Alberto Guerreiro Ramos’s public life and scholarly works challenge us to rethink and reconceptualize the field of public administration, particularly in this era of public cynicism and theoretical uncertainty. This article examines the historical context of his earlier writings and how they influenced his later scholarly work. As a prominent Brazilian scholar working in the United States, Guerreiro Ramos’s “in-betweenness,” as he called it, provided him a unique and little-appreciated perspective from which to reevaluate the social sciences. The result was his last book, The New Science of Organizations: A Reconceptualization of the Wealth of Nations, one of the most polemical works published in the field and an examination of the fundamental assumptions of public administration and the social sciences.

Relatively recently—at the time of Machiavelli and Hobbes—we took a sharp fork in the intellectual road. It is time to retrace our cultural steps, and rethink what we think.

—George F. Will

Human dignity needs a new guarantee which can be found only in a new political principle …

—Hannah Arendt

If there be a skeptical star I was born under it, Yet I have lived all my days in complete astonishment.

—W. MacNeile Dixon

Introduction: Guerreiro Ramos’s Search for Fundamentals

It has been just over 20 years since Alberto Guerreiro Ramos saw his last book, The New Science of Organizations, finally published. He was, quite understandably, eager and somewhat concerned about the reactions of his colleagues, given that he knew many of his ideas ran directly counter to the prevailing thought in public administration (and social science). However, some scholars, such as Guy Adams,1 have referred to Guerreiro Ramos’s book as probably the most underrated classic in the field today. Concomitantly, William Scott (1983), in his insightful assessment in Public Administration Review, thought that Guerreiro Ramos’s ideas would continue to speak to thinkers about the future challenges confronting public administration. It is a book, Scott declared, that will continue to haunt the field constructively in terms of the uncomfortable and disconcerting questions it raises about the issues central to the discipline.

Other scholars, however, have found the book rather cumbersome or just plain confusing. Gerald Caiden contended that The New Science of Organizations would be
quickly forgotten (or dismissed) due to its heavy-handed theoretical approach to a discipline that has inherently strong pragmatic tendencies. Even more pointedly, Richard Stillman and Frank Marini have both stated that Guerreiro Ramos’s work is difficult to comprehend, particularly the convoluted theoretical language employed to make his arguments.

There is, of course, some truth in all of these viewpoints. It is true that the *New Science of Organizations* perhaps has not exhibited the theoretical impact Guerreiro Ramos was hoping for because its terminology is probably too philosophical for most people in public administration and public policy. Moreover, it is reasonable to surmise that Guerreiro Ramos’s concerns may seem too theoretical to be applied in the rough-and-ready world of modern politics. Why, then, should practitioners and scholars be interested—or even care—about this book written over two decades ago by a Brazilian who was “a rare combination of public servant, political activist, and globe-trotter academic” (Anderson 2000, 246)? This analysis demonstrates that Guerreiro Ramos is still critical to public administration because he offers one of the most far-reaching (and profound) critiques of the field, and he posits some key propositions about how public administration might be reconceptualized to recapture the normative underpinnings of a substantive citizenry in the contemporary polity.

To understand how Guerreiro Ramos formulated his ideas, it is crucial to see how the cultural, political, and social influences of his own milieu shaped his thinking. Hence, the first part of this article presents the historical context of Guerreiro Ramos’s theoretical development and proceeds to discuss the relevance of the *New Science of Organizations* to public affairs. A key point in this article is that Guerreiro Ramos has been woefully misunderstood in American academe. Despite having been a prominent civil rights advocate, elected federal politician, and advisor to three presidents; despite having been one of the founders of the public administration discipline in one of the world’s most populous countries; and despite an extraordinary record of scholarship in the field of public administration—in the often insular academic world of American public administration (Candler 2002; Klingner and Washington 2000, 36; Riggs 1994, 27; Ventriss 1991, 9-10)—he has been a marginal character at best. Some of the shortcomings or lacuna of his conceptual critique and his intellectual approaches to revitalize the field will be analyzed. Regardless of how one thinks about Guerreiro Ramos’s intellectual framework and his critique of instrumental rationality, it is a voice that should be heard, especially in a time when economics is having a growing influence on public affairs and the substantive implications of that influence on human inquiry. It is a voice that has salient ramifications for a discipline such as public administration in resurrecting its role in shaping public affairs and confronting those who regard it, albeit in overstated manner, as nothing more than an intellectual wasteland (Eulau 1977). This article will consider the intellectual development and the important policy issues that Guerreiro Ramos contended with, both in Brazil and in the United States. His intellectual “in-betweeness,” as he called it, created a unique, substantive perspective that helped to shape the conceptual framework that echoes in his later writings.

**The Myth of Racial Democracy**

Guerreiro Ramos’s first major contribution to Brazilian public policy came through work that led to a better understanding of racial issues in Brazil, especially through his participation in efforts to dispel what has been referred to as “the myth of racial democracy.” For many Brazilians, the intermingling of the races during *carnaval* has long been a metaphor for race relations in the country on the whole: That is, it has been widely believed that race relations are quite good, especially when compared to the United States, that other large, late slave-owning country in the Americas. This Brazilian myth of racial democracy persists even today (Jones 2002; Reichmann 1995; Santos 1998, 119–22; Twine 1998, 6–7). Especially if North American criteria are applied to the issue, great racial inequality and racial discrimination are clear. Although they constitute a larger percentage of the Brazilian population than the American population, descendants of Africans are less represented in economic and political circles in Brazil than in America. As in America, they do not fare as well on a range of socioeconomic indicators (Fry 2000, 90–94; Twine 1998, 65–86). Guerreiro Ramos’s daughter, Eliana Guerreiro Ramos Bennett, perhaps put it best:

> The picture of Brazil as a “racial paradise” is a Jungian exercise in collective fantasy in the sense that Brazil presents itself as it would like to be seen, even perhaps as it would like to be, but this fantasy is far from the shadowy reality of ethnic relations in Brazil. The truth—or the shadow, to use Jung’s term to describe our inner reality—of Brazilian interethnic relations is that Brazil is more similar to the old South Africa than to any racial paradise. (1999, 227)

Questions regarding the relevance of this relative racial discrimination and disadvantage notwithstanding, by the mid-twentieth century a number of Afro-Brazilians had come to note the very real existence of absolute discrimination and disadvantage in the country. A major step in the development of the Brazilian civil rights movement was the establishment in 1944 of the Teatro Experimental do Negro (TEN, the Black Experimental Theater) in Rio de Janeiro by Abdias Nascimento. TEN was primarily “a psycho-sociological experiment” (Guerreiro Ramos 1949)
that “intended to further the affirmation and promotion of cultural values brought from Africa to Brazil by the black slaves. From the choice of the title of the theater we revealed one of our primary intentions: to purge the ancient load of pejorative connotations implicit in the word ‘black.’ ‘Black’ was always synonymous with absolute Evil; that which was ugly and inferior was always expressed in terms of ‘black’” (Nascimento 1995).

Nascimento and Guerreiro Ramos had met five years earlier when the latter moved to Rio de Janeiro (for its better universities) upon receipt of a scholarship from the state government of Bahia. Guerreiro Ramos became involved in the broad movement associated with TEN and was one of the earliest people to challenge “the myth.” In a 1946 newspaper article on the “problems and aspirations of Brazilian blacks,” he identified three aspects of the issue: racial prejudice, economic disadvantage, and what he referred to as “two distinct, incompatible mental worlds” (1946c).

He was to develop this final point more fully in his later work, but in the meantime, through TEN he was instrumental in establishing the Instituto Nacional do Negro (National Black Institute) and, through this, the 1a Conferência do Negro (1st Black National Conference) (Diário Carioca 1949). At the same time, the heightened global awareness of race and the movement toward decolonization came together during a UNESCO project to study race relations in Brazil, with TEN prominent in advocating for the study. Ironically, the project ostensibly sought lessons for the rest of the world from Brazil’s apparently good race relations. Yet, as Guerreiro Ramos and TEN expected, the report presented considerable evidence of racial discrimination in the country while preserving this fiction (Fry 2000, 90–91; Maio 2001).

In the early 1950s Guerreiro Ramos’s role shifted from activism to conceptualizing the racial problem in Brazil, especially through the Cartilha brasileira do aprendiz de sociólogo (Brazilian Primer in Sociology, 1954) and its chapter on Patologia social do “branco” brasileiro (Social Pathology of the “White” Brazilian), published separately as a pamphlet in 1955. The Cartilha includes a long criticism of the treatment of race in Brazilian history (123–66) from the racist anthropology of Euclides da Cunha’s classic Os Sertões (Guerreiro Ramos 1954, 131; see also Cunha 1944, 51, 84–89) to Nina Rodrigues’ assertion that “the black race in Brazil … has always constituted one of the factors in our inferiority as a people” (cited in Guerreiro Ramos 1954, 137). Guerreiro Ramos contended, however, that “the real problem of the black in Brazil is essentially psychological and secondarily economic.” Poverty and “the condition of the black in Brazil [are] only sociologically problematic, in as much as it results from the aesthetic alienation of the Brazilian blacks themselves, eager for identification with the European” (1954, 157).

The “distinct, incompatible mental worlds” resulting from this aesthetic alienation are further elaborated in Patologia social do “branco” brasileiro (1955). The central problem is stated early: “Whiteness” remains society’s aesthetic reference in a country where people of nonwhite origins predominate (3). Brazilian social science regarding race has reinforced this, treating “blackness” as a subject of study rather than whiteness (25) and often stereotyping white as good and black as bad, thus providing a psychological support for racism (7). In Patologia social Guerreiro Ramos inverted this, instead treating whiteness as the subject of study (1995, 172). His conclusion: the dominant white race, through its neocolonial fixation on Europe (1955, 8–9) inhibited the development of an authentic Brazilian national sense of identity (24). As a result, for Guerreiro Ramos the racial problem in Brazil was one of the white race, not of the black (28).

A Redução Sociológica

On the surface, Alberto Guerreiro Ramos’s involvement in the Afro-Brazilian campaign for civil rights is perhaps not surprising: as an Afro-Brazilian from the “subaltern” class (Maio 1996, 179–80), he could not help but be aware of the problems associated with racial prejudice and the economic deprivation of the Brazilian poor. Yet a more important insight into his intellectual development is revealed as far back as 1937, in a book of poems entitled O drama de ser dois (The Drama to be Two), which Guerreiro Ramos was later to describe as “seminal … an expression of what I always was. In English there is an expression: In betweeners. I am always in between” (1995, 134).

As an educated Afro-Brazilian, he was a rare educated black man among the largely white intelligentsia. But critical to his subsequent intellectual history was the way he dealt with this in-betweeness: not by seeking to assimilate seamlessly into the elite by adopting its values (and so potentially gaining considerable material rewards), but by challenging those things that his unique background indicated were in need of reform. At least two reasons have been offered for his subsequent reformist zeal: gratitude for the privilege of the government scholarship that made his education possible and subsequently oriented him toward a life of public service (Guerreiro Ramos 1995, 132), and his mother, who always urged him to “make a difference” (Guerreiro Ramos 1995, 132). Whatever the cause, O drama de ser dois illustrates this early. The book opens with a poem titled O canto da rebeldia, which begins,

My song is a song of rebellion
It is a song of affirmation
It is a song of simplicity and of humility.
A man born inside of me.
A man who broke the chains that was enslaving them

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The rebellion resulting from his in-betweenness continued through the 1950s. As his career as a civil rights advocate peaked, Guerreiro Ramos moved into a number of powerful positions in the Brazilian administrative and governmental hierarchy. In 1951, he was appointed to the advisory staff of the civil cabinet of President Getúlio Vargas, and a year later he became a founding professor of the Escola Brasileira de Administração Pública (Brazilian School of Public Administration), an event that is often cited as the birth of public administration as a separate academic discipline in Brazil (Graham 1968, 165–68; Warlich 1965, 62). This new prominence led to major contributions to the conceptualization of the racial question in Brazil in the Cartilha brasileira do aprendiz de sociólogo.

About this time, Guerreiro Ramos also shifted his energies away from the narrow field of race relations to mainstream scholarship. Inspired by the work of Max Weber, he became increasingly interested in organizational theory and public administration. The result was probably his best-known and most influential book in Brazil (Schwartzman 1983), A redução sociológica (1965). In A redução sociológica, Guerreiro Ramos advocates the development of a Brazilian sociology—and, by extension, a Brazilian version of all social sciences—through the “critical assimilation of the foreign sociological patrimony” (1965, 14–15). The literal English translation of the title of the book would be “sociological reduction.” Reduction in this sense is understood in terms of the “critical assimilation” that Guerreiro Ramos calls for; what he refers to is a process of distilling the international social science literature so as to reduce it to the part that is relevant, and therefore useful, to Brazil.

His ideas in A redução sociológica were clearly being developed during the preceding years. His article on the importance of Max Weber to public administration, for instance, asserts the usefulness of Weberian sociology (1946b). Guerreiro Ramos refers to Weber’s work as a “tool and instrument that can be used in the organization of society” (1946b, 129). According to Guerreiro Ramos, social science should not be an abstract theoretical undertaking, but a policy-relevant academic discipline engaged in improving Brazilian society. It is probable, again, that this emphasis had its intellectual origins in the nature of his homeland. As Guerreiro Ramos recognized, Brazil was a developing country. A redução sociológica includes a substantial chapter that presents a range of development indicators whereby Brazil is contrasted with the developed world and scores well below them in each (1965, 147–64). Given the “ecumenical and universal” (1967, 40) fact of modernity, this development imperative required Brazilian sociology to be oriented toward assisting this process. In short, the critical nature of the development/modernization imperative in the country was such that a purely theoretical social science was a waste of scarce resources. Theory building, while critical, must always be linked to social reality for understanding political change: “The administrator, especially, needs less a pure theory of social reality than a knowledge of systematic regularities of strategy, that permit him/her to carry out a specific role as an active agent of transformation” (1966, 243).

A second key point of A redução sociológica was that much sociology from the metropolitan countries might not be relevant to Brazil. In a published 1956 lecture, Guerreiro Ramos likened the unproblematic adoption of European or North American administrative techniques in Brazil to eighteenth-century Tahitians burying iron in the soil after the departure of Captain James Cook, expecting that iron trees would grow from the soil. Rather than this naiveté, he called for the “critical assimilation” of the foreign literature (1965, 14–15) and foreign experience (80–83). The foreign literature was to be “subsidiary” to Brazilian reality (120). This idea was further fleshed out in his 1966 Administração e estratégia do desenvolvimento (Administration and Development Strategy). The development imperative is repeated and, from it, the need for a policy relevant Brazilian sociology (239–40). For Guerreiro Ramos, public administration is deeply embedded in society (38–41) and critically dependent on the local, regional, and national context, to which he added the historical context (97–98). As a result, policy research is crucial (208–10) to understanding the context, and Brazil must adapt the development lessons from elsewhere, especially those of the developed countries. The latter point was a key issue for Guerreiro Ramos. On one hand, he saw the core–periphery distinction as fundamental (1983, 18–19), and he was deeply critical of the “mechanistic adoption” (1965, 13–15) of the development lessons of the former. On the other hand, even within the periphery, he argued for Brazil’s uniqueness.

With reference to his assertion of his in-betweenness, it is worth considering the radical departure that Guerreiro Ramos was suggesting with his critical assimilation of foreign ideas: He was rejecting both of the dominant schools of thought in the country, as well as centuries of tradition in a country that had always looked (and gone) to France for intellectual inspiration. This raises a third issue illustrated by A redução sociológica: Guerreiro Ramos’s theoretical orientation. In rejecting the mechanistic adoption of foreign models, he criticized two broad categories of models in particular. The first is the stages model of development, especially the notion of development “prerequisites” (1983, 118–23) and the assumption that development requires the adoption of the ethos and norms of the West (1967, 30). Guerreiro Ramos saw this as little more than unthinking backward induction (1967, 26). In other words, deterministic models—that is, those based on...
mechanistically aping the development process of the West, at least as this was understood—were of little use (1967, 9; see also 1966, 243). Developing countries need to assess their own characteristics and work out where their possibilities for development lie.

In a provocative article, Guerreiro Ramos (1970) makes a distinction between what he calls “Theory N,” which assumes that modernization is part of “a law of historical necessity that impels every society to try to attain the stage occupied by the so-called developed or modernized societies” (22). He compares this approach to his concept of a possibility model, or “Theory P,” which “supposes that modernity is not located in any specific part of the world … and it holds that any nation … always has its own possibility of modernization, the implementation of which can be disturbed by the superimposition of a frozen, normative model, extrinsic to those possibilities” (23). Here, Guerreiro Ramos was boldly calling for a reformulation of modernization itself.

Remaining on the subject of development for the moment: As with the notion of development prerequisites derived from the advanced capitalist experience, Guerreiro Ramos saw Marxist class-based analyses as wanting. Andre Gunder Frank’s 1967 Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America argued that what Guerreiro Ramos referred to as the “external configuring agent” of global society (1966, 17–19) does not “and can not offer any way out of underdevelopment in Latin America” (Frank 1967, xi). As a result, Frank argued that the only alternative for people on the periphery was to destroy global capitalism and adopt “revolutionary Marxist strategy” (120).

The subsequent development of this debate is well known: For the purposes of this analysis, we note that in 1979, Cardoso and Faletto’s influential Dependency and Development in Latin America suggested there might be some possibility for “associated dependent” development.10 Yet in the midst of all of this activity—indeed, prior to much of it, given the 1958 publication of A redução sociológica—Guerreiro Ramos was emphasizing the possibilities of development on the periphery (1967, 8–22)—the unique characteristics of a society on the periphery will suggest possibilities for development—years before Cardoso.

Guerreiro Ramos’s rejection of mechanistically following intellectual models based on the experience of other societies in other eras—whether it be the Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx or the noncommunist manifesto of W. W. Rostow—was therefore likely to offend both right and left. His view that possibilities for development existed further inflamed the deterministic “no way out” dependentista left. This resulted in heated rejections of A redução sociológica by both the academic and the political left. Indeed, the second edition of the book (1965) opens with responses to criticisms from both Marxist scholar Florestan Fernandes (1958) and from Partido Comunista militant Jacob Goreneder (1958). Guerreiro Ramos lamented Fernandes’s provincialism (1965), understood in an academic sense of reifying foreign theory at the expense of domestic empiricism. As for the communists, he points to the effect of the “militancy of the ranks of the PC impoverishing their intellectual horizon” (1965, 39), refers to the “verbal fetishes” (49) that characterize Marxist thought, and argues that “Marxist-Leninist solipsism” is an inferior cultural attitude, a limitation that makes one’s thinking unnatural and sectarian (42).

Guerreiro Ramos once described himself as of the left “but not an extremist” (1959), and his personal life reflected this non-dogmatic viewpoint. He was a federal legislator from the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (Brazilian Labor Party) in the early 1960s, though the party was never a vehicle of the Brazilian labor movement, having been a creation of the populist dictator Getúlio Vargas to co-opt labor (Roett 1999, 39–40), and, despite ideological battles within the party, was certainly no socialist party. In the 1930s Guerreiro Ramos “entered public life during the Estado Novo through the Catholic right” (Schwartzman 1994). In short, neither his writings nor his personal life support the characterization of Guerreiro Ramos as a leftist ideologue; indeed, he fought these perceptions publicly on a number of occasions in Brazil.11

Finally, Guerreiro Ramos’s redução sociológica was no “debilitating ‘administrative nationalism’ which blinds administrators to lessons from elsewhere” (Candler 2002; see also Carvalho Junior and Vergara 1996, 135–37; Vergara 2001). In rejecting the mechanistic adoption of foreign models, he was not rejecting these outright, but merely advocating their critical assimilation. It is worth noting that Guerreiro Ramos spoke highly of the work of Fred Riggs and others (Guerreiro Ramos 1966, 331–38, 420; 1983, 250–55), and his own work certainly reflected an exceptional familiarity with the international literature (see, for instance, 1965, 96–111; 1966, 330–87; 1967, 12–22). Guerreiro Ramos acknowledged the existence of global society as an “external configuring agent” (1966, 17–19) that affects Brazilian public policy. This was not necessarily for the good, and he called for global reform to moderate those external agents that configured the world in such a manner as to seriously limit development possibilities on the periphery (1967, 41). He also acknowledged the validity of the international literature at the level of “general principles” (1965, 90), but, again, he called for the critical assimilation of these ideas. As a result, while the forces of globalization—he refers to “the penetration of a global supersystem” (1967, 37)—and modernity may be leading to a convergence in administrative methods, he saw the process as one of true convergence, with both parties
moving toward the middle, rather than the periphery following lockstep behind the core (1967, 36–38).

Regardless of the correctness of this position, Guerreiro Ramos’s *Redução sociológica* made a dramatic, lasting impact on Brazil. Simon Schwartzman (1994), a prominent Brazilian scholar, summarized Guerreiro Ramos’s intellectual influence as no less than “a well-known proponent of a radically Brazilian social science which could provide the framework for a nationalist revolution, led by the country’s intellectuals.”

**The New Science of Organizations**

Guerreiro Ramos’s in-betweenness was to take an extraordinary turn in the 1960s. His already high stature increased: He entered federal politics through the National Council of the Brazilian Labor Party in 1960 and became an elected member of Congress himself in 1963. Three influential, less theoretical, and more policy-oriented books subsequently came out in the early 1960s: *A problema nacional do Brasil* (The Brazilian National Problem, 1960a), *A crise do poder no Brasil* (The Crisis of Power in Brazil, 1961a), and *Mito e verdade sobre a revolução brasileira* (Myth and Reality of the Brazilian Revolution, 1963). At this juncture, this lower-class black man from a small town in Bahia found himself at the center of Brazilian political and intellectual life: in between these two worlds of poverty and power. This was all to change dramatically with the military coup of March 31, 1964. Congress was shut down, and so Guerreiro Ramos lost his political position; over the next two years, the military government pressured the Getúlio Vargas Foundation to fire him as well. The pressure eventually increased enough that Guerreiro Ramos left the country in 1966 and, with the critical assistance of Frank Sherwood, was hired by the School of Public Administration at the University of Southern California. In this position, he influenced an entire generation of scholars dealing with the fundamental issues facing the field.

Ironically, he went to the United States, which had supported the 1964 coup that led both to the shutdown of the government he was a part of and to his own exile. Worse, few Americans appreciated the extent of Guerreiro Ramos’s intellectual achievements in Brazil, so, in his words, he went from being an eminent member of the Brazilian academic community to being relatively unknown in America (Guerreiro Ramos 1995, 176). At the same time, he was reaching a point in his intellectual development when he was ready for what he asserted was his most important work (Guerreiro Ramos 1979; C. Guerreiro Ramos 2002), reflected in *The New Science of Organizations: A Reconceptualization of the Wealth of Nations* (1981). But the United States was not a comfortable milieu for him. As he indicated in a letter to the book’s publisher, “as a Brazilian scholar with a European background, I am not so comfortable with the state of social science in America, which in my view is fraught with serious fallacies” (1977).

Though he often stated that he loved life in America, professional life included numerous frustrations for a scholar of his stature. In 1977, an article submitted to a well-respected journal in the field, for instance, was rejected by a reviewer on the following grounds:

> The material is really heavy stuff; and I think it would be valuable to only a handful of people, interested in examining in profundity the logic of [Guerreiro] Ramos’ delimitation argument. My guess is that not many people have that interest. I have waded through the whole manuscript and am frankly overwhelmed by his scholarship. There is so much that I have not read and do not know anything about that I simply have to take his arguments on faith. Since I think I am somewhat better prepared than most readers of [this journal] I come to the reluctant conclusion that the matter should not be pursued.

It was in this milieu, this state of in-betweenness, that Guerreiro Ramos produced *The New Science of Organizations* in 1981.

As indicated, Guerreiro Ramos considered *The New Science of Organizations*, compared to all of his previous published works, his most salient contribution to public administration. This work, in short, was the culmination of all of his thinking about where social science was going and how it had to be rethought on a more substantive foundation. He was quite aware there would be much opposition, if not indifference, to his critique of administrative and political thought and to his proposals to position the field of public administration on a new theoretical trajectory. So what was Guerreiro Ramos trying to say? For the purposes of this discussion, only the key factors that had a direct bearing on his critique of modern reason and its ramifications for public administration are elaborated here. No detailed analysis is devoted to his theory of social system delimitation or his emphasis on what he called the “Law of Requisite Adequacy.” This is not to negate the critical importance of this part of Guerreiro Ramos’s theoretical framework; rather, for reasons of space, our emphasis here is his critical exploration of the assumptions concerning the present influence of instrumental rationality on the field. This is because Guerreiro Ramos, in the first chapter, opens his polemical insights in these rather stark (and biting) terms: “Organization theory as it has prevailed is naïve because it is predicated on the instrumental rationality inherent in extant Western social science. In fact until now the naïveté has been the fundamental reason for its practical success. Nevertheless, we must now recognize that its success has been unidimensional and … has a distortive impact on human associated life” (1981, 3).
Saying this, this analysis of Guerreiro Ramos’s thinking is divided into the following major categories: (1) His theoretical argument as one of the most piquant critiques of the encroachment of economic assumptions on public affairs; (2) Guerreiro Ramos’s emphasis on the importance of substantive rationality in public administration (and social science) and the role it should—and can—play in shaping societal affairs. Moreover, attention will be given to his arguments concerning the inherent limitations or hubris of certain methodological inquiries and economic assumptions that have derailed thinking about contemporary policy issues.

**A Normative Critique of Public Administration**

Long before criticisms emerged against some of the central tenets of both the New Public Management movement and the rational-choice approach, Guerreiro Ramos “was one of the first intellectuals within our field to denounce the abusive application of Economics to human affairs and in the theory of organizations, in particular” (Anderson 2000, 247). His major contention was straightforward and far reaching: that contemporary social science is, for the most part, predicated upon an instrumental rationality that is characteristic (and reflective) of the prevailing market system in society. This notion has inevitably led, according to Guerreiro Ramos, to a naïve objectivism that promotes nothing more than what he so aptly refers to as a cryptopolitical phenomenon, that is, “disguised normative dimension of the established power configuration” (Guerreiro Ramos 1981, 4). Simply put, public administration is becoming an integral part of this disconcerting intellectual proclivity in political and administrative thinking. Yet, one may ask, what specifically is he referring to in making this claim?

Guerreiro Ramos argues that, in Western intellectual history, something pivotal occurred during the seventeenth century that transformed rationality from its previous ethical considerations into a new conceptualization that eviscerated reason “of any normative role in the domain of theory building and human associated life” (1981). It was Thomas Hobbes (and thinkers like Francis Bacon) who legitimized the cognitive development of a market-centered society predicated upon utilitarian foundations (Macpherson 1964; Wolin 1960). Guerreiro Ramos, pulling no punches, explains it this way: “Thus in modern market-centered society, predicated upon the Hobbesian understanding of rationality, distorted language has become normal, and one of the means to critique such a society is to describe its cunning in misappropriating the theoretical vocabulary which prevailed before its rise” (5). He even goes as far as to say rather boldly that modern social science “itself is largely a footnote to Hobbes” (5). Hobbes has particular importance for Guerreiro Ramos because it was Hobbes who contended the individual is primarily a creature of passion rather than reason; that reason itself is nothing more than the capacity to “reckon consequences” (the emphasis is on what works independent of its moral content and purpose); that empirical information is the only valid form of knowledge, and all other approaches of inquiry are to be regarded as secondary; and finally, that fear is the primary force for ordering personal and social affairs. These Hobbesian assumptions, Guerreiro Ramos articulates, have resulted in the emergence of positivism and the psychological requirements necessary for a market society based on self-interest and a calculative individual who is often indifferent to the value content of decision making.

To bolster his major points about this historical turn (or derailing, as he called it) in rationality and its implications on modern society and thought, he analyzes the relevance of such seminal thinkers as Aristotle, Hannah Arendt, Karl Polanyi, Eric Voegelin, Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, Alfred Whitehead, and (with a degree of reservation) both Max Horkheimer and Jürgen Habermas from the Frankfurt School. These diverse thinkers provided Guerreiro Ramos with the theoretical ammunition about the pervasive influence of instrumental rationality on modern life and its distortive ramifications for the denaturation of language and the uncritical socialization of the individual into market society.

Assuming, of course, the validity of these theoretical (and practical) insights, Guerreiro Ramos became increasingly troubled by what he believed would be the growing and steady influence of economic assumptions as the cardinal criterion for both analyzing and formulating public policy, and, equally important, as the overarching epistemological foundation for a viable social science. Here he echoes Daniel Bell’s normative observation that the market ideology of advanced industrial countries is, by and large, “instrumental and rational, and creates no value of its own” (1980, 193). But what Guerreiro Ramos probably found most disturbing about this trend was that the market is deeply (and inherently) antipublic. Because the market exalts both the primacy of self-interest and economic efficiency, it can—in its extreme form—deny “meaning and value to even the notion of common purpose, or politics in its classical sense” (Sullivan 1986, xii). Can societies afford the risk, Guerreiro Ramos asked, of taking for granted “the unlimited intrusion of the market system upon human existence” (1981, 23)? If this risk is taken, do societies sacrifice—without perhaps even knowing it—the ability to formulate coherent political discourse congruent to the complexities of the modern polity (Sullivan 1986, 9)? If the market and the economic as-
sumptions that emerge are indeed ubiquitous in both the public and private realms of society, what civic space is left to foster any resemblance of a reflective citizenship of mutual responsibility and normative cultivation of responsible selves?

The intellectual malaise confronting public administration, Guerreiro Ramos believed, is that if one uncritically accepts the instrumental rationality that is an integral part of organizational theory, and if one does not understand the specific nature of the market of organizational theory, and if one does not understand the societal fabric, one inevitably becomes part and parcel of a procedural utilitarian ethos that economizes more and more of public life, thus promoting (whether one knows it or not) a narrow conceptual focus for public administration (and public policy). The legacy of such a posture is a utility language that is unable to grasp the salience of social interdependency and mutual concern and a myopic view of citizens as nothing more than mere consumers of social services.

While there has been a myriad of subsequent criticisms against New Public Management, Ramos’s perspective remains different in that he would argue that this approach, while conceding that it has a role to play in public affairs if appropriately restricted to narrow efficiency issues, is in fact merely a disguised tautology based upon a mechanomorphic mode of conduct and is thus theoretically pedantic because it does not take into account both the functional and substantive requisites of public life. The New Public Management is nothing more than a manifestation of what he called cognitive politics:

Today the market tends to become the shaping force of society at large, and the peculiar type of organization which meets its requirements has assumed the character of a paradigm for organizing human existence at large. In such circumstances the market patterns of thinking and language tend to become equivalent to patterns of thinking and language at large. This is the environment of cognitive politics. Established organizational scholarship is uncritical or unaware of these circumstances, and thus is itself a manifestation of the success of cognitive politics (1981, 81).

Guerreiro Ramos’s critique of the central ideas of the New Public Management movement concerned him because those ideas can inevitably restrict the field’s attention to the instrumental goals of administrative expediency and efficiency, thus running the deleterious risk of narrowing the intellectual scope of the field. Put bluntly, as important as the managerial values of efficiency and competence are to many in public administration, “they are not sufficient (and never can be) to sustain any substantive credibility or purpose to the role of public administration in shaping societal affairs” (Ventriss 1998, 235).

To Guerreiro Ramos, the penchant of public administration (and public policy) to align itself with economic assumptions and the unqualified expansionist trends of the New Public Management should come as no surprise given the field’s secondary concern—notwithstanding its lip service—with the importance of substantive rationality.

**The Relevance of Substantive Rationality to Public Affairs**

Guerreiro Ramos argued that one of the central dilemmas of public administration is the lack of a bulwark to instrumental reason, which negates the plurality of human political possibilities. The field has, knowingly or unknowingly, homogenized the individual as consonant with the “interests of society,” thus replacing reason with sociality; this is the ultimate result of the view that citizens are the aggregation of interests rather than active participants in the deliberation of public action. A substantive rationality, in other words, would confront how the market ideology has become embedded in society (Polanyi 1944) and the necessity of formulating a new normative framework for human associated life. It would be a rationality that resists the conformity of mass society and the fiction that citizenship, to a large extent, merely means being a good job holder and consumer in society.

Although Guerreiro Ramos admits that substantive rationality is difficult to capture within any simple definitional statement, his usage of this term implies a nonutilitarian perspective that transcends efficiency and the calculation of means and ends. He indicates, in embryonic terms, the major characteristics of a substantive orientation:

- It recognizes the primacy of ethical considerations and inquiry over the role of markets as the overarching decision-making process for human associated life.
- It denotes the restriction of the socialization process prevailing in market society on the individual psyche.
- It recognizes the plurality of individual needs and the importance of political regulation of the economy.
- It acknowledges that the dichotomy between facts and values is incorrect and can lead to distortion in theory development.
- It opposes the notion of historicism and the subordination of the individual to a historical process.
- It implies a need for a new science of organizations that is based on a substantive social science that “enables [individuals] to understand the historical varieties of the human predicament” (Guerreiro Ramos 1981, 43).

What is so striking about this view is its similarity to Hannah Arendt’s (1958) theoretical analysis of the deterioration of the public realm in contemporary society. Guerreiro Ramos appropriates Arendt’s distinction between behavior and action, her stress on plurality, her acknowl-
edgement of Hobbes’s break with classical reason, her critique of modern social science, and even her Greek terminology (such as “isonomy”). And, like Arendt, he argues this lack of emphasis on substantive rationality in the modern polity has resulted, ironically, in the obfuscation of common sense itself. The stark implications of this state of affairs—a perspective that Guerreiro Ramos and Arendt share—is that reliance on administrative rationality is ill-suited for the pursuit of substantive endeavors, given the stress on “behaving” congruent with the instrumental goals of formal organizations.

At this point, Guerreiro Ramos introduces his concept of organizational delimitation, which confines formal, economizing organizations to a restricted enclave in the overall social fabric, hence allowing the cultivation of substantive rationality (and pursuits) free from contrived organized pressures (1981, 101). To some, this smacks of a form of institutional Manichaeanism that sharply dichotomizes the boundaries of instrumental and substantive rationality in the modern polity. Guerreiro Ramos certainly leaves this impression, for example, when he severely criticizes the humanist theorists, who contend that such notions as self-actualization, spiritual values, and love can be imposed on modern economizing organizations. It is worth quoting him at length as he forcefully makes this argument:

Contemporary theoreticians and practitioners tend in fact to legitimize the expansion of economizing organizations beyond their specific contextual boundaries by practicing a misplaced and mistaken humanism. Through integrationist strategies, i.e., through strategies which aim at the integration of individual and organizational goals, they strive to transform economizing organizations into homelike social systems. Thus they indulge in the practice of cognitive politics, by which issues such as love, self-actualization, basic trust, openness, dealienation, and authenticity are brought within the confines of the conventional organization where they only incidentally belong… The practice of dealing with them in the realm of economizing organizations is theoretically indefensible. (1981, 84)

If one follows Guerreiro Ramos’s logic here, he is asking for a reformulation of organizational theory on substantive grounds that would delimit the market system and allow for a new (and expanded) role for public administrators as social system designers who create a variety of social spaces commensurate with the needs and activities of the individual. He contended that such an approach would help to develop and protect substantive rationality from the ravages of instrumental rationality. He called this approach the “paraeconomic paradigm”—a multicentric approach that allows for a variety of interpersonal pursuits, where the market is only one among many different enclaves that respond to the different needs of the citizen:

[A] paraeconomy postulates a society diversified enough to allow its members to deal with substantive issues of life according to their pertinent intrinsic criteria, and in specific settings where they belong. From the paraeconomic viewpoint, not only the economies which constitute the market enclave, but [other substantive enclaves] and the variety of their mixed forms are to be considered agencies for optimal allocation of resources and manpower. (Guerreiro Ramos 1976, 22)

Each enclave, according to his analysis, has its own unique design requisites that are appropriate to its setting. Echoing his earlier emphasis on the importance of context in A Redução Sociológica, these design requisites include technology, size, time, cognition, and space. The hubris of the field is that by confining analysis primarily to market considerations, the intellectual parameters of public administration are restricted to instrumental concerns as a basis for ordering social and political affairs. This propensity among many in public administration has blinded theorists in acknowledging that administrative theory indeed has strong ideological overtones—which are manifested in the inability to understand that, in fact, substantive and functional rationality “belong to two different qualitative spheres of human existence” (Guerreiro Ramos 1981, 107). Administrative theorists, Guerreiro Ramos contends, have developed their conceptual approaches as if economizing behavior belongs to all social settings. In other words, the present hubris confronting the field is that it negates the notion of limits and, without even being aware of it, superimposes concepts such as spirituality into formal organizations where they do not normatively belong. This misplacement of concepts, as Guerreiro Ramos calls it, inevitably leads to theoretical deception and conformity, often under the rubric of advancing normative ends. Simply stated, this deception, in its worst manifestations, merely masks the psychological underpinnings of a calculative rationality. Such hubris, he warns, usually comes with a high intellectual cost and eventually erodes the field’s theoretical credibility and relevance.

A Look Back, A Look Forward

So what can one make of this rather foreboding intellect, whose polemic view of the field has gone unnoticed; whose leitmotif is derived largely from his own experiences as a poor Afro-Brazilian raised in a turbulent, developing Brazil; and whose intellectual and theoretical weltanschauung comes from his readings of seminal Western thinkers such as Aristotle, Arendt, Voegelin, and Weber? Guerreiro Ramos believed in 1981—and we think he would...
hold this view if he were alive today—that public administration had entered a period of debilitating malaise that has undermined its theoretical and practical saliency and, equally important, reduced its relevance at a time when the challenges it must confront are unprecedented (management of social and political interdependency, globalization, the changing nature of citizenship, etc.)

To be sure, Guerreiro Ramos understated the role of the state and politics in his theoretical scheme, and he hardly addressed how instrumental rationality can be contained as an individual goes from one enclave to another. Moreover, his analysis of the Frankfurt School is particularly underdeveloped, and his stress on rationality as the root concept of society or social science, while understandable, does not necessarily mean the deformation of classical reason (read: instrumental rationality) has entirely stripped reason of its normative role in theory building and human associated life.

Moreover, the intellectual tapestry of the theorists that Guerreiro Ramos depends on in developing his critique of modern reason is sometimes woven at the expense of any synchronicity of detail, thus leaving an uneasy feeling that the Teutonic historical forces associated with the rise of the market have eradicated the viability of any rehabilitative approaches other than what he is proposing. Guerreiro Ramos would dispute this assertion by arguing that The New Science of Organizations was a preliminary theoretical statement for a new science of organizations, and he was engaged in further elaboration on his death. Much more research would be needed to give it practical relevance for social reform, he admitted. Even if one agrees with his basic contention on this point, he still anchors his conceptual critique on an idyllic formulation of reason that may lack potency in challenging the political and administrative status quo. Ironically, for all its theoretical acumen in addressing the failure of the present trajectory in public administration (not to mention, in social science in general), he failed to develop a viable praxis that would realistically move the field in a new direction. In this regard—notwithstanding the merits of the paraeconomic paradigm—he missed an opportunity to have the impact he had hoped for.

Even given the shortcomings of some of his theoretical ideas, Guerreiro Ramos reminds one that the governing maladies confronting the field cannot be resolved by administrative tinkering, nor by the infusion of the latest managerial approaches or fads, nor even by the application of sophisticated methodologies for testing new theories (as important as this approach is). Rather, this resolution will come from the way we address the notion of becoming a substantive public administration, which comprehends and confronts the moral vacuity of any sanitized democracy or polity that can conveniently mask itself by adhering to the good government principles of cost-efficiency and citizens as passive consumers. Such was the controversial nature of Guerreiro Ramos’s warning.

There are, of course, more intriguing questions to be posed about the implications of Guerreiro Ramos’s thinking on issues such as the modern liberal state as it relates to public administration—a point that is underdeveloped in his analysis—and his contribution to a democratic theory of public administration. While these important questions are beyond the scope of this article, they are critical issues as one continues to assess the impact of Guerreiro Ramos’s thinking on the field.

In March 1982, Guerreiro Ramos died of pancreatic cancer—a little less than a year after the publication of The New Science of Organizations. His life, as both a scholar and public official, can be seen as an anxious search to understand and discover new political possibilities in the turbulent times in which he found himself, both in Brazil and the United States.

In writing The New Science of Organizations, he spoke to a field he loved in the hope of revitalizing public administration by forcing it, however reluctantly, to examine some of the fundamental assumptions of modern organizations (and social science). Yet, in many respects, Guerreiro Ramos’s ideas went beyond trying to revitalize the field; rather, they were really an attempt to redefine public administration itself in more than a managerial, legal, or analytical manner. It is a redefinition that strove to give public administration some needed theoretical imagination when many were—and still are—arguing that the field’s intellectual horizon is inherently mechanical, uninteresting, and lacking in rigor. It is a redefinition that perceived a role for both instrumental and substantive rationality within their proper social (and cognitive) settings, while acknowledging they need to be—and should be—kept in a constant condition of energetic tension. It is also a redefinition that sees the field as more than an agent or administrative arm of the state. Finally, it is a redefinition that directly addresses the varied needs of the individual, which go beyond mere utilitarian considerations, and, just as attentively, focuses intellectual and practical energies on preserving the inherent dignity of the individual, especially when the onslaught of potent ideological forces can—sometimes in the most subtle ways—obscure the normative vision concerning the roles of a democratic citizenry in public affairs.

Guerreiro Ramos was sometimes, no doubt, a quarrelsome voice that often had a combative edge to it. It is an erudite voice now gone, except for his writings, and, for whatever faults one may find with him, his is a voice that remains both extremely influential in Brazil and also seeks to substantively rethink public roles and intellectual purposes to challenge this era of public cynicism and theoretical ambivalence. His is a voice, one can safely argue,
still worth pondering, if for no other reason than that pub-
lic administration will—as Guerreiro Ramos so well un-
derstood—continue to have an important—indeed, criti-
cal—role to play in contemporary society.

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ing them access to his personal papers. Both have since passed
away. On behalf of those in the U.S. public administration disci-
pline who knew or were influenced by Guerreiro Ramos, we
offer our heartfelt condolences to the family.

Notes

1. Personal communication with Guy Adams, 1986.
2. Personal communication with Gerald Caiden, 1982.
3. Personal communication with Richard Stillman (1989) and
4. As Fry points out, some argue these criteria are not relevant
5. All translations are by G. G. Candler.
6. The two remained extremely close: Guerreiro Ramos listed
Nascimento as one of his closest friends (1995, 172);
Nascimento quotes Guerreiro Ramos in opening the 1976
preface to his seminal 1951 play Sortilege (Nascimento
1995); and two of their children married.
7. According to Clélia Guerreiro Ramos (2002), the move away
from racial issues was based partly on an assertion that he
was simply a Brazilian, as well as an Afro-Brazilian, and so
was reluctant to be restricted to directly race-related issues.
interest in what might be termed “administrative reform” is
also evident in the closing poem of O drama de ser dois,
“The poet and the world” (1937, 42–45).
9. Although in “A modernização em nova perspectiva” (1967)
he prefers the term “peripheral” relative to the “hegemonic
industrialized countries, he used the term “underdeveloped”
(sub-desenvolvido) elsewhere. He took great pains to dispel
the idea this is a dichotomized phenomenon, as no country
is either one or the other, all have elements of each charac-
teristic and lie on a continuum (35–42).
10. Cardoso (1966) himself suggested this at least four years
earlier. Four of the classic broader rebuttals of dependency
theory were provided by Laclau (1971), Smith (1979), War-
11. There is an enormous amount of evidence for this. In addi-
tion to the conflict over A redução sociológica, see Guerreiro
Redução sociológica, as an antidote to the mechanistic adop-
tion of irrelevant foreign thought, can go too far into a mecha-
nistic rejection of often useful foreign thought.
13. When asked in a 1959 interview why he was getting in-
volved in party politics, he answered that it was partly to
improve his research by making it more accessible to prac-
titioners.
14. In the Oliveira interview (Guerreiro Ramos 1995), he called
it a paradise with “peace, stability, respect, power” (see also
1977).
15. The influence of Arendt on Guerreiro Ramos cannot be un-
derstated. His daughter, who wrote her dissertation on her
father’s thinking, emphasized how strongly he relied on
Arendt’s ideas (Guerreiro Ramos Bennett 1994).
16. He referred to this as the misplacement of concepts, which
he believed was widespread among administrative theorists.
17. See in particular his chapter on “Cognitive Politics” in The
New Science of Organizations, where he makes this point
strongly.
18. See, for instance, the 1997 “Guerreiro Yesterday, Guerreiro
Today” symposium in Revista de administração pública.
19. This point is discussed in the last chapter of the The New
Science of Organizations.
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