

Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group in collaboration with Global Migration Centre, The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (Geneva, Switzerland) is organizing a research workshop on

*Borders, Violence and Challenges to Identities* (21 December – 23 December, 2016)

### **Concept Note**

Borders in various parts of the world are major sources of disputes between states. The contested sites of borderlands are symbols and limits of territorial power. For India, some of the major border conflicts can be traced back to India's partition in 1947 and Radcliffe's arbitrary lines separating India and Pakistan. Border, here, is porous, artificial and even shifting in some places. Till recently, the existence of *Chhitmahal* (border enclaves) further complicated the Indo-Bangladesh borderland situation. India also shares a deeply contested border with China. Border disputes between India and Pakistan/Bangladesh and China have repercussions for not only the borderland residents, but also for religious and ethnic minorities of the subcontinent. Beyond South Asia intensely violent borders exist between U.S. and Mexico, Thailand and Cambodia, Congo and Angola – to name a few. Graves of Rohingya refugees have been discovered recently in Thailand borders. Border crossings within Europe can also be equally dangerous for different groups of people as the recent Syrian crisis has shown.

Borders, however, connect as much as they separate. Therefore, borderlands open up spaces for various types of movements – of people, commodities, animals. If violence is part of everyday lives of borderland people in various parts of the world, staying close to an international border can also create opportunities, economic and otherwise. Often, different worlds co-habit borderlands: one is that of police, security, metropolitan politicians and city people eager to ensure a neat and sealed border where the flows of goods and people are completely regulated; the other is the 'world of subalternity' where people have cross border personal and economic relations and is least concerned about the 'cartographic anxiety' of the state. Therefore, to study the world of the border, one has to focus on these varied worlds - the high intensity border conflicts and everyday violence, "legal" and "illegal" movements of people and things, policing and subversion techniques etc.

The study of borders has undergone a transformation during the past decade. This has been partly in response to the emergence of a counter-narrative to the borderless and de-territorialized world discourse which has accompanied much of globalization theory. But the contemporary refugee “crisis” and the anxiety of the Global North has once again established that the territorial borders are here to stay. The study of borders has moved beyond the limited confines of the political geography discourse, crossing its own disciplinary boundaries, to include sociologists, political scientists, historians, international lawyers and scholars of international relations. While geographers have sought to place the notions of boundary within other social theoretical constructs, other social scientists have attempted to understand the role of space and, in some cases, territory in their understanding of personal, group, and national boundaries and identities. Recent studies include analyses of the postmodern ideas of territoriality and the ‘disappearance’ of borders, the construction of socio spatial identities, socialization narratives in which boundaries are responsible for creating the ‘us’ and them and the different scale dimensions of boundary research. These can be brought together within a multidimensional, multidisciplinary framework for the future study of borders. However, this meeting of disciplines has not yet been successful in creating a common language or glossary of terms which is relevant to all scholars of borders. Central to the contemporary study of borders are notions such as ‘borders are institutions’, the process of ‘bordering’ as a dynamic process in its own right, and border terminologies which focus on the binary distinctions between the ‘us’ and ‘them’, the ‘included’ and the ‘excluded’. Borders are studied not only from a top-down perspective, but also from the bottom up, with a focus on the individual border narratives and experiences, reflecting the ways in which borders impact upon the daily life practices of people living in and around the borderland and trans-boundary transition zones.

The research workshop on *Borders, Violence and Challenges to Identities* invites abstracts (500 words) from scholars on the following themes:

- a) “Legal” and “Illegal” Flows: This theme will address the causes, modes and consequences of migration and forced migration, human trafficking, scope and politics of repatriation. Papers on “legal” and “illegal” modes of commodity flow,

- i.e., border trade, smuggling and informal border economy will also fall within the scope of this theme.
- b) Refugees and Stateless People: Refugee “crises” of contemporary world and their historical roots, issues of statelessness like in the case of the Rohingyas or the enclave dwellers (residents of Chhirmahals), their experiences and the bi-lateral/multi-lateral negotiations around them are some of the possible areas within this theme.
  - c) Gendered Nature of Border Violence: Violence faced by the inhabitants of the borderlands often have gender dimensions. Women and children are generally more vulnerable to the risk of trafficking and also they are often subjects of state violence. Transgender communities in border areas are also acutely susceptible to violence. Being “able-bodied men” can have its own advantages and disadvantages. The risks increase further for religious/ethnic/ racial minorities. Papers addressing the issues of gendered violence in borderlands are most welcome.
  - d) Ecology, Environment and Borders: Borders may disrupt environments and ecosystems. “Natural” borders like river may cause numerous conflicts between two states, like it has happened in the case of India and Bangladesh since partition (1947) where rivers shift their courses continuously. Climate disaster in one country may have huge impact on the cross border migration patterns. Papers addressing issues of climate, environment, ecology and border are welcome.
  - e) Representations: within this sub-theme, we invite papers on representations of border violence, border crossings and refugee issues in literature (fictional, autobiographical), films, art and photography.

Please note that papers focusing on areas beyond South Asia are particularly welcome. Within South Asia, the focus will be on India’s North East and West Bengal-Bangladesh border issues. Abstracts along with short bio-note (250 words) should be emailed to [anwasha@mcrgh.ac.in](mailto:anwasha@mcrgh.ac.in) and [mcrgh@mcrgh.ac.in](mailto:mcrgh@mcrgh.ac.in). The last date for receiving abstract is **June 30, 2016**.