



The Case for a Decolonization of Global History

A Response to Bruce Gilley, Elvira Roca Barea, and Sebastian Conrad

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After three decades of cultural, philosophical, and epistemological decolonization, numerous areas and disciplines have been subjected to a profound critical review concerning the colonial and Eurocentric character of the social sciences and humanities. Anthropology, literary criticism, philosophy, gender studies, art, sociology, geography, education, and cultural studies have seen the emergence of critical spaces of theoretical contestation that seek to overcome the Eurocentric, Western, colonial legacy of academic knowledge. Anticolonial political thought, postcolonial studies, decolonial thought, southern epistemologies, Chicano studies, Afrodiasporic thought, interculturality in spaces of indigenous knowledge, feminisms, anti-racism, and other series of theories and currents have developed a series of solid critiques, knowledge, academic spaces, and ways of interpreting reality that today are part of the dispute in and against the Westernized university.

However, if there is one discipline that has yet to have a theoretical and epistemological debate on colonial legacies within the discipline, it is history. Indeed, despite extensively developing the field of studies on empires, colonialism, and anti-colonialism, historiography has



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yet to question the main perspectives, methods, and ways of interpreting the past. The main areas of historiography still need to develop a reflection on the implications of colonialism in forming the discipline itself. Ancient history and its orientalist and colonial genealogy; medieval history and its study of the feudal roots of the West; modern history and the study of colonial expansions and the gestation of capitalism; and, of course, contemporary history as a history of the international supremacy of Europe and the United States. It is not only a history of decolonization but a decolonization of history.

On the contrary, in the last decade, we have witnessed a new cultural battle in the field of historiography with new theoretical proposals that vindicate imperial legacies, the European and Western locus and colonial politics while marginalizing and dismissing any argument from postcolonial, decolonial and critical theories produced in the global South. From reformulations of the role of the Spanish Empire to critiques of anticolonial movements, attempts at Eurocentric renewal of historiographical theory and practices of epistemic extractivism that do not recognize the contribution of postcolonial and decolonial theories.

Colonial History as a Battlefield

In this text, I will broadly reflect on three works that have led to a renewed cultural battle around the historical legacy of colonialism, empires, and the formulation of postcolonial historiography. These publications are representative of the profound mismatch that still exists between critical studies of colonial legacies and historiographical productions. These three publications have set the pace and tone of research on empires, imperialism, and anti-colonialism in recent years. I refer to the publications of “The Case for Colonialism: A Response to My Critics” (2022) by Bruce Gilley, Elvira Roca Barea’s (2022) *Imperiofobia y leyenda negra: Roma, Rusia, Estados Unidos y el Imperio español (Imperiphobia and Black Legend: Rome, Russia, the United States and the Spanish Empire)*, and thirdly the essay *What is a Global History* (2016) by the German historian Sebastian Conrad. All three works are already works of reference, not only for their followers but also for their detractors. We can say that the three works constitute a way of reinterpreting the imperial, colonial, and anticolonial past, born as responses to the emergence of anticolonial and postcolonial critiques and their proposal to revise the histories of conquest, domination and colonization.

The first text, Bruce Gilley’s (2017) “The Case for Colonialism” was published in 2017 in the journal *Third World Quarterly*. After provoking an actual rebellion in the journal’s editorial board and a wave of protests thousands of signatures were gathered against the article. In response, the journal decided to withdraw its publication. It was finally republished in 2018 under the same title by the journal *Academic Questions*. After many published responses to the article, the same author published “The Case for Colonialism: A Response to My Critics” in 2022. Bruce Gilley, trained at Oxford and Princeton, developed in his long text some of the most common narratives in different social science disciplines. While in this paper I cannot summarize the entire work, I

can present the arguments in three key points, which are usually found expressed in other ways in many other works.

First, for Gilley, despite its problems, colonialism was more beneficial than problematic for the societies under colonial rule—an idea that has been stated in many ways. However, it is similar to what the great works of social history or global history have to say about the history of the Iberian empires, European colonial history, or U.S. interference in the global South.

Secondly, according to Gilley, the independence processes were not the solution but the problem of many independent countries. According to the author, these processes were led by authoritarian, military, and nationalist leaders; as opposed to de Gaulle, Churchill, Eisenhower, António de Oliveira Salazar, and Francisco Franco, who were not military, authoritarian or nationalist leaders. On this topic in particular, it is not difficult to recognize how little sympathy Western historians and academics have shown for anticolonial leaders except for Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela Madiba (and other leaders legitimized by the Commonwealth), or Ernesto Che Guevara (who never occupied a government position). There is no need to emphasize the deep antipathy of Western historians for anti-colonialist figures around the world. Whether from the African context such as Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumba, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Tomas Shankara; from Asian countries including Ho Chi Min and Mao Tse Tung; or from the Arab world as in the case of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Muammar Gaddafi, or Yasser Arafat. Nor do we need to insist on the deep general antipathy aroused by figures such as Fidel Castro, Hugo Chaves or, in the current moment, Nicolas Maduro, Pedro Castillo, or Evo Morales. In most works and currents of recent history in Africa, Asia, and Latin America they have been branded as nationalists, authoritarians, dictators, patriarchal, egocentric, and populist; adjectives that are not usually used for other leaders of the time also from the global South but aligned with the interests of the West—such as Ariel Sharon, Anwar el-Sadat, or Syngman Rhee.

Thirdly, Gilley argues that reordering international relations in an unstable and changing world should include a return to the colonial pattern of international relations in pursuit of global, responsible, and collective governance. This argument should not require in-depth explanation as most international organizations today fulfil a function of colonial domination, such as the OAS, NATO, or the Commonwealth itself. It contrasts the relative weakness of counter-hegemonic or alternative organizations such as UNASUR, Mercosur, the African Union, or the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Since the publication of the work *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* by Kwame Nkrumah in 1965, the denunciation from the countries of the global South that international relations are ordered by the hegemonic powers reproducing the patterns of colonial administration has not ceased. In the case of the United States, despite not having had a colonial administration in legal terms, it has had a long list of neocolonial interference in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Maghreb, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia since the Second World War. Therefore, Bruce Gilley's proposal to return to colonial parameters to reorder international relations in the twenty-first century is nothing more than a way of expressing Western policy aloud in current international relations.

The second publication that has been key in renewing the debates on imperial pasts, in this case on the Hispanic world, is the 2022 work by historian Elvira Roca Barea *Imperiofobia y leyenda negra: Roma, Rusia, Estados Unidos y el Imperio español*. The text has been a true neoconservative theoretical revolution that has aroused an infinity of unexpected intellectual support—from the sectors of the Spanish right and ultra-right of Vox and Ciudadanos, ultra-conservative intellectuals like Arcadi Espadas, to the leaders of the reactionary sector of the PSOE including Josep Borrell, the new disciples of the Spanish philosopher Gustavo Bueno such as Pedro Insúa, or the new Spanish nationalist Marxists like Santiago Armesillas. Ultraconservatives have welcomed the work as a real act of restorative justice that highlights the history of the Spanish Empire against the powers of the so-called “Black Legend.” It is the best-selling work of history in Spain in recent decades. It has given rise to a whole new ultra-nationalist historiographical current, denial of the Spanish genocide in Latin America, and revisionist historiography, which denounces the concealment of national history by the enemies of Spain. The work has given rise to a film entitled *España, la primera globalización* (López-Linares 2021) that has brought together all kinds of conservative historians such as Stanly Paine¹, a British Hispanist historian linked to the Spanish extreme right in recent years.

The work has had a series of critical or progressive reactions, among which we must point out the work of the progressive philosopher José Luis Villacañas, a specialist in German philosophy (Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger) who claims that Roca Barea's attacks on European Protestants as an attack on the Spanish liberal tradition. His work *Imperiofilia y el populismo nacional-católico* (Villacañas 2019) is a denunciation of the conservative reactions and imperial nostalgias that merge with the national-Catholic narratives of Franco's dictatorship and the rise of a new alt-right in Spain. The work also attempts to defend Spanish dissidents such as Erasmists, liberals, and religious minorities who, at every moment of history, synchronized criticisms of the Spanish Empire with emancipatory political cultures in the rest of Europe.

Is Global History a Postcolonial History? A Critical Dialogue with Sebastian Conrad

The third case we will analyze, and the one central to this essay, will be the work *What is a Global History?* (2016) by the German historian Sebastian Conrad. Published by Princeton University in 2016, it has been a real milestone in the renewal of the field of global history. It has been published in over a dozen languages including English, French, Spanish, German, Japanese, Hindi, Chinese, and Italian. The English version alone accumulates almost a thousand citations in Google Scholar and is considered one of the significant milestones in the renewal of global history from within. I say renewal from within because the author himself, a historian legitimized in the field of historiography, has taken it upon himself to point out what global history is for him and what it is not.

¹ https://www.elconfidencial.com/cultura/2022-05-08/stanley-payne-vox-no-miedo-verdadera-historia-espana_3419895/

In this part of my essay, I discuss to what extent we can consider Conrad's proposal a new global history and the novelty with which it contributes to this renewal. Specifically I am interested in the latter: what is the contribution, the nature, and the specific characteristics of Conrad's proposal for global history? What differentiates it from what has been characterized for several decades as global history?

This essay argues that the fundamental contribution made by Conrad has been the connection of the old global history with the contributions of different theoretical currents of the global South, specifically with postcolonial studies, subaltern studies, and Latin American and Caribbean decolonial thought. Nevertheless, all these contributions have not been acknowledged in Conrad's work nor cited. On the contrary, the author develops harsh abstract critiques of decolonial theory. Even so, he incorporates many of these debates into his proposal for a new global history. It leads me to affirm that Sebastian Conrad's work is a practice of epistemic extractivism, as defined by decolonial authors such as Ramón Grosfoguel (2016), Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010), or Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2021) as the practice carried out by specific sectors of the Western academy of combating the theoretical tendencies born in the global South while incorporating their reflections yet discrediting and delegitimizing those who produce them. In this way, it seems that theories are reformulated by authors from the Western or European academy, who have more vocal academics, legitimacy, and capacity to enunciate their production. While appropriating the contributions they militantly battle against the theoretical sectors of the global South because they take their criticisms as challenges to themselves.

First, I will review the author's trajectory and work in his encounter and relationship with postcolonial and decolonial productions. Secondly, I will develop Conrad's fundamental arguments in his new formulation of global history as a theoretical field and as a perspective. For each of these contributions, we will identify and go through different works of postcolonial and decolonial theorists who developed these same ideas and theories despite needing to be cited by Conrad. Thirdly, we will point out the limits of Conrad's new global history and address a new scenario of theoretical discussion for new postcolonial historiography.

In order to situate Sebastian Conrad's relationship with decolonial theory, we must review some issues. The impact of Latin American decolonial thought reached European universities in the first decade of the twentieth century through area studies, mainly Latin American and Caribbean studies and migration and intercultural studies. Such was the case of German universities and Sebastian Conrad. Between 2009 and 2011, different events were organized by the Mexican researcher Andrea Meza Torres and other Latin American students from the Humboldt-Universität (Humboldt University of Berlin). These events were organized through the Decolonial Group Berlin under the support of Professor Regina Roemhild and the Labor Kritische Europäisierungsforschung (Laboratory for Critical Europeanization Research). These events brought essential decolonial theorists to Humboldt University, where Sebastian Conrad was training. Between 2009 and 2011, thinkers such as Enrique Dussel, Ramón Grosfoguel, Houria Bouteldja, and Julia Suarez-Krabbe attended the seminars of the Decolonial Group Berlin at the Humboldt-Universität. In *addition* to the purely theoretical, the Decolonial Group Berlin

developed as a student and activist group that developed a critical and anti-racist activism supported by racialized artists and anti-racist movements in Berlin. The activist and radical dimension of the student group and the limits of the university meant that, like other initiatives developed by students and from below, it did not carry out a permanent activity over time, but it was very intense. The group's activities generated a series of controversies within the seminars at the Humboldt-Universität. One of these controversies included a fierce confrontation between Professor Bert Hoffmann and Professor Ramón Grosfoguel.

Also in 2007, Sebastián Conrad, together with Ulrike Freitag and Andreas Eckert, published *Globalgeschichte: Theorien, Ansätze, Themen*, an anthology of classic texts on global history, which translated into German some of the classics such as Christopher A. Bayly, Charles Bright, Frederick Cooper, Arif Dirlik, Michael Geyer, Christopher L. Hill, Rebecca E. Karl, Erez Manela, Jürgen Osterhammel, Kenneth Pomeranz, and Andrew Zimmermann.

In 2013, after having participated in the decolonial seminars of Ramón Grosfoguel and Enrique Dussel which had been organized between 2009 and 2011, Sebastian Conrad, together with Regina Römhild and Shalini Randeria published in German *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*. In this volume, as in the previous one, authors such as Michel Rolph Trouillot, Fernando Coronil (whose article was “Jenseit des Okzidenatlismus,” which almost gives the volume its title), Stuart Hall, and Dipesh Chakrabarty were published for the first time in German, this time in postcolonial and decolonial theory.

In this last volume Sebastian Conrad published an article with Shalini Randeria (2013), which is the only known incursion of the author in relation to postcolonial theory itself or postcolonial theory. The article is entitled “Einleitung: Geteilte Geschichten-Europa in einer postcolonial Weltis,” very similar to the section in which Conrad explains postcolonial studies in his global history work, citing the same authors—Ghandi, Said, Bhabha, Fanon, Hall, and a set of authors from the Indian subaltern studies collective including Chakrabarty, Guha, and Spivak. The only authors cited who can be considered decolonial are Water Mingnolo, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and Fernando Coronil. None of them were participants in the activities of the Decolonial Group Berlin.

In the years before his book *What is the Global History*, Conrad knew in depth the debates on global history through the publication of an anthology of the texts in 2009. He was also familiar with postcolonial and decolonial theories and reflections, not only because of his attendance to this whole series of seminars but also because of the publication in 2013 of an anthology of essential texts that was for the first time translated into German. In the text itself, Conrad acknowledges that his work to be published in 2016 was to be a translation of his 2013 published book *Globalgeschichte: Eine Einführung* published the same year as *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus* but also that it would eventually be almost wholly rewritten resulting in a new manuscript to be published in 2013. From this we can easily interpret that his 2016 work is a dialogue between both fields of study—old global history in dialogue with postcolonial and decolonial studies creating a

dialogue between the two previously published anthologies: the anthology on global history and the anthology on postcolonial studies.

The objective impact of his work *What is Global History?* shows us that his synthesis has been elaborated in a way that resolves many of the knots in both disciplines. On the one hand, global historiography locked into a Eurocentric and nationalistic view of the world's past, and on the other hand, postcolonial and decolonial studies developed on the margins of historiography itself. None of this would be problematic if Sebastian Conrad cited where he drew the main contributions on which he developed his synthesis. As I will show below, the fundamental pillars of his work are the debates taken up by the tradition of postcolonial studies in the 1980s and by the current decolonial thought in the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The fundamental operation of Sebastian Conrad will be to put in dialogue a global history that emerges in the nineties in the universities of the North Atlantic—the United States, the UK, and their zones of influence, such as Germany. The fall of the Berlin Wall implies not only a unipolar military hegemony on the part of the United States but also a new unipolar history, a historical narrative that interconnects and integrates all the civilizing systems of the world. Indeed, if authors from the global South argued that postcoloniality was the reverse in the non-Western world of postmodernity, global narratives also provoked discourses critical of Western globalization, such as decolonial theory. Conrad, therefore, seeks to bring a profoundly Eurocentric discipline such as historiography into dialogue with the range of theoretical and intellectual responses produced in the global South through postcolonial and decolonial thought.

This dialogue between postcolonial studies and global history in Conrad's work must be observed under three premises to orient ourselves in his reading. First, Conrad tries to overcome an old vision of global history in order to, at the same time, reassert himself in global history itself. It is a renewal within the field of global history. The second premise is that the field of verification and legitimization that Conrad has before him is exclusively the field of global history. It is a work that seeks to impact the field of historiography, specifically the discipline of global history. Conrad's literature is a vast and extensive bibliography of global history. With this bibliography, Conrad seeks to protect and legitimize himself before the proposal of theoretical renovation in the theoretical field of global historiography. The third premise guiding Conrad's reading was also his way of protecting and legitimizing himself before a historiographical public which usually despises theoretical debates, especially those of a postmodern or critical nature with Western Eurocentrism. His way of protecting himself was not to cite postcolonial or decolonial authors or to do so very scarcely. Moreover, those cited differ from those from whom he draws most of his ideas. His brief citations to postcolonial authors such as Chakrabarty, Bhabha, or Said or to decolonial theorists such as Santiago Castro-Gómez or Fernando Coronil do not account for the debates he takes from the postcolonial and decolonial field.

This way of pretending to renew the field of global history by conversing with postcolonial and decolonial reflections without citing other authors makes the discussion take place without a genealogy. Conrad introduces concepts without explaining how they arise, what they mean, who proposed them or in which intellectual tradition they are imbricated. Most of the novel concepts

he introduces in his work² and creatively articulates what comes from the postcolonial or decolonial tradition. Some examples of concepts that Conrad does not cite are Eurocentrism (9), Black Atlantic (16), the critique of the concept of discovery (25), Westernization (27), the civilizational critique of modernity (33), methodological nationalism (46), the critique of universalism, cultural imperialism (71), provincializing Europe, provincializing modernity (130), positionality (197), decentering interpretations of the past (163), alternative epistemologies (164), writing from the South (164), colonization of the imagination (169), native epistemologies (176), universalizing Europe (182), cultural difference (190), and post-Eurocentric (197).

Although Conrad takes up all these concepts and debates, the author must commit more to these postcolonial and decolonial scholars. On the contrary, at all times, he distances himself from these theories and their authors. Even when he criticizes these theories, he does not even cite the theories he criticizes. His criticism is always abstract—which is why we need to find out exactly which ideas he criticizes. What is certain is that Conrad, on too many occasions, constructs a straw man with which he castigates decolonial authors by making a series of criticisms that we do not know precisely where they are directed or to whom. In any case, Conrad makes a series of criticisms of certain postcolonial and decolonial intellectuals and ideas. At the same time, he takes another series of ideas without citing and appropriating them in his definition of global history.

We will develop a series of debates grouped by theme. I will structure the discussion starting from the theses put forward by Conrad to point out that similar theses have been put forward earlier by postcolonial and decolonial theorists. I will then discuss Conrad's approach and argue for the future of global postcolonial historiography, grouping the discussion into four cross-cutting debates that will pick up different aspects of his work. The debates into which I group the discussion are (1) Why global history in a postcolonial world; (2) the discussion between history, social sciences and Eurocentrism; (3) the critique of the world system; (4) the critique of postcolonial and decolonial studies; and (5) the locus of enunciation and the positionality of the historian.

First, the definition that the author constructs of global history fundamentally reiterates the fusion of classical global history with postcolonial and decolonial contributions to the study of the past. In this way, the author moves away from the classical and Western definitions of global history and constructs a new definition. This can be perceived in each contribution the author proposes. It would be okay if the author cited those reflections that are well-known in the field of postcolonial and decolonial studies. Secondly, there is a significant gap and an outstanding debt. Sebastian Conrad does not speak at any time of decolonial theory nor of the decolonial authors he knows very well, which is also constantly implied. Moreover, almost all of Conrad's debate and discussion in his work takes place with decolonial theories, produced from the exhaustion of postcolonial studies in the 1990s, together at the moment when decolonial theory emerged from

² All the concepts cited within the text come from the Spanish version of Sebastian Conrad's *Global History: A New Vision for Today's World*, published by Editorial Crítica in 2017.

1992 and during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. However, Conrad never quotes the authors with whom he argues.

In the first section, we will analyze the reasons Conrad gave to explain the emergence of global history. In its most general definition, global history emerged as a discipline in the early 1990s due to multiple changes that culminated in the American world hegemony, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the September 11th attack. In this sense, the global is the expanded West. The connection of Atlantic history with eastern Europe, the emergence of former colonies in the Arab world, Africa, and the Asian world gives rise to a global perspective whose center is the Western world, and more specifically, the American academic world, and Westernized universities. Global history is a unipolar history, a history of Western centrality in the world after the fall of the Wall. Global history was the way of interpreting the past of a unipolar world. This global history is different from the one claimed by Conrad since this global history suffers from the same Eurocentric, Westernist and colonial positions as the rest of the historiographical trends of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Conrad, however, will enrich this hegemonic global history of the 1990s with contributions generated within postcolonial studies and decolonial criticism.

The fundamental transformations that gave rise to another conception of the past and another formulation of history as an academic discipline that we can call a postcolonial history are produced within intellectual currents led by anticolonial, postcolonial, migrant, racialized thinkers, and members of subaltern or border communities. For example, the phenomenon of migration forces societies receiving immigration to accept, through migrant intellectuals, new historical discourses with a reflection on the entire population's origins, belonging, ethnicity, and culture.

Thus, according to Conrad, in societies that have received much immigration, global history emerges as a more inclusive, less strictly national (7). However, at the same time, it must be said that societies that have undergone processes of migratory extractivism have produced new theoretical phenomena such as border thinking, diasporic thinking, or the literature of exile.

The sixties and seventies gave rise to a new global anti-imperialist consciousness. The decolonizations produced by the end of World War II, the Bandung conference in 1955, the Cuban revolution, the Tricontinental Conference of 1967, the anti-imperialist consciousness born in Western Europe with the development of the New Left, the movement of May '68, the opposition to the Algerian and Vietnam wars, and the international support to the Palestinian and Sandinista cause activated a new social conscience that at the academic level led to a postmodern critique of Eurocentrism, but at another level activated the theory of dependency and the critique of imperialism. All this has repercussions in forming an anti-imperialist historiographic consciousness that tries to gather different voices and challenge Western supremacism in formulating historical discourses.

The reflection on the disappearance of a unipolar geopolitical model produced after the 2008 crisis and the formulation of several growth models forces us to think of history with several centers, with many polycentric systems crossed by semiperipheral and border conditions. The debate on the misnamed V Centenary in Latin America, the emergence of the decade won. The progressive governments, the new research and university teaching centers such as CLACSO, the

Bolivarian University of Venezuela, and the Simon Bolivar Andean University sustained processes of reflection, research, and production of knowledge in dispute with the hegemonic and Eurocentric discourses from Latin America.

Regarding the discussion on the relationship between history, social sciences, and Eurocentrism, Sebastian Conrad points out two transcendental issues, which he calls birth defects (9). These two birth defects would be the linkage and dependence of the social sciences to the idea of the nation-state and the Eurocentric condition of these disciplines. Although Conrad does not mention any authorship in his work, nor does he point out any debates or theoretical traditions that have previously pointed out this issue, both “defects” have been much discussed in recent decades. To cite two milestones, the link between the social sciences and the nation-state was highlighted in the report “Opening up the Social Sciences, prepared by the Gulbenkian Commission for the Restructuring of the Social Sciences,” chaired by Immanuel Wallerstein. This commission was composed of Calestomus Juma from Kenya, Evelyn Fox Keller from the United States, Jürgen Kocka from Germany, Dominique Lecourt from France, the Congolese Valentin Y. Mudimbe from the Congo; Kinhomus Juma, Kinhayé Koku, and Kinhide Mushakoji from Japan; Ilya Prigogine from Russia, Peter J. Taylor from the UK, Michel-Rolph Trouillot from Haiti, and Richard Lee from Canada. In addition, the Puerto Rican scholar Ramón Grosfoguel, who was a Postdoctoral Fellow of Immanuel Wallerstein between 1993 and 1998, worked on the report. In this report, one of the essential discussions was to point out how the social sciences were produced from institutions of knowledge of a state-national character that gave disciplines such as history, geography, literature, art history, archaeology, or philosophy a strictly national character, especially since the middle of the nineteenth century. Later, the concept of methodological nationalism in the social sciences was coined by Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller (2002), who took the work of Immanuel Wallerstein to develop it.

The second birth defect of the social sciences pointed out by Conrad is much better known, and it is hardly worth mentioning the discussions that have taken place were it not for the fact that Conrad does not refer to this “defect.” It is the Eurocentric character of the social sciences. In 1978, Edward Said published his work *Orientalism*, which was a radical critique of the concept of Eurocentrism. A decade later, in 1988, Samir Amin published *L'eurocentrisme, critique d'une idéologie*, his first French version. This work was a response to Said's work that sought not to limit the critique of Eurocentrism to cultural, symbolic, and literary aspects but to return to a materialist and ideological critique of the political economy of the empire. In 1995, Dussel dealt with this discussion for the first time in Latin American critical thought with the publication of *Europa, modernidad y Eurocentrismo* the fruit of the debates produced in Mexico as a result of the so-called 5th Centenary of the misnamed discovery of America. In 2000 Edgardo Lander published the classic work *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales: perspectivas latinoamericanas*, where authors such as Aníbal Quijano, Dussel, Lander, Escobar, and Coronil discuss the concept of Eurocentrism concerning contemporary social sciences (Lander et al. 2000). Conrad does not point out any of these debates, does not collect the contributions that have been made to the Eurocentric character of the social sciences, and tries to point out as his such criticism.

The next issue I will present here is Conrad's critique of postcolonial studies and world-systems theory. It is a tremendously unbiased and unfair critique that does not take up the discussions produced in recent years, and that beats a straw man to later re-subtract the reflections produced in those fields and add them to his new concept of global history. The first thing to note in this area is that the only person who crossed the debates of postcolonial studies with world-systems theory was Ramon Grosfoguel. The classic text that brings both theoretical fields into discussion is his article *La descolonización de la economía política y los estudios postcoloniales: transmodernidad, pensamiento fronterizo y colonialidad global*, published in 2006, which brings together the debates produced within the Modernity/Coloniality Network during the second half of the 1990s. Ramón Grosfoguel was, between 1993 and 1998, a postdoctoral fellow at the Braudel Center, directed by Immanuel Wallerstein and associated with the Department of Sociology at Binghamton, State University of New York.

In October 1998, there was a seminar at Duke University between the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group and the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group. This conference was attended by Dipesh Chakrabarty as a representative of the Subaltern Studies Group and Ileana Rodriguez and John Beverly as members of the Latin American Group. Walter Mignolo (who was the organizer), Enrique Dussel, Nelson Maldonado Torres, and Ramón Grosfoguel also attended. That meeting marked a break between Southeast Asian subaltern studies and the incipient group of Latin American postcolonial thinkers who would form the Modernity/Coloniality Network in the coming years.

In December 1998, Ramón Grosfoguel and Agustín Lao organized the international conference *Transmodernity, Historical Capitalism, and Coloniality in Binghamton: A Post-Disciplinary Dialogue*. In addition to Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, both the Argentine philosopher and professor at UNAM, Enrique Dussel, and the (also Argentinian) semiologist and professor at Duke University, Walter Mignolo, were invited to this meeting. Both meetings marked the condensation of Latin American decolonial theory, which was born as a crossroads between postcolonial studies, subaltern studies, and world-systems theory. It allowed Ramón Grosfoguel to have the ability to put all these currents into discussion and obtain a synthesis that was expressed in his text *Decolonizing Political Economy* and which he has presented in his courses and seminars at different universities around the world, such as those organized by Andrea Meza Torres with the support of Professor Regina Roemhild and the *Labor Kritische Europäisierungsforschung* between 2009 and 2011 at the Humboldt University of Berlin, which Sebastian Conrad attended.

Conrad's critique of world-systems theory is based on three aspects. Economics, the primacy of the system concept, and the Eurocentric bias in Wallerstein's formulation of world-systems theory. These three issues are extensively discussed by Grosfoguel in his different works, especially in "Decolonizing Political Economy" (2006) and in "Systemic Chaos, Civilizational Crisis and Decolonial Projects: Thinking Beyond the Civilizational Process of Modernity/Coloniality" (2016). In the first work, he tries to overcome the economicist dimension of world-systems theory and the culturalist dimension of postcolonial studies. In the second, he

seeks to overcome the essentialism of the systemic model formulated by the first generation of world-systems theorists. To this end, he proposes the notion of systemic chaos to think in a more contradictory, tense, and dialectical way of the world-systems approach.

Conrad's critique of postcolonial studies, on the other hand, is equally succinct. He only cites the work of Edward Said, which had been published in 1978, before postcolonial studies can be considered to exist as a theoretical field. It needs to be more representative. Besides this work, he cites a note with works by Leela Gandhi, Robert Young, and Arif Dirlik.

Sebastian Conrad begins his section of analysis on postcolonial studies with phrases such as "global historians can also benefit from their contributions" and "the postcolonial critique of the modernization paradigm has provided us with a wealth of fruitful ideas for understanding the global past" (53). Despite this, we do not find where he recognizes which concrete ideas have served him in his analysis since he points out generalities and abstract ideas that he does not locate in any specific work or author. According to Conrad, the contribution of postcolonial studies is threefold. First, Conrad rescues from postcolonial studies its more complex interpretation of cross-cultural exchanges, agencies, modes of local appropriation, strategic modifications, and mechanisms of hybridization that allow us to complexify the usually mechanistic views of macro-history that struggles between diffusion and adaptation. The second contribution, postcolonial studies think of countries or continents in a relational way, overcoming essentialist approaches or those that assume their natural existence. According to Conrad, postcolonial studies "are interested in how entities such as 'India' or 'Europe' were constructed in the context of global circulation" (54). The third contribution of postcolonial studies rescued by Conrad is "to situate processes of global integration within unequal (colonial) power structures." Conrad adds, "The increasingly interconnected character of the modern world cannot be separated from the colonial conditions under which those connections were formed and by emphasizing this, the assumption that globalization is natural is left behind" (54). These three ideas that Conrad rescues from postcolonial studies are not located in any author nor a specific work, so there is no recognition or commitment to these theories, even when rescuing ideas that can be productive.

Conrad then points to three criticisms of postcolonial studies. First, Conrad points out that the global approach should also be understood as a response to the impasse in which postcolonial studies have been trapped, which since the 1990s have been the object of criticism fundamentally for two reasons, because of the concept of culture formulated in postcolonial studies and because of the concept of colonialism. Concerning the concept of culture, it is true, as Conrad states, that postcolonial studies had their heyday in the 1980s at a time when studies on cultural criticism, literary criticism, and studies on discourse and representation also proliferated. He makes a culturalist critique of postcolonial studies which, as I noted earlier, had already been formulated by Samir Amin or Grosfoguel in his work "Decolonizing Political Economy." Regarding colonialism, it is quite true that the concept of colonialism handled by postcolonial authors does not correspond to the terminology used by a historian who requires a definition, concreteness, and justification concerning a historical period and a specific geographical and cultural context. Third, Conrad warns that

privileging the opposition between colonizers and colonized as the fundamental explanatory framework imposes a binary logic that, although it sheds light on many aspects, is ultimately restrictive. It does not allow us to explain a complex world in the process of globalization. (55)

Again, it is easier to discuss his criticisms when they are subject to a specific work or author. There are no authors or works that affirm that there is only a binary logic of colonizers and colonized, since all the works produced in colonial theory start from the existence of multiple racial positionalities and ethnic and national diversities, in addition to being crossed by the paradigm of intersectionality, Feminism, and political economy. Although it is a generalist question with which everyone can agree, it would not be less problematic to blur the consequences of imperialism and colonialism where they have been noticed by postcolonial theory in, for example, culture, knowledge, and within states or in social or juridical structures beyond independence.

Later in Conrad's definition of global history, point six is a typically postcolonial and decolonial aspect. Conrad notes that "many global histories explicitly reflect on Eurocentrism. One of the characteristic features that separate this approach from most earlier variants of global historiography" (65). Nevertheless, we don't know what concrete contributions Conrad assumed from postcolonial and global south theorists in his new definitions of global history. In his "Beyond Connectivity: Competing Narratives" section, Conrad returns to a fully decolonial discussion, which is the critique of Western modernity. Moreover, Conrad considers "the spread of Western modernity as a form of cultural imperialism capable of eradicating other worldviews" (71). Elsewhere Conrad points out that "critiques of Western modernity often go hand in hand with attempts to rehabilitate alternative experiences and native points of view" and then states that "in criticizing Western essentialisms, they have not always been able to avoid falling into a cultural essentialism of their own." This critique, which is the classic confrontation of Western authors against critiques of Western modernity, is often determined to brand the critics as fostering new essentialisms—ethnic, national, cultural, feminist, activist, biological, and civilizational. Since the Western position is a covert essentialism, any critique of Eurocentrism, Western modernity, or Europe is a critique of a new essentialism. This discussion was overcome decades ago; in 1988, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak published "Can the Subaltern Speak?" ([2004] 2023) in which she proposed her theoretical strategy of strategic essentialism. According to Spivak, any confrontation between Eurocentrism and Westernism suffered from a lack of referents since Western thought had done away with all essentialisms to appropriate them and build a great horizon of cultural reference that no longer had outskirts. However in her perspective, any confrontation and challenge to Western knowledge required a temporary essentialist strategy or strategic essentialism, a point of reference on which to rely in order to formulate critiques of Eurocentrism.

Conrad's eighth chapter, "Positionality and Centered Approaches," is one of the most important chapters in the book and most connected to decolonial theory; although, again, he does not point to authors or debates from which he takes this discussion. What Conrad calls positionality has for decades been called in decolonial and postcolonial theory the *locus* of enunciation, the

place from which the world is thought and interpreted. Conrad begins the chapter by asking “[w]hat is the location of the world? Where do historians situate themselves when they write their history?” (147), to which he answers a few lines later that “global histories are not written in a vacuum. Historians may address the whole world's history, but they do so from a specific location, and they write in a particular temporal moment, inscribed in their lifeworlds” (147). The place from which the world is thought is a discussion that originates in the post-structuralist critique of the meta-narratives and abstract locus of the social sciences. The critique of this abstract position of science has been developed from the epistemological debates that defend the position that every way of thinking about the world is related to the territorial, historical, social, and cultural experience of the subjects producing knowledge. Already in 1988, Donna Haraway published her *Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, which served as the basis for a new conception of feminist knowledge, of the discourses of the agenda and the defense of experience in the production of knowledge. In 1994 Homi K. Bhabha published his classic *The Location of Culture*, where he defined culture as a producer of different experiences of knowledge. In 2001 Mingnolo published his work *Capitalismo y geopolítica del conocimiento*, following it in 2003 with *Historias locales/diseños globales: colonialidad, conocimientos subalternos y pensamiento fronterizo*. In 2007 Ramón Grosfoguel published *Descolonizando los universalismos occidentales: el pluri-versalismo transmoderno decolonial desde Aimé Césaire hasta los zapatistas*, where he spoke of a *corpo-política del conocimiento*, taking the concept of geopolitics of knowledge and connecting it with the theories of Chicano feminism that claimed the body as a territory of dispute in writing, literature, and the production of knowledge. In 2014 Juan José Bautista published his work *¿Qué significa pensar desde América Latina?* trying, in a broader way, to create his categorical frameworks for a Latin American philosophical experience. I cite this body of work because although it may seem a new debate in the historiographical field, in the critical, feminist, and decolonial social sciences, it has been a very important discussion in the last three decades.

To address the debate on positionality or locus of enunciation, Conrad establishes the problem of centrism; that is to say, he groups the enunciations of history into several typologies. The first of these would be European or Western centrism, that is to say, Eurocentrism. On the other hand, he categorizes what he understands as other problematic centrism that summons us, in his own words, to go beyond a culturalist conception of positionality. We will not dwell on Conrad's critique of Eurocentric positionality since he reproduces ideas that other authors have already pointed out. For example, he points out that “[p]recisely the geopolitical power acted as a support for the European account of the rise of Europe itself, and made Eurocentric narratives appear to be objective relations” (151). This reflection could be linked to any debate on the colonality of knowledge, Eurocentrism, or geopolitics of knowledge, but as throughout the foregoing section he does not cite any author or any work. He criticizes Enrique Dussel's philosophy of history on the role of China during the fourteenth century in the formation of the world-system on the arrival of Zhen He to the American continent, which he calls mythical and reproductive of traditionally Eurocentric dynamics. He quotes Gunder Frank in this same sense, whom he accuses of trying to

replace Eurocentrism with Sinocentrism, producing “a simple revision without any depth to the historical narratives and underlying concepts” (152). To conclude, Conrad acknowledges that “freeing global history from a Eurocentric grand narrative remains a challenge” (152), a reflection that is also widespread in decolonial theory.

Concerning the proposals of new centers and new loci of enunciation, Conrad has a much more belligerent position, making harsh criticisms of alleged proposals, which, again, we cannot know because he hits on a straw dummy without citing specific works or authors that we can rescue for a solid and honest discussion. In the following pages, Conrad fights a hard battle against the following concepts that I recount literally: local pasts, historical difference, particular trajectories, indigenous thinking, exaggerating differences, making alternative perspectives exotic, geographical justice, symbolic re-configuration, cultural diversity as a marketable commodity, alternative modernities, Afrocentrism, an ontological difference of African societies, cultural fundamentalisms, indigenist logic, native forms of rationality, indigenous entrepreneurs, products of indigenous traditions, particularist obsession, global intellectual market, native epistemology, cultural essentialism, identity politics, and the indigenes of the new centrism.

After several pages of a veritable crusade of the theoretical battle against all these concepts, with language bordering on an anti-woke crusade, Conrad ends by affirming the opposite:

This should not prevent us from trying to admit positionality by critically reflecting on the structures of contemporary knowledge production, a task that remains very urgent. It also remains crucial to have different perspectives on the world and to decenter interpretations of the past. (163)

Despite this brief digression, he returns to his battle, stating, “Conversations between Western, African, Russian and Chinese perspectives are necessary, but global history should not be organized like the Olympic Games.” To end his chapter, in line with the whole book, he makes a claim already well-known in decolonial theory from Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Conrad states that “writing about the global south, therefore, does not imply above all a geographical or ethnic designation, but an epistemological position” (164) but instead of quoting Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meneses, he quotes John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff and Marcelo C. Rosa—the classic works on epistemologies born from the experiences of the global South have been published by Boaventura de Sousa Santos in *Una epistemología del sur. Reinención del conocimiento y la emancipación social* (2006) and in *Epistemologías del Sur (Perspectivas)* (2009) with the Mozambican anthropologist Maria Paula Meneses.

Can the New Global History be a Postcolonial Historiography at the End of Eurocentrism?

As we have seen in reviewing these three important works in recent historiography on colonial history, the history of empires, and global history, there is not yet a sufficient tendency to dialogue with critical postcolonial and decolonial studies. On the contrary, we can see a reinforcement of Eurocentric theses with different theoretical strategies that are inserted in the same cultural battle,

from tendencies that recover and enhance the civilizing role of European colonialism to tendencies that compete between different European colonialisms, such as the case of Roca Barea and his search for reparations with the Spanish Empire, supposedly reviled by other colonial powers. The case of Sebastian Conrad (2016) and his work *What is the Global History?* involves a delegitimization of postcolonial and decolonial theories, discrediting the theoretical debates of the postcolonial field while incorporating concepts, reflections and theoretical strategies born of the theoretical debates of the postcolonial and decolonial field. Sebastian Conrad has in-depth knowledge of the theoretical fields of postcolonial and decolonial studies, having edited an anthology in 2013 and having attended the Berlin Decolonial Group's seminars between 2009 and 2011. As such, his work involves an uneven discussion between the old global history of the 1990s and postcolonial and decolonial theories. His work has no real engagement with critical thinking born of the global South and racialized migrant or global South intellectuals. The vindication of the civilizing work of colonialism, with the defense of the Spanish Empire as the reviled victim of Western imperialism and the delegitimization of postcolonial and decolonial theoretical debates, and the practice of epistemic extractivism are the new forms assumed by the defense of militant Eurocentrism in its conservative and provincial version or its more progressive and cosmopolitan version.

What is certain is that Sebastian Conrad's work, despite the severe practice of epistemological and theoretical extractivism, is a rapprochement between the theoretical field of the old global history and the postcolonial and decolonial fields. Nevertheless, in order to build a new theoretical space that allows us to think of ways of imagining the past that do not reproduce the militant Eurocentrism of the historiographical currents of the twentieth century, it will be necessary to reconcile global perspectives with postcolonial theory and produce an honest debate, gathering both traditions and intellectually engaging with the set of critical theories that have been born from the struggles against imperialism, capitalism, racism, and patriarchy. As the Basque historian Itzea Goikolea-Amiano says, we must historicize if we want to decolonize (2020). It is necessary to go beyond global history towards post colonial or post-global historiography.

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