

**International Symposium on
Indigenous Peoples and Borders: decolonization, contestation, trans-border practices**

New York, 11-12 November 2019

organized by

Columbia University (Institute for the Study of Human Rights, Indigenous Peoples' Rights Program), (UiT) - the Arctic University of Norway and the University of British Columbia (First Nations and Indigenous Studies, Department of Political Science)

This International Symposium will be hosted by Columbia University (Heyman Center). It is co-sponsored by Columbia's Institute for the Study of Human Rights (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Program); UiT - the Arctic University of Norway; the University of British Columbia (First Nations and Indigenous Studies, Department of Political Science); University of Guelph (Political Science Department), Canada; University of Lapland, Finland (Sami and Arctic Indigenous Studies); New York University (Center for Latin American Studies); MADRE; and the International Indian Treaty Council. Within Columbia the Symposium is also co-sponsored by the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society (ICLS); the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race and The University Seminar on Indigenous Studies.

Concept Note

Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty, cultural integrity, connection to the land and their overall well-being continue to be threatened, defined and constrained by borders.

This symposium aims at offering a rare opportunity for indigenous (focused) scholars and practitioners to engage in dialogue in and through border studies. This burgeoning research field can enrich our global knowledge community and vice versa, stimulate border studies scholars to address topics of particular importance for the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples. In a separate background note, we provide an overview of this increasingly diverse international research field that started with a nearly exclusive focus on physical and political border issues, but has in recent decades examined social, cultural and psychological dimensions. Some of the recent interdisciplinary scholarship, often-coined as "borderology" in Scandinavia, opens up for important new contributions from the humanities, social sciences and law.

When examining the shifts in history of ideas behind border studies, and relating these intriguing shifts to the Indigenous rights agenda, we have found a striking convergence in knowledge shifts on the one hand and rather limited direct intellectual exchange on the other hand, making us firmly believe that there is much to be gained by bringing together these knowledge and practice communities. Indigenous Peoples and scholars have also contributed to a significant discourse

around their own borders vis-a-vis the states as well as borders that have nothing to do with the states. Some of the recent theoretical innovations in border studies may stimulate not only novel insights into the intellectual sources (epistemology) underpinning the key international instruments, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration), but also help analyze the scope for successful political and juridical entrepreneurship at regional, sub-regional and local levels.

The link between human rights and borders is specifically recognized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Art 36 stipulates that:

1. Indigenous peoples, in particular those divided by international borders, have the right to maintain and develop contacts, relations and cooperation, including activities for spiritual, cultural, political, economic and social purposes, with their own members as well as other peoples across borders.

2. States, in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples, shall take effective measures to facilitate the exercise and ensure the implementation of this right.

This provision is closely linked to all three major pillars of the Declaration, namely the right to self-determination, the right to lands, territories and resources and the cultural rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration is not just concerned with the issue of physical and political borders, but also the very conditions for crossing and transcending borders, through political, social and cultural cooperation, other forms of mobility, and also transcending borders through public memory, border poetics etc.

The ever-evolving human rights regime has been opening up international accountability and elevating individuals, groups and peoples, including Indigenous Peoples, to subjects of international law. Hence, borders, as vessels of territorial sovereignty of states, become relativized through the emergence and broad expansion of international human rights and humanitarian law in the last 70 years.

The approach of the Symposium will be a multi-dimensional notion of borders that should enable an exciting policy-relevant and intellectual occasion.

The International Symposium's priorities in terms of inquiry

Given the breadth and vitality of border studies and indigenous studies the organizers hope that the Symposium can examine and debate useful specific examples (both case studies and comparative studies) on the ground that not only deepen academic understanding, but also identify some possible solutions/directions that can have positive impacts on the vexed political, legal, environmental, economic and cultural issues at hand.

The organizers also hope that papers will be presented from various regions and sub- regions, including the US-Mexico border, the Canada-US border, African border regions, the borders between Bangladesh, India and Myanmar, Sápmi (transcending the borders of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia) and the regions of Central and South America where the Maya Indigenous Peoples live.

Selected issues for discussion

- Borders, territories and the politics of recognition: evolving contexts of statehood, and indigenous governance
- Borders, lands, territories in everyday life worlds, public memory and border poetics
- Re-bordering and de-bordering by the state and its high-tech intelligence-military complex
- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a universal document and framework of situated border politics
- Indigenous visions of multiple territorialities and trans border movements
- Well-being with culture and identity within and without borders in the light of the Sustainable Development Goals

Participation and structure

This will be a two-day interdisciplinary Symposium. It will be open to academics, representatives and experts from Indigenous Peoples' organizations and nations, states, non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations. The background note for the Symposium, referred to above, that briefly outlines certain key theoretical and analytical approaches as a basis for this International Symposium will be posted by the organizers in due course.