Inuit are nationals of four different countries (US, Canada, Russia and Denmark), but share the same past and common traditions across international borders. Inuit culture and traditional way of life is deeply impacted by the effects of colonialism. Inuit founded the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), a non-governmental organization (NGO) in 1977. The ICC, as a transnational, indigenous peoples’ organization, represents and makes heard the voices of Inuit 160,000. It aspires to further Inuit decolonization and peacebuilding through the protection and practice of Inuit culture and tradition, by incorporating the Inuit voice in (inter-national) policy-making bodies and structures, and through the active creation of new political approaches to policy-making in the fields of climate governance/indigenous governance in the Arctic.

In this doctoral research, the Inuit Circumpolar Council’s capacity for decolonization and (indigenous) peacemaking is analyzed. In particular, the organization’s efforts to reduce the effects of climate change and to enhance Inuit sovereignty will be scrutinized to develop a better understanding of ICC’s potential as a means of empowerment for Inuit on the local level in Canada and Greenland as well as on the international level.

The research is guided by theories of decolonization and peacemaking (multi-track diplomacy/citizen diplomacy/track two diplomacy; hybrid peace, everyday peace, indigenous peacemaking) to explain the role of the ICC as (1) an NGO and (2) as an agent that incorporates indigenous forms of peacemaking to transform conflicts around climate change and sovereignty. Of particular importance in this research will be the development of an understanding of the interactions of the micro and macro levels within the ICC. Based on this, the research objectives can be summarized in the following three questions: What are the everyday realities of Inuit in communities in the North regarding issues related to climate change and sovereignty and how are these challenges addressed locally? What is the relevance of the international/transnational level for Inuit for the addressing of conflicts related to climate change and sovereignty? How are the micro and macro level connected and (how) does the ICC actively work towards the enhancement of such connections?

The research methods are guided by an indigenous paradigm/methodology and involve observation and conversation with Inuit in two local communities (one in Nunavut and one in Greenland) and key informant conversations with current and former ICC representatives and staff. In addition, this project will be informed by the results from a policy analysis of ICC documents.
Proposed Research: “The Inuit Circumpolar Council – vehicle for Inuit decolonization and a model for Inuit peacemaking for the Inuit in Nunavut and West Greenland?”
Lydia Schoeppner, March 2016

This project advances the field of Peace and Conflict Studies’ more recent understanding of the importance of the bottom-up, multi-track, multi-faceted, inclusive, emancipatory, and every-day nature of peacebuilding approaches that call for acknowledgement and inclusion of indigenous peacemaking hybrid peace. The study will build on these works to create new insights about indigenous peacemaking / emancipatory peacemaking on the micro and macro level. This research will provide new insights into interconnections between the local and international level of the ICC and the reflection of traditional (local) Inuit approaches to conflict in a trans- and international non-governmental organization. Thus, this study contributes to their process of decolonization by focusing on the Inuit point of view regarding climate change, sovereignty and peacemaking.

1. Lederach, Preparing for Peace.
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