

# ThinkBox – Decolonizing management research and education in Brazil: integrating theories and methodologies from the Global South

## Introduction

Post-colonial ideas have been increasingly debated among academic communities worldwide, revealing power/knowledge imbalances that have persisted for centuries. Such imbalances are linked to a symbolic and material architecture – the so-called “Western” or Euro-USA-based – which tends to present itself as universal while placing the rest of the world as peripheries. Less well-known under the broad post-colonial umbrella, the *decolonial* movement was consolidated in Latin America in the 1990s, with Walter Dignolo, Aníbal Quijano, Catherine Walsh and María Lugones, among others. Decolonial concepts – such as *colonial difference*, *coloniality of power/knowing/being*, *border thinking*, and *epistemic disobedience*, to name a few – have inspired a growing number of people seeking to break with Western political and epistemic hegemony and to highlight the existence of alternative voices/knowledges in universities and local communities.

The consequences of Western hegemony are evident in management studies. Back in 1997, Abdalla and Faria highlighted the subaltern position of Brazil, alongside most countries in the Global South, in the production and dissemination of management knowledge. In denouncing the long-standing and dominant picture of asymmetry and injustice, they pointed to the potential of decolonial perspectives to change this imbalance (Abdalla & Faria, 2017). It is now 2025, and even though many scholars have finally realized (“caiu a ficha”) the harmful effects of subalternity in understanding and discussing not only many regional but also global problems that inexorably affect us, truly decolonizing management education and research is still taking initial timid steps in Brazil.

This essay was inspired by a dialogical workshop presented in 2024 during pre-EnAnpad events (Pozzebon et al., 2024) and aims to discuss, in a frank and unpretentious way, the following question: *How can we decolonize Brazilian management research and education?* Although we are focusing primarily on the Brazilian context, we believe that this exact reflection and the resulting insights could be extended to other contexts of the Global South.

## Contextualizing decoloniality

To discuss decoloniality, we must think about the difference between colonialism and coloniality, two interconnected but distinct concepts. *Colonialism* refers to the historical process of domination – political, economic and cultural – of one nation over another. Temporally, most colonizing processes that mark Western history began in the middle of the fifteenth century and ended in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mainly due to the political struggles and wars for the independence of the so-called colonies. On the other hand, *coloniality* is not limited to a formal set of territorial domination policies, as it refers to a power matrix resulting from colonialism that remains even after the end of colonization itself (Misoczky, 2011). Various terms cohabit within this polysemic terrain of struggles and



resistance: post-colonial, decolonial, counter-colonial, anti-colonial and non-colonial, among others. Behind all those terms, we find a point of consensus: challenging colonialism and coloniality. We can, therefore, understand decoloniality as a political and epistemic movement that aims to deconstruct and re-signify coloniality's strategies of domination.

In brief, the decolonial movement designates a group of Latin American thinkers, while post-colonial represents an umbrella term encompassing groups from all continents (for a comprehensive overview, see [Ballestrin, 2013](#)). Post-colonial studies incorporate discussions about the marginalization and stigmatization of the other ([Said, 1977](#)), antagonistic relations between colonizer and colonized as an impediment to existence ([Fanon, 1961](#)), and the subaltern silencing, even when post-colonial intellectuals seek to speak for them ([Spivak, 1988](#)), among several other issues. In its turn, the decolonial movement comes from the Modernity/Coloniality (M/C) group, founded in the 1990s, which deepens the perspective based on the region's longer trajectory of domination and resistance and recognizes modernity as an inextricably constitutive part of the perpetuation of coloniality ([Mignolo, 2003](#)). The collective work of the M/C group became a milestone in what [Maldonado-Torres \(2005\)](#) would call the decolonial turn to reinforce the movement of resistance to the logic of modernity/coloniality.

Despite the effervescence of post-colonial and decolonial debates in many areas, a full engagement with the decolonial critique is still marginal in management studies. On the contrary, the foundations that structure business schools in the Global South are still quite solidly laid on allegedly universal frames of reference from the Global North. Most used books, articles, and frameworks are still produced or legitimized by hegemonic ways that tend to make invisible or devalue the diverse epistemologies of the Global South. Even Western critical currents did not see or value OTHER epistemes.

Therefore, opening formal academic spaces, such as this editorial, is essential to present new reflections on the field of management continually. Researchers and students must be able to appreciate and recognize that academically valuable knowledge produced in the Global South has the same legitimacy as external references that have been historically incorporated as universal.

### **Decoloniality as praxis**

The emergence of decolonial studies, in general, has been dominated by theoretical content, i.e. articles and books that deeply discuss the different concepts, premises and values that mark the development of this Latin American intellectual and militant framework. Few empirical articles emphasize the "research doings" by discussing concrete strategies or mechanisms to decolonize in practice. We know a lot about what decoloniality *is*, but we are still learning *how to* decolonize.

In this section, we will look at some decolonizing tactics in management studies, both in the theoretical and methodological domains. Those concrete empirical examples come from the experience of the researchers who presented the EnAnpad pre-event that shaped this essay ([Pozzebon et al., 2024](#)) and also the webinar series *Inspirations from the South*, which took place in Montreal, reuniting researchers from Latin America, Africa and Quebec ([IFS, 2020](#)). More experiences are emerging around the world, although most of them remain invisible and unknown to the majority of academic communities. We hope this essay encourages other scholars to publish their decolonizing experiences.

### **Decolonizing the theoretical domain of management research**

Numerous researchers have emphasized the silencing of lenses and voices of the Global South in international (i.e. European and American) academic publications ([Jammulamadaka et al., 2021](#)). The editorial boards of these journals tend to be composed almost exclusively of researchers from the Global North, and there is a strong bias to evaluate and judge the

production submitted through an implicit vision that discriminates against other ways of producing and presenting knowledge.

So far, those journals have mainly published knowledge produced in the Global North's context, using lenses and perspectives legitimized by the Global North, seen as superior and universal. They are the benchmark to be followed by all other people and cultures, giving a narrower space for other forms unless they resemble the benchmark. Knowledge produced in the contexts of the Global South tends to be seen as local (or endogenous), with little relevance to an "international" (meaning European and American) audience from standard contexts:

Morgana Krieger (UFBA) commented about the importance of including Brazilian authors like Guerreiro Ramos, an intellectual who, back in the 1950s, questioned the irreflective "import" of concepts produced in the Global North to explain Brazilian society and its contexts. Morgana also emphasizes that decolonizing academia does not mean denying or rejecting knowledge produced in the North but rather recognizing it as just as regional as the knowledge produced here (Pozzebon et al., 2024).

The academic articles, master's dissertations and doctoral theses produced in the Global South tend to mimic the conceptual frameworks of the Global North in a naive attempt to find "their place in the sun," to seek legitimacy and acceptance by the "masters" of the North. They lose out doubly. First, by using lenses and concepts that have little to do with local contexts and issues, research results lose relevance and connection with the territories investigated. Second, even if they use lenses and concepts from the Global North, when they submit their work for publication in so-called international journals, they suffer a high rejection rate and rarely make it through the "funnel": "We're not good enough." It would make much more sense if researchers from the Global South began to value their own ways of making sense of their own contexts and being inspired by the local cultural richness and history. At the same time, giving a voice to the Global South does not mean disregarding or ignoring the vast production of knowledge in the Global North. Rejecting the universality of Western thought does not mean rejecting its value *en bloc*.

We propose that decolonizing management research in the Global South can take at least two main routes, one emphasizing the local and the other more international. The first, more local perspective, involves an internal valorization of what is ours, written in our languages and directly connected to our territories. We need to valorize producing knowledge with and for the people of the territories. Situated research is extremely valuable due to its proximity and local relevance. The second perspective, linked to internationalization processes, also involves valuing what is ours but seeking to *create bridges* with knowledge created in other contexts. Proposing a bridge differs from accepting a subordinate place. How can we give voice to our knowledge, lenses and methods through a dialogue with other knowledges, lenses and methods? The challenge is to create *decolonizing tactics*.

One decolonizing tactic is related to the literature review. The great tendency of bibliographic reviews carried out in management studies is to concentrate efforts on international databases and journals, especially those ranked as "top" by international agencies (i.e. European and American). The first barrier that makes academic production from the Global South invisible is that our knowledge (in this case, articles) is not often published in these sources. Moreover, a vibrant and deep source of local critical concepts and theories has not yet been written in English. A decolonizing tactic would be to include the production of the Global South in literature reviews, creating bridges between this production and the so-called international one. In this way, we do not ignore what has international legitimacy, but we do not disregard local production either. These bridges can be created in various ways within the literature review:

The Colombian researcher Luz Dinora Vera-Acevedo, professor at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, developed several participatory action projects with indigenous communities – coffee

producers – in Santander de Quilichao, Cauca (Colombia). Using the ethnoterritorial perspective, she integrates beliefs (i.e., the use of the moon calendar to guide productive activities), rituals (i.e., rituals of the earth, of the seeds, and rivers as sacred places) and ancestral practices (i.e., the Minga, the organization of collective work) in the core of the collective knowledge production during the entire research program (IFS, 2020):

PhD student Silvia Follador recently defended her thesis proposal in which she combines important authors from international literature – Amartya Sen, Judith Butler, Kimberlé Crenshaw – with the ideas of black Brazilian activists such as Lélia Gonzalez and Sueli Carneiro. By creating these bridges in a rich and coherent way, the literature review brings visibility to the voices of the Global South (Pozzebon et al., 2024).

Another decolonizing tactic concerns theoretical positioning, i.e. the lenses, theories, concepts or frameworks adopted within a research project to analyze empirical data and produce results. Almost invariably, this position is based exclusively on European and American authors. Almost all of our academic production is based on authors and knowledge from abroad. We can build bridges not only in literature reviews but also in theoretical positions adopted from a literature review. We need to build an argument about how concepts from the Global South make sense and can guide academic work, whether or not combined with concepts from abroad:

Erika Licon, a Mexican researcher, explores indigenous and decolonial methodologies that prioritize the voices and experiences of youth people involved in cooperatives, respecting their linguistic and cultural diversity, and ensuring the theorization process remains coherent with the principles of the solidarity economy (Licon-Cisneros, 2024).

Saldanha, Pozzebon, and Delgado (2024) published an article in the Organization journal where the authors use “tecnologia social” as a theoretical lens and insist on keeping the term in Portuguese even in an article written in English. They argue that translating the term also changes its meaning since “social technology” in English refers to social networks. The political and semantic force of the term in Portuguese gives visibility to the South American tradition.

This linguistic, semantic, and political struggle to value non-Anglo cultures started more than a decade earlier when Pozzebon, Diniz, and Reinhardt (2011) published an editorial in a leading Brazilian journal calling for the creation of a Brazilian school of thought in the production of knowledge within a key area of management, technology, and society. In 2015, a provocative essay claimed that the academic community should “*resist linguistic domination and promote knowledge diversity*” as part of a progressive process of decolonizing research and education (Alves & Pozzebon, 2013, p. 1).

### Decolonizing methodologies

A second vital domain to be decolonized is the *methodological domain* of management research. We have been trained to use methodological approaches that, in the name of rigor, consolidate the roles of researcher and researched in such a way that these roles are translated into active/passive or subject/object dichotomies, establishing the premise that it is the researcher who must produce knowledge about the researched. Thinkers such as Fals Borda and Paulo Freire, as early as the last century, as well as Bell Hooks and Conceição Evaristo, to cite more recent examples, challenge this epistemological separation and propose participatory and collaborative methodologies that value the knowledge of the people who live in the situations being studied, eliminating the idea that they are not experts, as researchers would be:

Harari and Pozzebon (2024) published an article in the thought-provoking Management Learning journal, presenting the OTRA methodology perspective. The authors identify practices

experimented on by decolonial scholars in Latin America to operationalize methodological techniques and principles that are definitely outside the Western box. In highlighting Paulo Freire's contributions to the decolonial debate, they argue that more than being critical, reflective, or dialogical, a real commitment to decoloniality requires the mobilization of radical principles: learning to unlearn, *escrevivência*, interculturality, and *corazonar/sentipensar*.

Marcela Nery, a former FGV master's student, highlighted her interaction for about a year with people from Brazilian quilombos. The researcher shared her experience based on reading Grada Kilomba and using episodic analysis as a method, which allowed her to change the direction of her master's thesis. The episodes highlighted by the interviewees allowed these voices to emphasize what was most relevant in approaching the topic, without being conditioned by the researcher, showing a powerful epistemological gain and broadening the critical and reflexive understanding of the issue studied: racism and exclusion (Pozzebon et al., 2024).

These are numerous routes and examples for seeking decolonizing theoretical and methodological paths in management studies beyond historically colonized and functionalist approaches. Those perspectives, principles and experiences can serve as references to exercise other ways of conducting research and education that can be reconfigured and (re)appropriated by researchers in different contexts. However, as we mentioned at the beginning of this essay, there are no definitive answers – and perhaps there never will be – unless we genuinely embrace a pluriverse and value the diverse matrices of knowledge.

### **Final insights**

Deconstructing colonial beliefs that have been inscribed in our minds and bodies for more than five centuries is a lengthy and complex process. One could argue that the tactics and strategies proposed in this essay are not radical enough to bring about the social and political transformation that people from the Global South deserve. We tend to agree with this criticism. Dismantling the colonial matrix is both necessary and urgent, but also a daunting challenge. However, rejecting the persistent dualism – another colonial legacy – that demands “all-or-nothing,” we understand the struggle for decolonization as part of a pluriversal trajectory, where indigenous and non-indigenous, liberal and community-oriented, colonial and decolonial perspectives coexist. In such a hybrid and diverse context, our concrete tactics of integrating Global South theories and methodologies in research and practice represent one step among many towards decolonizing management research and education.

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