



## **SMAIAS/ASN SUMMER SCHOOL 2020**

### **CONCEPT NOTE AND CALL FOR PAPERS**

#### **THEME:**

**Race, Caste and Indigenous Peoples in the Global South**

**Sub-theme: Ecology as Commons**

**20-24 January 2020, Harare, Zimbabwe**

The changes within the contemporary global political economy have had an uneven impact on different regions and social groups. This unevenness arises out of historical deprivation as well as diverse manifestations of the penetration of capitalist enterprise into hitherto non-capitalist territories. Such a process of expansion and adaptation of capital to new social settings is as old as colonialism itself since the voyages of Christopher Columbus and has resulted in the simultaneous underdevelopment of the countries of the South. It has also led to a reconfiguration of ecologies and spaces by capitalists so that they could benefit and profiteer to the detriment of a large mass of oppressed 'indigenous' people and other subjugated races and castes. Hence, any study of this phenomena should recognise that the categories of 'indigenous', 'race' and 'caste' are complex and have diverse meanings across countries and continents. One of the aims of this Summer School is to explore and provide a window of analysis into these complex meanings and processes.

Given the above reality it is also important to note that emerging alliances between national elites and transnational capital have resulted in important changes within the social structures of countries of the Global South, whereby conditions of accumulation have been supported and reproduced through social institutions and relations. At first sight, it may appear that there are residual traces of pre-capitalist formations through the persistence of certain social phenomena, but in reality the older forms of social institutions and relations are structured through new forms of discrimination and primitive accumulation. Thus, the meanings of race, caste and indigenous are themselves a product of the reproduction of long established processes of accumulation in specific historical conjectures and under different stages of development.

Today, there are several forms of discrimination arising out of this long historical process, three of which will receive special attention in this Summer School. The first concerns widespread forms of race discrimination in relation to the distribution of land and resources. Race discrimination became a factor that mediated the formation and changes in the social structure, especially under settler populations. Not only were the resources and land of non-white peasantries and agricultural workers appropriated by the business interests of the dominant white races, but in many cases they were also ghettoised into particular

occupations and living spaces. Another key feature of race domination has been its inherently patriarchal character which has moulded women's paid and unpaid labour into informal labour arrangements which are accompanied by sexual exploitation and violence.

The second form of prominent discrimination is 'caste discrimination' which is borne out of ideas of purity and impurity that are embedded in patriarchal and Brahmanical power structures. The contemporary debate between class, caste, and gender has some peculiar characteristics, as caste itself was used as a social principle of labour organisation in the pre-capitalist times. However, this connection between caste and occupation has changed over time, as the segmentation of labour force has been permeated by institutions of caste. Upper caste domination in landholdings and control over farm servants through debt bondage and other means has led to the historical and structural oppression of the lower castes. Such exploitation cannot be overcome without the redistribution of land and resources, against the concentration of wealth in the hands of the upper castes.

The third form of discrimination is against the 'indigenous people' who emphasise their rights on historical homelands, their own systems of control and government, as well as their land and resource use patterns. Notwithstanding that indigenous communities are approximately five percent of the global population and 15 percent of the global poor, they are considered 'custodians' of 80 percent of the planet's biodiversity. Yet, the issue is not just about a 'stock' of foods and natural resources that indigenous communities 'offer', but the traditional knowledge that supports this cultural-biodiversity production and conservation. Though the category of the 'indigenous' has no universal meaning, there is a broad understanding that their autonomy and way of life must be respected so that the economic as well as the ecological crises can be averted.

The idea of the revival of 'indigenous' presents, potentially, a critique of capitalist modernity. Whereas the 'indigenous' has been considered an expression of backwardness since the colonial times, today the desire for a reduced incorporation into corporate agriculture and its technologies, from the Green Revolution to contemporary biotechnology, sees in the indigenous a source of answers to the global ecological crisis. In the FAO's High-Level Expert Seminar on Indigenous Food Systems, the latter were acknowledged as resilient systems to climate change because of the close adaptation to local conditions, in synergy with natural environment and its biodiversity, and with a high level of diversification, light carbon footprint, and reduced use of external inputs. In this sense, the indigenous food systems, along with agroecology, forest and mountain farming, pastoralism, and small-scale fisheries are considered important in the efforts to define more sustainable and healthier food systems. However, such recognition does not necessarily provide a viable alternative path of development in fulfilling the aim of food security and sustainability. There is, indeed, a new tendency of appropriation of the 'indigenous', whereby high-income urban consumers, principally from Europe and the United States, are demanding non-traditional food commodities or 'indigenous' foods in the search for more diverse and healthier diets.

Given that transformations in the agrarian structure are essential to address the forms of discrimination arising out of contemporary capitalism, it is important to emphasise that the current patterns of uneven development are driven by some further important tendencies. There is an enormous scramble for land in the Global South and a penetration of global capital in lands ordinarily held under communal tenures and by small farmers. This development has prompted, on the one hand, the formation of a number of local movements whose social basis is formed in particular by race, caste, or ethnic identity, and, on the other hand, the response by UN agencies, such as the FAO, which have produced several Voluntary Guidelines for Responsible Investments, whose implementation and impact on the local people and indigenous

groups need to be assessed across regions. Preliminary studies show that the current state of implementation of these Guidelines is quite inadequate and detrimental to the historically deprived and oppressed groups in different regions.

Additionally, the privatisation of forest, water, and land commons have impacted on the tenure and livelihood rights of oppressed races, castes, and communities. The ILO's Convention 169 calls upon states to endorse and uphold traditional tenures, but does not contextualise the embeddedness of these tenures in multilateral market negotiations. As is evident from the policies followed by several neoliberal governments, the community tenures are often incorporated into reforms through the dilution of protective mechanisms on land acquisition in these resource rich regions. The FAO has developed the concept of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) to enable the historically deprived social groups to make democratic choices about their own path of development. However, experiences from several parts of the Global South illustrate that institutional and legal frameworks to operationalise FPIC are not only weak but continue to be driven by pro-business interests that jeopardise the democratic process and decision-making by communities with regards to their own future.

The 2020 Summer School will focus on the issues and dilemmas raised above and more specifically on the themes below:

1. Contemporary capital accumulation and its relationship to diverse forms of 'indigeneity', 'race', and 'caste' formations.
2. Gender relations in the formation of indigeneity and race and caste structures under contemporary capitalism.
3. Impact of ethnicity, race and caste on formation and reproduction of class relations in specific material contexts.
4. Historical and contemporary patterns of dispossession and alienation from nature.
5. Impact of indigeneity, caste and race on land tenures and reforms.
6. Food, nutrition and changing land use patterns: their impact and mediation by race, caste and indigenous peoples.
7. Food markets and security in relation to indigenous agriculture.
8. An assessment of responses to voluntary guidelines and conventions, such as the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples conventions, and their interface with the agrarian question.
9. Tri-continental experiences of national policies of ecological management and responses from below.
10. Impact of transnational and finance capital on the lives of indigenous people, oppressed races and castes.
11. Counter hegemonic ideologies and movements of indigenous people and oppressed castes and races.
12. Movements for autonomy, self-determination and rights over local resources.

In sum, all these issues, to be deliberated in the proposed Summer School would seek to reflect on some of the major challenges and key concerns associated with race' and 'caste' in the contemporary Global South. As always, it will bring together leading as well as young scholars from diverse disciplines, as well as civil society activists from Africa, Latin America, and Asia in order to engage with the complexities of the issues.

Interested scholars and activists are invited to submit paper proposals or abstracts (not more than 300 words) no later than 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019. Authors of selected papers will be requested to develop their full papers by 30 September, and will be invited to participate at the 2020 Summer School in Harare. Fundraising is in progress and travel support for selected abstracts is not guaranteed. Some of the articles may also be selected for publication in *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, subject to normal peer review process.

Paper proposals should be submitted to Walter Chambati: [walter@aiatrust.org](mailto:walter@aiatrust.org) and copy to Professor Paris Yeros: [parisyeros@gmail.com](mailto:parisyeros@gmail.com)