

[Yulia Egorova](#)

Professor in the Department of Anthropology, Durham University

“Sovereignty, Genomics and Diaspora: Alternative Genealogies and DNA Research on Jewish Populations”

The paper considers the naturalizing tendencies of what became to be known as ‘Jewish genetics’ in a new analytical light through engaging with anthropological work on the concept of genomic sovereignty. Focusing on geneticists’, religious specialists’, and tests participants’ narratives about community-level genomic mapping initiatives and ancestry tests, I suggest that genetic research emerges here as an endeavour to achieve genomic sovereignty born out of relationally subaltern self-perceptions and concerns about inequality. While at first glance, DNA testing used in search for social and political recognition appears to be an epistemological tool which could allow disenfranchised groups to subvert dominant political and epistemological regimes, it could also be theorized as a tool of subordination and control that is imposed upon these groups by those in position of political and economic power in the fields of contestation in question. At the same time, I argue that such cases also highlight that alternative genealogies and epistemological regimes which emerge as a result of these contestations should not be viewed in a hierarchical way irrespective of the levels of political power that their proponents hold.

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*University of Zurich via Zoom*

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Contact [eric.hounshell@unilu.ch](mailto:eric.hounshell@unilu.ch) to register for a Zoom link.