**Report on CAMPACC Tamil workshop on 21 March 2015**
The second workshop in CAMPACC’s series of workshops on ‘Self-determination against the global counter-terror regime’ took place on Sat 21st March.

After an introduction to the workshop series by Radha D’Souza, Dr. Suthaharan Nadarajah, Lecturer of International Relations at SOAS, began his presentation on the history of the right to self-determination & its relationship to the spread of liberal democratic market economy state forms; responses to groups with collective political grievances, promote – at maximum – conflict resolution & individualised rights within the liberal state form. This narrative is so strong that in the case of the Tamils, even the Palestinian political class support the unity of Sri Lanka, seeing it as a state in conflict. In only a few instances have self-determination claims succeeded. In the case of Kosovo, for example, this was largely due to the fact Serbia could not be brought into the liberal democratic market economy fold. In the present case of Iraqi Kurdistan, support had previously only been for federalism until the arrival of ISIS. Since Iraqi Kurds now seem to be showing that they ‘understand’ liberal democracy, there is more international support for their claims. This is not the case for Turkish Kurdistan where international support is behind the Turkish state.

Jeyachandran Kopinath of TamilNet continued by tracing the historical ambiguity in the Tamil nation’s right to struggle from colonial and post-colonial injustices of the British imperial regime to the post-2009 denial of remedial justice to Eelam Tamils. He recommended that movements strengthen their position by working from their own framework and creating a de facto situation of self-determination by essentially behaving like a nation.

Kumaravadivel Guruparan from the Tamil Civil Society Forum concluded by arguing that we need to counter the dumbing down of the struggle (which encourages Tamils to simply ask for a right to ‘democratic governance’) with deliberated reflection and meaningful action. Suthaharan suggested that one path is to make ‘an exceptional case’ for Tamils in the ‘court of global public opinion’.

After a short response by Gopi Ratnam, other participants made contributiong, including disagreeing with the idea that Tamils needed to work within the confines of the liberal democratic model, even to make ‘an exceptional case’, since the ‘global public’ also includes other oppressed peoples of the world who see liberal democratic market economic systems as neo-colonial and nation-states a product of colonial modernity.

Suthaharan responded with the opinion that it isn’t self-evident that most third world groups or left-leaning states would necessarily support a Tamil claim to self-determination, however speakers concurred that a priority is to connect with people struggling on the ground and to create a de facto position of self-determination, making it understood that there is a Tamil nation (although not necessarily a nation-state) that exists and that genocide is and has been carried out against them.

After a short break, Bashana Abeywardane began the second half of the workshop with a presentation describing how, as the Tamil LTTE-led struggle strengthened, it managed to weaken the Sri Lankan state. This opened up the possibility of Sinhalese civil society being able to imagine possibilities beyond the unitary state and to begin to see the imperial centre. He described his work with the JVP, organising cultural events and festivals working on such issues.

Karthick RM wrapped up presentations with a hope for Tamil Nadu politics to go beyond nationalism and problematic approaches to imperialism, gender & class, associated with it. Instead of this, he dreamed of a Tamil civilisational consciousness, one that is forward thinking and future-oriented; learning from a global progressive community, rejecting liberal multicultural politics and particularised identities. In this he noted the achievements of the Kurds and pointed out that the Tamil diaspora also have lines of communication open to other influences, which bodes well for prospects of civilisational revival.

Reponding to the speakers, Nirmala Rajasingam flagged up contradictions within both the LTTE and the JVP, which sparked off other participant contributions setting these contradictions in the context of their achievements. Nirmala wrapped up contributions with the hope that the workshop participants could move on from discussions on self-determination to conversations about the future.

Closing the workshop, Radha reported that whilst, out of all the threads of conversation emerging from the workshop, she felt most excited by the dream of a Tamil civilisational consciousness, she also noted the reality of solidarity, giving the example of Malaysian Tamils who, when rubber prices collapsed because of the WTO, were made destitute. There were protests against the Malaysian state, but few support demonstrations from Tamil groups in other states. She noted that we cannot just defend abstract principles; things have to be unpacked in concrete struggles; which brings us to geopolitics. Using an example raised by one participant, Tamil fishermen being gunned down by the Sri Lankan navy as Sinhalese fishermen are made destitute by Tamil trawlers, she noted the larger issue of militarisation & wondered if our gaze were widened to the issue of militarisation of the Indian Ocean, would it then be possible to generate genuine solidarity & connections with other affected peoples?

She also raised the question, what does it mean to be Tamil? What is a Tamil consciousness made from? Whilst the issue arises out of colonialism & imperialism, self-determination is often spoken of as a liberal democratic project and few connections are made to the economic exploitation that is facilitated by it. When connections are made, they are mostly informed by Western Marxist perspectives. Yet the discussion in the workshop reminded her of Auviyaar, a Tamil philosopher-poet who had much to say about bottom-up development. Whilst generating a strong Tamil movement does not mean going back to the primeval, it does mean a resurgence in Tamil philosophy and history, because how can we talk about justice and law within colonial framings of it?

Radha also added that whilst movements must be self-reflexive, this has to come from inside, because if we critique movements in an adversarial manner, we talk past one another.  For example, Tamil Solidarity people need to create spaces where we can talk within ourselves as to how to do things better. She reminded participants that adversarial systems are Western, rather than part of the Tamil cultural system.

In conclusion, she wondered whether the movement is missing intermediary forums – buffer spaces between dealing with the US/UN & the Sri Lankan state - that would allow groups to imagine, discuss & strategise on issues beyond responding to immediate needs. Could the diaspora play the role of creating those spaces?

Below are video links to the presentations at the workshop.

Dr. Radha D'Souza, University oh Westminster, civil rights sctivist
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSEVzG20pKA>

Suthaharan Nadarajha - Lecturer in International Relations, SOAS, University of London
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-c--grm264Q>

Kumaravadivel Guruparan - Layyer, co-spokesperson of thr Tamil Civil Society Forum
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s61W66sak2s>

Bashana Abeywardane, journalist, co-ordinator of Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pm--GZwv1V0>

Karthick RM, PhD Student at the University of Essex
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6StAbOMnBI&feature=youtu.be>

Radha Summing up
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KjEFeeDzD0>