Panel 1A – Kurdish Women's Activism in its Various Forms and Shapes

Factors Affecting Rural Women Entrepreneurship in Kurdistan, Iran: A Structural Equation Model
Snour Ahmadi

Researchers have always attempted to identify factors that can help rural women use their potentials, skills, and resources to establish their private and family business, despite various restrictions. The aim of this study is to assess the determinant factors of entrepreneurship development among rural women in Kurdistan. The statistical population of this study was all female entrepreneurs (WEs) living in rural areas of Kurdistan province in Iran. Two-hundred and nine women (female entrepreneurs) were selected using an appropriate stratified random sampling method. Relying on quantitative methods, the analysis included: financial and economic factors and personal empowerment, which were shown have the highest contribution to the promotion of entrepreneurship among rural women. Furthermore, structural equation modeling showed that socio-cultural factors (0.35), educational-extension factors (0.39), and legal supports (0.38) have effects on the variable of rural WEs. Given the importance of economic factors contributing to the development of women's businesses as shown by the findings of the present study, policymakers and planners are advised to design and enforce effective policies and programs to boost the economic strength of rural households, especially women.

Kurdish Women Activists' Conceptualisation of Feminism and Nationalism: An Ethnographic Study of London-Based Kurdish Organisations
Berrin Altın Soran

This study explores the ways in which Kurdish women activists interpret and practise feminism and nationalism in London. Kurdish women's relations to nationalism can be analysed in various ways. However, this study specifically focuses on the claim that nationalism is antithetical to feminism. Moreover, it has argued that the pre-migration experiences of Kurdish women, related to their national and gender identities, direct them to continue their activism in London. Accordingly, I asked: what roles did the pre-migration experiences of Kurdish women play in their identities and their engagement with activism in London? In what ways do Kurdish women activists in London articulate their political and social demands? How do these women activists negotiate feminism and nationalism? This research is based on feminist ethnographic research that applied observations and unstructured interviews with twenty-eight Kurdish activists.

The Emerging Field of Kurdish Gender Studies and the Formation of the Kurdish Gender Studies Network
Necla Açik

For a long time, research on Kurdish gender issues and women was scarce compared to research on Kurds in general. However, since the turn of the twenty-first century, Kurdish gender studies (KGS) have been developing as an academic field. Linked to this development, the establishment of the Kurdish Gender Studies Network (KGSN) in 2020 emerged from a need to create alternative spaces for knowledge exchange and intellectual solidarity among women and queer scholars in Kurdish studies. The network is also rooted in decades of struggles by Kurdish women who have grappled with the dual challenge of resisting external colonial forces while simultaneously confronting internal patriarchal dynamics in both domestic and public spheres, including in the academic realm. In this presentation, I will contextualise the growth of KGS in relation to decolonial knowledge production in Kurdistan and the Global North. I will argue that both KGS and KGSN have emerged from and actively engage in the politics of recognition and the struggle against oppression, marginalisation, and silencing.

Panel 1B – Voice, Justice and Memory in Kurdish Film and Documentary

Voice and Subjectivity in Contemporary Kurdish Documentary Film
Erika González Flores

This research revolves around the documentary production of three female Kurdish filmmakers residing outside of Kurdistan (Kudret Günes, Mizgin M. Arslan, Zaynê Akyol). The selected cases unveil the use of subjectivity as an explicit implication of the filmmakers in the cinematic form. I argue that this manifests a contemporary form of documentary filmmaking that breaks away from the traditional pretence of objectivity and reinforces the voices of the filmmakers as political subjects within the context of recent Kurdish history. Subjectivity becomes a part of the filmmakers' argumentative process and evolves into a claim of authority, enabling them to speak of a 'pro-cinematic reality' in which they acknowledge their participation. Within the cinematic discourse, these filmmakers construct a subject whose voice can be heard, in contrast to certain narratives that seek to deny such a possibility.

Kurds on and Behind the Screen: Producing Films and Festivals
Fatma Edemen

This paper investigates the strategies employed by Kurdish filmmakers and film festivals, emerging within a context marked by statelessness and geopolitical intricacies. It traces the history and evolution of Kurdish cinema, focusing on how it has flourished as a national concept despite the absence of a nation-state, and challenges such as a lack of industrial support, cultural recognition, and limited resources (Koçer 2014, Sengul 2013, Şimşek 2016). A key aspect of the analysis is the resilience and innovation shown by Kurdish filmmakers overcoming numerous barriers to create and disseminate a Kurdish cinematic narrative. I highlight the vital role of Kurdish film festivals, particularly in Berlin and London, which have

been instrumental in gaining cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu 1993, De Valck 2016) and international attention for Kurdish Cinema.

Vernacular Imaginations of Justice in Kurdish Documentary Films
Nilgün Yelpaze

After the latest attempt of "democratization" and "solution" in Bakur (Northern Kurdistan) and Turkey, the escalation of violence in 2015-2016 shifted the trajectory of the conflict once again towards securitization and militarization. In this context, where the space for seeking justice is limited, looking at the productions of Kurdish activists and artists within the arts and media field might provide insightful information on the prospects for peace. This paper focuses on how Kurdish documentary cinema narrates and popularizes the concept of justice. During conflict and in post-conflict contexts, creating different platforms where (past) atrocities can be voiced, documented and archived seems to be politically and socially important for many people affected by the violence, and may provide crucial means for achieving a sense of justice. Documentary cinema offers such a platform, enabling the presentation of various standpoints and perspectives and as such might play a mediating role between victims, witnesses, and other relevant parties to any conflict. This paper collects examples of local actors engaging in different performances of seeking for justice as they are represented in documentary films, to illustrate "what justice looks like" locally and temporally.

Cultural Memory Through Stateless Cinema: An Exploration of Kurdish Documentary Film
Cem Koç

This paper focuses on the significance of Kurdish documentary cinema in shaping the cultural memory of the Kurdish people. It emphasizes the rise of Kurdish cinema as a dynamic transnational and decolonial practice. An in-depth examination of Kurdish documentary filmmaking practices within Turkey and Northern Kurdistan is conducted to reveal the films' decolonial aspects and their impact on shaping cultural memory. This approach facilitates an exploration of how Kurdish documentary cinema counters prevailing narratives, captures authentic experiences, and fosters alternative recollections in opposition to colonialist perspectives. As a case study, Veysi Altay's films *Bîr* (*The Well*, 2018) and *Faîlî Dewlet* (*Official Murders*, 2012) will be discussed. While discussing the productions of Kurds in the context of cultural memory, it will not be regarded merely as a form of cultural trauma, confrontation with the past, and the compilation of narratives of victimization, but rather as an effort to reaffirm, compile, and create a memory of political struggle.

Dynamics of Kurdish Cinematic Production and Distribution in Turkey: Unveiling Alternative Models and State Mechanisms
Ilknur Bilir

This research delves into the contemporary landscape of Kurdish cinema in the Turkish film industry focusing on alternative production and distribution strategies that have developed in the last decade. The study investigates how these strategies have navigated state censorship, facilitating the dissemination of Kurdish content on platforms such as YouTube. Examining

factors such as production support deficiencies, distribution channel consolidation, and the influence of Turkish state language policies, this research provides a compound understanding of the socio-political constraints shaping Kurdish cinematic narratives and productions on digital streaming platforms. The emergence of Kurdish content on YouTube serves as a critical lens through which to analyse the intersection of creative endeavours and sociopolitical dynamics.

Panel 2A – Approaches to Kurdish Cultural Production

Areas of Intersection Between Alevi and Kurdish Identities in Contemporary Theatre and Dance from Turkey
Sinibaldo De Rosa

The role of Kurdish elements in the formation of Alevi beliefs and practices remained long unrecognised in Turkey, where studies of Aleviness have been strongly entangled within nationalist agendas. Starting with early Kemalist experiments of ethnic engineering, these studies not only neglected the Kurdish components within Aleviness, but often manipulated its Turkish dimension to implement a rapid assimilation of the Alevi Kurds. The representation of contemporary Alevi and Kurdish identities in contemporary theatre and dance in Turkey attests to the ways this nationalist framework is being challenged. This paper focuses on *4Kapı 40Makam* ('4Doors 40Stations'), a piece created in 2011 by choreographer Yeşim Coşkun (b. 1983) and toured until 2022, which defied this framework by highlighting a Kurdish perspective on Alevi ritual. The choreography develops around repetitions and variations over precise movement phrases that are presented in four sections, each introduced by ritual prayers performed in both Turkish and Kurmanji and inspired by the four doors and 40 stages that Alevi devotees are invited to traverse over their spiritual journey. The paper will reflect on the need for intersectional and multi-disciplinary approaches to untangle the complexity of often conflicting religious, linguistic, ethnic, national, and transnational components which conflate in contemporary Alevism.

Analyzing the Symbolic Action of Bereaved Mothers of Kurdistan based on Mourning Sounds and Mourning Dance in the Jina Movement
Shakiba Rahmani

Throughout history, no phenomenon has been as important to human thought as death, which is perceived as a place beyond human perception. Attempts to understand this phenomenon have tended to turn it into an object in the field of thought, operating as dynamic exchange between the body and the mind. The mourning ritual is seen as guiding the dead to another world. When we talk about mourning, we are actually talking about rituals that, according to René Guénon, are symbolic. In the midst of the Jina protest movement in Iran, we witnessed the presence of grieving mothers who lost their children to government forces' bullets. What was published in a sad but glorious way on social networks in those inflammatory days in Iran was the mourning of the bereaved mothers of Kurdistan, who became one of the powerful symbols of the struggle in this movement by holding the mourning ritual of their children in the field of mourning dance and lullaby. This research, in three parts, tries to address the

question of the mourning dances and Kurdish lullabies of these mothers at the graves of their children by studying the physicality of women in the Jina protest movement, the place of women in the culture of Kurdistan, as well as the mourning rituals and mourning sounds of Kurdistan in a descriptive-analytical manner. It analyses why and how these mourning's turn from conventional practices to symbolic ones.

Unveiling Dêrsim: A Linguistic and Literary Analysis of Zazakî Oral Literature
Mahîr Dogan

This paper explores the richness and variety of oral literature from Dêrsim, focusing on its traditional songs and folk tales in the local Kirmanckî (Zazakî) variety. As the language, particularly the Dêrsim variety, faces endangerment with diminishing fluency among younger generations, this analysis aims to preserve and understand this cultural and linguistic heritage. The study first categorizes the types of oral literature prevalent in Dêrsim based on the existing literature, establishing a framework for future research. Emphasis is placed exclusively on Zazakî texts that have been written down since the 1980s. By offering a unique window into this under-explored linguistic domain, the presentation will then provide a detailed linguistic analysis of these texts, examining varying syntactical, semantic, and stylistic forms. The importance of oral literature is emphasized not only from a cultural and heritage perspective but also as a critical source for linguistic analysis of an endangered variety. Despite the prevalent high interest in Zazakî and Dêrsim music, there has been a lack of thorough linguistic scrutiny in these domains. This paper aims to offer new insights into the language and its usage in traditional oral narratives. Through this exploration, the author aims to shed light on the linguistic intricacies of Zazakî oral literature, contributing to the preservation and understanding of this endangered language.

Self-Governing Through Cultural Production: A Comparative Study of Kurdistan's Jews in Jerusalem and the Kurdish Diaspora in Berlin
Veysi Dag

This paper examines how the self-organized cultural establishments of Kurdistan's Jewish community in Jerusalem and the Kurdish diaspora community in Berlin differently govern the cultural, emotional, psychological, and social human needs and desires of their respective community members through cultural production and defy their assimilation and discriminatory experiences. The paper argues that self-identified Kurdish restaurant operators, autonomous dance bands, and musicians, including religious leadership, engage in self-established cultural practices to create diaspora-centric culinary, musical, and dance spaces. These practices result from shared cultural elements and lived experiences in their traditional homeland and adopted homes. Community members utilize the diaspora-centric cultural spaces to (re)evoke their sense of belonging, (re)construct their identities, and ensure the formation and cohesion of their community. Additionally, Kurdish diaspora members in Berlin address their integration-related difficulties and homeland politics. Based on 87 in-depth interviews with cultural actors and constituents and seventeen months of ethnographic field research in Jerusalem and Berlin, this paper sheds light on the role of self-organized cultural actors in constructing multi-sided diaspora-centric spaces through self-established

services of cultural production to convey different meanings, including the construction of ancestral and cultural identities, a sense of belonging, community cohesion and integration, as well as homeland politics.

Panel 2B – Education as an 'Integration' Policy: Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey

Formal Education in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq Towards Coexistance and Peacebuilding
Mustafa Wshyar

Formal education in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has undergone significant changes since the 1991 revolution. In response to the region's de facto status, the Kurdistan Regional Government has instituted various reforms to enhance the educational curriculum, with a focus on inclusiveness and modernisation. However, one notable gap remains: the absence of sufficient material in the curriculum to teach students the vital skills of acceptance and coexistence, particularly towards other minority groups in the region, such as Turkmens, Assyrians, and Chaldeans. This study aims to investigate the narratives utilized in the subject of Kurdish Studies within primary school education. I will employ a narrative learning approach to analyse these stories, with the objective of understanding their impact on the learning outcomes and their role in the peace-building process. Our focus will be on examining the narrative elements used in the construction of these stories and how students comprehend them.

Education Policies in the Refugee Camps in Iraqi Kurdistan
Hussein Abbas

Since 2011, the Syrian Kurds crossed the border in large numbers for the first time and came into contact with the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq. In Iraqi Kurdistan, for example, in 2012 the number of refugees was only 30,000. After 11 years, the number of Kurds increased more than 9 times, reaching 264,000 refugees. The focus of this paper is the education policies in refugee camps for Syrian Kurds in the Kurdistan Region (KRG). This is analysed through the comparison between 3 camps, Domiz camp in Duhok, Qushtapa camp in Erbil, and Arbat camp in Sulaymaniyah. There are more than 55 schools with over 60,000 students. The main inquiry is how political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan respond to the challenge of the presence of refugees, and rehabilitate them to build a new generation that is compatible with the values, agenda, and interests of the two traditional parties in the region of (KRG). To address this inquiry, the author conducted interviews with teachers, students, administrators, and children's families. The heavy reliance on primary sources, is due to the topic being relatively new and that research on education in Kurdistan and refugees is limited.

Stories of Women Displaced by ISIS: A Social Justice Perspective on the Social and Educational Experiences of Young Women in Kurdistan
Jumana Al-Waeli

This paper narrates the vivid stories of young women displaced to Kurdistan, Iraq, following the ISIS invasion of Mosul and Nineveh Plain in 2014. The young women - aged 18-25 from a variety of cultural backgrounds (Yazidi, Shabak, Christian and Sunni Arab), share their voices and social and educational encounters and conceptualise their experiences and the barriers to pursuing their rights to and in education in light of the political, socioeconomic, cultural, and traditional environments during and post the 2014 conflict and displacement. Through interviews and art-based productions, the young women's stories are interpreted via a lens of social justice as parity of participation (Fraser, 2008). The stories reflect their different life trajectories, socioeconomic status, and varying levels of education and affiliations. The paper also represents the experiences of those who had their educational journeys interrupted or were prevented from accessing education due to political, cultural, or socioeconomic circumstances between 2014 and the present time in the Kurdistan region. This work aspires to provide insights into young women's social and educational stories, dreams, and aspirations to inform similar research conducted with women and girls in conflict-affected societies. It also aims to inform formal, informal, and non-formal local and international educational efforts that seek to help young women -especially those affected by war and displacement- access education and challenge social injustices and barriers to pursuing their educational goals.

Panel 2C – Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Human Mobility Hub

The Grass is Not Always Greener on the Other Side: The Evolution of Iraqi Kurdish Migration to Europe: The Case of Kurdish Migrants in Athens and Dunkirk
Abdullah Omar Yassen and Jehat Mirkhan

In a state of repeated conflict, instability and widespread corruption, Iraq has not only hosted refugees, but it has also produced them. Since 1980, Iraq has consistently been in the top 20 source countries, and Iraqi refugees are one of the three groups of refugees to remain in this list (UNHCR, 2014). Therefore, there are limited resources for the host community and no resources for forcibly displaced populations (NRC, 2023). As such, there is a huge appetite for migration towards Europe and the push factors are clear, with well over a quarter of Iraq's young people being unemployed. The influx of thousands of mostly Kurdish Iraqi refugees migrating along the dangerous route from Turkey, Greece to Germany, France and the UK is a recent example of youths who have lost faith in politicians in Iraq. This research examines the drivers of irregular migration from Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) to Europe through in-depth interviews with Kurdish potential migrants in the KRI, transit migrants based in Athens (Greece) and Dunkirk informal camp (France) and returnees from Germany and the UK. The qualitative method is complemented by desk research analysis of migration phenomenon among Kurds. The initial findings show that high unemployment, political instability, and corruption have been the main drivers of migration towards Europe. We also found that Transit

countries such Greece and France are used a stop gap by migrants to reach their preferred destinations of Germany and the UK.

The Prospects for Durable Solutions for IDPs in Iraq: A Case Study of Erbil Governorate Camps
Halmat Saadoon Ghareeb and *Taban Masoom* *Hawrami*

In 2014, Iraq witnessed its highest wave of internal displacement during the military operations against ISIS (Islamic State). Many innocent civilians had to leave their homes and become Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Today, an estimated 1.2 million Iraqis are still displaced. While some of them live in homes, most live in makeshift shelters, often in airless tents at the mercy of the extreme weather. Across the country, year after year, the heat compounds their suffering, threatens to undo painstaking gains in livelihoods and food security. All this is happening in a country suffering from 20 years of conflict, where 45 million people struggle to move forward with their lives. The question of how IDP situation plays out in the context of the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where the vast majority of Iraq's IDPs are to be found, leads us to reflect on the solution for their displacement. By discussing self-reliance and durable solution, this research undertakes in-depth interviews with IDPs based in camps in the Erbil governorate, the camp management, international and national organizations to identify what future holds for this group of IDPs in KRI. Can they return, integrate in Kurdistan or are they anticipating risks of a second displacement? This is in the light of Iraqis strategy to close all 26 camps by the end of 2023.

What Happens to Law in a Refugee Camp? Turkish and Iranian Attacks on Refugee Camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Zozan Yasar and *Shakir Suleman Mahmud*

Refugee camps are temporary facilities built to provide immediate protection and assistance for people forced to flee their homes due to war, persecution or violence. Such camps, established as safe havens for refugees and designed to meet their most basic needs, are the responsibility of the host country in cooperation with the UNHCR. However, asylum-producing countries violate international law by attacking refugees residing in camps on the grounds where combatants are present. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has almost 20,000 refugees from Iran and Turkey. Having fled oppressive governments that discriminate against, persecute and imprison them, these two groups of refugees have been continuously attacked in the camps since the 1990s, starting with military attacks and most recently through the use of drones. This research explores the legal framework applicable to these attacks on refugee camps and settlements in the KRI, focusing particularly on the use of force and barriers to the integration of Iranian and Turkish refugees. The question is when camps are attacked, to which actors shall responsibility be allocated? The contribution of this research lies in the failure of Iraq, KRI and UNHCR to protect refugee camps. These camps have become notorious for their insecurity. There is one school of thought that the authorities are not 'unable' it is 'unwilling' to provide protection to these two groups of refugees. To unpack this,

semi-structured interviews with camp refugees and management, combined with desk research to understand the complex legal framework and procedures in place is undertaken.

The Use of Kurdish Language vs English Language in the Workplace in the Private Sector of Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Dlpak Mustafa Azeez, Taban Khudhur Omar and Selar Othman Ali

The workplace is heading towards language shift in Kurdistan due to the late changes in the market place and globalisation. The aim of this study is to explore the uses of the different languages in the work sector. It examines the use of the three main languages in the region in the private sector in five various growing fields which are, education, health, communication, humanitarian, management and marketing. The data represents the use of the languages in the formal and informal environment in the workplace. The data was collected using a questionnaire and sent through digital platforms to different employers in the private sector in the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI). The results from the 70 respondents reveal that English language, which is the foreign language in the region, is necessary language requirement for applicant to secure a job while Kurdish mother tongue is not. Moreover, the majority state that English language is used for formal and informal medium of operation. Other respondents state that English and Kurdish languages are used in daily communication at the workplace. The result further show that the respondents receive capacity building training and the training is mainly conducted in English. This study indicates that the English language is expanding to be more dominant and emerging as a strongly present language at workplace in the private sector.

Panel 2D – Discourses of Kurdishness, Conflict and Reconciliation in Turkey

Between Indigenous to Territory and Threat to State Sovereignty: Polarisation of Discourse on Kurdishness within Turkey's Political Sphere
Aynur Unal

The emergence of pro-Kurdish political parties within Turkey's political sphere dates back to the early 1990s. Since then, the major development is the first pro-Kurdish party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which entered Turkey's parliament by overcoming the 10% electoral threshold in 2015. With this development, the discourse on Kurdishness constituted by Turkish nationalists, which is based on both denying Kurds and identifying the movement as a threat to the state's sovereignty, has expanded to parliamentary pro-Kurdish politics. The state discourse on Kurdishness has been sharpened around terrorism in response to claims of pro-Kurdish parliamentary politics. Although the Kurds have been struggling for their self-determination since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the parliamentary pro-Kurdish politics has employed political communication of a legal unified voice of oppressed, marginalised and denied peoples, including Armenians, Alevis, Assyrians, Laz, and Arabs based on self-representation. Therefore, the discourse on Kurdishness constituted by pro-Kurdish politics has become an alternative to extreme centre, which is more than a third alliance for elections in Turkey. In this paper, I discuss political communication on polarised

discourses on Kurdishness and the impact of pro-Kurdish political parties within the Turkish political sphere.

The Turkish Official Discourse of Terrorism and the Kurdish Peace Process
Azad Dewanee

The study examines how Turkish authorities, including Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP), framed the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and Kurdish national activism, both during and after the Kurdish peace process, based on the discourse of terrorism. This discourse not only targeted the armed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) but also affected Kurdish civic activists, elected parliamentarians, mayors, journalists, human rights advocates, and others. The study utilises critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyse relevant written and spoken texts produced by Turkish authorities between 2012 and 2019. The analysis shows that the Turkish official discourse on terrorism had two primary objectives: a) Delegitimizing Kurdish national activism and movements, and b) Legitimising Turkish repressive policies and military actions against Kurds in Turkey and the Kurdish regions of Syria and Iraq. The study highlights how Erdogan and the AKP's electoral strategies influenced their approach to the Kurdish question. During the peace process, the AKP favoured non-military approaches and peace negotiations. However, when the AKP failed to secure the necessary majority to change the Turkish constitution in the June 2015 elections, Erdogan reverted to a military approach, abandoning the peace process. This shift matched the appeal of the AKP leadership to the votes of ultranationalists in the November 2015 elections and the subsequent referendum to amend the constitution.

Land, Conflict and Political Mobilisation in Kurdistan: The Agrarian frontiers of Kurdish Autonomy, 1950s-1980s
Alex Creamer

The PKK is often thought of as a direct outcome of the pro-Kurdish intellectual milieu of the 1960s and 70s. Mass state repression against the ad hoc organisation of these short-lived reformist and separatist movements in the urban sphere of Ankara is said to give rise to the PKK's clandestine core of hard-line cadres. This common narrative excludes crucial developments in the Anatolian countryside, whereby the 'Kurdish Question' at large came into being through the process of agrarian reform and violent subordination. The first part of this article considers Kurdish political consciousness as deeply ingrained in injustices of rural social relations such as the demise of land tenure, expropriation of land holdings and consequent conditions of landlessness. The second part discusses how the PKK's period of gathering strength for its guerrilla insurgency evolved in and through the traditional authorities of village elders in Kurdish villages, and thus its strategies of political reproduction were co-constituted by crises of social and economic reproduction within the agrarian economy of Turkey's Kurdish provinces. The third part advances the comparative dimension of a symmetry between the ecological and environment underpinnings of guerrilla organisation in the Anatolian countryside and the PKK's transnational withdrawal to Lebanon's Beqaa Valley. This article positions agrarian inequality, landownership, and rural working conditions as the principal question of the restoration of Kurdish political rights, which bridges the gap between

rural sociology and urban-centric narratives of Kurdish history, national identity, political consciousness and class interest.

Panel 3A – Constructions of Political and National Identity in the Diaspora

Banal Nationalism and Kurdishness: A Comparative Approach between Denmark and Sweden
Tiago Duarte Dias

Kurds are one of the largest diaspora populations in the Global North. Sweden and Denmark, two Scandinavian countries that share a lot of cultural, linguistic, and political similarities, share the presence of a large, politically and culturally active Kurdish minority population. With that in mind, this article wishes to further explore the differences and similarities of how Kurdish identity and nationalism are expressed in those two contexts. The article will explores the idea of banal nationalism as proposed by Michael Billig (1995), and how the concept can help us further understand Kurdish nationalism in two different nation-states, alongside the appearance and maintenance of both Swedish-Kurdish and Danish-Kurdish identities. By framing nationalism through its banal aspect, that is, the routine and less subtle ways in which it is expressed, this article will focus on how Kurdishness as a daily, lived reality, within aspects which are not constructed to be overtly nationalistic, but rather mundane, in those two contexts. Empirically, this work draws on ethnographic experiences in Denmark in 2014 and in Sweden from 2019 (and ongoing). By comparing both Danish- and Swedish-Kurdishness the author seeks to further illuminate the processes of identity-formation within the Kurdish diaspora, and to better comprehend how Kurdishness becomes a multivocal identity that is articulated with a series of other local belongings, without losing the Kurdish aspect of self-identification.

Exploring the Impact of AKP's Authoritarianism on Kurdish Diaspora Psychological and Political Dynamics
Haci Cevik

Recent years have witnessed a concerning surge in authoritarian tendencies within Turkey's AKP (Justice and Development Party) government, prompting widespread apprehension about its repercussions on diverse societal segments, particularly the Kurdish diaspora. This presentation aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the psychological and political ramifications of this phenomenon on diaspora Kurds. Primarily, it scrutinises the influence of the AKP's authoritarian trajectory on diaspora Kurds. This entails conducting an in-depth appraisal of the policies and measures implemented by the AKP government and their resonance within diaspora communities. Additionally, I aim to assess the extent to which this authoritarian shift has affected the political-psychological bonds between diaspora Kurds and Turkey. The research methodology is extensive interviews with Kurdish individuals residing in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Stuttgart—cities where the AKP and the Kurdish Movement garnered nearly equal support. Through this method, I aim to unearth the subtle intricacies of their evolving political identities. The selection of these cities is deliberate, as they serve as microcosms of the broader diaspora, providing a nuanced outlook on the diverse reactions to

the authoritarian transition. Furthermore, the research endeavours to dissect the interplay between authoritarianism in Turkish politics and the psychological affinities of diaspora Kurds towards Turkey. By means of qualitative interviews, I aspire to uncover the intricate tapestry of emotions, perceptions, and attitudes that mould their political allegiances and sense of belonging. This research bears significant implications for both scholarly discourse and policy formulation. It casts a revealing light on the multifaceted dynamics shaping diaspora communities amidst an era marked by democratic regression and heightened political uncertainties.

Portrait of a Kurdish Exile between "intellectualism" and "activism": Nuredin Zaza (1919-1988)
Bilal Ata Aktaş

In Kurdish society, as in all societies, intellectuals have always played an important role, especially during the great moments of transformation. This research aims to investigate the formation and development of the Kurdish intellectual tradition from the Ottoman Empire to the contemporary diasporic spheres. Although most societies have a group or category of individuals exercising an intellectual function, a relatively autonomous intellectual field firstly emerged in Europe. What does this newly emerged "social type" say to the Kurdish intelligentsia? Are there any differences between an intellectual born in Europe or in Kurdistan? How has the statelessness of the Kurds affected the Kurdish intelligentsia? This article argues that in times of constant crisis and during contentious political turmoil, the intellectual is expected to perform multiple roles for his community while remaining marginalized and contested as a result of fragmented consciousness and contentious politics.

Yezidi Women in Siberia and the Discourse over Education and Employment: Chances and Perspectives
Henriette Raddatz

As a result of the Armenian genocide by the Ottoman Empire, the fall of the Soviet Union, the violent conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the connected weak economic situation in the Caucasus countries, Yezidis found their way to Siberia at the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. This research looks into the establishment of the Yezidi diaspora in Siberia, with a particular focus on women and the question of women's education and wage-giving labour. Several aspects influence positions for women reaching higher education or even employment, such as their origin, social and family background, and the settlement pattern in Siberia. Positions are highly diverse: girls attending the mandatory nine years of school and then going into unemployment and marriage; softer positions, such as women gaining higher education after going into unemployment and marriage; or entirely opposing positions, such as leading their own businesses and being divorced. Discourses are shaped by religious and partly patriarchal value structures and having to navigate a globalising and neoliberal world. Yet between possibilities for woman agency and securing basic needs, education and labour for women are also challenged by the predominantly conservative Yezidi-Siberian Diaspora from Armenia.

Panel 3B – Governing North-East Syria

Democratic Confederalism in Deir ez-Zor and the Arab Regions of North and East Syria: Crisis or Opportunity?
Matt Broomfield

The expansion of Kurdish-led governance under the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) into conservative Arab regions is often represented as the greatest challenge the AANES faces. But this process also provides the greatest opportunity for the AANES to implement its idealised political vision, putting its claimed commitment to direct-democratic devolution to the test. While Kurdish regions align more broadly behind AANES policy, it's in restive Arab regions the AANES has been forced to compromise, alter or defend its policy positions in response to public demands, protests, and armed unrest. Drawing on first-hand observations from 2020 public consultations in Raqqa and Heseke, and using the 2023 Deir ez-Zor uprising as a case study, it can be seen that while the AANES faces severe challenges in incorporating conservative, distrustful Arab communities into its model of 'democratic confederalism', it's precisely these challenges driving the AANES to avoid the pitfalls of centralised authoritarianism and Kurdish chauvinism. Through a practice-based assessment of the compromised and imperfect federality forged through adversity in the Arab regions, we can trace the evolution of democratic confederalism in practice. Recent scholarship has criticising the AANES for defaulting to authoritarianism on the basis of an immature, Rancièrian understanding of politics as mere 'dissensus', but in Deir ez-Zor we can observe a continually-evolving, strategic response to real-world pressure. In this light, the Deir ez-Zor crisis can be reassessed as paradigmatic of actually-existing democratic confederalism, as defined by ideological flexibility, responsiveness to bottom-up pressure, and the strategic management of dissensus.

Rojava's Democratic Governance: A Unique Paradigm within the Rebel Governance Discourse
Pedro Campos

This paper examines the Rojava democratic model of governance within the broader academic discourse on rebel governance. Rooted in democratic confederalism, the Rojava model implemented by Kurdish groups in northern Syria provides a distinctive departure from conventional rebel governance structures. Emphasizing direct democracy, gender equality, and local self-governance, Rojava's institutional structures, including communes, councils, and assemblies, manifest a bottom-up approach rarely observed in traditional rebel organizations. This study analyses the legitimacy of Rojava's governance structures, linking it to grassroots support and the model's capacity to address the needs of the local population. Like other rebel governance contexts, Rojava prioritises social service provision, with a focus

on education, healthcare, and community-based initiatives. The model's accommodation of ethnic and cultural diversity contrasts with potential exclusionary practices observed in other rebel groups. Examining Rojava's external relations reveals complexities in navigating geopolitical challenges and the impact of neighbouring states on the model's sustainability. This paper also explores how Rojava addresses internal and external pressures, demonstrating resilience in the face of military threats and economic difficulties. Lastly, the study considers the implications of Rojava's governance model for post-conflict transitions, offering insights into the potential long-term influence of rebel governance on political landscapes. Overall, Rojava's experience enriches our understanding of governance in conflict settings, presenting a unique case that informs discussions on the adaptability and inclusivity of rebel governance structures.

Education Reform in Rojava: Rebel Governance Practices in a Multicultural Context
Yushan Huang

After the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, north-eastern Syria, popularly known as Rojava, embarked on an attempt at autonomy based on "Democratic Confederalism". As an autonomous region lacking international recognition, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) should institutionalise its ideology in the existing social structure to ensure its local legitimacy and long-term impact on people. In this process, schools and educational structures play a crucial role. In response to the prevailing "Arab nationalism" since the founding of Syria and the restrictive policies against the Kurdish language, the ANNES reinstated Kurdish language education in the Rojava region as an act of resistance. A multi-lingual education model has been created, treating Kurdish as the primary language with the coexistence of other languages, such as Arabic, Syriac, and Armenian. By tracing the history of Syrian education and language policies, this article aims to better understand the context of ANNES's education reform. Meanwhile, based on the theory of "rebel governance", this article further discusses the structures, mechanisms, and reasons for the formation of the current Rojava education model, while analysing the contradictions between the reality and ideals of this model.

Panel 3C – The Different Aspects of Consolidating 'Statehood' in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Interactions between Emerging and Established States: A Pathway to a New Form of Statehood? The Case Study of the Consolidation of Statehood of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (1991 – 2020)
Silvia-Lucreția Nicola

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has emerged as a want-to-be-state in early 1991, in the aftermath of the First Gulf War. This paper challenges the way the US is repeatedly portrayed in an imperialist, all-mighty fashion as "the first accidental liberator of Kurdistan". This narrative of the US or "the West" as the creators of the KRI tells only one side of the story, disregarding Iraqi-Kurdish agency. As this paper will show, the Iraqi Kurds seized unexpectedly opportunities and exploited the chances to work on the consolidation of their own statehood. The process of consolidating the KRI's statehood through the strategic development of interactions with various established actors in the international system can

be observed most effectively across four distinct phases (1991-1996; 1996-2005; 2005-2014; 2014-2020). This paper, furthermore, claims that especially this variety of intended interactions is what distinguishes the KRI in the long-run from other want-to-be-states that have a "classic" patron-state. The analysis of these interactions between the KRI and established states in the international system is based on a comprehensive theoretical framework that draws on Krasner's (1999, 2004) conceptualisation of domestic, Westphalian, and international sovereignty and the notion of "engagement without recognition" (Pegg/Berg/Ker-Lindsay). The analysed data corpus includes official documents, archival sources, and empirical data gathered from extensive fieldwork conducted throughout the KRI in 2019 and 2022.

Institutionalising Peace in Iraqi Kurdistan post-Civil War, 1998 to Present
Hawre Hasan Hama

The four-year armed conflict between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) ended in September 1998 under the terms of the Washington Agreement. Since then, there has been a quarter-century of durable peace between the two combatant parties, though they have often been at odds politically. Based on interviews with Kurdish political leaders from both parties, this paper argues that sharing or dividing power across all four dimensions of state power — political, military, territorial, and economic — has played a vital role in ensuring the durability of the peace settlement. The paper traces the KDP-PUK power sharing system through three stages: the transition stage (1998-2006), the "golden" period (2006-2013), the "weakening" period (2013 to present).

The Role of Kurdish Women in Parliament and Government in South Kurdistan 1992-2023
Harem Hasan Ahmed Baban

The role of Kurdish women in governance is one of the issues that have been discussed since the 1991 uprising and the beginning of Kurdish rule in southern Kurdistan. Since the beginning of Kurdish rule, Kurdish women in southern Kurdistan, have been able to participate in the top of the Kurdish government – albeit on a small scale. The aim of this study is to demonstrate the role of Kurdish women in making political decisions in all the parliamentary sessions of Kurdistan and the cabinets of the government in 1992-2023 and their work as parliamentarians and ministers in the parliament and cabinets of the Kurdistan Regional Government. This study attempts to analyse and compare the oral history of the role of women in these two institutions in this historical period. In addition to answering many questions, such as what were the reasons for Kurdish women to participate in the government? What are the obstacles to women's participation in parliament and government cabinets? Did the women of Kurdistan reach the top of power because of the ironwork of the parties? Was the participation of Kurdish women out of conviction on the part of the perspective of political parties? Or was it pressure of foreign countries? How many Kurdish people have succeeded in the government, considering the different experiences than men?

An Academic Affair: Kurdish Cultural Production in South Kurdistan in 1970s
Saman Ihsan Abdalkarim

The strong emergence of the Kurdish nationalist movement from the 1960s made political science the dominant discipline in Kurdish studies, side-lining studies on Kurdish culture at large (Bruinessen, 2014, p. 19; Tejel, 2017, p. 3). This poses a challenge to anyone covering Kurdish cultural institutions during that period and risks the omission of the role of cultural institutions from Kurdish history, both as practitioners of cultural production and as actors who influenced politics. This paper seeks to answer the question of how the Kurdish Academy of Science (KAS) engaged in cultural production and what implications did this have on the development of the Kurdish nation? As such I will argue that KAS first sought to establish a firm foundation for the Kurdish language through processes of the officialisation of the Kurdish language, with every aspect such as morphology, phonology, and syntax. Furthermore, they sought to gain symbolic capital for the Kurdish language by tracing its roots all the way back to the Medes. The second objective was that KAS sought ways to incentivise Kurdish cultural production through two main centres: the first was the Kurdish library they had which was rich with 16,000 books until the 1980s. The second centre was the KAS publishing house which ended up producing 16.7% of all Kurdish books published in the 1970s. KAS engaged in these activities because it saw the development of Kurdish language and the increase of cultural production as inseparable from the development of the Kurdish nation.

Panel 3D – The Transformation of Kurdish Identity in Turkey

Reflections of the Modernisation / Urbanity Relationship Established in Hegemonic Discourse on Kurds' "New Urbanity" Experience: The Case of Diyarbakır
Rotinda Çağdaş

This study focuses on the urbanity experiences of middle-class people who have physically broken away from agriculture and migrated from the village to the city and their daily encounters in the city. Focusing on the city of Diyarbakır in south-eastern Turkey, the study centres on the effects of the conflict between the hegemonic definitions of 'urbanity' and 'Kurdishness' fixed by the state, which Kurds in the city encounter in their experiences of detachment from agriculture and migration to the city. It seeks to understand the impact of the state's equating Kurds with 'peasantry' and 'primitiveness' on the desirability of urbanity as an identity in Diyarbakır. It tries to understand the impact of modernisation policies of the Kurdish Political Movement on the urbanity and modernisation practices of people in Diyarbakır. The focus is on the agrarian city that the Kurds of Diyarbakır established in the city centre in order to adapt to the dominant discourse and the ideal urban profile, and the 'new urbanity' identity they tried to create with it. This autoethnographic study will be expanded by referring to the story of the author's parents, the first generation born and raised in the city, leaving agriculture behind. It will be further expanded with in-depth interviews and participant observation to understand the state's perception of modernisation-urbanity and primitiveness-peasantry in daily encounters and life practices in the city centre through the experiences of Kurds living in Diyarbakır.

Glocal Securitization-Led Gentrification of Diyarbakir-Sur
Ibrahim Has

Security became dominant in people's everyday lives in the face of increasing violence in various forms in cities around the world. Every private and public space is assessed from security perspective that is deeply linked to authoritarian state which closely deploys coercive dispositive such as surveillance, policing and military operations to secure and sustain hegemony of dominant socio-political forces. Based on an ethnographic case study in Sur district of Diyarbakir, this paper with interdisciplinary approach analysis urban rent production and distribution through unpacking dialectics of securitisation and gentrification processes in three organic stages. It focuses on how multidimensional moments of bourgeois creative destruction have turned Diyarbakir into a laboratory before, during and after urban warfare stages in which growth-oriented actors formed temporal conflictual unity with various innovations, visions, and imaginaries to construct an entrepreneurial city. It elaborates social, political, economic and military moments that also exposes the security paradox from cultural decolonisation and neoliberal colonisation nexus which interacts with securitising the Kurdish Question simultaneously at local (Diyarbakir), national (Türkiye) and regional (Rojava-Syria) scales. This elaboration focuses on local scale that critically captures one-sidedness of scholars who reduce gentrification of Sur neighbourhoods to the state repression, violence and terror against the Kurds on the one side, and violence and terror of the Kurdish movement on the other. The paper urges us to move away from reductionist conclusions to understand complex sets of actors and processes in different stages involving multiscale spatial struggle of hegemony and resistance.

Between the Legacy and the Reality: Unveiling the Kurdish Ethnic Identity through the Intergenerational Perspective
Berfin Coşkun

Based on ethnographic research conducted with 8 pairs of parent-child in Diyarbakır, Turkey, this article focuses on the question of how the perception and daily life practices of Kurdish ethnic identity differ intergenerationally. The article delves into how both generations delineate the boundaries of Kurdish identity and the extent to which their perceptions align or diverge. Three key identity components are highlighted while defining the Kurdishness: (a) the Kurdish language, (b) the cultural items and collectivistic way of organizing community, and (c) religion.

The article then shifts to examining intergenerational changes in how the Kurdish community encounters Turkish society. It concludes that the more Kurdish youth confront the Turkish society - as a result of some sociological processes that the Kurdish community has been going through the last thirty years, e.g. urbanization, engagement with the Turkish education system etc. - the more culturally hybridised they become. However, this cultural blending doesn't necessarily manifest in the political sphere due to heightened polarization in political discourse and an increase in daily-life Turkish nationalism. Therefore, this study emphasizes the socially constructed nature of ethnic identity, recognising that its boundaries can expand or contract depending on the socio-historical context. Consequently, the research aims to

comprehend the similarities and differences across generations in the perception and daily life expressions of Kurdish ethnic identity.

Modernisation Theory and the Emergence of a Hierarchical Caste System in Turkey
Abdullah Hawez

Following World War II, modernisation theory emerged as a powerful construct within the field of social sciences, primarily aiming to streamline a global transition from traditional to modern societies. In Turkey, modernisation was initially viewed as a pathway to political and societal progress, driven by interactions between American and Turkish scholars. However, the adoption and internalisation of modernisation led to unforeseen socio-political outcomes. This paper delves into how the quest for modernisation created deep-seated class stratifications within the broader Turkish populace, categorising Kurds as the lower caste and further dichotomising the Turks themselves into 'White' and 'non-White' divisions. We explore the role of modernisation in transforming the Kurdish identity from an ethnic marker to a class-based identification and further into a hierarchical, caste-like system within the broader Turkish societal matrix. Drawing on both historical and cultural contexts, this paper argues that while modernisation aimed at fostering national unity, it inadvertently contributed to the development of such a hierarchical social system reminiscent of the caste system. The redefinition of Kurdish identity, their portrayal in popular culture, and the subsequent unwritten codification of societal classes highlight this transformation. Through this analysis, the paper unveils how global paradigms, when localised, can produce unintended socio-political consequences, using Turkey as a representative case study. The paper concludes by positing that Turkey's experience, while unique in its specifics, offers broader insights into the interplay of modernisation, class, ethnic politics, and neo-colonialism.

Panel 4A – The Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Politics, Patronage and Sovereignty

The Kurdish Political System in Erbil
Rebwar Salih

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is the official body of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and is recognised by the central government of Iraq. The majority of its governing body comprises a collection of parties (primarily the KDP and the PUK) which form the cabinet and (in theory at least) select the prime minister, who is traditionally the head of the executive body but also shares executive powers with the president. The President of the KRI is also the commander-in-chief of the Peshmerga armed forces. This paper aims to analyse the Kurdish political system to address whether the elite could offer the KRI a governing system that could function better, or at least at the same level as the consociational system approach taken by Iraq's central government in Baghdad, a system that Iraq has been following since 2003. The paper also assesses whether the KRG follows democratic principles and liberal values, or if instead it is based on nepotism and dynasticism. It examines the opposition parties to explain why they cannot manage to gain power in the region. It begins by focussing on how the KRG functions and provides public services by examining the role of the main ruling parties, the KDP and the PUK. More importantly, it analyses the judicial system to see if the judges and courts are functioning independently or have been politicised and monopolised by party leaders. Finally, it looks at the political economy of the KRG with a particular focus on oil.

Between Merit and Patronage: Hybrid Appointments of KRG Top Civil Service
Ari Mamshae

This paper offers a comprehensive exploration of top civil service appointments in the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG), shedding light on the intricate relationship between merit and patronage in developing contexts. Contrary to common assumptions, the study reveals that merit-based considerations significantly influence these appointments alongside political factors. By analysing biographical data and conducting interviews with ministers and deputy ministers, the research unveils that top civil service positions in the KRG encompass both political allegiances and noteworthy qualifications. This study not only contributes empirically by providing data on top civil servants' appointments in the KRG but also enriches the conceptual understanding of hybrid appointments in the public sector. The findings underscore the nuanced interplay between merit and patronage, expanding the discourse beyond conventional categorizations.

Intensifying Domestic Challenges of Iraqi Kurdistan: Bolstering Iran's Influence in the Middle East
Anahita Motazed Rad

While the Israel-Hamas conflict is the prevailing discourse of the Middle East, the rising domestic challenges in Kurdistan may unfold as another potential threat. Facing a challenging transformation is marked by political turmoil, critical resource scarcities, and persistent rivalry between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), coupled with Peshmerga fragmentation, pose a crucial threat to the Kurdistan Regional Government's efficiency. On a larger scale, it may contribute to significant political and strategic instability, favouring Iran and its regional allies and militias. Any serious challenge to the autonomy of Kurdistan and its likely reintegration under Iraqi authority would position Iran as the main beneficiary. This can lead to more suppressing of Iranian Kurds as well as the loss of a crucial ally for Israel which is encircled by Iranian allies, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. Based on the main tenets of the Neo-realism approach, the paper explores the potential impact of domestic challenges including rivalry between main political parties in Kurdistan as well as antagonism between the Kurdistan Region Government (KRG) and Baghdad as a driver to reinforcing and extending Iran's regional influence. While these dynamics pose a significant threat to the existence of an autonomous Kurdistan, underscore intensifying regional instabilities, particularly in terms of Iran's increasing regional influence. However, it presents a complex geopolitical landscape with potential implications among great powers in the region in broader terms.

Panel 4B – The Ugly Terrain of Ethnic Identity Management

Ethnic Engineering and Neo-colonial Regional Planning in the Afrin Region
Hevidar Mert

In the aftermath of the Turkish military incursion into Afrin in 2018, a disturbing pattern of urban planning has emerged, suggesting a deliberate effort to displace the Kurdish population. Operation Olive Branch, initiated by the Turkish army on January 20, 2018, was

ostensibly aimed at countering terrorism in Afrin. However, subsequent events and developments paint a picture of strategic displacement and demographic alteration. Reports indicate that Turkey has been settling Arab and Turkmen families in villages captured during the operation. The looting and destruction of Kurdish symbols, such as the statue of Kawa, further underscored a targeted erasure of Kurdish identity. Recent developments reveal Turkey's ongoing effort to alter the demographic landscape through colonial settlements. The construction of housing blocks, supported by "aid organizations" from Qatar and Kuwait, suggests a coordinated strategy. The policy of demographic change has intensified, with jihadist mercenaries settling in the region with their families. The Turkish government's misleading claims about the ethnic composition of Afrin and its intention to return the land to its alleged "rightful owners" indicate a calculated attempt to justify a resettlement program. As Turkey continues to build settlements and alter the demographics of Afrin, concerns grow over the long-term impact on the displaced Kurdish population and the region's cultural heritage.

Democratic Confederalism as a Disputing Kurdish Cosmology
José Vicente Mertz and Felipe Mattos Johnson

This article intends to discuss the origins of the Kurdish liberation struggle, from an ethnic-nationalist movement to the actual conformation with the disputing cosmologies inside the self-determination process. In this sense, the paradigm of democratic confederalism developed by Abdullah Öcalan will be understood not only as a theoretical, ideological and political frame for the revolutionary process - post-rupture with Marxism-Leninism - but as a cosmopolitical movement that encompasses a common ground for natural societies, conceived as a native concept, to overcome state-centred perspectives. This research will be based on the encounter of two ongoing ethnographies conducted by the authors: one with the Kurdish people; the other with the Guarani and Kaiowá people in the lowlands of Brazil. The ontological resistances that underlie both contexts are inspirations to expand and experiment categories linked to critical and insurgent practices and perspectives over the interstate, patriarchal and capitalist world-system as an holistically led approach to understanding democratic confederalism as Kurdish cosmopolitics - following Isabelle Stengers' apprehension of multiple and divergent worlds - and as a tool to multiply the overview of the mosaic of natural societies as pre-existent stateless forces of freedom and communal life.

Automated Ethnic Cleansing? AI's Turkish Bias, Minority Risks, and the Spector of Genocide
Naren Briar

Large language models have been shown to display a wide range of societal biases learned from their underlying datasets. Recent work has primarily focused on exploring and mitigating biases in the context of protected classes (i.e., race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation). Although the field of ethics in AI is progressing quickly, little attention has been paid to biases arising from various forms of nationalism, including general geopolitical and ethnic frictions. This paper highlights the bias of various language models toward the specific case of Turkish nationalism and the real-life negative impacts it can foster on ethnic minorities like the Kurds, Armenians, and others. We have created a curated benchmark of questions designed to probe several axes of Turkish nationalism across both causal and masked language models. We

benchmark and analyse an extensive collection of publicly available models and show that a relatively large percentage have historically exhibited statistically significant biases against minority groups. Furthermore, we continue our study by analysing the bias inherent in standard pre-training datasets, training causal masked language models in a controlled setting using individual datasets. We find that datasets derived from web crawls are mostly responsible for this bias. We argue that while artificial intelligence (AI) models cannot form their own moral judgments, we can focus on reducing the total bias affecting minority groups impacted by the aforementioned ethnic nationalism. Additionally, we explore how this evolving technology can impact the preservation of human rights for minority groups suffering from occupation and ethno-nationalism.

The Factors Affecting Kurdish Language Publishing in Turkey
Miki Nose

The purpose of this study is to determine what impacts Kurdish-language publishing in the Republic of Turkey. It has been said that the legislative reforms in Turkey, the legalisation of using non-Turkish languages in 1991, and the amendment of the Penal Code in 2002 as part of Turkey's EU accession negotiations, have affected Kurdish-language publishing. However, social and political factors may have had a greater impact on Kurdish-language publishing than legal changes in Turkey. This is because no significant increase in Kurdish-language publications was observed in Turkey until 2011. Certainly, the 1991 legislation made Kurdish-language publications in Turkey legally possible. Further, with the 2002 amendment, legal restrictions on Kurdish publications were completely lifted. However, if we look at the actual number of Kurdish-language publications recorded in the catalogue of the Turkish National Library, the number of publications suddenly increased from 52 to 235 in 2011. Compared to this increase in 2011, the impact of the 1991 and 2002 legal changes is negligible. The number of Kurdish-language publications is more than 100 per year from 2011 to 2017. However, this flourishing of Kurdish publishing ended in 2018, with only 12 publications. The period of prosperity from 2011 to 2017 roughly coincides with the period of peace negotiations between the Turkish government and the PKK, which suggests that actual developments in the social and political situation, rather than legal developments, prompted Kurdish publications.

Panel 4C – Historical Accounts from Kurdistan

Land, Power and Armenian-Kurdish Relations in the Ottoman East: A Testimony of an Armenian Survivor from Van
Diana Yayloyan and Mete Ulutaş

By using the untapped testimony of the Armenian survivor Yervant Kureghian, we plan to explore how overlooked forms of cooperation between the villagers within the Armenian and Kurdish communities in the Ottoman Van and the stories of everyday lives can nuance our understanding of the complex nature of the nineteenth-century inter-communal relations and shifting alignments before and after the Hamidian massacres in 1894-1896. Kureghian's testimony is full of rare and vivid collaboration episodes that suggest different engagement patterns, often missing from the history of Armenian-Kurdish relations. We centre the narrative of Kureghian in the broader Ottoman centralisation politics and the locals' rearrangement of social spaces in the Ottoman Van according to the "will of the periphery".

Not to be seen as a substitute, the oral and written accounts by the Armenian survivors, many of whom were farmers and pastoralists in the villages in the Ottoman eastern provinces, are important complementary sources to the history of Armenian-Kurdish relations in the late Ottoman Empire. We believe that integrating the Armenian and Kurdish elements into the study of the late Ottoman East will contribute to a much more comprehensive understanding of the region's history and its overlapping dynamics.

Readership and Book Culture in a 17th- Century Ottoman Kurdish Emirate: A Study of the Library of Abdāl Khān of Bidlīs
Sacha Alsancakli

The study of book culture and reading practices in the Muslim world has in recent years seen unprecedented developments, with a notable increase in studies of libraries and manuscript collections. As a contribution to this scholarship, I will examine the library of Abdāl Khān of Bidlīs (r. 1622-1664), the independent-minded ruler of a Kurdish emirate located on the western shores of Lake Van, and emphatically described by Ottoman traveller Evliyā Çelebi as a master of a thousand skills (*hezār-fen*). Evliyā visited Bidlīs in 1655, during an expedition led against the khan by his kinsman and patron, Van *beylerbeyi* Melek Aḥmed Paşa. More specifically, he was tasked with auctioning the khan's library after he had fled. In his *Seyāḥatnāme*, Evliyā provides us with a list of 121 books kept in that library, works related to all domains of the arts and sciences and written in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, as well as European printed books (list reproduced in Robert Dankoff (ed.), *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis*, 282-295). In this presentation, I will highlight the peculiarities of Abdāl Khān's library, and discuss its possible contributions to broader research questions on readership and book culture in Kurdistan, the Ottoman Empire, and the Turco-Iranian cultural sphere.

An Anatomy of Islamic Awakening in Iranian Ouramanat: the Case of Naser Sobhani
Yasuyuki Matsunaga and Sohrab Ahmadian

One of the waves of Islamic awakening in Iranian Ouramanat took the form of cross-border diffusion of Ikhwani 'aqidah and movement on top of the networks of Naqshbandi Sufism-infused schooling around mosque-affiliated educational settings, known as *hojreh*, in the 1970s and 1980s. The emphasis by the locally dominant Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi-Khalidi tariqat on shari'ah and 'ulum al-din let its shaykhs construct madrasahs literally side by side their khanaqahs. Naser Sobhani, one of the graduates of such settings in the mid-1970s, nonetheless moved on to disavow Sufism just before the Iranian Revolution of 1979, despite his previous great attachment to it, accepted the Ikhwani 'aqidah, and joined the underground movement when it was organized in the Ouramanat region in the early 1980s by the migrating Iraqi Kurdish Ikhwanis. Sobhani, however, was in fact exposed to two distinct amalgams of Ikhwani currents, ending up accepting one and rejecting the other. Drawing on both written sources in Kurdish, Persian, and Arabic, and fieldwork in the region, this paper argues that, while venturing into the world of Islamism centred around the teachings of Sayyid Qutb and Abul A'la Mawdudi and engaging in locally based educational and propagational activities (*da'wat*), Sobhani ended up embodying an amalgam of Ikhwani Islam, not despite, but exactly due to his prior training and immersion in Sufism. The paper employs comparative-historical as well as structural (network) analyses and explains the outcome of interest in terms of a

time-and-place-specific confluence of different indigenous sociocultural and sociopolitical currents.

Panel 4D− Gender, militarism and nationalism

'Women Who Face Death': Understanding Motivational Factors for the Female Peshmergas of the KDPI
Clara Rasouli

Why do Kurdish girls and women choose to leave their lives behind in Iranian Kurdistan for a life of armed struggle in exile? This paper presentation identifies the different motivational factors for Kurdish women who cross the border, pick up arms, and join the peshmerga forces of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), operating in exile from Iraqi Kurdistan. Based on a four-month long research stay with the KDPI, this study offers a deeper understanding of the context, intentions, and underlying motivations of female peshmergas to make such an irreversible life choice by joining the political group. The study is narrated through an insider-outsider position, as I lived intensely embedded in the field. The study combined participant observation and extensive in-depth interviews around female interlocutors. My analysis of the collected data revealed three categories of motivational factors, each with their own sub-categories. These factors include (1) revolutionary ideals: Represented by the emic concept of *Bîr o bawêr*. This encompasses a strong ideological conviction and belief in the necessity of armed struggle. (2) Exposure: People who contributed to the cause in various ways in Iran, so-called *teshkilat*, but were exposed by the Iranian authorities. Their intention was not necessarily to become a peshmerga, but they felt they had no alternative after their exposure. (3) Personal freedom: Joining the KDPI becomes an escape from negative societal or personal circumstances, unrelated to party ideology. Given the lack of other options, joining the peshmerga forces becomes a means to seeking personal freedom.

Fighting Multiple Battles on Different Frontlines − An Extensive Study of the Female Peshmerga
Rawina Trautmann

While the question of why people join the armed forces may be as old as mankind itself, the question of whether men and women have different motivations adds to the complexity of this issue. Even though there has been extensive research on several armed forces containing prominent female members, there has been comparatively minimal research on the female Peshmerga in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Female Kurdish fighters reveal an oxymoron regarding women's roles in Kurdish society: On the one hand, Kurdish society is shaped by honor- and gender-based violence. On the other hand, Kurdish female fighters portray an image of gender equality, where men and women fight together. A strong contradiction can be seen here: Gender discrimination in the private sphere, but gender equality in the armed forces − the public sphere. How can this be explained? What leads Kurdish women to defy gendered societal expectations by entering a stereotypically masculine domain? The purpose of this single case study is to describe and explain when and why women in the Kurdistan

Region of Iraq join the Peshmerga. Furthermore, it seeks to contribute to theoretical debates regarding gender, security, nationalism, and militarism. From March to July 2023 a first round of data was gathered through ethnographic observations and interviews. By interviewing Peshmerga women across generations, who have experienced different social, political, and economic climates in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, similarities, and differences in their motivations for joining the Peshmerga can be established.

Dehumanizing Kurdish men, delegitimising Kurdish nationalist movement: The portrayal of Kurdish and Persian masculinities in Iranian war films
Kaveh Ghobadi

Soon after the 1979 Iranian revolution, the newly formed Islamic regime opposed granting the Kurds local autonomy. From the outset, the Iranian government tried to convince its people that Kurdish political parties were secessionist and supported by the 'imperialist' powers to justify an all-out attack against its own Kurdish people. This paper examines the representation of Kurdish and Persian masculinities in the government-sponsored Iranian films portraying the conflicts between the Kurdish Peshmerga and Iranian forces. It deploys discourse analysis and semiology to reveal the power dynamics at work in particular representations of Kurdish and Persian men and masculinities. Nation and masculinity are generally assumed to be the same and war has traditionally been considered a male preserve. As such, it comes as no surprise that during times of war, masculinities of those involved in the conflict are targeted mainly to either undermine the enemy's military prowess by effeminising him or to dehumanise the enemy by hyper-masculinising him. The paper suggests that the films in question on the one hand denigrate Kurdish masculinity by portraying it as foolish, aggressive, and self-centred, and, on the other, glorify Persian masculinity by depicting it as wise, death-defying, and self-sacrificing. These films not only produce dehumanizing images of Kurdish masculinity to delegitimise the Kurdish nationalist movement, they also opt to construct a 'tempered' Persian masculinity in opposition to an 'other', namely, the hyper-masculine Kurdish 'rebels'.

Panel 5A – Challenges Faced by the Displaced in Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK

Returning from Europe to the Camp? Barriers Faced by Yezidi IDPs Escaping Protracted Displacement in Iraqi Kurdistan
Aleksandra Ancite-Jepifánova

This paper discusses the challenges currently faced by Iraqi Yezidis in their attempts to overcome protracted displacement by seeking protection in Europe. Having been forced to flee the Sinjar area after it was captured by ISIS in 2014, over 135,000 Yezidis still remain in IDP (tent) camps in Iraqi Kurdistan and are hesitant to return to Sinjar due to its significant destruction, lack of adequate public services and insecurity. Multiple international bodies and Western governments, including Germany and the UK, have recognised the atrocities committed against the Yezidi community by ISIS as genocide. This, however, no longer guarantees this group protection or even access to asylum procedure in the EU – even despite

their decade-long displacement in the KRI with limited prospects for durable solutions. This paper approaches the topic from a socio-legal perspective and is based on an analysis of the relevant legislation and interviews with the persons affected. First, it explores the reasons behind the shift of EU policies towards this group and evaluates their compatibility with international refugee law. Second, it describes real-life experiences of Yezidis who were effectively forced to return from Europe to IDP camps or find themselves in a precarious position.

The Forgotten Refugees: Rojhelati Refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Allan Hassaniyan

Displacement is a common outcome of war and violent conflict. The Kurdish-state conflict in Iran has not been an exception. Owing to cross-border Kurdish kinship, Iraqi Kurdistan has been the first apparent choice of refuge destination for many Kurdish freedom fighters (Peshmerga) from Rojhelat (East/Iranian Kurdistan) and their families. Thousands of Kurdish people, mostly affiliated with Kurdish political parties such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), Komala, and Khabat, were forced to flee their homes and sought refuge on the mountainous borders separating Rojhelat from Iraqi Kurdistan after the Iranian regime attacked Rojhelat and the Peshmerga gradually withdrew from this region's urban and rural areas in the 1980s. However, following Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in August 1990, the international coalition's response and attack on Iraq in 1991, establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1992, and consequently changes in regional dynamics forced the Rojhelati political parties to relocate and resettle their forces and families to (semi)urban areas of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Because of this circumstance, there is a generation of Rojhelati refugees in the KRI, who are stateless, with only a few with ambiguously and weakly defined temporary settlement rights. This chapter, composed of two main sections focuses on: a) the interaction and relationships between the Rojhelati refugees and the Kurdish people in the KRI and institutions of the KRG, and b) reflects on and provides an account of the Rojhelati refugees' lived experiences in this region. The analysis will include the cross-border kindship aspect of Kurdishness, particularly during moments of national/political persecution, trauma and displacement of Kurds of one part of Kurdistan settled on the other part of Kurdistan. This chapter will also give a first-hand account of the daily struggles faced by several hundred KDPI families who were forced to flee their refugee compounds due to increased drone assaults and bombardment by the Iranian regime in 2023. These families have been relocated at random throughout the KRI, with the largest concentration of them being in the small provincial town of Koye. Nevertheless, the Rojhelati refugees have become even more traumatised and impoverished due to their ongoing fear of being terrorised or kidnapped by Iranian spies and agents in the KRI and their lack of public support.

"Credibility Undermined" - Challenges in Determining Country of Origin for Stateless Asylum Seekers: Kurds from Syria in the UK
Thomas McGee

This paper summarises the findings of research undertaken with the European Network on Statelessness into the challenges faced by stateless Kurds from Syria when claiming asylum in the UK. It reveals that many have experienced unique hurdles to establish Syria as their Country of Origin due to issues relating to i) civil documentation, ii) decision makers' cultural understanding, iii) and deficiencies in language analysis. These hurdles are often compounded due to the intersection of statelessness and minority identity for the Kurdish community in Syria, complicating the asylum claim process for both applicants and decision makers considering their asylum claims. The challenges in proving one's country of origin adds to the legacy of life as a stateless person within Syria prior to displacement, highlighting the need for more statelessness-sensitive procedures and policy changes in the UK and are of wider relevance to other countries hosting stateless asylum across Europe.

Panel 5B – Social Movements, Identity and Economic Progress in Kurdistan

Identity as Injustice: Contested Meanings of Rural Life in Northern Iraq
Deema Alchuristany

Kurdish people still suffer from the impact of the Anfal genocide, yet the scholarly focus has been on the genocide itself rather than its aftermath. Understanding this post-Anfal period is crucial for understanding modern Iraqi Kurdistan as it's during this period that the production and reproduction of cultural memory of this traumatic event first occurs. To more fully understand Kurdish lived and re-lived experience, this paper examines the intricate methods of cultural repression in Kurdish villages under the Baath regime and the subsequent memorialization strategies of local actors, and then draws comparisons between that episode of repression and related dynamics that occurred in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime. Building on Kavita Singh's framework—which looks at acts of omission and commission—the study investigates how the reconstruction of cultural heritage can actively contribute to the further marginalization of minority groups. Using historical documents, field observations, and oral history, this study examines how the concept of "civilization" serves as a fundamentally disputed concept, and how this framing might serve as a means of hegemony through the elimination of alternative perspectives. In particular, the study investigates the role of villages as alternatives to this hegemonic discourse in Iraq, whereas the village serves as the idealized mode of civilization in Afghanistan that marginalizes narratives of diversity. Thus, the village plays a central role in the development of univocality. Ultimately, this comparative approach will elaborate on the means by which social injustice manifests itself in a wider matrix of policies dealing with cultural identity.

Political Hurdles on the Road to Economic Progress: Exploring Challenges in Iraqi Kurdistan
Ribaz Chato Biro

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) with significant economic capacity, confronts persistent political obstacles. This research provides a comprehensive analysis of the challenges associated with these developments. The literature analysis examines the intricate historical context of economic challenges, with a specific emphasis on the dynamics between the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, as well as the involvement of other entities and regional disputes. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, this paper has systematically classified the obstacles above into four primary domains: conflicts associated with the distribution of resources, security uncertainties impacted by geopolitical factors, issues related to governance, and the involvement of external parties. The problems mentioned earlier possess noteworthy economic outcomes, exerting influence on several aspects, such as the increase of GDP, the promotion of diversification, the generation of job opportunities, the advancement of human capital, and the enhancement of infrastructure. This study highlights the complex relationship between politics and economic progress, which is crucial for the long-term development of the Region. A set of thorough policy proposals is put out, focusing on the distribution of resources, the stability of the KRI, governance, and international engagement. These recommendations underscore the utmost need to tackle such challenges to realize the economic potential of the KRI fully.

Has the Iranian 1979 Revolution benefited the Kurdish movements in the Middle East?
Hemn Seyedi

Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran have been suppressing Kurdish national aspirations in their own countries, but they sometimes provide support to other Kurdish movements in neighbouring countries. These tactical supports go back to the pre-modern age in the Safavid and Ottoman Empires wars. In the twentieth century, however, these new modern states started their relationship based on regional cooperation, but two unpredictable events changed the situation: the 1958 Iraq revolution and the 1979 Iranian revolution. This study focuses on the trajectory of Kurdish movements after the Iranian Revolution, finding out whether the Kurds are now in a better situation. At first, the Kurdish situation before 1979 will be sketched out. Then, the theoretical aspects of Iranian foreign policy will be analysed. From a Realism point of view, Iran, as a normal state, pursues its interests based on a rational decision-making process. But constructivists argue that Iranian policies are designed to pursue its ideological goals, which may sometimes be irrational. As a synthesis, I argue that Iran's foreign policy has been normal but not rational. Post-Revolutionary Iran broke down many regional alliances, creating new ones which unwittingly favoured the Kurdish agenda. Now, the conventional assumption that regional powers use the Kurds as a card is no longer valid since the overall Kurds' achievement is far more than what regional powers have been willing to see, especially since Iran's tactical support did not remain tactical but led to strategic achievement for the Kurds.

From de-Tribalisation to re-Tribalisation: Instrumentalisation of Tribal Ties among the Kurmanji-speaking Kurds in post-Revolutionary Iran
Mostafa Khalili

Historically, tribal ties and primordial loyalties have served both as unifying and dividing elements in various stages of the Kurdish resistance movement. Due to the accelerated modernization and urbanization processes in the last several decades in Iranian Kurdistan, tribal cohesion has been in significant decline in most of the Kurdish-dominant regions. Thus, the role of influential tribal families for mobilisation has been replaced by the young activists engaging in bottom-up movements. During the last two decades, however, such a de-tribalization process has taken an adverse path among the Kurmanji-speaking Kurds residing in the northern parts of Iranian Kurdistan. Relying on extensive ethnographic research in three rural districts of Margawar, Targawar, and Sumay-Baradoost alongside the Iran-Turkey border, this paper explores the reasons behind hindering the de-tribalisation processes and intensification of re-tribalisation attempts by the state in those regions. Methodologically, I rely on various local archives and the in-depth interviews and oral testimonies of 61 interviewees from different socio-economic and tribal backgrounds. The paper argues that the state's intervention in instrumentalizing the tribal ties has been relatively effective among the Kurmanji-speaking Kurds, primarily because of the lack of robust bottom-up resistance among them. Their comparatively weaker civil society can be explained by various causes, from their rather late urbanisation process and the socio-economic underdevelopment to being marginalised in the Sorani-dominant Kurdish political activism in Iran.

Panel 5C – Historical Approaches to Kurdish Politics: Lausanne, Mahabad and the Soviet Union

Britain's Response to Mahmoud's Collaboration with Turkey During and After the Lausanne Conference, 1922-23
Ranjdar Mohammed Azeez

The policy of the British authority in managing southern Kurdistan prior to the Lausanne Conference was centred around the strategic objective of removing the Turks from Rawanduz, to effectively control the disturbances occurring on the northern boundary of Iraq. To cultivate a Kurdish nationalist spirit that would align with their interests and counter the influence of the Turks, British officials decided to reintroduce Sheikh Mahmoud to Sulaimaniyah. The nature of the relationship between British authority and Mahmoud would be significantly influenced by the outcomes of the negotiations that took place during the Lausanne Conference. Hence, the primary focus of this study revolves around the direct actions taken by the Anglo-Iraqi authorities in response to Mahmoud's collaboration with Turkey and his efforts to safeguard the Kurdish government in Southern Kurdistan. This study mainly aims to elucidate the underlying motivations of the Turkish nationalist government in its efforts to exert influence over southern Kurdistan, specifically through the collaborative actions of Mahmoud. It also explains the British strategies employed to compel Mahmoud's journey to Baghdad for negotiations, utilising direct military intervention as well as providing support to the pro-British faction in Sulaimaniyah. The study is significant because it examines the British

authorities' deliberations over their opposition to Mahmoud's collaboration with the Turks. This investigation is based on analysing British government documents from several British Archives. While acknowledging the significance of those records, the study subjects the sources to a critical scrutiny to reveal their inherent bias towards the British perspective.

"This is another melody": The Turkish Newspapers' Reactions to the Establishment of Mahabad Kurdish Republic and Azerbaijan People's Government in 1946
Evren Cakil

In 1946, Iran was divided into three entities: the central government, a Kurdish republic established in Mahabad, and an Azerbaijani government supported by Soviet Russia. As a neighbour of Iran, Turkey was in a fragile position. The irredentist claims of Soviet Russia about Turkish borders became a frustration after seeing Iran's situation. Given the Kurdish population was a majority in areas bordering Iran, the Turkish government feared a similar situation occurring within its own borders. Therefore, from the moment the newspapers declared a Kurdish republic was established in Iran, Turkish government fully supported Iran's territoriality. The state archives and the assembly records do not provide details about the nature of discussions that took place. Therefore, I rely on newspapers as sources because many columnists were affiliated with state apparatus, publishing their columns after undergoing a censorship process. The use of the newspaper therefore can be viewed as the representation of official state stance. I argue that while the official discourse mainly attributed the refusal of Azerbaijani government to Soviet pressure, the columnists seemed to refute the Mahabad Kurdish Republic purely on ethnic grounds. The emphasis on Azerbaijani situation aimed to persuade people that living conditions under a Soviet puppet government would be disastrous. However, regarding Mahabad Kurdish Republic, the concern was to prevent potential revolt within both the Turkish Republic and neighbouring Iraq.

Revolutionary Heroes in Kurdish Sovietic Novels (1935-1991)
Betül Çoban Akaygün

After the Revolution of October 17 in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the new government began cultural activities, and the First Soviet Writers Congress was held in 1934. In this congress, socialist realism was regarded as the official art view of the state. Soviet authors unavoidably produced works within this framework. Socialist realism emerged with a few principles and one of them is "positive heroes" and it acts with a revolutionary romance. In this study we will focus on the positive and revolutionary heroes of Soviet Kurdish novels written in this current. We will deal with thirteen Kurdish novels written in the Soviet Union between 1935 and 1991. We will analyse how many positive and revolutionary heroes are involved in these novels. As a result, the Soviet Kurdish novel is a novel based on positive heroes. In these novels, the positive and revolutionary heroes have fought against the dominant class, the family, the masters and the bourgeoisie. They have acted with a far more idealistic attitude rather than their human sentiments.

Deconstructing Soviet Kurdish Policies: the Kurds between Moscow, Baku and Yerevan
Angelika Pobedonostseva-Kaya

Michael Reynolds argued that support provided by Russian and Ottoman imperial authorities for political actors in the other imperial rival's borderlands played a bigger role as a driver of political identity than Kurdish or Armenian nationalism and national identities. According to him, "*nationalism […] is best understood as a form of geopolitics, not as a phenomenon that springs from some non-political base.*" I follow and refine his approach to analyse a later case of contradictory Soviet policies towards the Kurds by focusing on the agency exerted with regard to them by non-central players inside Soviet state system – especially Soviet Union member republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan which interacted, cooperated and clashed among themselves, with central authorities and Kurdish activists. The Union member republics were for a long time dismissed in terms of foreign relations despite well-known cases of them being involved in intra-Union (Soviet Armenia and Yezidi-Kurdish projects) and extra-Union external relations or even something resembling foreign policies (the role of Soviet Azerbaijan in establishing Azerbaijani and Kurdish autonomies in Iran as well as in interaction with the Iraqi Kurdish rebels). The paper shall focus on the competition and cooperation between Armenian and Azerbaijani Soviet Republics in the context of the policies towards Kurdish ethnic groups pursued by the Soviet Union central government and constituent Union republics in the 1920s-1980s. It explores the issue through publications of the time, official records in about twenty archives, memoirs, family documents and archives.

Panel 5D – The Women's Movement in Rojava: Tactics, Mythology, Empowerment and Resistance

Gendered Discursive Tactics: The Strategy behind the Kurdish Women Movement's Liberation Ideals in Rojava
Mustafa Kemal Topal

Women from the Kurdish women movement Kongra Star are implementing their ideals for gender and gender-norms in practice in the post conflict period in Rojava. Kongra Stars promotes liberation ideals for women, are contributes to creating normative changes and new gender positions in local society. In my presentation I will argue that Kongra Star's implementation success should be viewed considering its systematic use of gendered discursive tactics towards women. Kongra Star's ideology and gender policy demonstrate new opportunities for action, where women through their activities and self-realization are empowered by an opportunity to build a new identity. Based on ethnographic studies in the form of interviews and observation with women from Rojava, I will present how women themselves explain why they chose to be activists in Kongra Star's fight for women's rights. The gathered empiric evidence will be analysed utilising Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham's (1999) approach *discursive opportunity structures* to be able to identify ideas, that are believed to be "reasonable", "realistic" and "legitimate", and how the presence of these align with the already existing ideal elements in the political culture, and gender theories. This will enable us to analyse the formation of women's identity and whether women in the political and social movements have the possibility of subverting their gender.

Gender, Militarism, and Mythology in the Kurdish Freedom Movement
Stephen Knight and Jenny Schulz

Within the Kurdish Freedom Movement women's roles have become increasingly visible in civil, political, and military structures. This visibility mirrors the use of gendered myths deployed in the Kurdish Freedom Movement's political discourse. Based on a review of literature and preliminary field research, we expand the debate within Gender and Security Studies beyond typically androcentric case studies on whether militaristic activity and culture can be vehicles for gender-transformative change. We situate our research within debates on deployment of myth, drawing on Braudel, and on Barthes' view of myth as "de-politicised" speech. We also consider conceptual and practical interdependencies between gender and militarism, including Stiehm's "protector, protected, defender" theory, and Sjoberg & Gentry's "mothers, monsters, whores" trichotomy. We then examine the role of myth as a de-politicised tool for promoting political messaging in the Kurdish Freedom Movement. From the 1990s onwards this accompanied a move in the political narrative away from focussing on men to a re-valorisation of the feminine. We critically assess this shift, and the birth of independent women's structures, arguing that the Kurdish Freedom Movement's ideology remains rooted in gendered identities and acceptable forms of femininity, communicated through de-politicised means. We evaluate the implications of the Movement's ideology and praxis, including theories of self-defence, for re-gendered military and non-military identities and the broader academic field. We conclude that, contrary to conventional wisdom in feminist critiques of security studies, centring military discourse and identities around gendered myths can result in radical, transformative, structural change in gendered power relationships.

Jineolojî and Women's Protection Units (YPJ): A Cartography on the Resistance of the Kurdish Women's Movement to Femicide and Ecocide
Letícia Gimenez

The Women's Protection Units (YPJ) fighters became headlines in the Western media for creating a guerrilla made up exclusively of women in the Middle East who fought and defeated Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Syrian War. In January 2018, the Afrin canton in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) became the target of Operation Olive Branch, launched by Turkey. Since then Afrin is militarily occupied, and Kurdish women (including YPJ fighters) in the region have been increasingly targets of kidnappings, rapes, torture, executions and mutilations. The environment is also attacked through ecocide, with the cutting of thousands of olive trees that are important to Afrin's economy and a source of affective connection to the land for the Kurds. Therefore, the Turkish operation works through practices of violence aimed specifically at Kurdish women and their land. *Jineolojî*, the Science of Women and Life, a paradigm created by the Kurdish Women's Movement, interprets both women and nature as colonized, seeking to disrupt this violently imposed inferiority by reclaiming women's erased knowledge and connection to nature. In this paper, I will examine how *Jineolojî* is a source of resistance to femicide and ecocide while investigating how YPJ combat the gender violence present in Afrin's occupation on the ground. The methods supporting this research are a cartography of the Kurdish Women's Movement's resistance and a bibliographical review on decolonial approaches, Critical Security Studies and Gender Studies. Data from news and online interviews with Kurdish women are included.

Plenary Session – Republic of Dreams: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Struggles, and the Future of Iraqi Kurdistan

A Reading and Conversation with Professor Nicole Watts, San Francisco State University

Panel 6A – Kurdish Geopolitics

Turkey's rapprochement towards China in geopolitics: Understanding security policies of the Kurdish people inside the Belt and Road Initiative
Edoardo Lavezzo

Recently, Securitisation has become an attracting dynamic in the Middle East, for great and middle powers with the excuse of guaranteeing peacekeeping policies. Among these middle powers, Turkey has directed its foreign policy assertiveness into security policies applied in Syria and Iraq to face the terrorist action of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The crushed coup of 2016 has allowed the AKP government to direct its security policies into a strong militarism, colliding with the PKK. At the same time, China has expanded the logistical prospects of its international project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), directing its efforts in securing potential transit hubs for its energy demands. This paper reconstructs Turkish Foreign Policy's assertiveness against the PKK, describing how the previous domestic polarisation adopted by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has been transferred to anti-terrorism policies against the PK. Secondly, the paper analyses how Turkey has framed Securitisation of the 'Kurdish Issue' when dialoguing with China for mutual cooperation in the BRI. It asserts that Turkey frames its securitisation of the PKK as a form of threat perception, using the former domestic polarisation occurred after the crushed coup of 2016 and the nationalist ideology of Neo-Ottomanism to legitimise its military actions. Secondly, the article concludes that Turkey has found in its securitisation narratives a fertile ground for enhancing Sino-Turkish cooperation in peacekeeping the BRI's infrastructures in the Middle East and justifying the aggressive reaction against recognised 'terrorist groups'.

Using Human Rights to Gain International Standing: A Comparison of the Iraqi Ba'thist and Kurdish Nationalist Archives
Lily Hindy

Archives of the Iraqi Ba'th regime and the Kurdish national movement between 1975 – 2003 show that both entities began to step up their attempts to gain international attention by using human rights language in international forums and engaging with human rights organizations in the 1990s. Examining the archives side-by-side offers a fascinating look at similar strategies adopted by these warring parties. Iraq had become isolated under the Ba'th regime and was struggling to publicize the effects of harsh international sanctions after the Gulf War. The Kurdish national movement had recently gained a form of autonomy protected by a large international military and civilian presence in their region, and after holding elections in 1992 to form a regional government there was a push to gain international recognition for crimes against humanity committed by the Ba'th regime. There was some overlap too as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was also suffering from the effects of the international sanctions,

coupled with an internal blockade by the government of Iraq. The Ba'th regime kept close tabs on activism by the Kurdish diaspora through its own international chapter. Both parties tried to garner support for their goals in this way, though in the end only the Kurdish national movement achieved some level of success.

From Would-be-state Diplomacy to Rebel Diplomacy: The International Relations and Diplomatic Activities of Kurdish Political Actors, 1908-1938
Kubra Sagir

Since the advent of the modern state system, the domains of international relations and diplomacy have evolved as realms predominantly dominated by states. However, amidst this state-centric paradigm, non-state actors have sought to carve out a presence in various ways. Notably, the actors harboring aspirations of statehood, such as Kurdish political actors, have endeavored to establish their footing in the arenas of international relations and diplomacy with the aim of attaining political legitimacy and international recognition. This study delves into the diplomatic activities of Kurdish political actors spanning the period from 1908 to 1938. By partitioning this 30-year span into two distinct phases—pre and post the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne—this analysis examines shifts in international relations, the evolution of diplomatic paradigms, and global power dynamics. Simultaneously, it scrutinizes the strategies and discourses employed by Kurdish political actors, elucidating both hierarchical and non-hierarchical alliances formed by non-state entities.

Panel 6B – Social Media and Education in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The Role of Coping Strategies on Social Networking Sites: Addiction as Mediated by Perceived Social Support among Yazidis in Kurdistan Region – Iraq
Hozan Salih Hussein

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) attacked the Yazidis who are a minority in Iraq, and this act concluded in the crime of genocide in August 2014. As a result of this brutal attack, they became internally displaced people (IDP) in the camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The purpose of this study is to assess the role of coping strategies on social networking sites addiction (SNSs) with mediation of perceived social support. To this end, a cross-sectional study was conducted among 611 Yazidi IDP adults (males = 304, females = 307). The age of the participants ranged from 18-60 years old a mean age of 27.07 and SD = 9.13. A convenient sampling technique for gathering the desired data, and descriptive and inferential statistical analyses for analyzing the variables were conducted. The results indicated that most Yazidis use emotion- focused coping to deal with their stressors and 50.4% of the study participants reported high levels of SNSs addiction especially among male compared with their female counterparts. The findings of the study also showed that the subscales of family and friends support mediate the role of coping strategies on SNSs addiction. In general, the major findings of this inquiry suggest that the situation of the Yazidi IDP adults with regard to SNSs addiction is a cause for worry, especially among men. Therefore, necessary actions in terms of psychoeducation and awareness need to be placed.

Social Media Engagement and Internet Usage Patterns among Youth in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Mahmood Baban

The Kurdistan region of Iraq is currently undergoing a significant demographic shift, marked by a burgeoning population primarily composed of individuals under the age of 30. As per the latest data from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's statistics office, the region's total population stands at 6,171,083, with the 15-29 age group accounting for over 28% of the total populace. This demographic composition suggests a youthful majority that is likely to shape the social, economic, and political landscape of the region in the coming years. In June 2023, a comprehensive survey was conducted to explore the perspectives of the youth in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq regarding various facets of life, including the economy, society, and political dynamics. Notably, the survey findings brought to light the pervasive influence of social media within this demographic cohort. The objective of this paper is to shed light on the pivotal role and impact of internet usage and social media practices, particularly among the youth in the Kurdistan Region. Leveraging insights derived from two recent surveys, this study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the implications of this digital transformation on the socio-cultural fabric and dynamics of the people and youth in the region. The research encompasses a broad representation. The sample size was determined using a scientifically validated random sampling equation, resulting in a robust sample of 1122 respondents, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate portrayal of the youth's experiences and behaviors within the digital realm.

The Duality of Leadership and Policy and the Questions of Social Justice Education in Iraqi Kurdistan Schools
Nidal Al Haj Sleiman

This presentation is based on ongoing research that is a part of the wider Education, Peace, and Politics network in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. This research examines the role of school principals, their practice, and response to developing policies in Iraqi Kurdistan schools (public and private). The last two decades have witnessed massive developments in educational policies in the region, however, research examining the role of leaders and their practice is still rare, especially in areas related to social justice. This research examines leadership and policy through Giddens's Theory of Structuration (1992) and social justice leadership (Smyth, 1989), while exploring local conceptualisations of leadership and social justice within the Iraqi Kurdistan schools. The project has a multimethodological design and a dual theoretical framework, which both inform the analysis of findings and the development of relevant and localised knowledge in the field. The data collection takes place through three methods: instrumental multiple case studies (Stake, 2006), stories of professional practice (Clandinin et al., 1999), and reflective analysis journals (Brown, 2004). The data will be analysed in three phases and verified with principals for validation and accuracy, and for engaging them in the research and ensuring their contribution to the outcomes. This study is expected to be at the completion stage by the time of the conference.

The Rise of Education Privatization in Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Karwan Mustafa Saeed

The privatization of education has become an important phenomenon in the Kurdistan Region's education sector for the past two decades, and; therefore, establishing its status in the region. Education experts argue that the absence of a strong public education system has led to the rapid rise of privatization of education, especially in developing countries. As a basic right of the modern society, a strong and successful education system is one that targets the majority of society or as known, "education for all". However, it is obvious that the private sector can only target a small portion, and leaves behind the majority of children in a community. If the rapid establishment of private schools continues at the current rate, it is expected that a split in society is likely a consequence. Recently, researchers have started to conduct empirical research on the rise of education privatization in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), but little has been written on harmful effects of this privatization. As such, a local perspective of the possible harmful effects of privatizing the education sector is important to be addressed in the literature. This qualitative inquiry explores the possible harmful effects of education privatization and how can the harmful effects of privatization be mitigated. It is hoped that the outcome of this study will help the Kurdistan's Ministry of Education, policy makers, education advisors to construct a clear plan, and see where private schools are heading, and how they should fit into the education system.

Panel 6C – Agency, Desire and Positionality in Kurdish Worlds

Re-Theorising Namûs Beyond 'Honour': Self-making, Feminist Agency and Global Epistemic Justice
Hasret Cetinkaya

Namûs describes a 'way of life' integral to Kurdish sociality and to the sense of self for many Kurds who live it in a plurality of ways. Constituting a form of power-over the subject which can potentially take the form of domination, namûs is also a social relation of care and power between subjects and is integral to its subject's ethical relationship of self-to-self and processes of *self-making*. Post-Enlightenment and liberal frameworks of 'modern' selfhood, however, have tended to render namûs equivalent to 'honour' and 'honour-based violence' ('HBV'). Through this act of mistranslation, a life with namûs is constructed as violent, unworthy, racially inferior, and harmful to women. Building upon multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted in North Kurdistan, Turkey and Denmark, this presentation theorises namûs as a practice of ethical *self-making* that is epistemic, dignified, and agentic in all its complexities. Women living with and through namûs actively work to cultivate this way of *being*, thereby interrupting the epistemic authority of liberal feminism. Namûs, this article argues, cannot be understood through blanket explanations of 'crime', 'oppression' and 'patriarchy', as the discourse on 'HBV' would suggest. Breaking away from these injurious portrayals is, therefore, vital to realise global epistemological justice.

Queer States of Camouflage: Race and Desire in Kurdish Worlds
Emrah Karakus

In this paper, I show how intimate relations, desires, and spaces among *lubunya* (queer/trans) Kurds in Istanbul and Diyarbakır, Turkey, are constituted and contested through a series of fugitive movements across gendered and racialized identities, coined as chameleonhood, that reflect myriad strategies of queer camouflage through hiding and revealing, hit-and-run tactics, loss and transformation of identity, and unintended consequences of falling in love and betrayal. What is the nature of chameleonhood to Kurdish identity and space? How do lubunya Kurds constitute their sense of self across identities, spaces, and national causes, and what strategies do they use (bodily techniques and movements, tactics, moods, sensibilities, emotions, gestures) in their struggles for the protection of their rights and livelihoods and disorienting racialized and sexual surveillance? Rather than taking chameleonhood simply as a metaphor, I conceptualize it as an orientation, a particular type of queer disposition, towards affective and embodied forms of autonomous adaptation to one's social and political environment through its fluid and fugitive movements across identities and spaces. In the lives of lubunya Kurds, these all unfold in shifting contexts of (in)visibility, honor, dignity, and respectability among Kurdish queers who seek to advance their national and gender cause by incorporating them into their intimate relations.

The Female Combatant in Rojava: Perspectives on Gender and War from Brazil
Beatriz de Tullio Pessoa Ramos

This work aims to (1) provide an overview of discussions regarding the Rojava *combatant* from a Brazilian perspective, focusing on the gender-war relationship and, thus, (2) contribute to systematizing knowledge production about this topic from the Global South. Since 2014, when the image of female combatants of Rojava resonated globally due to their combat against the self-proclaimed Islamic State (or *Daesh*), the research interest on the trajectory of the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) also spread in Brazil. Brazilian studies that interconnect gender and war in the context of Rojava have heavily focused on the Western media's fascination with Kurdish *combatants*. They highlight that this fascination arose from the rupture of the orientalist image of Middle East women as an "oppressed victim". Conversely, these studies have devoted effort to presenting the political project and epistemology advocated by the Kurdish Women's Movement. Moreover, the figure of the *combatant* is understood to hold a pivotal role in forging international solidarity. This predominantly emerges because women are inhabiting a space historically defined by masculine universality. Considering this, some Brazilian studies point out that the *combatants* have been able to contest the traditional narratives of war. In general, these are some of the arguments being developed in Brazilian studies, deeply influenced by their integration within the Global South and, thus, interconnected with anti-colonial and anti-racist perspectives. In summary, our objective is to analyse, through a systematic literature review, Brazilian contributions to the knowledge production on the experience of the *combatant* in northern Syria.