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## ARTICLE

## Historical narrative, decoloniality, and polyphony in Management and Organization Studies: a theoretic-methodological approach

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to propose a polyphonic decolonial historical approach to Management and Organization Studies (MOS), relating the theoretical-methodological aspects of the historical perspective with the decolonial option. We suggest a conceptual dialogue between the historiographical approach and MOS. We aimed to reflect on the possibilities for improving the organization theory, emphasizing the methodological concern with polyphony in historical studies. As a result, epistemological limitations in the use of history are presented when associated with MOS that is necessary to be overcome. We assume a position of understanding the history composed of narratives as fragmented representations of the past. Also, we articulate the ethical-political option of decoloniality for the co-construction of historical narratives about translocal practical-knowledge in management - towards pluriversal transmodernity. The article contributes to epistemic and methodological (re)orientations engaged in the context of (1) local/regional research-teaching (2) through the theory and practice of management in (3) rescuing the sociocultural identity.

### KEYWORDS

Epistemology, Historiography, Organizations, Decolonial option, Polyphonic studies

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Arguments around epistemological and methodological positions have raised emblematic discussions in Management and Organization Studies (MOS) (Adorisio & Mutch, 2013; Geoffrey & Friedman, 2017; Pozzebon & Bido, 2019), presenting a variety of theoretical currents that underpin the state-of-the-art in the MOS (Serva, 2017). In this debate, if Clark and Rowlinson's (2004) argument that the knowledge produced in MOS tends to be "universal" and "presentist" is valid, then it seems that the theoretical-epistemological involvement with historical studies is a feasible possibility that can help to better understand organizations and their phenomena, together with organizations theory.

The under-representation of the historical approach to the improvement of the organization theory is the result of little understanding of why history is of interest to be debated and integrated into MOS (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2016). Sometimes the role of history is not represented in textbooks on management research methods and practice (Bell & Taylor, 2013), which implies the generation of absolutist, deterministic, and categorical theories (Weatherbee, 2012). Sometimes the role of history is not represented in textbooks on management research methods and practice (Weatherbee, 2012). We believe that history as a theory helps to understand the anachronistic uses of decontextualized symbols and narratives about organizations (Popp & Fellman, 2016; Lara, Vizeu, & Alves, 2019).

History as a research method provides an empirical contribution to improve organizational theory (Van Lent & Durepos, 2019). Thus, if history matters to improving organizations theory (Van Lent & Durepos, 2019), then it is necessary to reflect the importance of the "historical turn" in MOS (Mills et al., 2016) and finally, it is time to practice what was proposed (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2017; Van Lent & Durepos, 2019). However, we also need to reflect on the western origin of such historical turn, to construct more authentic possibilities for research done in the global south. We assume the understanding that history is risen elevated by narratives in the relationship between people, actions, and contexts (Decker, Kipping, & Wadhvani, 2015) and that, consequently, it is a fragmented form of representation of the past (Mordhorst & Schwarzkopf, 2017).

Now, whether there is more involvement of MOS with history (Rowlinson, 2013), then it seems that such involvement has made these studies "tormented" by an influence of "North Americans corporative" ideas (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2017, p. 459) that constitute historical narrative imperialism of a management pattern (Mollan, 2019). That is why, from this point of view, we recognize the appeal for the polyphonic historiographical approach when seeking not for historical narratives already consolidated in the field of study, but by scattered or silenced narrative fragments that show other questions, space for possibilities or unanswered queries in history (Adorisio, 2014). Also, we recognize the significance of studying the experiences and ideas of a variety of people, actions, and events in organizations (Smith & Russel, 2015) from different documents, artifacts, and historical sources (Kaul, Sandhu, & Alam, 2019).

Attention is needed not only to become MOS "more historic", but also to consider the treatment of history in the MOS that are being told or silenced under the influence of the narrative of capitalist, modern and neoliberal management (Decker, 2013; Abdalla & Faria, 2017; Lage, 2019). Thus, Wanderley and Barros (2018) affirmation that MOS urges a decolonization action through the historical turn seems valid. The decolonial option, therefore, appears in this article because it allows the co-construction of translocal, transmodern, and pluriversal historical narratives from different management modes (Dussel & Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Abdalla & Faria, 2017).

The decolonial option is a possibility to intervene in the disciplinary system of knowledge in management that not only Euro-American management and instrumental rationality, seeking to rescue historically a variety of insurgent, resurgent, and liberating knowledge in the MOS (Misoczky, Flores, & Goulart, 2015; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). For this reason, we identified the need exposed by Abdalla and Faria (2017) for more involvement between organizational theorists and the discussion of scientific methodology because of the scarcity of empirical research informed by modernity/coloniality. For the authors, this involvement intends to develop alternative research methods enlightened by decoloniality from a transmodern and pluriversal perspective.

In this context, it is prudent to declare that “the construction of historical narratives about MOS in Brazil is still timid” (Barros & Carrieri, 2015, p. 158); recognizing that organizations do not follow generic, neutral, or universal models, and thereby must be studied from the location that is inserted (Couto, Honorato, & Silva, 2019); and there is no definition in the literature of “how to carry out a decolonial critical historical analysis” (Wanderley, 2015, 241). Therefore, this article has a core objective to propose a polyphonic decolonial historical approach to MOS, relating the theoretical-methodological aspects of the historical perspective with the decolonial option. We presume that MOS has yet to assume the conceptual and empirical requirements on which historical research is established and thus expand knowledge about organizations in a relational, contextual, and polyphonic way.

We believe that the relationship between organization theory, polyphonic historical theory, and the decolonial option can contribute to MOS in at least three broad contexts. In the research and teaching contexts: with the elaboration of research projects that understand the reality of local/regional historical management, and that instructs the most authentic, identity, and peculiar teaching. In the context of management: acknowledgment of the diversity of organizational practices that can support the theory and practice of administration consistent with each location demands. And finally, in the socio-cultural contexts through the historical rescue of practical knowledge in management as liberating strategies in the coordination of social life.

## 2. THE HISTORICAL APPROACH IN MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES

The involvement with history in the MOS has made it possible to discuss some questions about the organization theory based on varied approaches to the history theory and historiography logic (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Rowlinson, 2013). It has also enabled us to question the marginality and scientific rhetoric concerning the use of history as a variable in the distorted and deterministic interpretations present in the mainstream of management research (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Weatherbee, 2012). “To what extent do organizations and organizational research need to become historicized?” is the question raised by Booth and Rowlinson (2006, p. 7) right after the emblematic call for the “historical turn” in MOS made by Clark and Rowlinson (2004). Such questioning sought to join ways of a more authentic, truthful, and reflective relationship of the organization theory making use of the historical approach (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2016).

The term “history” carries certain ambiguities of meanings. Sometimes referring to the completeness of human actions in the past, sometimes referring to the told narratives that we construct about the past (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004). Anyway, it seems that history is usually treated under empiricist, objectivist, and documentary beliefs (Jenkins, 1997) assuming that efforts to understand history should be directed towards analyzing history as “faithful reproduction of the past” (Weatherbee, 2012), in which historical events are supposedly “discovered” or “revealed,”

by checking past “facts” (Munslow, 2000). This is a position adopted recurrently in historical studies at MOS, and we strongly reject in this article, named by some authors of “historical realism” (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Weatherbee, 2012).

We understand that this is an onto-epistemological problem when treating history and the past as synonyms. Thus, there is a wrong deduction when understanding history as the “true past reality” determined by the correlation between “facts” and “past” (Weatherbee, 2012). The confusion and referential illusion derived from this correlation between facts, past, and history had already been argued by Bhaskar (1997, 2009) as an epistemic fallacy in which the empirical knowledge of the world should not be considered as the totality of it (Weatherbee, 2012). We agree with the understanding that history and the past have different ontological statuses (Jenkins, 1995) because the past suggests lived reality, and history is only a fragmented representation of that past (Van Maanen, Sorensen, & Mitchell, 2007; Van Lent & Durepos, 2019).

Based on this discussion, Costa and Saraiva (2011) argue the common objective rescue of the past through memories considered official, to construct unique histories, sometimes romanticized, and with ideological character. For the authors, this would be a managerial use of memory, reifying the past to improve organizational performance. Thus, it seems to show that Organizational Memory Studies have limited themselves to “collected memories” to the detriment of “collective memories” (Rowlinson et al., 2010).

We emphasize here that we understand the existence of a strong relationship between history, past, and memory. However, we cannot confuse such concepts. In particular, memory is understood not only as the accumulation of individual memories (Rowlinson et al., 2010), but a phenomenon elaborated from the feeling of identity. Therefore, memory and social identity are disputed values (Pollak, 1992). Thus, there are always conflicts between official and organized memories or clandestine and inaudible memories that contest and claim social spaces. According to Pollak (1989), disputes between different memories have the purpose of maintaining the institutional structures of society.

In this sense, the theoretical relationship between history and MOS involves understanding what precisely history is (Lente & Durepos, 2019), how it has been most used and what it represents. We realize that history - as a discipline - has been criticized for its lack of reflective involvement with theory, epistemology, and method (Bell & Taylor, 2013).

We summarize in Table 1 some recent research that has attempted to mitigate this gap seeking to define the use of historical theory when incorporated into the MOS. Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg (2016) categorized the usage of history in the MOS as evaluation, explanatory, conceptual, and narrative. The categorization identifies the use of historical theory: as a route to validate the organization theory, generalizations of specific analytical models and interpretations of the past, or the construction of narratives with high sensitivity to the context of the creation of empirical evidence.

Therefore to comprehend further, we adopted that “there is no history without narratives and there are no narratives without history” (Mordhorst & Schwarzkopf, 2017, p. 1158). And thus, it is possible to improve the organization theory through contextual, relational, and historical knowledge when researching organizational phenomena. The narrative seems to be the genre most used by historians and theorists in MOS (Mordhorst & Schwarzkopf, 2017), even assuming epistemological discussion status (Czarniawska, 2000). In other words, it is valid to understand that the narratives have described history in an attempt to organize the past. The construction of

history occurs through the relationship between events, people, and actions based on associations having nothing to do with chronological time (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Adorasio, 2014).

If historical research is narrative in the relationship between people, actions, and contexts, like Decker, Kipping, and Wadhwani (2015) pointed out, then historical narratives are a fragmented representation of the past (Mordhorst & Schwarzkopf, 2017). This concept has made it possible to improve the organization theory by accessing the past in the knowledge production in a theoretical and epistemological way. We chose this understanding when using the historical approach, in which we see the history constituted by narratives that help to analyze the investigated organizational facts and phenomena. Such theoretical alignment is adopted to guarantee the authenticity and reflexivity of the historical approach when it comes to improving the knowledge produced in the MOS. Furthermore, it seems that the historian's narrative form - when linked to MOS - has become a mode of theoretical explanation (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2017).

We affirm that our understanding of what history is linked to the idea of "New History" is strongly influenced by the studies of Michel Foucault. This perception of history questions the various truths produced by historiographical analysis (Carneiro, 2016). It is necessary to make clear the position regarding the historical approach, understanding its impact in epistemological and methodological terms. We need to overcome the obstacles to using the historical approach in MOS. As Carneiro (2016) put it, it is necessary to adapt the historiographic approach to the analysis of organizations respecting the particularities of each area of knowledge. We believe that knowing the particulars of the historical approach is important for there to be a dialogue with the MOS without incurring the risk of instrumentalizing history for the administration area (Wanderley et. al., 2016).

Still referring to Table 1, it is possible to perceive, as argued by Rowlinson, Hassard, and Decker (2014), the historical themes commonly used in MOS. It is customary to write about the achievements of large corporations, privileging the objectivist view in sources and periods of the stories of the entities themselves. It is also common to develop analytical structures through the investigated archives as well as interpretations focused on repeatable facts of a chronological order that generates the quantitative value of data to describe the studied phenomena. And more recently, the ethnography of microhistory is used in archival sources, sometimes silenced and revisited in the construction of management narratives. The ethnography of micro-history has considered everyday issues (Wanderley et al., 2016).

In reality, it is necessary to have a forthright positioning of what kind of history one wants to write in MOS to the point of questioning which history is being written and read so far and how to reorient the existing theoretical-methodological alignments. For Smith and Russel (2015), history cannot be simply "invented" in which the past acts "as an empirical test". Also, the authors argue about how the disproportionate focus of management research in large corporations, particularly multinationals, is recurrent. This datum makes us understand the need to think about the involvement of historical theory with the organization theory in terms of the diversification of theories, methods, and research objects. However, we need to be careful not to instrumentalize the study of past events or to reproduce common mistakes - but not without purpose - that confuse history, past, and memory in MOS.



**Table 1**  
*The use of the history theory in the MOS*

The history is used as:	Description:	The history is written about:	Description:
Evaluation	Historical facts and evidence are used to test the theory's validity.	Corporate Organization	Holistic and objectivist narratives are elaborated about corporate organizations with an emphasis on multinationals.
Explanation	Historical evidence goes through a consistent interpretive synthesis, which generates new interpretations through the theoretical refinement of the past to understand the present.	Analytically Structured	Analytical structures are elaborated on structures and historical events. Narratives based on organizational files are presented.
Conceptual	New theoretical constructions are elaborated through the systematic interrogation of historical evidence. There is an inductive generalization based on specific cases.	Serial Base	The facts that are repeated in history are analyzed. In general, the analysis is developed on a predefined and chronological set of continuous sources.
Narrative	General proposals are made under the accumulation, ordering, and analysis of historical evidence. This requires a high level of contextual sensitivity.	Ethnography of microhistory	Historical sources are used to narrate the events of microhistory. Cultural studies and storytelling are the basis for writing history. It is an opposition to what is commonly studied.

**Source:** Prepared by the authors based on Booth & Rowlinson (2006); Decker (2013); Rowlinson, Hassard, & Decker (2014); Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg (2016).

In this sense, Bell and Taylor (2013) argued that historical theory needs to be thought of in epistemological terms - as we are discussing throughout the text - and in methodological terms, about data collection and analysis techniques. Thinking of history as a method is to adjust the theory more flexible with a basis for the integrated practice of collecting and analyzing historical data (Van Lent & Durepos, 2019). Or, as Carneiro (2016) puts it, a rigid determinism between epistemology and method is not advocated. But more importantly, it is to consider the theoretical-methodology choice at the level of analysis of research. The choice of methods in the construction of historical narratives can help to attenuate the common tendency towards linear narratives and traditional approaches to historiography (Adorisio, 2014) already well consolidated in MOS.

More recently, some researchers have sought to make historical studies in MOS more polyphonic in an attempt to construct narratives in which different contexts and histories are possible to be understood (Sliwa, 2013; Decker, 2013; Smith & Russel, 2015; Barros & Carrieri, 2015; Kaul, Sandhu, & Alam, 2019). For Smith and Russell (2015), polyphony in historical studies is the attempt to investigate how competing interpretations of the past are developed and used by different sets of actors and institutions in the construction of narratives. This positioning seeks to capture alternative, singular, insurgent, and insurgent versions of the histories within (and around) organizations.

Polyphony as a methodological concern in historical studies aims to "learn to listen/investigate/question" because "the past speaks" and silence implies that there are versions of history that have not always been heard and written (Sliwa, 2013; Decker, 2013). For polyphonic historical studies, it is significant that many voices are understood together, "rather than just a single voice or just the voices of a few elite individuals within an organization." (Smith & Russel, 2015, p.

6). “Voices”, in these terms, is about realizing that narratives are reachable to be collected in different historical sources and artifacts produced by a variety of people, actions, and events in different contexts and interpretations of a specific phenomenon to be studied. That is to say, the use of multi-methods in the historical studies enriches the methodological contribution to the theoretical diversification that is important for the context of management research through various historical sources (Kaul, Sandhu, & Alam, 2019).

Historical narratives, when polyphonic, are, therefore, the attempt to overcome the practical barriers of capturing, converging, and analyzing distinct narratives (Smith & Russel, 2015) aimed to developing in a more elaborated way the organization theory. Sometimes, it is questioning the commonly accepted “official history”, telling a new history or a different history. The analysis of organizational phenomena must embrace the context and the relations situated in the intention of breaking with anachronism and the decontextualized interpretations that are disseminated in the mainstream of literature in the MOS (Lara, Vizeu & Alves, 2019).

We chose polyphony in historical studies in the MOS, as an attempt to make the research process more reflective and allow the researcher to understand and analyze multiple narratives around the complexity of organizational facts/phenomena. For this, it is necessary to use the various theoretical and methodological currents that demystify the anachronistic, decontextualized, and simplistic interpretations of history (Adorisio & Mutch, 2013; Lara, Vizeu & Alves, 2019; Van Lent & Durepos, 2019) and thus advance in the involvement of historical theory with the organization theory.

### 3. THE DECOLONIAL OPTION

The decoloniality construct has been developed by a group initially formed by South American researchers that discuss the relationship between modernity, coloniality, and Eurocentrism (Wanderley, 2015). The concept of “coloniality” was first introduced by Quijano (1993; 2005) in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Mignolo, 2017). In the early 1990s, from the academy in the USA and some Latin American countries, the research group Modernity/Coloniality (MC) was formed, which later became Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (MCD) (Abdalla & Faria, 2017). The main concepts used by researchers in this group are the ethics of liberation and pluriversal transmodernity (Dussel, 1993); the geopolitics of knowledge (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006); the rhetoric of modernity and epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2007; 2009); the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2005); and decolonial praxis (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

As Ballestrin (2017) observed, decolonial studies in their origin have epistemological assumptions influenced by Marxian and Marxist writings. The themes of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism were three major historical processes that several Latin American authors have studied. Particularly the Subaltern Studies Group, before the MCD group, harshly criticizes post-structuralist authors such as Foucault and Deleuze because they disregard the international division of labor and the epistemic violence produced by imperialism. These post-structuralist authors were criticized as “transparent subjects”, authorized to speak by subordinate subjects (Spivak, 2010).

In this research article, we are aware of the criticisms necessary to the post-structuralist perspective and the critics made by decolonial authors to Marxist theories. For example, when Quijano (2009) problematizes the Eurocentric theory about social classes. Therefore, we believe it is possible to articulate the historical approach to decolonial studies, considering that coloniality has assumed certain cloudiness through different practices, discourses, levels, scales, and not only through the action of the nation-state (Ballestrin, 2017). We also believe that the decolonial option is relevant to problematize the very historical approach adopted here since it is told by



Europeans and reproduced by Latin Americans. Therefore, we reinforce the importance of linking the “new story” to decolonial concerns, reconstructing the commonly accepted view of history, and creating more authentic conceptions (Wanderley & Barros, 2018).

We opted for the decolonial option and accepted the basic thesis adopted by the MCD group that “modernity” was born in 1492 with the conquest/domination of America, and that to solve the problems of universality as a result of modernity, it is necessary to move towards pluriversal transmodernity in general context (Dussel, 2005; 2012), and in the context of MOS in a specific way (Abdalla & Faria, 2017). Escobar (2007) argues that the concept of modernity is directly related to the concept of coloniality elaborated to demonstrate: (1) the construction of the world capitalist system as constitutive of modernity and persistence of colonialism; (2) the domination of other people outside the European nucleus as a necessary dimension of modernity, subordinating their knowledge and cultures; and (3) the conception of the history of Europe as the center of universality and world hegemony.

In this way, the idea of unilateral and unidirectional modernity as a path to progress/salvation/mission/rebirth is a European conception imported into other peoples, cultures, and territories as “universal and homogeneous” modernity (Mignolo, 2017). That is why Quijano (1993; 2005) argued that the coloniality of knowledge, power, and being is visible from the historical-socioeconomic analysis of colonization and its impacts on the distorted perception that modernity and rationality are exclusively European phenomena and experiences. Therefore, when we speak of modernity, it is also necessary to discuss the coloniality that accompanies such modernity and the ills of equality/inequality, wealth/poverty produced by this power system (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Lage, 2019; Simões, 2019).

When we analyze history from the rhetoric of modernity, it is possible to perceive the macro-narrative of progress assimilated by capitalism that imposes a selective, monolithic, and unanimous modernity that convinces little or nothing (Chumbita, 2015; Lage, 2019; Simões, 2019). At this point, decoloniality is to perceive the effects of coloniality that persist and to unveil its functioning before the mirage of modernity and its broken promises (Mignolo, 2017; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). For this, we adopted the option for pluriversal transmodernity in overcoming the imposed universal modernity, in the search: (1) of the self-valorization of peoples and cultures devalued by modernity that remains outside this ostentatious and destructive universal modern culture; (2) traditional values ignored by modernity as a starting point for the construction of criticism; and (3) for understanding the “frontiers” of modernity in the creation of critical thinking (Dussel, 2012).

According to Dussel (2012), transmodernity is the search for a dialogue between cultures, peoples, and identities, understanding the limitations and positive aspects of modernity in an authentic intercultural construction. Thus it is possible to move towards pluriversal transmodernity in which the cultural identity of a people can be preserved and at the same time assimilate the development of globalized modernity in the co-construction of a more inclusive and diverse world, nations, without ignoring the existing relational asymmetries. That is, pluriversal transmodernity tries to encourage people to live together as opposed to excessive profit, private appropriations, and personal benefits (Dussel & Ibarra-Colado, 2006).

In this research article, we understand that the notion of modernity/coloniality is capable of being used in the knowledge generated in the MOS that reflects the problems propagated by the logic of Euro-American management and instrumental rationality. The idea of “modernization”, “development” and “technical rationality” appears to be the universal propaganda of the managerial ideology disseminated in the MOS (Misoczky, 2011). This ideology based - as stated by Dussel

and Ibarra-Colado (2006) - on the logic of technological efficiency associated with administration and related to commercial production in a capitalist world system.

This understanding is related to the naturalization of instrumental reason that ensured - in the particular field of management knowledge - control and discipline supported by the division of labor, technological development, and economic supremacy. Dussel and Ibarra-Colado (2006) observed that management knowledge was influenced by the thoughts of Adam Smith, which Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford later refined, in what we usually call “scientific management”. This process of “rationalization” along with the logic of modernity contributed to institutionalizing the bureaucratic, technical, and hierarchical organization, with the influence of Weberian thought. Furthermore, Misoczky & Camara (2015) recall that the modern management, disseminated by Peter Drucker, preserves the discourse of the neo-capitalist ideology, which had the function of legitimizing the status quo of management as a neutral technology.

These arguments made Wanderley and Barros (2018) claim that MOS is an expression of modernity/coloniality reproduced and reinforced by Euro-American management. For Couto and Carrieri (2018), it is necessary to see coloniality in the MOS through a critical awareness of management in the readings of popular business media, the rhetoric of consultancy, and the belief in the free market that naturalizes the neoliberal ideology. This seems to corroborate the position of Couto, Honorato, and Silva (2019) when reiterating that the naturalized view of Euro-American management was not spontaneously exported worldwide, but historically constructed by the political interests of the central economic powers.

At this point, we argue that in MOS modernity/coloniality is an expression of the radical neoliberal capitalist discourse, universally disseminated through instrumental rationality and Euro-American administration. This management, therefore, is seen as a neutral tool for modernizing organizations that ensure organizational effectiveness and profitable production. We agree with Abdalla and Faria (2017) about the need to co-construct a pluriversal transmodern world that rescues, legitimizes, and disseminates other decolonial knowledge in the MOS. Thus, we overcome this situation of asymmetry between the management modes devalued by modernity. For us, this is a transmodern perspective in which different worlds, knowledge, and history can coexist.

Misoczky and Camara (2015) note the need to free at least part of the MOS, including critical studies, from the hegemony of Euro-American management, opening up to the possibilities of multiple interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogues. Thus, it seems that the use of polyphonic historical studies in MOS research is a decolonial option when articulating alternatives through the dynamics of the co-construction of narratives around historically devalued management knowledge and practices. Also, we understand that such a perspective defends the promotion of the pluriversality of knowledge in the MOS with the possibility of transmodern coexistence (Abdalla & Faria, 2017).

Therefore, we believe that the “historical turnaround” in MOS is more than simply articulating the historical approach with the organization theory in epistemological, theoretical, or methodological terms. We understand that it is also necessary to promote a historical turn in organizational knowledge in a critical way linked to the decolonial option (Wanderley & Barros, 2018). This idea requires the promotion of pluriversal transmodernity as opposed to Euro-American modern universality, allowing the co-construction of historical narratives in MOS (Abdalla & Faria, 2017). We also seek to supply the “absence of dialogue between the world of scientific methodology and decoloniality” (Abdalla & Farias, 2017, p. 924) through a polyphonic decolonial historical approach that we will expose below, relating the theoretical-methodological aspects of the historical perspective with the decolonial option.

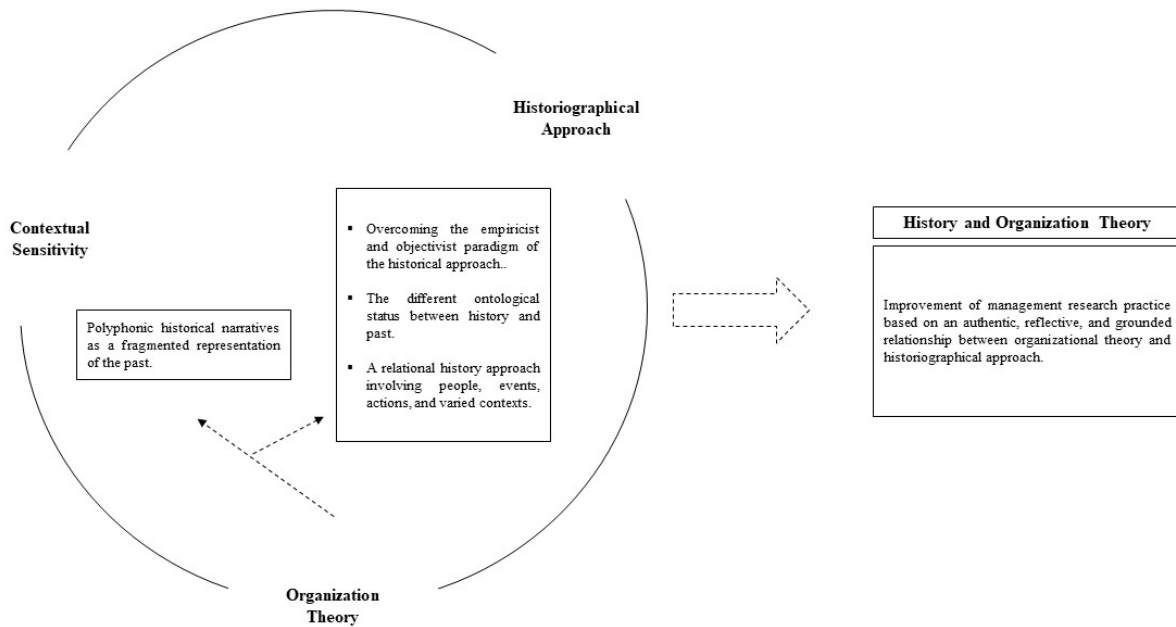
#### 4. THE POLYPHONIC DECOLONIAL HISTORICAL APPROACH TO MOS

When we use the theoretical-methodological aspects of the historical approach, it is an attempt to rethink “how to study the complexity of organizational phenomena?” and consider the process of doing science in the particular area of MOS. If the intention is to improve the theory of organizations to understand the processes, structures, and people in organizations, then we must question the use of the theories, methods, and objects of research so predominant in the area. Such criticism exposes the way we researchers reflect on our research desires and also how we project and understand the organizational reality. That also involves tinkering with ontological predispositions that are quite consolidated in the field of specialized research, sometimes objective and deterministic.

We strongly believe that historical theory should improve research in MOS because it is only possible to understand organizations when we recognize the basis of the socio-historical formulation of their organizational phenomena. As introduced in Figure 1, the relationship between the organization theory with historical theory requires high contextual sensitivity when we realized historical narratives as a fragmented representation of the past captured during the research.

From this, some inferences are pertinent to the explanation. We understand that the theoretical-methodological relationship between the historiographical research and the MOS needs to consider the context in which the organizational phenomena are investigated. Thence, if we try to answer “how” and “why” the historical narratives about the past in MOS are told only from one perspective, then we incur the process of denaturalization of history understood as linear, homogeneous, and without conflicts. So, contextual sensitivity is the ability to doubt the unison of historical narratives that discredit competing versions of history, commonly fragmented and heterogeneous from the past. In other words, we chose to analyze historical narratives relationally through people, events, and past actions as an alternative to the empiricist and objectivist beliefs of traditional historiography when associated with management research.

The logic arranged in a figure format seeks to achieve a certain authenticity and reflexivity that we believe to be fundamental for theoretical-empirical research that wants to understand organizations through dialogue with history. However, there is the awareness of the necessity of building authentic stories that consider the colonality of power and knowledge that characterize the contexts in the Global South. When we relate history, polyphony, and decolonial options, we intend to advocate beyond the need to insert the historical perspective in MOS, because we understand that to some extent this is being done - even if partially and in a non-polyphonic manner. Here we suggest a historical approach with the purpose to recognize the effects of modernity/coloniality imposed by Euro-American management through corporative narratives in a presentist and realistic form. Such recognition allows researchers to rethink management knowledge from a pluriversal transmodern perspective. Therefore, we need to value the coexistence of decolonial knowledge and insurgent forms of management, sometimes delegitimized.



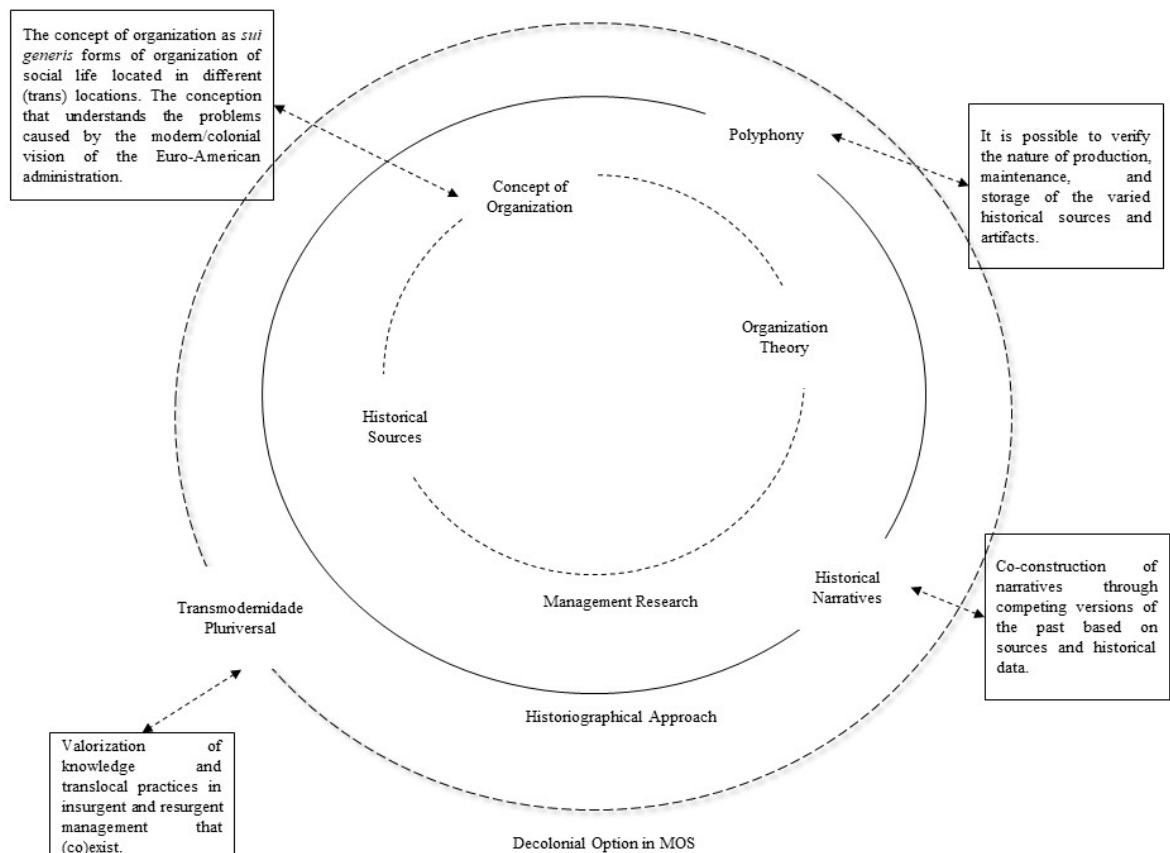
**Figure 1.** Relationship between history and organizational theory.  
**Source:** Prepared by the authors based on Kaul, Sandhu, & Alam (2019).

In any case, we need to understand historical studies in organizations that develop management knowledge based on historical facts through methods and sources that can be empirically and conceptually verified (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2016). The improvement of management research practice seeks to converge fields of history knowledge and management concerning epistemic predispositions. For this, there is an essential involvement with competing narratives and competing interpretations of the past, historical sources, and historiographical methods - when advancing in the understanding of organizational phenomena (Van Lent & Durepos, 2019). Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg (2017) suggest that the field of management studies is somewhat introspective, excessively narrow, and quite fragmented. That same field neglects numerous themes, issues, and objects of study within what would be the natural scope of it.

Anyway, it seems prudent to rethink what we mean by organization, knowledge, and management practices to promote critical translocal dialogues recognizing the modernity/coloniality problems of the universal vision disseminated through Euro-American and instrumental management. When we recognize this universal view of modernity/coloniality, we choose the decolonial ethical-political position seeking to interpret the specific variety of social life organizations. Thence we respond to the inherent demands and needs that disturb the totality in which the universal and the “modern” are recognized with more dissonance and frequency.

We understand that the involvement with the decolonial option with historical studies helps to expand organizational knowledge in two central points: (1) develops the epistemological in MOS when it analyzes organizations based on theories that understand the heterogeneity of the different configurations of organization of social life and, therefore, cause the discontinuity of the modernity/coloniality matrix of Euro-American management founded on the “myth of instrumental rationality” of “modern” administration; (2) and invites researchers to diversify the methods of collecting and analyzing empirical material in the construction of polyphonic historical narratives with various archival sources and artifacts.

What is interesting from our perspective is that we converge levels of concentric analysis when we put management research, the historical approach, and the decolonial option into dialogue. We need management research to improve the theory of organizations. We use historical research through its conceptual and empirical requirements. We understand historical research in its relational, contextual, and polyphonic character. The decolonial option that values insurgent and resurgent management knowledge and translocal practices that (co)exist in defense of pluriversal transmodernity. Our proposition of articulation concerning these three levels of analysis can be better visualized in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Concentric levels of analysis.

**Source:** Authors (2020).

In the analysis presented in Figure 2, we mobilize the organization theory intending to expand the concept of organization as a priori conception in the practice of management research. We start from the assumption of understanding the concept of organization as *sui generis* forms of organization of social life located in different (trans)locations. These organizations face the problems caused by the modern/colonial/universal vision of Euro-American management. Therefore, we (re)think of critical dialogues that promote a vision of decolonial management with legitimate bases for the co-construction of a pluriversal global academy (Abdalla & Faria, 2017).

In response to these historical-contextual asymmetries, we used the polyphonic historiographical approach to co-construction historical narratives in management, consistent with local histories and problems. Thereby, it is necessary to be attentive to practical knowledge in management that crosses geopolitical locations and colonial differences (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). We argue the influence of that colonial difference in other organizations, practices, knowledge, narratives, and modes of management as opposed to the modern colonial order. The broader level of analysis in Figure 2, the decolonial option, is illustrated concerning the historical approach and the MOS. We affirm that the decolonial option allows us to question the very conception of history adopted, encouraging distinct reflections on universal history. It is possible, therefore, to understand history beyond what Euro-American authors say and to ponder management theories.

That means that the use of polyphony in the historical narrative requires the researcher to be careful with historical sources, using reflexivity in collecting empirical material for further analysis. Researchers must record and compare the historical ideas of different sets of actors and institutions (Smith & Russell, 2015) and build narratives based on the multiple views of the studied fact/phenomenon. The notion of archives as a source of data for historical research is not just official written documents. There are different historical sources for research (Barros, Carneiro, & Wanderley, 2019).

The term polyphony is for us to realize that it is possible to elaborate historical narratives from different sources and artifacts. Thus, anyone can question historical narratives concerning the nature of production, maintenance, and storage over time. We understand as a historical source: illustrations, images, pictures of arts, crafts, sculptures, photographs, books, comics, newspapers, pamphlets, popular literature, films, the literature of twine, television and radio advertisements, short stories, music, testimonies and so on. That helps to elucidate the polyphony in competing versions of the past and clarify the historical narratives in management.

The researcher's position reflects the perception of the historical sources that need to reconstruct the view of the field of study. Also, historical sources assume the function in the (re)construction of historical narratives, demonstrating evidence of inequality, multiplicity, confusion, and complexity through the researchers' intellectual framework. We also emphasize that it is necessary to recover some dissonant sources and narratives about the past, recurrently silenced (Decker, 2013)

As Barros, Carneiro, & Wanderley (2018) put it, researchers need to question the nature of historical documents and sources. Why were the files created? How easy is it to access the sources? How do these sources influence historical narratives? For the authors, the construction of history is understood from different points of view of the past in a process of critical and reflective research. Similarly, Kaul, Sandhu, & Alam (2019) suggest comparing files that offer similar information; identify the authors, date, and place of creation of the document; and contextualize when and where historical events occurred. This process aims to guarantee the validity and reliability of historical sources.



We understand that historical narratives may be constructed using primary sources in the form of private properties or collections such as personal files, diaries, newsletters, books, letters, annual reports, biographies, and lectures (Kaul, Sandhu, & Alam, 2019). When writing historical narratives, we are required to have high epistemic and methodological sensitivity. Thereby, we analyze or propose conclusions of the traces existing in the varied versions of the past.

For this reason, we suggest that researchers opt for research strategies that allow a broad analysis of the polyphony of historical narratives. As an example, Sliwa (2013) and Joaquim & Carrieri (2018) use oral history to access memories and narratives that formulate the notion of the organization as a locus of existence, practices, and knowledge that elaborate group identities. Or as Bowie (2019) and Tumbé (2019) suggest, the narratives told in newspapers, films, advertisements, and the information media, in general, can be used to contextualize historical research.

The images, cartoons, comics, photographs, and advertisements, for example, can be used as historical sources in which “images as speeches” are analyzed in the proposal of Godoi & Uchôa (2019, p. 777). That diversifies the scope of methodological techniques that enable more polyphonic historical research. Another example is the archivist ethnography that makes it possible to analyze the archives and focus on the silencing that occurs in historical records when they are created and stored (Decker, 2013).

We consider that the theoretical and methodological possibilities- presented by the current literature- promote the interdisciplinary articulation that we propose between the organization theory, the polyphonic historical approach, and the decolonial option. The production of knowledge, theories, and research methods are situated socially, historically, and culturally. When we recognize the situated character of scientific production in MOS, it is valid to choose research practices as opposed to the universality and modernity of management research. Therefore, it is possible to opt for the knowledge that is resurging and rising from below - invisible or neglected - towards the visions of a transmodern and pluriversal world (Dussel, 2012; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). We do not want to present a theoretical or methodological prescription, and we also do not want our approach to be a universal model. The purpose of the undertaken reflection is to promote a dialogue between the different theoretical and methodological perspectives for MOS.

## 5. REFLECTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESEARCH PRACTICE

This paper proposed a polyphonic decolonial historical approach to Management and Organization Studies (MOS), relating the theoretical-methodological aspects of the historical perspective with the decolonial option. We recognize the epistemological limitations in the use of approach historical associated with the organization theory that needs to be overcome. We also affirm the position of recognizing history composed of narratives. These narratives are fragmented representations of the past.

We suggest the construction of polyphonic historical narratives as a methodological concern of using the historical approach to inform a more authentic, inclusive, and diverse management knowledge. This suggestion takes the decolonial option as a political-ethical action. We defend the need to understand the sui generis forms of social life organization in response to the problems arising from the modern/colonial view existing in MOS. And we thus value and co-construct translocal knowledge and decolonial practices towards pluriversal transmodernity. Pluriversal transmodernity is a possibility in which different worlds, people, organizations, and management can coexist.

Also, we understand the decolonial assumption that theory and practice are interrelated in the challenge of researching “with” (and not simply “about”) people, knowledge, and management practices (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Our suggestion - of relating historical approach, organization theory, and decoloniality - aims to contribute to three broad contexts interconnected by more reflective and critical research practice.

In the research and teaching contexts, we are concerned with promoting epistemological, theoretical, and methodological reflections that make researchers rethink the contribution of their research to MOS. Questions such as: “where does my interest in developing this research come from?” and “how do the theories we use obscure the narratives I can write?” are well suggested by Barros, Carneiro, & Wanderley (2018).

Our approach also provides reflections on academic writing at MOS. How we construct the supposedly scientific academic argument can be understood as a mechanism of epistemic imperialism coming from the Anglo-Saxon axis of Management knowledge. So, would it be possible to question our colonized academic prose? What is our identity when we choose to participate in this science conversation? Is it possible to construct rational knowledge without submitting to the protocol of Anglo-Saxon academicism?

Thus, it is also relevant to be concerned with understanding different subaltern groups and collectives that create forms of management adapted to their realities. Good examples of studies related to this point were developed by Holanda (2011) and Santos et al. (2019) that show how ancestral knowledge in local popular organizations underlies the decolonial management practices maintained and passed on historically. These decolonial pieces of knowledge are forms of insurgent management in creation, construction, and intervention in the opposite direction to the universal.

Counter-narratives and antagonistic versions of people, actions, and events from the past in organizations are the loci for understanding the contradictions and conflicts in MOS. They help us to co-construct dissonant narratives that inform alternatives for the improvement of pluriversal and authentic knowledge in management research. Thus, questions such as the following are substantial: what is the purpose, and for whom is the common management knowledge being constructed in the area? Are the researchers welcoming other management concepts, analyzes, and practices? We call attention to “why”, “with whom” and “how” to think about decoloniality. That is why, from this point of view, we promote liberations in thinking, being, knowing, understanding, and living. It is necessary to encourage places of existence and construct connections between regions, territories, struggles, and peoples (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize critically and reflexively the dilemma of researching in response to modern/colonial problems. We cannot have a distorted view of the “modern organization” and instrumental Euro-American management that is intended to be universal. And we also need to write historical narratives in management without reproducing modernity/coloniality - towards pluriversal transmodernity. Therefore, we suggest the encounter between historical approach and MOS with theoretical and methodological positions concerned with articulating alternatives through the dynamics of the co-construction of historical narratives about decolonial knowledge, practices, and management. We defend the legitimation of the pluriversality of knowledge through research practice that constructs conditions for transmodern coexistence (Dussel, 2012; Abdalla & Faria, 2017).

Moreover, Mignolo (2017) analyzed historical-structural nodes that interrelate through the rhetoric of modernity/coloniality based on the colonial difference. For the author, these historical analyzes can help us to analyze modernity/coloniality/decoloniality and see:

- A global racial formation that subjugated people and cultures. We need to look at inequalities in management practices as a result of ethnic/racial hierarchies. Thus, it is possible to understand the discourse of “diversity” of the workforce in organizations. We can see the subtle forms of “modern” people management practices that preserve coloniality. It is necessary to demystify the modern/colonial discourses that are also related in the hierarchy between gender, sex, and sexuality.
- A global class formation of workers organized in different forms of work. We need to investigate the implications of wage labor, slavery, serfdom, economic and foreign exchange, for example. These forms of work coexist and persist at the base of the modern and financial capitalist system. The time has come to question what happened in the Global South when capitalism was established here through slavery or other forms of labor exploitation. The forms of work established in the global south were based on the logic of the colonial pact, aristocratic elites, and eugenics concerning traditional peoples.
- Moreover, we know that the forms of work organization are related to the international division of labor historically constituted. This international division of labor hierarchizes societies and nations in dichotomies such as Center/Periphery and North/Global South. That is to say, what are the socio-cultural consequences of the relationship between capital and labor responsible for structuring the production, sale, and distribution of goods and services? How does the profit of global markets underlie the production of surplus-value, sometimes imposed by authoritarian socio-political systems?
- System of political-military organizations and colonial administration. Here, we call attention to the performance of the State and its coercive authority. New research needs to investigate the institutionalization of the forms of management historically used in State structures such as colonial, bureaucratic, military, dictatorial, and totalitarian management. Therefore, what are the forms of administration of the Global South that were constituted from a historical context differently from the Global North? Or what are the existing resistance practices in the colonized contexts that can serve as a reference for the reconstruction of organizational processes in contemporary times? We recognize here the Anglo-Saxon colonization in management and the coercive authority of the State.
- An epistemic and linguistic hierarchy that favors the production of knowledge on the north axis (Europe and North America) and neglects the stories on the south axis (Western and Eastern). Therefore, new interpretations need to be made about the (trans)local economic, political, and social organization and administration practices. We have to go back to our past and interpret organizational events again without the axiom of the concepts of the Global North - such as instrumental rationality, modern capitalism, Weberian bureaucracy, and Taylorism-Fordism.

We indicate such research questions in particular for peripheral contexts. We also believe that teaching can be enhanced through the reflections proposed in this paper. Together with students and from their social communities, we can construct heterogeneous narratives that tell their histories. It is then possible to train new managers based on historical and political issues in each location. Thus, questioning the modern and universal assumptions common in MOS is necessary. That helps to promote consciously and transforming actions about their realities.

In the context of management practice: research projects and a change in the teaching can provide answers to the needs of each location. The resolution of local economic-administrative problems helps to understand the relationships, practices, and knowledge in management that

can support the authentic and identity theory/practice in MOS. It is to recognize the academic, social, and management contexts of knowledge and practices produced in the local/regional context that solve local problems. That means understanding the broader systems of organized life in society - such as political, economic, scientific, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic, religious, cultural, and environmental dimensions.

We need to consider organizations other than just modern-western logic: how organizations based are popular knowledge linked to ancestry, affection, and traditions (Santos et al., 2019); or those organizations based on economic systems of communal reciprocity that prioritize the work and welfare of the community (Mignolo, 2008); or those organizations based on complementary relations between genders as opposed to binary relations in the modern world (Segato, 2012); or organizations that are born from a fractured locus, that is, from a context of subordinate enunciation (Lugones, 2014).

We thus present implications that interfere with the sociocultural context of organizations. It is necessary to consider the processes of rescue, legitimation, and dissemination of historical local/regional knowledge. And so, co-construct translocal narratives in MOS as liberating strategies for coexistence. We intend in this paper to base the MOS to find polyphonic historical narratives in organizations, which allow us to access processes and practices that disturb, transgress, and construct pluriversal identities and forms of transmodern coexistence.

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#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The authors' contribution was fundamental to compose this paper and declare that there is no interest conflict. Author 1 contributed to the project design and administration; theoretical foundation; research and analysis of the literature; writing and proofreading the paper; and tables and figures elaboration. Author 2 contributed to the project design; literature review and analysis; repeated revisions of this paper; and figures elaboration. The authors acknowledge the contributions of the anonymous reviewers of the VII Colloquium on Epistemology and Sociology of Science in Administration 2020 and BBR who contributed directly to the initial versions of the paper.

