ICS SEMINAR SERIES 2024

Bioscience Governance and Global Inequality in an Open Science Era

3 October 2024 | 11:30am - 1:00pm

Room: EA.G.26 Parramatta South Campus

Abstract

This talk draws from my recent article published in the *Social Studies of Science* on material transfer agreements (MTAs). The article highlights how countries in the Global South—particularly South Africa, Brazil, and Indonesia—are increasingly incorporating MTAs into their national laws to govern the exchange of scientific materials. MTAs are contracts that facilitate the legal transfer of tangible research materials between entities such as laboratories, pharmaceutical companies, and universities. While critics maintain that MTAs in the North support the neoliberal expansion of intellectual property regimes, my article—focusing on the distinct enactment of MTAs in Indonesia as a case study—argued instead that they functioned more as postcolonial legal technologies to alter persisting inequalities in global science.

In my presentation, I will further reflect on the implications of these legal technologies for the future of scientific exchange, particularly within the current call to ‘open’ science. Propelled by the EU and UNESCO, the recent global push of the Open Science movement generates multiple initiatives to open access, data, source, software etc., with the intent of making science more inclusive, transparent, and democratic. How does bioscience governance relate to what we could call the hegemonic epistemic infrastructure of the Open Science movement? What safeguards are there to mitigate platform capitalism underpinning many open science initiatives? And can law or governance decolonize Open Science without reproducing forms of science nationalism?

Biography

Sonja van Wichelen is Professor of Anthropology and Sociology with the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Sydney. Her research takes place on the cross-disciplinary node of law, life, and science in a globalizing world. She is the author of *Biolegality: A Critical Introduction* (Palgrave, 2024, with Marc de Leeuw), *Legitimizing Life: Adoption in the Age of Globalization and Biotechnology* (Rutgers UP, 2019) and *Religion, Gender and Politics in Indonesia: Disputing the Muslim Body* (Routledge, 2010), co-editor of the Palgrave Biolegalities Book Series, and on the editorial board/committee of the *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, and *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience*.

Presenter: Sonja van
Wichelen

Discussant: Hallam Stevens

Chair: Valentina Bau

NEXT SEMINAR:
10 OCTOBER