

Kurds in the Age of Middle Eastern Revolutions



On Friday March 21, 2014, interdisciplinary experts gathered for a roundtable discussion entitled "Kurds in the Age of Middle Eastern Revolutions." Scholars who work on Kurdish issues from historical, sociological, and political angles debated and discussed the role that one of the largest populations in the Middle East—the Kurds of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran—are playing in the fast-moving developments in the region starting in 2011.

"Kurds in the Age of Middle Eastern Revolutions" brought together scholars from across the globe to focus the conversation on the role that Kurds are playing, and the future of Kurdish populations in light of the dramatic developments taking place in the region. This timely

discussion aimed to make a significant, and indeed, unique contribution to the wider debate on current events and the long- and short-term impact they will have on this highly volatile region.

The roundtable attracted a wide variety of audience members, ranging from curious educated audience members to specialists in Kurdish studies and Middle Eastern history. The stage was set for a rich discussion, followed by an engaging question and answer period. Anthropologists Hişyar Özsoy, Azat Zana Özdoğan, Seda Altuğ, and historians Susan Benson-Sökmen and İdan Barir contributed to the roundtable discussion by focusing on their areas of expertise. From the history of urban social and political movements in Turkey, the Kurdish movement for autonomy in Anatolia and Northern Syria, the role that women have played in the Kurdish movements, the impact of the Gezi protests of 2013 and the Syrian civil war on the Kurdish question(s), or the role that Iraqi Kurdistan and its relationship to the Turkish government, there was a great deal to cover. The role of the moderator, historian Mostafa Minawi, was to maintain a balance between providing information to an informed non-specialist audience without losing the sophisticated edge of analysis provided by these international experts.

The result of the roundtable was a jam-packed two hours that called for much more time for discussion. Thankfully, the reception afterwards provided an added venue for the audience to continue to discuss some of the many issues brought up during the roundtable. Overall, it was an exciting discussion that kicked off a rich series of current issues roundtable discussions hosted by the Einaudi Center, along with partners from across the campus.

The Roundtable Discussion Series is part of the Foreign Policy Forum at Cornell University led by the Einaudi Center to maximize the intellectual impact of Cornell's outstanding resources in this area.

[Bios of the panelists](#)

Dr. Hişyar Özsoy is an Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Michigan, Flint. He has published articles and delivered several lectures on the Kurdish conflict in Turkey and the Middle East. His research is concerned with nationalism and state formation, political violence, death and sovereignty, social movements, and human rights. Most recently, he edited a special issue on the Kurdish struggles in Turkey and Syria in a rapidly transforming Middle East. He is currently working on a book project, tentatively entitled: *Grieving for "the Terrorist": The Politics of Impossible Mourning in Turkish Kurdistan*.

Dr. Azat Zana Gündoğan is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Michigan-Flint. Dr. Gündoğan conducts research on and published articles about urbanization patterns, social production of nation-state space, social movements, and Kurdish political mobilization in Turkey. Currently he works on two projects: one focuses on peripheral urbanization and urban social movements in the Istanbul city-region since the mid-1960s. His other project is a manuscript on the identity formation process of the Kurdish 1968 generation in Turkey, and

mobilization processes of the major collective action of this generation of Kurdish activists, Eastern Demonstrations.

Susan Benson-Sökmen is a PhD Candidate at the University of Toronto in History and Women and Gender Studies. She conducted the research for her dissertation in 2012-2013 in Doğubeyazıt, Turkey and Northern Iraq. She is interested in the role violence plays in the articulation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party feminist theory, as well as how "ordinary" Kurds make meaning out of this violence through everyday negotiations of gender and nation. Her research interests include the relationship of feminism to imperialism, nationalism and armed struggle, non-state histories, and histories of violence.

Idan Barir is a PhD candidate in the school of historical studies at Tel Aviv University, and a 2013-14 Fox International Fellow at the The Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale University. His doctoral project examines the social history of Kirkuk in the late Ottoman period, focusing on the city's growth during this period and on the social, political and economic forces that catalyzed or hindered it. In his master's thesis, he analyzed the construction of a new collective identity among Yezidi communities in Kurdistan and the diaspora.

Dr. Seda Altuğ is an Assistant Professor of History at the Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University. Her MA thesis is about popular nationalisms in the Sanjak of Alexandretta under the French mandate, titled "Between colonial and national dominations: Antioch under the French mandate (1920-1939)." Her PhD research focuses on the social history of Syrian Kurdistan during the French Mandate period, "Sectarianism in the Syrian Jazira: Community, land and violence in the memories of World War I and the French mandate (1915-1939)." Her recent research is a historical-anthropological study about changing state-society and inter-communal relations during the Ottoman reform period in the countryside of Diyarbakir and Batman in mid-19th century. The land issue is the primary lens through which she deals with the increasing inter- and intra-communal violence between different ethno-religious groups in the region. Her research interests include inter-communal relations, modern Middle East history, empire, and political economy.