

## ***Symposium—The Destiny of Theory: Beyond The New Science of Organizations***

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE SYMPOSIUM: WHY GUERREIRO?**

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A rare, 1997 symposium in *Revista de Administração Pública* titled “Guerreiro yesterday, Guerreiro today” illustrated the continued relevance that many Brazilian scholars see in the work of Alberto Guerreiro Ramos. Yet on his death in Los Angeles some twenty-five years ago, Alberto Guerreiro Ramos was hardly one of the central figures in American public administration. As a result, one might fairly ask why a symposium should be dedicated to his work, a quarter-century later. Guerreiro Ramos remains important, though, for at least three reasons.

First, he was one of the earliest scholars to point to the risks of a social science that took *homo economicus* as its referent. A solution that he offered for this dilemma was to recognize the importance of non-market settings in which people could pursue other, non-materialist interests. These issues are presented in the papers by Azevêdo and Albernaz; Salm, Candler and Ventriss; and Geczi and Ventriss. As José Salm points out, Ramos’s emphasis on the importance of human multidimensionality provides an alternative to *homo economicus*, and his social systems delimitation provides a conception of society that allows public administration to contribute to more substantive social outcomes.

Second, as a self-described “in-betweener,” his work is an intellectual bridge-builder. As a poor Afro-Brazilian educated in the European (especially French) intellectual tradition, early attracted to the empiricism of the Chicago School of American sociology, and who was subsequently to spend the last fifteen years of his professional career in the U.S., Guerreiro Ramos bridged a wide range of both geographical and

intellectual worlds that contemporary social science still struggles to integrate.

The rich intellectual milieu from which Guerreiro Ramos drew his early inspiration is illustrated especially in Azevêdo and Albernaz's paper. Candler, though, argues that rather than enriching, encounters such as that between Guerreiro Ramos and American public administration were inhibited by American ethnocentrism. Though regrettable, to a large extent history has solved this problem of technology transfer raised by Ramos (1958) in his *A Redução Sociológica*. The question of the appropriateness for the south of northern "technical assistance" has become somewhat less relevant as a result of a combination of the current wave of democratization, strong rates of economic growth, and the south's increased willingness to forcefully represent its own interests in international fora (not least under the leadership of Brazilian presidents). To state this in the no-holds-barred fashion that Guerreiro Ramos often employed: this may be just as well, as the lack of progress in correcting the monolingual ethnocentrism evident 50 years ago suggests that American technical assistance in public administration risks sliding further towards a sort of academic Peace Corps (without either the modest accommodation or the intensive language training!), meant to culturally enrich, or at least titillate, the American "development missionary" more than "assist" the host country.

Third, and most important in this short introduction, Alberto Guerreiro Ramos's life and work raise a number of ethical issues in the social sciences. He was one of countless forgotten victims of a turbulent, at times extremely bloody, century. Even beyond the racism that he suffered growing up in what he called (perhaps with just a little exaggeration) "the most racist country in the world" (Oliveira, 1995, p. 174), he then suffered further indignity on exile from the country of his birth. While a portion of the American public administration academic community may have saved his life by offering him a way out of Brazil just before the dictatorship took a hard-line turn, much of the rest (including the University of Southern California) failed to give him the respect someone of his accomplishment deserved. As we indicate elsewhere (Ventriss & Candler, 2005, p. 348), despite having been a prominent civil rights organizer, a senator, an adviser to presidents, a co-founder of the public administration discipline in one of the world's most populous countries, despite an exceptional record of scholarship and status as a public intellectual prior to his exile, he was largely marginalized by an American public administration discipline that rejected his otherness, rather than welcoming the chance to learn from it. This sympo-

sium, then, can be seen both as an ethical warning, and as an act of restitution.

With regards to restitution, our initial intent in starting out on the research project that led first to a 2002 ASPA panel, then a 2005 paper in *Public Administration Review*, and finally this symposium, was to find Ramos's follow-up book to *The New Science*. Guerreiro Ramos was no doubt proud of his *The New Science of Organizations*, but he saw the book as "an introduction" (A. G. Ramos, personal communication to Robert Biller, January 25, 1979), and a beginning (1981, xii). In a conversation with former students in 1980, Ramos stated "I need ten more years of life to complete my work" (Caravantes, 1983, p. 59). Over the next two years he intended a follow-up to *The New Science*, described to his then Dean, Robert Biller of the University of Southern California as follows:

The book is a development of the two concluding chapters of my *New Science of Organizations*. Tentatively, it will focus on matters such as: the psycho-cultural underpinnings of the market system, the present state of the policy science field, normative economic planning, the emerging functions of government, the interface between technology and the physical and social environment, grants economy as a tool for resource and manpower allocation, the geopolitical syndrome of the United States and the Soviet Union and its impingement on national normative economic planning. (A. G. Ramos, personal communication, January 25, 1979)

The book was to be titled *Theory & Destiny* (hence the title of this symposium, suggested by Ariston Azevêdo), and we had hoped to find, transcribe, translate and/or develop any drafts found in his personal papers still in the possession of his family. Unfortunately, if such drafts ever existed, they did not survive the decades since his death. We next hoped to infer this text from hints given above.

We would have to conclude that we have failed, certainly in terms of writing his *Theory & Destiny*. Our collective efforts to date do cover a wide range of his intellectual contributions, including his work on race, development administration, his Parenthetical Man, his theory of Social Systems Delimitation, and the importance of substantive concerns in the social sciences. Yet there are other highly significant ideas that have not been adequately discussed: the behavioral syndrome, the misplacement of concepts, the law of requisite adequacy, and the inclusion of such factors as time, space, cognition, size and technology into public affairs. These ideas warrant, we believe, more serious attention in the field for no other reason than that they represent, in many respects, a

critique of the conventional wisdom underlying most of public administration and public policy thought today. Much Brazilian research, too voluminous to cite in this short introduction, has addressed some of these aspects of Ramos's work, and Ariston Avevêdo's scholarship (especially his 2006 dissertation) is providing probably the most systematic presentation of Alberto Guerreiro Ramos's thought, and of his contribution to Brazilian social science.

Beyond this question of restitution, and of honoring the life and work of an exceptional yet under-appreciated scholar, this life and work raise a number of ethical issues in the social sciences. The ethics of American public administration's inability to communicate with a globalizing world has been raised in Candler's article in this volume. This ethnocentrism also appears evident both in American public administration's lack of awareness of Guerreiro Ramos's exceptional background; and in the apparent unwillingness to learn from his otherness.

Guerreiro Ramos also provided a personal example of ethical scholarship. His was certainly a life characterized by personal courage. It is hoped that his contemporaries will reinterpret his at times conflictual character in light of the broader context that we provide. The same man who engaged in the academic jousting of challenging the edifice of contemporary social science in America was also the man who stood up both to a military government, and to the centuries-old system of racism in Brazil. This was no academic Don Quijote, tilting at theoretical windmills!

Ironically, the *lack* of courage in research in the social sciences, and in particular organizational theory, was a theme of his research. Former student George Najjar put this especially strongly, arguing that the adoption by the social sciences of positivism, and an evidence-based, neutral natural-sciences methodology led to "value emptiness. Social science is of necessity an evaluation interpretation of a social order and as such cannot be authentic to its task of social critique if it operates in a normative vacuum" (1976, p. 204). Ventriss argues that this has been reinforced as a result of the New Public Management, as a field "that has always exhibited a deep-seated aversion toward social and value conflicts" (2000, p. 502) has adopted a paradigm that has "largely resulted in disempowering the citizenry's attempt to articulate the need for any productive social change that does not lie within the lexicon of managerial and market values" (p. 504).

And so, one might ask whether there was a connection between Guerreiro Ramos's life and his work. This poor Afro-Brazilian, who

beat the odds and made it into the circles of power usually reserved for the children of privilege, may have had little sympathy for a social science that failed to speak out about substantive issues like class, race, and other forms of discrimination. This Brazilian sociologist who advocated for the introduction of *more* rigorous, quantitative analysis in a Brazil that had precious little of this in the 1940s, may have seen the dark side of this approach with the arrival of ethnocentric, politically neutral American public administration technical specialists who worked with the military dictatorship despite its use of torture, extrajudicial detention, and other fundamental abuses of human rights. These experiences surely motivated his concern with a theory of administration that had chosen to focus not on such substantive, normative topics, but had instead chosen to focus on amoral topics like efficiency and effectiveness, with these increasingly mediated by one-dollar, one-vote market mechanisms.

In the end, Ramos was the field's thinking gadfly who tried to compel us—in his own particular way—to critically re-examine the epistemological and normative foundations of the field. In a conversation during the 2002 ASPA conference, Lloyd Nigro once mentioned to me that some day we will come to realize that Ramos was one of the few visionaries we have ever had in our field. We think he was right.

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