

## Program for Conference

3–5 April 2015, Hamburg University, Audimax

# CHALLENGING CAPITALIST MODERNITY II DISSECTING CAPITALIST MODERNITY – BUILDING DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM

**3 April 2015 – Friday**



### 12:00-13:00 Welcoming Speeches and Messages

**Welcoming Speech** | Gülistan Kahraman *is studying law and has been active in the Association of Students from Kurdistan since 2010.*



**Welcoming Speech** | Dêrsim Dağdeviren *is a pediatrician and chairwoman of the Network of Kurdish Academics (KURD-AKAD).*



**Welcoming Speech** | Prof. Norman Paech *is professor emeritus for constitutional and international right and a former member of the German parliament for the left group.*



**Introduction** | Prof. Elmar Altvater *is professor emeritus for political sciences. He is regarded as a co-founder of an ecological economy and an early critic of a deregulated globalization of markets.*



**Eröffnung** | Reimar Heider *ist Arzt und Menschenrechtsaktivist. Er ist einer der Sprecher der Internationalen Initiative »Freiheit für Abdullah Öcalan – Frieden in Kurdistan« und Übersetzer mehrerer Bücher Abdullah Öcalans.*



**Message of Greeting** | Abdullah Öcalan

13:00-15:00 Session 1

## Dissecting Capitalist Modernity



**Moderation:** Dr. Thomas Jeffrey Miley is Lecturer of Political Sociology in the Department of Sociology at Cambridge. He received his B.A. from U.C.L.A. (1995) and his PhD. from Yale University (2004). He was a Garcia-Pelayo Research Fellow at the Center for Political and Constitutional Studies in Madrid (2007-2009). His research interests include comparative nationalisms, the politics of migration, religion and politics, and democratic theory.



**1. 1. Scientism – Re-colonization of the Mind |** Dr. Muriel González Athenas is an activist in feminist, anti-racist, and autonomous networks. For two years, she has been working with the Kurdish women's movement in Europe on a new departure for emancipatory movements. In 2013, she opened an exhibition in several Catalan cities, called "...so that freedom no longer remains a utopia", informing on the current positions of the Kurdish movement. She is a historian and a research assistant at the University of Cologne. Her research focus is on gender studies, labor and capitalism, Eurocentric geographies, feminist epistemology and historiographic methods.

Certain patterns of thinking determine the way we see ourselves and the world around us. These epistemologies are impregnated by the existing power relations. How did feminists criticize these ways of thinking and how do we have to go one step further? What can a feminist science look like?



**1. 2. Capitalism – Accumulation of Value or Power? |** Kenan Ayaz is a Kurdish human rights researcher and activist who was imprisoned in Turkey because of his political views for twelve years. He is active in the Kurdish people's struggle for freedom. Capitalism is more than a kind of economical organization. It is a system of complex relationships of accumulation and exploitation. An attempt to clear up some things and to expose capitalism.



**1. 3. Nation State – God on Earth? |** Prof. David Harvey is the Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Geography at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY). He received his PhD in Geography from the University of Cambridge in 1961. Harvey authored many books and essays that have been prominent in the development of modern geography as a discipline. He is a proponent of the idea of the right to the city. The nation-state, the dominant form of state organization of recent times, appears to be in crisis. This is especially true for the Middle East. What can emerge from today's chaos?



**1. 4. Industrialism – Law, Science and Imperialism |** Dr. Radha D'Souza is a Reader in Law specializing in International Law & Development, Law in Third World societies and Resource Conflicts in the Third World. She is a social justice and civil liberties activist working in India and internationally. Industrialism and democracy are incompatible ideas. Industrialism relies on command-control mechanisms. Contemporary

imperialism is the expansion of industrialism to militarism. Democracy must be underpinned by a very different kind of science and law. Democracy and capitalism must be delinked in public discourse and political practice.



**1. 5. Religionism and Secularism – Religion and the State |** Rojda Yildirim is a woman rights activist who was imprisoned for 10 years because of her political views. She is active in the Kurdish people's and women's struggle for freedom. She is presently researching different belief systems.

The last decade has seen the introduction of Islam as a source of legislation in several countries. In Turkey state-imposed laicism is on the descent. Syria and Iraq are faced with a group that claims to resurrect the caliphate. Why does the Western model of secularism fail? And what are the deeper reasons for the renaissance of religion in state affairs?

### CALL FOR PAPERS TOPIC



**1. 6. From Marxism and nationalism to radical democracy: Abdullah Öcalan's synthesis for the 21st century |** Dr. Tamir Bar-On is professor for political sciences at the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education in Querétaro, Mexico. He studies the French Nouvelle Droite or European New

Right and its relationship to fascism.

Although Öcalan only was able to read Gramsci very late, he reaches similar conclusions with different dimensions. Öcalan also finds it important to delve into the definition of an intellectual and its role in the transformation of the society. They are also both critical about a class rule, no matter which class it is. How do Öcalan and Gramsci differ and how much are they similar is the main research topic of this paper.

15:00-16:30 Discussion

16:30-18:00 Dinner Break

18:00-20:00 Session 2

## Democratic Modernity



**Moderation:** Eirik Eigladd has been involved in a broad range of social ecology projects in Scandinavia for more than two decades, as a movement activist, writer, translator, and editor. Eigladd co-founded the New Compass collective. He is the author of *The Anti-Jewish Riots in Oslo and Communalism as Alternative*, and the editor of *Social Ecology and Social Change*.

**2. 1. New Concepts – Democratic Confederalism – Democratic Autonomy |** Havin Gunesser is an engineer, journalist and a women's rights activist. She is one of the spokespersons of the International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan" and translator of Öcalan's several books.

Socialism is not out of fashion, but after long theoretical debates the Kurdish movement suggests a set of new terms and concepts. "Democratic autonomy" and "democratic confederalism" are becoming practical already in Rojava. The overall concept is "democratic modernity" as the alternative to "capitalist modernity". What does this all mean?



## 2.2. Liberating Life: Political and Moral Society

| Emine Ayna had to abandon the University of Çukurova shortly before the completion of her studies of economics due to political reasons. During her studies, she worked with the first organization of Kurdish women. She was elected to parliament as deputy of the DTP and was its co-chair shortly before the party was banned. She was arrested several times. There are still about 700 proceedings opened against her. She is also a founding member of the platform "Freedom for Öcalan, for peace". She is currently an MP for HDP and co-chair of the DBP.

In Kurdistan, people have been taking their life into their own hands for a long time. Feudal structures have been smashed, women advanced. The society is highly politicized, but the movement has even higher aims. Stating that the moral and ethical fabric of a society are more important than the laws of the state that rules, they envisage a political and moral society where people build up an alternative to the state.



## 2.3. Democratic Nation – A Cure for Nationalism?

| Asya Abdullah is co-chairperson of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Rojava/Syria. Due to repression under the Assad regime, she was forced to leave university and devoted herself entirely to politics. She sees herself as a feminist activist and has also been active in the Kurdish movement in Rojava for a number of years. She is a founding member of PYD and was elected co-chair along with Salih Muslim in 2011.

Nationalism of every kind has devastated also the Middle East in the last 100 years. The nation-state, a European import product, was never really at home there. Can the project of a multi-ethnic "democratic nation" in Rojava be a historical turning point?

### CALL FOR PAPERS TOPIC



## 2.4. Truth and Power: Analytics of Power and Nomadic Thinking as Fragments of a Philosophy of Liberation

| Michael Panser studied history. Since 2011 self-study of philosophy and political theory with a focus on nomadology, internationalism and revolutionary liberation movements.

Foucault's power-knowledge-complex is closely related to Öcalan's concept of regimes of truth. Every way in which we organize our thinking, our perception, implies a string of possible ideas and acts. Knowledge means power to act, while being separated from knowledge about oneself means powerlessness.

### CALL FOR PAPERS TOPIC



## 2.5. Social Ecology and the Non-Western World

| Federico Venturini is a PhD student of geography in Leeds. He holds a master degree in Philosophy and one in History and European Culture. He researches the relations between modern cities and urban social movements, using Social Ecology as research framework. He is working with social movements in Rio de Janeiro with participatory/militant methodology. He is a member on the of the Transnational Institute of Social Ecology (TRISE).

How do Murray Bookchin's social ecology and libertarian municipalism and Öcalan's "women's freedom ideology" and democratic confederalism relate to the attempts to implement them? What problems does the concrete political movement face and struggle to overcome, how does this in turn contribute to the further development of theory?

## 20:00-21:30 Discussion

4 April 2015 – Saturday

## 10:00-12:00 Session 3

## Ecological Industry and Communal Economy



**Moderation:** Thomas Konicz studied history, sociology and Philosophy in Hanover and Poznan. He is a freelance journalist and publicist working for various left and left-liberal publications, including *Konkret* and *Telepolis*. Recent publications by him include ebooks on the ideology of the capitalist crisis and alternatives to it.



**3.1. Communal Economy: The Case for the Commons** | Silke Helfrich, Freelance journalist and co-founder of Commons Strategies Group and of Commons Institute e. V., for many years representative for Central America, Mexico and Cuba of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Editor of "The Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market and State", "Wem gehört die Welt?" and "Was mehr wird, wenn wir teilen". She is currently researching patterns of commoning.

Marx described the enclosure of the commons as a factor in the emergence of capitalism. Not only since the works of nobel prize laureate Elinor Ostrom we witness a re-discovery of the commons, whether as digital knowledge commons or in commons-based peer production. How can we arrive at a world beyond market & state?



## 3.2. Bağlar Women's Cooperative |

The cooperative was founded in 2005. It combines economical and political activities. The women fight against the patriarchal system and for democratic administration and a communal economy.

In North Kurdistan several women's cooperatives have been established lately. In a video conference, Saniye Varlı from the cooperative will join us live from Bağlar, a suburb of Amed (Diyarbakır).



## 3.3. All Economies are Ultimately Human

**Economies** | Prof. David Graeber teaches anthropology at the London School of Economics. Active in a number of anti-authoritarian activist projects from the Direct Action Network in 2000 to Occupy Wall Street in 2011, he is also the author of books such as "Debt: The First Five Thousand Years", "Lost People", "Direct Action: An Ethnography", "Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology", and most recently, "The Utopia of Rules."

The creation of material wealth is always simply one moment in the larger process of the mutual shaping of human beings, caring labor is really the primary form of labor. Capitalism is perhaps unique among all economic systems in that it entirely inverts this and teaches us that the purpose of human life itself is the production of material commodities. This is a form of social insanity. How do we turn things around?



**3.4. Common Political Imperative for a Revolutionary Prospect** | Penny Vounisiou works as a conservator of antiquities and works of art. She is an active member of the group “Platform for Autonomy, Self-Sufficiency and Equality” and a member of the Cretan movement against the industrial renewable energy resources. She also participates in a new group which works on the struggle against privatization of the social possessions.

The myth that capitalism promises prosperity to all, is still powerful-despite all realities. To overcome it we need the vision of a different world, a different society and a different economy. What is the role of autonomy, self-sufficiency and equality?

**CALL FOR PAPERS TOPIC**



**3.5. Building a Communal Economy in Kurdistan** | Azize Aslan graduated from the economics department of Marmara University. She has a master degree in Development Economics and is currently working on her doctoral degree in Public Administration and Political Science at Istanbul University. Her doctoral thesis deals with the economic politics of democratic autonomy. She is engaged in the economy works within the framework of the Democratic Society Congress (DTK).

From Braudel’s, Wallerstein’s and Öcalan’s critique of capitalism to building a communal economy in Kurdistan. What are the discussions, which are the concepts? How does economy relate to the goals of democracy, ecology and women’s liberation?

**12:00-13:30 Discussion**

**13:30-15:00 Lunch Break**

**15:00-16:30 Session 4**

**Overcoming the Stumbling Blocks of Revolutionary Theory**



**Moderation:** Ismail Küpeli is a political scientist and journalist. He analyses the conflicts in Turkey and the Middle East and reports on social protests and the results of the neo-liberal crisis politics in Europe. He writes for daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, online media, gives interviews to radio stations and holds lectures.

holds lectures.



**4.1. Reproducing Capitalism: Consumption and Habits** | Ehmed Pelda did his higher education in economics. He works on economics and social change in Kurdistan, alternative economics, ecology and technology. He was a columnist for the newspaper Azadiya Welat and now writes for the Özgür Gündem. On the TV channel Stêrk TV he hosts the program “Economy and Ecology”. In his latest work he deals with the distribution of resources in Kurdistan.

Capitalism abstracts humans from nature, holds them in a circle of production and consumption and uses them for the accumulation of capital and power. How does the system achieve this, and how can we break out?



**4.2. New Concepts of Self-defense** | Fidan Yildirim is a journalist and a political activist. Since the 1980s she has taken part in activities to further Kurdish people’s and women’s freedom. She worked in various Kurdish newspapers for many years and continues to write articles for them. She was imprisoned for 11 years in Turkey due to her political views.

Kurdish women caught everybody’s attention in the brave fight to defend Kobanê in 2014. But they have been fighting before that, and armed defense is only one part of their concept of self-defense. It encompasses education, self-organization, civil obedience, and other forms of struggle.



**4.3. The Centrality of Women’s Freedom** | Sara Aktaş graduated from the Philosophy Department in Ankara. After 1990 she joined the Kurdish liberation movement. Due to her political activities she spent 11 years in prison and was released in 2004. She was a founding member of the DTP and actively worked in the women’s councils. In 2009 she was arrested again due to her activities in the Democratic Free Women’s Movement (DÖKH). She spent another 5 years and 3 months in jail and was released on a pending trial. Currently she is a spokeswoman of the Free Women’s Congress (KJA). She writes for various newspapers and magazines on women’s liberation.

Many real socialist movements that deal with the liberation of woman see these problems as not as central or important as the class contradictions. What are the views of Öcalan and the Kurdish freedom movement in that regard? What are the perspectives?



**4.4. Power Relations: State and Family** | Dr. Nazan Üstündağ is an associate professor for sociology at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. Her fields of interest include feminist theory, post-colonial theory, state and violence issues and narrative methods. Her columns are published by Bianet and Özgür Gündem. She is a founding member of the Peace Council, Women for Peace and Academics for Peace. Üstündağ is also a member of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP)’s central executive committee.

Power relationships exist in a state as well as inside a family. How do statism and patriarchy mutually depend on each other? In what sense is the family indeed the nucleus of the state?

**CALL FOR PAPERS TOPIC**



**4.5. Feminism and the Kurdish Liberation Movement** | Dilar Dirik holds a degree in History and Political Science and wrote her Master’s thesis on women’s liberation and the PKK. At the moment, she is working on her PhD at the Sociology Department at the University of Cambridge. Her doctoral thesis tries to compare the nation-state system to the paradigm of democratic confederalism from the perspective of women’s liberation.

The Kurdish women’s movement is the strongest in the region – to say the least. But how do their theoretical foundations relate to socialist, radical or anarchist feminism of Western provenance? Which are the original approaches in Kurdish feminism, and why is the most read feminist – a man?

**16:30-18:00 Discussion**

**18:00-19:00 Evening Break**

## 19:00-21:00 Concert

### 19:00-21:00 Konzert

mit: Rotında, Zelar Gökçe, Meral Tekçi, Mehmet Akbas



5 April 2015 – Sunday

## Lessons to be Learned from Alternative Practices



**Moderation:** Anja Flach *is an ethnologist and member of the Rojbîn Women's Council, Hamburg. She published two books on the Kurdish women's army. Recently she co-authored a book on the revolution in Rojava.*



**5.1. Internationalism – an Evolving Concept |** Arno-Jermaine Laffin *studied Political Science and Law in Marburg and Hannover. As a member of the Association of Students from Kurdistan (YXK) he has been active in the Kurdish freedom movement for many years.*

The concept of internationalism was filled over the last one hundred years with different ideas and preconceptions. The Kurdish freedom movement defined itself as internationalist from the start. In the last few years new concepts have opened up new perspectives for internationalist struggles.



**5.2. Individual and Neighborhood: Citizen and Assembly in Montreal |** Dimitrios Roussopoulos *is a Montreal based political activist, ecologist, writer, editor, publisher, community organizer, and public speaker. Educated in philosophy, politics and economics at several Montreal universities and London.*

How were the tools of community organizing developed and used in Montreal neighborhoods to help individuals become participating citizens? How were citizens helped to understand the importance of local community priorities, broaden the idea of citizenship into urban citizenship, and mobilize citizens into assemblies wherein direct democracy found a place? Empowering citizens, who insist on taking decision-making into their hands and forming assemblies, naturally threatens the power elite. What are the fruits of the Montreal model and experience?



**5.3. South Africa: Progressive Politics in a Capitalist Country? |** Alex Mohubetswane Mashilo *is an electrical engineer and jurist. He is currently studying towards a PhD at the University of the Witwatersrand with focus on the relationship between economic and social development. Mashilo is the*

*National Spokesperson and Head of Communications at the South*

*African Communist Party.*

South Africa is one of the few countries in the world where a communist party is part of a government coalition. But despite certain hopes (or fears) that socialism would take over, this did not happen. South Africa is facing huge problems but also opportunities to overcome them. What are the perspectives for progressive parties in capitalist states in the 21st century? What kind of progressive role does South Africa play on the African continent and perhaps the greater world?



**5.4. Gandhi's Vision for India and Democratic Confederation |** Joám Evans Pim *is a father, farmer and activist in Galiza (a territory under Spanish occupation). He works with the non-profit Center for Global Nonkilling and seasonally teaches Nonviolence at Åbo Akademi University in Vaasa, Finland. He is a member of the Advisory Council of the Transnational Institute of Social Ecology and has been involved with the IntegraRevolucio initiative.*

Gandhi imagined small self-sufficient village republics that should be “capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world”. Things turned out differently in India. How does the Indian experience compare to the project of democratic confederalism?

## Democratic Confederation in Kurdistan – Work in Progress



**5.5. Rojava: The Cantons – Resistance and Construction |** Mustefa Ebdî *is jurist and minister of local governments and municipalities in Kobanê. After high school in Kobanê he studied law in Aleppo. He worked in the municipality of Kobanê even before the proclamation of the canton. He is also the co-chair of the organization for the rebuilding of Kobanê.*

The three cantons in the Rojava region in Syria are under military, political and economic attack from many sides. Struggling against tanks as well as embargoes, the people nevertheless fight for an ambitious, revolutionary project: a democratic self-administration unlike any other in the Middle East. Kobanê is just the tip of the iceberg.



**5.6. Başûr: Stuck between Freedom and the State |** Şilan Şakir *lives in South Kurdistan (Iraq). She is co-chair of the Freedom Movement of the Society in Kurdistan (TACK) and has been active in the Kurdish women's movement for many years.*

In South Kurdistan (Iraq) a de-facto-state has emerged whose authoritarian tendencies by now have become clear. The contrast to Rojava is obvious. What is the vision of the women's movement and the newly founded Freedom Movement?

12:30-14:00 Discussion

14:00-15:00 Lunch Break

15:00-17:00 Session 5b

## Lessons to be Learned from Alternative Practices (continued)



**Moderation:** Prof. Sabine Rollberg is professor for artistic TV formats in Cologne. She studied history, Germanistics and political sciences. She was foreign correspondent and editor-in-chief of ARTE. Currently she is head of editorial staff of WDR/ARTE.



**5.7. Rojhilat: The KODAR Model** | Shirzad Kamangar has been in active politics for the past 15 years in Iran and Kurdistan. He is a council member of the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK). His brother, Farzad Kamangar, a human rights activist too, was executed on May 2010 by the Iranian state for his

political views.

In East Kurdistan and Iran, the Kurdish freedom movement is fighting under extremely difficult conditions. The death penalty is frequently imposed and executed against political activists. What is the KODAR model and how does PJAK want to implement it?



**5.8. Bakûr: From State to Democracy** | Selma Irmak is co-chair of the Democratic Society Congress (DTK) and activist of the Kurdish women's movement. She was a founding member of the DTP. In the KCK operations she was arrested despite being a mayoral candidate in Diyarbakir. During her trial, she was elected as an MP in 2011. After her release from prison in 2014 she joined the HDP group in parliament.

North Kurdistan (Turkey) has its own unique conditions. Numerous parties, NGOs and organizations pursue the goal of democratic autonomy while struggling against the AKP and the state. What does democratic autonomy mean for this part of Kurdistan? How can the transition from state to democracy happen under these circumstances?



**5.9. The Fourth World War and How to Win it – A Tribute to Kurds and Zapatistas** | Prof. John Holloway is a Professor of Sociology at the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades in the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico and Honorary Visiting Professor at the University of Rhodes, South Africa. He has published widely on Marxist theory, on the Zapatista movement and on the new forms of anti-capitalist struggle. His books *Change the World without taking Power* (Pluto, London, 2002, new edition 2010) and *Crack Capitalism* (Pluto,

London, 2010), have stirred international debate and have each been translated into eleven languages.

We live in a world of increasing aggression against humanity, which the Zapatistas refer to as the Fourth World War. To win this war is not just to win particular battles but to put a halt to the constant aggression. The aggression comes not from the states from but the crisis of a particular form of social organization (capital). To reach the source of the aggression, our struggles must be based on a radically different form of organization. The Zapatistas and the Kurds are the most outstanding examples of this form of struggle.



**5.10. The Venezuela Experience** | Andrés Pie-rantoni Giua studied political sciences in Milano. He worked as a businessman and political advisor. Currently he serves as co-ordinator of 11 community councils in the Hatillo-Baruta rural area and as an advisor to the minister of commerce of Venezuela.

The Bolivarian Revolution has created lots of interest around the world. How have the past 15 years changed Latin America? What are the experiences with participatory democracy an communal councils? What problems does the movement face?



**5.11. New England – Rojava: Assembly Democracies** | Janet Biehl is an independent writer on democracy and ecology, blogging at [biehlonbookchin.com](http://biehlonbookchin.com). Her book *Ecology or Catastrophe: The Life of Murray Bookchin* will be published by Oxford University Press in September 2015. An artist as well, she lives in Burlington, Vermont.

An example for assembly democracy is the tradition in New England of the town meeting, which has persisted over the centuries since the early colonial settlements by English Puritans. What are the connections with Bookchin's Libertarian Municipalism and Democratic Confederalism?

## 17:00-18:00 Discussion

## 18:00-18:25 Closing speech



**New Horizons: Reconstructing Liberation** | Gö-nül Kaya has actively taken place within the Kurdish women's freedom struggle since 1991. She is on the board of International Free Women's Foundation. She was a columnist at newspaper *Özgür Politika* and at present is a columnist in the women's newspaper *Newaya Jin*. She currently working within the International Representation of the Kurdish Women's Movement.

In December 2014 we made a "CALL FOR PAPERS" to write on one of five topics. Students, academics and several political prisoners responded. The submitted papers were reviewed by a committee and the authors invited to present them at the conference. The Call for Papers will become a steady part of future conferences.

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