Colonial continuities in the Kurdish liberation

Jan Yasin Sunca[1]

Abstract

This commentary seeks to examine the extent to which Kurdish liberation projects are free from the global colonial continuities. While the discussion on colonialism and Kurdistan typically centres on the Kurds' relationships with their immediate colonisers, it obscures at least two forms of colonial continuities in Kurdish liberation projects. A decolonial perspective built on the coloniality concept enables these colonial continuities. Firstly, the manifestation of politico-tribal domination in Başûr (South Kurdistan, Iraq) is a common feature of postcolonial states that perpetuates the originally colonial power relations within internal structures. Secondly, the Rojava (West Kurdistan, Syria) revolution, which, despite its extensive criticism of orientalism, inadvertently reproduces the frustration of Rojava's people arising from the feeling of abandonment, by equating "we fight for humanity" with "we fight for Western values." The reproduction of internal coloniality and Western superiority are, I argue, inextricably linked to the colonial nature of modern power.

---

[1] Dr. Jan Yasin Sunca is affiliated with the Research Group on "World Politics" at Bielefeld University in Germany. He is also a co-founder and current co-chair of the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Rojava.

Introduction

In broadest terms, colonialism has been defined as a practice of domination that involves the subjugation of one people by another (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 116). Decolonization, on the other hand, has been standardised as the self-determination of the colonized people, usually through the formation of a nation-state (e.g., Go & Watson, 2019). These established meanings and associated political processes have been critically examined by the coloniality/modernity school, which contends that colonialism and decolonization are not completed processes (Dussel, 1995; Quijano, 2007). This is due to the fact that modern power is intrinsically colonial in nature, and the existing hierarchical structures of the world-system can be understood primarily through the concept of the coloniality of power. Coloniality refers to a globally present matrix of knowledge and power that originates in the processes of colonialism and continuously reproduces Western hegemony politically, culturally, economically, epistemologically, racially, and in many other ways. Building on this, the decolonial turn in social sciences enables us to comprehend how modern power is a direct result of the processes of colonialism.

The ongoing discourse and practices surrounding colonialism in Kurdistan primarily revolve around the colonial practices of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. While this focus is understandable, I argue that it risks obscuring colonial continuities in Kurdish liberation projects due to the colonial nature of modern power. Kurdish political structures directly shape contemporary political power relations in Başûr (South Kurdistan, Iraq) and Rojava (Western Kurdistan, Syria), while significantly impacting power dynamics in Bakûr (North Kurdistan, Turkey) and Rojhelat (East Kurdistan, Iran) (cf. Gunes, 2019). This commentary offers two examples of colonial continuity in Kurdish liberation. Firstly, the power structures established in Başûr are colonial in nature and dominates people through two family-party structures. The political structures of domination in Başûr are rooted in and perpetuates the colonial practices of Iraq's pre-war Ba'ath regime. Secondly, the Rojava revolution's extensive

criticism of orientalism notwithstanding, it inadvertently perpetuates the notion of Rojava's people and fighters as inferior to the West by falsely equating "we fight for humanity" with "we fight for western values." Consequently, Rojava's people and politics remain in a permanent frustration arising from the US's abandonment in the face of Turkish aggression which strengthens the need for an 'external survivor.'

Despite differences in their specific contexts and manifestations, these examples offer insights into the constitutive impact of the colonial nature of power on societal structures. The manifestation of politico-tribal hegemony in Başûr is a characteristic common to many postcolonial states that are confronted with the ongoing impact of global coloniality of power, whereby originally colonial power relations are perpetuated within internal structures. On the other hand, the "humanity" discourse impedes Rojava's struggle to establish genuine self-rule. The reproduction of internal coloniality and western superiority, respectively, are inextricably linked to the colonial nature of modern power.

In what follows, I first examine the existing debate on colonialism in Kurdistan and the struggles for liberation, before delving into the decolonial turn and the coloniality of power, providing context for the ensuing discussion on colonial continuities. Later, through a focus on Başûr and Rojava experiences, I offer two different examples of colonial continuities in Kurdish liberation. Although a more detailed analysis of colonial continuities is not only possible but also indispensable, I remain focused on two examples to open up this debate. In conclusion, I present some implications of coloniality of power for Kurdish politics, both theoretically and practically.

Colonialism and Kurdistan

The debate on colonialism and decolonisation in Kurdistan reifies the colonial borders of the nation-states due to its explicit internalism and elevates the nation-state model as the ultimate liberation. The early debate on colonialism and Kurdistan ranges from the assertion

that "Kurdistan is not even a colony" referring to the absence of an official status of colony, to the argument that it is an "international colony" (Beşikçi, 1991). Similar observations persist such as in the conceptualisation of second-generation liberation movements (e.g., Voller, 2022). Typically, the location of this debate is within the framework of "internal colonialism" (e.g., Kurt, 2019), which nonetheless paradoxically reinforces the colonial borders of those states by analytically construing the Kurdish question as the internal matter of singular states. One strand of this debate focuses on racism, informed by the originally US-American whiteness studies (e.g. Ünlü, 2018) or the anti-orientalist perspective (e.g., Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008). Yarkin highlights the existence of racist social (Yarkin, 2020) and political (Yarkin, 2019) structures. However, similarly, the question of race is regarded, consciously or unconsciously, as a matter internal to the state(s), disregarding the larger global framework —the nation-state-based world order— which is directly causal in racism. Concerning liberation, while the majority unsurprisingly associates self-determination with statehood and hence privileges the nation-state model as the ultimate form of liberation, Jongerden (2016), among others, reflect on stateless self-determination based on the ideological transformation of the PKK. Constituting the backbone of the discourse on colonialism in/and Kurdistan, the existing literature almost exclusively, albeit understandably, focuses on different colonial practices carried out by respective states in Kurdistan, often overlooking the global historical framework that has made such practices possible.

There exist scholars who go beyond this prevailing trend, nonetheless. Matin, for instance, contextualises the issue within the broader framework of imperialism and its impact on the region, shedding light on how the Kurdish question is perceived on an international scale (Matin, 2020). Küçük, on the other hand, demonstrates how the universalisation of Kurdish liberation is achieved through a process of localisation, as exemplified in the experience of Bakûr (Küçük, 2015).

The quest for Kurdish liberation dates back to the late 17th century, with a long history of attempts to achieve self-determination. However, the trajectory of this struggle bifurcated in the late 1990s and early 2000s due, precisely, to the recontextualisation of liberation within overall global conditions (Sunca, 2022). Discursive Kurdish nationalism continued to view statelessness as the root of the problem, but Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), redefined statelessness as a condition from which an alternative could be built, problematising the nation-state-based world order. Duruiz (2020) posits that both nationalist and PKK-led projects respond to the same analysis of colonialism in Kurdistan, but a more thorough examination of Öcalan's work reveals otherwise. While discursive Kurdish nationalism does not problematise existing nation-state system and aims to join it as an independent nation-state, the PKK-led movement questions the entire system of historical dominations. Rather than seeing the nation-state as a means to achieve self-determination, Öcalan identifies it as a new form of colonisation that hierarchically reorganises society within the cage of nation-state (Öcalan, 2013b, p. 398). The Kurdish question is thus understood within a much larger framework: self-determination should not be reduced to national self-determination, rather it should be understood as self-rule through radical/direct democracy that traverses all veins of society, including gender, co-existence in peace, and social ecology (Öcalan, 2013a).

However, neither of these liberation projects is completely free from the coloniality of power. I will return to the reproduction of the coloniality of power in Kurdistan after a brief exploration of the "decolonial turn" in the following section.

Decolonial turn and the coloniality of power

The decolonial turn has emerged against the rejection of multiple ways of being, knowing, and doing. There exist various histories, political processes, and ways of producing knowledge, and different spatiotemporal processes enact different spatiotemporal realities.

Many worlds (Law, 2011) or universes (Mignolo, 2010), each with its own materiality, epistemology, power relations, aesthetics, ethics, and more, coexist. So why is Eurocentric modernity, among all other worlds, almost unquestionably considered the highest standard of humanity? Why is it considered an irreplaceable path towards prosperity, liberty, and civility? Why do we view the world through European standards? Why are capitalism as a hegemonic economic system (Bhattacharyya, 2018), and the nation and nation-state as two core pillars of modern governance (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991), manifestly global even though they are historically European? Why is the "superiority" of white males unshakable? (Lugones, 2008). Why are historical alternatives to capitalism or the nation-state considered unthinkable, if not ridiculous? Building on similar questions, the decolonial turn is a particular scepticism towards Western hegemony, where Western civilization is depicted as "God-given" and must be defended at all costs (Maldonado Torres, 2008, p. 7).

The intellectual foundation of the decolonial turn lies in the analysis of the coloniality of power, which involves the neutralization of Eurocentric universalism as *the* objective condition of being, knowing, and doing. Although postcolonial (Said, 1978) and world-systems (Wallerstein, 2004) perspectives inform coloniality perspective, it goes beyond these by overcoming their cultural and macro-economic reductionism and state-centrism which leads into the analysis of a caste-like global order. Despite the cessation of colonialism as an explicit political order of domination and violence, coloniality remains the most general structure of domination globally and continues to benefit the West (Quijano, 2007). The emergence of coloniality of power can be traced in two historical processes. The first process involves its historical emergence through a gradual process of colonialism and otherization, wherein the colonization, extraction, and sub-humanization of colonized lands established the domination of the European core over the rest of the world. The transfer of material, scientific, moral, political, and social resources from the rest of the world to the European core created the

supposedly "endogenous" European civilization. The Eurocentric social scientific, philosophical and historical discourse has been constitutive of these processes all the way down, rather than being derivative of it.

The second process is the myth of decolonisation that makes coloniality invisible. Formal independence did not undo coloniality but rather transformed its outer form (Quijano & Wallerstein 1992), with the mythology of the "decolonization of the world" obscuring the continuities between the colonial past and current global colonial/racial hierarchies and contributing to the invisibility of coloniality today (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). The modern world-system is thus a spatial articulation of colonial power. "The rest" is situated in a state of permanent backwardness, forced into a never-ending race to catch up with the standards of Western modernity as a result of these two historical processes. However, coloniality, or the darker side of modernity, continuously reproduces Western hegemony.

The decolonial turn is founded on a fundamental distinction between modernity and coloniality. We are conditioned, throughout the modern history, to perceive, examine, and replicate power dynamics through a modern perspective, which, despite its claims of liberation, prosperity, and progress, has obfuscated the violent and ongoing oppression of marginalized and vulnerable groups, bodies and communities (Mignolo, 2012). It is imperative to differentiate between the "epistemic location" of our perspectives and the "social location" of our physical and temporal being. As Grosfoguel (2011) explains, the modern/colonial world-system has successfully induced those on the oppressed side of the colonial divide to adopt the epistemological perspectives of their oppressors. In other words, being on the oppressed side of power relations does not mean that one has decolonial perspective. The decolonial turn invites us to scrutinize the world from the viewpoint of the margins, oppressed, colonized, racialized, and subjugated groups in every power relation. Such an approach demands us to be critical of the epistemological orientation of those in power. The underlying premise of the

decolonial turn is that our supposed "objective" viewpoint is, in fact, entirely shaped within the framework of the Eurocentric constitution of power. What is presented as objective is, in reality, intertwined with power, rather than it being objectively objective.

The decolonial turn has gained notable traction within the field of International Relations (IR) as well. As a social scientific discipline, IR was established in the United States with the aim of advancing US interests on a global scale (Kuru, 2017), leading to a particular vision of coloniality that legitimized imperialism and colonialism (Tucker, 2018). The decolonial turn in IR has emphasized the need to rethink and analyse the world from the perspective of the margins, or the oppressed side of every power relation. Contributions to this perspective include exploring how we imagine peace (Azarmandi, 2018) and war (Barkawi, 2016), examining the colonial legacy of the nation-state (Bhambra, 2018; Parasram, 2014), critiquing the hegemonic colonial sociological perspectives that shape our perceptions of world politics (Bhambra, 2009), and identifying ways to shift such perspectives to make marginalized voices heard (Scauso, 2020; Shilliam, 2021). These efforts represent significant contributions to the decolonial turn in IR.

This paper suggests that the coloniality of power, a historico-social and political structure that hierarchically reproduces power relations under Western hegemony, has also had an irreversible impact on the imagination of and struggle for liberation. A decolonial approach to liberation necessitates deconstructing established modern assumptions about ways of being, knowing, and doing, and reconstructing them from the epistemic location of the marginalized, rather than being limited to emancipation from immediate oppressors. Viewed in this light, it is imperative to question the extent to which Kurdish liberation projects are free from global colonial continuities. Although an overall assessment is beyond the reach, this paper identifies two colonial continuities in Kurdish liberation: the KRG's internal reproduction of coloniality and the perpetuation of Rojava's inferiority through the discourse of humanity.

Başûr: coloniality of nationalist discourse

In late 2021, several Kurds fleeing Southern Kurdistan found themselves stranded at the Belarussian-Polish border without food and heating. Umed Ahmed, a Kurdish poet and activist at the border, spoke with journalist Kamal Chomani and stated, "[t]he mafia family rule has starved our nation for the last 30 years, and whenever we take to the streets to call for our rights, we are arrested, intimidated, and beaten." (Chomani, 2021) It raises the question of why people would risk freezing to death while attempting to flee from Southern Kurdistan, which was once a prominent Kurdish liberation project. The idea of national emancipation from Iraqi colonial rule through statehood was imagined and, albeit de facto, achieved in Başûr. However, when decolonization is viewed from the prism of liberation, and not just emancipation from Iraqi state's colonial rule, the colonial continuities in Başûr become clearer: the politico-tribal rule takes the will and agency of the people of Başûr hostage and prevents their self-rule. Thus, it is a direct projection of colonial continuities that are associated with the postcolonial state.

As explored, the nation-state is widely perceived as the natural path for decolonization in the framework of the modern world order, and issues of domination are often attributed to individual politicians' mismanagement or the fallacies of state-building. However, far from being isolated occurrences, the failure of postcolonial states is inherently linked to the colonial nature of power. Postcolonial states emerged as a beacon of hope for achieving liberation from colonialism, driven by anti-colonial nationalist ideology. These states sought to establish external recognition and internal sovereignty to join the world of nation-states. However, by the end of the 1970s, these states faced immediate challenges such as authoritarianism, secession, and humanitarian crises that questioned their anti-colonial nation-building efforts (Getachew, 2019, p. 29). Almost invariably, postcolonial states reproduced the dominations associated with colonial modernity internally. Maldonado-Torres (2008) posits that the nature of modern power is rooted in colonial violence, which has historically normalized and naturalized violence through the

paradigm of war. A deeply violent postcolonial nationalism, similar to other forms of nationalism, results from the epistemic embrace of colonial modernity by colonized subjects, leading to a feeling of a second colonisation (Mamdani, 2020, p. 14).

If we view decolonization as liberation from colonial violence, it is evident that postcolonial states did not bring about true liberation. Sanjinés asserts that national elites played a central role in bringing colonial structures of governance to the colonized world under the guise of emancipation from colonialism (Sanjinés, 2010, pp. 155–156). These elites mobilized nationalism to capture the state, which granted them "extraordinary power to sway and dominate the masses" (Getachew, 2019, p. 26) and enabled them to reproduce oppressive structures, privileges, and conditions of unrepresentative governance (Rao, 2010, p. 79). As a result, the false image of decolonization has created structures in which ordinary people continue to be oppressed, while the nationalist discourse opened new doors for ruling elites. Başûr's experience is an unfortunate example of the persistence of colonial dominations, which go much deeper than mere mismanagement by political elites or fallacies of state-building.

The political-tribal structure in Başûr has its roots in the *avant-guard* role played by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in the Kurdish resistance against Iraq. The KDP has been at the centre of Kurdish politics since the 1940s, while the PUK emerged as a split from the KDP in 1975, fuelled by a social-democratic critique. Over time, these parties came under the strict control of the Barzani and Talabani families, respectively, through complex inter-tribal coalitions. These families were able to consolidate their power during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in the 1990s. In the mid-1990s, the two parties engaged in a civil war that ended with a US-brokered agreement in 1998, allowing them to maintain their hold on Başûr. As demonstrated by the US intervention in 1991 and invasion in 2003, as well as the PUK's relationships with Iran and the KDP's connections to Saddam Hussein and more recently with Turkey, the party-family structures

in Başûr have consistently sought support from external forces to maintain their grip on power.

The party-family structure's control over power is rooted in the urbanization period during Saddam's regime. The lack of rural development after the 1975 land reforms forced many Kurds to migrate to cities, making the population largely dependent on state aid. The decades-long conflict, forced displacement, and resultant urbanization, combined with cheap imported food and humanitarian aid, replaced agriculture as the main source of self-sufficiency for the population. These factors created a structure of dependence on and loyalty to the Ba'ath regime through tribal middlemen, which served the politico-tribal elites. Accumulating wealth and power through oil rent, tribal leaders turned these structures to their advantage. Contemporary tribal divisions should not be seen as archaic leftovers but rather as social strategies that have a function in the modern urbanized context (*cf.* Leezenberg, 2006). Oil revenue controlled by ruling families leads to excessive wealth for them while people suffer. Recent disclosure shows only a fraction of Barzani family has hidden nine-digit worth properties in the US, using complex money-laundering methods with law firms (Kopsplin & Humadi, 2022). By using some part of this oil revenue, the two parties employ up to 70% of the population and hence buy them into their own system of corruption, strike the fear of famine in case of dissolution from the party-family structure, and ultimately force them to be grateful with what they have (Aziz, 2017). The population denounces politico-tribal control on every occasion, yet does not have any other possibility but to ask for their aid or employment, resulting in an unresolvable paradox. This system of loyalty and dependence that the politico-tribal elites are exploiting is an originally colonial structure that was implemented by the Ba'ath regime to ensure its control, and therefore, it is a direct colonial continuity.

Barkawi (2016) argues that the war has been ongoing for the last 500 years and has never truly ended. This does not mean that there were no wars prior to this, but rather a particular kind of colonial war has been taking place since the 15th century. While it initially began as

colonialism, it shaded into a global structure of domination and coercion ever since. It was thought that the war was over after the partial emancipation of the Başûri government, but it then evolved into a war against the Başûrî people, shaded into constant coercion and domination by the politico-tribal elite. The end of Iraqi colonialism meant the disguised reproduction of violence and hence the continuity of coloniality for the Başûrî people.

Başûrî people, particularly the youth, have always shown resistance to the politico-tribal structure of domination. For instance, the Arab spring inspired the Kurdish youth in Başûr. However, the parties coordinated their crackdown on society by further strengthening the region's security structures. Although ISIS posed a real threat to Başûr and committed genocide in Shengal (Sinjar), it provided the much-needed pretext to extend the KRG president's term illegally, suspend parliament gatherings, and kill critical journalists. The 2017 independence referendum was launched against this background to divert attention from the issues of corrupt governance in Başûr. A discursive Kurdish nationalism is constructed on the reproduction of the dominant position of the ruling elite (Salih & Fantappie, 2019). Furthermore, a large student protest recently broke out in Sulaymaniyah and spread to other provinces against a decision to cut scholarships. Despite being in a zero-sum conflict of interest, the two parties agreed to violently suppress the student protests. The domination experienced in Başûr is not unique, but rather reflects broader structures of recolonization by postcolonial ruling elite. These structures are shaped by the colonial nature of modern power, which is reproduced through and within postcolonial nation-states.

An ideal national self-determination, if that exists at all, should strengthen state institutions, ensure democracy, protect people, and provide a decent life. But in Başûr, the politico-tribal structure maintains a system of poverty and oppression that originates in the colonial Ba'ath regime. Brutal coercive power dominates people who resist, while external forces cooperate with this structure politically and economically, and ensure its continuity. The elites' unquestionable control, legitimized by international recognition and

business partnerships, is effectively recolonizing the people who were once thought to be emancipated.

Rojava: fight for humanity?

The coloniality of power is present in the political discourse of Rojava in a particular way. As early as 2013, Salih Muslim, the co-chair of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), among others, stated that the Rojava revolution was applying Western values (Civiroglu, 2012). Recently, he reiterated that they have been defending Western values (GercekNews 2022). Similarly, from the beginning of the revolution in Rojava, many leading figures claimed that they were "fighting for humanity." This discourse is problematic for many reasons, but I am particularly concerned about the abstract association of "humanity" with "the West" and "Western values." This discourse, especially when articulated by people like Salih Muslim, is mainly rhetorical and aims to appeal to the Western public. However, this rhetorical position reproduces the conditions that have led to the frustration of the Rojavans, caused by the perceived betrayal of the West.

There are several issues with the concept of "equality of humans," but one fundamental problem lies in how we define the "nature" of "human." In the context of the modern/colonial world order, the notion of human is shaped by ideas of secularism, individualism, and racism, which lead to problematic forms of scepticism that question the full humanity of certain individuals (Maldonado-Torres, 2017, p. 131). Those who have not yet achieved a certain level of relationship with capitalism and modernity are often considered sub-human. Although the concept of humanity suggests equality among all people, this notion of equality departs from a particular point that completely ignores the hierarchical nature of relations among different human collectivities. As a result, the "sub-human" or the "other" is either not acknowledged to exist or is treated in an objectified manner (Quijano, 2007, p. 173). Thus, the perception of "sub-human" emerges as not only inferior but also dispensable (Azarmandi, 2018, p. 73). For instance, in the context of the anti-

ISIS war, the existence of Kurds can be meaningful only as an object that sacrifices itself for the real subject. Despite their normative equality, the life of a white US-American may hold more material and semantic significance than that of a Rojavan because the historical coloniality of power has been built to ensure that the former is more valuable than the latter.

North and East Syria has been under uninterrupted attack, embargo, and military aggression since its formation. The invasion of Serêkaniyê and Efrîn demonstrated that most of these attacks were enabled either by the green light of Russia or the United States. The immediate consequence of allowing Turkish attacks was a heavy price, accompanied by a deep feeling of betrayal, that both the people and fighters had to endure. During the anti-ISIS war, the Rojava revolution managed to connect with the Western public, but they were still betrayed by policymakers despite the public's discomfort. The "humanity" discourse has an important consequence in Rojava, such as creating misguided expectations for saviours, which is deeply rooted in the assumption that the Kurds will be defended against Turkish aggression because they "fought for humanity." This assumption ultimately weakens the possibilities of genuine anti-colonial liberation and feeds the colonial/modern hierarchical structure of the world. Because the Kurds, like any other Middle Easterners, are permanently placed in the category of sub-human by colonial/modern structures, and their bodily existence is only meaningful if they are ready to kill or be killed for "humanity." This de-subjectivizes the anti-colonial liberation struggle in North and East Syria.

Although the "humanity" discourse obfuscates it to some extent, however, the values that the revolution advanced and defended are deeply contradicting the "Western values." The revolution rejected the nation-state, a concept that originates in the West. It proposed a domination-free existence within nature, but it is precisely capitalist modernity that circumstanced the climate crisis. The sexism against which the revolution fought is a deeply embedded structure worldwide, including in the West, which organises social relations

through the dominant role of heterosexual white men. The question of racism profoundly shapes the entirety of Western states which informs their relations with both the unwanted segments of their own society and the rest of the world. It is unavoidable to question which one of these the Rojava revolution and ensuing political transformations are defending.

The solution to the contradiction that constitutes the betrayal-frustration cycle in Rojava would not emerge from embracing humanity as a whole, nor would it be to cage the people of North and East Syria into the structures of nationalism, as has so far been the case for Başûr. A potential solution is to return to the ideological origins of the revolution, that is, to distinguish between capitalist and democratic streams of modernity. The "humanity" discourse is rooted in the totalisation of the Western experience, which does not differentiate between the history of colonisers and ruling elites and those who were resisting the internal oppressions and imperialist wars of their ruling elites. Or, to put it in the words of Öcalan, this discourse does not differentiate between the capitalist and democratic strands of modernity, which Öcalan understands universally and historically and places the PKK-led movement as part of the latter along with other struggles for liberation, including those in the West. What is being defended in Rojava is rather the legacy of democratic modernity, or the resistance to domination. But "Western values" as a discursive totality suppress the distinction between the dominant and the dominated, and the abstracted association of "West" and "humanity" as a politically and ethically superior entity is advanced against its presumed inferior forms, among which are the values produced by the Kurdish-led revolution.

Conclusion

The modern liberation projects are underpinned by a worldview that is frequently intertwined with colonial legacies. Nevertheless, the decolonial turn, underpinned by the coloniality of power perspective illustrates that the process of decolonisation is far from being concluded; indeed, coloniality persists in shaping and reshaping

political, social, and economic structures. This does not mean that colonialism is the "ultimate evil" and that every structure of domination is inherently colonial. Rather, it highlights the need to excavate the modern/colonial structures of domination from the historical streamed of struggles for liberation. To genuinely achieve decolonisation, it is imperative to dismantle all structures that perpetuate originally colonial hierarchies, and to establish a system of direct, radical, and democratic self-rule for communities.

This commentary attempts to understand colonial continuities in anti-colonial struggles for liberation, based on the experiences of Başûr and Rojava. As far as Rojava is concerned, this commentary does not seek pure political correctness, nor does it aim to damage the struggles for liberation, not in a moment when Kurdistan is going through historic moments. On the contrary, it aims to strengthen peoples' organized struggle by excluding certain unintended meanings. When it comes to Başûr, a deeply self-orientalising polity, the problem has been identified by everyone, including even the leading members of the party-tribe structures: mismanagement and corruption. Naming it merely a system of "mismanagement" trivializes the problem as an unsuccessful state-building, a minor problem that should be resolved through state structures. However, it does not reveal the systemic reconstruction of Başûr rooted in the illusion of emancipation in a world of originally colonial dominations. Ultimately, as the two examples presented demonstrate, recognising the colonial nature of modern power and its crucial impact on Kurdish politics, both in academic debate and political practice, is a prerequisite for a genuine liberation.

Bibliography

Azarmandi, M. (2018). The Racial Silence within Peace Studies. Peace Review *30*(1):69–77.

Aziz, S. (2017). The Economic System(s) of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Iraq. Between State and Non-State: Politics and Society in Kurdistan-Iraq and Palestine. Gurbey, Hoffman, & Ibrahim Seyder. Palgrave Macmillan:103–122.

Balibar, É., & Wallerstein, I. M. (1991). Race, nation, class: Ambiguous identities. Verso.

Barkawi, T. (2016). Decolonising war. European Journal of International Security, *1*(2), 199–214. https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2016.7

Beşikçi, İ. (1991). Devletlerarası Sömürge Kürdistan. Yurt.

Bhambra, G. K. (2009). Rethinking modernity: Postcolonialism and the sociological imagination. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bhambra, G. K. (2018). The State. Postcolonial histories of the concept. In O. U. Rutazibwa & R. Shilliam (Eds.), Routledge Handbook of Postcolonial Politics. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315671192

Bhattacharyya, G. (2018). Rethinking racial capitalism: Questions of reproduction and survival. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Civiroglu M., (2012) PYD's Salih Muslim: We are Awaiting an Invitation for Talks with Washington. Rudaw. https://www.rudaw.net/english/interview/16082013

Chomani, K. (2021). Why Iraqi Kurds Fleeing to Europe? News Line Magazine. https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/why-are-iraqi-kurds-fleeing-to-europe/

Duruiz, D. (2020). Tracing the Conceptual Genealogy of Kurdistan as International Colony. Middle East Report, *295*(Summer). https://merip.org/2020/08/tracing-the-conceptual-genealogy-of-kurdistan-as-international-colony/

Dussel, E. (1995). The Invention of the Americas. Continuum.

GercekNews (2022). Salih Muslim: We are defending Western values. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfw64nCKC30

Getachew, A. (2019). Worldmaking After Empire. The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination. Princeton University Press

Go, J., & Watson, J. (2019). Anti-colonial Nationalism: From Imagined Communities to Colonial Conflict. European Journal of Sociology, *60*(1), 31–68.

Grosfoguel, R. (2011). Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality. Transmodernity *1*(1)

Gunes, C. (2019). The Kurds in a New Middle East. Palgrave Macmillan.

Jongerden, J. (2016). Colonialism, Self-Determination and Independence: The new PKK paradigm. Kurdish Issues: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Olson. R.Olson &M. Gunter. Mazda Publishers

Kopsplin Z. & Humadi B. (2022) How Oligarchs Stash Money in Foreign Real Estate. Prospect. https://prospect.org/power/how-oligarchs-stash-money-in-foreign-real-estate/#.Yk57djztgXc.twitter

Küçük, B. (2015). Yerelleşmenin ve Evrenselleşmenin Ötesinde Kürt Sorununu Yeniden Düşünmek. Mülkiye Dergisi, *39*(2), 61–84.

Kurt, M. (2019). 'My Muslim Kurdish brother': Colonial rule and Islamist governmentality in the Kurdish region of Turkey. Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies *21*(3):350–365.

Kuru, D. (2017). Who f(o)unded IR: American philanthropies and the discipline of International Relations in Europe. International Relations, *31*(1), 42–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117816676307

Law, J. (2011). What's Wrong with a One-World World. Heterogeneities, *19*, 14.

Leezenberg, M. (2006). Urbanization, Privatization, and Patronage: The Political Economy of Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics F. 'Abd al-Jabbār & D. Hosham. Saqi books:151–179

Lugones, M. (2008). The Coloniality of Gender. Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise |, *Spring*, 17.

Maldonado Torres, N. (2008). Against war. Views from the underside of modernity. Duke University Press.

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2017). On the Coloniality of Human Rights. Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais. *114*:117–136.

Mamdani, M. (2020). Neither settler nor native: the making and unmaking of permanent minorities. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press

Matin, K. (2020). Liminal Lineages of the "Kurdish Question." Middle East Report, *295*(Summer). https://merip.org/2020/08/liminal-lineages-of-the-kurdish-question/?fbclid=IwAR1JH_8eatYQUTQFBhj9nh2BYZBGKkQKnbr71EkGN hYMlRsd8Qur9W3-Lfk

Mignolo, W. (2010). Cosmopolitanism and the De-colonial Option. Studies in Philosophy and Education, *29*(2), 111–127. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-009-9163-1

Mignolo, W. D. (2012). Local Histories/ Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking. Princeton University Press.

Mignolo, W., & Walsh, C. E. (2018). On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics, praxis. Duke University Press.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2013). Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa: Myths of decolonization. CODESRIA.

Öcalan, A. (2013a). Demokratik Uygarlık Manifestosu III. Kitap: Özgürlük Sosyolojisi Üzerine Deneme. Abdullah Öcalan Sosyal Bilimler Akademisi Yayınları.

Öcalan, A. (2013b). Demokratik Uygarlık Manifestosu V. Kitap: Kürt Sorunu ve Demokratik Ulus Çözümü. Abdullah Öcalan Sosyal Bilimler Akademisi Yayınları.

Parasram, A. (2014). Postcolonial Territory and the Coloniality of the State. Caribbean Journal of International Relations & Diplomacy, *2*(4), 29.

Rao, R. (2010). Third World protest: between home and the world. Oxford University Press

Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. Cultural Studies, *21*, 168–178.

Quijano, A., & Wallerstein, I. (1992). Americanity as a concept, or the Americas in the modern world-system. International Social Science Journal, *44*, 549–557.

Said, E. (1978). Orientalism. Pantheon Books.

Salih, C., & Fantappie, M. (2019). *Kurdish Nationalism at an Impasse*. The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/report/iraqi-kurdistan-losing-place-center-kurdayeti/

Sanjinés, J. (2010). The Nation: An Imagined Community? Globalization and the Decolonial Option. W. Mignolo. A. Escobar. Routledge

Scauso, M. S. (2020). Intersectional decoloniality: Reimagining international relations and the problem of difference. Routledge.

Shilliam, R. (2021). Decolonizing politics: An introduction. Polity Press.

Sunca, Y. (2022). The Regional Kurdish Question in a Global World: Mentalities, Policies and Geopolitical Dynamics. Truth Justice Memory Center.

Tucker, K. (2018). Unraveling Coloniality in International Relations: Knowledge, Relationality, and Strategies for Engagement. International Political Sociology, *12*(3), 215–232. https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/oly005

Ünlü, B. (2018). Türklük Sözleşmesi: Oluşumu, İşleyişi ve Krizi. Dipnot yayınları.

Voller, Y. (2022). Second-Generation Liberation Wars: Rethinking Colonialism in Iraqi Kurdistan and Southern Sudan. Cambridge University Press.

Wallerstein, I. (2004). World-systems analysis: An introduction. Duke University Press.

Yarkin, G. (2019). İnkâr Edilen Hakikat: Sömürge Kuzey Kürdistan. Kürd Araştırmaları, *October*. http://kurdarastirmalari.com/yazi-detay-nk-r-edilen-hakikat-s-m-rge-kuzey-k-rdistan-26

Yarkin, G. (2020). Fighting racism in Turkey: Kurdish homeownership as an anti-racist practice. Ethnic and Racial Studies, *43*(15), 2705–2723. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1685116

Zeydanlıoğlu, W. (2008). "The White Turkish Man's Burden": Orientalism, Kemalisma and the Kurds in Turkey. Neo-colonial Mentalities in Contemporary Europe? Language and Discourse in the Construction of Identities. G. Rings & A. Ife. Cambridge Scholars Publishing:155–174