

Call for contributions

for the online symposium

**"Decolonizing Knowledge and Science.
Breaking Isolation and Weaving Solidarity
with the Universities of North and
East Syria/Rojava"**

**Get involved in
one of the working
groups starting of
November 13, 5 p.m. CET**

Contact: csua.paris@gmail.com

The organizers:

Universities of DAANES, Center for Solidarity with Alternative Universities (CSUA), Kurd Akad

In these times of social, political, economic and ecological crises and increasing authoritarianism and multilayered inequalities all over the world, universities must be forerunners of transformations, internationalism and global social justice. A lot of academic discourse on decolonizing knowledge and universities focuses merely on theoretical issues, and overlooks material structures, sites of oppositional consciousness, oppression and critical theories/approaches for liberation in neocolonial wars, eco-, geno- and femicide, expropriation and new geopolitical formations.

The symposium brings decolonizing knowledge back to the roots of the struggles that aim to build self-organized democratic societies.

The symposium starts from decolonizing knowledge that was developed from the Kurdish movements and freedom struggles with the goal of building self-organized democratic societies. Particularly in the self-governed autonomous region in North and East Syria (NES), which also includes historical "Rojava", the newly established universities are themselves participatory and democratic in their topics, methodologies and organizational structures. In a new and innovative way, the academic institutions in NES are combining theory and praxis as activist scholarship for the overall social processes of freedom and autonomy through women's liberation, sustainable ecology and grassroots democracy. This emancipatory scholarship also seeks to build alliances with feminist, anticolonial/imperialist/anti-capitalist movements for broader popular coalitions against the extreme right authoritarianism, militarized austerity politics and intersectional poverty and climate colonialisms.

In the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES), colonialism is as real and concrete as the falling bombs. Decolonization is about undoing it. The practice of decolonizing knowledge must therefore be more than mere words and purely intra-academic discussion. Instead, the current situation calls for practical solidarity and political activism/actions against Turkey's attacks and atrocities against DAANES, its universities and also against measures that undermine its international recognition and cooperation capacities. The non-recognition of the diplomas of North and East Syrian universities leads to the isolation of Rojava. This is directly related to the colonial world order.

The overall format and content of the symposium is intended to express our solidarity with each other, with struggles for democratic transformations, and with service to the community. The symposium will not foreground European/Eurocentric academic discourses on decolonizing knowledge, but will give space to the perspectives, theories and practices of NES' universities that are developing alternatives to colonial forms of knowledge and thus inspiring people worldwide.

After a successful dialogue meeting in May 2024, the Symposium aims to create effective networking and working structures for international cooperation that will strengthen support for the alternative universities of the DAANES and their foundational project on Decolonizing Knowledge and Science. In the current context, it is essential to break the isolation of the universities of Rojava, caused by attacks and atrocities of the Turkish state and other imperialist actors, as well as the power structures of the global academic system with its geopolitical, racist and sexist epistemic violence.

Your contribution to the working groups

We invite your contributions to this symposium. The program will not consist of presentations of individual papers; instead, we invite you to contribute to joint meetings of the following working groups. You can also find their descriptions and overall aims below.

- International Teaching Cooperation
- International Research Cooperation
- Access to Resources and Equipment for NES Universities
- Translation of Educational Materials
- Recognition/Accreditation of Universities in the DAANES

1. Collaborative Teaching Working Group:

Lecturers and instructors from a number of European, Asian, North and South American universities have already established different forms of exchange with the NES universities. Several university partnerships have been created; summer schools and joint courses have been held, and reciprocal guest lectures have been given in different programs of the NES universities. Various additional forms of educational cooperation are already underway. There is still much to be done. The Collaborative Teaching Working Group will work together with the NES Universities to facilitate the exchange of experience between existing partnerships, to identify new areas of collaborative teaching and new collaborative learning formats that will strengthen the teaching capabilities of the NES universities.

2. International Collaborative Research Working Group:

International research collaboration between the NES universities and the world academic and research institutions has so far remained insufficient to harness the full potential of the constituents of NES universities. A number of international research symposiums were organized with scant resources of the NES universities and the diffusion of their outcomes has been limited. There are however, research projects being conducted by faculty and students and there is further need to collect information about the research they want to do in the future and the different forms of cooperation they consider to be created. Questions related to the research setting (research topics, participants, funding, among other elements) should be answered together with Rojava researchers and research projects should prioritize local and regional issues, and the needs of the peoples of NES. Methods such as Participatory Action research may allow to discuss future joint research projects in a non-hierarchical way with the aim of providing knowledge for oppressed groups/subjects. It is also important to ensure the participation of Kurdish-speaking researchers from different parts of the world in research programs. In cooperation with the NES Universities, the International Collaborative Research Working Group will work to identify research needs and to build an international research network specialized in the immediate interests of the NES universities in particular and the peoples of NES in general. This initiative will also aim to enrich existing curricula of research-oriented academic programs.

3. Access to Resources and Equipment Working Group:

Physical and digital infrastructure quality is vital for students to enroll and complete their studies. However, besides the insufficient number of digitally equipped classrooms, scientific laboratories and comprehensive libraries, IT infrastructure in NES universities is very limited due to a lack of necessary technical infrastructure and resources. Students can benefit from a very limited range of digital hardware and software tools. Student housing and essential household equipment such as washing machines and kitchen equipment are also insufficient to attract a larger number of motivated students. In collaboration with the administrators of the NES universities, Access to Resources & Equipment Working Group will prepare an inventory of the specific needs and propose a road map identifying the ways through which these needs can be met over the short and middle term.

4. Translation of Education Materials Working Group:

The lack of sufficient educational and pedagogical material in Kurdish language is one of the biggest challenges of the NES universities to provide to provide students with a broad range of knowledge in any field of study. More translators and funds need to be organized for the translation of textbooks and other scholarly work into Kurdish. The Translation of Education Materials Working Group will cooperate with the NES universities and accompany their efforts to bring in a substantial number of resources translated in Kurdish in line with their priorities. A pool of educational resources with digital access could also be established within the scope of NES universities' libraries.

5. Recognition/Accreditation of NES Universities Working Group:

NES universities have been calling for solidarity and support of the world's academic institutions in their struggle for recognition and future accreditation. Several universities from all over the world signed Memorandums of Understanding and some supportive agreements (i.e. Hochschule Emden Leer, Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin, Universität Bremen, Humboldt Universität). Further steps can be taken to recognize the degrees of NES' universities, e.g. through international joint supervision of Master's thesis and PhD programs. Permanent joint degree programs can also be established. These examples could encourage others; however, there is an urgent need to start a global campaign for their recognition and lasting partnerships with academic and research organizations around the world. Any partnership or collaboration will also support the awareness of the special character of the Rojava model and its institutions. The working group will identify the motives, elements and structure of a potential global campaign, which will eventually contribute to the official accreditation of NES universities and their full integration within the global university system.

By grounding the presentations in these working groups, which are all starting to meet now in the run-up to the symposium, we intend to have a practical focus to the program and discussions. We invite you to contribute your theoretical and practical experiences and ideas for future developments to one (or more) of the above-mentioned working groups and their respective presentations at the symposium.

The symposium will be held in an online format with the possibility of some local hybrid meetings. Date: Thursday, 20th February 2025, Time: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. CET

We call on interested academics, activists, artists, intellectuals, internationalists to contribute to the symposium and/or to become part of the internationalist, decolonial network that is developing and growing stronger.

Send a message indicating your interest in contributing to the symposium and any working group; your area of interest; and some background information about yourself to: csua.paris@gmail.com before our first working groups meeting that will take place on November 13 at 5 p.m. CET.

Safe the date – November 13, 5 p.m. CET – and join one of the working groups.

Furthermore, anyone who would like to stay informed and be part of a communication structure is also welcome to join our email list. Please contact us here: csua.paris@gmail.com

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KURD-AKAD

Tora Akademîsyenên Kurd
Network of Kurdish Professionals
Netzwerk kurdischer AkademikerInnen