



Contemporary Russia: A dialogue between English School and Constructivism

Rússia Contemporânea: Um diálogo entre a Escola Inglesa e o Construtivismo

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It is important (...) to avoid taking states for granted by assuming that they are preformed entities that then interact in a society of states. Instead, we should acknowledge the fact that international society itself plays a crucial role in constituting and legitimating particular forms of political community. On the other hand, however, it is equally important to avoid societal structuralism and to resist the temptation to imply that states are simply constituted by international society. States and other forms of political community have a degree of agency and play an important role in constructing, sometimes deliberately, the societal structures that in turn constitutes and legitimates particular forms of agency.

Alex Bellamy, 2009, p.15.

Abstract

A dialogue between English School and constructivism is fruitful within contemporary world. As one of its important actors, Russia poses a challenge for International Relations when it comes to understand and forecast its behavior nowadays. The article, thus, seeks to analyze this issue by combining concepts from both theoretical contributions.

Keywords: *Russia; English School; Constructivism; Foreign Policy Analysis*

Sumário

Um diálogo entre Escola Inglesa e Construtivismo pode ser proveitoso no mundo atual. Como um de seus importantes atores, compreender o comportamento da Rússia é um desafio para as Relações Internacionais. O artigo, então, busca analisar essa questão combinando conceitos de ambas as contribuições teóricas.

Palavras-chave: *Rússia; Escola Inglesa; Construtivismo; análise de política externa*

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As the contemporary society life management milestone, the state can be the main character, or, at least, frames most of these cooperation and conflict processes at international arena. Nevertheless, they are not the only ones, neither there is a consensus on how to qualify them. The centrality of agency in Foreign Policy Analysis tries to overcome its dichotomy with structure.² The focus on decision-making process enables reflection on how a specific individual using his capacity to individually act or while acting collectively is capable of shaping international relations direction. Theoretical perspectives as constructivism and the English School collaborate for building such bridges more consistently since they are able to think under a sociological umbrella.

Here, the purpose is to briefly sketch a possible dialogue between English School and constructivism that would be applied to comprehend how contemporary Russian foreign policy mobilizes the country identitarian forces by defending an alternative political system against the dominant Western liberal model, that is, the defense of a Slavic democracy. The hypothesis is that such a homogenization strategy within the domestic debate is transferred to international speech as a tool for consolidating Russian role as a norm maker concerning the post-Cold War international society constitutive principle. At a first glance, it will be discussed the main theoretical concepts borrowed from a dialogue between the English School and constructivism – international society, identity, and interest. Last but not least, the empirical object – Russia today, will be discussed in order to demonstrate some brief final considerations on this combined theoretical framework potential.

2. This article aim is no to propose a full Foreign Policy Analysis model. Rather, it attempts to combine theoretical elements from English School and constructivism that would enable a better comprehension on Russia behavior in post-Cold War international society.

English School, constructivism and foreign policy analysis

The English School mainly works with three core concepts – international system, international society, and world society; and seeks to contribute for the debate based on theoretical and methodological pluralism (LITTLE, 2000). The debate on international society under rationalism is one of the central topics analyzed by English School. Manning (1975) considers international society articulated by state leaders for giving meaning to their behavior when it comes to relations with other countries. It would encompass, for the author, a peculiar social dynamics between peoples and organizations, as Linklater and Suganami (2006) point out. In a similar sense, Bull and Watson (1984, p.1) detailed the concept as

(...) a group of states (or, more generally, a group of independent political communities) which not merely form a system, in the sense that the behavior of each is a necessary factor in the calculations of the others, but also have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their common interest in maintaining these arrangements.

The departure idea is that international society is a social construction. Therefore, states shape it when they interact within the foreign arena and are at once shaped by it paralleling what happens domestically with their society. Nevertheless, this should not mean a straightforward analogy between domestic and international societies. Linklater and Suganami (2006) recognize that international institutions where states shared norms and values exist have their own nature built upon their historical specificity.³ It is not possible to understand international society as something outside states practices.

3. It seems still pertinent here to endorse Tim Dunne (1998) discussion on John Rawls concept on society.

They are consubstantiated in these international society institutions. Buzan (2004) resumes Wight (1992) debates and remembers that the principles which organize international society can be changed from the Westphalia political equality model, to the suzerainty inequality model, and to the (neo)medieval functional difference between states. However, the 20th century international society is uncertain, what makes the reflection on its actors behavior more relevant and innovating. With this on mind, Ian Clark (2005) disagrees with the pluralist-solidarist dichotomy and asserts that international society is rather legitimist, and this was drift from the fundamental normative principle of a given international society.

Legitimacy original meaning comes from Latin, and refers literally to the quality of being in accordance with law, what was also related to custom during the medieval age. Nevertheless, legitimacy only becomes a common vocabulary after the French Revolution, and was not present within Illuminist reasoning (CLARK, 2005). International legitimacy is part of an intersubjective built bound to the normative set that composes it. Franck (1988, p. 16 e 19) conceptualizes legitimacy as “(...) a property of a rule or rule-making institution which itself exerts a pull towards compliance on those addressed normatively”. It is combined to “(...) the perception of those addressed by a rule or a rule-making institution that the rule or institution has come into being and operates in accordance with generally accepted principles of right process”.

For Clark (2005), the state actor qualification as an international society rightful member and its rightful behavior within it are two central principles of international society legitimacy bound. The first dimension is connected to the first order rules that detail the criteria for the own international society existence, as Wight (1992) points out. Therefore, the fundamental principles indicate which are

the entities able to be recognized as peers. This judgment is not only restrained to norms whose origin and verification are essentially external (COICAUD, 2002). To recognize what it is to be a state, a given political system entity is fundamental. It is relevant, then, not only formal criteria for state recognition as diplomatic tools, but also, and equally, informal membership requirements. The second normative dimension deals with how this settlement will function once it exists. Here, there are the second order rules that encompass coexistence and cooperation norms (BULL, 1977). Hence, there are two consensus productions. One is procedural, that is, it is focused on normative sources. The other is substantive, and concerns the behavior patterns enforcement that is considered adequate and responsive to primary rules (CLARK, 2005).

To think about the foreign realm legitimacy can be more easily systematized than domestic legitimacy, since there coercion is excluded (FRANCK, 1988). Therefore, legitimacy presupposes the existence and the recognition of a bound between the actors and the normative set to be observed by him. Clark (2005, p. 24) asserts that:

(...) [the] international society is constituted by its changing principles of legitimacy (first-order), which express its commitment to be bound: we can then trace its evolving (second-order) rules, revealed in its practices with regard to sovereignty, non-intervention, and non-use of force.

As a process under constant change, to comprehend international society legitimacy enables us to reflect upon periods of change that can even impact its stability. As put by Bukovansky (2002), these society constitutive principles are specific to a given cultural system and a given historical moment. Thus, legitimacy is something whose content is born, grows, ages, and dies, and can even demonstrate internal conflicts during its conformation (CLARK, 2005).

During times of systemic uncertainty, to think about international legitimacy enables to conjecture on international relations stability. Clark (2005) identified in its research periods when international order stability were shaken or even broken by changes within the international society constitutive principles, that is, shifts in what was understood intersubjectively as a legitimate international society, as it was the case of Westphalia (1648), Utrecht (1713-1714), the Congress of Vienna (1815), Versailles (1918), and the post-Second World War (1945). For Watson (1992), the state coexistence stability in a given moment is intrinsically connected to legitimacy and the consensus degree on its constitutive principles.

Following a more empirical reflection and understanding legitimacy as a belief on the existence of an organizing principle meant to be bounding (WEBER, 1978), it is possible to identify the European international society legitimizing constitutive basis until its full expansion to a global Western society after the Second World War. For Wight (1977), until the French Revolution it was possible to note that international legitimacy was built upon dynastic principle. It was replaced by the popular legitimization, that is, sovereignty was transferred from the monarch to the ruled ones, what made possible an increasing rational definition of the *Self* based on the national criteria, that shall be further discussed here soon (RAE, 2003).

International legitimacy boundaries are limited by legality, morality, and constitutionality, that define the political space (CLARK, 2005). It is not possible, then, to divorce the comprehension of distinct legitimacies creation and mutation without consider power distribution. This makes understanding what kind of society is possible and what are the criteria for its existence. It is necessary to differentiate between the qualitative legitimacy as a criterion for distinguishing a legitimate and a non-legitimate order;

as well to think about quantitative legitimacy, that is, the degree under which legitimacy is sustained in these society entities actions.

With this on mind, it is noted that the states behavior may be able to shape this legitimizing structure. Finnemore (1996, p. 2-3) remembers that:

(...) State interests are defined in the context of internationally held norms and understandings about what is good and appropriate... The normative context also changes over time, and as internationally held norms and values change, they create coordinated shifts in state interests and behavior across the system.

The states interests conformation process and its projection towards international society through its foreign policy are framed by international legitimacy both in qualitative and in quantitative terms. Nevertheless, distinct power distributions and intersubjective interactions between states and between state and international structure enable an active discrimination on actors whose rightful membership is not desired by this settlement in order to diminish its importance. This interaction is a powerful socialization force, and the legitimacy is better understood as a semi-permanent structure that encompasses values that will appear absolute in a given time for fulfilling state memberships (CLARK, 2005). A legitimate international society is born, then, “as an active, contested political process, rather than legitimacy as an abstract political resource. Since it is an activity, not a property, it involves creation, modification, innovation, and transformation” (BARKER, 2001, p. 28).

To comprehend this “process of consensual empowerment” (MINCHEV, 2000, p. 5) needs to consider a mediative epistemology in order to interpret the multiple crossing influences between the actor – the state and its foreign policy, and the structure – the international society. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the state entity is also

a structure, as already mentioned here (BELLAMY, 2009), and the national interest construction can be only fully understood based on this premise. Hence, foreign policy analysis through the English School becomes richer within a dialogue with a more holistic constructivism.

The governance system diversity in the changing contemporary international order is related to an intense process of identity reconstruction and the reformulation of state and its *demos* relation. The thesis briefly presented here strives to consider Russia role in international society based on how this actor intersubjectively catches the foreign structure against which it acts and reacts. Therefore, it will be needed a historical inquiry on identity forces that compose Russian perception of the national. Identity is understood then as an intersubjective social construction process that is chronologically and locally altered, and is produced and reproduced by individuals connected to social categories (KLOTZ; LYNCH, 2007, p. 65).

State formation as a cultural component is central (RAE, 2003). In this sense, domestic society constitutes the state political body from its unification by means of a cohesive identity that is able to relate itself to a representative political administration. In this process, leaders and elites use identity discourse consciously or not to solidify and centralize their power on territorial boundaries of other state. In this discursive construction, the outsider is defined, that is, the *Other* against which the national identity body will make opposition. Nevertheless, it can pave the way for a pathological homogenization action, justifying institutionalized exclusion policies against certain individuals or certain collective entities. Therefore, national identity must be understood and reproduced as inherent and immutable by the identified ones.

The nation-state would, then, overcome its competitors due to its capacity to answer authori-

ty and centralization requirements, along with the demand for legitimate foreign recognition (SPRUYT, 1994). Ruggie (1993) stresses the intimate relation between state formation and culture, that is comprehended in Bourdian terms as a *habitus* created from a purposive design made by actors (BOURDIEU, 1990). For the author, this interaction changed the way a political community rearticulated during the medieval period around the Church, and transferred political authority for the individualized *Self* in modernity and for a clear demarcation between public and private, between domestic and international. This new perspective is, initially, still understood culturally under dynastic terms. The nobility premise, though, is surpassed with the growing post-First World War nationalism, and turned itself to the state territorial space, and, then, to popular sovereignty.

The political elite responsible for creating or keeping the state existence while the sovereign political entity is worried about personifying, symbolizing, and fomenting imagination on the identity it tries to sustain connected currently to nationalism (RAE, 2003). Gellner (1983) understand nationalism as a powerful force that elicits elites to define state identity and legitimize their own power. Within the international realm, hence, "is negotiated out of interaction within intersubjectively identifiable communities and it is this institution which legitimates the state as an agent in international social life" (RAE, 2003, p. 16). Therefore, a state interest projection towards its legitimation, coexistence, and cooperation relations with international society has a mutual influence with the state identity. Interests can be understood as aims that inform the actor behavior and are constructed from its identity structure informed by a narrative basis that gives meaning to the material purpose (RAE, 2003). Moreover, the macrostructure in which identity, as an intersubjective social process,

and the domestic elites agency towards mobilizing ideational resources can equally influence identities and interests.

The constructivist theory makes it possible to understand such a relation between identity and interests due to its historical and sociological effort for granting relevance to state own normative, ideational, and material structures related to their *demos* and the international society where they act. Price and Reus-Smit (1998) challenges the odds of comprehending material resources as power and richness outside a subjective reality that gives meaning to it, since it is this same reality that would permit understand how these instruments will be used in the political world. On one hand, the domestic political elites use internal and external symbolic resources to reinvent identitarian forces that could legitimate its power at home. On the other, international society is used as a structural framework that gives meaning and limits these elites action by defining the state formation and rightful membership conditions. As a consequence,

(...) the society of states evolves standards of legitimate corporate state behavior. International society thus plays an active role in state-building, as international principles of legitimate state action define, in part, how corporate state-building *should* occur. What is more, this is a two-way relationship (RAE, 2003, p. 23).

The analysis of an empirical problem based on the dialogue between constructivists and the English School dialogue can contribute for shedding some light on the contemporary multiple realities. Bearing that on mind, this article proposes to apply theoretical concepts from both streams that would overcome the agent-structure dichotomy and the materialist assumptions as a way to direct efforts for better understanding Russia and its role in the post-Cold War international society.

Russian foreign policy and the international society

The end of the Cold War and the bipolar order transformed the 1990 in an environment of high systemic uncertainty. It can be observed that the global international society under formation is highly heterogeneous. It finds challenging, therefore, to surpass its apparent inability to present international norms that can truly constrain international great powers behavior (BELLAMY, 2009). Within this context described by Vladimir Putin, current Russian president, as a polycentric and emergent world,⁴ Russia seeks to consolidate its role in the international arena. Its continental dimension that almost occupies one tenth of Earth, its hydrocarbons richness, its global economy share, its military arsenal, and its history in international politics makes its foreign policy aim almost naturally on finding a highlighted spot for the country, whose identitarian configuration and social practices were build as having for main *Other* Europe, and, today, the West (HOPF, 2008).

Haukkala (2008) discusses the role played by Russia during history concerning primary rules responsible for constructing international society legitimacy. The author identifies two possible roles. The norm maker is a state responsible for actively formulating the constitutive principle over which legitimacy and rightful membership are built, and, afterwards, construct the second order rules. The norm taker, on its turn, must obey the constitutive principle set out in order to be recognized as a peer. Table 1 summarizes Haukkala thought (2008, p. 53):

4. Statements made by Vladimir Putin during an interview to the Cuban agency Prensa Latina. See PRENSA LATINA. **Putín por una América Latina unida, sostenible e independiente**. Available in http://prensa-latina.cu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1&id=2871011&Itemid=1. Accessed on July 17th, 2014.

Table 1. Russia role for legitimacy constitution during history.

Period	International legitimacy constitutive principle	Russia role
17 th and 18 th centuries	Religion	Initially, Russia is not a full member. After Westphalia, it becomes a norm taker.
19 th century	Monarchy	Initially, a norm maker. Later, a norm taker.
20 th century during interwar	Nationalism	Not a full member between 1917 and 1930. Afterwards, a superficial norm taker.
Cold War	Territorial control	Key norm maker.
Post-Cold War	Liberal democracy, free-trade, and human rights	Norm taker.

Source: HAUKKALA, 2008, p. 53 (adapted).

Nevertheless, though Haukkala (2008) deals with the post-Cold War, his reflection is not deepened to consider 21st century Russian role, especially considering the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement, the post-September 11st, the 2008 global crisis, and, mainly, the current Ukrainian crisis. These events are central for comprehending how Russia behaves in front of such structural changes.

A relevant instrument for such discursive mobilization is the constitution of the difference through opposition against the *Other*. Hopf (2008), as previously pointed out, indicates Europe and the West as the main alterity reference for Russian national identity. Elite discursive mobilization of this distinction is strengthened during the 17th and the 18th centuries with the debate between Slavophil and westernizer forces (NEUMAN, 1996). The czarist Russia relations with Western Europe are further pushed by Peter the Great reforms, what made possible a sharper contrast with the alterity and a deeper social division within the political elite that whether defended the imitation of the West or supported an alternative path that could respect Russian uniqueness.⁵

5. These categories do not presented them monolithically. As time passed, they showed some internal divisions. For instance,

During its history, Russia presents distinct identitarian forces conformation, what can be understood partially as a consequence of structural changes happened in the period.⁶ As demonstrated by Haukkala (2008), Russian rightful membership and its role for the international society constitutive principle changed over time. Considering Russia participation and its interest for a differentiated international insertion from its historical legacy, it can be observed that identitarian forces were differently mobilized. One of the paths followed was the defense of certain domestic regimes as a way to correspond

Slavophiles, according to Neumann (2008), were divided into xenophobic and non-xenophobic groups, and the Westernizers turned into liberal, socialist, and Marxist streams.

6. Hopf (2008) writes about a Russia that swings between the desire of see its European nature recognized; a Russia that consciously transforms itself into European, and a Russia transcends Europe to search for a way to reaffirm its uniqueness. Tsygankov (2010) suggests three schools of thought on Russian identity over time – occidentalism, statism, and civilizationism. During the post-Cold War, Thorun (2009) recognizes the presence of identities that would translate the alterity into liberal ideas incorporation (1992-1994), into geopolitical realism (1993-2000), into geoeconomic realism (2000-2004), and into cultural geostrategic realism (2004-2007). Kuchins and Zevelev (2012) consider Russian identity in contemporary international society as composed of pro-Western liberals, great powers balancers, and nationalists. Finally, Clunan (2009) brings about seven classifications on recent Russian identity components. These distinct orientations led to a diverse interest formation that is translated into political mobilization, and, consequently, discursive mobilization of Russian leaders and political elite.

to the constitutive principle of a given time, and, hence, promoting Russian role within this structure.

The current Russian position and international society character resembles the 19th century. In this opportunity, Russia was raised as a norm maker during the Congress of Vienna through a conservative stance concerning international society primary rules, mobilizing initially Slavophil forces and the defense of a despotic political regime based on an alternative Christianity. In the 19th second half, the foreign minister Gorchakov adopts a more Westernizer discourse and a hesitant norm taker role. From 1998 on and a clearer NATO persistence and enlargement, Russian elite effectively downplays Westernizers forces into a more *sui generis* identitarian combination searching for a balance within intersubjectivities and the diverse approaches on the West. This strategy has made Russia mobilize a reformist contesting foreign policy against international order based on the defense of an alternative political regime.

This reformist, though not revolutionary, regime is known as Slavic democracy (DUGIN, 2012), and it is a consequence of the bureaucratic centralization resumed from 2000 on when Vladimir Putin arrived at the government. Nevertheless, the power concentration on the leader reproduces an idolatry relation between the leader and the *demos*. In this sense, a strong state is not mistaken by something totalitarian or bad even for popular participation by identitarian forces in Russia. This domestic governance reproduces previous models as Ivan IV and Joseph Stalin rules. At the same time, elements of the Western liberal model are also incorporated into this particular conception of state, by means of free trade and a human rights protection different sense. However, it still does not correspond directly to US or European models that are basis for contemporary global international society legitimacy, and poses a challenge

for understanding Russian foreign policy and internal politics bridges in the post-Cold War era.

Final remarks

The defense of a Slavic democracy is projected by Russian foreign policy today as a way to legitimize its interest on keeping its rightful membership to international society and become a stronger norm maker for its constitutive principle. Such strategy reflects an internal homogenization discourse that is read internationally as a challenging proposal for post-Cold War international order, even if it is not necessarily revolutionary. The consequent impact of this dynamics for international stability credits relevance for such a research within International Relations field, considering that there are few following this line of reasoning nowadays on Russia. A dialogue between constructivism and English School can enable scholars to update such empiric inquiry at the same time it contributes for development theoretical encounters within the discipline.

The hybrid theoretical model briefly presented here can shed some light into such a mysterious actor and its tension between a norm maker and a norm taker role. From an agrarian state to great world power, an analysis based sole on rational interest would not be able to fully understand Russian foreign behavior in the post-Cold War era. The internal government change from Yeltsin rule to Putin-Medvedev in an specific political model historically built, along side with a different international context, represents a structural and normative framework with which Russia perception of itself interact. To better comprehend this dynamic by applying English School theory combined with constructivism to this study case proves itself as a promising research agenda to be further detailed following a mediative epistemology.

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