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ESTRANGEIRAS: O CASO DE UMA EMPRESA NO SETOR AERONÁUTICO**

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ABSTRACT

Neocolonialism refers to relationships of superiority between two parties, as countries with different levels of economic development, which can occur in the daily practices of multinational corporations. The objective of this research was to investigate the process of acquisition of a company in the Brazilian aviation industry by a foreign company under the bias of neocolonialism. Based on qualitative research techniques aligned with the Critical Theory paradigm, primary and secondary data were collected, using semi-structured interviews and information obtained from news about the companies involved, the internationalization process, and organizational documents. Critical Discourse Analysis (ACD) was carried out, from which three categories of analysis emerged: (1) the foreign company's lack of consideration for Brazilian legislation (tax, labor, and environmental); (2) disregard for the technical capacity and knowledge of Brazilian professionals; and (3) interpersonal conflicts involving foreigners and Brazilians. The interviewees' discourse demonstrated their feeling of a devaluation by foreigners on the knowledge of Brazilian managers, while they adopted a subservient stance to foreign impositions, a characteristic of colonized countries. The easy acceptance of Brazilians under the determinations imposed by foreign controllers was manifested in their practices, including the belief that what comes from abroad is better or superior to that practiced in Brazil, as pointed out by the literature. Such signs of neocolonialist domination in the process of acquisition of the Brazilian company by the foreigner occurred even when the interviewees perceived the existing cultural differences and conflicts generated, however, they revealed such differences, expressing conformity with foreign discourses and practices.

Keywords: Neocolonialism; Internationalization; Acquisition of companies; Critical Discourse Analysis; Qualitative research

RESUMO

O neocolonialismo refere-se à relação de superioridade entre duas partes, como países com níveis de desenvolvimento econômico distintos, podendo ocorrer nas práticas cotidianas de corporações multinacionais. O objetivo deste trabalho foi, portanto, investigar o processo de aquisição de uma empresa da indústria aeronáutica brasileira por uma empresa estrangeira sob o viés do neocolonialismo. Com base em técnicas de pesquisa qualitativa alinhadas ao paradigma da Teoria Crítica, coletaram-se dados primários e secundários, utilizando-se entrevistas semiestruturadas e informações obtidas em notícias sobre as empresas envolvidas, o processo de internacionalização e documentos organizacionais. Realizou-se Análise Crítica de Discurso (ACD), a partir da qual emergiram três categorias de análise: (1) falta de consideração da empresa estrangeira pela legislação brasileira (fiscal, trabalhista e ambiental); (2) menosprezo pela capacidade técnica e conhecimento dos profissionais brasileiros; e (3) conflitos interpessoais envolvendo estrangeiros e brasileiros. O discurso dos entrevistados demonstrou a percepção de desvalorização dos conhecimentos dos gestores brasileiros pelos estrangeiros, ao mesmo tempo em que esses gestores adotaram uma postura subserviente às imposições estrangeiras, características de países colonizados. A fácil aceitação dos brasileiros quanto às determinações impostas pelos controladores estrangeiros manifestou-se em suas práticas, incluindo a crença de que o que vem do exterior é melhor ou superior ao praticado no Brasil, tal como apontado pela literatura. Tais sinais de dominação neocolonialista no processo de aquisição da empresa brasileira pela estrangeira deu-se quando os entrevistados percebiam as diferenças culturais existentes e os conflitos gerados, porém, relevaram tais diferenças, expressando conformidade com discursos e práticas estrangeiras.

Palavras-chave: Neocolonialismo; Internacionalização; Aquisição de empresas; Análise Crítica do Discurso; Pesquisa qualitativa.

INTRODUCTION

The opening of the Brazilian market in the early 1990s made clear the differences in performance, organization, and management of domestic companies in comparison to foreign competitors that began to operate in Brazil. Brazilian companies that were less able to compete internationally sought alternatives for their survival. Among the possibilities were the independent and late incorporation of management techniques and technologies similar to those used by competitors: association with new companies joining the Brazilian market, which bought new technologies and offered a consolidated customer base in the national territory, or being acquired by multinational companies that wanted to operate in the Brazilian market. All transitions occurred with shocks on different levels, such as organizational, cultural, and operational levels (Tanure; Patrus, 2011; Toledo, 2019).



Internationalization strategies, such as alliances between companies coming from countries with different levels of economic and technological development, can highlight neocolonial issues. Conceptually, neocolonialism refers to the continuity of relations of the dominance of Western colonialism by non-traditional means, i.e., that can be observed in the economic, political, cultural, and academic dimensions of colonized countries. Neocolonialism affects a nation's culture so that the values adopted by individuals and local organizations are not those from their native country, but the values of the colonizers (Frenkel; Shenhav, 2003; Quijano, 2000; Toledo, 2019; Young, 2007).

Some industries are fundamentally global, with characteristics that could contrast with neocolonial premises since standards and technical requirements are the same at the global level. The aeronautical market, for instance, is strongly related to regional, national, and continental economic development and has an international quality and operation standard. To provide services to aviation companies, independent aircraft maintenance companies need to meet the requirements of different countries regarding their technical, personnel, and facilities capacity. To ensure this level of service, acquisitions, mergers, and commercial partnerships are common among companies, resulting in the concentration of the industry in a few players at each stage of the production chain (Ferreira, 2009; Souza, 2012).

In general, when companies from less economically developed countries are acquired by foreign multinationals, leaders of those organizations may accept the determinations from more developed multinational partners believing that "what comes from abroad is better." Thus, neocolonialism is present, as observed in less economically developed countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Borim-de-Souza *et al.*, 2015; Caldas, 1997; Motta *et al.*, 2001; Woitas; Pires, 2016). Furthermore, the neocolonial discourse, the thesis of modernization, industrialization, and convergence are used as a justificative to impose North American and Eurocentric economic models to the rest of the world (McKenna, 2011).

Taking into consideration that, on the one hand, the theory of internationalization has been based mainly on cultural differences to explain conflicts in internationalization processes (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; Rodrigues; Child, 2012), on the other hand, it is necessary to highlight the neocolonialist stance in the internationalization of companies that have Brazil as a target country, even in well-developed global industries, such as aeronautics.



Thus, the present work is intended to **investigate the process of acquisition of a Brazilian company in the aeronautical industry by a foreign company under the bias of neocolonialism.** The main argument of this work is that, empirically, neocolonialism can present itself by ignoring the cultural and management differences between companies and also the legislation of the target country, since in internationalization strategies this may occur in an attempt to transform the cultural traits of these organizations by external characteristics.

This work has the potential contribution to broaden the theoretical discussion about the presence of neocolonialism in recent internationalization processes of Brazilian companies, by demonstrating that ignoring cultural and legal factors in conflicts in acquisition processes is inherent to neocolonialist behavior, which can be used for other fields of organizational analysis. Although the focus of the research was not on regional differences, the choice of a case study in which there are two operational bases in two regions of Brazil, with different behaviors and perceptions of Brazilian professionals, reinforced neocolonialism from European professionals, who had difficulty in understanding such regional differences in the country.

Among the practical contributions of this work, it highlights the empirical aspects of the transition between the national and multinational companies, where the “colonizing” organization disregards the “colonized” organization’s cultural and management aspects as if these didn’t exist or had little relevance. Knowing these factors in advance enables companies in the process of internationalization by merger or acquisition to avoid the devaluation of the national aspects or the overvaluation of the foreign ones, placing themselves in an equal position in the elaboration of a common organizational project. It should also be noted that internationalization and neocolonialism are related to the debate on development, presenting themselves as articulated elements. The development of this relationship consists of a field of knowledge (Theis *et al.*, 2022) and a field in dispute in the Bourdesian sense (Bourdieu; Wacquant, 1992), in which different actors put their capital at stake to exert or resist domination. The processes of internationalization and their relations with development, approached from the perspective of neocolonial studies, avoid the cultural and technical reductionism of the dominant approaches, and may point to perspectives of more sovereign internationalization processes for the so-called developing countries. On the



other hand, although relations between countries have been widely explored from perspectives that deal with the issue of imperialism in the countries from the global north, or with the perspectives of dependence (Marini, 2000; Frank, 1967), the neocolonial perspective is more forceful for the analysis of internationalization processes at the firm level, since it allows the researcher to lay bare the cultural and technical subterfuges concealed in the theoretical field to justify *the modus operandi* of multinational companies in their relations with companies from the countries from the global south.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used for this purpose (Fairclough, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Wodak, 2001, 2009; Chouliaraki, 2008) as a data analysis methodology, as it consists of a critical approach that considers connections between language and society, to understand the relationships between discourse, power, domination, and social inequalities (Bomfim, 2019; Chouliaraki, 2008; Cardoso, 2010; Melo, 2009; Salles, Dellagnelo, 2019).

In the meantime, this article is organized into five sections, in addition to this introduction. The second section presents a brief construction on colonialism and its role in capitalist expansion and the current economic dependence of underdeveloped countries on developed countries, as well as the cultural aspects present in the acquisition processes of Brazilian companies by foreign companies. The third section describes the research method. The fourth section focuses on the results obtained by this research, and, finally, the last section presents the final considerations, limitations, and contributions of this work for future research.

COLONIALISM AND NEOCOLONIALISM AS RESULTS OF THE EUROPEAN CAPITALISM EXPANSION

Domination processes exercised by European countries over Asian, African, and American countries are known as colonialism and imperialism and are widely debated in their multiple and inconstant meanings. Colonialism involves a real physical conquest, occupation, and administration of the territory of one country by another, while imperialism is the exercise of political and economic power of one country over another, without, necessarily, a direct physical occupation (Woitas; Pires, 2016; Young, 2007).



For Quijano (2000), colonialism is the relationship of direct, political, social, and cultural domination of Europeans over the conquered countries on all continents. In parallel with colonialism, and later, imperialism is characterized by the association of social interests between dominant groups (social classes or ethnicities) of countries unequally placed in an articulation of power, through institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and not by new conquests and occupations (Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Quijano, 2000; Silva; Abdalla, 2017; Young, 2007).

In modern Western colonialism, not only was there the extraction of wealth and the collection of taxes from the people and territories conquered, but also a connection between the West and its colonies through a structure in which there are unequal exchanges, in the same way that the process of industrialization operates unequally, making the colonies economically dependent on the colonialist nations (Dussel, 2000; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Toledo, 2019; Woitas; Pires, 2016). This balance made possible, in the past, the emergence of European capitalism, contributing, to its maintenance, the subjugation of the colonies, also in the cultural and ideological spheres (Dussel, 2000; Quijano, 2000). An important difference between modern Western colonialism and ancient empires is the economic dimension present today (Young, 2007).

The term neocolonialism came to be used after the period of decolonization of countries, mainly in Africa and Asia, which began in the middle of the twentieth century and which in a few decades led to the formal political independence of almost all European colonies. Newly independent countries realized that, despite their political independence, they remained economically dependent on their former colonizers, as a result of the deep economic restructuring carried out during the colonial period (Silva; Abdalla, 2017; Toledo, 2019; Woitas; Pires, 2016; Young, 2007).

The incomplete independence of the former colonies was evident since the colonial period, when the colonized were empowered to participate in the administration of their country, as long as it was coordinated by the colonial sovereign power and with limited autonomy (Cooke, 2004; Young, 2007). Neocolonialism, therefore, refers to the continuity of Western colonialism through non-traditional means, including economic and political dimensions, but also Western control of the cultural dimension of these countries (Frenkel; Shenhav, 2003; Quijano, 2000; Silva; Abdalla,



2017; Toledo, 2019; Young, 2007). Both colonial administration and development management are fundamentally interventions by developed countries in the operations of developing or underdeveloped states and societies (Silva; Abdalla, 2017; Toledo, 2019).

The roots of the 21st-century management system of multinational corporations lie in the way the mother country administered the colonies. Modern production management techniques were used in the colonies before being applied in the metropolis, based on the premise that the colonizer is the cultural model to be followed. The differentiation between Westerners/civilized and “barbaric savages” for labor would be, according to the colonizer, in “biological traits” of the savage, making him an “undesirable worker” (Frenkel; Shenhav, 2006, p. 863).

In the hegemonic context of administration, cultures different from those of the West and North America are considered exotic and inferior in comparison to exclusively Western administration, which is worthy of being imitated by the rest of the world (Frenkel; Shenhav, 2006). This distortion became most evident in the era of neocolonialism, when “control of the colonized was transferred from the military commanders and state bureaucrats into the hands of managers from multinational corporations” (Frenkel; Shenhav, 2006, p. 866). In this sense, it is worth stating that neocolonialism is based on a difference between “superiors” and “inferiors” regarding the daily practices of many multinational corporations, as a result of the evolution of organizations over time, whose specific cultural aspects of their home country can be evidenced in organizational strategies, such as those of internationalization.

CULTURAL ASPECTS OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS PROCESSES IN BRAZIL

Brazilian companies’ internationalization strategies and globalization involve cultural, organizational, and national differences that may hinder the work of contemporary managers, since this may require the adoption of management practices originating from other cultures (Chu; Wood Jr., 2008; Tanure; Patrus, 2011; Silva; Abdalla, 2017).

The growing international trade reveals differences between national cultures that result in different organizational and management practices. The more culturally distant two countries are, the more distant their organizational characteristics will be, on average, and adjustments are necessary to



combine administrative and cultural practices between companies (Kogut; Singh, 1988; Carpes *et al.*, 2015). This, in turn, alters the organizational culture, present in the visible and conscious practices of the worker and his perception of the company environment (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010).

The resistance to change is greater when cultural and institutional differences are not considered throughout the process (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010; Johanson; Vahlne, 1990; Tanure; Patrus, 2011). Organizational cultures cannot be manipulated at an organization's will, especially a multinational one, during the acquisition of companies from countries with national and organizational cultures different from its own (Motta, 2003).

In the Brazilian case, the valorization of foreigners has influenced the management of companies for decades and is seen by Guerreiro Ramos (1983) as the result of a historical-social conditioning, "masked by an alleged search for modernity" (Motta *et al.*, 2001, p. 61). The problem with Brazil is that both the colonizer and the colonized do not feel and see Brazil as their homeland, which welcomes them and gives them security, and so they continue to look for a cultural matrix to serve as a guide. There is the "valorization of what is foreign, belittling what is Brazilian", because one feels "proud to identify with the foreigner and, thus, deny their Brazilianness" (Motta *et al.*, 2001, p. 67).

The set of different people, languages, and cultures that formed the Brazilian society makes it difficult to have a feeling of national unity, combined with the admiration that Brazilians have for life in other countries, and there is, for example, even pride in those who have foreign passports, due to European heritage (Motta *et al.*, 2001). The colonization of the country did not end with the arrival of the Portuguese royal family to Brazil in 1808, being crowned by its proclamation of independence in 1822, and the transition to the Republic in 1889. Even after Brazil's independence from Portugal, the foreign reference model switched to the Great Britain model. Since then, the valorization of the foreign way of life has been seen as a way to bring Brazil to modernity and the developed world (Bresler, 2000; Motta *et al.*, 2001). The importation of external references in the Brazilian social, cultural, economic, and organizational reality is linked to the myth of the "miracle worker" (Caldas, 1997, p. 74) and the belief that "everything that comes from abroad is better" (Caldas, 1997, p. 73).

Foreign references have always been adopted, which carry within them the idea of modernity, not only by countries such as Brazil but also by others in Latin America and peripheral countries (Ramos,



1983; Bresler, 2000). The Foreigner figure, in addition to being an archetypal construction of the Brazilian imaginary, is also a convenient construction, present in “all organizations in Brazil, regardless of national origin, as well as in the study and theorization of these organizations”, without criteria and critical analysis of the validity and applicability to the Brazilian organizational reality (Caldas, 1997, p. 86).

These factors contribute to the internationalization processes of Brazilian companies to have characteristics oriented to the management system practiced by economically developed countries (Center), disregarding peculiarities of peripheral countries, such as Brazil. In internationalized Brazilian companies, this can result in internal conflicts attributed to cultural differences between the members of the Brazilian company and the Eurocentric management system adopted due to internationalization. It is necessary, however, to recognize that the use of the cultural dimension as a justification for these conflicts reveals traces of neocolonial cultural domination. After all, is it possible to identify neocolonialism through the maintenance of colonialist characteristics in Brazilian companies acquired by foreign companies?

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This qualitative research is guided by the Critical Theory paradigm, aligned with the Constructivism and Dialectics epistemological view, which influenced the way the data were collected and analyzed. The articulation of Critical Theory in qualitative research is possible because it is characterized by the inductive study of socially constructed realities, focusing on meanings, ideas, and practices, considering the point of view of the research subject, without losing focus on the broader context of which the research is part (Alvesson; Deetz, 2000).

Alvesson and Deetz (2000) argue that every research is somehow critical when it does not accept claims without verifying their arguments first. However, in the case of Critical Social Science, and more specifically Management Critical Studies, it is necessary to develop deeper critical thinking, as described by Brookfield (1987 *apud* Alvesson; Deetz, 2000).

The Social and critical research is oriented to challenge the established order and not to agree with it, showing existing tensions that are neither recognized nor studied, encouraging questioning rather than agreement. Management Critical Studies, therefore, are based on the view



that to manage is “to fulfill activities that shape the general orientation of an organization and exert influence on people within the organization and in its environment” (Alvesson; Deetz, 2000, p. 05).

Thus, the selected case was analyzed in a descriptive and explanatory way, understanding that it is a system of social relations (Stake, 2005) that has borders but does not have the limits of an organization. The interrelationship between the researcher and the research object built the case.

The choice of the analyzed case was justified by specific criteria, namely:

- A Brazilian Company that had been acquired by, or has gone through a merger process with, a multinational company from North America or Europe;
- The internationalization process (by merger or acquisition) must have occurred between 2005 and 2015;
- It has to be possible to learn about the company’s internationalization process through testimonials, news, or a history on its web pages;
- Those involved in the internationalization process have to be still available to be interviewed;
- The willingness to participate in the research, with the guarantee of its confidentiality, both about the name of the companies and the identity of the interviewees.

Primary data, such as semi-structured interviews with former employees of the analyzed company, and secondary data, such as news about the companies involved and the internationalization process and available organizational documents, were used. The interviews were personally conducted, at a place and time convenient for each interviewee, between May and July 2017, lasting between 1 hour and 2 hours, and were recorded and transcribed for later analysis. The construction of the interview script occurred as it was carried out, where the points of interest to be explored became evident. The following topics were addressed: the interviewee’s trajectory in the company, professional background, perceptions about the transition process from the national company to the multinational, contact with the foreign company, and circumstances of their company’s dismissal.

The analyzed company, called in this article Beta company, belongs to the maintenance sector in the aeronautical industry, having units in two different regions of Brazil (Southeast and



South), and was acquired by a European multinational, here called Alfa company. The analysis focused on the acquisition process, and the characterization of the employees interviewed from the Beta company is presented in Chart 1. This qualitative research is guided by the paradigm of Critical Theory, aligned with Constructivism and Dialectics epistemological views, which influenced the way the data were collected and analyzed. The articulation of Critical Theory in qualitative research is possible because it is characterized by the inductive study of socially constructed realities, focusing on meanings, ideas, and practices, considering the point of view of the research subject, but without losing focus on the broader context of which the research belongs to (Alvesson; Deetz, 2000).

Chart 1 | Employees interviewed by the Beta company.

Name	Gender	Age	Hierarchy	How long worked in the company	Interview length
A1	F	35-40	Supervision	6,5 years	1h
A2	M	50-55	Management	30 years	1h30
A3	F	35-40	Supervision	10 years	1h
A4	F	41-45	Operational support	17 years	1h20
A5	M	56-60	Management	30 years	2h
A6	M	35-40	Operational support	12 years	1h30

Source: survey data (2017).

The data were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Wodak, 2001, 2009; Chouliaraki, 2008). The influence of the management discourse (McKenna, 2011) and, above all, neocolonial discourse, on the internationalization process of the Beta company, from the period immediately before its internationalization until the conclusion of the process, was analyzed considering the perception of the Brazilian employees who took part in this transition process.

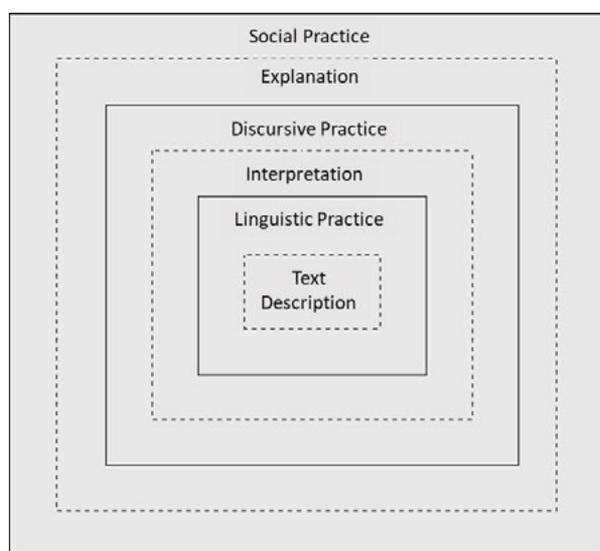
A critical approach to discourse takes into account connections between language and society, to understand the relationships between discourse, power, domination, and social inequalities (Bomfim, 2019; Chouliaraki, 2008; Cardoso, 2010; Melo, 2009; Salles, Dellagnelo, 2019). This is a more effective resource if used in conjunction with other methods of analysis in an analytical context (Misoczky, 2010). It is possible to analyze structural or opaque relations of domination, discrimination, power, and control considering the manifestations in language (Wodak, 2001).



Discourse is the use of language as a social practice, and its analysis is a way of showing how texts function within sociocultural practices (Fairclough, 2001a, 2001b). “Discourse is always politically and ideologically invested [...] and the orders of discourses can be seen as linguistic variants of organization and social control” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 23-24). It is structured by social reality and, at the same time, structures it (Wodak, 2009), establishing its dialectical character (Barros, 2008; Cardoso, 2010; Fairclough, 2001a, 2003).

Figure 1 schematizes the dimensions of discourse and its textual analysis presented by Fairclough (2001) and adapted by Barros (2008), used to guide the analysis of the collected data. There are three stages of text analysis: description, interpretation, and explanation.

Figure 1 | Dimensions of discourse and dimensions of textual analysis.



Source: Barros (2008, p. 202), adapted from Fairclough (2001a, p. 101).

In the description stage, the analysis of linguistic practice predominates, in which the object is the text, and it is possible to apprehend values linked to knowledge, beliefs, social relations, and social identities that are present (Barros, 2008; Fairclough, 2001a, 2001b; Melo, 2009). In this research, the reports obtained from the interviews and the news from newspapers and specialized magazines make up the source of these texts.

In the interpretation stage, there is a predominance of discourse analysis as a discursive practice, and three questions are addressed (Barros, 2008; Fairclough, 2001a):

- What is the context in which the participants are inserted and that influences their interpretations?
- What kind of discourse is being employed? Can it be seen as influenced by other discourses (managerialist, globalization)?
- Are there differences between the answers to the first two questions? Does the discursive practice perceived by the interviewees correspond to what they say?

Finally, in the explanatory stage, discourse is analyzed as a social practice, based on these questions (Fairclough, 2001a, 2001b; Barros, 2008):

- What are the social determinants that are established in power relations at different levels (situational, institutional, and societal) that are evident in the discourse?
- Is there an ideological character present in the participants' speeches (interviewees and news reports)?
- What are the effects of this discourse on existing power relations? Do they contribute to the intensification of social struggles (in this case, between Brazilians and foreigners)?

Based on the analysis of the interviewees' answers, three categories of analysis were elaborated, which reflect predominant themes in their statements: (1) Lack of consideration of the foreign company by Brazilian legislation (fiscal, labor, and environmental); (2) Contempt for the technical capacity and knowledge of Brazilian professionals; and (3) Interpersonal conflicts involving foreigners and Brazilians.

In the next section, the case analyzed is described, with a brief characterization of the aeronautical sector, the insertion of the companies analyzed in this context, and the acquisition process. Then, the discourse analysis is performed, and the results obtained in each category mentioned before are presented.

SECTOR AND CASE CHARACTERIZATION

The Beta company belongs to the aeronautical industry and specializes in the maintenance of aircraft and aeronautical components. In this segment, the intensive use of capital and knowledge is a characteristic, as there is a dependence on a highly qualified labor force, which is constantly audited and trained, and also the exchange rate variation is relevant, as there are both products and labor exportation and importation of necessary inputs for its operations (Ferreira, 2009; Souza, 2012).

The aeronautical industry is characterized by a high concentration of tangible and intangible assets in the hands of a few agents (Ferreira, 2009). The certification for the operation of aeronautical maintenance companies is granted by the National Civil Aviation Agency (ANAC), and is specific to each activity to be carried out (ANAC, 2020; Machado *et al.*, 2015; Souza, 2012), including applying to international aeronautical authorities, if the aircraft or component belongs to a foreign customer.

Originally, the Beta company emerged as a maintenance department of a Brazilian airline, established at the end of the 1930s. It was spun off into an independent company in 2001, and in 2005 it was acquired by the Alfa company, a European airline. From then on, the old organizational structure began to undergo constant changes, aiming to adapt to the new market reality and societal control, starting with the reduction of its bases of operation, from three to two bases (Base 1, in the South of Brazil, and Base 2, in the Southeast of the country).

The interruption of the Brazilian airline operations in May 2006, due to the serious financial crisis it had been facing since the beginning of the 21st century, impacted the operations of the Beta company immediately. Aircraft Maintenance service accounted for 70% of its revenue, resulting in monthly delays in the payment of salaries. The employees of the Beta company had difficulty adapting to the new reality, generating a climate of instability in the company, which was faced by the management with administrative measures received by the employees with increasing discredit.

Since December 2006, when an employee of the Alfa company assumed the presidency of the Beta company, the process of organizational transformation accelerated, and several managers who had held their positions before the sale of the Beta company were dismissed. The justification for the dismissals, according to the interviewees' reports, was that the Alfa company considered them to be little committed to the new management of the company and brought with them the old culture of



the Brazilian airline, passed down from generation to generation by employees, even though many of them were hired after 2001.

The instability and insecurity among employees grew. In January 2009, the Beta company was transformed into a subsidiary of the Alfa company group and adopted, in Brazil, the same corporate name as the Alfa company. Staff cuts and replacements in the management structure occurred, as the previous operating procedures were deemed ineffective and replaced with new ones, in line with the reality of the European counterpart of the Beta company.

For the former employees interviewed, at that time, the implementation of the career plan that ignored the history of each employee within the company, with constant cuts in the workforce that added to the loss of qualified employees to other companies, generated uncertainties regarding the future of the company and made the environment more turbulent. A nostalgic discourse began to be shared by the management itself. Throughout the transition, Brazilians were treated with intolerance, contempt, and irony, in the view of the employees interviewed. Another reason for dissatisfaction raised in the interviews was the progressive decrease in the benefits they had when working at the Brazilian airline:

They implemented the career plan at [Base 3], and they warned everyone, here at [Base 1] they didn't warn anyone, because they were there (sic). (...) When the career plan came out here, man, I remember that I saw all the mechanics surrounding me so I could explain something that I didn't know was being implemented... The problem, the problem is that the guys put something else, the translation of the Europeans, the artificer... then I went there at [Base 3], the structural staff at [Base 3], 50% of the personnel did not have a license [as a mechanic, issued by ANAC], here at [Base 1], 90% of them had a license... Then they went there and said "No, only 50% of personnel need to have a license, the rest need to be an assistant", they wanted someone with a license, they wanted to turn them into an assistant... So, they didn't understand... they didn't understand until now that they couldn't lower their salary... There, in Europe, you can lower your salary, not here in Brazil. (Interviewee A5).

The main shock was the loss of identification with the Brazilian airline, which everyone was proud to work at in the maintenance sector until it became the Beta company. When, in 2009, the company's identity reached its definitive and current form, "Now I got it". In the words of Interviewee A6, "It was like the Portuguese arriving at Brazil and forcing the Indians to stop worshipping their gods and Christianizing them." The Alfa company eliminated any memory of the Beta company as part of a Brazilian airline so they, under European control, could prosper under its direct command.



Cultural differences between the two bases of operation of the Beta company, as they are located in different regions of Brazil (South and Southeast) and have different colonization and development, generated mixed reactions in each base. At the Southeast base, people chose not to clash with the Alfa company managers, accepting their recommendations but not carrying them out. At the Southern base, officials carried out the recommendations but expressed their disagreement in doing so. The imposition of unique solutions for culturally diverse bases revealed a difficulty for Europeans to understand the cultural diversity of Brazil, present in both bases.

In a note from the news portal NewsAvia (Fernandes, 2014), when reproducing an article published in the newspaper *Diário Econômico*, from Portugal, it is reported that the Alfa company had again reduced the number of workers of the Beta company in October 2013, to make the Brazilian unit viable. The justification of the Alfa company would be the need to adapt the size of the Beta company's workforce to the needs of the market. In 2013, Beta reduced losses by around 18.6 percent, with losses of 41 million euros, compared to a negative result of 50.4 million euros recorded in 2012. Between 2005 and 2015, the company Beta went from 5,000 employees to 2,000, or less, either due to staff cuts, layoffs, or Voluntary Dismissal Plans (PDV).

Among the interviewees, there were two types of positioning regarding the acquisition of the Beta company by Alfa. A favorable position for the acquisition of the Brazilian company by the foreign company, intending new perspectives and management techniques coming from abroad, was notably found in the female interviewees, due to the historical predominance of male employees in the company and the overvaluation of seniority. It should be remembered, however, that a sign of neocolonialist domination is the impression that everything that comes from abroad is better (Caldas, 1997), making explicit the image of the superiority of the foreigner. Dissatisfaction with the treatment given to women and young people in a work environment dominated by men and older people led the interviewees to expect change, combined with the notion of the foreigner's superiority. However, this was not evident among male interviewees, for whom Brazilian managers were incompetent and who should learn "how to work" from the Alfa team.

In the perception of the interviewees, there was no equal treatment between employees of the same hierarchical level of the Brazilian and European companies. Brazilian managers were treated



as inferiors in comparison to their European peers, even explicitly, based on the statements of foreign managers. Few representatives of the European headquarters, upon knowing the reality of the two bases, saw the capacity of Brazilian managers to deal with specific problems of the local reality and the company's situation. This perception did not echo in the Alpha company and Brazilian attempts to suggest improvements for both companies were promptly dismissed by the European headquarters.

Yes, because the [European] processes were undoubtedly different processes from the processes we had at [Beta Company]. So, all the processes we had were wrong and all their processes were right [...]. So, it's no use 'oh, let's implement the system of [headquarters of the European Controller] here even if the system is not going to comply with Brazilian legislation'. That was hard, it was complicated. The decision was not like this: 'Let's study processes to change', it was 'Let's change to these processes' (sic) (Interviewee A2).

On September 18, 2018, the Alfa company closed the activities of Base 1 of the Beta company, leaving only Base 3, which ended its operations at the beginning of 2019, when the activities of the Beta Company were completely closed in Brazil.

ANALYSIS OF THE ACQUISITION PROCESS THROUGH CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

There are traces of neocolonialist domination in the acquisition of the Brazilian company by the foreign company, as shown in the analyses presented below. The discursive practice found during the interviews leads to the interpretation of the context in which the interviewees are inserted and the answer to the questions proposed by Fairclough (2001) (Chart 2). On the other hand, the analysis of discourse as a social practice aimed to explain the process in which the interviewees are inserted (Chart 3). Finally, the reports are analyzed based on the categories that emerged during the interviews (Chart 4).

Chart 2 | Context in which the interviewees are inserted.

Analysis Category	Analysis
The context in which the participants are inserted and that influences their interpretations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All employees owe obedience to the acquiring company, even if they disagree with the decisions made. Management of internal conflicts. Limited agency capacity, even for those in management positions.
Type of discourse being employed and influence of other discourses (managerialist, globalization).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Globalization, which understands the acquisition as beneficial (female interviewees). Managerialist discourse (male interviewees in management positions): they believed they had the power to influence decisions due to their positions and knowledge. A single speech that was out of tune with the group demonstrated awareness of the position of being oppressed, both by Brazilian and European management, drawing parallels between the acquisition of the company by a European group and the colonization of Brazil by Portugal.

Source: survey data (2017).



Chart 3 | Discourse as a social practice.

Analysis Category	Analysis
Social determinants that are present in the form of the discourse analyzed.	Relationship of economic domination of the Europeans over the Brazilians.
Presence of an ideological character in the participants' statements.	Although the interviewees raised the issue of gender, even if subtle, only one interviewee presented a posture of recognition of his oppressed posture, unable to fight against the situation and seeing as the only alternative the dismissal of the company.
Effects of this discourse on existing power relations and its contribution to the intensification of social struggles (in this case, between Brazilians and foreigners).	The Brazilian management of the Beta company assumes the posture of a legitimate representative of the Alfa company, taking control of its agenda within the company, even after all the European representatives have left, maintaining the figure of European domination over the Brazilian organization.

Source: survey data (2017).

Table 4 | Criteria for assessing the presence of neocolonialist domination in the Beta company.

Criteria	Description
Lack of consideration by the foreign company of Brazilian legislation (fiscal, labor, environmental).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived during the launch of the career and salary plan implemented in Brazil in 2009, when the company did not seek to follow the denominations of professional categories existing in the Brazilian context. • During the implementation of the management control system, which was not adequate to the Brazilian tax legislation. • Dissenting opinion of the interviewees: one interviewee speaks of an improvement in following the aeronautical regulations from other countries, brought about by the practice of the European Quality Manager. However, the aeronautical industry has regulations established by bodies based in developed countries, and all companies in this field in the world need to adapt these external rules to their realities. The fact that the controller is European and has influence in the establishment of these rules reinforces the presence of neocolonialism, interfering in the legal autonomy of airlines around the world.
Contempt from the European Company regarding both the technical capacity of Brazilian professionals to present solutions and their knowledge of the market.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present in the statements of the interviewees at the management level and in the symbology used by the interviewee at the lowest hierarchical level. • European representatives uninterruptedly criticized the actions of Brazilian managers and technicians, showing a lack of willingness to listen to them. Influenced by the initial view that they were unaware of the diversity of Brazilian colonization and culture, they took their country of origin as their standard, in an attitude of superiority. • The discrediting of Brazilian suggestions by the European headquarters, a fact that culminated in the resignation of one of the managers. It recalls the figure of the hereditary captaincies of Portugal in Brazil, during the initial years of its colonization, when the tenants had autonomy to administer their captaincies, as long as they sent the due taxes to the Portuguese Crown. • The company Beta does not seem to have taken into account the growth scenario of Brazilian aviation predicted until the year 2020, presented by the media portal Meio Aéreo (2014).



Properly interpersonal conflicts involving foreigners and Brazilians.

- Conflicts exist at all hierarchical levels, to varying degrees.
- The interviewees who had greater contact with their European colleagues reported that they were “culturally backward” and that they took professional disagreements to the personal level.
- Personal and professional differences were accompanied by other characteristics and conflicts typical of neocolonial domination.

Source: survey data (2017).

When internationalization occurs with the domination of the economically developed partner (buyer or major shareholder), disregarding previous experiences of the acquired company and the legislation of the focus country, in addition to the acceptance and naturalization of the superiority of the foreigner, consciously or not, there is a relationship of neocolonial domination (Borim-de-Souza *et al.*, 2015; Woitas; Pires, 2016; Young, 2007).

This is facilitated in the case of Brazil, since its historical formation, the acceptance that the external is better has been naturalized (Motta, 2003; Woitas; Pires, 2016). The discourse of globalization, which reduces and even eliminates barriers and asserts that a single mode of management can lead to economic progress (Cooke, 2004; McKenna, 2011; Woitas; Pires, 2016), normalizes these impositions as something acceptable and even desirable. This acceptance is perceptible in the statements of the interviewees of the Beta company, especially due to the disappointment when the expected changes in the company’s management did not happen, reminding the son who has not yet found the father figure, as Bresler (2000) points out.

As can be seen in the analysis of the interviews, the employees of the Beta company were outraged at not being treated as equals to their European partners, but they are still grateful to the Alfa company for having kept the Beta company running, even with negative financial results.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was **to investigate the process of acquisition of a company in the Brazilian aeronautical industry by a foreign company under the bias of neocolonial domination.** Built on the argument that neocolonial domination can be based on the disregard of cultural and management differences in companies, tending to overvalue the foreign in comparison to the national, the research analyzed the case of the Beta company, a Brazilian company in the aviation sector, which was acquired by a foreign company at the beginning of the 21st century.



Conflicts were reported between the new foreign controllers and Brazilian employees, especially those who held management positions in these companies. If the economic advantages of the Alfa company in acquiring the Beta company were clear, as well as the existing proximity according to the cultural dimensions of Hofstede, why did the Brazilian company take about three years to be taken over, in fact, by the Alfa company, changing the name and identity of the Beta company? The premises of Organizational Culture, and how to proceed in the adaptation of these different cultures in internationalization processes, may try to offer explanations for this type of result, but even so, they will not consider the complexity of the issues raised by the interviewees in their entirety.

The explanation for the results of this internationalization process via the acquisition of a Brazilian company by a foreign company, as well as the resulting conflicts, gains new light if analyzed considering the posture of neocolonialism. Reflected in the management practices described in the research, neocolonialism can have implications originating from the influence of dominant nations (and their corporations) on the culture of dominated countries (as well as acquired companies), which extend from the economic and political sphere to a nation's culture and values. Aspects related to neocolonial domination resulted in a loss of labor, customers, and market share in the years following the acquisition.

In the relations between companies from different countries, as in the presented case, neocolonialism can be expressed by the ease with which leaders of Brazilian organizations come to accept the determinations imposed by the controllers (European and North American), simply because they believe that what comes from abroad is better, as pointed out by the literature. In addition, they can adopt the discourse of globalization as a justification to promote changes in organizational habits and practices, as reported by the interviewees.

In the case of a power relationship based on neocolonial domination, eventual conflicts can be suffocated or managed, not being clearly visible to those who are dominated, not meaning that they do not exist, but rather that they are latent. In addition, Brazilian companies can also accept the determinations of foreign companies that acquire them, since there is a perception among managers that foreigners are superior and more efficient in competing in the international market, indicating a subservient posture to foreign impositions, a characteristic of colonized countries. The behavior of the Alfa company, showing disrespect for the history, the capacity of the Beta company, and also concerning labor and tax legislation,



reflects the fragility of the Brazilian system in defending the application of national law in companies installed in its territory.

Although specific factors inherent to the regional differences in Brazil were not the object of this research, it was evident that such differences were disregarded by the managers of the Alfa company throughout the process of internationalization of the Beta company, since, despite the distinct behaviors demonstrated by the professionals of the regions where the company operates in Brazil, they were not treated differently by the Alfa company throughout the process.

Considering the universe of this paper, it can be concluded that there are signs of neocolonialist domination in this process of acquisition of the Beta company by the Alfa company. This neocolonial aspect remained hidden for most of the interviewees, since most of the reports express conformity with the managerialist and globalization discourses, which justify these processes, regardless of the existing cultural differences and the conflicts generated by revealing such differences.

The adherence to managerialist and globalizing discourses, even perceiving negative aspects resulting from the domination exercised, can be seen as a result of the influence of the literature on administration, management, and international business, influenced by North American managerialism and disseminated in business schools and executive training courses in Brazil. Over the years, there has been an apparent normalization of neocolonial domination processes in companies acquired by foreigners, even in Brazilian companies that still seek international insertion through association with multinationals. This submission may be covered up by an opportunistic desire to gain experience and scale with this association, although there may be a loss of identity and culture of the organizations making this move.

This research was limited to the analysis of a single case, and it was not possible to generalize its results to other internationalization actions involving mergers and acquisitions of companies of different nationalities. In terms of data collection and analysis, this topic is delicate, as it addresses situations of submission and oppression in business relationships and involves the complexities of individuals and their roles in the organizational context. However, it is necessary that, in a gradual and non-generalized way, this theme be investigated, so that the signs of neocolonialism do not remain naturalized or unnoticed by those who are immersed in the process. Thus, it is possible to attribute an external, critical, and attentive look to the present discourses and the conflicts existing in the internationalization of companies, whether these aspects are latent or not.



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