

## ABSTRACTS

### Kurdish Studies Conference

Wednesday 29 April – Friday 1 May 2026

London School of Economics

#### Panel 1A – Politics from the margins in Iran

##### **Rojîn Mûkrîyan, University College Cork**

*Jin, Jiyan Azadî: Decolonising the 'Iranian nation'*

The national question in Iran has been both a catalyst for, and an obstacle to, the women-led 2022 Jin, Jiyan, Azadî (JJA, Woman, Life, Freedom) movement. While this transnational, intersectional, and decolonial struggle inspired unprecedented solidarity, it also exposed entrenched and incommensurable tensions, especially around issues concerning self-determination for non-Persian groups such as the Kurds. These demands, often resisted by the state and segments of the opposition, generate a structural impasse that fragments solidarity, undermines opposition unity, and is leveraged by the Islamic Republic to maintain power. This article contends that the stalemate is rooted in methodological nationalism and the naturalization of the nation-state paradigm. Through a critical review of this framework and examining the historical formation of the Iranian nation-state, this paper shows how these paradigms reproduce ethno-national conflict and restrict political imagination. Drawing on Abdullah Öcalan's theory of Democratic Confederalism, it explores a dual power model that reconciles self-determination with territorial integrity through decentralized and pluralistic governance. In doing so, the study contributes to decolonizing the "Iranian nation," enriches scholarship on the JJA movement, and offers insights for activists and policymakers working toward a democratic and inclusive Iran.

##### **Armin Messenger, Sciences-Po Paris**

*From margin to metropole: Kurdish, Baluch and working-class invisibilities in the Jina Uprising*

The Jina (Mahsa Amini) uprising began with the death of a Kurdish woman and a slogan rooted in decades of Kurdish leftist and feminist struggles: Jin, Jîyan, Azadî. Yet despite its Kurdish—and therefore peripheral—origins, the movement was rapidly reframed around the concerns of metropolitan, middle-class, liberal publics. Drawing on fieldwork, media analysis, and interviews, this paper examines how structural inequalities shaped both the representation and the lived experience of the uprising across Iran. I argue that satellite channels—often tied to foreign states or to political actors living abroad aligned with Iran's upper classes—produced a profound imbalance: slogans emerging from peripheral regions, whether ethnonational or socio-economic, including conservative, autonomist, or explicitly ethnic claims, were largely erased from national narratives. Likewise, victims from central provinces were commemorated with biographies and visual tributes, while Kurdish, Baluch, and working-class victims remained comparatively invisible, despite accounting for roughly half of all deaths. This disparity within the mobilization reflects deeper patterns of inequality largely produced by the state. It also manifests in the dynamics disparity of risk and repression: Kurds, Baluchs, and the urban poor faced significantly higher probabilities of being killed or executed, even as the state appears to have somewhat loosened its control over individual moral behaviours. The result is a paradoxical political landscape in which increasing tolerance of personal liberties coexists with intensified collective repression against marginalised communities.

**Yunus Abakay, University of Exeter**

*Iran's ethnonational dynamics: Persian hegemony and intersectional struggles in the peripheries*

This article analyses the sociopolitical dynamics of protests against Iran's Islamic regime, which were triggered by the death of Jîna (Mahsa) Amini, a Kurdish woman persecuted for not adhering to hijab standards. These demonstrations have evolved into more substantial critiques of oppressive policies, and the paper draws attention to the conflicting interests within the opposition vis-à-vis the intersectional oppression of non-Persian communities, with a focus on Kurds, their pursuit of liberty, and the Persian hegemonic concerns. The article examines the one-language policy and the exclusive political recognition in favour of Persian by the Islamic regime, and the Persian opposition's negation of Jîna's Kurdish identity, the cultural appropriation of the Kurdish slogan Jin, Jiyan, Azadî (Women, Life, Freedom) to Persian Zen, Zendegi, Azadi, and silencing the demands of minoritised non-Persian communities during the protests as a manifestation of Persian hegemony shared by the Islamic regime and its Persian opposition. The article employs Michel Foucault's theory of discourse, Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation of capital, and Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality to analyse the sociopolitical dynamics of protests and politics in Iran and the diaspora. It argues for a nuanced discourse that transcends the Islamic frame to recognise the nationalist motives underlying the power dynamics and the intersectional struggle of non-Persian communities.

**Soran Mansournia, Hiwa Foundation**

*Spatial politics in Kurdistan: How urban geography is weaponised against Kurds in Iran*

For nearly five decades, the Islamic Republic has responded to uprisings in Rojhilat (Kurdistan Region in Iran) with systematic, often brutal violence. Although thousands have been killed during major crackdowns, human-rights documentation focuses on casualties while overlooking the spatial mechanisms that enable state violence. How urban configurations anticipate, channel, or constrain dissent remains largely unexamined—despite being central to how crackdown unfolds. This study reveals spatial mechanisms linking urban form to protest suppression in Kurdish cities. Using participatory geospatial methods and trusted networks in Mariwan, we mapped the experiences of 210 demonstrators involved in protests over two decades. Participants geo-referenced where they joined marches, encountered violence, and witnessed state actions. These experiential datasets were analyzed alongside urban-planning layers—street networks, block morphologies, land-use patterns—to examine how built environments shape both mobilization and suppression. Participants mapped over 430 protest locations and 400 suppression sites. Initial spatial analysis shows that street configurations do more than carry traffic, they structure opportunities for assembly and constrain escape routes. Civic-infrastructure become weaponized during crackdowns, with their spatial positioning facilitating rather than coincidentally enabling state violence. This evidence demonstrates how urban form itself functions as a technology of political control in authoritarian contexts.

**Panel 1B – Agency and belonging in Europe and beyond**

**Haci Cevik, Humboldt University & Miki Nose, Institute of Developing Economies**

*Between invisibility and hypervisibility: Everyday lives and media framing of Kurdish diaspora in Japan*

In Japan, the Kurdish diaspora has recently attracted media and governmental attention, yet their everyday experiences remain largely invisible in public discourse and academic literature. This study combines ethnographic fieldwork with media analysis to examine two parallel dynamics: (1) the lived experiences of Kurdish residents navigating precarious legal status, and (2) how specific media outlets construct public perceptions of the Kurdish community. Fieldwork shows that despite unstable residency, limited access to employment and healthcare,

and the constant threat of detention or deportation, Kurdish people maintain cultural identity through daily practices. These practices function as cultural citizenship, even without legal recognition. The media analysis reveals that one prominent conservative outlet recurrently frames Kurds as a security issue. Such framing not only amplifies stereotypes but also legitimizes and reinforces restrictive refugee policies. This interaction between media narratives and political agendas intensifies the community's vulnerability and shapes public perception. By juxtaposing lived narratives with media representations, this study highlights the gap between how the Kurdish community understands itself and how it is framed by influential political-media networks. The case contributes to diaspora and migration studies by showing how identity is negotiated under legal precarity, selective media visibility, and politicized framing in Japanese context.

**Haqqi Bahram, Linköping University**

*Statelessness, borders and bureaucracies: Experiences of stateless Kurds from Syria*

Statelessness is a pressing issue impacting many refugees globally, yet it often remains marginalised in asylum and migration policy discussions. Drawing on materials and findings from my doctoral dissertation on the case of Kurds from Syria, this paper explores how statelessness and identity are negotiated in asylum and migration processes. It outlines the unique challenges of statelessness faced by the Kurds, from histories of identity erasure and confinement in Syria to displacement journeys, encounters with state borders, and interactions with asylum systems in Germany and Sweden. Narratives of research participants are analysed as interconnected epistemic standpoints, reflecting both an individual and collective struggle to prove statelessness and assert identities. This struggle exposes a recurring pattern in asylum and statelessness procedures, marked by limited official understanding of statelessness, hierarchical protection norms, arbitrariness, and bureaucratic violence. The paper concludes by emphasising the need for dedicated policies on statelessness within asylum procedures, that are sensitive to intersecting forms of discrimination and contextual histories of exclusion and identity erasure.

**Henriette Raddatz, Freie Universität Berlin**

*From refugee narrative to economic actor: Yezidis in Russia reimagined*

This paper examines the socio-economic networks of Yezidis in Russia, challenging dominant Western narratives that portray Yezidis primarily as impoverished refugees or displaced minorities. While Yezidis have indeed faced historical persecution and marginalization, their experiences in Russia reveal a distinct trajectory marked by economic mobility, organized community structures, and transregional connections. Drawing on community institutions and commercial networks that span the entire Russian Federation, Yezidis have developed a cohesive presence that blends economic entrepreneurship with cultural preservation. Central to this process is the All-Russian Yezidi Congress, which functions as both a representative body and a strategic platform for advancing collective interests. The Congress fosters intra-community cohesion, facilitates economic cooperation, and articulates national aspirations within a multicultural Russian context. By connecting local chapters, business actors, and cultural organizations, it serves as a vital node linking social ties and economic initiatives. This study therefore repositions Yezidis in Russia not as passive subjects of displacement, but as active agents shaping their own social and economic futures. In doing so, it highlights how diasporic structures can generate new forms of national identity and economic agency, complicating simplified global narratives of minority vulnerability and refugee dependence.

**Joanna Bocheńska, Jagiellonian University**

*Heritage bridges: Kurdish contemporary art in Poland (2003-2025)*

In March 2003, the National Museum in Kraków (Poland) hosted, for the first time, an exhibition of contemporary “Kurdish art” entitled *Outlook: Contemporary Kurdish Art in Europe*. The exhibition occupied the museum’s largest hall was the first large-scale presentation of “Kurdish art” in Europe. Organized in cooperation between Ziyad Raoof, director of the Kurdish Centre for Information and Documentation, and the National Museum in Kraków, it marked an important beginning in the presentation of Kurdish art in Poland. Thanks to its success and Ziyad Raoof’s engagement, over the past two decades Poland has become a unique hub for the presentation of “Kurdish art”. This has included both solo exhibitions and group exhibitions such as *Kurdistan: Images of Existence* (Bydgoszcz, 2022–2023). The exhibitions, sadly, remained virtually unknown outside Poland. Drawing on Denis Byrne’s concept of “heritage corridors” (2016) and postcolonial critiques of centre–periphery relations, I propose the term “heritage bridges” to account for the popularity of “Kurdish art” in Poland. I argue that modern Kurdish art resonates with Poland’s own historical experience of statelessness, that shaped Polish art and literature for over two centuries and which today constitutes a core of Poland’s “national heritage”. However, Poland tends to be positioned on the periphery of European artistic life; consequently, the impact of these exhibitions has remained limited. Moreover, a critical examination of the reception of Kurdish art in Poland reveals that the exhibitions have sometimes lacked broader cultural and political contextualisation and have, on occasion, resulted in the “exoticisation” of the works.

**Evin Bulut, Ibn Haldun University**

*Making space for agency: Yezidi women in the Russian diaspora*

This study examines the forms of subjectivity, forms of agency, and processes of empowerment of Yezidi women living in Russia, focusing particularly on education and employment as forms of deliberative agency. The narrative surrounding Yezidi women is shaped by beliefs that they are oppressed, passive, or confined to cultural boundaries. Rather than conceptualizing agency as neither complete freedom nor complete dependency, the study focuses on how women create their own unique spaces for agency. A key characteristic of this article is that the narrative is constructed by the women themselves. Yezidi women’s agency is interpreted through their own narratives and experiences. The research is based on fieldwork conducted in Yezidi communities in the Russian provinces of Volgograd, Samara, and St. Petersburg, as well as in-depth oral history interviews with Yezidis from diverse social backgrounds and settlement patterns. Moving away from one-dimensional explanations, the article aims to rethink Yezidi women’s agency from a socio-economic and anthropological perspective.

**Panel 1C – Culture, migration and survivors in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq**

**Lina Abdulqadir, Independent Researcher & Arin Khorshed, Loughborough University**

*Narratives of opportunity: Strengthening cultural infrastructure and international engagement in the Kurdistan Region, Iraq*

This research examines how creative-sector institutions function as strategic tools of soft power in reshaping global narratives about The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Despite major diplomatic advances over recent decades, the KRI remains internationally dominated by imagery of conflict and political instability. Drawing on the theoretical framework of paradiplomacy and protodiplomacy, this study seeks to answer a key question: How does innovation in cultural infrastructure translate into measurable diplomatic returns? The study

qualitatively assesses the gradual construction of the Kurdistan Region Government's (KRG) actorness in the international sphere. In recent years there has been a growing number of independent grassroots filmmaking communities that engage the new generation of Kurdish creatives. For example, The Kurdistan Film Commission, is a newly founded women led nonprofit that functions as a hub to connect local screen writers, producers and filmmakers to the international market and vice versa. The aim of the non-profit is to introduce the region for its vibrant nature, and historical sites and other locations amid post-conflict reconstruction of the country. Investment in creative infrastructure is not merely symbolic but constitutes a strategic avenue to leverage low politics for narrative renewal, economic opportunity, and strengthened external relations for the KRI.

**Hersh Hama Karem, University of Sulaimani**

*Oral codes of Anfal: New perspectives from survivor narratives in the Jabary region of Garmyan*

Although the Kurdish genocide- especially the Anfal campaign- has been widely studied, much of the existing literature relies on official documents, governmental archives, and academic analyses. This research shifts the focus toward the oral codes and meanings expressed by survivors who escaped Anfal. Through in-depth interviews with individuals from the Jabary region in Garmyan, we identified a set of concepts that survivors used spontaneously to describe their experiences. These expressions are shaped by cultural memory, local environment, religious narratives, and personal creativity formed under extreme violence. The central question guiding this study is whether oral history offers a distinct and valuable angle for understanding Anfal. Can these parallel narratives reveal dimensions of the genocide that remain absent in official reports, academic studies, or artistic representations? Our findings strongly suggest that they do. Oral testimony-especially from women and elderly survivors- often carries emotional depth and cultural insight that exceed the explanatory power of formal documentation. Such narratives uncover layers of fear, survival, meaning-making, and community identity that conventional historical methods may overlook. By foregrounding these oral codes, the research argues for integrating survivor narratives as an essential and authoritative source in the broader historiography of Anfal.

**Mansur Tayfuri, University of Paris 8**

*Political paradigm in the Kurdish genocide in Iraq (1987-1989)*

This article examines the naming of the genocidal operation against the Kurds in Iraq between 1987 and 1989. It critiques the dominant interpretations that describe this naming as: 1) a "euphemism" (as proposed by the Middle East Human Rights Watch Report, 1993); 2) "chosen haphazardly" (according to the memoirs of Ba'ath officer Nazar al-Khazraji); and 3) Al-Anfal as "Ganimah" or "booty" (the popular understanding). This research argues that Al-Anfal is best understood in relation to the declaration of Manateq al-Muharramah - misleadingly translated as "Prohibited Zone" in the 1993 Report and as Nawçay Qedexe in Kurdish translations from 1999 and 2024. This declaration represents a decision to establish a state of exception (1987) in which Al-Anfal becomes possible. The declaration of Manateq al-Muharramah laid the groundwork for defining life itself as Al-Anfal, as haram. The article proposes understanding Al-Anfal and Manateq al-Muharramah as paradigmatic constructs in the formation of political power within Islam, just as, for Giorgio Agamben, the camps represent the paradigm of politics in the West.

## **Panel 1D – The conflict in Turkey: Discrimination, disagreement and discourse**

**Özden Melis Uluğ, University of Sussex**

*Emotional dynamics of talking to lay vs. ally Turks: Discrimination experiences and intergroup contact intentions among Kurds*

This study investigated whether emotional reactions during discussions of power differences with Turks shape the association between Kurds' experiences of ethnic discrimination and their willingness to engage in intergroup contact with them. Self-identifying Kurds in Turkey (N = 407) completed measures of discrimination experiences, emotional responses when discussing power differences with either lay Turks or ally Turks, and willingness to engage in intergroup contact. Greater experiences of discrimination were associated with lower willingness to interact with Turks. Moderation analyses further showed this relationship was conditional based on the emotions embedded in intergroup conversations. First, positive emotions when discussing power differences with ally Turks strengthened the negative link between discrimination and intergroup contact. As discrimination increased, individuals who felt more hope and perceived dialogue with ally Turks showed less willingness to engage in contact. Second, negative emotions when discussing power differences with lay Turks also intensified the negative association: participants who felt more disappointment and frustration when discussing power differences with lay Turks showed the steepest decreases in intergroup contact willingness as discrimination rose. These findings highlight how relationally grounded emotions predict minority group members' contact intentions, demonstrating that emotional climates of intergroup discussions, both hopeful and discouraging, play a pivotal role in whether discrimination fosters or undermines willingness to interact.

**Recep Onursal, Independent Researcher**

*Tracing radical disagreement in the Kurdish conflict: Discourse, hegemony and ontological insecurity*

This paper reconceptualises radical disagreement in intractable conflicts through the notion of "ontological conflict regimes", understood as patterned discursive, affective and institutional formations that organise the Kurdish conflict in Turkey across historical and socio political axes. Bringing post foundational discourse theory into dialogue with Lacanian psychoanalysis and ontological security theory, the paper explains how disagreements persist as struggles over being, identity and reality rather than as negotiable differences. It specifies how hegemonic projects attempt to fix meanings of the conflict, how libidinal investments attach enjoyment and loss to antagonisms, and how quests for ontological security stabilise narratives of self and other. Drawing on empirical material from Turkish and Kurdish political discourse, it traces disputes over the very existence of the conflict and over the meanings of Kurdishness, violence and citizenship, and shows how these disputes sediment yet periodically unsettle the conflict regime. The analysis clarifies why dialogue and negotiation repeatedly stall and identifies openings for transformation through dislocation, re articulation and agonistic engagement. Finally, the paper brings theories of conflict transformation into conversation with theories of discourse, power and subjectivity in order to account for the persistent non-resolution of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey.

**Jiyan Andiç, Boğaziçi University**

*Fifty shades of Turkishness: Conflicts and convergences in the Saraçhane Protests*

This paper examines the Saraçhane protests following the detention of Ekrem İmamoğlu and others in March 2025, analysing both participants' motivations and the discourses they articulated, including their exclusions. It highlights the conflicts and convergences within calls for "rights, law, and justice," showing how opposition politics both challenge authoritarian

practices and reproduce ethnic boundaries. Conducted as part of my ongoing MA thesis research, this study employed participant observation and semi-structured interviews with 26 participants drawn from across the oppositional political spectrum. Drawing on insights from social movement theory, framing processes, and the concept of the Turkishness Contract, the paper examines how justice is defined within the protests and, crucially, who is excluded from this definition. In particular, the silence – or deliberate distance – shown in the face of pressure on Kurdish politicians, the appointment of trustees in Kurdish regions, and long-term detentions illustrates how demands for rights and justice are shaped within ethnic boundaries. Rather than conceiving the Saraçhane crowd as a homogeneous bloc, the paper focuses on the conflicts and contradictions emerging among protesters and places these in tension with the convergences and continuities that indeed constitute a shared, if contested, narrative of Turkishness. The analysis demonstrates how Turkishness is internalised, reproduced, and redefined not as a fixed identity, but as a plural, contextual, and performative practice, shaping both solidarities and silences in opposition politics.

**Güllistan Yarkin, University of Hamburg**

*Everyday racism and anti-racism in Istanbul: Kurdish youth, car arson, and the Turkish flag (2005–2013)*

This paper examines car arson by Kurdish youth in Istanbul’s working-class district of Zeytinburnu between 2005 and 2013, when incidents escalated amid the PKK–state conflict and rising racist mob violence against Kurds. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork (2014–2017) alongside media reports, human-rights documentation, and secondary literature, it identifies a recurrent pattern of privately owned vehicles displaying the Turkish flag being targeted. The article argues that these attacks constituted a form of militant anti-racism in response to racist state violence, everyday racism, and coercive pressures to display the flag as a public performance of loyalty. Following the 2005 Mersin flag incident, the Turkish flag increasingly operated both as a tool of everyday racism and as a racialised loyalty test imposed on Kurds. Refusal or inability to display it exposed them to suspicion, surveillance, and punishment. Conceptualising Istanbul as a colonial metropolis and Kurdish migrants as racialised colonial subjects, the article theorises militant anti-racism as confrontational resistance practices forged against racist state violence and everyday racism. It contributes to scholarship on anti-racism and youth resistance by identifying the coercive display of the Turkish flag as an everyday racist practice and illuminating the political agency of Kurdish youth through a previously under-examined pattern of targeted car arson.

**Panel 1E – The Kurdish underground: Fugitive epistemologies of worldmaking in Kurdistan**

**Emrah Karakuş, University of Sussex**

*Fieldnotes from the underground: Queer Kurdish intimacies in the drug world*

This paper examines how drug use shapes queer and trans (lubunya) Kurdish socialities in Istanbul and Amed (Diyarbakır), where racialized securitization structures everyday life. Drawing on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork, including participant observation and interviews with sex workers, activists, customers, and drug dealers, it traces how substances such as marijuana, methamphetamine, and ecstasy become central to practices of intimacy, desire, and survival. These substances facilitate the formation of friendships and erotic worlds, even as they expose individuals to intensified criminalization and bodily harm. Focusing on everyday scenes- from “kafa dilenciligi” (seeking a buzz by bumming marijuana) near the city walls and Hevsel Gardens to the intimate economies of drug exchange- the paper shows how drugs act as a molecular engine for social connection amid precarity. It also highlights the politicized understandings of drug use within Kurdish queer and trans communities, particularly through the concept of bedel (“paying one’s debt to society”). Finally, it considers local claims that rising

drug circulation is a state-driven strategy to depoliticize and criminalize Kurdish youth, illuminating how state power and grassroots resistance converge in shaping queer and trans Kurdish life in Turkey's urban centres.

**Delal Aydın, Geneva Graduate Institute**

*Yurtsever's breath: The atmospheres of revolution and the politics from the below in Kurdistan*

This paper traces the atmospheric and often unseen socialities of revolution that take shape from below, in the liminal spaces of the under/ground. It approaches the Kurdish struggle not only as a history marked by violence and loss, but also as one sustained through joy, affection, and the intimate labour of friendship relations formed within the subterranean affective worlds inhabited by Kurdish youth. I argue that friendship, shaped by playfulness, care, and mutual recognition, became a key site through which young people fashioned themselves as political subjects. Drawing on long-term ethnographic research in Diyarbakır- the cultural and political centre of Kurdish life, and a site of both mobilisation and repression- the paper explores friendship as a political relation that grounded identity, belonging, and revolutionary possibility. It further shows how, in contexts shaped by death, dispossession, and suffocating forms of state power, friendship worked as a life-producing practice. Through shared ways of breathing together, Kurdish youth created pockets of livability and political possibility that resisted suffocation and subtly reshaped the very atmospheres of struggle from below.

**Ruken Atçeken, Independent Researcher**

*Off the sonic grounds: The Kurdish music in queer scenes*

This paper explores how Kurdish music emerges within Turkish queer nightlife as a visible and audible cultural presence, yet often in ways that detach it from its political force. Drawing on my experiences as a DJ and participant in queer party scenes, I examine how Kurdish sounds, or the absence of it, deeply rooted in histories of struggle, displacement, and cultural suppression- are brought into queer clubs, where they circulate as aesthetic markers of difference, novelty, or trendiness. While these sonic moments can produce feelings of joy, connection, and shared energy on the dance floor, they frequently depoliticize Kurdish music by stripping it of the grounded histories and ongoing violences that shape its meaning. The paper traces how Kurdish musical elements- remixes, samples, and dances- are appropriated into queer party cultures in ways that celebrate sonic diversity yet obscure structural inequalities. This incorporation mirrors broader dynamics within the mainstream LGBTI+ movement in Turkey, where gestures of inclusion can coexist with unaddressed racism, homonationalist narratives, and the marginalization of Kurdish political demands.

**Heja Aksünger, Independent Researcher**

*Flesh and soil: The trans/grounds of the Kurdish aesthetics*

This narrative presentation develops a grounded approach from Kurdish trans perspective on contemporary artmaking, drawing on my own artistic practice and projects that centre Kurdish feminist, queer, and trans embodiments. Rather than treating Kurdish lives as symbols or aesthetic resources, I focus on how art emerges from the material conditions that shape daily life under authoritarianism, displacement, and ongoing gendered and racialized violence. My work engages these grounded realities not as themes to be represented but as forces that structure the textures, gestures, and forms of the artwork itself. Through an examination of several pieces from my recent practice, I explore how Kurdish trans aesthetics can open new ways of seeing and sensing the body—its vulnerabilities, resistances, and transformative capacities. These works foreground the everyday negotiations of living as a Kurdish trans person in Turkey, addressing questions of survival, care, intimacy, and the politics of visibility without being absorbed into nationalist, capitalist, or liberal narratives of representation.

**Helin Karabil, Independent Researcher**

*Centaurea Kurdica: Spinosaic encounters with the grounded fragments of Kurdish life*

This spinosaic (thorny) performance work will bring Helin Karabil and Emrah Karakus to explore justice-oriented storytelling with experimental artistic and academic practice focusing on the interspecies illuminations across Mesopotamian region, with particular attention to Kurdistan. At its centre is the artwork by Helin Karabil that comes to life through the *Centaurea Kurdica*- a rare, delicate, and increasingly endangered plant native to these lands, now pushed toward extinction by environmental devastation, extractivist economies, and accelerating climate change. In the project, the plant becomes more than a botanical specimen: it operates as a living metaphor for cultural precarity. Its vulnerability echoes the condition of lives and identities systematically suppressed through state violence, forced assimilation, and long histories of erasure. By foregrounding this fragile flora, the work gestures toward the intertwined endangerments of ecologies, languages, and queer worlds that are continually rendered unspeakable or disposable and how alternative forms of lives can be imagined through interspecies imagination.

**Panel 2A – Women in Bakur: Authority, memory and resistance**

**Berivan Matyar, Independent Researcher**

*Voices of mourning: The ritual authority of Zakir women in post-earthquake Gomika*

This paper offers a feminist analysis of death, mourning, and şîn (lament) rituals in the Kurdish-Alevi village of Gomika in Adıyaman, Turkey, with a particular focus on zakir women (female lament singers central to mourning rituals). In this community, death is not experienced solely as a biological end but as a gendered social transition shaped by care, emotional labour, and collective responsibility. Fieldwork conducted in the aftermath of the 2023 earthquake (Turkey) shows how women's ritual labour became highly visible, as the community struggled to process extensive loss and reassemble social cohesion. The study details the sequence of mourning rituals, from the moment of death through funeral preparations, communal lamentations (şîn), zakir women's performances, and the closure of the mourning period. Zakir women are not merely performers of lament; they are custodians of gendered knowledge who translate affect into ritual expression, articulate collective memory, and mediate the community's moral and emotional responses. Through their voices, grief is structured, emotions are regulated, and communal solidarity is reestablished. By foregrounding the ritual authority and emotional labour of zakir women, this paper demonstrates how Kurdish-Alevi mourning practices are sustained through women's cultural work. It argues that, in the wake of the earthquake, ritual continuity and communal resilience were reconstructed primarily through women's embodied, affective, and narrative practices.

**Hazal Özvarış, Goldsmiths, University of London**

*Archives of doubly disappeared women in Turkey*

My research investigates, narrates, and visualises the stories of Kurdish women forcibly disappeared in the 1990s in Turkey, who remain largely uncommemorated. Drawing on openings created by the failed transitional justice efforts of the early 2010s and focusing on 15 re-verified disappearances in the southeast, the study aims to develop new methods for examining past gendered violence and to uncover the gendered dimensions of the crime and its aftermath. Through investigative visualisations, it traces memories and materials tied to these women -including bureaucratic remnants, soundscapes, textual remains- and charts zones of exceptionality to address the spatiality of their double disappearance. It simultaneously examines the relationship between disappearance and displacement by digitally mapping village destruction and forced migration in the 1990s, alongside the relocation of enforced-

disappearance trials and the repeated displacement of relatives. Bringing these materials together, the project creates forms of reappearance through an interactive archive, comprising of timelines and maps, that reveals the geographic embeddedness and continuity of the violence. In doing so, it seeks to craft new visibilities that counter the invisibilisation of women, spatial hierarchies of visibility, and biases embedded in legal, humanitarian, and academic frameworks.

**William Persichilli, University of Cambridge/University of Messina**

*The Kurdish women's movement for a new positive peace: From a sociological fieldwork in Northern Kurdistan*

I propose an empirical study which draws from the more general research framework of my PhD research, in which I analyse the linkages between women's activism and peace. Öcalan's paradigm of Democratic Confederalism, and its application within the Kurdish Movement for Freedom, perfectly resonates with my research's scope, if we consider the way the stateless Kurdish population and the Kurdish women are succeeding in constructing peace. The main theoretical avenues of my research are: sociology of social movements / feminist movements; political ecology / transfeminism; decolonial thought; democratic theories.

The outcomes of my research are also drawn from the 6-week fieldwork activity which I carried out in Northern Kurdistan, during which I realised observant participations and semi-structured interviews with Kurdish activists and political representatives, looking at the possible role of Democratic Confederalism in their activity and organisation. Following the axes of qualitative research, employing a grounded theory approach, 35 semi-structured interviews have been realised to date. The sampling has been theoretical, non-probabilistic, mainly a snow-ball sampling. The main analytical results emerging from the research are: notion of Democratic Confederalism; features of the Kurdish Freedom Movement; notion of Kurdish Feminism; history of the Kurdish community's exclusion; Kurdish political activism; ecological struggle.

**Ozlem Belcim Galip, University of Sussex**

*Women, war, and the architecture of loss: Gendered spatial politics in post-conflict Kurdish cities*

This paper examines how Kurdish women reconstruct everyday life and belonging in the aftermath of war and state-led urban transformation. Drawing on nine months of ethnographic and visual fieldwork in southeastern Turkey, it explores how urban warfare (2015–16) and forced resettlement into TOKI (in Turkish Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı and literally meaning Mass Housing Development Administration) state housing have reshaped gendered spatial relations in Kurdish-majority cities. Conceptually framed within feminist urbanism and critical geographies of home, the paper interrogates how displacement operates as both a spatial and affective condition. It introduces the dual concepts of home-unmaking and home-remaking to reveal how Kurdish women's domestic and creative practices—gardening on balconies, modifying flats, re-establishing communal rituals—become acts of spatial reclamation and quiet resistance to erasure. Using a co-produced visual methodology, the study treats participants' photographs as analytical artefacts that articulate memory, trauma, and resilience in gendered space. It argues that women's agency in transforming imposed architectures offers an alternative understanding of urban recovery—one grounded not in reconstruction policies but in lived, affective geographies of care, repair, and continuity.

## **Panel 2B – Education, religion and knowledge production**

**James Hewitt, University of St Andrews**

*Loyalty from learning: Education, skills and training in the PKK and Komala*

This paper explores three different forms of learning likely to be experienced by members of the PKK and Komala: military training, skills development and political education. Drawing upon original empirical data from interviews and autobiographies of former revolutionaries, this paper demonstrates that these distinct forms of learning and education contribute to the development of in-group loyalties. Two aspects of this process are identified as especially influential: the social environment in which learning takes place and positive emotions that are produced through the learning process. This paper argues that these forms of learning combine to construct a new social and political environment to which members become deeply attached. This paper thereby offers both an empirical and theoretical contribution to Kurdish Studies in particular, and studies of revolutionary movements more broadly.

**Muslih Irwani, American University of Iraq – Baghdad (co-authors: Botan T. Maghdid & Silvia Marchionne)**

*Assessing minority heritage curricula in the Kurdistan Region*

This paper reports the findings of a research project funded by the EU's ERASMUS+ project (TRANSITION project) and examines how universities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) teach and safeguard the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of minority communities. Drawing on a mixed methods design (literature review, institutional survey, course-book analysis, and six focus group discussions with faculty), the study maps existing curricula in four partner higher education institutions and benchmarks them against EU partners. Results show a strong bias towards archaeological and material heritage, with limited, fragmented treatment of minorities' languages, rituals, oral traditions and everyday practices. In KRI, minority heritage (Assyrian/Christian, Turkmen, Shabak, Armenian and Yazidis) is acknowledged but rarely mainstreamed. In this context, theory-heavy teaching, exam-centred assessment, and scarce fieldwork reinforce a gap between classroom learning and community needs. The paper concludes by outlining priorities that link inclusive heritage education to social cohesion, livelihoods and post-conflict peacebuilding. Furthermore, key recommendations are defined among those: integrating the intangible cultural heritage of minority groups explicitly across modules and case studies; Embedding heritage within sustainable development and tourism policies; Promoting gender-inclusive practices; Prioritising curriculum updates, targeted training and awareness campaigns with local communities.

**Hevidar Isik, University of Münster**

*Negotiating religious practice: Kurdish Sunni Muslims and mosque engagement in Germany*

This paper examines Kurdish individuals of the first, second, and later migrant generations in Germany who maintain a Sunni Muslim affiliation while seeking engagement with mosque institutions. These individuals navigate a field of tension arising from their embeddedness in an organizational and religious landscape largely dominated by the Turkish Sunni majority. This dominance is particularly visible in institutions such as DİTİB (the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs), the largest Muslim umbrella organization in Germany, encompassing more than 900 mosques nationwide. Against this backdrop, the paper asks: How do Kurdish Sunni Muslims in Germany negotiate religious participation within mosque fields shaped by Turkish organizational dominance? Drawing on initial data collected through problem-centered interviews with Kurdish Sunni Muslims in Berlin and employing an inductive approach informed by Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), preliminary findings suggest that (1) motivations for

mosque attendance, (2) the selection of specific mosque communities, and (3) disengagement from previous mosque associations are shaped by both experiences of exclusion and respondents' perceived capacities to transform mosque communities from within. These dynamics highlight processes of religious adaptation and agency through which individuals redefine their place within Germany's mosque landscape.

## **Panel 2C – New approaches to Kurdish philology and literature**

### **Yashar Abduselamoglu, Sofia University**

*Establishing classical Kurdish literature as a sociological field: Identity, discourse, and canon*

This paper offers a comprehensive sociological framework for understanding classical Kurdish literature, positioning this tradition not merely as a local literary heritage but as a comparative model for global literary sociology. The study examines key structural elements that have shaped Kurdish literary production—such as linguistic multilayeredness, Sufi epistemology, ethno-cultural identity, tribal organization, the emergence of national consciousness, and the ideological construction of the literary canon—through sociological and discourse-analytic methods. The works of foundational figures such as Melayê Cizîrî, Feqiyê Teyran, Ehmedê Xanî, and Hacî Qadirê Koyî are read as discursive sites in which collective identity is produced, negotiated, and symbolically articulated. This interpretive approach exposes the historical tensions between Sufi universalism and local-ethnic belonging, while illuminating the role of themes such as language, geography, love, and justice in the formation of Kurdish collective identity. The paper argues that classical Kurdish literature functions not only as a repository of cultural memory but as a dynamic laboratory where social subjectivity is constructed through literary forms. In addition, the study addresses the relationship between canon formation and sociopolitical power. Thus, it aims to reposition Kurdish literature both within its own historical context and within global debates on literature, identity, and cultural production.

### **Sirma Kostadinova, Sofia University**

*The unspeakable in dreams: Cultural identity in Fouzieh Besharat's "Dance of Fate"*

Dreams have long held a central place in literary imagination, serving as symbolic landscapes and vehicles for narrative transformation. In Kurdish literature, dreams are not mere aesthetic flourishes but powerful cultural motifs that reflect the emotional, historical, and social realities of a people shaped by displacement, resistance, and longing. This study focuses on Fouzieh Besharat's novel "Dance of Fate", examining how dream narratives function as literary strategies for articulating collective memory and cultural identity. The aim is to explore how Besharat mobilizes dreamscapes to narrate silenced experiences, negotiate tensions between tradition and modernity, and preserve cultural continuity. Significantly, her use of the Garusi dialect situates narration as an act of cultural preservation, reinforcing the inseparability of language and identity. Methodologically, the research combines close textual analysis of selected dream sequences with a cultural studies approach. It interprets dreams both as psychological phenomena and culturally embedded texts that encode social norms, historical trauma, and communal as well as individual aspirations. By situating Besharat's work within broader Kurdish literary traditions, the study highlights how dreams become a shared reservoir of meaning – a space where personal longing and collective history converge, and where literature voices what cannot be spoken in waking life.

**Michiel Leezenberg, University of Amsterdam**

*Mem û Zîn as subaltern world literature*

Ehmedê Xani's *Mem û Zîn* is considered the Kurdish national epic. It has long been studied in an exclusively Kurdish national setting, but it may also be read against the background of classical Persian, or Persianate, literature; and doing so may at the same time imply a critique of the (largely unrecognized) power dimensions of that tradition. I will do so using the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Pascale Casanova, which calls attention to literary domination as an unrecognized form of symbolic power. In this presentation, I will explore how *Mem û Zîn* has, already in early modern times, circulated beyond national and linguistic boundaries in what may be called a wider cosmopolitan sphere of Persian literary civilization. Already when it was first written, its author appears to have been conscious of working under, and in part revolting against, the literary domination of Persian. It has also become clear in recent years that from the eighteenth century on, translations of this poem in different languages started appearing. I will explore the significance of these translations, and more generally discuss how Xani's masterpiece has fared under different forms of literary domination and national oppression over the centuries.

**Halil İbrahim Şakar, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University**

*Defending Kurdish episteme: Dengbêjî, oral tradition, and the epistemic lines of national narration*

This study argues that Kurdish oral tradition—particularly the Dengbêjî repertoire—constitutes a foundational epistemic framework through which Kurdish collective identity, historical consciousness, and national narration have been articulated, protected, and transmitted. Building on my earlier work on Şakiro, I contend that the “we/they” distinction embedded in Dengbêjî songs produced a form of vernacular nationalism long before the development of institutional Kurdish historiography. Dengbêjî is therefore not merely cultural performance, but also an archive of collective memory, a vehicle of national consciousness, and a site of epistemic resistance against state-centered knowledge regimes. The study addresses the fragmented nature of Kurdish Studies—divided between historical, philological, ethnographic, and political-science approaches—and proposes a framework that places oral sources at the center of Kurdish knowledge production. I argue that Dengbêjî and other oral genres are not peripheral folkloric materials but core epistemic sources that enable the reconstruction of narratives lost, silenced, or displaced through political marginalization. Drawing on examples from Turkey and Iran, the study further examines how modern state policies, migration, and digital media reshape the circulation and meaning of oral narratives. Ultimately, defending a Kurdish episteme requires revaluing oral tradition as a primary domain of historical knowledge and national self-understanding, as published widely on Kurdish society, history, and literature, most recently *Glimpses of Agony: The Kurds as Subaltern Actors in Islamic History* (Sophia University Press) and *The Alchemy of Language: Classical Kurdish Poetry, Persian Literary Domination and World Literature* (to appear).

**Chenoor Zagros, University of Applied Sciences in Eindhoven**

*Literature, identity, and belonging: The role of children's books in Kurdish diaspora identity formation*

This paper examines the role of children's literature in shaping cultural identity among Kurdish children growing up in diaspora. Drawing on my experience as the author of seven Dutch-language children's books, I will analyse how narratives can serve as pedagogical and cultural instruments for children whose heritage is marginalized or politically constrained. This study conceptualizes children's literature as a dual framework of mirrors and windows: they validate and reflect children's linguistic and cultural background, and provide access to broader social imaginaries and intercultural understanding. For Kurdish children in Europe—many of whom

encounter limited institutional recognition of their language and culture—such literary spaces can become crucial sites for cultivating self-esteem, resilience, and a positive sense of belonging. The paper engages with narrative strategies, symbolic representations, and linguistic choices that support processes of cultural continuity, identity negotiation, and intergenerational transmission, and reflects on the challenges Kurdish authors face in diaspora, including issues of representation, multilingualism, and the politics of visibility in European literary and educational spheres. By situating children’s literature within diaspora studies, minority language preservation, and identity formation, it highlights storytelling as a transformative tool capable of empowering the next generation of Kurdish children and strengthening cultural resilience.

## **Panel 2D – Internationalising Kurdish struggles & responses to displacement**

**Özgür Güneş Öztürk, University of Lleida**

*Translocal communal imaginaries: Kurdish Democratic Confederalism and the Catalan Left Independence Movement*

This paper examines how Kurdish experiments in democratic confederalism in Rojava and democratic municipalism in Bakur have been interpreted, adapted, and mobilized within the Catalan left independence movement. Rather than approaching Kurdish self-governance as a distant or external case, the analysis conceptualizes it as a translocal political reference through which Catalan activists negotiate their own understandings of communal democracy, sovereignty, and collective decision-making. Drawing on the notion of situated knowledge, the paper reflects from an embedded position within Catalan municipalist, feminist, and independence spaces to trace how imaginaries of selfgovernment travel, resonate, and are reconfigured across contexts. The discussion highlights how the Kurdish model provides a conceptual and practical lexicon for rethinking political organization beyond the nation-state, parliamentary institutions, and liberal-democratic governance. At the same time, it recognises that the Catalan left independence movement does not abandon the national horizon but rather engages in an ongoing tension between state-oriented claims and the attraction of post-statist, communal forms of democracy. The paper explores how Catalan actors selectively adopt, translate, and contest elements of Kurdish communal autonomy in response to specific experiences of state repression, territorial politics, and identity formation. It also asks what kinds of questions and dilemmas emerge within Catalan debates when the Kurdish experience is invoked: What is shared, what is untranslatable, and what does solidarity mean when the languages of autonomy differ? Rather than assuming convergence, the paper probes whether communal democracy operates as a shared horizon of political imagination or as a productive space of disagreement and reinterpretation. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates on transnational solidarities, the circulation of liberatory models of governance, and the possibilities of building democratic alternatives both within and beyond the nation-state framework.

**Judith Hoppermann, SOAS**

*Competitive-state building: Governing refugees and displacement in Northern Kurdistan*

This paper examines refugee governance in Northern Kurdistan (2014-2025) as an example of competitive state-building. Drawing on fieldwork involving semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observation in three cities (Amed, Mêrdîn, and Riha), it investigates how actors within or close to the Kurdish movement have governed Syrian Kurdish and Êzidî refugees in parallel to or in substitution of the Turkish state. Rather than treating refugee governance as either apolitical or state-centred, the paper reveals how support to refugees has reconfigured political authority beyond formal state institutions, producing differing versions of state-building that reflect competing geographical imaginations. The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, it examines how municipalities and civil society have responded to refugees,

highlighting differences from state-centred approaches. Second, it explores motivations underlying these responses. Third, it conceptualizes competitive state-building, demonstrating how displacement from Western and Southern Kurdistan to Northern Kurdistan has impacted Kurdish institution-building and political relations in contexts of authoritarian control. Briefly addressing the role of international organizations and NGOs within this process of competitive state-building, the paper contributes to debates on non-state governance and forced migration by analysing how conflict and displacement intersect to transform political authority from below.

**Durukan Imrie-Kuzu, LSE Middle East Centre**

*Kurdish responses to the securitisation of Syrian refugees in Turkey*

This paper examines how Kurdish political actors in Turkey respond to the state's securitisation of Syrian refugees, and how these responses reshape Kurdish claims to citizenship and belonging. Since 2011, Turkey has absorbed over 3.7 million Syrian refugees whilst simultaneously framing their presence through a security lens emphasising border control and demographic management. Existing scholarship has documented this securitisation process but has overlooked how this paradigm impacts Turkey's Kurdish population and Kurdish political responses. This paper addresses that gap by analysing a triangular dynamic: state securitisation of Syrians, Kurdish critique and counter-discourse, and Kurdish demographic anxieties about ethnic balance in their homelands.

**Panel 2E – Ecologies of conflict, environment and resistance**

**Nisan Alici Zeytun, University of Derby & Suanne M. Segovia-Tzompa, Centre for Natural Hazards and Disaster Science, Uppsala**

*The transitional justice and environmental harm nexus: The Turkish Kurdish peace*

The paper offers insights into how green transitional justice can respond to challenges arising from the intersection between environmental harm and peace processes, focusing on Diyarbakir in northern Kurdistan. Having been defined by activists as an ecocide crime scene, the Kurdish region has experienced extensive environmental destruction during the Kurdish conflict. It draws on a month-long fieldwork conducted in May 2025, consisting of interviews with environmental activists, lawyers, and small-scale farmers who experienced and resisted the destruction of the natural environment, providing social and political accounts of the root causes, challenges, and potential solutions. Against the backdrop of the ongoing peace process, our findings show that transition to peace simultaneously brings opportunities and challenges: the absence of armed violence eliminates the justification of environmental harm while intensifying the harm in unexpected ways, such as attracting more multinational extractivist projects.

**Roza Kavak, Independent Researcher**

*River, brook, stream: Intimate and official currents of the Tigris River Roza*

This paper examines the classification of the Tigris and the tensions surrounding whether it is considered a nehir (river), çay (brook), or dere (stream). This line of inquiry emerged during ethnographic fieldwork conducted in early 2025 in Diyarbakir, where my interlocutors explicitly drew my attention to these distinctions. Bringing together conversations about childhood memories of playing along its shores, written accounts of watermelon cultivation and hülle gatherings, and the songs of Onnik Dinkjian, the paper explores how the categorization of the Tigris change over time and what traces these shifts carry—or leave behind. I therefore treat the Tigris not as a passive backdrop but as an active site of meaning and relation for Diyarbekirlis. While the paper is situated within the environmental turn in social sciences, it resists the turn's

power-blind tendencies by understanding these linguistic categories as remnants of genocidal violence and of state-led extraction projects. It argues that when the Tigris is framed as Dicle Nehri—and more recently dere—in official discourse, what is at stake is not only the disruption of cultural continuity, one that holds space for a multi-ethnic past, but also the imposition of a new regime for imagining, remembering, and claiming the river, dictated by the language, and therefore the terms, of the state. Yet as the category of çay endures in everyday practices and intimate memories, it reveals that neither statemaking practices nor History are totalizing.

**Noor Boz, Macquarie University**

*Becoming Mağdur and living as a Mâcîre: Narratives of displacement after the Muş Alpaslan-1 Dam*

This anthropological paper explores the concepts of *mağduriyet* (destitution) and *mâcîre* (displaced person), which shape everyday understandings of displacement and belonging in Kurdish villages affected by the Alpaslan-1 Dam in Muş Province, Eastern Turkey. Based on long-term ethnographic research conducted in 2022, it examines how villagers use these terms to describe experiences of loss, resilience, and adaptation, both during the dam's initial flooding in 2002, its impoundment in 2009, and in its aftermath. The terms take shape through social relations, expressed in homes and communal gatherings, as villagers navigate disrupted livelihoods, altered landscapes, and uncertain futures. The narratives focus on how individuals managed flooded lands, relocation, and bureaucratic processes related to land titles, compensation, expropriation, and resettlement. Displacement also created opportunities, particularly for children and young and middle-aged women, who gained access to education in urban areas and experienced shifts in extended familial and kinship dynamics, enabling domestic women greater freedom from rigid patriarchal structures and heavy household and agricultural responsibilities. By situating local understandings of *mağduriyet* and *mâcîre* within broader frameworks of development and regional inequality, the paper highlights how practice, experience, and everyday language interweave in the ongoing aftermath of a dam project.

**Marcin Skupiński, University of Warsaw**

*Death of nature – death of the movement? Necro-eco-politics and resistance in Rojava*

In this paper I will draw from my experiences from research stay in North East Syria (NES) as well as available data related to attacks on infrastructure and field fires (as reported by Rojava Information Center) to discuss the geopolitical predicament of AANES, caught between the necropolitical regimes of the Syrian regime, Islamic State (ISIS) and Turkey. I will discuss how each of these regimes enacted distinctive form of infrastructural and ecological violence. In particular I will analyse the pattern of Turkish state exercising control over key water resources in NES and military attacks on key infrastructure. Based on this I will formulate my main argument describing a shift from conventional military occupation to indirect strategies of environmental and infrastructural destruction. Characterized by resignation from land occupation and physical extermination and shift towards rendering region 'unliveable' and thus undermining the support for Autonomous Administration and thwarting efforts for building autonomy and testing democratic confederalism in practice. This articulation underscores how ecocide functions as a form of counterinsurgency aimed at making democratic confederalism materially unsustainable. Based on this predicament I will propose reinterpretation of ecological initiatives in Rojava as a form of resistance. One of tremendous importance as it not only asserts right to the land but protects the potential of the life (both social and biological) to continue in the region facing growing environmental pressure.

## **Panel 3A – Alevi and Kurdish Studies at the crossroads: Rethinking fields and research horizons**

### **Hakan Mertcan, Independent Researcher**

*Kurdish Studies and Alevism: The role of Arab Alevis*

The intersection of Kurdish Studies and Alevi Studies has often been framed through Kurdish or Zaza Alevism, particularly in the Dersim region. While this focus has generated valuable scholarship, it has also narrowed the field's scope and overlooked Alawis (Arab Alevis), whose histories are deeply entangled with Kurdish communities in Turkey and Syria. Expanding Kurdish Studies to include Alawis is both an epistemological and political necessity. Historical parallels illustrate this entanglement. The Dersim Massacre of the 1930s, a defining moment in Kurdish Alevi history, can be compared with the annexation of Hatay, a core geography of the Alawi community, during the same period. Assimilationist policies and ideological manipulation targeted both groups, exemplified by figures such as Hasan Reşit Tankut, who played roles in the assimilation of Zazas and Alawis alike. In the 1990s, forced migrations from Kurdish regions reshaped Alawi communities in southern Turkey, creating minority-to-minority dynamics that remain underexplored. Looking at the present day, allegations of genocide against Alawis in Syria have been documented in international reports following the rise of HTŞ-affiliated groups in December 2024. The fate of Alawis and Kurds is closely linked to the region's democratic transition. It is therefore important to expand the scope of Kurdish Studies and to build on epistemologies that foreground and strengthen inter minority collaboration, ensuring that Alawis are included as integral to understanding the shared histories and contemporary struggles of marginalized communities in Turkey and Syria.

### **Hayal Hanoğlu, Alevi Encyclopedia**

*Collective knowledge-making in Alevi Studies: The Alevi Encyclopedia*

This paper reflects on the Alevi Encyclopedia as an ongoing scholarly initiative grounded in collective and interdisciplinary knowledge-making within the expanding field of Alevi Studies. Drawing on the experience of developing the Encyclopedia as a multilingual, open-access digital platform, the paper examines how encyclopedic work can function not merely as a repository of established knowledge, but as an epistemic practice shaped by collaboration, negotiation, and reflexivity. The Alevi Encyclopedia brings together academically produced research with knowledge embedded in oral tradition, ritual practice, and community memory, through contributions by scholars from different disciplines alongside the direct involvement of religious leaders (Pirs/Anas). By placing these different modes of knowing in dialogue, the project challenges conventional hierarchies between written and oral knowledge. Rather than presenting the Encyclopedia as a finished product, the paper approaches it as a living knowledge infrastructure and as an important collective experience, particularly in relation to the increasing participation of new generations of scholars in a field where knowledge has long been produced predominantly from the outside. It considers how collective editorial processes, interdisciplinary engagement, and participatory forms of knowledge production shape both the content and the boundaries of the field. In doing so, the paper situates encyclopedic practice as a reflective and methodologically significant intervention that contributes to broader discussions on field formation, collaboration, and future research horizons in Alevi Studies.

**Ahmet Kerim Gultekin, Alevi Encyclopedia**

*Intersecting fields: Kurdish Alevism (Raa Haqi) at the crossroads of Alevi and Kurdish Studies*

This paper proposes to explore the intersections between Alevi Studies and Kurdish Studies through the case of Kurdish Alevism, known in local terminology as Raa Haqi. In Turkey, Alevi constitute the country's largest non-official religious minority, and a significant proportion of this population are Kurmanji- and Kirmancki-speaking Kurdish Alevi. Although research on Kurdish Alevism has modestly increased over the past two decades, it has remained largely confined to frameworks of identity politics, violence, and trauma. This paper seeks to move beyond these dominant paradigms by examining Raa Haqi as a living epistemology that offers fresh analytical ground for both Alevi and Kurdish Studies. The paper aims to identify the mutual potentials and shared research horizons between these two growing international fields—how they can inform each other methodologically and conceptually, and how Kurdish Alevism may function as a bridge for comparative and decolonial approaches to religion, ethnicity, and locality in the Middle East. The paper invites a collective reflection on how cross-field dialogues can open new pathways of understanding in both disciplines.

**Ece Esmer Kirma, University of Hamburg**

*Reimagining Jiara: Towards an ecofeminist understanding of human–more-than-human intra-actions in Kurdish Alevi communities*

This study adopts a feminist perspective to examine how modernization, urbanization, and secularization in Turkey have reshaped Kurdish Alevi women's relationships with more-than-human beings (Barad 2007). It focuses on women's lived experiences and ritual engagements with jiara—sacred visitation sites—in the mountainous villages of Dersim, where spiritual, ecological, and cultural practices are closely intertwined. Modern rationalities, often materialized through state structures, intervene in these practices and expose the homogenizing and extractive logics that transform local landscapes. The study therefore investigates how ethnic identity, local cosmologies, and spatial belonging shape women's ritual engagements and ecological imaginaries. Contemporary Alevi discourse that emphasises a "love for nature" can reproduce modern nature–culture binaries, revealing an underlying anthropocentric and androcentric worldview. Drawing on ecofeminist theory, the research challenges these hierarchies and proposes an affective, relational model of human–more-than-human intra-action, highlighting the social and ecological harms generated by dualistic oppositions. It traces shifting understandings of jiara across time and space, including among migrants in Istanbul and Hamburg. Ethnographic fieldwork will combine participant observation in Dersim with interviews across three generations of Kurdish Alevi women. By exploring women's religious knowledge and practices, the study aims to fill a gap in Kurdish and Alevi scholarship and demonstrates how ecofeminism can reframe human–more-than-human relationality beyond dominant modernist logics.

**Panel 3B – Kurdish women navigating belonging in Europe**

**Sevil Çakir, Independent Researcher**

*Kurdish Women's Movement in Germany*

This paper explores the diversity of engagements of the Kurdish Women's Movement in Diaspora (KWMD) in Germany, examining its multifaceted activism across transnational, local, and intersectional arenas. Based on ongoing ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis, the study reveals how Kurdish women's organizations operate simultaneously across different political and social fronts: advocating for peace and democratization in the Middle East, promoting women's empowerment and raising awareness

in Germany around Kurds' ethnic and political rights, and engaging in internationalist feminist networks. The analysis shows that the KWMD's activism is neither homogeneous nor limited to Kurdish politics. The paper discusses the KWMD's collaborations with other migrant, racialized, and non-migrant feminist groups in Germany, highlighting both solidarities and challenges within transnational feminist spaces. It argues that these interactions produce new forms of feminist knowledge and praxis that challenge dominant narratives of both migration and feminism in Europe. By situating Kurdish women's activism within broader debates on transnationalism, diaspora politics, and intersectional feminism, the paper contributes to understanding how diasporic actors reshape contemporary feminist and social justice movements in Europe.

**Bahar Çati, Humboldt University**

*Urban motherhood and social integration: The role of social infrastructure in managing everyday lives of Kurdish migrant mothers in Berlin*

This thesis examines how urban social infrastructure shapes the everyday lives and social integration of first-generation Kurdish migrant mothers in Berlin and Paris. Using a mixed-method triangulation design, combining macro-level descriptive statistics, meso-level narrative interviews, and micro-level mobile ethnography, the study explores how gendered care responsibilities intersect with migration, urban space, and access to resources. The theoretical framework integrates feminist urbanism, maternal thinking, social infrastructure theory, and de Certeau's concept of "tactics of the weak," complemented by Carney's notion of motherhood as a form of management. This approach conceptualizes Kurdish mothers as active urban agents and as "minorities within minorities," navigating structural constraints while producing everyday forms of belonging. Preliminary findings indicate that social infrastructure, childcare availability, integration courses with childcare, transportation networks, welfare institutions, and informal community spaces, plays a decisive yet ambivalent role. While it can enable labour market participation, mobility, and social contact, gaps in childcare, bureaucratic barriers, and gendered expectations often reinforce processes of urban housewifization and limited public presence. At the same time, Kurdish community networks function as vital "micro-infrastructures," offering emotional, childcare, and informational support.

**Ruşen Işık, Graduate Institute Geneva**

*Performing citizenship at the edge: Kurdish migrant women navigating liminality in Switzerland*

This paper explores how Kurdish migrant women in Switzerland—who are -or used to be- politically engaged or connected to the Kurdish women's movement—navigate persistent forms of liminality shaped by displacement, asylum processes, and transnational political commitments. Drawing on ongoing ethnographic research, the analysis focuses on how women manage everyday life under overlapping layers of bureaucratic uncertainty, structural violence, and affective pressure. Rather than treating liminality as a temporary phase, the paper argues that these women inhabit a mode of continuous liminality that informs their practices of belonging, care, and political engagement. I show how they perform citizenship beyond formal legal frameworks through community involvement, emotional labour, and the maintenance of diasporic solidarities, while simultaneously negotiating the constraints of the Swiss migration regime. These practices reveal an operational form of agency that works within institutional, social, and affective boundaries. By tracing how women reconcile political commitments with the pragmatic demands of survival in exile, the paper reframes liminality as a long-term condition structuring migrant life and reshaping what counts as civic participation.

### **Panel 3C – Cultural Preservation**

**Emilie Pons, University of Oregon**

*When Dengbêj and Native American tribal music preserve communal stories*

Music is often associated with strong nationalistic sentiments, especially in post colonial and diasporic contexts, since colonial censoring can create even more of a need for reasserting one's identities, one's spirituality and one's belief systems. This paper proposes to see how dengbej and Native American music, which are both highly meditative, help strengthen collective identities. Tribal history is constantly told and retold through music and music allows for strong identity formation, especially for oppressed communities. Music becomes synonymous with survival against cultural genocide. It is not simply an essential tool for ethnic and racial identity formation, as Josh Kun argues in *Audiotopia* – it is also a crucial tool for ethnic and racial identity preservation. This paper argues that performing Dengbêj and Native American tribal music is resisting since Dengbêj and Native American tribal songs are storytelling. Performing is an act of defiance, too. With both Dengbêj and Native American music, singing is most often at the forefront of the musical experience. Finally, there is urgency in researching this topic since both Dengbêj and Native American tribal songs are threatened with erasure. This paper is at the intersection of Kurdish and Native American studies, musicology, minority and diasporic studies.

**Nasir Heval Batu, Mehmet Paso, Ekrem Koçbaşı, & Mehmet Yonat, Mardin Artuklu University**

*From home to café: Semi-public language practices and Kurdish vitality*

This study explores language shift among Kurdish–Turkish bilinguals in Turkey by examining language negotiation in semi-public spaces, specifically cafés in Diyarbakır and Van. While intergenerational loss of Kurdish has been widely observed, the survival of a minority language depends not only on home transmission but also on its visibility and use in communal public settings, as emphasized in Fishman's (1991) *Reversing Language Shift* framework. In Kurdish-majority cities, recent cases of cafés being pressured to avoid Kurdish or, conversely, being penalized for using only Kurdish show that language choice has become a socially contested, politically mediated act. Using Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) (Giles, 1973; Giles & Coupland, 1991), this research investigates how café staff and customers adopt convergence, divergence, or maintenance strategies when speaking Turkish or Kurdish. The study employs a qualitative ethnographic methodology through participant observation and semi-structured interviews in contrasting sociolinguistic zones: middle-class café districts (75th Street in Diyarbakır, 2 Nisan Street in Van) and locally rooted, Kurdish-identifying areas (Diclekent/Ofis in Diyarbakır, Maraş Street in Van). By highlighting how bilingual choices in everyday service interactions impact linguistic identity and symbolic value, this study argues that semi-public Kurdish use plays a crucial role in sustaining language vitality and intergenerational continuity.

**Mehmet Tayfur, University of Strasbourg**

*An examination of Kurdish cultural institutions in Diyarbakır following 2015*

Since the early 2000s, Kurdish municipalities have played a central role in supporting the Kurdish language, culture, and the arts. This dynamic was profoundly disrupted after the collapse of the peace process in 2015 and the subsequent urban clashes in Kurdish cities. In the aftermath of the unsuccessful coup d'état attempt of 2016, the Turkish state embarked upon a novel phase of authoritarian centralisation. This was characterised by the removal and replacement of elected mayors with state-appointed trustees (*kayyım*). Key municipal cultural institutions including the Aram Tigran City Conservatory, Kurdish-language kindergartens (*Zarokîstan*), and the Amed City Theatre have undergone significant changes. These institutions

have either closed, undergone restructuring, or been stripped of their Kurdish-language activities. However, this restrictive environment gave rise to a powerful counter-mobilisation. Following their dismissal from the conservatory, former teachers and students established a number of independent initiatives including MA Music, Jin MA, Zarok MA, and Çand MA, KASED. Concurrently, dismissed theatre practitioners established the Şanoya Bajar a Amedê. The term MA, which is derived from the Kurdish word for "to stay" or "to remain", has been employed as a symbolic assertion of cultural persistence and continuity. This paper examines these alternative cultural formations as practices of resistance, analysing how they position themselves within an increasingly centralized political context and how they sustain Kurdish artistic and intellectual production despite institutional repression.

### **Panel 3D – Conceptual and theoretical approaches to Kurdish questions**

#### **Thoreau Redcrow, Independent Researcher**

*Borders, banners, and bodies: The contested foundations of Kurdistan's national vision*

This paper explores three foundational yet deeply contested pillars of Kurdish national imagination: the map of Kurdistan, the flags that symbolise it, and the shifting estimations of the Kurdish population. While each of these elements appears at first glance to offer clarity in the form of territory, emblem, and demography, they are in fact sites of ongoing negotiation shaped by competing political visions, historical ruptures, and transnational dispersal. Drawing on cartographic archives, political iconography, census data, and contemporary Kurdish cultural production, the analysis examines how the borders of Kurdistan are variously expanded, contracted, or reinterpreted; how different flags, from the colorful 'Ala Rengin' sun flag, to the 'Rojava' tri-colour, to party specific banners, encode divergent narratives of identity and sovereignty; and how population figures are mobilised rhetorically to support claims to recognition, autonomy, and statehood. The paper argues that these three conceptual terrains operate not as static facts but as dynamic fields through which Kurds collectively imagine, debate, and assert their place within and beyond the Middle East. By tracing how map, flag, and population estimates circulate across political movements, diasporic communities, and digital spaces, the study demonstrates how these contested categories together sustain a shared yet plural national imagination that continues to evolve in response to changing geopolitical conditions.

#### **Behnam Amini, York University Canada**

*Theorising 'National Colonialism': The Kurdish case*

This paper proposes the novel concept of 'national colonialism' to analyse the subjugation of stateless nations within modern nation-states. It argues that prevailing post-colonial studies, with its focus on Western agency, and the concept of internal colonialism, which often takes the nation-state for granted, fail to adequately theorise this phenomenon. National colonialism identifies colonial relations as intrinsic to the nation-state form itself. It manifests as a combination of political subjugation, economic exploitation, and racist exclusion of a peripheral population by a core nation. Crucially, this dynamic is driven not only by capitalist uneven development but also by the ideological tenets of nationalism and processes of nation-building, which inherently 'otherise' and minoritise populations. Using the illuminating case of the great Kurdistan, partitioned and dominated by four different nation-states (Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey), this paper will empirically substantiate the theoretical claims of national colonialism. It will demonstrate how the Kurdish experience, defying conventional post-colonial and internal colonial frameworks, provides compelling evidence for a universal tendency of nation-states to form core-periphery colonial relations, irrespective of the cultural identity of the coloniser. This re-conceptualisation bridges critical gaps in post-colonial, nationalism, and Kurdish studies.

**Ahmed Swar, Soran University**

*Revisiting regional security complex theory: The Kurdish question in Middle Eastern security dynamics*

This research aims to reassess the analytical utility of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) in understanding the changing security dynamics of the Middle East, specifically as they pertain to semi-autonomous Kurdish regions. Specifically, this study challenges RSCT's state-centric framework by incorporating sub-state actors as crucial security agents within regional complexes. This research examines the KRI and Rojava as case studies, demonstrating that semi-autonomous regions function as active stakeholders influencing state behavior, engaging in securitization and de-securitization processes, and affecting patterns of amity and enmity in the Middle East. Employing a qualitative case study design and thematic analysis, this paper attempts to analyze the role of semi-autonomous regions in shaping the security dynamics in relation to neighboring states and external powers. The results show that while the KRI has tried to use pragmatic engagement and economic interdependence as ways to de-securitize, Rojava's government and its military structure have created new forms of localized securitization within Syria's fragmented states context. The findings of this study expand RSCT by showing that sub-state actors are constitutive forces in regional security architecture, not merely reactive participants.

**Hemn Seyedi, Independent Researcher**

*The missed opportunity of Kurdish secularism in the Iranian 1979 Islamic Revolution*

In the revolutionary days of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, unlike the other regions of Iran, the people in Kurdistan were united around democratic, secular and egalitarian demands, formulated under the Democracy for Iran and Autonomy for Kurdistan. Indeed, the leadership of the Kurdish revolution employed nationalism, egalitarianism, and democracy as their main discourses, not Islamism. The massive participation in demonstrations was proof of the solid political roots of Kurdish political parties. Kurdistan was an exception in Iran, with an anti-authoritarian and pro-democratisation agenda to make a democratic and decentralised Iran. They viewed secularism as a guarantee of peaceful coexistence in Iran. In this presentation, I will discuss a 30-article autonomy proposal from the Kurdish Representative Council, particularly Article 10, which emphasises secularism in Iran. This proposal was published on 12 March 1979 in the semi-state Etelaat Newspaper. Though Khomeini became the central charismatic leader for many Iranians, there was no support for his ideological stance in Kurdistan. In short, the Kurdish people did not revolt to achieve an Islamic society, and they had no shared values with Khomeini's ambitions.

**Panel 4A – Papers presented in Kurdish languages**

**Münevver Azizoğlu-Bazan, University of Bremen**

*Diasporic Struggles, Decolonial Visions: Empowerment and Knowledge in the Kurdish Women's Movement*

The Kurdish women's movement is one of the most dynamic feminist movements in the Middle East. While its organisation in the regions of origin has been widely analysed, its impact in the Kurdish diaspora remains understudied. This paper presents key findings from my dissertation, which examines the empowerment processes of Kurdish activists in the German diaspora. The study analyses how collective self-empowerment emerges under conditions of migration, gendered marginalisation and political repression, and how political subjectivity and collective action are shaped within diasporic contexts. The theoretical foundation combines critical, feminist and decolonial perspectives, including movement-specific epistemologies such as Jineolojî. Methodologically, the research is

based on qualitative interviews with Kurdish activists in Germany and evaluated through qualitative content analysis. It follows a feminist, situated research approach that centres the perspectives, experiences and positionalities of the interviewees. The analysis shows that empowerment is not a linear development, but one marked by ruptures, tensions and contextual shifts. Nonetheless, collective organising, reliance on concepts such as *hevaltî* (comradeship), gender-conscious living and the use of *Jineolojî* as an epistemic tool create sustainable spaces for participation, agency and collective transformation. This contribution offers an empirically grounded perspective on the Kurdish women's movement in the diaspora and enriches broader debates on decolonial empowerment and transnational feminism.

**Riber Çelik, Galatasaray University**

*Dogs, Humans, Conflict, and Common Ecologies in Şemdinli from the 1990s to the Present*

This research aims to interpret the consequences of the conflict processes in Şemdinli from the 1990s onwards through a non-anthropocentric framework, focusing on a multi-layered zone of interaction that encompasses waste, dogs, conflict, state institutions, and humans. Grounded in post-humanist and new materialist discourses, the study examines the interaction between the living and non-living entities within the Şemdinli landfill. Specifically, it interrogates the position of human agency as it becomes intertwined with conflict, discussing its impact on dogs and the broader natural environment. Consequently, the research seeks to include not only the human population, which has been profoundly affected by intermittent conflict for decades, but also the often-unseen actors—the dogs and the landscape itself—that are directly exposed to these processes. The dump, where waste is collected and incinerated, is particularly important due to the presence of dogs abandoned by nearby military units. The study problematizes the transformation of the waste site in conjunction with regional conditions and its relationship with dogs, humans, and conflict. The primary objective is to understand how this space is constructed, sustained, and transformed through non-anthropocentric interactions.

**Dersim Dağ, EHESS**

*The Co-Presidency in Kurdish Local Governments: Level and Process of Socialization of the System (2014-2024)*

This study analyzes the degree of socialization of the co-presidency system implemented by the Kurdish political movement in Turkey's local governments during the 2014-2024 period. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research examines how this distinctive democratic model, in which women and men co-govern local administrations with equal authority, has been disseminated at the grassroots level. Through quantitative analysis of 1,956 female candidacies in the 2019 and 2024 local elections, combined with in-depth interviews with three female co-presidents who served in different periods, the study reveals that the system has achieved a high level of socialization despite significant institutional and social resistance. The findings demonstrate an evolution from initial enthusiasm (2014) to normalization (2024), reflecting a fundamental transformation in mentalities. Beyond numerical representation, this research contributes to feminist political theory and local governance literature by demonstrating the effectiveness of an alternative democratic governance model that transforms political practices. The study also situates this Kurdish feminist practice within broader discussions of women's liberation movements in the Middle East, examining how grassroots democratization persists under state repression, including the ongoing trustee (*kayyim*) appointments that have replaced elected co-presidents since 2016.

## **Panel 4B – Kurdish women in the diaspora**

**Dilan Salik, Université de Paris Cité**

*Kurdish women's coping strategies in the post-migration settings*

Avatar Brah, a sociologist who has developed an extensive understanding of complex issues such as gender, ethnicity, racism and diaspora, has expanded the analysis of migration beyond the moment of border crossing to address contemporary conflicts over “difference” and multiple configurations of identity and resistance among migrant and diasporic people (Brah 2022, 104–8). Drawing upon her critique of coloniality, which she has employed to illuminate both the pre-migration conditions and post-migration difficulties experienced by subjects and descendants, this presentation aims to examine the post-migration obstacles that give rise to the colonial categorisations of dispersed Kurdish women and descendants. In addition, it will explore the coping strategies employed by Kurdish women in response to these dominant representational regimes. The purpose of this study is to shed light on the post-migration experiences of three Kurdish women living in Berlin, Paris and Istanbul. In doing so, the analysis of how participants interpret border crossing, resettlement and migrant roots constitutes the core of the presentation, which provides a critical, comparative perspective on the women's identities and the structural inequalities they encounter in diverse diasporic settings.

**Shilan Fuad Hussein, Institute of Domestic Violence, Religion and Migration**

*Navigating the 'Patriarchal Trifecta': Kurdish women's agency and daily struggles in the United Kingdom*

This paper investigates gender-based violence and women's agency within Kurdish communities in the United Kingdom, focusing on what I term the “Patriarchal Trifecta”: honour killings, forced / arranged marriage, and female genital mutilation. It examines how these practices, reshaped through migration, continue to influence the lives of Kurdish women in Britain, many of whom navigate two moral worlds: the expectations of familial honour and the egalitarian ideals that surround them. Drawing on interviews with women, community activists, and scholars, the study traces how Kurdish women respond to these tensions and cultivate forms of quiet resistance, subtle adaptation, and careful negotiation. It also questions whether feminist organisations in Britain have genuinely enabled Kurdish women to speak for themselves or whether they have, often inadvertently, reproduced hierarchies that marginalise minoritised voices. Using an intersectional feminist lens, the research highlights the intertwined effects of cultural identity, gender, and displacement on women's daily realities. It shows how agency is not confined to dramatic acts of defiance but is equally embedded in endurance, humour, and the understated strategies through which women navigate daily life. Through these modes of resilience, Kurdish women continue to shape their understanding of freedom and reimagine the futures of their communities.

**Karol Kaczorowski, Cracow University of Economics**

*Trans-local Kurdish family and diverse forms of activism*

The paper examines the complex negotiation between Kurdish public and everyday activisms and family life among transnational Kurds in the European Diaspora and Turkey. Drawing on James C. Scott's micro-politics, Engin Isin's acts of citizenship, and David Morgan's 'doing family,' the study analyzes participant narratives concerning family dynamics, shifting gender roles, and the negotiation between political and domestic vocations. The analysis highlights the significance of often-overlooked, everyday family interactions—of domestic life—in shaping family relationships and activists' engagement

which may take diverse forms, not only the political one. The research is based on original qualitative fieldwork across key trans-local hubs (Brussels, Stockholm, London, Istanbul). The empirical foundation includes 20 in-depth interviews with Kurdish transnational activists (17 women, 3 men), supplemented by expert interviews with representatives from critical Kurdish cultural, women's, and publishing organizations. Findings reveal significant generational change in the visibility and acceptance of gender equality. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates the mutual influence between everyday negotiations of equality in the private sphere and engagement in public activism, showing how these combined efforts may contribute to gradual social transformation within the transnational Kurdish community.

#### **Panel 4C – Statelessness and resilience in Rojava**

##### **Merve Firat, Middle East Technical University**

*Statelessness in Rojava: Reassessing human rights through the Kurdish statelessness experience*

This study foregrounds the six-decade-long statelessness of Rojava Kurds and examines how their experience exposes the limits of contemporary human rights frameworks. Drawing on primary and secondary sources, it reconstructs the historical and political processes through which the Syrian state systematically excluded tens of thousands of Kurds from citizenship. Following the 1962 special census, the state revoked citizenship from large segments of the Kurdish population and placed them under two state-imposed legal categories—Ajanib and Maktoumeen. These designations denied Kurds' access to essential rights such as legal marriage, education, property ownership, and healthcare, creating a structurally rightless population within Syria. Their situation intensified after the 2011 civil war, when many stateless Kurds encountered further injustice during displacement and asylum procedures due to their lack of legal identity. By analysing these experiences through Hannah Arendt's insights on statelessness—particularly her link between rights-subjectivity, citizenship, the nation-state, and the "right to have rights"—the study shows how the Kurdish case illustrates the persistence of state-centered limitations in human rights protection. The findings reveal that nation-states continue to prioritize domestic legal frameworks over weak international norms, allowing prolonged statelessness to inhibit rights-subjectivity, and further demonstrating that the absence of a nation-state critically restricts access to human rights. Overall, the study contributes to Kurdish studies and human rights scholarship by highlighting how the long-term exclusion and statelessness of Kurds shape broader debates on citizenship, belonging, and human rights during Syria's ongoing political restructuring.

##### **Thomas McGee, European University Institute**

*Kurdish statelessness after Assad - Finally hope of resolution and justice?*

This paper considers the new possibilities to address the unresolved legacy of Kurdish statelessness caused by the 1962 census in Hassakeh governorate in light of the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. Building on my PhD about statelessness in Syria (completed in 2025), this paper assesses the position of the new Syrian authorities towards this problem that they inherited from Ba'athist Syria. It does so in particular by tracing the emerging role and demands of the "Network of Statelessness Victims in Al-Hassakeh" that was established in October 2025 with a focus on solidarity building and inclusion of (Kurdish) statelessness within transitional justice processes following the fall of the Assad regime.<sup>1</sup> The Network has engaged with the United Nations (UNHCR) and is seeking to position itself with relevant interlocutors involved in demands for restorative justice in Syria. This advocacy led by those affected by statelessness themselves is considered against the backdrop of political relations between the new Syrian authorities in Damascus and the Kurdish-led Self Administration.

**Polat Jan, Independent Researcher**

*Roots of resilience: Syrian Kurdish political culture and the making of wartime democracy in Rojava*

The emergence of democratic self-rule in Rojava is often explained through external factors such as the Syrian civil war, international military support, and transnational ideological influences. These conditions undoubtedly shaped the environment, but they cannot by themselves explain why democratic governance could take root and endure under wartime conditions. This paper argues that the deeper foundations of Rojava's resilience lie within the cultural and political structures of Syrian Kurds. Decades of marginalisation under the Ba'ath state forged strong traditions of solidarity, clandestine activism, and leftist political engagement. Kurdish identity remained remarkably intact: language, cultural practices, and community ties were preserved across generations, distinguishing Kurds from their Arab neighbours in the same regions. Tribal authority steadily weakened, opening space for modern political organisation, while agriculture-based livelihoods that depended on equal labour from men and women reinforced traditions of gender cooperation. Kurdish religious practice, generally softer and more cultural than political, also meant that radical Islamist movements never emerged in Rojava, further strengthening secular and collective forms of mobilisation. These dynamics were vividly revealed during the 12 March 2004 uprising, a spontaneous grassroots Kurdish mobilisation independent of parties and external actors. Far from being an accident of war or the gift of outside powers, Rojava's democratic project arose from long-standing cultural and social foundations. By reframing Rojava as a case of culturally rooted wartime democracy, this paper challenges prevailing narratives and re-centres Syrian Kurds as agents of their own political future.

**Rezan Saleh, University of Oslo**

*Theatre in Rojava: The theatre among ruins, between reality and ambition*

This study examines one of the most sidelined forms of theatre in the Middle East, which is the theatre of the displaced. More specifically, it highlights theatrical events and festivals held in Qamishlo city in Rojava (north east Syria) and in Shahba (a formerly autonomous canton centered on the city of Tall Rifa'at) north of the city of Aleppo. The Mitan and Yakta Monodrama festival (now in its 7th year) are two important festivals feature displaced children and young amateur artists. Kurdish theatre makers in Rojava, have faced repeated attacks first from Daesh and since 2018 have been targeted and partly occupied by Turkish and Turkish-supported groups, forcing people to relocate during the post-2011 Syrian civil wars. Based on thematic and analysis of interviews with the initiatives, teachers and creator of the events I conducted in person through my fieldwork in the camps and during the festival, this work argues that theatre of the displaced has the capacity not only to document acts of violence and occupation, but also that it can resist erasure imposed by regional and transnational powers. Despite war, restricted access, and closed borders, these festivals persist, embodying resilience and cultural resistance. The work highlights how these groups continues to sustain theatre as a means of empowerment and identity preservation, transcending geopolitical boundaries, cultural marginalization, and economic hardship.

## **Panel 4D – Counter-imaginings in Kurdish cinema**

**Zara Masrou, Independent Researcher**

*Statelessness in Kurdish cinema*

Kurdish cinema has become a crucial space for expressing the lived realities of statelessness, displacement, and resilience in a region divided by colonial borders. While Middle Eastern and diasporic cinemas are widely studied, the specific ways Kurdish filmmakers construct national identity without statehood—and how cinematic visibility substitutes for political invisibility—remain understudied. This research examines how Kurdish films represent statelessness and how these representations diverge from diaspora cinema. Using theories of accented cinema (Naficy), kinetic migration (Nail), and reconceptualized diaspora cinema (De Man), the study analyzes four films—*A Time for Drunken Horses* (Rojhilat), *Son of Babylon* (Başûr), *Voice of My Father* (Bakur), and *Kobane* (Rojava). Through close textual and visual analysis, the research investigates cinematic language, narrative form, spatiality, sound, and recurring motifs of borders, memory, and mobility. The findings show that Kurdish cinema uses fragmented journeys, multilingual soundscapes, testimonial modes, and border landscapes to render stateless life visible. Across the films, cinematic form functions as resistance, offering an alternative sense of nationhood grounded in visibility, solidarity, and lived experience rather than territorial sovereignty. Ultimately, this research argues that Kurdish cinema produces a distinctive aesthetic of statelessness—one that challenges erasure and asserts cultural presence through cinematic means.

**Pshtiwan Babakr, Kashkul**

*On Kurdish cinema: Mapping Kurdish cinematic languages*

This project examines contemporary Kurdish cinema as a site where histories, geographies, and political experiences converge to shape distinct cinematic languages. Drawing on interviews with filmmakers, screenwriters, and critics across Kurdistan and the diaspora, it explores how creative practices articulate cultural memory, social identity, and political subjectivity in Kurdish film. The study positions Kurdish cinema within broader discussions on regional cinema, transnational artistic networks, and cultural representation. By combining ethnographic fieldwork with critical analysis, it traces how contemporary Kurdish filmmakers negotiate aesthetic innovation, historical narratives, and socio-political realities. The resulting insights investigate Kurdish cinema as a medium of cultural negotiation, resistance, and community formation. This research advances the study of Kurdish cultural production by offering the first concept-driven mapping of Kurdish cinematic practices, highlighting the intersections of artistry, politics, and identity, and providing a framework for future scholarly engagement with Kurdish visual culture.

**Vakkas Çolak, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies**

*Kurds in Japanese cinema: Representation, identity, and the politics of visibility in contemporary Japan*

This paper offers a theoretically grounded examination of Kurdish representation in Japanese cinema through frameworks from cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and diaspora studies. Drawing on Stuart Hall's concept of representation and the encoding/decoding model, the study analyses how Kurdish identities are constructed, mediated, and contested within Japanese visual culture. Edward Said's notion of 'the Other' and orientalist discourse informs the reading of Kurdish portrayals as symbolically positioned at the margins of Japanese national narratives. Diaspora theory (Brah, Gilroy, Clifford) provides a lens through which to understand how cinematic depictions of

displacement, statelessness, and border precarity reflect broader socio-political conditions faced by Kurds in Japan. Focusing on feature films such as *Tokyo Kurd* (2021), *My Small Land* (2022) and *Minna, Oshaberi!* (Chatterbox) (2024), as well as representation motifs in *Mobile Suit Gundam 00*, the paper employs film theory approaches (Mulvey, Bordwell & Thompson, Nichols) to assess narrative framing, visual codes, and affective structures. The analysis is complemented by ethnographic insights from Japan's Kurdish community. I argue that these cinematic texts constitute a dynamic site where Japan's debates on immigration, multiculturalism, and minority recognition intersect with global narratives of Kurdish struggle. Ultimately, the paper highlights both the representational limitations and transformative potential of Japanese cinema in shaping public understandings of Kurdish identity.

**Dilan Şenay Yılmaz, Eastern Mediterranean University**

*The role of dream in Kurdish-Queer memory: The frame and side paths of Kurdish-Queer childhood*

This presentation focuses on the documentary *Me and Nuri Bala* (2012), in which Kurdish trans activist Esmeray tells the story of her childhood and transition. It understands Kurdish-queer childhoods as spaces of colonial neglect and as sites where childhood is "eliminated" (unchildling). I read Esmeray's story as a counter-archive that shows how the Turkish regime of denial racialises Kurdish children, takes away their innocence, and devalues their futures. When desire, the motor of psychic life, is repressed, it returns in disguised forms. The desire covered over in daily life can appear again in dreams and haunt us, as in the dream that inspired this presentation. By listening to Esmeray's dream, I follow the desire economy of Kurdish-queer childhood through shame, guilt, identification, and colonial neglect. Bringing together Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian's theory of unchilding, the epistemology of the situation, and queer childhood studies, I ask how Kurdish-queer childhoods are both exposed to intense colonial violence and erased from official memory. Close analysis of the film's visual and verbal testimonies shows how *Me and Nuri Bala* recalls the embodied textures of growing up as a Kurdish-queer child in Turkey and works as a Kurdish-queer epistemic intervention.

**Panel 5A – Translation and cultural representation**

**Yaser Ali, University of Duhok & Nawroz University**

*Decentring Sorani Kurdish in Iraq: The rise of Bahdinani in translation*

This paper explores the emerging phenomenon of Bahdinani Kurdish translation in Iraqi Kurdistan, focusing on the increasing trend of retranslating literary and non-literary works that were previously available only in Sorani Kurdish. For decades, readers in Bahdinan depended almost exclusively on Sorani translations, reflecting Sorani's dominant position in publishing and its status as the primary written variety. This situation began to shift with the rise of a new generation educated entirely in Bahdinani over the past fifteen years, creating growing demand for translated material in their local variety. Recently, translators and cultural initiatives have begun producing Bahdinani versions directly from Arabic, English, or Persian, or by retranslating existing Sorani editions. The paper argues that this development is not merely a secondary linguistic transfer but a cultural and political act that challenges Sorani centrality and affirms Bahdinani as a legitimate medium of translation. Through examining recent translations and their accompanying discourse, the study shows how this trend contributes to decentring Sorani Kurdish and reshaping Kurdish linguistic identity in contemporary Iraq.

**Shene Mohammed, American University of Iraq, Sulaimani**

*Voice and power in Kurdish literary translation*

This paper reflects on power and its circulation in Kurdish literary translation and within the institutional spaces of Kurdish Studies. As a translator and as the director of the AUIS Kurdish Studies Forum in its inaugural year, I examine how curation—who we put on stage, who we translate, and how we decide whose work enters the conversation—redistributes power. These questions include whose work is lifted, and how an institution like Kurdish Studies can help cultivate new ways of thinking. I'll discuss two projects: co-editing, with Dr. Alana Marie Levinson LaBrosse, a forthcoming anthology of nineteenth-century Sorani poetry (Deep Vellum, 2027), and translating Bachtyar Ali's *Occupying Darkness* for Archipelago Books. These projects reveal different forms of agency. The anthology represents a collective insistence, shaped through years of working closely with many contributors as the project took form. Translating *Occupying Darkness*, by contrast, is a solitary act that has raised questions for me about voice—what it means to bring my voice to Bachtyar Ali's work, and how opportunities and relationships often emerge in ways that are not fully intentional yet still require a careful balance of power. This exploration of power also reveals what decolonization means to me and how I see it unfolding in the projects I participate in.

**Sarwar Fatih, Kashkul**

*"Translation is the opposite of war": Between misrepresentation and possibility in Kurdish cultural production*

This paper portrays the nuances of the presence of international cultural organizations in Iraqi Kurdistan and challenges whether they reinforce hegemonic narratives on the Kurds or offer a pragmatic solution to literary production. The existing criticism in the literature written on such organizations such as UNESCO or American Universities in Iraqi Kurdistan, is that subtle acts of misrepresentation often go unseen. However, I argue that although there is truth in the way the Kurdish literary canon has not been up to the aspirations of the Kurds themselves, in the absence of locally funded cultural institutions, the presence of such organizations is instrumental for ethnic minorities. This is only the case if the human resources mobilized in such centers are local to the context that they come from, which results in the curating of local voices to be heard and broadcasted to the rest of the world in the way the Kurds themselves wish to be perceived through the medium of poetry and fiction in translation.

**Busra Tasdemir, York University**

*Perceiving Kurdish-accented Turkish: Phonetic cues, ideology, and ethnic boundaries in language*

This study explores how Turkish listeners perceive and evaluate Kurdish-accented Turkish, focusing on the linguistic and ideological processes through which "Kurdishness" is identified and socially constructed in speech. Using a matched-guise experiment, Turkish participants listen to recordings that vary systematically in phonetic features commonly associated with Kurdish-accented Turkish. The study examines not only the social evaluations attached to these voices (status vs. solidarity) but also which specific phonetic features lead listeners to recognize a speaker as Kurdish. Grounded in the framework of language ideology and linguistic differentiation, the analysis situates perceptual judgments within broader discourses of nationalism, linguistic standardization, and ethnic marginalization in Turkey. In doing so, the research investigates how ideologies of linguistic purity and national unity shape perceptions of non-mainstream accents. By examining how the recognition of "Kurdishness" operates simultaneously at perceptual and ideological levels, this study demonstrates how subtle phonetic cues acquire powerful social meanings. These findings highlight the role of listening as an active site of ideological reproduction,

revealing how everyday acts of perception sustain symbolic boundaries of belonging and exclusion in the sociolinguistic landscape of Turkey.

### **Panel 5B – Kurdish geopolitics**

#### **Akiko Yoshioka, Institute of Energy Economics, Japan**

*Japan's diplomacy toward semi-sovereign actors: Lessons from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*

This presentation analyzes Japan's diplomacy toward semi-sovereign actors through the case of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Although constitutionally a federal region of Iraq, the KRI has developed an active and autonomous external policy, hosting numerous foreign consulates and seeking to engage directly with them. The United States and European states often pursue a "dual-track" approach—conducting Iraq-wide diplomacy while simultaneously maintaining tailored relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). In contrast, Japan's diplomacy remains largely state-centric: it positions the Iraqi federal government as its sole formal counterpart and engages the KRG primarily within that framework. This study examines Japan–KRG relations through diplomatic documents, official statements, and Japan's political and development policies. It also draws on comparative cases of other semi-sovereign actors—such as Palestine and Taiwan—to identify common patterns and divergences in Japan's external relations with entities lacking full international recognition. By situating the KRI within Japan's broader patterns of "engagement without formal recognition," the presentation offers preliminary observations on the characteristics, current practices, and challenges of Japan's diplomacy toward semi-sovereign actors.

#### **Silvia Nicola, Bundeswehr Center for Military History and Social Sciences**

*How the Kurds shaped the security policy of reunited Germany: Rethinking Operation Kurdish Aid (1991)*

What role did the Kurds play in reshaping the foreign and security policy of a newly reunified Germany? This paper argues that the 1991 Kurdish refugee crisis—far from being a peripheral humanitarian emergency—became a decisive catalyst for Germany's first major security-policy recalibration after the Cold War. Drawing on archival records from the German Military Archive and the Political Archive of the German Foreign Office, the paper shows that the fate of Iraqi Kurds unexpectedly influenced the strategic self-understanding of reunited Germany. Following the suppression of the Kurdish uprising in spring 1991, the mass exodus into Turkey and Iran forced the German government into a dilemma: remain a "civilian power" defined by military abstention, or assert itself within an emerging post-bipolar security architecture. The paper demonstrates that the humanitarian operation Kurdenhilfe in Iran was not simply aid-driven; it was Germany's first attempt to project influence beyond NATO territory, to define its own responsibilities in the so-called "New World Order," and to gain visibility in a crisis where France, Britain, and the United States were setting the terms of intervention.

#### **Ruiheng Li, Peking University & Yiwei Jia, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies**

*Great power interference, threat perception, and the institutionalisation of non-state armed actors: Evidence from Iraq's Kurdish Peshmerga*

The institutionalization of non-state armed actors has long remained challenging to accurately explain and evaluate. As one of the most institutionalized cases in the Middle East, Iraq's Kurdish Peshmerga could provide a theoretical answer to this puzzle. Deeply rooted in historical legacies and contemporary political developments, the Peshmerga, however, has fallen primarily under the influence of U.S. policy, its foremost external driver. Periods of robust U.S.

support built institutional momentum through financial, military, and political backing, whereas U.S. retrenchment at times directly constrained or disrupted such efforts. Situated within a broader historical context, this paper addresses the central research question: What determines U.S. policy toward the Peshmerga and its institutionalization? We argue that U.S. threat perception—shaped both by the Peshmerga’s nature and capability as an armed force and by its evolving role within Washington’s regional geopolitical calculations—has been the core variable of policy continuity and discontinuity. Drawing on first-hand interviews with senior officials in the Peshmerga Ministry of the KRG, as well as theories of threat perception in international relations, this study explains how Washington’s threat assessments, evolving security concerns, and Middle Eastern geostrategy structure U.S. engagement with Peshmerga institutionalization and further develops a conceptual framework for understanding great power interactions with regional non-state armed actors.

### **Panel 5C – Kurdish Historical Encounters**

**Himan Heidari, University of Roehampton**

*Between deference and dominance: Freya Stark among the exiled Khajehvand Kurds*

This article examines Freya Stark’s 1931 encounters with the Khajehvand Kurds, whom Reza Shah forcibly resettled in Iran’s Caspian highlands. Drawing on Mary Louise Pratt’s idea of ‘anti-conquest’—where European travellers present themselves as innocent while asserting hegemony—I argue that, in *The Valleys of the Assassins* (1934), Stark performs a gendered version of the ‘seeing-man.’ Her gaze appears harmless yet claims possession. By adopting Kurdish etiquette, reciting Qur’anic verses, and dispensing small favours, she stages humility while translating Khajehvand life into colonial categories that recentre the British observer. These ambivalent performances, deferential yet appropriative, serve Stark’s self-fashioning as an authoritative witness, normalize forced displacement, and reinscribe imperial hierarchies. Situating this microhistory within travel-writing studies and Kurdish historiography, the article shows how women’s travel writing can both reproduce and resist imperial power.

**Karzan Kareem Ameen, Salahaddin University-Erbil**

*British colonial vision and travel writing: Kurdish identity in Gertrude Bell’s archival narratives*

Colonial power grows through knowledge, and knowledge grows through the narratives that empires choose to preserve. This paper examines how Gertrude Bell constructed Kurdish identity in her letters, travel writings, and archival papers, and demonstrates how these representations served British imperial power in Iraq. Utilizing critical discourse analysis and archival readings, the study treats Bell’s writing as textual choices shaped by imperial expectations rather than impartial observation. Analysis of descriptive patterns, narrative frames, and strategic omissions reveals three dominant representations: the idealized mountain tribesman, the politically unreliable frontier subject, and the managing local ally. These images rely on universal claims about Kurdish character and political capacity that stereotypically reproduce colonialisms. The findings demonstrate that Bell’s representations were precisely aligned with Britain’s strategic needs—to stabilize the mandate while limiting Kurdish claims to autonomy. Her writing converted the uneven colonial encounters into a coherent narrative that rendered the Kurds as administratively knowable and governable. This archive illustrates how travel writing and personal papers function as tools of imperial knowledge production, establishing a colonized image of Kurdish identity that would re-shape British policy and Kurdish subordination in the region continuously as colonial legacies.

**Gerald MacLean, University of Exeter**

*English-language reports of Behlül Pasha, the last Kurdish Emir of Bayazid*

This paper examines reports by a variety of British travellers who described meeting Behlül Pasha, the last Kurdish emir of Bayazid. It abbreviates part of a chapter on English-language accounts of four Kurdish emirs – Budaq Khan of the Mukri, Mir Muhammad Pasha of Rawanduz, and Bedir Khan Beg of Botan – taken from Part Two of a work in progress provisionally titled 'The Kurds in English Literary History, 1520-1923.' Part One examines information about the Kurds and Kurdistan provided by works printed in English from 1520 to 1799. Part Two consists of contextual studies of English-language accounts of the Kurds and Kurdistan, mostly but not exclusively by British authors, including travellers, merchants, journalists, historians, geographers, diplomats, missionaries, and explorers as well as consular and military intelligencers, published between 1800 and 1923. This paper exemplifies several key arguments and themes of the longer study, most notably ways that travellers sometimes report details otherwise not recorded in other sources, and how traveller's reports regularly disagree with those of other witnesses, especially other British travellers, thereby exemplifying how there was no coherent, consistent or unified British attitude or policy towards the Kurds from first encounters to the Treaty of Lausanne.

**Adnan Keçi, Université de Paris Cité**

*Towards a history of Behdinan: Central Kurdistan in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire*

The reforms of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century proved difficult in Kurdistan, if they ever succeeded. The socio-political organization of Kurdistan had been dominated by the semi-autonomous polities for centuries predating the Ottomans and survived all the way to the mid-nineteenth century under the empire. The last autonomous Kurdish emirate was dissolved in 1848. The same period coincides with the demarcation and fortification of the Ottoman-Iranian boundary. The essence of the reform programs was the reorganization of the tax and land tenure system as well as the restoration of administrative and military authority. While it is widely acknowledged how decisive this period was for the fate of Kurdistan in the following decades and even in the post-empire period, the existing literature, accepting some linear and overarching explanations, falls short to thoroughly delineate the social and political transformations in the micro level. Relying on the archival documents and limiting itself to the central Kurdistan, the present paper aims to delve into the first years of what could be named as the modern Ottoman state apparatus; the new forms of center-province encounter it entailed and the initial social transformations that will unfold in the coming years. The central claim of this study is that such a radical rupture in the sociopolitical rule could not have taken place smoothly and without resistance -and/or negotiations- in such a socially heterogeneous and geographically harsh region.

**Zehra Ayman, Independent Researcher**

*The Kemalist regime's "Colonial-Style Administration" via the People's Houses (Halkevleri): Participation/representation, boundaries, and adaptation, (1930s–1940s)*

This presentation examines the "colonial-style administration" implemented by the Kemalist single-party regime in twelve Kurdish provinces during the 1930s and 1940s through the institutional lens of the People's Houses (Halkevleri). Although the regime officially embraced republicanism and political populism, it deliberately refrained from establishing Republican People's Party (RPP) branches in these provinces until 1945, replacing them with People's Houses operating under the General Inspectorates. Drawing on primary archival documents and memory sources, this study approaches the People's Houses not solely as vehicles of cultural assimilation but as everyday sites where bureaucratic domination, surveillance, political boundary-making, and interaction with local actors were continuously produced. The first argument is that, in the 1930s, the People's Houses intensified mechanisms of exclusion and

administrative control to suppress Kurdish ethno-political and cultural agency in regions largely corresponding to historical Kurdistan. The second argument is that the transition to multi-party politics after 1945—combined with RPP–Democrat Party competition and broader geopolitical shifts—created openings that made even limited Kurdish political participation more visible. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that state authority in the region was neither uniform nor stable but instead operated through adaptive forms of “colonial separation,” “thresholding,” and “selective inclusion.” Moreover, the everyday negotiations, compromises, and subtle resistance practices of local actors significantly shaped the functioning of the People’s Houses and the evolving contours of state–society relations in Kurdish provinces.

#### **Panel 5D – Political economy and power in Iranian Kurdistan**

**Aso Javaheri, Simon Fraser University**

*History of the making of Kolbari: Accumulation and disposable life*

This study examines women’s kolbari in Rojhelat as a form of labor and livelihood shaped within a specific historical–political trajectory. The transformation of property relations, the collapse of local economies, and the state-building made dependent people on a market that, under Iran’s particular pattern of capitalism, has been unable to absorb them while continually producing surplus labor through the logic of accumulation. The accumulation has historically relied on a centralized top-down and unit-identity program. Therefore, it has produced the marginalized non-Persian/Shiit population that has been removed from productive and market circuits. While the value extraction depends on these regions, investment, infrastructure, and productive capacity are concentrated in central regions. It produces systematically peripheries deprived and pushes people into unsafe, precarious labour and disposable life. Women face an even more complex position. They not only lost their means of production, but also their social reproductive labor became devalued and invisible. Political and cultural constraints also limited access to education, employment, property, and mobility. The study argues that women’s kolbari is the point where commercial-rentier accumulation, historical dispossession, surplus labour production, spatialized value extraction, and social reproduction converge into a single relation. Kolbari is not an anomaly; it is the exact outcome of the logic of this way of accumulation.

**Milad Moradi & Hesam Mohammadzadeh, Institute for Humanities and Culture Studies**

*The political economic of body and population: Demographic programs and the control of the Kurds in the Second Pahlavi Era (1953-1977)*

This study employs Michel Foucault’s concept of “bio power” to examine how population policies and bodily control mechanisms were utilized during the Second Pahlavi era (1953-1977) to manage and direct Kurdish society in Iran. By Foucauldian perspective, modern power operates not merely through repression but through the administration and organization of life—both individual and collective. Within this framework, policies such as public health, social security, and economic welfare programs function not only to improve citizens, lives but also as “technologies of governance” aimed at population management and behavioral control. Following the establishment of the Republic of Kurdistan in 1946 under Qazi Muhammad’s leadership, Kurdistan transformed into a contested arena for competing governance projects. While the nascent Republic sought to institutionalize welfare, economic, and infrastructural reforms, the central government simultaneously attempted to establish a counter-discourse through bio political approaches. This dynamic intensified after the 1953 coup d’état, when Mohammad Reza Shah, responding to regional developments and international pressures, initiated comprehensive development, welfare, and health programs designed to render the Kurdish population governable and integrate them into the mold of the state’s ideal subjects.

This research seeks to answer how the Pahlavi regime utilized bio power to control and reshape the Kurdish population.

**Mostafa Khalili, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies**

*Everyday politics and ambivalent belonging among Kurdish tri-border communities during the post-1979 conflicts in Iran*

This paper examines the everyday politics of life in the Kurdish tri-borderlands of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey during the turbulent decade following the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Drawing on extensive oral histories and ethnographic research from villages across Margavar, Targavar, and Sumay in northwestern Iran, the study explores how ordinary Kurds navigated competing sources of authority—tribal structures, land disputes, the newly revolutionary Iranian state, Kurdish nationalist movements, and leftist organisations active in the region. Rather than aligning consistently with any single actor, villagers adopted flexible and pragmatic strategies to secure survival, autonomy, and social continuity amid shifting political pressures. By foregrounding the perspectives of herders, small-scale traders, tribal intermediaries, and village elders, the paper reconstructs a complex landscape of power in which ideological boundaries rarely mapped neatly onto local practices. It shows how borderlanders' mediation practices and selective, constantly shifting alliances enabled them to adapt to rapid militarisation, cross-border conflict, and tightening state control. It further argues that Borderlanders' ambivalent identities—expressed through alternating, situationally flexible, and simultaneously overlapping affiliations with conflicting authorities and ideologies—should not be understood as a sign of inconsistency, but as a central and adaptive feature of everyday life in the borderland region. The paper contributes to debates on frontier governance, minority nationalism, and the anthropology of the state, arguing that villagers' ambivalent positioning in the 1980s reveals the limits of macro-level narratives of nationalism and state formation.

**Senour Ahmadi, University of Foggia & Serveh Ahmadi, Independent Researcher**

*The impact of the landlord-peasant system on the socioeconomic structures of rural Kurdistan in Iran*

The landlord-peasant system, as one of the traditional socio-economic structures of Iran, has had a profound impact on the rural communities of Kurdistan. This study, using the methodology of historical sociological analysis, has examined the role of this system in the social and economic structures of the villages of Kurdistan. The research question is: What impact has the landlord-peasant system had on power relations, social inequalities, and economic development? The research data was obtained from the analysis of historical documents, official reports, and scientific papers. The results show that this system, as social impacts, consolidated social inequality by concentrating power and land ownership in the hands of landlords, and as the economic impacts, by limiting the access of peasants to resources and rights, it disrupted sustainable economic development. The dependence of resources on landlords led to the creation of relative social cohesion but limited the formation of independent institutions. The elimination of this system in the land reforms of the 1960s created social and economic changes, but its long-term effects are still evident. For future research, it is suggested that comparative studies be conducted in other regions of Kurdistan and a deeper analysis of the political impacts of this system be conducted.

## **Panel 5E – Gender, law and tradition**

### **Minatullah Alobaidi**

*The impact of Iraq's 2025 Ja'fari Personal Status Law on the Kurdistan Region's legal autonomy and gender protections*

The amendment of Iraq's Personal Status Law through the Ja'fari code in 2025 has far-reaching implications not only for women's and children's rights across Iraq but also for the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region. While the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) maintains its own legal framework under Article 6 of Law No. 15 (2008) and the 2011 Domestic Violence Law—which criminalizes child marriage and sets a conditional minimum age of sixteen for registering a marriage contract—the Ja'fari amendment threatens to undermine these protections by creating overlapping jurisdictions and setting dangerous legal precedents in both federal Iraq and the Kurdistan region. The Ja'fari code reintroduces sectarian jurisprudence into Iraq's family law system, permitting marriage contracts for the Shi'a community based on their religious affiliation. It enables child marriages far below internationally recognized standards. Its provisions—such as granting automatic child custody to fathers from age 7, minimizing women's inheritance rights, and permitting marriages from as young as nine—represent a stark reversal of Iraq's 1959 civil legal reforms. This dual structure effectively fractures the already complex legal environment between Baghdad and Erbil, encouraging conservative actors to push for similar codes within or parallel to KRG law. For the Kurdish region, the ripple effects are both legal and social. Increased internal migration of women from southern Iraq to the Kurdistan Region—seeking protection from custody rulings and forced marriages—may pressure Kurdish courts and shelters managed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Moreover, the symbolic normalization of child marriage in federal law risks eroding Kurdish-led efforts to promote gender equality and civic governance. While Kurdistan retains comparatively progressive legislation, the federal amendment blurs the line between religion and state, challenging Kurdish autonomy over personal status issues and threatening to dilute its distinct advancement of women's rights compared to the rest of Iraq. This evolving legal conflict highlights a crucial research frontier for Kurdish studies in Iraq: how regional governance, sectarian jurisprudence, and gender intersect in shaping cultural norms and civic pluralism within Iraq's fragile federal system.

### **Shahla Wali Jabbar Shwan, Salahuddin University & Abdul Samih Gubari, Eötvös Loránd University**

*Gendered mobility and cultural norms: How gender roles shape women's mobility experiences in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*

The concept of women and mobility in the context of migration examines how gender roles influence women's ability to move and migrate, often shaped by cultural norms and societal expectations. Women during migration experience distinct challenges rooted in traditional roles, yet they also find opportunities for empowerment and independence through new experiences and economic prospects in diverse locations. The freedom to transnational mobility serves as a locus of power and stratification that functions at structural, institutional, and individual levels (Alinia, et al., 2025). The unequal distribution of mobility rights doesn't simply exist between the Global North and the Global South; it also creates inequalities within migrant groups. While structural limitations disproportionately affect migrants from the Global South, these limits interact with various forms of inequality, including gender, class, ethnicity, and legal status, so generating varied experiences of marginalization. Drawing on intersectionality, a theory first presented by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, the literature on gender and migration has increasingly emphasized this "marginality within the marginalized." According to Izaguirre et al. (2025), intersectional

analysis sheds light on how overlapping social and economic disparities exacerbate the vulnerabilities brought about by restricted mobility regimes. Statistical evidence shows that mobility in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is strongly gendered, with men granted greater spatial freedom to move across borders. Therefore, it is important to be involved in this issue. This study aims to explore how gender role norms shape mobility cultures in the KRI. Employing a qualitative framework and interview, it investigates how women experience mobility and how cultural constraints hinder them from enjoying full freedom of movement.

**Mairéad Smith, Brown University**

*Translating rape at the limits of language in post-Da'esh Iraq*

Rape as a “weapon of war” is a powerful global discourse shaping legal, humanitarian, and state responses to wartime sexual violence. In Iraq, in the aftermath of Da’esh’s targeted sexual violence against Ezidi and other ethno-religious minority women, rendering a sociolegal concept such as rape legible to victims is complicated by the notion that Kurmancî—the language spoken by the majority of victims—lacks a direct translation for “rape.” Drawing on participant observation at local Iraqi-based organizations, NGO reports, interviews with translators, and through examining the origins of the Yazidi [Female] Survivors’ Law, the first law in the region to recognize conflict-related sexual violence and provide reparations for victims, I argue that the translation of rape is guided by international legal frameworks that produce a narrow, historically specific notion of sexual harm that is both enabling and limiting. It renders certain harms legible to the state while separating them from the continuum of gendered violence and local moral worlds in which violence is experienced by victims. I suggest an approach that attends to violence in the vernacular, opening analytical space to consider alternative moral and epistemic worlds that challenge law’s inherent tendency to make incommensurable worlds commensurate, reflecting women’s narrated experiences of violence.

#### **Panel 6A – Kurdish Representations in Literature**

**Shamisa Naseri, Independent Researcher**

*From the Orientalist domain to the geopolitical vacuum: Representing the Kurd, a stateless nation, in western fiction (1892–2013)*

This study analyzes the representation of the Kurdish nation in five major works of Western fiction, including Karl May’s *Wild Kurdistan* and Laurie Fraser’s *The Word Not Spoken*. Utilizing a blended theoretical framework of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Benedict Anderson’s *Political Imagination*, and Henri Lefebvre’s *Critical Spatial Theory*, the research treats these texts not as mere narratives, but as cultural documents reflecting Western geopolitical discourses on the Kurds. The core question is: How is the image of the Kurd as a stateless nation reproduced in the Western imagination, and what geopolitical function do these representations serve? Employing close narrative analysis, the study reveals how Kurdish identity is constructed and modified based on Western strategic necessities—from the “Romantic Savage” to a “Geopolitical Instrument.” Ultimately, the research argues that the narrative imposition of permanent placelessness (symbolized by the perpetual mountains and exile) serves the discursive function of naturalizing and justifying the lack of a centralized, sovereign state in the dominant political imagination. This analysis contributes to understanding how the political condition of statelessness is structurally affirmed through Western cultural production.

**Essmat Sophie, Independent Researcher**

*Feminist counter-archives: Kurdish women's memoir and fiction as politics of refusal*

This paper examines contemporary Kurdish women's literature as a feminist counter-archive that emerges where official records are absent, censored, or destroyed. Bringing together three key texts—Malaka Mostafa Soltanti's *In the Shadow of Qalabard Peak*, Golrokh Ghobadi's *Poppies Blossoming on the Rugged Stones*, and my literary novel *Dancing Amid Fire, Rising Above Ruins* (2023)—I argue that Kurdish women develop narrative methods that transform lived trauma into forms of knowledge grounded in fragmentation, withheld backstory, ritual lament, and embodied memory. Across memoir, biography, and fiction, these works create alternative modes of remembrance rooted in voice, naming, affective opacity, and embodied witnessing. Drawing on trauma temporality (Caruth; LaCapra), postmemory (Hirsch), and the distinction between archive and repertoire (Taylor), I conceptualize Kurdish women's storytelling—breath, gesture, lament, rememory, and renaming—as embodied knowledge practices that exceed textual documentation. These forms do not merely represent violence; they actively refuse extractive empathy, resist nationalist domestication of women's suffering, and challenge state-scripted versions of history. Together, this corpus of Kurdish women's writing enacts a politics of refusal that protects the opacity of pain, regenerates communal memory, and contributes to broader debates on stateless archives, gendered violence, cultural memory, and collective survivance.

**Elizabeth Pinkney, University of Exeter**

*Questioning nationalism: Kurdish women's sexual expression in the work of Bachtyar Ali, Jan Dost and Sema Kaygusuz*

This paper examines representations of women in contemporary Kurdish novels and explores how women's sexual expression and transgression are utilised to complicate Kurdish nationalism. I will focus on three novels from different parts of Kurdistan, *I Stared at the Night of the City* by Bachtyar Ali (2016), *Every Fire You Tend* by Sema Kaygusuz (2019) and *Safe Corridor* by Jan Dost (2025). Each text engages with magic realist representations of Kurdistan, showcasing the Kurdish women's magical embodiment in tandem with her refusal to reproduce. She thus dislocates her role as the symbol of the nation but instead as an active participant in questioning the system of nation-states as a whole. In a region of state violence and homogenisation that has subjected the Kurds to marginalisation, genocide and exile, I seek to expose how these novels, through women's sexuality, question nationalism and the creation of a Kurdish nation under these circumstances.

**Delzar Sadiq, Salahaddin University-Erbil**

*The image of Kurdish women in European travelogues and early Kurdological discourse (1800-1914)*

This study examines the construction and evolution of the image of Kurdish women within European travelogues and the nascent field of Kurdology during the long nineteenth century (1800-1914). During this period of intensified colonial and orientalist interest in the Ottoman Empire, European travelers, missionaries, and early scholars produced a significant body of literature describing Kurdish society. This paper argues that within these texts, the portrayal of Kurdish women was not a mere reflection of reality but a discursive construct, heavily shaped by orientalist tropes, gendered expectations, and the political agendas of the observers. The analysis reveals a persistent dichotomy in their depiction: Kurdish women were frequently romanticized as symbols of exotic beauty, tribal freedom, and martial spirit, yet simultaneously marginalized as victims of a perceived oppressive and patriarchal Kurdish social structure. By situating these representations within their historical context,

this research demonstrates how these portrayals served to reinforce European civilizational hierarchies and justify imperial projects. Ultimately, this investigation uncovers how the figure of the Kurdish woman became a pivotal site for the negotiation of European identity and the projection of colonial knowledge, leaving a lasting legacy on the perception of Kurdish gender relations in Western scholarship.

**Panel 6B – Beyond “voicelessness”: Kurdish women’s audibility, refusal, performance, and situated resonance**

**Berivan Kutlay Sarıkaya, University of Toronto**

*You know what happened to us”: Silence, refusal, and embodied testimony in Kurdish women’s prison narratives*

In the aftermath of the 1980 military coup in Turkey, Diyarbakır Military Prison became a central site of Kurdish resistance. While the prison has occupied a pivotal place in Kurdish collective memory, the experiences of women incarcerated there have remained marginalized. This paper centers Kurdish women’s testimonies, examining how silence, refusal, and embodiment shaped their narratives. These narratives resist linear accounts of testimonies of violence; and coherence, disclosure and extraction, articulated through phrases such as “you know what happened to us”. They cannot be simply translated into publicly legible testimonies without insisting on the collective recognition of colonial violence and women’s resistance. Drawing on fieldwork, I conceptualize Kurdish women’s prison narratives as embodied forms of testimony and refusal. The female body became both the site of colonial violence – strip searches, sexual torture and carceral discipline – and the locus of insurgent agency in survival practices, hunger strikes, humor, and collective solidarity. Refusal, expressed through silence or non-disclosure, emerges not as absence but as political praxis. Drawing on Audra Simpson, I argue that these narratives generate insurgent knowledge that unsettles state violence and academic extraction. By centering refusal as voice and embodiment as testimony, the paper demonstrates how narrative/testimony becomes a site of resistance for incarcerated Kurdish women.

**Marlene Schäfers, Utrecht University**

*Revolutionary voice and the limits of liberal politics in Kurdistan*

Kurdish women are often cast as “lacking a voice” in Turkey and beyond; a shorthand that understands a lack in public audibility as equating to social oppression and political insignificance. Yet Kurdish women are deeply invested in raising their voices, often despite heavy social and political constraints that seek to prevent them from doing so. I understand this desire to become publicly audible as one effect of liberal politics, which elevate the voice to a prime symbol for agency, empowerment, and participation. But while liberal politics may incite the marginalized to raise their voices, the patterns of sound and speech that result do not always accede to what I call the “representational imperative”: the expectation that voices should reliably represent the thoughts, ideas, and feelings of their bearers. By focusing on oral history performed by Kurdish female singers and forms of speech by Kurdish political activists and freedom fighters, this paper identifies vocal formations alternative to normative liberal ones. In doing so, this paper sets out to theorize what I call “revolutionary voice”: a sonic-semiotic form that deconstructs the primacy of the self on which hegemonic understandings of voice rely.

**Dilan Bozgan, Columbia Global Center in Santiago, Chile**

*Kurdish women's voices across Latin America: Speaking, being heard and the making of the authorised voice*

This paper examines how Kurdish women's voices become audible across transnational feminist circles, shifting the focus from whether they can speak to whether they can be heard. Drawing on long-term ethnographic work in Turkey and Argentina, and – centrally – the participation in the Encuentros Nacionales/Plurinacionales in Argentina, I show that Kurdish women's audibility is shaped by situated alterity: the relational conditions, political grammars, and power configurations of each context. The paper first analyses how the Kurdish women's movement internally constructs authorized voice – who can speak, with what legitimacy, and through which embodied forms of political subjectivity. These internal processes reveal that “voice” is not a given but negotiated, differentiating among the diverse experiences and positionalities of Kurdish women. Bringing notion of actants (Bruno Latour) into conversation with notion of embodiment (Rosi Braidotti), and moving beyond the post-colonial feminist frame “voicelessness of subaltern women”, I approach voice as actant: a force that affects, convenes, and reshapes political worlds. I trace how these actant voices act, travel, and become hearable - resonate or dissonate - across geopolitically situated settings: constrained by state violence in the Middle East and securitization in Europe, yet amplified and newly intelligible within Latin American “plurinational” feminist circles.

**Panel 6C – Law making and governance in North and East Syria**

**Stephen Knight, University of Oxford**

*Prophetic lawgiving in North and East Syria?*

Abdullah Öcalan, as the leader of the Kurdish Freedom Movement, rejects any claim to be a prophet. Nonetheless, the Movement he founded effectively treats him as one. Major intellectual developments by the Movement, particularly the adoption of “democratic confederalist” ideology, are traced back to Öcalan, and where possible he provides practical direction to the Movement. In North and East Syria, the Social Contract provides a constitutional basis on which to regulate society. All versions of the Social Contract have been explicitly founded on principles derived from Öcalan's works. In the most recent version, legislative and executive bodies are given responsibility for implementing democratic confederalism. A “Social Contract Protection Court” exists to allow for any laws which conflict with the Social Contract – and by extension, democratic confederalism – to be challenged. Based on primary empirical research in NE Syria including interviews with judges, alongside a review of secondary material, this paper suggests that Öcalan may be engaged in a practice of prophetic lawgiving in NE Syria, and that the legal system founded on Öcalan's ideas can be usefully compared to a system of religious law. The paper sets out arguments for and against the value of such a prophetic approach to lawgiving.

**Azad Hasan, Durham University**

*Subsidising bread and civilian survival under rebel governance*

The paper examines the political economy of bread to explore civilian everyday life under rebel governance. Using the case of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), it analyses how civilians experienced Kurdish-led rebel governance during the Syrian civil war (2011–2024). While production and accessing bread may appear as a mundane and taken-for-granted daily activity, a closer examination reveals a dense web of social, economic, and political relations. Drawing on extensive fieldwork, the paper demonstrates how the provision of subsidised bread shaped civilian relations with political

authorities throughout the conflict. Fluctuations in bread availability, quality, and price, whether driven by political decisions, war consequences, or climate effects, shaped diverse forms of civilian coping strategies and subtle everyday resistance. The findings show that political legitimacy sought by violent nonstate actors, civilian agency, and the governance of bread were mutually constitutive. Situating production of bread at the centre of wartime governance, the paper contributes to broader debates on rebel legitimacy, service provision, and the politics of everyday life in protracted conflicts.

**Azad Deewanee, Independent Researcher**

*Syria: From centralisation to decentralisation – implications for peacebuilding, democratic governance, human rights, and regional security*

This project examines how governance models in Syria have shaped implications for peacebuilding, democracy, human rights, and security before and after the December 2024 regime collapse. It compares centralised governance under Al-Assad and post-2024 Hayyat Tahrir Al Sham (HTS) with decentralised forms, including the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) and Al Suwayda's growing autonomy, alongside the Alawite coastal movement advocating federalism. The study asks which arrangements effectively promote peacebuilding, democratic participation, human rights, and regional security. Using comparative process tracing and critical discourse analysis, the research draws 100 texts (2010–2026) from sources such as ACLED data, UN and human rights reports, and 15 expert interviews plus 4 stakeholder discussion groups in 2026. Addressing a key gap in the literature on Syria, which lacks a comprehensive comparative analysis of centralised and decentralised governance models, the study links governance structures to outcomes in peacebuilding, democratic governance, and security. The central hypothesis contends that decentralisation, grounded in local legitimacy and supported by constructive external engagement, strengthens stability, democratic inclusion, and human rights. In contrast, ideologically driven or exclusionary centralisation, whether under Al-Assad produced abuses, repression, and instability, or under HTS has reproduced them, with HTS posing acute risks for regional security.

**Panel 7A – Turkish authoritarianism, violence and the peace process**

**Andrea Novellis, Independent Researcher & Gabriele Leone, University of Graz**

*The authoritarian settlement playbook: Learning and conflict management in Turkey*

Existing literature on illiberal peacebuilding analyses authoritarian practices but often treats them as a static alternative to the liberal peace. This scholarship has yet to fully theorize how such strategies are dynamically refined through state learning in response to the perceived failures of prior, more pluralistic approaches. This paper addresses that gap by analysing a critical case: the paradox of Turkey's simultaneous pursuit of a PKK demobilization process since 2024 alongside an intensified crackdown on the political opposition. It argues this is part of a coherent strategy of 'learned illiberalism,' a refined, second-generation model of stabilization designed to achieve pacification while actively foreclosing the political risks of pluralism that derailed the previous, semi-liberal peace attempt. Using a comparative process-tracing methodology, the analysis contrasts the institutional architecture and sequencing of the current process with the 2013–2015 peace process. The empirical analysis reveals a shift from a political bargaining model to an administrative-coercive one, which inverts the logic of concession and coercion to transform a political conflict into a matter of state-managed compliance. This finding allows the paper to specify a key mechanism of authoritarian learning in conflict management, reframing such processes as potentially successful projects of authoritarian state consolidation. It challenges scholars to look beyond the war/peace binary and examine how conflict

management techniques are repurposed as core instruments in the modern authoritarian toolkit. This case demonstrates a pathway by which autocracies achieve pacification not by solving political conflicts, but by absorbing them into the permanent administrative and security apparatus of the state, with implications for the durability of both peace and autocracy.

**Devran Koray Öcal, University of Bern**

*Embodied interpretations of violence: Understanding state violence through the perspectives of security officers in Turkish Kurdistan*

This paper develops an embodied and affective framework for understanding state violence in Turkish Kurdistan by examining how security officers interpret, rationalize, and live the violent practices they carry out or witness. Building on recent debates in political geography and feminist analyses of embodiment, the study conceptualizes violence not as a fixed structure or a discrete event, but as a process constituted through sensory perceptions, emotional dispositions, and bureaucratic cultures. Drawing on ethnographic interviews with active and retired members of Turkey's police and military, the paper shows how officers narrate moments of armed confrontation, raids, and civilian encounters through affective registers shaped by institutional training, historically sedimented imaginaries of Kurdish spaces, and colonial relations of authority. Fear, vigilance, and moralized notions of duty emerge as key affective infrastructures through which violence becomes both intelligible and legitimate. The empirical material demonstrates that state violence is continually produced at the intersection of structural power and embodied practice: it is lived through alert postures, routinized suspicion, spatial distancing, and paternalistic interpretations of Kurdish civilians. By foregrounding perpetrator-side sensibilities, the paper contributes to Kurdish Studies by opening the black box of the state, and advances theoretical debates on embodied state violence by tracing how coercion is felt, justified, and enacted in everyday geographies.

**Elif Sandal-Önal, Bielefeld University (co-authors: Ercan Şen; Yasemin G. Acar; Mete Sefa Uysal & Aydın Bayad)**

*Rethinking peace under uncertainty: Kurdish identities, emotions and imaginations of a collective future during the current Peace Process in Turkey*

This study investigates how Kurdish communities in Turkey and in diaspora make sense of the recent peace process initiated in October 2024, which remains marked by profound uncertainty. Building on the theories of social/political psychology and peace studies, the paper investigates how the disarmament and withdrawal of the PKK, the ambiguous state engagement and agency, the political alliances during the negotiations and the fragile trajectory of past peace attempts shape Kurdish identities, emotional orientations, democratic beliefs, and collective future imaginations. The study adopts a bottom-up perspective and attempts to understand lay meanings of peace as a lived and contested social experience rather than an institutional process, drawing on frameworks of everyday peace, relational peace, and social representations. Empirically, the research employs semi-structured interviews across multiple sites in Turkey (Van, Diyarbakır, Dersim, İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir) and diaspora communities in Germany (Berlin, Köln) and the United Kingdom (London, Glasgow). Complementary media analysis maps the discursive constructions surrounding the peace process across digital platforms. By engaging with narratives of uncertainty, hope, mistrust, and coexistence, the study aims to illuminate how individuals imagine possible futures amid an evolving political climate. The paper will present preliminary findings from the ongoing fieldwork, offering early insights into how uncertainty shapes Kurdish political subjectivities and visions of sustainable peace.

**Pelin Oral, EHESS**

*Post-conflict reconstruction and the politicisation of heritage in Diyarbakır*

Cities embody collective identity, and in Turkey, urban planning, architecture, and heritage have increasingly become tools for state power to shape narratives of nationhood and control space. This paper examines the post-conflict reconstruction of Diyarbakır's Suriçi district (2015-2025), a UNESCO World Heritage site and a symbolic center of Kurdish culture. The period encompasses the aftermath of the 2015-2016 clashes and the lead-up to a potential second peace process, highlighting the contested nature of heritage and spatial authority. Following the 2016 military operations, state-led reconstruction entailed large-scale demolition, displacement, and expropriation under the justification of "public order." Traditional Kurdish urban forms, communal practices, and social networks were replaced with standardized façades, wide boulevards, and commercialized spaces. Pre-existing gentrification trends intensified, turning Suriçi into a depoliticized, tourist-oriented neighborhood while marginalizing local residents. This case demonstrates how post-conflict reconstruction functions as a form of cultural and political control. By aestheticizing destruction and framing it as progress, the state redefines who can inhabit and represent the city. Yet local communities maintain alternative cultural practices and networks that resist these interventions, preserving claims to heritage, identity, and space. Suriçi thus exemplifies the tensions between authority, cultural preservation, and resistance in post-conflict urban contexts.

**Esin Gülsen, Goethe University**

*The significance and potential of memorialising past atrocities: How and what to remember in the new peace process in Turkey*

This study explores the significance and potential of remembrance and memorialisation in the context of the recent Kurdish peace initiative in Turkey. The question of what and how to remember remains a central area of political negotiation, particularly in relation to the gross human rights violations committed during decades of armed conflict. Building on the new peace process that began in 2024, the study argues that recognizing and addressing past atrocities is crucial for achieving lasting and legitimate peace. Sites such as Diyarbakır Military Prison -the most symbolically charged location of the Kurdish conflict- serve as key spaces where collective memory, trauma, and political contestation intersect. The study examines debates and initiatives concerning the memorialisation of the Kurdish conflict, including ex-prisoners' demands to transform Diyarbakır Military Prison into a human rights museum. As transformative and restorative mechanisms within a broader framework of transitional justice, memorialisation practices facilitate truth-telling, the public recognition of previously silenced narratives, and realising justice for the victims. By analysing competing memory practices and the political dilemmas surrounding what and how to remember, the study highlights the contested nature of collective memory while demonstrating its potential as a resource for reconciliation and sustainable peace.

**Panel 7B – Global Feminist solidarities****Nancy Mancias, California Institute of Integral Studies**

*Demilitarisation as Feminist praxis: Decolonising climate justice through Indigenous and subaltern resistance*

This paper interrogates the gendered dimensions of militarized climate violence through Indigenous and feminist epistemologies of resistance. Centering the embodied knowledge of women land defenders, nuclear survivors, and anti-military activists, it examines how colonial-capitalist systems weaponize both ecology and gender across occupied territories,

from Standing Rock to Okinawa. The paper traces how Indigenous women like Winona LaDuke document the militarization of Native lands, while Hibakusha women's testimonies (featured in *The Spirit of Hiroshima*) reframe nuclear colonialism through intergenerational trauma. These cases reveal how environmental destruction operates as gendered violence, disproportionately targeting women's bodies and kinship networks. Readings such as *The Militarization of Indian Country* and *Being Nuclear* deconstruct the racial patriarchy of extractivism, while films like *Broken Worlds: The Island* (on Vieques) and *A Dream for Standing Rock* highlight women's leadership in land struggles. This paper critiques how international frameworks, like the Kyoto Protocol, erase military pollution, a silence contested by transnational feminist networks, including Pacific Islanders linking United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change failures to base contamination. By asking whose knowledge counts as "expertise," this paper amplifies subaltern methodologies: oral histories of Kurdish environmentalists, Puerto Rican women's water testing near naval bases, and Okinawan grandmothers' soil archives. By analyzing anti-base protests as feminist praxis and uranium mining as reproductive violence, this paper reimagines climate justice through decolonial feminist lenses. It challenges anthropology's complicity in militarized knowledge production, offering radical alternatives: Indigenous land pedagogies, embodied protest, and solidarity economies. Ultimately, this framework asserts that demilitarization is inseparable from gender justice, a truth embodied by the Kurdish women's movement's ecological revolts and other frontline resistances reclaiming life amid ruin.

**Yushan Huang, EHSS**

*From "Half the Sky" to "Jin, Jiyān, Azadī": A South–South Comparison between Rojava and the Chinese Socialist Women's Movement*

This paper develops a comparative South–South perspective on Kurdish women's knowledge production in North and East Syria (Rojava). While existing analyses often rely on Western feminist theory, such frameworks inadequately capture the collective, institutional and revolutionary character of women's political participation in the region. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in local women's institutions, I place the Rojava experience in dialogue with women's mobilisation during the Chinese socialist period. Rather than treating the Mao-era women's movement as a theoretical model, the paper identifies structural parallels—such as the slogan "women hold up half the sky," the institutional role of the All-China Women's Federation, and the conceptualisation of gender work as a political task. These points of comparison illuminate how revolutionary movements employ gender ideology, organisational structures and mass participation to reshape social relations, while also encountering resistance, contradictions and structural limits. By comparing Rojava with another non-Western revolutionary project, the paper demonstrates how women's knowledge emerges through collective labour, political education and everyday negotiations with power, despite the markedly different political contexts: Rojava operates within conditions of ongoing instability, uncertain autonomy and significant influence from cadres, whereas the Chinese socialist women's movement was situated within a consolidated one-party state with strong centralised control.

**Aynur Ünal, London College of Contemporary Arts**

*Struggle for multiple identities: Drawing parallels between Kurdish women and Indigenous women's rights movements*

This paper examines parallels between the struggles of Indigenous women and Kurdish women, placing particular emphasis on how Alevi identity shapes Kurdish women's political mobilisation. While Indigenous feminists diverge from mainstream feminist movements by centring identity, collective rights, and decolonial demands, they also confront colonial and

patriarchal systems that impose additional constraints. Indigenous women's organising in Latin America became especially visible in the 1990s, grounded in notions of equality that extend beyond Western individualism. Their participation was pivotal to the Zapatista movement, influencing its political evolution and strengthening demands for equal representation. In this context, Indigenous women contribute to broader decolonial projects while simultaneously challenging patriarchal norms within their communities. A similar dynamic emerges in the Kurdish movement, where Alevi identity adds a layer of marginalisation shaped by both ethnic and religious difference. This intersection informs Kurdish women's experiences of internal colonisation, community-based patriarchy, and state repression. Accordingly, this paper explores the convergences between decoloniality and the internal colonisation experienced by Indigenous women and Kurdish women, with particular attention to the intertwined dimensions of gender, religion, and ethnicity.

### **Panel 7C – Power and representation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq**

**Majida Ismael, Liverpool John Moores University**

*Representation under pressure: Electoral reform, constitutional equality, and judicial centralisation in Iraq*

Iraq's recent electoral reforms have reshaped political representation in ways that raise serious constitutional questions, particularly for Kurdish constituencies and communities in the disputed territories. This paper analyses the implications of the revised electoral law and the 2025 election results, with particular focus on the role of the Federal Supreme Court (FSC) in redefining the rules of the game. The Court's interventions, ranging from ruling on electoral districting to interpreting the constitutional standards of political equality, have strengthened the federal government's hand while narrowing the scope for regional and minority representation. The 2025 elections demonstrated how larger districts and the adjusted Sainte-Laguë formula favour established blocs, a trend reinforced by judicial decisions emphasising national over regional electoral considerations. This paper argues that this intersection of electoral engineering and judicial centralisation risks weakening constitutional guarantees of fair representation. It concludes by suggesting reforms that could reconcile the FSC's constitutional role with the need to protect regional and minority political agency within Iraq's federal system focusing on Kurdistan region.

**Francis Owtram, University of Exeter**

*Blow-out preventers? Limits of liberal power sharing approaches to the issue of natural resources in disputed territories: Hydrocarbons and Kirkuk in comparative perspective*

Within the field of ethno-politics the study of 'disputed territories' has notably broadened in recent years from first world case studies (Wolff 2003) to encompass a wide variety of 'developing world' settings along with enhanced conceptualisation of conflict management strategies (e.g Wolff 2010, 2011; Wolff and Yakinthou 2012). Yet the development and implementation of 'liberal peace' solutions and their application to the issue of natural resources remains relatively understudied. Harvey and Stansfield (2011) analyse the natural resources factor in the closely related phenomenon of unrecognized states whilst from a legal perspective Zedalis (2012) offers useful insights into natural resources and the 'Disputed Kurdish Territories' as well as lessons for 'indigenous peoples' in places such as Canada. As in the oil industry blow-out preventers stop an uncontrolled eruption of oil to the surface so might certain 'liberal peace interventions' (Mac Ginty 2010) be likened to containing armed conflict whilst more substantial constitutional engineering can be put in place. Undoubtedly, in the current context following the 20th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq (Costantini and O'Driscoll 2023), new Iraqi and KRG governments, the issue of Kirkuk

(city and province) and its hydrocarbons will be a key issue to resolve.

**Tom Prével, Sorbonne University**

*The family institution in PUK's power apparatuses*

Drawing from Michel Foucault's perspective of power and domination, this paper aims at questioning the role and function of the family institution in PUK's power apparatuses. The family plays a central role, acting as a medium for the diffusion of partisan power and a forum for its expression, which affect individual and collective subjectivations. I will show how this institution lies at the intersection of different types of apparatuses: enhancing militancy (as a model and structure of political engagement), being a key component of the patronage system (as a mode of resource distribution), serving the production and dissemination of the partisan nationalist narrative (as the symbolic and memorial foundation of legitimacy) and forming one of the scales of the social grid control (the segmentation of the social body into manageable units). However, I will also show how its autonomization can explain the loss of effectiveness of some of those power mechanisms and the de-encompassment of the party over the social tissue, partly explaining PUK's weakening over time. This research is the result of nearly a year of fieldwork and dozens of interviews, informal discussions and ethnographic observations conducted over the last 4 years.