

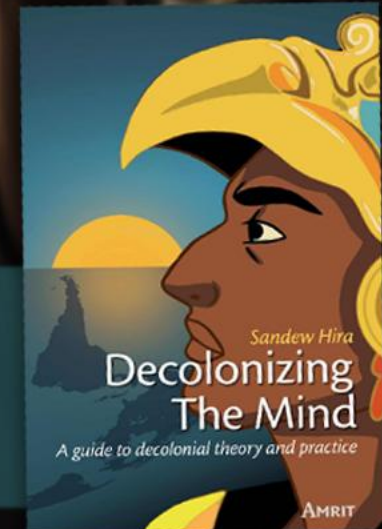
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## What is decolonial theory?

The background, nature, strength and weaknesses of decolonial theory and practice

# What does it mean to decolonize the world?

Decolonizing The Mind,  
the final frontier of colonialism  
with Sandew Hira



#017

20-11-2023

# Original idea podcast series

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- ❑ Explain DTM: weekly rhythm
- ❑ War in Palestine: apply DTM
- ❑ Prediction: Israel will not exist in a few decades
- ❑ DTM analysis: explain the main players and the direction of the liberation struggle of Palestine on a daily basis
- ❑ Not limited to 15-20 minutes

# Topics

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- ❑ Short comment on world affairs
- ❑ What is colonizing the mind? Eurocentrism – a distorted view of the world
- ❑ How do we proceed with DTM?
- ❑ Examples of comprehensive, coherent and integral frameworks

# Where does the war stand now?

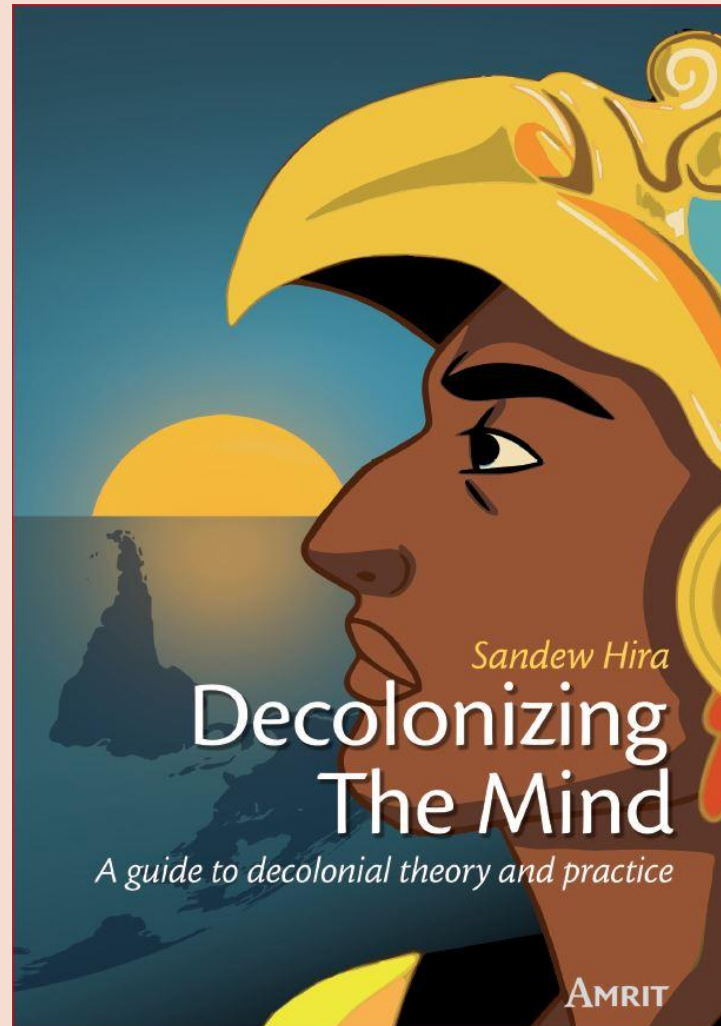
- ❑ Genocide by Israel continues: 13,000 dead (5,000 children), 30,000 injured
- ❑ Preparation under way for a regional war by all parties: political, organizational and militarily
- ❑ Question: not if, but when will the escalation take place and how
- ❑ Global solidarity building up





# Back to DTM

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# Eurocentrism: a distorted view of the world



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLqC3FNN0aI&t=8s>

US fictional political drama series *The West Wing*. White House staff received a delegation from the Organization of Cartographers for Social Equality.

*“The Mercator projection has fostered European imperialist attitude for centuries and created an ethnic bias against the Third World. The German cartographer Mercator originally designed this map in 1569 as a navigational tool for European sailors. The map enlarges areas of the pole to create straight lines of constant bearing of geographic directions so as to make it easier to cross an ocean. But it distorts the relative size of nations and continents.”*

*Greenland and Africa appear to be roughly the same size, but Africa is 14 times larger than Greenland.*

*Europe drawn considerably larger than South America when its 6.9 million square miles South America is almost double the size of Europe’s 3.8 million.*

*Alaska appears three times as large as Mexico, when Mexico is larger by 0.9 million square miles.*

*Germany appears in the middle of the map at the most northern quarter of the earth.*

# Where are the distortions?

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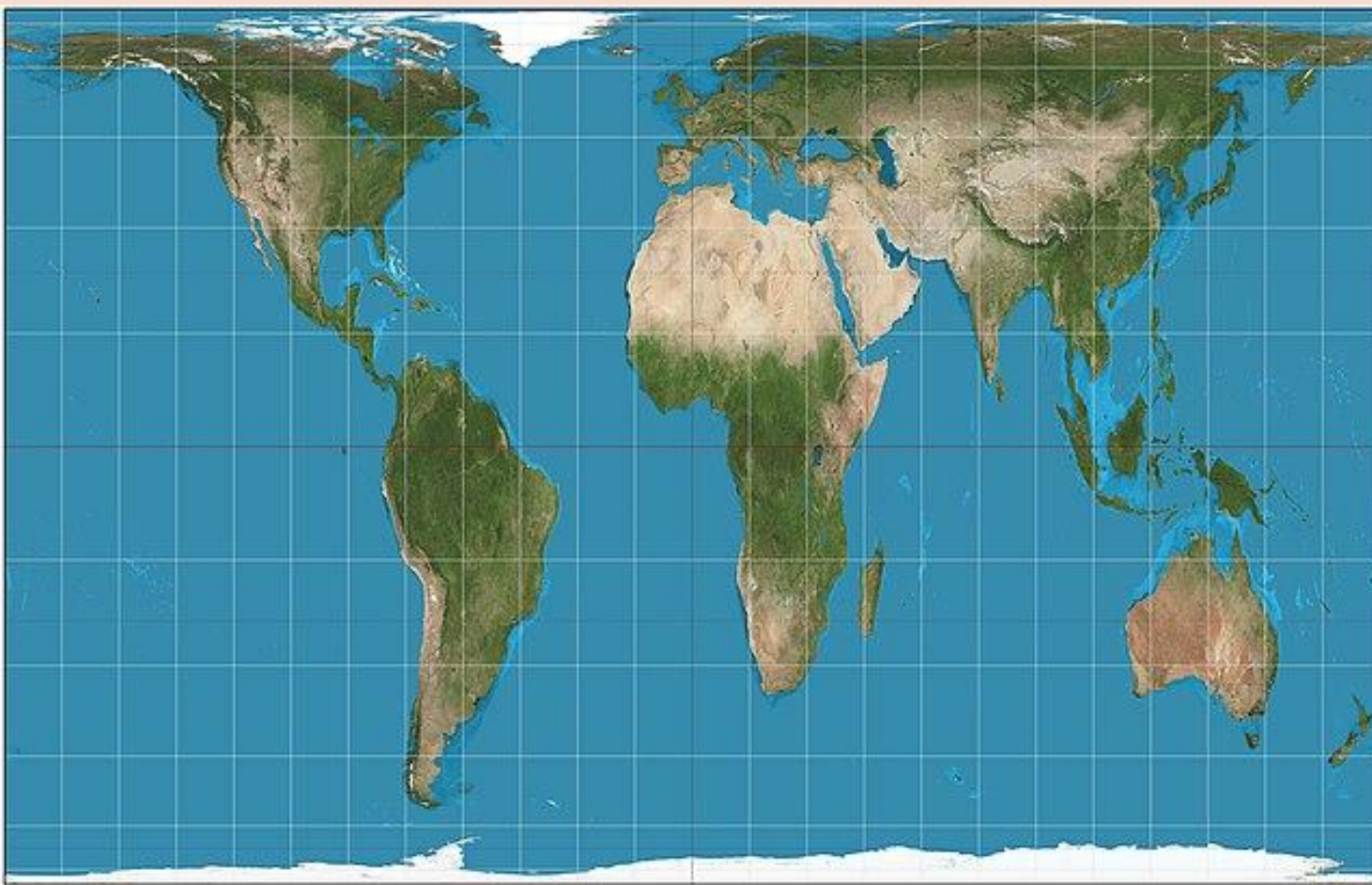
- ❑ The facts and the distorted representation of the facts.
- ❑ The narrative: why is Germany at the center of the map? Why is Europe at the top of the map?
- ❑ DTM is a change of the colonial mind set.



# Other views of the world: view 1 with facts

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*Gall Petersen projection: it gives an accurate presentation of the facts: the land masses.*

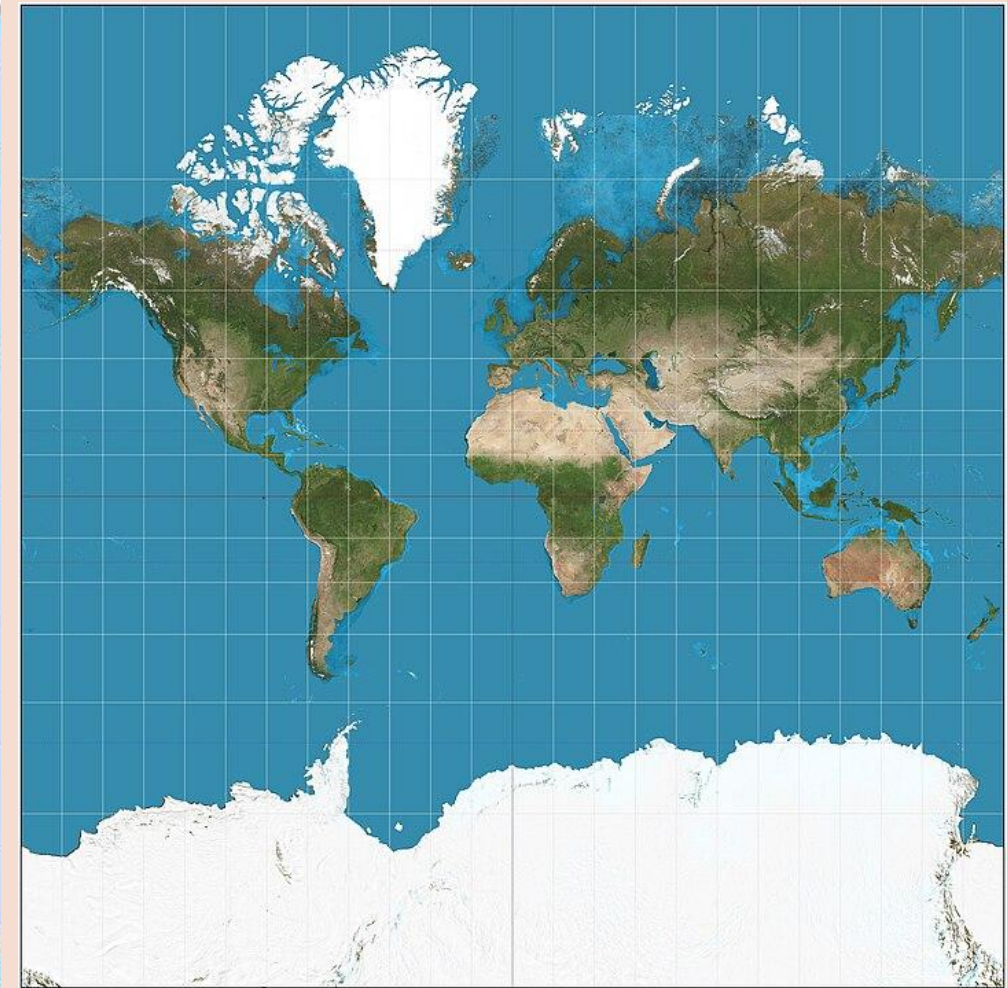




# Other views of the world: view 2 with narrative

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**DTM map**



# Imagine the introduction of DTM maps in education

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- ❑ It requires a total change of mind set
- ❑ It is a huge undertaking to prepare and education billions of people about the need
- ❑ It will meet stiff and even violent resistance from the colonized minds

# How do we proceed with DTM?

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1. Create a thorough understanding of colonialism and its impact on the world
2. Develop a tool to create this understanding
3. Use the tool to chart out a trajectory for changing the world



# What is the tool to develop our understanding?

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1. A theoretical framework: DTM.
2. A vision for the future: building a new world civilization

# The pillars of the theoretical framework

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1. Establishing the requirements for the framework: comprehensive, coherent and integral.
2. DTM concept of civilization
3. DTM theory of racism: how racism is embedded in the Western colonial world civilization.
4. DTM epistemology: theory on decolonial knowledge
5. DTM strategy: reconstruct the disciplines

# The requirements for the DTM framework

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- It is comprehensive because it has produced concepts of how to look at the most important dimensions of a society: epistemology, a world-view, economics, politics, social relations including relations with nature, and culture. There are other important aspects of a society, but these dimensions are essential to make a framework comprehensive.
- It is coherent because its concepts don't contradict each other. They are consistent and logical.
- It is integral because the concepts of the different dimensions are not just lumped together but are related to each other from a basic concept. In Liberalism this is “individual freedom” and in Marxism “class struggle”. In decolonial theory it is “mental slavery and decolonizing the mind (DTM)”. The colonization of the mind is the last frontier of colonialism.



# The current phase of decolonial theory

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- ❑ Important milestones: acknowledgement that decolonization is more than political independence is: it is a critique of colonialism, colonial history, Eurocentric epistemology and power.
- ❑ Problems in general
  - ❑ It is scattered and not comprehensive: contribution focus on philosophy, language and literature, and social theory.
  - ❑ It is not coherent: economic theory can come from Marxism, epistemology is a critique of the European Enlightenment.
  - ❑ It is not integral: many concepts are there that are every diverse: orientalism, subaltern, theories of racism, concept of black skins, white masks

# Logical consequences of the problems

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- ❑ Decolonial theory is not a practical theory about how to build a new society, how to build a new economic, political or cultural system: nationally and internationally
- ❑ In order to be practical it needs to move from general analysis to reconstructing the disciplines.

# DTM and other decolonial contributions

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- ❑ There are many contributions in different parts of the world to decolonial theory.
- ❑ I am not going to discuss and evaluate them. I leave that for historians.
- ❑ My focus: developing DTM framework with others



# DTM concept of civilization

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A civilization as a collection of societies with a specific knowledge base:

- ❑ It has a cultural base with institutions for knowledge production and knowledge dissemination that produces material and non-material culture. The cultural base is the most distinctive feature of a civilization because it has a view of what kind of societies that civilization wants to build, what kind of vision it has for the future of mankind, where it stands now and where it wants to go. It defines the identity of that civilization. On the basis of these views, it sets up the institutions for knowledge production and distribution and other institutions in the economic, political, social and geographic dimension.
- ❑ It has economic institutions that produce goods and services that can sustain highly developed social, political and cultural institutions.
- ❑ It has political institutions that structure the relationship between the rulers and those being ruled in the form of a state. Civilizations are not anarchist societies. These political and state structures can be very varied.
- ❑ It has social institutions that organizes social relations in a civilization. Social relations can be organized on the basis of a social division of labor. A social institution like an administrative class can be involved in the business of governing a society. A social group like agricultural producers can be involved in the production of agricultural products. The social relations can be organized along the lines of economic exploitation, like in many class societies.
- ❑ A civilization can have different empires (Islamic civilization with Ottoman, Safavid, Mogul). An empire can have different civilizations (Mongol empire with Chinese, Buddhist, Islam)

# Other concepts of civilization

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- ❑ Ferdinand Braudel (1902-1985) normative definition in *A History of Civilizations* (1963): “Civilization meant broadly the opposite of barbarism. On one side were the civilized peoples: on the other, primitive savages or barbarians.” Limited to Islam, China, India, Japan, Europe, USA.
- ❑ Arnold Toynbee (1889-1995) 12-volume *A Study of History* (1934 to 1961):
  - ❑ Lists 23 civilizations
  - ❑ No clear definition of civilization
- ❑ [National Geographic](#): Civilization is a complex way of life: large population centers( cities); monumental architecture and unique art styles; shared communication strategies; systems for administering territories; a complex division of labor; and the division of people into social and economic classes.

# The importance of DTM concept of civilization

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- ❑ Societies have developed on the basis of a system of knowledge production: concepts of history, knowledge, economics, social relations, political theory, mathematics etc.
- ❑ Colonialism has colonized that knowledge and thus the mind and made it global and universal
- ❑ It stands in contrast with other concepts of history: Liberalism (modernity) and Marxism (mode of production).
- ❑ It has become a major narrative of how to look at the world now: China, Russia, India, Western Asia, Abya Yala.

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# Examples of civilizations

# West Asia: Sumerian civilization 7000 years ago

- ❑ Tigris-Euphrates valley in Mesopotamia (nowadays Iraq, Iran and the Persian Gulf). It lasted for 3,000 years.
- ❑ Sumerians refer to themselves as the “black-headed-people”, possibly because of their North African ancestry.
- ❑ Handicraft, a physical infrastructure of communications (roads, bridges, canals and other waterways), a social structure (social classes), a system of government with rules and regulations and a system of knowledge production and dissemination (writings, signs, philosophy, cosmology, science, religion).
- ❑ A highlight of Sumerian civilization was the establishment of the Code of Hammurabi (circa 1745 BCE), named after the sixth king of the First Babylonian Dynasty. It consists of 281 laws written in cuneiform on clay tablets.
- ❑ Babylonian society was a slave society, so many articles dealt with the system of slavery. But it also had articles that were based on the premise that you are innocent until proven guilty (article 2 and 3). That is in stark contradiction to the laws of the Catholic Inquisition that prevailed in Europe three thousand years later, starting in Spain with the Spanish Inquisition. In those laws *“the accused could be presumed guilty from the start and would have to prove his own innocence.”*

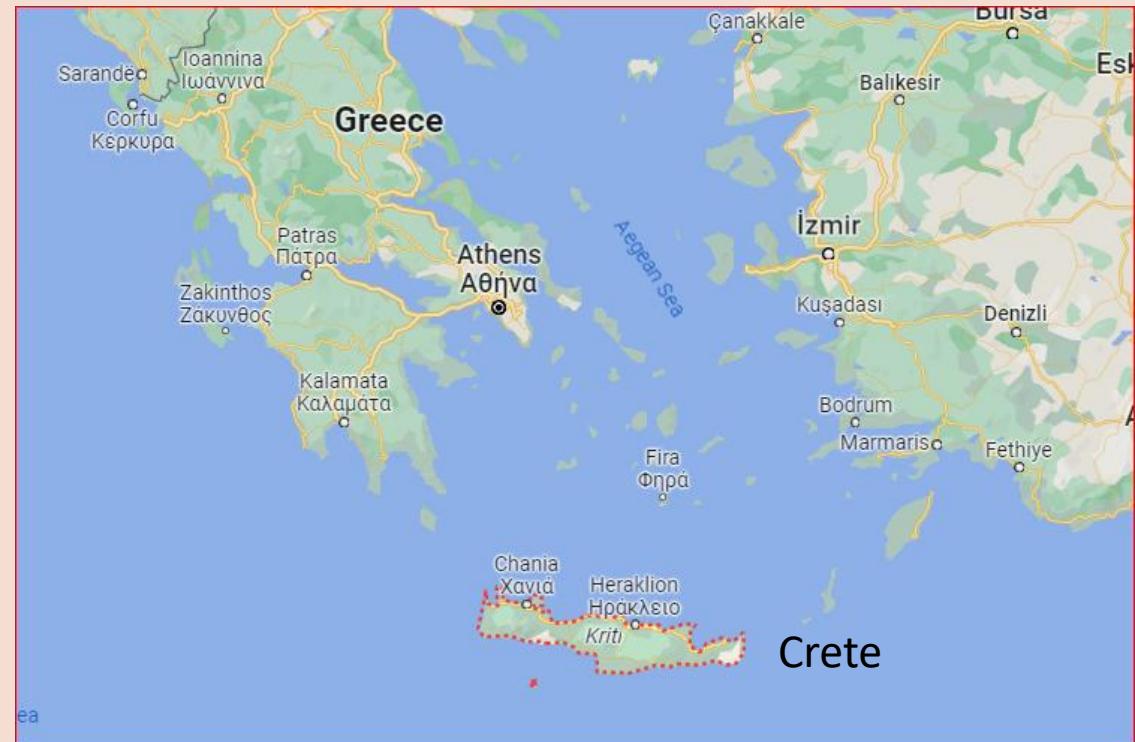




# Mediterranean civilization

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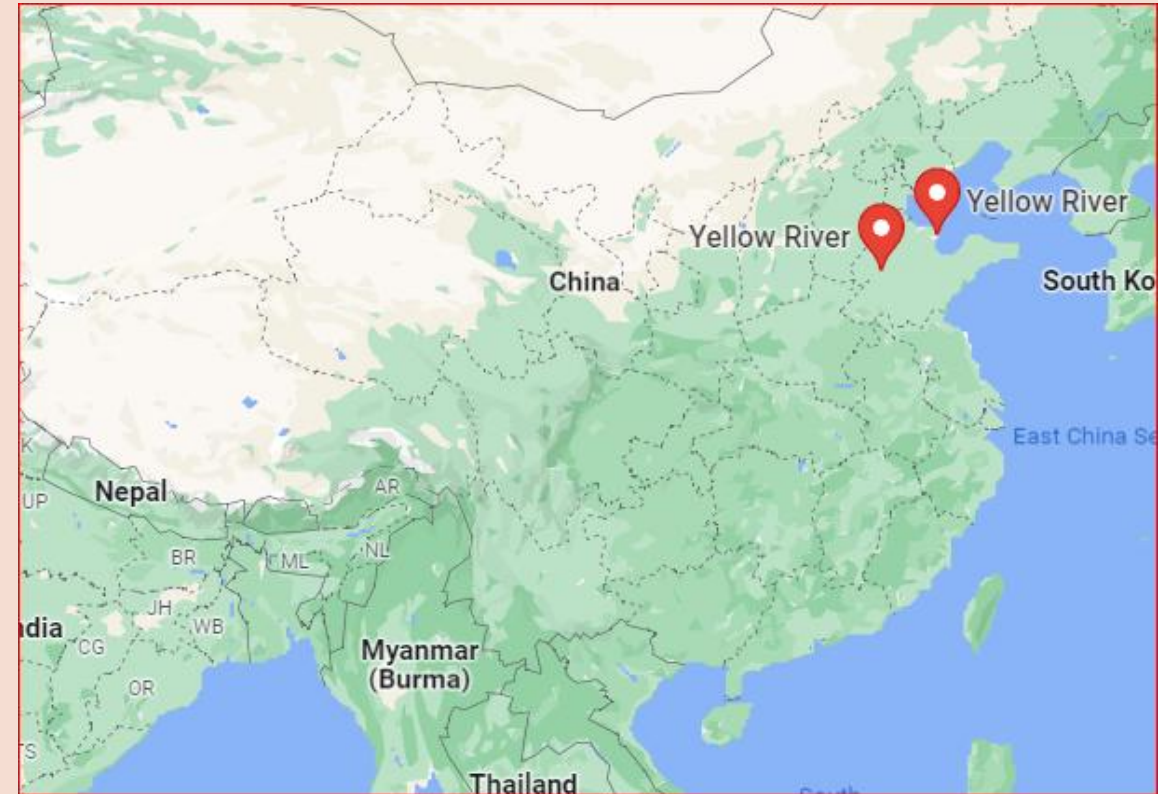
- ❑ The island of Crete, the Minoan civilization lasted 1,600 years, from 2700 BCE till 1100 BCE.
- ❑ It was followed by the Mycenaean civilization in Greece (1600-1100 BCE)
- ❑ And ultimately found its peak in the ancient Greek-Hellenic civilization from 1200 BCE till 600 BC.



# China: 1,600 BCE - 3,500 years ago

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On the banks of the Hwang Ho river (Yellow River) in China in around 1600 BCE the first dynasty - the Shang Dynasty - was founded that paved the way for a series of imperial dynasties that ruled China until 1912, a period of more than three and a half thousand years. On February 12, 1912, the last Chinese emperor abdicated during the Xinhai revolution. The Marxist revolution that led to the birth of the People's Republic of China might appear as a product of Western civilization, but president Xi Jinping of China regards the current civilization of China as part of the millennia old civilization that began with the Shang Dynasty.



# Harappan civilization: 2600 BCE – 4,600 years ago

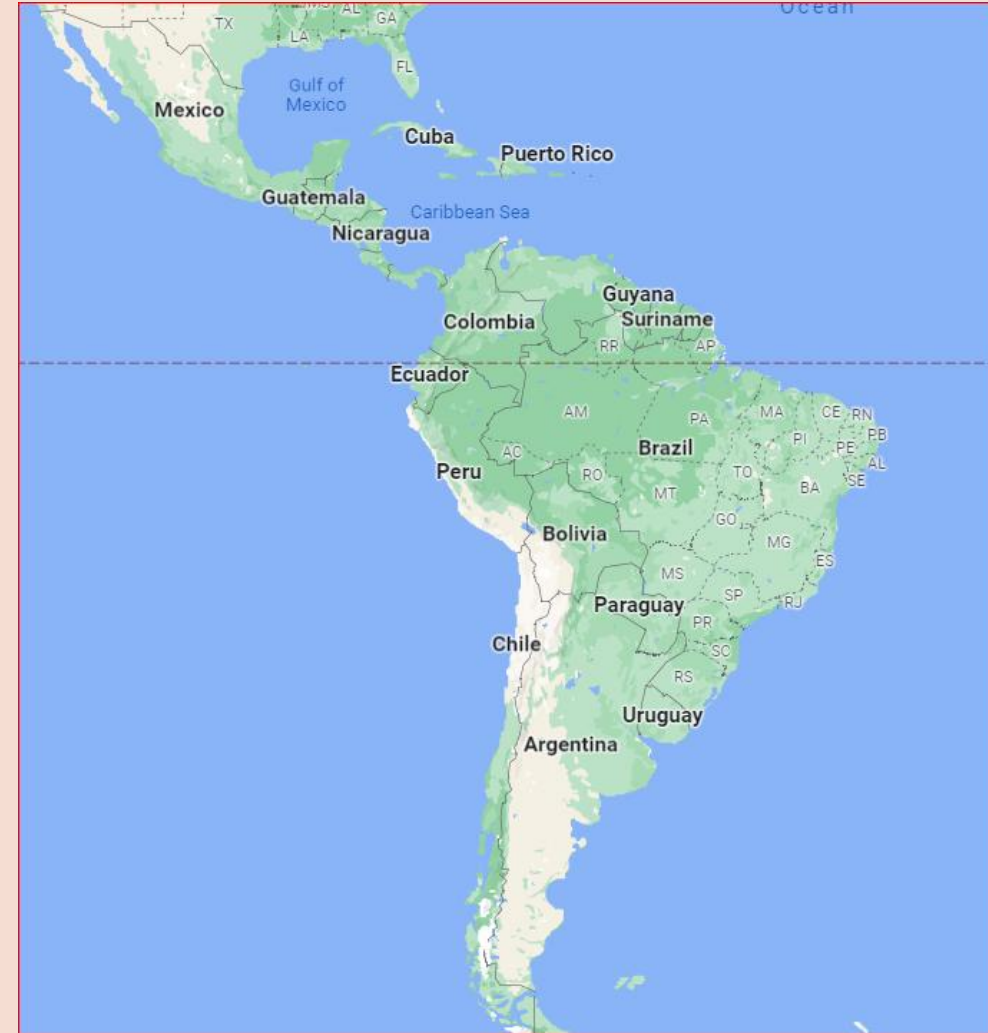
In the Indus Valley (Afghanistan, Pakistan and northwest India) the Harappan civilization emerged around 2600 BCE that laid the foundation of the Indian civilization that consists of a variety of religious and social systems. The Vedas, one of the sacred texts of Hinduism, is thought to have been written between 1700 and 1100 BCE and is still used today in religious ceremonies.





# Abya Yala: 3500 BCE – 5,500 years ago

In Abya Yala the first city was established during the Norte Chico civilization (3500 BCE) in north-central Peru. This civilization lasted for 1,700 years. Since then, in many parts of Abya Yala advanced urban centers developed under a variety of names of which the Maya, Inca and Aztecs are the most well known.



# Islamic civilization

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The Islamic civilization originated in Arabia in the seventh century and had different empires. They all had the same cultural foundation: Islam. But the empires were widely different.

- ❑ The Safavid empire (1500-1700) arose in Iran on the basis of the Shia-school in Islam and spread to countries like Iraq, Kuwait, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Uzbekistan and Türkiye.
- ❑ The Ottoman empire (14th - 20th century) was based on Sunni-Islam and originated in Anatolia, Türkiye . It lasted six centuries and controlled large portions of Western Asia, Southeast Europe, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, North Africa and the Horn of Africa.
- ❑ The Mogul empire (1520-1720) controlled a large part of Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan) and was predominantly Sunni.





# How to assess the quality of knowledge production in a civilization?

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- ❑ Natural sciences: technology – architecture
- ❑ Social sciences: how a society is organized: economic, social, political and cultural organization

# Aztec technology: Tenochtitlan (Mexico city)



*The ancient city of Tenochtitlan as depicted in a mural by Diego Rivera (cc) Wikimedia Commons*



# Ancient China architecture

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# Ancient India

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# Ancient Egypt/Africa

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# Buddhist architecture

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*Winter palace of the Dalai Lamas from 1649 to 1959*

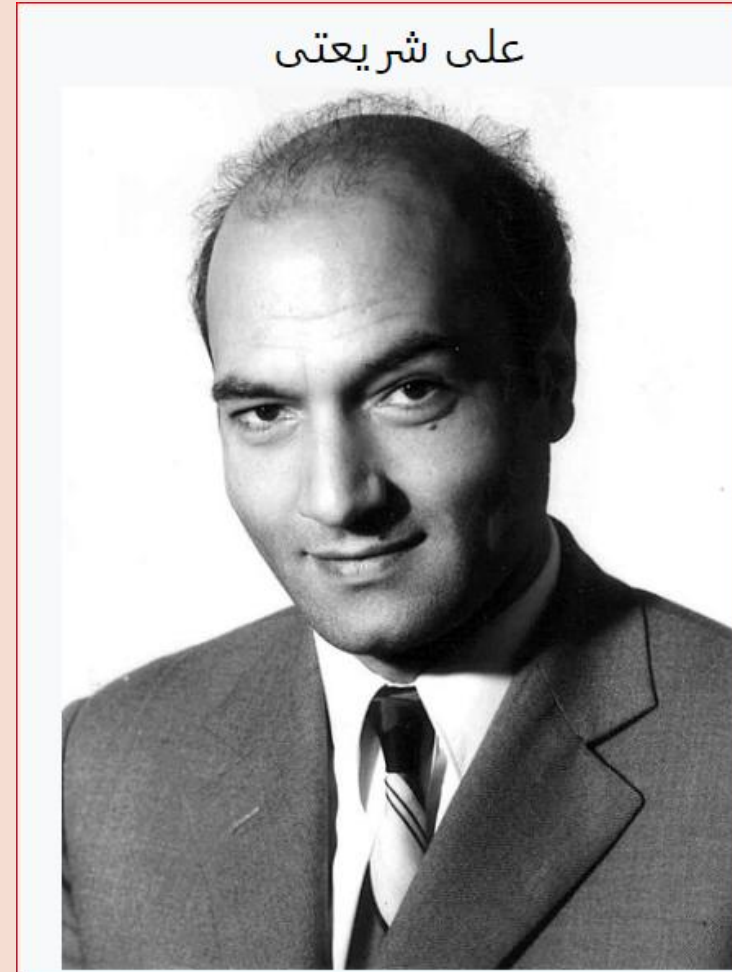
# Conclusions

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- ❑ The old civilization of the world were very advanced in the knowledge production and their practice
- ❑ They were able to last for a very long time. Why? It was not all misery. There was progress.

# Decolonial philosopher Ali Shariati (1933-1977)

He contemplated on the dual sides of ancient civilizations. On the one side the magnificence of its marvelous architecture. On the other side the sacrifices that were made by the toiling workers. Discussing the Egyptian pyramids and the Great Wall of China Shariati writes: *“I felt so much hatred towards the great monuments of civilization which throughout history were raised upon the bones of my predecessors! My predecessors also built the great walls of China. Those who could not carry the loads were crushed under the heavy stones and put into the walls with the stones. This was how all the great monuments of civilization were constructed at the expense of the flesh and blood of my predecessors! I viewed civilization as a curse. I felt a burning hatred for the thousands of years of oppression against my predecessors. I realized that the feelings of all those people buried together in the ditches were once the same as mine.”*





# The current narratives about civilization

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- ❑ Europe/USA
- ❑ China
- ❑ Russia
- ❑ India
- ❑ Western Asia
- ❑ Latin Abya Yala



**2** What is decolonial theory?  
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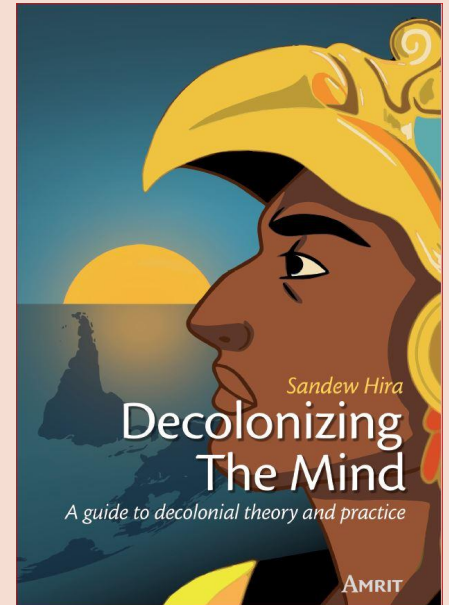
**The current narratives about civilization:  
Europe/USA**

Decolonizing The Mind,  
the final frontier of colonialism  
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Decolonizing  
The Mind  
A guide to decolonial theory and practice  
#017  
20-11-2023

# Source in the DTM book

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Download the PDF of the PowerPoint on [www.sandewhira.com](http://www.sandewhira.com)



sandewhira.com

**SANDEW HIRA**  
Author. Activist. Decolonial Thinker.

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