Patenting Hoodia: Difference, Materiality, and Belonging in South Africa

Through a feminist decolonial technoscience approach, this talk examines how San peoples, Hoodia growers, and CSIR scientists made claims of attachment to different materialities of the same Hoodia plant (as molecule, as cultivated, and as from nature) to assert rights of belonging in South Africa through struggles over patent ownership and benefit sharing. What becomes apparent is how such claims were informed in unequal ways by colonial and apartheid understandings of race, indigeneity, and gender as the San African San Council worked towards establishing meanings of San as modern political subjects, CSIR scientists sought recognition as producers of science located in the global south, and Afrikaner Hoodia growers aimed to position themselves as belonging to a changing post-apartheid South Africa. In turn, this talk analyzes how Hoodia’s materialities (e.g. chemicals and seeds) refused and/or aligned with the forces of law and science that sought to contain them. In doing so, it argues for an emphasis on multiple modalities or expressions of human and nonhuman materiality to understand modes of unequal belonging within South Africa.