

4<sup>e</sup>

# CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds  
Studies

28 June - 2 July 2021



## Panel 20

---

### Wars in Syria and Kurdish dynamics (2011-2021)

The ten years of the conflict in Syria are an opportunity to take stock of the uses of the « Kurdish question » in the Middle East. These years of destruction are also a time for reconstruction: in this sense, this workshop on Syrian conflicts and Kurdish dynamics (2011-2021) wishes above all to question the very concept of the « Kurdish Question » by trying to build a new approach based on the analysis of the various social and political realities called Kurdish that can be observed on the ground. Based on ethnographic surveys and recent research, it will be an opportunity to free ourselves from the weight of politics and various nationalisms to better observe the new Kurdish dynamics in the Syrian context and the effects they may have at the regional level.

**Coordinators:** Solène Poyraz (CETOBaC/EHESS, Paris and IFEA, Istanbul) and Laurent Dissard (ITEM, University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour and CETOBaC, EHESS)

**Discussant:** Jean-François Pérouse (University of Toulouse Jean Jaurès)

#### Program

---

##### **Joseph Daher (European University Institute, Italy)**

*The Kurdish national dynamic in Syria: from independence to the Syrian revolutionary process*

The presentation addresses the Kurdish national question in Syria in a long historical perspective, from the country's independence to the Syrian revolutionary process. First, we examine the context of the emergence of Kurdish political parties in Syria and the discriminatory policies of the Syrian state towards the Kurdish population in recent decades. The eruption of the Syrian revolt and the forms of collaboration of the different components of the Syrian population, including the Kurds, will then be examined, before analyzing the progressive division within the popular protest movement between Arab and Kurdish components. The hostility of the dominant Syrian Arab opposition parties to Kurdish national demands will also be examined. The article will end with an analysis of the ideology and policies of the PYD, the dominant party on the Syrian Kurdish political scene since 2011. The Kurdish national question in Syria has been a key element in the evolution of the Syrian revolutionary process and the growing divisions that have developed within the popular protest movement and opposition groups and coalitions.

##### **India Ledeganck (Catholic University of Leuven)**

*The tribes in Cezîre: keeping space between solidarities and democracies*

In a context of mistrust, ethnic boundaries seem strangely imprecise when it comes to tribal affiliation, a primary source of social identity in 21st century Syria. Field research has shown that the social fields of Northeast Syria do not univocally map onto an ethnic component. Dividing the political from the social, or a democratic politics from a militarized or oppressive one, are techniques for monopolizing

the democratic ethos. Within the discourses of field actors, tribal affiliation creates shared and divided spaces based on a way of doing solidarity and politics. Within this presentation, I show that the collected discourses focus on a desire for tribal empowerment vis-à-vis the autonomous administration in Northeast Syria. In Qamîşlî, the tribes, as semi-autonomous social fields, adapt with the other cadres with whom they interact through the Assemblies. They influence political decisions and are an inherent part of the judicial processes of the region. At the same time, they are perceived by my interlocutors as democratic entities because of their detachment from any form of party politics. The distancing from political parties can also be a source of unity, as is the case with the Shammars and the Mîrans. Conversely, in the following case study, political parties are able to represent the tribes. The latter are thus bearers of a nationalist project through the specific relationship they have with political parties. Thinking about the Syrian Northeast through the local issues of the Cezîre region makes it possible to realize that ethnic boundaries are updated or, conversely, reduced through tribal affiliation and its eminently democratic character.

### **Özcan Yılmaz (University of Geneva)**

---

#### *The integration of Rojava into the Kurdish space and intra-Kurdish rivalries through the PYD-ENKS opposition*

Between 2004 and 2018, the Syrian Kurdish movement experienced a spectacular development. It is changing its status, historically considered «weak and marginal» both in Syria and in the cross-border «Kurdish space». It proposes itself as an alternative to the regime and to the Syrian opposition. It also reverses the relationship with the «pan-Kurdish» movements and imposes itself on the Kurdish space where a consensus prevailed according to which the «liberation of the other parts of Kurdistan constitutes the necessary and preliminary condition for that of Kurdistan in Syria (Rojava)». In the Kurdish space as well, wanting to be non-nationalist, non-patriarchal, non-sexist, Rojava imposes itself as an alternative to the solution considered «nationalist» and outdated (independence or an autonomous Kurdish zone) claimed by different Kurdish parties as a solution to the «Kurdish question» in different countries. Rojava thus becomes the battleground between the KDP and the PKK, which represent different ideologies within Kurdish society and advocate contradictory and conflicting solutions to the «Kurdish question». This paper will thus revisit the «conflict» between the «nationalist» and «non-nationalist» solutions to trace the history of the solution models claimed by the Kurdish parties and analyze the impact of the Rojava model in the Kurdish space, especially regarding the search for a model of society and the solution to the Kurdish question.

### **Boris James (University Paul Valéry Montpellier 3, CEMM)**

---

#### *The ambiguities of the PYD school: between overcoming Kurdish nationalism, militant heritages and local contingencies*

In 2013, with the disengagement of the Syrian security services, the Democratic Society Movement (TEV-DEM), the body encompassing the civilian institutions of Rojava (Eastern Kurdistan) controlled by the Democratic Union Party (PYD), officially declared autonomy. Since 2015, education in Kurdish and Arabic is provided under the leadership of one of the emanations of this organization affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Congress for the Education of Democratic Society. The challenge for the PYD is to demonstrate its ability to build sustainable educational institutions. In addition, it is a matter of transmitting the substance of the project in force in Rojava. We will focus our attention on the history textbooks in Kurdish and Arabic used in these schools. After recalling the ancient tradition of instruction specific to the PKK (Marxism-Leninism and Kurdish nationalism) and its survival in the PYD's school books, we will show the specificity of the current situation, namely the emphasis on the PKK's inclusivist vision and the underlying construction of a «Rojavian» or Kurdish-Syrian localism.