

Call for Papers  
**41st American Indian Workshop**  
***Indigenous Shapes of Water***

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) Munich, April 01—04, 2020

(Deadline for papers & abstracts: Jan 05, 2020)

The 41<sup>st</sup> edition of the American Indian Workshop 2020 invites proposals for papers pertaining to the main theme “Indigenous Shapes of Water”, as well for papers that document ongoing research efforts in indigenous North America beyond the main topic of the conference.

With “Indigenous Shapes of Water” the 2020 AIW intends to take a holistic look at the manifold manifestations of and relationships with water in Indigenous life-worlds. In the context of deteriorating climates and problematic climate policies, *water* is likely to evoke primarily environmental studies discourses. The conference, however, is an invitation to explore Indigenous shapes of water in the broadest sense: living with, by, in, on the water, and being water in all its states. Besides the liquid form we understand H<sub>2</sub>O as including vapour (as clouds, as a cooking agent, as a cleansing agent in the sweat lodge) and ice (snow as building material, ice floats as hunting grounds, glaciers as vital water sources, snow capped mountaintops as landmarks).

Water was also chosen as a topic because it is good to think with as it is constantly in motion — be it as fast as falling raindrop or as slow as a flowing glacier. Its fluidity is a reminder of how inevitable change is. Change induces risk, a challenge human collectives have learnt to deal with for millennia. Water has changed and shaped groups of humans, and, increasingly, humans have been changing water and its flows. In the collective historical experience of North American Aboriginal Peoples, waterways and coastlines that once were flourishing, dynamic, intercultural spaces, became entryways for settler colonialism and epidemics along with the devastation of whole ecosystems. Undisputedly, globalized capitalism has accelerated change to an unprecedented degree, disrupting the hitherto known cycles of water. For Indigenous Peoples this poses the important question of how and to what extent ancestral knowledge can help deal with abrupt changes and shifting risks. Often referred to as traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), these epistemologies have for a long time been superseded by a somewhat authoritarian application of expert knowledge from the realm of natural sciences. While more recently both camps have started to converge and cooperate, a new threat has emerged: the

denial and depreciation of any verifiable knowledge whose validity is vested in collective practice, be it community-generated or science-based.

As an example, the *Dakota Access Pipeline* has been pushed to completion, even if common sense predicts that contaminated water does not stop at state or reservation boundaries and in blatant disregard for American Indian treaty rights as well as well-founded environmental concerns among many actors. The partial defeat of the #NoDAPL resistance has demonstrated how important it is to look at the political practices around water. Through great advances in autonomy statutes Indigenous Peoples have been able to wrench more and more control over their own affairs from nation state administrations, though still within a colonial framework. Tribal authorities have to deal with the challenge of accommodating diverse views and practices around water in their territories. They may be aiming at “sustainability” via market-based models, treating land and water as “resources” to be “managed”, but that means they may operate in contradiction to local ancestral knowledge and cosmovision. On the other hand, issues as existential as safe drinking water or the destruction of saltwater food sources through fish farms seem to require a certain degree of bureaucratization and lobbying.

Changing water practices can precipitate in changing forms of community organization and can affect how people relate to water and the land they are part of. The individual and collective connections to water—in many worldviews defined as sacred—are finally also a question of health, spiritual well-being, personal integrity and intellectual growth, and therefore crucial for viable futures in Indigenous communities. Contributions to understanding the vastly diverse ways of dealing with water-related challenges opens opportunities for indigenous peoples to learn from each other and for all of us to learn from them.

The conveners look forward to meeting you at a gathering to re-think landscapes as waterscapes—as diverse as the Mississippi Delta, the Great Lakes, the Bering Sea or the Sonoran Desert—that are what they are because Indigenous Peoples have shaped them and resiliently refuse to sever their ties with them. All disciplines and approaches that share an interest in the cultures of Indigenous North Americans are invited to explore the questions: What does water do with people and what do people do with water on Turtle Island? As always, we also invite reports and reflections of current research projects with indigenous communities beyond the conference theme.

Potential topics for papers include, but are not limited to:

- What does water do with people and what do people do with water from Indigenous perspectives?
- Manifestations of and relationships with water in Indigenous life-worlds
- Indigenous landscapes as waterscapes
- Cycles of water, their management and their disruption (dams, fish farms, pollution)
- Water and its states: ice, snow, permafrost, glacier, rain, fog, clouds, vapor
- Presence, absence, and overabundance of water
- Indigenous waterways as means of communication, transportation and intercultural spaces
- Water as saltwater, freshwater, and its gradients from briny to brackish
- Coastlines and Waterways as entryways for colonialism (1620–2020: 400 years of Plymouth Plantation)
- Tides and tidal waves as shapers of spaces and collective memories
- Traditional ecological knowledge vs. expert knowledge vs. anti-environmentalism
- Access to clean water: Water is Life, Waterwalkers, #NoDAPL
- Water in Indigenous languages, oral tradition, mythology, spirituality and philosophy
- Human-water-interaction in educational and museum practices
- Water creatures as non-human collectives to interact with
- Water in Indigenous histories, literatures, art, film and performance

and

- Current Research in general

Please submit proposals for papers (title & abstract of max. 500 words)

by

**January 5, 2020**

to

*aiw41@american-indian-workshop.org*

Acceptance notifications will be sent out by

**January 20, 2020**

**For more information, please visit**

**<https://www.american-indian-workshop.org/>**