

7. September 2024

PREAMBLE – WHY WE NEED THE ALLIANCE

Preface:

Socio-political framing of higher education and university autonomy

For some years now, we have been observing various interrelated developments:

- Internationally, an increasing public, political and media polarization, also in Germany and in the neighboring countries of Austria and Switzerland
- the public and sometimes also internal delegitimization of traditions of research, such as gender studies, postcolonial theories and other theories that see themselves as decidedly engaged, i.e. critical of domination and power, and emancipatory
- increasing state intervention in the autonomy of universities, cultural institutions and other areas of society
- increasing securitization within universities, the establishment of regulatory committees, tightening of university laws
- increasingly reckless criminalization of students and university members and their legitimate and peaceful protests if they deviate from politically dominant opinions and narratives

These tendencies can be observed, for example, in the way the climate movement has been repeatedly confronted with massive state repression and the criminalization of activists as well as of the academics supporting the activists. In Germany, Austria and Switzerland, it is particularly evident in the intense social polarization around the ongoing war in Palestine. This has prompted increasing state pressure on various social fields of action and institutions, including central cultural institutions and universities. The state pressure on institutions can be seen, for example, in the development of new action plans ('repressive and preventive') and political guidelines as well as in the close co-operation with police. Further, members of universities, research institutions, cultural organizations and other social sectors and institutions are often intimidated and publicly defamed if they take a political stance that differs from that declared as 'raison d'état' by criticizing the Israeli government or calling for a ceasefire. This practice of public defamation recently became particularly evident in the press campaign and political reactions to the 'Statement by Berlin Teachers' in May 2024, which has developed into a tangible funding scandal. It appears that the Federal Ministry of Education and Research intended to withdraw funding from the signatories, which must be seen as an attempt to link the award of funding to alleged views held by applicants.

A repressive climate in society as a whole is narrowing spaces for discourse and favoring right-wing and authoritarian narratives that legitimize the erosion of constitutional freedoms, such as freedom of opinion, art and science.

Against the backdrop of these developments, we not only see our research locations under threat as places of open and science-based discourse. We also see the need to defend, organize and maintain universities, research institutes and other areas of work and public institutions affected by growing repression in such a way that their legally guaranteed autonomy is safeguarded.

The Alliance for Critical Scholarship in Solidarity wants to create resilient structures and open and democratic public spheres to strengthen democratic procedures and institutions.

We also firmly understand colleges and universities as places that are permeated by hierarchical structures, which entail differently valued and paid positions. We are committed to making hierarchical structures visible and open to discussion, with the long-term goal of changing them and creating a climate of solidarity and of awareness and critique of discrimination in order to promote engaged research, teaching and practice. This requires building relationships of solidarity with one another that allow all members of the alliance

to be recognized in the heterogeneity of their political and intersectional positions, and to jointly develop diverse and new ways of dealing with complex problems. To do this, we must be highly attentive to and support and strengthen the precarious and vulnerable positions that hierarchical academic spaces create.

In this sense, the alliance strives for a tradition of solidarity that works towards creating universities, arts and media that are open to discourse, sensitive to differences and aimed at equality, in a society that is impacted by the historical entanglement of ongoing colonial and imperial forms of domination. Acts (of speech) in one place are therefore intertwined with the present in a different place. Wars and genocides that do not take place in territorial Europe often transport the colonial legacy and the ongoing violence that it produces to the spaces of Europe – for example through arms supplies, war interventions and the coloniality of migration. It is this entanglement that defines our political and academic activities in the present.

I. WHAT ARE OUR GOALS

The aim of the association is to create and maintain an infrastructure that is committed to emancipatory and democratic public research and teaching, to dismantling hierarchies and marginalization at universities and in academic practice, and to critically reflecting upon and helping to shape the relationship between universities, art and society.

For the coming decades, we need an infrastructure that protects and safeguards academic freedom and university autonomy in the face of attacks on fundamental democratic freedoms, the freedom of scholarship and the autonomy of universities and of cultural production. In detail, this autonomy means that

- controversial discussions can be conducted respectfully, in which all participants are protected from structural violence and discrimination
- the possibility of teaching and research that is emancipatory and critical of domination and power is guaranteed
- protest and expression of political dissent is made possible and is heard.

Against this background, the Alliance for Critical Scholarship in Solidarity sees itself as an alliance of actors (primarily from universities, research institutes and other academic institutions, but also from other affected and related fields of work and institutions), with the following overarching goals:

- Standing up for the preservation of university autonomy and academic freedom
- Advocating against the militarization of educational and research institutions and for a civilian orientation of research and teaching that works against war and for global peace and justice
- Resisting securitization and carceral logics, as well as state interventions that jeopardies autonomy
- Standing up for research and teaching in accordance with international law and for consistent public action in the event of non-compliance by universities, research institutes and other academic institutions
- Standing up for open spaces for discourse, creating spaces for dissent, protests, controversial debates and the recognition of different situations and concerns in conflicts
- Development of solidarity-based, anti-discrimination structures of democratic self-administration at colleges/universities, including through comprehensive intersectional involvement and committees to facilitate the participation of all university members and the associated dissemination of anti-discrimination knowledge in the institutions and areas of work
- Advocacy against the economization and privatization of scholarship and teaching and for public democratic universities
- Cooperation with student self-organization and resistance against state and university tactics of division and criminalization.

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE ALLIANCE:

- Public visibility of a large movement of individuals who share the overarching goals formulated above
- Observation, recording, documentation and analysis of current developments relevant to the goals of the Alliance
- Collecting and providing relevant information
- Drawing up and publishing statements and recommendations
- Maintaining contact and exchange with political and higher education policy bodies, professional societies and associations
- Coordination of collegial strategic consultations and further training, e.g. media training for members
- Infrastructure for activities, networks and people who do not want to or cannot become public due to vulnerability
- Provision of legal advice and other forms of support for members who are affected by repression such as discrimination, threats, defamation, etc. in the context of the developments outlined above

The following working principles are relevant to the work of all bodies of the association, as well as the general interaction between all members.

III. HOW WE WANT TO WORK TOGETHER BEHAVIOUR: COLLEGIAL, IN SOLIDARITY, BASED ON TRUST

The Alliance acts according to a principle that frames all other working principles: cooperation based on collegiality, solidarity, awareness of discrimination, the use of discrimination-sensitive language and trust. We are committed to collective cooperation that strives for consensus and works towards finding a common opinion and point of view. This means that processes and decisions are based on multiple perspectives and the diversity of social positions and are negotiated in respectful dialogue and exchange. Critical reflection not only on social conditions, but also on how we interact with each other is the prerequisite for communication and interaction based on mutual respect, perception and caution. Social positions must be considered in a reflexive manner. The aim is to make the participation and process structures as accessible as possible. It therefore also requires constant self-reflection on one's own position and the privileges associated with it. This also means that based on the structural vulnerability of individuals and specific groups, external representation or public speaking is selectively chosen or rejected. Some who occupy hegemonic speaker positions can use these strategically to represent the diversity of the alliance to the outside world. This in turn means that there will be some groups that are less visible to the outside world and others that are highly visible. Groups and chats should function in the understanding of a 'braver space' (<https://thelivingarchives.org/en/tla/archive/braver-spaces-en/>), which is oriented towards social marginalization and regards these voices as important points of departure.

IV. COLLECTIVITY: WORKING IN COMMUNITY, AGAINST COMPETITION

We work in community and reject capitalist dynamics of scientific and social competition among ourselves. The jointly developed knowledge thus becomes communal knowledge, a result of communitarian labor, as Gladys Tzul Tzul (2018) puts it (<https://journals.openedition.org/colombiaint/19256>). Forms of extraction and appropriation are not encouraged in the alliance. Collaborative work requires trust, and this trust is to be established in this alliance over time and made the starting point of our work.

Thoughts, perspectives, texts and other sources should be regarded as the intellectual property of the person or collective who contributed them. Of course, these authors should be asked for permission as soon as something is shared publicly by third parties or used to produce new resources, further ideas and theses. In this way, we make it clear that we are not the autonomous subjects and individuals that the Western academic tradition presumes, but that we are primarily organized in and learn from collective life situations.

V. REPRESENTATION: MARGINALISED POSITIONS (INTERSECTIONAL, INSTITUTIONAL) SHOULD BE IN THE MAJORITY

We need to center marginalized voices and make a clear commitment to listen and understand why and how exclusion takes place. We need to engage with spaces of experience that are not socially centered, but often exist on the margins of hegemonically authorized academic, public and media knowledge.

If we want to break through the logic of domination of the reproduction of social hegemony along class privileges, racism, coloniality, antisemitism, CIS heteropatriarchal and ableist dynamics in our immediate everyday lives, we must start with our everyday interactions and practices of living together. They allow us to understand the technologies and mechanisms that produce the exclusion and negation of certain populations and voices, and the authoritarian transformation of democracy. As Black feminists like Saidiya Hartman (2007/2022) or Hortense Spillers (1987) have described, they allow us to identify where people suffer a social, societal, economic and, ultimately, physical death in a state that claims to be concerned about democracy and equality. This relationship between marginalized subject positions and structures of exclusion, between center and periphery, must be kept present in the consciousness of alliance members and its effects noted – for example in violent representations in the media, as is increasingly the case for Palestinians, Muslims, refugees, precarious migrants and trans people.

In order to foster interactions that are based on an abolitionist analysis of carceral and necropolitical conditions (<https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/abolitionismus-heute/>) and is committed to their abolition, the Alliance work towards the decolonization of science and art. Decolonization also means working against imperial structures in research and, in particular, keeping an eye on growing militarization in academic and research contexts. The alliance opposes the criminalization of various people (groups), especially Palestinians, refugees and undocumented migrants, and of associations that work in solidarity with them.

VI. CONFIDENTIALITY, TRANSPARENCY, DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Each member decides whether they want to be publicly visible or remain anonymous; the decision can be changed at any time. Each member has a different need for confidentiality. Precariousness, an insecure residence permit or racialization and other forms of marginalization can increase the need for confidentiality. All members are obliged to respect the decision of individual members to remain anonymous to the outside world and to take this into account in the work processes of the Alliance. Compliance with this confidentiality obligation is essential to ensure the safety and trust of our members and to ensure that they are protected from possible repression, defamation or consequences under labor law, among other things. In concrete terms, this means that emails or posts in chat groups may not be duplicated. Messages from chat groups may not be passed on without the consent of the persons involved, in particular the person who created them. Some Alliance working groups work confidentially. The results of the work of these groups may not be publicized unless otherwise authorized (e.g. if they are intended for publication at a later date).

Despite the need to keep certain information confidential, transparency remains a core value of our alliance. We are committed to communicating and organizing our goals, strategies and decision-making processes as openly and honestly as possible. We see transparency as a right of all members, not just an obligation. A culture of transparency helps to strengthen the trust of our active and passive members who are not actively involved in the work processes. Wherever it is safe and feasible, we share important information about our activities and finances in order to make our work comprehensible and trustworthy without jeopardizing the safety of our members. There is a fundamental right to information. All members have a right to be informed about the work of the working groups. The duty of disclosure can only be suspended in very limited cases; one example is working groups that work confidentially.

Avoiding conflicts of interest is crucial to ensure the integrity of our work. All members are required to disclose potential conflicts of interest immediately. A conflict of interest exists when personal, professional or financial interests could compromise the independence and objectivity of the Partnership's work. By disclosing such conflicts and resolving them, we ensure that the impartiality and credibility of our commitment is maintained.

VII. SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY/RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT WE DO AND THE CARE THAT GOES WITH IT

In our organization, we attach great importance to share as well as personal accountability. Every member contributes to the achievement of our goals and the integrity of our work by taking responsibility for their actions and their consequences. We are aware that it is necessary to try out paths beyond capitalist and colonial logics and that this can also involve failures. This is the reason for dealing openly with mistakes and missteps and cultivating a constructive, non-punitive error culture.

VIIa. ONBOARDING FOR NEW MEMBERS: BUDDY SYSTEM

Every new member is welcomed by a member when they join, introduced to the working principles and accompanied for the first weeks – ideally this is one of the people who invited the new member, but it can also be a person from the members' committee. This person helps the new member to settle into the alliance, introduces the working structure and provides an insight into the various working committees, working groups, working parties, etc. They ensure that the new member familiarizes themselves with the working principles, applies them and is available to answer any questions.

VIIb. COMMUNICATION WITH EACH OTHER THAT IS CRITICAL OF DISCRIMINATION

In our organization, a conscious distribution of speaking time is a central principle. We are aware that speaking power can be unequally distributed. Wherever possible, every member should be given the opportunity to actively contribute to discussions. To achieve this, we take care at our meetings and in our discussions to ensure that individuals or groups do not dominate the conversation. Moderation techniques help us to promote a balanced and inclusive culture of dialogue. In this way, we ensure that different perspectives and opinions are incorporated into our decisions and that the diversity of our organization is appropriately represented. The exchange of experiences and perspectives takes place without judging or evaluating what has been said. Within this framework, it is important to leave room for perspectives and to look for what connects the respective perspectives rather than going into a conflict (more "and" instead of "but"). Since I cannot know how my speech will affect others, we attach great importance to listening openly and self-critically, listening to and accepting criticism and learning from each other. Depending on the topic, different members are personally affected to varying degrees; we see such personal involvement as a reason to give the person in question more space in this case. We recognize that personal involvement can also lead to emotional and irritable reactions. Instead of admonishing or reprimanding members, we deal with this openly. We approach every exchange positively, with the aim of clarifying things on a factual rather than a personal level. As a matter of principle, we assume that our counterparts are favorably disposed towards us.

As we talk to each other, we use and expand our critical vocabulary as we learn together. For example, we use self-designations from the movements of intersectionally marginalized groups and make an effort to pronounce each other's names correctly. As a matter of principle, we do not talk about marginalized groups, but with them. Devaluing and shaming people or yourself should be avoided. If we are unsure about aspects of anti-discriminatory speech, we take the time to do some research. As speakers, we relate to others and recognize each other as intersectionally differently positioned learners.

As such, we pay close attention to the dynamics of social media, which strongly determine the ways in which we interact in public with inscriptions, polemics, abbreviations, devaluations and misinformation. If we get the impression that these dynamics are being reproduced in communications in the network, we interrupt them, draw attention to them and suggest a different way of dealing with them. We strive for regular personal encounters in the digital and analogue space in order to counteract the dehumanizing tendencies of text-based digital communication.

We endeavor to open up spaces in which several languages can be used in the same room. Communicating in a language that someone does not know should not be seen as an exclusion. The content can then be briefly translated into lingua franca. This enables communication in several languages and not just in the hegemonic languages of the network: German/English.

VIIc. ATTENTION TO CENTRE-PERIPHERY DYNAMICS

We want to talk to each other, not about each other. Hierarchies between center and periphery (globally as well as regionally) and other effects of epistemic violence should not be reproduced. We are committed to promoting inclusive decision-making processes. Recognizing the expertise and unique experiences of members from different backgrounds is of great importance to us. It makes our work better and more self-reflective. This means that we also create communication and participation structures that enable all members to contribute their perspectives, regardless of their geographical location. This includes regular virtual meetings, rotating venues and, where possible, providing resources to make it easier for everyone to attend annual meetings in person.

VIII. HOW WE WANT TO DEAL WITH CONFLICTS

VIIIa. DEALING WITH CONFLICTS WITHIN THE ALLIANCE

The members of the alliance are united by the commitment to recognize the existence of intersectional axes of discrimination and to ensure that no proactive discrimination along these axes takes place in the interactions of the alliance. There is also agreement that intersectional axes of discrimination are structural and that their effectiveness therefore transcends the intentional actions of individuals. An action or behavior can therefore be discriminatory, even if it was not intentional. In this sense, the alliance strives to develop along the lines of a 'community of care' as proposed by Black feminism (Aisha K. Finch 2022, <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/163/article/857840/pdf>). If discrimination is perceived, the alliance commits to engaging with it – for example, by pausing and taking time to analyze and process the respective incident, if necessary, with external support.

One of the guiding principles of the Alliance in dealing with conflicts is to develop tolerance for ambiguity and contradictions, and to consider and to repeatedly raise awareness of contradictory boundaries and consider them carefully together.

An awareness team consisting of members who have experienced multiple intersectional discrimination offers a point of contact for members who experience discrimination within the alliance. The awareness team listens to the person(s) affected and, together with them, develops appropriate proposals for action for the situation, which are then brought into the alliance and implemented.

In addition, there is an ombuds office staffed by experienced members for conflicts arising from actions contrary to the working principles developed here. Together with those affected, it works to find solutions.

Further, spaces are made available (in person and digitally) in which conflicts can be discussed collectively. Any member can contact the ombuds office or the awareness team at any time to request a meeting, which will then be convened. An important aspect here is time, time to pause, meet and interact (in person or digitally).

VIIIb. DEALING WITH POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC DISSENT WITHIN THE ALLIANCE

As an alliance of researchers which is emerging in a particularly challenging political environment in Germany, we must proceed with the expectation that there will be disagreements on key political questions relating to the public face of this association, its common political line, and decisions about who we choose to align or collaborate with. These tensions will also inevitably appear when the personal, professional or financial interests of individuals contradict the association's founding principles and practical decisions.

Such political and strategic dissent cannot be made the responsibility of the ombuds team because it risks overloading a key capacity of the association and also addresses problems at the wrong scale. Debates on these issues must involve as many members as possible and proceed with the help of a moderator. Fostering formats for such discussion should be complemented with procedures that encourage political education and learning, e.g. learning how to bring forward political points backed by evidence; discussing whether majority-led votes on strategy deliver the desired outcome in the long run.

VIIIc. MANAGING AND RESOLVING CONFLICTS BETWEEN MEMBERS

The tendency to avoid conflict often results in more conflict. The work of this alliance will bring together individuals from different career stages and varied proximity to power within working groups or at the level of the association. As the Alliance is in its formative phase, it currently cannot guarantee an ombuds team that can operate from the outset. This runs the risk of alienating members or causing working groups to grind to a halt as unresolved tensions accumulate. We can anticipate this and attempt to put safeguards in place that make mediation a group responsibility. The first step is to create an environment in which people feel comfortable with acknowledging that there is tension or conflict that should be addressed instead of continuing with business as usual. What usually prevents this is the imbalance of power between people; this is a common problem especially in a new association with an (as yet) undefined structure of distributing roles and responsibilities. As a result, power and information tends to accumulate in the person who is most available, making it difficult to challenge their informal leadership of a working group or association: "Their power was not given to them; it cannot be taken away" (Freeman, 3, <https://coco-net.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/tyranny.pdf>). In young associations with a limited pool of active members, working groups should focus on drawing in and training new people via a rotation system. This can optionally be enabled further by combining membership with volunteer work in at least one working group.

When conflict does occur, members are encouraged to refer to the following mediation guidelines:

1. Assign two contact people to each person involved in the conflict to minimize contact between them outside a mediation setting.
2. Evaluate the roles and responsibilities of affected people as a group and determine if someone needs to take over their work or if it is possible to continue working parallel to conflict resolution.
3. Each working group is encouraged to anticipate future conflict and have a conversation around awareness and resolution at the outset.
4. If needed, a mediation group based on volunteer effort can be spontaneously formed. However, this should be done with the understanding that once a situation escalates to a point where volunteers feel unable to address it, an expert should be brought in to help de-escalate and resolve the situation.
5. The work of mediation does not stop at resolution and must incorporate a reflection process that continues at the group level. This is vital to restoring any lost trust or sense of safety amongst affected members.

VIIIId. EXTERNAL ATTACKS: SOLIDARITY WITH ALLIANCE MEMBERS

If members of the Alliance are attacked because of activities and positions associated with the Alliance, its goals and/or working principles, the Alliance will endeavor to provide maximum possible support. Depending on the resources available, this includes organizing legal assistance, providing peer counselling, amplifying voices through the use of social media and lobbying in various spheres of society such as the press, politics, institutions, associations or grassroots organizations.

IX. CHANGING THE WORKING PRINCIPLES

The working principles, as well as the rules of procedure, can always be rewritten and expanded as a "living document." We have a procedure for this, as explained in the rules of procedure:

- At every general meeting, we will reflect on whether we are adhering to the the working principles. There will also be an opportunity to submit proposals for amendments at the general meeting. In addition, suggestions for changes can come from the Executive Board, the Members' Committee, the Ombudsman Team, the Awareness Team or the working groups. Amendments should be dated to enable tracking.
- The working principles will be tested during the first few months of the Alliance's existence and should not be revised during this time.

Literature

Finch, Aisha K. 2022. Black Feminism and the Practice of Care. In *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* State University of New York Press, Volume 11, Issue 1, 2022, pp. 1–41.

Freeman, Jo. 1996. The Tyranny of Structurelessness. <https://coco-net.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/tyranny.pdf>

Tzul Tzul, Gladys. 2018. *Gobierno Comunal Indígena y Estado Guatemalteco*. Guatemala: Ediciones Bizarrras.

Miñoso, Yuderlys Espinosa, Bruna Barros, and Jess Oliveira 2021. “And the One Doesn’t Stir without the Other: Decoloniality, Anti-Racism, and Feminism.” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 49: 100–116. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27083253>.

Hartman, Saidiya V. (2019): *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Hartman, Saidiya V. (2007): *Lose your mother: a journey along the Atlantic slave route*. 1. ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Spillers, Hortense J. (1987): *Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book*. In: *Diacritics* 17/2, 65–81.