

# Brazilian sociological theory and postcolonial criticism<sup>i</sup>

Received: 24.09.22  
Approved: 14.02.23

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**Abstract:** The article discusses to what extent sociological theories produced in the Brazilian academic field dialogue with a global intellectual movement criticizing coloniality and the Eurocentric foundations of the social sciences. Initially, we analyze the challenges regarding the attempts to define two theoretical approaches, Brazilian sociology, and Postcolonial Thought, without overlooking their internal heterogeneities. Then, we address the tensions between these approaches as conditions for research agendas that bring both contributions into proximity. Finally, we explore the epistemological potential of one of these agendas, which corresponds to a rereading of Brazilian sociological theory in light of postcolonial criticism. This exercise in rereading the canon is based on the methodological program of *sociological reduction* of Guerreiro Ramos, which indicates a reciprocal interrogation between Brazilian sociology and postcolonial thought, i.e., a decentered look at our sociological tradition that also reveals contributions from this tradition for the future of postcolonial epistemologies.

**Keywords:** Brazilian sociology. Postcolonialism. Rereading. Alberto Guerreiro Ramos.

## *Relendo a teoria sociológica brasileira à luz da crítica pós-colonial*

**Resumo:** O artigo discute em que medida teorias sociológicas produzidas no campo acadêmico brasileiro dialogam com um movimento global de crítica à colonialidade e aos fundamentos eurocêntricos das ciências sociais. De início, tratamos dos desafios subjacentes às tentativas de definir os dois enquadramentos, sociologia brasileira e pensamento pós-colonial, sem ignorar suas heterogeneidades internas. Em seguida, analisamos as convergências e tensões entre esses campos como condições de possibilidade para agendas de pesquisa que aproximem ambos os aportes. Por fim, exploramos o potencial epistemológico de uma dessas agendas, que corresponde a uma releitura da tradição sociológica brasileira à luz da crítica pós-colonial. Esse exercício é feito a partir do projeto da “redução sociológica”, de Guerreiro Ramos, que indica uma via de mão dupla na interlocução entre sociologia brasileira e pensamento pós-colonial: um olhar descentrado sobre nossa tradição sociológica que revela contribuições dessa tradição para o futuro das epistemologias pós-coloniais.

**Palavras-chave:** Sociologia brasileira. Teorias pós-coloniais. Releitura. Alberto Guerreiro Ramos.

*i.* We thank the journal editors and, in particular, the reviewers for their relevant suggestions, which helped to improve the hypotheses and arguments of the article.

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## Introduction

In this article, we discuss the extent to which sociological theories produced within the Brazilian academic field can be correlated with a broader intellectual movement that has been gaining attention in recent decades, which critiques coloniality and the Eurocentric foundations of the social sciences. However, it is important to note that the effort to consider these possible homologies and dialogues presents us with some initial difficulties.

The first challenge is related to dealing with two theoretical approaches that are complex and heterogeneous, as is the case with Brazilian sociology and postcolonial perspectives, in their diverse forms and developments. On the one hand, no single tradition or specific theoretical approach within Brazilian sociology has focused on questioning the Eurocentric foundations of sociology. On the other, postcolonialism itself is an “umbrella” term, combining multiple academic and extra-academic approaches. Therefore, in this analysis, we consider both approaches from a panoramic perspective, which includes critical perspectives within Brazilian sociological theory, particularly concerning Eurocentrism, modernity, and colonialism, as well as the various facets of postcolonial approaches in contemporary scholarship.

The second challenge is to consider both perspectives in their specificities – contextual, theoretical, methodological, and epistemological – to avoid homogenizing readings that label any critical interpretation of a social problem as postcolonial. Our aim is to avoid anachronisms or vague adjectives that offer little analytical insight into the substantial contributions of the mentioned authors.

In the article, we face these challenges by discussing the relevance of Brazilian sociologist Alberto Guerreiro Ramos (1915-1982), understood as an author with postcolonial inspiration. We look at his contributions in criticizing academic Eurocentrism and “intellectual dependence” (Alatas, 2000; 2003) in order to investigate his proposition of an epistemological approach that sought to deal with the challenge of the appropriation by Brazilian sociology of concepts, theories, methods, and techniques developed in other contexts.

In the first part of the text, we address the underlying challenges in attempting to define these two approaches. In the second, we examine the convergences and divergences observed between Brazilian sociological theory and Postcolonial thought, which provide a basis for reflecting on possible research agendas that combine these approaches. In the final section, we explore the epistemological

potential of one of these agendas, which involves rereading Brazilian sociological theory in light of the tensions provoked by Postcolonial thought in contemporary social theory at a global level. For that, we analyze the heuristic potential of the Guerreiro Ramos' reduction sociology, which is conceived as a critical-assimilative method of foreign social theories whose relevance may suggest a reciprocal inquiry between Brazilian sociology and postcolonial thought – a decentered approach to our sociological tradition that also highlights significant contributions to the future of postcolonial epistemologies.

## Preliminary considerations

Sociological theory distinguishes itself, on the one hand, due to a lack of consensus in terms of its ontological, epistemological, and methodological dimensions<sup>1</sup> (Alexander, 1999; Go, 2016; McLennan, 2010; Seidman, 1994); on the other hand, due to the existence of a plurality of schools, perspectives, approaches, and paradigms (Connell, 2007; Giddens & Turner, 1999; Patel, 2010). This tendency was no different in the institutionalization of the social sciences in Brazil, which, since the 1940s, has been characterized by intense debates and by the internal constitution and competition between specific fields of study.

Even when considering the internal constitution of such fields, it is worth noting that they are not based on univocal interpretations or any monolithic theoretical or political entity. This is what Lívio Sansone (2002, p. 7) argues regarding racial studies in Brazil, a field that, since the 1930s, has been “full of tensions, agendas, points of view, perspectives, and desires”. This context becomes more complex when one observes the disputes, which arise from divergent explanatory principles of class and race for the structure and dynamics of inequality in Brazil (Barreto, Rios, Neves & Santos, 2020; Barreti, Lima, Lopes & Sotero, 2017; Guimarães, 2021; Souza, 2006). The debate acquires new dimensions with the perspectives that accentuate the structuring and overlapping characteristics of these categories, in addition to gender (Rios & Sotero, 2019).

These discussions encapsulate the challenge of approaching Brazilian sociology more comprehensively, particularly in terms of rereading the criticism of coloniality and Eurocentrism. As suggested, such critiques are not confined to a single theoretical strand. On the contrary, they can be observed in authors who advocated epistemically divergent proposals for Brazilian sociology, such as Guerreiro Ramos and Florestan Fernandes, who engaged in an emblematic debate on how to understand sociological practice in the 1950s (Bariani, 2006; Fernandes, 1977; Ramos, 1996). Therefore, our effort to systematize the theoretical commonalities

1. The distinction between social theory and sociological theory is sometimes considered subtle. By social theory, we understand the abstract, metatheoretical manner of research in the social sciences (Go, 2016; Patel, 2020), since, when searching for more general models for analysis, social theory can schematize, conceptualize, and explain the forms and dynamics in the interactions, classifications, hierarchies, reproductions, and social changes. In its turn, sociological theory is “less general and more concrete, which does not mean that it is less abstract, but offers not so much a reflection regarding society as such, but rather about any given society or [...] any determined set of societies” (Vandenbergh, 2011, p. 19). Thus, we agree with Vandenbergh that sociological theory tends to be more disciplined and historically informed compared to social theory. Additionally, the analytic and metatheoretical propositions of social theory become important presuppositions for sociological theory, which in turn informs empirical research in sociology.

and differences between Brazilian sociology and postcolonial theories generally considers the most critical strands of the country's sociological tradition regarding the persistence of colonialism and Eurocentrism in the construction of national sociological knowledge.

The postcolonial tradition is equally thorny. There are at least two conceptions of the term. The first refers to a historical-political condition that points to the "later" processes of decolonization in "Third World" countries between 1950 and 1970 (Ballestrin, 2013; Chakrabarty, 2000; Miglievich-Ribeiro, 2014; Meneses, 2016; Young, 2001). The second refers to the range of theoretical, methodological, and epistemological perspectives that emerged in critical historiography and cultural studies starting in the 1970s, with a strong impact in India, the United States, and England, aiming to produce knowledge that is unaffected by Eurocentrism, even if at times invoking European currents such as poststructuralism, deconstruction, and Marxism (Ballestrin, 2013; Oliveira, 2020).

Sérgio Costa (2006) argues that, despite the theoretical dissimilarities of authors as distinct as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, who are seminal for social theory in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they share a common intellectual and political program. All of them seek to break with the tyranny of a single history sustained by Western metanarratives; overcome ideologies of singular modernization and progress; develop a critique of colonial domination and the ethnocentric "civilizational" processes; and deconstruct the essentialisms based on class, race, ethnicity, nation, and gender.

In Latin America, the postcolonial perspective can be observed in discussions regarding decoloniality, especially within the Latin-American Subaltern Studies Group and, subsequently, in the Coloniality/Modernity Group. The creation of the latter was guided by a concern to break with the Eurocentric canon and achieve truly decolonized forms of knowledge and social organization (see Oliveira, 2020). However, Luciana Ballestrin (2013) and Joaze Bernardino-Costa (2018) point out that one of the issues with decolonial approaches in Latin America has been the limited engagement with Brazil. Significantly, no Brazilians have been associated with these groups, indicating that the intellectual output of Brazilian social sciences remains excluded from what Santiago Castro-Gómez and Ramón Grosfoguel (2007) called the "decolonial turn".

Examining the convergences and divergences between Brazilian sociology and postcolonial approaches constitutes a first step in our effort to analyze connections among these perspectives. In this endeavor, we will consider the term postcolo-

nialism as broadly as possible, encompassing the various tendencies and variations cited, regardless of their specificities and dissimilarities. As Pedro Borba and Guilherme Benzaquen (2020, p. 2) assert, “a constructive dialogue does not depend on rigid demarcations, but rather on uncovering pertinent connections”.

## Connections between Brazilian sociology and postcolonial theory

Analyzing the conditions that led to the emergence of a critical discourse on coloniality and the Eurocentric foundations of the social sciences, which gained notoriety in many peripheral countries of capitalism since at least the 1950s, provides a productive path for discussing convergences between Brazilian sociology and postcolonial approaches. We do not intend to reconstruct the entire history of this process of theoretical decentering (Maia, 2011) but rather to identify some of the social, economic, cultural, and institutional conditions that allowed the emergence of this debate in peripheral contexts between the 1950s and 1970s.

Decolonization struggles in Africa and Asia were responsible for the political and intellectual reorientation observed in countries on the periphery of capitalism. Furthermore, as noted by Ballestrin (2017) and Meneses (2016), the Bandung Conference in 1955, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961, and the Tricontinental Conference in Cuba in 1966 helped to shape a geopolitical identity for the so-called Third World countries, which sought to achieve a better position in the global context beyond the polarization imposed by the Cold War.

In Brazil, there was a change in foreign policy in the 1960s with the election of Jânio Quadros and, shortly after, João Goulart. They began to adopt a more independent position towards North countries and affirmed an anticolonial and antiracist stance in solidarity with other Third World countries. During his brief time in power, Quadros opened embassies in Africa and granted scholarships to African students with funding from Itamaraty (Silva, 2017). Mário Augusto Medeiros da Silva (2017) highlights the growing connection between Brazilian activists, intellectuals, and anticolonial activists from Lusophone Africa during that period. He cites the foundation of the Afro-Brazilian Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Mabla) in 1962, which was linked to the Pro-Liberation of Angola Movement (MPLA) and established partnerships with black cultural activism in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, as well as with white and Black Brazilian intellectuals.

During this period, Brazil underwent an intense process of industrialization, creating an atmosphere of pursuing change that was evident in both the intellectual

and political spheres. There was also a growing desire for a more independent geopolitical position on the global stage. These factors led to a critical approach to the Eurocentric foundations of the social sciences and the creation of intellectual projects aimed at developing an autonomous sociology engaged with national concerns and the country's future direction. These conditions allowed for theoretical and methodological convergences between Brazilian intellectuals and those from other peripheral contexts.

*The status of sociology  
in peripheral contexts*

We could say that the first point of convergence between Brazilian sociology and postcolonial theories concerns a *theoretical preoccupation with the status of sociology in peripheral contexts*. This discussion is crucial to the postcolonial debate and is woven into the national sociological field in various ways. In the history of Brazilian sociology, we see an intense debate about applying social theories and normative ideals produced in the Global North to the Brazilian reality while simultaneously critiquing the Eurocentric foundations of the social sciences.

The influence of Euro-North American sociology on the formation of Brazilian sociology is undeniable. As in other peripheral contexts, the Brazilian sociological canon was fundamentally constituted by European (especially French and British) and American models. Despite this, there has been a constant concern with the peripheral *status* of Brazilian sociology at different moments in the discipline's history.

It is worth mentioning the debate between Guerreiro Ramos and Florestan Fernandes in the 1950s regarding the possible directions of Brazilian sociology and society during a time of institutionalization of the social sciences in Brazil (Bariani, 2006; Fernandes, 1977; Oliveira, 2001; Ramos, 1996). The debate began during the 2nd Latin-American Congress of Sociology, held in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, in 1953, and, according to Bariani (2006), revealed the divergences in understanding sociological research, its methods, and the conditions and development of research in Brazil, demonstrating different projects for the discipline and the nation.

In the proposals presented at the Congress – and later in the works *Cartilha brasileira do aprendiz de sociólogo*, published in 1954, and *A redução sociológica*, published in 1958 –, Guerreiro Ramos criticized the transplantation of measures adopted in “developed” countries to solve domestic problems. He believed that solutions should be sought in the actual conditions of Brazil's national and regional structures. Concerning ideal research conditions, the sociologist from Bahia be-

lieved they should be adapted to the “underdeveloped” nature of Brazilian society, prioritizing the formulation of general interpretations of the social structure rather than studies of the “minutiae of social life”. These general interpretations should be able to guide the implementation of central planning policies aimed at national development through industrialization (Bariani, 2006, p. 152; Oliveira, 1995; Ramos, 1996). By endowing sociological Thought with a salvational orientation, Guerreiro Ramos believed that teaching sociology, even as a school discipline, could best promote “the diffusion of a critical consciousness of national problems and the promotion of emancipation concerning cultural colonialism” (Bariani, 2006, p. 154).

Florestan Fernandes, in turn, disagrees with Guerreiro Ramos in his analysis of the scientific working pattern that should be adopted by Brazilian sociology. In a text originally published in 1958, *The scientific working pattern of Brazilian sociologists*, Fernandes emphasizes that sociology should not be guided by the nation’s system of interests and values but rather by the system of norms and values of scientific knowledge; otherwise, it would not be possible to put science at the service of the community. The author sees the defense of the autonomy of the scientific field as a way to counter external influences that weigh on the sociologist at various levels, especially in a context marked by the persistence of archaic and authoritarian relationships. Therefore, he advocates for methodological rigor in the conduct of sociological research – which should not be subordinate to the material conditions of underdevelopment in the nation – and the universal character of scientific knowledge, which can be absorbed from major academic centers. The incorporation of community studies – rejected by Guerreiro Ramos – would allow Fernandes to apprehend the variations in internal, economic, and sociocultural development that characterize the country’s various regions. In other words, science itself should be explored as a factor in development (Bariani, 2006; Fernandes, 1977).

Although it is beyond the scope of this work to reconstruct the multiple meanings and subsequent interpretations taken on by this debate, it is worth noting the centrality of the concerns of both authors regarding the future of sociology in Brazil at the moment of its institutionalization. Such concerns were focused on reflecting on the nature of the relationships to be established with the centers of scientific production and the limits and possibilities of Sociological Thought in promoting the country’s development.

These critical approaches converge with a decentralized transnational intellectual movement that, since the 1950s, has challenged the Eurocentric *status* of social sciences practiced in North Atlantic countries. According to Marcelo Maia (2011),

2. In this sense, the sociological output of Florestan Fernandes is noteworthy, especially starting from the second half of the 1960s, when he developed the notion of *dependent capitalism* as an explanatory category to analyze the character assumed by the bourgeois revolution in Brazil. His interpretation was a direct critique of the American theory of modernization, which, amongst other aspects, highlights the ideological dimension of its progressive imaginary and places in check the necessary relationship between democracy and modernity. For Fernandes, the connection between modernity and autocracy is the *normal condition* imposed by dependent capitalism, and not a *failure* of the process of modernization as it takes place on the periphery of capitalism. Far from suggesting a mere correction of hegemonic theories of modernity, Fernandes argues that these theoretical and empirical limitations require a significant change of perspective and the formulation of new conceptual instruments, capable of including its diverse variants, as well as the external and

this reflection contributed to two analytical procedures observed in our academic field and other peripheral countries. The first refers to “conceptual criticism”, developed from other places of enunciation. The second corresponds to the refutation of mid-range theories due to the biases of their empirical bases and the proposition of new analytical approaches for specific phenomena. These procedures allow for another convergence between Brazilian sociology and postcolonial epistemologies: the critique of dominant theories of modernity.

### *Critique of the dominant theories of “modernity”*

The critique of modernization theories has been one of the main features of post-colonial debates, which seek to highlight coloniality as its obscure but constitutive side (Miglievich-Ribeiro, 2020; Mignolo, 2017; Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992; Segato, 2015). Equally, it is possible to observe the development of critical readings in Brazilian sociological theory that seek to break with the normative and evolutionist understanding of the hegemonic theories of modernity. These theories adopt Europe as a universal model, basing themselves on a methodological dualism between European modernity and the premodern, traditional, backward nature of peripheral countries.

If such criticisms can be found in our intellectual context throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>, it is especially in the last century’s final decades that new interpretations emerge. These focus on

- i. the construction of a critical theory of Brazilian modernity, which affirms the fully modern character of Brazil’s national society, and*
- ii. the development of a truly global theory of modernity.*

Jessé Souza (2000-2006) drew up a critical theory of Brazilian modernity through a rereading of the classical interpreters of Brazil, rooted in the theoretical models developed by Pierre Bourdieu (2013) and Charles Taylor (1997). Souza seeks to re-interpret the process of modernization and constitution of a class society in Brazil, returning to a central problem in the Brazilian intellectual context regarding the “specificity” of our society, in contrast to countries central to the modern West. According to Souza (2017a), the essayistic tradition in Brazil produces an interpretation of Brazilian modernity grounded in a European distortion, characterizing it as an inauthentic, “epidermal”, and superficial process from its inception. His argument presents two fronts. On the one hand, against a “culturalist” legacy of Brazilian political-social Thought, imported by Gilberto Freyre from the Boasian circles in the USA, which Souza labeled the “personalist” tradition, whose representatives



included Gilberto Freyre, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, and Raymundo Faoro. On the other, he opposed the sociological tradition from São Paulo organized around the figure of Florestan Fernandes and dominant in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Souza (2000; 2006), it is possible to observe, in both traditions, an emphasis on the persistence of premodern elements in the modernization of Brazilian society, which marked its incomplete character and its “specificity” about fully modern societies<sup>3</sup>.

Contrasting these readings, Jessé Souza (2000; 2006) affirms the modern character of Brazilian society, whose modernization began at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of the Portuguese crown to Brazil, thereby favoring the introduction of modern institutions (State and market). It is possible to observe the gradual abandonment of personalist and patrimonialist criteria, typical of traditional domination, and the subsequent adoption of properly capitalist criteria of social classification – such as merit and personal performance. These would be supposedly valid even for those who remain on the margins of the formal labor market in the post-abolition context.

In the reinterpretation of the modernization process and social class structures in Brazil, Souza adopts Bourdieu’s Theory of class (2013) based on a sociocultural understanding of these structures. They manifest themselves as appropriating impersonal economic and cultural capital, evolving over time, and understood through the notion of “trajectory”. This theoretical model affirms the modernity of Brazilian society – whose social structure can be conceived through the same concepts applied to modern central societies – and the reanalysis of historical transformations in Brazilian class structure.

Souza (2006) points out that the modernization process of Brazilian society is characterized by the marginalization of a significant part of its population. These individuals are denied not only the capacities that would allow them entry into the labor market as productive workers but also the social, cultural, affective, and emotional preconditions that could facilitate this entry. The distinctive features of Brazilian society would be the formation of a class characterized by a precarious habitus – marked by an absence of the economic and political dispositions that make up the “disciplined, productive, and useful subject”, typical of a primary habitus (Souza, 2006, p. 168). The author labels this class as the *ralé estrutural* (“structural rabble”). Its historical origins go back to the period of slavery and how the constitution of modern society on the periphery of capitalism, whose modern institutions emerged as “ready-made artifacts”, was disconnected from an extended moral and cultural maturation capable of universalizing an egalitarian logic throughout the

internal conditions of societies that act on the character assumed by their respective processes of modernization (Brasil Jr., 2017; Fernandes, 1975; 2006).

3. For the intellectuals in the “personalist” tradition, this premodern character is the result of a cultural legacy connected with “personalism” and “patrimonialism”, a legacy of the colonial past, which hampered the complete nationalization of national society. Fernandes, in his turn, highlighted the persistence of elements of *status*, and premodern, archaic elements in the constitution of a society of classes, resultant from the way in which abolition and the development of capitalism occurred, marked by the clear marginalization of the Black community.

population. In this sense, Souza (2000) stresses the selective character of Brazilian modernization.

With this interpretation, Souza (2006; 2017a) aims to go beyond Pierre Bourdieu's theorization, who proposed the generalization of those minimum dispositions (*primary habitus*) to the entire population, using the example of the French case. According to Souza (2017a), such generalization does not occur in the periphery of capitalism. Therefore it is necessary to advance in the construction of new analytical instruments and a critical theory of modernization that apprehends the material and symbolic forms of domination prevailing in the current phase of capitalism in central and peripheral countries.

However, Souza has been criticized for reaffirming the "peculiar" character of Brazilian modernity, employing the idea of selective modernization, which would deprive the national experience of a fully modern condition. This criticism has been made by Sérgio Tavolaro (2009; 2011), who is amongst the current theorists interested in situating the experience of modernity in Brazil in the global context. Tavolaro seeks to distance himself from what he labels the "hegemonic sociological discourse of modernity", underlining its limits for understanding the contingent and historical processes of modernization worldwide.

In analyzing Brazilian sociological production, both classic and contemporary, Tavolaro (2011) asserts that despite their theoretical differences, they converge on an interpretation of modernity in Brazil that does not place it on equal footing with the experiences lived in central countries. The so-called "sociology of inauthenticity" would encompass not only the tradition of atavistic culturalism of authors such as Freyre and Buarque de Holanda but also the Sociology of Dependency and the Marxist approach from the Escola Paulista, together with their interpretations of peripheral modernity – such as Caio Prado Jr., Florestan Fernandes, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Octávio Ianni, among others (Tavolaro, 2017). Thus, the center-periphery binomial has been consolidated, where the prevailing view is that Brazilian modernity remains incomplete. This is because, according to Tavolaro (2009), our experience of modernity is evaluated according to an external model standard. Furthermore, in both traditions, there is a tendency to relegate historical variations in sociability to the background and to assume a normative pattern that has remained practically intact in Brazil for the past two centuries.

In his critique, Tavolaro (2011) proposes the "de-essentialization" of modernity, which is seen as a process in which historically contingent institutions emerge. His analysis relies on two key notions:

- i. the modern pattern of sociability, and
- ii. modernity as a tendentially global and decentralized process from its original birthplace.

The first notion is anchored in a critique of the modern episteme – represented by the sociological classics and, more recently, in figures such as Luhmann, Parsons, and Habermas. However, they fail to consider variations in three pillars of modern experience: a) social differentiation/complexification; b) secularization of normativity; and c) separation between public and private domains. This episteme, reproduced both by classical sociology and Brazilian sociology, projected an unchanging image of central societies based on these pillars, relegating “societies of delayed modernity” to the condition of “peculiar modern arrangements”.

Seeking to overcome the theoretical and empirical limitations of the modern episteme, Tavolaro (2011) proposes his version based on the ideas of varying patterns of social differentiation, *varying patterns of secularization, and varying patterns of separation between public and private spheres*. Such a derivation would allow an understanding of the configurations assumed by the “later modern societies” and those experienced by “central societies”. Additionally, Tavolaro argues for the need to understand such patterns of modern sociability beyond simply national borders, highlighting the idea of modernity as a potentially global process. In this manner, even if central societies can be understood as the historical origin of modernity, they can no longer be considered the exclusive disseminators of this type of modern sociability. Therefore, the very assumption of the existence of coherent, linear, and national scripts in the direction of modernity becomes problematic (Tavolaro, 2011).

Based on this synthesis of the debates, we can sustain that Brazilian sociological theory is close to postcolonial concerns in its critique of the modern episteme, even though there are significant differences in the formulation of the critiques and the very conception of modernity defended by these perspectives. It is worth investigating the differences and specificities observed between Brazilian sociology and postcolonial epistemologies based on systematization and analysis of what we will call “strategic distances”.

### *Strategic distances*

In the review of research regarding modernity in Latin America, Sérgio Costa (2019) stresses that contemporary Brazilian sociological theory constitutes an intermediary response between the dominant interpretations of modernity and the decen-

tering provoked by postcolonial approaches, such as in the case of the Theory of coloniality of power proposed by the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano. According to Costa, in the case of post and decolonial theories, the decentering is even more radical, to the extent that the very ontological and historical origins of the idea of modernity become geographically and temporally decentered. It no longer refers exclusively to the European/Latin American axis but rather is shaped by an understanding of the colonial power relations between Europe and the “rest” of the world more generally (Costa 2019, p. 11).

The emphasis of these perspectives is much more on the constitutive link between modernity and coloniality, the relations of power and domination anchored in racial classifications, and the traffic of people and goods that formed the modern project. Such elements would not be considered failures or exceptions but rather elements integral to this project. Authors such as Walter D. Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova (2006) seek to take the decolonization of social relations and knowledge production to the limit, proposing a radical rupture with the univocal idea of modernity and the Euro-North-American canon. Although providing a counterpoint to the hegemonic theories of modernity, even the most critical voices within Brazilian social theory do not fully break with the “modern project” paradigm. Instead, many Brazilian theorists have emphasized the dangers of abandoning the entire theoretical-methodological tradition that could help understand colonial sociability patterns and relations in their diverse manifestations.

José Maurício Domingues (2013), for instance, examines the idea of modernity in Latin America, considering the “anti-modern risks” that its wholesale rejection could generate. On the one hand, locating the “evils of origin” of modernity on the European continent turned out to be unproductive. On the other, negatively essentializing or characterizing modernity as a whole, based on its “dark side”, as Mignolo (2017) proposes, results in the promotion of the “native tradition” and nostalgia for the “autochthonous purity”.

Even if the discussion regarding “entangled modernities” (Randeria, 2009; Therborn, 2003) involves a constant and, at times, conflicted negotiation between different, overlapping historical contexts, this does not presume the undoing of Eurocentric theories or the relations of epistemic dependence between North and South. Domingues (2011) proposes a “third phase of modernity” – more decentered, heterogeneous, and complex than the previous phases – and advocates for the validity of Critical Theory in producing a diagnosis of the present. The proposal seeks to respond to the systems of domination (capitalism, patrimonialism, patriarchy, racism, etc.) imposed on the global periphery that undermines democracy.

Domingues points out emancipatory elements and the horizon of expectation that social movements in Latin America have demonstrated since the 1980s, mainly those centered around racial, gender, or environmental concerns. For him, theorizing on the periphery of capitalism should lead to changes in concepts and a more radical perspective on modernity (Domingues, 2011; 2018), considering the socio-political dynamics these societies manifest. Therefore, Brazilian sociology, beyond producing a description of the local problems and case studies, should pursue general theorizations with universalist aspirations, playing its part in future processes of emancipation on the subcontinent and at the global level.

Marcelo Maia (2009; 2013) also problematizes some ossified paradigms in postcolonial theory, warning about the perils of adopting such perspectives in the same manner European metanarratives of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were embraced throughout the history of global sociology. According to him, in reviewing Eurocentrism and seeking alternative paradigms, we cannot fall into the trap of uncritically formulating a “Brazilian postcolonialism” since this would obscure other equally critical perspectives rooted in national particularities. Brazilian sociological tradition sought to understand the country starting from its specificities while constituting a conflicted, at times harmonious dialogue with the social imagination of other countries in Latin America and Europe (Maia, 2013). A possible way of replacing the unequal logic of the geopolitics of Thought, which mirrors global inequalities in the social and economic spheres, is to understand how questions once conceived as endogenous developments of our intellectual tradition can assume a sense and intelligibility when situated within transnational peripheral networks of cooperation.

Brazilian political theorist Luciana Ballestrin (2013; 2017) has also pointed out the theoretical limitations and challenges that post and decolonial perspectives confront:

[...] is it possible to break with the logic of the colonality of modernity without abandoning the contributions of Western/European/ Enlightenment thought [...] for decolonization itself? Would the success of its project depend on its subaltern and peripheral condition? What is the limit of undoing the epistemological foundations of the social sciences? [...] How should we deal with the European paternity of our political institutions and social Thought? How should we empirically verify the “colonized subject” today? Are experiments considered decolonial such as the new Andean Latin-American constitutionalism, free of contradictions? [...] How does one methodologically operationalize the analysis of scales, levels, and spheres that colonality includes? (Ballestrin, 2013, p. 112).

These questions lead us to discuss the main theoretical divergences between the critical lineage in the Brazilian academic field and a more radical strand of the de-

bates on post and decoloniality, especially regarding their relationship with the Euro-North-American sociological canon. We hypothesize that, in Brazilian sociology, there seems to be a greater willingness, in general, to engage in critical dialogue with the canon while still acknowledging its limits,

*i.* either because they recognize in it a grammar that allows for a cross-cutting dialogue,

*ii.* or because they claim the use of methodological repertoires considered useful for analyzing social phenomena,

*iii.* or even because they defend the existence of elements of resistance and emancipation in the modern imaginary, which should not be entirely discarded.

Our reflection reveals how the dialogue between a critical strand of Brazilian sociology and postcolonial theories can operate as a two-way street, marked by reciprocal contributions that enable both advances in theoretical approaches that are more decentered in relation to the sociological canon and the construction of appropriate repertoires for the analysis of the most diverse local realities. It is based on this hypothesis that we propose an exercise of “rereading” one of Guerreiro Ramos’ main works, *The sociological reduction*, from 1958, which allows us to highlight the recurring concern of part of our academic field with theoretical-methodological issues and creative responses to the challenge of dealing with the hegemonic sociological tradition.

### A rereading of Ramos’ sociological reduction

Since the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Brazilian intellectual history has been characterized by a modernist ideal of a critical inflection in comparison with other theoretical traditions, which expresses a certain “anthropophagic” tendency of selective appropriation of different traditions in the process of intellectual creativity. Guerreiro Ramos’ project of “sociological reduction” (1996), in our view, expresses this anthropophagy in the sociological field insofar as it systematizes the “critical-assimilative” procedure of foreign explanatory schemes without completely breaking with “alien theories” of the Global North while adapting frameworks and techniques to local circumstances. Therefore, we propose a critical exercise of “rereading” this author, which seems to us a productive path for bringing together a more critical tradition of Brazilian sociology and postcolonial epistemologies.

For some time now in Brazil, research programs have sought to emphasize the relevance of certain intellectuals as “precursors” of postcolonial perspectives. According to specific interests, researchers have held up the intellectual production and trajectory of Guerreiro Ramos as a pioneering effort to articulate lines of investigation for a decentered theory and a critique of Eurocentrism, looking to understand sociology starting from the idiosyncrasies of the national context (Barbosa, 2006; Bariani, 2011; Bringel, Lynch & Maio, 2015; Figueiredo & Grosfoguel, 2007; Filgueiras, 2012; Lynch, 2015; Maia, 2012; 2015; Oliveira, 1995; Rezende, 2006). We aim to present Ramos and his program of sociological reduction as a methodological alternative for expanding postcolonial praxis and then propose the hypothesis of possible “rereadings” of Brazilian sociology.

Our argument starts from an observation and a wager. We believe that certain epistemological turns in Contemporary social theory, such as postcolonial theory, have reconfigured the way of analyzing our own intellectual history. The wager emerges when we observe that research programs such as Ramos’ sociological reduction are methodologically original procedures that can be returned to, cultivated, and practiced not only in current Brazilian sociology but also by contemporary sociology at a global level.

A rereading of Guerreiro Ramos in light of postcolonial critique helps us to confront what the author referred to at the time as “centripetism”, which is the tendency of some peripheral intellectual traditions to always turn outward – especially toward hegemonic centers – in search of ready-made and model solutions to our problems. This tendency, according to his critique, is not limited to the academic field; it affects all levels of our lives, creating tension between the anachronisms of the country, the potential of its “structures in generation”, and the difficulties in generating effective solutions:

In terms of superstructural elements, this tension reflects a conflict between two perspectives: that of the old country and that of the new country, between the colonial or reflexive mentality and the authentically national mentality. In the realm of social sciences, this tension is also present. Until now, many scholars have conducted their work without considering the historical and ideological pre-suppositions of their scientific work. Their approach was reflexive, and they passively and mechanically adhered to criteria from developed countries. [...] To the literal and passive assimilation of imported scientific products, one must oppose the *critical assimilation* of these products. Therefore, the term “sociological reduction” is proposed here to designate the methodical procedure that seeks to make critical assimilation systematic (Ramos, 1996, p. 68).

The “reduction” expresses, among other things, a concern to systematically reflect on the historical, theoretical, and ideological presuppositions that shape the social sciences. In his essay *O negro na sociologia brasileira*, originally published in 1954, the author highlights the ideological bias – for him, imperialist, colonialist, and ethnocentric – of fundamental concepts in European and North American sociology and anthropology, such as “acculturation” and “social change”, which would constitute a “rationalization or disguise of colonial exploitation” (Ramos, 1981, p. 3).

As these and other concepts – such as social structure – are uncritically appropriated by scholars from peripheral countries, through a mimetic process, they begin to act as a “powerful factor of alienation”, contributing to the consolidation of a “quietist conception of society”, which favors the “concealment of the decisive therapy for human problems in underdeveloped countries” (Ramos, 1981, p. 3). It is interesting to note that although Ramos proposes, in this text, an assessment of studies on the Black population in Brazil, his criticism directed at various Brazilian authors is oriented not so much by the conception of race they adopted – racist and, in any case, outdated from a scientific point of view –, but by the attitude assumed towards the foreign theoretical repertoire. Therefore, it is possible to observe in this criticism a sketch of what would be his proposal of sociological reduction as a critical-assimilative attitude and a methodological concern, considered fundamental to ensure sociological work in peripheral contexts.

In this sense, Ramos converges with postcolonial approaches in his criticism of the colonial bias inherent in hegemonic sociological theories. However, in our view, the Bahian sociologist advances in the attempt to propose theoretical-methodological alternatives to deal with this legacy, responding to a yearning that marks the national academic field of the time and which can still be felt in the criticisms of contemporary Brazilian theorists addressed to postcolonial approaches, as discussed in the previous section. According to Ramos (1996), sociological reduction, whether practiced in the theoretical-comprehensive domain or in the area of empirical operations, consists of eliminating everything that disturbs the effort due to its ideological, accessory, or secondary character of understanding and obtaining the essential of a social fact.

In epistemological terms, to recover the “reduction” is to invest in a framework that, on the one hand, reflects a decentered view of Brazilian sociological Theory and, on the other, can entail contributions from critical Brazilian sociology to the future of postcolonial criticism. However, before advancing this discussion, it is worth clarifying what the notion of “rereading” consists of and its possibilities.



### *Three potential avenues of rereading*

The idea of “rereading” should be understood as an analytical category. *Rereading* presupposes retrospection and implies reading in a different, displaced, and heterotopic manner. It does not mean “redefining” a certain historical tradition based on its foundational authors, ideas, projects, contexts, and disputes, framing them in light of contemporary movements as if this group of factors prophetically announced the future or expressed avant-garde premonitions of epistemological discoveries. Instead, by sociological “rereading”, we mean an epistemic displacement and decentering, a change of perspective, a new prism through which the sociological tradition in Brazil can be rediscovered, reevaluated, resignified, and refigured critically. This was the main challenge that postcolonial paradigms posed to Brazilian sociology.

This problematization involves discovering new inflections within the same tradition as well as outside of it. The analytical perspective of “rereading” that we propose returns to and reconsiders the past in all its nuances while critically reappropriating it. This perspective is different and integrative, yet it is also capable of applying the “necessary corrections” to the tradition, which tends to be neglectful due to its historical determinations, as argued by Alatas and Sinha (2017) and Connell (2007). Following this line of Thought, we can identify three significant sets of possible rereadings in social theory.

The first type of rereading involves an *analytical recovery procedure that provides necessary temporal corrections*, capable of uncovering the tradition’s elements that were neglected in their time. This procedure is analogous to what Alatas and Sinha (2017) practiced concerning European sociological classics (Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim). These authors demonstrate the timeless methodological qualities of the classics that remain useful regardless of different local contexts. At the same time, they also expose their conceptual, methodological, political, and ideological limitations in light of new displacements enabled by the epistemological turns in social theory.

In the Brazilian case, an example would be the criticism of culturalist racism inherent in the interpretations of the generation of essayists from the 1930s, as highlighted by Jessé Souza (2017b) regarding the concepts of “cordiality” and “patrimonialism” developed by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda. Even Caio Prado Jr., who starts from a materialist paradigm, is criticized for the cultural racism inherent in his proposal for modernizing the country, which is anchored in raising the cultural standards (“*aggiornamento*”) of our colonial roots – Amerindian and African (Melo, 2019).

The second type of rereading enables the rediscovery of *intellectuals marginalized by the hegemonic production of knowledge in the country or who belonged to silenced, unrecognized, or forgotten traditions*. There are many examples, such as Alex Ratts (2007) with Beatriz Nascimento, Érika Mesquita (2003) with the sociology of praxis by Clóvis Moura, Sandra Siqueira (2020), who analyzes the ostracism of theorists from the “radical current” of Dependency Theory, such as Vânia Bambirra, and Flávia Rios (2019) recovering the political and intellectual trajectory of Brazilian sociologist Lélia Gonzalez.

This article also proposes a third possible form of rereading. This one seeks to *uncover elements and biases from the margins of the history of sociological ideas in Brazil*. It is more precisely a reorientation of the focus onto questions that were excluded or interpreted as contingent compared to what was epistemologically valued at the time. In other words, it is a recovery of authors, concepts, and theoretical-methodological projects from the intellectual limbo they were thrown to give them renewed relevance and recognition<sup>4</sup>. Mário Augusto Medeiros da Silva (2018), for example, undertakes a critical reexamination of black sociologists such as Virginia Bicudo and Eduardo de Oliveira e Oliveira, amongst others, in São Paulo between 1950 and 1970. Muryatan Barbosa (2006) reconsiders the idea of “black personalism” of Guerreiro Ramos, based on his activism in the Teatro Experimental do Negro (Experimental Black Theater) of Abdias do Nascimento, and in a debate with theorists of *negritude*. Lastly, Adélia Miglievich-Ribeiro (2014, 2018) investigates the relationships of Darcy Ribeiro and Paulo Freire with intellectuals from other Latin-American and African countries.

These three ideas of rereading seek to correct traditions, recover or rediscover authors, and uncover debates and reevaluate marginalized intellectuals. With these in hand, we can systematize both the impact of postcolonial perspectives on the sociological context in Brazil and the influence that Brazilian sociology, viewed from a transnational and “desprovincialized” perspective, can exercise on postcolonial approaches. These rereadings were made possible thanks to the problematizations provided by contemporary turns in social theory, especially by postcolonial epistemologies. To reread sociological traditions like the Brazilian one – in its most critical incarnation – can offer relevant contributions to postcolonial approaches. To better demonstrate this argument, we propose rereading the “diagnosis of the intellectual context” present in *A redução sociológica*, a pioneering work of Guerreiro Ramos.

4. However, different to the “presentist” perspective of Olli Pyyhtinen (2010), the rereading that we are proposing here does not return to “the classics” of sociology to update them in light of contemporary problems and topics, but rather it divests those that were undervalued by their tradition of their secondary status, reevaluating their contributions in light of the new methodological and theoretical possibilities opened up by the epistemic turns in contemporary social theory.

## *The sociological reduction against the colonial mentality*

As previously discussed, Guerreiro Ramos identified in the sociological research of the 1940s and 1950s Brazil a reflection of “academic and intellectual dependency”, characterized by “scientific alienation” and “conceptual servitude” – a theme further developed in his work *Myth and truth of the Brazilian Revolution* (Ramos, 1963). Ramos accused a portion of the national sociology community of his time of imprecisely applying foreign, “alien” production to Brazil in a mechanical and subservient manner without regard for the “historical and ideological presuppositions of scientific work” in a peripheral capitalist country (Ramos, 1996, p. 68).

On the one hand, there is a sharp criticism directed at the arrogance of some authors who composed the sociological tradition in Brazil, which according to him, is an ambiguous expression of a “*viralatismo*” (inferiority complex) that reflects the “condition of copier and repeater” of the national intellectual elite in relation to European habits (Ramos, 1996, p. 106). On the other hand, there is an apprehension about “academic dependence” and the challenges to producing an autonomous sociology based on the abandonment of umbilical ties that relegate the sociological field of the country to a secondary and, therefore, unimportant position on the proposition of “instruments of self-knowledge and development of national and regional structures”<sup>5</sup> (Ramos, 1995, p. 107).

Ramos (1996) suggests specific measures to contest Brazil’s academic dependency: a) the removal of the “colonial mentality”<sup>6</sup> and its effects at the level of culture, ideas, and politics; and b) the presentation of the historical and ideological foundations for the “new critical awareness of the Brazilian reality”. This awareness would be the foundation for an autonomous, authentic, dynamic, and less alienated sociology, free of “imperial shackles” and productive of theories adjusted to the demands of the national reality (Ramos, 1966), which would set the stage for the emergence of an “epistemic subject” or, as he would have it, of the “parenthetical man”. In this regard, Ramos argued for a type of “systematic training”, which could prepare citizens” to transcend, as far as possible, circumstantial factors that conspire against its free and autonomous expression” (Ramos, 1996, p. 11). Sociological culture is then a qualitative component of resistance against “the robotization of conduct due to organized social pressures” (Ramos, 1996, p. 11).

However, Ramos accuses the Brazilian tradition of presenting a “canned sociology” (Ramos, 1995, p. 120) and a “consular sociology” (Ramos, 1996, p. 127). In both *A cartilha brasileira de aprendiz de sociólogo* and *A redução sociológica*, he asserts

5. This concern with epistemological colonialism and scientific autonomy appeared in other sociological fields of the Global South during the same period. We could mention Syed Hussein Alatas (1977), who undertook a similar discussion in Malaysia, Pablo Gonzalez Casanova (1969) in Mexico, and Anouar Abdel-Malek (1972) in Egypt – who, incidentally, was the one who provided the concept “Orientalism” for Edward Said.

6. The critique of the “colonial mentality” is close to the phenomenon of the “captive mind”, which Syed Hussein Alatas argued was persistent in peripheral scientific traditions. Regarding Alatas and Ramos, see: Maia (2011; 2014).

that Brazil was not producing sociologists capable of making a “sociological use of sociology”. With this diagnosis in the 1950s, Ramos claimed that conventional Brazilian sociologists had become accustomed to mechanically incorporating foreign production, sacrificing their critical sense for the prestige they could gain from the lay public by using concepts and techniques imported from abroad, where the “best sociology” was being produced, but which were not effective in dealing with historical obstacles in the nation (Ramos, 1966, p. 9).

It is worth noting that *A redução sociológica* is a work in which Ramos responds to criticisms he received at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Latin-American Congress of sociology in 1953, reformulating and expanding some of the proposals presented on that occasion. Amongst these was his position concerning methodological questions.

In the “Preface to the Second Edition”, Ramos asserts that many “leading figures of conventional sociology in the country” were unwilling to “adjust” foreign research techniques to the material conditions of Brazilian society, fearing that such adjustments could alter the methodological character of their contribution and hinder their theoretical work. Ramos (1996, p. 26) also criticizes the “provincial purism” that constitutes part of this national sociology and advocates that sociological work must always involve a modulation of scientific techniques and methods. Similarly, concepts and analytical models needed to be constantly adapted to situated realities and concretely underlie all authentic sociological inquiry – whose authenticity is measured by the degree to which it is linked to real problems of social life. The “authentic sociology” discussion had already been raised in “*Sociologia enlatada versus sociologia dinâmica*”, presented at that Congress.

Authentic sociology’s essence, directly and indirectly, reflects an intention of salvation and social reconstruction. It is grounded in an experience of the community lived by the sociologist, as a function of which it gains sense [...]. Whoever speaks of life speaks of questions. The essence of life is its incessant problematization. Therefore, to the extent that sociologist vitally practices their discipline, they are forcefully led to connect their thinking with their national and regional circumstances (Ramos, 1995, p. 79).

Ramos also criticized the so-called “consular sociology” in Brazil for being “Bovarist”, that is, distorting empirical reality, generating a significant error by perceiving an unbridgeable gap between the “world of the sociologists” and the “world of the layperson” (Ramos, 1996, p. 27). He grounded this analysis in a parallel between “conventional sociologists” and the “puritans” of grammar, who sought a linguistic vernacular for Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which was not only unachievable but also nonexistent. Ramos argues that the “hypercorrection in sociology” is a contra-

diction in terms “because there is very little sociology and a great deal of alienated and mystified consciousness”. Therefore, what puts us in a balanced relationship with “foreign colleagues is not the memorized knowledge of their output but rather a mastery of the reasoning that it implies, which allows sociologists to do different things in different circumstances without harming the scientific objective” (Ramos, 1996, p. 20).

As a counterpoint, Ramos advocated replacing “centripetism”, the purist attitude of importing Euro-North American theories, which he called the “literal and passive assimilation of imported scientific products” (Ramos, 1996, p. 68), with a “critical-assimilative” methodology. This would lead to a “sociological use of sociology”, the foundation of his sociological reduction. He developed the reduction method based on Husserl’s phenomenology and Gurvitch’s sociology of knowledge<sup>7</sup>. However, Ramos (1996, p. 35) warned that the idea of reduction is foreign to European intellectuals who did not experience the challenge of *decolonizing their sociological work*<sup>8</sup>. They did not need to deal with what Cheik Anta Diop (2012) once denounced as a *falsification of history*, namely, the fact that the history of peripheral societies has been written solely “from the European point of view” (Ramos, 1996, p. 49).

In this sense, *The sociological reduction* emerges as an anthropophagic method of “critical assimilation”, selective of the intellectual patrimony from overseas<sup>9</sup>. This method is a way of overcoming what he described as “mimetic imperialism” (Ramos, 1953) and giving visibility to “autonomous and authentic sociology” (Ramos, 1995). Reduction is not a mere transposition of knowledge from one social context to another but rather the *quintessence of sociological work*: a critical rereading of reality in its diverse situated expressions (Ramos, 1996).

Guerreiro Ramos underlines three senses of his “sociological reduction”:

- i.* as a method of “critical assimilation” of the situationally adjusted foreign production;
- ii.* as a “parenthetic” attitude, guided by a readjustment of our analytic perspectives, namely a capacity to put social facts “between brackets”, grounded in a systematic training of our perception, to perceive the world from another epistemic point of view; and
- iii.* as a form of sociological overcoming in its merely institutional and academic dimensions, which takes into account sociology’s potential as a science of *making and being made*, an unfinished project of “elab-

7. According to Ramos (1996, p. 35), “the sociological reduction, although permeated by the influence of Husserl, is divergent from an eidetic social science. What we take from Husserl is not so much the philosophical content of his method as a fragment of his terminology. Additionally, the idea of the sociological reduction as it is conceived of and presented here never occurred to Gurvitch. This idea is foreign to Gurvitch who does not experience the problem of the decolonization of sociological labor”.

8. “Sociological reduction” is something different from an eidetic science of the social. What we took from Husserl was less the philosophical content of his method than a fragment of his terminology. Moreover, the idea of sociological reduction as conceived and expounded in this book never crossed Gurvitch’s mind. This idea is foreign to Gurvitch, who did not experience the problem of decolonizing sociological work” (Ramos, 1996, p. 35).

9. The “critical-assimilative” methodological procedure is not against international theoretical influences, and therefore, it is not

possible to say that Guerreiro Ramos breaks radically with the epistemes of the Global North. He himself affirms that: "It is stupid to advocate for or condemn the importation of knowledge. All countries import science. What we are dealing with in this case is how to import it [...]; it is the replacement of the "hypercorrect attitude" when confronting such a product with the critical-assimilative attitude" (Ramos, 1996, p. 20).

orating a new knowledge" (Ramos, 1996, p. 11), whose elements are posed within a concrete society.

Ramos" proposal (1996) converges with the analytical procedures highlighted by Maia (2011) in that sociological reduction invites both conceptual critique from other sites of enunciation and the proposal of new analytic approaches for specific phenomena. Moreover, revisiting Ramos" work, especially his proposal of sociological reduction, can offer inventive contributions to the critical fortune of postcolonial epistemologies as it enters the realm of discussions on methodological challenges faced by sociological practices in peripheral contexts.

Adrián Scribano (2012) highlights that constructing a theoretical corpus involves integrating five ways of understanding society: epistemological, ontological, critical, theoretical, and methodological. While postcolonialism has emphasized the first four domains, little attention has been given to methodological questions. This suggests that sociology has not had much impact on "anti, post and decolonial" epistemologies and supports criticisms made by scholars such as Gurminder Bhambra (2007) and Julian Go (2016), who argue that Postcolonial Thought risks becoming another "missing revolution" for sociology.

Guerreiro Ramos does not relinquish the intellectual challenge of reflecting on methodological issues. In this sense, we highlight some elements of his "sociological reduction". Even if it is *inductive*, it is a systematically *methodical* approach to the extent that it apprehends social reality as it shows itself immediately to our inattentive eyes without evaluating its foundations and presuppositions, its conditions of possibility, and its connections of sense. Additionally, it is perspectivist and situated. As such, it *postulates a world* in which individuals and objects encounter one another in an infinite and complicated "web of references", within which they mutually constitute one another. Therefore, if we displace the analytic focus onto another perspective, both problems initially formulated and the objects analyzed cease to be exactly what they were. Due to this variability, a sociological problem cannot be understood as "disconnected from a determined context" (Ramos, 1996, p. 72). While presupposing *a collective support* (based on social experiences), which suggests that sociology, in a generic sense, is not an "act of individual insight", *The sociological reduction* is also grounded in a type of "material logic immanent to society", It is highly rigorous and developed in methodological terms, and makes use of historical knowledge, the systematic study of social facts, and scientifically grounded reasoning.

Lastly, the reduction constitutes a *critical-assimilative procedure* of foreign influences. This does not imply scientific "isolationism", nor the romantic exaltation of

local, regional, or national traditions, but rather be guided by the “aspiration to the universal” mediated by the force of local circumstances. It modulates the analytical method based on investigating real social problems from a specific society according to how they present themselves to us, without “distorting them” to better integrate them into foreign theories (Ramos, 1996, p. 73). Thus, Ramos seems to advocate for a certain flexibility of concepts and theory in light of empirical reality and the pragmatic interests of national sociology.

Critiquing the *philosophical fascisms* (Ramos, 1996, p. 13) that emerge in the chauvinist manner of staking a claim to methodological nationalisms, he distinguishes *science in act* from *science as a habit*. This latter one presupposes a fictitious imagination about the relationship between theory and practice in the field of intellectual work and therefore tends to “hypostasize” the sociological discipline, making it a highly privileged knowledge restricted to a few. In this sense, sociology would be ideological and informational, just another European legacy.

“Science in the act”, on the other hand, reflects a methodic and scientific attitude in the face of concrete reality. It bases its method on what it encounters in concrete reality, in the dynamics of lived experience. Its future and main goal is to stop being the knowledge of a few specialists and become practical knowledge for general citizens. In the “Preface to the Second Edition” of *A redução sociológica*, written around 1963, just prior to the civil-military coup in Brazil, Ramos (1996, p. 27) advocates for an ideal type of public and activist sociology as a horizon for research when criticizing scholastic, conventional sociology, “separated from the life world” and represented by other Brazilian sociologists. According to Ramos, “the vocation of sociology [in Brazil] is to become public knowledge. Sociology will volatize itself in the very global social process”.

These elements show us the strength of *The sociological reduction*, a sufficiently rigorous and creative research program that allows for the anthropophagic appropriation of social theories, concepts, intellectual experiences, and normative ideas produced in countries of the Global North. However, this always occurs within the construction of autonomous sociological knowledge, concerned with confronting concrete social problems to guarantee peripheral societies’ political and intellectual self-determination. Therefore, we understand that the “reduction” coincides with and complements more radical projects of decolonization of knowledge found in postcolonial epistemologies.

## Final considerations

Rereading Brazilian Sociology implies revisiting diverse traditions – some well-established, others hidden – and taking a renewed look at them. Nevertheless, as we argued at the start, this is not to “fit” authors from the past into contemporary epistemological dynamics, nor would it be to attribute to them concerns that were not necessarily theirs. Both operations would be anachronistic equivocations. Even though Guerreiro Ramos mentions intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon, Cheikh Anta Diop, Aimé Césaire, and Abdoulaye Ly, amongst others, it is not our intention here to situate him as a postcolonial movement member, even more so because he makes use of categories that are criticized by these movements<sup>10</sup>. This does not prevent us from understanding him as an author with “postcolonial aspirations” and especially as a genuinely critical, anticolonial, anti-Eurocentric, and antiracist theorist who is a relevant theoretical reference for contemporary debates and who can contribute to the future development of postcolonial epistemologies in the global level.

10. There are various examples of it: “social evolution”, “modern history”, “development”, “universal man”, “human nature”, and “progress”, concepts of their time and place, and of the circumstances of the intellectual and political debate between the 1950s and 1970s.

We proposed in this article a possible (and more archeological) rereading of Guerreiro Ramos, suggesting that his contributions should be understood not only as an object of study for the history of ideas in Brazil but as a source of sophisticated, relevant, and up-to-date methods and theories. We argued that his idea of “reduction” could be understood as contributing to postcolonial epistemologies from Brazilian sociological theory. Ramos set out the fundamental preoccupations for the sociology of his time, proposing an innovative method of investigation to examine peripheral societies (which he named “semi-colonial”) and offering a critique of forms of domination, servitude, colonialism, and dependency. For Ramos, sociology is not mere philosophical speculation. Rather, it is an occupation that requires to “roll up your sleeves”, a *praxis* with practical and empirical consequences.

If postcolonial approaches have already established unavoidable questions for social theory and have provoked a necessary decentralization of its main intellectual traditions, we believe in the interlocution between such approaches and Brazilian sociology, considering that the latter can contribute to the advancement and deepening of this critical movement.

The proposal of possible rereadings of Brazilian sociological theory allows for the recuperation of the main contributions of this academic field, especially in terms of:

- i.* the importance assumed by the methodological dimensions of the social analysis, including as a way of overcoming the relations of epistemic dependency between North and South;



ii. the meeting of challenges that present themselves to an analysis of the “colonized subject”, which recuperates part of the European and American philosophical and sociological legacy; and lastly

iii. the emphasis on the variable, contradictory, and decentered character of the idea of “modernity”, understood as an invitation for new theorizations of a global reach, seeking the critical formation of new emancipatory horizons and political connections at the South-South level.

All these contributions suggest that, beyond simply opening the discipline’s canon, Brazilian sociology appears engaged, with all its specificities and limitations, in the decolonization movement of our disciplinary field.

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