

Decolonising the Ungovernable: Epistemic Erasure, and the Limits of Colonial Theory

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This talk examines how we theorise colonialism and colonality beyond the Euro-American framework. Kurdistan presents a distinctive and analytically generative case: a geography colonised not by a distant European empire but by contiguous nation-states, (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria) whose colonial projects involved the systematic erasure of Kurdish identity through state education, language suppression, forced displacement, and epistemic violence. Unlike the postcolonial contexts that gave rise to decolonial theory in Latin America and the global South, Kurdistan remains under active military and political colonisation, raising questions about the applicability of frameworks developed primarily to address the afterlives of colonialism rather than its ongoing operation. One analytical complexity that distinguishes the Kurdish case from canonical colonial formations is the role of shared religious identity as a terrain of governance. Islamist governmentality operates as a complement to rather than a departure from colonial repression, complicates frameworks that map colonialism onto a straightforward civilisational or racial binary, and points toward the need for more contextually analytical tools. These theoretical lacunae are, the talk argues, partly a product of how Middle East studies itself developed as a field. I argue that a decolonised Middle East studies would need to do more than accommodate Kurdish perspectives within an otherwise intact disciplinary framework. It would need to critically interrogate its own epistemological foundations, develop methodologies that can hold together fragmented geographies and suppressed epistemologies, and engage seriously with the kinds of colonial difference that do not conform to the template derived from European imperial history.

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Venue: **Sociology Seminar Room**
AS1 #02-12



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<https://tinyurl.com/yu56z4jj>

Dr. Mashuq Kurt (Official name Mehmet Kurt) is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is a scholar of Islam, the Middle East and Muslim diasporas, with a particular focus on Turkey and Kurds. He is the author of *Kurdish Hizbullah in Turkey: Islamism, Violence and the State* (Pluto, 2017) and co-editor of two special issues in the journals of *South Atlantic Quarterly* and *Contemporary Islam*. His numerous articles and book chapters appeared in *Current Anthropology*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, *Contemporary Islam*, *Cambridge History of the Kurds* and *Oxford Handbook of Religion in Turkey*, among others. He writes about Kurds and Kurdistan, Turkey, Islamism, political violence, and Muslim diasporas in Europe and the USA.