The International Business and Management Discourse and Epistemic Colonization in Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s: A Postcolonial Reading of Guerreiro Ramos

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss from a postcolonial perspective the colonial problematic present in the works of one of the most influential scholars in critical Organization Studies (OS) in Brazil: the Brazilian sociologist, Guerreiro Ramos. In order to achieve its objective, this paper first briefly overviews the basis of postcolonial theory, especially the general context in which it emerged (marked by the struggle of former colonies against non-traditional forms of colonialism that perpetuated after their political independence). Afterwards, we examine, more specifically, the situation of Brazil in the 50s and 60s in parallel with a discussion of Ramos' most influential works, giving special attention to his theory of sociological reduction. Finally, we draw a comparison of how both theories relate to potentially colonialist discourse (more precisely, the *International Business and Management Studies* discourse). Although the matter of epistemic colonialism was one of the key issues that drove Ramos' thought, we conclude that despite the merits of the author in having raised a discussion congruent with postcolonial concerns that aimed at recovering the voice of Brazilian theorists, Guerreiro Ramos' thought was deeply embedded in a mystified concept of development. As a consequence, it can be said that, when questioned from a postcolonial perspective, Ramos' ideas did not criticize but rather converged with the *IBMS* discourse disseminated in that period. This paper whishes to contribute to strengthen postcolonialism in Brazilian OS as well as to provide a better understanding of the roots of epistemic colonization in Latin America by presenting an evidence of the success of discourses such as *IBMS* in escaping criticism and thus maintaining the colonial order in Brazilian OS since its early days.

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1. Introduction

Latin American issues such as the production of local knowledge have been a source of reflection to post-colonial thought since its early days. Ramos (1915-1982) is up to this day a key figure in the Brazilian intellectual tradition and he was most active in the academia in the 1950 and 1960s decades, which coincided, on one hand, with the emergence and expansion of the *International Business and Management Studies* (IBMS) in the international context and, on the other hand, with the emergence of the development discourse in the Brazilian context. It does not come as a surprise, then, that the matter of epistemic colonialism was one of the key issues that drove Ramos' thought. Guerreiro Ramos was, and still is, one of the most important scholars in the Brazilian organizational studies field. It is clear that the author has contributed immensely to the emergence of critical thinking in this field and that his ideas and concepts still raise discussions among contemporary Brazilian scholars. Being a controversial figure, it is difficult to detach Ramos' image from the many intellectual conflicts in which the author was involved throughout his career (including struggles with equally notable scholars, like the Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes). It is important to clarify beforehand that this paper is far from wanting to raise doubts around his unquestionable academic contributions. The purpose of this paper is not to point out flaws in Guerreiro Ramos' thought, on the contrary, we would like to trace a movement that allows us to discuss and possibly give new life to some of his ideas that still, up to this day, show up more relevant than ever. We argue that a post-colonial perspective can shed new light on Ramos' ideas.

According to a postcolonial perspective, the dynamics of colonization cannot be restricted to a solely economical and political sphere In this sense, colonization is seen as a broad process that also relies on the construction of social and cultural subalternity. Although postcolonial perspective is varied and complex, the issue epistemology has been generally denounced as a mean to subjugate ex-colonies both socially and culturally (Calás and Smircich, 1999; Prasad and Prasad, 2001). Since the 1950's, the management literature has played an important role in this process, especially through the emergence and diffusion of the *IBMS*' discourse (Westood, 2006; Westwood and Jack, 2008). As pointed out by Westwood (2006), IBMS' discourse deploys correlate types of universalistic, essentialising and exoticising representations to colonial and neo-colonial discourse added to a striking connection with the development and industrialization discourses in the 1950s and 1960s.

The issues surrounding both epistemic colonialism and the matter of Brazilian development in the 1950s and 60s were among the main themes explored by Guerreiro Ramos (Ramos, 1965) mainly through his theory Sociological Reduction. Ramos' ideas on colonialism and epistemic subalternity formulated back in the 1950s still raise discussions among Brazilian scholars,thus remaining a strong influence in the ideas and theoretical positions of organization studies theorists in Brazil (see Filgueiras, 2012; Paula et al, 2010; Pizza-junior, 2010; Bariani, 2010; Motta, 2010; Paula, 2007; Davel and Alcadipani, 2003).

Although, on one hand, Ramos' influence remains strong in the Brazilian OS field, on the other hand, postcolonial theory was not received with much enthusiasm. We argue that such disparity should not exist due to the evidence that postcolonialism revives many of the issues addressed by Guerreiro Ramos. We are also aware, however, that the dynamics of colonialism became substantially more complex in the last decades and we believe that postcolonialism provides an analytical perspective that precisely helps to grasp such complexity. The effort to strengthen postcolonialism in Brazil is especially relevant due to two of its aspects: this perspective's role in recovering long silenced voices of those historically marginalized by colonialism and imperialism; and also due to its potential to deconstruct the mystified concepts of development constructed by Western thought and that up to this day drive decisions and cause harms in multiple spheres in the context of ex-colonies such as Brazil.

This paper aims to discuss from a postcolonial perspective the colonial problematic present in the works of one of the most influential scholars in critical Organization Studies (OS) in Brazil: the Brazilian sociologist, Guerreiro Ramos. In order to achieve its objective, this paper first briefly overviews the basis of postcolonial theory, especially the general context in which it emerged (marked by the struggle of former colonies against non-traditional forms of colonialism that perpetuated after their political independence). Afterwards, we examine, more specifically, the situation of Brazil in the 50s and 60s in parallel with a discussion of Ramos' most influential works, giving special attention to his theory of sociological reduction. Finally, we draw a comparison of how both theories relate to potentially colonialist discourse (more precisely, the *International Business and Management Studies* discourse).

2. Imperialism, Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory: A Brief Overview

According Prassad (2003) colonialism and imperialism are widely discussed and mutant concepts with multiple meanings. According to the author, the postcolonial theory and criticism constitute an attempt to investigate the complex dynamics of Western colonialism. It was precisely the continuation of the colonial condition even after the period of decolonization (ie. the process that led to political independence of almost all European colonies in the world) that created the conditions for the emergence of postcolonial analysis. The perpetuation of the colonial condition, despite ex-colonies' conquest of political independence, required ex-colonies to be socially and culturally subjugated and controlled through non-traditional forms of colonialism (Prassad, 2003).

Having emerged as a theoretical movement that questions and criticizes the colonial condition, postcolonialism cannot be regarded as something entirely new, given the

strong anti-colonial movement that led to the political independence of the colonies. However, this perspective's most singular trait was its commitment to subvert the often unquestioned empire of Western categories that have historically subjugated the figure of the Other through various forms (might they be epistemological, cultural, ethical, moral, economical, political, aesthetic, etc.). Thus, it's not surprising the fact that it can't be said that postcolonial studies have a single theoretical framework (Loomba, 1998; Young, 2001, Westwood, 2006). However, it's possible to say that two general assumptions that underlie this complex theoretical body are the wish recover long silenced voices and to deconstruct essentialist categories and mystified concepts such as the concept of development (Prasad, 1997). In doing so, postcolonial approaches search for the establishment of a critical epistemological reference bold enough to oppose dominant conceptions of modernity (Costa, 2006).

In organizational studies (OS), also according to Prassad (2003), post-colonialism was not received with great enthusiasm and, therefore, this theoretical movement still remains marginalized. This gap is especially worrying to the field of OS in a former colony such as Brazil, where Western colonialism and neo-colonialism were massive and constitute up to this day an undeniable influence in the process of formation and transformation of society. The effort to strengthen postcolonialism in Brazil is especially relevant due to this perspective's role in both recovering long silenced voices of those historically marginalized by colonialism and imperialism and also due to its potential to deconstruct the myths of development (Prasad, 1997). The development myths have been strongly present in Brazil since the 1950's, making an ideal terrain for the dissemination of discourses such as *IBMS* and have also had a direct influence in Ramos' ideas.

In the next topic specifically discuss Ramos' thoughts taking under consideration the historical context of the 1950's in Brazil, a period of intense societal change marked by the imperative of development. We will seek to make initial notes of how this historical period, strongly characterized by neo-colonialism, provided the conditions for the emergence of many of Ramos' ideas.

3 . Guerreiro Ramos' Thought and The 1950's Brazilian Context

The purpose of this topic will be to explore both Ramos works as well as a brief account of the context that provided the conditions for the emergence of his ideas. Laying out this background will allow us to question his ideas via a postcolonial critique later on in this paper.

The end of the World War II in 1945 drove substantial changes the international scenario. It also represented to Brazil a great increase of North American influence in its

society (Barros, 2013). In the 1950's, the first wave of foreign capital entered the Brazilian market (Carrieri and Rodrigues, 2001). This fact lead to deep societal changes, Ramos (1965) affirmed that this moment of transformation was characterized it by three phenomena: industrialization, urbanization and changes in popular consumption (when Brazilian citizens were being transformed into consumers).

This period also coincided with the opening of the first management schools in Brazil that provided undergraduate courses in business and public administration (Bertero and Keinert, 1994). It's important to note that close to all business courses being offered in Brazil by the 1960's had received direct support and funding by the American government – with only two exceptions; one in the state of Minas Gerais and another in the state of Pernambuco (Machado, 1966). It is clear, then, that the American influence in Brazil was not restricted to the economical and political sphere; it also comprised an ideological sphere through the diffusion of business education and a discourse primarily aimed at serving foreign investor's interests in the region.

To Guerreiro Ramos, this moment of transformation was exciting, but according to his view it also demanded the creation of what he called a critical conscious that should take under consideration local particularities and needs throughout this industrialization of the Brazilian economy (Ramos, 1965). Guerreiro Ramos was the first Brazilian scholar to defend to necessity of formulating local theories that should be more adequate to local reality than imported knowledge. Given this scenario of transformation and strong dubious foreign influence, Ramos was a scholar who, especially in the 1960's, actively participated in the defense of a so called "revolutionary nationalism". The nationalist ideology seen in Ramos writings at that time had as a key point the questioning of the colonial condition (Motta, 2010).

However, it should be noted that Ramos' concept of nationalism was peculiar. The author explained that what he understood as nationalism was precisely the struggle of a nation to free itself from a colonial condition. But he also claimed that the colonial condition was the sole reason for nationalism, adding that once a country reaches its goal of sovereignty and enters the realm of "universality and of civilization" the necessity of nationalism ceases to exist (Ramos, 1960: 225-226).

Ramos' theory of Sociological Reduction was precisely "the elimination of everything that, for its secondary character, disturbs the process of comprehension and the obtaining of what is essential in a given thing" (Ramos, 1965: 81). What Ramos is suggesting is that any foreign theory or practice can be assimilated as long as this assimilation is mediated by the local, regional or national context. We should note that the key issue here is that Ramos does not put into question the essences or such theories or practices (and its universal assumptions), on the contrary, he defends that such Western categories must be maintained. The so call critical assimilation of imported knowledge and practices trough sociological reduction was, according to the author's view, mandatory for that period of transformations and for the development of the Brazilian economy.

Ramos (1965) classifyied such transformations (industrialization, urbanization and the emergence of a consumer market) as an evolution of the Brazilian society. He also

advocates the goods of urban life that, contrary to rural life, stimulated "individualism, competition, initiative capacity, and the interest in superior patterns of existence" (Ramos, 1965: 74).

We note that Ramos (1983) advocated a normative concept of "good society" that would be inseparable from the strategies of modernization that were being out into practice in that period (Ramos, 1983). Another trait of Ramos' theory of sociological reduction was its strong criticism of other Brazilian sociologists who, at that time, condemned the industrialization process. The author argued that the claim that Brazil should stay faithful to its rural vocation would only serve the interests of dominant nations who would prefer the rest of the world to remain unchanged.

Another important trait of the theory of sociological reduction formulated by Ramos was its pragmatic approach. According to the author, only through the analysis of practical local matters "true" local knowledge could be generated. This pragmatic attribute of Ramos theory, added to his clear concern with the nation development through industrialization, makes it not surprising that throughout his later works Ramos (1981) has questioned precisely specific issues related to organizations and their functioning in the Brazilian context. One of his main concerns was the development of skills that could help private and state companies to introduce rationality in their structures in the process of adaptation to local realities such as the Brazilian reality.

In his exile in the USA, and working as a scholar at the University of South California, Ramos' wrote another of his most influential works. In *The New Science of Organizations* (originally published in English), Ramos (1981) explains that his theory of sociological reduction had three main concerns: first, with the process of importation of foreign science and culture (as we have already noted here); secondly, the concern to provide individuals with a systematic cultural "training" in order to preserve their "genuine" self; and, finally, an abrupt change in social science in its institutional form.

The New Science of Organizations was, then, an attempt to reformulate the science of organizations in order to reconcile the modern project according to ideals of reason. This was also an attempt to shift the so called modern project it away from its negative consequences. Guerreiro Ramos encountered such consequences while living in the USA (according to the author, the main ones were: psychological insecurity, degradation in quality of life, pollution and excessive production of waste). According to Ramos' view (Ramos, 1981) only true, rational science could reverse such consequences. We can see a clear shift from the theorist who once questioned the Brazilian reality to an author that later started to think in terms of the context of advanced industrial societies. In this book, Ramos' no longer makes reference to colonialism, but is completely embedded in Western categories.

We should also note that this wasn't the first transformation occurred in Ramos' thought. Smith (2006) points out that, until 1955, Ramos produced many papers on the blackness, for various reasons - among them for his own racial background. However, the author states that after 1955, Ramos did not produced more work on this subject, quoting: "In his interview with CEPEDOC in 1981, when asked if the personal

problems he had experienced had had relationship with its color, he responded positively saying "Brazil is a country of idiots" (Soares, 2006: 139).

Ramos abandoned the "romantic" character of his work when he put aside questions about the blackness in Brazil. Soares (2006) states that Ramos' saw sociology under its instrumental character, and for this reason he started studying management as a hard fact and social system. The topics covered by Ramos' thereafter included: rationality, ethics, alienation, work, class, power, reason, modernization, etc. All these topics were revolving around a developmental logic, "where administrative action takes maximum scale inspired by the intention of promoting social change" (Soares, 2006: 82). Rios (1983) corroborates this view, highlighting the fact that Ramos' intellectual change was due to the pragmatic form that his sociological proposal had assumed.

In short, we can trace a line that connects Ramos works analyzed here. Ramos started off by analyzing the societal changes that Brazil was undergoing in the 1950s and 1960s., According to the author's reading, these changes were being driven by three phenomena: industrialization, urbanization and the emergence of a consumer market. Ramos proposed that under the scrutiny of the sociological reduction, the importation of foreign knowledge and practices would both produce authentic local knowledge and drive Brazil out of its colonial condition and into the realm of "universality and civilization". After his move to the US, Ramos let the issue of colonization aside, and proceeded no analyze the advanced industrial society projecting into it ideals of man and science all in accordance with the universalized concept of Western reason.

4. Ramos Thought *versus* IBMS discourse: A postcolonial questioning

In this section we'll proceed with a postcolonial critique of Ramos' thought through the analysis of the existence of an alignment of Ramos ideas with the discourse of International Business and Management Studies.

As we saw in the last topic, Ramos addressed in the early course of his work certain exaltation of a nationalism characteristic of the 1950s in Brazil. However, he noted that his concept of nationalism did not incite xenophobia; on the contrary, he defended the importation of ideas and practices, as long as they were subjected to critical analysis (what he called sociological reduction) so that these ideas would acquire a pragmatic functionality in the local context. But it is noteworthy that such concern with the

Brazilian context was not a constant in his thought. In this topic we shall discuss both early aspects of his thought, that is his theory of sociological reduction, as well as the basis of his thought that remained unchanged throughout his works. Such basis revolved around Western ideals of reason and development.

It is interesting to note that although Ramos' strongly believed in the universality of science - that for him would be the same in Germany, England, France or Brazil – Ramos' believed as well in the notion of the nation state and, as said before, the possibility of knowledge to differentiate according to a national context. However, Ramos' also strongly criticized the ramifications of sociological studies in Brazil that would study "distant" subjects/objects that drifted away from the concerns of development, or issues that he classified as esthetic issues, such as "missing tribes, the bobbin lace, the struggles of families, communities, assimilation of immigrants [...]" (Ramos, 1957: 27) . Ramos thus expressed his desire for universals, applicability and a functional/pragmatic approach in conducting research, inseparable from the developmental and pragmatist approach of *IBMS*, which in turn played an important role in maintaining colonial ordering in the world.

It becomes clear that the early nationalist trait of Ramos' thought – marked by his defense of the need to develop an authentic sociological discipline in close correspondence with Brazilian particularities – was a criticisim to imperialism only to a certain extent. We argue that the criticism made by Ramos (1957) to imperialism seems consistent only when referring to economic imperialism, because, despite claiming that Brazilian society could not subdue to the cultural influence of dominant societies, Ramos states that this influence would be strictly linked to economic domination, expressing his concern over the applicability of foreign institutional apparatuses.

Another possible neo-colonial feature Ramos' ideas might be seen in the fact that the author expressed clear disdain for local and marginal knowledge, regarding his "new science of organizations" - based on his analysis of European and American societies - as the result of " a sense of reality common to all individuals, at all times and in all places" (Ramos, 1981: 46). This trait of Ramos' thought also converges with *IBMS* discourse, that presents itself as universal and tends to depreciate other types of knowledge, or simply regard outside knowledge under a Western perspective.

Also, Ramos' idea of the necessity of formalism in order to conduct the development process of a society also resembles the *IBMS* discourse. According to Westwood (2006) the *IBMS* discourse is produced according to U.S. ideologies and, when disseminated, it serves to best transact and control other cultures and societies. Ramos' (1983) states that its basic premise of the notion of "formalism" that he advocated would be "the discrepancy between the actual conduct and prescribed standard that is supposed to regulate it" Ramos (1983) concludes: "The elite have always more consciousness than the mass of the conventional character of rules and standards, given their privileged participation in the social process" (Ramos, 1983: 255). The necessity of formalism and the fact that the elite detains the knowledge of such systems would, then, legitimate the domination of a small group over a peripheral one.

Although Ramos criticized functional rationality that dominated organizational studies (Webering, 2010), the author proposed an alternative ideal of rationality (substantive rationality), projecting an ideal speech that even though local imposes itself as universal, constituting a dash of colonial behavior silimar to *IBMS* and other colonialist discourses. It is interesting to note, too, that in the Brazilian Context and Administration Ramos (1983) illustrated a concept of Brazilian national from the perspective of a foreigner, citing research and texts wrote about Brazilians by foreigners , labeling Brazilians as being a sad, ignorant, fatalistic passive, and uncritical people, always using as a parameter for comparison European and American people. For instance, according to the author, while the Brazilian spent money on gambling, Europeans saved resources for capitalist savings.

Ramos (2009) also regards the organization of work itself (following the premise of formalism) as a necessary step for the development. That is, the logic of the work present in Taylorism should be disseminated throughout the rest of the world. In Ramos (2009) view, this would be a necessary evolution of peripheral countries. But it should be noted that in *The New Science of Organizations* (Ramos, 1981), when Ramos was a scholar living in the USA, the author criticized the mechanical aspects of Taylorism.

With respect to certain traits of nationalism found in Ramos' earlier work, it seems to have abandoned as he developed his ideas. The author stated that "the nation, as such, is fast becoming unviable as a unit of analysis" (Ramos, 1970: 28-9) "nowadays a social scientist cannot be nationalistic, for the same reasons why a biologist cannot be racist" (Ramos , 1970 , p . 29). According to the author, social science should be global, but its understood that his notion of global equals north American and/or European, since he remains faithful to their assumptions, even pointing out an "intellectual disability" of Latin America scholars.

With regard to his view of Latin America, the author makes a clear division of what he called underdeveloped countries, and central countries, notably the U.S. (Ramos, 1983). Ramos states that the U.S. had reached a greater refinement of administrative problems, noting that much of what was considered at that time as true about administrative sciences in the U.S. could not be applied to developing countries such as Brazil. However, Ramos (1983) states that an underdeveloped country should not be doomed to have "an underdeveloped science."

In addition, the author considers the United States to be the "pilot country in the western world," where the "first trends of the future" would appear (Ramos, 1983, p. 55). Going further, Ramos says its development induces the U.S. to "become promoters of economic and social agencies for conscious and planned development" (Ramos, 1983: 55). The author clearly expressed its view that the U.S. would be in a "superior" position, and that Brazil would not be in the position to welcome some trends of American sociology and anthropology, for it could not "[...] skip a phase to another that is superior" (Ramos, 1957: 113).

Ramos (1965) explains that the fact that he has spoken about the need for a national sociology does not mean that he defended a rationality and or an ideal of reason different of those found in Western dominant countries, since " [...] in the general plan

of sociological reasoning, 'standards', 'values', 'ideal' transcend historical particularities of each national society" (Ramos, 1965: 32).

Ramos (1983) states that science should be universalizing and should serve as a mean for driving the development process in peripheral countries: "The sociological reduction does not mean isolationism, nor romantic exaltation of local, regional or national. It is, instead, directed by a universal aspiration mediated, however, by local, regional, or national [...]" (Ramos, 1965: 83-84).

The objectives of the sociological reduction, therefore, were the following: first, Ramos, intended to integrate the sociological discipline in Brazil with universal currents of sociological though; secondly, the author wished to formulate a methodology for conducting sociological interventions endowed with pragmatic value in order to play a role in the national development. Thus, we conclude that the sociological reduction is a critical assimilation of intellectual heritage of the centric countries by the ones that are peripheral taking into account their local particularities. But the" assimilation of these ideas was necessary solely to the development of such countries and also served the interests of foreign organizations and institutions that would more easily adapt and operate successfully diverse local realities.

The concern that we see here is not the necessity to overcome the colonial logic, but to suppress it by affirming that so called underdeveloped countries could to achieve the same level of development as so called developed countries (might it be intellectual, cultural and/or economic). The main colonialist feature of this proposal is to ascribe to Western rationality as an universal category (which must be exported and assimilated by all), and also the acceptance of values and ideals of progress and development coming from the central countries. Finally, it is noted Guerreiro Ramos' sociological reduction's goal goal seems to coincide with the developmentalist goal of the *IBMS* discourse in its emergence, which seeks to address local realities for the benefit of the proper functioning of organizations operating in their space.

Despite the critique made by Ramos to the colonial situation , we conclude that the thought of Guerreiro Ramos was embedded in colonialism since. Through out later works he wrote in an American/European perspective, taking such societies as aparameter and referring to the rest of the world as "backward", "underdeveloped", "poor", "wild", "colonized", "alienated", etc. Even his vision of "emancipated man" or "parenthetical man" as an ideal model of man can be regarded as an European/North American/white male, which must prevail in the organizational world and become a model for the rest of the world . We quote Ramos:

> The parenthetical man is both a reflection of, and a reaction to new social circumstances that are more perceptible now in advanced industrial societies like the United States, but which will eventually prevail throughout the entire world (Ramos, 1972: 244).

When describing this generalization of a "model of man" who the author found in the U.S. Ramos seems to contradict what he stated back in 1965 when he said that "American sociology suffers from low technical and scientific level , it tends to confuse

the particular dynamics of U.S. society with the general social dynamics" (Ramos, 1965: 136) . It seems that the mutations present in the thought of Guerreiro Ramos, from the Sociological Reduction to the New Science of Organizations, include a complete abandonment of his anti-colonial criticism.

5. Final Thoughts

In this paper we concluded that, when questioned from a postcolonial perspective, Ramos' ideas did not criticize but rather converged with colonialist discourses such as the *IBMS* discourse disseminated in that period. Although there was considerable change throughout Ramos' work, his incline towards universalist categories and his commitment to Western ideals of progress and development were a constant trait of his works analyzed here.

Although he clearly problematized colonial issues in his theory of sociological reduction, this criticism was restricted to the economical sphere, leaving aside other forms of colonization that postcolonialism analyses (such as cultural and social subjugation and control). However, it is important to note that through this theory Ramos did not criticize the importation of foreign ideas; he did not criticize Western ideal of humanity, truth, and scientific practice, rather he stood for these ideals and they provided the underpinnings of all his works. Postcolonialism, on the other hand, rightly criticizes such ideals.

By showing the potential of such analysis, this paper whishes to contribute to strengthen postcolonialism in Brazilian OS as well as to provide a better understanding of the roots of epistemic colonization in Latin America by presenting an evidence of the success of discourses such as *IBMS* in escaping criticism and thus maintaining the colonial order in Brazilian OS since its early days.

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