

## SISP Standing Group on Social Movements and Political Participation- Call for Proposals

Florence, May 2024- Study Days III ed.

**Proposal Title:** A decolonial paradigm shift to centre transformative Indigenous and social movements in research and activism.

### **Proposed by:**

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Chiara is a Ph.D. student in Urban Studies at Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca. She is experienced in researching food and tourism systems, to highlight contradictions and inequalities from the perspectives of local communities. For her PhD, she has conducted extensive qualitative research on conservation and ecotourism in Tanzania, specifically examining community-based conservation dynamics, and the limitations of participatory processes, through the lens of political ecology and dispossession by accumulation. She has a BA in Geography and a MA in Sociology of the Environment

### **And by:**

*Laura Pipolo (Terzani), Campaigner, Advocacy officer, Project manager ([laura.pipolo19@gmail.com](mailto:laura.pipolo19@gmail.com))*

Laura, campaigner, advocacy officer, and project manager, brings extensive field research experience on Indigenous rights focusing on conservation with a decolonial, participatory and action research approach. She has a BA in Communication sciences, Sociology and Political sciences, and a MA in Environment, Development and Policy, where she has analysed the case of the Greater Kruger National Park in South Africa through a decolonial feminist political ecology analysis. She has also conducted research and advocated for and with Indigenous Peoples and local communities and their liberation in Kenya, Palestine and India, and has dedicated herself to supporting movements and communities in their struggles through decolonial solidarity

### **Long Abstract:**

The Social Movements and Political Participation Study Days presents a unique opportunity to unveil our project and research findings from which it stems. We propose a joint presentation that aligns with the event's themes, to foster insightful discussions and build a supportive network for our initiative. The goal is not just to present research findings but address and dismantle Coloniality within conservation, research practices and international solidarity and advocate for a decolonial paradigm shift to finally have the movements at the centre. With this approach in mind, we would also bring, if allowed the participation of Indigenous activists (from India and/or Colombia, live or pre-recorded).

The current conservation model ("fortress") is rooted in the displacement and violent oppression of local and Indigenous and local communities and presents ineffective so-called "community-based" alternatives, based on a vaguely defined and often instrumentalized concept of grassroots participation. Concurrently, Eurocentric assumptions and extractivist research practices, both in academia and activism, perpetuate an exploitative approach that does not centre the transformative actions of Indigenous and social movements. Despite the systematic neglect of their perspective and agency, and the success of the emergency-based rhetoric of conservationists, local and Indigenous communities self-determine their narratives and propose real alternatives, creating and engaging in trans-local movements based on mutual aid and practical solidarity. During the Study Days, we aim to present our research/action project that transcends conventional research and is aimed at decolonizing research and activism, centering the communities to listen to their own instances, while simultaneously gathering the opinions of experienced scholars, and possibly, extending the network of our project.

Grounded in the decolonial perspectives of research, exemplified by scholars like Linda Smith, the project confronts Coloniality in both activism and research. By critically examining existing power structures and colonial

roots, this framework allows us to address and challenge the Eurocentric narratives that underpin conservation policies and research methodologies. This foundation guides our quest for transformative strategies that prioritize the agency and agendas of communities over outdated and oppressive paradigms.

Chiara PhD research addressed the challenges in creating protected areas amidst decentralization reforms in conservation, land governance, and tourism (community-based tourism, conservation, and natural resource management). She aimed to comprehend power dynamics in participatory and fortress conservation, investigating the hypothesis of green grabbing. Focused on Northern Tanzania, the study examined the case of an agro-pastoral community involved in community-based conservation. Utilizing qualitative methods and a cultural interpretative approach, the study relied on involved participant observation, focus groups, stakeholder interviews, content analysis of institutional sources, and scrutiny of policy documents.

In India, Laura has joined protests and inter-communities' dialogues of Indigenous communities (Adivasis) and activists contesting the militarised, colonial and racist conservation that evicts, abuses and kill them, the real protectors of the environment. Through a participatory action research she has investigated human rights and international law violations in the implementation of protected areas - where "shot-at-sight" policies and market-based approaches (offsetting, REDD+ and ecotourism) are enforced. At the same time, her research focused on the power of the Indigenous and activists movements, like the Community Network Against Protected Areas (CNAPA), exposing the profound need to decolonizing international solidarity.

From our studies and field research experiences, emerged that fortress and community-based conservation, not addressing the structural dimension of Coloniality, entrench existing unjust power relations and dynamics. In addition, we have realized that both academia- and activism-based research are limited to extracting data from the communities they

research, avoid exercises of positionality, and finally do not truly serve such communities and movements. Therefore, the project strives to fulfill the essential need for a profound shift in the narrative, putting research and activism at the forefront of empowering communities rather than perpetuating colonial practices.

This decolonial paradigm shift will benefit the communities directly impacted by conservation policies and practices. Simultaneously, stakeholders, including researchers, activists, and organizations, are invited to reflect and recognize on their positionality and on what it truly means to establish a network based on trust, mutual aid, and solidarity. This transformative change will benefit them too, opening a “paradigma otro”, as expressed by Walter Mignolo, breaking free from the chains of colonialism and its oppressive legacy, Coloniality.

The project promises to create a platform that fosters collaboration between Indigenous communities and movements and researchers/activists, leading to more effective, community-driven conservation and research practices.

The project envisions self-determined communities shaping their own project agendas, and mobilized stakeholders actively engaged to support them. The project anticipates a diverse range of outputs, including videos testimonies and interviews, campaigns, online and offline protests and non-violent direct actions, mobilization of academia, third-sector (foundations, associations), and activists. These outputs will exist to support the movements in the modalities autonomously expressed and envisioned by the movements themselves, recognizing their powerful role as active agents, and to foster bottom-up transformative change.

We are aware that general public awareness and academic understanding of the issue remain limited, resulting in insufficient attention and resources on behalf of stakeholders. Furthermore, the project seeks a profound transformation of the research and the conservation systems, alongside a narrative shift, to support the changes Indigenous activists are

driving. Due to its radical and decolonial nature, the project is going to face resistance, and attempts of co-optation by academic or third-sector entities aiming to instrumentalize and dilute the transformative power of a decolonial paradigm shift that centres, Indigenous struggles and agency. Despite these challenges, liberation movements in history have taught us that every empire is destined to fall and it will do so only through grassroots community organization and meaningful solidarity, and mutual trust.

We are sure that the Study Days promoted by the Standing Group on Standing Group on Social Movements and Political Participation would represent the perfect venue to launch our project of a decolonial paradigm shift of research/action to centre transformative Indigenous and social movements in research and activism.