

Anthropology • History • Science, Technology, and Society

Speaker Series Fall 2022

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**THE PETRO-STATE MASQUERADE: OIL AND
SOVEREIGNTY IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

The "Petro-State Masquerade" considers how postcolonial political futures in the Caribbean nation state of Trinidad and Tobago came to be staked to the market futures of oil, natural gas, and their petrochemical derivatives. Drawing on archival and ethnographic research, this paper theorizes how the tenuous relationship between oil and political power-enshrined in the hyphenated form of the petro-state is represented by postcolonial state officials as a Carnavalesque "masquerade of permanence" through the perpetual expansion of fossil fuel ventures. At the same time, low oil and gas prices, diminishing reserves, and renewable energy innovations threaten the viability of the Trinbagonian energy sector. In turn, this paper examines the turn to offshore exploration in the deepwater sector beginning in 1998. Characterized by protracted production cycles, deepwater ventures feature prohibitive costs and a comparatively low probability of success. After several deepwater ventures failed to yield substantive commercial quantities of oil or gas, the unfulfilled potential of a lucrative offshore geology is invoked to mitigate uncertainty and secure the long-term viability of the Trinbagonian energy sector. In their masquerade, state officials depict fossil fuels as inexhaustible resources waiting to be unearthed by multinational capital and novel extractive technologies .



SEPT. 19, 2022



4:00PM-5:30PM



**Hayden Library
Nexus 14S-130***

***Individuals who do not have an MIT ID must RSVP
by **Friday, Sept. 16, 12pm** to be registered for
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