



The history of sociology as a field of research and some recent trends in Brazilian social thought

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Abstract

The article lays the foundation for a dialog between scholars of Brazilian social thought and historians of sociology as a discipline. In order to achieve this objective, I analyze recent developments in the field of the history of sociology, highlighting the incorporation of historiographic methods and the emergence of a transnational approach, which points toward a global history of the discipline. I criticize the Eurocentric limits of this field and argue that recent research trends in the area of Brazilian social thought can help overcome this limitation. Finally, I briefly analyze the obstacles that impede this dialog and indicate possible strategies for overcoming them.

Keywords: history of sociology; Brazilian social thought; global history; Eurocentrism.

Never has the field of research devoted to what is known as Brazilian social thought enjoyed such intellectual and academic prestige. Two different research groups coexist in the National Social Science Graduate Association (*Associação Nacional de Pós-graduação em Ciências Sociais, Anpocs*), but even so a significant number of abstracts are rejected. In the meetings of the Brazilian Sociological Society (*Sociedade Brasileira de Sociologia, SBS*), the group on social thought also often receives a plethora of proposals every two years, and the roundtables that bring together scholars from the area are always well-attended. Esteemed publishers such as *Companhia das Letras* and *Editora 34* regularly publish works derived from the research agenda constructed in the field, such as biographies of intellectuals and politicians (Carvalho, 2002; Alonso, 2007) and studies on the interpreters of Brazil (Botelho, Schwarcz, 2009). In addition, different academic events intended to improve the methodological and theoretical debate in the area were created in the last years, such as the *Social Thinking Workshop (Ateliê do Pensamento Social)*, an initiative of the *Social Thought Laboratory* at the *Center for Research and Documentation on the History of Contemporary Brazil (Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil)*, and the seminar on social thought in research institutions in Rio de Janeiro, a joint initiative by several departments in Rio de Janeiro but originally organized by the *Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences* at the *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*. Finally, in a move that indicates the maturity of a field of study, the researchers themselves have dedicated their own efforts to publishing significant texts that seek to establish balance between the research conducted and the main institutional developments within the field (Maia, 2009; Schwarcz, Botelho, 2011; Lynch, 2013).

On the other hand, in the world of international social sciences, research on the history of ideas and social thought also became widely accepted within the institutions, and within the arena of the *International Sociological Association (ISA)* empirical and theoretical studies on the history of sociology blossomed. Amid the innovative research on the history of methodology (Platt, 1996) and the mechanisms of production and the consecration of the disciplinary canon (Connell, 1997; Baehr, 2002), a growing effort to build a truly global history of sociology can be seen, with an emphasis on the transnational dimension of the discipline (Heilbron, Guilhot, Jeanpierre, 2008; Schrecker, 2010a; Fleck, 2011).

Nevertheless, even though the field of Brazilian thought is one of the most prolific areas of research in social sciences in Brazil, it has little dialog with the international scholarship on the history of sociology. There are clearly structural reasons behind most of this problem, and these reasons are well known to scholars of science: low international circulation of the social science produced in Brazil, inequitable impacts from the international publishing system, the Eurocentrism of this system (Keim, 2010; Ginbras, Mosbah-Natason, 2010), and the very hegemony of the English language (Ortiz, 2006), which is decisive for scientific practices that depend on qualitative models of argumentation. Even so, it is possible to establish common ground for dialog, which should go in both directions. Therefore, the objective of this article is to suggest a path toward this interaction. To do so, I propose a dialog between more recent studies on the transnational history of sociology and some studies in the field of Brazilian social thought that highlight the relations between peripheral intellectual contexts and hegemonic circuits. My hypothesis is that the approaches considered

transnational are still very Eurocentric and there is a need for more studies on the circulation of social sciences outside the North Atlantic.

In the first section of the text, I present studies in the field of the history of sociology that question the excessive emphasis on national traditions and propose transnational or global approaches. Additionally, I emphasize the limitations produced by Eurocentrism, which still define the area, and discuss some contributions that attempt to overcome this problem. In the second section, I review some recent analytical trends in the studies on Brazilian social thought, pointing out how they can help to fill gaps in the knowledge about the global history of sociology and question some fundamental assumptions of the hegemonic narratives. I also indicate how the scholars of Brazilian social thought could benefit greatly if they were to have more intense dialog with the international production. Finally, I conclude by discussing the problems that harm the type of dialog proposed herein, and suggest some strategies for dealing with these challenges.

The history of sociology: in search of a genuine global approach

Sociology has always been concerned with telling its own history, a task seen as intrinsic in a field of knowledge that has had great difficulty building a single paradigm. This constant return to the classics thus reduces the complexity inherent to the discipline and provides a common conceptual horizon (Alexander, 1988). As we know, many critics regard this characteristic of sociological science as a deficiency due to the lack of scientific systematization (Freitas, Figueiredo, 2009).

It can be said that the field dedicated to the study of the history of sociology has only grown in the last four decades, at a time when the history of sociology emerged as a specialized field, capable of producing studies that challenged the more naive narratives that are generally structured around “presentist” perspectives. “Presentism” means construction of the history of the discipline from contemporary disputes and concerns, in which the choice of brilliant predecessors figures is an important weapon. It is true that, at least in the field of anthropology, the development of a less naive disciplinary history came before the discussions in sociology, considering that the work of George Stocking Jr. (1968) had already established the terms of the criticism of “presentism.” But in the case of the history of sociology, the landmarks of this period of questioning are classic works, like those of Terry Clark (1973), which revealed the intellectual entrepreneurship of Émile Durkheim and his disciples who were responsible for the institutionalization of the so-called French school, and the work by John Peel (1971) on Herbert Spencer, a model for the accurate intellectual biography. These works emerged at a time when the history of science generally underwent a powerful revolution, marked by the work of Thomas Kuhn (1962) and the unfolding of the advanced sociological analyses developed by David Bloor (1976), which helped popularize the conviction that any scientific discoveries, even those considered “correct” or “true,” could generally be interpreted in the light of institutional, political, and material conditions.

More recently, some empirically-oriented works have emerged that focus on topics such as the history of sociological methodology (Platt, 1996), the process of forming the canon (Lamont, 1987; Baehr, 2002; Camic, 1992; McLaughlin, 1998), and the circulation of manuals

and textbooks (Pereyra, 2008). As part of this trend, new scholarship quickly moved from national frameworks to so-called transnational or global approaches. However, what are the analytical landmarks of these approaches, their potentials, and their shortcomings?

First, it is important to note that the emphasis on the transnational and/or international dimension of historical phenomena is far from new. A significant part of the tradition of historical sociology produced in the twentieth century made wide use of comparisons between national cases to consider the development of capitalism from a global perspective, as in the case of the classic works of Barrington Moore Jr. (1966) and Reinhard Bendix (1977). In the 1950s and 1960s, innovative historians and economists rewrote economic theory by adopting approaches that used comparative and historical approaches to analyze the causes of industrialization (Gerschenkron, 1962) and to reveal the phenomenon of underdevelopment, as can be seen in the classic work by Celso Furtado (1959). Particularly in these two cases, a great interest in the historical and relative nature of the theories and ideas can be seen, although both Furtado and Gerschenkron focused less on the history of economic thought *per se* than the process of development itself, in all its variants.¹ Furthermore, during this period the history of sociology had not yet been institutionally integrated as a field of its own, and most of the authors cited above did not have sociology as a discipline as their objective, although they were interested in the global dissemination of ideas.

In addition, the prestige of contextualist ethnographic approaches joined the specialization of science to delegitimize the focus on macro-level structural processes. Finally, it is important to stress that studies focusing on intellectual traditions or the construction of the sociological tradition usually adopted national histories or the intellectual contexts demarcated by the nation-states as analytical landmarks, as in the examples contained in the works authored by Donald Levine (1997) and Wolf Lepenies (1996). All these factors contributed to strengthening methodological nationalism in the field of the history of sociology.

The concern with the importance of national cases is witnessed in the canonical work of Pierre Bourdieu (2002) on the international circulation of ideas, in which the French sociologist argues that concepts and theories are profoundly dependent on their local contexts of origin, particularly because of the overlap between institutional realities and linguistic universes. According to Bourdieu, the circulation of works and of concepts inevitably involves translation or betrayal; the dynamics of this process are defined by the respective national intellectual fields, from the starting point and the ending point of the concepts.

More recent works indicating a transnational approach have sought to deal with these limitations of methodological nationalism, addressing problems such as the circulation and reception of ideas through analytical landmarks that are not restricted to national intellectual fields. As a way of discussing the potentials and the limits of this new trend, in this section I explore the approaches contained in the text by Heilbron, Guilhot and Jeanpierre (2008) and in the collection edited by Cherry Schrecker (2010a). The choice of texts is justified by both their programmatic dimension as well as the circulation of their authors in the institutional forums in which these ideas are being discussed. Next, I show the constraints produced by Eurocentrism, and analyze the more recent contributions that indicate pathways to overcoming these limitations.

Heilbron, Guilhot and Jeanpierre (2008) initially argue that, although the social sciences have organized themselves within the framework of nation-states, contemporary historians take this geographic dimension for granted, which prevents them from seeing the connections that cross states and lead to the circulation of people, ideas, and financial and institutional resources. From this hypothesis, the authors highlight three fundamental variables for constructing a transnational history of sociology: (a) the formation of international disciplinary institutions; (b) migration and movement of intellectuals and scientists; (c) international exchanges between non-disciplinary institutions, such as foundations, non-governmental organizations, or broader cultural agencies.

In using these variables to illustrate some empirical cases, the authors highlight how after World War II sociology became a global science through the formation of associations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Unesco) and the ISA, and the export of prestigious theoretical models from the northern hemisphere, such as the sociology of modernization. Heilbron, Guilhot and Jeanpierre (2008) also maintain that this process was accompanied by a growing tension between these more abstract and general models and the linguistic and cultural entrenchment that marked much of the sociological imagination up to that point.

In the case of movement of scientists and intellectuals, the authors stressed that these migrations could be voluntary or forced, as was the case with German thinkers who migrated to the US after the rise of Nazism and were at the root of the development of the New School for Social Research in New York.

Finally, agencies and foundations also contributed to the overall formation of sociology by financing doctorates and cooperation agreements between central and peripheral countries, allowing for the formation of human resources in different countries and the sharing of common vocabularies. These mechanisms of cooperation, as the authors point out, invariably implied a process of center-to-periphery dissemination.

A similar perspective can be seen in the collection edited by the sociologist Cherry Schrecker (2010a). The objective of this work is the analysis of what she calls “transatlantic voyages” of ideas and concepts, that are usually more difficult to track or follow than the circulation of people. The main geographical focus is on the connections established between European and American contexts, usually considered to be the bearers of peculiar and idiosyncratic sociological traditions.

In the introduction to the text, Schrecker (2010b) argues that national traditions are usually regarded as forming a separate universe upon which the “international” is superimposed. In the words of the author, “No systematic attempt will be made here to separate national from international characteristics” (p.3). Schrecker (2010c) applies this procedure in a study on the concept of “community,” which according to her developed similarly in different contexts, at the same time that Ferdinand Tonnies (1957) coined his famous definition of the concept. Schrecker (2010c) argues that in the United States, authors like Charles Cooley were operating with peers or similar dichotomies through concepts like primary groups, indicating the need to study the emergence of similar concepts in culturally diverse locales. Of course, the national contexts continue to be relevant, since they are what explain, in this

last case, the translations made in the German version of the concept of “community” when they were deployed in American sociology.

Transnational approaches have the merit of allowing researchers to analyze international flows that can explain processes of institutionalization and intellectual creation that are considered purely endogenous. Furthermore, they offer another view of the international dimension, not only seen as a simple externality that provides a mere general context for the dynamics that were considered internal. In these new analyses, processes that occurred in certain countries are thought of as factors in a broader extra-national dynamic. However, these potentials come up against the excessive weight given to flows from the northern hemisphere.

In the case of the text by Heilbron, Guilhot and Jeanpierre (2008), there is the recognition of asymmetries between the centers and the peripheries in the circulation of institutions, ideas, and intellectuals, but the authors generally attribute the origin of initiatives that would later be exported or spread to the rest of the world to the hegemonic centers. Therefore, the authors stress the sending of specialists from Europe and the US to universities and research centers in the southern hemisphere as an example of the dynamics of intellectual migration after World War II. Although this is a real phenomenon, reiterating the asymmetries between the center and the periphery, it is possible to locate trades and flows occurring between the regional centers in the southern hemisphere itself, or even the circulation of theories and concepts that arise in Latin American spaces and end up affecting the production that is considered hegemonic, as can be seen in the classic case of dependency theory.

The collection by Schrecker (2010a), in turn, offers very good case studies on the transatlantic voyages of ideas and concepts, but these movements fundamentally occur between Europe and the US. Not coincidentally, in the preface to the text David Chalcraft (2010, p.XX) argues that the book indicates the urgent need for more studies outlining itineraries involving other regions, not only Europe and the US.

These limitations have repeatedly been cited by those who criticize the Eurocentrism of the social sciences. In her book *Southern theory: the social sciences and the global dynamics of knowledge*, the Australian Raewyn Connell (2007) argues that much of the sociology practiced globally consumes theories that are the result of scientific work carried out in the northern hemisphere. This is reflected in the conceptual structures that derive from restricted empirical data, or factual information framed from questions and problems that reflect the bias of these researchers. To resolve this problem, Connell's book attempts to recover sociological traditions constructed in different contexts of the southern hemisphere, with emphasis on the centrality of issues and concepts that do not receive significant treatment in hegemonic sociology. This is the case of reflections on land, ancestry, and colonialism in Africa, or the classic works produced in Latin America on the problem of economic and intellectual dependency.

Recently, some historians of sociology have tried to take critiques to Eurocentrism seriously, particularly in the case of Latin America. In this sense, the book edited by Fernanda Beigel (2013a) is exemplary. Her objective is to analyze the formation of the regional spaces of sociological production on the continent which produce intellectual exchanges in the Southern Cone, particularly between Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina between the 1950s and 1970s. In the introduction to his volume, Beigel (2013b) recognizes dependence as a structural condition governing the relations between the center and the periphery, but states

that this condition would not have prevented the formation of relatively autonomous spaces in South America, and not even the creation of regional centers that promoted circulation and mediation.

Beigel also shares with the transnational approaches the conception that the “international” is not an external dimension to be contrasted with endogenous factors, but her approach makes advances in two aspects with relation to the texts by Heilbron, Guilhot and Jeanpierre (2008) and Schrecker (2010c): (a) it recognizes the importance of institutional spaces and intellectual traditions in South America to the global history of sociology, moving away from the idea that these were only derivations of institutional spaces pertaining to the center; (b) it shows there was movement and institutional exchange between different contexts in the southern hemisphere, breaking away from the view that the flow between the center and the periphery moved only in one direction.

It is important to note that this debate in the context of the history of sociology has come late in relation to broader discussions of the history of science in general, in which for quite some time the limitations of diffusionist approaches have been stated; these approaches saw innovation as an attribute of central countries that spread to the so-called peripheries (Lafuente, Catala, 1989; Barros da Silva, 2014). It should be noted, moreover, that the historiography of science has already influenced the field of the so-called social and technology studies (STS) in an international dimension, by means of critiques that go to the heart of what Fernanda Beigel has argued for the more specific case of the history of sociology.

In the text introducing a recent collection on the topic (Medina, Marques, Holmes, 2014b), the authors seek to show how in the 1980s, the history of Latin American science had already shifted from a Eurocentric conception about what was supposedly the strictly peripheral dimension of science practiced on the continent to a more detailed analysis of the specific local features and their conditions with regard to innovation and creation. The growth of these debates encouraged these historians to investigate how contexts considered “local” were in fact important links in the construction of scientific discourses and practices on a much broader scale. In the words of the authors (p.2-3): “The essays here offer alternative narratives that move the story of invention and innovation southward; study forms of local innovation and use; analyze the circulation of ideas, people, and artifacts in local and global networks; and investigate the creation of hybrid technologies and forms of knowledge production.”

Returning to the history of sociology, Wiebke Keim (2014) recently incorporated this discussion from Latin American science historians into her general theory about knowledge circulation in sociology. Keim has targeted Bourdieu’s theory, which reifies national intellectual fields as fundamental instances in the translation/betrayal of concepts in transit. She argues that a theory of circulation must consider the asymmetries between centers and peripheries, but needs to recognize the different uses of texts or ideas in contexts that differ from those of the origin. In Keim’s view, not all international movement implies a reception that erases the originating context, as Bourdieu stated, since cases in which knowledge itself is co-constructed from this migration can be noted, implying an active role played by scientists regarded as peripheral.

The very reception of ideas in peripheral contexts can imply different modalities, which vary from simple passive acceptance and rhetorical use to even denial of critical theories

or reinvention. Furthermore, according to Keim the practices of re-creation themselves can contribute to changes in institutional and material structures governing intellectual communities outside the hegemonic centers, which would prevent us from assuming the national contexts as already given and previously constituted prior to the movement.

As we can see, the debate about the transnational dimension in the history of sociology is experiencing an interesting moment. On the one hand, historians of the discipline located within the heart of the tradition in the central countries have employed this approach to overcome the shortcomings of methodological nationalism. This allows scholars to track institutional flows and intellectual dynamics that have always been present in the very construction of the scientific systems of sociology. On the other hand, some of these approaches still ignore the role played by peripheral circuits; as we can see in the works of Beigel and Keim, this role is not limited to receiving or importing theories or concepts. The best way of addressing this tension is not through pure theoretical debate, but instead through more empirical studies that prove how peripheral spaces played an important role in the construction of the social sciences. I maintain that within this challenge lies great potential for the field of Brazilian social thought, which I intend to show in the following section.

Brazilian social thought: some recent trends

In 1999, Lucia Lippi Oliveira (1999) published a survey on the area of social thought that today is seen as a landmark in terms of its scope and originality at the time. In the text, Oliveira highlighted the regularity of the Anpocs working group on social thought (working group GT27, Social Thought in Brazil), the circulation of different researchers in its space, and the depth of the issues analyzed. Since that time, the field has only continued to grow, and is showing a good capacity for self-reproduction with a large number of theses, dissertations, and books published.

Among this vast wealth of works, I have concentrated on those that I believe have a great potential for dialog with the debate described in the previous section, in which I attempted to equate a transnational approach to the history of sociology, a criticism of Eurocentrism, and a consequent search for studies focusing on institutional and intellectual circulation in peripheral contexts. In the case of Brazil, it is possible to identify different research traditions that follow a similar path, but I chose works that contribute to the reconstruction of the global history of the discipline. To broaden the scope of the analysis, I combine exemplary works in the field that circulated widely and were well received, as well as more recent studies.

In the first case are the studies on the history of health sciences conducted at the Casa de Oswaldo Cruz (COC). These studies were part of the Latin American effort summarized recently by Medina, Marques and Holmes (2014a), but had individual characteristics. One of these characteristics was the concern with examining scientific practices in Brazil without resorting to the criterion of university institutionalization as a breaking point (Kropf, Hochman, 2011). This criterion was widely used in the past to narrate the history of science in the country, as can be seen in both the works of Simon Schwartzman and the classic studies on the history of social sciences by Florestan Fernandes. This institutionalism was initially criticized by Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos (1978) in his classic text on Brazilian social thought which

pointed out the limitations of this method and ended placing institutionalized social science in opposition to other forms of reflection, ignoring their more strictly cognitive dimensions.

One example of the alternative approach developed within the COC is the work of Nísia Lima (1999) on the geographical representations of national identity produced by Brazilian scientists and intellectuals in the First Republic (1889-1930). In this work, Lima analyzes different contexts in which the theories and discourses on the northeastern wilderness (the *sertão*) were set out as a way of thinking about the construction of the country, exerting a large influence on institutionalized social science itself, even in the case of the scientific sociology practiced at the University of São Paulo (USP). For example, Lima shows how Euclides da Cunha's remarks on the reality of the wilderness were positively evaluated by Florestan Fernandes himself, who many consider a social scientist who completely broke with the essayistic tradition.

Lima's work also highlights the creative way in which scientists and thinkers in a peripheral society like Brazil resort to geographical ideas from other places, helping to increase the stock of spatial discourses in circulation in the first decades of the twentieth century. This connection between geographical knowledge about non-urban spaces and the broader sociological imagination proved to be extremely rich in Brazil and in some other contexts (Maia, 2008), but is not necessarily an issue analyzed in the field of the history of sociology, where such knowledge went through a strong process of disciplinary specialization.

Among the works conducted at COC, the doctoral thesis by Marco Chôr Maio (1997) on the Unesco project deserves emphasis. In 1950, the organization approved a project on race relations and the causes explaining the persistence of prejudice and racism and the possible forms of overcoming it. Brazil was chosen as a research laboratory, and several Brazilian social scientists carried out investigations between 1951 and 1952 under this initiative. As Maio showed, the results revealed the peculiarities of racial prejudice in different regions of Brazil, and also contributed to the very institutional construction of Brazilian social sciences. At the conclusion of his work, the author analyzed how this transnational initiative, although it was not without tensions or internal conflicts, impacted the careers and trajectories of a diverse group of sociologists including Florestan Fernandes, Luiz Aguiar Costa Pinto, and Thales de Azevedo. Finally, Maio's thesis challenged a recurring myth surrounding the Unesco project by demonstrating that the results of the studies did not frustrate the organization, as had been previously argued. The studies actually served to test different hypotheses about the obstacles to overcoming racial issues.

With respect to the broader debate outlined in the previous section, the works by Lima (1999) and Maio (1997) open up important possibilities for dialog. The connections between social science and race, for example, have been explored in a transnational dimension in texts that highlight the importance of the racial issue in the sociology of Weber (Zimmerman, 2013) and the impact of colonialism in the French school (Kurasawa, 2013); both are part of a recent effort to rethink the history of sociology in the light of the problem of forming modern empires (Steinmetz, 2013). However, this field still lacks a greater knowledge about the relationships between social sciences and racialism in non-European contexts – relationships that have been explored by researchers of Brazilian thought like Lima and Maio.

Furthermore, these works show how Brazil's role in the global system did not necessarily imply a passive reception of theories and concepts considered external. The thesis by Lima (1999) shows how geographical theories that had a particular meaning in Europe gained new forms in the Brazilian case, and Maio (1997) demonstrated how social sciences in Brazil had a creative dialog with Unesco, since the studies that were done in the country achieved a relative autonomy in relation to the original propositions. These ideas put forward by Maio and Lima break away from the thesis that transnational circulation was marked by a unilateral center-periphery dynamic. Both scholars also created the possibility of new studies in which the connection between local and global is considered in terms of the circulations of knowledge in its multiple forms, particularly in the case of peripheral societies.

More recent work in the field of social thought has pointed out the ways in which Brazilian sociologists have been able to establish links with global sociology that did not replicate the unilateral export of theories and concepts from the centers to the peripheries.

The work by André Botelho (2007) on the intellectual history of Brazilian political sociology is a good example of how the suggested dialog can occur. By showing the relevance of the agrarian issue in the works of classical authors such as Oliveira Vianna and Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco, Botelho demonstrated that modern Brazilian theories on the relationship between politics and society, and public and private spheres, must take into account the rural world. This centrality of the agrarian issue is actually a feature of other Latin American sociologies which is strong evidence of the fact that a more adequate understanding of the history of rural sociology cannot be restricted to the classical studies of peasants done in Eastern and Central Europe. It thus can be said that Botelho's work can contribute to a broader discussion of political sociology in general, as the relationship between state and society is one of the main issues on its agenda. Much of the great political and historical sociology built its generalizations from the analysis of classic cases on the periphery of capitalism, but it is rare for peripheral intellectuals themselves to be considered as a source for new cognitive categories and mid-range theories.

The book by Antônio Brasil Junior (2013) on the sociology of modernization and its criticism in Latin America is also a good model for the proposed dialog. In this work, Brasil Junior initially shows how American theories about development after World War II were constructed. He then analyzes how Gino Germani and Florestan Fernandes, two of the most important sociologists from Latin America, were able to read these North-American theories and reconstruct them from empirical research on their local contexts. In this process, the meanings of "modernization" and "development" were switched, showing an important point described by Keim (2014) which refers to the multiplicity of forms of circulation of ideas, in which reception is only the first step. Brasil Junior's argument can be taken further, because his work can assist historians of the discipline to better understand how the intellectual circuits of the southern hemisphere played an important role in general intellectual creation.

A third example is in my own work (Maia, 2014) about Guerreiro Ramos. In analyzing the theoretical construction of this Brazilian sociologist, I placed him alongside other peripheral social scientists of the 1950s and 1960s who also thought about the role of theory developed in central capitalist countries in peripheral contexts. I argued that many of Ramos's concepts should be understood not only as outcomes of Brazilian social thought, but as part

of the circulation of authors and ideas about decolonization and the Third World. Finally, I maintained that the works which tell the story of sociology after World War II should take into account this sociological language that was based on the idea of “intellectual autonomy” and had remarkable circulation in South America and Asia.

These three examples of recent works in the field of social thought in Brazil speak directly with a key topic from the previous section, which relates to the need to analyze the processes of intellectual creation in peripheral contexts. This topic is highlighted both by Beigel in her empirical study on Latin America, and by Wiebke Keim in her analytical theorizing on the various mechanisms that govern the international circulation of knowledge.

Different studies in the field of Brazilian social thought can help broaden the analytical scope of the history of sociology, which is still strongly marked by a focus on the history that took place in the northern hemisphere. However, for this intellectual dialogue to be complete, not only would the work done in Brazil have to be translated into English (although this is both desirable and urgent, given the quality of the production and the need to increase international circulation of the science practiced in Brazil), but an analytical opening of our very field would be required. The agenda still remains relatively self-referred, which is expected in a big country with a large intellectual community distributed across different institutions, graduate programs, and publications. Furthermore, the field of social thought has methodological peculiarities that set itself apart from the history of sociology as it is practiced in the international forums of the discipline. In the next section, I attempt to deal with these issues.

Final considerations

There are three major issues which need to be tackled so that the dialog proposed above can flourish, and I will present them briefly: the asymmetries and structural inequalities between the scientific systems; the methodological singularities of the field of social thought in Brazil, in which essayist style of writing remains a powerful force in analytical construction; and the relationships between Brazilian social thought and the historical construction of the nation-state in Brazil.

At the beginning of the text, I listed a variety of factors associated with the inequalities and asymmetries between scientific systems (the hegemony of the English language in scientific forums and international journals, and the peripheral condition of Brazilian social science in terms of financial, institutional, and symbolic resources, among other factors). I consider it appropriate to summarize these problems into a fundamental variable, which speaks to the peripheral nature of the Brazilian scientific community in the process of internationalization of science, which is currently underway. It is known that despite the remarkable growth of publications and articles in internationally indexed journals (Grácio, Oliveira, 2014), the science produced here continues to have a low impact, particularly in sociology and the humanities in general (Fiorin, 2007). This is not the result of supposed incapacity on the part of Brazilian researchers, but instead the product of structural conditions that reproduce a center-periphery dynamic which still is quite resistant (Vessuri, 2003; Keim, 2008; Heilbron, 2014).

With regard to the hegemony of English, this issue particularly affects areas such as intellectual history and the sociology of culture, because of the eminently qualitative nature of the arguments and of data analysis. This also combines with the difficulty of translating the semantic and linguistic universes of writers, scientists and thinkers, which are usually the subject of our analysis. One way to overcome this obstacle would be to develop transnational research networks, which would reduce the time and economic costs involved in defining strategies for publication and translations, while also encouraging more regular exchanges and contributing to an effective collective production of knowledge (Costa, 1 ago. 2014). In a recent example, researchers from the field of Brazilian social thought have developed comparative studies involving South American colleagues, which certainly help boost the circulation of the knowledge produced in Brazil and the formation of cooperative agendas. This is the case of the collective project on intellectuals in Latin America, mainly involving researchers from Brazil and Argentina (Myers, 2008; Miceli, Pontes, 2014). Such projects and alliances can be enhanced, since they allow the costs involved in international circulation to be shared and lessened; they also stimulate less hierarchical networks than those in the hegemonic centers of the discipline, which are located in the northern hemisphere. In the case of the social sciences in general, Anpocs and SBS have sponsored forums for scholars from the Brics, which also allows the formation of more complex and creative international agendas. All these efforts can be leveraged by researchers in the field of Brazilian social thought as a way to advance the circulation of knowledge and allow the formation of new agendas from less unequal dialogs.

In the case of scientific journals, the unequal costs which affect researchers from peripheral intellectual communities that do not dominate the codes, the language and the cultural conventions that shape the production of scientific articles are well known (Canagarajah, 2002). These circumstances are usually taken as a synonym for “good science,” but in many cases, they hide protocols and modes of communication that are far from being naturally shared by all the actors in the scientific universe. Many publishers have realized this problem, and some journals are putting a lot of effort into expanding their network of reviewers and direct stimulus for non-English speaking researchers (Martín, 2012).

The very definition of the internationalization that is hegemonic affects Brazilian researchers in a contradictory manner. On the one hand, there is a significant increase in research scholarships, funding, and other incentives for Brazilians to form international networks and to attend events and scientific forums abroad. The case of the “Science without borders” (Ciência sem fronteiras) program exemplifies this trend and its positive effects, although it is not open to undergraduates in the social sciences. On the other hand, in many cases globalization seems to reinforce the unequal dynamics that were mentioned previously by promoting the idea that the sociology produced in the peripheral countries consumes the theories and concepts originally created in the central countries, with cooperation fundamentally meaning a passive adjustment of peripheral science (Connell, 2007; Keim, 2010). In the case of the dialog proposed herein, it is crucial that the knowledge produced in the field of Brazilian social thought contribute not only to international research agendas, but to the very questioning of these agendas. This involves showing the shortcomings of these agendas, connecting the knowledge produced here to agendas and forums that for

quite some time have sought to challenge the Eurocentric framework of problems, theoretical references, and systems of scientific relevance (Alatas, 2006).

A second issue relates to methodological peculiarities. In Brazil, essay writing as a form of intellectual expression has had an enormous influence on the field that was later occupied by academic sociology (Jackson, Blanco, 2014). Contemporary scholars of Brazilian social thought know this means of intellectual expression very well, since they dedicate themselves to analyzing books and texts written in this style. In addition, many of these scholars prize essay writing, which they see as the heritage of a creative moment of Brazilian intellectual life and a powerful tool against the specialization of university life. This orientation is visible in studies that not only explain the history of authors and schools of thought, but also draw on these classical ideas to construct contemporary theories. This approach can be traced in classic works in the field, such as the studies of Luiz Werneck Vianna (1997) on the Iberian heritage in Brazilian intellectual life that influenced a large generation of young researchers.

This methodological quirk is not negative, but creates problems for international dialog. How can works that attempt to address contemporary issues by drawing on a peripheral intellectual culture be translated? Note that this is not the case for much of the work done within the ISA History of Sociology group, where the construction of the research object is more a matter of strict historical interests. This problem is reinforced by the fact that the European cultural and intellectual traditions are better known by Brazilian scholars than the other way around, which facilitates the circulation of studies that I analyzed at the beginning of this article.

A possible solution to this issue would be to follow the rules and protocols of scientific communication that are common to the Anglo-Saxon social sciences. This solution does not seem proper to me, because of the threat it poses to the connection between sociology and the Brazilian cultural debate. The best form of dealing with the issue is to foster more critical reflections about our ways of doing the history of Brazilian social thought. More reflections of this type in our area would improve self-reflexivity and thus help us critically examine many of the hidden assumptions that shape our national debates. Additionally, a greater knowledge of other peripheral intellectual traditions which have dealt with similar problems and issues can help scholars of Brazilian social thought to make meaningful contributions to international debates (Maia, 2014). Finally, I believe that one of the main dilemmas to be faced by researchers in the field of Brazilian social thought refers to the political status of their objects, which are deeply interwoven with the very construction of the nation-state. The study of social thought in Brazil has always dealt with intellectuals, literati, and thinkers heavily identified with the national question. This has provoked an excessive emphasis on the theme of Brazilian singularity (Tavolaro, 2014), which ends up putting a damper on broader comparisons. But this national framework is being questioned, not only by globalization (Ortiz, 2013) but also by the increasing democratization of Brazilian society itself, a phenomenon that calls into question the legitimacy of the literate elite that has always "interpreted Brazil." This new condition is not totally ignored by scholars in the area, who have been conducting more and more studies on intellectuals, writers, and thinkers who talk about the country from a radically different place from that which has historically been occupied by this elite (Medeiros da Silva, 2013).

A different form of framing the problems in our research agenda can help to overcome the overlap between the history of social thinking and the construction of the state in Brazil. The discussion about the relationship between nationalism and sociology, a very common question for all researchers interested in Brazilian sociological thought during the 1950s and 1960s, is a perfect example. This demarcation is fundamental in the studies about the Superior Institute of Brazilian Studies (Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros, Iseb), on the philosophy of Vieira Pinto, or about the emergency of the problem of development and its connections with the modernizing agency of the state and its elites.

However, this connection was far from exclusive to Brazil at that time, as a broad network of intellectuals, works, concepts, and institutions drew on nationalist ideologies and thus turned the Third World into a powerhouse for heterodox ideas about development and modernization. This scenario has been addressed extensively in the work of the Chilean social scientist Eduardo Devés-Valdés (2012), who mapped the emergence of transnational peripheral networks in different countries throughout the twentieth century. Devés-Valdés's work is exemplary in this regard because it makes us realize how the analysis of peripheral transnational networks can shed new light on ideas and theories which emerged within the Brazilian intellectual tradition.

I am not suggesting that we must leave the nation-state behind, but rather that we analyze it within a broader perspective; for example, investigating how certain ideas have emerged not from purely national dynamics, but also from displacements, diasporas, translations of reference works, and institutions that worked in a continental scope. I believe that this recent trend may in fact represent an expansion of the universe of studies about intellectual and cultural production beyond the more common themes related to the problem of national construction.

NOTE

¹ It should be noted that in his classic 1962 book, Gerschenkron published an essay that could be classified as "intellectual history," which was dedicated to an analysis of Russian economic thinking of the nineteenth century.

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