Introduction

This chapter is written by three friends and colleagues of Eduardo Ibarra-Colado. It is our reflection on his scholarship and ideas, and how working with him shaped our perspectives on organizations and organization studies. We have divided this chapter into three parts: we begin first with a chronological overview of Eduardo’s career and scholarship including his publications in Spanish; second we discuss some of the ideas and philosophies that animated Eduardo’s engagement with the field of management; and finally we each share an anecdote of our encounter with Eduardo and what they demonstrated of his values and particular personality.

Eduardo’s career: an overview

Eduardo’s career from a distance can appear similar to that of many other successful academics in Latin America, completing their doctoral education, establishing a publication record in dual languages, serving on editorial boards, and working with doctoral students. From a closer gaze it was also a career of bold critique and resistance.

Eduardo was Professor of Management and Organization Studies at the Department of Economic Production at the Autonomous Metropolitan University, Campus Xochimilco, and founder of the Laboratorio de Análisis Institucional del Sistema Universitario Mexicano (Laboratory for Institutional Analysis of the Mexican University System) (LAISUM) which produced and maintained the website for the most complete and detailed analysis of the development and growth of public universities in Mexico.

He held academic positions at three campuses of the Autonomous Metropolitan University, as, from 1981, Professor of Management and Organization Theory, Coordinator of the BA on Management, and Head of the Organization Studies Research Group at the Department of Economics; and Coordinator of the MA and PhD in Labor Studies at the Department of Sociology, in Campus Iztapalapa. He was the Founder and First Head of the Department of Institutional Studies (2005–2009) and Professor of Management and Organization Theory,
Department of Institutional Studies, Campus Cuajimalpa. In 2010 he was Visiting Fellow at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Harvard University.

Eduardo obtained his PhD in Sociology with Honours at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (1999) and received an award for the Best PhD Thesis in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2000. He was a National Researcher of the Mexican National System of Researchers, and regular member of the Mexican Academy of Sciences. His intellectual contributions are spread among numerous books, articles, editorial boards, research grants, conferences and associations, teaching, supervision and consultancies.

He published in the fields of Organization Studies and Higher Education Studies in México and abroad. Particularly notable are his contributions on power (Mito y poder en las organizaciones in 1984) and the Mexican higher education system (La universidad en México hoy: gubernamentalidad y modernización in 2001, for which he received the Research Award in Social Sciences and Humanities in 2003), and global management (Global Management: Universal Theories, Local Realities, with Steward Clegg and Luis Bueno in 1999). In 2006 his influential article ‘Organization Studies and Epistemic Coloniality in Latin America: Thinking Otherness from the Margins’, was published in Organization. The same issue of the journal also contained his important collaboration with the noted philosopher Enrique Dussel, ‘Globalization, Organization and the Ethics of Liberation’. This text was originally the address delivered by Dussel to the Asia-Pacific Researchers of Organizations (APROS) conference in 2003, in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico. Dussel worked with Ibarra-Colado in presenting the implication of his own philosophy of liberation for scholars of organizations.

These two articles, published in an internationally recognized journal, while reminding a generation of South American scholars of the hegemonic role of epistemic coloniality, also introduced Eduardo to many of us. It may seem superficial to observe that scholars in countries not so far apart from each other, functioning in sister languages such as Spanish and Portuguese, needed the global presence of an English-language journal such as Organization to acknowledge each other. Yet it is a reminder of the historical pattern of perceived superiority and recognition offered by knowledge published in English, a pattern we scholars continue to perpetuate in this region and outside it. Ironically enough Eduardo’s journal articles argued precisely that such linguistic hegemony prevailed.

In 2007, he received the Best Critical Management Studies (CMS) Paper Nominee for his paper ‘“Entrepreneurialization” of the University: Shadows of the US History on the Ongoing Mexican Reform’. The same year, Walter Mignolo, coordinator of the Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise Project, stated that

Ibarra-Colado makes a signal contribution as he unveils the logic of coloniality underneath current celebration of management; management as the key that opens all the doors toward a bright neo-liberal future. He sees, correctly in my view, ‘management’ as the new face of the logic of coloniality.

(Mignolo, 2007)

From 2008 onward, there were a variety of significant contributions by Eduardo in critical management studies and more specifically critical international management, as convenor, guest editor, author, and co-author. But one particular moment has special meaning to us, the article ‘Internationalization of management, neoliberalism and the Latin America challenge’ (Faria, Ibarro-Colado & Guedes, 2010) which marked the start of joint initiatives and projects at the
CMS and the Latin American and European Meeting on Organization Studies (LAEMOS). During this period as ties among the three of us with Eduardo grew, we particularly delighted in sharing and exploring the historic meaning of the concept of Latin America and the parochialism of the so-called ‘international’ domains within management. These ties also remind us of the poignancy in the title of one of his final publications, ‘Cómo comprender y transformar los Estudios Organizacionales desde América Latina y no morir en el intento’ (Ibarra-Colado, 2012) (‘How to understand and transform Organization Studies within Latin America and not die while trying’).

Across these projects as must be apparent by now, we see a thematic pattern, an argument on the need to struggle against, to bring forth, a set of ideas that offered an alternative view of organization studies, with a sensitivity to the history of Latin America and with an eye on social inequality, including that created by contemporary capitalism and the ideologies of business schools. The next section turns to this thematic pattern and fleshes out the guiding ideas in Eduardo’s work.

Guiding ideas

A particular set of ideas and philosophies appeared to characterize Eduardo’s research to the three of us. In this section we discuss four of them.

Firstly, the process of colonization and decolonization remains a vital influence on management theorizing. To Eduardo it was hardly coincidental that the directionality of management theorizing was oriented to the West, specifically towards the United States and Europe, such that production of theory occurred in their metropolitan centers and consumption of such theories dispersed outward to the peripheries of Latin America, South Asia, China, and elsewhere. The historical expansion of European societies, first towards the Americas, and then towards other continents, had transformed not only these societies, but also the way in which they were studied, assessed, and planned. The expansion had led to a differentiated and unequal configuration of the knowledge of societies, where the concepts, language, and evaluative standards, especially in the field of organization studies, rested in the historical centers of global capitalism, and were then applied as universal context-neutral tools to classify the societies that had been colonized by these very same centers.

Secondly, this process of colonialism had been elided and obscured within management studies. Few management scholars problematized colonization or discussed its influence on management theories and on the societies and organizations that such theories sought to explain. As a result of this silence, the trajectory of management knowledge appeared natural and inevitable, moving from Western Europe and the United States to Eastern Europe with the fall of communism and of the Soviet bloc in the 1990s, and then to the Global South as the pace of economic globalization quickened. This sense of historical inevitability strengthened a view of the South being somehow barren of management expertise and theories, requiring such specialized knowledge from the West. Crucially it was also taken for granted and deemed to be natural and inevitable that the language in which the knowledge would be offered was that of English.

Thirdly, this elision was part of a larger historical process. Eduardo’s particular contribution was to situate this elision within a regional historical trajectory, that of the creole colonization of South America by Spanish and Portuguese through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His collaboration with Enrique Dussel was particularly influential in this regard. Following Dussel, Eduardo argued that the creole colonization of South America brought with it an emphasis on
a particular set of views of what individuals, nature, and society should be. These were views that became symptomatic of European modernity and displaced existing indigenous beliefs and values. What were these views? The primacy of agency was placed in the individual. Following René Descartes, European thinkers during the Enlightenment saw human beings as divinely gifted with intelligence, with an ability to reason. Such ability separated into two parts, that of the corporeal entity that housed the individual and the brain that offered cognition and identity. Thus I think therefore I am. Such a view of the individual displaced local ways of imagining agency that did not emphasize individuality alone, nor a separation of corporeality from cognition, and instead sought forms of relationality and empathy.

Similarly the onrush of the conquistadors and settlers into South America brought with it a view of the natural world as directly available for human exploitation. Nature was understood as being present for conquest and use, a resource to be exploited for human ends. Another alternative view of nature was displaced in this colonial process, one sensitive to the interdependence of human beings with the natural world that sought to find meaning through nature and not solely by dominating it. Finally, European settler society was stratified in a particular way. Power rested with colonizers and an expectation of market society, of economically distinct ideas of work productivity, employment and wages. This in turn displaced other forms of stratifications apparent in indigenous South American society, based on kinship, personal charisma, or divinity.

Creole colonization therefore created a dual pull within these countries. There was a pull away from the locality itself, where the indigenous people were violently moved out of their homes, dispossessed, resettled, exterminated, and converted to Western modes of thinking and being. And there was also the pull towards a metropole, where cultural resonance and legitimacy rested in these centers, and not in the peripheries of the colonies themselves. To Eduardo, it was this dual pull that shaped profoundly the dissemination of management ideas and the manner in which they were incorporated in South America. In these ways colonialism and its aftermath remained a potent influence on the discipline of management.

Fourthly, engaging with this history was a critical move. Such engagement was in effect a critical project, where the effort of challenging existing disciplinary investments and theoretical positions, was to mark, even re-imagine alternative epistemes and ontologies for managers, as well as for those studying them. There was in effect a possibility of reconstructing the trajectory of management knowledge, so that this dual pull now became instead a dual push, of indigenes asserting their identity and needs, and therefore pushing against urban creole constructions, and of former colonies redefining their professional identities away from metropolitan pressures. It was this dual push, we believe, that marked the aspirations and bounds of Eduardo’s theoretical project.

Reflecting on Eduardo Ibarra-Colado

From 2008, Eduardo, Ana, and Alexandre worked together on the proposal of a CMS stream for the 2009 conference at Warwick University (although Eduardo could not be present due to institutional problems at his university). During this time, other South American scholars were being subject to hostile pressure at their institutions, at business schools in Chile and in Brazil, due to their research interests in critical studies. Critical management, depending on the particular university setting, was seen as irrelevant, marginal, or threatening the prevailing manner in which management education was to be conducted. Eduardo was always sympathetic to these many struggles and consistently argued for the idea that universities should be a locus
of shared knowledge and experiences, with a tolerance for multiple and different theoretical perspectives.

Eduardo’s ideas, concepts, and narrative style, especially in Spanish, always reminded his interlocutors that epistemic coloniality remained present and that a huge effort was required to overcome it, to credibly respect local realities and knowledge, in any effort of engagement, critique, or transformation. Each of us has vivid memories of Eduardo that remind us of his commitment to respecting local histories and realities. Ana and Alex recall first encountering Eduardo in Rio de Janeiro (II LAEMOS, 2008) and Buenos Aires (III LAEMOS, 2009). Through their encounters they were able to understand better the paradox that Latin America, usually represented as a cohesive whole, is in actuality incommunicable fragments whose scholarly representatives typically know of each other only through the intermediation of European and North American academics and journals. Ana recognizes especially that this sort of mutual solitude meant it took even longer for her to realize Eduardo’s contributions.

At the same time Ana and Alex recall his ability to be a powerful catalyst, to explain what was needed for us to think otherwise. As the keynote speaker at the Brazilian Academy of Management conference held in Rio de Janeiro in 2008, he was able to personally experience the distance and the depth of the epistemic coloniality embodied in the scholars present in that room (Ibarra-Colado, 2008). Despite a powerful address, the audience reacted quite critically to it. What was at issue to them was not the content of what Eduardo said, nor what could be accomplished together, it was rather the fact that he chose to speak in Spanish! The questioning that followed reflected confusion and discomfort concerning his choice of language. He accepted it all with tranquility, integrity, and politeness. In the following year, at the Third LAEMOS in Buenos Aires he appeared unsurprised during a fierce debate among Brazilian scholars on whether they were or were not Latin Americans. Naturally this was a debate conducted in English in front of a broader audience. (The irony would not have escaped Eduardo.) Consensus could not be reached that day, and we remain far from an accommodation since. But the informal conversations that followed in the humdrum and soulless lobby of the conference venue were vital and exciting ones, on the implications and possibilities for overcoming epistemic coloniality. The effort to smother linguistic differences and to render research in a global register in such conferences seemed nonsensical and a waste of time to Eduardo, though it did provide for encounters that encouraged many of us to take his views seriously. And indeed though the LAEMOS sessions were to be conducted, in English, some conveners did subvert this as a group, usually when the room comprised Spanish and/or Portuguese-speaking students and scholars.

Nidhi met Eduardo at the Third LAEMOS conference in Buenos Aires. Eduardo was co-convenor of the stream and had communicated with him, before the conference, in English. They had not met before, and their email exchanges had been in English. However just as the stream was about to begin, Eduardo turned to Nidhi and explained that with one exception (Nidhi) all the stream presenters were native Spanish and Portuguese speakers. It made sense therefore, to allow presenters to speak in their local language rather than compel them to speak in English. Would this be alright? Eduardo explained that LAEMOS guidelines stated quite clearly that all sessions should be in English, and that he did not agree with these guidelines. In this way Nidhi received an invaluable insight into epistemic coloniality, and thanks to Eduardo’s intervention, also increased his sensitivity to the two reigning European languages of South America.

When the news of Eduardo’s passing reached the wide circle of his readers, collaborators, admirers, colleagues, and students, many offered tributes to his memory. “Much more than his
achievements in print were his great accomplishments as a person: a man of great integrity … he was a scholar *par excellence* (Clegg, 2013). Others expressed their shock at the news: ‘Con gran pesar nos enteramos de la temprana muerte de nuestro amigo y colaborador’ (‘With great sadness we have learned of the sudden death of our friend and collaborator’, Rodríguez Gómez, 2013). There were commemorations: “Eduardo was a dear friend, a kind man, and is much missed, and we dedicate this special issue to him” (Cooke and Faria, 2013). There was a reflection on his legacy for organization studies at the LAISUM, for an alternative epistemic community. LAISUM was, in Eduardo’s vision, to be an open, free access laboratory to share knowledge, experiences, media, and other resources as a public good (Buendía Espinosa, 2013), and its tribute titled ‘Continuación y legado Eduardo Ibarra Colado (2013 – ∞)’ commemorates his visionary nature or, in his own words, ‘cosmovisión’ (Ibarra-Colado, 2013).

In Cuba, the Caribbean, and in parts of South America, a quote is recalled from Brecht’s play, *The Mother*, a quote that has smuggled into a variety of other media, including popular songs. The quote is that “there are those who struggle for a day and they are good … But there are those who struggle all their lives: these are the indispensable ones” (quoted in Reynolds, 1997: v). The quote reminds us of the importance of struggle, of the necessity to embed a life in a process of exploration, questioning, and resistance. Eduardo made great contributions to organizational studies, to critical management, and to critical international management as a scholar and as a practitioner. To the three of us he will remain *uno de los imprescindibles*, one of the indispensable ones, willing to commit to a lifetime of questioning, conflict, and struggle.

**Notes**

1 This paper was the Outstanding Paper Award Winner at the Emerald Literati Network Awards for Excellence 2011, co-authored with Alex Faria and Ana Guedes.

**References**


