

March 2026 Kurdish Culture & Scholarship Week



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Land Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca and, most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, the place this event series will take place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work and learn on this land.

Abstract

The Kurdish Culture and Scholarship Week will mark a historic and celebratory milestone for the University of Toronto, establishing an annual tradition that bridges academic scholarship, artistic expression, and community dialogue. Jointly organized by the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations (NMC), Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies, the Kurdish Studies Initiative, and partner units across the University, in collaboration with the Kurdish Students' Associations and the local Kurdish community, this inaugural week will celebrate the vibrancy and resilience of Kurdish culture, art, and scholarship.

Through exhibitions, film screenings, conferences, and public events, the week will bring together scholars, artists, and students to explore Kurdish histories, creativity, and intellectual traditions—situating Kurdish Studies as an essential field of inquiry and engagement at the University of Toronto.

ORGANIZER



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March 16

Light and Resistance: Kurdish Lives through the Lens of Maryam Ashrafi

WILLIAM DOO AUDITORIUM (45 Willcocks St)

1-2 PM

Kurdish Culture and Scholarship Week begins with the opening of *Light and Resistance*, a powerful exhibition of photographs by acclaimed Iranian photojournalist Maryam Ashrafi. Her work captures Kurdish communities across Kurdistan and the diaspora, documenting everyday life, displacement, women's participation in political struggle, and the enduring presence of resistance.

The opening event includes a meet-the-artist conversation with Maryam Ashrafi, who will speak about her photographic journey, the challenges of documenting conflict, and the responsibility of witnessing through the lens. Guests will have the opportunity to engage directly with the artist and learn more about the stories behind the images.

The exhibition will remain open to the public from March 16 to March 20 on the third floor of the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations (NMC), within the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies, University of Toronto.



Film Screening: Eternal Sentinel

WILLIAM DOO AUDITORIUM (45 Willcocks St)

2-3:30 PM

The evening will continue with the screening of *Eternal Sentinel*, a documentary directed by Maryam Ashrafi. The film explores the psychological trauma and physical dangers faced by journalists covering conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Focusing on the devastating impact of landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), it follows journalists who have been wounded or who have witnessed deadly incidents, while also reflecting on Ashrafi's own experiences reporting from conflict zones.

A short discussion with the director will follow the screening.

March 17

Panel Discussion: The State of Kurdish Studies in the World

BF 304 (4 Bancroft Ave)

1-3 PM (HYBRID)

This panel will explore the current landscape of Kurdish Studies globally, addressing key themes in the field, emerging areas of research, and institutional challenges.

Moderator:

Omer Ozcan (University of Toronto)

Contributors:

Marouf Cabi (LSE)

Marlene Schäfers (Utrecht University)

Serdar Şengul (McGill University)

Join Online: <https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/82269690127>

Urgent Roundtable Discussion: War, Democracy and The Future of Iran and Rojhilat

BF 304 (4 Bancroft Ave)

3-5 PM (HYBRID)

Details to be confirmed.

Join Online: <https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/82269690127>

March 18

From Madrasa Scholars to Book Peddlers: The Social Life of Books in Kurdish Educational Traditions

AP 246 (19 Ursula Franklin St)

2-4 PM

Speaker:

Serdar Şengül (McGill University)

Chair/discussant:

Firat Bozçalı (University of Toronto)



Film Screening: Night and Fog in Kurdistan

BF 304 (4 Bancroft Ave)

4:30-6:30 PM

An award-winning documentary that tells the powerful story of seven Yazidi teenagers who survived the 2014 ISIS genocide. The film portrays both trauma and resilience, capturing the ongoing struggle for survival, healing, and hope.

A brief discussion with the director and a co-producer will follow the screening.

March 19

Panel Discussion: Kurdish Archives and the Future of Knowledge

MACLEAN HUNTER ROOM, THOMAS FISHER RARE BOOK LIBRARY

1-5 PM (HYBRID)

This panel explores archives as contested sites of power, memory, and knowledge production across the Middle East. Focusing on Kurdish archival practices while situating them within broader regional debates, the discussion examines how archives are shaped by state authority, violence, revolution, and struggles over historical narration. The panel highlights the Kurdish archival collections at the University of Toronto, including the Amir Hassanpour Fonds and the Setar Faithi Fonds, and places them in conversation with wider scholarly work on archives, counter-archives, and documentation practices in the Middle East. Building on recent international conversations on Kurdish archives, the session reflects on the political life of documents and the ethical challenges of archival research under conditions of repression and erasure.

Join Online: <https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/87619793645>

Keynote Speaker:
Rosie Bsheer (Harvard University)

Panel Moderator:
Shahrazad Mojab (University of Toronto)

Panel Contributors:
Mahdi Ganjavi (University of Toronto)
Farangis Ghaderi (University of Exeter)
Chowra Makaremi (CNRS, Paris)

Film Screening: Guerrilla Archive

GUERRILLA
ARCHIVE

MACLEAN HUNTER ROOM, THOMAS FISHER RARE BOOK LIBRARY

1-5 PM

Directed by Chowra Makaremi, Shahrazad Mojab, and Setar Faithi, *Guerrilla Archive* explores the previously unseen visual and sonic archives of the Kurdish revolutionary movement in Iran, tracing memory, struggle, and everyday life through the lens of Setar Faithi. The screening will include an introduction by Shahrazad Mojab, followed by a discussion on archives, activism, and the politics of collective memory.

March 20

Kurdish Studies at the University of Toronto: A Conversation

BA 2135 (40 St George St)

3-5 PM

This public dialogue will reflect on the intellectual trajectory of Kurdish Studies at the University of Toronto—its origins in the vision of Amir Hassanpour, its recent developments, and its aspirations for the coming decade. The event will be held in conjunction with the course Kurdish Studies: A Critical Introduction, bringing together students, faculty, and community members.

Moderator:
Sardar Saadi

Contributors:
Shahrazad Mojab
Jaffer Sheyholislami
Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi

Newroz Reception and Celebration

CAFÉ PAMENAR (307 Augusta Ave)

5:30-7:30 PM

The week concludes with a Newroz celebration and fundraising reception in support of the Kurdish Studies Initiative. The gathering will feature Kurdish music, food, and cultural performances, creating a space for joy, reflection, and community connection.

All proceeds will go toward the continued growth of Kurdish Studies at the University of Toronto, including future language instruction, student scholarships, and public programming.