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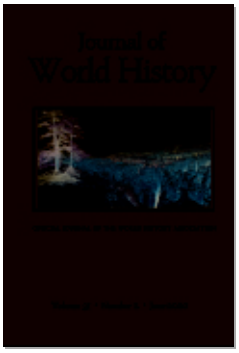

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Decolonizing Global History? A Latin American Perspective*

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The field of global history has been thriving for over two decades; however, unlike Europe, the United States, and Asia, which have witnessed a true "boom" in this area, there has been no such significant development in Latin America. In fact, there is even an attitude of rejection toward what many academics in the region consider an "Anglo-Saxon trend." This article argues that this lack of attachment to global history lies in conceptual flaws, as well as in the continuous production of academic work that lacks nuance and is predominantly based on secondary literature written in English. To counteract these tendencies and better adapt the field to the academic and historical realities of Latin America, this article engages in a dialogue with representatives of decolonial studies. This article suggests that an approach to this movement—whose followers condemn the implicit Eurocentrism of Western historiography—will contribute to the necessary decolonization of global history.

KEYWORDS: global history, Latin America, decoloniality, transnational history, Eurocentrism, historiography.

Currently, global history is one of the most visible and influential fields of historiography. Historical studies that transcend the analytical framework of the nation-state and criticize the Eurocentrism of a large portion of Western historiography are being produced, not only in European and North American academia but also increasingly in Asia. What began in the 1990s—as a result of the enthusiasm following the end of the bipolar world, accelerated globalization, and

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the increasing permeability of national borders—has quickly become one of the dominant historiographical trends.

Within humanities departments at universities in the United States and Europe, this new paradigm has manifested through the diminished importance of area studies, which were established during the Cold War to increase knowledge of "cultural spaces" outside of the West. Instead of the homogenizing perspectives sometimes found in area studies, preference has increasingly been given to the perspectives present in global history, where practitioners question the existence of self-contained cultural areas, in order to focus on connections, interactions, or transfer processes between different regions of the world. Thus, the study of migration, exchange of objects, ideas, and concepts, world trade, the relationship between global and local phenomena, etc., reveals that political entities such as nation-states or cultural areas have themselves been the result of global entanglements. Therefore, many global historians view their mission as that of reconstructing long-lasting historical connections that have been cut off by modern historiography, which emerged together with the nation-state at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[1]

Although global history has been under discussion for at least two decades already, there is still no consensus on its definition; it remains an umbrella term for a wide variety of approaches. As Hugo Fazio states in a panoramic essay on global history, this emerging field may include comparative perspectives, approaches to exchanges, transfers, and connections, as well as "globalizing" narratives.[2] Although most global historians today reject "classical" comparative history because of the methodological pitfalls associated with the creation of impenetrable, static, and, therefore, ahistorical units of analysis, contextual comparison remains a part of global history, albeit implicitly.[3] Likewise, global historians continue to emphasize that their field is not a new version of nineteenth century universal history, in which the world's destiny is explained through teleological and diffusionist concepts that emphasize the "civilizing" role of the West. However, despite the

[1] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–762.

[2] Hugo Fazio Vengoa, "La historia global y su conveniencia para el estudio del pasado y del presente," *Historia Crítica*, special edition (November 2009): 300–319.

[3] Micol Seigel, "Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn," *Radical History Review* 91 (2005): 62–90; Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, "Comparative history – A Contested Method," *Historisk Tidskrift* 127, no. 4 (2007): 697–716; Sebastian Conrad, *Historia global. Una nueva visión para el mundo actual* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2017), 40–45.

criticism of such Eurocentric and globalizing narratives, they continue to persist today with aspirations of writing history on a planetary scale, as shown by the influential works of Jürgen Osterhammel, Sven Beckert, and Christopher Bayly.[4] Although these authors strive to include non-Western regions as well as Latin America in their stories, they continue to favor secondary literature written in English, barely reflecting on their methods and categories, and, in this manner, largely replicating the Eurocentrism of universal history.

Although the three authors in question have contributed significantly to the study of certain world regions (East Asia, India, North America) in earlier works, their "global histories" suffer from a lack of historiographical depth on areas beyond their expertise. For instance, Osterhammel's celebrated panorama of the nineteenth century dedicates very little space to Latin America. Based on outdated literature, this author also maintains that "Latin America" was a French concept, invented in 1861 to justify the imperial ambitions of Napoleon III.[5] However, as Aims McGuiness, Michel Gobat, and James Sanders have shown in detail, the concept of Latin America was already forged in the 1850s by Latin American intellectuals against the growing U.S. imperialism in the region.[6] From the outset, "Latin America" was meant to describe a liberal, republican, and progressive ideal, in opposition to Europe's monarchic despotism and the United States' aggressive expansionism.[7] Nevertheless, as Walter Mignolo and Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo have rightly remarked, the term carries the heavy burden of excluding Afro-American and indigenous populations, and should be used with caution today.[8] Despite these objections, we will apply "Latin America" throughout this article, not as a

[4] Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage, 2014); Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004); Christopher Bayly, *Remaking the Modern World, 1900–2015* (Malden: Blackwell, 2018).

[5] Osterhammel, *Transformation of the World*, 81–82.

[6] Aims McGuiness, "Searching for 'Latin America': Race and Sovereignty in the Americas in the 1850s," in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. Nancy Appelbaum et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 87–107; Michel Gobat, "The Invention of Latin America: A Transnational History of Anti-Imperialism, Democracy, and Race," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 (2013): 1345–1375; James Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in Nineteenth-Century Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

[7] Sanders, *Vanguard of the Atlantic World*, 81–135.

[8] Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005); Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

homogenizing and culturalist category, but rather to indicate the region's many similarities in terms of political, economic, and social structures.[9]

Despite the high visibility of the aforementioned books by Osterhammel, Beckert, and Bayly, it must be said that such works are not entirely representative for the field of global history. In fact, most global historians neither develop analysis on a universal scale, nor base their work exclusively on secondary sources. Rather, they embark on a collective project with the objective of redefining spatial and temporal scales, and which calls into question the preeminence of nation-states and shows the agency of social groups and actors made invisible by national or imperial historiographies. In spite of the many conceptual and methodological problems in global history, there can be no doubt that its different currents have contributed enormously to the rejuvenation of the historical discipline.[10]

Thus, if the achievements of global history are so remarkable, then why has it been so poorly received in Latin America? This is one question that several Latin American historians have pondered in recent years, especially since there have been few studies that explicitly identify with this current, and there is even an apparent attitude of rejection toward global history in some academic circles. Thus, Hilda Sábato mentions that for many historians in the region, it is an "Anglo-Saxon trend" that does not adapt well to an academic context characterized by decidedly national research agendas, with few opportunities to finance work in international archives.[11] Different forms of provincialism, nationalism, and financial restrictions in Latin American academia, which contribute to the limited impact of global history, have been criticized by a number of authors and will be dealt within the following section.[12]

However, in our view, the most serious obstacle that global history faces today in Latin America is not academic nationalism or a lack of

[9] Even such an outspoken critic of the concept as Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo admits that it can be a useful historiographical category, especially regarding its transnational dimension: "Its more-than-national nature can thus bring historical connections and interactions that are unreachable through mere national histories. Hence Latin America becomes the inviting entrance to specific ways of telling stories that echo in many ways and whose final conclusions may not return to the idea of Latin America—but who cares."

[10] Fazio Vengoa, "La historia global," 315.

[11] Hilda Sábato, "Historia latinoamericana, historia de Ameórica Latina, Latinoameórica en la historia," *Prismas*, no. 19 (2015): 135–145.

[12] Matthew Brown, "The Global History of Latin America," *Journal of Global History* 10, no. 3 (2015): 365–386; Jeremy Adelman, "What is Global History Now?" *AEON*, March 2, 2017, https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment.

adequate infrastructure, but instead methodological and conceptual flaws. Perla Patricia Valero Pacheco rightly notes that the categories used by many global historians are not adequate to reconstruct the variety of past realities of Latin America in the global context.[13] In this sense, Valero Pacheco proposes rethinking the concepts and categories implicitly present in many global history studies in order to move toward a more self-reflexive history in terms of implicit epistemic Eurocentrism. Referencing Latin American authors close to critical theory, she denounces the geopolitics of knowledge behind a large part of historiographic production, and whose logic, global history—often produced with universalist pretensions in the "centers" of the Global North—does not escape:

> [I]s it possible to write truly non-Eurocentric history from the academia of the hegemonic centers as sites of enunciation, from where political, economic, and cultural power is exercised on a world scale? It could be possible of course, but not before reviewing what Eurocentrism really is and means, a review that would involve explaining and conceptualizing the phenomenon from a global history perspective.[14]

Although Valero Pacheco does not answer how a non-Eurocentric global history could be written from a Latin American perspective, we considered it worthwhile to reflect on this point and seek dialogue with recent Latin American critical thought, especially with representatives of so-called "decolonial studies." So far, global historians have ignored this movement's output because many of its texts that touch on historical themes are noted for their political militancy, anachronisms, lack of empirical study, and a certain neo-*indigenista* nativism that tends to idealize and essentialize the "other" and "ancestral" knowledge.[15] Despite these criticisms, figures close to decolonial thinking have proposed categories that are not only useful for global history but also complementary. Apart from establishing a dialogue between these two movements, we would like to explore how a tradition of writing global history *avant la lettre* in Latin America exists and that the category of the nation is still important, although at first glance it may appear to be a contradiction.

[13] Perla Patricia Valero Pacheco, "Hacia una nueva historia global no eurocéntrica: un balance crítico," *Trashumante. Revista Americana de Historia Social*, no. 9 (2017): 144–165.
[14] Valero Pacheco, "Hacia una nueva historia," 161 (our translation).
[15] Santiago Castro-Gómez, "¿Qué hacer con los universalismos occidentales? Observaciones en torno al 'giro decolonial'," *Analecta Política* 7, no. 13 (2017): 249–272.

Toward a Non-Eurocentric Global History

As we have specified, historical science has recently incorporated a more detailed look into the spatio-temporal complexity of human societies and has adopted a viewpoint that considers the rise of global perspectives. This new "magnifying glass" on the world represents a challenge that leads to a reflection that goes beyond the borders of national governments and, in part, questions the categorical apparatus that has been used by modern historiography. However, the concurrent proliferation of different historiographic labels also invites us to formulate a more precise definition of "global history"—understood as a specific approach that goes beyond comparisons, international relations, or similar historical processes.

According to Sebastian Conrad, the *global turn* is an attempt to confront two central challenges in the historiographical task: on the one hand, to overcome the perspective of the nation-state as the central unit of study and, on the other, to transcend Eurocentrism as a model of universal development.[16] These two "birth defects" of nineteenth-century historiography correspond to the idea that the nation-state is a fundamental unit of study, as well as to the understanding that there is a primary center of the world: the North Atlantic space. From this perspective, universal analytical concepts, such as "development," "progress," "modernization," or "civilization," and temporariness from the European idea of time (medieval, modern history, etc.) were established, and assumed valid for the entire world. Historical study thus went on to homogenize the narrative structure of histories and build uniform methodological standards. This is precisely one of the problems of modern epistemology; the construction of Eurocentric meta-narratives that played (and continue to play) a decisive role in the construction of a historical narrative centered on world unity, the limits of the territory of the nation-state, and the evolutionary notion of time and progress.[17]

Therefore, one of the most important pillars of global history is its attempt to propose a critical view of power structures and knowledge construction; it is a project that seeks to confront the "birthmarks" of modern historical science. Specifically, global history aspires to be particularly sensitive to the asymmetries of power and epistemological

[16] Conrad, *Historia global*, 9–11.

[17] Gabriela de Lima Grecco and Diego Sebastián Crescentino, "Relaciones Internacionales e historia global: un diálogo posible y necesario," *Relaciones Internacionales*, no. 37 (2018): 209–218.

hierarchies. However, global history's criticism of Eurocentrism, curiously, is the main contradiction of this historiographical paradigm. According to Jeremy Adelman, it is difficult not to think that the *global turn* is another of the many inventions of Anglophone historiography to integrate the "other" into a narrative that remains Eurocentric.[18] Global history seeks to include *other* histories in a globalizing story but their voices are "heard" through a "dubbed" voice: English. Indeed, in order for the global perspective not to build its own segregation, academic openness should be sought in order to confront Anglocentrism. For this reason, Matthew Brown and Sebastian Conrad affirm that if we want global history to be truly "global," English cannot be the only language of discussion and production because the hegemony of English means other historiography traditions and languages are marginalized, and thus the expression or defense of these ideas for the benefit of native English speakers is prevented.[19] A system of discursive consent is then established, in which the global is provincialized—or rather *Anglicized*. In this sense, Brown notes:

> The past fifty years have seen an increased attention to language skills among US and European graduate students, and in-country immersion through long periods of archival research. Historians of Latin America from elsewhere have developed language and cultural skills in Spanish and Portuguese as part of their tools as professional historians, and those from Latin America have been slower to access sources in other languages. Together these trends, perhaps unconsciously, contributed to making the field more parochial than it needed to be as academia itself was globalizing.[20]

In this manner, instead of highlighting the interactions between different systems of thought, the *global turn* ends up reaffirming the North as the center and producer of historiographical narratives. Moreover, actors located in Latin America usually appear as a secondary element in global analyses because this region does not adapt easily to the *West/rest* dichotomy that is so crucial for the narratives produced under the name of global history.[21] Certainly, this is one of

[18] Adelman, "What is Global History Now?"
[19] Brown, "The Global History," 365–386; Conrad, *Historia global*, 192–199.
[20] Brown, "The Global History," 374–375.
[21] Frederik Schulze and Georg Fischer, "Brazilian History as Global History," *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, May 2, 2018, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/blar.12781.

the main reasons for the poor acceptance of global history in Latin America: the *global turn* is seen as a perspective that seeks to face Eurocentrism, but which, at the same time, reinforces it through a fundamental element (language), and, consequently, reaffirms the view from the Global North.

In this sense, the persistence of a globalized "other" as a "shadow" of the North implies a key problem in methodological terms. Including the analysis from the South and decolonizing the epistemological apparatus should be one of the objectives of the research agenda if we want to take a step forward in the development of the discipline of history. Thus, Latin America emerges as an important actor for the construction of pluralized subjects and knowledge. By historicizing the insertion of other spaces beyond the European one, more inclusive, complex, and interconnected perspectives are created. However, as Alessandro Stanziani highlights, specialization in non-European regions does not necessarily shield against Eurocentrism, as exemplified by the history of Latin American studies in the United States—originally developed to generate *soft power* at the service of a hegemonic and expansive foreign policy.[22] Thus, referring to the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, we must ask ourselves: can the subaltern have a voice in global history? This is where hierarchies must be questioned from different sites of enunciation and where epistemological perspectives of the South must enter to create new analytical categories and offer new interpretations in order to overcome epistemic Eurocentrism.[23]

According to Sebastian Conrad, global history recognizes that thinking about the global past is a positional action and that the idea of the illusory neutrality of an omniscient narrator must be rejected.[24] That is to say, although historians aspire to narrate the history of global processes or the planet as a whole, they do so from a particular place and from their subjectivity. However, the figure of a "cosmopolitan" researcher, having a global perspective and able to take into account every possible viewpoint in the process of knowledge production, is a utopia. While the lenses might be expanded to encompass a viewpoint beyond a purely European one, creating a somewhat kaleidoscopic view

[22] Alessandro Stanziani, *Eurocentrism and the Politics of Global History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Mark Berger, *Under Northern Eyes: Latin American Studies and US Hegemony in the Americas 1898–1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

[23] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

[24] Conrad, *Historia global*, 147–165.

of the world, interpretations are still made from within Eurocentric paradigms. In this sense, historiographical practices are not disconnected from the "being" (the historian) and the "power" (from where it is written and for whom it is written). Undoubtedly, this new approach is seen, then, as a challenge for the historical discipline and for those who write it, since opening the historian's subjective view is not "a free and voluntary option."[25] In this way, despite the decentering of global history that contributes to producing "healthy effects" of estrangement from a traditionally Eurocentric history, it is necessary to establish more suitable explanatory frameworks.[26]

Incorporating other Latin American interpretations and epistemologies could widen the angle and focus of the global perspective. Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre (author of *Casa-Grande & Senzala*, 1933), whose writings introduced a new understanding of ethnic-cultural hybridization and, therefore, reveal important parallels with the post/decolonial and global history debates, can be considered one of the pioneers of cultural studies, as his studies are considered an interpretive framework of what has been called *microhistory of globalization* or also *microglobal history*.[27] According to Peter Burke and Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, Freyre was one of the first to examine topics such as the history of language, as well as food, body, childhood, and housing, as part of an integrated description of a past society.[28] The Brazilian colonial space could therefore be the site of global encounters and of the plural configuration of the Brazilian "self" with the intersection of different cultures and ethnicities (European, indigenous, and African). It would be a "contact zone," in the words of Mary Louise Pratt, that is, a place in which geographically and historically separated people come into contact and establish lasting relationships, which usually imply conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and insurmountable conflict.[29] Thus, as Frederik Schulze and Georg Fischer point out, Brazilian social thinking is in itself a product of global

[25] Valero Pacheco, "Hacia una nueva historia," 160 (our translation).

[26] Romain Bertrand, "Historia global, historias conectadas: ¿un giro historiográfico?," *Prohistoria* no. 24 (2015): 3–20.

[27] Debora Gerstenberger, "Gilberto Freyre: um teórico da globalização?," *História, Ciência, Saúde - Manguinhos* 21, no. 1 (2013): 111–120; Jesús Bohórquez, "Microglobal history: agencia, sociedad y pobreza de la historia cultural postestructural," *Historia Crítica*, no. 69 (2018): 79–98.

[28] Peter Burke and Maria Lúcia Pallares-Burke, *Repensando os trópicos. Um relato intelectual de Gilberto Freyre* (São Paulo: UNESP), 312–319.

[29] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 7–8.

interactions and knowledge exchanges, which is why it has preceded the global history of today in many aspects.[30]

In this sense, global approaches to the past already existed in Latin America. In several important ways, the *global turn* would improve with the *Latinization* of its methodology by using categories such as hybridization, mimesis, or *mestizaje*, which take on their full meaning in the Latin American context and are not "spatial" categories strictly speaking but a different way of thinking analytically about the idea of what is global.[31] For Conrad, "more often, we aspire to write a history of defined (and, therefore, not 'global') spaces, but with global connections and structural conditions in mind."[32] Specifically, the transcultural nature of Latin American societies, and the availability of primary sources of non-European origin, imply the opening of important epistemological routes for the discipline of global history. It could even signify a "methodological revolution" through the use of new sources, concepts, and theories from the South, since, geographically, Latin America represents a point of intersection between global processes and their local manifestations. The interaction between *macro* and *micro*, where micro represents the concentration of plurality—that is, macro *in* micro—would not only mean changing the "magnifying glass" that the study of global history represents, but also redirecting its gaze.

Hilda Sábato also emphasizes that "dialogue spaces and debates of greater scope" can be generated at a national level.[33] Examples of this include studies on nation-building in Latin America, which have contributed to understanding both the global (interconnections, contacts, etc.) and the local (nationalism, identity constructions, etc.) levels. An example of this type of study is *El nacionalismo cosmopolita* by

[30] Schulze and Fischer, "Brazilian History," 3.

[31] By referring to *Latinization* we do not mean to confirm the existence of a homogeneous body of "Latin American"-knowledge. Our aim is to highlight the great array of approaches and concepts created in the region during the last decades. One of those approaches, that could be fruitfully applied in historical studies, is the Participatory Action Research-program (PAR), developed by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda. It is a set of methods intended to overcome the distinction between researchers and researched, thus integrating nonacademic forms of knowledge into social research. The foundational opus of this tradition is actually a work of history with a global dimension: Fals Borda's *Historia doble de la costa* (1979). For PAR's history and its ongoing popularity in many Latin American countries, see Jafte Dilean Robles Lomeli and Joanne Rappaport, "Imagining Latin American Social Science from the Global South: Orlando Fals Borda and Participatory Action Research," *Latin American Research Review* 53, no. 3 (2018): 597–612.

[32] Conrad, *Historia global*, 16 (our translation).

[33] Hilda Sábato, "Historia latinoamericana," 141 (our translation).

Frédéric Martínez, which explores the relationship between Colombia and Europe by analyzing the flow of ideas and cultural exchanges between both continents.[34] These exchanges led the Colombian national identity to be largely constructed through a series of transnational contacts. Thus, the historiography of and about Latin America has built a tradition that seeks dialogue between local phenomena and broader histories, combining unity with diversity.[35] In this way, one of the objectives of global history, that is, correcting the endogenous forms of historical thinking that reduce historical change to internal causes, has found wide acceptance among Latin Americanists who study the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[36]

In sum, global history points to new ways of looking at the world by connecting national, local, and global perspectives. These new perspectives that lead to questioning the structure of the nation-state push us to rethink the nature and historicity of how nations are formed, as well as to search for new analytical approaches. In fact, the goal of the global approach is not to abandon national history, but to *transnationalize* it.[37] To overcome nation-centered analysis, we must think about collective identities beyond traditional interpretations and question the endogenesis of historical analysis. In this sense, national history has its place in global history, but it must be reflected upon in the terms of structure and contact. The study of the birth of nationalism, processes of Latin American independence, or the birth of liberal and conservative ideology on the continent, for example, must be understood from a global perspective in which not only are the specificities and differences emphasized, but also the similarities, contacts, and interrelations between them.

Another risk of the *global turn*—which goes against advances in gender and subaltern studies, for example—is the possibility of forgetting the "sedentary" people: those who were unable to embark on transnational trips or move because they were not part of the

[34] Frédéric Martínez, *El nacionalismo cosmopolita. La referencia europea en la construcción nacional en Colombia, 1845–1900* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 2001).

[35] For the recent "boom" of transnational history within the community of Latin Americanists, see Barbara Weinstein, "Pensando la historia más allá de la nación: la historiografía de América Latina y la perspectiva transnacional," *Aletheia* 3, no. 6 (2013): 1–14. It is also worth mentioning that the Mexican town of Tepoztlán is home to a highly visible Center for the Transnational History of the Americas. For further information, see https://www.tepoztlaninstitute.org/home.html.

[36] Conrad, *Historia global*, 10.

[37] Ibid., 195.

economically privileged class. The global perspective could signify a new approach to the history of the elites, traditionally centered on the actions and thoughts of white male subjects. To overcome this important paradox, global historians should review their methodology, in order to question "the teleology of globalization rhetoric."[38] They must pose questions related to *who those are that move, who do* ***not*** *cross borders*, and *why and in what dynamics?* These questions imply criticism of the idea of a peaceful "global village," that is, the historicization of today's globalized world through teleology "written backward," as Frederick Cooper reminds us.[39] The problem is that a large portion of the planet, in the past and today, is not really part of the "global world," and indeed, the *global turn* favors the view of the "winners of globalization." Global history, therefore, should not only analyze the successful projects of global agents, but also question the perspective of those excluded, the "losers," and those who, against their will, were displaced or stagnant.

In short, global history is not a "planetary" history, "a history of everything." In fact, what is global in global history is not the object of study, but the emphasis on processes, connections and, above all, integration. The global approach invites us to broaden horizons, open the debate, and include and look at the world with its "diverse colors." Emphasis is then placed on intermingling, global integration, and changes within a connected world: "a see-saw between the local and the universal, the micro and the macro perspective."[40] The originality of the *global turn* lies in the promise of uniting a perspective with an outlook that goes beyond border limits and which, at the same time, considers structural impacts. In short, a view that finally overcomes the dichotomy between the internal and external. The global paradigm can, and should, create a broad and logical portrait of humanity interconnected by the critical reflections of the twenty-first century. The next step is to establish a more precise theory and method, and go beyond an Anglocentric interpretation that is still generated through "Northern glasses." Thinking about global history from the South is fundamental in confronting the epistemic violence that still encompasses the project of the *spatial turn*.

[38] Ibid. (our translation).

[39] Frederick Cooper, "What is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian's Perspective," *African Affairs*, no. 100 (2001): 204–208.

[40] Jürgen Osterhammel, "Global History," in *Debating New Approaches to History*, ed. Marek Tamm and Peter Burke (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 24.

How to Write Global History from a Latin American Perspective?

As we have demonstrated in the previous section, an intense debate exists around the implicit Eurocentrism present in a large portion of global history. Although to a lesser extent, this debate is also taking place in Latin American academia. As Rafael Marquese and João Pimenta have recently highlighted, due to their early integration into the modern world-system, at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, the territories that constituted the Iberian empires have been studied for a long time through a focus on connections, networks, and the exchange of people, objects, and knowledge. Thus, as we have mentioned with the pioneering example of Gilberto Freyre, Latin American scholars have actively participated in the creation of what we now call global history. "Trendy" historiographical topics such as transatlantic migration or slavery are, therefore, nothing new for Latin Americanists, even if they have not subscribed to the seal of global history until now.[41]

However, despite the pioneering role of a section of Latin American academia in the field of global history, the question of how to leave Eurocentric categories and epistemologies behind remains unanswered. If we begin with the idea that the macro-region of what would be called "Latin America" since the 1850s has not been a simple extension of Europe, we should aspire toward a narration that, while aware of asymmetries and hierarchies of power, makes visible the role of the different actors, societies, governments, regions, and cultures that forged the connections studied, in order to decentralize the analysis. However, in historiographical practice it is not that easy to implicitly or explicitly overcome the various obstacles imposed by Eurocentrism. It is then a matter of finding ways to write history from a Latin American perspective that, on the one hand, maintain a certain methodological rigor, historical depth, broad empirical basis, and appropriate analytical concepts, and, on the other, adjust these categories and methods to the historical realities of the region.

[41] Rafael Marquese and João Pimenta, "Latin America and the Caribbean: Traditions of Global History," in *Global History, Globally: Research and Practice around the World*, ed. Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 67–82. For a concise history of modern Latin America in transnational perspective, see Héctor Pérez Brignoli, *Historia global de América Latina: del siglo XXI a la Independencia* (Madrid: Alianza, 2018); for the role of the Iberian empires as primary agents of early modern globalization, see Bernd Hausberger, *Historia mínima de la globalización temprana* (México: El Colegio de México, 2018).

With this in mind, we have already emphasized the category of nation. Thus, the continued importance of national history in the region must not necessarily go against global history, provided there is a willingness to understand the modern form of the nation-state as a result of complex global processes of the exchange of ideas and concepts, within hierarchical geopolitical orders. This renewed focus on Latin American nationalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would not only be better adapted to the academic realities of the region, but would also help keep an eye on geopolitical hierarchies, by inserting the region into a world-system characterized by formal and informal imperialism, and unequal relationships in the fields of trade, knowledge, movement of people, etc.[42] On the one hand, global history must overcome simplistic dichotomies such as exploiters versus exploited—as they are found in a large part of the historiography inspired by dependency theory—and replace them with precise and nuanced analysis. On the other hand, and this may be the greatest challenge, the various historical contexts in which the processes of exchange and contact occur must be treated with a certain sensitivity in terms of the structural asymmetries of power and today's most relevant problems. As Ina Kerner emphasizes, if we want to decolonize methodological Eurocentrism, it is insufficient to just acknowledge non-Western styles of thought. Instead, we must "engage in critiques of both past and present forms of global asymmetries and power, and consider critical assessments of how such global asymmetries and power have shaped Western social and political theories themselves."[43]

In this sense, a global history that is aware of power relations cannot simply "follow the actors" (or actants), as some of Bruno Latour's disciples claim. Adherents to this line of thought favor the perspective of the actors themselves, and thus reject the formulation of previously defined contexts. Although historiographical studies of this type have yielded extremely interesting results, focusing, for example, on the agency of scientists, collectors, entrepreneurs, or scholars, as well as the circulation of objects, knowledge, and people in transnational or transregional spaces, many of them lack a description of context that

[42] For the ongoing relevance of world-system theory, especially in the face of global financial crisis and economic inequality, see Chamsy el-Ojeili, "Reflections on Wallerstein: The Modern World-System, Four Decades on," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 4–5 (2015): 679–700; Manuela Boatcă, Andrea Komlosy, and Hans-Heinrich Nolte, eds., *Global Inequalities in World-Systems Perspective: Theoretical Debates and Methodological Innovations* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[43] Ina Kerner, "Beyond Eurocentrism: Trajectories Towards a Renewed Political and Social Theory," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 44, no. 5 (2018): 2.

goes beyond what is merely indicated by the actors. They resort, therefore, to developing descriptive, superficial, and uncritical narratives.[44] As historian Georg Fischer has expressed, drawing on the work of sociologist Georg Kneer, applying actor-network theory in global history, that is, "reducing one's own steps to follow the connections indicated by the actors," (as Latour calls for) can certainly yield valid results. However, this way of making history, in which the social order is defined exclusively according to the actors' criteria, runs the risk of applying a merely descriptive vocabulary over an "empty map, in which the actors can inscribe themselves or others as actants."[45]

In this context, Fischer warns that a global history focused on materiality and the movement of objects, people, and knowledge should take up a skeptical stance towards the very popular notion of "circulation."[46] In fact, uninterrupted, harmonic, and circular flows are rarely encountered, as the language used in much of recent historiography suggests. What we do find very often are interrupted movements, broken and diverging connections, "erroneous translations," flows of lower or higher density, as well as complex networks of actors whose structure should be described by models better adapted to historical reality. Through an exhaustive analysis of articles published in the *Journal of World History*, the *Journal of Global History*, and *Isis* between 2009 and 2016, historian Stefanie Gänger concludes that the notion of "circulation" or the verb "circulate" occurred in 42%, 52%, and 37% respectively.[47] She asserts that many authors who highlight the "circular" or "fluid" movement of objects, knowledge, or people as they move from one point to another refer rather to simple transfers or linear connections. This is then a metaphorical use that has little purpose for a historiography interested in precision and empirical density.[48] According to Gänger, the notion is only useful "when what

[44] For a good balance on the scope and limitations of actor-network theory in global history, see Debora Gerstenberger and Joël Glasman, eds., *Techniken der Globalisierung. Globalgeschichte meets Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016). For a critique of Latour's notions of "actor/actant" from the perspective of history and material culture studies, see Ivan Gaskell, "History of Things," in *Debating New Approaches to History*, ed. Marek Tamm and Peter Burke (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 217–246.

[45] Georg Fischer, *Globalisierte Geologie. Eine Wissensgeschichte des Eisenerzes in Brasilien* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2017), 31 (our translation).

[46] Fischer, *Globalisierte Geologie*, 25–26.

[47] Stefanie Gänger, "Circulation: Reflections in Circularity, Entity, and Liquidity in the Language of Global History," *Journal of Global History* 12, no. 3 (2017): 304.

[48] Gänger, "Circulation," 305–312.

authors seek to describe are actually passages within a given structure, built network, or technological system."[49]

With all this, however, the deepest epistemological problem, which touches the foundations of the historical discipline itself, has not yet been solved. As was mentioned at the beginning of this text, one perspective offered, is that of so-called "decolonial studies," which is widespread in Latin America. This school of thought—led by figures such as Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Rita Laura Segato, Walter Mignolo, Catherine Walsh, Fernando Coronil, Ramón Grosfoguel, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Arturo Escobar, and Eduardo Restrepo—is inspired by critical theory and postcolonial studies, while it also aims to overcome them from a genuinely Latin American perspective.[50] In sum, despite the great variety and number of differences present in this movement, whose members work mainly in anthropology, literature, and cultural studies departments, their common denominator is the belief in the continued existence of the "coloniality of power" in Latin America. This extends from the early colonial period to the present day, and its effects can be observed and analyzed in the areas of politics, economics, culture, race, and gender relations. With this, decolonial theorists not only seek to unmask the complex genealogies behind these effects, but also link their frequently interdisciplinary analysis with the hypothesis of breaking from the epistemological system developed by the West. In this sense, they propose advancing the formulation and application of "epistemologies of the South," rejecting both the narrow disciplinarity and the Eurocentrism of traditional social sciences.[51]

The problem is that these propositions, at least at first sight, do not seem to mix well with the discipline of history. The methodological and epistemological foundations of modern historiography clearly date back to the Europe of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, specifically to the methodological innovations developed in Germany and France in the first half of the nineteenth century. Thus, the historical-critical method, despite its many relativizations experienced over time, is still the preferred method of contemporary historiography, although it is implicitly practiced in most cases. What many decolonial theorists criticize as "positivism" or, in the even more extreme case of Walter

[49] Ibid., 311.

[50] Eduardo Restrepo and Axel Rojas, *Inflexión decolonial: fuentes, conceptos y cuestionamientos* (Popayán: Universidad del Cauca, 2010).

[51] Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "Epistemologías del Sur," *Utopióa y Praxis Latinoamericana* 16, no. 54 (2011): 17–39.

Mignolo, as a "flat narrative of imperial dominium," actually has a far more complex genesis, and, as Lynn Hunt mentions, also has a global dimension.[52] To start with, the notion of qualifying the method introduced by Leopold von Ranke as "positivist" not only demonstrates ignorance of the history of philosophical positivism, but also underestimates the global impact, differentiated reception, and appropriations that this tool has had in different parts of the globe. Thus, as Georg Iggers, Q. Edward Wang, and Supira Mukherjee show, Ranke certainly insisted on the scientific nature of historiography and the philological control of sources.[53] However, unlike later thinkers following Marxism, social Darwinism, or Comptian positivism, Ranke denied the existence of laws or a teleology in history, which, of course, does not mean that the first "scientific" histories created by him or Michelet were free of Eurocentrism. In fact, Ranke and his contemporaries, at no point, doubted the supposed superiority of the West. Furthermore, despite the insistence on crafting an "objective" story, or reconstructing "how it really was," it is now evident that Ranke and his followers were among the main providers of myths for the rising nation-states of their time.[54]

However, more important, in this context is the fact that philological criticism of historical documents also emerged outside of Europe, notably in China, Japan, India, and the Arab world. According to Peter Burke, Luke Clossey, and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, in India and some Islamic societies, philological criticism was already developed during the Middle Ages, so the "great achievements" of the European renaissance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries could only be qualified as "little more than catching up to the world's best scholarship."[55] Although in very different contexts, and influenced by Western developments, toward the end of the eighteenth century, methods of criticizing and evaluating historical documents were established with the aim of constructing truer stories based on rational criteria. As analyzed by Iggers, Wang, and Mukherjee in detail, the business of transforming a literary and memorialist history into a true "science" took very different and hybrid forms in different regions

[52] Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 70–73.

[53] Georg Iggers, Q. Edward Wang, and Supira Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2008), 12–13.

[54] Iggers, Wang, and Mukherjee, "A Global History," 4.

[55] Peter Burke, Luke Clossey, and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, "The Global Renaissance," *Journal of World History* 28, no. 1 (2017): 6.

of the world. However, it was a process that occurred parallelly within a globalized context.[56]

What the example of the globalized genesis of modern historiography shows is that many decolonial theorists, such as Walter Mignolo, over-simplify when they reject the social sciences commonly practiced in universities around the world as a product of "the West" and permeated by high doses of "epistemic violence" against non-Western knowledge. As we have seen, not even the famous historical-critical method was singular or restricted to Europe, as one could believe from a dualistic viewpoint lacking in nuance, such as Mignolo's, who holds that "history" as an academic discipline would have only served to marginalize memories and ancestral knowledge, as well as a plurality of stories.[57]

In this sense, it must be noted that many decolonial theorists are wrong when they equate globalization with "Westernization," since the modern historical discipline, like many other innovations, could have originated in Europe. However, and against a simplistic diffusionism, neither science in general nor history in particular are "Western" in essence. Inquiring into the global conformation of knowledge is precisely one of the most important tasks in global history. It must also be recognized that a significant part of recent Latin American historiography deals specifically with ancestral memories and knowledge, and not so much with the traditional political and officialist history that Mignolo may have in mind.[58]

Finally, as José Antonio Mazzotti mentions, the concept of "coloniality of power" has clear limitations as a heuristic tool, since it supposes a static idea of "colonial," conflating more than 300 years of Iberian domination in the Americas. Thus, as Mazzotti expresses, the term "colony" was not even widely used before the time of the Bourbon reforms at the end of the eighteenth century, and if it was used at all, it was in its original Latin meaning, referring to the result of the transfer of settlers to a newly explored territory.[59] With such imprecise terminology, it can hardly be a useful conceptual tool for the nuanced

[56] Iggers, Wang, and Mukherjee, "A Global History," 11.
[57] Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 175.
[58] This claim can be confirmed by taking a look on the "Latin American History"-section of the Oxford Research Encyclopedia (https://oxfordre.com/latinamericanhistory), an ambitious online-project that provides reference articles from the whole field of Latin American history since 2015.
[59] José Antonio Mazzotti, "Estudios coloniales latinoamericanos y colonialidad: una breve aclaración de conceptos," in *Dimensiones del latinoamericanismo*, ed. Mabel Moraña (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2018), 18–19.

analysis of the varied effects of "coloniality" in postcolonial Latin America. Furthermore, as also criticized by Jeff Browitt and Santiago Castro-Gómez, many decolonial authors tend to seek the antidote to "coloniality" in "recovering" an idealized and largely invented "indigenous episteme."[60] This type of academic neo-*indigenismo* fulfills the function of counteracting the supposed "epistemic violence" of the West toward ancestral knowledge, which is often described in a static, essentialist, and ahistorical way, as, for example, the concept of "good living" (*sumak kawsay*) in Ecuador.[61]

One thing then is the critical and legitimate reflection on the uses and abuses of Eurocentric concepts in social sciences in Latin America, another is the ahistorical formulation of supposedly "pure and native" models. In addition, with European critical theory and the defense of "good" universalisms, such as justice, human rights, or social equality, decolonial thinkers are also trapped in insoluble conceptual aporias.[62] Considering these criticisms of decolonial thinking and the main category of "coloniality," is it really worth opening a dialogue between global history and this movement of Latin American critique?; we believe it is.

Following Matthew Brown, we argue that instead of ignoring Mignolo and other decolonial critics because of their "crude ahistoricism," we should take some of their ideas seriously in order to move toward a decolonization of the discipline.[63] Bearing in mind the renewed spatial-temporal idea demanded by global history, a highly useful category developed by members of the decolonial movement is that of the "geopolitics of knowledge."[64] Unlike the concept of "coloniality," which, as we saw, lacks the depth and differentiation necessary to serve as a heuristic instrument, this category would adapt very well to a global history aware of the effects of power. Even a figure far removed from decolonial thinking, such as historian Peter Burke, highlights the use of this category in writing a global history of knowledge. He sees it as an opportunity to exit a story that is too often lost in empty metaphors of "flow," "circulation," and "connection,"

[60] Jeff Browitt, "La teoría decolonial: buscando la identidad en el mercado académico," *Cuadernos de Literatura* 18, no. 36 (2014): 25–46; Castro-Gómez, "Qué hacer con los universalismos," 249–272.

[61] Víctor Bretón de Zaldívar, "Etnicidad, desarrollo y 'Buen Vivir': Reflexiones críticas en perspectiva histórica," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies – Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, no. 95 (2013): 71–95.

[62] Hunt, *Writing History*, 71

[63] Brown, "The Global History," 385.

[64] Walter Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (2002): 57–96.

leaving aside the broader contexts, as well as the often-asymmetric power relations.[65] In this sense, the category acts as an antidote to the forms of history mentioned above, that is, perspectives that are too focused on the actors themselves or stories that are limited to an ethereal world of great ideas, concepts, or policies, without considering the materiality, social context, and location of knowledge. Yet how exactly do decolonial authors interpret this category? Despite the many differences between them, Eduardo Restrepo and Axel Rojas provide us with a kind of minimal definition:

> The geopolitics of knowledge shows how the peripheralization of some places and the centrification of others has operated. Therefore, it reveals the interaction of certain types of knowledge produced and suitable in certain places (those of the center and those of modernity) with the relationships of subordination and inferiorization of the knowledge generated in other places (those of the periphery and those of the colonial difference) for the sake of dominating, exploiting, and subjecting the latter. The geopolitics of knowledge insists that knowledge is marked geo-historically, that is, marked by the locus of enunciation from which it is produced. In opposition to the modern discourse that has illusively argued that knowledge is disincorporated and delocalized, the perspective of geopolitics argues that knowledge is necessarily pervaded by the specific locations that constitute the very conditions of existence and enunciation of the knowing subject.[66]

As noted above, according to decolonial thinkers, it is important to consider the epistemic geopolitical order when analyzing the production of knowledge, both in today's world and in the past. Here is a clear awareness of the importance of situating and historicizing the production of knowledge, of looking at the asymmetries of power, the processes of appropriation, subordination, and the exploitation that have characterized the history of Latin America since the end of the fifteenth century until today. However, unlike Mignolo and others who reject supposed "Western" social science methods and concepts in a generalized manner, the application of this category in global history should be seen as an opportunity. In contrast to Anglophone global history, which largely ignores the implicit Eurocentrism of its concepts, sources, methodologies, and periodization, and in contrast to a global history excessively focused on self-referential networks, the actor/

[65] Peter Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 31–67; see also Conrad, *Historia global*, 51.

[66] Restrepo and Rojas, *Inflexión decolonial*, 140–141 (our translation).

actant-perspective, as well as acritical and decontextualized notions of circulation and movement, the focus on the geopolitics of knowledge opens the opportunity to not only better capture the historical reality of a region marked by economic and political dependence, imperialism, and neoliberal exploitation, but also better reflects the realities of the academic field. Thus, in most of the countries that constitute Latin America, social sciences are in an increasingly marginalized position, operating in the context of public resource cut backs, under productivity mandates, and reduced to mere indicators within absurd metric systems, as well as being under increasing pressure to follow foreign models and to publish in English.[67]

In view of this discouraging panorama, instead of getting lost in sterile confrontations, decolonial theorists and historians should work together to arrive at a more nuanced, self-reflexive, and critical version of Latin American history in a global context. Contrary to what many decolonial authors think or demonstrate in their more historically oriented studies, further historicizing Latin America's insertion into the modern world-system from the fifteenth century until today, will contribute greatly to illuminating the processes of domination, subordination, exploitation, and inferiorization, indicated by the category of the geopolitics of knowledge. Additionally, the different forms of agency, resistance, conformation of subaltern cultures, dimensions of gender, ethnicity, race, etc., will also come to light. By leaving behind methodological nationalism, and procuring a "story in equal parts," that is, taking the archive of the "other" seriously and giving it the same weight as European sources, global history can be decolonized.[68] The use of such sources, often written in non-European languages, as well as of an oral and/or immaterial nature, is indispensable for progress in the "provincialization of Europe," proclaimed by Dipesh Chakrabarty.[69] In order to develop this type of history, it is also necessary to converse with other disciplines, such as anthropology or cultural studies to maintain a self-reflexive position regarding the site of enunciation and the location of knowledge; be aware of and critical of methodology, periodization, and concepts; and

[67] For the current situation in Colombia, Mexico, and Argentina, see Federico Vasen and Ivonne Lujano Vilchis, "Sistemas nacionales de clasificación de revistas científicas en América Latina: tendencias recientes e implicaciones para la evaluación académica en ciencias sociales," *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 62, no. 231 (2017): 199–228.

[68] Bertrand, "Historia global," 3–20.

[69] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

to dismiss the idea that these sources (written or unwritten) have a unique meaning. In this sense, dialogue with Latin American critical thinking could contribute to strengthening the field of global history as a whole and open space in Latin American academia.

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