



# the **GCAS** review

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## “Theorizing the Ideally Non-Ideal: Sanín Restrepo’s Decolonizing Democracy and Political Philosophy”

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### **Abstract:**

This paper examines methodological problems in political philosophy by way of an examination of the phenomenon of coloniality, animated by an analysis of Ricardo Sanín-Restrepo’s *Decolonizing Democracy: Power in a Solid State*. I argue that rigorous political philosophy cannot involve narrowing one’s philosophical scope to either “ideal theory” or “nonideal theory,” as has become commonplace in contemporary Analytic philosophy. Sanín-Restrepo’s text is taken up as an exemplar of an

approach in which the theoretical account of an ideal or ideals is worked out in relation to a critical account of political reality, and, hence, an account that restricts itself neither to ideal nor nonideal theory. Using Sanín-Restrepo's account of coloniality, I defend the position that both ideal theory and nonideal theory in the Analytic tradition would manifest certain forms of disciplinary decadence due to their inattention to forms of epistemic and axiological colonization formative to Euromodern philosophy. By the same token, though, I argue that this points to tendencies toward decadence in the so-called Continental tradition, and that these tendencies may call into question certain of Sanín-Restrepo's conclusions about the function of political philosophy for decolonization. I conclude with a discussion of the synthesis of alternative ideals as an imperative for anti-colonial and decolonial approaches in political philosophy, arguing that such an endeavor entails pairing the project of articulating novel values beyond Euromodern ones with the critical project of elucidating coloniality's implicit rationality.

Invoking Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, John Rawls wrote that "political philosophy may try to calm our frustration and rage against our society and its history by showing us the way in which its institutions, when properly understood from a philosophical point of view, are rational, and developed over time as they did to attain their present, rational form." [1] Though on Rawls's account this is merely one among the several primary roles that political philosophy is called upon to fulfill, it raises an obvious question: what if the philosopher, in the process of elucidating the rationality and development of political institutions, demonstrates that they ought to serve as profound sources of rage and revolt rather than rapprochement?

Relevant to this question is the contemporary divide among many philosophers—particularly those trained in the so-called Analytic or Anglo-American tradition—that is framed in terms of a binary logic in which one either performs what Rawls had termed "ideal theory" or what he had called "nonideal theory." [2] Ideal theory on this account "works out the principles that characterize a well-ordered society under favorable circumstances," whereas nonideal theory "is worked out after an ideal

conception of justice has been chosen; only then do the parties ask which principles to adopt under less happy conditions.”[3] Charles Mills has advanced an argument that Rawls’s focus on the importance of ideal theory has played an ideological role in keeping political philosophers from reckoning with the realities of the profoundly unjust societies those philosophers inhabit.[4] A bevy of literature either affirming its status as non-ideal theory or engaged in conceptual examination of the notion of non-ideal theory has emerged in Mills’s wake.[5]

Though it is perhaps curious that Rawls’s conceptual distinction between theoretical approaches has retained its currency even among many of those professing to be his staunchest contemporary critics, it is noteworthy that non-ideal theory, so defined, would seem to have limited relevance to the Hegelian role for political philosophy that Rawls found so noteworthy. While there is certainly no shortage of literature that finds the contemporary world to be a profoundly unjust one and that endeavors to examine the conditions under which it has come into existence, little of this work is expressly categorized or understood as political philosophy. Indeed, although there is much work in intellectual history that examines the ideas espoused by the architects of unjust social and political institutions, rarely does such work move toward an analysis of the *coherent* underpinnings of such institutions.[6] That is to say, it is one thing to study the ideological positions expressed by the architects of political realities and to examine the contradictions that their rhetoric seeks to elide, but it is quite another to examine the philosophical foundations of institutions whose founders and servants articulate rationalizations that are at odds with institutional realities. Against this tendency, the political philosopher may have reason to treat existing systems *as if* they were well-ordered and to articulate the rationality that makes them function, even if that rationality is repressed or disavowed by those institutions and their representatives. Such an effort, in turn, may suggest not only a more rigorous *descriptive* political philosophy but may yield insights that the political philosopher working narrowly within the framework of *normative* political philosophy may otherwise tend to overlook.

In this essay, I seek to reflect on the project of political philosophy in light of these challenges through an examination of a recent text that takes a peculiar approach: Ricardo Sanín-Restrepo's *Decolonizing Democracy: Power in a Solid State*.<sup>[7]</sup> That work offers a powerful examination of the logic of contemporary political institutions, one that seeks to go to the heart of their implicit rationalities. In this paper, I will explore Sanín-Restrepo's text in order to show how it demonstrates an alternative to the "ideal theory" vs. "non-ideal theory" divide as well as to work through some of the challenges that such an alternative entails. I will begin by examining Sanín-Restrepo's account of the relationship between coloniality and democracy, wherein he argues that the production of *simulacra* of democracy is an essential feature of coloniality. I will then offer an account of the relationship between theory and ideals, building upon Sanín-Restrepo's account of coloniality as it pertains to contemporary enthusiasm for the project of non-ideal theory in Analytic philosophy and political theory. I then turn to some of the shortcomings of prevailing tendencies in Continental thought in addressing these matters through an exploration of Sanín-Restrepo's argument for the necessity of *decryption* for decolonization. Finally, I conclude by examining how recent work on the possibility and/or realization of "other modernities" points to alternative directions forward in which political philosophy can take up the task of rigorously examining the non-ideal without abandoning the analytic project of articulating desirable political ideals. In short, I argue in this paper that political philosophy can facilitate decolonization by uniting the project of offering a rational analysis of coloniality—a theory of conditions that are "non-ideal" but are nonetheless governed by the *logic* of a colonial political ideal—with the project of articulating alternative ideals.

### *"Democracy" and Coloniality*

The telos of a variety of modern institutions, if we take them at their word, is the achievement of democracy, at least in some shape or form. But the telos of those same institutions, if we are to take the word of a preponderance of voices on modernity's underside (to employ Enrique Dussel's now familiar turn of phrase), is domination—or, more specifically, coloniality, a global system of domination coextensive with what can be

termed Euromodernity.[8] If democracy is defined coherently, then coloniality would seem to be its antithesis: the systematic subordination of the masses of people. Yet modern discourse and institutions seem to function so that what they term “democracy” is understood in such a way that it is not only compatible with coloniality but is, further, its necessary complement. Coloniality is plainly an enemy to democracy as such, but, in spite of this, coloniality functions as an uncurious bedfellow to the “democracy” that Euromodern regimes purport to manifest. This implies that the mode of “democracy” that coloniality inaugurates and sustains is not democracy at all. If this is the case, though, what is to be made of the fact that it continues to be called “democracy”?

This evident paradox is at the heart of *Decolonizing Democracy*. Sanín-Restrepo’s book can be seen as playing a dual role. As a work in critical theory, it articulates how “democracy” functions as a concept undergirding domination of a variety of stripes. For Sanín-Restrepo, it is not merely that modern institutions belie their aims by paying mere lip service to democracy, but rather that a counterfeit notion of democracy renders coloniality more total, more successful, and more durable. “[T]he uniqueness of coloniality,” he writes, “is that in order for potestas [the capture of the power of language and the imposition of qualifications for its use] to act expansively and frictionlessly it must *simulate* democracy and thus necessarily *encrypt* power” (1). Sanín-Restrepo’s text, though, goes beyond mere critical theory toward the terrain of political philosophy insofar as it puts forward a provocative argument about the actual meaning of democracy. As such, this text elaborates a grand theory of a political ideal coupled with an analysis of how, in the service of a “simulacrum” of that ideal, coloniality is able to subvert democracy in service of “democracy.”[9]

To briefly summarize the book’s core contentions, coloniality creates what Sanín-Restrepo terms “the hidden people” (34-7). On the one hand, the hidden people are a constitutive exclusion of modernity. The disavowal of their humanity (174) facilitates not only their economic exploitation but also a symbolic exploitation: they are the monstrous presence, the “difference” against which modern democracy is supposed to protect (43-4). They are

made to represent that which, by virtue of being extra-human, is thereby subhuman; as a “problem people” (33), they become *the* problem that rule “of and by” the people must combat.[10] Under conditions of coloniality, democracy as such is subverted by the process wherein “democracy,” as a simulacrum of actual democracy, is legitimated precisely through its opposition to the hidden people. The *demos* recognized by Euromodern politics refers not to the people as such but rather to a conception of “the people” that emerges once the humanity of the hidden people is radically discounted.

In fact, the reality of the hidden people’s exclusion reveals “democracy” not to be democracy: if there are people who are not served—indeed, people who are exploited, oppressed, and routinely massacred—then one is dealing not with rule by the people and for the people but with rule by *some* people and for *some* rather than all. The philosophical resolution of such a problem is to hold, in short, that the *some* represent the true referent of “people,” and the problematic hidden people are, on such an account, regarded as blameworthy for not having fit themselves into the narrow parameters of the model citizens who constitute the true *demos*.

The outcome of this inversion is a notion of democracy premised on similarity to (or, simply, *sameness* vis-à-vis) the people who constitute modernity’s overside, which entails that “democracy” must function as a project for the eradication of difference. For Sanín-Restrepo, though, democracy *is* difference. The nature of the people lies in their irreducibility to rigid logical formulae and in their capacity to always be otherwise than any definition would dictate. Hence, the effort to articulate the *demos* as denoted in advance by a well-ordered logical statement about what it is to be human is, simply, dehumanizing. Sanín-Restrepo writes that “difference is not what a being is—that is, it is not the recognizable stamp or emblem that being exhibits to the light in order to be commensurable, but rather, difference is what being produces through its difference” (64). What makes democracy desirable is precisely the capacity of human existents to lie beyond epistemic formulae that could apprehend and ideally serve their interests.

If democracy, as such, is for Sanín-Restrepo the actualization of difference (64-70), then the “democracy” espoused by Euromodern regimes is a project founded on the production of sameness as a democratic inversion. Coloniality, then, works through a simulacrum of democracy: Euromodernity yields “democracy” which is, simply put, the antithesis of democracy. It is an imitation of an ideal whose function is to preempt and eradicate the ideal itself.

This suggests that the fulfillment of democracy would require not merely a celebration of difference, but a process of decrypting the codes that serve the simulacrum in order to set afoot projects through which decolonization could be pursued in earnest. Decolonization, on this account, requires more than simply the eradication of colonial institutions and power structures. That is because the functioning of such structures is a veiled one: coloniality presents the colonial as if it were the “democratic.” It presents the domination of the hidden people as if it were simply the will of the people. What is colonial is, for Euromodern coloniality, presented as if it were non-colonial, just as contemporary forms of racism—as one of coloniality’s fundamental components—are typically expressed as deriving from a commitment to being non-racist.[11] For Sanín-Restrepo, this means that central to coloniality is the encryption of power (7-13). Encryption, he writes,

not only serves the purpose of upending democracy, but also severs politics, as it privatizes it to the sole dominium of experts. What is encrypted is not only the formal sense of the words and constructions of the law, but every chain of communication, every code and point of access to interpretation, through which we identify reality. ...Encryption is thus the main circuit by which power as domination operates under the code names of ‘democracy’, ‘rule of law’, and the ‘open market’. (10)

As such, to decolonize and bring forth actual democracy would require projects of decryption in which the true functioning of power is unmasked. This project of decryption is central to Sanín-Restrepo’s oeuvre. It was originally elaborated by him and Gabriel Méndez-Hincapié in their 2012 article, “La Constitución Encriptada” (“The Encrypted Constitution”), and it is the subject of his recent edited volume, *Decrypting Power*. [12] On his account,

“decryption means not only a critical or semiotic tool but fundamentally the primordial act of liberation and the first exercise of power. ...Decryption is not the world unveiled but the world reimagined, written with a new light and new intensity.”[13] Decryption, then, figures for Sanín-Restrepo as indispensable to the project of decolonization. The encryption of power is part and parcel of coloniality. Deciphering how coloniality functions demands decryptive efforts. And, indeed, to *realize* democracy would require putting in place systems of power that are not encrypted. Hence, decryption is a vital force of democratic practice, and not merely a demystifying prerequisite to radical anti-colonial upheaval.

### *Theories and Ideals*

This perspective on democracy suggests that one group for whom Sanín-Restrepo’s volume should be of pressing interest would be one that may at first strike many readers as unlikely: namely, contemporary political philosophers and theorists working through or alongside the Analytic philosophical tradition.[14] As discussed above, such philosophical communities, in particular due to the interventions of Mills, have begun to focus attention on the project of “non-ideal theory.” This tendency is anchored in response to the overwhelming, half-century long popularity of Rawls in that tradition and the many debates on the meaning of justice that emerged in Rawls’s wake. Why, asked critics like Mills, was the dominant tendency of philosophers in manifestly unjust societies to inquire *only* into the meaning of justice within an ideal (or idealized) society, when such work appeared to prevent a philosophical reckoning with political and social realities?[15]

A tension within recent calls for non-ideal theory, however, pertains to whether such calls are adequate to dealing with the coloniality of ideal theory and the broader colonization of political thought of which it is both part and symptom. It is perhaps trivial to note that philosophical work could only be identified as “non-ideal theory” if one has at least an elementary sense of the ideal itself; a rudimentary conception of what is ideal would seem to be a



minimal prerequisite for maintaining that one's work pertains to the non-ideal. Indeed, on Rawls's definition, nonideal theory presupposes mutual respect for resolved principles of ideal theory. But suppose the call for non-ideal theory ought to be regarded in the way that many (though by no means all) do: as a call to *abandon* ideal theory in favor of non-ideal theory. Ideal theory would then be either a province of the colonial past untouched by ongoing efforts of epistemic decolonization, or it would be the province of present and future thinkers who (as Mills's argument suggests) maintain an ideological commitment to ignoring reality. A consequence of the call to abandon ideal theory, then, may be to facilitate the covert recolonization of how human beings conceive of ideals. The recolonization of how ideals are conceived, in turn, would have metatheoretical consequences for how the domain of non-ideal theory is conceived.[16]

As such, I read *Decolonizing Democracy* as a contribution to an alternative approach. Rather than simply offering a theory of the ideal or retreating to a philosophical treatment of injustices as such, Sanín-Restrepo offers a theory of the ideal that demonstrates how the colonization of the meaning of that ideal generates non-ideal realities. In other words, here we have an effort to decolonize the ideal of democracy, coupled with a theory of how coloniality can undermine the ideal of democracy by producing "democracy." *Decolonizing Democracy*, therefore, offers a theory of democracy as an ideal at the same time that it can be conceived of as "non-ideal theory" insofar as it examines a) how extant realities do not manifest the ideal articulated and b) questions of what ought to be done in light of such non-ideality. In that sense, the work can be seen as fulfilling the demands of both sides of the ideal/non-ideal debate.

However, there are elements of Sanín-Restrepo's text that suggest there is a greater depth of approach than simply engaging in both ideal and non-ideal theory. A consequence of his contentions would be that "democracy" (the simulacrum) itself functions as an ideal. Euromodern institutions appeal repeatedly to "democracy" as an ideal. If Sanín-Restrepo is correct, it is not so much that they do so because of an error in reasoning on account of which they have failed to discern the crucial differences between

democracy and “democracy.” This is because “democracy” is precisely the ideal that coloniality calls for. In short, *the ideal of coloniality* is to develop a simulacrum of democracy that would universally be regarded as democracy itself – even by the underside that finds itself crushed and massacred in the process.

We might here distinguish between monistic and pluralistic senses of the notion of an ideal. A monistic sense of ideality would entail that the nature of ideals is such that they are always subordinate to *the* ideal, the unitary end which all lesser ideals serve regionally. Ideal-monism, then, holds that all subordinate ideals are dissolved into a single ideal whose teleological gravity pulls in all others. The only functional ideal on such an account is, therefore, the *ideal* ideal. For instance, an ideal-monist proponent of capitalism would maintain that proponents of socialism are *mistaken* about what is ideal; socialists, on such an account, would be charged with *having made an error in reasoning* that has led them to regard capitalism as diverging from *the* ideal. The same would hold in reverse for an ideal-monist proponent of socialism: the capitalist, from that vantage, has failed to offer or abide by a rigorous account of what is truly idea. By contrast, ideal-pluralism would hold that one can and should speak of multiple, differentiable ideals, without the presupposition that one among these ideals constitutes the ultimate ideal to which other ideals must be subordinated. On that model, one can rigorously articulate a multiplicity of ideals that, given ideal articulations thereof, could stand in relation to one another without dissolution into the absoluteness of a supraordinate ideal. An ideal-pluralist account could, then, speak of what ideal capitalism demands while also speaking of what ideal socialism demands. Indeed, a socialist political philosopher could distinguish between forms of capitalism that realize capitalist ideals and forms that do not, all while maintaining commitments to socialist ideals—and vice versa for a capitalist political philosopher.

The call for “non-ideal theory” often involves a monistic sense of “*the* ideal,” such that non-ideal theory is called for to analyze any deviation from that true ideal. Indeed, such an approach would seem to be an analytic consequence of the Rawlsian definition of nonideal theory, because there the

fundamental principles of justice—the theoretical conclusions of ideal theory—have become matters of mutual consent. A pluralistic conception of ideals, by contrast, could be taken to suggest that, say, monarchism, totalitarianism, neoliberalism, and coloniality would each be perspectives from which one could articulate an ideal—indeed, “*the* ideal,” from the vantage point of each of those perspectives—even if that ideal were clearly undesirable from the perspectives of those thereby rendered marginal and/or disposable. In that sense, Sanín-Restrepo’s text suggests that *ideal coloniality* involves an opposition to democracy that is carried out by fealty to its stated ideal of “democracy,” the simulacrum. (Or, alternately, that coloniality is the hidden ideal of “democracy.”) Ideal coloniality is thus *ideally non-ideal* from the perspective of the ideal of democracy (rather than from the perspective of simulacra thereof). From the vantage of democracy as an ideal, coloniality is non-ideal, and it is ideally non-ideal where its commitment to “democracy,” the simulacrum, prevents agents from understanding their reality as a colonial one. Likewise, from the vantage of coloniality as an ideal, democracy is non-ideal, but “democracy” is essential to coloniality’s ideal fulfillment.

This suggests that one way to view a possible function of political philosophy is that it may proceed through an examination of how a society and its institutions would function when serving particular articulable ideals, independent of a subscription to the normative desirability of those ideals. A philosophical account of coloniality as an ideal would, on those terms, have to take seriously many of the problems that coloniality as a coherent system of values presents. That is to say, taken as a term in decolonial studies or critical theory, “coloniality” is often used to refer to a *period* rather than to a supraordinate ideal. Although any understanding of coloniality would be wise to be attentive to the ways in which study of its development requires an examination of coloniality as a *longue durée* historical phenomenon, there are significant intellectual disadvantages to treating coloniality as *merely* a periodized historical happening.[17] Consider, for instance, what occurs where opposition to colonial institutions yields dialectical outcomes involving overthrow of some but not all dimensions of the coloniality of those institutions—that is, what could be described as cases of *partial*

*decolonization*. Though one may certainly speak of coloniality *remaining* in these instances, should one really treat the entire ensemble of events as manifesting coloniality no more and no less than the preceding conditions? That is, what is the relationship between coloniality and states of institutional affairs that are partly but not wholly neo-colonial? To coherently *distinguish* dimensions of coloniality from dimensions of decoloniality, then, may demand that the theorist go beyond referring simply to historical phenomena—since even decoloniality could then be understood reductively as mere historical *consequence* of coloniality—toward an articulation of the axiological differences that distinguish coloniality from opposition thereto.

This suggests, indeed, that *coloniality* can be understood as an ideal distinct from *colonialism* as an ideal. Many discussions of coloniality, particularly in wake of that term's growing popularity, involve a naïve conflation of colonialism with coloniality even where those discussions retain an acknowledgement of the basic point that coloniality may remain where proper colonialism has subsided. Properly speaking, though, it may be said that colonialism as an ideal is anti-coloniality and vice versa. For those who truly regard colonialism as ideal, the non-sovereignty of the colonized or the "hidden people" is ideal; their absolute fealty is ideal, rather than the efforts through which their functional fealty is retained through compromising on the status of its absoluteness. For colonialism on those terms, there is no need to articulate "democracy" as a simulacrum of democracy for the hidden people. The hidden people are simply regarded as those who are legitimately subordinated and, indeed, legitimately killable wherever they manifest resistance to their colonization. Coloniality as an ideal, though, is compatible with the partial sovereignty and/or pseudo-sovereignty of the hidden people. If one is willing to understand coloniality in terms of *a distinction in political philosophy*—as opposed to a historical or sociological conception of coloniality merely as residue of previous phenomena of colonization—then it functions under the terms of a different configuration of values than colonialism, even if coloniality's values predominantly derive from colonialism. For coloniality so defined, neo-colonialism is ultimately more desirable than colonialism; hence, colonialism is not coloniality's ideal. The need to give neo-colonialism a

veneer of being “non-colonial” calls, in turn—as Sanín-Restrepo contends—for a simulacrum of democracy.[18]

In light of this, it is worth reflecting on the ways in which non-ideal theory may have need to distinguish between colonialism and coloniality. Non-ideal theory offers descriptive and/or normative philosophical accounts of political agency under conditions of unfulfilled ideals. If one accepts Rawlsian principles of justice, then any analysis of conditions of colonialism or of coloniality ought to qualify as non-ideal theory because both constitute unjust conditions.[19] But it certainly should not be taken-for-granted that disobedience and resistance to an unjust sociopolitical order ought to be inattentive to the particular ways in which that order functions. Hence, what resistance to coloniality demands may be substantively different than what resistance to colonialism demands.

For instance, if we take proponents of non-ideal theory at their word about what they value, then Frantz Fanon’s breathtaking *The Wretched of the Earth* ought to be seen as a *locus classicus* for that field.[20] That text gives a thorough philosophical account of decolonization under conditions of colonialism. Yet the text is also concerned with articulating the neo-colonial future that is likely to succeed such decolonization and is engaged in exploring how decolonization ought to proceed in order to forestall such neo-colonial outcomes. Hence, one may analyze Fanon’s text as offering an account of decolonization under conditions of colonialism while taking seriously the possibility of coloniality replacing colonialism. This implies, though, that it is a slightly different matter to explore what decolonization looks like *under conditions of coloniality rather than colonialism*—a matter that, in light of Fanon’s concerns, one may reasonably conclude he would have taken seriously as a concern not fully addressed in *Wretched*. Decolonization under conditions of colonialism may involve very different demands than decolonization under conditions of coloniality, as the contemporary preference of some to speak of “decoloniality” implies.[21] Understanding what decolonization in variegated contexts demands makes the philosophical project of understanding the difference between colonialism’s ideal and coloniality’s ideal an urgent task. To briefly sketch the philosophical matters

demanding attention here, note that whereas colonialism as such may be static and grounded in principles of rule, coloniality is dynamic and relies on efforts at what Reva Siegel has termed “preservation-through-transformation” in order to foment elements of consent.[22] Coloniality employs Rousseauian dimensions of legitimation where colonialism sticks to Hobbesian ones, even though neither actually satisfies the conditions for legitimacy articulated by Hobbes or Rousseau.[23] To pose questions of anti-colonial political agency rigorously suggests a call for understanding these diverging ideals, because to misunderstand what coloniality values is to put oneself in a position of very easily contributing to its replication.

Simply put, the non-ideal theorist who understands “democracy,” the simulacrum, as part of the ideal form of coloniality will have a greater grasp of the philosophical demands on genuine decolonization. A pluralistic conception of the task of ideal theory, then, would facilitate a more rigorous approach to non-ideal theory. In light of that, *Decolonizing Democracy* can be taken as representative of an alternative approach that, rather than rejecting ideal theory, philosophically interrogates ideals in order to understand how contemporary manifestations of power undermine the fulfillment of those ideals. Further, the text also serves as an argument that, under present conditions and within Euromodernity more generally, the conceptual decolonization of the notion of the ideal is therefore a prerequisite to eventual fulfillment of the ideal itself. That is to say that, because the ideal of democracy is present within now-existing vocabularies in such a way that it is confused for the colonial simulacrum “democracy,” to decrypt this manifestation of colonial power would demand not only an analysis of how status quo institutions are not actually democratic but also the effort of demonstrating what, in reality, democracy as an ideal must be understood to mean. Hence, the text speaks to the ways in which an abandonment of ideal theory in order to grapple with extant sociopolitical realities may be counter-productive.

*Decrypting Philosophy?*

I have thus far situated Sanín-Restrepo's text in relation to the debate concerning ideal and non-ideal theory that bears currency in the Analytic tradition. A more obvious audience for the book, however, in light of the array of interlocutors that animate the bulk of its theoretical explorations, would be those working through critical theory and political philosophy by way of the so-called Continental tradition.

After a brief discussion of coloniality by way of figures such as Walter Dignolo, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Ramón Grosfoguel, and Lewis Gordon at the outset of Chapter 1, the rest of the text primarily pursues its lines of argumentation by way of interventions aimed at figures whose work enjoys considerable currency in contemporary Continental thought. To wit, the centrality of the "simulacrum" to Sanín-Restrepo's argument suggests an implicit indebtedness to Jean Baudrillard; Chapter 1 closes with a discussion of power heavily inflected with the work of Michel Foucault; Chapter 2 probes ideas from a who's who of Continental thinkers (Jean-Luc Nancy, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and Slavoj Žižek figure prominently, alongside many others) to give an initial account of the notions of politics, the people, and democracy, though the engagements with Gordon's ideas constitute perhaps the primary fulcrum; Chapter 3, "Difference and Simulacra," centers on a critical engagement with Gilles Deleuze; the centerpiece of Chapter 4 is an exhaustive and rather creative exploration of Aristotelian metaphysics that is ultimately targeted at Giorgio Agamben; and Chapter 5, which comprises nearly half of the entire book, is aptly summarized by its subtitle: "Against Negri's Understanding of Spinoza." Neither the arguments within these subsections nor the overall thesis that they ultimately serve are derivative of these interlocutors. Rather, the method employed generally is well described by Sanín-Restrepo's specific claim that the third chapter "use[s] Deleuze as a kind of Archimedean lever" (47). In short, the text represents an aim to decolonize our understanding of democracy, and the centrality of European critical thought in the text is, I take it, functional rather than essential: these are tools that facilitate the communication of the text's central ideas.

Given that, it may have been a nice addendum for Sanín-Restrepo to have dealt with the methodological and metatheoretical issues that the central

role of European Continental thought in the text seems to raise. I take this to be the case especially in light of the weight of the volume's title. If we speak of democracy as a concept, then the book can be regarded as primarily a conceptual decolonization. That is to say, it demonstrates philosophically that there have been errors in the articulation of the concept, that these errors have occurred because of a colonial project, and that those errors in turn contribute to the establishment and endurance of "power in a solid state" (13), a simulacrum of democracy that militates against the arrival of democracy itself. The text demonstrates that Agamben, Deleuze, Derrida, and others are radical critics of the simulacrum whose insights facilitate its decryption. At the same time, though, the text—by virtue of Sanín-Restrepo's extended criticisms of these figures animated by his attention to the phenomenon of the hidden people and thinking in decolonial studies—would seem to suggest that the work of Continental thought is in some sense *a part of the simulacrum*. That is to say, on Sanín-Restrepo's account, these figures are effective critics in key areas but are, on the whole, insufficiently radical. Their commitment to democracy may be both insightful and genuine—and even may offer meaningful contributions to the larger project of decolonizing democracy—but is also bedeviled by elements of the colonality of reason. Hence, we face the question of whether Continental thought is constitutive of the simulacrum. If so, then Sanín-Restrepo can be said to be engaged in a decryption of Continental thought. The reader is left to wonder, then, whether the aspects of colonality that tinge Continental thought are merely errors that can be overcome through more rigorous reasoning within that tradition or whether they are symptomatic of more general patterns in Euromodernity that call for interventions of a different sort. I suspect that the basic answer is somewhere in between: that these are *characteristic* errors, but that Euromodern thought may nonetheless be capable of changing its character. But even so, this leaves open as a theoretical concern the question of whether the changing of that character would require certain transcendental moves or could be accomplished in a fashion that is immanent to it.

Now, here one may point to Sanín-Restrepo's affirmation of the Deleuzian criticism of the transcendent/immanent dualism (48-9) as a



response: it would seem, in short, that *difference* is the antidote—that the anti-democratic dimensions of Euro-modern thought can be overcome by democratizing theory. But if this is the case, it still raises the metatheoretical issue of whether the Deleuzian or even Sanín-Restrepo's articulation of difference achieves its apparent viability because of a hidden recapitulation of the logic of coloniality. I raise these issues not in order to argue that *Decolonizing Democracy* falls into the very traps that it warns of—that it is, ultimately, a simulacrum of what a *real* conceptual decolonization of democracy would amount to—but to suggest that this is a theoretical concern that the text's thesis raises as a possibility but that the text does not ultimately pursue. The text appears implicitly confident in its position on both the role that Continental thought plays in sustaining the simulacrum and the role that it can play in abolishing it. The theoretical position on democracy argued for, though, raises the stakes for making explicit the role that Continental thought can and should play for anybody interested in the project of decolonizing democracy.

On the one hand, then, Sanín-Restrepo's project can be read as seeking to render more rigorous the deceptive endeavors that have been undertaken implicitly or explicitly in Continental critical theory. On the other hand, Sanín-Restrepo's intervention can be read as affecting, at least in part, a decryption of Continental thought, such that it is an endeavor in decrypting power *by way of decrypting theoretical articulations shaped by such power*. A problem for evaluating such decryption is as follows: one can read Sanín-Restrepo's intervention as immanent to the Continental tradition that it takes on. One can, for instance, invoke the Foucauldian tradition of examining power relations, the Derridean tradition of deconstruction, and the hermeneutic tradition beginning with Heideggerian phenomenology as exemplars of an approach in which one is engaged in the project of undercutting power by way of a self-reflexive interpretation of its functioning.[24] Indeed, one might contend that, contra the Hegelian project of discerning and celebrating the underlying rationality of institutions, whatever could be called "Continental philosophy" has, since Karl Marx, been concerned with a project of countering those elite mystifications that saturate

everyday knowledge production in the West. The project of “decrypting power” would, on that account, amount to nothing but the continuation under a new name of the project that has been definitive of Continental thought from its origins.[25]

For many who begin with the framework of decolonial studies, this could be read as a critical flaw in Sanín-Restrepo’s approach, and, by extension, in any approach to decolonial philosophy premised on intensifying the rigor of Continental thought as opposed to simply demonstrating its enmeshment in coloniality and seeking alternative lines of thought external to it. From that perspective, part of how power in a solid state is achieved is through the production and proliferation of theoretical and philosophical discourses through which the functioning of coloniality is occluded and mystified as the workings of “democracy.” Philosophical discourse, then, would be a vital dimension of the encryption of power. This suggests that, in parallel to the problem of “democracy” as simulacrum of democracy, we have the problem of “philosophy” as simulacrum of philosophy. As those like Sylvia Wynter have argued, Euromodernity rests upon an over-representation of the figure of “Man” as if it stood for all of humanity, even as it is only “Man,” narrowly defined as male, white, bourgeois, able-bodied, non-queer, etc. who gets to count as truly human.[26] Within that framework, “philosophy” could be said to emerge as a simulacrum of philosophy, wherein it is only “Man”—a simulacrum over-representing himself as if he spanned the full breadth and depth of legitimate humanity—that counts as a “philosopher.”[27]

At issue, then, is the question of the relationship between philosophy—beyond “philosophy,” the simulacrum thereof that functions as an extension of coloniality—and the decryption of power. That is to say, does Sanín-Restrepo’s analysis logically entail that the primary task of the genuine philosopher is to engage in practices of decrypting power, which would include the project of decrypting “philosophy”? Sanín-Restrepo’s formulation of “power in a solid state” would certainly seem to suggest such a direction. Democracy on that account functions through what difference produces, but power enters into a solid state through the eradication of the productive power of difference, such that an ideological apparatus is called upon to encrypt

“democracy” so that it can be mistaken for democracy. To the extent that “philosophy” is constitutive of such an ideological apparatus, it would appear that the task of the philosopher, if she or he is committed to actualizing democracy, is to demonstrate the functioning of the ideological apparatus through “philosophers” so that truths can be snatched from the claws of power in a solid state.

If we accept such decryption as the central task of philosophical decolonization, we may note an important schism between the mainstreams of Analytic and Continental philosophy. The approach to non-ideal theory predominant in contemporary Analytic philosophy, though in many respects emanating from Mills’s attack on the ideological function of the hegemony of ideal theory, is typically not especially concerned with a philosophical critique of extant ideology. Typical approaches there might be categorized in terms of (a) expository efforts in applied ideal theory, (b) efforts in what could be termed *sub-ideal theory*, or (c) moral philosophy offering normative prescriptions for agents operating under conditions of political injustice. Efforts toward (a) are grounded in the notion that one should analyze contemporary realities, but they remain grounded in application of existing conceptions in ideal theory rather than in an effort to reconceptualize those ideals—for instance, philosophical accounts of whether or not affirmative action policies are compatible with Rawlsian principles of justice. They thus respond to Mills’s ideological critique of ideal theory but rarely extend to examinations of how ideology shapes the societies under examination or the theorist’s account of those societies. Efforts toward (b) are about conceiving of alternative ideals under the presumption that recourse to *ideal* ideals is supposedly impossible under contemporary conditions. This approach is perhaps best exemplified by Mills’s calls for a theory of “racial justice,” which calls on the philosopher to put considerations about what would constitute justice *per se* to the side in order to articulate what justice demands in cases of repairing particular injustices.[28] Such calls, though, prompt questions about why one should presume the impossibility of justice proper while affirming the possibility of racial justice or other modes of reparative justice; scarcely do such accounts come with reflections on the ideological function that this sort of presumption

may serve. Efforts toward (c) most properly fit the Rawlsian articulation of nonideal theory, but such efforts neither are concerned, in typical cases, with an examination of ideology nor should they unproblematically count as efforts in political philosophy, given their grounding in normative principles for individual action rather than principles of political legitimacy.

By contrast, as noted above, few approaches could be said to be more central to the Continental tradition, as it is conventionally understood, than an examination of ideology and the conditions under which the theorist may be shaped by it. If the approach of decrypting power is understood broadly, it would be rather easy to make the case that much of the Continental canon is engaged in it. Given the suggestion that decryption would be central to the project of decolonization, one could reach the conclusion that the Analytic tradition is ill-equipped for that project but that the Continental tradition is very well-equipped. From there, one could arrive at a further conclusion: that the Analytic tradition is rife with “philosophy” but that it is within the Continental tradition that one could genuinely find philosophy and, hence, the path toward democracy and beyond coloniality.

I find such a conclusion highly dubious and troublesome. To begin with, it is clearly the case that the Continental tradition is shot through with the tendency toward “philosophy” defined here as a simulacrum of philosophy. Eurocentrism is not alien to that tradition, and, indeed, for some critics, it is that tradition’s defining feature.[29] At best, one can conclude that the Continental tradition is one in which the challenge of moving from “philosophy” to philosophy is a motivating charge. It does not logically follow, though, that the best resources for fulfilling that aim are to be found within that tradition. Here *Decolonizing Democracy* can be taken as evidence: the move to develop a more rigorous and liberatory mode of theories derived from Continental thought requires Sanín-Restrepo to draw on insights exogenous to that tradition in order to “turn the screw” on them.

On this point, one could argue against this characterization by drawing upon Sanín-Restrepo’s Deleuzian rejection of transcendence in favor of an ontology of immanence and difference. Such an argument would suggest that

Sanín-Restrepo could not have drawn upon a tradition of thought transcending the Continental because of the illusory nature of any such transcendence. One wonders, though, why the rejection of transcendence there ought not be considered merely a matter of *regional* ontology. That is to say, a rejection of *any* metaphysical conception of transcendence strains plausibility; can one regard the arguments of *Decolonizing Democracy* as coherent or persuasive if one rejects *any* possibility of transcendence? What is decolonization if it is not an effort to transcend colonialism and coloniality? One might rightly conclude that the Deleuzian ontology simply involves an oxymoronic quest to move beyond transcendence, and that this quest is less than philosophically rigorous insofar as it conflates particular appearances of the notion of “transcendence” within the European thought with transcendence itself—the target of the criticism, in short, may be a simulacrum of transcendence.

Such a conclusion would neither invalidate Deleuze’s formulation of difference nor Sanín-Restrepo’s reworking thereof. What it would demonstrate, though, is that the project of realizing democracy beyond “democracy” may call for an appeal to sources beyond the traditions of “philosophy” whose emergence was coextensive with coloniality. In fine, it is to raise the possibility that political philosophy might transcend political “philosophy” through an engagement with traditions of thought that “philosophy” has regarded as *a priori* non-philosophical. Such traditions may have alternative conceptions that philosophers trained in traditions deriving from the hegemony of European thought could engage with in order to transcend the limitations of their concepts of freedom, legitimacy, justice, democracy, and, indeed, transcendence.[30]

What that suggests is that the philosophical projects relevant to decolonization are not limited to the project of decrypting power. Sanín-Restrepo’s text moves beyond the limitations of Analytic non-ideal theory insofar as it is concerned with a contestation over the real meaning of democracy as an ideal, and it moves beyond the limitations of Continental thought insofar as it begins by taking seriously the ideas of the hidden people on Euromodernity’s underside. But the contestation over ideals need not only

take the form of a decryptive account of what democracy really is once we have partially displaced the Eurocentricity of Continental thought. This implies not only that the project of decrypting power is necessary but insufficient for the achievement of decolonization, but that that project is necessary but insufficient for the decolonization of political philosophy. There is more to be done than to re-read “philosophy” in light of a demonstration of how it has been shaped by coloniality. While decrypting the “philosophy” that coloniality has begotten—to demonstrate the ways that such “philosophy” functions as a manifestation of colonial power—is both an urgent and a worthwhile task, other important tasks remain.

### *From Disavowal to Avowal*

An interesting point of comparison for Sanín-Restrepo can be found in the work of Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò.[31] For Táíwò, modernity refers to an ideal. Hence, he regards it as incoherent to speak of modernity and coloniality as “two sides of the same coin” as does Walter Mignolo or to speak of “Euromodernity” as does Lewis Gordon.[32] That many European thinkers and institutions have failed to realize that ideal—due in large part to their racist, sexist, and colonial commitments—does not, though, imply that the ideal itself ought to be abandoned. Indeed, Táíwò argues, there were other figures who were pointing out the failures of Europe and its thinkers to live up to those ideals that they had articulated, and though *some* such critics have been anti-modern, many others have simply been “excluded moderns,” supporters of modernity who have shown that colonialism and coloniality are projects that undermine modernity.[33] In other words, opposition to coloniality need not imply rejection of modernity.

The theorists drawn upon by Sanín-Restrepo are, for the most part, in the camp more inclined toward rejection or at least problematization of modernity than those who would seek to philosophically evaluate modernity as an ideal realizable in other ways or under different conditions than Euromodernity has sought to do. Táíwò’s position, however, suggests that decolonization need not be anti-modern or postmodern—indeed, decolonization may itself be profoundly modern. A fusion of the positions of

Sanín-Restrepo and Táíwò implies that the simulacrum, “democracy,” seeks to exclude, in short, the decolonial moderns. One could then maintain that many of the excluded decolonial moderns are, as well, disavowed democrats. Their decolonial commitments led them to a rigorous articulation of democracy as an ideal rather than “democracy,” its simulacrum. The simulacrum, though, calls for their disavowal, in much the same way that Sybille Fischer argues that the modernity of the Haitian Revolution was disavowed.[34]

A pressing question for Sanín-Restrepo, then, is what is the role of the disavowed democrats in his conception of decolonization? The absence of any of, say, Guaman Poma, W.E.B. Du Bois, or Ella Baker from *Decolonizing Democracy* is not a problem in itself, but the general absence of the disavowed democrats raises issues about the text’s orientation toward, very loosely speaking, postmodern or anti-modern European thought. Is the implicit argument that the disavowed democrats of the past were, simply, lacking in their articulation of the ideal of democracy because they failed to make the postmodern moves characteristic of Agamben, Negri, Deleuze, et al? If that is the case, then Sanín-Restrepo offers a theoretical advancement over both the Euro-postmodern critiques and the tradition of disavowed democrats by fusing elements of the two camps together. If not, it would seem that Sanín-Restrepo is part of a lineage, a democratic critic of the postmoderns who, in showing how their theoretical positions are insufficient for the achievement of decolonization and democracy, is a fellow to the disavowed democrats.

The exclusion of moderns and disavowal of democrats at issue here is a part and parcel of coloniality’s production of “the hidden people,” to use Sanín-Restrepo’s term. What is hidden, then, is not merely the people themselves but the *thinking and ideas* of those people.[35] This suggests that the over-representation of “philosophy” as if it were philosophy itself involves not only forms of Euromodern narcissism but dynamics involving the active exclusion of actual philosophical thought from the general understanding of what counts as philosophical—and, it would seem, these dynamics are equally present regardless of which side of the Analytic/Continental divide is

under examination. Coloniality involves the production, in short, of hidden philosophies and hidden philosophers.

This raises questions in light of Sanín-Restrepo's closing observation, in *Decolonizing Democracy*, on political philosophy. He argues that the tendency in Hardt and Negri—and, one might conclude, typical exponents of contemporary Continental thought at large—is to render sovereignty intrinsically problematic and to seek means of seizing people power beyond the sovereign. Attention to the ways in which Euromodern sovereignty is premised on the exclusion of the hidden people, though, shows that such directions may rest upon fallacy. Hence, Sanín-Restrepo concludes:

The primordial effort of political philosophy must then be directed to synthesize sovereignty and people as true democracy...

The only history that should matter to a real political philosophy in the twenty-first century has to be precisely those legal and political schemes from where the absolute and irreconcilable detachment between the people and democracy was planned and executed. Political philosophy must encounter head on the way the people have been replaced—first by a dense image of a people as an impossible totality that depends on a fundamental exclusion, and then by the production of institutions deriving their hidden legitimacy from this image. Ultimately the first question has to concern how democracy can function without a people or a substitute that is only nominal and empty. To continue to omit sovereignty is to help the executioner blindfold his victims. (207)

In short, political philosophy is tasked with bringing about a world in which sovereignty is fused with the people as such—and, hence, political philosophy is tasked with bringing about a sovereignty fully inclusive of the power of the hidden people.

If it is the case that political philosophy has this as its task—to overcome “democracy” in favor of democracy by restoring and/or inaugurating the power of the hidden people—then this should raise the question of political



philosophy's responsibilities to the hidden philosophers and hidden philosophies. In short, does political philosophy bear a responsibility for synthesizing *itself* with the hidden people and to bring a measure of philosophical sovereignty to the people? I submit that it does. If this is the case, it suggests that part of the "history that should matter to a real political philosophy" is the execution of the plan by which the hidden philosophers and philosophies have been concealed. But this history would only be rendered relevant to the extent that that which had been disavowed as philosophy and those that had been disavowed as philosophers are actively engaged. Of course, an argument such as this is incoherent if pitched at philosophy or philosophers as a whole, because it presupposes that, *for the hidden philosophers*, an attitude of excluding other hidden philosophers prevails; this is clearly not the case.[36] Rather, the argument would imply that those heretofore working within the framework of "philosophy" (as a simulacrum of philosophy) would be obligated to turn their attention to hidden philosophy.

An impediment to such a turn would be the phenomenon that Lewis Gordon has identified as "disciplinary decadence." [37] Disciplinary decadence involves forms of epistemic closure in which one cannot access realities lying beyond the reach of one's own discipline(s). Where "philosophy" is concerned, there is a tendency to treat Analytic and Continental approaches as if they were two separate disciplines and to train aspiring philosophers accordingly. A consequence of this that is familiar to academically-trained professional philosophers is the tendency of Analytic philosophers to fail to grasp the contributions of Continental philosophers and vice versa. A separate consequence, though, is that the Eurocentrism definitive of both the Analytic and the Continental leads academic philosophers to tend defend their lack of familiarity with Africana and Latin American thought on the grounds of its lying on the other side of the Analytic/Continental divide. For many Analytic philosophers, Africana thought is viewed as a subfield of Continental Philosophy and, hence, beyond the purview of what they could be expected to read and engage. The Continental view of Africana thought is perhaps less limited, but not without its insidious dimensions. There, Africana philosophy is accepted as a disciplinary bedfellow generally only to the extent that it

engages with prominent figures in the Continental canon—a figure such as Fanon is welcome to the extent that he is regarded as building upon the work of Hegel, Marx, Freud, or Sartre or, perhaps, as prefiguring the concerns of a Derrida or Foucault. Hence, figures such as Táíwò, for whom dealing with questions of decolonization does not mandate an engagement with 20th century Continental thought, are beyond the scope of what many Continental thinkers are willing to entertain.

Disciplinarily decadent approaches in the Analytic field have been, since Rawls, preoccupied with offering a conceptual analysis of “justice,” or, on occasion, on other terms with a genealogical grounding in the European/Western philosophical heritage—liberty, democracy, nondomination, etc. Such approaches are indifferent or impervious to commonplace hermeneuticist, postmodern, and/or poststructuralist challenges, for which an ideally rational account of political values is regarded as impossible and, typically, undesirable. The Analytic turn toward the non-ideal offers, to some, an escape from these challenges, insofar as it implies that one may abandon the pursuit of grand ideals in favor of a more direct attention to reality. Yet, non-ideal theory at best would entail *delaying* the project of reckoning with those issues, rather than sidestepping them altogether. Analytic political philosophy may manifest a decadent commitment to Rawlsian ideal theory, in which the task of the philosopher is imagined as consisting in nothing more than a conceptual analysis of “justice” or related terms as they would be manifest in idealized contexts. To acknowledge this, though, is not to negate the possibility or likelihood of the reverse: that the call for non-ideal theory yields forms of disciplinary decadence in which, having reduced the field of political philosophy to examination of what to do under irreparable conditions, it crowds out efforts to think radically about those values and institutions that really are desirable. Indeed, for many political philosophers it has become taboo for one’s work to be understood as “teleological” or concerned with “progress.” Yet such appeals mask that they are, indeed, *teleological commitments* to do away with teleology and progress. The dimensions of coloniality present in Euromodern accounts of telos and progress are taken as naïve warrants for wholesale rejection rather than as

stimuli to more rigorous thinking about which *telo*i and which modes of achieving progress toward those *telo*i are desirable and justifiable.[38] Disciplinarily decadent approaches to ideal theory and non-ideal theory serve to impoverish each by foreclosing the rigor that emerges where theorists hold themselves responsible for understanding the relationship between non-ideal conditions and conditions that are genuinely desirable.

Of course, there is a further issue of the possible decadence of Analytic political philosophy even should it successfully overcome the deleterious effects of an ideal/non-ideal schism. In short, any philosophical approach grounded in the analysis of extant Euromodern values and ideals—and/or analysis of what actions or additional values that axiological commitment on those grounds would entail—remains subject to the charge that those values need to be decrypted to demonstrate their colonial function. At best, this would imply the role for Analytic political philosophy as taking primarily the form of conceptual decolonization, as has been suggested by thinkers like Kwasi Wiredu, in which cross-cultural dialogue about the meanings of terms such as “democracy” can be used to overcome the Eurocentric presuppositions present in articulations thereof.[39] At worst, this would suggest that the effort to render Euromodern values as *apparently* non-colonial, post-colonial, or decolonized, may involve simply an effort to enhance the function of colonial simulacra: it would exacerbate, rather than eliminate, the function of Euromodern ideals to produce an undesirable world on the one hand and to affect the taken-for-granted quality of that world’s desirability on the other hand. One could conclude, then, that the projects of decryption for which Sanín-Restrepo calls are a necessary antidote to the tendency toward disciplinary decadence present in Analytic thought, insofar as it is premised on the clarification of the meaning of extant concepts rather than the effort to understand the ideological and/or colonial functions that those concepts may serve.

Yet by the same token, disciplinarily decadent approaches in Continental thought bear much the same problem when employed as a rationale for indifference to conceptual and rational examination of ideals. Simply put, one must confront the question of whether post-colonial,

non-colonial, decolonized, decolonial, or anti-colonial ideals are possible. The hasty generalization drawn by many philosophers informed by postmodern and poststructuralist accounts is that rationality and, indeed, even values themselves may be little more than residue of projects of colonizing the world and colonizing an otherwise wild psyche. Hence, the task of the philosopher becomes merely to demonstrate the failures and aporias of political thinking and institutions, rather than the difficult project of constructing alternatives. The obvious issue to raise here is that the logic of such accounts would imply their contiguity with the Euromodern legacies they criticize. One may conclude from this that, insofar as postmodern or poststructuralist-infused accounts that are taken as reasons to reject the decolonial thinking of excluded moderns, hidden philosophers, and disavowed democrats, they are precisely a recapitulation of the colonial dynamics they regard themselves as transcending.

Overcoming the tendency toward decadence in Continental political philosophy may entail, then, fusing the project of articulating non-, post-, anti-, and/or de-colonial ideals with the effort to take seriously the hidden philosophy that the broader Euromodern tradition of which Continental thought is a part has functioned to conceal. Crucially, this may be a different matter than trying to bring about the decolonization of Euromodern ideals. Note, for instance, that for someone like Táíwò, Euromodern *articulations* of ideals can be decoupled from the notion of modernity, such that one may speak of modernity as a desirable ideal that bears no essential relation to Europe or coloniality. It is true that one could approach that matter by, as it were, peeling the skin of Euromodern coloniality away from the flesh of the ideals Euromodern thinkers had articulated. Then again, though, one may simply take up the project of offering a coherent account of what it means to be modern and flesh out this account through the study of other modernities—that is, African, Asian, Amerindian, etc. modernities. Hence, it is not clear that what is at issue is a conceptual decolonization of European discourses on modernity so much as it is, simply, an effort to conceptually analyze modernity and modern ideals in light of thinking and practices grounded in the global south. Hence, the project of articulating desirable

ideals of modernity would not amount to merely the decryption of Euromodern thought in order to separate the wheat from the colonial chaff.

We have here an important distinction. It is one thing to offer an analysis of extant ideals in light of an effort to decolonize their prior articulations. It is quite another thing to synthesize meaningful ideals that are commensurable with and/or desirable for anti-colonial and decolonial struggles, or that would be meaningful for genuinely post-colonial societies and institutions. The synthesis of concepts, though, involves a project of elucidating their limits and limitations: novel terms call for conceptual analysis as much as do familiar ones, and, we may say, decolonial values call for conceptual analysis as much as do Euromodern ones. Where the practice of philosophy within the narrow framework of the Continental veers toward decadence, then, is where the approach mandates a refusal to work conceptually with ideals in favor of forms of hermeneutic and/or poststructuralist skepticism or pessimism about the possibility of axiological intelligibility. To slightly modify Sanín-Restrepo's formulation, we may contend that the task of political philosophy includes the project of uniting the hidden people with *axiological* sovereignty, which calls, in turn, for modes of rational examination that decadent approaches in Continental thought may forswear.

A consequence of this, then, should be as follows: Sanín-Restrepo's call for decryption is necessary but insufficient for the project of a decolonizing political philosophy. Decryption involves both a critical theoretical perspective on how discourses manifest their colonial function as well as a deconstructive impulse toward demonstrating other alternatives. Therefore, decryption opens up possibility for imagining otherwise; it is epistemically counter-hegemonic, and thus may serve as a precursor to synthesizing ideals. However, a limitation of the decryptive project is that it may require presupposing the presence of pre-encrypted meanings. For a decryption of "democracy," this concern may appear trivial, insofar as serious attention to the term's meaning points to the issue of the rule of the people prior to the production of a hidden people—in other words, here we do have the presence of a pre-encrypted meaning, even if the "pre" in that formulation need not imply a strictly historico-temporal sense. Yet where it comes to the understanding of ideals

from beyond the Euromodern axiological canon, it is not obvious that encryption serves any essential function. If there are *anti-colonial* ideals—meaning not ideals that are pre-colonial or non-colonial but, rather, ideals that are meaningful to anti-colonial political struggle—then the apprehension of their meanings and desirability would call not for critical hermeneutic practices of decryption but rather for imaginative efforts that may call, ultimately, for forms of intersubjective dialogue and debate.

Colonialism and coloniality have involved the disavowal of the hidden people as people, meaning, on the one hand, that Euromodern political “philosophy” has tended to resolve normative questions on the basis of the presupposed irrelevance or repudiation of non-European humanity and, on the other hand, that non-European political philosophy is treated as if it were not philosophy. If colonized peoples and their successors are to achieve degrees of axiological sovereignty—if they are able to articulate and debate their political beliefs in shared contexts with real public stakes—then this would seem to imply an overcoming of such disavowal. However, “overcoming” in this context would not necessarily amount to “elimination,” because the axiological sovereignty of the colonized need not be a matter of colonizers and other hegemonic communities recognizing and/or consenting to their ideas.[40] In other words, overcoming coloniality may be less a matter of colonial beneficiaries consenting to regard the struggles and thought of anti-colonial communities as legitimate and more a matter of lessening the power of colonizers to the point of their irrelevance. If decryption is a powerful antidote to the disavowal of the hidden people, its limitation lies in its having less to offer when the hidden people seek to avow, refine, and realize values of their own.

What this suggests is that for anti-colonial political philosophy, the project of decryption is one that goes hand-in-hand with the project of articulating other ideals. To posit coloniality as the ideally non-ideal is to take responsibility both for how one conceives of what is ideal as well as for how one conceives of the reality that fails to fulfill that ideal. Because competing ideals compose part of that reality, such a theoretical endeavor calls, ultimately, for an ability to understand various ideals in relation to each other.

What is non-ideal from the theorist's perspective may, as Sanín-Restrepo's work shows us, be precisely the fulfillment of another ideal. To give a theoretical account of politics calls for understanding the relationship between the real and the desirable upon a terrain in which the real is a reflection of competing desires. To decrypt the non-ideal is to demonstrate the hidden functioning of its oft-concealed ideal(s). To posit the ideal as genuinely ideal calls, in turn, for doing so rigorously in light of what one has learned about the functioning of undesired or undesirable ideals.

## Conclusion

Let us conclude by returning directly to the issue raised by Rawls and Hegel of the salience of the society's implicit rationality to political philosophy. Much of non-ideal theory, it could be said, starts with a rejection of this framework: because the society is irrational, as it does not manifest the commitment to justice that reason would demand, the theorist turns simply to the effort of understanding how to survive and navigate its injustices. Likewise for much of Continental political philosophy that takes on the challenges to rationality that characterized much of its 20th century development: because a rational society is regarded as impossible or undesirable, the task of the theorist is not to glean an underlying rationality but to offer an ironic or playful counterpoint. Although there is much that could be said to be anti-colonial or decolonial political philosophy that fits into one or the other of these frameworks, I contend that there is a different and very much worthwhile strand afoot. There, understanding precisely what makes coloniality rational—and understanding how the rationality of coloniality stands in relation to the rationality or rationalities of colonialism—serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it simply allows the theorist to be better attuned to reality: the theorist is not, as is the case for many Rawlsian political philosophers, concerned only with the contours of an imagined social world. On the other hand, it means that the theorist stands in confrontation with a rationality *that it would be desirable to overcome*, which raises the question of *what other rationalities are possible*. In short, the Hegelian project of political philosophy need not take the form of a *rationalization* of society as it stands, in which *what is* always implicitly demonstrates *what should be*. Apprehending the

rationality of a colonial society—or of a globe overtaken by the agglomeration of overtly and covertly colonial forces—is a precursor to putting forth rigorous accounts of how a society or a globe really ought to be and of those ideals that would make its functioning not only rational but desirable.

[1] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, edited by Erin Kelly (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2001). p. 4. For Hegel’s classic formulation, see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel: Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, translated by H.B. Nisbet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[2] Although many prefer to refer to this tradition simply as “analytic philosophy,” in this paper I will refer to it as “Analytic philosophy.” This is because our relevant context will be a consideration of mainstream tendencies on each side of the so-called Analytic/Continental divide. To suggest that neither Continental philosophy nor any other philosophical tradition beyond the Anglo-American is “analytic” in its orientation is philosophically problematic, unless one loads up the notion of analyticity with so much definitional baggage that it would be difficult even to find many Anglo-American practitioners thereof. Hence, I will treat “Analytic” and “Continental” as names—and, hence, as proper nouns—whose extensional referents are both philosophically and sociologically problematic, even as these terms are, if perhaps regrettably, nonetheless rather useful in referring to phenomena in the sociology of knowledge at the level of generality and typicality.

[3] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Revised Edition (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 216.

[4] Charles Mills, “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology,” *Hypatia* volume 20, number 3, Summer 2005, pp. 165-184. For an argument that, *contra* Mills, the preference for “nonideal methodology” is no less ideological than the preference for ideal theory, see Matthew Adams, “An Ideology Critique of Nonideal Methodology,” *European Journal of Critical Theory*, forthcoming.



[5] Though Rawls's original usage referred to "nonideal theory," contemporary usage often employs the hyphenated "non-ideal" as well. Though some philosophers may implicitly or explicitly be utilizing a distinction between "nonideal" and "non-ideal," in this paper I will use the terms interchangeably. For a critical survey of recent approaches in non-ideal theory, see Laura Valentini, "Ideal vs. Non-Ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map," *Philosophy Compass* 7/9 (2012), pp. 654-664.

[6] I have in mind here works such as David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823*, revised edition with new preface (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Works such as these explore the political thought of influential political agents in light of the contradictions their ideas would seem to imply—in Davis's case, the contradiction between the revolutionary discourse of centralized colonial administration as a form of "slavery" and the revolutionaries' various modes of support for and/or dependence on chattel slavery. However, I read that as a very different project than the Hegelian one alluded to by Rawls. The former involves demonstrating the *lack* of a rigorous, coherent, and supervenient logic that bedevils much of Euromodern political thought and discourse (particularly as it regards the consistency of its recognition of the humanity of non-European peoples). The latter, though, would be an effort to analyze the political *reality* of such contexts as composing a coherent, rational whole. Indeed, the coherence of the political reality may, in some cases, *require* there to be contradictions in political discourse, such that the Hegelian project would seek to unearth how discursive contradictions beget the rational functioning of political institutions.

[7] Ricardo Sanín-Restrepo, *Decolonizing Democracy: Power in a Solid State* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016).

[8] For the notion of "modernity's underside," see Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor & the Philosophy of Liberation*, translated and edited by Eduardo Mendieta (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1998). On the notion of coloniality, see, *intra alia*, Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla*:

*Views from South* 1:3 (2000), pp. 533-580; and *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, edited by Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (New York: Routledge, 2010), most of which was originally published as Volume 21, Numbers 2 & 3 of *Cultural Studies*.

[9] “Simulacrum” is one of the most important terms for Sanín-Restrepo’s account. The key reference for Sanín-Restrepo here is Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004). Though he does not invoke Jean Baudrillard explicitly, the influence of Baudrillard’s formulation of that concept is felt in Sanín-Restrepo’s text. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

[10] On the notion of problem people, see also Lewis R. Gordon, “Du Bois’s Humanistic Philosophy of Human Sciences,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568 (March 2000), pp. 265–280.

[11] For a compelling critique of the notion of persons or acts being “non-racist,” see Michael J. Monahan, *The Creolizing Subject: Race, Reason, and the Politics of Purity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), chapter 5.

[12] Gabriel Méndez-Hincapie and Ricardo Sanín-Restrepo, “La Constitución Encriptada. Nuevas formas de emancipación del poder global,” *Redhes, Revista de Derechos Humanos y Estudios Sociales*, Número 8 (2012), Universidad Autónoma de San Luis de Potosí; *Decrypting Power*, edited by Ricardo Sanín-Restrepo (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018).

[13] Ricardo Sanín-Restrepo, “Introduction,” *Decrypting Power*, p. xxi.

[14] I say that this may strike many readers as unlikely because, as is discussed in the next section, the text primarily addresses philosophers and critical theorists working in the Continental tradition. It is somewhat typical for many working in the Analytic tradition to regard monographs devoted to such interventions as beyond the scope of political philosophy, or at least political philosophy with which their work could possibly engage. This is, likewise, a

formula applied with the same degree of typicality on the other side of the purported Analytic/Continental divide. An alternative reason could be given, in addition, to support this claim: that it simply remains rare for political philosophers identifying as Analytic or as Continental to engage literature on coloniality.

[15] See also Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), which examines the same issue in terms of the dominant approaches to studying the United States in political science. Smith's text is a crucial point of discussion in Mills's "Ideal Theory as Ideology."

[16] Matthew Adams's recent critique of Mills makes a similar point pitched in terms of Mills's call for non-ideal theory fulfilling an ideological function for neoliberal capitalism. See Adams, "An Ideology Critique of Nonideal Methodology." It is worth noting here, though, that viewed in light of theoretical frameworks in decolonial studies, one may reasonably contend that Adams's *particular* ideological critique of nonideal methodology can be seen as ideologically derivative of coloniality—though such a finding would not undermine the conclusion that the preference for non-ideal theory over ideal theory is ideological, because the salient features of capital for Adams's account would remain salient features of any account of coloniality grounded in Quijano's articulation thereof.

[17] Indeed, one may look to the earlier formulation of "Americanity" as an attempt to distinguish the periodized historical account of what emerges through European conquest from "coloniality" as something that Americanity inaugurates. See Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System," *International Social Science Journal* 44:4 (1992), p. 549-557. There, coloniality is articulated as one of four "newnesses" that Americanity would initiate: "coloniality, ethnicity, racism, and the concept of newness itself" (550). Although the *historical* point of the novelty of these four factors in the production of the modern world-system is given a strong account there, one may nonetheless come to the conclusions that, as there conceptualized, coloniality, ethnicity, racism,

and newness refer to phenomena that *could* have emerged under different circumstances—indeed, that could have had, and perhaps did in fact have, manifestations in earlier historical contexts—and that could, in principle, recur in future world-systems after the present one subsides.

[18] I do not mean to imply that, as historical and political phenomena, this means that one should presume a radical distinction between coloniality and colonialism such that one can erect a dichotomous barrier between that which evidences coloniality and that which evidences colonialism. As historical phenomena, colonialism begat coloniality—indeed, various forms and iterations of colonialism begat various forms and iterations of coloniality. But understanding the genetic relationship between the two should not cloud an understanding of the functional dimensions of the two that imply a cleavage at the level of values and ideals.

[19] This, of course, presupposes that one regards colonized people as people, rather than treating them as hidden people; typical members of Euromodernity’s oversight—including many political philosophers—may, of course, regard colonialism and coloniality as manifestations of justice rather than injustice because of their commitments to viewing the humanity of Euromodernity’s underside as non-existent or heavily impaired.

[20] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

[21] See Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

[22] Reva Siegel, “Why Equal Protection No Longer Protects: The Evolving Forms of Status-Enforcing State Action,” *Stanford Law Review* 49:5 (May 1997), pp. 1111-1148.

[23] See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Penguin Classics Edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1985); and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, translated by Maurice Cranston (New York: Penguin Books, 1968).

[24] See, e.g., Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Fortieth Anniversary Edition translated by Gayatri Spivak and with an introduction by Judith Butler (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016); Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, translated by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson and with a foreword by Richard Kearney (New York: Continuum, 2008).

[25] Precisely what those origins are and what the scope of the referent of “Continental” is are, of course, matters of ongoing and long-standing debate. For an overview, see William R. Schroeder, *Continental Philosophy: A Critical Approach* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

[26] Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003), pp. 257-337.

[27] For accounts of Euromodern philosophy and political thought in terms of these dynamics, see, for instance: Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ in Western Philosophy*, second edition (London: Routledge, 1993); Peter K.J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780-1830* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2013); Leonard Harris, “‘Believe it Or Not’ or the Ku Klux Klan and American Philosophy Exposed,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 68:5 (May, 1995), pp. 133-137; Penny A. Weiss, *Canon Fodder: Historical Women Political Thinkers* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2009).

[28] See Charles W. Mills, “Contract of Breach: Repairing the Racial Contract,” in Carole Pateman and Charles W. Mills, *Contract & Domination* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 106-133.

[29] See, e.g., Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Toward a Critique of Continental Reason: Africana Studies and the Decolonization of Imperial Cartographies in the Americas,” in *Not Only the Master’s Tools: African-American Studies in*

*Theory and Practice*, edited by Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 51-84.

[30] For an argument in this vein regarding “justice,” see Lewis Gordon, “When Justice Is Not Enough: Toward the Decolonization of Normative Life,” in *Geopolitics and Decolonization: Perspectives from the Global South*, edited by Fernanda Frizzo Bragato and Lewis R. Gordon (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018), pp. 31-48.

[31] See Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*, Indiana University Press, 2010; *Africa Must Be Modern*, Indiana University Press, 2014; “‘The love of freedom brought us here’: An Introduction to Modern African Political Philosophy,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109:2, Spring 2010, pp. 391-410.

[32] Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 66; Lewis R. Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 87. I use the formulation of Euromodernity throughout this piece because of a nuance that Táíwò’s rejection of that formulation may miss: as Gordon uses it, Euromodernity denotes a conception of modernity in which modernity is conceived of as an exclusively European ideal or achievement. Hence, there could be other forms of modernity—even ones realized by Europeans—that would not count as Euromodern.

[33] Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, “Excluded Moderns and Race/Racism in Euro-American Philosophy: James Africanus Beale Horton,” *The CLR James Journal* 24:1/2 (Fall 2018), pp. 177-203.

[34] Sybille Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, Duke University Press, 2004.

[35] For a reflection on this issue, see Lewis R. Gordon, *Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 22-40.

[36] That is not to say, though, that there are no hidden philosophers who participate in the exclusion of other hidden philosophers. It is simply to say that this is not always the case and, indeed, often is not the case.

[37] Lewis R. Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[38] For discussion, see Drucilla Cornell, *Defending Ideals: War, Democracy, and Political Struggles* (New York: Routledge), especially pp. 85-98.

[39] See Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), especially pp. 136-144.

[40] For discussion, see Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

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