

Welcome to the **Winter 2017 Speaker Series** of the
Indian Ocean World Centre

Speaker: Dr. Zozan Pehlivan
Indian Ocean World Centre, McGill University
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5:45 pm, Peterson Hall, Room 116

**Pastoralists' Response to Climatic Crises
in Ottoman Kurdistan, 1840-1895**



For centuries, pastoralist and their animals have inhabited arid and semi-arid ecological zones of the Middle East. Although pastoral nomads played crucial roles in the social, economic, political, and ecological life of the regions they inhabited, their history has often been written from the perspective of imperial authorities. This paper offers an alternative view by examining the history of pastoralists in the modern Middle East through an environmental perspective. Using British and Ottoman archival sources, I respond to three important questions: How did climatic and environmental disasters affect pastoralists and their livestock in late nineteenth-century Ottoman Kurdistan, Syria, and Iraq; what kind of coping strategies did pastoralists develop to save their herds; and finally, were they resilient to abnormal fluctuations in temperature as is argued by some historians and anthropologists? My findings indicate that pastoral nomadic communities and their herds were quite vulnerable to extreme changes in temperature. Repeated severe cold in spring and winter, and summer drought, destroyed food resources for both human beings and animals. Lack of pasture and water, and unusually cold temperatures, decimated herds. In order to try to protect their animals from the impact of severe weather events, pastoralists a number of strategies, each of which had distinct social, political and economic consequences for peoples of the Ottoman East.