GRIC
Groupe de recherche identités et cultures
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THE RISE OF ASIA 100 YEARS AFTER LAI:
Is the Imperialism Dying and a New World Order Emerging?

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https://bandungspirit.org/

ANTI-IMPERIALIST AND TRANSFORMATIVE INITIATIVES BY WOMEN FROM GLOBAL SOUTH: Implications for a changing world order

Call for Abstracts

The panel is open to individual and group paper presentations. Those willing to present their papers are invited to submit their abstracts until December 31, 2026. Abstracts of approximately 200-300 words (excluding figures, tables, and references) and basic personal data of the authors are to be submitted online at: https://forms.gle/2F3dS1QrDNQTugUs8

Introduction

Imperialism had destroyed societies and economies by its extractive and exploitative policies. Many functioning local institutions and collective practices were incapacitated in the process. Land systems, forest use and production practices were severely affected. People launched struggles against colonialism and imperialism and gained independence. In all these struggles women had played an important role. In postcolonial period important initiatives had been taken for nation-building and development. That process faced serious challenges by neoliberal economic policies in the recent decades. But inspired by the anticolonial legacies several movements have emerged in which women played key role.

At present the world is troubled by many wars and crisis of climate change. It may seem as if the Bandung Spirit ideals of building a postcolonial world of emancipation of oppressed people have disappeared from the consciousness of humanity. I wish to point out that despite many adverse developments, women's initiatives on several fronts have maintained the trends of transformation carrying forward the anti-colonial agenda.

Imperialism had created new patriarchal structures in land relations depriving women of their rightful role in agriculture. In postcolonial period many land reform measures by governments sought to give land rights to women. The neoliberal economic reforms however pushed land reforms to the background. In recent years many grassroots struggles are going on demanding equal land rights to women.

Imperialism had caused large scale deforestation to exploit forest resources and for mining purposes. Postcolonial states, unfortunately, continued that process in the name of industrial development. Mining and dam constructions caused a great deal of displacement of tribal and/or indigenous people. During the colonial period there were tribal revolts resisting displacement and deprivation of rights of access to forest resources. Many movements again came up in the recent decades against displacement and deforestation where women were on the forefront to defend their rights. When climate crisis acquired threatening proportions and global debates led to acknowledging the need to protect environment, many women's movements took the lead to take concrete actions on the ground.

Neoliberalism did contain some of the imperialist orientation to transfer raw materials to advanced centres of production. That was the target of resistance by many people's movements opposing mining. Women have played a major role in these movements.

Colonial regime had centralized political and administrative power denying autonomy to regions and local communities. Many postcolonial countries tried to set up federal and decentralized structures. When democratic decentralization was implemented in India in 1993 giving statutory representation to women a new wave of transformation sprang up with much hopes of restructuring rural power structures which imperialism had only taken advantage of. After over three decades of experience two trends were discernible. One was the assertion of people's rights to local resources and making local plans for development in a framework of autonomy. The other – propelled by neoliberal economic growth strategy – was to use the local bodies – Panchayats and Nagar Palikas – as market arena for goods from outside and delivery mechanism of central funds. The former was inspired by the idea of Gram Swaraj – village self-governance of Mahatma Gandhi. The latter was to treat the village as a market unit of the national and global political economy. Many women's movements are active in affirming their rights and autonomy of their Panchayats. Similar processes of decentralized governance and women's empowerment happened in many other countries in the Global South.

Third World feminism had anti-imperialism at its core. In addition, due to the intensity of class, caste, race, ethnicity, religion intersecting with gender, intersectionality was built into all interventions. In the context of the present-day challenges of neoliberalism and global hegemonic trends, all these struggles are getting interconnected to transform unequal conditions and enhance the process of emancipation.

Struggles for land rights, forest rights and self-governance are a part of broader social and political struggles for freedom, justice and peace women have fought all these years. What new questions have come up in carrying forward the anti-imperialist legacies will be our common challenge to enquire.

This panel will have contributions from countries of the Global South on transformative initiatives by women's movement which have continued the anti-imperialist legacies while confronting the new challenges posed by neoliberalism and neocolonialism.

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